

**Mapping Bangla Town and Bondukdwip: A Study of Spatio-Psychological Dynamics in  
*Brick Lane and Gun Island***

**Mapeando Bangla Town e Bondukdwip: Um Estudo das Dinâmicas Espaço-  
Psicológicas em *Brick Lane e Gun Island***

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**ABSTRACT:** Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* (2019) centre on the theme of migration, particularly Bengalis from South Bengal, India, and Bangladeshis seeking a better life. In *Gun Island*, the migration is driven by climate change and economic precarity. The climate-induced uninhabitability of the Sundarbans and dire poverty encourage Bangladeshis to migrate to Venice either legally or illegally. While in *Brick Lane*, it is a legal migration from Bangladesh. The deterritorialised migrants from two locations form an unpredictable environment of global labour. Both Bangla Town at Brick Lane in East London and the ghetto of Venice (depicted as Bondukdwip) serve as comfort spaces for the migrants. Both texts examine the phenomena of displacement, ghettoisation, and (re)territorialisation and their associated risks and opportunities. Migration also intersects with geopolitical conflicts. Interestingly, here, the ghetto of Venice and Brick Lane constitute the landscape of desire, opening to myriad self-actualisations from the perspectives of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, thereby transforming the place into space. These two spaces function as territorial assemblages in which language, food, kinship, and shared memories rebuild a sense of belonging. These enclaves are not merely zones of confinement; they are productive spaces of meaning, community, and survival. Ghettoised neighbourhoods become minor territories (in D&G's sense), shaped by migrants' collective practices rather than by dominant state or capitalist power structures alone. Thus, these contested spaces augment the matrix of spatio-psychological dynamics. Considering all the dimensions, I, in the present paper, will employ Henri Lefebvre's theory of space, along with concepts of assemblage, territorialisation and geopolitics to initiate a discussion on how scholars might

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address this widespread global phenomenon of territorialisation of urban spaces and overcome the dynamics of spatial fixity/unfixity, which can envision human unity in a globalised world beyond all the separatist forces.

**KEYWORDS:** Space/Ghetto, Territorialisation, Assemblage, Desire and Geopolitics

**RESUMO:** Monica Ali, em *Brick Lane* (2003), e Amitav Ghosh, em *Gun Island* (2019), centram-se no tema da migração, particularmente de bengalis do sul de Bengala, na Índia, e de bengaleses de Bangladesh em busca de uma vida melhor. Em *Gun Island*, a migração é impulsionada pelas mudanças climáticas e pela precariedade econômica. A inabitabilidade induzida pelo clima na região dos Sundarbans e a pobreza extrema encorajam os bengaleses de Bangladesh a migrar para Veneza, de forma legal ou ilegal. Já em *Brick Lane*, trata-se de uma migração legal a partir de Bangladesh. Os migrantes desterritorializados provenientes desses dois contextos formam um ambiente imprevisível de trabalho global. Tanto Bangla Town, em *Brick Lane*, no leste de Londres, quanto o gueto de Veneza (representado como Bondukdwip) funcionam como espaços de conforto para os migrantes. Ambos os textos examinam os fenômenos do deslocamento, da guetização e da (re)territorialização, bem como os riscos e oportunidades a eles associados. A migração também se cruza com conflitos geopolíticos. De modo interessante, o gueto de Veneza e *Brick Lane* constituem paisagens de desejo, abrindo-se a múltiplas possibilidades de autoatualização a partir das perspectivas de Gilles Deleuze e Félix Guattari, o que transforma o lugar em espaço. Esses dois espaços funcionam como agenciamentos territoriais, nos quais língua, alimentação, parentesco e memórias compartilhadas reconstróem um sentido de pertencimento. Esses enclaves não são meramente zonas de confinamento; são espaços produtivos de significado, comunidade e sobrevivência. Os bairros guetizados tornam-se territórios menores (no sentido de Deleuze e Guattari), moldados pelas práticas coletivas dos migrantes, e não apenas pelas estruturas dominantes do Estado ou do capitalismo. Assim, esses espaços contestados ampliam a matriz das dinâmicas espaço-psicológicas. Considerando todas essas dimensões, neste artigo pretendo empregar a teoria do espaço de Henri Lefebvre, juntamente com os conceitos de agenciamento, territorialização e geopolítica, para iniciar uma discussão sobre como os estudiosos podem abordar esse fenômeno global disseminado de (re)territorialização dos espaços urbanos e superar as dinâmicas de fixidez e não-fixidez espacial, de modo a imaginar uma unidade humana em um mundo globalizado para além de todas as forças separatistas.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Espaço/Gueto, Territorialização, Montagem, Desejo, Geopolítica

