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“This place is now your home”. A Comparative View on Partition Migrants in a New City. Kamila Shamsie’s *Kartography* and Inga Iwasiów’s *Bambino*

Abstract

The goal of the article is the comparison between the condition of Polish and Pakistani migrants, forcibly resettled on new territories in 1940s, depicted in fictional narratives of two women writers. Both Central Europe and the Indian Subcontinent witnessed violent conflicts leading to changes of borders and large-scale migrations. Following the ravages of the Second World War, in 1945 Poland lost a considerable part of its pre-war territory, and acquired the formerly German regions to its West, labelled by the communist authorities as the “Regained Lands”. Poles who lost their homes in the Eastern territories were allocated the former German houses in the West. Just two years later, in 1947, the former British India was divided into India and Pakistan, and religious tensions became even more acute. As a result, millions of people previously living intermixed would now be forced to migrate – Hindus to India, and Muslims to Pakistan. In order to illustrate the fate of individuals taking part in these historical transformations, the article discusses two narratives of displacement and forced settlement on a new territory. These two stories originate from Inga Iwasiów’s novel “Bambino”, and Kamila Shamsie’s novel “Kartography”. Both authors present their protagonists with exceptional empathy, whether they are young people rebuilding their lives in the postwar Szczecin, or teenage lovers from Karachi, dealing with their parents’ traumas and their own quest for identity. In both these contexts, the key question

is how to reconstruct one's own identity in a new place, with the burden of tragic experiences still fresh in one's memory?

Keywords: forced migrations, displacement, identity, memory, Poland, Pakistan, "Regained Territories", 1947 Indian Partition

Space and place are concepts that are usually taken for granted, Yi-Fu Tuan¹ contends. The notion of place can be understood in many ways – a home, a neighbourhood, a town, or a country. However, what differentiates it from the more abstract notion of space is the meaning, or meanings, ascribed to it. Place is a space that one gets *attached* to, that gives one a feeling of a connectedness, a belongingness. What happens, though, when one loses that most intimate of places, one which serves as a point of reference for much of the "meaning" to all other aspects in one's life, one that is called "home"? Can one reconstruct that same feeling of intimacy in a new environment? Can one ascribe the same "meaning" to an unfamiliar space that was previously reserved for the place called "home"? This article analyses the condition of *migrants*, people that were uprooted from their homes and forced to start a new life in an unfamiliar space. It takes into consideration two texts, although stemming from different cultural contexts, nonetheless depicting similar experiences and emotions.

Drawing new borders, changing lives

History of the world is one of mass migrations. Such migrations are often undertaken in search for new places to build a home and provide better means of life. Motivations for such movements are not always purely economic, but, many a times much more dramatic, one accompanied with violent conflict, trauma, and loss of the close ones. Sometimes, there is even no decision-making by the subject involved in such migrations. Through the ages, forced displacements of a people have been initiated by various authorities, more recently, in name of nationalist ideologies. And in times of war or conflict, such migrations may not be initiated by an authority but by groups or individuals, who may forcibly remove people from their homes. Both of these phenomena could be observed in the aftermath of the Indian Partition of 1947. Many were forced to leave their homes because of nationalist ideas of purity and ethnic or religious separation, and many emigrated out of fear of violence.

Similarly, in Central and Eastern Europe, where borders were radically changed after both the First and the Second World War, resulted in millions

¹ Y.-F. Tuan, *Space and place: the perspective of experience*, Amazon Kindle Edition 1977, p. 3.

removed from their homes and resettled in new places. Already, during the Second World War, both the Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union massively deported citizens of the states they had occupied, not to mention the ethnic purges that both of these totalitarian systems conducted upon various ethnic and national groups. The aftermath of the Second World War witnessed another huge wave of displacements as a consequence of new states being created, borders changed, and social structures of many countries profoundly altered. All in all, the number of displaced persons in Central and Eastern Europe is estimated at around 20 million².

It was in Poland where the biggest population displacement in European history took place³. As a consequence of the Yalta conference in 1945, not only did Poland lose 20% of its pre-war territory, but more significantly, it's both borders shifted westward. Poland's Eastern borderlands, which constituted almost half of its pre-war territory, were acquired and incorporated in the Soviet Union, and in a so called compensation, Poland was granted a hundred thousand kilometres of previously German lands on its western border. Such an arbitrary decision, taken with complete and utter disregard for the lives of millions of people living in these territories – Poles, Ukrainians, Germans and countless others – caused massive expulsions and forced resettlements.

The border changes were followed by a sustained campaign of de-Polonization by the Stalinist authorities launched in the territories annexed by the Soviet Union⁴. This involved "repatriation" of Poles, which happened in two waves, first, in 1944–1946, and later, after Stalin's death, in 1955–1959. The term "repatriation" was eagerly used by the post-war Polish communist authorities, as it was helpful to disguise *de facto* deportations as a "return to homeland"⁵.

Aping their Soviet counterparts, the Polish communist state launched a campaign to "re-Polonize" the so-called "regained territories", which were previously German. The Polish authorities relied on a claim to these territories from a period of remote history when they belonged to the Piast dynasty of Polish kings. In the campaign to "re-Polonize", traces of German culture were partly effaced, street names changed, cities rebranded, and new communist institutions established⁶. The "repatriated" were assigned houses in these ter-

² According to Juergen Weber, *Germany 1945–1990: A Parallel History*, Budapest 2004, p. 2.

³ N. Davies, *Polish National Mythologies* [in:] *Myths and Nationhood*, eds. G. Schopflin, G. Hosking, London 2013, p. 153.

⁴ These territories became part of the Soviet Republics of Ukraine, Belorussia and Lithuania.

⁵ J. Kochanowski, *Gathering Poles into Poland: Forced Migration from Poland's Former Eastern Territories* [in:] P.T. Siljak, *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944–1948*, The Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series, Rowman & Littlefield 2001, p. 135–154.

⁶ Oftentimes, public institutions were housed in former German schools or administrative buildings, so except of very superficial changes, such as street signs or banners, the

ritories, while the Germans living there were gradually expelled. The forced “repatriation” of the Poles from the east depended thus on the gradual deportation of Germans from the west. During these times, it was not uncommon to have two families – one German and the other Polish – temporarily sharing the same house.

Even today, the western regions of Poland have a particular heritage that is a confluence of German culture with that of Eastern Polish culture. The older generation still speaks with the accent of Polish that was typical of Lviv or Vilnius. Their traumas and exile memories were for long silenced as the communist state of Poland would not admit that the Soviet Union deported Polish citizens. Only after the fall of communism in 1989 could the people speak up.

Around the same time in the aftermath of the Second World War, in the Indian subcontinent, the demise of the British colonial state was also leading to drastic changes. While the leaders of the Allied Forces were discussing the future of Central and Eastern Europe in Yalta, the Indian independence movement was growing stronger and stronger in the subcontinent. Separate national claims were voiced by the Indian National Congress and by the Muslim League, with the latter demanding creation of a new independent state, to be called Pakistan. As argued by Gyanendra Pandey, it was a relatively fresh idea, voiced for the first time by the Muslim League only in 1940. It was conceived as a claim for “autonomy, or independence, of Muslim-majority regions in the north-west and north-east of India – a land (or lands?) where Muslims, and therefore the ideals of Islam, would hold sway”⁷. However, the League leaders initially did not envisage any changes in the demographic structure of these lands, it was only supposed to be a Muslim-majority state, with Hindus living there alongside with Muslims, just as India, or “Hindustan”, which was imagined as Hindu-majority state with a strong Muslim minority.

