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The Hybridity of Partition Novels in English: Reshaping National Identities in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*

The 1947 Partition led to the division of the Indian subcontinent along religious lines and the creation of seemingly homogeneous Indian and Pakistani national identities.

Yet such clear-cut national imaginings have long been questioned, notably in the Indian novel in English. By incorporating tropes and forms from traditional Indian literatures into their novels, Amitav Ghosh and Kamila Shamsie give the genre a hybrid texture that shapes their multicultural understanding of national identity.

In the introduction to his monograph on Indian Partition movies, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition*, Bhaskar Sarkar states:

[S]cholars have sought to wean us off the mythopoesis of the nation as primordial, essential, natural. As a result, we now know that the nation is a cultural artifact: an “imagined community” [...]. Nationhood leads to the inevitable erasure of difference, of alternative and equally salient poles of affiliation, in the service of a monolithic, and at times oppressive, identity. (6)

Sarkar's words immediately evoke Benedict Anderson's analysis in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) of the nation and nationalism as fast evolving cultural artifacts and social constructs that are willed into being. Such a comment resonates even more powerfully in the context of the subcontinent since the modern Indian nation was shaped both by national politics and cultural imaginings, and notably by the Anglo-Indian novel.

I offer to examine two Partition novels published from across the Indo-Pakistani divide created on 15 August 1947 when the British left the subcontinent after hastily drawing the new borders that were to split the region into two independent states: *The Shadow Lines* (1988) by Indian writer Amitav Ghosh and *Burnt Shadows* (2009) by Pakistani-British novelist Kamila Shamsie.¹ I focus specifically on the Anglo-Indian novel whose development is “handcuffed to [the] history” of the subcontinent insofar as, both in form and content, this literature was transformed by history (Kabir, “Handcuffed” 119-32). The first Anglo-Indian novel was published in India during the colonial era – *Rajmohan's Wife* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1864). The novel in English then quickly became the vehicle of Hindu nationalist aspirations. In the 1930s, this mode of representation gained larger recognition through the pioneering works of Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, and N.K. Narayan, especially the latter's *Chronicles of Maguldi* (1936-

1. The two Radcliffe Commissions – named after their President, the London lawyer Sir Cyril Radcliffe – pressured by the increasing amount of communitarian riots opposing the Hindus and Sikhs to the Muslim minority, divided in haste the two Indian provinces which gathered the largest concentration of Muslim population: the Eastern province of Bengal and the Western province of Punjab. The Partition of India led to some of the largest displacements of population of the twentieth century. Within a few months, around 12 million were displaced. According to Butalia, “estimates of the dead vary from 200,000 (the contemporary British figure) to two million (a later Indian estimate) [...] there was widespread sexual savagery: about 75,000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own [...]. Thousands of families were divided, homes destroyed, crops left to rot, villages abandoned” (*Other Side* 3).

1983; Raghavacharyulu 21-48).² However, the sudden social, cultural and political ruptures brought about by the 1947 Partition questioned the very “idea” of the nation³ that Indian nationalists had fought for, and radically reshaped the Anglo-Indian novel. Anglo-Indian novels do not necessarily portray the history of the nation – let alone Partition – yet Partition has been hovering over the subcontinent like a “long shadow” for the last seventy years. Several fictional and non-fictional works make use of the trope of the “shadows” to refer to this epochal event. For instance, the collection edited by Urvashi Butalia, *Partition: The Long Shadow* (2015), demonstrates how Partition has been revisited through various modes of representation such as literature, the visual arts, music, film, etc. The volume gathers essays written by scholars from across the national borders inherited after 1947 and the 1971 Bangladesh War of Independence. Some of them are either working or living outside the subcontinent, mainly in the United States or Canada. As I examine here two novels written by Indian and Pakistani diasporic writers, I wish to contribute to the cross-cultural memory work advocated by Butalia and her fellow researchers.

