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Amitav Ghosh'un *In An Antique Land* Kitabında Postkolonyal Tarih Yazımı ve Etnografya

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Özet

Çağdaş Hintli yazar Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (1992) adlı kitabında, 12. yüzyılda Mısır'da yaşamış olan Hintli bir köleyi araştırmak üzere yaptığı araştırma geziyle Mısır'ın kırsal kesiminde yaptığı antropolojik gözlemleri birleştirir. Kahire'deki arşivlerde, biri Arap biri Yahudi iki tüccarın mektuplaşmalarını okuyarak sömürgecilik tarihi öncesinde Kuzey Afrika ile Güney Asya coğrafyaları arasında kurulmuş olan canlı ticaret ve sosyal ilişki ağlarını keşfeder. Tarihte var olan bu ağlar ile kendisinin Mısırlı köylülerle ve kadınlarla yaşadığı kopukluk arasındaki tezat ise kitabın ana dinamiğini oluşturur. Ghosh kitabında Ortaçağ döneminde yaşamış olan bu iki tüccarın hayatlarının tarihçesiyle kendisinin Mısırlılarla olan etkileşimlerini iç içe geçirirken aynı zaman da tarih ve etnografya disiplinlerinin metodolojilerini de sorgular. Dil engeli ya da kültürel farklılıklar gibi antropolojik çalışmalarda sıklıkla karşılaşılan sorunlara ek olarak Mısırlı köylülerin sadece sömürgecilik öncesi tarihten değil aynı zamanda Mısır'ın modernleşmesinden ve metropollerinden de oldukça uzak yaşadıklarını, adeta zamanda donmuş olduklarını anlatır. Ghosh'un kitabı Kuzey Afrika ve Güney Asya arasında sömürgecilik tarihi nedeniyle kesintiye uğrayıp yok olmuş olan bağlar için yazılmış bir ağıt gibidir. Tarihi arşivlerde keşfetme coşkusu tattığı bu ilişkileri köylerinde kaldığı Mısırlılarla kurmayı başaramaz çünkü Mısırlı köylüler kendilerini geri kalmış Ghosh'u da ileri bir uygarlığa ait olarak görürler. Ghosh'un zengin anlatısı Mısırlı köylülerin kendilerini algılayışlarının nasıl Batı kültürü ve kolonyal tarihin kalıntıları ışığında gerçekleştiğini gösterir. Mısırlı köylüleri ve kadınları ne tarihin ne de etnografik gözlemin ulaşabildiği madun figürler olarak temsil eder.

Anahtar sözcükler: Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, postkolonyal tarih yazımı, etnografya, kadınların tarihi

Amitav Ghosh is a prominent Indian writer of the twentieth century. As a doctoral student of social anthropology at Oxford University in 1982, he conducted field research on the kinship and economic relations in an Egyptian village. Several years later, he returned to the same village to continue his research on the history of a twelfth-century Jewish merchant named Abraham Ben Yiju and his two slaves named Ashu and Bomma. The book *In an Antique Land*, published in 1992, is a travel book about these trips and his evolving relationship with Egyptian history as well as Egyptian villagers. The book defies categorizations of genre as it interweaves ethnography, autobiography, travel narrative, historical account, and fiction. This mélange of genres and modes of writing is a deliberate strategy to counter the disjunctures and discontinuities that stem from colonial history and Eurocentric historiography. Retrieving the history of the suppressed and silenced colonial subjects has been a central issue in postcolonial studies. Postcolonial subjects are burdened with the consciousness of their intimate relation with history as inhabitants of a belated modernity. *In an Antique Land* explores diverse issues of colonial history and historiography, the gaps and margins of mainstream political history, alternative ways of retrieving the histories of disenfranchised people, making them agents of their time and ancestors of the present. In his very self-conscious text, Ghosh identifies the Egyptian villagers, called fellaheen, and women as the subaltern figures of respectively the present day and of history. While the fellaheen in the village, where he stays seem to be “left out of Time,” women appear as inhabitants of a “parallel history” that remains beyond his reach. He displays his failures in creating accounts of such figures as an ethnographer and as a historian, while trying to remedy these failures with a writerly imaginative vision.

