Ordinary People on the Move: Subaltern Cosmopolitanisms in Amitav Ghosh's Writings

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Abstract

This essay draws on Ulf Hannerz's notion of locals and cosmopolitans and Zygmunt Bauman's idea of the tourists and the vagabonds to focus on the movements of ordinary folks in Ghosh's works due to a number of reasons that equip them with an "orientation towards the other" (Berland 124). Borrowing Joseph Berland's category of "multi-service nomads," it argues that his engagement with these movements anticipates the new discourse on cosmopolitanism and shows that in contrast to contemporary cosmopolitan narratives that privilege the movements of the new professional, intellectual or artistic elite, Ghosh recovers the buried narratives of those who may be called *subaltern cosmopolitans* even though their movements might have been triggered from above. After summarising contemporary understandings of cosmopolitanism as developed in the discourse of globalisation, the essay proceeds to uncover such cosmopolitanism that was produced through the contact zones created by trade, travel and indenturement.

Abstract in Malay

Karangan ini berdasarkan idea tentang penduduk tempatan dan bandaraya dari Ulf Hannerz dan idea tentang para pelancong dan mereka yang berpindah-randah Zygmunt Bauman, untuk bertumpu kepada pergerakan orang-orang biasa dalam karya Ghosh kerana beberapa sebab yang melengkapkan mereka dengan petunjuk untuk mendekatkan diri mereka antara satu sama lain (Berland 124). Meminjam kategori "orang nomad pelbagai servis" Joseph Berland, ia membahaskan bahawa penglibatan Ghosh dengan pergerakan ini mengagakkan kedatangan wacana baru tentang dunia kekotaan dan ia menunjukkan dalam percanggahan naratif kosmopilitan semasa yang menguntungkan pergerakan prefesional baru, golongan bijak dan bakat artis elit, Ghosh menemui semula naratif terkubur golongan yang dipanggil "subaltern kosmopolitan" walaupun pergerakan mereka telah dimulakan sebelum ini. Selepas merumuskan kefahaman semasa terhadap isu kosmopolitanisma yang dikembangkan dalam wacana globalisasi, karangan ini diteruskan dengan menerangkan kosmopolitanisma yang dibuahkan melalui zon yang dicipta oleh perdagangan, pengembaraan dan perjanjian.

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Keywords
Subaltern, cosmopolitanism, multi-service nomads, locals, tourists, vagabonds

Keywords in Malay
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Introduction
Ulf Hannerz believes that there is now "a world culture" created "through the increasing interconnectedness of varied local cultures, as well as through the development of cultures without a clear anchorage in any one territory" and argues that people can relate to this global interconnected diversity either as cosmopolitans or as locals(237). Defining cosmopolitanism as "a stance toward diversity itself," "an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other" (239), he describes cosmopolitans as those who are willing "to become involved with the Other" and are concerned with "achieving competence in cultures which are initially alien" (240). Interrogating the binary of cosmopolitans as those who move about in the world and locals as those who remain at home, Hannerz issues a warning against confusing cosmopolitans with other kinds of travellers such as tourists, exiles and expatriates because merely being on the move, according to him, does not turn one into a cosmopolitan (241). Arguing that "in our postmodern society, we are all – to one extent or another, in body or thought, here and now or in the anticipated future, willingly or unwillingly – on the move," Zygmunt Bauman considers "the opposition between the tourists and the vagabonds" as "the major, principal division of the postmodern society" (93). According to Baumann, "we are all plotted on a continuum stretched between the poles of the 'perfect tourist' and the 'vagabond beyond remedy'" – and our respective places between the poles are plotted according to the degree of freedom we possess in choosing our life itineraries.

