

*Rewriting Histories and Geographies:  
Cosmopolitan Moments in  
Contemporary Indian Writing in English*

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*To my parents  
and to Matthias, Sophie and Emilie  
with love and gratitude*

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past fifteen years, cosmopolitanism, understood to be a concept that encompasses the negotiation of the ethics and practice of migration, community, responsibility, difference and sameness, has become the subject of an international literary debate. In many ways, the critical output that accompanies this debate has acknowledged the relevance of cosmopolitan thought in contemporary literatures of a global, transnational literary imaginary.<sup>1</sup> Yet the critical literature concerned with cosmopolitanism has, with a few exceptions, mainly used it as a descriptive rather than as an interpretative term, focusing on the *politics* of the texts rather than on their *aesthetics* or in this case, to be more precise, their literary features.<sup>2</sup> Surprisingly, this has been the case particularly with the interpretation of contemporary Indian writing in English, which is in most cases still labelled as postcolonial, a description that is not necessarily redundant, but that cannot do justice to the scope of this body of literature. Intervening in a field that takes into account concerns that go beyond postcolonialism – post-postcolonialism, if one so wills – means taking into account postcolonial concerns, yet it also means thinking about literature beyond the paradigms of national and even transnational diasporic literatures.

This is precisely the aim of this thesis, which proposes that in order to grasp the imaginative geographical and historical scope of contemporary Indian writing in English, it is necessary to think beyond the above-mentioned paradigms and reflect upon this body of literature in the context of cosmopolitanism, because this concept offers a means of thinking critically about migration<sup>3</sup> and globalization<sup>4</sup> in

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<sup>1</sup> The use and definition of cosmopolitanism for this thesis is to be discussed at length in the second chapter.

<sup>2</sup> 'Aesthetics' as it is used here expresses the texts' enhancement of certain literary features. This is achieved through style, narrative structure and use of rhetorical tropes. Chapter 2.1.3 discusses these aesthetic concerns in connection with cosmopolitan moments.

<sup>3</sup> Migration refers to the movement of people(s) across geographical space. It is understood here as "a comprehensive social and cultural process within and between geographic and social spaces" (*Encyclopedia of Migration and Minorities in Europe* xix). Migration is not a new phenomenon, although modernity has accelerated it.

<sup>4</sup> Globalization is a historical process that began with trade, travel and colonization and was, in modernity, accelerated by the internalization of commerce and global capitalist ventures. Globalization is a spatial phenomenon that implies a shift in the spatiality of human organization

the context of literary fiction.<sup>5</sup> These key concerns of the four novels at the centre of this thesis: Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and *River of Smoke* (2011), Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* (2007) and M.G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song* (2007).<sup>6</sup>

In the reading of these texts, three main concerns come to the fore: the ethical, practical and aesthetic (literary) concerns of cosmopolitanism. The ethics of cosmopolitanism relate, as defined here, to the moral obligation toward the other, responsibility for and solidarity with the other, community, and the negotiation of difference and sameness.<sup>7</sup> These ethical concerns are closely related to the practical concerns of migration, which is what is meant by practical cosmopolitanism.<sup>8</sup> Bringing these two concerns together allows for a thorough discussion of the moral obligation toward the other in the sometimes precarious circumstances brought about by globalization and migration. It is of particular interest to this thesis to see how the novels at hand negotiate ethics and practice of cosmopolitanism aesthetically, that is in their propensity as works of literary fiction, with a focus on style, language and tropes, to name the main literary features of interest. In other words, the questions asked are how these 'intersections' of ethics and practice occur in the texts at hand, that is by which literary means they are conveyed and how this affects their relevance in view of the narrative as a whole.

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and activity and "can be thought of as the widening, intensifying, speeding up and growing impact of worldwide interconnectedness" (Held, *Cosmopolitanism* 28-29).

<sup>5</sup> So far only a few literary critics have engaged with the aesthetic qualities of cosmopolitan literature. See mainly: Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance. Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (2001), Jessica Berman, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Community* (2001), Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style* (2006), Neelam Srivastava, *Secularism in the Postcolonial Indian Novel: National and Cosmopolitan Narratives in English* (2008) and Berthold Schoene, *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (2009). More critics have written on cosmopolitanism and politics in literature (as opposed to aesthetics): Bishnupriya Ghosh, *When Borne Across: Literary Cosmopolitics in the Contemporary Indian Novel* (2004), Katherine Stanton, *Cosmopolitan Fictions. Ethics, Politics, and Global Change in the Works of Kazuo Ishiguro, Michael Ondaatje, Jamaica Kincaid, and J.M. Coetzee* (2006), Pranav Jani, *Decentering Rushdie: Cosmopolitanism and the Indian Novel in English* (2010).

<sup>6</sup> From now on, I will refer to the four novels by using their short forms: *Poppies*, *Smoke*, *Enchantress* and *Assassin*. The order of the novels as mentioned mirrors the sequence of the analysis chapters.

<sup>7</sup> For my discussion of cosmopolitan ethics, see chapter 2.1.1.

<sup>8</sup> For my discussion of cosmopolitan practice, see chapter 2.1.2.



These instances when the ethics, practice and aesthetics of cosmopolitanism are negotiated in the novels and in which histories and geographies are rewritten and reimagined are here called *cosmopolitan moments*. Histories and geographies are fictionally rewritten, it is claimed here, because the cosmopolitan moments in the novels question and reimagine the world beyond its national(ist) historiographies and geographies. Rewriting in postcolonial studies has come to mean the rewriting of canonized works into narratives of Empire.<sup>9</sup> What is termed as 'postcolonial' literature concerns itself with the British Empire and its impact on its colonies, the Commonwealth, diaspora and exile, as well as with the nation-building processes of the former colonies that became independent.<sup>10</sup> In the context of this thesis, rewriting histories and geographies refers to the propensity of the four novels to remap, rethink and reimagine these narratives of time and space according to an understanding that moves away from postcolonial dichotomies towards a more global view of events that still takes into account existing power relations. In cosmopolitan moments of the text, the questioning of accepted historical narratives are questioned, capsized, expanded, modified and so rewritten.<sup>11</sup>

The analysis of the novels shows that cosmopolitan moments occur in variations, which led to the development of *cosmopolitan mirroring* and *cosmopolitan passages*. Effectively, these two terms are specification of 'moments'; they are moments in which mirroring is a central device, and moments in which 'passage' in the sense of movement and transformation comes to the fore as a relevant trope.<sup>12</sup> This particular approach constitutes an innovation in the field of cosmopolitanism and literary studies, and contributes to the understanding of cosmopolitanism in the context of migration and globalization, as well as in the field of Indian writing in English.

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<sup>9</sup> One well-known example is *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys in which Charlotte Brontës's *Jane Eyre* is rewritten from a postcolonial perspective.

<sup>10</sup> See for example *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* (1993), edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. For a more recent work on the subject, see Ankhi Mukherjee's *What is a Classic? Postcolonial Rewriting and the Invention of the Canon* (2013).

<sup>11</sup> See chapter two: "Cosmopolitan Moments in Indian Writing in English" for more on my choice of texts and genre.

<sup>12</sup> Mirroring and passages are included in my definition and use of cosmopolitan moments.

The approach that is introduced in this thesis serves to interpret this selection of novels that rewrite India's geographies and histories in a globalized context by reimagining spatial and temporal projections of India, and by envisioning lives that are transformed by displacement, voluntary or not. This thesis, then, investigates the practical, ethical and aesthetic aspects of cosmopolitanism in literary fictions that address, firstly, the practical implications of migration, secondly, the ethics towards the other, community, and sameness and difference, and thirdly, the way in which these novels negotiate ethics and practice aesthetically, thereby creating a cosmopolitan imaginary. Accordingly, in this interpretation, the aesthetics of cosmopolitanism come to the fore in a hitherto unprecedented way.<sup>13</sup>

Hence, *Poppies*, *Smoke*, *Enchantress* and *Assassin* engage in an aesthetic negotiation of cosmopolitan ethics and practice by reimagining global histories and geographies. Their cosmopolitanism consists of a shared interest and focused investment in histories and geographies that have not been explored to this extent before, embedding India and its history into a globalized understanding of events. They tell stories about India, China, Afghanistan, Persia, Canada, the US and many other places, tales of land and sea, thus framing the Indian subcontinent in transcultural imaginaries of migration: they rewrite and reenvision Indian histories and geographies by placing India squarely into a narrative of global history and geography that takes into account the pre-colonial, colonial and post-Independence eras.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the four novels were selected according to their in-depth investment in Indian history and geography.<sup>15</sup> Over the last twenty years, a

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<sup>13</sup> Vassanji's novel *The In-Between Life of Vikram Lall* (2003), Rushdie's novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), and Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2003) are also, in theme and style, of interest to this thesis. Other contemporary Indian writers whose work touches upon transnational and diasporic issues are Kiran Desai, who won the Man Booker Prize for *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Jhumpa Lahiri, author of *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), *The Namesake* (2003), *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) and *The Lowland* (2013). Kamila Shamsie is a Pakistani author who writes in English; the plot of her novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009) spans the globe. The fact that these are all women writers whose work I have not considered is not significant; the investment in history and geography is most prominent in the works I have chosen and therefore of foremost interest to this thesis.

<sup>14</sup> I am aware that countries and regions change their names and status: for example, Persia is now known as Iran, and India became a nation in 1947. Where appropriate I will use the denominations used in the novels.

<sup>15</sup> It is clear that my own position as a critic is extremely limited because I can consider only a translated fragment of a large literary output in *bhasha* (vernacular) languages.

shift in historical and geographical concerns has occurred in the work of Rushdie, Ghosh and Vassanji. These concerns go beyond the postcolonial in the sense that although postcolonial themes are still important, it has become more central to narrate histories and geographies that are part of a global rather than a national approach to historical narratives. This shift is clearly visible in *Poppies*, *Smoke*, *Enchantress*, and *Assassin*, novels that were all written in the time span of the last seven years (2007 to 2011). While they consider postcolonial concerns, this is not where their main focus lies. On the contrary, this analysis demonstrates the relevance of cosmopolitan concerns in these novels.

Even though the term 'Indian' is used to denominate these works, their topical interests move beyond boundaries, and they are being read (and critically acclaimed) by an international readership. If adhering to David Damrosch's definition that takes "world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their cultures of origin, whether in translation or in their original language" (4), this renders these novels part of world literature.<sup>16</sup> Their popularity in the English-speaking world outside of India is remarkable: Pranav Jani states that "the Indian (English) novel seems to mainly look abroad for its readers, partly because it appeals only to elites and partly because even in the context of a growing middle class there is only a small audience" (28). Even so, these texts are not tailored to fit the knowledge of 'Western' readers: it is quite common for writers to insert languages in their writing which might not be understood by their readers. Certainly, in the novels investigated, Indian vernaculars, creoles, pidgins and other variations form part of the text, and are not translated into English or explained. Thus, linguistically permeable transitions between English language writing and writing in the vernaculars are created. English becomes part of the Indian subcontinent's multilingualism, "an Indian tongue, a place of linguistic migration, of translation, of mobility", according to Bishnupriya Ghosh (76). Certainly, Ghosh, Rushdie and Vassanji are conscious of a multilingual reality that they integrate into their fictions. The linguistic relationship between English, Hindi and other Indian languages is complex (B. Ghosh 69ff.), and it is "a

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<sup>16</sup> The term 'world literature' was originally coined by Goethe, in his conversations with Johann Peter Eckermann. See Eckermann's *Beiträge zur Poesie, mit besonderer Hinweisung auf Goethe* (1911).

misconception to see English in blanket opposition to the ‘vernacular’ or regional language cultures” (B. Ghosh 72). It is relevant to think of Indian literature in English as part of the Indian literary production (rather than as removed from it), as well as part of world literature because these texts do not address a particular national readership.

Not only in terms of circulation can these novels be considered part of world literature, but also in subject matter. Following Homi K. Bhabha, who suggests that “transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees – these border and frontier conditions – may be the terrains of world literature” (*Location* 17), *Poppies*, *Smoke*, *Enchantress* and *Assassin* can be considered part of world literature, since these are major issues that are discussed in these novels. Arguably, it is productive to think of the novels in these terms because the concept of world literature leaves a wider scope for the interpretation of these novels that are concerned with cosmopolitan as well as postcolonial themes. Hence, including them in a corpus of world literature emphasizes the novels’ international circulation, as well as their preoccupation with marginalized migration histories that are global rather than national in scale.

This thesis has the particular aim to establish a theoretical framework that defines cosmopolitanism as a concept that can be used for literary analysis, which is based on close and wide reading, narratology and a focus on stylistic issues that aims to interpret the novels with cosmopolitan moments as an interpretative lens. It will remain to be seen how far it can take us, and what its limitations are. Hence, the research questions of this thesis are, in a nutshell, the following: how far can cosmopolitanism take us in a literary context, and how can it be used for literary analysis? How are the ethics and practice of cosmopolitanism relevant for analysing these novels? Is the analytical framework useful for distinguishing a repetition of certain literary features, i.e. reoccurring images, metaphors, narratives, themes in cosmopolitan moments? Importantly, can the claim that histories and geographies are rewritten in cosmopolitan moments be verified?

These questions are part of the theoretical, analytical and interpretative work that informs this thesis. In order to find answers to these questions, and to

analyse the literary texts, this thesis is structured as follows: after the introduction and the theoretical chapter, there are four consecutive literature chapters that analyse the novels, each followed by a concluding chapter. With the exception of one subchapter, namely 6.2 “The Aesthetics of Arrival and Community in *The Assassin’s Song* and *The Enchantress of Florence*”, in which particular aspects of these two novels are contrasted, each chapter is dedicated to the analysis of one novel. In view of the richness, intricacy (in terms of themes, imagery and language) and the idiosyncrasy of the novels, this approach makes sense because it enables a detailed negotiation with the individual texts. Each subchapter interprets a different cosmopolitan moment.

The length of the analysis chapters varies to some extent: *Poppies* and *Enchantress* demanded lengthier analyses, *Smoke* and *Assassin* less so. Moreover, it was necessary to add sections to the subchapters in the chapter on *Enchantress* in order to structure and group my findings appropriately and meaningfully. This variation can be attributed in part to the novel’s complexity, and in part to my wish to address several issues that seem relevant. Concretely, the structure of the thesis is as follows:

The **introduction** offers, in two subchapters, a short overview of Indian writing in English and cosmopolitanism. In 1.1 “Indian Writing in English: Developments from Local to Global Orientations”, a short overview of Indian writing in English is given, which is followed by 1.2 “Critical Approaches to Cosmopolitanism and Indian Writing in English”. Both subchapters introduce Indian writing in English, and embed cosmopolitanism as well as the novels at the centre of this thesis into a literary, historical and critical context.

Chapter **two**, “**Cosmopolitan Moments in Contemporary Writing in English**” establishes the theoretical framework of this thesis, which is concerned with the cosmopolitan moments. In subchapter 2.1 “Expressing Cosmopolitan Ethics, Practice and Aesthetics in Cosmopolitan Moments”, cosmopolitanism as a term is investigated closely and critically, and its advantages and disadvantages as an interpretative lens are questioned. Moreover, in three sections, the understanding and definition of cosmopolitan aesthetics, ethics, and practice in

this thesis are explicated and it is suggested that instead of using cosmopolitanism as a blanket term, it is meaningful to read the texts with the lens of cosmopolitan moments. Subchapter 2.2 “Rewriting Histories and Geographies”, explains how histories and geographies are rewritten in cosmopolitan moments, by referring to conceptions of global history, space and the literary imagination. 2.3 “Methodology” briefly reviews the methodological considerations by listing the methodologies of close and wide reading, and narratological and stylistic concerns that were used for textual analysis.

The third chapter, “**Cosmopolitan Passages in Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies***”, is concerned with the analyses of the cosmopolitan passages and moments in this novel about characters caught up in the heyday of colonialism, globalization, trade and the impending opium wars.<sup>17</sup> In four subchapters, it is argued that in cosmopolitan moments, the conditions of human existence in colonial times, community, movement and transformation are negotiated. 3.1 “*Girmitiyas* and Lascars: Cosmopolitan Practices” ostensibly deals with the cosmopolitan practices which existed historically. In this subchapter, it is claimed that this constitutes a rewriting of subaltern<sup>18</sup> histories into a narrative of global economic and imperial history. Next, 3.2 “The *Ibis*: Vision and Cosmopolitan Community” concerns itself closely with the metaphor of the ship, the *Ibis*, which figures as a trope for community and aspirational cosmopolitanism. In “3.3 Masks and Disguises: The *Ibis*’s Cosmopolitan Passengers”, the playful destabilizations of race, class and gender are analysed and read as cosmopolitan moments, and it is argued that in these moments, conceived notions of histories are rewritten. Lastly,

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<sup>17</sup> The novels are introduced in detail in the literature chapters.

<sup>18</sup> The term subaltern refers to (in the context of this thesis) the inferior position of individuals who, in a strongly stratified society, are outside the sphere of hegemonial power. It is strongly related to a historiographical understanding that opposes master narratives of history. Moreover, subaltern history “is capable of extension to any subordinated population, and it has been influential in histories of women and of African Americans. Its main challenge to world history is that most subaltern theorists deny the possibility of any single master narrative that could form a plot for world history. This entails at least a partial break with Marxism, which is exactly such a narrative. Instead, most see a postmodern developing world with a congeries of national or tribal histories, without closures or conventional narratives, whose unity, if it has one at all, was imposed by the imperialist power.” (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Subaltern history”). Since one of the novels discussed here, *Enchantress*, reflects upon the hegemony of Akbar’s Mughal empire, subalternity is not understood to be a strictly postcolonial concept. See Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and, for example, Gyanendra Pandey (1992), Dipesh Chakrabarty (2008).

in 3.4 “Foreigner, Friend: Transformation and Cosmopolitan Responsibility”, the ethics of cosmopolitan responsibility and the trope of the body are highlighted in the discussion of a narrative strand about an unusual friendship.

The fourth chapter deals with the second part of the *Ibis* trilogy, **“Cosmopolitan Moments in Amitav Ghosh’s *River of Smoke*”**. In this chapter, three cosmopolitan concerns are highlighted: in 4.1 “Storms and Winds of Change: Cosmopolitan Transformations”, the trope of the storm is discussed as a means of aesthetically conveying the rewriting of histories. Secondly, in 4.2 “Canton’s Fanqui-town: A Cosmopolitan Community?”, the foreign enclave of Canton, Fanqui-town, as well as the floating city of boats on its shore, and the Indian house of trade are analysed with a cosmopolitan lens and discussed. Lastly, in 4.3 “Bahram, Opium and the Ghost: Failed Cosmopolitan Responsibility”, the issue of cosmopolitan responsibility is raised (as in 3.4) and debated.

Chapter five, **“Cosmopolitan Moments in a Magical World: Salman Rushdie’s *The Enchantress of Florence*”**, addresses two main issues: the envisionment of geographies, of spaces and places, with the aid of the trope of the mirror, and the imagination of historical narratives with the help of the trope of the painting. In other words, geographies and histories are understood to be created with the help of framed visualities. The second issue concerns cosmopolitan passages or trajectories that combine both ethical and practical cosmopolitan concerns. Concretely, the subchapter (and its subsections) 5.1 “Cosmopolitan Mirroring: From Fatehpur Sikri to Samarkand, to Florence” and 5.2 “Cosmopolitan Moments: Art and Storytelling” (and subsections) are dedicated especially to intermedial aspects as an aesthetic means to express cosmopolitan concerns. The former identifies imagined geographies, conveyed by mirroring, as cosmopolitan moments in which geographies are rewritten into a narrative not defined by the dichotomy of ‘East’ and ‘West’. The latter focuses on the interaction of painting, historiography and storytelling as a cosmopolitan moment that allows for a rewriting of a female subaltern history into imperial Mughal history. 5.3 “Cosmopolitan Passages: Qara Köz and Mogor’s Travels”

resumes the theme of migration and its ethical and practical implications. The ghost as a trope recurs (as in 3.4), raising interesting narrative problems.

The last literary analysis is undertaken in chapter six, **“Cosmopolitan Travellers and Their Tales in M.G. Vassanji’s *The Assassins’s Song*”**. This chapter focuses on two travellers, one contemporary, the other medieval, whose life-worlds at the intersections of an increasingly globalized world are examined. In this novel, poetic forms like songs, legends and poems are relevant when it comes to thinking about cosmopolitanism, and it is argued that these aesthetic components of the text mark its literary cosmopolitanism, in which the ethics and practice of cosmopolitanism are also negotiated. In 6.1 “Interweaving Legends and Histories Across Time: Karsan and Nur Fazal”, it is argued that by interweaving and contrasting the two narratives of migration, one modern and medieval, one a fictional memoir and one a legend, one realist and one magical, a literary aesthetics of cosmopolitanism is created which, as a cosmopolitan moment, allows the negotiation of community, belonging, migration and responsibility. Then, in 6.2 “The Aesthetics of Arrival and Community in *The Assassin’s Song* and *The Enchantress of Florence*”, the parallels concerning the situations of arrival, hospitality and community are analysed as cosmopolitan moments and it is contended that the aesthetics of the text highlight the negotiation of these issues. This is the only instance of direct comparison between two novels, and it was undertaken because of the strikingly similar use of imagery. The last literary analysis subchapter, 6.4 “Songs, Poetry, Legends: The Aesthetics of Literary Cosmopolitanism” investigates the relevance of other literary forms in the novel and argues that they constitute a cosmopolitan moment with which the polarity of home and diaspora is questioned, as well as the dissolution or at least meaninglessness of the dichotomies of ‘East’ and ‘West’.

The **conclusion**, which is preceded by a **summary and intermediate conclusion at the end of each literature chapter**, synthesizes the findings made in the analysis chapters, by identifying the main literary themes that have emerged and, after concluding, reflects upon further steps and possibilities for analysis.



In the following two subchapters, the novels and the authors at the centre of this thesis are introduced and embedded into the context of English writing in contemporary literatures about India.

## 1.1 Indian Writing in English: Developments from Local to Global Orientations

Salman Rushdie received the Man Booker Prize for *Midnight's Children* (1980) in 1981. This marked the beginning of a period of unprecedented international visibility of Indian writing in English, as well as the beginning of a series of awards for Indian writers. The prize was further awarded to Arundhati Roy in 1997 for *The God of Small Things* (1997), to Kiran Desai in 2006 for *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) and, most recently, to Aravind Agida in 2008 for *The White Tiger* (2008). V.S. Naipaul won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001. Vikram Chandra won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book in 1996; in 2001, Amitav Ghosh caused a stir when he turned down his nomination for the same prize, thereby "short-circuiting his currency within that colonial rubric," as B. Ghosh puts it (32). In 2006, the Frankfurt Book Fair's guest country was India.<sup>19</sup>

The internationally acclaimed novel *Midnight's Children* led to a renaissance of the Indian novel in English by prompting a whole generation of writers to adopt a "certain postmodern playfulness, the turn to history, a new exuberance of language, the reinvention of allegory, the sexual frankness" (Mee 358). The nation as a concept of unity, which was central to the years of nationalist struggle and the building of the new nation-state, was replaced by the need to question this unity. The "issue of imagining the nation, the issue of the fate of the children of the midnight hours of Independence" became, according to Mee, a pressing one throughout India (ibid.).

Not surprisingly, the period in which 'the nation' was most central to the Indian novel in English was the 1930s and 1940s, the period of anti-colonial nationalism. Leela Gandhi states that the writers who wrote in English (many of

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<sup>19</sup> This international recognition ties in with the general hype surrounding India, which has received renewed cultural and commercial attention due to the export of Bollywood films, Bollywood film stars (former Miss World Aishwarya Ray and Sharukh Khan, for example, are globally known megastars), the export of fashionable lifestyle, food and interior decoration, yoga and Ayurvedic medicine, to name but a few of the signposts of 'Indian' culture as it has been perceived in the West in recent years. See Graham Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic. Marketing the Margins* (2001) for more on the commodification of exoticism in Indian literature in English.

whom, she pointedly remarks, “tried their hand – with varying degrees of success – at novel writing”) focused on the social and political issues which preoccupied the age of Indian nationalism (190). According to her,

the nation-centered consciousness [of this new generation of novelists] was tempered by a characteristic cosmopolitanism of outlook and experience. Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattachary, Raja Rao, Aubrey Menen, and G.V. Desani, to name a few, each spent a substantial and formative period of their lives in Europe, and their writing is often, albeit subtly, underscored by the sense of cultural schizophrenia which has become the hallmark of recent and more self-consciously post-colonial fiction. (190)

Indian novelists of this period found themselves, therefore, caught between India and Europe, between Indian nationalism and the period of late European modernism (191).<sup>20</sup> There is ambivalence where the use of English is concerned. On the one hand, English was the language of the colonizer – famously, the British had consciously subscribed to a rigorous policy of English language education in Thomas Babington Macaulay’s *Minute on Indian Education* in 1835.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, English had become the language of upper-class education, and a lingua franca that was used by the Indian intelligentsia to communicate.

In the decades after Independence, the “ruling triumvirate of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao” (Mee and Narayan, “Novelists of the 1950s and 1960s”, 248) continued to write in English; on a broader scale, however, it was felt that it was somewhat unpatriotic to write in the language of the colonizer, and it was only in 1960 that a novel in English (R.K. Narayan’s *The Guide*, 1958) won the Sahitya Akademi Award (247). The career of a writer in English was therefore not exactly promising, and few novelists could sustain their careers in this way.

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<sup>20</sup> The contemporary writer Amit Chaudhuri, in his essay “Cosmopolitanism’s Alien Face” (2009), focuses on modernism and defamiliarization, and postcoloniality and alterity. Chaudhuri points out that far from being distinct discourses, the modernity/defamiliarization versus postcoloniality/alterity are reconcilable: “[a] second glance at the cosmopolitan – especially at the Jewish writers and artists who lived in Europe, many of them transplanted to America around the time of the Second World War, or who died shortly before (Benjamin, Kracauer, Schoenberg, Bloch, Arendt, to name a few) – reminds us that alterity is an indispensable and intimate constituent of the ‘high’ modern, that it is the hidden twin of what is already hidden but powerfully definitive of ‘high’ modernity – the defamiliarized” (101). Dirk Wiedmann traces modernity in contemporary Indian English writing in *Genres of Modernity. Contemporary Indian Novels in English* (2008).

<sup>21</sup> See Macaulay’s *Minute on Indian Education*, February 2, 1835.

Mee and Narayan point out that the theme of alienation is central to many novels, and that the dominant concern of this period is with “character development and psychological depth, often combined with a sense of the alienated individual, dissatisfied with modern life” (247).<sup>22</sup> In particular, writers such as Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, and Anita Desai, a remarkable quartet of women writers that emerged during this time, took up alienation as a central theme and thus continued the modernist tradition of writing in India which began with R.K Narayan and Khushwant Singh.<sup>23</sup> Jani has argued that these writers represent a ‘namaak-halal’ (meaning ‘true to one’s salt’) cosmopolitanism that was concerned with post-Independence India, women and society (2010). Khushwant Singh, author of the famed *Train to Pakistan* (1947) and Arun Joshi, whose best-known novel is perhaps *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) are further exponents of this particular generation of writers that was concerned with tradition and modernity, and less with nationalism. According to Mee and Narayan, many of the novels “seem highly sceptical of the dominant forms of Indian culture and society” (259), but do not develop “the conflict between tradition and modernity – which are a thematic feature of so many of their stories – into any kind of formal exploration of indigenous narrative form” (260). However, what they did do – and this is of interest here – was to show

a command of the dominant forms of the English novel, and the right of Indian novelists to be taken seriously in terms of the criteria of Western novel writing. Perhaps this represents a building up towards the cultural capital so conspicuously consumed by the Rushdie generation of the 1980s and 1990s. (260)

The ‘Rushdie generation’, also called ‘Midnight’s Children’, refers to the generation of novelists that was born around Independence and still exerts a strong influence on the literary scene. The novelists who are considered part of this ‘Rushdie generation’ are obviously Salman Rushdie himself, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Rukun Advani, Mukul

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<sup>22</sup> Tabish Khair, in *Babu Fictions. Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels* (2001), writes extensively about alienation.

<sup>23</sup> See *The Vintage Book of Modern Indian Literature* (2004), edited by Amit Chaudhuri.

Kesavan, and Anurag Mathur (all at one time students at St. Stephens, an elite Delhi college). Moreover, these writers profited from the establishment of Penguin India and the emergence of Rupa Paperbacks and IndiaInk “provided a marketing network able to deliver more affordable English-language fiction to the expanding urban middle class” (359). Furthermore, Indian writing became increasingly popular in Europe and the United States. Indeed, it is this market which propelled Indian writing in English to the status it has today in the English language book market, as Tabish Khair convincingly argues (59).<sup>24</sup>

Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie began writing in the 1980s, and continue to write and publish – almost exclusively with European and American publishing houses. These writers have been criticized for having adopted the trend of moving the nation to the city, and some critics believe that India’s writers in English “have taken advantage of this trend to retreat into a metropolitan or cosmopolitan élitism which produces a literature intended only for the English-reading privileged classes within India or the international public outside” (359). Whether or not these accusations are justified is closely linked to the question of language, and the use of language in the novels, as Mee and Narayan claim (360). In a sense, the adherence to a national framework of writing is related to the question of the relationship between the novels of the 1980s and the Indian regional languages. The novelists of the 1980s and 1990s have tried to show that Indian languages and cultures are not ‘essential’ or monolithic – a shift from nationalism and, to a certain extent, cultural essentialism, towards what was termed ‘hybridity’ by Homi K. Bhabha (*Location* 2004).<sup>25</sup> Indeed, cosmopolitical writers (in the sense of a political agenda, i.e. with the goal of including both local and global in their writing strategies) have specifically aimed at localizing the practice of English in their work, thus creating specific English vernaculars (B. Ghosh 48).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Khair states that the success of Indian writing in English and “the hard fact of its sale all around the (Eurocentric) world [is] largely based on the so-called literary quality of the writing, its situation within a westernized perception of India and Indian traditions” (59).

<sup>25</sup> Hybridity was coined by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (2004).

<sup>26</sup> The use of the vernacular will be discussed in more detail in the analysis chapters.

The debate about the cosmopolitanism of these writers, and about a 'cosmopolitan writer persona' as a means of marketing Indian writing in English is valid. However, it is necessary to carefully distinguish between an author's alleged cosmopolitanism and what the implications of this cosmopolitanism are.<sup>27</sup> The type of cosmopolitanism usually implied refers to the worldly, wealthy authors with homes in several countries (dividing their year between Delhi or Bombay or Calcutta and the US, UK, Canada and other places). This thesis does not support this kind of pigeon-holing of the authors under study here as upper-class cosmopolitans. Their cosmopolitanism is seen in the light of their personal experience of migration and as a result of their interest in narrating global histories and its cosmopolitan aspects. Of particular interest in this respect is Bishnupriya Ghosh's work on the cosmopolitical writers Upamanyu Chatterjee, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, and Salman Rushdie. She uses the term cosmopolitical consciously, implying an ethics of political commitment that challenges the forms of "nationalism reinforced by global flows and the pernicious globalism surfacing in dispersed local contexts" (5). Throughout this thesis, the context of the novels, including the author, will be considered, even though the tracing of cosmopolitan moments within the texts is the interest at the centre of the research.

Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie and M.G. Vassanji can be considered a part of a polyglot group of Indian writers of this particular generation. They are upper-class, British and/or US educated, and they write in English – so there are similarities between them and their peers that cannot be ignored. Yet their literary work is immensely varied and differs within the corpus of each individual author as well as between the output of the three writers. This variation and the investment of their work in cosmopolitan concerns are at the centre of this thesis, rather than the authors themselves.

M.G. Vassanji is the only one of the writers who was not born in India. He is from Kenya, was raised in Tanzania, and studied in the US before he moved to

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<sup>27</sup> The question of the marketing of authorship in postcolonial literature has been discussed in depth by Graham Huggan in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001) and Sarah Brouillette in *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (2007).

Canada, where he still lives. Due to his African background, much of Vassanji's work has been concerned with Africa (for example *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003) and *The Book of Secrets* (1994), both winners of the prestigious Canadian Giller Prize), as is his most recent novel, *The Magic of Saida* (2013). *The Assassin's Song* (2007) is the first of his novels to be set in India. Just like the other two authors, Vassanji can be considered part of what B. Ghosh has called a "South Asian progressive formation" (5) of writers who invest in a literary cosmopolitanism and who can, therefore, rightly be called cosmopolitan authors. The point made here is that it is the subject matter that is relevant, not primarily the authors. Rushdie writes of the difficulties of classifying writers like himself along the lines of nationality in his seminal essay "'Commonwealth Literature' Does Not Exist" (1992):

I have constantly been asked whether I am British, or Indian. The formulation 'Indian-born British writer' has been explained to me. But, as I said last night, my new book deals with Pakistan. So what now? 'British-resident Indo-Pakistani writer'? You see the folly of trying to contain writers inside passports. (67)

Similarly, Vassanji states on his website that "if pressed, the author identifies himself as African-Asian-Canadian." But, he adds, attempts to pigeon-hole him along communal or other lines [...] he considers narrow-minded, malicious and oppressive" (*Biography*). Therefore, the identification of the authors as 'Indian' is not of primary interest and indeed, this singular definition does not even seem fitting. Similarly, it seems redundant to classify these authors as cosmopolitan (or not). Rather, their writing about India is of central interest here.

## 1.2 Critical Approaches to Cosmopolitanism and Indian Writing in English

The question of whether authors can rightly be called cosmopolitan leads to the question of whether the same may be applied to texts. While critics used 'cosmopolitan' quite freely to denominate a certain type of writing (Stanton 2006, Srivastava 2008), the difficulty remains that 'cosmopolitan' and 'cosmopolitanism' are defined in different ways so that it is a problem to adopt their use, however justified it may be in the context of the various critical interpretations. This is also the case for critical work on cosmopolitanism and Indian writing in English (Khair 2001, Ghosh 2004, Srivastava 2008, Jani 2010).<sup>28</sup> Again, the divide between the critical use of the term and what might constitute an 'actually existing' cosmopolitanism arises. Not surprisingly, perhaps, so far no literary history that deals exclusively with cosmopolitanism and Indian writing in English has been published. Rather, the topic is touched upon in anthologies<sup>29</sup> and has been avidly discussed in critical literature over the past ten to fifteen years. In the following, a brief sketch of what cosmopolitanism has meant so far to Indian writing in English is attempted, taking into account what is discussed above: on the one hand, that cosmopolitanism is used critically, and on the other hand, that it can be a thematic issue which is negotiated in the texts. The methodological problem here is that the approaches are very different, and that it is very difficult to write a history of this subject precisely because the critical definition of cosmopolitanism and the corpus of work discussed varies so immensely. The discussion remains selective; it is difficult to connect and arrange these various approaches meaningfully.

To begin with, it can safely be said that, from a thematic point of view, cosmopolitanism in Indian Writing in English does not lie at the end of a narrative of linear literary development that goes from 'national' to 'cosmopolitan'. Indeed, cosmopolitanism and Indian writing in English have mainly been discussed in the

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<sup>28</sup> This methodological difficulty is tackled in chapter two of this thesis, where the analytical approach via cosmopolitan moments is developed.

<sup>29</sup> See *The Vintage Book of Modern Indian Literature* (2004), edited by Amit Chaudhuri, and *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997* (1997), edited by Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West.



context of nationalism and post-nationalism (Srivastava 2008, Jani 2010), thus they complement rather than oppose each other discursively. Pertinently, Jani draws attention to the “multiple cosmopolitanisms” (5) of the Indian novel in English, illustrating effectively how cosmopolitanism can work on several levels:

On one level, Indian English novels across the board often foreground cosmopolitan-elite characters and voices in their depictions of postcolonial life, meditating on their relationship to the postcolonial nation and its people. On another, since the very use of English by Indian novelists is embedded with their middle-class status, the production and consumption of the Indian English novel generate cosmopolitan spaces, in which authors who are linked to both India and the West communicate with other English speakers, whether they are Indian elites or foreign readers.  
(6)

Cosmopolitanism is not a recent phenomenon in the literary history of Indian fiction. Jani, who takes a historicizing approach, argues that there has been a shift of orientation from a first period of ‘namaak-halal’ cosmopolitanism to postnational cosmopolitanism. ‘Namaak-halal’ means ‘true to one’s salt’ in that it “was oriented and committed to the nation as a potentially emancipatory space” (7). Postnational cosmopolitanism, an orientation that turns away from the nation (‘postnational’ turn) established itself after the Emergency in 1977, when Indira Gandhi’s government showed disrespect for democratic principles, to put it mildly.<sup>30</sup> The nation is not ‘over’ as a topical concern; it is still a major political and social concern that needs to be recognized and discussed in contemporary Indian fiction. One of the early texts of interest is undoubtedly Rabindranath Tagore’s *The Home and the World* (1916), which is often mentioned in attempts to canonize cosmopolitanism and Indian literature in English. Tagore concerns himself with questions of inside and outside (the Bengali title of the novel is “At Home and

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<sup>30</sup> The Indian Emergency (25 June 1975, to 21 March 1975) during which a state of emergency under Article 352 of the Constitution of India was declared by the president Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was bestowed the right to rule by decree. Elections and civil liberties were suspended, making this one of the most controversial periods in the history of Indian democracy (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “India”). Several contemporary novelists have written on it: Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* (1991), or Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980) recall the horrors of mass sterilization committed by the authorities during this time.

Outside”), responsibility towards the nation and the world.<sup>31</sup> The question of responsibility also arises in Neelam Srivastava’s analyses of Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* (1993) and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980) as secularist writings which she perceives as being cosmopolitan, i.e. going beyond the nation-state and expressing a “cosmopolitical understanding of the self in relation to the world and the question of inter-cultural communicability” (158). In her work, the nation is also seminal (as in Jani’s), and is considered a touchstone for cosmopolitanism: “a responsible and located cosmopolitanism is actually linked to a strong national sense” (168–169). Similarly, Pramod K. Nayar discerns two kinds of cosmopolitanism in the transnational novel: Neelam Srivastava’s definition as quoted above and a second kind where “roots, origins and cultural affiliations are abandoned in favour of a new cosmopolitan tendency” (180).

Bishnupriya Ghosh (2004) uses the term ‘cosmopolitics’ (as do Cheah and Robbins 1998) to describe a distinguished discursive formation, “a cosmopolitical South Asian writing that shares not just distinctive literary features but, more crucially, fundamental politics and ethical commitments” (4). Ghosh’s framework is translocal, and concerned with the literary practice of cosmopolitical writing in the sense of a “cosmopolitical localisms” (27). She takes a two-pronged approach in her concern for the localisms of literary cosmopolitics (28), claiming that while the localizing strategies of cosmopolitical writers produce locally in two senses: on the one hand, what she calls “fetishistic locales” (ibid.) that are produced for commercial reasons, on the other hand they also produce a “performative local” that cannot, in terms of the global market, be stabilized, reproduced or circulated (ibid.). Ghosh does not adhere to the nation as a theoretical vantage point; in her understanding of cosmopolitanism, the local is prevalent in every sense, and thus

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<sup>31</sup> Martha Nussbaum, in her essay “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism”, refers to Rabindranath Tagore’s *The Home and the World* (1916), specifically to the character Nikhil who, in her view, is a cosmopolitan because he refuses to engage with the nationalist movement (3–4). She uses this example to illustrate that this is an attitude that more Americans should adopt towards their country, claiming that she believes, “as do Tagore and his character Nikhil, that this emphasis on patriotic pride is both morally dangerous and, ultimately, subversive of some of the worthy goals patriotism sets out to serve, for example the goal of national unity in devotion to worthy moral ideas of justice and equality” (4). While it remains debatable what “worthy” actually means, her comment does point to the novel’s engagement with these issues at a time when nationalism was becoming increasingly important in Indian elite circles.

hers is an approach that differs quite distinctly from approaches that underline the nation, transnationalism<sup>32</sup> and postcolonialism as cornerstones of cosmopolitanism in Indian writing in English, i.e. she relies on vernacularism, subalternity, and local and global concerns and thus her work constitutes an exception in this critical field.

In a sense, critical approaches to cosmopolitanism and Indian writing in English have in common a confidence that cosmopolitanism as a theme in literary texts does, in some ways, provide a positive ethical engagement. Cosmopolitanism is seen less as a theoretical and critical approach, and more as a defining theme of the literary texts and/or the authors. In the theoretical framework established in the following chapter, it is argued that to actually make full use of cosmopolitanism in literary studies, it is necessary to consider its uses as a theoretical framework as well as a theme in literary texts.

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<sup>32</sup> Transnationalism implies movement, conditions or structures that are not based on national structures but that go beyond them or between them. It implies space and structure, but does not imply, as cosmopolitanism does, an ethical component.

## 2. Cosmopolitan Moments in Contemporary Indian Writing in English

In *Poppies* and *Smoke* by Amitav Ghosh, *Enchantress* by Salman Rushdie and *Assassin* by M.G. Vassanji, histories and geographies of India in the world are rewritten in cosmopolitan moments. Rewriting in these literary texts is expressed in cosmopolitan moments - cosmopolitan because in these moments, cosmopolitan ethics and practice are highlighted aesthetically as moments in global history. It is important to clarify that the analysis focuses on *cosmopolitan ethics and practice*, which are core cosmopolitan concerns, whereas the aesthetic concern is of interest when it comes to understanding how these concerns are negotiated on a literary level. Clearly, then, what is termed 'cosmopolitan aesthetics' refers to this particular interest, not to a new aesthetic movement.

Cosmopolitan moments are defined as shifting, contingent and fleeting because cosmopolitan ethics and practice never occur as a steadfast morale or as constant situations in these texts. It is the interest of this thesis to engage with these cosmopolitan moments in the literary texts at hand, to see how they interact, and to contextualize them on the level of the text. Therefore, cosmopolitan moments are an *interpretative lens* for reading these texts. In terms of method, this approach is constructive because it enables a literary engagement on a textual level. In some instances, the terms cosmopolitan fictions (Stanton 2006), cosmopolitan narratives (Srivastava 2008) and cosmopolitan novel (Schoene 2009) are employed to express an engagement with global and ethical questions in the texts. For the present purposes, however, these denominations are too general, which is why the term cosmopolitan moment was developed as an interpretative lens.

This chapter seeks to establish a framework for the main claim made in this study, namely that in cosmopolitan moments, histories and geographies are rewritten and reimagined. In the first subchapter, 2.1 "Expressing Cosmopolitan Ethics, Practice and Aesthetics in Cosmopolitan Moments", a survey of cosmopolitanism is presented, interaction between aesthetics, practice and ethics is addressed and a lens for interpretation suggested. In the subsequent three

sections of this subchapter, a particular focus is the ethics, practice and the aesthetics of cosmopolitan moments. In 2.2. “Rewriting Histories and Geographies”, the claim that in cosmopolitan moments, histories and geographies are rewritten is explained by referring to conceptions of global history, space and the literary imagination. Lastly, in 2.3, the methodological approach is explained: close reading, narratological concerns and intermedial reading.

‘Cosmopolitan’ as it is used here obviously relates to cosmopolitanism, a philosophical and also a sociological concept. The term is genealogically complex – partly because it represents an idea rather than a fixed concept: this, of course, enhances its attractiveness for literary interpretation. Hence, while this lack of a fixed universal definition of cosmopolitanism might be a weakness of the term, it also constitutes one of its interesting and creative aspects.

According to Ulrich Beck, there are three types of cosmopolitanism that must be considered when we discuss cosmopolitanism today:

- ‘normative’ or ‘philosophical cosmopolitanism’: “reading which pleads for harmony beyond national and cultural boundaries” (17)
- ‘cosmopolitan outlook’ or ‘analytical-empirical cosmopolitanism’: “descriptive-analytical perspective in the social sciences which liberates itself from national categories” (18)
- ‘cosmopolitanization’ or ‘really existing cosmopolitanism’ occurs as the unwanted and unobserved side effect of actions that are not intended as ‘cosmopolitan’ in the normative sense (18)

These concise categorizations of cosmopolitanism efficiently bundle the vast field of cosmopolitanism theory. The categories as outlined by Beck are in constant conflict and even contradiction, because throughout its history, cosmopolitanism has shifted in emphasis, and in analytical category. Starting out from its Greek origins that denominated behaviour towards the other, cosmopolitanism acquired many different meanings and attributes, so that defining the term can be a daunting task.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See 2.1 “Expressing Cosmopolitan Moments in Contemporary Indian Writing in English”.

In this study, the distinction is made between *ethical* and *practical* aspects of cosmopolitanism; or a *cosmopolitan ethics* and *practice*. Ethical cosmopolitanism relates strongly to Beck's first category of *normative or philosophical* cosmopolitanism.<sup>34</sup> Practical cosmopolitanism refers to analytical-empirical cosmopolitanism in the social sciences: questions of migration and its consequences. Beck's third category describes sociological realities, experiences that can be called cosmopolitan because they pertain to migration, movement, transformation, transition and exile, for example. The next chapter offers a theoretical discussion of the topical and aesthetic negotiation of these terms in literary fiction, and it follows that the close readings of the novels in chapters three to six will also concern themselves with these issues.

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<sup>34</sup> 'Ethical', of course, does not equate to 'normative'.