## Introduction

“It goes without saying that migration is an extremely complex and multidimensional phenomenon in which wars, political conflicts, state collapse, climate change, poverty, and inequality may all play a part” (Ghosh, 2025, p.25). This phenomenon entails the worldwide geopolitical conflicts between the countries of the global south and those of the global north, which result in ethnic violence and the politics of erasure. Europe faced an acute migration crisis in 2015. “By the end of 2016, nearly 5.2 million refugees and migrants reached European shores, undertaking treacherous journeys from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries torn apart by war and persecution”.<sup>2</sup> According to Ghosh, Bangladesh is at the top. The report of the International Organization for Migration confirms that over 456,516 Bangladeshi nationals resided in Europe in 2023, mostly in London and Italy.<sup>2</sup> Another newspaper report from *The Hindu*, published on 24/02/2025, presents the Indian context:

Every year, countless young Indians attempt what is called ‘irregular migration’. Backing them are the ‘unethical merchants of death’ who sponsor this activity and who have proliferated in rural Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala and Gujarat. Manpower export-legally called human smuggling or kabootarbazi-is one of the most profitable forms of trade...Sadly, the Emigration Act,1983-officially ‘an Act to consolidate and amend the law relating to emigration of citizens of India’- neither defines human smuggling nor looks at the serious problems connected with this deathly trade.<sup>3</sup>

The reason behind migration is the promise of a better living, which lures the youth to relocate by paying money to the traffickers. Illegal migrants from India and Bangladesh enter Europe through the Middle East. In Ghosh’s *Gun Island*, two young boys, Tipu and Rafi, migrate to Venice from the Sundarban delta (the Sundarban lies along the border between India and Bangladesh) with the help of a Bangladeshi agent. Their migration is driven by extreme climate conditions in South Bengal, where frequent floods engulf cultivable land, leaving the inhabitants in dire poverty. In Ali’s *Brick Lane*, Nazneen and Chanu, unlike Tipu and Rafi, are legal migrants from Gouripur, Bangladesh, settled in East London. Chanu aspires to have a decent and respectable life away from the poverty-stricken homeland. The search for a better life in terms of money and comfort encourages a lot of youth to migrate from the Global South to the North, which often results in a ruckus at international borders, culminating in xenophobia. Presently, we have been witnessing how many countries are bent on deporting illegal migrants back to their home countries. In the earlier centuries, many had been forced to migrate to the West (global north) due to the transatlantic slave trade, a thriving business of the imperialist colonisers. The slave trade began in the 15<sup>th</sup> century with the Western colonial expansion

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<sup>2</sup>[https://dtm.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11461/files/reports/Bangladeshi%20Migrants%20in%20Europe%202020\\_Final.pdf](https://dtm.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11461/files/reports/Bangladeshi%20Migrants%20in%20Europe%202020_Final.pdf)

<sup>3</sup><https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/human-smuggling-must-engage-parliaments-attention/article69263355.ece>

to the East. It was one of the largest and most barbaric systems of human trafficking in the cultural history of the world. The trade grew significantly in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries when the demand for labour in European colonies was quite high. The slaves were employed in sugar, tobacco, and cotton plantations.<sup>4</sup>

By the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, Venice was famous as a powerful maritime republic for its dynamic role in trade and military affairs in the Mediterranean. The economy of Venice was largely dependent on military power, the manufacturing of weapons, and gunpowder. Fabrizio Ansani's (2017) paper "The Life of a Renaissance Gunmaker" provides us with a detailed history of the Venetian gunmakers, who played a pivotal role in strengthening the socio-economic condition of Venice. Further, Venice served as a transit point for enslaved humans from the East and North Africa to various parts of Europe, thereby playing the role of a facilitator in the human trafficking network. Ghosh foregrounds this pressing issue of migration and its myriad aspects in *Gun Island*. Likewise, the Bangladeshi migrants, in Ali's narrative, settled in Brick Lane from the 1850s onwards. An online report informs the history of the place since the beginning of the transatlantic trade by the East India Company:

Caroline Adams has noted that Sylheti lascars were employed by the East India Company on trading ships between India, Burma, China, the Malay archipelago and East Africa, and on occasional trips to Britain from as early as the seventeenth century. In addition, records show the presence of itinerant and abandoned seamen in East London's ports from the late eighteenth century. From the 1850s onwards, at the height of imperial rule, Bengali lascars were crucial for the manning of the Empire's shipping lines and large numbers of Indian sailors also worked in the engine rooms of the British merchant ships during World War 1 (when 3,427 were killed and 1,200 taken prisoner) and World War 2... These early imperial seafaring connections are crucial in understanding the formation of the present day Bengali community in Britain. They established routes between particular parts of East Bengal and East London, and set up networks of patrons and facilitators that were to prove central to later phases of migration (Alexander, Firoz, Rashid, p.6-7).