Ghosh first traveled to Egypt in 1982 in order to research an Indian slave in in twelfth-century Egypt, on a scholarship funded by expatriate Indian families. This is narrated in the first part of the book titled “Lataifa”. The second part “Nashawy” is a narrative of his second visit in 1988 and it is followed by the third main part “Mangalore” which is an account of his continuing research back in India. The Indian slave is mentioned in the letters, exchanged between two Egyptian merchants named Khalaf ibn Ishaq and Abraham Ben Yiju. The Jewish merchant Ben Yiju lived in India for seventeen years before returning to Egypt with his accrued wealth. In the meantime, he had sent his slave to manage his business in Egypt. The Slave of Manuscript H.6 is mentioned in passing in the letters, but Ghosh is fascinated by the power of daily life to inscribe itself and politically insignificant individuals into historical archives. The sections about the search for the lost history of the slave and interpretation of the evidence from the documents pose many questions about historiography, documentation, and how to read the gaps in the documents in order to retrieve the histories of excluded groups. The issue of the gaps in history connects his

quest to the next layer that he encounters during his research, namely the history of the fellaheen, who live in a disjunctured time from the West and even from the other strands of Egyptian society. His historical search leads him not only to the depths of history but also to his own period. In this phase of his quest and education, Ghosh starts doing ethnographic search on the villagers. Ghosh skillfully interweaves ethnographic accounts of the fellaheen, his quest in the historical archives of Geniza.

Multiple layers of history are discovered, unfolded, and then connected throughout the book. The book is designed to reveal layers of histories that lie parallel to each other, intersect anachronistically or never intersect, thus revealing a connection through their parallelism. Ghosh explores three distinct acts of retrieval and reconnection: historiography, through which he reveals the close social relationships of trade and friendship between an Egyptian, a Jew, and an Indian eight hundred years before the present moment; ethnographic writing, through which he is able to record the fellaheen as they live their lives seemingly outside history; and fiction, with which he imaginatively reconstructs a past, where women were part of the public sphere.

1 History

One of the main concerns of postcolonial historiography is the question of retrieval: how to retrieve the history of the colonized people, how to read the colonizers' accounts and records, how to represent the silences and gaps. In postcolonial historiography, this issue manifests itself as the question of how to speak for the subaltern or make the subaltern speak. J. M. Blaut discusses how Eurocentric historiography constructed the world as the center and the periphery, and history as the history of the Inside and Outside.¹ This model of the geographical disjuncture supports the idea that Europe is developed and advanced as a result of its inherent qualities and not as a result of its interaction with the "Outside". Similarly, non-Western cultures are deemed left behind in modernity, as a result of their inherent qualities and not because colonialism has arrested the development of the countries.

Ghosh constantly points at the fact that European and non-European civilizations, peoples, and cultures intersected in these geographies. In the "Prologue," as he introduces the archival documents that lead him to travel to Egypt, he describes the European royalty and nobility who traveled to Jerusalem during the year when Khalef was writing his letters to his friend Ben Yiju in

¹ J. M. Blaut, "History Inside Out," in *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts in Literary Studies*, ed. Diana Brydon (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 1692-1738.

India. The two men's daily lives are placed in the context of politically significant events like the Crusades but the two are given equal importance in Ghosh's narrative. The Egyptian man Khaled's daily life of commerce appears to exist on an equal plane as the arrival of German crusaders or Louis VII and Eleanor of Aquitaine's visit to Jerusalem.

Ghosh also frequently includes pieces of information that show the historicity of the East-West divide. For example, the first chapter titled "Lataifa" begins with the account of Ghosh's stay in Cairo for his archival research. Ghosh writes about how Egypt is known to the Western and non-Western world in two different names. European languages refer to the country as Egypt, a word derived from the Greek word used for the indigenous Christians, while in the Middle East and India the country is called Masr, Misar, or Mishor, derived from the Arabic word that the Egyptians use. This linguistic fracture is one of a series of ways in which the culture of a region has become disjointed. Throughout the book, Ghosh gestures toward the violent colonial history by unearthing vanished social, cultural networks of the pre-colonial past.