Despite the two decades that separate their publication, *The Shadow Lines* and *Burnt Shadows* share a similar interest in grasping the “idea” of the nation. Ghosh and Shamsie transform and adapt the novel in English to subvert the hegemonic nationalist discourse that has shaped the official history of the subcontinent since Partition and has led to several Indo-Pakistani wars in 1965, 1971 and 1999, to the militarization of the frontier zones, and to the arms race and missile tests via which both states seek to consolidate their home power by threatening their neighbour and turning it into *the* archenemy (see Kaul’s introduction).

In my comparative analysis, I argue that Ghosh and Shamsie refashion the cartography traced at Partition by interrogating the ideologies that underlie geographical constructs. I study the literary techniques both novelists borrow from South Asian literatures and cultures to invent “maps of memory” that are transcultural, transnational and international (for this coinage, see Mallot). First, I will show that the nation imagined into being during the colonial period was reinvented in the Indian novel in English in the 1980s. Then, I will discuss the way *The Shadow Lines* and *Burnt Shadows* produce imaginary maps of the subcontinent that replace the concept of a holistic and time- and space-bound nation by that of ever-changing homes. Lastly, I will demonstrate that although both novelists create imaginary homelands, Ghosh revisits the *Bildungsroman* by drawing inspiration from Bengali literature, while Shamsie reaches back to older literary sources by peppering her work with Sufi tropes and Persian lyricism.

Imagining a Holistic Nation in the Anglo-Indian Novel during the Colonial Period

During the anticolonial struggle, the Indian nationalists fought to shape a unitary vision of the nation that all Indians, regardless of their social and communal backgrounds, could rally to. Amartya Sen asserts that though the “Indian identity” forged then did not have a unique definition, most nationalists still promoted an inclusive and secular

2. *The Chronicles of Maguldi* are a series of novels published by Narayan on the fictional semi-urban town of Maguldi in southern India, from *Swami and Friends* (1935) to *A Tiger for Maguldi* (1983).

3. I borrow the term “idea” of a nation from the title of Sunil Khilnani’s book, *The Idea of India*, which refers to the historic, economic and socio-political circumstances that participated in the national conception of India.

image of the nation that would encompass the cultural, religious and social diversity of the different Indian communities:

[T]hese varying interpretations all share an inclusionary reading of Indian identity that tolerates, protects and indeed celebrates diversity within a pluralist India. [...] [T]hey shared a general refusal to privilege any narrowly circumscribed perspective (such as an exclusively religious approach, or more specifically, a Hindu view). (A. Sen 348)

Yet the fracture of the subcontinent destroyed this ideal of unity since it endangered the “idea” of the nation. According to Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, this “idea” could only be maintained provided the nation was inclusive of the Other: “the idea of India” itself militates ‘against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one’s own people from others’” (qtd. in A. Sen 349). Paradoxically enough, this ideal seems to have been a nostalgic dream even before Independence since the Other – in the present case the opposite religious community – was already rejected within the country, as illustrated during the many riots which paved the way to Partition. Moreover, Perry Anderson observes that the nationalism advocated by the Indian Congress Party was dominated early on by a Hindu ideology despite the secular aspirations it openly claimed. Statistics made in the mid-1930s reveal that 97% of the Congress members were Hindus, and during that time Gandhi himself invoked Hindu imagery in his public speeches to gather new followers (P. Anderson 94). By using this religious iconography, the seemingly secular leaders were actually walking in the footsteps of the late nineteenth-century Bengali nationalists who had developed a political and cultural ethos based on Hindu myths and on Bankim Chatterji’s (anti-Muslim) poem, “*Vande Mataram*,” which inspired the anthem of the Congress Party (P. Anderson 99).