In contrast to the narratives of cosmopolitanism that have emerged in the wake of the new global process that largely focus on the circulation of elite cosmopolitans, the movements of ordinary people beginning several centuries ago predate the history of cosmopolitanism. Amitav Ghosh's writings, both fiction and non-fiction, have engaged with movements within and without nation states of ordinary people who moved voluntarily or were forced to move due to indenturement, trade and ethnic violence before and after the formation of the Indian nation. These movements have uncovered more instances of contact than of insulation in the histories of nations that interrogate essentialist notions of self, community and nation. This essay draws on Hannerz's notion of locals and cosmopolitans and Bauman's idea of the tourists and the vagabonds to focus on the movements of ordinary folks in Ghosh's works due

to a number of reasons that equip them with an "orientation towards the other" (Berland 124). Borrowing Joseph Berland's category of "multi-service nomads," it argues that his engagement with these movements anticipates the new discourse on cosmopolitanism and shows that in contrast to contemporary cosmopolitan narratives that privilege the movements of the new professional, intellectual or artistic elite, Ghosh recovers the buried narratives of those who may be called *subaltern cosmopolitans* even though their movements might have been triggered from above. After summarising contemporary understandings of cosmopolitanism as developed in the discourse of globalisation, the essay proceeds to uncover such cosmopolitanism that was produced through the contact zones created by trade, travel and indenturement that forced interactions between ordinary folks in different part of the world. Connecting movements to spatial configurations, it shows that the statist division of space in modernity through the creation of borders closed the porous, intersecting boundaries of the past as well as the peripatetic niche.

The Tourists and the Vagabonds, Locals and Cosmopolitans
Defining locals in opposition to cosmopolitans, Hannerz concerns himself largely with cosmopolitans. Contesting the common perception of cosmopolitans as those who move about in the world, he demonstrates that many who move might not be cosmopolitan at all but locals.[2] He defines cosmopolitanism both as "an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences," as well as a matter of "competence" of "both a generalized and a more specialized kind" (239). This competence might be "a state of readiness, a personal ability to make one's way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting" (239). It could also be "a built-up skill in maneuvering more or less expertly with a particular system of meanings and meaningful forms" (239). Hannerz believes that cosmopolitans' competence with regard to alien cultures "entails a sense of mastery" not only because their surrender to an alien culture implies a personal autonomy vis-a-vis the culture from where they originated but also because they can choose to disengage from it at any time (240). Hannerz's cosmopolitans may embrace an alien culture but they know all the time where the exit is. He contrasts cosmopolitans with locals or those "who would rather not have left home" but also with tourists for whom "there is no general openness to a somewhat unpredictable variety of experiences" (241). Similarly, he does not consider the exile as a real cosmopolitan because "his involvement with a culture away from his homeland is something that has been forced on him" (242). Nor does he associate the expatriates who he defines as "people who have chosen to live

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[2] Padmini Mongia borrows Syed Manzurul Islam's idea of the traveller to distinguish between sedentary and nomadic travellers (75).

abroad for some period, and who know when they are there that they can go home when it suits them" with cosmopolitanism. For Hannerz cosmopolitans are different from tourists in their being participants who want to immerse themselves in other cultures and not remain spectators like tourists (242).

In emphasising their non-participatory character, Hannerz echoes Bauman's definition of the tourist. According to Bauman, the tourists "perform the feat of not belonging to the place they might be visiting; theirs is the miracle of being in and out of place at the same time" and the "point of tourist life is to be on the move, not to arrive" (89). Since the tourists "embark on their travels by choice," their decision to leave home to explore foreign parts is "all the easier to make for the comforting feeling that one can always return, if need be" (91). Tourists essentially move between the non-places of globalisation such as airports, luxury hotels, shopping malls, business complexes, theme parks and beaches that are equipped with similar facilities in every part of the world. In this "home-plus" travel, the tourists might move but they are still at home because they want things to be different albeit with the familiarity and comforts of home. An increasing number of such travellers today travel across different parts of the world but might still be very closed in their thinking and not be open to new ideas.