Despite the strong presence of the Bangladeshi diaspora, the site is also associated with one of the oldest breweries in London. Another online report provides us with the cultural history of the place, which states that just after the Great Fire of London in 1666, a huge brewery was established at Brick Lane by the Bucknall family. In the same year, the members of the Bucknall family hired brewer Joseph Truman to run the operation. Truman took it over completely in 1679. The long history of the brewery came to a halt in 1989 because production was stopped due to the intervention of large multinationals, who established a monopoly on beer production. Many of London's traditional

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/transatlantic-slave-trade>  
<https://louis.pressbooks.pub/westernciv2/chapter/2-4-the-atlantic-slave-trade/>

industries had to wind up their business.<sup>5</sup> Further, the early immigrants at Brick Lane were French Huguenots, who followed the teachings of John Calvin. But the French Catholic government persecuted them in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Huguenots fled the country and settled all over Europe. In London, Brick Lane was the ghetto of Huguenots. The Bangladeshis occupied the place from 1850 onwards. This contested site is often described as “a monoculture enclave” because of the Bangladeshi diaspora (Brouillette, 2009, p. 435). Thus, it is evident that migration, displacement, and territorialisation of human beings have been an integral part of existence caused by various socio-political factors, dating back to medieval Europe and even earlier, as found in the accounts of voyagers. Ali and Ghosh foreground this issue in their narratives to initiate a discussion on how migration, followed by territorialisation, can transcend geopolitical conflicts at borders and ghettos.

## **1. Space/Ghetto: Spatio-Psychological Dynamics**

### **1.1 Brick Lane/Bangla Town**

The space is contentious and encourages scholarly debate due to its multi-dimensional nature, regardless of its territorial boundary. Further, it is considered a living phenomenon in the present context as it can be expanded, transformed, and recreated as per the necessities, which Henri Lefebvre explains in his seminal work *The Production of Space* (1974). Space is always seen as a contested site in any urban location because of its polymorphosity. The socio-political policies and neoliberal economy affect the formation of spaces from place and their subsequent transformations (of shapes/contours) continuously because of increasing human interaction. In “The Space of Lefebvre” Harvey Molotch (1993) argues:

...it is a project shaped by interests of classes, experts, the grassroots, and other contending forces. Space is not simply inherited from nature, or passed on by the dead hand of the past, or autonomously determined by “laws” of spatial geometry as per conventional location theory. Space is produced and reproduced through human intentions. (p.887)

Likewise, the site in Brick Lane is reproduced as Bangla Town by the Bangladeshi migrants, who had settled in the area from the 1850s onwards as a result of transatlantic trade by the East India Company. The preceding section has narrated the changing history of the landscape of Brick Lane. Monica Ali, in an interview, said that her exposure to the culture of Brick Lane was from Naila Kabear’s *The Power to Choose*, “a piece of ethnographic scholarship about garment workers in London...” (Brouillette, 2009, p. 439). Her initial plan was to name the narrative *Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers* to indicate the geographical distance between London and Bangladesh. Later, the

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<sup>5</sup> More about the socio-political history of Brick Lane can be found in: <https://londonbitestours.com/brick-lane/>

publisher Doubleday suggested that it should be named *Brick Lane* as the narrative pivots around the location. This distinctive place name drew a lot of attention from the residents of the space. Ali was also blamed for not being authentic in her portrayal of the iconic space. The Sylheti community found her work “untrue” and “hurtful” (Brouillette, 2009, p. 441). Despite controversies, the space as projected by Ali exemplifies life and dynamism because of the expanding market in the area. According to Sarah Brouillette (2009), it is a “traditional immigrant receptor area”, which is depicted in the story too (p.429). Nazneen, as a newly married bride from Gouripur village, arrives in Tower Hamlets with Chanu in 1985. The new territory accommodates her just as it did for other Bangladeshi women like Mrs. Islam, Jorina, Mumtaz, Razia, and all. All of them work in garment factories as unskilled labourers. Chanu takes pride in the fact that he is a legal immigrant: “These people didn’t know the difference between me, who stepped off an aeroplane with a degree certificate, and the peasants who jumped off the boat possessing only lice on their heads” (Ali, 2003, p. 34). Nazneen accepts her confined life in Brick Lane, surrounded by shops selling saris, fish, samosas (fried and stuffed parcel) and Punjabi-pyjama (two-piece South Asian outfit). Signposts are also written in the Bengali language to mark the space as a Bangladeshi ghetto, which highlights the insider and outsider binary. For insiders, it builds up an emotional “community cohesion” despite internal heterogeneity of class and gender (Brouillette, 2009, p. 426).

The Chicago School sociologists argue that mutual support and common values were very much part of the dynamic of city life in immigrant neighbourhoods. Such arguments were extremely important for recognizing the underlying structure of these communities, despite the seeming chaos and distinct poverty and struggles within them. At the same time, however, these portrayals tended to represent urban communities as more internally coherent and homogenous than they actually were. While certainly Chicago and other cities, then and now, have distinct geographical districts such as ‘Little Italy’ or ‘Chinatown’, which express culture through stores and restaurants, language, modes of work and recreation. (Martin, 2017, p. 76)