## 2.1 Expressing Cosmopolitan Ethics, Practice and Aesthetics in Cosmopolitan Moments

The interaction between practical, ethical and aesthetic understandings of cosmopolitanism is valuable for the reading of literary texts because it becomes possible to undertake a reading that is multi-layered and complex. Cosmopolitanism goes a long way towards bringing together the materiality of the globalized world and a philosophical approach that critically and self-consciously examines and questions the ethics of the self and the other, of extending help to the other, of responsibility and solidarity in these circumstances. In cosmopolitan moments, the life-worlds of characters are situated at the intersections and crossroads of an increasingly globalized world and the ethics of these complex situations are examined closely. Cosmopolitan moments are instances in the text where ethics and practice are negotiated aesthetically, and must be understood as being part of a narrative of *global* histories rather than national histories.

It is argued here that the practical and ethical aspects of cosmopolitanism were present from the earliest moment of the term's use, and that they remain relevant. There have been instances in the history of cosmopolitanism when not both aspects were considered. However, this one-sided understanding cannot be considered accurate, because it does not engage with the complexity of the term, as the following short overview of the history of cosmopolitanism shows.

To begin with, Greek cosmopolitanism stated that it was the moral obligation of the Stoic sage to extend help to the other; to help fellow citizens and foreigners alike. The idea of travelling was only faintly present in these early conceptions. Indeed, the one reference to migration is that the sage should also travel in order to do good, yet he or she was not held to this ideal. The original paradigm of cosmopolitanism (virtue and community), while we can still relate to it today through the texts of Seneca<sup>35</sup> and others, shifted and has, it seems, not ceased shifting since. Already in the times of early Christianity, when Stoic cosmopolitanism was at its most influential, the meaning of the cosmopolis had

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<sup>35</sup> Seneca (1<sup>st</sup> century BCE) was a Stoic philosopher, dramatist and Roman statesman.

changed. For the early Christians, the cosmopolis became a community for certain people only, namely a city of God for those who love God (Kleingeld and Brown 4).

With Kant, cosmopolitanism received a moral outlook onto the world and global power politics that deeply influenced the principles of twentieth century international law. Kant proclaimed that the earth was a shared space; the implication is both ethical and practical; his ideas are of interest here because he radically negates the right of nations to their own privileged nation space.<sup>36</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels understood cosmopolitanism to be an ideological reflection of capitalism: market capitalism is inherently expansive and breaks the bounds of the nation-state system. Effectively, cosmopolitanism is tied to capitalist expansion and globalization of trade, and linked to the ideology of 'free trade'. At the same time, however, the communist manifesto, with its call to proletarians of all countries to unite, implies a form of cosmopolitanism too (Kleingeld and Brown 8). In the twentieth century, cosmopolitanism was expressed through the development of institutions such as the League of Nations, later the United Nations, the International Criminal Court (Kleingeld and Brown 9), the World Trade Organization, and much of the contemporary debate on cosmopolitanism, philosophy and law centres around the problems of a cosmopolitan or global justice (Benhabib 2006, Held 2010). The history of the concept is emblematic of the shifting meanings of cosmopolitanism.

Pertinent to the development of cosmopolitan moments is a consideration of the history of the concept, because it becomes clear that the axis it turns around is concerned with morality, with the other, with difference and sameness. First, a normative universalist approach that considers 'sameness' in cosmopolitanism, i.e. premised, on a philosophical and legal level, on the equality of all human beings (Kant "Toward Perpetual Peace", 2006, Nussbaum 1997, 2002, Appiah 2006).<sup>37</sup> The

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<sup>36</sup> Read more about Kant's cosmopolitanism in 2.1 "Expressing Cosmopolitan Ethics and Practice".

<sup>37</sup> In her essays "Kant and Cosmopolitanism" (1997) and "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism" (2002), Nussbaum develops a universalist model of cosmopolitanism. Similarly, in Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism. Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006), cosmopolitanism is interpreted in a *universalist* way, as a way of life, and as a philosophy that, while it acknowledges difference, insists on the equality of human beings. Another philosophical work to be considered in this context is the economist Amartya Sen's book *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (2006), in which Sen



second approach is concerned with the premise that relations between human beings are governed by difference; i.e. that the material lives of human beings are unequal, and that the relationships between human beings are governed by difference. Consequently, the recognition and negotiation of the other becomes central, especially in the question of hospitality (Derrida 2002). Hence, sameness and otherness constitute relevant aspects when considering the ethics of cosmopolitanism. These concerns are closely related to the ethics of cosmopolitanism.

A recent phase in academic activity, which has come to be known as the new cosmopolitanisms,<sup>38</sup> is a reaction to the political and social upheaval

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claims that everyone has multiple identities, and that much strife in the world is caused by the false belief that people have only one single pertinent identity. In all four works, there is an inherent universalist belief in human equality. This belief is contested, to a certain extent, in works by social anthropologists and cultural studies critics, where a discourse of difference is preferred to universalist notions of sameness. In 1995, David Hollinger published *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*, which deals with American cultural diversity and the need to overcome differences such as colour. More recently, in political philosophy and law, Seyla Benhabib, in *Another Cosmopolitanism: Hospitality, Sovereignty, and Democratic Iterations* (2006), debates the issues of cosmopolitan law, democracy and citizenship. Ulrich Beck's *Cosmopolitan Vision* (2006) proposes a methodological cosmopolitanism (instead of a methodological nationalism). Further attempts in this field to grasp cosmopolitanism on a material legal level are provided by Garret Wallace Brown's *Grounding Cosmopolitanism* (2009) and David Held's *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities* (2010). Brown and Held's edited essay collection *The Cosmopolitan Reader* (2010) provides a wide survey on cosmopolitanism.

<sup>38</sup> Although this movement is generally referred to as the new cosmopolitanism, it would be more accurate to call it the new cosmopolitanisms, i.e. to use the plural form of the word, since it encompasses a variety of hyphenated versions of cosmopolitanism. The social anthropologist Pnina Werbner, in her introduction to *Anthropology and the New Cosmopolitanism* (2008), distinguishes between various approaches to cosmopolitanism: new 'normative' cosmopolitanism, the new anthropological cosmopolitanism, counter-cosmopolitans, demotic cosmopolitans, cosmopolitan national spaces, vernacular and rooted cosmopolitanisms, feminist and non-violence cosmopolitan movements (2-19). Magdalena Nowicka and Maria Rovisco, in *Cosmopolitanism in Practice* (2009), also categorize several types of cosmopolitanism. David Harvey writes of "all manner of hyphenated versions of cosmopolitanism, variously described as 'rooted,' 'situated,' 'actually existing,' 'discrepant,' 'vernacular,' 'Christian,' 'bourgeois,' 'liberal,' 'postcolonial,' 'feminist,' 'proletarian,' 'subaltern,' 'ecological,' 'socialist', and so forth" (77).

The 'new cosmopolitanisms' is a term that has established itself in critical literature and has served as a descriptive (rather than analytical) term for a broad range of academic approaches to cosmopolitanism that have made "provocative appearances across a range of writings in anthropology, cultural studies, literary criticism, intellectual history, and contemporary theory broadly construed," as Amanda Anderson writes ("Divided Legacies", 1998, 266). As Robert Fine has noted, the study of cosmopolitanism has evolved considerably since 1989, the year of the fall of the Berlin wall (1) and, as such, the beginning of a post-Cold War era which Fine sees marking a "new intellectual and political movement that is itself international and places human rights, international law, global governance and peaceful relations between states" – this movement is called "the 'new cosmopolitanism'" (1). David Hollinger agrees that this movement has found strong support in a number of academic disciplines and their communities (227). Ever since Ulf

following the rise of nationalism, to the acceleration of global capital and to the increased presence and influence of diaspora<sup>39</sup> communities, as Vinay Dharwadker has argued (2). This debate on the new cosmopolitanism is characterized by a wide range of stances, from a very affirmative stance that celebrates cultural contact and hybridity (Hannerz 1990, Clifford 1992, Appiah 2006), in relation to international and global justice expressed by cosmopolitan law (Benhabib 2006, Held 2010), the effects of globalization (Beck 2006), to a more guarded stance that is used to describe practices of globalization, migration, transnationalism, and translation (Brennan 1997, Cheah and Robbins 1998; Bhabha et al. 2002; Cohen and Vertovec 2002, Bhabha, *Location* 2004). Particularly in social anthropology and sociology, much attention has been given to the question of how migration and cosmopolitanism interrelate today. This is mainly in the light of the assumption that cosmopolitanism can also be understood *practically*, as a lived experience.<sup>40</sup>

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Hannerz's seminal essay "Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture" was published (1990), cosmopolitanism has been the subject of a theoretical debate across the disciplines, ranging from sociology to philosophy and social anthropology.

<sup>39</sup> Rather than denoting the transnational movement of migrants, diaspora denotes a community formed by emigrants from the same or a similar culture after they have moved to another country. Traditionally used to describe the Jews' expulsion from Israel and their consequent exile (Dufoix 5), diaspora has now come to apply to all kinds of immigrant communities. Well-known today are the African and the South Asian diaspora communities. Diaspora has been connected with cosmopolitanism in the sense that certain diaspora communities have been termed cosmopolitan due to their supposed detachment from the national community they live in. Today, diaspora communities that are connected internationally are often called cosmopolitan communities. The notion of the homeland is an important component of diaspora. Gabriel Sheffer has defined diasporas as "ethnic minority groups that [maintain] strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin - their homelands" (21). In South Asian diaspora literature (as in other literatures), the homeland became a central concern, as Salman Rushdie's essay collection *Imaginary Homelands* (1992) shows.

<sup>40</sup> In "Cosmopolitans and Locals in the World Culture" (1990), Hannerz wrote an essay on cosmopolitanism in today's world that has been equally praised and criticized for its celebratory stance on cosmopolitanism. James Clifford's "Traveling Cultures" (1992) is more critical, yet nonetheless underlines the productivity of migrant culture and the cosmopolitanism that is linked to it. A very relevant book that investigates cosmopolitanism from a cultural studies point of view is *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (1998), edited by Bruce Robbins and Pheng Cheah. Robin Cohen and Steven Vertovec's *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice* (2002) brings together a group of relevant critical voices on the topic. Two years later, *Cosmopolitanism* (2000), a volume of *Public Culture* edited by Carol Breckenridge Appadurai, Homi K. Bhabha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Sheldon Pollock, was published, in which migration, subalternity, transnationalism, historical and geographical aspects are central to the discussion of cosmopolitanism. In *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (2004), Paul Gilroy proposes a 'planetary conviviality' as a means of living together in multicultural societies, a concept that is closely related to cosmopolitanism. Gilroy's work on this is relevant in that it looks for ways out of a postcolonial crisis, while at the same time acknowledging that the realities of race and racism are

The ethics and practice of cosmopolitanism are more often than not linked. Metaphorically-speaking there are two sides to the coin of cosmopolitanism, for cosmopolitanism is ethics and practice alike. Therefore, writing about cosmopolitanism in Indian writing in English today means taking into account not only the original *ethical* directive of cosmopolitanism, but also its *practical* aspects. In the history of cosmopolitanism the stages of development in cosmopolitan thinking that are relevant for this study are the following: Stoic cosmopolitanism, Kantian cosmopolitanism and the concept of 'actually existing' cosmopolitanism that was developed in recent decades by a school of new cosmopolitanism and that is related to migration, transnationalism and the effects of globalization. These footholds in the history of cosmopolitanism, so to speak, best convey the interest of developing a lens of *literary* interpretation. This lens of interpretation is based on the four main points of cosmopolitan ethics and practice as identified here and the negotiation thereof:

- difference/sameness
- migration, transnationalism, movement, space
- the moral obligation to extend help to the other, responsibility for and solidarity with the other
- the negotiation of community

These topical points form cosmopolitan ethics and practice as they are understood here. They are crucial for the reading of the literary texts at hand because they provide focal points for understanding how histories and geographies are rewritten in cosmopolitan moments.<sup>41</sup>

In the following, cosmopolitan ethics, practice and aesthetics as they are defined and understood in the framework of this thesis will be elaborated by taking into account historical and philosophical as well as contemporary sociological material. It is crucial to understand that cosmopolitanism is not merely either a philosophical or a sociological concept; the added value of

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still present and damaging. In other words, difference is relevant, and conviviality designates a positive, productive and peaceful way of living with difference.

<sup>41</sup> See 2.2 "Rewriting Histories and Geographies".

cosmopolitanism is that it addresses both ethical and practical problems. This complexity makes cosmopolitanism interesting for the reading of these texts, and the analysis of cosmopolitan moments is an approach that leaves enough scope for literary interpretation but is also concise and exacting.

### 2.1.1 Cosmopolitan Ethics

Cosmopolitan ethics<sup>42</sup> refers to a moral understanding of goodness that is expressed in an *obligation to help others*. Ethics, in reference to the origins of cosmopolitanism, form an integral part of cosmopolitanism; acting ethically is one of the main traits of the cosmopolitan citizen. Importantly, the *deeply moral commitment to others and to one's own community or society* that is characteristic of Stoic cosmopolitanism needs to be taken into account when discussing cosmopolitanism in the framework of this thesis, as does the Kantian idea of *hospitality* and the *shared space of the Earth*. The *solidarity* with others, and a very urgent sense of *responsibility* also to those human beings who are not known to us personally, form the ethical core of cosmopolitan thinking and politics. This responsibility is expressed in Kantian hospitality. It is precisely at this crossroads of moral cosmopolitanism and its political practice (helping others through political engagement) that cosmopolitanism must be situated theoretically.

Historically speaking, the Stoics were the first to dwell in depth on the actual moral or ethical considerations of cosmopolitanism, and their understanding of cosmopolitanism has remained pertinent throughout the history of the term. One of the key terms in Stoic cosmopolitanism is virtue, or goodness. The Stoics believed that goodness required serving other human beings to the best of one's ability, while knowing that it is impossible to serve everyone equally well. The best service is political engagement that is not, however, restricted to one's own polis (Kleingeld and Brown 3). This engagement with the other, with the moral incentive to help via political engagement, is one of the most important traits of cosmopolitan theory. The feasibility of helping everyone was a concern to them. In fact, the sage had to decide for him- or herself where to help, be it at

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<sup>42</sup> When the terms cosmopolitan ethics, practice or aesthetics are used, is it always in specific reference to the framework of this thesis.

home or abroad. Some Stoic philosophers argued that it is necessary to help one's compatriots first, in the sense of the individual being at the centre of concentric relations, while others did not make this distinction (Brown 554).

The Stoics argued that self-preservation is a fundamental human desire that is expressed in the sense of a concern for one's community (Sellars 131). An obvious example is the concern for one's children, and then the concern for one's extended family and friends, and then for one's whole community or society, a concern that includes the entire cosmos, all human beings and the natural world. It is upon reaching this "widest possible circle of concern" that we become citizens of the cosmos (ibid.).<sup>43</sup> Seneca states that one's primary political affiliation should be to the cosmos as a whole rather than to the country of one's birth ("On Leisure"/*De otio*, 187-189). People are citizens of two commonwealths:

Let us grasp the idea that there are two commonwealths – the one, a vast and truly common state, which embraces alike gods and men, in which we look neither to this corner of the earth nor to that, but measure the bounds of our citizenship by the path of the sun; the other, the one to which we have been assigned by the accident of birth. This will be the commonwealth of the Athenians or of the Carthaginians, or of any other city that belongs, not to all, but to some particular race of men. Some yield service to both commonwealths at the same time – to the greater and to the lesser – some only to the lesser, some only to the great. ("On Leisure"/*De otio*, 187-189)

However, he cannot deny that people are also citizens of traditional states, with the duties and obligations and rights that come with such membership. Thus, a Stoic sage living here and now will have dual citizenship, being a member of both a traditional political community and a cosmic city. The cosmic city is the only true city, as mentioned above, the city (*polis*) is a community of virtuous people held together by a common law: consequently, real cities do not exist (Sellars 132).

In a simplified summary, in Stoic cosmopolitanism, the following points are particularly relevant: goodness or virtue is a prerequisite for the cosmopolis. The

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<sup>43</sup> The question is, of course, what will happen when these concerns clash. Martha R. Nussbaum writes about the concentric circles of cosmopolitan engagement, yet omits to discuss this pertinent issue in her essay "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism" (1997).

cosmopolitan community of sages extends its help, via political engagement, to all human beings alike, although there are differing opinions as to the practicality of fulfilling this obligation, i.e. to whom should this help be extended. It is possible for a sage to be a member of the traditional city as well as the cosmopolis. The members of these communities must be virtuous (serving other human beings), the highest virtue being political engagement. Importantly, the cosmopolis constitutes an ideal, not a reality.

In terms of space, while cosmopolitanism as an idea is bound up with spatial imaginations (the traditional city, the world city)<sup>44</sup> the concept was provincially developed and could, quite obviously, only be known to a particular group of people, at least in the beginning. In terms of movement, cosmopolitans might consider moving away from the traditional city in order to advise foreign rulers, for example, but they are not required to do so. A non-cosmopolitan would not consider doing this in the first place (Kleingeld and Brown 3).<sup>45</sup>

Several problems in cosmopolitanism theory are already inherent in these early theoretical debates about what constitutes cosmopolitanism. As seen in this chapter, there is no definite theory or definition of cosmopolitanism. On the contrary, it is a particularly fluid term. Nonetheless, there are particular tensions or problems that can be identified as such: firstly, the idea of extending help to everyone becomes a problem when the political practicality of such an enterprise is considered. Secondly, the sense of obligation towards the world at large, the cosmopolis, is often challenged by the sense of loyalty, duty, and connectedness to one's own group (the family, the clan, the tribe, the city, the country). Thirdly, the problem of place arises. Where should the cosmopolitan extend help? Should he or she stay in the polis, extending help and hospitality to fellow citizens and

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<sup>44</sup> The city space plays an important role in the novels, particularly in *Smoke* and *Enchantress*.

<sup>45</sup> Historically speaking, through the expansion of the Greek empire with Alexander the Great, the classical polis lost importance. For the Greek intellectual, the question that arose was whether it is time to withdraw to private life (Epicure) or to enlarge one's consciousness, i.e. to profess a cosmopolitan outlook on the world (Hobert 215). With the arrival of panhellenism and later the conquests of Alexander the Great, foreigners were perceived differently. The world became larger, and cultural, ethnic and political differences more pronounced. Commerce evolved, and the migration of people increased. After the initial theories of cosmopolitanism had been developed, as shown above, theories that had focused on the city and the world at large, a new factor had to be considered: the fact that there was a disruption of the polis, increased migration, and that the traditional city state as such became weaker in the face of empire.

strangers alike? Or should the cosmopolitan leave the polis and become a stranger or a guest himself or herself? These problems as such remain unresolved, and are characteristic of the contradictions in the history and conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism.

Similarly, Immanuel Kant also engages with the ethics towards the other, a core cosmopolitan concern. More than two thousand years after the Stoics, Kant theorized cosmopolitanism in a series of seminal essays<sup>46</sup> spanning a twelve-year period before and after the French Revolution. Kant's theory of cosmopolitanism is indebted to Stoic cosmopolitanism (Nussbaum, "Kant and Cosmopolitanism" 28), yet is also infused with ideas of its time, such as republicanism, and is based on the consideration of global and perpetual peace. I will restrict myself to two of his essays, "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective" (1795) and "Toward Perpetual Peace" (1784).

In "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective", Kant proposes a teleological view of history, with an aspirational cosmopolitan world state as the end goal of man's historical progress. Robert Fine and Robin Cohen argue that for Kant, "the attainment of a cosmopolitan order was the greatest problem facing the human race – even greater than the achievement of republican civic constitutions within particular nation-states" (140), and that he realized that creating a cosmopolitan order was a fantastical idea without precedent, yet claimed it necessary if the human race wanted to survive (ibid.). What can be gained from this essay is the thought of a utopian coexistence as something that needs to be aspired to. The aspirational aspect is relevant here; cosmopolitan ethics have this aspirational aspect to them. Kant's teleological view of history is perhaps less interesting here, because in this context, history is understood as a plurality, as a narration that needs to be fragmentary, so that there is no History with a capital H, in the sense of a master narrative of history.

Of more interest in this study is "Toward Perpetual Peace", in which Kant focuses on the question of hospitality and cosmopolitanism. Kant's exploration of

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<sup>46</sup> The essays are: "Idea for Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View" (1785), "On the Common Saying 'This may be true in theory but it does not hold in practice'" (1793), "Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" (published 1795, revised 1796), "International Right in the Metaphysics of Morals" (1797). All essays are published in Reiss (1970).

the ethics of hospitality in this cosmopolitan order (cosmopolitan right)<sup>47</sup> is particularly relevant here because he thinks about the *shared global space of the earth as something belonging to all human beings*, as he explains in this essay (82). In the same essay, Kant makes a case for *hospitality to strangers*, which “means the right of a stranger not to be treated in a hostile manner by another upon his arrival on the other’s territory” (ibid.). He makes a very clear distinction between the right of the guest and the right to visit:

It is not the right of a guest that the stranger has a claim to (which would require a special, charitable contract stipulating that he be made a member of the household for a certain period of time), but rather the right to visit, to which all human beings have claim. (82)

“The right to visit” means that one can present oneself to society “by virtue of the right of the common possession of the surface of the earth” (82), Kant’s logic here is that the *earth is a finite space*, and that people cannot spread without limit. This entails a need for *tolerance of the neighbour*, for “originally no one has more of a right to be at a given place on earth than anyone else,” and there is “right to the surface” that is common to everyone (ibid.). Commerce is a driving force in man’s endeavour to travel and to traverse “these regions that belong to no one, and to use the right to the surface, which is common to the human species, to establish commerce with one another” (ibid.) In this way, remote parts of the world can establish relations peacefully with each other, relations which ultimately become regulated by public laws and can thus finally bring the human species ever closer to a cosmopolitan constitution (ibid.).<sup>48</sup> For this thesis, the concept of the finite and

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<sup>47</sup> Jacques Derrida complicates or radicalizes the idea of hospitality in a compelling way in *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond* (2000), where he argues that “absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner etc.) but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them [...]” (25). This is a radical notion, and contradicts or perverts hospitality, as Derrida himself states (ibid.): “The law of hospitality, the express law that governs the general concept of hospitality, appears as a paradoxical law, pervertible or perverting. It seems to dictate that absolute hospitality should break with the law of hospitality as right or duty, with the pact of hospitality” (ibid.). While Derrida’s thoughts on this would absolutely have to be taken into account in an in-depth discussion of hospitality, the more conventional Kantian idea of hospitality suffices for the theoretical framework of this thesis.

<sup>48</sup> Kant’s thoughts on colonialist expansion show that he understood hospitality as a very concrete project. In a further stipulation on hospitality, Kant writes that the stranger has the right not to be



shared space of the earth is intriguing: a conception of global geography that is shared, despite the existence of nations. Clearly, the theme of the obligation to extend help to the other, and to show responsibility and solidarity is expressed through an obligation to offer hospitality to the other. Kant pursued his thoughts on cosmopolitanism in the framework of a political theory of cosmopolitanism, yet these specific ethical concerns point in the same direction as the Stoics' basic assumptions about cosmopolitanism.

To further our understanding of what is meant by the obligation to extend help to the other, it is helpful to consider a contemporary philosopher, Judith Butler, who, although she does not write on cosmopolitanism per se, is concerned with the obligation to help the other. In her essay "Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation" (2012) Butler argues for a responsibility or moral obligation to responsiveness and a global ethical obligation that "emerges both at a distance and within relations of proximity" ("Precarious Life", 137), and asks what it means

for our ethical obligations [...] when we are up against another person or group, find ourselves invariably joined to those we never chose, and must respond to solicitations in languages we may not understand or even wish to understand. (137)

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treated with hostility upon his arrival. In return, he or she must behave peacefully (82). Thus, peaceful relations between remote parts of the world can be established and the human species brought closer to a cosmopolitan constitution. In this sense, colonialism is a gross violation of cosmopolitan right: "If one compares with this the *inhospitable* behaviour of the civilized states in our part of the world, especially the commercial ones, the injustice that the latter show when *visiting* foreign lands and peoples (which to them is one and the same as *conquering* those lands and peoples) takes on terrifying proportions. America, the negro countries, the Spice Islands, the Cape etc., were at the time of their discovery lands that they regarded as belonging to no one, for native inhabitants counted as nothing to them. In East India (Hindustan) they brought in foreign troops under the pretext of merely intending to establish trading posts. But with these they introduced the oppression of the native inhabitants, the incitement of the different states involved to expansive wars, famine, unrest, faithlessness, and the whole litany of evils that weigh upon the human species" (82–83). Kant adds further examples, such as China and Japan, who have "wisely, limited interaction" (84), Japan not allowing entry to its territory, and China trading only with the Dutch, but excluding them "as if they were prisoners, from associating with the native inhabitants" (ibid.). After having confronted his readers with this unjust and immoral behaviour, Kant underlines his point one more time, claiming that "the violation of right at any one place on the earth is felt in all places" (ibid.). He develops what could be termed a global moral perspective because he, interestingly, takes colonialism and its violation of hospitality as key examples of a misuse of this law of hospitality.

Butler's idea of responsibility is interesting here because for her, the ethical obligation does not depend on proximity or distance. Although Butler herself does not call this kind of ethical engagement with the other, near or far, 'cosmopolitan', her thoughts on responsibility express, quite concisely, what cosmopolitan responsibility means in the context of this analysis and framework.

To conclude, in literary texts, the ethical concerns of cosmopolitanism arise in cosmopolitan moments, where problems pertaining to cosmopolitan ethics are negotiated. Specifically (in reference to the points listed above) this is defined as *the moral obligation to extend help to the other, responsibility for and solidarity with the other; negotiation with the other, negotiating and accepting difference and sameness, and community.*<sup>49</sup>

### 2.1.2 Cosmopolitan Practice

As in cosmopolitan ethics, the definition of cosmopolitan practice is not bound by a single determination, but is also rather loose. By using this term, cosmopolitanism that is "actually existing" (Malcolmson 239), in everyday life (in this case, transposed into literature) is described. Bruce Robbins takes up Malcolmson's "actually existing" cosmopolitanism (2), for example or what Ulrich Beck calls "cosmopolitanization" (18). Practical or actually existing cosmopolitanisms refer to migrants (Bhabha, *Location* 2004, Bhabha et al. 2000), refugees, exiles (Bhabha et al. 2000), minorities (B. Ghosh, *When Borne Across* 3) and to multicultural local communities (Gilroy 2004, Wise and Velyutham 2009). Cosmopolitan practice refers to "transnational experiences that are particular rather than universal and that are unprivileged – indeed, often coerced" (Robbins 1), and as Beck puts it, as "the unwanted and unobserved side effect of actions that are not intended as 'cosmopolitan' in the normative sense" (18). Practical cosmopolitanism comes 'from below', is not elitist, and is enforced by

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<sup>49</sup> In the context of American studies, Thomas Claviez has negotiated aesthetics and ethics in *Aesthetics and Ethics: Otherness and Moral Imagination from Aristotle to Levinas and from Uncle Tom's Cabin to House Made of Dawn* (2008). Claviez asks in his introduction whether it is possible to conceive of an "ethics that avoids falling into universalist categories and that is based on notions of the particular, the local or even otherness?" (xxii-xxiii). It is the aim here to establish this kind of approach.

globalization (Werbner, "Conversation" 347). Today's cosmopolitans are "often victims of modernity [...] and bereft of those comforts and customs of national belonging. Refugees, peoples of the diaspora, and migrants and exiles represent the spirit of the cosmopolitical community" (Bhabha et al. 582). In this sense, cosmopolitans from below are people on the move, in diaspora, whose sense of (national or other) belonging and identity is more complex than that of non-migrants.

Here, cosmopolitan practice refers to an actually existing cosmopolitanism from below that is lived in communities or by the individual, by migrants, refugees, travellers, and people in exile. In the literary texts at hand, a subaltern cosmopolitanism or cosmopolitanism 'from below' (Hall 2002, Mignolo 2000, Bhabha *Location*, 2004) expresses the migratory, transitory aspect of cosmopolitan moments. Manjapra writes that

[s]cholars have been willing to see cosmopolitanism arising in the interstices and cracks of domination created by colonial capital, particularly amongst the service classes that global capitalism spread across the face of the earth. Lascars, ayahs, dubashes, army men, and indentured servants have been identified as carriers of a cosmopolitanism from below – representatives of the teeming global life born of the contradictions of capital. (4–5)<sup>50</sup>

Cosmopolitan practice is understood here as referring to the human condition as it is changed and influenced by *globalization processes, migration, transnationalism, movement and space*. In this sense, it is both practical and ethical: it refers to the migrant's experience of dislocation, loss, and sense of belonging, as well as to the ethical discussion that accompanies these experiences: To which nation do we owe allegiance? When we have left our homelands and our families, who are we responsible for? Which community do we belong to? And who belongs to our community? To whom do we show hospitality? With whom do we show

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<sup>50</sup> Manjapra, in support of his argument that there was a cosmopolitan thought zone in the area of South Asia and the Indian Ocean, is eager to state that capital "did not provide the only velocity for travel in South Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (5).

solidarity?<sup>51</sup> Because of this investment in ethics and practice, cosmopolitanism is a meaningful term for thinking about the human condition in these circumstances.

A further aspect concerning cosmopolitan practice is that writing literature *about* these cosmopolitan concerns is also a cosmopolitan practice. In a sense, then, the literariness of the text reflects upon cosmopolitanism not only *within* the text, in the system of the text as such, but is also indicative of a cosmopolitan practice of writing.

### 2.1.3 The Aesthetics of Cosmopolitan Moments

By looking at the aesthetics of cosmopolitan moments, we ask about how literary features negotiate cosmopolitanism in specific moments in the text. Aesthetics is understood as a pronounced *literariness* of the text, i.e. of the literary fiction discussed here. Aesthetics, according to Levinson, “involves a certain kind of property, feature, or aspect of things – namely, one that is aesthetic, such as beauty or grace or dynamism” (3). The property that is of interest here are literary features that negotiate cosmopolitan concerns. Admittedly, it is difficult to distinguish strictly between an authorial intention and the reader’s interpretation. In this reading, it is argued that the aesthetics of cosmopolitan moments were intended by the author, yet that a critical reading with this particular lens is necessary to analyse these moments in the text and to relate them to the theoretical framework of cosmopolitanism.

In recent years, literary criticism on cosmopolitanism and literature has produced a varied body of literature on the aesthetics of cosmopolitanism. In terms of descriptive category, Berthold Schoene, for example, writes in *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (2009) that the composite qualities of what he calls cosmopolitan narration should be central: “Cosmopolitan narration assembles as many as possible of the countless segments of our being-in-common into a momentarily composite picture of the world” (27). Schoene believes that the cosmopolitan novel is “the novel that imagines the world” (28). The approach taken in this study, namely that cosmopolitan moments are negotiated

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<sup>51</sup> A compelling text that discusses this is Jacques Derrida’s *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2002).

aesthetically, is a novel one, and forms an original part of this thesis.<sup>52</sup> It was inspired, however, by Schoene's work in *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (2009). Schoene argues that Jean-Luc Nancy's work on community<sup>53</sup> (the Nancean being-in-common) serves well to illustrate that it is necessary to move on from the idea of Anderson's imagined community to a community that is larger, i.e. it is now the 'world' that is being imagined. Schoene envisages a type of cosmopolitan narration that "assembles as many as possible of the countless segments of our being-in-common into a momentarily composite picture of the world" (27). This idea of the segments inspired the idea of cosmopolitan moments that is employed in this thesis. Schoene's segments capture the fragmentary and transitory aspect inherent to cosmopolitan moments. The idea of being-in-common is, when translated into a historical view, intriguing, because it also expresses an all-encompassing approach, just as global history does (although it is of course clear that this is a purely theoretical idea – global historians as well as writers of global historical fiction will agree that there is no such thing as an all-encompassing global history). Still, the gesture is similar. Schoene is interested in thematic and formal aspects of cosmopolitan narratives (11) that imagine the global community instead of the nation (12).<sup>54</sup> Other critics have used similar terms: in *Cosmopolitan Fictions: Ethics, Politics, and Global Change in the Works of Kazuo Ishiguro, Michael Ondaatje, Jamaica Kincaid, and J.M. Coetzee* (2006), Katherine Stanton uses the term cosmopolitan fictions to denote novels that negotiate cosmopolitan concerns, while Neelam Srivastava writes about Salman Rushdie and Vikram Seth's cosmopolitan narratives in *Secularism in the Postcolonial Indian Novel. National and Cosmopolitan Narratives in English* (2008).

In terms of the aesthetics of cosmopolitanism, Jessica Berman's *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community* (2001), which focuses on community, has been influential in thinking about cosmopolitanism in the context

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<sup>52</sup> In *Cosmopolitan Criticism and Postcolonial Criticism* (2011), Robert Spencer kindly refers to and credits my approach.

<sup>53</sup> Schoene relies on Jean-Luc Nancy's reflections in Nancy's works *The Inoperative Community* (1986), *Being Singular Plural* (1996) and *The Creation of the World or Globalization* (2002).

<sup>54</sup> The writers he focuses on are contemporary British, with the exception of Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai (both Man Booker Prize winners and therefore, possibly considered 'British' by Schoene) and Hari Kunzru, who are grouped in the chapter "Global Noise".

of the aesthetics of community. Her book takes on a two-fold project: firstly, she argues that community must be seen as a narrative process, just as the nation is narrated (in reference to Bhabha) (3).<sup>55</sup> Her second concern is to highlight modernism's historical and political engagement with cosmopolitanism and community (4). In a contextual approach that takes into account political, historical and geographical issues, Berman investigates community in modernist fiction. Her work is important to this study because she firmly brings together cosmopolitanism and literariness and takes into account the historical contingency and materiality of cosmopolitanism (19). Also from an aesthetic point of view, Amanda Anderson's *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (2001) is influential because Anderson's reading of the texts is narratological (with a focus on character) and it takes into account Victorian scientific discourse, history and politics; i.e. it is a textual as well as contextual analysis that in method serves as an example for my own approach.

Rebecca Walkowitz's insightful study *Cosmopolitan Style* (2006) attributes particular relevance to literary style. She claims that the postmodernist writers whose works she analyses use specific stylistic devices to develop a critical cosmopolitanism that is averse to heroism (2). Walkowitz's meticulous analysis of modernist texts by W.G. Sebald, Kazuo Ishiguro and others serve, if not as a blueprint, then as a methodological inspiration for this thesis.<sup>56</sup>

In this thesis, cosmopolitan aesthetics denote the literariness of the texts and the impact that the aesthetics of the text have on the reader's understanding of ethics and practice of cosmopolitanism and the rewriting of histories and geographies. The propensity of these fictions is to *imagine* and to rewrite, via the aesthetics of the text, cosmopolitan moments and their histories and geographies.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the term 'cosmopolitan' does not pertain to a particular form of narration, for example (as Berthold Schoene argues), nor does it denominate a specific kind of fiction (as Katherine Stanton argues). In this approach that is concerned with cosmopolitanism as a means of reading these novels as texts that imagine India

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<sup>55</sup> See Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (1990).

<sup>56</sup> For methodology, see 2.3 "Methodology: Reading Cosmopolitan Moments".

<sup>57</sup> This is discussed in detail in 2.2 "Rewriting Histories and Geographies".

and its histories and geographies in non-national and non-postcolonial paradigms, cosmopolitan aesthetics are defined as the literary features that bring to the fore and negotiate cosmopolitan moments.

Cosmopolitan moments include the *literary tropes of mirroring and passages*. As explained above, cosmopolitan moments are defined as contingent, fleeting and shifting. Of these three properties, two – fleeting, shifting – imply a brief temporality, whereas contingency denominates a momentary dissolution or expansion of time and space. Hence, in contingent cosmopolitan moments, narrative time and space are expanded for a brief moment. This can happen in connection with a trope, for example the storm. In *The Genesis of Secrecy* (1979), Frank Kermode argues that there are narratives that are opaque, and hence difficult to interpret within the context of the story. They are mysteries in the text which are secret, and which the reader can only glimpse “through the meshes of a text; this is divination, but what is divined is visible from our angle” (144). This is, as will be seen, the case with two tropes, namely the ghost and the storm. In other words: cosmopolitan moments can refer to moments or instances in the text that imply narrative stasis. Then, cosmopolitan passages are indicative of movement, migration and transformation, and cosmopolitan mirroring refers to the trope of the mirror that is used to negotiate sameness and difference.

The aesthetic aspects of cosmopolitan moments serve to underline the ethical and practical cosmopolitan concerns that the novels negotiate. With their particular aesthetics – tropes such as the storm, the ship, the traveller, the city, the ghost and others, and their narrative concerns with imaginary global trajectories, for example – the novels relate these concerns in a compelling and influential way and further our understanding of cosmopolitan concerns. Moreover, through their striking imagery, the aesthetics of these moments highlight the rewriting and reimagining of histories and geographies.

## 2.2 Rewriting Histories and Geographies

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said makes the point that we form our own histories and geographies: quoting the historian Vico, he argues that “men make their own history, [what] they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography” (5). Said clearly states that the ‘Orient’ is not shaped by imagination alone; rather, it was shaped by the power structures and ideology of imperialism that helped construct, in English and French imaginations, the ‘Orient’ (and its opposite, the ‘Occident’). In a Foucauldian sense, then, history and its geographies as imagined are determined by the abovementioned constraints. This is just as much the case with imagined or fictive histories and geographies. In the literary works at hand, the histories and geographies that are rewritten – and reimagined – are shaped by the constraints of Empire (British and Mughal), colonialism, trade, indentured labour and migration. Departing from the assumption, then, the analysis of histories and geographies in the fictions at hand must take into account existing power relations both within and without the text.

The notion of imagining a geographical space is also present in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983). Famously, he argues that the nation is an imagined community, that although its members do not know each other, they share a feeling of national identity that was created by the novel and the newspaper, two forms of writing that allow a simultaneity of actions: “these forms provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation” (25). It is claimed here that Anderson’s argument can be transferred to other forms of community, for example to diaspora or migrant communities. While there are no politically sanctioned state borders, no citizens, no constitution and government that unify these communities, they constitute an ‘imagined’ community.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> In the literary texts discussed here, the nation is not ‘represented’ as such. Earlier works, mainly Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980), Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* (1989) and Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* (1993) are all metaphorically and allegorically concerned with the early years of the Indian nation.



Global histories, as all histories, are constructed. 'Global' is also an imagined space, an imagined geography with an imagined history. Where 'the globe' begins or ends cannot be defined; it is an all-encompassing entity. There is no predetermined historical or geographical framework for cosmopolitan moments. Cosmopolitanism integrates a "plurality of modes and histories - not necessarily shared in degree or in concept regionally, nationally, or internationally - that comprise cosmopolitan practice and history" (Bhabha et al. 584).<sup>59</sup> Departing from this idea of a *plurality of histories*, cosmopolitan moments can be defined as *unfixed, fleeting* and *transitory*. In view of this approach, it makes sense to take a global view of historical narratives. Global histories, as Bruce Mazlish and Ralph Buultjens write,

are [...] many global experiences, i.e. encounters between local situations and global pressure or between particular peoples and the forces of globalization. Each of these experiences [...] requires its own history, as part of our increased awareness of global history. (4)

Cosmopolitan moments form part of a narrative of global history (or belong to the plurality of histories). Global history<sup>60</sup> is not a discipline, as Pamela Kyle Crossley has contended, rather it is a

historical subdiscipline of historiography, or the study of the writing of history. [...] In this way, global history becomes a mode of thinking and writing rather than a discipline. In the

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<sup>59</sup> In a sense, Vinay Dharwadker illustrates this with his example of the community surrounding the Buddha, Siddharta-Gautama, (about 500 BC) which "foreshadows the Stoic one to an interesting degree" (6). Dharwadker argues that this was a cosmopolitan community, because it welcomed anyone, "regardless of caste, wealth, rank, sex, or ethnic origin, and the wandering monk, nun or teacher is at home everywhere [...] The Buddhist sanga emerged as the first programmatically cosmopolitan community on the subcontinent, and remains the oldest continuously surviving community of this type in the world today" (ibid.). For more information about this early form of cosmopolitan community, see also Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism* (1990), chapters 4 and 14.

<sup>60</sup> Global history is a field that has been expanding since the 1990s, when historians came to realize that narrating history on a global scale is crucial when it comes to making sense of global processes. Frank Andre Gunder, who wrote *Re-orient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (1998) and Bruce Mazlish, who co-edited *Conceptualizing Global History* (1993) with Ralph Buultjens and *The Global History Reader* (2005) with Akira Iriye, and wrote *A New Global History* (2006), provided much of the groundwork. For a detailed and concise study of global history as an academic field see Pamela Kyle Crossley, *What Is Global History?* (2008).

end, writers must tell a story that aspires to explain global-scale changes over time. (105)

In this sense, global history is not only a historical concern – it is very much a literary concern too. One of the propensities of literature is its ability to narrate stories and histories, to interpret and make sense of connections and to create an imaginary realm that links fact and fiction. Historical fiction, a popular genre since Sir Walter Scott wrote *Waverley* (1814),<sup>61</sup> is still en vogue today. The historical novel “as a form [...] might investigate, trouble and complicate the past; [and offer] a way of communicating that past in innovative and complex ways” (16), as Jerome de Groot has argued. Keith Jenkins maintains that “texts are not cognitive, empirical, epistemological entities, but speculative, propositional invitations to imagine the past ad infinitum” (49). Evolving from a realist form (Sir Walter Scott) to modern (Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* 1928) and to postmodern forms (Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 1980), the genre's metadiscourse on how 'History' should and must be understood has changed.<sup>62</sup> Postcolonial fictions often resort to metafictional debates; this is famously the case in the postmodern novels by Salman Rushdie (*Midnight's Children* (1980) being one of the best-known examples).<sup>63</sup>

The novels at the centre of this study are concerned with the fictionalized narration of history. In these texts, transnational and cosmopolitan processes are negotiated, and thus narratives of global history are created. This is a feature that all texts share: the narration of (hi)stories that are not national but regional, and take into account trade, migration and cultures that developed irrespective of individual political entities (be these kingdoms, states, nations, or other forms of

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<sup>61</sup> As Jerome de Groot points out, “[t]echnological innovations relating to printing meant that novels became the first mass-market literary medium, and the first novel to be published widely and also to be marketed to this new public was Scott's *Waverley* (1814). Scott's novel was massively, globally successful” (17).

<sup>62</sup> The historical novel has been theorized extensively. See for example Herbert Butterfield, *The Historical Novel* (1924) and Hayden White, *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature and Theory, 1957-2007* (2010). For a Marxist perspective, see Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (1962).

<sup>63</sup> For more on Salman Rushdie's historiographic metafiction see Meenu Gupta's *Salman Rushdie: Retelling History Through Fiction* (2009). Linda Hutcheon coined the term 'historiographic metafiction' in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988).

rule). These texts are historical novels set in global history and have a cosmopolitan outlook on events past and also present.

Although this will be discussed in more detail in the literature chapters of this study, it is necessary to point out that there is, of course, a political interest or intent present when global (hi)stories are narrated in a fictionalized context. This political intent drives at pointing out ways of understanding and imagining the world beyond national or postcolonial paradigms. Rewriting history is meant to express a sense of appropriation by these writers, a political claim to an understanding of history that is idiosyncratic, that cannot be packed together with an existing set of narratives. In this sense, it is arguable that that there is an explorative nature to these texts: if we discard of binaries and dichotomies, which stories can be told? Geography – writing or describing the earth – is intrinsically bound to the idea of rewriting history; the temporal and the spatial are firmly linked. As Edward Soja writes,

a third critical perspective [Thirdspace], associated with an explicitly spatial imagination, has in recent years begun to infuse the study of history and society with new modes of thinking and interpretation [...] there is a growing awareness of the simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical and the spatial. (261)

This imaginative aspect of space is also referred to by bell hooks, who argues that “[s]paces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated and transformed through artistic and literary practice” (152). On a fictional level, then, rewriting geography therefore expresses the same intentions as rewriting history: the idea of producing a literary aesthetic through rewriting. Especially when discussing history in a global context, with its explicit emphasis on space, the understanding of geographies and their propensity to be narrated becomes relevant. In *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), Said argues that texts are worldly in that they form a material part of a public world: “The point is that texts have ways of existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society – in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly” (35). The literary texts discussed here are ‘enmeshed’,

and consciously so – the choice to write global histories as fiction is a political choice as much as an aesthetic one. The politics of history are a relevant concern that will be addressed in the individual chapters.

Within the narrative framework of global history, i.e. the narration of global-scale historical processes in these literary texts, the ethics and practice of cosmopolitanism are negotiated. In these cosmopolitan moments, histories and geographies can be rewritten. The literary texts at the centre of this thesis do exactly this: by negotiating cosmopolitan moments, they question accepted narratives of history and offer their own historical interpretations and narratives within a literary framework. Cosmopolitan moments are defined here as follows: they are expressive of a theoretical framework that is concerned with ethical and practical cosmopolitanism, history and geography. Cosmopolitan moments *complicate* (fictional) historical narratives; they are accentuated moments in the texts that emphasize an understanding of global history and raise the ethical issues that come with it. Furthermore, cosmopolitan moments in narratives do not have a specific temporal and spatial frame: cosmopolitan histories and geographies can be found in many instances in literature and history.

How can these cosmopolitan moments be read and interpreted? What are the methodological implications? This question is taken up in the following chapter that is specifically concerned with literary methodology and analysis.