As opposed to the tourists, Bauman defines vagabonds as another category of wanderers who "would perhaps refuse to embark on a life of wandering were they asked, but they had not been asked in the first place" (92). According to him, unlike the tourists, who wander out of choice, vagabonds are on the move "because they have been pushed from behind – having been first uprooted by a force too powerful, and often too mysterious, to resist" (92). Unlike the tourists who have the luxury of freedom, autonomy and independence, "to be free" means "*not to have to* wander around" to vagabonds. It means "to have a home and to be allowed to stay inside" (92). Bauman points out that instead of understanding these terms literally, the tourists and vagabonds, must be seen as "*metaphors of* contemporary life" and that one can be (and often is) a tourist or a vagabond without ever travelling physically far. Hannerz's cosmopolitans and Bauman's vagabonds have much in common by virtue of the competence they have for understanding alien cultures. But both speak to and are entrenched in the cosmopolitan space produced through modern or contemporary translocal flows. Hannerz's categories of cosmopolitans and locals have largely been defined in relation to the present world culture "created through the increasing interconnectedness of varied local cultures, as well as through the development of cultures without a clear anchorage in any one territory" (237). Since the notion of the tourist or one who undertakes travel for recreational, leisure, or business purposes also emerged only in the 18th century, Bauman's categories of the tourist and the vagabond are essentially modern.

Multi-service Nomads

Recent studies have thrown new light on cultures of mobility facilitated by pilgrimage, nomadism, travel, trade and indenturement triggering circulations across India and the rest of the world (Markovits 2; Rao and Casimir 44). They have uncovered religious, economic and cultural flows from Central Asia to India forged by trade networks, pilgrimage and travel in addition to those by invasion to demonstrate that global movements, including globalisation from below, did not begin at the end of the 20th century as suggested in the contemporary discourse of globalisation. Borrowing from Sugata Bose's work on oceanic circulations, Pedro Machado, for instance, has traced the history of the oceanic trade from Gujarat to East Africa through focusing on textiles. He has examined the transformation of Gujarati textile patterns through the incorporation of patterns preferred by African "Mamas" into the patterns traditionally used by Gujarati weavers to cater to African buyers' tastes. Similarly, movements to the Middle East emerged within these oceanic circulations beginning in the 12th century that testify to the existence of a flourishing trade between India, the Middle East and the rest of the world. Although the number of cosmopolitans, or people who move, might have been considerably less in the past in contrast to the era of globalisation in which everyone seems to be on the move, the presence of the idea of circulation – of goods, images, people, finance and ideas – predates the present global flows.

Joseph Berland's study of the *khanabadosh* or the peripatetic communities of the North Western Frontier of undivided Punjab fills up an important gap in these studies as it expands the growing body of literature on oceanic circulations by including neglected land routes and marginalised peripatetic groups that he calls "the other nomads" (104).[3] Identifying mobility as the essence of the peripatetic niche, Berland maintains that the other nomads possess mobility, flexibility and resourcefulness and "a willingness to engage with the Other" that Hannerz views as the essence of genuine cosmopolitanism (Berland 114; Hannerz 239). Asserting that their preference for "a multitude of resources" that is in accord with the peripatetic imperatives of flexibility, freedom and resourcefulness displays not only an orientation towards "the others," but it also suggests a competence to find one's way into other cultures through accumulation and intergenerational transmission of detailed levels of ecocultural knowledge about "the others" (124). The discovery of "other nomads" can help us to put together a different cosmopolitan narrative, which involved ordinary folks who moved in the service of others. Rather than local and cosmopolitans, tourists and vagabonds, Berland's category of the peripatetic people he labels

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[3] *Khanabadosh* is a Persian term meaning "house-on-shoulder" used by sedentary populations to lump together all nomads who view themselves as belonging to specific groups or refer to themselves as *pukiwaas* (Berland 108).

"the multi-service nomads" may be borrowed to theorise subaltern cosmopolitans.