In Ghosh's book, history is reimagined and historiography is practiced for its potential to reconstruct the commercial, political, and social networks that stretched across North Africa, Middle East, and South Asia before the advent of European colonialism. The amicable relationship Ghosh sees in the letters evinces the existence of these networks. For example, Khalef sends warm greetings from Ben Yiju's slave and business partner, Bomma. News of personal life, commercial goods, and objects of daily life are sent back and forth between Egypt and India in the twelfth century. In one of the letters, Khalef tells Ben Yiju that he included five jars of different sweets along with the merchandise.² The ease with which the two merchants can exchange news, sentiments, and goods in the twelfth century is in stark contrast with the incredulity of the contemporary Egyptian villagers at the fact that an Indian man could travel to their village from such a far away land.

2 Ethnography

In *In an Antique Land*, Ghosh moves from past into the present, from the position of the anthropologist to that of the object of the villagers' curiosity; and from alienation towards a community in a foreign land to a sense of solidarity with the Egyptians. In the beginning, he tries to put aside his historical background and act as a neutral, objective observer as he was trained. By time, as he gets more and more engaged with the community of the villagers, he starts to draw parallels between his present experience and his historical search as well as his own

² Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land: History in the Guise of a Traveler's Tale* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 16-18.

culture. He realizes the shared history and the possibilities of reviving the lost network of the past. He learns to align his own story with the villagers' and our own story with that of the Slave of MS H.6 as he gives voice to the unvoiced, unrepresented Egyptian peasants.

Ghosh encounters typical limitations of an ethnographer, like the language barrier or cultural differences. For instance, not only are the villagers shocked to learn that there is no circumcision custom in India, but Ghosh is comically humiliated because the word for circumcision is derived from the word "purify" and uncircumcised also means "impure." "'Yes,' I answered, 'yes, many people in my country are "impure." I had no alternative; I was trapped by language."³ In addition to typical obstacles involving ethnographic work, Ghosh's Indian identity makes him subject to the villagers' ethnographic curiosity. As Rekha Kamath has pointed out, the relationship between the ethnographer and the object of their study is reversed.⁴ The villagers constantly ask Ghosh questions about his own customs, religion, language etc. He is absorbed into the community because he is perceived as a harmless foreigner, uncategorizable. But this ambivalent status also deters him from creating connections and communication with the villagers.

Ghosh cannot breach the wall of cultural difference as an ethnographer, both because the villagers "elude definition" as Shirley Chew says, by showing resistance to being studied and also because they are not coeval with the ethnographer.⁵ Wherever he goes, young Ghosh is interrogated about his own country and has great difficulty explaining its culture and religion to the "incredulous, horrified, or cruelly laughing" villagers, who do not want to accept that he is not circumcised, that his people burn their dead, and that he has a religion without a prophet. Once the reader gets past the humor and/or frustration resulting from lack of cultural reciprocity, they come face to face with a graver disjuncture: the temporal disjuncture. Ghosh consistently foregrounds historicity as the main barrier between himself and the villagers, between India and Egypt. Despite the shared history of Western colonialism, the villagers perceive him as someone from a different historical period, a more advanced epoch. The villagers insistently see him as coming from a technologically more advanced country.

³ Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 203.

⁴ Rekha Kamath, "Memory and Discourse: On Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*," in *The Poetics of Memory*, ed. Thomas Wagenbaur (Tubingen, Germany: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1998), 210.

⁵ Shirley Chew, "Texts and Worlds in Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*," in *Reconstructing the Book: Literary Texts in Transition*, ed. Maureen Bell, Shirley Chew, Simon Eliot, (London: Routledge, 2001), 206.

The villagers are not only disconnected from the modern world that Ghosh represents from their perspective, but they seem to be disconnected from modern metropolitan center of Egypt too. They themselves seem to be acutely aware of their historically disjunctured position. In a wedding, Ghosh is questioned about his country again. This time, unlike as in his previous conversations with the villagers, they are not interested in the customs and religious believes in his country. What they want to hear is that his country is technologically more advanced than Egypt, that they have concrete houses, stoves etc. And they seem to be disappointed to learn that people in India live under similar conditions as they do.