Martin, in his argument, underscores the elements of ‘mutual support’ and ‘common values’ for group cohesion in any urban space, which transforms the geographical location into a space or ghetto. The process of cohesion takes place through the preservation and manifestation of cultural memorabilia. Stuart Elden argues: “that space emerges in Western thought through a particular way of grasping place” (Elden, 2005, p. 8). Elden points out rightly that it is more of conceiving space through our imagination. The place is reimagined and transformed into a space by the inhabitants, and that evolves into a ghetto by the minority diaspora. According to Sandra D-Stow, the early evidence of the word “ghetto” is found in Italian in 1516 as *getto* or *geto* (D-Stow, 1992, p. 79). In Hebrew, it denotes divorce or separation. The term was used to indicate the Jewish quarter in Italy. Further, that space

was associated with foundry works. It is therefore understood that the ghetto is not considered an inclusive space. It indicates spatial segregation and is reserved for ethnic minorities (D-Stow, 1992, pp. 1-3). "...from a political point of view, the ghetto is an area inhabited by immigrants and their children from specific parts of the world. In areas that are on the list, residents are subjected to demands that people outside those areas are not" (Schmidt, 2022, p. 311). It is separated and yet "exotic" (Schmidt, 2022, p. 314). Further, it promotes cultural heterogeneity and transnational discourse, thus offering a counter to racial bias, often resulting in socio-political violence, which results in spatio-psychological crises. Both Ali and Ghosh have focused on this unique space formed by migrants in London and Venice. The primary objective of migration, as explained earlier, is decent living conditions. Ali does not deal with illegal migrants like Ghosh. In the polyphonic space of Ali's narratology, we encounter a large group of impoverished Bangladeshi women who survive as seamstresses and attempt to assimilate into the culture of the host country from within the ghetto, thereby transcending the respective cultural boundaries.

## 1.2 The Ghetto of Venice /Bondukdwip

Ghosh begins his narrative by employing an anecdote of the gun merchant from the Sundarban (the Gangetic delta) of medieval Bengal to forge a link between Europe and India. The anecdote of the medieval gun merchant, as informed by Rafi, reveals that the merchant was trying to migrate abroad to escape the wrath of Goddess *Mansa*.<sup>6</sup> On his way, he was captured by the pirates and was taken to a port for sale as a slave. But he was rescued by Captain Ilyas. Both of them had travelled to different places and encountered several hurdles. Finally, it was decided by them to take refuge in Bondukdwip or Gun Island, a unique space, which looks like two concentric circles. Gun Island, or Bondukdwip, is an island within an island in Venice known as the ghetto of Venice, and it has been associated with the manufacturing of guns since 1526.<sup>7</sup> Ghosh's recurring reference to the narrative of the gun merchant reminds us obliquely of the issue of migration, which operates both legally and illegally. The protagonist of *Gun Island*, Dinanath Datta, who is fondly referred to as Deen by other characters, travels to Venice to assist Gisa, a documentary filmmaker, working on Bangladeshi refugees in Italy. Upon instruction from Cinta, a historian, Deen is entrusted with the responsibility of the script because he speaks Bengali, so he can translate the interviews of the Bengali migrants into Italian. Deen is intrigued by the cityscape of the ancient port town of Venice. The proxemics of the space prompt him to compare the space with another old city in India, Varanasi:

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<sup>6</sup> <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/story-of-goddess-manasa-banglanatak/ewXxyq4sezQew?hl=en>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.seevenice.it/en/metal-foundry-workers-in-venice-from-cannons-to-sculpture/>

That there is a strange kinship between Venice and Varanasi has often been noted: both cities are like portals in time; they seem to draw you into lost ways of life...Everywhere you look there is evidence of the enchantment of decay, of a kind of beauty that can only be revealed by long, slow fading. (Ghosh, 2019, p. 151)

The signs of decay everywhere carry the rich legacy of the space, which stood against the onslaughts of Time. Being situated by the river, it accommodated whoever sought refuge. Deen, as a flaneur, moves around the city and discovers that “the Ghetto of Venice really is an island within an island, surrounded by water on all sides. An arched wooden bridge leads to a tunnel-like entrance, and this in turn opens to a large piazza...” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 151). It relates to the symbol of two concentric circles drawn on the wall of Goddess Manasa’s shrine in Sundarban, as mentioned earlier. By the metaphor of Bondukdwip, the gun merchant had meant the ghetto of Venice. The protagonist intuitively realises the link between the two locations: Venice and Sundarban. This link is forged because of the matrix of economic dependence and empowerment:

...there are two parts to the Ghetto of Venice: “one is called the New Ghetto (Getto Nuovo) and the other is the Old Ghetto (Getto Vecchio) ... A narrow lane, with tall houses on either side, leads from the New Ghetto to the Old”. (Ghosh, 2019, p. 154)