Berland argues that the *khanabadosh* have this "orientation towards the other" in a greater degree than sedentary populations because their peripatetic niche equips them with an openness towards those who are different from them. Following Berland, I would define cosmopolitanism not as a physical movement but as an orientation towards the other by distinguishing between sedentary people and people who inhabit the peripatetic niche – travellers, performing tribes and lascars. While the majority of the people are locals who don't move mentally or psychologically even though they might travel physically, it is the cosmopolitans, or Syed Manzurul Islam's travellers, who have an orientation towards the other even if they might not move physically. It is the *khanabadosh* who interrogate the notion of organic, rooted, fixed identities and spaces through their dwelling-in-travel.

Borders, Boundaries, Dislocation
In contrast to narratives of cosmopolitanism, the discourse of nativism and vernacularism has been characterised by a resistance to movement. Mobility is perceived as alienation from home and as a form of dislocation in these narratives. Dislocation is defined as "a term for both the occasion of displacement as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with the event" (Ashcroft 65). The term is made to cover the "willing or unwilling movement from a known to an unknown location" (Ashcroft 65), and includes experiences ranging from invasion and settlement to slavery and imprisonment. While dislocation might be the common experience of those who have moved away from home, "globalising" displacement theories fail to address local displacement issues and concerns. Postcolonialism's exclusive focus on colonisation's dislocating effects has diverted interest from other dislocating moments in a community's history prior to and after colonisation just as its preoccupation with movement out of the nation has relegated intra-national displacements to the background. Postcolonial theory also appears to be fixated on the displacement of a select group of postcolonial individuals from their homelands and the metaphoric displacement of the colonised elite from indigenous knowledge systems. The thrust of diaspora and postcolonial theory needs to be shifted from colonisation as a dislocating experience to the displacements caused by nationalist histories and geographies.

Similarly, the intermezzo discourse on borders tends to view cultures as a self-contained whole rather than bringing out the porosity of cultural borders marked by a porous array of intersections, where distinct processes from within and beyond these borders are clearly visible. But a different understanding of borders emerges if we look at the boundaries of the past and their impact on the rooted people of the past. This is how we can distinguish the forced

migration in 1947 or cross-border movements from the earlier movements.[4] Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson distinguish between the discontinuous space of modernity and nation-states and continuous space of globalisation that they consider as similar and yet different from the pre-national continuous space (1997). One may add that while the discrete space of the nation is produced through borders, pre-national space is marked by boundaries. While borders are fixed and clearly demarcated, boundaries are porous, shifting and indeterminate. However, unlike the borders of the past that were physical, modern borders that came into being with the formation of nation states are essentially political and are largely a matter of visas, passports and legalities.

The analogy I have used to describe the interconnected space and porous boundaries of the past is the *durrah*, the local name for the Khyber, which is Persian for "pass" and the facilitators of the flows are the *khanabadosh,* the peripatetic communities carrying not only goods but also culture across the *durrah* on the caravan route (Gera Roy 8). The *durrah*, the historic entry point connecting India and the world on the land route features prominently in the history of invasion. But the pass has served as the entry point for flows of goods, culture and people in a parallel history of contact. It is this history of contact among the ordinary folks of the past that has been erased in the discontinuous space of modern nation states. The premise of discontinuity continues to govern the policing of the physical boundaries even in the era of globalisation. While the policing of the *durrah* signifies the closure of the penetrable boundaries that Benedict Anderson has noted among the sacral communities of the past, this understanding of boundaries compels us to look at borders not as transitional zones but as sites of creative cultural production.

Borders, Movement and Rootedness in Ghosh

Ghosh's writings focus on migration during the pre-national space that was continuous and permitted boundary crossings as well as on colonial and post-colonial spaces. While critiquing the concept of borders, he engages with the frequency of boundary-crossings within and outside India, focusing on Bengal in particular, which challenges essentialist definitions of nations and societies. Although Ghosh's fiction and non-fiction throws light on both pre-colonial and colonial movements and displacements in general, he focuses in particular on the dislocation caused by the formation of nations through the marking of what he has called "the shadow lines" across nations (Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*).

