

Gift Unpossessed: Community as ‘Gift’ in *The Calcutta Chromosome*

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Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Fevers, Delirium & Discovery* presents an alternate history of Ronald Ross’s research on the transmission of malaria. The novel juxtaposes empirical, western science with a different epistemology of folk medicine. At the same time, Ghosh’s invocation of the Nobel Prize Ross historically received in connection with this work suggests a homologous gap between the monetary reward (and international recognition) of the Nobel and the uncredited scientific discoveries of a silent, economically poor community. Ghosh uses Ross—an Englishman in India working with western scientific methods to investigate a disease impeding the colonization of India—as a springboard from which to launch a postcolonial interrogation of the scientific method.

Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, particularly his intertextual reading of Martin Heidegger’s essay on “The Anaximander Fragment” and *Hamlet*, offers a way to read the small community which comes together at the end of *The Calcutta Chromosome*: community as a representation of justice and the invitation into that community as a gift.¹ Wendy Brown’s assertion that “Derrida’s formulation of justice entails the present generation’s responsibility for crafting continuity” (147) captures this shifting of the focus on the practice of justice. A justice that entails community is not one of economic or political balance sheets. The justice community represents makes it possible to set aside zero-sum contexts and to pursue justice on a “win-win” basis. Justice as gift does not measure but rather offers a joining of what there is—of “whatever lingers awhile,” Heidegger writes, perhaps suggesting a reward for endurance (41). In this spirit, I address the community which lingers in the closing pages of *The Calcutta Chromosome*: Antar, left behind by so many people who had once been connected to his life; Mangala, pursuing a means of en-

abling “relations between generations” by extending the temporal reach of each generation; Tara, holding out in New York largely through assistance (not only financial) from friends; and Murugan, the lingering traces of whose life carry Antar forward toward a return to community life. By interrogating the postcolonial and technologically mediated community formed at the close of this novel, and the context that was subverted in the formation of this community, I intend to demonstrate that community building not only enacts the Heideggerian justice of “Being as presence” but also furthers the Derridean justice of “jointure of the accord: the proper jointure to the other given by one who does not have it” (Derrida 27).

Because *The Calcutta Chromosome* represents injustices that underwrite colonial power not only topically and thematically, but also formally, via the disjunctions of its non-sequential narrative, any summary of the plot elides a significant portion of the novel’s effect.² Taking the opening moment as “the present,” the novel covers only two days. The rest apparently occurs in retrospective. The first section, “mosquito day,” begins with Antar’s current data-collection employment; it proceeds to his past conversations with Murugan which reveal the latter’s hypothesis that the received history of malaria research is only the public outcome of the results of manipulations of the scientific process by a cult of Silence (and/or of “counter-science”). The object of this cult of Silence is to effect an “interpersonal transfer” which would preserve the personality beyond the death of an individual body (Ghosh 107). Given their belief that knowledge destroys or alters that which becomes known, the cultists, led by Mangala, work to enable such interpersonal transfer by influencing the research into the transfer mechanism for malaria. Alfred Nobel’s designation of the prize for “discovery” stands in opposition to the counter-science of silence, because, as Murugan observes, “the first principle of a functioning counter-science would have to be secrecy [... and] it wouldn’t just have to be secretive about *what* it did; it would also have to be secretive *in* what it did. It would have to use secrecy as a technique or procedure” (Ghosh 104). This secrecy is in the background even when Murugan meets Urmila and Sonali in Calcutta: Phulboni, lecturing in an adjacent auditorium, says that, in Calcutta, “that which

is hidden has no need of words to give it life; like any creature that lives in a perverse element, it mutates to discover sustenance precisely where it appears to be most starkly withheld—in this case, in silence” (25). Conjoining the novel’s first intimation of a cult of Silence with the unique identity of Calcutta itself, Phulboni continues to prepare the way for the reader to understand Murugan’s explanation of the cult. Whether one at this moment believes Phulboni or simply takes him as a mystic artist, his lecture marks Murugan’s revised history of malaria research as plausible by providing Murugan with a comrade who also respects the workings of silence (despite Murugan’s unawareness that he has such a comrade). This association and other connections between characters proliferate temporally forward and backward as the novel progresses.³ The first part, “mosquito day,” is narrated largely (but by no means exclusively) from the “present” day on which the novel begins and from the earlier day on which Murugan met Sonali and Urmila. These connections work in the novel’s second section, “the day after,” to knit together the spatio-temporal separation between the two mosquito days.