Meanwhile, Deen encounters Rafi at a construction site in the ghetto. This sudden meeting startles him further because he met Rafi only some time ago at the shrine of goddess Manasa in Sundarban. Rafi takes him to Lubna Khala’s (Lubna's aunt) office, who is a travel agent as well as a human rights activist fighting for the rights of the migrants. Lubna informs Deen that she is a climate refugee. “Shob gasé! She said (sob means all in Bengali, gase means gone in Bengali). Everything’s gone now; the house, the people--the water’s taken it all” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 160). A deadly cyclone carried off the roof of her house. She, along with her brothers, took shelter on the branch of a tree when the water rose. Unfortunately, the brothers were bitten by snakes on the tree and fell off the branches into the floodwater. She was rescued by Munir. Later, both of them tied the knot and left the country and reached Venice via Russia, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia around twenty years ago. Lubna agrees to assist Deen with the documentary on migrants, but makes Deen aware of the potential risks associated with this project. “And I’m sad to say there have been problems in the past for those who spoke with journalists—anything they say to the media can be used against them” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 162). The illegal migrants in the ghetto of Venice form the floating population, who are vulnerable and susceptible to ethnic violence and racial attacks. Lubna escorts Deen to a busy street called Rio Tera San Leonardo, thronged with tourists and vendors. “You see”, she said, with a note of pride in her voice, “they are all Bengalis, and many of them are from Madaripur” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 163). Deen

experiences the space as vibrant and filled with hope. The vendors are mostly from Bangladesh, selling either ice cream and chestnuts or waiting for customers at the cafes. When someone asks Deen “*ghor koi*” (*Ghor* means home in Bengali, *Koi* means where in Bengali, where is your home) in Bengali, he feels a sense of belonging, as though he’s at home (Ghosh, 2019, p.163). Bangla Town and the ghetto of Venice are transformed into unique spaces through the gradual process of assemblage of different cultures thriving on plurality and shared values.

## **2. Assemblage: A Process of Territorialisation**

Thomas Nail (2017), in his paper entitled “What is an Assemblage”? highlights the three features of it as explained by Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy*. The three features are the abstract machine, the concrete assemblage, and the persona. By the term, abstract machine, they mean the condition of an assemblage is abstract because it is not a tangible thing or object in the world; rather, it defines a network of relations through which concrete elements and agencies come into being and interact. The literal meaning of assemblage denotes the union of two things. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the importance of it lies in “multiplicity” (Nail, p.23). The concrete assemblage means the embodiment of concrete elements. They are not abstract; they are part of the assemblage that emerges within the “relations of distribution” (Nail, p. 26).

Deleuze and Guattari state that the concrete elements are like multiple waves, rising and falling, but the [abstract machine] is the single wave that rolls them up and unrolls them’ (qtd by Nail, 2017, p. 26). The elements in an assemblage can be added, eliminated, and recombined. Taking clues from Deleuze and Guattari, Nail opines that the concrete pieces are “mutually transformative” (Nail, 2017, p. 26). The last feature is the persona. The concept of persona with reference to assemblage is not governed by fixity. It can change due to any disruption in concrete elements. The assemblage imbues the persona, which arises out of the combination of two previous features:

Personae do not transcend the assemblage but are immanent to it. They are not the origin of the assemblage and do not control or programme the assemblage in advance. Rather personae are the immanent agents or mobile positions, roles or figures of the assemblage (Nail, 2017, p 27).

While discussing the topology of assemblages, Thomas Nail has pointed out four types: Territorial, State, Capitalist, and Nomadic. Among the list, the territorial and nomadic assemblages are instrumental to understanding the ghettoised space occupied by the migrants in Brick Lane and Venice. Territorial one is clearly defined in relation to an inhabitant’s role in it. “Territorial assemblages divide the world into coded segments. Each concrete element has a designated place and every persona’s life has a plan related to its place in the world” (Nail, 2017, p. 28). While the nomadic one is governed by

mobility and transiency. The ghettoised space in both narratives is marked by territorial assemblages of material elements like shops selling Bangladeshi food, clothes, and other cultural artefacts. The people in the busy streets of these spaces speak in their mother tongue. The Bengali way of life is immanent in these assemblages as a qualifying metaphor of “persona” as explained in the preceding section with reference to the features of assemblage. The shared memories of Bangladesh and the Sundarban delta, India, re-constitute the site by transforming it to space from a geographical/political place. In the words of Raj Kaithwar, the assemblage has an effect in its totality. It is not dealing with an individual player or element.

While materials have an independent ontological existence, an assemblage or its flow of power cannot be understood only by analysing its material components. It is essential to examine how they are interconnected and what functions they produce. An assemblage is the relation of materials with discursive processes. (Kaithwar, 2025, p. 30)

Kaithwar’s observation highlights the point of collectivity, which is apt in the context, as Bangla Town and Bondukdwp are shaped by the collective practices, shared values, and aspirations of the migrants. Both Ghosh and Ali depict how (re)territorialised Brick Lane and the ghetto of Venice become the landscape of existence and desire among the impoverished migrants from Bangladesh and the Sundarban delta. These migrants participate in the economic activities of the host countries and contribute significantly to the generation of revenue. At the same time, the migrants in the select texts form the floating population, because in most cases, their stability is temporary. Chanu and Karim in *Brick Lane* return to their roots. Sometimes, the migrants are deported coercively by the government.