I later came to understand that their disbelief had little or nothing to do with what I had said; rather, they had constructed a certain ladder of 'Development' in their minds, and because all their images of material life were those who stood in the rungs above, the circumstances of those had become more or less unimaginable. I had an inkling then of the real and desperate seriousness of their engagement with modernism, because I realized that the fellaheen saw the material circumstances of their lives in exactly the same way that a university economist would: as a situation that was shamefully anachronistic a warp upon time; I understood that their relationship with the objects of their everyday lives was never innocent of the knowledge that there were other places, other countries which did not have mud-walled houses and cattle-drawn ploughs, so that those objects, those houses and ploughs, were insubstantial things, ghosts displaced in time, waiting to be exorcized and laid to rest. It was thus that I had my first suspicion of what it might mean to belong to an 'historical civilization', and it left me bewildered because, for my own part, it was precisely the absoluteness of time and the discreteness of the epochs that I always had trouble in imagining.⁶

Ghosh identifies a crucial distinction between the twelfth-century Egyptians he has come to know through the archives and the contemporary Egyptians he encounters in his daily life. The fellaheen of twentieth century are conscious of the historical interruptions that Western modernity has produced in the non-Western world. *In an Antique Land* delves deep into the intricacies of the postcolonial subjectivity, through the insightful, albeit fictionalized, observations of these figures. It is ironic that Ghosh, who is from a country with an ancient history like Egypt is bewildered by the fellaheens' sense of being staunchly mired in ancient history. The fellaheens' sense of their historicity is described as a "shameful time warp" because they watch television all the time,

⁶ Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 200.

as Ghosh observes frequently, and they continue their rural lives with the awareness of its contrast to the relatively modernized life in the major cities.

Johannes Fabian has argued that anthropology's relationship with power is "clearly visible, at least once we look for it, than in the uses of Time anthropology makes when it strives to constitute its own object- the savage, the primitive, the Other".⁷ Although the villagers are temporally in the same time period with Ghosh, the ethnographer's gaze places them in the past as the remnants of a vanishing past, foregrounding their potential to disappear without leaving a mark on history. "Intersubjective Time requires the assumption that the participants are coeval that is, they share the same Time... Ethnographers have always acknowledged coevalness as a condition without which hardly anything could ever be learned about another culture".⁸ Young ethnographer, Ghosh desperately tries to create that contemporaneity between himself and the Egyptians in order to break through the cultural barriers. There are multiple factors in effect that inhibit Ghosh and the villagers from feeling like they inhabit the same historical epoch. The anthropological training Ghosh has received is still too strongly rooted in the colonizing perspective of European culture. As a historian, Ghosh's perception of the contemporary villagers is haunted by his knowledge of twelfth century Egypt. More importantly, the fellaheen are not only disconnected from Ghosh's present moment but also from their won country's modernized metropolitan culture. And finally, the interactions of the Indian researcher and the Egyptian villagers are always mediated through products of Western culture.

For example, television features prominently in the lives of the villagers, a few of whom are proud owners of televisions even though the village does not even have electricity. "Oh there is so much to be learned from television," says one man to Ghosh "It's lucky for us there is one next door."⁹ What connected the world of Ben Yiju and Bomma and united it as an apparently peaceful, "accommodating and compromising"¹⁰ world was trade. In modern Egypt, however, the networks seem to be formed through television. When Ghosh first looks for Ustaz Sabri, the intellectual imam of the village, he is told that he is gone to watch television. Ghosh and the villagers watch images of the Iraqis running away during the war, carrying their TV sets. One of the families even watches their own son on TV, disappearing into the crowd. In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Arjun Appadurai argued that in the twentieth century mediascapes are the new mediums of networking and

⁷ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Colombia UP, 1983), 1.

⁸ Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 33.

⁹ Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 26.

¹⁰ Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 234.

cosmopolitanism and they differ widely from trade of twelfth century in forming communities.¹¹ Television renders the villagers aware of certain aspects of the world outside their village but it also pushes them back into passiveness and obscurity by reflecting their belatedness back at them. The mediascape is far from providing the knowledge that will empower them. On the contrary, television puts the villagers in position of passive viewers who watch their own disappearance. When Ghosh has a conversation with a young man about love, the young man says that a fellah does not have the privilege to fall in love. “‘But in the city,’ he [‘Eid] said, ‘they fall in love- in Cairo and Alexandria and Damanhour. You can see it on TV.’”¹² The narrative structure of the novel reflects the temporal distancing, too. The narrator is either remembering his experiences in the village and narrating past events, which he looks back on, or he is listening to his friend narrating him what happened in the twenty years when he was away. Even the community which he could penetrate and revive through communication, friendship, and a lot of patience is already history. The alternating layers of history, constructed by Ghosh in his narrative constantly imply parallelisms between the slave’s history and the fellaheen, but the fellaheen’s temporality has been severed from the contemporary modernity. They run the risk of being lost like the Slave of MS H6. However, unlike the historical Slave they seem to be acutely aware of this possibility. Images of the modern world outside their life is a constant reminder.