Amid all of these connections and separations, time remains “out of joint.” *The Calcutta Chromosome*’s conclusion is confusing not least because it brings together the temporal gap of unspecified duration between Murugan’s disappearance and the day on which the novel begins. That ‘beginning’ day is when Ava, a computer system with which Antar works to inventory objects of interest to his employer, discovers Murugan’s ID badge.⁴ One way of knitting up the gap (between the day after the mosquito day on which Murugan disappeared and the mosquito day on which Ava found his ID badge) would be to trace Murugan from the taxi to the railway station at Sealdah, whence he appears to have traveled to the Department of Alternative Inner States on the “present” day—initiating the strip search and subsequent inventory including the ID badge (240, 294). *The Calcutta Chromosome* resists such imposition of sequence. Antar cannot answer for the missing years of Murugan’s history, and Murugan either cannot or will not. Through the use of Simultaneous Visualization headgear, Murugan provides Antar with glimpses of mosquito day 1995 and the promise—can we say gift?—of community (310–11). In putting on the SimVis headgear

at the close of the novel Antar completes a circuit drawing together at least three temporal loci: mosquito day 1995; “5:25 p.m. [...] about the time Ava stumbled upon Murugan’s ID card” (130); and “the present.”⁵ Murugan thus shows Antar that he was not lost but was instead working to create that gap in his own history (the epistemological gap within which Antar had “lost” Murugan) that made it possible for Murugan to follow Mangala and Urmila into the space of Silence and counter-science. This jointure is necessary to redeem Murugan before he will have anything to offer to Antar. Until the gap in Murugan’s history can be seamed up or drawn together (and thus acknowledged) from Antar’s perspective, Antar would not be able to recognize Murugan’s ability to involve himself in offering the gift. Until Antar sees that Murugan has not only gone *from* but also gone *to*, he cannot see that Murugan’s dis-possession is a place of wealth (in community) and cannot recognize the incalculable value of what Murugan has to offer.

The anachrony Ghosh imposes by Murugan’s revision of history invites a Derridean investigation of this anachrony as opening up space “[n]ot for calculable equality, therefore, not for the symmetrizing and synchronic accountability or imputability of subjects or objects, not for a *rendering justice* that would be limited to sanctioning, to restituting, and to *doing right*, but for justice as incalculability of the gift and singularity of the an-economic ex-position to others” (Derrida 22–3, emphasis in original). The temporal gap within *The Calcutta Chromosome* is one which Ghosh never closes but only crosses. Murugan, Sonali, and Urmila disappear on the way to Sealdah and reappear later, changed. Their changes—Murugan’s appearance as a filthy madman and Sonali and Urmila’s transformation into Maria and Tara—do not turn them back into some “proper” selves; they are not granted economic stability. In economic terms all three suffer enormously. Sonali loses her movie-star wealth and reputation, Urmila her legal employment, and Murugan (apparently) even the sanity required to handle money. What they lose and gain is impossible to translate entirely into a common unit for calculation and comparison. In terms of relationship, too, all three appear to have abandoned their former ties. Because we do not know just how isolated Antar is, but only that he is isolated (and because we do not see

Antar *himself* recognizing his isolation as a *lack*), we cannot calculate the value of the gift of community.⁶