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[4] These movements were boundary crossings with no restrictions on the movements of people whereas the new movements since 1947 are a different kind of movement, which are cross-border. Crossings, similar to those across the Indus described earlier in the essay, were equally common across the rivers of Bengal before the formation of nation states. But the cross-flow border flows between Bangladesh and India are not one time cross-flow border-flows as on the border in the West but continuous and still on-going.

Through uncovering these on-going histories of migration and transnational flows that began several centuries ago as well as through the construction of borders, Ghosh interrogates the idea of the nation and borders. In his novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988), Ghosh captures this difference between boundaries and borders in the character of the grandmother or Tha'mma's consternation when she is informed about there being no physical markers between India and Bangladesh: "But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then?" (*The Shadow Lines* 151). In contrast to modern national borders that are policed and implicated in issues of legality and illegality, pre-national boundaries were essentially permeable and permitted frequent crossings, as Tha'mma points out in the novel:

> And if there's no difference both sides will be the same, it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for then – Partition and all the killing and everything – if there isn't something in between? (151)

As one who gave her consent to the idea of the nation through her allegiance to the nationalist cause, Tha'mma does not realise that she is herself complicit in the closure of those boundaries that could be crossed effortlessly before the formation of borders and nation states.

Ghosh provides us a glimpse of pre-colonial global movements across the porous boundaries of the past that belong to older cultures of circulation. As he puts it, "I am trying to see these global movements of people in a historical perspective. *Sea of Poppies* (2008) is a historical novel about migration – both past and present. Don't call it rootless or alienation from the mother culture. Those are negative words" ("Migration is the Reality of My Times"). *In An Antique Land* (1992*)*, Ghosh traces these mobile histories back to the 12th century A.D. through his recovery of a letter marked as MS H.6 sent by the Jewish merchant Abrahim Ben Yiju living in Mangalore to his friend Khalaf ibn Ishaq in Aden in 1132 that contains a reference to a slave named Bomma. He refers to more recent histories of the migration of labour to the Middle East in *The Circle of Reason* (1986), which look back to an earlier migratory movement. One of the main differences between the older cultures of circulation, say the oceanic circulations and the global circulations of the present, is that these circulations included non-elite movements of those I would like to describe as subaltern cosmopolitans. For instance, one would not associate a character like the slave in *In an Antique Land* or like Rajkumar in Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2006) with cosmopolitanism. But if one looks at the history of movements during this period one finds that they belong to those of ordinary working class people who might or might not have been indentured. This movement of an orphaned child on a ship that lands in Burma in Ghosh's novel *The Glass Palace*

mirrors the movements of lascars who travelled on ships, who appear directly in the *Sea of Poppies* or indirectly as the Ghosh family's cook in *An Antique Land*. Ghosh documents unwritten histories of the migration of ordinary folks due to trade, labour and Partition that intersect with one another through characters like the slave *In An Antique Land,* Alu and Kulfi in *The Circle of Reason*, Rajkumar and Dolly in *The Glass Palace,* and Ditti and her co-travellers in *Sea of Poppies*. These stories of the movements of ordinary people in the past and the present put together a narrative of globalisation from below or low globalisation through their crossing of boundaries that, unlike borders, are overlapping, porous and shifting.