The “idea” of the nation was undermined from its very inception as the cohesiveness of the nation was put in jeopardy by the nationalist discourses that shaped it. In the four decades that followed Independence, the official Indian historiography worked at erasing the violence of Partition from collective memory, and the event was considered an “anomaly” (Sarkar 15). Admittedly, the Indian government tried to marginalize the tragedy to consolidate its secular ideal. Yet, by denying this legacy of communitarian violence to smooth out cultural and religious differences, the government-fueled “collective amnesia” prevented the nation from confronting its collective trauma and working through it (Pandey 33). The traces of the Partition violence took on biased and displaced forms which permeated cultural productions and eventually resurfaced on the socio-political stage. To guarantee its national integrity, India focused on the neighbouring enemy, Pakistan – and Pakistan retaliated – all the while downplaying the plight of religious minorities on both sides. After the 1971 partition of Bengal, such contradictions could no longer be contained and, as the subcontinent became more open to the globalized world in the 1980s, the image of the nation that Indian and Pakistani novelists in English would offer to the world changed drastically.

The 1980s: Reshaping the Fractured Nation in Indian and Pakistani Novels in English

Though the Indian official historiography marginalized the violence of Partition during the four decades that followed Independence, several Indian novels in English published during that time evoked Partition. These novels mainly focused on the im-

mediate experience of violence, sometimes described with harsh realism. This is true of the first Indian novel in English dealing with Partition, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), which uses the image of the "trainload of corpses" that later became a recurring trope in Partition literature (Rituparna Roy 33-46, 135-7). From the 1950s to the early 1980s, Partition novels mostly described the traumatic experience of victims confronted with the horrors of Partition, faced with forced migration or burdened with psychological wounds. All three aspects are illustrated by Indian novelist Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961). Starting in the early 1920s and ending in 1952, the novel examines the repercussions of Partition for the Indian Muslim minority by adopting the perspective of Laila, a young girl brought up in the landowning class of the *Taluqdars*,⁴ who opposes the patriarchal values imposed on women. Given the time-frame in which these novels were written, it is no surprise that they would mainly focus on the experience of the generation who lived through Partition. While they depicted Partition as a rupture in the Indian socio-cultural fabric – often by using tropes of mutilation, dislocation, dismemberment – none of these novels went so far as to rethink the concept of the nation in the way some Anglo-Indian novels would from the 1980s on.

The 1980s became a landmark in the history of the Indian novel in English when Salman Rushdie published his much acclaimed and debated *Midnight's Children* (1981) that propelled the genre on the international scene while simultaneously disclosing to the world a sensitive and intimate history of Partition (Coussy 60-8). The publication of *Midnight's Children* initiated a new vision of the nation that was to guide most Indian and Pakistani novelists. While fiction devoted to the nation had been forging so far a holistic image supporting the nationalist agenda of both India and Pakistan, Rushdie rewrote the collective past through magical realism and personal memories and trajectories. In "Interrogating the Nation, Growing Global in *The Shadow Lines*," Someshwar Sati demonstrates how Rushdie's polymorphous imaginary nation inspired many other Indian writers:

Rushdie offers a history of the nation not through a unilinear narrative, but in terms of disruption and discontinuity [...]. Rushdie's novel has been diagnosed as a plural narrative that explodes the notion of the nation having a stable identity. It however does so without discarding the nation; it merely attempts to draw attention to the glorious multiplicity of this entity. (51)

Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* similarly reinvents the history of the subcontinent from the memory fragments of an anonymous middle-class Bengali narrator, who also introduces himself as the author of the novel. He retraces his family history to make sense of a private drama which still haunts him after two decades: the murder of his uncle and mentor Tridib, assassinated by a mob of angry Muslims during the 1964 Dhaka riots. The narrator's family migrated from Dhaka (which became Pakistani in 1947 and then the Bangladeshi capital city in 1971) to Calcutta (which remained Indian) before Partition. He appears to be Ghosh's spokesperson on the sensitive issues of nationalism and national history which are central to the novel. In several essays and interviews, Ghosh stated he had decided to write *The Shadow Lines* following the 1984 massacre of the Sikhs of Delhi – perpetrated to avenge the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards – because these more recent events had triggered his

4. During the Mughal domination, the *Taluqdars* were in charge of tax collection in the Indian provinces. Under British rule, they kept their status of feudal landlords until the abolition of their privileges in 1947.

childhood memories of the 1964 Calcutta riots (see Aldama 84-90 and Ghosh, "The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi" 60-1). Like Ghosh, the narrator was born in the 1950s, after Partition. Yet, in his narrative, individual and family memories relating to Partition and other tragedies which shook the subcontinent converge to reshape the past of India, and produce a fragmentary and plural vision of national history and of the nation.

Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* also revisits the history of the subcontinent through private memories as the lives of three generations of families from different parts of the world intersect in the narrative. The national tragedies that bring the characters together are transformed by their personal trajectories. The novel opens up in Japan just before the bombing of Nagasaki; the plot then follows the journey of a *hibakusha*, an irradiated survivor, Hiroko Tanaka, as she reaches Delhi just before Partition. In 1948, Hiroko and her Indian husband are forced to settle down in Karachi refugee camps as *muhadjirs* (a derogatory name given to Muslim refugees from India), and eventually she moves to New York where she witnesses the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Though the novel predominantly adopts Hiroko's perspective, the plot also explores the life of second-generation immigrants – such as Hiroko and Sajjad's son, Raza, who was born in Pakistan and became *de facto* a Pakistani citizen, but never fit either in his country or in the *muhadjir* community because he remained burdened by the traumatic memories inherited from his parents, the survivors of Nagasaki and Partition.

Ghosh and Shamsie are second- and third-generation novelists who did not confront Partition directly but remain deeply affected by its tragic legacy since their national identities and cultures are still being defined by this event today. They participate in what Marianne Hirsch calls "postmemory," the process whereby traumatic pasts are being transmitted from one older generation to a younger one who did not experience them personally but appropriates and transforms them.

Both authors use narrative techniques and tropes to fashion memory maps that enable them to re-create the subcontinent they live far from. I would argue that the place they reinvent is not so much a "nation," either territorial or imaginary, as it is a "home" wrought through affective ties and human relations, a subjective "home" which encompasses multicultural identities.

Memory Maps of Affects: From "Nation" to "Home"

Though the term "memory maps" can undoubtedly qualify other Partition novels in English that question and imagine the national borders of the subcontinent – a good illustration is offered by Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2002) – I use the concept of "memory maps" here to demonstrate how *The Shadow Lines* and *Burnt Shadows* redefine the "idea" of the nation by both turning to the private and domestic sphere of "home" and by placing the South Asian experience of Partition on a world map of international traumas. Through the narrator's experience, *The Shadow Lines* offers a precise method to rewrite the past. The first step requires using one's "imagination" to picture places and times one has never travelled to. Thus the narrator repeatedly claims his uncle Tridib taught him to use his "imagination with precision" (24) so as to devise the world in which he would live since everyone lived in a story and "the alternative wasn't blankness – it only meant if we didn't try ourselves, we would never be free of other people's inventions" (31). Personal imagination, and more generally fiction, could enable individuals to emancipate themselves from the ideological constructs shaping official histo-

ries and cartographies. The second step consists in examining archival documents such as contemporary press articles. Using both the imaginative power of fiction and his knowledge as a scholar – Ghosh completed a PhD in history and anthropology – the novelist elaborates a narrative that reads as an imaginary memory map crossing over time and space, connecting past private memories to more recent collective histories, and also linking different world traumas together – namely the 1947 Partition and the Second World War Blitz in London.