Throughout the novel Antar's situation is one of increasingly evident isolation. Antar's isolation stems from his separation from Egypt; his wife's death; his no-longer-residential apartment building; and his supernumerary employment. Without a recognizable position within a nation, a family, a community, or an economy, Antar lingers with Ava (a computer program) in his apartment, piling the closet with the detritus of his life and "hit[ting] the right key in a steady rhythm," his presence waning as he "dream[s] of leaving New York and going back to Egypt: of getting out" (117, 4-5, 5). While Antar seems to have friends at the doughnut shop, only Tara and Maria appear to interact with him, and Ava's discovery of the ID badge crowds out even his time for a walk to the Penn Station shop before physical illness causes him to cancel his dinner plans with Tara entirely. When a storm blows into Tara's apartment one day, it becomes easy to read his anxiety over the damage to Tara's apartment as a desire for society and also as jealousy against Lucky, who has the right to enter and to clean Tara's space: "[a]ll [Antar] could do was wait" (224, 223). However, Lucky, with whom Antar is acquainted as one of Tara's friends, not only enters into but also acts on his relationship with Tara (by bowing at her feet as well as by cleaning up the apartment) as Antar cannot (224). During Tara's phone call, in the course of which she claims to be able to cross half an hour (or more) of space in "a couple of minutes," and in which "for a moment it had sounded as though Tara were in the room with him and her mouthpiece had picked up Ava's ping," Tara ceases to be available to Antar as a human contact despite her willingness to come to him if needed (225, 226). Tara stands, then, at a non-spatial distance from him and his isolation becomes incalculable. Neither readers nor Antar can know how close or far is the possibility of Tara fracturing his isolation. When Tara had been unemployed, Antar could speak with her and offer his resources to her, from one apartment to another within the building, but the divide between their legal and illegal status as immigrants is too wide for him when he also has to reach outside of the building. He only speaks with her when she contacts him: Antar is fixed in place

by his own isolation, whereas Tara has no place because she has not been fixed in place—she cannot claim America, having entered illegally, and cannot claim employment, being ineligible as a tax write-off (192). Tara's mobility and her relationships outside of her relationship with Antar emphasize the large degree to which Antar has been immobilized within his own isolation. The community within which Tara moves is precisely the gift Antar needs to receive.

In New York, Antar needs justice to be given to him as a man without a country, an isolated postcolonial subject. Before departing for India, Murugan reveals his comparable isolation by trying—and failing—to explain his theory. Thus Murugan's research in India sits at the intersection of epistemology, community, and the postcolonial subject: he goes to learn the possibility of a postcolonial subject entering into community. As Murugan says, “[t]he only way to escape the tyranny of knowledge is to turn it on itself [so that] the person who discovers is also that which is discovered” (307). For this to be possible, a person cannot, before the moment of her discovery, know what she discovers or what discovers her—hence Urmila's surprise when Murugan asserts that she is the one to (be) discover(ed). In this moment, Urmila is clearly both at the center and on the periphery: she does not know and she is also “the one [Mangala has] chosen [... for] herself” (307). This is no “simple inversion” (Bhabha 28).⁷ The approximate parallel to this process achieved by Antar's failure to listen to or to understand Murugan in conjunction with Ava's ability to reconstruct data—and another parallel in the reader's gradual building up of knowledge that is never quite complete—underscores the difficulty of modeling the community into which Murugan invites Antar.

Elsewhere, Ghosh discusses the unreliability of fragmentary and invisible systems of knowledge in terms that explain his project in *The Calcutta Chromosome*. Coercion, he says, is usually invisible: “[H]ow is it possible to recognise coercion, when its traces are invisible, as they most often are? [...] [I]n its effects on everyday life and culture, coercion leaves few if any detectable traces—but this does not imply its absence” (“Correspondence”). In *The Calcutta Chromosome* oppression is often invisible or nearly so. The spectral presence of oppression appears in