Ghosh constantly laments the lack of connection between India and Egypt. The passages in which he describes discovering details of Ben Yiju and Bomma’s lives, are interspersed among accounts of his encounters with present day Egyptians and the lack of contemporaneity he acutely experiences. One day, he becomes too frustrated with the continuous cultural misunderstandings and miscommunication. He quarrels with the village Imam about which country’s guns and tanks are more advanced. “Imam and I: delegates from two superseded civilizations, vying with each other to establish a prior claim to the technology of modern violence. At that moment, despite the vast gap that lay between us, we understood each other perfectly. We were both traveling, he and I: we were traveling in the West”.¹³

I was crushed, as I walked away; it seemed to me that the Imam and I had participated in our own final defeat, in the dissolution of the centuries of dialogue that had linked us: we had demonstrated the irreversible triumph

¹¹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 33.

¹² Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 219.

¹³ Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 236.

of the language that had usurped all the others in which people once discussed their differences. We had acknowledged that it as no longer possible to speak, as Ben Yiju and his Slave, or any one of the thousands of travelers who had crossed the Indian Ocean in the Middle Ages might have done: of things that were right, or good, or willed by God; it would have been merely absurd for either of us to use those words, for they belonged to a dismantled rung on the ascending ladder of Development.¹⁴

Rekha Kamath writes that Ghosh highlights “the links and connections that existed between peoples and cultures before the advent of colonialism”.¹⁵ “What Ghosh perhaps wishes to highlight is the cultural negotiation at the level of “ordinary” daily life- at the level of the subaltern in contrast to the military and political strategies of the various states”.¹⁶ What is at stake in retrieving the Slave’s history is not only to give voice to the marginalized but to complete the gap that will make history as well as the present meaningful. At this point, Ghosh begins to look at the present with the lenses provided by the past. Thus, the account of the personal transformation of the ethnographer, transforms the Slave MS H6 from a silent subaltern of history into an agent, shaping Ghosh’s contemporary world. R G Collingwood says that “historical knowledge is that special case of memory where the object of present thought is past thought, the gap between the present and the past being bridged not only by the power of present thought to think of the past, but also by the power of the past thought to reawaken itself in the present”.¹⁷ The identification between past and the present renders the past an active agent in the present and empowers the marginalized, unrepresented subjects of Egyptian history.

3 Women; The Subaltern of Postcolonial History

Ghosh interacts mostly with men but he continuously receives news of specific women throughout the years. For example, Busaina is one of villagers who leaves her husband and returns to the village when he wants to marry a second wife. Busaina’s narrative continues throughout the book through the news transmitted to Ghosh by third parties. Despite his particular position, which enables him to get into the lives of the people, he claims that he is unable to get into the world of women: “It was thanks to ‘Amm Taha that I knew those details about her [Busaina]: if it were not for him, the self-contained world of Nashawy’s women

¹⁴ Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 236-7.

¹⁵ Kamath, “Memory and Discourse,” 206.

¹⁶ Kamath, “Memory and Discourse,” 209.

¹⁷ R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*. Oxford UP, 1994.

would have even more firmly closed for me than it was for other men, since unlike them, I had no female relatives in the village to keep me abreast of that parallel history”.¹⁸

Ghosh uses these indirect narratives of contemporary Egyptian women as a model for the lost or hidden histories of the other unprivileged people in history. The “parallel history” of women, which emerges briefly in the novel seems to be as inaccessible and irretrievable as the Slave’s history, which seems to be lost in history. Women appear in the novel much less frequently than Ben Yiju and Bomma, whose history emerges in intervals on torn, incomplete parchments and letters. The Geniza contains thousands of documents; “letters, bills, contracts, poems, marriage deeds and so on”.¹⁹ What gets recorded on paper determines the subject matter of history. The emphasis on the material, perishable nature of historical evidence brings in the role of writing as a means of survival from disappearing in the past and forms the connection between the two novels. Women, however, seem to be deprived of this.