What the political leaders of India did not foresee, was to what extent the idea of Pakistan, the “pure land”, could stir the imagination of Muslims, some of whom felt oppressed by the Hindu state. They accused the Hindus not only of working hand-in-hand with the British, but of capitalist exploitation, of discrimination of lower castes and minorities and not granting enough religious freedom to Muslims. The mistrust was present on the side of Hindus too. Hindus saw Muslims as previous invaders and oppressors, often pointing to the Mughal rule in India, which lasted for centuries before the British colonization.

On 16 August 1946, the “Direct Action Day”, emotions escalated fast and soon communal violence broke out, starting with clashes between Hindus and Muslims in Calcutta. And when the calm was restored, four days later, several thousand people had been killed⁸. Therefore, by 1947, there were already

urban landscape retain most of its pre-war character.

⁷ G. Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*, Cambridge 2001, p. 25–26.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

thousands of victims of communal violence. But still unanticipated was the scale of the exodus that accompanied the independence of India and the creation of Pakistan. This was to be the largest forced migration in the world. The Partition became a collective trauma for generations to come.

Comparative studies of partition and displacement

Even though a comparative approach to the case of India and Poland might seem an unlikely one, it is not impossible. Multiple authors have suggested that partitions can be, or even should be, studied from a comparative angle. Willem van Schendel, among them, has warned against the danger of treating the Indian Partition as a unique event⁹. He underlines that putting it in a global perspective leads to a better understanding of the causes and consequences of such territorial divisions. Other authors also embarked on this uneasy task: Radha Kumar focuses on the Balkans, analysing the possibility of partition in the case of Bosnia¹⁰ and later, of Kosovo¹¹. She is, however, deeply suspicious of using partition as viable solutions to international or national conflicts. Comparing different kinds of partitions, notably the ones of India, Cyprus, Ireland or Palestine, she argues that partition often leads to strengthening of ethnic conflict and causing mass migrations¹². According to Radha Kumar, the discussion on the pros and cons of partition as a solution to end conflicts, needs a deeper, comparative study, in order to address the repeating patterns and recurring problems. A similar approach – though in a different disciplinary framework – is undertaken by Rada Iveković, who ponders on borders and their meaning, on partitions of lands and also on partitioned minds. With Stefano Bianchini, Sanjay Chaturvedi and Ranabir Samaddar¹³, Iveković analyses various instances of partitions and divisions, in India, the Koreas, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Germany. Iveković also draws the attention on how closely related are the issues of nation and gender, and how women become a symbolic collective, particularly vulnerable in times of conflict. To demonstrate it, she juxtaposes examples from South Asia and Eastern Europe in the volume *From Gender to Nation*¹⁴, comprising articles on Croatia, India, Belarus, and Latvia, among others.

⁹ W. van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland. Beyond State and Nation in South Asia*, London–New York–Delhi 2005, p. 25.

¹⁰ R. Kumar, *The Troubled History of Partition*, “Foreign Affairs” 1995, vol. 76, Issue 1, 16–21

¹¹ R. Kumar, *The Partition Debate: Colonialism Revisited or New Policies?*, “Brown Journal of World Affairs” 2000, vol. VII, Issue 1, p. 3–12.

¹² R. Kumar, *The Troubled History of Partition...*, p. 2.

¹³ *Partitions: Reshaping States and Minds*, eds. S. Bianchini, S. Chaturvedi, R. Iveković, R. Samaddar, New York 2007.

¹⁴ *From Gender to Nation*, eds. R. Iveković, J. Mostov, New Delhi 2004.

This article also advocates the need for a comparative approach, with the obvious differences in contexts taken into account. The goal is not to define partition or to analyse the border changes in either the Indian subcontinent or in Central and Eastern Europe from the point of view of political science. The focus of this article is to bring together the experiences of migrants who were forced to abandon their homes and to continue their lives in an unfamiliar environment, with still fresh memories of war and violence. Yi-Fu Tuan argues that it is possible to analyse the human relation to space and place in a wide, more universalist perspective, transcending cultural particularities. While admitting that culture explains how people construct meanings, Tuan contends that such an anthropological, culture-centred approach is not the only one. It is just as important to look for examples that go beyond cultural specificity, given that all humans share certain basic traits¹⁵. Such a comparative approach can shed new light on the matter and offer new insight as to how people, independently of their cultural background, deal with displacement.

Kartography and *Bambino*

This article attempts a comparison of the experiences of those who suffered from displacement on a historic scale in post-war Poland and newly independent Indian subcontinent by analysing two novels: Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*¹⁶, set in Pakistan, and Inga Iwasiów's *Bambino*¹⁷ (2008), set in Poland. Although the contexts of these two novels are very different, the individual trajectories of certain characters from the two novels seem to have much in common. *Bambino* engages with the lives of four main characters, Ula, Stefan, Maria and Janek, all born in 1930s and 40s, and Magda, who is born a generation later. This structure is similar to *Kartography* whose main protagonists are Zafar, Yasmin, Maheen and Ali, and their children, Raheen and Karim. In *Bambino*, the story of the "parents' generation" is more prominent, while *Kartography* gives more voice to the children, particularly to Raheen, who is the narrator. In both novels, the "parents' generation" is burdened with a story of migration, which later impacts the lives of their children. For both authors, the places where their novels are set play a key role. These are places where newcomers settle and rejoice, but also suffer. These places then form a dichotomous identity which is occasionally haunted by the past, and yet is invested with hopes and dreams for a better future. Karachi and Szczecin, the cities where the action of the two novels *Kartography* and *Bambino*, respectively, takes place, bring together people of different walks of life, from various regions and backgrounds, looking for a better, perhaps just safer, lives,

¹⁵ Y.-F. Tuan, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁶ K. Shamsie, *Kartography*, London 2011.

¹⁷ I. Iwasiów, *Bambino*, Warszawa 2008.

and, hopefully, a brighter future. On the surface, the cohabitation of people of diverse origins seems possible. But the Muhajirs – primarily Urdu-speaking Muslims from northern plains of the Indian Subcontinent that came to settle in what became Pakistan – continued to be labelled as newcomers in the country long after Partition. And the resentment of the locals toward Muhajirs has long simmered under the illusion of a peaceful coexistence. Similarly, the post-war Szczecin is not free from prejudices. Even though the new socialist state attempts at making all its citizens equal and at effacing the divisive differences, it is not entirely successful in moulding them into exemplary comrades. The “repatriates” dislike the “autochthones”, the ones who migrated from central Poland are apprehensive towards the ones that came from the East, and an undercurrent of anti-Semitism is still flowing, only to explode in 1968. There are other parallels between the two novels, but first, let us briefly outline their plots, later focus on the key characters, and finally proceed to a broader comparison of the two contexts.