Subaltern Cosmopolitans

Cosmopolitanism as an old concept, whose etymological roots lie in the Greek idea of "a citizenship of the world," has been reinscribed with different meanings over the centuries. As Hannerz points out, the local cosmopolitan dichotomy has been part of the sociological and philosophical idiom since the 1950s when it was attached to nationalism (237). Cosmopolitans were those who aligned with structures of the nation rather than those of the locality. However, what was cosmopolitanism in the 1950s would appear to be a form of localism in the new global arrangement. Irrespective of how it is defined, cosmopolitanism appears to be imbricated with histories of colonialism, nationalism and globalisation. Is it possible to speak of a cosmopolitanism that emerges neither from the histories of the nation-state nor from those of the Empire? In his non-fictional work *In an Antique Land*, Ghosh suggests the possibility of a pre-colonial space produced by trade and travel that enabled contacts between people in the past in which Europe did not play any role. The novels, on the other hand, are concerned with movements in the 19th century, or even the 20th century, that are propelled by the Empire, the nation or globalisation.

James Clifford's appropriation of Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* to call attention to "complex histories of dwelling and travelling, cosmopolitan experiences dwelling-in-travel" (2) set the tone of a number of studies that converged on Ghosh's works to illustrate different forms of cosmopolitanism. While cosmopolitanism in Ghosh's works has attracted the attention of a number of scholars, most studies, focusing largely on elite cosmopolitans, have interpreted cosmopolitanism in its modern or postmodern meanings (Black 46; Tomsky 54). These studies have opposed cosmopolitans to subalterns or seen them as compatible with rusticity or rootedness. Similarly, nomadism has been viewed as the essential condition of postmodernity and the debates on the relationship between nomadism, nationalism and cosmopolitanism have largely focused on elite nomads (Grewal). Padmini Mongia was the first to point out that "Bomma's mediaeval society is richly seen by Ghosh as a

vital, cosmopolitan one that put to shame our current notions of cosmopolitanism" (159). But it is Inderpal Grewal who disengages cosmopolitanism from its colonial and post-colonial meanings and relocates it in an earlier history of trade. Her gesturing to the debates on the relationship between cosmopolitanism, nationalism and nomadism in modernity and colonialism before retrieving pre-colonial narratives of cosmopolitanism is particularly relevant in this context. The tensions between cosmopolitans as those who feel "at home" in the world and locals as those who remain at home during this period were produced, as Grewal explains, through colonial policies that equipped certain groups with skills to function in the world through providing them with Western education. She rightly distinguishes these colonial cosmopolitans from the postcolonial cosmopolitans of the 1990s before returning to those medieval histories that produced forms of accommodation that created a form of cosmopolitanism outside the gaze of Europe. As opposed to colonial, postcolonial and global cosmopolitanisms, the contact zones of the past produced subaltern cosmopolitanisms, which involved ordinary folk. Grewal asserts that European intervention destroyed these pre-colonial cosmopolitan zones produced through trade and oceanic circulations. Arguing that Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* suggested a cosmopolitanism that was "not Western in its origin but rather a product of Indian trading practices of the ten and eleventh centuries," she asserts that the book articulates "a cosmopolitanism that is understood to be authentically non-Western and emerging from a historical narrative suppressed by many Western histories" (Grewal 180).

Through recovering the buried narratives of these ordinary folk, Ghosh attempts to disengage cosmopolitanism from colonialism and nationalism while tracing the continuities between pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial migrations. The slave Bomma in Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* has been viewed as a metaphor for these forms of subaltern cosmopolitanisms. But the marginalised narrative of the slave is woven into Ghosh's own journey to Egypt, which is called by its older name Masr, as well as to those of his characters. Alu, in the *Circle of Reason*, raised by his middle class uncle in the traditional craft of weaving, is implicated in the history of the trade between Bengal and Masr. Ghosh recovers through Alu "the gory history in parts; a story of greed and destruction" of the indigenous textile industry during the British Empire as "the loom reaches through the centuries and across continents to decide the fate of mechanical man" (*Circle of Reason* 57-58). Against the narrator's "living belief that having once made the world one and blessed it with its diversity" weaving "must do so again" (*Circle of Reason* 57-58), Alu travels to the imaginary land of Al-Ghazira to be implicated in a new history of capital in which third world labour is made to service not only the West but also the East. Like Alu, Kulfi who travels to work as a domestic help

in a rich household, illustrates these new migratory trends. In both his fiction and non-fiction, Ghosh reminds his readers of those contact zones that enabled the inhabitants of what the Arabs called al-Hind to engage with those in Masr in a dialogue unmediated by Europe. While he does not follow the textile route to Masr, his allusions to weaving look back to the flourishing trade in Indian ocean cultures through which Dhaka's muslin found its way into Egypt.