the novel through Silence. When Phulboni asserts that “[t]he silence of the city [...] has sustained me [...]: kept me alive in the hope that it would claim me too before my ink ran dry,” he not only names his need for sustenance (to survive) but also cites Silence as his sustainer and his hope (Ghosh 32). The inaudible knowledge of coercion (against which silence sustains him) drives Phulboni’s pursuit of the community that Mangala’s interpersonal transference makes possible. Ghosh positions Ross’s discovery, which led to a greater ability to prevent and to treat malaria, against the methods and practices of counter-science (Ghosh 139, 23). At face value, this contrast is surely cause for light-heartedness—even, perhaps, for “joy and laughter” (Ghosh, “Correspondence”).⁸ And the signs of oppression are indeed small: the subtext of Phulboni’s speech (a scarcely audible sign), and “an arch framing a rusted iron gate” (a memorial most memorable for the “wasteland” of refuse just beyond it [43]). Just as Phulboni articulated silence as truth and life (in contrast to the word as mind and language), Ghosh in his correspondence identifies the truth as (generally) invisible (*Calcutta* 29, “Correspondence”).

Thus the community in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is spectrally invisible. It comes together in the unseen transfer of personalities between bodies and in a hyperspace created through SimVis technology. In his critique of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, Partha Chatterjee points towards the imaginary, the creative, a non-material domain that he sees anticolonial nationalism carving out for itself. The embrace of an “inner,” spiritual, cultural domain that is imperative in proportion to one’s “success in imitating skills” useful in the western, material, economic, scientific domain has an unexpected resemblance to Ghosh’s novel: Chatterjee might well be describing Mangala’s relationship with the research of the Indian Medical Service: the more effectively Mangala inserts herself into the labs, the more effectively she can subvert the research there to her own ends (Chatterjee 6).⁹ *The Calcutta Chromosome* does not concede the realm of technology, though the appearance of science—even the forms of science—remains the territory of the West. Silence, counter-science, and entrance into community via SimVis headgear together claim technology for the “anti-colonial” and thus for the postcolonial individual. These technologies and individuals enact the work of seaming that

counter-science performs in the novel in order to cross between the material and the spiritual by locating a material (and scientific) transmitter of the immaterial soul or personality. Ghosh's novel thus moves beyond the starting point of an anti-colonial nationalism to a new position for the postcolonial subject: "sovereign" not only within "its own domain" but across both the "outer sphere" and the *related* "inner domain."

Antar is not only emotionally isolated but also unnecessary in his profession. His wife has died, his neighbours have left, his employer has been absorbed by a multinational corporation, and he is exiled from his country. Industrialization, gentrification, murder, transnational power structures, and his own desire for a salary in American dollars are responsible in varying degrees for his solitary existence (Ghosh 9–17). This isolation is not only a "disjointed or disadjusted now" but also the disjointed or disadjusted community which Derrida introduces in discussing "*plus d'un*" both as numbers of people or ghosts ("with or without a leader") and "also [as] the *less than one* of pure and simple dispersion [w]ithout any possibility of getting together" (Derrida 3, emphasis in original). On the side of "more than one," Derrida ranges disorderly plurality: ghosts without people, people without leaders. Antar, "assigned to an inconsequential 'At Home' job to see him through to retirement," lives such a life: the Council "communicated with him through Ava whenever they wanted, which wasn't often" (9). This infrequency of communication, alongside the inconsequentiality of his work, as part of the Council's strategy for taking care of Antar and "most of his colleagues" situates Antar as part of a mass without a leader (10). But the disconnection and disorder of working away from a central office building leaves Antar "without any possibility of getting together" with his fellow 'un-led' employees. His professional interactions, such as they are, are primarily with Ava. He has no significant tasks and works exclusively with a machine that approximates his Egyptian community only imperfectly (7). Ava's "program[ming] to simulate 'localization'" is no more real an assemblage of people than the dispersed workers with whom Antar has no contact (14). In this isolation, Antar remembers when, as a child in Egypt, watching archeologists work, he had "announced: 'I know what they're doing; they're counting the dust; they're dust counters'" (6). This

childhood misunderstanding recurs to Antar as a description of what Ava does, and he no more understands why he and Ava do their tasks than he, as a child, understood the archaeologists' work.