### **3. Territorialised Space: Metaphor of Desire**

The thriving business either at Bangla Town or at the Venetian ghetto offers hope and assurance to the migrants. Further, the space protects the inhabitants who seek shelter. It fosters a sense of community, which results in mutual support and group cohesiveness. Chanu in *Brick Lane* does not leave Tower Hamlets like Dr. Azad for the protection of the community despite his anguish towards the migrants. “They don’t really leave home. Their bodies are here, but their hearts are back there. And anyway, look how they live: just recreating the villages here” (Ali, 2003, p. 32). At another place, Chanu speaks bitterly to his wife: “Bring them all. Make a little village here... Get a box and sow rice. Make a paddy on the windowsill. Everyone will feel at home” (Ali, 2003, p.182). Chanu’s ironical remarks indicate his psychological tension relating to his belongingness, which is also conspicuous in the behaviour of the community at Bangla Town ghetto. The attempt to transform a place into a ghetto underscores the underlying effort of cultural invasion of the space, which in turn strengthens the socio-economic power of the migrant community. The same applies to the Venetian ghetto in *Gun Island*.

Deborah G Martin (2017) describes the phenomenon of cultural invasion as “immigrant identity expression” (p.76). She further adds that the space in the ghetto reinforces the idea of “multiplicity of socio-spatial dynamics” (p.78). Both Bangla Town and Bondukdwip accommodate the diversity of culture. Also, the migrants’ participation in the business and labour market aids in the foreign economy. Both authors, in their descriptions, highlight the market space in the ghetto. The market has been depicted as a site for social interaction. Additionally, it plays a significant role in sustaining the local economy of the host country. Henri Lefebvre (1996) describes the market space as a “field of encounters” (Wilson, 2017, p. 110). Doreen Massey (2005) suggests that in urban market spaces one can experience “throwntogetherness” (cited by Wilson,2017, p. 111). One experiences a slice of Bengal that is thrown on the designated spaces in a palimpsestic manner. Migrants negotiate with the space for years, and that transforms the place into a space/ghetto of dreams and self-actualisation. The traditional concept of desire stems from the lack or absence. While Deleuze and Guattari consider the metaphor of desire productive and positive, which forges connections. Jihai Gao, in his article, “Deleuze’s Conception of Desire”, explains from *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (trans Robert Hurley1977) that Deleuzian desire is productive and real, and it forms connections, which grow through connection with other desires. This has nothing to do with individual ego, as it is impersonal and social and forms a reality. The connection and production constitute the “social wholes” (Gao, 2013, p. 410).

When bodies connect with other bodies to enhance their power they eventually form communities or societies. Against the idea that social wholes are formed through ideology, Deleuze argues for social wholes as positive and productive. Social wholes take desires in order to produce interests, coded, regular, collective and organised forms of desire. (Gao, 2013, p. 410).

Therefore, in the Deleuzian perspective, desire does not relate to the Freudian concept of sensory pleasure. It is more of “becoming” a social whole or a reality premised on multiple connections (Gao, 2013, p.410). It is not limited to any fixity. That is why, from a Deleuzian sense, it is anti-oedipal, shattering the web of the family matrix. Gao further explains: “Due to persistent subjectivist misunderstandings, in *A Thousand Plateaus* the word was changed to the more neutral assemblage” (p.410). Equating it with assemblage is appropriate because desire is not subjective; it is collective, and that operates through the heterogeneous assemblages of elements. In the select narratives, the ghettoised spaces become the landscape of desire for the migrants whose desire to live well is fulfilled by the elements of territorial assemblages like the residential building Tower Hamlets sheltering migrants at Brick Lane, the shops selling Bangladeshi food and vegetables, the signposts and tailoring shops run by Muslim women. Likewise, in the Venetian ghetto, the young Bangladeshi and Indian (from Sundarban Delta) boys, the travel agent Lubana or Palash, the university dropout, always speak

Bengali. Lubana's office is decorated with photos of her village in Bangladesh. Both spaces continue to thrive on the dynamic energy of the Bangladeshi diaspora, which raises curiosity among the journalists, social workers, historians, and policy makers of the host countries.

#### **4. Territorialised Space: Geopolitical Conflicts**

Territorialised Space, or the ghetto, serves as the marginal space within the dominant spatio-cultural dynamics of the host country. Irene Fernández (2009) highlights the paradoxes associated with the ghetto: "This space is problematic, it is characterised by ambivalence and an ongoing process of juggling notions of belonging and exclusion; it is the outcome of processes of negotiation and change" (p. 144). The migrants in the ghetto experience the tension arising from the binary of insider and outsider. Such tension is the result of resistance from the host country when the migrant communities try to establish their cultural identity from that liminal space for the sake of cultural heterogeneity, which is reaffirmed through art, craft, food, music, and language. These elements are often seen as cultural tools used to increase visibility. This marginal space, according to Fernández (2009), is "fluid" and "contested" (p. 148). It undergoes transformation recurrently. The migrants in Bangla Town form a group called "The Bengal Tigers" to protect and preserve the values and culture of the Bengalis of Bangladesh (Ali, 2003, p. 241). The challenges of Bangla Town are associated with the culture of the migrants, who often feel intimidated by the host culture, which results in myriad psychological crises. In order to get assimilated in the host culture, the Bangladeshi women take English lessons, as linguistic empowerment will hasten the process.