Mapping Karachi

Even the title of Kamila Shamsie’s book, *Kartography*, suggests that space and place are key notions in the novel. And it is a very particular space: the one of the hometown. A two-dimensional representation of a town – a map – is merely one way of understanding and embracing it. It offers a possibility of drawing and naming a familiar space, lending it an almost scientific bent. This is the approach favoured by Karim, one of the protagonists. However, his friend and later lover, Raheen, prefers an approach that is based on lived experience, in which what counts are stories and events that link people and places together. In her approach, maps are soulless. The novel is an unfolding dialogue between Raheen and Karim. In this way, the novel follows template of the discussion between two ancient thinkers, Erasthenes, the cartographer, and Strabo, the story teller. Shamsie skilfully includes references to these classical figures, to better illustrate the two opposite poles, the science of maps and a humanist understanding of lived experience. While maps are a useful everyday tool, for instance in the exploration of a new city, cartography has often been employed for rather dubious enterprises, such as colonial conquests, state-commissioned urban revolutions and war strategies. Maps have been used to draw borders, abstract lines separating neighbours, and to erect walls that solidify national and ethnic divisions. Shamsie shows how nationalist cartographies and arbitrary changes of borders have influenced millions of human lives. Her book demonstrates how long the traumas from the Indian Partition persist, affecting more than one generation. Her protagonists belong to two generations, one born around 1950, the two couples, Zafar and Yasmin, and Maheen and Ali, and the second, their children, born around 1980. All of them are in one way or the other affected by the Partition, which brought their families to Pakistan, and fur-

ther shaped by the second Partition, which separated Pakistan from Bangladesh in 1971. The communal hatred, the labelling of newcomers as “others”, the social tensions lasted for decades after both Partitions. Even those born much later could not escape these forces, which are reflected in the case with second generation of their children, Raheen and Karim.

The city of Karachi, itself, is one of the protagonists in *Kartography*. Already the title, spelled with a capital K, suggests the centrality of this city to the narrative. Raheen talks to Karim about the city:

(Kar) achi, nivals and ousing. ‘Except Carnival and Carousing are spelt with a “C”,’ Karim pointed out. Somehow, my cheek was resting against his shoulder. ‘Not in Karachi. We worship at the alter of K. Haven’t you noticed all the Ks in business names in Karachi: Karachi Kars, Karachi Karpets, Karachi Kards – not to mention Karat Jewellers, KwickKababs, KleenKleeners and KweerKween.’ ‘KweerKween?’ ‘Somewhere in Karachi there’s got to be a KweerKween.’¹⁸

But the city is far from ideal. It’s not any more the old Karachi, “a Karachi before drugs, before guns, before Civil War, before the economy ran on foreign aid, before religion was wielded as the most powerful of political tool. A Karachi in which people stayed.” (p. 282). The city they know is full of ethnic divides and conflicts. Both Raheen and Karim feel like Karachiites, but as third-generation migrants, they bear the memory of other places, that were the homelands of their parents. Their blood is mixed: Karim is Bengali and Punjabi, while Raheen is a Muhajir with a trace of Pathan. Bengali here means Muslim citizens of Bengal, the region near the Ganges delta which belonged to British India, which after Partition of 1947 was split between India and East Pakistan. Some Bengali Muslims moved to West Pakistan, like Karim’s mother, Maheen. Karim’s father, Ali, is Punjabi, coming from the region in the North of British India, which was split between Pakistan in the Western and India in the Eastern part. Raheen’s her father is a Muhajir – whose family left North India for Pakistan, as they were Muslim – and her mother is from a local Pakistani family, but with Pathan ancestors. Pathan is the Urdu name for Pashtun people, people of Eastern Iranian origin settled mostly in Afghanistan and its border with Pakistan. The various ethnic backgrounds that characterize the new Pakistani society are one of the reasons why there are strong tensions between various groups. Nevertheless, both families have made a comfortable life for themselves and their children. The two young protagonists, Karim and Raheen, belong to an affluent, English-speaking upper class, which could afford to remain relatively unaffected by ethnic struggles among the more dispossessed. As teenagers, they lead a rather carefree life, full of trips to the beach, evenings with friends, and loving, safe and well-off households. Home, for Raheen, is a cocoon, where one can lead a protected life, far from the violence of the streets. However, as hard as they try to escape their ethnicities, in

¹⁸ K. Shamsie, *op.cit.*, p. 241.

a Karachi riled with ethnic tensions, there comes a point when these divides begin to affect them.

In parallel to their coming-of-age love story, reflecting their troubles with identity construction, unfolds the story of their parents. Half-way through the novel, the secret that was burdening both couples and the relationship of their children is revealed: Zafar, Raheen’s father, was once supposed to marry Maheen, Karim’s mother, but succumbed to the prejudice against Bengalis, deciding against marriage. This was in the time of divisive tensions between the East and the West Pakistan, which culminated in the war and the separation of the East in 1971, and creation of Bangladesh. East Pakistanis – also called Bengalis – living in Karachi were facing strong hostility from the rest of the population. Zafar was constantly offended and abused for dating an “outsider”. Even though he considered himself as an intellectual, as someone who is above such ethnic divides, he was eventually carried away by emotions. In a moment of weakness, he said that by marrying Maheen, he will ‘dilute her Bengali bloodline’. This hurtful sentence led to their breakup, and eventually a couple-swap took place. Zafar married Yasmin, and Maheen wedded Ali. The two couples remained friends and decided not to mention the events of the past to their children, Karim and Raheen. Karim and Raheen grew up together and when they reached teenage years, they started to fall in love with one another. However Karim, after learning about the reason of her mother’s broken engagement with Zafar, could not come to terms with that fact. He felt betrayed by his “Uncle” Zafar and – by extension – Raheen. For years, he did not realize that Raheen remains in the dark about these past events. He lives abroad, refusing to contact his childhood friend, completely turning away from the past, never wanting to come back to Karachi. For Raheen, on the contrary, her city is a safe haven, a place that constitutes her one and only home, in spite of the violence and painful memories that weigh on it. She goes to United States to study, but after graduating from college she is happy to return. The two young people cannot reconcile until the truth about the past resurfaces and they both need to come to terms with it, in their own way. Finally, Karim decides to come back to Karachi, and Raheen learns about the reasons of his silence. The couple reunites, deciding to combine both Erasthones’ and Strabo’s approaches and draw a map of Karachi that includes their stories, their emotions and their experiences.

New beginnings in Szczecin

Inga Iwasiów’s novel, *Bambino*, tells the story of a few destinies brought together in one city, the post-war Szczecin. All the protagonists have a difficult past behind them. For all of them, except one, this is a new city, a place that they have no links to, but which bears the promise of a new, better life. The title refers to the name of a local bar, where lives of all four characters cross.

“Bambino” in Italian means “child” – this word was often used in socialist Poland maybe to counterbalance the grim reality of the times by its lightness and joyfulness¹⁹. The name of the bar suggests that new lives of the protagonists start there: they take baby-steps to discover a new reality and they look forward to a brighter future.

In a city like this, people meet by chance, in new constellations. People invented by chance. Let’s say, most often at work. For Anna and Ula, work means the bar called “Bambino”, where they ended up after having been employed in other bars. Bambino, Bambino, Bambino. Janek, who is a sweetie at the first sight, but also a man, is their client. Marysia is Ula’s tenant. Bambini, Bambino. Here’s a chance setting. This set [of characters] will be extended later. With a new element. Necessary to live. They all have something in common: they don’t have families here, in this city. They shape their life, rubbing skin with people from here, making promises²⁰.