While scholars have largely focused on modern cosmopolitans and postmodern nomads in Ghosh's fiction, Ghosh is concerned with the movements of the marginalised who have figured as an absence in histories of nations or diasporas. One of the most conspicuous absences is that of lascars who, as the first to travel across the seas, can provide a glimpse into oceanic circulations. In his *Sea of Poppies*, which is set in the 19th century, lascars already enjoyed a dominant position in the nautical hierarchy as indicated by the position of the head of the lascars Serang Ali whose help is solicited by an American sailor Zachary Reid to become second-in-command on the ship. This tradition of the maritime districts of Bengal supplying lascars to the oceanic trade appears to have continued until the 1940s when the lascar reappears as the Ghosh family's cook in *In An Antique Land* to regale the young author with amazing tales of travels to foreign lands. In contrast to Jodu who crosses the sea, Rajkumar in *The Glass Palace* makes a riverine journey across the fluid borders between Rangoon and Dhaka that closed only with the Partition of Bengal. Fascinated by "sailors from all around the Indian Ocean" who "went by the name 'lascar' – East Africans, South Asians, Filipinos, Chinese, Malays," Ghosh wonders "how things got done on a ship with such a cosmopolitan crew" (qtd. in Caswell) and views lascars as initiators of forms of cosmopolitans from below. "I personally believe that lascars were responsible for enormous numbers of changes, innovations in English, in vocabulary, in costume," he stated in an interview (Raote).

Instead of opposing subalterns like Alu and Kulfi of *The Circle of Reason* to cosmopolitans, Ghosh reveals both subaltern and elites to be equipped with similar forms of competence that enable them to find their way in alien worlds through bringing Alu and Kulfi together with the doctor couple Vermas and Das in the little town of El-Qued at the northeastern tip of the Algerian desert Sahara at the end of the novel. While conceding that "class was often the key to mobility in the British Empire," he juxtaposes the narratives of upper class women such as Uma in *The Glass Palace* and Mayadevi in *The Shadow Lines* with those like the young orphan Rajkumar in *The Glass Palace* who opted to try his luck in Burma. Through merging the stories of different kinds of travellers such as Neel Rattan Halder, a wealthy Raja, with the untouchable Kalua in *Sea of Poppies* and of the poor Rajkumar and the maid Dolly with the Burmese King Thibaw Min and his Queen Supayalat, Ghosh demonstrates the dissolution of boundaries of language, class and caste among those who are forced to travel.

These connections formed across boundaries of language, gender, class, caste and location through a shared openness to the world, whether natural or acquired, are nowhere as visible as the bond that connects the marine biologist of Indian descent Pia with the fisherman Fokir in *The Hungry Tide* (2006).