As part of *less than one* Antar is separated from his wife, his homeland, and even a residential neighborhood. What he has is the doughnut shop. This community stands in contrast both to the disjunction of the various commercial enterprises, located in what used to be a building bursting with families, and to the uncanny inversion of community that Ava's programming provides. Ava creates a set of voices that do not so much put Antar at home as in prison—"encaged" in a "bleak, cold building," longing to "escape" from Ava's localization (14). The noises behind Ava's voices are those of the commercial use of the building. These noises are so distinctly *not* "all those noisy, festive families that had so attracted Tayseer" that Antar even prefers the silence of the evening after the employees have left (16). The doughnut shop, with its conglomeration of the displaced ("the un-named Sudanese bank-teller, Maria, the well-dressed Guyanese woman who worked in a Chelsea used-clothes store, Lucky, the young Bangladeshi man from the subway newsstand" [13-14]), is, at this moment, Antar's only hope of society, something he still wants, even though Tara plans to come over with dinner: Tara alone is not enough. He will, however, never make it there, caught as he is between Murugan's ID badge and his own malarial fever.

The narrative arcs of *The Calcutta Chromosome* reveal and rely upon a permeability of the present. The temporal endpoints of the novel are its opening on Mosquito Day and its closing on the Day After. In between—overnight, as it were—we, as readers, come to understanding only by virtue of extended discursions (excursions) into various past incidents, reaching back at least a century. These archives of the past chart impositions of the past on the present, of silence on science, of the colonized on the colonizer as Mangala and those who practice counter-science make use of science and its methods to achieve their own ends.¹⁰ This imbrication of the past and the present reflects not only Ava's functions but also Murugan's gathering in of Antar. Just as Mangala and her associates need silently to alter Ronald Ross's research trajectory, so the back story Murugan uncovers works to alter Antar's life.

The disruption of time—both as a narrative technique and as a function of the transmigration harnessed by Mangala’s counter-science—creates a space for justice by both breaking down causal relationships and opening up cyberspace (Derrida 23). In narrative terms, the vernacular Indian stories embedded in Ghosh’s novel show ghosts breaking down causal relationships, first by classifying ghosts as causal agents within counter-science and second by disrupting time within the community through the ghostly movement of identity between borders.¹¹ Mangala’s counter-scientific methods (and the manner in which Ross does not discover so much as (mis)appropriate facts and ideas that Mangala and her associates arrange for him to see) devalue the methods of cause-and-effect-based research, as part of a process which leads the reader to see her as a ghost—a personality with the ability to transfer between bodies.¹² Similarly, Ghosh’s interruption (and disruption) of straightforward chronological narration implies the counter-scientific use of Murugan as a receptacle for knowledge, even as Ghosh’s work undermines Ava’s knowledge in favor of her usefulness as a means by which Murugan can reach Antar (*Calcutta* 307).

Antar travels through life transnationally, yet without translation. Heidegger points out that it is the responsibility of the translator to translate to the destination language.¹³ Antar, instead, is brought across to New York, not so much translated as trained (and, even so, trained in a job other than that for which he was hired). The Council catalogues and organizes according to its own schema: it does not translate, it commodifies and records; it expropriates histories. Murugan’s method (and Ghosh’s) is to enter into Antar’s space before bringing him into the SimVis. In fact, SimVis itself is already familiar terrain for Antar, into which we may assume he has learned to translate himself. By beginning in this space, Murugan starts translating himself, as is necessary to Antar’s entrance into the community Murugan offers. Counter-science, in its need for Silence, might have no language of its own. Mangala sees further than Ross because she is Silent. Murugan is able to read the counter-history because he does not adopt the standard history. In their receptiveness, they have something to offer (Mangala most notably to the syphilitics [149] and Murugan to Antar).