### 2.3 Methodology: Reading Cosmopolitan Moments

Reading cosmopolitan moments functions as a lens for interpretation, as a particular way of reading the four novels at the centre of this thesis.<sup>64</sup> Specifically, the following literary concerns are relevant for the literary analysis because they aesthetically express cosmopolitan ethics and practice.

- narrative and its spatial and temporal trajectories
- characters
- setting: places and spaces
- storytelling and historiography
- legends, songs, poems and other intertextual references
- framed visuality (paintings, mirrors)
- metaphor
- language

The methodologies employed in order to analyse these elements are: close reading and wide reading, narratological and stylistic concerns.

By definition, *close reading* is an established method of literary analysis which adheres to the principles of a detailed reading and analysis of a literary text. Close reading, based on structuralism, tries to do justice to the complexity of literary texts, to their aesthetics and to the variety of meanings expressed by language and form (Hallet 294).<sup>65</sup>

While close reading has the advantage of enabling a precise negotiation of the issues *within* the text, it is necessary, in order to achieve a more holistic analysis and interpretation, to complement this intrinsic approach with *wide reading*. This approach, which considers texts (literary and other) *without* the main object of literary analysis, allows for a consideration of the wider historical and cultural context of a literary work (ibid.). In particular, intertextual as well as

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<sup>64</sup> For now, the reading of the novels as undertaken in this thesis cannot be used as a blueprint for the interpretation of other literary texts concerned with global history and cosmopolitanism, but must be understood as an attempt to unravel the complex components and narratives that form these particular texts. However, it is interesting to consider whether this approach is also applicable to other literatures with similarly thematic concerns. This is mentioned in 7. "Conclusion".

<sup>65</sup> Close reading has been criticized for its intrinsic approach to literary texts, which is why combining it with wide reading makes sense.

intermedial approaches come to the fore in wide reading. The intertextual approach presupposes that the cultural sphere surrounding the text can also be read or decoded: the cultural dimension of literary texts is reconstructed, and paradigmatic dimensions outside the text are considered (Hallet 299). Intertextuality, then, is defined as a literary text's direct reference to literary or other works (Hallet 300). In a Bakhtinian sense, intertextuality also means addressing elements from non-literary discourses. These various voices combined in the novel result in heteroglossia or polyphony (Bakhtin 1979). Intermediality refers to the fact that literary texts can refer to other media, which in turn also convey meaning with their own sign systems (Hallet 302). Werner Wolf defines intermediality applying to "any transgression of boundaries between media and thus is concerned with 'heteromedial' relations between different semiotic complexes" (252).

In the analysis of these four novels, close and wide reading provides an expedient approach: firstly, undertaking a close reading is a useful analytical approach because it helps to unravel the complex issues that are negotiated in these texts. Secondly, wide reading is equally necessary because the four novels are all embedded in several cultural contexts that are referred to persistently. In other words, the combination of close and wide reading is worthwhile and necessary for this analysis.

*Narratology* comes to the fore in this analysis as a means of analysing the texts with its useful tools of narrative, story, analepsis and prolepsis, character and characterization, to name the most pertinent examples. Two standard works of reference, Mieke Bal's *Narratology* (2009) and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (1999), provide the basis for thinking about narratological concerns. This is not a narratological analysis per se, but throughout the reading, certain narratological terms are used for the analysis.

*Stylistics* is used as a means to analyse certain language- and style-related issues. Specifically, the interest lies in metaphors and other tropes, as well as in the use of languages. However, this is not rigorous stylistic analysis: on the contrary, certain elements that are pertinent to analysis and interpretation of the novels are

selected. In terms of language, the insertion of pidgins, creoles and Indian vernaculars into texts written in English (variants of their own) is considered a sociolinguistic practice (Simpson 102).

In summary, the textual analysis of the novels is based mainly on the methodological approach of close and wide reading. This approach allows for an intrinsic negotiation with the novels and for the consideration of the larger cultural context which surrounds them. Hence, the literary history and history of the novels is carefully considered in the interpretation. Moreover, certain narratological and stylistic concerns are, whenever deemed useful, taken into account. With the methodological approach laid out above, the concerns listed above are analysed as expressive of a cosmopolitan aesthetic that highlights cosmopolitan practice and ethics. These cosmopolitan moments are analysed and interpreted within the theoretical framework of cosmopolitanism, literature, and the rewriting and reimagining of histories and geographies as described in the two parts of this chapter, and as shown in the following chapters concerned with the literary analysis.

### 3. Cosmopolitan Passages in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*

*Poppies* (2008) and *Smoke* (2011) are the first two novels of the *Ibis* trilogy,<sup>66</sup> Ghosh's ambitious project to write a fictional history about colonialism and globalization, and more specifically, about the Indian and British colonial opium trade and indentured labour<sup>67</sup> set (so far) in India, Mauritius, China and the vast seas surrounding and connecting these countries. The Indian Ocean and the South China Sea (which belongs, geographically, to the North Pacific Ocean) are the cosmopolitan maritime spaces that are explored by ship. It is not surprising, then, that Ghosh's trilogy is called the *Ibis* trilogy, named after the old slaving ship the *Ibis* in *Poppies*. Both novels attracted considerable critical acclaim: *Poppies* was shortlisted for the 2008 Booker Prize, and *Smoke* was longlisted for the 2011 Man Asian Literary Prize. Most reviews were in praise of the novels; therefore, they have been successful from a commercial as well as from a critical point of view. Ghosh is currently writing the last part of the trilogy, *Flood of Fire*, which will be published in spring 2015.<sup>68</sup>

In this chapter, the aim is to analyse the cosmopolitan moments and passages in this novel, and to highlight that they are embedded in a narrative about colonialism, the opium trade and globalization – in other words, they are a conscious attempt to represent material historical conditions and subaltern histories.<sup>18</sup> In cosmopolitan moments and passages, the conditions of human existence under these circumstances are negotiated in a debate that centres on questions of community, movement and transformation, and responsibility towards the other.

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<sup>66</sup> According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, the ibis is a bird and a sacred animal in Egyptian mythology. Budge writes that Thoth, one of the main deities of the Egyptian pantheon, is often depicted with the head of an ibis or a baboon. Thoth was entrusted with maintaining the universe, and stood at the side of the solar deity Ra's boat. In the later history of Egypt, he became associated with the arbitration of godly disputes, the arts of magic, the system of writing and the judgement of the dead (400–114).

<sup>67</sup> With indentured labour, the British employed impoverished Indians on long-term contracts and paid them meagre salaries. They were engaged by the British to work on plantations in Mauritius and on the railways in East Africa (this is a theme in M.G. Vassanji's writing). This form of migration is a major theme in *Poppies*.

<sup>68</sup> The date of publication was announced by Ghosh on his blog [www.amitavghosh.com/blog](http://www.amitavghosh.com/blog) on November 20, 2013. The publishers are Penguin India, John Murray (UK) and Farrar, Straus and Giroux (USA).



In his earlier work, Ghosh has already focused on globalization, trade and the lives of the people caught up in the economic and political changes brought about by colonialism.

As Chitra Sankaran succinctly puts it, Ghosh's works is defined by

the distinctive way in which his works manage to hold together a global, ecumenical perspective while focusing on highly individual, often contested and marginalized histories, such as those of refugees, Indian sepoys under the British Raj, the "lower" caste Othered, and voiceless women. Ghosh's consummate skill as both storyteller and sensitive interpreter of varied histories is revealed in the way his narratives effectively counterpoise vignettes of human drama that occupy these distinctive locales against epic backdrops that adumbrate global issues of capitalized "History," without taking away the significance from either.  
(xv)

In particular in *The Shadow Lines* (1988) that deals with the partition of India and Pakistan and the ensuing violence and in *The Glass Palace* (2000), set in Burma, India and Malaysia, there is a similar investment in narratives that cross national or even regional boundaries. In a comparable narrative style, Ghosh introduces a number of characters whose trajectories weave a rich tapestry of the history of the region and beyond. In the autobiographical and fictional travel narrative *In An Antique Land* (1990), Ghosh investigates the life and travels of a subaltern slave from Africa to India, and writes about the relationship between India and Egypt, his experiences while researching for his dissertation in anthropology when he was staying in a village in rural Egypt, thus imagining and exploring the cosmopolitan space of the Indian Ocean as well as the contemporary and medieval worlds of India and Egypt.<sup>69</sup> Ghosh states in an interview with Chitra Sankaran:

[I]'m drawn to rural India, to marginal India, I'm drawn to marginal people in India. I'm drawn to marginal people across the world. I'm drawn to Burmese, Cambodians, to obscure figures, defeated figures and people who salvage some sort of life out of wreckage... these characters appeal to me, they interest me. [But] I'm not interested in victimhood.

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<sup>69</sup> See Chitra Sankaran's introduction to *History, Narrative, and Testimony in Amitav Ghosh's Fiction* (2012), which gives an excellent overview of Ghosh's work to date.

[...] I'm interested in people who shape their own lives in some sense or who give up shaping their own lives, or who find themselves defeated. ("Diasporic Predicaments" 13-14)

Thus, the *Ibis* novels (as I will call them, since the trilogy as such does not yet exist) can be aligned in Ghosh's very own tradition of historical and political writing, for they take up the themes of colonialism, and political, economic and subaltern history. As I mention above, there is a distinct investment in colonialism and imperialism in Ghosh's work. Incontestably, his work belongs to a *postcolonial* body of writing, and is thus evidently shaped by his own political opinions. Ghosh withdrew *The Glass Palace* from the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 2001 in protest against a revival of imperial ideology that later found expression, for example, in Niall Ferguson's book *War of the World* (2006)<sup>70</sup> and generally in, to quote Ghosh, "a real and massive revival of imperialist ideology, [which] has reached an apex with the Iraq War" ("Diasporic Predicaments" 3).<sup>71</sup> This consciousness of colonial power structures that are still present in today's world, and the issues of globalization, trade and culture that belong to this legacy, is present also in the *Ibis* novels, epics of migration and tributes to subaltern trajectories that rewrite and reimagine the regional and global movements of people and trade. One aspect of this field of interest is undoubtedly language, which figures prominently in the *Ibis* novels.<sup>72</sup>

When looking at Ghosh's work, it seems fair to state that at the heart of his writing is an idea of the *plurality* of histories and voices. This is a characteristic of cosmopolitanism as Bhabha et al. define it: cosmopolitanism integrates a "plurality of modes and histories – not necessarily shared in degree or in concept regionally, nationally, or internationally – that comprise cosmopolitan practice and history"

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<sup>70</sup> Niall Ferguson is an award-winning historian specialized in financial and economic history. He is best known for his revisionist views on imperialism and colonialism.

<sup>71</sup> Ghosh is quite cutting on this matter, and criticizes some fellow Indian intellectuals (excepting, for example, Arundhati Roy) for not responding to the "whole slew of stuff coming out of Britain right now. They're trying to repaint themselves into some kind of crusader role. British intellectuals have been absolutely at the heart of this attack upon Iraq" ("Diasporic Predicaments" 3-4).

<sup>72</sup> In this analysis of *Poppies* and *River*, language is not the main object of analysis, but it figures repeatedly in my reading of the text as part of a cosmopolitan practice that Ghosh reminds us of with much insistence. In order to do justice to the meaning and use of the various languages in the novels, it would be necessary to undertake a sociolinguistic analysis.

(584). In *Poppies* and *Smoke*, this plurality of histories is reflected in the narrative structure of the novels that is built on intersecting and at times meandering and contingent trajectories of the characters. Both novels are narrated by an omniscient narrator as well as by several focalizers; thus various perspectives and much insight into the history of the time is made possible. Ghosh acknowledges that the events of 'history' are plural, and that it must be narrated polyphonically, meaning that not only is it narrated by several voices, but also in several languages. In the *Ibis* novels, the role of the individual life in these events is central and is a tribute to Ghosh's interest in the human condition of the marginalized. As he says, "[h]istory itself is...in a novel...not very interesting, except in as much as it forms the background of an individual's predicaments" ("Diasporic Predicaments" 1).

*Poppies* is set in rural Bengal, Calcutta and aboard the *Ibis*. Colonial Bengal is described as a place or space of cosmopolitan encounters and a vivid hybridized local culture. Other places in the world – China, France, America – are present because of the characters mentioned above. In this way, the world is acknowledged to be a larger and more complex space than the space of the local colonial encounter. Spatial and temporal issues are linked, for with the involvement of characters from all over the globe, Ghosh establishes Calcutta as an international trading post. Indeed, globalization is not anticipated as a future phenomenon; the ways in which global transfers were taking place in the form of imperial production and trade form part of the narrative. Importantly, India is placed in a narrative network of trade and cultural exchange that relates to a global historical context. As the title of the novel reveals, opium and its economic and political significance forms the topical background of the novel, yet intriguingly, Ghosh never becomes didactic – reading the novel does not feel like taking part in a history lesson. Rather, the stories of the characters are gripping and narrated with much dedication and empathy. Ghosh is, in this sense, a true storyteller whose main interest is to imagine the life of individuals rather than to inform his readers about a particular historical period.

Therefore, the novel's structure relies on the various narrative strands linked to the characters, which are brought together eventually – at the latest when they all board the *Ibis*.<sup>73</sup> The main protagonists are also focalizers: Deeti, a high-caste Rajput widow who is saved from death on the funeral pyre by Kalua, an untouchable, whom she later marries, Neel, an impoverished raja who has been dispossessed by Benjamin Burnham in a fake court trial, Paulette, a young woman of French-Mauritian parentage, Zachary, an American carpenter turned second mate aboard the *Ibis*, and Baboo Nob Kissin Pander, an employee of the British businessman Benjamin Burnham, owner of the *Ibis*, who is slowly transforming into his (dead) female spiritual leader. Others include Ah Fatt, a Chinese opium addict, who becomes Neel's charge on the ship. The characters' stories intertwine and intersect, for the fact that they are all on board the same ship joins these stories. Their destinies are shared because they are all 'in the same boat' (the pun to the saying is so obvious that it is also mentioned in a dialogue between Neel Rattan and Paulette Lambert, as will be discussed below). The *Ibis* is, in my reading of the text, a meeting-place, a place of transformation where new and uncommon alliances are formed.

Hence, cosmopolitanism comes in as a means of understanding and reading the *Ibis* novels as texts that narrate plural histories: subaltern and migrant histories, in which issues of the racialized other, gender, caste and class are negotiated. Sameness and difference, solidarity and responsibility are negotiated in the narrative framework of a world that is doubtlessly dominated by colonial power structures that affect the characters on many levels. While previous works such as *The Glass Palace* are similar in their intention to portray the workings of colonialism on a micro- as well as a macro-level, I argue here that *Poppies* and *Smoke* are particularly relevant for this analysis because they place a particular emphasis on a cosmopolitan *aesthetics* that highlights the ethical and practical implications of cosmopolitanism on a *literary* level.

The most striking and prominent trope of this aesthetic is the *Ibis*, as well as the two other ships that are important in *Smoke*, the *Anahita* and the *Redruth*. These

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<sup>73</sup> In *Enchantress*, the pirate ship *Scáthach* is also a vessel that expresses dubious morals (EF 13).

cosmopolitan aesthetics highlight *ethical* and *practical* as well as *aspirational* cosmopolitan concerns: the contingencies and vagaries that migration entails, an emphasis on community, race, gender, the negotiation of sameness and difference, solidarity and responsibility. The specific emphasis on the aesthetics, ethics and practice of cosmopolitanism is expressed in *cosmopolitan moments*, and, specifically in relation to my analysis of the *Ibis* novels, *cosmopolitan passages*.

Specifically, cosmopolitan passages refer to the passage of the three ships in *Poppies* and *Smoke*: the *Ibis* in *Poppies*, whose route takes her across the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, and *Smoke's Redruth*, who sails from England to China, also across the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. The *Anahita*, also in *Smoke*, sails from India to China and back. The routes of the three ships intersect spatially (in the Indian Ocean), and narratively; they are connected via the characters' journeys and also through one contingent moment, namely a storm that enables the convicted raja Neel and other characters to escape the *Ibis*, and that damages the *Anahita* and its expensive freight of opium severely. These passages are perilous, but they also contain aspirational moments of transformation, of hope and community that belong, in my view, to a reading of cosmopolitan aesthetics, ethics and practice.

In the analysis of the *Ibis* novels, I have chosen to dedicate a chapter each to *Poppies* and *Smoke* (chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis). As is usually the case with a sequence of novels that are related (here the first two parts of a trilogy), continuity is upheld in *Smoke*. Specifically, to establish continuity, the first chapter of *Smoke* is dedicated to Deeti. Interestingly, however, Deeti soon fades into the background. The second chapter introduces the reader to Bahram Moodie, Ah Fatt's father and a Parsi opium trader from Bombay, and Robin Chinnery, Paulette's childhood friend from Calcutta. Paulette remains a relevant character, although she too is less central to the narrative. Hence, the reader recognizes major and minor characters from *Poppies*, and is introduced to new ones.<sup>74</sup>

In this chapter on *Poppies*, the analysis of cosmopolitan moments as *passages* is central and is based on the idea of the ship metaphor that implies movement

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<sup>74</sup> Other characters are, much to the reader's chagrin, sorely neglected or seemingly forgotten – it is to be hoped that they will enter stage again in the third novel.

and change through space and time. Therefore, the term *passages* refers to, but not only, the passage of the ship; it also refers to rites of passage, and to transformations of individuals and communities. The following subchapters are all concerned with passages and transformations of one kind or another. The first subchapter 3.1 "*Girmitiyas* and Lascars: Cosmopolitan Practices and Passages" discusses migration, language and transformation as cosmopolitan practice. Transformation, hope and community are addressed in 3.2 "*The Ibis: Vision and Cosmopolitan Community*", where the ship is read as a metaphor for an aspirational cosmopolitan community. In 3.3 "*Masks and Disguises: The Ibis's Cosmopolitan Passengers*", the discussion centres on the cosmopolitan moment of masking and disguising as tropes that provoke a negotiation of sameness and difference in the context of race, class, caste and gender. The last analysis subchapter is concerned with questions of cosmopolitan responsibility toward the other, and it is argued that in *Poppies*, this responsibility is negotiated and explored via the trope of the body.

### 3.1 *Girmitiyas* and Lascars: Cosmopolitan Practices

The trajectory of the *Ibis* throughout *Poppies* is the inconspicuous main theme of the novel – it is always present because the passage of the ship is so intricately linked with the characters. The ship sails from Baltimore, where Zachary goes aboard, to Cape Town, where the lascars (sailors of Asian and African descent) embark. From there it sets sail to Port Louis, then heads to Calcutta. In Calcutta, the *girmitiyas* (indentured labourers) take ship. In this subchapter, I discuss how the *Ibis*'s passage, mixed crew and passengers are expressive of a cosmopolitan practice of migration and language in the space of the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean, and it is argued that this constitutes a rewriting of (subaltern) histories into a narrative of a global history of trade and imperialism.

Originally, the *Ibis* is a slave ship, an old blackbirder that transports Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to America, so that early on in the novel, the *Ibis* becomes a symbol of enslavement and forced migration. The ship is marked by the suffering of the slaves: “the ‘tween deck, where the schooner’s human cargo had been accommodated with peepholes and air ducts, bored by generations of captive Africans” (SP 11-12). She has changed hands to serve another profitable trade, that of opium:

[In] the years since the formal abolition of the slave trade, British and American naval vessels had taken to patrolling the West African coast in growing numbers, and the *Ibis* was not swift enough to be confident of outrunning them. As with many another slave-ship, the schooner’s new owner had acquired her with an eye to fitting her for a different trade: the export of opium. In this instance, the purchasers were a firm called Burnham Bros., a shipping company and trading house that had extensive interests in India and China. (SP 11)

Clearly, the investment in the *Ibis* is a profoundly capitalist and colonial one; the ship carries first a morally reprehensible cargo of slaves, then indentured labourers, and later opium. Indeed, Burnham is drawn as a ruthless profiteer, who, in line with the ideologies of British free trade, explains to Zachary that

slavery is “the greatest exercise in freedom since God led the children of Israel out of Egypt” (SP 73). The hypocrisy exposed here is emblematic of the tone of the whole novel, which, with an intertextual parody of the Bible, severely criticizes the colonial enterprise. (It is also ironic that Burnham reveals his opinion on this matter to Zachary, who is of African-American descent but who is sufficiently light-skinned as to not be perceived as ‘black’.)

Hence, this reference to slavery ties the *Ibis* to its past, as well as to its present. Visibly, the trope of the ship effectively manifests the connection between slavery and indentured labour, and relates directly to the fact that it is now transporting indentured labourers, who are contracted for years of hard labour on plantations and other menial work in conditions not far removed from those of slavery.<sup>75</sup> The trope therefore constitutes an effective means of criticizing, as I think is Ghosh’s intention, the continuation of a form of enslavement that was, at least outwardly, morally acceptable.

Historically speaking, indentured labour is directly related to the abolition of slavery, as well as to a change in Chinese policies that threatened the lucrative opium trade (Rai and Pinkney 66). The change in economic circumstances made indentured labour profitable, and so British officials began to recruit Indian peasants in masses. Those who were recruited signed an indenture ‘agreement’ – vernacularized in North Indian languages as *girmit* – and were from then on known as *girmitiyas* (Mishra 122). Indentured migrants belonged to the first large group of Indians to leave the Indian subcontinent. Prior to this movement, only a small number of people travelled.<sup>76</sup>

Indeed, the *girmitiyas* on the *Ibis* are not seasoned travellers. They are peasants who have left their homes out of economic necessity. Monocultures of

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<sup>75</sup> Slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1833, and in consequence, cheap labour on the sugar plantations was wiped out (Lal 46).

<sup>76</sup> As Rai and Pinkney explain, prior to indenture, travelling was undertaken by pilgrims, itinerant traders and caravanserais. The actual number of travellers was numerically insignificant. According to them, only by “the mid-nineteenth century can we identify a monumental shift in the extent and patterns of the global emigration of Indians that led to the establishment of diasporic Indian communities throughout the (former) British colonies. Even more significantly, this movement marked a radical attitudinal change, particularly among Hindus who, prior to this shift, were disinclined to travel by sea due to a widely religious taboo” (66). This fear is referred to in *Poppies* (228).



crops such as opium and indigo brought about food shortages even in areas as fertile as the Gangetic plain, and Ghosh points out the consequences that its inhabitants must suffer, namely lack of work and food:

Both Deeti and Kalua has tried to find work, but employment was hard to come by in Chhapra. The town was thronged with hundreds of impoverished transients, many of whom were willing to sweat themselves half to death for a few handfuls of rice. Many of these people had been driven from their villages by the flood of flowers that had washed over the countryside: lands that had once provided sustenance were now swamped by the rising tide of poppies. (SP 187)

Deeti and Kalua are among the many who are in search of work, and who eventually hear that labourers are being recruited. Deeti, a young Rajput widow, is saved from being burned on the funeral pyre by Kalua, an Untouchable who lives in her village. They get married and must flee their homes, Deeti leaving her daughter Kabutri behind. In one way or another, all migrants have an unhappy story to tell. On the voyage itself, Deeti hears many stories of desperation from the women on board: Ratna and Champa, two sisters, who decided to indenture themselves rather than starve (SP 223), Dookhane, who joined her husband on this trip to escape an abusive mother-in-law (ibid.), Heeru, who got lost at a cattle fair, and after coming home weeks later, finds out that her husband has remarried (ibid.), and Munia, whose illegitimate infant and parents die in a fire that was set at the behest of the opium factory agent who was the father of her child (SP 227). Ghosh shows a particular interest in the women migrants, as Rai and Pinkney have noted:

Ghosh's rich narrative of the *girmitiyas'* journey [...] is particularly revealing for its assiduous attempt to capture the experience of women *girmitiyas*. Here a lacuna exists in scholarly literature that can in part be explained by the fact that women formed only a small fraction of the indentured, especially prior to the late 1860s when the colonial office fixed the ratio of female to male indentured emigrants at 40 to 100. (71)

Ghosh imagines the lives of these subaltern women and writes them into a narrative of global history and trade.<sup>77</sup> This is done very effectively, and it is quite remarkable that one of the main characters of *Poppies* is a female indentured labourer. Deeti's 'voice' is certainly heard, for she is fundamental to building the ship community as well as her clan in Mauritius. Ghosh underscores the cosmopolitan practice of migration by developing a narrative that is closely concerned with the lives of his characters, and thus creates a literary engagement with migration. Arguably, this constitutes a cosmopolitan practice of writing in which histories of migration and indentured labour are reimagined and rewritten.

Likewise, Ghosh directs his focus to the lascars, the sailors on the *Ibis*. After leaving Baltimore, the ship heads towards Cape Town, where there is only a short stopover, and then sails on towards Mauritius. No other sailors than lascars seem to want to board the ship, for the *Ibis*' reputation has become quite terrible, so that "not a single American or European, not even the worst rufflers or rum-gaggers could be induced to sign on" (SP 12).

Aboard the *Ibis* comes a mixed – cosmopolitan – crew, very much like Melville's motley crew in *Moby-Dick* (1851). The lascars, as these sailors are called, come from many different regions; indeed, they "had nothing in common, except the Indian Ocean; among them were Chinese and East Africans, Arabs and Malays, Bengalis and Goans, Tamils and Arakanese" (SP 13). Their language is Lascari.<sup>78</sup> Lascars were sailors and militiamen, mainly recruited to serve on European ships. They developed a language of their own, Lascari, which, in *Poppies*, is mainly rendered via the speech of the leader of the lascar company, Serang Ali. In a talk at the Asia Society, Ghosh explained that this sailor language was made up of elements of "Hindi, Hindusthani, Chinese, Persian, Malayalam, Bengali, African words Arabic words, and all put together in a sort of seamless mixture." Moreover, he states that Lascari was responsible for introducing Asian words into English and vice versa (2008). In a radio interview with Christopher

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<sup>77</sup> Giving a voice to the subaltern is still an issue up for debate. For a discussion of Gayatri Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1985), see a collection of responses edited by Rosalind C. Morris, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (2010).

<sup>78</sup> The fact that *A Laskari Dictionary or Anglo-Indian Vocabulary of Nautical Terms and Phrases in English and Hindustani* (1882) was published points to the significance this language had.

Lydon, Ghosh said that he wanted to capture Herman Melville's cosmopolitan vision rather than break the "imperial gaze of British writers like Kipling and Conrad." Ghosh states that

Melville has a level of curiosity, a level of engagement with the world that is completely absent from 19th century English writing. Even though England has a long connection with Asia, it is so rare actually to find a believable representation of an Asian in English books. In Melville, on the other hand, you remember in *Moby-Dick*, the 40th chapter, all of the sailors sing in different languages, and then suddenly you discover that this ship, which is a Nantucket whaling ship, actually has forty different nationalities on board, including Indians. (*Amitav Ghosh and his Sea of Poppies*)

Melville's engagement with the world and cosmopolitan vision was undoubtedly an inspiration for Ghosh when he wrote *Poppies*. In the literary rendering of Lascari, a cosmopolitan practice is expressed aesthetically. In other words, the novel's engagement with this language, and the frequent mentioning and rendering of Lascari, stages a linguistic world that has so far not found expression in a literary work. Moreover, it is fair to state that the use of languages is an overall theme in *Poppies* and *Smoke*. Certainly, Ghosh renders the languages spoken in much detail: Bhojpuri, the language of most migrant workers, Hindi, and several American and British English sociolects and dialects.

In this context of migration and language that I have been addressing above, the theme of transformation persistently occurs. For example, the migrants themselves feel that they are changing, as the next subchapter will discuss in more detail. Indeed, it seems that historians recognize that the ship voyage effected a lasting transformation among the *girmitiyas*. Many of the taboos connected to religion, observance of purity of food, caste, marriage and so on were difficult to keep up on board the ship (Lal 50). Undoubtedly, the voyage changes the migrants' sense of self and belonging and they begin to feel that they are part of a community; Paulette and Zachary transform themselves by changing their appearances, and Neel, the former convict, transforms himself by nursing his sick

cell mate and thus consciously abandoning his caste.<sup>79</sup> Hence, the cosmopolitan passage of the ship is inextricably bound to the notion of transformation. In summary, then, the trope of the ship expresses transformation aesthetically (the ship as a community), practically (as a means of travel, migration, language), and ethically (as a transformative space and aspirational community).

In conclusion, the cosmopolitan practice that is rendered in *Poppies* is illustrative of the mixed cultures and histories that coexisted in the space of the Indian Ocean. Yet this cosmopolitan practice cannot be read in isolation – in relation to cosmopolitan practices as they have been investigated here, questions of ethics and aesthetics arise. In this novel, the three aspects of cosmopolitanism interact and are joined. Therefore, the ship as metaphor of a shared space, and its metaphoric transformative passage will be discussed in more depth in the following subchapters.

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<sup>79</sup> These transformations are the topic of subchapters 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4.

### 3.2 The *Ibis*: Vision and Cosmopolitan Community

The *Ibis* figures not only as a literal vessel of transport indicating cosmopolitan practice: in this subchapter, the trope of the ship is read figuratively; as a vessel that, for a fleeting moment, harbours an aspirational cosmopolitan community and is expressive of a cosmopolitan ethics of equality and solidarity.

By agreeing to cross the *Kala-Pani*, the Black Water (the Indian Ocean), the Hindu migrants show bravery and recklessness alike, for this is a passage that, for Hindus, meant losing caste. This ship community seems like an exemplary cosmopolitan community, if cosmopolitan means 'mixed', as one of the definitions in the *Oxford English Dictionary* states. The *Ibis* contains the heterogeneous, contingent and transient cosmopolitan community of passengers and constitutes a meeting-place, a place of transformation that enables new and uncommon alliances. It is argued in this subchapter that the space of the ship, the action on board and the course it takes – its spatial and temporal paradigms – constitute a cosmopolitan moment in the text in which cosmopolitan practice (subaltern migration) and aspirational cosmopolitan ethics (contingent community) are negotiated.

Deeti is the most important character in the narrative strand concerning the *Ibis* and its community. She has visionary powers, and in her shrines (first in her village, later on Mauritius) she paints images of those who belong to the ship community. Deeti's visionary powers are hinted at in the description of her eyes:

She had light grey eyes, a feature that was unusual in that part of the country. Such was the colour – or perhaps colourlessness – of her eyes that they made her seem at once blind and all-seeing. This had the effect of unnerving the young, and of reinforcing their prejudices and superstitions to the point that they would sometimes shout taunts at her – *chudaliya*, *dainiya* – as if she were a witch: but Deeti had only to turn her eyes on them to make them scatter and run off.  
(SP 4-5)

Deeti is in many respects a striking character, with her resourcefulness and strength of mind. She is a Rajput widow who has escaped death on the funeral

pyre, a poor rural woman, yet she creates the ship community in her shrine before she actually boards the ship. She is empowered by this visionary gift, and although one would presume, at a first glance, that hers is a 'subaltern' character in the sense of someone inhabiting a weak position in the social strata, this is only partly true. Deeti not only has strong visionary powers, she is also the founder of a dynasty, a fact that is strongly emphasized (SP 9). In respect to community, the text functions on two levels: Deeti's shrine and the felt community on the ship. There are two ways in which the text underlines the importance of the ship and its community: firstly, the spiritual or even mythical conception of the ship as a vision and its ensuing placement in a shrine, with dead and living family members (for Deeti's vision is mentioned in the very first sentence of the novel). Secondly, the *Ibis* is ascribed a special function as a 'parent' of some sort by Paulette and Deeti, and the characters feel that their being on the *Ibis* is fateful and binding. Both constitute aspirational moments in the text; cosmopolitan moments that are concerned with what is desired and dreamed of. When she first sees the *Ibis*, it is clear to Deeti that she is having a vision, "yet not for a moment did she doubt that the ship existed somewhere and was heading for her direction" (SP 7-8). After Deeti has seen the *Ibis* in her vision, while she is standing kilometres away from where the actual ship is, she makes a charcoal drawing of the ship for her daughter, Kabutri, and places it in the shrine. Kabutri cannot understand why a ship should go in a puja room. Deeti explains, although puzzled herself:

I don't know [...] I just know that it must be there; and not just the ship, but also many of those who are in it; they too must be on the walls of our puja room. But who are they? said the puzzled child. I don't know yet, Deeti told her. But I will when I see them. (SP 9)

The shrine has a teleological function because it is the visionary projection of the ship community. The ship as a metaphor for a new community or dynasty is underlined in a hyperbolic fashion and is contrasted effectively with the actual harsh living conditions on board the *Ibis*. Certainly, this founding myth constitutes a binding narrative element in *Poppies* as well as in *Smoke* as becomes apparent in the quotation already mentioned above: "In time, among the legions who came to

regard the *Ibis* as their ancestor, it was accepted that it was the river itself that had granted Deeti the vision" (SP 9).

Interestingly, a female perspective conveys this sense of community. Paulette Lambert, a young woman of French-Mauritian origin, has secretly boarded the ship, disguised as an Indian woman. Upon Deeti's question if she, Paulette, or Pugli as she calls herself, is not afraid of losing caste by crossing the Black Water, and by being on the ship with many kinds of people, Paulette answers:

Not at all [...] On a boat of pilgrims, no one can lose caste and everyone is the same: it's like taking a boat to the temple of Jagannath, in Puri.<sup>80</sup> From now on, and forever afterwards, we will all be ship-siblings – *jaházbhais* and *jaházbahens* – to each other. There'll be no difference between us. This answer was so daring, so ingenious, as fairly to rob the women of their breath. Not in a lifetime of thinking, Deeti knew, would she have stumbled upon an answer so complete, so satisfactory and so thrilling in its possibilities. In the glow of the moment, she did something she would have never done otherwise: she reached out to take the stranger's hand in her own. Instantly, in emulation of her gesture, every other woman reached out too, to share this communion of touch. Yes, said Deeti, from now on, there are no differences between us; we are *jahaz-bhai* and *jahaz-bahen* to each other; all of us children of the ship. (SP 328)

Following this moment of shared emotion, expressed both verbally and physically, the *Ibis* appears. The *Ibis* takes on a significance that goes far beyond the usual significance of a ship as a vessel of transport. It is a mother and father, and Deeti understands that

her new self, her new life, has been gestating all this while in the belly of this creature, this vessel that was the Mother-Father of her new family [...] an adoptive ancestor and parent of dynasties yet to come. (SP 328)

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<sup>80</sup> Although long-distance travel was still uncommon (indentured labour being the first instance of a mass migration from the Indian subcontinent), pilgrimages were common and not considered dangerous. By calling their passage a 'pilgrimage', Paulette tries to allay Deeti's fear of crossing the Indian Ocean.

Not only is the *Ibis* the bearer of Deeti's new life with Kalua, her newly-wed husband, and of her unborn child, it is the parent of a new community. The family metaphor is also present in the passage quoted above, where Paulette refers to all the travellers on the ship as siblings. The notion of community is thus linked to diasporic hopefulness.

The metaphor of the *Ibis* as a vessel carrying in her belly or – to use the extended metaphor – giving birth to a new dynasty is the only element that is treated so hyperbolically in this realist novel. Possibly because it so extended, this metaphor emphatically suggests how we should think about community in the context of migration – how old ties are broken, and new and unexpected ones forged. Despite Deeti's – and, on another level, the omniscient narrator's – concern with this community and Deeti's efforts to enshrine it, it is ultimately ephemeral, at least where the actual plot is concerned. Furthermore, the metaphor allows for the complex interweaving of the creation of legends in a global history. In this dire situation, Deeti begins to create a family legend that will be passed down for generations, and that supplies her with a belief which sustains her even in times of hardship.

In conclusion, the cosmopolitan ethics here, as mentioned above, are aspirational, meaning that they are contained in an idea of a future community. The moral idea of extending help to the other is perhaps less present, yet the concern for the other, and the desire to meet him or her on an equal footing, despite different backgrounds, is clearly present when Deeti says: “[W]e are *jahaz-bhai* and *jahaz-bahen* to each other; all of us children of the ship” (SP 328). The ethics of this cosmopolitan moment merge with the cosmopolitan practice of migration. In conclusion, in bringing ethics and practice together *aesthetically*, with the ship as a metaphor that expresses this effectively, Ghosh creates a powerful trope for migration, its transformative power, and the ethics of community and, possibly, dynasty.<sup>81</sup> The narrative strategy of designing such a motley crew of passengers emphasizes the need to rewrite history into a history of the globe,

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<sup>81</sup> Dynasty and genealogical concerns are prevalent in *Enchantress*, *Assassin* and *Poppies* and *Smoke*. They cannot be investigated in the framework of this thesis, but would be a worthwhile subject of analysis.



beyond national, colonial and other borders and makes for an aesthetically striking negotiation of migration and the new beginnings it triggers. In this sense, the *Ibis* undergoes a momentary transformation from a trade ship into a temporary harbinger of hope.

### 3.3 Masks and Disguises: The *Ibis*'s Cosmopolitan Passengers

The momentary transformation of the *Ibis* is supported by several transformations that centre on race, class, caste and gender that are undermined as 'stable' societal categories. In this subchapter, the destabilization of these categories is discussed as a cosmopolitan moment in the text. The ethics of difference and the complications involved in assessing the other are negotiated playfully and seemingly at random. Specifically, the confusions about Zachary's identity become funny in their absurdity, and Paulette's mysterious masking of her mixed heritage is completely misinterpreted. Masking and disguising function as cross-gender and cross-ethnic narrative devices that alternately amuse, intrigue and mystify the reader. In cosmopolitan moments, these markers of race, class and gender, such as clothing, language and skin tone, are shifted and become deceptive, thus provoking a rethinking of these categories and a negotiation of what is considered different and other. By means of masking and disguising, multiple selves are identified – the characters do not have a fixed and constant identity. My reading focuses on two characters: young Zachary Reid, who is an African-American, son of a freedwoman (a former slave) and a plantation owner, and second mate on the *Ibis*. Paulette Lambert is the orphaned daughter of a French botanist and his Mauritian wife and was raised, with her foster brother Jodu, by her Indian *ayah* (nanny) who becomes her father's second companion until his death.

At the very beginning of the novel, Zachary Reid has to go ashore in Port Louis (Mauritius) in order to meet a man who is in business with Burnham; this only because the captain of the *Ibis* is ill (otherwise, Zachary's rank on board would not be high enough). Zachary looks rough and unkempt, as sailors are wont to do, and Serang Ali, the chief lascar, strongly disapproves of Zachary going as he is:

'Malum Zikri [Zachary] go so-fashion to Por'Lwee, no come back,' said Serang Ali. 'Too muchi press gang in Por'Lwee. Plenty blackbirder [slave traders] wanchi catch one piece slave. Malum go be shanghaied, made slave; allo time floggin', beatin'. No good.' (SP 17)

Zachary's looks, according to Serang Ali, could tempt slave traders to take him. It is not clear, however, if it is Zachary's unkempt looks that could induce this, or if it is the African appearance his mother passed on to him. In any case, Zachary is successfully transformed into a gentleman by the crew of the *Ibis* and visits the plantation owner M. D'Epinay. M. D'Epinay seems to perceive Zachary as a 'white' person, for he warns him:

'Be careful, Mr Reid; keep your eyes open. The mountains around are filled with marrons and desperados and escaped slaves. A gentleman on his own must be careful. Make sure your gun is never far from your hands.' Zachary trotted away from the plantation with a grin on his face and the word 'gentleman' ringing in his ears: there were clearly many advantages to being branded with this label – and more of these became apparent when he arrived at the dockside quarter of Port Louis [he is accosted by prostitutes]. (SP 20)

The text is interestingly ambivalent about Zachary's transformation. While we are never led to believe, initially, that Zachary looks like a slave because of his skin colour, Serang Ali's statement is contradictory. However, considering that Zachary is then treated as a gentleman because of his grooming, the disguise is double: not only is Zachary's social position hidden (he is, after all, only second mate, and certainly not a 'gentleman'), but also his origins – moreover, this does not seem to be a problem at all. The importance of physical appearance is completely undermined. Zachary's mask is ultimately a social one; despite his family roots, he is not recognizable as the son of a former African-American slave. Only Serang Ali knows of Zachary's origins because he is listed as 'black' in the ship's logbook.<sup>82</sup> In contrast, M. D'Epinay thinks, due to Zachary's alleged social position, that he is a white man of standing. The text is ambivalent on this matter, and it is actually difficult to ascertain by Zachary's looks whether he is African-

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<sup>82</sup> Serang Ali has his own interest in transforming Zachary into a gentleman, as Zachary eventually realizes. "'All lascar wanchi Malum be captin-bugger by'm'by.' 'Eh?' Now, in a sudden flash of illumination, Zachary understood why his transformation meant so much to the serang: he was to become what no lascar could be – a 'Free Mariner', the kind of sahib officer they called a malum. For Serang Ali and his men Zachary was almost one of themselves, while yet being endowed with the power to undertake an impersonation that was unthinkable for any of them; it was as much for their own sakes as for his that they wanted him to succeed" (SP 46–47).

American, or not. In a later instance, when the *Ibis* has already set sail to Mauritius, Paulette (and the reader) finds out that in the logbook of the ship, Zachary is listed as 'black' (this will be discussed in more detail below). Zachary chooses to leave Baltimore as a ship's carpenter on the *Ibis* and quickly rises in the hierarchy of the ship: due to the death of the captain and the first mate, and with a little dubious help from Serang Ali, the chief lascar, Zachary becomes second mate. It is at this point in the narrative unknown to the Captain and the first mate, Mr Crowle, that Zachary is listed as 'black' in the logbook, in accordance with the colonial racial categories. Zachary's light skin colour is explained towards the end of the plot, when Zachary tells Mr Crowle (who is trying to blackmail him into granting him sexual favours with the newly found knowledge that Zachary is listed as black in the logbook): "'I'm not a mulatto, Mr Crowle. My mother was a quadroon and my father white. That makes me a metif'" (SP 464).

The fact that colonial racism and the exported British class system are negotiated in *Poppies* forms part of the novel's engagement with colonialism. It is the *disruption* of these racial categories that constitutes a cosmopolitan moment; the insistence that these are not fixed, and that it is necessary to think beyond them. Moreover, the negotiation with issues of otherness and sameness is also central here: who is the 'other'? If the other is so difficult to determine, and so easily undermined, then how valid are these categorizations? Evidently, Ghosh's point is that rigid classifications according to 'race' are unethical, yet it is undeniable, from a historical perspective, that they were put to good use.<sup>83</sup>

Another recurring motif concerning Zachary's 'blackness' is in connection with the comic figure of the *gomusta* Baboo Nob Kissin Pander (the name itself is already very irreverent and several plays are made on it throughout the text). The *gomusta*, who is on a personal religious mission to build a temple for his spiritual mother Ma Taramony, is looking for a sign of the blue-skinned deity Krishna. He hears Zachary playing his favourite shanty 'Heave Away Cheerily' on his whistle (SP 132) and takes this as a sign that Zachary must be the incarnation Ma

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<sup>83</sup> For a compelling article on race see Ramon Saldivar, "Imagining Cultures. The Transnational Imaginary in Posttrace America" (2012) and David Hollinger's *Postethnic America. Beyond Multiculturalism* (1995).

Taramony had spoken of – one of Krishna's attributes being that he plays the flute. Indeed, he even finds that Zachary's tune is "set to Gurjari, one of the most favoured ragas for the singing of the Dark Lord's songs" (SP 133). He is at first disappointed that Zachary is so light-skinned:

[H]e still could not bring himself to believe that Krishna – whose very name meant 'black' and whose darkness had been celebrated in thousands of songs, poems and names – would choose as his emissary someone of so pale a cast of countenance, one who showed no trace of the monsoonal tint of Ghanshyam, the Cloud-Dark Lord. (SP 133–134)

It is only when he finds the ship's logbook that he is satisfied, for he reads the colonial classification 'black' as a sign from Krishna:

When at last he saw the notation beside Zachary's name – 'Black' – he uttered no wild cry of joy, it was rather with a sigh of quiet jubilation that he rested his eyes on the scribbled word that revealed the hand of the Dark Lord. (SP 153)

The *gomusta's* belief that Zachary is a dark emissary of Krishna is treated comically, short of ridicule, yet this works well as a play on what being 'black' can mean – in the Hindu religious context, it denominates Krishna, the playful, irreverent seducer of cow-girls. Suddenly, the notion of blackness is dissociated from race, and recontextualized in the meaning it has for the Hindu religion – rather a sort of black-blue than brown, the actual skin tone. This comic confusion regarding Zachary shows pertinently how racial and social classifications are played with, undermined and transcended, and how, on the level of race and outer appearance, difference versus sameness (such as in factors of classification) is complicated in this text.