This memory map is woven through several tropes that point to the instability and artificiality of national borders – be they geographical, ideological, cultural or religious. Among these motives, the trope of the “shadows” is undoubtedly the most important in the novel. The shadows evoke the porosity and the arbitrariness of the demarcations traced in 1947, they are both a visual metaphor and an ungraspable linguistic sign which denotes presence and absence. The trope of the shadows is often associated with the image of the “mirror” or the “looking-glass,” which frequently expresses a reduction of the distance between the individual and their reflection, but also, more generally, between the Self and the Other, and ultimately between India and Pakistan. For instance, the narrator’s discovery that similar riots occurred in Calcutta and Dhaka in 1964 is transcribed via an allusion to the “mirror” which blurs the distance between past and present, here and there: “It was thus, sitting in the air-conditioned calm of an exclusive library, that I began my strangest journey: a voyage into a land outside space, an expanse without distances; a land of looking-glass events” (219). Through the specular image, the enclosed, isolated space of the public library is transformed into a heterotopic space, to use a term coined by Michel Foucault (360-1). Heterotopia qualifies a space within society that does not abide by society’s rules; it is a marginal space that can house one’s imagination. The mirror metaphor abolishes the border between the real and the imaginary so that the library becomes a site where official state cartography can be contested and rewritten. Elsewhere in the novel, the specular reflection weaves cross-cultural affiliations: for instance, the Indian narrator’s image in the mirror is that of a blue-eyed, fair-haired English boy, Nick Price, a family friend he has not met in person but envies: “[...] Nick Price, whom I had never seen, [...], became a spectral presence beside me in my looking glass; growing with me, but always bigger and better, and in some ways more desirable” (49). The image brings closer places, people, even abstract ideas, which would ordinarily be opposed to one another, and thus it subverts various types of borders and dichotomies.

A similar erasure surfaces in language itself as the verbs of movement “come” and “go” end up meaning the same thing for people who lose their spatial bearings, and can no longer match their national identity with the place they consider home, once the borders arbitrarily drawn to separate India from Pakistan cut them off from their birthplace. For instance, in 1964, as Tha’mma, the narrator’s grandmother, goes through complex airport controls on her way to Dhaka, she struggles to understand how she can be an Indian citizen when her native town has become Pakistani. In Tha’mma’s language, Dhaka will always be the home to come to and should, consequently, remain where she experiences the warmth of homecoming.⁵ And yet, she is now treated as a foreigner and is required to produce a visa:

5. From the 1980s on, the shift from “nation” to “home” that we discuss here became a prevalent theme in Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi novels in English that challenge the hegemonic imaginaries produced in India, Pakistan and

You see, in our family we don't know whether we're coming or going [...] the fault [...] lay in language. Every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go away from and come back to, and what my grandmother was looking for was a word for a journey which was not a coming or a going at all; a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of verbs of movement. (150)

The inability of language to properly locate the subject on a mindscape, which symbolizes the physical map of the subcontinent, emphasizes the impossibility of ever fulfilling an identity quest relying on transient national bearings that uproot the individual.

The Shadow Lines focuses on the post-Independence history of Bengal. Strengthened by its cultural and linguistic unity, the province of Bengal was the birthplace of the first nationalists in the nineteenth century. Yet, after being partitioned in 1905, then reunified in 1911, Bengal was eventually split along religious lines in 1947 as cultural nationalism was supplanted by religious discord (Ludden). However, *The Shadow Lines* challenges the seemingly uniform nationalities created at Partition by subtly incorporating Bengali language into the English prose. In fact, Nivedita Sen observes that the interchangeable meanings of “come” and “go” in the novel can be attributed to Bengali customs:

In traditional Bengali households, there is something inauspicious about saying, “I take your leave” or “I will go now,” when one actually means to depart for any destination [...]. When one is going away, therefore, one is expected to say *Aashi*, which literally means its opposite, that is “I am just coming,” its nearest English equivalent as a farewell statement would be “See you soon” or “Until we meet again.” (132)

Here the superimposition of English and Bengali creates a linguistic pluralism that participates in what Homi Bhabha defines as cultural hybridity: “a difference ‘within,’ a subject that inhabits the rim of an ‘in-between’ reality” (19). Bhabha’s analysis sheds light on the subversive power of hybridity, its capacity to challenge traditionally accepted monolithic national dichotomies.