Another reason why the author places the bar as the central place is that it is a nurturing space, food is served there: *The bar is important. Food is life.* (Kindle Loc. 1093). An emphasis on food, often mentioned in the novel, strengthens the idea of everyday life, the ordinary existence of the characters. Inga Iwasiów, apart from being a writer, is also an academic, specializing in gender studies, and in her novels she turns her attention mostly towards women and their experience. Like other feminist critics, she is opposed to masculine nationalist narratives that focus on glorious events and achievements, forgetting the everyday struggle of those who tend to be in the shadow. According to Maria Janion²¹, Agnieszka Graff²², Shana Penn²³, the homosocial bonds between men, the emphasis on brotherhood in arms and war, push women out of history. Women are seen as bodies, as vessels that guarantee the reproduction and, in this way, the survival of a nation. Feminist critics and writers attempt to bring women to the centre of history and underline the importance of everyday struggles, not only of the spectacular battles or uprising. This is one of the strengths of Iwasiów’s novel. While historical events are presented in the background, the focus is on the micro-histories, on individual fates. Women and children, the less spectacular actors of history, are given a prominent place in the narrative. Similarly, in the works on Indian Partition, women scholars, such as Urvashi Butalia, Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon, have focussed particularly on the women’s story: on their suffering, on their voices that have often been

¹⁹ “Bambino” was a name for mini versions of various products, e.g. portable disk players, but also for sweets, e.g. ice-cream.

²⁰ I. Iwasiów, *op.cit.*, Kindle Locations 892–897, my own translation.

²¹ M. Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury*, Kraków 2006.

²² A. Graff, *Świat bez kobiet: pleć w polskim życiu publicznym*, Warszawa 2001, *eadem*, *Rykoszetem: rzecz o płci, seksualności i narodzie*, Warszawa 2008.

²³ S. Penn, *Solidarity’s Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland*, University of Michigan Press 2006.

silenced, on their individual experiences. Such is also the approach of Kamila Shamsie: it is Raheen’s voice that seems the most prominent in the novel.

The intertwining lives in *Bambino*, compared by the narrator to ‘knots’, are those of Ula, Stefan, Anna, Maria (Marysia) and Janek. Ula is the only one who was born in Szczecin when it was still called Stettin, in 1930. Stefan is a Jew from Warsaw, who survived Holocaust and settled down as far from Auschwitz as he could, taking a teaching job in the local high school. Anna is from an upper-class, but impoverished family from Galicja (southern Poland), who struggles to maintain her position, even if that means working at a bar to pay for her education. Maria comes from a family that left their hometown in the East after these territories were cut off from Poland and annexed by the Soviet Union. Janek, raised by single mother, bears the stigma of being a bastard since early childhood. He is from a small village in Wielkopolska region and coming to a city means a complete change in his lifestyle, which is marked by a blind faith in the promises of the communist party. For these young people, Szczecin offers an opportunity to break up with their traumatic past. In this article, I will focus on two main characters, Ula and Marysia. They represent the groups most harmed by the expulsions and deportations organised by the Soviet and the Polish authorities: the Poles from the East, and the Germans from the West²⁴.

Ulrike, the “autochthon”

Ula, formerly known as Ulrike, is the only one who did not migrate. She is of German origin and her father was a Nazi officer. Her mother, on the other hand, had Polish roots, like many borderland inhabitants of Germany. This

²⁴ Here the terms ‘East’ and ‘West’ are used in the way they appear in the Polish perspective, only for the sake of clarity in this article. However, it must be noted that what Poles see as ‘the Western territories’ used to be Eastern Prussia and later, the East of the German Third Reich. As in the case of many borderlands, this region was inhabited by a blend of ethnicities: Germans, Poles, Jews and local ethnicities such as Silesians and Kashubians. The Second World War changed this multicultural character: Jews were exterminated by the Nazis, Germans were forcibly removed as a result of Yalta agreement, and the communist authorities of Poland did not allow for an expression of cultural identity of the minorities. Similarly, the Polish ‘East’, till today referred to as Kresy (literally ‘Borderlands’), belonged to Poland until the 18th century partitions, then was incorporated in the Polish Second Republic (1918–1939), to finally be annexed by USSR after World War II. It was also a rich mixture of cultures: Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, Russians, Bielorrussians, Lithuanians... Already in the interwar period, there were controversies as to the census data – both Poles and Russians tried to manipulate the population statistics to legitimize their claims to these lands. For more precise data on the changing ethnic composition of these territories, see: *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944–1948*, by Philip Ter and Ana Siljak (eds.), and in particular the article in that volume by Jerzy Kochanowski.

fact was somewhat concealed in the family that proudly adhered to the Nazi ideology, which would stress the importance of ‘pure’ origins. Teenage Ulrike spends the war alone with her mother, while her brothers and father are away at war. Like other daughters or sisters, she writes letters to her father under the guidance of the Nazi party wing for girls, BDM (Bund Deutscher Mädel – League of German Girls). Towards the end of the war, when the Red Army is approaching, Ulrike’s mother starts to be anxious. She keeps pretending that her teenage daughter is a little girl, perhaps anticipating the danger that womanhood presents in times of war. Indeed, when Soviets march into the city, they take quick revenge on the German population, by raping women. According to various estimates, this was the fate of tens of thousands up to even two millions of women in Germany .

Better not to resist. This is what they say, although it isn’t much talked about at all. You know, better not to resist. If they are not too drunk and in not too big of a group, one can survive it somehow. Just hide the kid, so that they leave her alone. They always say they have a daughter of the same age at home, which doesn’t mean that they wouldn’t play with someone else’s daughter the conqueror-victim game, the master-puppet game. So mother hides Ula this one time and this second time. She even tries to be nice. True: apart from what they do, they don’t do any harm. One can survive it. Hospitals are plenty of women that were less lucky. They surely won’t be able to leave now. But the most important, now and years later, is not to talk about it. The margins of the war. The women. Then everything changes in a different way. When one has survived that much, there is no point in leaving. One must shut up and wait.²⁵

At the end of the war, unlike many other women, Ulrike’s mother refuses to leave. This is the place she knows and considers as her home. After being imprisoned and questioned about her husband (who has gone missing during the war), she falls sick and dies. A Polish neighbour takes care of her teenage daughter, changing her name to the more Polish-sounding Ula. That is how the girl manages to stay in her family apartment and later on lead the life of an independent woman. Even though she is one of the few people who are the true locals, born and raised in Szczecin, formerly Stettin, as time goes by, she is the one to feel like a stranger. She never moved, but the borders did. She was born in Germany, but after the war she became a Polish citizen. Even though the socialist state in theory promoted equality and downplayed ethnic differences, the local inhabitants of western Poland were labeled “autochtoni” – the autochthones.