In Ghosh's novel, the issue is complex with a twofold agenda: legal refugee status and culture. The illegal migrant labourers in Venice, despite participating in economic activities, form the floating population. Bilal, a companion of Rafi, informs Deen about the risks that the illegal migrants undertake at different connection houses along the borders of different countries. It is a vast web of networks operating in parallel alongside the legal channels and air routes. The ancient transatlantic maritime route is used in this shady business with potential risks. The agents or the human traffickers torture the illegal migrants to extract money. Through Bilal, the complex network of human trafficking is exposed, which I believe Ghosh deliberately does to raise awareness amongst his readers about this pressing issue. The space occupied by migrants is always under the surveillance of the locals and the government of the host country, despite the labourers' significant contribution to the economic growth of the host country. "The Mob has close ties with crime syndicates in Nigeria, Libya, and Egypt. They often smuggle people into this country and put them to work on their farms and construction sites" (Ghosh, 2019, p. 200). The diasporic population in the ghetto cannot live in peace because of the widespread scepticism against them among the natives. The attitude of the host country is sometimes

hostile to these spaces. The spatial dynamics of insiders and outsiders give rise to geopolitical conflicts. “Geopolitics, on the other hand, observes and speculates upon the influence of geographical necessities upon political events and changes in the political forms of states” (Hagan, 1942, p. 484). Hagan (1942) further explains the conflicting areas of geopolitics like “population problems”, “races” and “nationalism” (p. 486). Sadly, all these are evident in the select narratives for the present paper. The Bangladeshi migrants, despite their dream for a better life, many of them encounter failure and frustration. Chanu, a legal migrant in *Brick Lane*, returns to Bangladesh because he fails to secure a respectable job. His promotion is also denied, which he believes is due to his status as a racial minority in Britain.

My husband says they are racist, particularly Mr. Dalloway. He thinks he will get the promotion, but it will take him longer than any white man. He says that if he painted his skin pink and white then there would be no problem. (Ali, 2003, p.72)

This comment by Nazneen illustrates the contrast inherent in the concept of the racial other. In *Gun Island*, the illegal migrants, who are primarily climate refugees from Sundarban, India, pose a threat to the internal stability of the Venetian government because it is assumed that this will affect the native population and intersect with internal resources and nationalist identities and culture, fostering conflicts. In the words of Francois Debrix, such a conflicting space can be called “transversal space”, because it cuts across multiple dynamics as argued by Hagan (Debrix, 1998, p.832). While Jae Eon Yu says that such problematic spaces are governed by “minoritarian ethics” (Yu, 2013, p. 198). Despite the conflicts arising out of transversality of race, perceived threat, overpopulation, and nationalism, the territorialised spaces occupied by diasporic communities significantly influence the economies of host countries, and that is evident in the provision of inexpensive labour, particularly in sectors such as construction, textile industries, and street vending, which in turn, produce amplifying effects. Ghosh, in *Gun Island*, draws our attention to the contribution of slaves and coolies from the global south, who worked in plantations of the colonisers to produce rubber, cotton, tea, tobacco, sugar cane, and coffee, which were intended for consumption in the colonisers’ home countries (p. 279). Territorialisation through assemblages of elements had begun with the beginning of the mobility of human beings. All these leave a strong message of transnationalism and a globalised world beyond borders and separatist forces.

## **5. Vision of a Globalised World**

In the closing section of *Brick Lane*, Nazneen chooses to remain in London with her daughters rather than return to Bangladesh with her husband. To support herself, she joins Razia's boutique, *Fusion Fashion*, and begins working as a full-time seamstress. A report published by the Indian Express (13 August, 2025) confirms Bangladesh's position as the second-largest garment-exporting country after China in the world.<sup>8</sup> Further, a blog post by Asma on 15/07/2025 describes how Bangladeshi women carve out niches for themselves through sewing:

Fast forward over 200 years, after Bangladesh became independent in 1971, many families moved to the UK. Some left because of war or poverty, and others came to join family already in places like East London. Among them were many Bangladeshi women. Moving to a new country wasn't easy – new language, new culture, lots of changes. But they found ways to get by through textile work. Some worked in small factories, whilst others stitched clothes from home.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, the conclusion of *Gun Island* intensifies its focus on illegal migration, linking it closely to broader geopolitical conflicts. The blue boat with refugees (illegal migrants) arrives at the shore of Venice. On seeing it at the oceanic border, the protest begins: "Close borders now! L'Italia agli Italian" meaning Italy belongs to the Italian (Ghosh, 2019, p. 274). To counter this racial bigotry, the human rights activists shout out: "NO to xenophobia! NO to hate" (Ghosh, 2019, p. 274). The navy admiral comes forward in support of the migrants and announces: "...You have nothing to fear; you are safe now" (p. 282). When questioned, he responds calmly: "I have acted in accordance with the law of the sea, the law of humanity and the law of God. If I am tried, those are the laws that I will answer to" (p.285). The speaker asserts that his decision is ethically justified and guided by humanitarian principles and the law of Nature, so he is accountable only to those higher laws of existence. This calls for a democratic existence sans any ethnocentric and geopolitical clashes. Ghosh supplements the navy admiral's message by adding a more inclusive dimension in his concluding phrase, "the ocean's earth," which subtly echoes the admiral's words, while emphasising the interconnectedness of all life within a shared planetary space. This leads to "Asenbaum's concept of democratic assemblages" (Kaithwar, 2025, p. 27). In this process, the continents exist as components of a larger assemblage, suggesting a global vision by incorporating humans and non-humans. In contrast, Monica Ali's portrayal of the Bangladeshi diaspora hints at our transnational existence in a globalised world. The protagonist, Nazneen, in a sari, is seen preparing herself to skate in the rink. "Razia was already lacing her boots. 'This is England', she said. You can do whatever you like" (Ali,

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<sup>8</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/trending/top-10-listing/top-10-largest-textile-exporting-countries-india-china-bangladesh-10179517/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.poplarharca.co.uk/about-us/news/article/stitching-lives-how-bangladeshi-women-wove-a-new-life-in-east-london/>

2003, p. 492). Brick Lane / Banglatown in England is a land of desire for these women whose empowerment emerges through the support and solidarity fostered within the ghettoised space. Both Ali and Ghosh, in their narratives, depict how political borders and discrimination fall short, and the cause of humanity takes over. The world is connected by the vast ocean and the oceanic routes used by marine creatures to cross continents. The same principle applies to the ecosphere as birds fly across continents through the sky. Likewise, human beings also migrate to different locations and territorialise spaces to form ghettos, which, in turn, are capable of anticipating a world without borders and conflicts to materialise the notion of interconnectedness and to adopt a more-than-human worldview.

## Conclusion

Regardless of myriad controversies, the ghettoised space attracts curious visitors who wish to explore the pulse of the unique location. V.S. Naipaul (2007), in one of his essays, “The Worm in the Bud”, professes his love for “the Irish area in Kilburn” (p.10). It gave him a taste of another world outside his “two-room lodging” (p.10). The appeal of this unique territorialised space formed through assemblages of different elements is undeniable because of its distinct cultural identity, which can be contrasting but not contradicting, because in both narratives, it is seen that the migrants embrace the heterogeneity of culture. In reality, this space often evokes mixed reactions from policymakers, who view the migrants with scepticism, which underscores the divide between insiders and outsiders. According to Schmidt (2022), the ghettoised space is often characterised by “poverty” and “dirt” (p.314). This is significantly relevant to the context of Bangla Town and Bondukdwip, where the impoverished Bangladeshi working class survives with minimal facilities. Ali and Ghosh foreground all these spatio-psychological dynamics of ghettoisation in their narratives to draw our attention to its long cultural history of success and failure, aspiration and frustration, and security and risk, which add a critical dimension to the geopolitics of the host country and further necessitate an evaluation of the urban policies, which can allow the diasporic communities to live without potential threats like stigmatisation, exclusion, and lack of opportunities from the host country. To this date, thirty-five Chinatowns in nineteen countries spread over Asia, Europe, and the USA indicate the widespread Chinese diaspora.<sup>10</sup> At Auroville, in India, about fifteen hundred foreign nationals have been residing as per the census in March, 2025.<sup>11</sup> Apart from these two, there are plenty of examples of diasporic communities and the formation of ghettoised spaces through territorial and nomadic assemblages. Territorial assemblages underpin several factors: how a place is shaped or territorialised into space

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<sup>10</sup> [https://www.chinatownology.com/chinatowns\\_of\\_the\\_world.html](https://www.chinatownology.com/chinatowns_of_the_world.html)

<sup>11</sup> <https://auroville.org/page/census%20-%20auroville-population-539>

through cultural discourses and emotion, not just through “machinic relations” of elements; how that territorialised space becomes a ghetto of minorities and how the ghettoised spaces can forge the vision of global interconnectedness and interdependence of humans and nonhumans (Kaithwar, 2025, p. 30). Migration is a fundamental condition of life for both humans and non-humans, reflecting the principle of nomadic assemblage. Birds, animals, and people move across spaces for biological, social, and psychological reasons, while even plant life is relocated and re-rooted in new environments. These movements reveal a world order shaped by an unseen force of interconnectedness, one that persists despite policymakers’ attempts to impose rigid geopolitical boundaries. Bangla Town and Bondukdwip serve as case studies, which hint at the possibilities of human unity beyond such divisions and call for a “pluralist toleration” (Sen, 2005, p.34).

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