The novel *Burnt Shadows* also reconciles opposites by using the polysemous trope of the “shadows.” The trope connects different national histories and places, which are apparently far and unrelated, as it is repeated and redefined throughout the novel. For instance, the “shadows” first refer to the quasi-imperceptible traces of the bodies decimated by the Nagasaki explosion. Then, they allude to the bird-shaped scars Hiroko carries on her back after the blast, and, towards the end of the novel, these wounds take on the appearance of real birds as they cast dark shadows between Hiroko and her close American friend, Kim Burton, when the latter, overcome by her prejudices towards Arabs after the 9/11 attacks, unknowingly helps the police arrest Hiroko’s son who looks suspicious merely because he is a Pakistani and his mixed origins make him resemble an Afghan.

Both Ghosh and Shamsie use poetic tropes to structure their imaginary homelands, articulated via maps of memory which transcend national time and space constraints. However, they draw inspiration from different Indian literary traditions.

Bangladesh since the 1947 and 1971 partitions. By turning to everyday, domestic and private experiences of Partition, such novels question the “totalizing logic of bourgeois nationalism and point to a more contingent and polyphonic reading of national identity” (Dildur 6). These novels include notably narratives that, by privileging the perspective of marginalized and silenced women, demonstrate that the telling and writing of Partition is a gendered experience. One could think for instance of Indian Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* (1980), Pakistani Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* (1988) and Bangladeshi Tahmima Anam’s *A Golden Age* (2007).

Going Back to Pre-Traumatic Cultural Roots

Burnt Shadows's poetic description of Delhi as the "beating heart" of Muslim culture roots the novel's prose in classic Urdu literature (Shamsie 33). In the same passage, Shamsie directly quotes Ahmed Ali's novel *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), which is written in a lyrical prose partly composed of *ghazals*, religious hymns and popular songs. Moreover, Shamsie discreetly uses the Persian *qissa* of Laila and Majnun (King 149-50, 157), a popular myth in the Islamic world which tells of an impossible, excessive and passionate love bound to end up in disaster. This *qissa* is inspired from Sufism and reworks the image of the moth dangerously flirting with the flame, which often refers to forbidden love in poetry.

The novel also discusses the decline of Urdu literature in 1947 by staging the Urdu lessons taught by Sajjad to the Japanese heroine, Hiroko, while denouncing the "Indian Oxbridge set" that denigrates Urdu and chooses to learn Latin:

"Why are you wasting your time with Urdu?" Kamran Ali, one of the Indian Oxbridge set, lowered his bulky frame on to the picnic blanket beside Hiroko. "Language of mercenaries and marauders. Do you know the word "Urdu" has the same root as "horde"? Now, Latin. That's a language worth learning. (65)

Though Kamran Ali claims his admiration for Latin, his broken Urdu – "there was Kamran Ali speaking to a waiter in his broken, English-accented Urdu" (69) – and his drunken mockery of the Caesarean maxim, "Vini, vidi, vino" (65), transform his so-called mastery of Latin into pure mimicry of the British. Paradoxically, through this character, the Western-educated Indian elite seems to encourage the colonial discourse that maintains the colonized subjects in a submissive position (on mimicry and the ambivalence of colonial discourse, see Bhabha 121-31). Furthermore, *Burnt Shadows* rehabilitates Urdu language and literature by using several Urdu terms, such as *ghum-kehaur*/"grief eaters" (77) and *uljhan* (332) whose closest equivalent in English is "melancholy," and simultaneously commenting on the specific nuanced meanings of these words that make them almost untranslatable into English. At other times, the narrative turns to Muslim historical legends of heroic queens and kings: "Sajjad had no political allegiances, but many narrative preferences – in the stories of history two of his favourite characters were the Rani of Jhansi and Razia of the Mamluk Dynasty: powerful women who led troops and sat in council with men" (52). It also alludes repeatedly to an episode from the Koran relating the Prophet's escape from his pursuers on his way to Medina thanks to the providential help of a spider, a story that explains why the insect is sacred for Islam (59, 318, 357).