Ghosh points at other histories that face the danger of vanishing from the stage of history. The lost cosmopolitan East, is a counter-layer to “the parallel history” of women, both of which remain only partially accessible to Ghosh. The absence of women and their “parallel history” in *In an Antique Land* seems to be a deliberate choice to point at another central issue of historiography. Women’s history shares some concerns with postcolonial historiography about retrieving information about unprivileged groups like women and giving them a voice. In *Gender and the Politics of History*, Joan Scott has written that the one of the main problems of women’s history is to find its own historiographic approach as a field, without being an attachment to other fields such as history, cultural studies or postcolonial studies. Many postcolonialist feminists have drawn attention to the danger of worlding postcolonial women in the writings of Western feminist, who defend the rights of the Western women, or even the postcolonial female subjects themselves, at the expense of the Third World women. Western feminist writings, writes Chandra Talpede Mohanty “discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World, thereby producing /representing a composite, singular “Third World woman”- an image that appears arbitrarily constructed but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse”.²⁰

¹⁸ Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 164.

¹⁹ Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 457.

²⁰ Chandra Talpede Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, (Durham, London: Duke UP, 2003), 19.

Tracing Ben Yiju's wife in the Geniza documents gives a stark example of how women are often present in history by their absence. First of all, we learn the existence of a wife only because children are mentioned. Moreover, Ashu is never identified as Ben Yiju's wife. There is only a manumission document belonging to her: Ashu is not mentioned anywhere else in the entire body of Ben Yiju's documents, although her children figure in it frequently. Ben Yiju did not once refer to her in his letters or jottings, and his correspondents in Aden, who were always careful to send their good wishes to his children, never mentioned her either. Ghosh uses a writerly imagination to interpret the silences in the archive. He surmises that Ben Yiju married outside his faith by marrying his Hindu slave: "This haunting effacement may in fact be proof that Ben Yiju did indeed marry Ashu, for only a marriage of that kind- with a slave girl, born outside the community of his faith- could have earned so pointed a silence".²¹ Ghosh suggests that Ben Yiju must have married Ashu, although she was not from his community, because he fell in love with her, since that would be the logical explanation of his acquaintances' silence about her.

In the documents, women find a place only through their children's names and their marriage manuals. Very few glimpses of them survive in comparison to the details on the slave's life which have survived. Ghosh playfully inserts love into his account even if the historical methods and "the documents offer no certain proof".²² The fact that there is no room for expression of love in these documents, where a wide variety of personal feelings appear, and that women appear only in relation to their husbands shows the male-dominated methods of historiography that have been inherited from patriarchal history. Ghosh is aware of the intermingling of the private and the public, the collective and the extent to which private lives can become a part of history. Even the account of Bomma's, the obscure apprentice's getting drunk and asking for money from the merchant finds its place in the records because it happens to collide with a raid in the city. The personal and political, military, economic events are indistinguishable in terms of importance. Ghosh shows how women have not been able to get onto the historical stage because their personal lives rarely intersect with the public events that get recorded. Writing history by foregrounding the individual, searching historical period through the individuals is one of the methods that are adopted by historians working in women's history.²³ Only the aspects of individual lives that intersect with the broader political, social, and economic events find their way into the records.

²¹ Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 229-230.

²² Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 230.

²³ Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 22.

Because of their historical exclusion from economic and political life, women have not only been left out of the records of history but they have also come to symbolize resistance to change. In *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, Karen Lawrence shows how women have come to be seen as immobile Penelope figures, who are attached to home, and how they come to symbolize homeland itself as something that does not change and that must be preserved as it is.²⁴ Ghosh's narrative has several descriptions of a carpet weaver, a naïve and sweet man named Zaghloul, who seem to embody the feminine qualities that have excluded women from accounts of history and relegated them into the position of symbols of homeland. Zaghloul produces badly woven rugs with apparently no or very little practical use. He refuses to sell them, therefore these rugs seem to have no economic value at all and Zaghloul does not seem to participate in the rich economic life, which enabled even the Salve of MS H.6 to become recorded centuries ago. Through their uselessness, Zaghloul and his weaving become a symbol of the immutability of the villagers in Ghosh's account. Zaghloul is the eternal weaver Penelope, who stands for women that stay at home and are "miraculously unaffected by the storm of change".²⁵ His position as Penelope is further emphasized by his distance from travel and the notion of travel in an area where there are a lot of transit passages and people leaving or arriving all the time. Zaghloul admires Ghosh because he has traveled from such a faraway place:

No one listened to me more intently than Zaghloul, and for months afterwards, whenever he introduced me to anyone, he would tell them, with a dazzled, wondering lilt in his voice, of how far away my country was, of the deserts and wars and mountains that separated it from Egypt, and of the terrible fate that would befall one if one were to set out for it on a donkey.