Heidegger describes departure as a moment of “transiency rather than being” (31).¹⁴ Antar’s arrival, his transiency in New York, is a function of his lack of community. His lack of community is a function of not being well translated. Antar, unlike Tara, arrived in the States “in unconcealment” (Derrida 169). Murugan prevents or subverts the expropriation that the IWC would make of his person through Ava’s cataloguing of his ID card by claiming to have inserted the identity badge into the system for his own purposes, purposes he never names (although he does note that “the going was good” [310] and that “nothing would be quite as quick [a way to get in touch with Antar] as that ID card” [309]). Without fully explaining his mechanism, Murugan indicates that he employed it to bridge the spatial and the temporal gaps between himself and Antar. As Heidegger writes, “[t]he truly fateful encounter with historic language is a silent event” (57). Similarly, Antar’s encounters with Murugan occur with only passing reference to language.

Although Murugan acknowledges that all is not right (“Guess you couldn’t bear to look at my body any more” [295]), either in terms of his own material dispossession or in terms of the estrangement between himself and Antar, he conducts himself with the confidence that he has something to offer. He reaches out to Antar, underscoring the unknowability of the space of years between Mosquito Days, saying, “Guess we got in while the going was good [...]. Anyway, it’s all in there, waiting for you” (310). A gruesomely filthy, manacled, naked man, committed to an insane asylum, claims to have obtained the good life and to be able to offer it to Antar. He is visibly outside of the economic system, acting without reference to his poverty. His offer establishes him as standing separate from Antar, too—exposed and ex-poised. Antar sees him, in all too intimate detail. In the action of helping Antar “across,” however, that ex-position will be eliminated. Justice then becomes invisible, as the difference between the giver and the recipient of the gift (and therefore the exposure and ex-posture of Murugan) disappears in their mutual belonging to a single community.

As an inmate of the Fort William Shelter of the “Department of Alternative Inner States” Murugan is exposed as “outside himself,” but, because he still has, power, to insert his information in Antar’s way,

and has been able to “find his way back,” his madness is that of the Heideggerian seer (Heidegger 35).¹⁵ He has escaped the economic, the political, and the scientific in his pursuit of the Silence. Murugan’s efforts all along have been those of the seer: he has pursued a place “away from the sheer oppression of what lies before us” while also reaching or drawing himself backward into “the raging epidemic” from which he had exited (35). His subject for Antar has, all along, been malaria, disease, and the epidemic transmission of Silence and counter-science. Murugan sees and inverts the illness of the exteriorized colonial (or even postcolonial) person. “Outside himself,” Murugan finds (and offers) community: a healthy interiority. Murugan finds his way back to India and back to New York—he reaches *in* to all of his previous contexts, first translating himself as completely as he can. Murugan works with Antar at LifeWatch; he tries to communicate over a business lunch with him; he leaves messages (which Antar finds uninterpretable). The messages Murugan leaves will become clear to Antar when enough of the information comes together; Antar’s collection of information (produced by Ava’s illimitable need for facts) creates a moment in which Murugan’s messages can become present and in which Murugan’s offer can also therefore become present. Murugan’s work of translation follows Ghosh’s larger effort of translation as Ghosh weaves together the colonial narration of Ronald Ross’s discovery with vernacular fiction.