Clothing also functions as a means of disguise. Paulette, used to wearing a sari, is suddenly forced to wear European clothes handed down to her by her well-meaning benefactress, Mrs Burnham. Paulette is under social pressure to wear them, not only because of her hostess, but also because of the servants who have appropriated British colonial snobbery and ideas about appropriate dress: "[T]he servants, no less than the masters, held strong views on what was appropriate for

Europeans, especially memsahibs. The bearers and khidmutgars sneered when her clothing was not quite pukka" (SP 113). Paulette actually feels most comfortable in a sari and has, since childhood, acquired other habits that are, if not necessarily local, certainly not British, such as dipping in the river for refreshment (SP 114). The complicated washing procedure forced on Paulette is followed by dressing, which has become onerous too:

But immediately after this struggle [of washing], there followed several more: first she had to grapple with the stays of a pair of knee-length drawers; next, she had to twist herself into knots to find the fastenings of her bodice, her chemise, and her petticoat; only then could she wriggle into one of the many dresses her benefactress had bequeathed to her upon her arrival at Bethel. [...] The trouble with these fine fabrics, as Paulette had discovered, was that once having been cut and stitched, they could not easily be adapted for the use of another wearer, especially one as maladroit as herself. (SP 115)

Paulette can hardly get into into these ill-fitting and uncomfortable clothes. This is a kind of forced masquerade, one from which Paulette suffers, physically and mentally. She becomes painfully self-conscious about her appearance. The text dwells on these issues, as the textual examples show:

[S]uch was Paulette's build that even with the hems let out to the fullest, Mrs Burnham's gowns did not come quite as far down as they should - around the waist and arm, on the other hand, they seemed always to be much wider than was necessary. As a result, when draped upon Paulette, those finely tailored gowns had a tendency to slip and flap; memsahib costume of this kind being, in any case, unfamiliar to her, the lack of fit greatly compounded her discomfort: often, when the loose fabric chafed against her skin, she would pinch, pull and scratch - sometimes causing Mrs Burnham to ask if little chinties [bugs] had got into her clothes. (SP 117-118)

The importance of the focus on the body, and on the role of clothing as masquerade, becomes obvious in this passage. For Paulette, a descendant of European parents and grandparents, European clothing is a disguise, a costume; although a white person, she feels disguised in the clothes of the colonizer. White,

however, is not white: As a Frenchwoman, Paulette does not belong to the colonizer and is therefore, due to this special status, not in the role of the powerful who need to maintain their power. Paulette, although by appearance 'white', has local preferences in dress. This is not surprising, considering that she was raised by a local woman, her father's companion.<sup>84</sup> Paulette's appropriation of Indian culture and her habit of dressing in a sari are unacceptable in colonial society, and she is forced to mask herself. After she has made her secret escape from the Burnham household, Paulette dresses as a female *girmitiya* and wears a sari – this is less of a masquerade than the European dresses she had to wear at the Burnham's. As in Zachary's case, her disguise is achieved through a change of clothing which triggers a change of class, albeit in a different direction: Zachary moves up socially, and Paulette moves down – at least in the strata of colonial class and race classification. Paulette, like Zachary, eludes easy classifications of 'white', 'native' and others. Equally, the fact that she acknowledges and loves her Indian foster brother, Jodu, is unconventional. In this respect, Zachary and Paulette share the experience of unusual family circumstances. When Jodu's dinghy collides with the *Ibis* on the Hooghly River, and Jodu is then saved by Zachary, Paulette goes on board the *Ibis* to see to Jodu and meets Zachary for the first time:

'You see, Jodu, who you rescued, is the son of the woman who brought me up. Our growing was together, he is like my brother. It was as a sister I was holding him, for he has suffered a great loss. He is the only family I have in the world. All this will seem very strange to you no doubt...'  
'Not at all,' he said, shaking his head. 'Miss Lambert, I know very well how such a connection might arise.' (SP 137)

Zachary understands because he is the son of a plantation owner and a freedwoman. It is not surprising that their shared understanding draws them to each other romantically, although they disagree when it comes to Paulette's wish to board the *Ibis* as a passenger to Mauritius. Paulette boards the ship secretly.

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<sup>84</sup> In *Smoke*, Paulette's masquerade continues. On Mauritius, she dresses as a boy (RS 42). Later, she wears Fitcher Penrose's deceased daughter's clothes, which also do not really fit her (RS 78).

After their respective disguises – hers as a coolie on the ship, his as a gentleman officer – have been exposed, Paulette says:

‘What does it matter, Mr Reid? [...] Are not all appearances deceptive, in the end? Whatever there is within us – whether good, or bad, or neither – its existence will continue uninterrupted, will it not, no matter what the drape of our clothes, or the colour of our skin? What if it is the world that is a duperie, Mr Reid, and we the exceptions to its lies?’ (SP 459)

As mentioned above, Paulette realizes that Zachary's roots are actually ‘black’ or African-American when Baboo Nob Kissin (who believes that Zachary's skin has changed from the colour black to a lighter colour and will continue to change to blue, as he thinks he is a reincarnation of Krishna) shows her the ship's logbook:

As if mesmerized, Paulette's eyes ran back and forth along the line until they came to the word ‘Black’ scribbled beside Zachary's name. Suddenly so much that had seemed odd, or inexplicable, made perfect sense – his apparently intuitive sympathy for her circumstances, his unquestioning acceptance of her sisterly relationship with Jodu [...]. She saw now how miraculously wrong she had been in some of her judgments of him: if there was anyone on the *Ibis* who could match her in the multiplicity of her selves, it was none other than Zachary. It was as if some divine authority had sent a messenger to let her know that her soul was twinned with his. (SP 406–407)

Unmasked by the logbook, Zachary's true self is revealed; or rather the fact is unmasked that he, like her, has a multiplicity of selves. In another instance, Zachary unknowingly recognizes Paulette, despite her disguise:

[He] had noticed the woman in the red sari well before she dropped her baggage: she had been the first to come up the gangplank, and something about the tilt of her head had given him the impression that she was watching him, from the shelter of her headcloth. [...] There was a fervour in her concealment which seemed to suggest that a man's glance was as much to be feared as a tongue of fire – the thought made him smile, and a twinge of memory reminded him suddenly of the burning scowl that Paulette had directed at him, at the end of their last meeting. (SP 335–336)



Zachary recognizes not Paulette as herself, but from the tilt of her head. This passage is meaningful because it is not exterior appearance that defines the person, but the idiosyncrasies of their emotions and character.

Hence, ethnic or racial markers such as skin tone and dress, in short, the exterior appearance of a person are shown to be completely unreliable. Language is a further attribute that can determine a person's origin or class. Paulette, dressed as an Indian woman aboard the *Ibis*, begins a conversation with Neel Rattan, the learned but bankrupt and convicted raja who is being shipped off to Mauritius. Neel is intrigued by Paulette's accent, and wants to know who she is. Paulette, because she wishes to stay anonymous, reacts angrily at first, but then takes to him:

Her anger turned to a kind of pity and she said, softly: If you are so clever, then what are you doing here with us? If there was to be a panic or a riot in here, do you think your learning would save you? Haven't you heard of the saying: we're all in the same boat? - *amra shob-i ek naukoye bhashchhi*? Neel burst into laughter. Yes, I have heard it said - but never in Bengali. It's an English saying that you've just translated - very prettily, if I may say so - but it begs the question of where and how you learnt the English language. Paulette turned away without answering, but he persisted: Who are you, my good lady? You may well tell me. You can be sure I'll find out. I'm not of your kind, said Paulette. That is all you need to know. Yes, indeed it is, he said, in a tone of mockery - for in uttering her final retort, Paulette's tongue had betrayed just enough of the waterfront's sibilance for the mystery to be solved. Neel had heard Elokeshi [his former mistress] speak of a new class of prostitute who had learned English from their white clients - no doubt this was one such, on her way to join some island brothel. (SP 361-362)

Neel's conclusion is of course wrong. The waterfront, where Paulette was raised, reveals her origin. Neel erroneously interprets her origin, her class, and the purpose of her voyage, thus putting more emphasis on her waterfront upbringing than on her European origin. Language therefore proves to be just as misleading as dress and skin tone, and also has as transformative power. Strangely, although for the wrong reasons, Neel is right, for Paulette feels more at home at the waterfront than, for instance, in Bethel, Burnham's home. As seen above, her

discomfort when it comes to European fashions is an expression of her general sense of unease in colonial Anglo-Indian society.

In conclusion, the themes of disguise and masquerade form cosmopolitan moments in the text because they induce a complex discussion about the assumptions of race, class, gender and language in the context of migration. There is an aesthetic emphasis on clothes, skin tone and language, markers that complicate and highlight the ethical negotiation of difference, sameness and identities. The text suggests that we are different and yet same. The other is, ultimately, different, yet still recognizable, as Zachary and Paulette realize. Disguise, in the end, enables passage through different social spheres, but cannot, ultimately, mask character and origin.

### 3.4 Foreigner, Friend: Transformation and Cosmopolitan Responsibility

Visibly, the main 'character' in *Poppies* and *Smoke* is actually opium from the poppy seed to the smoke that is exhaled by the opium consumer, thus covering the whole range of aspects of opium. The novels emphasize the impact of opium; for instance, Deeti comprehends that "it was the not the planet [Saturn] above that governed her life: it was this minuscule orb [the poppy seed] – at once bountiful and all-devouring, merciful and destructive, sustaining and revengeful" (SP 415). Not surprisingly, the effects of opium are omnipresent, and all the characters' lives are affected by it in one way or another. This is particularly the case for one character, Ah Fatt, the young Chinese-Indian man who turns out to be Bahram Modi the Parsi opium trader's son, who, in turn, is one of the main characters in *Smoke*. Ah Fatt is a convicted opium addict, and is sent to Alipore Jail,<sup>85</sup> where he awaits his transportation to Mauritius. Neel, the convicted raja, is put into the same cell as Ah Fatt, and the unlikely pair become friends because Neel starts taking care of Ah Fatt, thus saving Ah Fatt's life and gradually restoring his human dignity. The ethics of responsibility for the other, which constitutes a core cosmopolitan concern, is negotiated in *Poppies* in the depiction of Neel and Ah Fatt's remarkable friendship, a friendship that is premised on transformation and negotiation with the other.

In this subchapter, this friendship is discussed via the question of cosmopolitan responsibility, negotiation with the other and transformation, as well the trope of the body, a theme that relates to the previous subchapter 3.3 "Masks and Disguises". The fact that the text engages with the issue of responsibility and solidarity constitutes a cosmopolitan moment. In this particular reading, the cosmopolitan ethics of extending help to the other are relevant, and this act as well the repercussions thereof are of central interest here. As I argue in chapter two, cosmopolitan responsibility toward the other means that help is

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<sup>85</sup> Alipore Jail is a prison outside Calcutta. It was built by British colonialists and was used for imprisoning political prisoners. It is still in use today.

extended to the foreigner, the unknown other, be they near or far. This responsibility is assumed by Neel, who is convicted by the colonial authorities for a forgery he did not commit. He thus loses his whole estate to Benjamin Burnham and is sent to Alipore Jail, where he must await his transportation to Mauritius (where he will be imprisoned for seven years).

The cosmopolitan ethics in this context of transformation and responsibility are expressed in the vulnerability of the body: the body becomes the aesthetic expression of the necessity to extend help and to assume responsibility towards the other. At first sight, this metaphor might not be as appealing or clearly cosmopolitan as the ship or even masks and disguises are, the aesthetics that were discussed in the three previous subchapters. Indeed, when discussing the body in a novel such as *Poppies* that deals with colonialism, the colonial body comes to mind, and we think of the representation of the non-Western body as a central trope of colonial discourse that constructed difference between the West and the non-West, as Said argued in *Orientalism* (1978). The body in the sense of the colonized body that is subject to violence and degradation is a postcolonial understanding, which interprets and deconstructs the colonizer's view of the colonized body as weak, unclean, infantile and barbarous, to list only a few possible descriptions.<sup>86</sup> This perception of the body is also present in *Poppies*, as my reading will show. Ghosh's ability to create narratives that are rooted in a colonial environment, and are told with a postcolonial lens of criticism with which he pointedly lays open colonial power structures, does not, however, exclude the cosmopolitan concerns that are also present in his texts. In other words, although *Smoke* decidedly has a postcolonial critical lens when it comes to representing colonialism, there are cosmopolitan moments in the text that go beyond this, and

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<sup>86</sup> James H. Mills and Satadru Sen point out in *Confronting the Body: The Politics of Physicality in Colonial and Post-Colonial India* (2004) that awareness has been raised in critical literature that concerns with the body in South Asia could just be a replication of Western scholarly issues (3). They counter this by arguing that the body "was at the heart of systems of society, of metaphor and of identity in South Asia long before Europeans came to have an impact in the region, and certainly long before Europeans came to explore concepts of the corporeal. In fact, a range of examples can be invoked to demonstrate the relevance of bodies in South Asian attempts to understand, structure and describe the world they inhabit. The organization of caste and rank provides important evidence as, despite all diversity and contingencies, it has nevertheless returned consistently to the 'body' as one of the key means of differentiation, as the manifestation and centre of 'purity' and 'untouchability'" (4).

show the reader that human beings are capable of extraordinary things in the most contrary circumstances, such as, to use the example at hand, the development of this particular friendship.

In a philosophical sense, following Judith Butler, the body can also express vulnerability. In view of this vulnerability, it is necessary to ask whose obligation it is to help and protect it. The urgency of this question is possibly greater if the body is other, unknown and foreign. In an understanding of cosmopolitan responsibility as expounded in chapter two, where the ethical obligation to help does not rely on proximity and distance, the vulnerable body that is close to us is just as much our responsibility, and demands responsiveness, as the one that is far away, as Butler argues (*"Precarious Life"*, 137ff).<sup>87</sup> Hence, I argue that this cosmopolitan moment in *Poppies* raises the question of responsibility and negotiation with the other.

In *Smoke*, the narrative strand concerning Neel and Ah Fatt provides a means of discussing the vulnerable body, colonialism, and cosmopolitan responsibility. Yet it also functions as a metaphor for how people can transform themselves, adapt to their circumstances and acquire strength; in this sense, as Ghosh himself has stated, he does not write about victimhood, he is interested in change (*"Diasporic Predicaments"* 13-14). Indeed, Neel's body must undergo a transformation so that he can take care of Ah Fatt, as I argue below.

The body quickly becomes a primary concern in the narrative concerning Neel and Ah Fatt, and is highlighted in the passage that relates to Neel and Ah Fatt's imprisonment. Upon entering Alipore Jail, Neel is stripped bare not only of his previous life and privileges, but also of his clothes and, to a certain extent, his identity: "it was as if his body had passed into the possession of a new owner, who was taking stock of it as a man might inspect a house he had recently acquired, searching for signs of disrepair or neglect" (SP 266). His cry of "Stop! You can't treat me like this; don't you know who I am?" (SP 264) is jeered at. When undressed, Neel loses all sense of shame, "at this moment he felt no shame at all, nor any other form of responsibility for his body; it was as if he had vacated

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<sup>87</sup> See 2.1.1 "Cosmopolitan Ethics"

his own flesh, in the process of yielding it to the tenancy of the prison" (SP 268). He is tattooed, on his forehead with the words "forgerer alipore 1838" (SP 269); his body is unjustly marked with the crime he has not committed.<sup>88</sup> The pain of the procedure immediately reminds him that he is his body's "sole tenant, the only being to whom it could announce its existence through its capacity for pain" (SP 268). Not surprisingly, Ghosh writes about colonial violence and racism in the prison just as directly as he writes about the conditions aboard the *Ibis*.<sup>89</sup>

Instead of being completely downcast by what has happened, Neel realizes that speaking English to the sergeant who is checking him for venereal diseases constitutes a form of resistance (SP 266).<sup>90</sup> Neel is elated, "the awareness [made him] giddy, exultant, eager to explore this new realm of power" (ibid.).<sup>91</sup> Before he is moved to Alipore Jail, Neel is in a prison in Calcutta. At the beginning of his imprisonment, his food is brought from Raskhali Palace, his home, and prepared according to the rules. However, at some point these deliveries stop, and Neel must eat the food that is laid out before him:

As he was raising his hand to his lips, it occurred to him that this was the first time in all his years that he had ever eaten something that was prepared by hands of unknown caste. Perhaps it was this thought, or maybe it was just the smell of the food – it happened, at any rate, that he was assailed by nausea so powerful that he could not bring his fingers to his mouth. The intensity of his body's resistance amazed him: for the fact was that he did not believe in caste, or so at least he had said, many, many times, to his friends and anyone else who would listen. [...] Neel stood up and walked away, trying to steady himself: it was clear now that this was a

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<sup>88</sup> Although it does not specifically serve my argument here, it is interesting to note that despite these violent circumstances, there is humanity and solidarity in the prison. While being undressed, Neel notices how the orderly brushes his feet with his fingers as a sign of respect (SP 266) that would normally be due to him. The tattooist waters down the ink so that Neel's mark will not stay forever, because his family is from Raskhali and indebted to Neel's family (SP 269).

<sup>89</sup> See Michel Foucault's work on prisons in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) for power and knowledge in prison. For a work on colonial prisons, see Satadru Sen, *Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands* (2000).

<sup>90</sup> Knowing the colonizer's language is a means of gaining power.

<sup>91</sup> Neel and language is a topic that is prevalent. Neel later becomes the chronicler of the events on the *Ibis*, and establishes a *Chrestomathy*. English is only one of the many languages he speaks. It is not surprising that this character should relate to language as a means of resistance in this situation, considering his involvement with linguistic issues throughout the novel.

question of life and death, whether he'd be able to survive or not. (SP 246)

The body revolts against the food, and shakes Neel into realizing that being in prison is a matter of survival. His body's reaction makes him aware of the precarious situation he is in, and makes him conscious of his own vulnerability. Hence, Neel's imprisonment and the physical subjugations he is forced to undergo trigger in him a sense of change, of survival and of overcoming these challenges. The experiences change him substantially, and he realizes with regret that he has betrayed "his wife and child [...] he had spent all his years as a somnambulist, walking through his days as if his life mattered not more than a bit-part in a play written by someone else" (SP 249). Neel's new-found resilience can be seen as a substantial factor in his ability to help Ah Fatt – one might suspect that the 'old' Neel would not have had the strength and power of endurance to undertake the menial tasks necessary.

Soon after Neel's own arrival in prison, Ah Fatt is put into his cell because they are both to be transferred to Mauritius on the *Ibis*. Not much is known of this prisoner, except that he is from "Maha-Chin" (SP 290) and an "afeemkhor", an opium addict (ibid.). In a prophetic manner, Bishuji, a friendly prison worker, invokes the anticipated aspirational community between the two convicts:

From now on, you will never be able to escape this Aafat [Bengali for calamity, misnaming of Ah Fatt]. He will be on your ship and you will have to travel with him to your jail across the Black Water. He is all you have, your caste, your community, your family, your friends; neither brother nor wife nor son will ever be as close to you as he will. You will have to make of him what you can; he is your fate, your destiny. (SP 291)

Neel soon realizes that Ah Fatt is suffering from opium withdrawal, namely vomiting, diarrhoea and total apathy:

Prodded by the stick, a limb came snaking out from under the bed and Neel saw that it was a man's arm, encrusted with filth. Then the head showed itself, barely visible because of a thick coating of matted hair, and a straggling black beard that was twisted into ropes. As the rest of the

body slowly emerged, it showed itself to be so thickly mired in dirt and mud that it was impossible to tell whether the man was naked or clothed. Then suddenly the cell was filled with the smell of ordure and Neel realized that it was not just mud the man was covered in, but also faeces and vomit. (SP 291)

Ghosh's graphic descriptions of Ah Fatt's state are part of his interest in the physical, human consequences of the colonial opium trade.<sup>92</sup> Neel starts taking care of Ah Fatt, although this means he has to completely give up who he is:

If he was to keep his sanity, Neel knew he would have to take hold of the jharu [brush] and scoop; there was no other way. To rise to his feet and take the three or four steps that separated him from the jharu took as intense an effort as he had ever made, and when he was finally within touching distance of it, he could not prevail upon his hand to make contact: the risk seemed unimaginably great, for he knew he would cease to be the man he had been a short while before. Closing his eyes, he thrust his hand blindly forward, and only when the handle was in his grasp did he allow himself to look again: it seemed miraculous then that his surroundings were unchanged, for within himself he could feel the intimations of an irreversible alteration. In a way, he was none other than the man he had ever been, Neel Rattan Halder, but he was different too, for his hands were affixed upon an object that was ringed with a bright penumbra of loathing; yet now that it was in his grip it seemed no more nor less than it was, a tool to be used according to his wishes. (SP 297-298)

This small movement of picking up the brush is a huge step for Neel, who, as a high-caste Brahmin, would obviously never undertake a menial task involving human excrement, such work being left to untouchables. It is intriguing how the physical step, the act of taking this brush into his hand, can have so much impact in the narrative. The bodily act prefigures and instigates the change in societal status and caste hierarchy. On the level of character development, this step is

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<sup>92</sup> Ironically, Ah Fatt's father transports opium from India to China, and forms part of the trade allegiance that wished China to open its doors to the opium trade. That his son becomes a victim and nearly dies is a moral pointer that can hardly be overlooked; such overt narrative situations to reveal moral failure are rare in Ghosh's writing. In this case, it must be understood as a means for emphasizing that the forceful introduction of large amounts of Indian opium into China constituted a tragedy for many Chinese.



made credible and sustainable because of Neel's physical transformation that has left his body stronger and more resilient, and enables him to lift a bedstead on his own, "he, who by family legend had been sickly since birth, subject to all manner of illness" (SP 301). Out of necessity but also, I argue, because of his physical as well as societal transformation, Neel begins to care for Ah Fatt. This is no easy task for anyone, and certainly not for a former raja: "Taking care of another human being - this was something Neel had never before thought of doing, not even with his own son, let alone a man of his own age, a foreigner" (SP 300). In assuming his responsibility towards Ah Fatt, Neel experiences a physical intimacy he has never experienced before, the intimacy of caring for the body of a stranger, a foreigner. Thereby, he overcomes personal barriers established by traditions of upbringing, social conduct and caste. Hence, Neel undergoes a remarkable change, for although he is depicted as not having ever really believed in caste, he and his household abided by caste hierarchies and rules.

Ah Fatt reciprocates this feeling of intimacy when Neel has a nightmare:

[Neel] woke to find himself sitting up, in the darkness. Gradually he became aware that there was an arm around his shoulder, holding him steady, as if in consolation: in this embrace there was more intimacy than he had ever known before, even with Elokeshi, and when a voice sounded in his ear, it was as if it were coming from within himself: 'My name Lei Leong Fatt,' it said. 'People call Ah Fatt. Ah Fatt your friend.' Those faltering, childlike words offered more comfort than was in all the poetry Neel had ever read, and more novelty too, because he had never before heard them said - and if he had, he would not have been able to value them for their worth. (SP 316)

This intimacy and friendship is again underlined when the two convicts board the *Ibis*. Paulette, watching them board, senses "a tenderness in their attitudes that seemed scarcely conceivable in a couple of criminal transportees" (SP 334).

So far, then, there is a positive building of friendship, and the narrative is hopeful about it. Neel in particular is depicted as becoming a stronger person through this act of helping, so that we can read the topics of transformation,

responsibility and friendship as a cosmopolitan moment in which the text engages with these issues in an affirmative and aspirational way.

It comes as no surprise, given the colonial setting of the novel, that colonial violence and subordination soon interfere with the harmonious relationship of the two men. On board the *Ibis*, their friendship attracts the attention of Mr Crowle, the sadistically inclined first mate, and the Subedar Bhyro Singh, of whom we read that "between them could be said to exist, if not exactly a friendship, then certainly a joining of interests" (SP 416). Mr Crowle is irritated by the friendship of the two convicts and decides to play a humiliating game with them, therewith hoping to destroy this bond. He makes a bet with Neel to urinate, or "empty the Jordan" (SP 418), on Ah Fatt. Neel refuses, thinking

strange to think, that having known each other only for a few weeks, the two of them – pitiful pair of convicts and transportees that they were – already possessed something that could excite the envy of men whose power over them was absolute. Could it be that there was something genuinely rare in such a bond as theirs, something that could provoke others to exert their ingenuity in order to test its limits. If that were so, then he, Neel was no less curious on that score than they. (SP 419)

It turns out that opium has the power to break their bond: Ah Fatt, who is promised a taste, succumbs to bodily temptation and does the unthinkable. The body is entangled in this conflict: Ah Fatt cannot control his desire for opium, and Neel is physically humiliated. Moreover, the scene underlines the addict's degradation; Ah Fatt falls "on his knees and was inching towards the mate, his hands cupped like a begging-bowl: 'Sir? For me?'" (SP 421). Instead of the opium he anticipates, Ah Fatt receives goat excrement in the form of a little black ball that resembles opium. In this instance, the narrative of the friendship breaks, and opium intervenes as a destructive force, a theme that occurs repeatedly in the novel.<sup>93</sup> In this instance, this becomes apparent on the level of personal relationships.

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<sup>93</sup> Deeti's first husband, for example, dies of an overdose of opium, and Deeti, a widow, in consequence nearly dies on the funeral pyre. Opium victimizes not only individuals, but whole

The convicts had yet to recover from their run-in with Mr Crowle: although the incident at the fo'c'sle deck has lasted no more than a few minutes, it had hit them with the force of a flash flood, sweeping away the fragile scaffolding of their friendship and leaving a residue that consisted not just of shame and humiliation, but also of profound dejection. (*SP* 425)

This moment of complete disillusionment constitutes a caesura in the narrative. The cosmopolitan responsibility that is apparent, as I have argued, in Neel's actions and thinking, and Neel and Ah Fatt's transformation seems, at this instant, to vanish and to be of no consequence at all. Yet their friendship, although damaged, continues. Despite its crass impact, colonialism has not been able to destroy it. This finding is in tune with my reading of *Poppies* as a novel that simultaneously engages with the colonial context and expresses cosmopolitan concerns. One does not exclude the other, as my reading has shown so far, and the fact that a cosmopolitan moment is challenged by narrative events leads to a *critical questioning* of cosmopolitan responsibility and aspirational moments. I read this instance as expressing a critical intervention with cosmopolitanism because it reminds the reader of the utter degradation that people in uneven power situations can be subjected to, and the impact this has on the level of human relationships and human dignity. So, while cosmopolitanism is relevant in *Poppies*, there are moments when the text critically and rather brutally calls it into question.

In conclusion, moments of cosmopolitan responsibility and solidarity are performed through a textual engagement with the vulnerability of the body. In *Poppies*, the body becomes a trope for the text's engagement with responsibility toward the other, the foreign. Despite the text's acknowledgement of colonial violence, friendship and solidarity are possible under these circumstances, even if they are unquestionably fragile.

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areas dedicated to its production, and the Chinese economy and population are thwarted because of the Western (and British) desire to import opium into the country.

### 3.5 Summary and Intermediate Conclusion

In summary, *Poppies* engages with cosmopolitan concerns on the levels of aesthetics, practice and ethics. Not surprisingly, the ship has emerged as one of the most striking tropes in this novel: the *Ibis* and its passage are indicative of a cosmopolitan practice of migration and of an aspirational cosmopolitanism about community and transformation. The passage, as I have argued, is related to the notion of transformation that is discussed in context with disguise. Clothes and disguise are the aesthetics at the heart of a negotiation of sameness and difference, a cosmopolitan concern best expressed as ethical. Similarly, the transformed body comes to the forefront as a trope that negotiates cosmopolitan responsibility. The analysis has shown that the theme of transformation – passage – pervades the novel. Transformation is positive in most cases, which is an interesting counterpoint to many literatures of diaspora that often discuss change and transformation in the less positively charged terms of mourning and nostalgia.

Therefore, the emphasis on transformation constitutes a *reimagination* not only of subaltern histories and their rewriting into a global history of trade and migration, but also implies that diaspora needs to be reimaged. *Smoke*, as if to exemplify my point, opens with descriptions of Mauritius, the Creole language and Deeti's clan and thus underlines the idea that diaspora is inherently positive in its production of new and hybrid cultures, even though the novel also highlights the difficulties of migration.

#### 4. Cosmopolitan Moments in Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke*

After having smoked a pipe of opium, Bahram Modi, the Parsi opium trader from Bombay and one of the main protagonists of the second novel of the *Ibis* trilogy, allows himself "to drift along, on the river of smoke" (RS 281), a reference to opium, arguably the main theme of this novel. 'Smoke' refers to the heavy smoke that filled the smokers' lungs and induced dreams and hallucinations. In less metaphoric terms, the river in question is the Pearl River, along which opium is transported to the port town of Canton in China,<sup>94</sup> where it is sold and distributed to the various opium merchants who have their business premises there. Both river and smoke profoundly affect the lives of the characters of this novel – some are affected by trade, others by the opium itself, so that most of their lives are touched by some aspect of the drug.<sup>95</sup>

The main setting of *Smoke* is Canton, the international trading post authorized by the Chinese Emperor. The historical backdrop is the period before the first Opium War (1839–1842).<sup>96</sup> Around this time, European, American and, to a lesser degree, Asian traders were trying to increase the opium market in China. Chinese commodities such as tea, silk and opium were in great demand on the European markets; infuriatingly for the foreign traders, the Chinese were not in need of any commodities from outside the country, at least not to the desired extent. In an attempt to forcefully balance this trade deficit, the opium dealers created a market in China by addicting thousands to opium. That this was not to the liking of the Chinese government is understandable. With time, the Chinese increased pressure on the foreign traders to stop importing opium. When this was ignored, stronger measures were taken. Eventually, however, the foreign traders

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<sup>94</sup> I will use the Europeanized version of the town's name (Europeanized spelling and pronunciation of Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province) since this is the way it is spelled in the novel.

<sup>95</sup> In *Poppies*, this was less the case. The poppy seeds that opium is made from are important to Deeti and the people of Bihar, who earn their money from the monoculture of poppy flowers that the British have enforced on the region. When Deeti's husband, whose livelihood was earned at the Ghazipur opium factory (historical), is killed, she is without income. Many impoverished farmers shared her plight, so that it was easy for the British colonial power to hire indentured labourers and to export them to Mauritius, Africa and other places.

<sup>96</sup> The second Opium War took place from 1856–1860.

tricked the Chinese into a false peace. They sold their stocks of opium and left, only to return a few years later with a plan to attack China and open its markets. In *Smoke*, this conflicted period before the outbreak of the first opium war is depicted.<sup>97</sup>

Accordingly, the novel revolves around the efforts of the foreign traders in Canton to maintain and increase imports and sales of opium in China. Ghosh states in an interview with Angiola Codacci:

There are many curious parallels between the situation in the early 19th century and now. Then as now the western world had a huge trade deficit in relation to China. This was why the British East India Company started exporting opium to China on a large scale – with catastrophic consequences for that country. (*Interview with L'Espresso Magazine*)

Hence, *Smoke* concerns itself with the politics, trade and consumption of opium with more emphasis than *Poppies*. In the same interview, Ghosh has commented on the differences between the two novels in an interview, stating that

the books are indeed quite different; the principal continuities between them are of time and certain characters. Even though the books are part of a trilogy they were never intended to be direct continuations of each other. Each of the novels in the trilogy will have its own themes, settings, characters and therefore, unavoidably, its own form. (*Interview with L'Espresso Magazine*)

Rather than 'just' being a sequel to *Poppies*, then, *Smoke* can be read as a novel in its own right – it does not rely on the reader having any knowledge of the first novel of the trilogy. The continuity of characters is established by Deeti and Neel, who, in a conversation that is held an indefinite number of years in the future (after 1865, though, because in that year, Fanqui-town was burned to the ground, and Neel refers to this as a past event).

*Smoke* begins with an interesting prolepsis. Many years after the *Ibis* set sail from Calcutta, Deeti and her clan – La Fami Colver, a Creole expression – are settled in Mauritius. The theme of Deeti's puja shrine is continued, for, as we learn

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<sup>97</sup> For a detailed history, see Hans Derks, *History of the Opium Problem. The Assault on the East, ca. 1600-1950* (2012).

from the first few pages of the novel, the whole family goes for an outing to her shrine in a natural rock formation high above the sea on a cliff.<sup>98</sup> This first chapter is the only one to refer to Deeti, who is one of the main characters in *Poppies*. Her shrine and her gift for visions are revisited and thus emphasized, but do not reappear for the rest of the story. A shift takes place which replaces Deeti as the main character with Bahram Modi, the Parsi merchant whose life becomes inextricably bound up with opium.

*Smoke* has an intricate plot, because the individual characters have their own narrative strands that at times converge and interwine, but which can also remain contingent. Whereas *Poppies* comes across as a dynamic adventure novel, *Smoke* is more static. There is hardly any noticeable action – the narrative dwells, in a fragmentary fashion, on one character, then on another. Rather than analysing cosmopolitan passages, then, this reading is focused on cosmopolitan moments that express this static quality of the text. The passages of the *Anahita* and the *Redruth* are not central here, because these ships, although relevant to the story, do not convey the cosmopolitan concerns that the trope of the *Ibis* does.<sup>99</sup>

If one considers this fragmentary style, it is not surprising that the ending (if it can even be called that, since there is no closure) is open, for the characters are, once again, scattered all over the globe: Neel, we learn, ends up in Mauritius at some point, and Robin goes to Macau, the Portuguese trading post situated on the coast of China. In only a few sentences at the end of *Smoke* do we finally hear that Kalua has survived, and that Zachary and Paulette are happily reunited. The reader familiar with *Poppies* would most likely expect this information at the beginning of the sequel – yet Ghosh plays with our expectations as readers, letting us in on the resolution to the suspenseful cliffhanger at the end of *Poppies* only in the last few pages of the novel and in a marginal way. Arguably, the fragmentary nature of this fictional narrative underlines the understanding that Ghosh has of global history, namely that there is a plurality of histories, that there is not only

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<sup>98</sup> Deeti and her shrine are discussed in chapter 3.2 “The *Ibis*: Vision and Cosmopolitan Community”.

<sup>99</sup> Even so, of course, the *Anahita* and the *Redruth* are relevant tropes. The *Ibis* carries indentured labourers, the *Anahita* opium, and the *Redruth* plants. These are all colonial ‘goods’, and the ships signify three strongholds of colonial trade.

one story to be told, and that it is, in a global context, sometimes difficult to grasp the beginnings and the ends of individual lives.

Through Robin Chinnery's letters, Neel's descriptions, and the actions of Bahram the Parsi trader (who is Ah Fatt's father and known as Barry Moddie when in Canton), Canton and its everyday social and political life are described vividly, and the political events and intrigues concerning the opium trade narrated in much detail. Yet opium is not the only interest in this novel. Important also are art and nature, respectively 'represented' by Robin Chinnery, a young aspiring artist, and Paulette Lambert, a young botanist, who now works for Fitcher Penrose, an English botanist who has earned a fortune from importing foreign plants to England. The themes of opium, trade, art and botany are alternately present in the narrative and thus form its thematic core.<sup>100</sup>

The themes from *Poppies* that are continued are those of the shrine and the sense of community that it creates. There is also a certain emphasis on language, on Creole and especially on the pidgin that is created as a language of business between the Chinese and the foreign traders. Thirdly, the theme of the ship reoccurs; the *Anahita* is Bahram Modi's ship that transports large cargoes of opium from India to China, and Fitcher Penrose's *Redruth* transports plants from Europe to China, in exchange for that much sought after commodity, exotic Chinese plants for the European collectors.

In this chapter, the focus is on three different aspects of cosmopolitanism in *Smoke*. In 4.1 "Storms and Winds of Change: Cosmopolitan Transformations", the trope of the storm is discussed as a means of aesthetically conveying the cosmopolitan concerns of rewriting histories. In 4.2, "Canton's Fanqui-Town: A Cosmopolitan Community?", the foreign enclave of Fanqui-town, as well as the floating city and the Indian house of trade are analysed through a cosmopolitan

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<sup>100</sup> Colonial botany is a fascinating topic, and its linkage with art, namely the botanical paintings, which were commissioned by Europeans to be drawn in a particular style for their collections by Chinese illustrators, is equally interesting. Colonial botany in Ghosh, and in general in postcolonial literature, seems like a very promising research area, also in the field of postcolonialism, globalization studies and intermediality. Unfortunately, it is not suited for the reading undertaken in this thesis, because it does not address cosmopolitan concerns. See Londa Schiebinger's excellent works *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (2004) and *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce and Politics in the Early Modern World* (2005).



lens, and discussed in view of their cosmopolitanism. In 4.3, "Bahram, Opium and the Ghost: Failed Cosmopolitan Responsibility", the question of the cosmopolitan ethical responsibility toward the other is used to debate Bahram's failings in this respect and the overall relevance of this for the understanding of the novel's moral stance.

#### 4.1 Storms and Winds of Change: Cosmopolitan Transformations

In *Smoke*, the theme of transformation that was addressed in my reading of *Poppies* continues. As I argue in my chapter on *Poppies*, cosmopolitan passages often express transformation and change. In *Poppies*, the metaphor of the *Ibis* and its voyage to Mauritius denotes transformation. In *Smoke*, transformation is conveyed by the trope of the storm, which creates continuity in the plot.<sup>101</sup> In the very last pages of *Poppies*, we read that the *Ibis* is caught in a storm, a typhoon that enables Serang Ali, Jodu, Neel, Ah Fatt and Kalua to escape from the *Ibis* in a longboat (SP 468). The storm reappears in the first pages of *Smoke* as a significant moment, a moment of vision experienced by Deeti, who already embodies vision in *Poppies*.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, the *Anahita*, Bahram Modi's ship, is surmised to have been caught in the same storm: "Later there would be much discussion on whether the *Anahita* was struck by the same storm that had hit the *Ibis*" (RS 25). Hence, the storm provides a narrative link to *Poppies*, but it also stands as a metaphor in its own right that expresses transformation and change.

In this subchapter, the discussion of the storm as a transformative moment is central, and it is argued that it symbolizes cosmopolitan concerns of rewriting histories and geographies. It seems quite clear that the storm is supposed to function as a metaphor for transformation and change when we read that it is responsible for "rewriting destinies and throwing people together who would never have met" (RS 19). The notion of people being thrown together contingently is also apparent in my reading of *Poppies*, and it is repeated here. The storm stands as a contingent transformative force that changes people's lives.

The storm is closely linked to Deeti, the visionary force of *Poppies* and now of *Smoke*. In Deeti's rendering of her experience of the storm, time and space are

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<sup>101</sup> For storms in literature, see for example Shakespeare's plays *The Tempest* and *Twelfth Night*, Joseph Conrad's *Typhoon* (1901) and Edgar Allan Poe's *A Descent into the Maelstrom* (1841). In these works, the storm figures as a transformative moment that changes the characters' destinies. The storm that is referred to in *Poppies* and *River* is a typhoon, also known as a cyclone or hurricane. In Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide*, a hurricane occurs that completely rejuvenates Nirmal, an old schoolteacher, and prompts him to rethink his life.

<sup>102</sup> See chapter 3.2 "The *Ibis*: Vision and Community".

expandable: the storm functions as an indefinite moment in time, neither long nor short. Her utterances in this respect are contradictory and remain unresolved. In Mauritian Creole, she tells Neel: "Don't be ridikil: the whole thing, from start to fini took just a few minits, and all that time, it was nothing but jaldi-jaldi, a hopeless golmal, tus in dezord" (RS 14). Despite this description, Deeti also insists that the departure of the refugees lasted an hour or two (RS 15), a paradox, of course. She is convinced that she was whirled up into the air: her twofold vision of the storm, namely one from the deck of the ship, and the other from the eye of the storm, is equally tricky to grasp as is her flexible notion of time during the storm.<sup>103</sup> In her shrine, she hangs a painting of "The Parting" (RS 12) (depicting the moment when the men leave the ship) on which her

body was drawn in such a way that she appeared to be suspended in the air, well above the deck. Her head was tilted backwards, so that her gaze appeared to be directed over Zachary's shoulder, towards the stormy heavens. (RS 14)

Although Paulette confirms that Deeti's feet never left deck during the whole time, Deeti is absolutely certain that she was lifted by the storm

to a height from which she could look down and observe all that was happening below – not in fear and panic, but in unruffled calm. It was as if the tufaan had chosen her to be its confidant, freezing the passage of time, and lending her the vision of its own eye; for the duration of that moment, she had been able to see everything that fell within that whirling circle of wind: she had seen the *Ibis*, directly below, and four figures that were huddled under the shelter of the quarter-deck's companion-way, herself being one of them; some distance to the east, she had noticed a chain of islands, pierced by many deep channels; she had seen fishing boats, sheltering in the islands' bays and coves, and other strange unfamiliar craft [...] All this – this succession of visions and images – had been granted to her, Deeti would insist later, in a matter of a few seconds. (RS 15–16)

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<sup>103</sup> In the following quotation, Deeti's gaze is described. Since *darshan* in Indian art designates the sacred, godly gaze, the gaze in this passage could very well be an allusion to the eyes of religious statues. See for example Wibke Lobo and Cornelia Mallebrein's *Darshan. Blickkontakte mit indischen Göttern. Die ländliche und tribale Tradition* (1998).

Deeti's visionary moment is not resolved, it remains inexplicable and metaphysical. There is no narrative answer, no cause, and it is therefore a contingent and fleeting moment that needs to be accepted by the reader as it is because there is no explanation. This quality is brought about by the conscious expansion of time and space in the narrative:

But Deeti was adamant: didn't they believe in stars, planets and the lines on their palms? Did they not accept that any of these might reveal something of fate to people who knew how to unravel their mysteries? So then why not the wind? Stars and planets, after all, travelled on predictable orbits – but the wind, nobody knew where the wind would choose to go. The wind was the power of change, of transformation: this was what she had come to understand that day – she, Deeti, who had always believed that her destiny [sic] was ruled by the stars and planets; she had understood that it was the wind that had decided it was her karma to be carried to Mauritius, into another life; it was the wind that had sent down a storm to set her husband free. (RS 18)

The fact that Deeti knows that cyclones have an eye – the eye of the storm – is especially puzzling to Neel, because the year of the storm – 1838 – was the year in which the scientific world discovered that a storm has an eye. In her rendering, the storm appears as a

gigantic serpent, coiling inwards from the outside, going around and around in circles of diminishing size, and ending in a single enormous eye. See for yourselves: she would say to the skeptics: isn't this proof? If I had not seen what I saw, how could I ever have imagined that a tufaan could have an eye? (RS 18)

Neel is fascinated by the image the typhoon conjures up:

of a gigantic oculus, at the far end of a great, spinning telescope, examining everything it passed over, upending some things, and leaving others unscathed; looking for new possibilities, creating fresh beginnings, rewriting destinies and throwing people together who would never have met. (RS 19)

In Neel's mind, the image of the storm has already acquired a metaphorical dimension of transformation, change and new destinies. The text thus creates a

contingent moment of disruption, chaos even, when everything is disordered and time and space are expandable. The storm transforms the characters' lives completely. The forceful description and the remarkable impact of the storm and its oculus constitute a cosmopolitan moment in the text that has two functions: firstly, it underlines the contingency of cosmopolitan moments. Secondly, it is a metaphor for extreme transformation and the rewriting of histories and arguably also geographies, since there is a very clear spatial indication in Deeti's tale, when she becomes one with the eye of the storm (RS 15). Deeti's oneness with the storm is underlined by the fact that she actually understands that storms – hurricanes – have eyes.

Thirdly, it constitutes a clear break in the narrative: the storm determines a radical new beginning, an interesting take at the beginning of a sequel, where the reader would expect continuation rather than a new beginning. Yet there is continuity, and the storm has not been able to completely break all ties. Deeti draws a picture of the storm for her shrine called "The Parting" (RS 12). To establish a link to the new characters, Bahram Modi and Fitcher Penrose are also entered into the shrine many years after the storm, as are their ships, the *Anahita* and the *Redruth*. Deeti thus continues to be a spiritual guardian of the story, whereas Neel who is fascinated with language functions as its chronicler.

In conclusion, the storm, read as a cosmopolitan moment, is inherently transformative. On the level of the story, it propels us into the distant future (the conversation between Neel and Deeti); it also, and this seems very important, shows how such contingent cosmopolitan moments that – despite the whirlwind activity of the storm – have a static quality of stillness when time and space become undetermined. However, not only is the storm transformative, it also presages the pervasive political and economic changes the characters in the novel will be subjected to, predicting the transformation of the South China Sea into an increasingly dangerous area in view of the impending Opium Wars.

## 4.2 Canton's Fanqui-town: A Cosmopolitan Community?

*Smoke's* main setting is Fanqui-town, the foreign enclave of the city of Canton, a place that no longer exists because it burned down in 1856. Its name is derived from the pidgin 'fanqui', which means foreigner. Because foreigners were not allowed into China (as a sort of precaution against colonial invasion that ultimately failed), European, American and Indian merchants had to live in this enclave if they wished to engage in trade with the Chinese. With an eye for detail, Ghosh recreates this extraordinary place, giving a place in his narrative to the powerful and wealthy as well as to marginalized and subaltern characters.

In this subchapter, the spaces of Fanqui-town, the Achha Hong (the Indian factory or house of trade)<sup>104</sup> and the floating city on the river, are all communities at the margins of Canton, "number-one city in the whole world" (RS 137) as Ah Fatt calls it. They are understood as being part of a cosmopolitan practice and discussed in view of the cosmopolitan ethical concerns pertaining to community and negotiation with the other. The cosmopolitan ethics and practice are expressed aesthetically by Fanqui-town's cityscape, the factories, the Achha Hong and by the floating city. Even though it is tempting to call these spaces and places cosmopolitan, there is one problem which must be addressed openly: namely, is it possible to discuss a place that excludes women (other inequalities aside) as a cosmopolitan space? Fanqui-town is clearly a gendered space, and Ghosh alludes, often quite comically, to the social situations where men replace women, for example at a ball (RS 201).<sup>105</sup> While not wishing to trivialize this theoretical problem, instead of arguing that Fanqui-town and also the Achha Hong are cosmopolitan spaces, I propose that they are understood as *spaces that enable cosmopolitan encounters* – admittedly only between men, but the quality of the

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<sup>104</sup> In an unexpected encounter with Napoleon, Zadig explains that "'Factory' comes from a word that was first used by Venetians and then by the Portuguese, in Goa. The word is *feitoria* and it refers merely to a place where agents and factors reside and do business. In Canton, these factories are also spoken of as 'hongs'" (RS 163–164).