To me there was something marvelous about the wonder that came into Zaghloul's voice when he talked about travel: for most of his neighbours travel held no surprises at all.²⁶

In an Antique Land is an immensely rich narrative of travels across geographies, history, and Ghosh's individual growth. Overcoming the distance between the present and the past is necessary in understanding the structures, networks, relations in present. In Ghosh's book, the key to the young anthropologist's

²⁴ Karen Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition* (London: Cornell UP, 1994).

²⁵ Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 331.

²⁶ Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 173.

search is the fact that Ben Yiju lived in India for seventeen years and sent his slave/apprentice to take care of his business while maintaining communication with the Egyptian merchants in Egypt. Years later, when he went back to Egypt, he wanted to visit the shrine of a Jewish saint, who is revered both by Muslims and Jews, but he was not allowed to do so. Then, he realizes that the lost understanding that connected the Egyptian, the Jew, and the Indian years ago, would be the solution to his own miscommunication problems with the fellaheen in Nashawy. Ghosh's book shows that lifting the temporal and conceptual distances between past and present will make it possible to find was of lifting the social and cultural distances between the countries in Western modernity and the countries, which are deemed to be outside it, the distances between men and women living in the same society, and distances between people of different religions and nationalities.

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Authors' Biographies

Nazmi Ağıl Boğaziçi Üniversitesi İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü'nden mezun oldu, master ve doktora çalışmalarını aynı bölümde tamamladı. İngiliz Edebiyatı'ndan Beowulf, Sir Gawain ve Yeşil Şövalye ile Canterbury Hikayeleri'nin de aralarında bulunduğu birçok temel yapıtı dilimize kazandırdı. 1998 yılında Boşanma Dosyası'yla Yunus Nadi Şiir Ödülü'nü kazanan Ağıl'ın Yağmura Bunca Düşkün adını taşıyan toplu şiirleri 2014 yılında okurla buluştu. Kendisi halen Koç Üniversitesi İngiliz Dili ve Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat Bölümü'nde öğretim üyesi olarak çalışmaktadır. İngiliz, Amerikan ve Türk Edebiyatına dair makalelerinin yanı sıra, Ekfrasis: Görsel Sanatın Sözlü Tasviri adlı akademik kitabı 2015 yılında Simurg Yayınevi tarafından okura sunulmuştur. Son zamanlarda çocuk edebiyatına da eğilen Ağıl'ın bu alanda yayınlanmış 1 ve yayınlanmayı bekleyen iki çalışması vardır.

Fatih Aşan lisans derecesini TOBB Ekonomi ve Teknoloji Üniversitesi Hukuk bölümünden, yüksek lisans derecesini Bilkent Üniversitesi Türk Edebiyatı bölümünden aldı. Şu anda Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı bölümünde doktora programına devam etmektedir. Aynı bölümde araştırma görevlisi olarak çalışmakta ve "Lives in Turkish: A Bibliography of Biography in Ottoman-Turkish Literary System (1800-2020)" adlı BAP projesinin ekibinde yer almaktadır. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda telif haklarının gelişimi, 19. yüzyılda edebi üretimin sosyo-ekonomik dinamikleri, yazarlığın meslekleşme süreci ve edebi kültür tarihi akademik ilgi alanları arasındadır.

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Başak Demirhan received her B.A. (2002) from Boğaziçi University, English Literature Department, her M.A. (2004) and PhD (2010) degrees from Rice University, English Department. During her PhD program she also completed the Graduate Certificate Program in the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexualities. Since 2010 she has been working as a faculty member at the Western Languages and Literatures Department at Boğaziçi University. Her main areas of interest are the Victorian period, the long eighteenth century, feminism and genre theory, literature and medicine. After completing her PhD dissertation on

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