At the same time, Ghosh makes a distinction between physical and psychological travel that makes some of those who travel tourists and others cosmopolitans. The distinction between the two travellers Ila and Tridib in *The Shadow Lines* has been observed and analysed in a number of essays. While Ila had "lived in many places, she had never travelled at all" and was one to whom names on the map appeared like a "worldwide string of departure lounges" (*The Shadow Lines* 21), Tridib who had given the young narrator "worlds to travel in" and "eyes to see them with" is a true cosmopolitan(*The Shadow Lines* 20). Unlike Ila who is an expatriate and looked for Ladies at every airport not because she wanted to go but because they were "the only fixed points in the shifting landscapes of her childhood," Tridib is also the modern nomad who is at home in several cultures due to his ability to move at ease across different geographical spaces. Ila is a classic example of Bauman's tourist who travels across the world without participating in alien cultures and remains a passive spectator. But she is also one whose travels make her a tourist even in her own culture. Unlike Ila whose frequent perambulations have an unsettling effect underlining her feeling of unhomeliness, Tridib, like the vagabonds, not only enthusiastically participates in diverse cultures but is also rooted in his own. Like Hannerz's cosmopolitans, his openness to alien cultures positions him in a position of mastery over his own culture over which he enjoys a certain degree of autonomy. Ghosh's novels are populated with vagabonds of all classes, castes and age. The young Rajkumar in true vagabond fashion settles for the uncertainty of the known rather than the security of home by exchanging his recently deceased mother's last bit of jewellery for a passage to Burma. Jodu, in *Sea of Poppies*, raring to leave home, boards the ship with great alacrity. Although Fokir in *The Hungry Tide* is a householder, his mysterious absences from home hint at a form of vagrancy that prevents him from being an ideal husband.

The idea of history as constructed through continuous movements co-exists in Ghosh's writings with the notion of rootedness. In their competence to remain at home while being at home in the world, cosmopolitans display Appiah's idea of "rooted cosmopolitanisms" (qtd. in Black 46). The Bengali notion of "udbastu" with its sense of rooted identities which are tied to a birth-place usually located in a village, rather with the notion of a "vit" in a village, and the disjuncture of birth-place and nationality is a theme that Ghosh returns to time and again in *The Shadow Lines* and *In An Antique Land*. But there are references of this understanding of the self in other novels as well. While many Indians still dwell within an old notion of identity rooted in a birth-place with an ancestral home and a deity in an ancestral village, the notion of home and

identity is radically altered for cosmopolitans. Many of Ghosh's novels refer to these displaced identities and the new notion of constructing identity. The village in *The Circle of Reason* is not an organic rooted village but a reconstructed village. Similarly, the narrative of resettlement recurs in *The Hungry Tide* through the presence of Partition refugees who move from Marichjhapi in Madhya Pradesh to the Sunderbans. The notion of "becoming" both in the sense of making a nation and an identity that is invented or constructed, recurs throughout Ghosh's writing. These imaginings of nation in which the lines don't seem to matter because of the way the memories reconstruct the past alter the understanding of borders and nations.[5]

Conclusion

Ghosh's definition of borders unpacks a history of movements, travels and inter-cultural crossings that produces an understanding of space as defined in postmodern geographies. The cross-border movements of ordinary folks in Ghosh's works convey the notion of separateness through the "historically situated subjectivities" of those who "dwell in travel." Although many of these travels were not independent of Europe and were often imposed from above, they equipped ordinary folks with a cultural competence that opened them to alien cultures and an orientation to the other. As opposed to purity, the fetish of purity and the pollution complex, they suggest a syncretism as an alternative to a mono-cultural or a mono-religious notion (Srivastava 47). It is these small indistinguishable, intertwined histories – Indian and Egyptian, Muslims and Jewish, Hindu and Muslim that have been subsequently Partitioned, which have been documented by Ghosh in I*n An Antique Land* and all his novels. Notwithstanding Gauri Viswanathan and Gaurav Desai's critical look at Ghosh's celebrated syncreticism, this alternative history of syncreticism may be juxtaposed against the segregationist narratives that aim to deny this common past in order to promote the cause of religious separatism.[6]

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[5] If one travels to the north, no person above a certain age is likely to use the term independence to refer to 1947. The older generation would always begin to 1947 as the year "Jado Pakistan bania" [when Pakistan was made] underlining the constructedness of nations.

[6] See Gauri Viswanathan for her critique of Ghosh's idealised cosmopolitanism that does not address the reality of religious difference. New historical research reveals the construction of religious boundaries through the birth of formal religions in the 19th century that closed the intersecting sectarian boundaries visible in the demotic practices of villages in India (Oberoi 24)

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