<sup>105</sup> The topic of gender in *Smoke* is omnipresent and deserves an analysis in its own right. References to gender, role-playing, and homosexuality are prominent, even more so than in *Poppies*.

encounters can still be cosmopolitan in the sense of a negotiation with the other, community, migration and transformation. This definition allows for a negotiation of the cosmopolitan issues that are of interest in this analysis – community, transformation, negotiation with the other, of sameness and difference – and takes into account the fact that the place itself cannot really be called cosmopolitan.

Indeed, the Chinese authorities decreed that for ethical reasons, women were not allowed to enter Fanqui-town, so that its vibrant social life was completely made up of men (RS 221). Ghosh explains in an interview with Angiola Codacci:

Almost no trace of [Fanqui-town] remains so I had to rebuild entirely from the historical documents, old paintings, memoirs etc. I tried to make my recreation as realistic as possible because I think it was perhaps one of the most interesting places that has ever existed. It was a much stranger, more interesting place than anything I could have made up – my imagination would not have been able to create anything as 'exotic' as the actual 'Thirteen Factories'.  
(*Interview with L'Espresso Magazine*)

In *Smoke*, Ghosh rewrites the history of this unique and buoyant place into the global history of the opium trade.<sup>106</sup> He brings the cosmopolitan practice of this extraordinary place back to life, with many detailed descriptions. The ones pertaining to Fanqui-town's odd social life, devoid of women, are particularly amusing:

The intensity of Fanqui-town's social whirls was a source of constant amazement to Neel: that a place so small, and inhabited by such a peculiar assortment of sojourners, should have a social life at all seemed incredible to him [...] but then, as Vico once pointed out to Neel, these buggers were, after all, some of the world's richest men; 'and over here, they are all squeezed together, with hardly any room to turn around. No families, nothing to do – they have to make their own fun, no? When no wife there is at home, who

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<sup>106</sup> Macau is also an international trading post "where Malays, Chinese, Gujaratis and Arabs had lived elbow to elbow with the descendants of the old Portuguese and Dutch families" (RS 60). Singapore, on the other hand, is segregated: "Singapore had been so designed as to set the 'white town' carefully apart from the rest of the settlement, with the Chinese, Malays and Indians each being assigned their own neighbourhoods – or 'ghettoes' as some people called them" (ibid.).

thinks of sitting down at his table? And what kind of falto will go to bed early when there is no one who will scold? (RS 211)

Ghosh has a blog on his website, where he has dedicated one page to Canton's old foreign enclave.<sup>107</sup> The uncredited painting below is not described in the novel, but it gives a good impression of Canton's Thirteen Factories:



Illustration 1: Canton's Fanqui-town

The façades facing the sea are narrow, but behind them, a whole network of rooms, courtyards and passageways is established. The artistic imagination of Robin Chinnery, Paulette's childhood friend from Calcutta, is inspired when his ferry arrives in Canton and he first sees Fanqui-town. He writes to Paulette:

As you may imagine, already on the ferry, I was thinking of how to paint this scene. I have not started yet, of course, but I know it will be a stern challenge, especially where it concerns the matter of depth. The factories are so narrow-fronted that to look at them you could think they could scarcely accommodate a dozen people. But behind each façade lies a warren of houses, courtyards, godowns, and khazanas; a long, arched corridor runs the length of each compound, linking the houses and courtyards. (RS 172)

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<sup>107</sup> See Ghosh's blog: [www.amitavghosh.com/blog/?p=697](http://www.amitavghosh.com/blog/?p=697). It is an interesting site to visit, because Ghosh has posted drawings and paintings of Fanqui-town, and gives a short account of the history of the place. According to him, the foreign enclave burned down completely in 1856. It was rebuilt nearby on Shamian Island but the new foreign enclave hardly resembled the old one.



The aesthetics of Fanqui-town as a very special place are highlighted by Robin's accounts and descriptions. In the example above, he contrasts the simple narrow façades that convey a sense of seclusion with the complex structure of the back areas. This description aesthetically captures Fanqui-town's social structure: once one sees behind the fronts of the houses, a complex society makes itself known.

In a further and quite striking example, described in another letter to Paulette, Robin imagines the influential traders in Fanqui-town as painted by famous European painters. The intermedial references here are comic: Robin envisions the traders as being part of an "epic painting" (RS 201) that he would like to paint. Indian as well as European art is evoked in an ekphratic moment. Following Gabriele Rippl's definition of ekphrasis, ekphrasis is understood as a moment of *evocation* rather than as *representation* of art (*Beschreibungskunst* 97).<sup>108</sup> To Robin, Bahram Modi is, for instance,

one of the great personages of Fanqui-town and a splendid figure he is too: he puts me in mind of Manohar's famous painting of the Emperor Akbar – with a turban, a flaring angarkha, a stoutish belly, and a fine muslin cummerbund. (RS 202)

In Mr Jardine, a rich trader from England, Robin finds "a window through which I can smuggle in a touch of Velázquez; Mr Wetmore, on the other hand, would be perfect for an essay in the manner of Van Dyck. And there will be room for a Breughel too [...]" (RS 201). This transcultural level of engagement is part of the novel's exploration of cosmopolitan practice. This becomes particularly clear because Robin's father is the famous artist George Chinnery,<sup>109</sup> who spent much of his life in India and China and painted locals as well as English people. Robin's

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<sup>108</sup> Rippl lists the artworks that can be evoked: "1. Kunstwerke wie Gemälde, Zeichnungen, Graphiken, Skulpturen, Kunstphotographien, Videoinstallationen, 'film stills' etc., und 2. Andere Bildformen, die in erster Linie nicht oder nur unter bestimmten Bedingungen als Kunstwerke aufgefasst werden, also z.B. Dokumentarphotographien, Fernsehbilder, von Computern erzeugte, u. U. animierte Bilder. Dabei können Ekphrasen sowohl literarischer Natur (wie dies z.B. in Bildgedichten der Fall ist), oder auch nicht-literarischer Natur sein (wie dies bei den traditionellerweise als Ekphrasen betrachteten kunstwissenschaftlichen Bild- und Skulpturbeschreibungen, Bildtiteln, Katalogtexten, kuratorischen Hinweisen etc. der Fall ist)" (*Beschreibungskunst* 97). Her definition is also relevant in my reading of *Enchantress*.

<sup>109</sup> George Chinnery is a historical figure (1774–1852). He was an English painter who lived in India and China for much of his life, and accordingly painted people and landscapes from those areas.

interest in painting the foreign traders is indicative of an imaginary cosmopolitan practice where a young artist of Indian-English origin, residing in Canton, thinks of portraying the men in power (a group of people who will, in time, be responsible for the outbreak of the Opium Wars).

Ghosh recreates Fanqui-town mainly through Robin Chinnery's letters, as mentioned above. They are addressed to his childhood friend from Calcutta, Paulette, who, being a woman, is not allowed to enter the enclave (RS 98) and is travelling with Fitcher Penrose on the *Redruth*. In enthusiastic terms, Robin describes Fanqui-town:

And yet it is a *tiny* place! All of Fanqui-town – the Maidan, the streets and all thirteen factories – would fit into a small corner of the Maidan in Calcutta. From end to end the enclave is only about a thousand feet in length, less than a quarter of a mile, and in width it is about half that. In a way Fanqui-town is like a ship at sea, with hundreds – no, thousands – of men living crammed together in a little sliver of a space. I do believe that there is no place like it on earth, so small and yet so varied, where people from the far corners of the earth must live, elbow by elbow, for six months of the year. I tell you, Pugglissimma mia, were you to stand in the Maidan and look at the flags of the factories, fluttering against the grey walls of Canton's citadel, I am certain you too would be *overcome*: it is as if you had arrived at the threshold of the last and greatest of all the world's caravanserais. (RS 174)

The enclave is compared to a "ship at sea," (RS 174) and to a "caravanseraï" (ibid.), metaphors that point to the contingent, shifting and fleeting nature of the migratory community in Fanqui-town. This is a fascinating aspect that is indicative of a cosmopolitan practice of migration and movement. Moreover, the constant flux of people sets the stage, as already stated above, for cosmopolitan encounters. In fact, the traders' cosmopolitan practice is embodied by the characters Bahram Modi and Zadig Karabedian, an Egyptian watchmaker of Armenian origin, whose meeting and friendship constitutes, in its contingency and negotiation with the other, a cosmopolitan moment (this will be discussed in more depth below).

Not only in the enclave, but also in the Achha Hong (the Indian factory), the community, which consists of people from all over the subcontinent, is constantly shifting. Robin writes to Paulette:

And this, my dear Puggly, is one of the greatest of the many surprises of Fanqui-town – a *great number* of its citizens are from India! They come from Sindh and Goa, Bombay and Malabar, Madras and the Coringa hills, Calcutta and Sylhet – but these differences mean nothing to the gamins who swarm around the Maidan. They have their own names for every variety of foreign devil: the British are ‘I-says’ and the French are ‘Merdes’. The Hindusthanis are by the same token ‘Achhas’: no matter whether a man is from Karachi or Chittagong, the lads will swarm after him, with their hands outstretched, shouting: ‘Achha! Achha! Gimme cumshaw!’ They seem to be persuaded that the Achhas are all from the same country – is that not the most diverting notion? There is even a factory that is spoken of as ‘Achha Hong’ – of course it has no flag of its own. (RS 174–175)

The Indians in Fanqui-town – Achhas – are considered as a unity by the Chinese. This understanding is exemplified by the Chinese boys asking in pidgin to be tipped.<sup>110</sup> In pre-nationalist times (indeed, India was not even, formally speaking, a colony of the British Empire at the time when this novel is set: this came about only in 1858, when the British Raj began), the idea of the subcontinent being united as one country appears to have been a funny one, at least according to Robin. However, the Indian traders have established themselves to a degree that allows them to have their own factory. They have a special status because they import a large share of the opium that comes from India. Bahram Modi is one of the wealthiest foreign traders in Canton, and it is thanks to his long engagement as a businessman and trader that he is allowed to turn an empty factory into the Indian factory (RS 176). Neel, who works as Bahram Modi's *munshi* (secretary) and stays with him in the Achha Hong, is fascinated by the community that is “a world in itself, with its own foods and words, rituals and routines” (RS 181). Indeed, Neel has an idea of an “Achha-sthan” that includes everyone:

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<sup>110</sup> The role of language in *Smoke* is a rich and interesting topic that deserves its own analysis. In this novel, Ghosh mainly focuses on the pidgin English that was developed for communication between the traders and the Chinese. Neel establishes a *Chrestomathy*, a glossary of pidgin, which is accessible on Amitav Ghosh's website.

[I]t was as if the first inmates were the inhabitants of a new country, a yet unmade Achha-sthan. What was more, all its residents, from the lowliest of broom-wielding kussabs to the most fastidious of coin-sifting shroffs, took a certain pride in their house, not unlike that of a family. This surprised Neel at first, for on the face of it, the idea that the Achhas might form a family of some kind was not just improbable but absurd: they were a motley gathering of men from distant parts of the Indian subcontinent and they spoke between them more than a dozen languages; some were from areas under British or Portuguese rule, and others hailed from states governed by Nawabs or Nizams, Rajas or Rawals; among them there were Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Parsis and also a few who, back home, would have been excluded by all. Had they not left the subcontinent their paths would never have crossed and few of them would ever have met or spoken with each other, far less thought of eating a meal together. (RS 181)

The diversity of the community is made clear in this passage – the men in Achha Hong come from various backgrounds that can only be joined in this community because they are not at home. Hence, the commonality of being from the subcontinent defines them – inclusively – as a group. Yet it is suggested that the community owes its form to mechanisms of exclusion rather than inclusion:

At home, it would not have occurred to them to imagine that they might have much in common – but here, whether they liked it or not there was no escaping those commonalities; they were thrust upon them every time they stepped out of doors, by the cries that greeted them in the Maidan: 'Achha! Aa-cha?' (RS 180-181)

The bitter truth is that the members of this community are united by their complicity as profiteers of the opium trade:

[...] the paradox was that these ties were knotted not by an excess of self-regard, but rather by a sense of shared shame. It was because you knew that almost all the 'black mud' that came to Canton was shipped from your own shores; and you knew also that even though your share of the riches that grew upon that mud was minuscule, that did not prevent the stench of it from clinging more closely to you than to any other kind of Alien. (RS 181-182)

Hence, yet again it all comes back to opium. There is no escaping it, it seems, as Neel (and the reader too) realizes in the passage quoted above. The community of Indians is defined by their origin that associates them with the drug that is imported, not necessarily by any other attribute. The anticipation of an Indian nation that arises in Robin's comment (RS 175) is undermined completely; the community is founded on a "sense of shared shame" (RS 182). This negative identification is a prerequisite for shaping this community. In this sense, this community as described by Neel is not aspirational because it does not embody, as the ship community does in *Poppies*, a fleeting vision of an ideal community of solidarity and equality, even though its members have a certain level of solidarity. Rather, its existence has a morally reprehensible foundation, namely that they come from the land of opium and that they all profit, in one way or another, from the opium trade. Still, there is an aspect of truly cosmopolitan practice here in the passages quoted above, namely that Ghosh has traced and imagined this small Indian community in Fanqui-town on the very edge of China, calling it back to life in his descriptions. The community is not perfect, it is true, and it is defined by mechanisms of exclusion and shame, rather than a sense of shared belonging. Still, it forms one of the first Indian diaspora communities and is thus indicative of a cosmopolitan practice that, as we have seen above, causes negotiations with the other and a sense of responsibility that are cosmopolitan in stance.

The floating city on the Pearl River is the third community on the margins of Canton. It is not mentioned often in the novel, but it has a substantial presence as the home of Bahram Modi's son Ah Fatt and of Chi-mei, who is Ah Fatt's mother and Bahram's mistress. It merits attention in this reading because it is a place of cosmopolitan practice. In Robin's description, the floating city is a shanty town on water:

You may not credit it, Puggly dear, but the greatest of Canton's suburbs is the river itself! There are more people living in the city floating bustees [sic] than in all of Calcutta: fully one million some say! Their boats are moored along the water's edge, on either side, and they are so numerous you cannot see the water beneath. At first this floating city looks like a vast shanty town made of driftwood, bamboo and

thatch; the boats are so tightly packed that if not for the rolls and tremors that shake them from time to time you would take them for oddly-shaped huts. (RS 170)

The floating city is interesting because it is inherently unstable: it is made up of boats which, were they to be unmoored, would no longer stand side by side but would disperse. Therefore, just like the community of Fanqui-town, the floating city is also contingent, shifting and fleeting. That this space made up of boats should also be part of a cosmopolitan practice of migration and trade is not surprising. One example of this cosmopolitan practice is Asha-didi, a woman of Chinese origin who grew up in Calcutta, but returned to Canton, where she now has a kitchen-boat on which she sells Indian food (RS 303–304). Asha-didi's linguistic competences are arguably illustrative of a vernacular cosmopolitanism:<sup>111</sup>

Asha-didi's fluency in Hindusthani and Bengali often came as a surprise to Achhas for there was nothing about her to suggest a connection with their homeland. [...] Achhas were often taken aback when she greeted them in a familiar tongue. (RS 303)

This is one of several examples in which Ghosh describes characters and their histories that do not relate to the novel as a whole – Asha-didi is not mentioned before or after this instance in the text. This example demonstrates that cosmopolitan moments can be isolated moments in the text that do not *need* to have (although they can) any meaning for the novel as a whole – Asha-didi's story, in narrative logic, helps us to gain an understanding of the cultural exchange and cosmopolitan practice between India and China, yet it does not help us to know more about any of the major characters or the plot, for example.<sup>112</sup> The

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<sup>111</sup> Vernacular cosmopolitanism designates a mode of practical cosmopolitanism that is to a linguistic competence that is linked to a background of migration and cultural mixing. Bhabha, for example, writes that his everyday life in Bombay “was live in that rich cultural mix of languages and lifestyles that most cosmopolitan Indian cities celebrate and perpetuate in their vernacular existence – ‘Bombay’ Hindustani, ‘Parsi’ Gujarati, mongrel Marathi, all held in suspension of Welsh-missionary-accented English peppered with an Anglo-Indian *patois* that was sometimes cast aside for American slang picked up from the movies or popular music” (*Location x*).

<sup>112</sup> The floating city comes across as a feminine space, embodied by Chi-mei. The borders between these gendered and adjacent communities are fluid. In reading of gender in *Smoke*, this would certainly be an interesting instance to discuss.

floating city services Fanqui-town: washerwomen, cooks, and prostitutes are available. It is also a place of the other, made up of a poor Chinese population that struggles for survival, as Ah Fatt's accounts of his childhood to Neel convey. It has a reputation for being a "rookery for bandits, bonegrabbers, sotweeds, bangtails and scumsuckers of every sort" (RS 171), as Robin writes to Paulette, although this does not stop him from wanting to paint the floating city: "It is so very *eye-catching* that I long to try my hand at a few nautical paintings, in the manner of Van Ruysdael perhaps, or even Mr Turner" (RS 171).

In terms of story, the fact that Chi-mei used to live in (or on) the floating city is more important. Chi-mei, who at the time in which the novel is set, is already dead, murdered on her boat, as Bahram finds out from Zadig, eventually comes back to haunt Bahram in his opium-induced dreams.<sup>113</sup> Chi-mei's boat is Bahram's second home for a long time, and it is with her, who is 'other', namely a poor Chinese boatwoman, that he feels most at home. Arguably, their love affair exemplifies the connection between the floating city and Fanqui-town, which is one of mutual interdependency. As mentioned already, the text does not dwell much more on the floating city, but it nonetheless forms, with Fanqui-town, one of Canton's adjacent communities that are all shifting, inherently transient and contingent.

In conclusion, cosmopolitan practice, the ethics of community and the aesthetic expression they find in Fanqui-town and the floating city (also via Robin's descriptions) are all part of Fanqui-town's community. Although it is not strictly speaking a 'cosmopolitan' community (because there are no women), the issues that are negotiated in the text are cosmopolitan in theme, as I hope to have shown above. There is a remarkable level of engagement with the issues of community and solidarity that can be read with a cosmopolitan lens, but also with a postcolonial lens.

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<sup>113</sup> This interesting ghostly presence is discussed in 4.3.

### 4.3 Bahram, Opium and the Ghost: Failed Cosmopolitan Responsibility

"Today the biggest profits don't come from selling useful things" (RS 48) says Bahram when trying to convince his father-in-law to join the business of exporting opium, a commodity which he considers "completely useless unless you're sick" (ibid.). The flooding of the market with commodities that are essentially not necessary (another example is white sugar) was an economic colonial enterprise that followed the rules of Free Trade<sup>114</sup> and its parallels to global capitalism are evident. Not surprisingly, one of the pressing ethical questions that arise in *Smoke* is the responsibility of the opium traders who at the time imported opium to China. Their motives are described as being purely economic – the opium trade is so immensely lucrative that the traders (and indeed, the imperial powers behind them) shut their eyes to the misery that the consumption of opium causes in the Chinese population. The novel is quite explicit in its condemnation of this immoral enrichment of Americans, Europeans and Indians alike.

Still, the main focus is on an Indian trader, Bahram Modi. It is interesting that Ghosh should have chosen an Indian to discuss the ethical issue of responsibility. Presumably, the reason for this is that he wanted to write a book about Indians abroad, as he states in an interview with Tim Teeman: "I'm from a family that has been displaced many times. I wanted to write a book about leaving India, and then discovered this whole history of opium, which formed our world" (*Interview with The Times*). Another reason might be that Ghosh wanted to show how India was involved in, and profited immensely from, the opium trade. This is a fact that, according to him, has not really been looked into historically, with a few exceptions.<sup>115</sup> "Contemporary India has developed a vision of itself as straitlaced, spiritual etc. and we've chosen to forget that much of modern India

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<sup>114</sup> Free Trade is an economic dogma that supported open markets, while effectually it signifies a domination of global markets by Western imperialism and capitalism. Adam Smith, who famously wrote *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), was the founder of classical economic theory.

<sup>115</sup> For example, Amar Farooqui's *Opium City: The Making of Early Victorian Bombay* (2006) traces Bombay's rise to wealth thanks to the opium trade. For a fictional account of opium in Bombay, see the recently published *Narcopolis* (2012) by Jeet Thayil, which was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2012.



was actually built on this drug" Ghosh states (*ibid.*). It certainly seems as if Ghosh's intention with *Poppies* and *Smoke* was to recall, perhaps painfully, to an Indian as well as to an international English-speaking public, that India was implicated in this business, as well as pointing out the involvement of Britain and the United States, to name the most powerful global players of the early nineteenth century. Hence, Ghosh rewrites the history of the opium trade into one that involves India, too, to its detriment. Since Bahram Modi embodies this endeavour on a fictional level, I argue in this subchapter that Bahram is the main figure of identification with opium, and therefore the character with which Ghosh discusses the morals concerning the opium trade. Because Bahram denies any kind of cosmopolitan responsibility toward the other, the unknown victim of opium, he fails morally. For other reasons, his business fails, so that he is in the end corrupted and ruined. However, Bahram, who is drawn quite minutely and about whose life the reader learns a lot, is also a very likeable character. The ambivalence of this character, whose actions are part of an overarching historical fictional narrative of trade and imperialism, gives credit to Ghosh's imagination and the complexity of his fiction.

Bahram's likeability becomes an issue of discussion between Neel and his friend Mr Compton, a Cantonese printer:

Compton pursed his lips in disapproval and shook his head: 'Mister Moddie not good, he have done too much harm. Low-low sek-sek, you should not work for him, Ah Neel. [...]' Neel fell silent as he considered this. 'Maybe you're right,' he said. 'But you know, Compton, it is also true that amongst those who are close to Seth Bahramji there are very few who do not love him. And I am not one of them - for if there is one thing I know about the Seth is that he has a large and generous heart. This is what makes him different from the Burnhams and Dents and Ferdoonjees and the rest of them. You mark my words, those men will lose nothing in the end. It is Seth Bahramji who will be the biggest loser - and the reason for that is just this: he had a heart. (RS 506)

Neel might seem sentimental, but he turns out to be right. Bahram loses everything in the end because he cannot bear to leave Canton, where he feels alive, and thus sides with Lancelot Dent who is against a withdrawal of the foreign

merchants from the opium trade. Opium is Bahram's means of *living* life, as the text clearly states:

[I]t was here, in Canton, that he had always felt most alive – it was here that he had learnt to live. Without the escape and refuge of Fanqui-town he would have been forever prisoner in the Mistris mansion; he would have been a man of no account, a failure, despised as a poor relative. It was China that had spared him that fate; it was Canton that had given wealth, friends, social standing, a son; it was this city that had given him such knowledge as he would ever have of love and carnal pleasure. If not for Canton he would have lived his life like a man without a shadow. (RS 324–325)

As a young man, he meets Chi-mei, a young and independent boatwoman from the floating city, who has a face that is “pert and lively, with glinting black eyes, and cheeks that glowed like polished apples” (RS 63–64) and with whom he has his only son, a child that he loves and dotes on. This continues when Ah Fatt is grown up, as Neel sees:

But to Neel what was most striking about Bahram's relationship with Ah Fatt was not its faults but rather the fact that it existed at all. [...] Bahram's conduct in relation to Ah Fatt and his mother was not just unusual but quite exceptional for a man of his circumstances. (RS 136–137)

Bahram assumes his responsibility towards his mistress and their child, and continues his relationship with Chi-mei faithfully into middle age. Despite this loyalty, Bahram's greatest failure as a father is that his own child becomes an opium addict, a fact that remains unknown to him. Still, although he does not always have the best judgement, Bahram's intentions are good. Even his bigamous lifestyle is excused, to a certain extent, because he is estranged from his wife who lives in Bombay. His sense of loyalty explains why he chooses the communities of his two families over geographical and political entities:

And what did continents and countries matter to him? He had to think first of those who were closest to him, did he not? And what conceivable good could result for them if he brought ruin upon himself? For his children, his daughters and Freddy, he would gladly sacrifice his well-being in the

hereafter: indeed he could think of no duty more pressing than this, even if it meant that the bridge to heaven would forever be barred to him. (RS 438)

The question of responsibility becomes pressing when Bahram leaves the private sphere of family and his own business and, upon being asked to join the committee as the Indian representative, enters politics. He thus becomes “a leader amongst a group that included some of the world’s richest men” (RS 186). Despite the committee’s usual “exclusion of Asiatics” (RS 185), it is deemed “impolitic to enforce too rigidly the racial norms that were followed by the clubs of the Indian subcontinent” (ibid.). This is the display of a double standard: the European and American traders rely on the large amounts of incoming goods shipped from Bombay and Calcutta (RS 185). Bahram finds himself in the middle, as his friend Zadig predicts (RS 189):

You may even be the one who sways the balance. After all, opium that is traded here comes almost entirely from Hindusthan. Your voice will carry great weight. Bahram shook his head. You are putting too much on my shoulders, Zadig Bey. I can only speak for myself – not for anyone else. Certainly not for all of Hindusthan. But you will have to do it, Bahram-bhai, said Zadig. And not just for Hindusthan – you will have to speak for all of us who are neither British nor American nor Chinese. You will have to ask yourself: what of the future? How do we safeguard our interests in the event of war? (RS 189–190)

Zadig expects Bahram to be a spokesperson for the Hindusthani as well as for all the others, a responsibility that Bahram denies. Mr King, one of the only traders in Fanqui-town who does not trade in opium and is thus interested in a lasting peaceful relationship with China, appeals to Bahram’s ethical responsibility, saying that

Amongst all of us it is you who bears the greatest responsibility, for you must answer not only to your homeland but also to its neighbours. The rest of us are from faraway countries – our successors will not have to live with the outcome of today’s decision in the same way that yours will. (RS 438)

Here, the argument is that because Bahram is from the region – Asia – he ought to see it as his duty to try to assure the region's well-being for generations to come. Yet here again, Bahram does not care to agree – as a trader, he is interested in staying where he is and dealing in opium. Moreover, his emotional attachment to Canton is too strong for him to risk leaving everything behind (which he would have to do without opium, for China did not need any imported commodities at all – especially not opium; this was forced upon them).

Interestingly, the ethical issues concerning Bahram's involvement in the opium trade are introduced in a prolepsis – a minor instance in the text that can be called a cosmopolitan moment because it is contingent, that is, it does not make sense in relation to the rest of the story except to give information to the reader. A closer look, however, reveals that it can be read as an attempt to interlace narratives of European and Asian history. Indeed, “[t]o encounter an Emperor in a manure-strewn cabbage patch was a contingency for which Bahram was wholly unprepared” (RS 155). The moment in question is when Zadig and Bahram, on their way home from England in the year 1815, meet Napoleon in exile on St. Helena where their ship is anchored for a few days. Napoleon, apparently a great admirer of Alexander the Great, hears that a “Zoroastrian prince” (RS 159) is aboard the ship *Cuffnells* and is desirous of meeting the exotic gentleman. Zadig and Bahram dress up in their very best and visit Napoleon, who asks them questions about the Zoroastrian religion, China and pidgin, the common language of trade in Southern China, about Fanqui-town and, last but not least, about the opium trade (RS 162 ff). The text introduces the ethical questions concerning opium quite early on with Napoleon's question, put to Zadig but meant for Bahram:

But what of your friend? He trades in opium, does he not? Does he believe it to be evil? This question caught Bahram unawares and he was temporarily at a loss for words. Then, gathering his wits, he said: Opium is like the wind or the tides: it is outside my power to affect its course. A man is neither good nor evil because he sails his ship upon the wind. It is his conduct towards those around him – his friends, his family, his servants – by which he must be judged. This is the creed I live by. (RS 166)

Bahram believes that only those close to you matter, and opium is like a natural force anyway, one that he cannot change. With these arguments, he denies any ethical responsibility.<sup>116</sup> Many years later, in the present time of the novel, Zadig and Bahram discuss this issue again. Zadig is a watchmaker, and not at all implicated in the opium trade. He serves as Bahram's ethical conscience, his 'happy' alter ego and mirror of a successful life of cosmopolitan practice (in contrast to Bahram, whose life is shattered). Zadig, like Bahram, comes to Canton regularly for business, is in a marriage of convenience, and has a second family. Yet Zadig decides to leave his family in Egypt and moves to Ceylon with his Ceylonese wife and their children, and is reportedly happy. Zadig addresses the ethical question directly, asking Bahram

whether it is right to carry on trading in opium? In the past it was not clear whether the Chinese were really against it. But now there can be no doubt. There was something in Zadig's voice - a note of disapproval or accusation - that made Bahram smart. He could feel himself growing heated now and having no wish to provoke a quarrel with his old friend, he forced himself to lower his voice. How can you say that, Zadig-bhai? Just because an order has come from Beijing does not mean that all of China is for it. If the people were against it, then the opium trade wouldn't exist. There are many things in the world, Bahram-bhai, that do exist, despite the wishes of the people. Thieves, dacoits, famines, fires - isn't it the task of the rulers to protect their people from these things? (RS 190)

Bahram's reponse is again defensive of his own morals, and he accuses the Mandarins of not stopping the trade because they are also making money from it. China, he argues, is one of the most powerful countries on earth, not "some helpless little kingdom to be kicked around by others" (RS 191).

Yes, Bahram-bhai, Zadig said quietly, what you say is not untrue. But in life it is not only the weak and helpless who are always treated unjustly. Just because a country is strong and obdurate and has its own way of thinking - that does not mean it cannot be wronged. (RS 191)

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<sup>116</sup> That Napoleon, who led many thousands to death in battle, should put these questions to Bahram is, it would seem, a touch of irony on the author's part.

Zadig's ethical stance is in opposition to Bahram's, which causes a rift in their friendship. Bahram is increasingly drawn into politics, and sides with the opium traders who are bent on continuing to trade, because otherwise their financial losses would be huge. This stance is morally condemned by the text, for Bahram does not get away with his selfish reasoning. Rather, he is financially ruined and morally corrupted, which he deeply regrets in the end, as he confesses to Zadig: "I have sold my soul to Ahriman ... and it was all for nothing. Nothing" (RS 486).

Bahram's moral failure, which I call here a failed cosmopolitan responsibility toward the unknown other, and his downfall, is accompanied by a particular aesthetics of haunting.<sup>117</sup> The ghostly image of Chi-mei keeps resurfacing in Bahram's mind when he has smoked opium – a refuge that he increasingly turns to. After her death by murder, Bahram tells Zadig:

Maybe it's true what you say – maybe what I felt for Chi-mei was the closest I'll ever come to these things you speak of: love, pyar, ishq. But what does it matter now? She's gone, isn't she? I have to carry on: I have cargo to sell. (RS 102)

Yet Chi-mei's memory begins to haunt him; she becomes his ghostly conscience that appears in his hallucinations. This first happens when the *Anahita*,<sup>118</sup> Bahram's ship, is caught in the same storm as the *Ibis*. During the storm, Bahram makes his way into the cargo room, only to be washed over by opium:

There was opium in his eyes, his ears, his nose, his windpipe – it was as if he were drowning, and in that instant many faces flashed past his eyes – that of his wife Shireenbai, in Bombay, and of their two daughters; of his mistress, Chi-mei who had died some years before, in Canton; and of the son

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<sup>117</sup> The ghost is also part of my discussion of *Enchantress*. See chapter five, "Cosmopolitan Moments in a Magical World: Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence*".

<sup>118</sup> According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the Anāhiti, also called Anāhitā, was an ancient Persian goddess of royalty, war, and fertility. In particular, she is associated with the last. Since Bahram is a Parsi, it is understandable that he should name his ship after this goddess. The *Anahita* is a beautiful Bombay-made boat of best quality and great luxury, decorated with Parsi motifs: "bulkheads were decorated with motifs from ancient Persian and Assyrian art, carved in relief upon the wooden panels" (RS 59).

he had had with her [Ah Fatt]. It was Chi-mei's face that lingered; her eyes seemed to be gazing into his own as he sat up, coughing and spluttering; her presence seemed so real that he reached out towards her – but only to find himself looking into Vico's lantern. (RS 29)

Thus begins Bahram's story in *Smoke*, and this bathing in opium indicates clearly how he is associated with opium – not only does he own it, he literally swims in it. The “drowning” (RS 29) feeling is a premonition of his later death by drowning. At the end of the novel, he is again in a state of hallucination and dreams that he is with Chi-mei:

Lying flat on their bellies they looked at the moon's image, shimmering in the water. It was shining so brightly that her face too was illuminated by its reflected glow: she seemed to be looking up from under the water's surface, smiling at him, beckoning with a finger. 'Come, Mister Barry. Come. Ha-loy!' He smiled. 'Yes, Chi-mei, I'm coming. It's time now.' The water was so warm that it was as if they were still on the boat, lying in each other's arms. (RS 510)

Chi-mei and opium, the two great passions in Bahram's life, are intertwined in his mind. As mentioned above, she comes to him when he is hallucinating, as two further instances in the text show. Interestingly, her death is mysterious, as the two passages below illustrate. Bahram believes that Chi-mei has come to him for a night of love on Allow's boat. In the morning, after having realized that it was just a dream, he sees a

wet trail, leading from the side of the deck that overlooked the river right up to the corner of the divan. Allow too had seen the puddles, each separated from the other by the space of a footstep. For an instant his face stiffened into a frightened scowl. But then, recovering quickly, he said: 'That blongi nothing, Mister Barry. Come from fog. Happen allo time.' 'But fog no can makee puddle.' 'Can. Can. Come, we go now. Too muchi late.' (RS 282–283)

In a second dream, Chi-mei comes to see him at the factory:

There was no answer and when he looked towards the window, she was gone: the shutters were open and the

curtains were fluttering in the breeze. He woke up in a sweat and found that the window had indeed blown open. (RS 490)

Whether the puddles and the open window are coincidental or not remains unresolved, and open to speculation. They are contingent moments that are not part of the narrative's logic (except for being, perhaps, an indication that Bahram misses Chi-mei). Chi-mei's ghostly appearance in Bahram's dreams (probably, but we are not quite sure) expresses the fleeting, contingency of cosmopolitan moments. Arguably, the trope of the uncanny ghost constitutes a cosmopolitan moment in which Bahram's failed responsibility toward the other, which is the consequence of his lifelong involvement with opium, is recalled.<sup>119</sup>

In conclusion, Ghosh cleverly brings together various issues: the (Chinese) ghost comes to haunt (and taunt) the Indian trader in his opium dreams, a trader who has not fulfilled his responsibilities towards the other, a failure that he comes to regret. In this scenario of an impending drug war, Bahram's abdication of responsibility is momentous, for he holds the casting vote that will decide whether there will eventually be a war against China or not. Therefore, there is undoubtedly a certain level of moral accusation directed towards India (embodied by Bahram) and its involvement in the opium trade and the opium wars. Moreover, Ghosh rewrites and reimagines the history of India into the global history of the opium trade, and by doing so, raises the issues of cosmopolitan responsibility of the individual towards the other – visibly a responsibility that, if abdicated, has disastrous consequences.

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<sup>119</sup> Freud's concept of the uncanny and Bhabha's explorations of that in the context of world literature are interesting to consider here. In a Freudian sense, the uncanny designates an instance where something can be familiar, yet foreign at the same time (see *The Uncanny*, 2003). Bhabha understands the 'unhomely', a more direct translation of the German word 'unheimlich', as an "estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations. To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres" (*Location* 13). With the unhomely, Bhabha addresses the displacement and confusion between the home and the world, and, he writes, "uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (*ibid.*).



#### 4.4 Summary and Intermediate Conclusion

In *Smoke*, as I hope to have shown, the fragmentary nature of the narrative underlines the cosmopolitan moments as inherently contingent moments in the text. This is particularly the case in my reading of the storm, as well as of the ghost. Both tropes are isolated from the narrative: they are unnecessary for story development. Arguably, contingent cosmopolitan moments that are not really part of the narrative are moments which have a certain secretive or mysterious aspect about them that cannot be explained. They do, however, *raise* issues pertaining to cosmopolitanism, we might remind ourselves, even if they do not *resolve* them.

Moreover, if we think about cosmopolitan moments as moments in the text in which a rewriting of histories and geographies takes place, then my analysis of *Smoke* underlines this interpretation. In all three instances, the notion of rewriting comes up: in the analysis of the storm, it is its transformative power that enables a rewriting of destinies. Secondly, Ghosh's rendering of Fanqui-town and its cosmopolitan practice can be interpreted as an act of rewriting history. Thirdly, the story of Bahram rewrites India's role into the history of opium and investigates how the course of history can – hypothetically – be changed by a single man's decision.

## 5. Cosmopolitan Moments in a Magical World: Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence*

Salman Rushdie's tenth novel, *Enchantress*, deals with references to art and also storytelling and historiography in an unprecedented way, at least where his oeuvre is concerned. Its combination of genres (historical novel with magical and fantastical elements), as well as its postmodern dissolution of fixed historical time and chronology, is bewildering at times, yet they also help create an immensely interesting and challenging text. *Cosmopolitan moments, mirroring and passages* offer a means of reading this novel as a text that extensively engages with the spatial, historical and artistic concerns of the time.<sup>120</sup> Florence and Fatehpur Sikri, one in Renaissance Europe, the other in Mughal India, are the cities at the centre of the plot. The novel's histories and geographies encompass a space that reaches from India<sup>121</sup> to South America, with Florence as the point in between. The belief in magic, enchantment and witchcraft is omnipresent in both cities. To young Niccolò Vespucci, or Mogor dell'Amore,<sup>122</sup> just arrived from Florence in Fatehpur Sikri, magic is certainly not a novelty – it is as much a reality to him as to anyone else in the capital of Akbar's empire.

Florence and Sikri Fatehpur are worlds of their own, worlds of beauty and power that are connected by a narrative of migration and travel: Mogor dell'Amore's story of the Mughal princess Qara Köz's life and travels, which he reveals to the Mughal emperor Akbar.<sup>123</sup> Mogor dell'Amore comes to Fatehpur

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<sup>120</sup> As I mention in my methodological chapter, cosmopolitan moments is the overarching term. Cosmopolitan mirroring and cosmopolitan passages are moments that deal with specific issues. The use of cosmopolitan mirroring is unique to this chapter, whereas cosmopolitan passages is also used in chapter three "Cosmopolitan Passages in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*" and in chapter six "Cosmopolitan Travellers and Their Tales in M.G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song*".

<sup>121</sup> 'India' and 'Italy' did not yet exist as nation-states. For simplicity's sake, I will refer to the Indian subcontinent as 'India', and to the region now known as Italy as 'Italy', in the full knowledge that that both areas were ruled by a variety of kings. Even Akbar did not control the whole of the subcontinent.

<sup>122</sup> The name 'Mughal of love' stands euphemistically for Mogor's birth out of wedlock, his bastard origins. 'Mogor' is Italian for 'Mughal'.

<sup>123</sup> Rushdie is not the only one who has recently dedicated his work to Akbar: in the same year that *Enchantress* was published, the Bollywood film *Jodhaa-Akbar* told the love story of the (Muslim)

Sikri, the 'city of victory' with "a secret to tell, a secret so astonishing that it could shake the dynasty itself" (EF 85). As he tells his story to Akbar, the world of Renaissance Florence of half a century earlier unfolds, and with it the tale of Qara Köz and of three Florentine boys, Niccolò 'il Machia', Nino Argali and Ago Vespucci. 'Il Machia', Rushdie's fictional Machiavelli, is exiled by his own community and is forced to live on the outskirts of Florence, whereas Nino Argalia is orphaned at an early age and leaves Italy to become a janissary of the Turks, and Ago Vespucci travels to South America with Qara Köz and never comes back. The narrative concerning the hidden princess is the main trajectory, yet these three men contribute to defining the geographical spaces the novel inhabits.

The novel has two narrative levels. The first is the frame, that is the story of Mogor, the Florentine stranger who arrives unexpectedly at Akbar's court, and enchants the emperor with his storytelling. The second narrative level, the core of the novel, consists of Mogor's tale of the beautiful Mughal princess Qara Köz, Akbar's great-aunt, who travelled from East to West and who is the eponymous enchantress of Florence. At the end, the two levels converge, for Qara Köz reappears as a ghost and the emperor, as all men before him, falls in love with her. Mogor's tale goes back fifty years, to when his supposed mother and Akbar's great-aunt Qara Köz travelled to Florence and beyond. The genealogical confusions that arise from his tale, and Akbar's ensuing (and incestuous) infatuation with the ghost from the past, point to a narrative dissolution of past and present.

In this chapter, cosmopolitan moments are understood as a cosmopolitan practice of migration. Because there are several relevant aspects and possibilities of reading the novel, it has seemed best to divide it into three subchapters which include analytical sections. The first two subchapters, 5.1 "Cosmopolitan

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ruler and his Hindu princess wife, Jodha (as spelled in *Enchantress*). This film was successful, yet strife arose because the film's historical accuracy was publicly contested, mainly in Rajasthan. Apparently, it is debatable whether Akbar's wife was really called Jodha, or whether his son Jahangir's wife had had that name. While this controversy will not be debated at length here, it does point to the fallacy of expecting historical accuracy in fictional narratives (such as this film, and also Rushdie's novel).

Mirroring: From Fatehpur Sikri to Samarkand, to Florence” and 5.2, “Cosmopolitan Moments: Art and Storytelling” are especially dedicated to intermedial relations. It is safe to claim that these form an important part of Rushdie’s work. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), for instance, pop music is the overall theme. Visual arts are relevant in *The Satanic Verses* (1990), where a variety of contemporary media, such as television and film, are negotiated. In *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995), the artist Aurora Zogoiby and her paintings form one of the prominent narrative strands. Despite these preliminary explorations into art, none of these previous works is so invested in art and historiography as *Enchantress* is. In this novel, the focus lies on Renaissance and Mughal art, and the function that art has in historiography and storytelling. This particular angle is special to this text. It is quite telling that there is an extensive bibliography at the end of the book that lists historical and art historical references. In the framework of this thesis that discusses cosmopolitanism, histories and geographies in contemporary Indian writing in English, *Enchantress* is a pertinent novel to analyse, because it discusses these issues topically and *aesthetically*. Framed visuality is an important aesthetic device: the mirror and painting are central tropes in this novel. In the first subchapter, then, it is argued that these tropes enable a *cosmopolitan mirroring* of spaces, places, people and stories by analysing the moments in the text that discuss these concerns. The second subchapter is also concerned with mirroring, but to a lesser degree. Painting, storytelling and historiography figure as ways to tell of and depict *cosmopolitan moments* in which the trajectories of migration, community and an ethical engagement with the other are negotiated.

The third subchapter 5.3 “Cosmopolitan Passages: Qara Köz and Mogor’s Travels” takes a different angle. Here, the trajectories of Qara Köz and Mogor are discussed as *cosmopolitan passages* that combine both a practical and an ethical discussion of migration. Moreover, the trope of the ghost offers an interesting aesthetic way of thinking about passages in the sense of trajectories and their endings in narrative terms. Clearly, this part of my analysis resembles the chapter on *Poppies*, which also offers an interpretation through this lens.

*Enchantress* is an elaborate text, as mentioned above, and it is necessary to read it from different angles, mirroring, moments and passages, in order to gain a full understanding of the cosmopolitan concerns that figure centrally in this dense and complex novel. This is why the themes this chapter explores vary, oscillate and still, it seems, interconnect at many levels.

## 5.1 Cosmopolitan Mirroring: From Fatehpur Sikri to Samarkand, to Florence and Beyond to the New World – and Back

Writing the earth – geography – is one of the main concerns of *Enchantress*. In contradistinction to postcolonial texts, which operate most often on the basis of an East–West (or North–South) dichotomy, texts that evoke cosmopolitan moments *rewrite* these (post)colonial histories and geographies into global narratives. In this subchapter, it is argued that spaces are mirrored – this mirroring device constitutes a cosmopolitan moment in the text and it is called cosmopolitan mirroring because it combines mirroring as a device to express and negotiate cosmopolitan concerns, namely the negotiation of sameness and difference, and the rewriting and reimagining of spaces, places and narratives. The trope of the mirror and the use of art create and imagine geographies and histories that go beyond national spaces – that are regional or even global in scope.

In *Enchantress*, the spaces of the two cities, Fatehpur Sikri and Florence, and the regions that encompass them, are brought together by Mogor's narrative. The geographical spaces that are engendered by the narrative are not limitless, yet not clearly defined either. Their borders are open and shifting, and denote a contingency that is characteristic of cosmopolitanism as it is understood in this thesis. The fact that the narrative goes beyond any kind of East–West dichotomy and ignores the idea of set cultural and national (here: imperial) boundaries constitutes a cosmopolitan moment that both lays the foundation for and makes possible the other cosmopolitan moments in this text. Arguably, Rushdie alludes to, and at the same time undermines, the East–West dichotomy that postcolonial studies have nurtured to a certain extent. Histories and geographies are quite consciously rewritten in this novel, and dichotomies of East and West are questioned.