Ula is not the only autochthon in Szczecin. There is Walter, the boss of Bambino bar, Helmut, the tailor. She often feels like talking to them, asking them if they feel as lonely and estranged in this city as she does, but something holds her back. Only years later, Ula decides to face her past, by responding to her father’s letters from West Germany and then visiting him as well as

²⁵ I. Iwasiów, *op.cit.*, Kindle Locations 547–553, my own translation from Polish.

her brother, who is now living in East Berlin. Her father, although a former Nazi officer, leads a comfortable life, having started a new family without even checking what happened with his first wife and daughter. Iwasiów complicates the relationship between perpetrator and victim, showing that even within one family, the one who has been a perpetrator gets rewarded, and the cost of his actions is borne by his daughter, who is stigmatized as “the German”, representing the oppressor. Ula becomes, to a large degree, “polonized”, changing her name, starting to favour Polish over German even in her dreams, and decides to stay in the city that is her home, even with the changed circumstances. She stands on the side of the victims, and this is further emphasized by her relationship with Stefan. A professor of maths in a local school, Stefan is a Jew and a survivor of the Holocaust. Even though he knows about Ula’s family background, he seeks in her the stability that most of the inhabitants of Szczecin lack. Her flat, full of old furniture, photos, small, familiar objects, gives him the feeling of continuity. The relative happiness they share is shattered by the events of 1968: the outbreak of anti-Semitic propaganda campaign launched by the communist party and the following expulsion of people of Jewish origin from Poland. Stefan is forced to leave the country – and yet another person abandons Ula. Once again in her life, the decisions of politicians leave her stranded and alone, against her will. Ula feels constantly betrayed and abandoned: by the men in her family, by her lover, by the state. She forms a friendship with other employees and clients of “Bambino”, lonely as she is, and as a result, years later, she adopts Magda, the daughter of Maria and Janek. Although she goes to visit her father and brother in West Germany, she comes back to never leave Szczecin.

Maria – the “repatriate”

Maria is ten years younger than Ula, but the two women form a friendship that lasts for years to come. It is on a meeting with Ula at “Bambino” that Maria meets her future husband, Janek. They are both alone in Szczecin, trying to sever the ties that link them to the past and to their families. *The past, they have strength for the future, now a double, and soon a triple one. Let the past go to hell!* (Kindle Loc. 1326)²⁶. They don’t want to look back, because what they see is violence, poverty and hateful whispers. As newcomer to the city, Maria is an outsider whose “Polishness” – like Ula’s – is constantly put into question by the society. Even her fiancée’s family doubts whether to accept her:

Janek had to write back home that he is getting married with a woman from the East. From over there. His grandfather wouldn’t have accepted it. But he is already dead. Aunts and uncles shouldn’t be too concerned. They are just a bit

²⁶ My own translation. In Polish, “przeszłość” means past, and “przyszłość” – future. Only one letter changes.

surprised. The ruskis (Russians) are always the ruskis. They are wild and primitive. They don't run their households well. They don't cook. Noise and dirt, this is how they are perceived. They would march with their guns hanging on a string... She's Polish? What kind of a Pole is she? Poles are born here. We're the Poles [My som Polacy]. But whatever. Be happy, kiddo! – writes his uncle. On the wedding day, a fancy telegram. Well-chosen words. They didn't save too much on it, a quite long telegram.²⁷

Maria's most traumatic memory is when, as a teenager, she had to save her baby brother from the fire of their house. For years to come, she felt that burden and the consequences of becoming an adult too soon. When her family is resettled to the West, Maria does not stay with them, but goes to get an education in Szczecin. She struggles in silence to learn the Polish (Latin) alphabet, laughed at by her colleagues. Meeting Janek presents an opportunity of building something permanent, facing the future together, and finally forgetting about the past. But it turns out to be an illusion. After a few happy years of marriage and the birth of their daughter, Janek and Ula grow apart. Janek is recruited by the secret services of communist Poland, UB (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa), which offers him opportunities of a career, ruining his family life as a consequence. He starts coming back home drunk, often quarrelling with Maria. Both spouses catch themselves using in anger the same labels that once they so fiercely rejected: the *ruska*²⁸, the bastard, the ignorant, the peasant... Maria makes a last attempt to feel at peace with herself and decides to visit the territories of her origin. But this only leads her to realize that her place is not there anymore. And the city that she grew to treat as her own did not bring her a happy future that she longed for. After her divorce with Janek, she starts drinking, awkwardly hiding her addiction from her daughter and friends. Finally, she commits suicide.

Partition Migrants as Permanent Foreigners

Attachment to the homeland is a common human emotion. Its strength varies among different cultures and historical periods. The more ties there are, the stronger is the emotional bond.²⁹

Profound sentiment for land, according to Tuan, is inherent across the cultures of the world, which is why the loss of one's homeland is such a traumatic, life-changing experience. It is often accompanied by violence and suffering, but the sole idea of abandoning the place that one is most attached

²⁷ I. Iwasiów, *op.cit.*, Kindle Locations 1310–1314, my own translation from Polish.

²⁸ Offensive word for 'Russian'.

²⁹ Y.-F.Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, University Press of Minnesota – Kindle Edition 2001 (Kindle Locations 2424–2425).

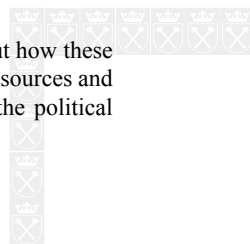
to already inflicts pain. Partitions, border changes, made millions of people homeless, only to become perpetual outsiders in a foreign land. Both *Bambino* and *Kartography* are an excellent study of this state, perpetuated for generations to come. How is the notion of the outsider, the other, formed in these two contexts?

The “Zabużanie”

The “repatriate”, the ones from “across the Bug river” (in Polish: *Zabużanie*) for a long time carried the label of newcomers from the East. Already the reference to the river separating the partitioned lands creates a metaphorical border. They were foreigners, people from across the river, from “over there”. The communist authorities of Poland preferred a more neutral term: “repatriates”. But what does this term stand for? Who was repatriated, and from where? Generally, repatriates were considered to be Poles who migrated from the formerly Polish territories annexed by the Soviet Union after the Second World War. But the migrations, forced and voluntary, started earlier. Already at the outbreak of the war in 1939 the Soviet Union occupied the east of Poland and began population purges. Poles were imprisoned, put on transports to Siberia and Central Asia, or forcibly conscripted to the Red Army. From 1941, when Germans took control over the Polish east, a brutal campaign of expulsions and exterminations of both Jews and Poles began. What is more, from 1942 Poles in Volhynia region (currently in Ukraine) were also attacked by the Ukrainian nationalist guerrillas, whose goal was the “ethnic purification” of that area. Finally towards the end of the war, the Red Army entered the Eastern territories, and further deportations and army conscriptions followed³⁰. As a result of these multifarious attempts at cleansing the Eastern territories off Poles (and Jews), the population identifying themselves as Poles in these areas shrunk from about 5 million to about 2,5 million³¹. Following the Yalta agreement, the communist authorities of Poland and the Soviet Socialist Republics of Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania decided on “mutual evacuation of citizens”. This, in theory, was supposed to be voluntary and organized. Evacuees were supposed to receive compensation for the lands left behind and have the freedom to choose where to settle down. As unrealistic as these promises were, so was the timeframe in which the expulsion was planned, a mere 5 months. However, it lasted for almost 2 years. In this time, about 1,5 million people

³⁰ J. Kochanowski, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

³¹ Data according to Kochanowski (*ibidem*), however the author points out how these numbers are only approximate ones, due to insufficient analysis of the archival sources and deliberate attempts to exaggerate or understate these numbers according to the political goals.



were “officially” moved and another 22 thousand migrated “unofficially”³². Among them were Poles who could not prove their nationality, having lost their documents or forcedly registered as Soviet citizens, and a result were denied repatriation.