The Shadow Lines draws inspiration from Bengali children's travel stories, especially in its characterization of Tridib. A learned but marginal uncle whose life is shrouded in mystery, Tridib's character is reminiscent of the typical mentor figure in Bengali literature: "Bengali children's fiction is replete with instances of the child protagonist's undiluted adulation for such eccentric and unconventional uncles or cousins who [...] do not follow the dictates of genteel decorum, discretion and discipline" (N. Sen 133). Ghosh's novel follows a pattern similar to these Bengali tales insofar as both narratives are close to the *Bildungsroman*: a child protagonist who resists abiding by family or social rules is temporarily tempted away from home by a male adult who becomes his guide and role model. Nonetheless, in children's fiction, the mentor usually offers an illusory

and dangerous escape world. Eventually both child and marginal uncle/cousin are expected to return to their daily reality and adapt to social codes. Such literature can serve educational purposes in middle-class families.

Ghosh makes use of Bengali travel literature, but he enriches the genre by enabling his young narrator to wander the world through imagination under the guidance of his uncle: "Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and he had given me eyes to see them with" (20). At first, the novel seems to be written as a *Bildungsroman* which follows the narrator's physical and mental growth from innocence to experience, from childhood to adulthood. However, the "lines" that should neatly separate these two stages are blurred like all the other "shadow lines" mentioned in the novel. Ghosh adapts the *Bildungsroman* and traditional Bengali stories to suit his narrative purposes. The narrator never forsakes his belief in imagination. Memories of Tridib and his teachings survive his death and haunt the adult narrator, and this intellectual legacy allows the protagonist to question the legitimacy of national borders. Till the end of the novel, imagination appears as a source of empowerment that can produce spaces which are not limited by political ideologies but do not look less real than territorially-bound nations. For instance, the narrator firmly sticks to his belief in the imaginary maps without borders he has devised as a child, yet his is not a naive disillusion, but rather an attempt at self-authorization and self-fashioning via fiction. The plot reverses the usual dichotomy associated to the *Bildungsroman* between fantasy/imagination on the one hand, and reality on the other. In *The Shadow Lines*, the official cartography that would objectively be considered as "real" is actually reinterpreted as an ideological construct and a deceptive illusion.

Ghosh and Shamsie incorporate in their novels tropes and vocabulary from various Indian literatures, thus creating hybrid narratives whose texture reflects their plural definitions of concepts such as the nation, identity and culture. Novels by Indian and Pakistani authors that fictionalize the postcolonial nation often entail a recreation of the traumatic history of Partition. Nevertheless, for those who have long been away from home, either out of necessity or out of choice, writing about the subcontinent can never be a simple return to historical, cultural or geographic pasts. As Rushdie argues, it may be that those living far from the subcontinent can only ever grasp their home countries as productions of the mind. Yet, despite the fractured and partial nature of the memory fragments shaping these imaginary homelands, the distance between diasporic writers and their native countries provides the former with a critical gaze and creates new sensorial and emotional resonances that physical closeness sometimes obscures. When discussing the chaotic structure of *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie thus compares the memories of his protagonist, Saleem Sinai, to the shards of a broken mirror:

It may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost. But there is a paradox here. The broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed. ("Imaginary Homelands" 10-1)

Saleem's memory shards allow him to weave a self-reflexive and personal history of the subcontinent which subverts monolithic and hegemonic national representations of the past. Similarly, many contemporary Indian and Pakistani diasporic novelists redefine the notions of exile, migration and displacement. As Joshi observes, for several postcolonial Indian writers fictionalizing the history of the subcontinent, among whom Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul and Ghosh:

Being at-home is always and only provisional; a homeland, then, becomes the imaginary place of symbolic meanings and associations that are woven together to render place to displacement, and meaning to memories. (226)

Joshi's statement could apply to both *The Shadow Lines* and *Burnt Shadows*. Indeed, the two novels conceive India and Pakistan as transcultural poetic spaces which can only be grasped as narrative memory-traces without borders. Such traces emerge through a fiction in English that incorporates selected Indian languages and literary tropes harking back to pre-traumatic South Asian cultures and performing the lasting impacts of the 1947 psychological and physical dislocations on the inhabitants of the subcontinent living in South Asia and abroad.

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