This subchapter discusses how geography is often accompanied by imagery and descriptions that evoke impressions of 'beauty': be it landscapes, cities,

women, art.<sup>124</sup> Life at court, the arts and the architecture of the city are dealt with in much detail. The text invests in the aesthetics of the time: beauty in women, in art and in architecture is underlined in the text; equally, in several instances, the style is made to resemble a courtly, poetic language, arguably in imitation of courtly poetry. Quotations of verses by Ghalib and Petrarch,<sup>125</sup> both eminent poets of their time, are inserted in the epigraph. They introduce us to the two travellers Qara Köz and Mogor:

Her way of moving was no mortal thing / but of angelic  
form: and her speech / rang higher than a mere human  
voice. A celestial spirit, a living sun / was what I saw...  
Francesco Petrarca

If there is a knower of tongues, fetch him; There's a stranger  
in the city / And he has many things to say. Mirza Ghalib  
(Epigraph)

Arguably, the pronounced aestheticism of the novel uses poetical language, intertextual references, mirroring, ekphrasis and imagery in general to create a fictive world of beauty, magic and power.<sup>126</sup> In other words, this aesthetic style is pronounced because it is hyperbolic and, at the same time, is an imitation of an ornate language that can be found – to take the example at hand – in poetry written by Ghalib and Petrarch. This aesthetic style is mentioned because it occurs repeatedly in the novel, and read it as part of a cosmopolitan mirroring that engages with art and writing as cosmopolitan practices that are not separated or distinguished by national borders.

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<sup>124</sup> In Renaissance literature, neoplatonist beliefs about love found frequent expression. The neoplatonic theory of love “rested on the beliefs that earthly beauty was an image of absolute beauty and that spiritual graces were even more important than bodily ones.” Rushdie, I am quite sure, is aware of these concerns and plays with them, thus rendering a tongue in cheek aesthetic of beauty. Moreover, a further reference is for example blazon. According to the OED, ‘blazon’ is a type of catalogue verse in which something is either praised or blamed through a detailed listing of its attributes or faults. The eponymous *Enchantress* is praised, one could say, in this fashion – her beauty, intelligence and courage are repeatedly mentioned and arguably ‘praised’.

<sup>125</sup> Petrarch or Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374) was an Italian poet, scholar and humanist. Mirza Ghalib (1797–1869) was a prominent Indian poet of his time writing in Persian and in Urdu. The sonnet is a Renaissance form of poetry and it is not surprising, of course, that the poet Petrarch should be referred to in this elaborate novel.

<sup>126</sup> For a discussion of ekphrasis and art, see 5.2.

From a theoretical point of view, the mirror shares, “with the art of painting, an emphasis on the worth of the image, resemblance, and stimulation, all of which are intertwined with the theme of looking at one’s self. The visual arts are thus inseparable from any study of the mirror” (3), as Sabine Melchior-Bonnet argues in her study *The Mirror: A History* (2012). The trope of the mirror suggests reflection, opposition, inversion, and distortion. The mirror image is never the same as the original; it is a reflection, even a distortion of the image to a certain degree. It does not suggest the reproduction of sameness. Quite the opposite, it denotes ambiguity, unreliability, and produces an inherently different image than the one it reflects: namely a mirror-inverted one. The mirror trope allows for a discussion of otherness and difference, and thus constitutes a cosmopolitan moment in the text. Melchior-Bonnet argues:

Because it does not duplicate reality exactly – in the mirror the right hand becomes the left – the reflection poses questions about image and resemblance; it returns an image that closely relates to, yet differs from, the reflected object itself. And just where does the image reside? At the same time both present and elsewhere, the perceived image has an unsettling ubiquity and depth, located at an uncertain distance. (101)

During the Renaissance, the understanding of the mirror as we know it changed. Its place was “between God and the world, [gave] meaning to the cosmos and is shared with man, who is capable of differentiating and opposing” (Melchior-Bonnet 118–119). The mirror raises questions of subjectivity and illusion, and recurs in several instances in *Enchantress*. In this novel, it is used playfully and all over the globe – in the old worlds of Europe and Asia, and in the new world of South America. As a literary device, mirroring establishes a link between these places, as will be discussed in the following subchapters.

In the following four sections of this subchapter, four different aspects of cosmopolitan mirroring and space in *Enchantress* are discussed. The first section discusses the mirroring of India and England, and their rulers Akbar and Elizabeth I, while the second section is concerned with the mirroring of spaces, namely those of Florence and Fatehpur Sikri. The third section emphasizes the



writing of space and beauty in the context of mirroring, and the fourth section debates the question whether East and West are applicable terms here.

### 5.1.1 Pre-colonial India and England: Mirroring Akbar and Elizabeth I

Early on in the plot, India and England, or rather, their rulers, are juxtaposed in a gesture that points to the stance that this book has taken: not to be postcolonial, but global in its (historical) scope. This section analyses how the novel brings together two leaders of that age in an imagined encounter by use of the mirror trope.

*Enchantress* is set in an era when globalization was already well under way, and trade between England and the subcontinent was well established.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, the narrative unfolds during one of India's most powerful and memorable eras, not only politically but also culturally.<sup>128</sup> The fact that England is invoked so early on in the text points to the stance on global history and geography that is taken in this novel; England is not referred to, it must be noted, as an up and coming colonial power, but as one country among others that wishes to engage in trade with the Mughal Empire. Furthermore, it underlines the fact that India was, at that time, the more powerful of the two, although Akbar's empire was soon to decline, whereas England would become immensely powerful over the following centuries.<sup>129</sup> In the novel, Akbar rules over a large empire, whereas the realm dominated by England and her naval forces is, at this time, still much smaller. There is certainly an imbalance of power between the two rulers or countries. In the future, due to British expansionism, these power relations would

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<sup>127</sup>G. Balachandran and Sanjay Subrahmanyam write in their essay "On the History of Globalization and India: Concepts, Measures and Debates" that between 1500 and 1800, trade between India and Europe expanded, although less significantly than between the Indian and the Asian market (28-29).

<sup>128</sup> In Indian historiography, this period figures prominently. See for example Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India* for a nationalist account of Indian history. For a contemporary work, see *India Before Europe* by Catherine B. Asher and Cynthia Talbot.

<sup>129</sup> The colonial expansion of England began during the reign of Elizabeth I. Walter Raleigh was the "great would-be empire-builder of the age" at whose instigation "Richard Haklyut wrote his *Discourse of Western Planting* in 1584, the first great manifesto of English imperialism overseas" (Darwin 18).

change. Ironically, Rushdie topples the expectations of the postcolonial reader who is used to portrayals of England as the powerful empire.

Mogor's arrival at Akbar's court is set in this narrative of trade, for he pretends to be Queen Elizabeth's ambassador bringing Akbar a trade letter from Elizabeth. Mogor achieves this honourable position by poisoning the ambassador, Lord Hauskbank, with laudanum. Akbar and Abul Fazl, his trusted advisor, are not deceived by Mogor's fake identity, but out of curiosity they grant him an audience at court. Mogor, a gifted storyteller, embellishes what turns out, many years later, to be "no more than a plain request for good trading terms for English merchants, accompanied by some routine expressions of respect" (EF 75). At the time when he meets Akbar, however, Mogor invents the content of the letter:

'Beware these lackeys of your Rival! Make alliance with us, and we will defeat all foes. For I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too, and I think foul scorn that any Pope in Rome should dare dishonour me, nor my allies either. For I have not only my own auctoritas, but potestas as well, and that potency will make me the victor in the fight. And when they are all destroyed and blown to the four winds, then you will be glad you made common cause with England.' (EF 73)

It is, of course, baffling that Mogor should know the words "the body of a weak and feeble woman" and "the heart and stomach of a king" (EF 73), words famously attributed to Elizabeth's speech to the troops at Tilbury in 1588.<sup>130</sup> In the actual Tilbury speech, Elizabeth refers to "Parma, or Spain, or any prince of Europe" (*Collected Works* 326). Mogor replaces these with the "Pope in Rome" (EF 69), and warns Akbar not to be blinded by the "blandishments of Philip the Dull" (*ibid.*). England's great rival Spain also appears in the letter as a "philistine bully [...] whereas England is the home of art and beauty and of Gloriana herself" (*ibid.*).

Mogor explains that

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<sup>130</sup> This speech can be found in *Elizabeth I. Collected Works*, edited by Leah S. Marcus, Janel M. Mueller and Mary Beth Rose (2000). This is echoed later on when Akbar admires Qara Köz, thinking that she "was a woman like a king" (EF 309).

the faraway redhead queen was nothing less than the Western mirror of the emperor himself, she was Akbar in female form, and he, the Shahanshah, the king of kings, could be said to be an Eastern Elizabeth, moustachioed, non-virginal, but in the essence of their greatness they were the same. (EF 69)

Akbar falls in love with the foreign queen, just as he has fallen in love with Mogor a few minutes earlier, crying "Abul Fazl [...] shall we not marry this great lady without delay? This virgin queen, Rani Zelabat Giloriana [sic] Pehlavi? We think we must have her at once" (EF 73). Akbar and Elizabeth are the first mirror images in the novel. It is interesting that Elizabeth and Akbar are 'equal': she is his Western mirror, he her Eastern mirror, and their empires are therefore also on an equal footing, similar but not the same.

Akbar's infatuation with his female mirror image, provoked by Mogor's letter, "resulted in a stream of love letters which were carried to England by accredited royal messengers, and never answered" (EF 74). Nobles and princes who intercept these letters are

delighted by the emperor of India's crazy declarations of undying affection for a woman he had never met, as well as his megalomaniac fantasies of creating a joint global empire that united the eastern and western hemispheres. (EF 74)

Despite the obviously impossible situation – an invented love letter that provokes an infatuation, which then leads to ideas of a global empire – and the comic treatment of the whole incident ("moustachioed, non virginal" (EF 69)), the imagined space created by a joint East and West, with rulers that are equal, remains. The mirror image is used to create an imagined geography of a space that encompasses East and West, or India and England, in a position that is equal yet different. The idea of creating a joint empire is a cosmopolitan moment; a moment in the text when an idea appears that topples existing power relations. For a short time, the cosmopolitan ethics of community and solidarity are highlighted, only to disappear again. Mogor's narrative is the catalyst for Akbar's idea, and many years later, Akbar understands

how daring a sorcerer he had encountered [...]. By then, however, the knowledge was of no use to him, except to remind him of what he should never have forgotten, that witchcraft requires no potions, familiar spirits or magic wands. Language upon a silvered tongue affords enchantment enough. (EF 75)

Akbar's short-lived fantasy of a joint empire fades soon enough. However, global history is invoked in the imaginary encounter of the two rulers, and therewith a geographical space is written that goes beyond a localized Indian geography, because it is globalized in scope. In conclusion, the mirroring of the two regents projects a global space of trade, empire and globalization.

### 5.1.2 Florence and Fatehpur Sikri: Mirroring Cities

Florence and Fatehpur Sikri are mirrored more extensively than India and England, not surprisingly so, as they are the main sites of narrative action. In this section, it is contended that the mirroring of the two city spaces, as depicted in Mogor's tale and in the omniscient narration, constitutes one of the novel's main cosmopolitan concerns. Throughout the novel, the cities and their inhabitants are contrasted, juxtaposed and mirrored, mainly by Mogor, storyteller and enchanter, who tells Akbar the tale of his own youth and that of Qara Köz's adventures in Florence. Thus, a cosmopolitan mirroring of the cities is created – cosmopolitan because an imagined intercultural space is drawn that includes both cities and allows for a playful negotiation of sameness and difference.

In this cosmopolitan moment of mirroring, then, mirroring comes to the forefront as a storytelling device, as an act of familiarizing the listener with a place and space that is different, other and unknown rather than as any kind of actual narrative 'reality'. In other words, by telling his Indian audience about the Italian city, Mogor mirrors Fatehpur Sikri in his tales about Florence, thus effectively acquainting his Indian listeners with said place and bringing it closer to their own world of experience by mirroring. This cosmopolitan moment elicits (Akbar's) negotiation with a (Florentine) other that is invisible, far away and *imagined*. Akbar's imagined Sikri is a dream-like place, a "new world, a world beyond religion, region, rank and tribe" (EF 43). *Enchantress* refers to Fatehpur Sikri as

being an imagined secular place<sup>131</sup> in which there is, presumably, a society that is not defined by the hierarchies of Akbar's time. In other words, there is an egalitarian aspect to Akbar's musings that goes by quickly. In this fleeting cosmopolitan moment, the dream-like, aspirational impression the city makes on Akbar is turned into a 'beautiful lie', and indeed, a statement that he himself undermines. While one could argue, and rightly so, that Akbar's egalitarian musings serve to portray an exceptional leader, it seems more to the point here to state that this is a means of establishing contrast between political ideals (albeit short-lived) and the political and social reality of Mughal India.<sup>132</sup>

The transitory dream-like impression of a beautiful city of equality is contrasted by a description of the same city that clearly points out that this is a highly stratified space, "built of wood and mud and dung" (EF 28), whose neighbourhoods are "determined by race as well as trade" (ibid.). This, of course, is the 'real' city that Mogor arrives at; splendid but clearly segregated, and that appears in his tales about Florence. Mostly, Florence appears as a politically unstable, corrupt and messy place.<sup>133</sup> When we first read about it in this novel, it has just emerged from the republic instigated by the movement of the monk Girolamo Savonarola and is again under Medici rule. Unlike Fatehpur Sikri, Florence is never described as being a dream-like place; on the contrary, it is a prosaic place and not described as particularly beautiful either. This may be because Mogor thinks Fatehpur Sikri impressive beyond compare:

Plainly it was one of the grand cities of the world, larger, it seemed to his eye, than Florence or Venice or Rome, larger than any town the traveller had ever seen. He had visited London once; it too was a lesser metropolis than this. (EF 8)

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<sup>131</sup> Akbar's vision mirrors Jawaharlal Nehru's dream of a secular India, as Vassilena Parashkevova argues (187-188). Nicole Weickgenannt Thiara writes that "Rushdie's account of Akbar bears great similarity to that proposed by nationalist historiography, the paradigmatic representative of which is Jawaharlal Nehru's history book, *The Discovery of India*" (1956) (418).

<sup>132</sup> Ironically, Akbar's ideas are contrasted and complemented by Il Machia in Florence, who must live on the outskirts of town, whereas Akbar inhabits the centre of power.

<sup>133</sup> Much of the city's politics is conveyed by 'Il Machia', or Niccolò Machiavelli, a character based on the author of the famous pamphlet 'Il Principe'. The theme of Florentine politics is not directly related to the theme of this thesis, which is why it is not discussed here, but it would be a worthwhile undertaking.

Florence's beauty seems quite negligible, if we are to believe Mogor. One could easily also assume, however, that this stance relates to a conscious aim on the author's part to distinctly emphasize the Indian city as a centre of power and beauty, and to underline India's importance in an anti-Eurocentric move.

Apart from this difference in beauty, however, the two cities share some common traits. The world of politics is eminently important in both, as is the world of magic and power. It is important to clarify that most of the mirroring is done via the characters. First and foremost, in Mogor's tale, the beautiful Florentine enchantress Simonetta Cattaneo precedes the eponymous enchantress Qara Köz. Both women are rumoured to have magical powers, and a cult forms around them. Furthermore, the two prostitutes, Mohini the Skeleton and her co-worker the Mattress live in Fatehpur Sikri (EF 61), whereas a bony girl named 'Skandal' lives and works in Florence, together with La Matterassina (EF 147). The prostitutes, as well as the brothels, represent the hedonistic cultures of the mirrored cities:

Both cities feature landmark brothels, each of which is represented by prostitutes whose nicknames are translations of each other across the interurban divide. Sikri's Hatyapul brothel, the House of Skanda, is named after the Hindu god of war; Florence's Macciana brothel, the House of Mars, is named after the Roman equivalent. (Parashkevova 199)

To Akbar, it is "plain that Mogor dell'Amore was also in the grip of a waking dream, because it was he who had transported these whores across the world to the Arno in this tale" (EF 153).

A further instance of mirroring is that both cities are caught up in a time of cultural innovation. In Florence, it is the Italian Renaissance, and in Fatehpur Sikri, too, a Renaissance of sorts is happening. Renaissance can be seen as a *movement* rather than as a period in fifteenth and sixteenth century European history and must be understood as a "mobile critical and politic-cultural term" that shows how the "transcultural imagination participates in a complicated network of literary and cultural exchange", as Schildgen et al. have convincingly argued (2). The Renaissance, according to them, must be understood as a travelling idea

which manifests itself in different geographical contexts and as a transcultural phenomenon rather than one that has originated in and is owned by the West (6-9). Akbar's investment in the arts, architecture and literature, and his striving for (religious) peace and unity belong to a particular period that has been highlighted in Indian nationalist historiography as a time when Indian literature and culture blossomed. In historiography, both periods - Akbari India and Renaissance Florence - are acknowledged to be remarkable.

In conclusion, the mirroring in Mogor's tale serves as a cultural familiarization that brings the other nearer to his listener, Akbar; therefore, this is a cosmopolitan moment of negotiation with the other. The direct textual references are then buttressed by the novel's understanding of the two periods as equally developing and innovative in the sense of a renaissance, even if they go about it in different ways.

### 5.1.3 Writing 'Beautiful' Worlds

Apart from the city space of Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar is involved with the space of his empire, and with the space that is created by his family history that is mirrored in his imaginings. These are the issues that are explored in this section, and it is argued that the fact that the text creates, sustains and brings these spaces together shows its investment in the rewriting of geographies. Moreover, it is argued that the aesthetics of space - or, the aesthetic rendering of space - underline the cosmopolitan mirroring concerned with community and negotiation with the other.

In his memoir, the *Baburnama. Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, Akbar's grandfather describes his homeland as enchanting: "In Andizhan the pheasants grew so fat that four men could not finish a meal cooked from a single bird" (EF 117). This sentence is inspired by the actual *Baburnama*, in which we can read that "[g]ame and sporting birds are plentiful in Andizhan. The pheasants get extremely fat, and it is said that not even four people can finish eating a stew from just one"

(*The Baburnama* 36).<sup>134</sup> Rushdie's use of phrases from this source belongs to a style that underlines the aesthetics. At the same time, he establishes a link to the original historical narrative of the Mughal founding father. Babur was Akbar's grandfather and the first to write his memoirs:

Andhizan, the Mughal's original family seat, was in the province of Ferghana 'which lay,' his grandfather had written in his autobiography, 'in the fifth clime, on the edge of the civilized world.' The emperor had never seen the land of his forefathers but he knew it from Babar's book. Ferghana stood on the great Silk Road in Central Asia to the east of Samarkand, north of the mighty peaks of the Hindu Kush. There were fine melons and grapes for wine, and you could feast on white deer and pomegranates stuffed with almond paste. There were running streams everywhere, good pasture meadows in the nearby mountains, red-barked spiraea trees whose wood made excellent whip-handles and arrows, and turquoise and iron in the mines. The women were considered beautiful, but such things, the emperor knew, were always a matter of opinion. Babar the conqueror of Hindustan had been born there, and Khanzada Begum as well, and also (though all records of her birth had been obliterated) the princess without a name. (EF 117)

The spaces that are evoked here - Ferghana, Samarkand, Hindu Kush - and the beauty of the landscape and the food conjure up pastoral images. Again, as in the description of Fatehpur Sikri, beauty is a prominent feature of this space that functions, for Akbar, as a kind of homeland, a lost paradise and a pastoral idyll. The bountiful past is mirrored in Akbar's memories.

Conspicuously, the reference to Herat in Samarkand, the "so-called 'Florence of the East'" (EF 126), where Qara Kōz and her sister Khanzada spend most of their childhood, also evokes beautiful imagery: "The world was like an ocean, people said, and in the ocean was a pearl, and the pearl was Herat. 'If you stretch your feet in Herat,' Nava'i said, 'you are sure to kick a poet.' O fabled Herat of mosques, palaces and flying-carpet bazaars!" (EF 126). In contradistinction, the Florence of the West is not described in particularly pleasing

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<sup>134</sup> Rushdie is well acquainted with the text of the *Baburnama*. He wrote the preface to the 2002 edition of *The Baburnama, Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, translated, edited and annotated by Wheeler M. Thackston.



terms. True, the city has beautiful women, magic, and sensuality.<sup>135</sup> From an aesthetic point of view, however, Florence does not seem to hold many charms. It is beset by political intrigue and wars, thus constituting a violent space within a war-torn Europe of mercenaries (this is comically expressed in Nino Argalia's dream of leading a mercenary troop of "Swiss Mohammedans" (EF 139)). This is possibly because the narrator of this tale, Mogor, does not care to praise the city's beauty (which was considerable in Renaissance times) too much in front of Akbar.

In the following passage, all three cities are mentioned:

The emperor's gaze travelled past the peacocks and the lake [of Sikri], past the court of Herat and the land of the fierce Turk, and rested on the spires and domes of an Italian city far away. 'Imagine a pair of woman's lips,' Mogor whispered, 'puckering for a kiss. That is the city of Florence, narrow at the edges, swelling at the centre, with the Arno flowing through them, parting the two lips, the upper and the lower. The city is an enchantress. When it kisses you, you are lost, whether you are commoner or king.' (EF 141)

Mogor's seductive tales trigger Akbar's imagination of Florence, and thus, Florence is mirrored in his imagination: distorted it is true, but still present. Akbar is fascinated with Florence, in which "nobody ever seemed to want to stay indoors" (EF 141) and asks himself "[w]hat [...] it [meant] to be a man so completely among men, and women too? When solitude was banished, did one become more oneself, or less? Did the crowd enhance one's selfhood or erase it?" (ibid.). Akbar's thoughts about this other city emphasize the novel's concern with intercultural themes and demonstrate an instance of cosmopolitan mirroring, because there is negotiation with the other, and with another community. More importantly, however, it underlines a cosmopolitan moment in which Akbar attempts to understand, to negotiate with the other, which in this case consists of people in another city and country, who speak a different language. Akbar's wish to understand issues of sameness and difference in relation to what is foreign to him (yet also familiar; this closeness is demonstrated by his magical

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<sup>135</sup> As this is set in the Renaissance, it is not surprising that there is much emphasis on beautiful women and similar conceits.

understanding of the language). Listening to Mogor's tale, Akbar feels a sense of kinship or empathy with the Florentines, despite the apparent differences between the cities:

Akbar's cloak was cut from the cloths of time and space and these people were not his. Why, then, did he feel so strong a sense of kinship with the denizens of these braying lanes? Why did he understand their unspeakable European tongue as if it were his own? (EF 141-142)

In effect, the interweaving of the tales of Florence and Fatehpur Sikri and the mirroring of the cities establishes a contingent community. The negotiation of otherness constructed in this instance is enhanced by the cosmopolitan mirroring of characters that appear repeatedly (see section above). Pertinently, this is really just a fleeting moment in the text, after which the characters go about their daily business.

Despite his interest in that which is other (as seen in his response to Mogor's tales about Florence) Akbar ultimately cannot bridge the divide when thinking about South America, the third of the spaces that is explored in this novel, as seen in the next chapter. In conclusion, it is relevant to remember that, on the level of the text's engagement, the novel does bring these spaces together, mirrors them, and thus creates cosmopolitan moments in which spaces are mirrored and rewritten and the other is negotiated, even if the characters do not fully engage with the situation.

#### **5.1.4 East, West?**

To recapitulate, the narrative of *Enchantress* sprawls across the globe, encompassing the Indian subcontinent, Europe and South America. In received (post)colonial divisions of space, India would be the East, and Europe and South America the West. In this novel, it is not surprising that the representations of the East and West – geographical categories that are very Eurocentric – are questioned. Therefore, in this analysis section, the undermining and subversion of these categories is discussed, and it is argued that their subversion is brought

about by a cosmopolitan mirroring of these spatial divisions which are consciously rewritten into a global imaginary space.

The adventures of Qara Köz open up an eastward space, and in their depictions, they consciously question the concept of 'the East'. We recall that in *Orientalism* (1978), Said argues that the East or the Orient is constructed by the Western imagination in order to achieve and maintain hegemonial power. In other words, the East as such does not exist because it is imagined (Said 1978). In *Enchantress*, the East figures partly as a place of enchantment and beauty, as has been argued above.<sup>136</sup> Some of Rushdie's descriptions of the East in this novel are hyperbolic.<sup>137</sup> These hyperbolic images of the *Baburnama*, which conjure up "fine melons and grapes for wine [... ] white deer and pomegranates stuffed with almond paste[...] running streams everywhere [...]" (EF 117)<sup>138</sup> are evoked by Akbar. Babur, the author of the *Baburnama*, emphatically does not represent Western political power. Ironically, then, images of the East that European readers might readily associate with the 'Orient' are envisioned by the Mughal emperor when remembering his family's homeland. This irony implies a playful reversal or even a toppling of established stereotypes; the East ceases to be a Western construction - interestingly, it is still imagined and constructed, but by those who originate from that area. This means that Akbar - and also, arguably, Babur in his memoirs - fantasize about an imaginary homeland.<sup>139</sup> It also means, however, that the 'East' ceases to be a Eurocentric idea, and becomes one that the East itself has generated. Arguably, this is an instance of mirroring that points to an emancipation process that places India and its surrounding areas into an independent space that is part of a global history, rather than a postcolonial and/or Eurocentric view of the matter.

Similarly, the Mughal princess Qara Köz remembers the East, although not in the same way. She was born in Andhizan and is later abducted by Lord

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<sup>136</sup> Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) was the wife of the British ambassador in Turkey from 1716-1718. She wrote letters home that described life in Istanbul vividly, and that inspired Orientalist art and later female travel writers.

<sup>137</sup> Rushdie wrote a collection of short stories *East, West* (1995).

<sup>138</sup> The complete quotations can be found in 4.1.3.

<sup>139</sup> Rushdie coined the term 'imaginary homelands' in his essay that bears that title.

Wormwood, Shaibani Khan, as is her sister Khanzada Begum. Raised in Herat, Qara Köz enchants (or falls in love with, the text is ambivalent about this) Shah Ismail of Persia and stays with him after he has defeated her abductor, Lord Wormwood. When she meets Argalia the janissary, she leaves the East to travel to Florence with him, and there she quickly becomes a popular figure, also due to her Eastern origins:

So she became a symbol of peace, of self-sacrifice in the name of peace, for many people. There was much talk of her 'Eastern wisdom', which she dismissed when it reached her ears. 'There is no particular wisdom in the East,' she said to Argalia. 'All human beings are foolish to the same degree.' (EF 286)

This could be read as an expression of a universalist or cultural relativist discourse, of course. However, Qara Köz understands the space she moves in not as defined by categories of East and West, but in more complex ways: her existence is defined by a cosmopolitan practice of migration, her trajectories are cosmopolitan passages that not only geographically, but also metaphorically, cross the boundaries of 'East' and 'West'. This is why, in a rather world-weary way, Qara Köz dismisses the East as a valid category for judging human beings.

The 'West' is the New World, or *Mundus Novus*, as it was called by Vespucci.<sup>140</sup> *Mundus Novus* is a reference to the cartographer and Benedictine monk Martin Waldseemüller, author of the *Cosmographiae Introductio*, who named South America and drew a map of the new world, the "Geography of the World according to the Tradition of Ptolemy and the Contributions of Amerigo Vespucci and Other People" (332).<sup>141</sup> This intertextual reference embeds the narrative into a global history of early colonialism and of the mapping of these 'new' spaces.

It is remarkable how South America or *Mundus Novus* figures as a vantage point in the narrative, where time and space shift, are expanded and suspended:

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<sup>140</sup>Amerigo Vespucci realized that America was not India, as Columbus had believed. Il Machia thinks that Amerigo had had "the wit to realize what that dolt Columbus never grasped, namely that the lands on the far side of the Ocean Sea were not Indies; they had nothing to do with India, and were, in fact, an entirely new world." (EF 241)

<sup>141</sup> See Martin Waldseemüller, *The Naming of America: Martin Waldseemüller's 1507 World Map and the Cosmographiae Introductio* (2008).

Across the Ocean Sea in *Mundus Novus* the ordinary laws of space and time did not apply. As to space, it was capable of expanding violently one day and then shrinking the next, so that the size of the earth seemed either to double or to halve. Different explorers brought back radically different accounts of the proportions of the new world, the nature of its inhabitants, and the way in which this new quadrant of the cosmos was prone to behave. There were accounts of flying monkeys and snakes as long as rivers. As for time, it was completely out of control. Not only did it accelerate and slow down in utterly wanton fashion, there were periods – though the word ‘periods’ could not properly be used to describe such phenomena – when it did not move at all. The locals, those few who mastered European languages, confirmed that theirs was a world without change, a place of stasis, *outside time*, they said, and that was the way they preferred it to be. (EF 328)

South America figures as dream place, an unfinished place that becomes the undoing of Qara Köz. Akbar listens to Mogor's tale and understands that “the lands of the West were exotic and surreal to a degree incomprehensible to the humdrum people of the East. In the East men and women worked hard, lived well or badly, died noble or ignoble deaths” (EF 329). Here, the tables are turned, for Akbar, in his imagination, constructs the West as a surreal place. Thus, because the East to him is a ‘real’ place, and the West is imagined, there is an inversion of what Said defines as ‘Orientalism’:

In his mind's eye Akbar pictured Western temples made of gold, with golden priests inside, and gold worshippers coming to pray, bringing offerings of gold to placate their golden god. [...] Gold, and also *India*, which they believed to contain fabulous hoards of gold. They did not find India, but they found... a further west. In this further west they found gold, and searched for more, for golden cities and rivers of gold, and they encountered beings even less probable and impressive than themselves, bizarre, unknowable men and women who wore feathers and skin and bones, and named them *Indians*. Akbar found this offensive. Men and women who made human sacrifices to their god were being called *Indians*! Some of these otherworld ‘Indians’ were little better than aborigines; and even the ones who had built cities and empires were lost, or so it seemed to the emperor, in philosophies of blood. Their god was half bird, half snake.

Their god was made of smoke. Theirs was a vegetable god, a god of turnips and corn. They suffered from syphilis and thought of stones and the rain and stars as living beings. In their fields they worked slowly, even lazily. They did not believe in change. To call these people *Indians* was in Akbar's emphatic opinion a slight to the noble men and women of Hindustan. (EF 329–330)<sup>142</sup>

This constitutes an inversion because the West is depicted stereotypically in Akbar's mind. Yet, while Akbar is able to imagine this world that is geographically so remote from his own, albeit with his own stereotypes, he cannot truly and does not wish to understand it, knowing "that he had reached a kind of boundary in his mind, a frontier beyond which his powers of empathy and interest could not journey" (EF 331). Apparently, Akbar's imagination is cut short by his lack of empathy and interest. Therefore, he fails in his negotiation of what is other despite the fact that he imagines South America and its "unknowable men and women" (330). It follows that in this case, imagination cannot approximate – from his Eastern vantage point, the 'West' becomes unimaginable. Although Akbar fails in negotiating with the other in an ethical sense – that is wishing to interact – this example figures as a cosmopolitan moment because Akbar at least attempts to engage with the other, and, more importantly, the text shows engagement with these questions. The scenario that is imagined – the Indian imagination of South America – is definitely a cosmopolitan moment because of its engagement with an imaginary space, viewpoints are introduced that circumvent or even contradict notions of East and West.

In conclusion, the spaces that are evoked and imagined in *Enchantress* render the East-West dichotomy meaningless, and arguably, the take on space becomes global. The spaces are mirrored in an uneven way, for the mirror images distort the imagination of the other. Moreover, interesting perspectives on time are also developed; time and space appear as expandable, uneven and imagined, as

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<sup>142</sup> There is a long tradition of narratives about South America, its native populations, and the finding of gold. See the English translation of Diego de Landa Calderón's *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* (1566): *Yucatan Before and After the Conquest* (1998), translated by William Gates. De Landa (1524–1579) was an ambivalent figure, because he chronicled the life of the Mayans, while actively and fanatically pursuing Christianization.

we have seen above. Indeed, in true postmodern fashion, there is no reference to 'reality', which is completely undermined. Thus, the realm of the imaginary is underlined, allowing the imaginary, shifting and fleeting conceptions of time and space to be rewritten into a global and at the same time fictional understanding of history and geography. To a certain extent, this is also thanks to the use of magic and enchantment, as will be seen in the following subchapter.

## 5.2 Cosmopolitan Moments: Art and History

Renaissance and Mughal art figure prominently in this novel which is deeply concerned with aesthetics. Indeed, *Enchantress* is firmly grounded in Indian culture as well as European culture, and one of its attractions as a literary text is that it resides in both. Rushdie combines the theme of art with one of his favourite interests, namely storytelling and historiography. Historiography is an important concern in much of Rushdie's fiction, one of the prime examples being *Midnight's Children*, in which the history of India is narrated in a magical realist mode that defamiliarizes the story of the nation and so allows a rewriting of history. Not surprisingly, then, the arts of storytelling, painting and historiography are frequently linked and highlighted in *Enchantress*. Indeed, art and artistic endeavour in this novel impress the attentive reader before the book has even been opened. 'Art' in this reading refers to poetry, literature and painting – these are all disciplines that are brought to the fore in this novel. Moreover, the merging of art and storytelling constitutes a means of visualizing – in the framed visuality of the painting – the cosmopolitan passage of Qara Kōz, the homeless Mughal princess who restlessly roams the world.

Hence, in this subchapter and its two sections, it is argued that storytelling, historiography and art figure as ways to tell of and depict *cosmopolitan moments* in which the trajectories of migration, community and an ethical engagement with the other are negotiated. Moreover, on a meta-textual level, it is claimed that the novel's (and the author's) engagement with cosmopolitanism, art, historiography and storytelling constitutes a moment of *cosmopolitan practice*, by which is meant a literary commitment to thinking and writing about literature in general as means of imagining bridges over the cross-cultural divide.

### 5.2.1 Art in *The Enchantress of Florence*

In cosmopolitan passages, Rushdie's knowledge about, and interest in, art becomes quite clear when looking at the many (often playful) references. For



instance, the Italian painter Botticelli and his muse, the enchantress Simonetta Vespucci, are clearly alluded to in a reference to Botticelli's famous paintings *Primavera* or *Allegory of Spring* and *The Birth of Venus*:<sup>143</sup> "The painter Alessandro Filipeppi painted her many times, before and after she died, painted her clothed and naked, as the Spring and the goddess Venus, and even as herself" (EF 135). In this section, the references to art and storytelling are looked at, and the most relevant examples are discussed in context with cosmopolitan moments. The visually most striking reference to art and intermediality is the ornate book cover, on which are depicted, besides the title and author, several paintings and figures.

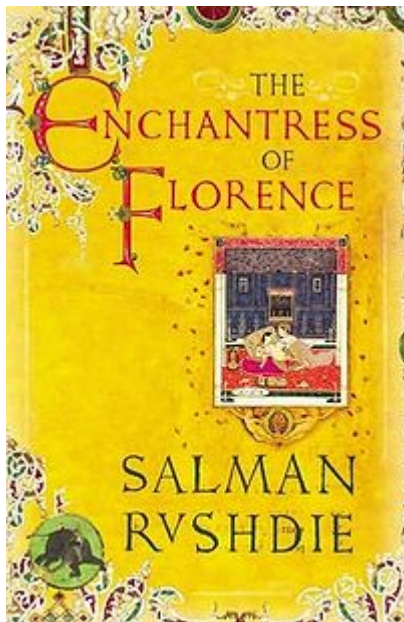


Illustration 2: the book cover of the first hardback edition of *The Enchantress of Florence*, published in 2007 by Jonathan Cape.

The book cover brings together illustrations from Florentine and Mughal art, whereby a cosmopolitan moment of bringing together cultural spheres is constituted. It shows the following scenes: The painting on the front depicts a lady receiving a lover at a Mughal palace, and in the painting on the back, Rajput princes are hunting bears. Furthermore, there are details showing courtly musicians, a tiger hunt, and an accident with an elephant. Since the largest image

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<sup>143</sup> Alessandro Filipeppi is the Renaissance painter with the nickname Little Barrel or Botticelli, as the text explains (EF 135). *Primavera* or *The Allegory of Spring* was painted in ca. 1482 and *The Birth of Venus* was finished in 1486.

on the cover is a Mughal painting, the reader is easily misled into thinking that the whole cover is 'Indian' art. Yet in fact it is not, for the background is a copy of a parchment from the Medici Psalter, and the border around the book cover is based on yet another manuscript. The detail on the inside of the back cover depicts three Florentine men from the *Carta della Catena*, a painting depicting a panorama of Florence by the Italian School.<sup>144</sup> Moreover, the front endpapers show a detail from the painting *The Building of Fatehpur Sikri Palace* from the *Akbarnama*, and the back endpapers feature a detail from the *Carta della Catena*, showing a panorama of Florence.<sup>145</sup> Clearly, the art on the cover and the endpapers refer to the book's contents in several ways, although it is not clear whether this was actually Rushdie's intention, and if he had any say in the matter at all. For one, the cover alludes to the two cultural spheres that are most important to the plot of the novel: Renaissance Florence and Mughal India.<sup>146</sup> Secondly, the cover inspires the reader to make connections to the novel, such as the scene from the *Akbarnama*, which refers directly to one of the characters, namely Akbar. Indeed, some of the images, for example the three men, could be understood to represent the three Florentine friends Ago Vespucci, Nino Argalia and Niccolò 'Il Machia', thus highlighting these characters. Thirdly, the appealing and beautiful cover is part of the book's aesthetic strategy, and fits in with the instances in the text where beauty is highlighted by means of poetic imagery. The erotic image on the front cover, in my opinion, does not point to a stereotypical representation of the East as a sensuous and ultimately feminine space (the kind of Orientalist understanding that is represented, for example, in Ingres' painting "The Turkish Bath", 1862)<sup>147</sup> because it is a Mughal painting, thus not created by the European imagination. However, it ostensibly plays with Orientalist notions. Ursula Kluwick has pointed out that it is important to consider that what she calls 'exotic' might be less a

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<sup>144</sup> More detailed information about the images can be found on the back of the book. Giovanni di Ser Giovanni's painting is the *Carta della Catena* which depicts the city of Florence.

<sup>145</sup> These references may be found in *Enchantress*.

<sup>146</sup> See Hans Belting, *Florence and Baghdad. Renaissance Art and Arab Science* (2012), for an excellent discussion of the interdependencies and influences of 'East' and 'West'.

<sup>147</sup> This painting is part of the collection of the Musée du Louvre in Paris.

matter of the text and more a matter of the reader who interprets certain cultural markers as 'exotic' (164). She argues that

[i]f we ignore all thoughts of the exotic, the plethora of allusions to Indian cultures that we find in his novels are precisely that: signals which ground Rushdie's texts in an Indian tradition and contextualize his fiction as non-Western. Or rather, since Rushdie refers to Western culture as much as to Eastern culture, the ease with which markers from different cultural traditions sit next to each other renders his novels truly transcultural. (165)

I agree with Kluwick that just because certain allusions to Indian culture occur in this novel, this does not mean that they are 'exotic'. On the contrary, the occurrence of Asian and European art reflects Rushdie's transcultural approach. This seamless merging of the types of art constitutes a cosmopolitan moment, in which a cosmopolitan practice is established, and the cosmopolitan ethical debates of sameness and difference are negotiated artistically. The text's cosmopolitan ethical and practical engagement, creates an aesthetic that is new and entirely original. In tune with the aesthetic strategy that Rushdie uses, as has already been argued, the 'new' art is also beautiful and appealing to the eye. In the example of the book cover, the merging of the two cultures creates a product that is the 'same' at least in this way, and does not constitute a breach of either aesthetic tradition in terms of what is beautiful.<sup>148</sup>

The book within the book is the *Qara-Köz-Nama*, the tale of Qara Köz. This fictional epic is based on the *Akbarnama*, which literally translates as 'the tale of Akbar'. Historically speaking, Akbar followed in the footsteps of his grandfather Babar who had written *The Baburnama*.<sup>149</sup> Babar had made the decision to write a record of his life, and his grandson, Akbar, decided to do the same. Since Akbar remained illiterate all his life (one of the more astonishing facts about this famous ruler; after all, his father and grandfather had been able to read and write, as were

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<sup>148</sup> Arguably, this constitutes an example of cultural hybridity, a term which loosely refers to Bhabha's concept of hybridity, explicated in "Signs Taken for Wonders. Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree in Delhi" (2004).

<sup>149</sup> Babar wrote his memoirs in Chaghatai. Many translations into Persian were made, but the original version was lost. Many of the translations were illustrated by artists of the Mughal workshops (Thackston 11).

many of his courtiers), his trusted advisor and court historian Abu-l-Fazl wrote the *Akbarnama*.<sup>150</sup> It was originally written in Persian, the language of Akbar's court, and is a long and detailed account of Akbar's life, richly illustrated by the artists of the Mughal workshops.<sup>151</sup> As readers, we can imagine that the fictional account at the heart of the novel, the *Qara-Köz-Nama*, is similar to Akbar's own *Akbarnama*.

In conclusion, references to visual art are conspicuous, and they allow a complex negotiation of cosmopolitan concerns of sameness and difference, migration and the rewriting of history.

### 5.2.1 The Tale of Qara Köz: Remembering the Other

Qara Köz, the eponymous enchantress of Florence, has disappeared from the pages of Mughal history until Mogor comes to Fatehpur Sikri and begins to tell her story: "Himself a teller of tales, he had been driven out of his door by stories of wonder, and by one in particular, a story which could make his fortune or else cost him his life" (*EF* 10). Mogor believes that Qara Köz was his mother and Akbar's great-aunt, thus daringly claiming that he belongs to the imperial family. In order to make this claim, he needs the emperor to believe his tale, thus triggering a great interest in the hidden princess not only in the emperor, but also in the entire imperial family and in the population of Fatehpur Sikri.

This section discusses the *Qara-Köz-Nama*, an epic that is both painted and narrated, as a cosmopolitan moment that, figuratively speaking, expresses the rewriting of a subaltern history into imperial history, and is, in a literal sense, an epic of travel and migration that also constitutes negotiation with the other, a core

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<sup>150</sup> See the translation by H. Beveridge.

<sup>151</sup> With some disapproval, H. Beveridge, whose translation of the work into English was published in 1902, states that "Abu Fazl is not an author for whom one can feel much sympathy or admiration. He was a great flatterer and unhesitatingly suppressed or distorted facts. His style, too, seems – at least to Western eyes – to be quite detestable, being full of circumlocutions, and both turgid and obscure. He is often prolix, and often unduly concise and darkly allusive" ("Preface"). In later years, Beveridge became more kindly disposed towards Abu-l-Fazl, admiring his industry and understanding that Abu-l-Fazl was inferior to Akbar in both social standing as well as in age (*Vol. 3*, xi). Still, I think his rather acrimonious comment is a pertinent example of how difficult the business of writing history is. After all, it is always a question of weighing fiction against fact, and is steered by the question of power: Who can afford to have which story told? And who has no say in the matter?

cosmopolitan concern. Moreover, it is argued here that these issues must be seen in the light of a cosmopolitan practice and ethics that are evoked by the intermedial aesthetics of framed visuality, or paintings. Qara Köz's wanderings are rewritten into imperial history, it is argued here, and she is again included in her family's history – even if only as a ghostly presence.<sup>152</sup>

In order to include Qara Köz in the imperial history, Akbar commissions the painter Dashwanth to paint a *Qara-Köz-Nama* in the tradition of Mughal courtly painting and of the *Hamzanama*, the tale of Hamza, who was the Prophet Muhammed's paternal uncle (Britschgi 64). Dashwanth's painting shows

the hidden princess as a beautiful four-year-old girl wandering with a little basket in the gorgeous woodlands of the Yeti Kent mountains, collecting belladonna leaves and roots, to add brilliance to her eyes and perhaps also to poison her enemies. [...] The painting itself worked as a kind of magic, because the moment old Princess Gulbadan looked at it in Akbar's private rooms she remembered the girl's name. (EF 120–121)

It is highly relevant that Qara Köz, a woman, and one who has abandoned her home, receives her own epic. Epics are created and supported by art, as we learn in *Enchantress*:

In their collaborative paintings of the adventures of Hamza and his friends, Mughal Hindustan was literally being invented; the union of the artists prefigured the unity of empire and, perhaps, brought it into being. (EF 119)

This is visual political propaganda, and the strength and impact of the imagery cannot be underestimated. However, not only does the emperor's power reside in these images, but also his soul: "Together we are painting the emperor's soul, Dashwanth told his collaborators sadly. And when his spirit leaves his body it will

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<sup>152</sup> In the *Qara-Köz-Nama*, the depicted early life and sufferings of the young Qara Köz foreshadow those of the woman Qara Köz in many instances: her magical powers become manifest, her life in exile begins, and she meets the man who will be her destiny, Shah Ismail of Persia. It also conveys the sense of the other that will always be with her; as mentioned above, she is treated as undesirable from birth onwards. Later, when a cult forms around her, this is reversed to the opposite extreme: she is other because she is revered as a goddess. The sun cult mentioned above alludes to the cult that later forms around her in Florence. *The Qara-Köz-Nama* can be said to mirror fragments of her later life, and thus forms yet another mirror moment in the novel.

come to rest in these pictures, in which he will be immortal'" (EF 119). The belief that the soul resides in the painting becomes relevant when Dashwanth, who has fallen in love with the dead princess, also paints himself into the picture, disappearing into the final pages of the *Qara-Köz-Nama* in the form of a frog (EF 125) and achieving, therefore, an undermining of reality.