Many forced migrants attempted to move to areas as close to the eastern border as possible, since they seemed less alien than territories farther west. However, in 1945 the main goal of the Polish government was the prompt colonization of the western territories, even at the cost of chaos and losses. Furthermore, the government was afraid that the expelled could damage the relations with the Soviet Union if they settled close to their old homeland.³³

Maria’s family story illustrates the fate of those Poles who had to leave their homes when the Eastern part of Poland (Kresy). Hers was a poor Polish-Ukrainian family living in Sambor, which is now in Ukraine. They were not part of the first wave of “repatriations”, in 1944–1946, but of the so-called “second repatriation”, in 1955–1959, when about 250 thousand Poles were forced to leave the Soviet Union. Inga Iwasiów deliberately depicts in her novel a story of a different repatriation than the one often imagined by the larger public. The flight from Kresy has been usually depicted as a story of people fleeing their homeland, and thus losing their estates, hiding their family jewellery, abandoning paintings of the forefathers, and other cherished objects. This focus is on the fallen aristocracy or nobility feeds well the myth of the rich heritage left behind. However, this narrative overlooks the condition of the lower classes³⁴.

Another myth that Iwasiów puts into question is the one of the idyllic social character of the pre-war eastern borderlands. It is presented as a picture of peaceful coexistence of many diverse cultures and religions on an unspoiled landscape. In this vision, violence comes from the outside, not from within. As argued by Czapliński³⁵ (2000), only the post-1989 generation of writers has begun to subvert this notion of mythical homeland, showing how violence had a source within, how the fault lines of ethnic and national divisions moved to turn neighbours against each other. In *Bambino*, the focus is on such individuals who appear to have not opted for repatriation out of any grand ideas, or

³² According to Polish Annual Statistical Report of 1949, quoted by Kochanowski (*ibidem*).

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 142.

³⁴ Przemysław Czapliński asserts in his article *The “Mythic Homeland” in Contemporary Polish Prose* (“Chicago Review” 2000, vol. 46. 3–4, Fall 2000, p. 357–365), that the tradition of mythologizing the Eastern territories is long, and it “ensured the primacy of the imagery of those territories *lost* to Poland (primarily the *kresy*, or eastern regions of prewar Poland) over those *regained* (the western territories of the postwar Poland); and by extension, it has led to the dominance of the provinces of the past over those of the present.” (*ibidem*, p. 357).

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

dreams of a “return to the homeland”. Their motivation was much simpler, to flee from the Soviet Union where they were persecuted by both the neighbours and the state. At the same time, the socialist state in Poland would encourage the settlement in the Western lands. It was not a forced deportation, they were the ones to make this uneasy decision. However:

This decision that cannot be treated as a fully sovereign one. One can hardly talk about making a decision. Yes, this is how this story should start – it’s hard to talk about a decision. It starts later, one can make it up for the events that came. They burn your house, they come again to take your crops, and there are not even potatoes left, since a long time there is no work either[...], the garden is grubbed through to the last cucumber, at school the kids are taught to forget their language (or at least this is how they talk about it, because who knows, maybe the kids are taught a new language – it’s a delicate affair – a proper language for their future); the next-door neighbor must have told her lover from NKWD something about them, she holds grudge against them for some old matters, maybe for some gossip; the left-side neighbor says louder and louder that it is all very strange.[...] It is strange that they haven’t been deported to the East [possibly indicating deportation to work camps further to the east of Soviet Union]. That they still haven’t left, it is also strange. That they don’t know what they want, strange. That they just sit here, strange. That... One doesn’t know better what’s best. Which language to use. Why would they be deported. Maybe somebody liked their house too much. There are always reasons for reasons. So for years, they wait for a decision and they have to decide themselves who they are more. Which grandfather to hide, and which one to display. Which grandfather could give an alibi, which one could be an asset.³⁶

Thus, they were not forcibly removed, but pressure was put on them to take sides, to declare clearly where they stand. Since the partition of Kresy, the inhabitants of the region became foreigners, both on the territory where they used to live, as well as in their “homeland”, which assigned them land in the West.

While the communist authorities of Poland and the Soviet Union signed agreements on “population exchange” and considered the matter settled, the inclusion of the newcomers in the society did not go as smoothly as the architects of this great population exchange expected. The rhetoric of the Polish communist state that wanted to portray people from the East as “repatriates” returning to homeland had little in common with reality. Neither was it their “home”, nor were they “returning” – most of them never lived within the present boundaries of Poland. Their home was *Kresy*, the Eastern borderlands of the pre-war Poland. Compounding the problem was the fact that the lands that they were resettled on hitherto belonged to Germany. During these times, everything was shared – houses, food rations, and bathrooms – both out of necessity as well as due to the communist ideology. Thus, in post-war Polish cities people coexisted, but distrust founded on old stereotypes still very

³⁶ I. Iwasiów, *op.cit.*, Kindle Locations 66–85, my own translation.

much remained part of the society: the “foreigners” from the East, the German-speaking “autochthones”, the “primitive” peasants, the “cunning” Jews receiving packages from relatives in the West. Some – including Ula, Stefan, Maria and Janek – formed friendships that transcended these stereotypes, albeit with complete awareness of the labels that were being used to define them.

It’s on the lips of others. Often. About neighbours. About the boss. Ruska, Niemra, Poznaniak (also an insult)³⁷, Warsawian (equally offensive), redneck, Ukrainian, Gypsy, Jew, this last one in all its abusive forms. All these absurd reminders. This constant recalling of the roots. Which perhaps they don’t have any more, because it stopped being simple. Sometimes, some nostalgia can be heard in one’s voice. You know, he was an old Ukrainian. You know, the Jewess had her packages. It’s not a rebuke. Not mere jealousy. It is talking about one’s own foreigners. As if they were house pets. A normal, social conversation. An everyday dialogue of Szczecin. Now completely effaced, concealed with analyses of integration. An alleged integration. Of language and culture. So when they finally come to call people these names, they reach for what’s most accessible. For what is easiest to use. To hurt, to strike a sensitive chord.³⁸

The “Muhajirs”

In manner similar to “repatriated” Poles from the east borderlands, many Hindus and Muslims also had to leave their homes in the aftermath of the Indian Partition of 1947. Some of them were expelled, but in many cases it was also a voluntary decision. Of course, the volition of such dramatic decisions has to be understood in the context the grave communal conflict, which made it impossible for them to stay. As explained in *The Other Side of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia, the politicians not only did not encourage the migrations, but were even surprised by the enormous movement of people from India to Pakistan and vice-versa.

[...] political leaders naively continued to assert that things would be all right if people simply remained where they were. Early in August 1947, Gandhi regretted that people were leaving their homes and running away. This, he said, was ‘not as it should be’. Later, in November of the same year, the AICC [All India Congress Committee] resolved to persuade people to return to their original homes. Appeal after appeal was issued to people, assuring them safety, asking them not to move.³⁹

³⁷ “Ruska” is an offensive name for a Russian woman, “Niemra” for a German. “Poznaniak” is an inhabitant of Poznań.

³⁸ I. Iwasiów, *op.cit.*, Kindle Locations 3756–3762, my own translation.

³⁹ U. Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, New Delhi 1998, p. 75–76.

In a similar way, the local authorities of Sindh, South-Western province of Pakistan with Karachi as its capital, were taken aback by the exodus of Hindus after violence escalated in Karachi. Even though at the central level Pakistani authorities were advocating for a “pure” Pakistan, but on the local level the outflow of Hindus and influx of Muslim refugees presented a problem. The economic stability of Sindh was threatened, since the Hindus constituted a large part of the middle-class and their absence would mean a severe disruption in the social and economic structure of Karachi. The Sindhi authorities took various measures to stop the exodus, calling for the Hindus to stay or introducing confidential orders to district authorities obliging Hindus to get a special permit in order to leave⁴⁰. None of these measures were ultimately successful. The influx of Muslim refugees from India arriving in newly formed Pakistan was growing, and with it, the resentment of the local Muslim population.