Before Dashwanth paints the *Qara-Köz-Nama*, he finishes Hamza's tale. This is worth mentioning because Rushdie illustrates quite effectively how art supported imperial policies not only in Europe, but also in Mughal India:

Over and over again, [Dashwanth] painted the legendary hero Hamza on his three-eyed fairy horse overcoming improbable monsters of all types, and understood better than any other artist involved in the fourteen-year-long Hamza cycle which was the ateliers' pride and joy that he was painting the emperor's dream-autobiography into being, that although his hand held the brush it was the emperor's vision that was appearing on the painted cloths. (EF 119)

Not only in the novel, but also historically speaking, the first major project tackled by Akbar's ateliers was a collection of fairy tales, among them the tale of Hamza. At the beginning of his imperial reign, Akbar chose to legitimize his rule by illustrating Hamza's battles and his triumph over evil (Britschgi 64–65).<sup>153</sup> Similar to the historiography of the *Akbarnama*, then, the *Hamzanama* also served to legitimize Akbar's rule and the consolidation of imperial power. In the novel, i.e. on a fictional level, the fantastic imagery of this fairy tale is evoked by a brief description of what can be seen in these illustrations. There is a strong artistic reference to an actually existing set of illustrations.<sup>154</sup> In the illustration below, we see Hamza battling a giant in a scene that is reminiscent of the descriptions of the *Hamzanama* in the novel (EF 119):

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<sup>153</sup> The *Hamzanama* was a vast undertaking: 1400 folios were produced, and it took at least fifteen years to complete (Britschgi 65).

<sup>154</sup> Again, Rippl's definition of ekphrasis is used: ekphrasis is understood as a moment of *evocation* rather than as *representation* of art (*Beschreibungskunst* 97).



Illustration 3: an excerpt of the Hamzanama<sup>155</sup>

In terms of the ekphrasis in this text, using this definition is worthwhile, because the passages in which works of art are mentioned never actually describe them accurately, rather they evoke them, to use the preferred term. Ekphrasis is often a question of gender, as it is here: After the ladies of the imperial family have confirmed Mogor's story that there was indeed a princess, Qara Köz, who had been deleted from the annals of Mughal imperial history because she decided to remain in exile although she could have come home, Akbar commissions Dashwanth to paint the *Qara-Köz-Nama*, i.e. to illustrate the book of Qara Köz with the words "Paint her into the world [...] for there is such magic in your brush that she may even come to life, spring off your pages and join us for feasting and wine" (EF 120). Although Qara Köz does not come to life in a literal sense (as did Pygmalion's Galatea in the Greek myth *Pygmalion*), she is remembered and thus brought back to life metaphorically. As James Heffernan explains, when there is a

conflict between narrative and stasis, when ekphrasis converts the picture of an arrested action into a story, as it typically does, we can read this conversion in terms of gender: the male as agent of narrative overcoming the female as image, as fixed and fixating object of desire. (109)

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<sup>155</sup>Taken from the website of the Victoria and Albert Museum:  
<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/h/hamzanama/> Web. 14 August 2013.

This instance of mirroring is highly gendered, for Qara Köz, desired by Dashwanth, is fixed in the image. So although she is now acknowledged as a family member by her clan and takes a preeminent place as a woman in the history of her family, because none before her had her own history written and illustrated in the style of the emperor's and Babar's tales, she is fixed. Yet, her wanderings are not at an end even after her death, when she continues to exist as a ghost.

It seems remarkable that Qara Köz receives, post mortem, her own history. After all, the histories of Babar and Akbar are about heroic deeds, about battles and adventures. They serve to consolidate power and to elevate the emperor to a near-divine status. In contrast, Qara Köz's story is one of migration, assimilation, love, loss, and of the power of enchantment. This is not the same kind of narrative because it is marked by a different gender, by other geographical trajectories and by other survival strategies (not necessarily submission as opposed to aggression, however). The fact that so much attention is given to the tale of Qara Köz shows that the novel's preoccupation with the condition of *women* in the circumstances of migration is remarkable because it is highlighted in intermedial references. Throughout the text, she is referred to as having special powers that enable her to fend for herself; magic, intuition, enchantment and love forming a mix of qualities and skills that are difficult to separate. In the novel, these are themes that frequently recur. Magic is part of the life-worlds of the characters in *Enchantress* and forms an important part of Mogor's storytelling, in which ambiguities of place and time are cultivated and reinforced through references to magic. As Kluwick has argued, "references to magic [...] are [...] conspicuous, since they always also seek to complicate the representation of reality and to throw suspicion on neat and unambiguous differentiations between the natural and the supernatural" (63). Magic is integrated into the narrative by underlining the fantastic elements, but it is not spectacular, because the characters perceive it as being quite normal.

By painting the princess Qara Köz into the history of the Mughal empire, Dashwanth raises her to the realm of the living. Moreover, via the act of painting, Dashwanth translates Mogor's story into art, as Jenni Ramone has argued (90). The



artistic translation is striking; the evocations of the Mughal artwork colourfully 'illustrate' the text and engage the reader's imagination. Moreover, the ekphrasis evoking Dashwanth's painting of the young princess is followed by a comment on the power of artistic representation and the influence it can have on public opinion: "everyone who saw that first painting realized that Dashwanth's exceptional powers of intuition were revealing the hidden princess as a born Enlightened One" (EF 120-121). In particular, chapter nine, which has the title "In Andhizan the pheasants grew so fat" (EF 115), focuses on the text and on the images of the *Qara-Köz-Nama*. The *Qara-Köz-Nama* ends when "the hidden princess Lady Black Eyes or Qara Köz or Angelica, and the Shah of Persia" (EF 128) stand face to face and she decides to leave her clan. This is as far as her story is known to the Mughal court. Old Princess Gulbadan remembers the hidden princess, who was nicknamed "Qara Köz, which was to say Black Eyes, on account of the extraordinary power of those orbs to bewitch all upon whom they gazed" (EF 121). For all information on her later life, Akbar must rely on Mogor's tale, as incredible and unreliable as it may seem at times.

On account of her powers and her beauty, Qara Köz is treated as the other from an early age, to the point of attempted murder (possibly by her jealous sister Khanzada) (EF 122). Qara Köz is magically unharmed by these attempts, and a sun cult forms around her (ibid.). When Khanzada is given as "a sacrificial offering, human booty, a living pawn" (EF 124) to Wormwood Khan so that her defeated elder brother, the emperor Babar, may leave in peace, she insists that Qara Köz and her slave girl, the Mirror, stay with her. Dashwanth captures this moment in his painting:

The painting is an allegory of the evils of power, how they pass down the chain from the greater to the lesser. Human beings were clutched at, and clutched at others in their turn. If power was a cry, then human lives were lived in the echo of the cries of others. The echo of the mighty deafened the ears of the helpless. But there was a final detail to be observed: Dashwanth had completed the chain of hands. The Mirror, the slave girl, her left wrist captured in her young mistress's firm grasp, with her free right hand had seized

hold of Khanzada Begum's left wrist. They stood in a circle, the three lost creatures, and by closing that circle the painter suggested that the clutch or echo of power could also be reversed. The slave girl could sometimes imprison the royal lady. The powerful could be deafened by the cries of the poor. (EF 125)

The three subaltern characters, who are left to fend for themselves at a foreign court, are equal for just one moment. Their fates are bound together by the political situation. This desperate moment constitutes a fleeting cosmopolitan moment of equality, fleeting because in the end, the Mirror remains a slave. This is a subaltern cosmopolitan moment that highlights aspirationally the ideal of *what could be* for one short instance. Yet the moment passes, and the state of inequality between the princess and her slave girl remains. In other words, there is no material improvement of the slave girl's situation.

However, the Mirror (yet another mirror image), ostensibly so named because she is the princess's mirror image in looks and beauty, functions as a sort of alter ego of Qara Köz, as a shadow who follows her wherever she goes and who becomes the mother of Angelica in Qara Köz's stead, and the grandmother of Mogor. Hence, Mogor, who mistakenly believes that Qara Köz was his mother, is just a shadow away from being a Mughal descendant. As I have argued above, the trope of the mirror offers a means of negotiating difference and sameness. It produces an inherently different image than the one it reflects, namely a mirror-inverted one. In the *Qara-Köz-Nama*, the mirror image occurs again as a moment of negotiation, when artistic intervention creates a moment of equality. Not only is the voice of the subaltern women heard, but also, the slave girl becomes, for an instant, equal to her mistress: the slave girl is like her mirror image, therefore different but equal. The complex references to mirroring throughout the novel are conspicuous, and the fact that they occur several times points to one of the novel's main concerns, namely the acknowledgment of the complexities that arise when difference and sameness are negotiated.

Most importantly, however, Qara Köz's reappearance in the annals of Mughal imperial history marks a moment of acceptance of her otherness. After all,

she had been deleted from all records for the previous fifty years, and very nearly erased from everyone's memory. The figure of the other, who is despicable because she chose to live with a foreigner, and to become a wanderer, is forgiven. Thus, in a cosmopolitan moment, history is rewritten to the advantage of a subaltern and the ethics of acceptance of and solidarity with the other are emphasized.

### 5.3 Cosmopolitan Passages: Qara Köz and Mogor

Qara Köz and Mogor are the two travellers in the novel, whose destinies are linked in unusual ways: Mogor brings the memory of Qara Köz back to life by telling her story to Akbar. Qara Köz is able to return home – albeit as a ghost – to Akbar's court and her family. The term cosmopolitan passages evokes the cosmopolitan practice of travelling and migrating.<sup>156</sup> In other words, it refers directly to the trajectories undertaken by the two wanderers. Not surprisingly, Mogor's path across the globe is greatly influenced by Qara Köz's path. Actually, it is a reversal of some sort. While Qara Köz travels from Samarkand to Herat, then to Florence with her lover Argalia, and then across the Atlantic to South America, fifty years later, Mogor travels from South America to Europe, with a few adventures along the way.<sup>157</sup> In many ways, the enchantress of Florence defines the geographical space of the novel. She is present in all the places, at some point or other. Moreover, her history is relevant when it comes to the notion of time in this novel. Time in the novel is flexible, as we have seen in the quoted passages about South America and as we will see below.<sup>158</sup>

In a more abstract sense, cosmopolitan passages allow for an ethical negotiation of migration, namely of leaving home and also searching for home. In the sections below, Mogor and Qara Köz's cosmopolitan passages are discussed in reference to storytelling, the rewriting and reimagining of passages, histories and worlds, and the instability of (historical) narratives, and it is argued that the realm of the imaginary outweighs the historical truth. Cosmopolitan passages combine both a practical and an ethical discussion of migration, and they also offer, in the context of my reading, interesting ways of thinking about passages in the sense of trajectories and their endings in narrative terms.

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<sup>156</sup> I also used the term cosmopolitan passages in my analysis of *Poppies*.

<sup>157</sup> For a discussion of spatial and temporal trajectories, see 5.1. "Cosmopolitan Mirroring. From Fatehpur Sikri to Samarkand, to Florence and Beyond to the New World – and Back".

<sup>158</sup> See 5.1.4 "East, West?", 5.3.1 "Mogor: The Conjuror of Magic and Tales" and 5.3.2 "Qara Köz: The Ghostly Wanderer".

### 5.3.1 Mogor: The Conjuror of Magic and Tales

In Rushdie's novels, "the fictional life of the narrator is fused, interspersed, intertwined and sometimes entangled with his own ancestral history" (Gupta 1). This is indeed the case for Mogor, whose life and dreams are bound to the idea that he belongs to the Mughal family.<sup>159</sup> In this section, it is argued that Mogor's storytelling conjures up imaginary cosmopolitan passages that are shifting in time and fleeting, and that lack narrative logic. By narrating these wishful fantasies, Mogor imagines and thus rewrites the history of the Mughal family so that he will be acknowledged as part of the imperial family.

Gifted with magical skills, Mogor has travelled the world and does not shy away from using whatever method is necessary to attain his goal of meeting Akbar and claiming his rightful heritage. He is the yellow-haired stranger who wears "a coat of coloured leather lozenges" (EF 6), who is "perfectly ready to be discovered, and dazzlingly confident of his powers of charm, persuasion and enchantment" (EF 13). Indeed, magic plays an important role in Mogor's plan to make Akbar listen to his story: he puts a spell on him with perfume (EF 64–65), and most importantly, uses his skills as a storyteller. "Language upon a silvered tongue affords enchantment enough" (EF 75) is the poetically phrased (fictional) proverb that comes to Akbar's mind when he remembers Mogor and his powers of enchantment that require "no potions, familiar spirits or magic wands" (ibid.). Indeed, this phrase points tellingly to the magic and witchcraft practised by the witches and enchantresses that appear throughout the narrative. As the 'proverb' says, their magic is practised mainly via storytelling and is therefore reminiscent of one of the most famous storytellers in literature, Scheherazade, who fought for her life with a thousand and one tales. Indeed, Mogor can be read as a sort of male Scheherazade, for the story saves his life, too.<sup>160</sup> In the dungeon, where he is thrown after his first visit at court, he suddenly hears a sound:

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<sup>159</sup> Mogor shares many characteristics of the trickster figure, a motif that is important in Rushdie's work.

<sup>160</sup> Vassilena Parashkevova argues that like "Don Quixote, Rushdie's itinerant protagonist Mogor dell'Amore weaves and lives through stories of enchantment, which also save his life, thus reiterating Rushdie's well-rehearsed motif of Scheherazadean survival through storytelling" (178).

*There was once a prince. He felt his heart begin to beat again, his blood to flow. His tongue was thick but it could move. His heart boomed like a cannon in his chest. Who possessed enchanted weapons. He had a body again, and words. They removed the blindfold. Four terrifying giants and a woman. He was in another cell but in this place there was a candle burning and a guard in the corner. The most beautiful woman. The story was saving his life. (EF 92)*

The ability to tell stories, so we learn, saves Mogor's life and allows him to enchant the emperor. Because Mogor would like to lay claim to the Mughal house with his secret (namely that he is, or so he believes, Akbar's lost grand-nephew), he begins to unfold the tale of Qara Köz.<sup>161</sup>

In Mogor's tale, the Mughal princess is transported into a space of global history, in which she must use her powers of enchantment in order to survive. According to Mogor, time in *Mundus Novus* is expanded and different from time in Europe and Asia. In the end, when Mogor's story has been told, and several versions of the truth unfolded, it becomes clear that Mogor believes in the magical variant of history in which time is flexible, and therefore, the Qara Köz might very well have been able to be Mogor's mother (rather than his great-grandmother):

'Shelter of the World [sic], the plain fact is that on account of the variability of chronological conditions in *Mundus Novus*,' he told the emperor Akbar by the waters of the Anup Talao, 'which is to say, on account of the unsettled nature of time in those parts, my mother the enchantress was able to prolong her youth, and she might have lived for three hundred years had she not lost heart, had she not lost her belief in the possibility of a homecoming, and permitted herself to catch a fatal sickness so that she could at least join her deceased family members in the hereafter. (EF 336)

Yet Akbar does not believe the magical twist in Mogor's story, and accuses him of falsely trying to claim a Mughal heritage that he cannot possibly have. In Mogor's unlikely version, as seen above, the enchantress puts a spell on time with her remaining powers, so that eventually, she will be able to return home. She marries Ago Vespucci (one of the three Florentine friends) because her lover Argalia is

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<sup>161</sup> See 5.2.1 "The Tale of Qara Köz: Remembering the Other".

killed and she must flee Florence for political reasons. Ago vows to protect her, and together with her slave girl, the Mirror, they leave Europe and travel to the New World, to South America. In Mogor's version, the enchantress remains eternally young and has a son with Ago.

In Akbar's version, Qara Köz has a daughter, Angelica, with Ago, and later on, Ago has a son with this his daughter. Here, incest arguably functions to break the natural genealogy, or as a means to break the chronology of history. The phantom Qara Köz agrees with this version of the story, but corrects Akbar on one point: she was barren, and the girl Angelica was born to the Mirror and Ago. Mogor and his mother, the phantom princess states, are innocent of any crime:

So the truth of it is this. Niccolò Vespucci who was raised to believe that he was born of a princess was the child of the Mirror's child. Both he and his mother were innocent of all deception. They were the deceived. (EF 348)

Akbar is remorseful for having wronged Mogor, but by then, it is too late, for he has already cast Mogor out of his empire.

In tune with shifting time and space, truth is also not monolithic, as is characteristic of postmodern texts. It seems particularly striking, however, that the character that comes up with the most realistic version of the truth is a ghost. In a rhetoric of truth, this makes sense, because Qara Köz has the status of an eyewitness and therefore, it could be argued, has some sort of authentic authority. Moreover, it seems as if the murky past has come back to haunt Akbar – the phantom has come to right a wrong, but she is too late, for the 'truth' does not set anyone free.<sup>162</sup> In conclusion, Mogor's imaginary cosmopolitan passages, which he writes (or narrates) in order to inscribe himself into the familial genealogy, have an open ending. There is no 'true' ending, no closure, for the only acceptable version of the story is one presented by a ghost, an entity that is not stable and realistic in a narrative sense, but also contingent and fleeting, as we will see in the following section.

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<sup>162</sup> The ghost will be discussed in more depth in 5.3.2 "Qara Köz: The Ghostly Wanderer".

### 5.3.2 Qara Köz: The Ghostly Wanderer

As we recall from the discussion of historiography and art, Qara Köz is reinscribed into Mughal history. Because she is dead, she cannot come back physically, so she returns as a ghost. In this section, it is shown that Qara Köz's cosmopolitan passage is marked by the cosmopolitan concerns pertaining to shifting, flexible notions of time and space, as well as to trajectories of migration and community (home and love, in this particular case). Moreover, her journey of 'passage', as narrated by Mogor and by an omniscient narrator,<sup>163</sup> ends in ghostliness. The text thus creates, again, an open ending of a cosmopolitan passage, a refusal to give closure.

Qara Köz's cosmopolitan passages take her through shifting, contingent space and time. Arguably, her destiny is shaped by men and her life lived "in the echo of the cries of others" (EF 125). However, she has an independent streak, and Shah Ismail does not "see the wandering thing in her, the unrooted thing. If a woman turned so easily from one allegiance she might just as readily turn away from the next" (EF 217-218). As a young woman, Qara Köz radically turned her back on the allegiances she has, and takes with her only the Mirror, her slave girl. For many years, her life is marked by survival. It becomes clear that she has to pay an immensely high price for leaving home, for staying with Shah Ismail, and later for abandoning him for Argalia and travelling to Europe and to South America. Repeatedly, her sorrow at being homeless is underlined:

These sadnesses came over her from time to time, but she had never learned to be on her guard against them. Her life had been a series of acts of will, but sometimes she wavered and sank. She had built her life on being loved by men, on being certain of her ability to engender such love whenever she chose to do so, but when the darkest questions of the self were asked, when she felt her soul shudder and crack under the weight of her isolation and loss, then no man's love could help her. As a result she had come to understand that her life

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<sup>163</sup> The question of who actually narrates is tricky, because in some instances, we as readers lose track of Mogor as the storyteller, and it seems that we are listening to an omniscient narrator. However, information is conveyed that must originate from Mogor, in the logic of the text. Therefore, there is certain ambivalence on this issue.



would inevitably ask her to make choices between her love and her self and when those crises came she must not choose love. To do so would endanger her life. Survival must come first. This was the inevitable consequence of having chosen to step away from her natural world. [...] She had made her choice and what followed, followed, and she had no regrets, but she did, from time to time, suffer the black terror. [...] (EF 256)

Hence, her migration and homelessness mean that she is permanently at risk.<sup>164</sup> She dreams of home, but 'home', in the sense of a sanctuary and as a place where she actually *belongs*, has become unattainable. This is accentuated towards the end of Qara Köz's cosmopolitan passage: Mundus Novus, where time and space are dilated and Qara Köz dies because, according to Mogor, she "lost her belief in the possibility of a homecoming, and permitted herself to catch a fatal sickness so that she could at least join her deceased family members in the hereafter" (EF 336). Migration finally means loss and death, themes that we find also in *Assassin*.<sup>165</sup>

The princess's lonely death is saddening, and yet, because this is a story, we must heed Andrea Doria, the Italian seafarer, who

had the feeling that after reading the *Cosmographiae Introductio* and inspecting Waldseemüller's great map the princess was actually entering the book, moving out of the world of earth, air and water and entering a universe of paper and ink, that she would sail across the Ocean Sea and arrive not at *Española* in Mundus Novus but in the pages of a story. (EF 334–335)<sup>166</sup>

This story is of course Mogor's story. Mogor is her narrator, and her destiny in South America is of his making. History is textual, and geography is also written or drawn as "a universe of paper and ink" (EF 334). We are reminded of the fictional nature of this text (the novel) and its emphasis on narrative and

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<sup>164</sup> *Enchantress* is ambivalent about the meaning of 'home'. The idea is omnipresent, but is not really defined or explained explicitly. For the purpose of this reading, then I define home as a place that gives a feeling of *belonging*. This is not necessarily one's place of birth, or the place where one lives.

<sup>165</sup> For my analysis of *Assassin*, see chapter 6 "Cosmopolitan Travellers and their Tales in M.G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song*".

<sup>166</sup> *Española* or, in English, *Hispaniola* (today comprising the two islands Haiti and the Dominican Republic) was where the first European colonies were founded by Christopher Columbus on his voyages in 1492 and 1493.

geographical and historical trajectories. Here also, there is a moment of dissolution: Andrea Doria imagines the princess's cosmopolitan passage as being *rewritten* into a colonial history of conquest. The ending of her story, we are reminded, is fictional, it can be rewritten and reimagined. This is exactly what Rushdie does: he reimagines the princess as a phantom who returns to the pages of the book as a ghostly presence at Akbar's side. She enchants him, just as she has enchanted all other men before him. His imaginary wife Jodha disappears, and Qara Köz takes her place as Akbar's ghostly companion:

The past was meaningless. Only the present existed, and her eyes. Under their irresistible enchantment, the generations blurred, merged, dissolved. [...] He had raised her from the dead and granted her the freedom of the living, had freed her to choose and be chosen, and she had chosen him. As if life was a river and men its stepping stones, she had crossed the liquid years and returned to command his dreams, usurping another woman's place in his *khayal*, his godlike, omnipotent fancy. [...] 'I have come home after all,' she told him. 'You have allowed me to return, and so here I am, at my journey's end. And now, Shelter of the World, I am yours.' Until you're not, the Universal Ruler thought. My love, until you're not. (EF 348–349)

It is interesting to note that the notion of home as a spatially fixed point is dissolved in this novel. For Qara Köz, 'home' is being with Akbar, her family. It does not figure as a specific place (Fatehpur Sikri was built long after her death). Qara Köz desires to return to "her old life, be rejoined to it, and made whole" and to be recognized by Akbar for who she is (EF 295), and this wish is indeed granted to her. Instead of being depicted with pathos (as such a plight might call for), she is admired by Akbar:

No woman in the history of the world had made a journey like hers. He loved her for it and admired her too, but he was also sure that her journey across the Ocean Sea was a kind of dying, a death before death, because death too was sailing away from the known into the unknown. She had sailed away into unreality, into a world of fantasy, which men were still dreaming into being. The phantasm haunting his palace was more real than that flesh-and-blood woman of the past

who gave up the real world for an impossible hope, just as she had once given up the natural world of family and obligations for the selfish choices of love. Dreaming of finding her way back to the point of origin, of being rejoined to that earlier self, she was lost for ever. (EF 330–331)

This passage reiterates the idea of death and journeying into a place that was still 'unreal', a metaphor that, in a certain sense, is also used in *Poppies*.<sup>167</sup> This quotation again underlines the notion of the cosmopolitan passage that ends in death. Interestingly, the phantom is 'reality' to Akbar, not the historical person who once left "her natural world" (EF 331). In my reading, this instance underlines the postmodern strategy of undermining what we perceive as 'real'. Here, there is an inversion of historical 'reality' and the fantastical or imagined. It follows that Qara Köz, although now a ghost, is 'real' to Akbar and attains an ontological status that allows her, at least for the time being, to assume her role as part of the Mughal family and as Akbar's lover.<sup>168</sup> Because the ghost is contingent, there can be no closure. Contingency signals that the narrative is unreliable, and so cosmopolitan passages are indicative not only of a cosmopolitan practice of migration, but also of a narrative that is unending.

In conclusion, then, cosmopolitan passages express the spatial and temporal trajectories of Qara Köz's travels. They allow for a negotiation of the ethical aspects of the human condition such as the loss of home, and the sadness and nostalgia that arise when one is unmoored, to put it metaphorically. Importantly, Qara Köz's passage results in her ghostliness, which means that the shifting notions of time, space and contingency that are part of the definition of cosmopolitanism in this thesis are also expressed on a narrative level. Hence contingent cosmopolitan moments (or passages) do not need a narrative beginning and end because they are outside the narrative. This is also the case, as we recall, with Chi-mei's ghost in *Smoke*.

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<sup>167</sup> In *Poppies*, the *Ibis* sails towards Mauritius, which, in the minds of the indentured labourers on board, is an unreal place too, in the sense that it is completely imagined. For my reading, see chapter three "Cosmopolitan Passages in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*".

<sup>168</sup> She is not Akbar's first imaginary lover: his wife Jodha is also imaginary.

## 5.4 Summary and Intermediate Conclusion

In summary, this chapter addresses three main issues: in 5.1, cosmopolitan mirroring is explored as means of reflecting upon cultural and geographical spaces, on the particular aesthetic style of the text. In 5.2, storytelling and art as cosmopolitan moments come to the fore, and in the last chapter, 5.3, cosmopolitan passages are shown to be means of negotiating contingency and narrative as expressed by the ghost. As a whole, the issues that are addressed focus on the ways in which it is possible to read *Enchantress* as a novel which negotiates cosmopolitanism via the aesthetic means of mirroring, use of aesthetic language and intermediality, and centres thematically on art, storytelling and historiography, global and local histories and geographies. This is achieved by means of characters (such as Qara Köz and Mogor), or by the description and comparison of the two cities, and of the two rulers. Dreams, ghosts and other shifting, fleeting and unsteady entities flit through the pages, and underline the contingent, fleeting and shifting nature of what I have defined as cosmopolitan moments. The cosmopolitan moments analysed here make us understand that *Enchantress* consciously addresses complex, troubling and also contemporary issues, such as migration and homelessness. The pleasure as well as the art of the text is – and this is the beauty of fiction – that these issues are underlined by mirroring, by investment in art and storytelling, by the complex interweaving of narratives and characters.

In conclusion, then, *Enchantress* negotiates cosmopolitanism in many and striking ways. Rushdie underlines the complexities, difficulties and dangers that arise with travel and the global paradigm. This enables one to understand *Enchantress* as a historical novel that also points to (post)modernity and globalization processes that are central to our world today. Reading *Enchantress* with a cosmopolitan lens has shown that the text engages with cosmopolitan issues in unprecedented aesthetic, ethical and practical ways.

## 6. Cosmopolitan Travellers and their Tales in M.G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song*

M.G. Vassanji's novel *Assassin* is set in Gujarat, India, in the United States and in Canada.<sup>169</sup> The part written as an embedded narrative tells the tale of the (fictional) Sufi saint Nur Fazal, and the other part is the story of Karsan Dargawalla, a Sufi descendant, who, as an elderly man, writes his memoirs and investigates his own history and that of his family and ancestor Nur Fazal.<sup>170</sup> The changing geographies and histories of the narrative take into account the conditions of migration, diaspora and the ethics of responsibility towards multiple locations. In this chapter, it is argued that M.G. Vassanji's *Assassin* critically examines the life-worlds of travellers at the intersections and crossroads of an increasingly globalized world. It does so, more specifically, in cosmopolitan moments, by *rewriting* histories through the use of legends, stories, and poetry, as well as through the use of song or *ginans*, the term for the devotional Sufi songs that are so central to this novel. The following subchapters are subsumed under the heading of 'cosmopolitan travellers', because they deal, in one way or another, with the trope of the travellers, with the tales they tell, and with their arrival and departure.

*Assassin* is the first of M.G. Vassanji's novels to be set in India, where Vassanji's family originally came from. Until writing *Assassin*, Vassanji has, in most of his work, written about the history of Indians in East Africa, and their migration to Canada, where Vassanji himself lives today. This is the case, for example, in *The Book of Secrets* (1993) and *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*

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<sup>169</sup> This chapter is based in part on my article "Loss, Belonging and the Vagaries of Migration: Cosmopolitanism in M.G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song*" (2013).

<sup>170</sup> According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Sufism is a "mystical Islamic belief and practice in which Muslims seek to find the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God. It consists of a variety of mystical paths that are designed to ascertain the nature of man and God and to facilitate the experience of divine love and wisdom in the world." In *Assassin*, the first person narrator is the successor to a Sufi shrine in Gujarat. Vassanji himself descends from the Khoja Ismaili sect of Islam, as he explains to Allan Gregg in an interview ("Interview with Allan Gregg").

(2003), both critically acclaimed winners of the Canadian Giller Prize, and his most recent novel, *The Magic of Saida* (2013).

The link to India has always been and still is influential in Vassanji's work; the Indian diasporas in East Africa and Canada, and the related themes of migration and dislocation are prevalent in his writing. The protagonists in his short stories and novels are Indian, African, Asian African and Canadian. India is topical in all of his work, and functions as a reference to the past and to cultural heritage.

Yet it has mostly appeared as a vantage point, and as a place of memory and the past, rarely as a site of narrative action. With *Assassin*, Vassanji wrote his first 'Indian' novel, engaging with India more intensively than in his previous work. Vassanji, who had never been to India during his childhood or his youth, has since 1993 visited it several times. His travel diaries were published in *A Place Within. Rediscovering India* (2008), and they are impressive proof of his wide-ranging knowledge about Indian history and politics. Vassanji states in an interview that Indian history and the understanding of his ancestral roots were important because his Indian origins were always in the background. Furthermore, he says that when he was at university in the United States, "India was a very romantic place, not the software engineering modern place that we think of now, but as a place of romance, of mystery, of mysticism" (*Interview with M.G. Vassanji*). His origins and the popularity of India in his youth seem to have sparked and nourished what was to become a long-standing personal and intellectual engagement with India. This becomes apparent in *Assassin*, in which the stories of the (fictional) medieval saint Nur Fazal and of Karsan Dargawalla, heir to Pirbaag (Nur Fazal's shrine) many centuries later, unfold in an intertwining way.<sup>171</sup>

As mentioned above, *Assassin* is narrated by the elderly Karsan, who, in 2002, the year of his return from North America to India, begins to write down his own life story as well as the story of Nur Fazal, his ancestor. The main emphasis of the plot lies on the events in India. In a sense, these events become that prominent

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<sup>171</sup> Nur Fazal is a fictional character based, as Vassanji explains in the author's note, on the Muslim mystics who arrived in medieval India and were called *pirs* (AS 315).

because they are the most urgent: Karsan's desperate attempts to escape his role as *gaadi-varas* (successor) to his father, who is *saheb*, lord of a medieval Sufi shrine in Gujarat, his return many years later to a destroyed shrine and a dead father, killed during the Gujarat communal riots, and the strained relationship he has with his brother. While abroad, Karsan distances himself from his origins completely to the extent that he changes his name to Krishna Fazal, so as not to be recognized as the *gaadi-varas* (successor).<sup>172</sup> The India he remembers when he is in North America is exclusively that of his childhood, and reminds him of the conflicted relationship with his father. Karsan grows up in the post-Independence years. Nehru, the war with China are mentioned, and discussed briefly. In any case, the ageing first person narrator's interest does not seem too invested in these events. The adventures, desires and suffering of his boyhood are of more interest to him. The portrait of India is individual due to the first-person narration in the form of a memoir. In fact, the nation is not 'narrated' in the sense of a community in reference to Benedict Anderson's imagined communities (1983). There is no national community in *Assassin*; the only community that is relevant is the local and transnational Sufi community that is so decisive for Karsan's life.<sup>173</sup> Still, calling *Assassin* a post-national or even anti-national novel would be imprecise as India is recognized as a national entity. The blood-curdling violence of the communal riots that occurred in Gujarat in 2002 (in the narrative, this is several months before Karsan returns to India) recalls the bleak reality of a country that prides itself on having a secular constitution, and it challenges concepts of national unity and coherence, as well as religious tolerance that belong to the multicultural self-understanding that India represents as a nation state.<sup>174</sup>

In *Assassin*, certain features of the text underline its cosmopolitan perspective. Vassanji discerningly describes the complex human conditions at the

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<sup>172</sup> Karsan is a localized form of Krishna.

<sup>173</sup> The Sufi community in this novel is, in true diasporic fashion, dispersed. Yet faith or spirituality is a binding factor, as becomes clear in my reading of 6.4, where I argue that the spiritual *ginans* guide Karsan back to India. This could also be read as a sort of pull towards the homeland.

<sup>174</sup> On 27 February 2002, a Muslim mob allegedly set fire to a train carrying Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya. In retaliation, communal riots took place in the state of Gujarat, during which thousands were murdered, the majority of them Muslims. The events remain controversial to this day. For additional and more detailed information, see Paul Brass's *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence* (2003), 386–392.

intersections of tradition and modernity, migration and diaspora. The cosmopolitan moments in *Assassin* are evoked by an aesthetic, ethical and practical negotiation of the novel's transnational framework, its investment in questions of migration, diaspora, its concern with a minority community and its localized and transnational history, as well as the ethics of a cosmopolitan responsibility that is expressed in the identification with multiple locations, solidarity and secularism.<sup>175</sup> Precisely because he combines the practical, ethical and aesthetic aspects of migration in this novel, Vassanji rewrites histories and geographies of the Sufi community and of its transnational affiliations. In the following subchapters, these elements are analysed and discussed, and it is contended that in *Assassin*, cosmopolitan moments are developed experientially and ethically, as well as aesthetically.

Generally, my analysis focuses on the text's transnational setting, Karsan and Nur Fazal as wanderers or migrants, the spatial and temporal implications of the narrative, the question of location and responsibility in view of Karsan's heritage, and the importance of the *ginans*. Clearly, these are inextricable concerns and intersect at times. Still, in each subchapter of this analysis, the emphasis lies on a particular interest. In "Interweaving Legends and Histories Across Time: Karsan and Nur Fazal", the relation between the historical and legendary figure Nur Fazal and his contemporary heir, Karsan, is discussed, and it is claimed that the interweaving narrative constitutes a cosmopolitan moment because it reaches across time and space to establish a negotiation of the question of responsibility and solidarity. Secondly, in "The Aesthetics of Arrival and Community in *The Assassin's Song* and *The Enchantress of Florence*", the focus lies on the aesthetics of the traveller, his arrival and the community that accommodates him. In "Coming Home: Assuming Cosmopolitan Responsibility", the question of homecoming and responsibility towards family and heritage is discussed. The comparison with instances from *Enchantress* is interesting because the situation of the arriving traveller is the same, and the aesthetics of these moments are strikingly similar.

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<sup>175</sup> Neelam Srivastava tackles the question of secularism and cosmopolitanism. To her, a cosmopolitan ethic as displayed in Salman Rushdie and Vikram Seth's work is always linked to a secularist stance.



Lastly, in "Songs, Poetry, Legends: The Aesthetics of Literary Cosmopolitanism" the novel's literary cosmopolitanism is of interest: the investment of the text in poetry, Sufi songs and intertextuality that weaves its own particular narrative about loss and belonging.

## 6.1 Interweaving Legends and Histories Across Time: Karsan and Nur Fazal

In this novel, history is a preeminent concern. Namely, one of the main questions that Vassanji is concerned with is how history affects individual lives. 'History' in his novels signifies the narratives that are handed down and transmuted over time, as well as the personal fates that help form these histories. An example of this is *The In-Between Life of Vikram Lall*, a novel about an Indian growing up in Kenya, who becomes part of the corrupt government, flees to Canada, and must remain permanently in exile where he picks up the pieces of his life. In *Assassin*, Karsan returns to a destroyed home, a dead father and a brother who, although originally quite moderate, has become a radical Muslim because of the aggression towards this minority population in India. The communal divide created by the British colonial power, and the partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan, destroys the lives of the fictional Sufi family Dargawalla in the year 2002 (as it did, in reality, the lives of many thousands). The histories that are of interest in this chapter are those of Karsan and of Nur Fazal, his Sufi ancestor, and the way they are interwoven. The past narrative or legend (of the Sufi) influences Karsan's own life and serves as a case in point for a topic that pervades Vassanji's work, namely that the past is in the present.

Therefore, *Assassin* can also be classified as a historical novel.<sup>176</sup> *Assassin* is as much about writing as it is about *rewriting* history into a fictionalized history. Vassanji does not veer from historical facts when it comes to contemporary history. Indeed, in many ways, his approach to history is exacting; the protagonist Karsan's youth is pictured against the backdrop of India in the sixties and much effort is invested in representing the times factually. In terms of the history of migration, it becomes obvious, when looking at the cosmopolitan trajectories undertaken in this novel, that Vassanji's narrative expresses not only the received notions of diaspora histories, although it does include this kind of subject matter. Diaspora histories usually focus on the characters' dilemma between homeland

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<sup>176</sup> Genre issues are discussed in chapter 2.

and new country, tradition and modernity, and the conflict between generations. While these aspects are present in *Assassin*, they are enhanced and complemented by less dichotomous notions of exile and its histories and geographies. The wanderer comes from Persia or Afghanistan and India is framed in its own local geography and history. This is a cosmopolitan gesture in which the story of India before the colonial period is emphasized.<sup>177</sup>

One of the intriguing aspects of *Assassin* is that it has several narrative layers. The most pertinent is, possibly, the narrative present, which is set in 2002, at a research institute in Shimla, the former summer capital of British India. There, the middle-aged Karsan Dargawalla begins writing down his life story and the story of the Sufi Nur Fazal. Both are wanderers: Karsan leaves his family behind, goes to America and betrays his parents in order to liberate himself from his heritage. Nur Fazal leaves home and is "in exile for his beliefs [his] home in the north and west now being ground to dust under hooves of Mongol horses, and drenched in the blood of his folk and his loved ones" (AS 9). This instance constitutes a crossroads between modernity and tradition: Karsan's modern individualism is contrasted by the Sufi's religious wish to uphold his spirituality, for he undertakes his journey at the instigation of his spiritual master (AS 9).

In this subchapter, it is argued that by interweaving and contrasting the two travel narratives or narratives of migration, one modern and one medieval, one a 'memoir' and one a legend, one 'realist' and one magical, a literary aesthetic of cosmopolitanism is created in this novel, which, as a cosmopolitan moment, allows the negotiation of community, belonging, migration and responsibility. The narrative goes back and forth between the past and the present, between Karsan's childhood and youth in the village of Haripir, his time as a young man in Cambridge, his life as a happy father and husband in Canada, and the time of bereavement that follows his young son's death and the separation from his wife. Looking back, Karsan writes that "America of those days is a blurry experience now; it's [sic] narratives interweaving, shifting perspectives. So much happened so

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<sup>177</sup> Salman Rushdie's *Enchantress* (2008), which was published only a year after *Assassin*, shows a similar concern with precolonial history. There, seventeenth century Muslim India is at the centre of interest.

fast" (AS 183). The interweaving narratives and shifting perspectives are mirrored in the narrative structure not only of the 'American' part of the story, but of the whole story. Generally speaking, the narrative strands in *Assassin* are very loosely connected, and several childhood memories – such as the story about his teacher, Mr David, who is fired because of his homosexuality,<sup>178</sup> or the story about his friend the bus driver who knows all about the regions around his village – serve to sketch an impression of the rural community Karsan grows up in rather than to actually contribute to the main narrative.

These shifting levels are only part of the picture, however. Inserted into this narrative is the story of Nur Fazal, a thirteenth century Sufi whose mysterious origins are investigated by Karsan during his stay in Shimla. Nur Fazal is of utmost importance to Karsan as he is the founder of the shrine and his direct ancestor, at least according to tradition. Karsan's father is the *saheb* – the lord and keeper – of Pirbaag, The Shrine of the Wanderer, of this holy man, and the same role awaits Karsan upon his father's death.

Nur Fazal's story begins with his arrival in the city of Patan Anularra in the Gujarat kingdom in c. AD 1260. His rise in the kingdom, his marriage to the Princess Rupade, his years as a wanderer and founder of the shrine are documented in six chapters of *Assassin*. There are several parallels between the lives of Karsan, who has gone to Boston, and Nur Fazal. Both have fled their homelands, both arrive in cities of learning. Nur Fazal goes to Patan Anularra of which it used to be said that

there was not a city within a thousand miles to match its splendour, not a ruler in that vast region not subject to its king. The wealth of its many bazaars came from all corners of the world through the great ports of Cambay and Broach, and from all across Hindustan over land. It boasted the foremost linguists, mathematicians, philosophers, and poets; thousands of students came to study at the feet of its teachers. (AS 7)

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<sup>178</sup> Mr David is the descendant of Africans brought to India by *nawabs* to work as palace guards (AS 90). This inverse migration is interesting, because mostly, Indians went to East Africa to work as indentured labourers for the British colonial power. The Asian community in East Africa is the topic of many of Vassanji's other novels and short stories.

The stranger is grudgingly accepted, and his knowledge respected just enough for it to be “taken and incorporated into theirs” (AS 16). Nur Fazal knows the world, he is familiar with “the glories of Cordoba and Cairo, Baghdad and Bukhara; of the works of Avicenna and Galen, Omar Khayyam and Al-Tusi, Aristotle and Plato” (ibid.). The emphasis on this network of global trade and learning underlines the emphasis on the cosmopolitan aspect of migration, which of course also includes these issues.

In a similar fashion, but approximately eight hundred years later, Karsan comes to Cambridge, Massachusetts, “the legendary city of knowledge and punditry; to its legendary ivy-covered university” (AS 183) at which he has arrived “almost by accident” (ibid.). Evidently, as Karsan is the Sufi’s chronicler, he emphasizes the aspects of Nur Fazal’s life that he thinks are most noteworthy. The fact that Nur Fazal is a wanderer is stressed several times, and his adventures during his wanderings form part of the legends passed down. Here also, the text underlines narratives of migration in medieval India. The juxtaposition and interweaving of these two migration (and assimilation) narratives, which seem completely different because of the eight hundred years, not to mention the formal differences, between them, constitutes a cosmopolitan moment. Both are visitors, or immigrants, and both depend on the hospitality<sup>179</sup> that is extended to them.

Early on in the text, Karsan emphasizes that even as a child, he did not want to be

God, or His trustee, or His avatar – the distinctions often blurred in the realm of the mystical that was my inheritance. Growing up in the village all I wanted to be was ordinary, my ambition, like that of many another boy, to play cricket and break the world batting record for my country. But I had been chosen. (AS 4)

Nur Fazal’s identity is unknown to Karsan; it is protected by a *bol*, a secret mantra that Karsan cannot understand because he is not learned enough. Once Karsan is

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<sup>179</sup> Hospitality is understood here as the obligation of the host to receive the visitor and to give her or him shelter for a determined period of time. The Kantian notion of hospitality is conditional; hospitality is never unlimited, it always refers to a certain period of time. The interesting question is, of course, for how long the visitor is allowed to stay, and for what reasons. See also Jacques Derrida’s *Of Hospitality*. Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to respond (2000).

back in Pirbaag, and finds his old home and the shrine in ruins, he decides to retire to Shimla for a few weeks. There, he begins working on his chronicle of Nur Fazal, which forms the narrative that intersects with his own story. The intricate weaving of the two narratives stands for their inextricability, for the fact that Karsan's own present, identity and history are bound with that of the past legend of the Sufi. Karsan begins a quest for the identity of the Sufi, 'true' being, according to his understanding, the historical truth. It is thanks to his scholarly curiosity, as well as to his personal concern, that Karsan finds out that Nur Fazal belonged to the "controversial Muslim sect of the Assassins", a much-feared Muslim group of heretics based in contemporary Afghanistan (AS 302).<sup>180</sup> Nur Fazal was

a Muslim mystic who had escaped persecution in a war-torn Near East and was given refuge by the Gujarati king Vishal Dev, whose reign coincided with the Mongol destruction of the Assassin strongholds. He invoked Indian gods and mystical ideas freely in his teachings, and according to legend he had once sided with Hindu Brahmins against orthodox Muslim mullah during a debate at a royal court. Not one Arabic prayer had he prescribed for his followers. These ways could only characterize an extremely nonconforming Muslim sectarian, a heretic. An Assassin. (AS 304)

As a historian, Karsan is convinced that this corresponds to an approximate historical truth. Yet a feeling of ambivalence and uncertainty troubles him, for he states that "[i]f only the bol in my mouth would confirm this. But it cannot, and I must imagine" (AS 304). At this point, it becomes clear that the rather cryptic title

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<sup>180</sup> Calling the Assassins by this name has an interesting etymological history. According to Farhad Daftary, "[t]he western tradition of calling the Nizari Isma'ilis by the name of Assassin can be traced to the Crusaders and their Latin chroniclers as well as other occidental observers who had originally heard about these sectarians in the Levant. The name, or more appropriately the misnomer, Assassin, which was originally derived under obscure circumstances from variants of the word hashish, the Arabic name for a narcotic product, and which later became the common occidental term for designating the Nizari Isma'ilis, soon acquired a new meaning in European languages; it was adopted as a common noun meaning murderer" (3). This aspect has to be considered in the discussion on Mansoor's role in the novel; i.e. his dubious activities after his radicalization as a Muslim.

of the novel refers to the *ginans* of Nur Fazal, the Persian assassin.<sup>181</sup> Through the linking of the song and the (fictional) historical figure of Nur Fazal, the title underlines the importance that poetic forms and the writing and tradition of history bear for each other in this text.<sup>182</sup> For Karsan, the rediscovery of history is a means for discovering his identity and an approach by which he is able to identify with his roots. His modern rationale will not allow him to believe in the founding myth, yet he is able to accept, at least to a certain extent, his identity as the inheritor and *saheb* of Pirbaag.