A “homecoming” narrative, used by the newly created state of Pakistan, did not fully resonate with the Muslim inhabitants of Sindh. At first, Muhajirs were to be welcomed by fellow Muslim brothers and sisters. And indeed the local had positive attitudes and sympathy towards the Muhajirs. However in the years that followed, the attitudes towards Muhajirs began to change for the worse: they became the guests who had overstayed their welcome. This is best illustrated by in the words of Laila, a family friend of Zafar and Yasmin:

‘Karachi’s my home, you know. Why did those bloody Muhajirs have to go and form a political group? Once they’re united they’ll do God knows what. Demanding this, demanding that. Thinking just because they’re a majority in Karachi they can trample over everyone else. Like they did in ’47. Coming across the border thinking we should be grateful for their presence.’[...] ‘Do you hear the way people like Zafar and Yasmin talk about “their Karachi”? My family lived there for generations. Who the hell are these Muhajirs to pretend it’s their city!’⁴¹

The labels used by people such as Laila, who is Raheen’s aunt, are permanent. They are repeated for generations to come. And Raheen, who overhears such outburst, wonders:

What kind of immigrant is born in a city and spends his whole life there, and gets married there, and raises his daughter there? And I, an immigrant’s daughter, was an immigrant too. I had spent three weeks living in Uncle Asif and Auntie Laila’s house; [...] If I went back to the house and told them I agreed with my father about land reforms, if I told them Karachi was my home just as much as it was anyone else’s, would they look at me and think: another Muhajir?⁴²

⁴⁰ S. Ansari, *Partition, Migration and Refugees: Responses to the Arrival of Muhajirs in Sind during 1947–1948*, „South Asia” 1995, vol. XVIII, p. 101–102.

⁴¹ K. Shamsie, *op.cit.*, p. 40–41.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 41.

Oskar Verkaaik, in his book *A People of Migrants*⁴³, outlines the history of the term “Muhajir”. It was initially linked with the pilgrimage to Mecca. In Quran, *mohajirs* are those ones who migrate for the sake of religion, leaving their country because they cannot practice their Islamic faith properly. Thus, at first, the term Muhajir had no ethnic connotation, simply a reference to the newcomers to Pakistan. Muhajirs, up until the 1970–80s, would call themselves Urdu-speakers or Karachiites. Frustrations with the quota system introduced by the Pakistani government that limited employment for Muhajirs led to Muhajirs forming a political group – MQM (Muhajir Qaumi Movement). Subsequently, the term “Muhajir” started to be used to the advantage of the group, as a positive marker of identity. The leaders of MQM started to define Muhajirs as a separate ethnic group, which needed clearly defined boundaries. In *Kartography*, the term “Muhajir” is used by Laila and Asif as a rather offensive term, but Raheen, when asked about her identity, proudly declares herself as a Muhajir. Privately, however, she has mixed feelings as the label singles her and her father out as newcomers in spite of their strong bonds with the city. Also, among Muhajirs, the sense of injustice is born out of the perception that many of them are better educated than the locals; this is pointed out by Zafar in a discussion with Asif:

Uncle Asif laughed. ‘Poor Karachiites. Living in this spacious, clean, city in ’47 when – whap! – Partition happens and all these immigrants come streaming across the new border, convinced of the superiority of their culture, and whisk away all the best jobs from Sindhis who’d been living here for generations. I’m speaking as a disinterested third party, of course.’ My father laughed even louder than Uncle Asif had. ‘I’ll let the disinterested bit go for the moment, Asif. But what I won’t do is to sit back and pretend to be unaware of your obliviousness to the fact that Muhajirs came here leaving everything behind. Our homes, our families, our ways of life. We can’t be blamed if some – mind you, some – of us came from areas with education systems that made us qualified for office jobs instead of latrine-cleaning, which is the kind of job you seem to think immigrants should be grateful for.’⁴⁴

The newly arrived Muhajirs wanted to build a new future for themselves and their children, firmly believing in the idea of a united Pakistan. Such was also the motivation of Zafar’s family:

I must have heard my parents say a thousand times “we came here to be Pakistani, not to be Sindhi”. I won’t deny there was an attitude of entitlement. I won’t even deny there’s still an attitude of cultural superiority, and I’m not defending that in any way.⁴⁵

⁴³ O. Verkaaik, *A people of migrants: ethnicity, state, and religion in Karachi*, VU University Press 1994.

⁴⁴ K. Shamsie, *op.cit.*, p. 222–223.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 224.

The civil war that divided the two parts of Pakistan – East and West – put an end to dreams of unity, as did the ethnic tensions in later years.

In spite of similarities in the treatment of newcomers by the rest of the population, mechanisms of othering and prejudice, the differences between the case of Poland and Pakistan must be understood. First of all, in comparison to forced displacement in Poland, the scale of violence was much larger in the case of Indian Partition and subsequent Civil War in Pakistan. In the Polish case, the horrors of the Second World War, where many people suffered persecution from both the state and their neighbors or died in the transports to the west due to cold, exhaustion or disease. However, the communal or ethnic violence did not reach such a scale as in India. Also, in Poland, especially after Stalin’s death in 1953, the situation started improving gradually. On the other hand, Pakistanis had to live through the trauma of civil war leading to a second partition in 1971.

Life after displacement

They are quite well-accomplished, on the outside. Inside, they have ruins. What they experienced at the beginning, bears fruit in the present. The images of war, the memories; what they don’t remember. What they never speak of.⁴⁶

The characters of *Kartography* and *Bambino* strive to build a happy life after the experience of displacement. Unlike their parents, they refuse to look back at the lands they left behind. They consider their cities as a promise, as a place where they will be able to bring up their children and grow old there. Maheen, when her husband mentions a possibility of emigrating says:

[...] if we leave here I’ll spend my whole time missing people in Karachi because there are so, so, many to miss that you can’t just squeeze in all that missing during your morning cup of tea.⁴⁷

Stefan, upon receiving a letter from the wife that he was separated from during Holocaust, also declines the opportunity to go abroad.

[...] my place is indisputably here. I can’t imagine, I don’t want any change. Remember, I found a life for myself here. I need a place of my own.⁴⁸

On New Year’s celebration, the protagonists of *Kartography* drink up to the future. Just like Maria and Janek, they dance the night away to forget about their worries, to silence their anxiety. They are, however, often disillusioned. Tensions erupt, antagonisms grow and even the most open-minded get trapped

⁴⁶ I. Iwasiów, *op.cit.*, Kindle Locations 3850–3851, my own translation.

⁴⁷ K. Shamsie, *op.cit.*, p. 103.

⁴⁸ I. Iwasiów, Kindle Locations 1630–1632, my own translation



in conflict. In search for closeness and intimacy they form relationships, even if these relationships are not made to last.

The worst thing is, and most people don't know about it, is that the seeds of break-ups have their beginning alongside the seeds of feelings, in the best moments, filled with joy and uncertainty. So he abandons her already when he joins her at the table, when they wait till it stops raining. [...] There is also another version, a less general and less melodramatic explanation. A historical explanation, let's say. The beginning of the end, they bring it with them. Marysia – her flight with the baby to the forest. Janek – his being a bastard. They try to cover these pictures for one another, but the world presents them a good way for distancing themselves, for creating an artificial mist in their eyes. The only way. Having fun.⁴⁹

For the upper-class Karachiites described by *Kartography*, having endless parties and social events is also a way of distracting themselves from the everyday reality of hatred and street violence. But this is not a solution that is made to last. People hurt each other, relationships break, families fall apart. Maheen divorces Ali; Marysia leaves Janek. Too much suffering was their share, they cannot simply be happy.

They intended to be happy. The seeds of failure had their beginning on the road, in the pre-histories, in their coming to the city in which they live. In the baggage of disaster, in the loss, on which they were supposed to build. They didn't make it, the sorrow, distracted by blabber, came up to their throats [...]. There would be nothing interesting about it, if this sorrow, and lies about it, wasn't inherited by their children. Transfused into their blood, masked with legends on the beauty of the lost land, and the beauty of acquiring the new one. It poisons another generation.⁵⁰

The past cannot be simply forgotten, it is bound to affect even those, who have not lived it. The people in Szczecin and Karachi, the newcomers, want to start anew. But it proves to be impossible.

Stories of Betrayal

Both novels tell the story of a betrayal. Zafar betrayed Maheen and married her best friend; Janek betrayed Stefan, the partner of his friend; in both cases, the justification of betrayal was “wrong blood”.

In the aftermath of the civil war with East Pakistan, tensions grew further among Karachiites. They were exacerbated by the news of the atrocities committed by both Bangladeshi Liberation Army (which advocated for partition of East Pakistan as a separate country called Bangladesh) and the Pakistani forces. Maheen, as a Bengali living in Karachi, was looked upon with resentment.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, Kindle Locations 4501–4511, my own translation.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, Kindle Locations 4282–4288, my own translation.

Zafar, who she was engaged to, was repeatedly threatened and even beaten up, as a "Bingo-lover". One day, a neighbour whose brother was killed in Bangladesh showed up in his house and started accusing him of disloyalty, marrying "the enemy", "the Bengali". Maheen overheard Zafar saying:

"How can I marry one of them? How can I let one of them bear my children? Think of it as a civic duty. I'll be diluting her Bengali blood line."⁵¹

As a result, their engagement was broken and the pain of being treated as a foreigner by someone that she considered as being closest to her stayed with Maheen for years. She was a victim of nationalist ideologies that ignited hearts and minds of people who were living side-by-side.

Aunty Maheen. Young, beautiful and in love, but with a heart that was daily further cleft by emotions more complicated than anything conjured up by the words 'politics', 'patriotism', 'loyalty'. Who every day heard the news, heard what was reported and what was not reported, heard things that I couldn't pretend to know because no one ever talked about it, no one ever talked about those days and told us what the people who raised us had to bear and what they made others bear, and what could not be borne. What could not be borne for her was obvious, so obvious: Zafar stepping into history, no more pretence at living outside the world around him (as I know he lived for so long, as he had told me he lived for so long, without explaining when he stopped), Zafar stepping into history, stepping where she could not go, and kicking her away as he stepped there, kicking her with blood-drenched boots.⁵²

In a broader sense, their entire generation, who lived through the Indian Partition of 1947 and the civil war in 1971, which led to creation of Bangladesh, was betrayed. Their dream of coming to a new land to have a better life was shattered, they were deceived by nationalist narratives, whose illusions of unity gave way to bitter divide.

In Newsline, the sentence "What we are seeing today in Karachi is a repeat of the East Pakistan situation" maintains a senior security official. 'Is that true?' I asked Ami, 'Ask Maheen that. She'll tell you never to compare Muhajirs to Bengalis. Being pummelled makes it easy for us to wring our hands and forget all we're guilty of. We left India in '47 – we left our homes, Raheen, think of what that means – saying we cannot live amid this injustice, this political marginalization, this exclusion. And then we came to our new homeland and became a willing part of a system that perpetuated marginalization and intolerance of the Bengalis. No, Karachi is not a repeat of the East Pakistan situation.' She pressed a red rose petal between her thumb and forefinger. 'But' 'But?' 'But there are certain parallels. History is never obliging enough to replay itself in all details. Not personal history, not

⁵¹ K. Shamsie, *op.cit.*, p. 232.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 238.



political history. But we can learn how to rise above the mistakes of the past, and that we haven't done. As a country we haven't. Not in the slightest.[...]”⁵³

The inability to learn from the past, the easy shift from being a victim to being a perpetrator, the readiness to forget and move forward: these phenomena are not only particular to Pakistan. In *Bambino*, the story of Stefan and Janek demonstrates how victims can become perpetrators. Stefan is a Jew who survived the Holocaust. He decides to come to the “Recovered Lands” in the West in search for a job and a fresh start. His wife left the country but sends him letters from Sweden, with ambiguous messages, proposing neither a reunion nor a formal divorce. Stefan begins a relationship with Ula, becomes friends with Maria and Janek. However, as the communist authorities embark on an anti-Semitic campaign in 1968, Stefan is “advised” by his “friend” Janek to leave. Janek, by then a senior officer of the Secret Security (UB), is the one to report on Stefan’s international contacts. It is striking transition for Janek, who not long ago was a victim, singled out as a bastard, perhaps of a German officer stationing in his village. However, as an officer in Secret Security (UB) reporting on other workers, denouncing neighbors and fellow citizens gives him a sense of power. Over the long-term, though, it comes at a high emotional cost. The guilt for betraying Stefan consumes him, leading to alcoholism and conflicts with Maria, resulting in a divorce.

Other characters of *Bambino* are betrayed too: Ula, whose father chose to live well in West Germany, abandoning her in Szczecin. She is also betrayed by Janek, for Janek condemns Stefan, Ula’s lover, to exile. It is once again the “bloodline”, the ethnic origin that creates divisions – even after the Holocaust, Stefan’s Jewishness still mattered. Not to him and Ula – they transcended the traumas of their past – but to everyone else. Maria is betrayed too: her dreams turn to rubble, she has no place to turn to. In an attempt to confront her memories and the growing nostalgia for the home left behind in the eastern borderlands, she visits her hometown, but nothing there is left for her to turn back to. She is forever place-less, home-less, lonely.

As borders shift, people are displaced and a deep sense of instability is instilled in them. After suffering from violence, discrimination, injustice, they seek a safe haven, a place that could become their home. However, when they reach a seemingly peaceful place, it turns out that the “rubbles inside them”, in the words of Inga Iwasiów, take over. Their heritage of fear and sense of loss is not easily discarded and often passes on to the following generations. The feelings of betrayal, of helplessness, of distrust have no nationality. That is why, it is possible to draw parallels between two unlikely contexts, the one of a German city which became Polish, and a city of the formerly Indian Sindh

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 319–320.

that became part of Pakistan. These are cities in transition, where nationalist politics cause pain to their inhabitant. Cities where locals and newcomers must learn to live together, transcending older national and ethnic divisions. Both novels underline how difficult a process it is, however they do not leave the reader completely hopeless – they also depict the strength of friendships, the rejection of labels, the force with which people can face their past and, like Zafar, stay and “look the city in the eye”.

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