In conclusion, the rewriting of history is not only but also *literary* too,<sup>183</sup> because Karsan writes fictional history, namely a legend. In this novel, then, history functions as a reference to a past that is personal and localized, and bound to the community on a small scale.

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<sup>181</sup> Many of the Sufis who came from the North were invaders, who were harboured and supported by the kings. Sufis were not just peaceful men of faith who introduced new syncretic thought into the region of North India. The choice of the title of the novel - *The Assassin's Song* - indicates a correlation with the present Hindu-Muslim divide in India.

<sup>182</sup> The poetics of history - the rewriting of the Sufi legend by Karsan - constitute a moment of cosmopolitan aesthetics in this text that is complemented by the insertion of *ginans* and poetry. This is discussed in more detail in 6.4.

<sup>183</sup> I am aware, of course, of Hayden White who argues that history is a narrative and therefore always has a fictional nature. See for example *Essays on History, Literature, and Theory: 1957 - 2007* (2010).

## 6.2 The Aesthetics of Arrival and Community in *The Assassin's Song* and *The Enchantress of Florence*

In *Smoke*, *Poppies*, *Assassin* and *Enchantress*, travellers and travelling are central issues. In fact, most of the main protagonists are travellers or migrants, Akbar in *Enchantress* being the notable exception. Nur Fazal the Sufi in *Assassin* and Mogor dell'Amore in *Enchantress* are traveller figures who particularly resemble each other because they *arrive* at a city, and in order to be allowed to be part of the city community, they are tested. This chapter deals with the cosmopolitan moment of arrival and hospitality, and investigates otherness and difference and processes of inclusion and exclusion.

It seems to me that the analogy between Nur Fazal and Mogor is so striking that it merits a closer investigation.<sup>184</sup> True, as mentioned above, there are travellers in Ghosh's novels too, yet the situation of arrival is specific to *Assassin* and *Enchantress* and as such does not occur in the other two novels.<sup>185</sup> Admittedly, in *Smoke* there is a similar narrative situation, i.e. that of a traveller arriving at a city: Robin Chinnery, the son of a British artist and an Indian woman, tries his luck as a painter in Canton's Fanqui-town.<sup>186</sup> Yet while the narrative situation has similar aspects, the aesthetics of arrival differ from those we find in *Enchantress* and *Assassin*. In this chapter, the parallels concerning the situation of arrival, hospitality and community will be analysed and discussed in the framework of aesthetics of these cosmopolitan moments as they relate to othering and community in particular. In this cosmopolitan moment, the hospitality that is extended by the community, and the community's politics of inclusion and exclusion, are negotiated. In particular, it is relevant to compare the aesthetics of arrival in these two novels, because they show similarities that are intriguing in relation to the questions asked here.

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<sup>184</sup> Karsan also arrives at a city, of course, but the aesthetics of his narrative do not coincide in the same ways as they do with Nur Fazal and Mogor, which is why he is left out of this discussion.

<sup>185</sup> See chapters on *Poppies* and *Smoke*.

<sup>186</sup> Literally translated as foreigner city, *Fanqui-town* was the foreigner's enclave in Imperial China's harbour trade city of Canton, one the main places of action in Ghosh's *Smoke*.



*Enchantress* and *Assassin*, with their Renaissance, Mughal and medieval narratives, contain elements of characterization and narrative that are similar from a narrative as well as from an aesthetic point of view. In this chapter, the similarities (and differences) in the arrival of the two characters Nur Fazal and Mogor are investigated. Of interest is the situation of their arrival in Patan Anularra and Fatehpur Sikri respectively, and their reception by the rulers and the townspeople.

The legend of the Sufi begins with the narration of his arrival in the city of Patan Anularra (AS 7). The Sufi, like the Mogor dell'Amore or Niccolò Vespucci, is a stranger to this new and foreign place:

In this once glorious but now a little nervous city there arrived one morning with the dawn a mysterious visitor. He was a man of such striking visage that on the highways which he had recently travelled men would avert their faces when they crossed his path, then turned to stare long and hard at his back as he hastened on southward. He was medium in stature and extremely fair; he had an emaciated face with a small pointed goatee, his eyes were green; and he wore the robe and turban of a Sufi. His name he gave as Nur Fazal, of no fixed abode. He entered the city's northern gate with a merchant caravan and was duly noted by his attire and language as a wandering Muslim mendicant and scholar originally from Afghanistan and Persia, and possibly a spy of the powerful sultanate of Delhi. (AS 8)

Mogor's looks and bearing are equally ostentatious. We recall that Mogor cuts a conspicuous figure when entering Fatehpur Sikri, with his long blond hair like a woman's, wearing a "coat of coloured leather lozenges" (EF 6) and riding on a bullock cart,

but instead of being seated on the rough cushions therein he stood up like a god, holding on to the rail of the cart's latticework wooden frame with one insouciant hand. A bullock-cart ride was far from smooth, the two-wheeled cart tossing and jerking to the rhythm of the animal's hoofs, and subject, too, to the vagaries of the highway beneath its wheels. A standing man might easily break his neck. [...] The driver had long ago given up shouting at him, at first taking the foreigner for a fool – if he wanted to die on the road, let him do so, for no man in this country would be sorry! Quickly, however, the driver's scorn had given way to

grudging admiration. The man might indeed be foolish, once could go so far as to say that he had a fool's overly pretty face and wore a fool's unsuitable clothes – a coat of coloured leather lozenges, in such heat! – but his balance was immaculate, to be wondered at. (AS 6)

In both instances, the text highlights the particularities of these travellers: they both stand out in dress as well as in character: the Sufi has a “striking visage” (AS 8) and Mogor makes a god-like impression in his many-coloured coat on the bullock-cart. Nur Fazal, we read, is “of no fixed abode” (AS 6) and Mogor too, although from Florence, has roamed the world for a long time. In attitude, they are both idiosyncratic, and so it is not surprising that they are perceived as foreigners by those who see them – in Mogor's case the driver of the cart, and in Nur Fazal's case an unnamed townspeople who immediately classify him as a possibly threatening ‘other’ (a spy) due to his dress and language. In both cases, there is a reaction to their arrival that is not overtly hostile, but also not particularly welcoming.

Both characters strive to access the core of power – the king's court – as quickly as possible. The Sufi gains access to the raja's court with the use of his magical powers: “somehow the Sufi, unseen at the gate – such were his powers – gained entrance and make his appearance inside” (AS 8). Mogor, under the belief that the magical potions he is anointed with are making this possible, gains access to Akbar's court. He is deceived, however, for Akbar has learned of his trick and lets him in out of curiosity; Mogor's faith in magic is thus erroneous. Both carry with them the secret of their origins. While Mogor desperately wishes to be heard, Nur Fazal does not wish to reveal his secret, for the sect of the Assassins is much feared because of its violent methods. In a sense, they both hide their ‘true’ identity; as the driver of the bullock cart thinks, “of seeking to be not only himself but a performance of himself as well, and, the driver thought, around here everybody is a little bit that way too, so maybe this man is not so foreign to us after all” (AS 6). It is interesting to note that the aspect of *performance* is what makes Mogor seem less foreign. Arguably, Mogor and Nur Fazal both perform the role of the foreigner that is given to them when entering the respective cities by taking on the challenges presented to them, as will be discussed later.

The first impression of the city is imposing. In *Assassin*, we read that Nur Fazal stands

with mild amazement beside a pale blue man-made lake, contained by banks of red stone painted with designs in pink and blue; in the middle was an ornate pavilion where played and relaxed royal women in bright clothes and long black hair, the tinkle of their pretty voices echoing off the water like birdsong. (AS 8)

This idyllic description is echoed by that of the lake in Sikri, which, as we read in the first lines of *Enchantress*, seems not blue but golden:

In the day's last light the glowing lake below the palace-city looked like a sea of molten gold. A traveler coming this way at sunset – this traveler, coming this way, now, along the lakeshore road – might believe himself to be approaching the throne of a monarch so fabulously wealthy that he could allow a portion of his treasure to be poured into a giant hollow in the earth to dazzle and awe his guests. (EF 5)

Even to Mogor, who has travelled far and wide, Sikri “was one of the grand cities of the world, larger, it seemed to his eye, than Florence or Venice or Rome, larger than any town [he] had ever seen. He had visited London once; it too was a lesser metropolis than this” (EF 8).

It is interesting to note that the legend of the Sufi also begins with the description of the city of Patan Anularra as a city of splendour and power:

It used to be said of Patan Anularra in the Gujarat kingdom of medieval India that there was not a city within a thousand miles to match its splendour, not a ruler in that vast region not subject to its king. (AS 7)

The city stands as a unity of power and beauty in both cases, and the travellers must pass the threshold and eventually pass tests in order to gain temporary entrance into the community. The city is the expression of a metaphoric community and of royal and imperial power. The aesthetics of this metaphor convey beauty at this moment of arrival; the city is dazzling, in its own way, and seen with wonder by the travellers.

The challenge for the travellers is not, however, to stand outside the city walls and to admire the city, but to enter it and be accepted. In *Enchantress*, the city's welcome for strangers happens on a public place that is commonly avoided by city people, because it is

for ignorant newcomers who did not know the real price of things. [...] But tired travelers, not knowing the plan of the city, and reluctant, in any case, to walk all the way around the outer walls to the larger, fairer bazaar, had little option but to deal with the merchants by the elephant gate. (EF 9)

This is an inhospitable welcome to travellers, to say the least; while not openly hostile, the city inhabitants do not mind that newcomers are ripped off. Hospitality is not writ large in this centre of power, it seems.

It is therefore not surprising to learn that in order to become part of the city community, the travellers must undergo a sort of rite of passage or test, which they can only pass by using their magical skills. In Patan Anularra, the Sufi must deal with the priest Darmasinha's stick, that has driven many visitors out of town:

Casting an angry, disdainful look at the visitor, with a mighty grunt and a heave he threw the staff up. Everyone turned to follow its rise. High above the assembly it hung suspended, awaiting a command. "Beat the impure one!" roared Darmasinha, pointing a finger at the Sufi. "Whip him! Cast him off!" The long stick paused in midair, eager to obey its master's bidding; the crowd held its breath. The king smiled broadly. Then the stick drifted down. It moved a length towards the Sufi and paused. Then it turned on one end, approached the startled Darmasinha, and started beating him on the backside, driving him away. (AS 13)

After the Sufi has proved more powerful than the priest, the Sufi is put to the test once more, this time with a snake charmer. Again, the Sufi wins by willing the snake to leave the body of the writhing woman (AS 14). After this, the Sufi is left alone, and stays in Patan Anularra for a while and is welcomed at the raja's court.

Equally, Mogor must pass a test; in his case, he has to calm an angry elephant:

But he stretched out his hand towards the elephant, and all who were present saw the elephant become absolutely quiet and calm, and allow the man to caress him; all who were present, high-born and low, gasped aloud as the elephant tenderly wound his trunk around the prisoner and raised him up." (EF 97)

Mogor also succeeds thanks to his magical powers. After passing the test, the Sufi and Mogor are accepted *temporarily* into the city community. The initial othering that takes place (they are perceived as foreign, and they must pass a test) turns into a *conditional* and temporary acceptance. This is hospitality in the sense of a limited acceptance into a community that does not, in the end, ever quite stop the process of othering. Grappling with the concept of subjectivity, the emperor Akbar thinks about his city and its inhabitants as a plural community that consists of "being[s] in the world" (31):

Perhaps this idea of self-as-community was what it meant to be a being in the world, any being, such a being being, after all, inevitably a being among other beings, a part of the beingness of all things. Perhaps plurality was not exclusively a king's prerogative, perhaps it was not, after all, his divine right. (EF 31)

Akbar tries to imagine that his subjects, too, might think of themselves in plurality (as he usually does, being the emperor and thus all-encompassing):

They saw themselves perhaps, as plural entities made up of themselves plus their children, mothers, aunts, employers, co-worshippers, fellow workers, clans and friends. They, too, saw their selves as multiple, one self that was the father of their children, another that was their parents' child; they knew themselves to be different with their employers than they were at home with their wives – in short, they were all bags of selves, bursting with plurality. (EF 32)

By analogy, it is possible to argue that if the individual consists of several selves already, hence has many markers of identity, then the same can be assumed for the community he or she lives in. In *Assassin*, Patan Anularra is described as a city of learning (AS 7), and is a wealthy trade hub in a global network of medieval trade, the "wealth of its bazaars came from all corners of the world through the

great ports of Cambay and Broach" (ibid.). The communities are not unified in the sense of a singular identity or homogeneity; in fact, their heterogeneity is underlined in several instances in the novels. The travellers' first impression of the city that emanates unified power is undermined and rewritten into a narrative of difference, plurality and heterogeneity. The city changes from being a metaphorical community that represents unity and power (through its aesthetics) to a city that is open. The city is revealed as a *contingent* community, where the homeless travellers find a temporary abode, but temporary it must be. Hospitality does not last forever, it is in one way or another temporally determined.<sup>187</sup> Therefore, for different reasons, Mogor and Nur Fazal leave the cities they have gained access to. In the end, Mogor does not gain the emperor's full trust, for Akbar does not believe the secret story he discloses (his genealogical descent from the emperor's family). Nur Fazal leaves Patan Anularra with the king's blessing and founds Pirbaag, the Garden of the Wanderer.

In conclusion, community is expressed here as being defined by conditional and temporary belonging rather than by a shared identity. The negotiation of issues concerning community, hospitality and othering in these two novels is underlined by the aesthetics of the text, mainly by the descriptions of the travellers and of the cities they arrive at. Moreover, the tests they must pass strongly resemble each other (manifestations of magic are necessary to overcome the challenges posed). Departure, interestingly, is quite different. Mogor is thrown out of the country, while the Sufi leaves to found a dynasty. In this cosmopolitan moment, issues are discussed that are essential to the ideas of cosmopolitanism, namely community, the negotiation of otherness and sameness. As argued before, cosmopolitan moments do not necessarily have 'positive' outcomes in the sense that they are affirmative: in some instances, the discussion of these cosmopolitan themes is dissentive.

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<sup>187</sup> See chapter 2 for a discussion of hospitality.

### 6.3 Coming Home: Assuming Cosmopolitan Responsibility

When Karsan leaves his family to go to the U.S., he does not think that he will not ever see either his mother or his father again. When his mother falls ill, he is still a student and resists his father's attempts to make him come back. His father will only pay for a one-way ticket because he wants Karsan to come home: the *gaadivaras* is expected to return. Angrily, Karsan refuses the one-way ticket home. The dread he feels about succeeding his father is the main motivation for his flight from Haripir to Boston, when he is adamant about leaving everything behind, and being free:

To walk the giddy streets of Boston-Cambridge, breathe deeply each morning the sheer exhilaration of freedom. Freedom from the iron bonds of history; freedom from the little shrine by the dusty roadside with its rituals and songs, in a little village in which my father was avatar, guru, and god; freedom from a country constantly lacerating itself, digging old wounds until the pus-blood stench was overwhelming. (AS 172)

The past has a very real influence on Karsan's life, and he feels the burden of history heavy on his shoulders. Ostensibly, the negotiation of history is one of the main themes of this novel; in this particular case, history refers to Karsan's family roots, the syncretic traditions passed on from father to son. The traditions of the Sufi sect are described in much detail: the shrine and its garden, the rites and in particular the songs, which will be discussed in more detail below. On the one hand, then, there is an investment in these local, rooted and vividly described traditions.<sup>188</sup> On the other hand, the origin of these traditions is shown to lie elsewhere, and fragments of a medieval legend of travel are a narrative within the main narrative set in the twentieth century; furthermore, due to twentieth century migration, the members of this transnational community are spread all over the

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<sup>188</sup> Vassanji has visited the Sufi shrines of his own family, as he himself is also the descendant of a Sufi family belonging to the Khoja Isma'ilis: "I went to some of these shrines, because they connect to my heritage. And I went out of curiosity, just to make a connection with the place where some holy man was buried whose songs I had grown up singing. So I went to those places. That I suppose, inspired, later, me to set a novel there [sic], because the burden of tradition in such a place is just huge" (Vassanji on *Book Lounge*).

globe, so that, in the end, it is impossible for Karsan to escape his role as *gaadivaras*, for even when in Cambridge, he is recognized and asked for a blessing. Thus, the novel emphasizes both local history (Sufi community and its history, life in the U.S., Canada) as well as the relevance of transnational aspects. In this subchapter, it is argued that Karsan assumes a cosmopolitan responsibility when returning home and becoming the next *saheb*.

The characters' lives are touched, even destroyed, by religious political violence. Moreover, the narrator harshly condemns political violence. This indicates that *Assassin* is part of a contemporary literature that negotiates and stages the horrors of communal violence.<sup>189</sup> Interestingly, the Sufi Nur Fazal belonged to the sect of the Assassins before becoming a guru: these possibly violent origins echo the violent present, in which Mansoor, Karsan's brother, becomes part of a radicalized Muslim group after his father's death during the 2002 Gujarat riots. Certainly, communal riots are emphasized in the novel. In the first chapter, Karsan describes the bleak situation:

But now the shrine lies in ruins, a victim of the violence that so gripped our state recently, an orgy of murder and destruction of the kind we euphemistically call 'riots.' Only rats visit the Sufi now, to root among the ruins. My father is dead and so is my mother. And my brother militantly calls himself a Muslim and is wanted for questioning regarding a horrific crime. (AS 5)

The significance of his father's death is manifold. Not only has Karsan not been able to be reunited with him, he has also nominally become the new *saheb*, lord of the shrine, a fate he now accepts after having run from it for many years. At the same time, however, it is only his experience of migration and the feelings of loss and lack of belonging that accompanied the last years of his life in Canada that enable him to accept this role. Upon his return to India, he begins to write down the history of the Sufi, thus taking on the role of historian and chronicler of a world that has come to interest him: "I had received it as legend and myth, magic

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<sup>189</sup> One noteworthy novel is Raj Kamal Jha's *Fireproof* (2006), in which the 2002 Gujarat riots are staged in a striking magical realist and intermedial style. See Gabriele Rippl, "Erzählte Fotos. Foto-Text-Beziehungen in Raj Kamal Jhas Roman *Fireproof* (2006)" (2008) and Annie Cottier, "Haunted Whispers From the Footnotes: Life Writing in Raj Kamal Jha's *Fireproof* (2013).



and mystery, all special to us; now I see it more as a real, historical period and myself as a thread in its endless extension" (AS 63). He comes to the conclusion, as mentioned above, that Nur Fazal belonged to a group of Muslim heretics:

The Assassins, also called the Ismailis, were a mystical Shia sect who disdained the outer forms of worship and the Muslim laws of Sharia for inner spiritual truths. They operated from well-defended, hard-to-access mountain fortresses in western Iran, and they were loathed for their heresy and feared for their penchant for murdering their enemies with impudent and terrifying facility, either as defence against persecution or to intimidate through terror, depending on your viewpoint. The great Saladin is said to have checked for hidden Assassins under his bed before lying down to sleep. They were secretive but had an extensive network of followers, and are believed to have sent their dais, or missionaries, all the way to India to teach their esoteric brand of the Islamic faith. (AS 303)

Communalism is highlighted mainly as part of a family tragedy, although some passages indicate the narrator's political public concern. The narrative emphasis lies on the medieval past, and on post-Independence India – the colonial period is rarely dwelt on, and is mainly relevant in relation to the history of communal violence. In *A Place Within. Rediscovering India*, Vassanji shows a secular sensibility regarding the communal riots in India, and attributes his reaction to the violence to his status as a newcomer to India: "To be as resigned to the violence as many of my new Indian friends and acquaintances were, I realized, I would have to be born here. I was not" (4).<sup>190</sup> Karsan, equally horrified by the communal violence, writes that

perhaps this madness to try to understand the ungraspable is an affliction incurred from having lived away so long, in a culture where a rational answer is only a matter of effort. I have become naive, forgotten the skill of blinking at the right moment, letting the unspeakable pass away. (AS 263)

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<sup>190</sup> Virginia Richter makes a similar argument in her article on Zoë Wicomb, stating that "Wicomb's critique of internal 'cleansings' in the anti-apartheid movement [...] is perhaps made possible by the freedom physical distance can give. Despite the intensity of pain and trauma conveyed in her fiction, there is also a sense of detachment that can be aligned with cosmopolitanism" (375).

Arguably, the fact that he has been away allows him to assume a detached perspective. Through the experience of travel and migration, and other locations he has belonged to, he has gained the distance necessary for him to accept his role as *saheb*. He is an atheist, so he will not take sides, either religious or political, for that matter, although he is caught in the middle of Hinduism and Islam because of his Sufi ancestry.<sup>191</sup> His belief in secularism, coupled with an atheistic stance (which he acquired as a boy at home, not when he was abroad), gives him a sense of responsibility towards the shrine and its community and so, despite his scepticism, he decides to accept his father's succession. Thus, a cosmopolitan ethics of responsibility and solidarity is foregrounded in Karsan's assumption of this role which was made possible by the narrator's previous diasporic situation and the experience of loss and rootlessness. His cosmopolitan experience enables him to assume this responsibility, even if it is in a new and personal way, yet with a certain detachment:

I am the caretaker of Pirbaag [...] There are those who will touch my feet or my sleeves, ask for blessings. I flinch, internally, and try to cope without wounding [...] But as I attend to these people, unable to disappoint, to pull my hand or my sleeve away, as I listen in sympathy and utter a blessing, a part of me detaches and stands away, observing. Asking, Are you real? The answer is not simple. But here I stop, to begin anew. For the call has come for me, again, and as Bapu-ji would say, this time I must bow. (AS 314)

Vassanji's cosmopolitanism might very well be of a "'located' nature, whose structures of feeling look beyond the nation while retaining a sense of its rights and responsibilities" (Srivastava 169). In other words, responsibility in *Assassin* is not linked to a national community, but to community that is at once local and transnational. In conclusion, Karsan's sense of responsibility constitutes a cosmopolitan moment in the text because it is both – local and transnational, and because assuming responsibility for one's own community is as much a cosmopolitan concern as assuming responsibility for those who are other.

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<sup>191</sup> The fact that Karsan is of Sufi ancestry is certainly a weighty statement concerning the Hindu-Muslim violence in the novel. Due to his religious beliefs, Karsan's father consciously refuses to take sides. Karsan refuses because of his cosmopolitan detachment; as an outsider coming home, he is shocked by the events but will not align his loyalties.

#### 6.4 Songs, Poetry, Legends: The Aesthetics of Literary Cosmopolitanism

*The Assassin's Song*: the title of Vassanji's novel is already indicative of the importance that literary forms and the writing and tradition of history have in this novel. In addition, in the epilogue, there is an excerpt from *Die Sonette an Orpheus* by Rainer Maria Rilke: "And song is not desire, so you taught. / Nor is it courtship, nor is it courtship's prize / Song is being." Vassanji's interest in various literary forms expands into a discussion of cultural influences that emerge when migration occurs, when the knowledge of, in this case, English literature and Sufi mystical poetry is combined in one person.<sup>192</sup> Arguably, Vassanji is making a point about the productivity and, at the same time, the complexity and ambivalence of sites of cultural production. In this subchapter, the aim is to investigate the aesthetics of the text in regard to poetry, songs and legends as they occur in the text. This subchapter deals with literary forms and how their use in this novel establishes a literary cosmopolitan practice.

It is not surprising that, due to Vassanji's investment in history, the *ginans* of Karsan's community are traced back to their very early form, when they were sung by the Sufi Nur Fazal (*Assassin* 123). *Ginans* are devotional songs that express the desire for union with God. Karsan, a student at Harvard, recognizes with scholarly enthusiasm their link to the metaphysical and Romantic poets, and writes to his father about his discovery that the metaphysical poets used extended metaphors in devotional poems, just as *ginans* have long metaphors over several verses (190). Reading Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*, Karsan discovers the world and its proportions, and he begins to reevaluate his origins, writing to his father that

living in a small place like Haripir we tend to forget that the world out there is much bigger and there is nothing special about us. Or that all peoples are special in their own way. Or that we are all the same. And it seems that I had to come to America to learn about myself! (AS 193)

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<sup>192</sup> The Sufi mystics in South Asia created the first true religious poetry. They blended classical Islamic motifs with popular legends and used popular rather than Persian metres. Their poetry expressed divine love and mystical union through the metaphors of profane love and union, thus often resembling ordinary worldly poetry. Nonmystical poetry made use of the Sufi vocabulary, thus producing an ambiguity that is "felt to be one of the most attractive and characteristic features of Persian, Turkish, and Urdu literatures. Sufi ideas thus permeated the hearts of all those who hearkened to poetry" [www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/571823/Sufism](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/571823/Sufism).

Telling his father that he had to come to America to learn about himself meant taking a risk: "That was the start of my undoing. Teaching Keats to my father" (*Assassin* 193) and he compares himself to the discoverers Columbus and Archimedes, who would not have been able to keep quiet about their discoveries, wryly adding that "Archimedes of course paid for his folly with his head" (*Assassin* 193). In this example, as in others, it is important to bear in mind that Karsan is writing about his younger and more enthusiastic self, with a retrospective distance and irony.

The fact that the young Karsan feels like Columbus clearly refers to a postcolonial subtext. In a Western understanding of history, Columbus is traditionally the great discoverer; in a postcolonial approach, he constitutes a reference to the exploitation and genocide that came with colonialism. This naïve approach to the discovery of the world is in tune with Karsan's belief that he will find freedom in America, yet another strong colonial referent that forms part of the myth of America, as is the discovery of Columbus's new world. However, this enthusiasm is touched by ambivalence, for Karsan writes

I was terrified, then, of drifting into nothingness, into an endless darkness, anchorless; without belief, without love; without a people or nation to go home to. Is that what freedom was? [...] I did not want that long-distance navigator [ref. to his father], I would take the terror of the unknown with the thrill of discovering myself and the world. (AS 189)

Karsan's investment in poetry continues, although he is aware that he is treading on dangerous ground. He compares Keats and the *ginans*, who, he is convinced are "as beautiful and satisfying as the best of Keats" (AS 231), and he discovers that there is a "mystical strain in English poetry that seemed amazingly familiar to [his] Indian mind" (AS 231). With his reading of poetry, Karsan translates between his culture of origin and his newly found enthusiasm for English poetry, and arguably, does this in order to survive, in reference to Bhabha and Comaroff who say that "[t]he postcolonial endorses a vernacular cosmopolitanism that has to translate between cultures and across them in order to survive" ("Speaking of Postcoloniality" 23). The fact that Karsan has profound knowledge of two

literatures enables a new insight into literary texts that transcends national borders, yet which is bound to the local.

While Karsan's interest in the metaphysical poets subsides after a while, this episode marks the beginning of his estrangement from home. His father, alarmed at his son's increasing intellectual distance from the shrine and the beliefs of the community, tries unsuccessfully to make him come home. Seemingly by chance, Premji, a man from his community, contacts Karsan. After having gone to a prayer meeting, Karsan is touched by the reverent followers who kiss his hand, yet he feels smothered: "But I couldn't help a feeling of my world closing in on me to suffocate me [...] I would not be anybody's godman in America" (AS 216).

Here, the world is closing in on him, rather than opening up, a sentiment triggered by his reading. It is interesting to see that the distancing from his origins is paralleled by his increasing scepticism concerning the mythology that explains the Sufi's story. Karsan begins to suspect that these are mere superstitions "based on a historical episode become vague and coloured by mythology" (AS 205). Although he estranges himself intellectually, Karsan never manages to disentangle himself emotionally from home. The diasporic condition is only temporarily satisfying – in his first years as a student, and later on, when he is married and has a son. In-between experiences a severe crisis: the shy but enthusiastic young immigrant Karsan falls into a severe depression, and harbours a fear of loneliness and a feeling of general angst. After he has overcome this crisis (with the help, in true seventies fashion, of a Freudian psychiatrist) he severs his last bonds with home by telling his father that he will not succeed him (AS 222). Thus banishing himself, Karsan is lucky at first: He finds a new home with Marge (whose given name is Mira,<sup>193</sup> and who has parents of Indian and American descent), and they have a son, Julian. But although he never entirely leaves Pirbaag, or it, him, the truth is that he "did find another life there, in North America, one of personal happiness and freedom" (AS 243). When singing to his son, suddenly the *ginans* crop up unexpectedly:

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<sup>193</sup> Mira, or Meera, is a fifteenth century saint who worshipped Krishna. The name Karsan is a local, rural version of Krishna. This reference is hardly a coincidence, of course: it is a conscious (if hidden to most readers) marker of the parallels in Karsan and Nur Fazal's lives.

to my astonishment when I unthinkingly recited to Julian a few simple ditties of Pir Bawa, the boy began to sing them with unswaying vigour. *Anand anand kariyo rikhisaro...* be happy, great souls, you have the guru. [...] The ginans of my childhood, the happy ones at least, had become my son's nursery rhymes. Did this make me nervous, my darling child echoing the songs of Pirbaag? Sometimes. But I could take comfort in the fact that their words could not possibly mean anything to him. (AS 243)

There is ambivalence in Karsan in regard to the *ginans*: they remind him of his happy childhood; yet he feels the need to protect his son from Pirbaag and his ancestry. The internal conflict that Karsan feels – on the one hand he loves his people, on the other he wants to be free from his inherited role and the burden of history – is illustrated in this ambivalence concerning the songs. Arguably, in this instance, as in the ones discussed above, the *ginans* accompany Karsan, even in times of crisis: “I would sing – sing those ginans I knew so well; their alienness of melody and language driving [my friends] up the wall, as they described it” (AS 217).

To come back to the function of the *ginans* in the text: they are what could be called a device for weaving between past and present, and between different places. One last and notable example is when Karsan hears the *ginans* of his youth being sung in the basement of a Korean church in the town where he lives. A few years after first having walked by this church and hearing an “odd-sounding chorus” (AS 255) from inside, he walks by it again and, going downstairs, hears the *ginans* being sung by the congregation:

Do I believe in miracles? No, but...But what? This, that a number of random-seeming events can connect themselves into a sequence that leads you to a remarkable outcome. A miracle? Perhaps only miraculous. (AS 254)

The *ginans* initiate Karsan's reconciliation with his father. Hence, they are relevant to Karsan in many aspects of his personal life; they accompany him and never quite let go of him. As markers of his childhood and home, they form a significant part of the cultural background that is drawn in the novel. Thus, the polarity of diaspora and home is questioned; by a narrative weaving of the *ginans*, and by the

insertion of 'Western' literary texts and Indian ones, all discussed at the same level, literature attains the status of an aspirational cohesion and equality – in daringly utopian words, an approximation of cultures is attained that renders them equal in status.

In this regard: another cosmopolitan moment in the text is the dissolution of the dichotomies of 'East' and 'West'. India, during the narrator's childhood, and even later, is associated with mysticism: the mystical Sufi, magic and the belief in the supernatural, whereas America is associated with freedom. This is asserted several times in the narrative, and voiced quite explicitly by the narrator, as the examples above have shown. Karsan acquires a 'rational' perspective in America; he does not believe in "miracles" (AS 254) but will acknowledge that "a number of random-seeming events can connect themselves into a sequence that leads you to a remarkable outcome" (ibid.). Rationality is in America, superstition in India: these stereotypical colonial conceptions of East and West reoccur, yet they lose importance and are finally dissolved in the reality of Karsan's new life in Haripir, where he manages to assume the responsibility of the *saheb* with his resolution to "construct a shrine of [his] own out of the ashes of Pirbaag; a bookish shrine of songs and stories" (AS 271).

In conclusion, literature and history, so pivotal to Karsan's life and interests, become a basis for the new life and for his role as a Sufi leader. His decision to "make every little item that has survived from the library open to the world. There will be no more secrets in Pirbaag" (AS 313) is indicative of the fact that the cosmopolitan experience acquired abroad has a profound effect on the local. Cosmopolitan moments, which negotiate the shifting paradigms of global and local, East and West, weave a web of influence and interdependence that is complex and difficult to grasp. In *Assassin*, Vassanji masterfully conveys the aesthetics of cosmopolitanism in order to point out the complexities that arise when people and their cultural baggage are on the move.

## 6.5 Summary and Intermediate Conclusion

In *Assassin*, it has been seen, there is a composite layering of narratives, temporal and spatial. The Sufi's story and songs intertwine with Karsan's life and choices, thus constantly reminding him of his roots. He is never completely able to let go of his heritage, despite his desire to do so, and in the end, he returns to the broken remains of what used to be the shrine of a faith unifying Islamic and Hindu beliefs, destroyed by interreligious violence and murder. The fact that Karsan then wishes to build a new place for the preservation of the songs and stories of a Sufi faith preaching peace is one of the novel's clearest secular – or moralistic – messages. Karsan's cosmopolitanism enables him to undertake this engagement.

Yet the cosmopolitan experience, even if enriching, is not a happy one due to its pervading ambivalence and sense of loss. While it is possible to argue that this shows the limitations of the concept by “insisting on the irreducible misery of displacement and cultural alienation” (Richter 386), it could also be stated that this is exactly one of the ambivalent characteristics of cosmopolitanism. *Assassin* captures much of the regret that comes with leaving one's roots behind – the loss of family and of heritage, for example. The gain from migration is not so evident; indeed, the narrator's melancholic undertone leads one to suspect that possibly, the loss is greater. It is precisely this human dimension, the reflections on loss, belonging, and the vagaries of migration, that renders *Assassin* a compelling cosmopolitan text.

To conclude, cosmopolitan moments in *Assassin* negotiate the rewriting of histories and geographies. The aesthetics of the text underline its cosmopolitanism repeatedly and with beauty; Vassanji is a writer with an elegantly slow style. The imagery, the metaphors and the intertextuality, and the use of genres (songs, poems, legends), is chosen with much care. Vassanji's main concern seems to be to show how complex, contingent and unreliable the trajectories of global movement are, both in the past and today, and that migration leads to loss of home and of sense of belonging. In his understanding, the in-between spaces, the interstices of existence, are not comfortable places.



## 7. Conclusion

This thesis has claimed that cosmopolitanism is an expedient concept with which it is possible to develop a framework for the interpretation of four examples of contemporary Indian writing in English, namely *Poppies*, *Smoke*, *Enchantress* and *Assassin*. Cosmopolitanism was understood as comprising both ethical and practical concerns: to recapitulate, the ethical concerns expressed the moral obligation to extend help to the other, responsibility for and solidarity with the other; the negotiation of difference, sameness and community. Cosmopolitan practice was understood as referring to the human condition as it is changed and influenced by globalization processes, migration, transnationalism, movement and space.

In the context of this thesis concerned with literary texts, the aim has been to develop an approach that was suited explicitly for the textual analysis of the primary literature. It was therefore claimed that cosmopolitan concerns are expressed in cosmopolitan moments (and passages and mirroring), in which the cosmopolitan concerns listed above were negotiated and expressed aesthetically. The aesthetics of cosmopolitan moments have been of central interest to this literary analysis, which has shown that approaching and reading the novels *Poppies*, *Smoke*, *Enchantress* and *Assassin* with the help of the interpretative lens of cosmopolitan moments was a fruitful approach that has brought to light a plethora of concerns. The individual readings of the novels have shown that cosmopolitan concerns are central to these texts, and that they are rendered with a compelling aesthetic that conjures a rich cosmopolitan imaginary that is, if not eclectic, then certainly diversified. This can be explained by the fact that this imaginary encompasses cosmopolitan ethics, practice and aesthetics, so that in this analysis and interpretation, an array of themes was addressed. In order to arrange my findings, it is perhaps best to identify the themes that have been raised during the course of the analysis and which have already been raised in the intermediate summaries and conclusions at the end of each literature chapter.

Accordingly, as part of a cosmopolitan practice, the most prominent theme has been that of the migrant: in all four novels there are migrant figures or travellers who undertake unusual journeys. In *Poppies*, many characters share this fate, epitomized by their common voyage on the *Ibis*, although their origins are very different, ranging from poor *girmityas* to an impoverished raja, to name only a few. In *Smoke*, Bahram Modi is a traveller between two worlds, China and India, and Qara Köz and Mogor roam the world in *Enchantress*. In *Assassin*, the modern migrant Karsan is contrasted with the medieval wanderer Nur Fazal. The trajectories of these migrants highlight temporal and spatial interconnections which do not necessarily come to mind when thinking about the respective historical periods. In many ways, the trope of the traveller and the narrative concerned with this trope highlight unusual trajectories. By imagining these wanderers and their trajectories, these authors rewrite histories and geographies so that we, as readers, are encouraged to reimagine the world from a possibly unaccustomed angle. Not only this, for the trope of the traveller is also connected to community, arrival and, to a certain extent, hospitality. This aspect of a cosmopolitan practice and ethics is present, to varying degrees, in all four novels. In relation to the travellers, it has seemed fitting to speak of cosmopolitan passages rather than moments. This is also the case for the trope of the ship, which comes to the fore in the *Ibis* novels as a metaphor for passage, community and transformation.

Transformation has been a theme that became unexpectedly important. More than initially anticipated, my analysis has shown that transformation is relevant when thinking about rewriting and reimagining histories and geographies. This is particularly prominent in *Poppies*, where the migrants on the ship experience a vivid sense of change that is rooted in a sense of new and aspirational community. Moreover, the masking and disguising in this chapter is part of a transformative process involving Paulette and Zachary, and Neel's transformation from a pampered raja into a person who assumes a cosmopolitan responsibility for someone he does not know under the most contrary circumstances. In *Smoke*, transformation comes in the form of the metaphor of the storm whose transformative power enables a rewriting of histories because it

permits a break with the colonial present: the men who escape on the longboat escape their death. Transformation is part of a cosmopolitan practice of migration and ethics of responsibility that is expressed by the trope of the ship, masks and disguises, the body and the storm.

Moreover, the way the storm is depicted was found to indicate contingency. On the one hand, it serves a very concrete purpose, namely that it allows, as mentioned above, the men to escape the boat. On the other hand, Deeti's experience of the storm was read as a moment of detachment from the narrative, or, put in other terms, a contingent and fleeting cosmopolitan moment. Similarly, the trope of the ghost was understood to indicate contingency: Chi-mei's ghost in *Smoke* keeps appearing in Bahram's opium-induced dreams, serving no narrative purpose at all. Similarly, Qara Köz's ghost in *Enchantress* comes home to haunt Akbar – her ghostly appearance is contingent and marks the end of her story, to which there is no closure. Equally, there is no closure in *Smoke*, because as readers we are left unsure whether Chi-mei is really dead or not. The instabilities in these texts help to underline the contingent, fleeting aspect of cosmopolitan moments and their tropes. For lack of causality, these instances have remained unresolved, at least from a narrative point of view. However, they have been interpreted as independent contingent moments in the text that point to a secret underlying the narrative.

Of particular interest and complexity was the analysis of art and storytelling in *Enchantress*, and of poetic forms of narration in *Assassin* as part of the narratives' rewriting and reimagining of histories and geographies. In this reading of *Enchantress*, it was shown that framed visuality (art and mirrors) and storytelling belong to a cosmopolitan mirroring and passages that express cosmopolitan concerns in this novel. It became clear that the invocation of the arts (specifically literature and painting) that aesthetically express cosmopolitan concerns constitutes a strong presence in both novels, and also, to a lesser degree, in *Smoke*, where Robin paints, in his mind's eye, Fanqui-town and its disparate community. Less obviously, perhaps, there is also an aspect of painting in *Poppies*: Deeti puts her portrait sketches on the walls of her shrines, first at home, then on the ship, and finally on the walls of her cave in Mauritius. Therefore, the presence

of art was stronger than initially expected, and was shown to be an important aesthetic expression of cosmopolitan practice and ethics in the analysis chapters. To summarize the above, in the novels that were analysed in this study, migration and transformation (as part of a globalization process, especially in Ghosh's novels), come to the fore as part of a cosmopolitan practice. The cosmopolitan ethics of negotiating with the other and assuming responsibility for the other are also present in some – although perhaps not in all – cosmopolitan moments, a finding that will be referred to below. The aesthetics of cosmopolitan moments, passages and mirroring are extremely varied, as my readings have shown. Rather than try to establish a system of classification of aesthetics – an undertaking that seems futile and uninteresting – I have found it more worthwhile to loosely group the aesthetic components of the novels and to claim that they all interconnect with the ethics and practice of cosmopolitanism. The aesthetics of cosmopolitan moments, which have been found to complicate received notions of histories and geographies, contribute to this complication by conflating ethics and practice. Therefore, the function of aesthetics in the texts has been shown to be absolutely central: without the striking tropes and other literary devices, the ethics and practice of cosmopolitanism would not be able to be expressed as saliently as they are.

As mentioned above, one of the main claims of this study was that in cosmopolitan moments, histories and geographies are rewritten and reimagined. Indeed, this has been the case, as my reading of cosmopolitan moments has shown. Global history is, as I have underlined, a literary concern because it is less a discipline and more about writing and imagining histories that are concerned with changes and transformations on a global level. In that sense global histories are narrated with much verve, imagination and dedication in the novels, as the analysis chapters have shown. Moreover, my readings have revealed that the novels show a high level of engagement with cosmopolitan concerns, and that they do this very imaginatively. Focusing on the cosmopolitan concerns in these novels has proved to be an effective means of bringing to the fore how these texts rewrite and reimagine histories and geographies. Each novel, in its own way, provokes readers to think about received historical and geographical notions by

uncovering hidden histories. For example, Ghosh's narrative of the indentured labourers, his descriptions of Fanqui-town, Rushdie's insertion of a Mughal princess into imperial historiography, and Vassanji's tale of the Sufi saint that turns out to be a religious heretic prone to violence, are all instances of (fictional) histories and geographies that expose unexpected and, possibly, unknown narratives.

Moreover, it has been claimed in this thesis that global history is a fitting framework for conceptualizing a plurality of histories that do not centre on a national history. This has proven true, for none of the histories and geographies that are narrated are nation-based. One reason for this is that three of the four novels, namely *Poppies*, *Smoke* and *Enchantress*, are set in eras long before the State of India and any of the other nations around it was founded. *Assassin* is set in post-Independence India, but the novel is not primarily concerned with the Indian nation, as we have seen.

Furthermore, cosmopolitan moments have shown to be a suitable lens for interpretation, bringing to the fore cosmopolitan concerns and the rewriting and reimagining of histories and geographies. In this sense, this approach constitutes an original and useful contribution to the field of cosmopolitanism studies and literature. Specifically, with this reading, it was possible to see that these novels highlight the human condition – in good as well as in bad terms – in situations of migration and globalization processes, and the movement and transformation that is associated with them. The main contribution to the field of cosmopolitanism in literary studies is the development of cosmopolitan moments as an interpretive lens, based on a close and wide reading that engages closely with the aesthetic aspects of cosmopolitanism. The aesthetics are a relevant added value to the understanding of cosmopolitanism because they convey issues in their own particular way, with the use of striking tropes such as the storm or the ship, for example.

While the close engagement with the text has allowed an intricate analysis and understanding of the novels, and has proven to be a worthwhile undertaking, the approach taken here is limited: its use is restricted to reading literatures that, from a topical point of view, negotiate migration, movement, spatial and temporal

issues. In particular, the idea of a cosmopolitan practice is bound to these actual concerns that, as has been argued in this thesis, are connected to globalization processes. The time frame is not so relevant, as shown by my reading of *Assassin*, in which a medieval migrant wanders from Afghanistan to India. Rather, the constraint is bound to context. Cosmopolitan ethics and aesthetics are more easily interpreted in other contexts than cosmopolitan practice, which is bound, at least in this theoretical framework, to migration. Hence, cosmopolitan moments as they were understood here are not universal, because they are always bound to the specific practice of migration. This approach, then, is relevant for literatures such as those discussed in this thesis: novels or other literary texts (an interesting strand to pursue) that negotiate migration on historical and contemporary levels.

Still, considering the recent output of literatures that defy easy national categorization, cosmopolitan moments may be yet be useful for the interpretation of recent 'Afropolitan' fictions, for example, such as *Ghana Must Go* (2013) by British writer Taiye Selasi and *Americanah* (2013) by Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, narratives which span the globe, reaching from Africa to the US. In the same year, the novel *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) by the US-Japanese writer Ruth Ozeki was published, also a narrative which imagines connections and responsibilities across time and space. It would certainly be a valid undertaking to analyse *Flood of Fire*, the third novel of Ghosh's *Ibis*. Also, Vassanji has recently published a new novel, *The Magic of Saida* (2012), in which he revisits his Tanzanian heritage and its history. Moreover, it would also be interesting to see if other genres, drama, poetry or short stories (Indian and other), negotiate cosmopolitanism in similar ways to those in the four novels.

In addition to investigating new novels and other forms of writing, a focus on motifs of world literature in the novels at hand could prove rewarding. While first steps have been made in this study to point out the relevance and recurring use of tropes such as the ship, ghost, traveller and others, the attempt to analyse them as recurrent tropes in world literature has not yet been made and might prove a worthwhile further undertaking. Furthermore, intermedial aspects, mainly ekphrasis, have repeatedly been shown to be aesthetic concerns in this reading, so that dedicating more research to this topic would certainly prove

worthwhile. Equally, although language figures as an aesthetic expression of a cosmopolitan practice in the analysis chapters (Lascari and pidgin, to name two examples), more emphasis could be put on the analysis of language. In this case, a sociolinguistic analysis would be most rewarding.

Finally, then, this undertaking has proven worthwhile, for cosmopolitan moments have been shown to be a concise critical lens of analysis for exposing the fictional rewriting and reimagining of histories and geographies in these novels. The complexity of issues, images, tropes and narratives that have emerged with this reading in these four splendid novels remains, at least to me, utterly fascinating.

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