Colonial injustice includes consequences lasting across generations. If “justice entails the present generation’s responsibility for crafting continuity,” then justice reaches forward to establish rightness rather than backward by striking with retribution (Brown 147). Justice as retribution would entail something done *against* Antar, in response to Antar’s disavowal of Murugan after Murugan’s expulsion from the restaurant (Ghosh 109). Instead, Antar remains, identified within Murugan’s interpellations: a “fucking jerk” with a “pal” (116). Having only buried the answering machine, with the messages that had been his last link to Murugan, rather than destroying or discarding it in a more final manner, Antar has indicated his predisposition to accept the community Murugan offers him (hinting that the final moment of the book is a prelude to Antar actually coming “across”).¹⁶ The material remnant of

the connection between them (the answering machine's tape) further frustrates any attempt to place a value upon the gift Murugan offers, as they are already members of a community, "deal[ing] with the human side of things" (115).¹⁷

Instead of a "human side," Antar has Ava. The IWC uses her to insulate him from people by providing simulations of "localization" and of "visualization" and by the audio-visual phone controls that make the images of the people to whom he speaks objects under his control. When Antar calls the Director of the Council in Calcutta, Ghosh's description makes the Director appear cartoonish:

[T]he Director appeared in Antar's living room, [displayed as] *half-size*. He was standing *under a shower* [...]. He dropped to all fours and began crawling furiously, dripping soap and water on the floor. [... To Antar] the director looked frantically stationary, *in the middle of his living room*, as though he were crawling on a conveyor belt. (238, 239, emphasis added)

From the size disparity to the displacement, Antar's view of the director is comic. It appears that the director has chosen to shower in full view in Antar's living room. The futility of his attempt to obtain some visual privacy (screaming, crawling, and covering the genitals he had been caught scratching), as well as the humor inherent in the scene even if his attempt had been successful, recalls the omnipresent vigilance attributed to many gods. The opening moment demonstrates only Antar's ability (through Ava) to see almost anything he wants to see. With the director's inability to escape, Antar becomes, momentarily, a powerful puller of puppet-strings. When he manipulates the image of Murugan's head later, his power is a mockery: reducing Murugan to an object (both by decapitation and by comparison to a painting) leaves Antar ultimately subject to another kind of disembodiment offered by Murugan: re-location within the community Murugan inhabits through SimVis and associated technology.

This system, Ava, is the means by which Murugan offers Antar participation in the mutation of the counter-scientific community that the former has helped to bring about by collating the knowledge which cost

him his job and any appearance of sanity. By means which remain undescribed in the novel, Murugan taps into the Visualization Simulation (SimVis) system at just the time Ava captured his card. He makes Ava his carrier-pigeon for the transmission of the chromosome-analogue which allows the community to expand: “Antar [...] left to himself, [would] have dispatched it [the badge] with a keystroke, sent it tumbling into the unbounded darkness of Ava’s heart. It was only because Ava went into one of her trances of unrecognition over the metal chain that he took a closer look” (8–9). His discovery arises from a machine failure. Whereas Ava cannot “read” the chain, Antar recognizes the illegible card (and reads the name on it before Ava finishes reconstructing it), Ava fails on the chain (and can reconstruct the card). Murugan may be referring to her when he speaks of a “technology that’ll make it easier and quicker to deliver their story to whoever they’re keeping it for: a technology that’ll be a lot more efficient in mounting it than anything that’s available right now” (219). Her technology is also the space within which the community is able to be present together.

The incalculable justice and gift of a community which nonetheless leaves one of its members in an asylum is what Derrida calls “the proper jointure to the other given by one who does not have it” (27). Murugan does not *have* community; it is not something he possesses. He does, however, give the jointure that is community to Antar, who finds himself in accord with this community. Community itself is naturally a jointure: one cannot have community with oneself. Accord with this community, then, brings Antar out of his isolation and loneliness. This end of isolation enacts justice, not only as jointure, but also in Heidegger’s thought ‘on the basis of Being as presence’: “voices everywhere now, in his room, in his head, in his ears, [...] as though a crowd of people was in the room with him” (311). This subjunctively present crowd indicatively affirms Murugan’s offer: “They were saying: ‘We’re with you; you’re not alone; we’ll help you across’” (311). They are not conditional, but actual. *The Calcutta Chromosome* closes with a community that enacts not only the Heideggerian justice of ‘Being as presence’ but further the Derridean justice of ‘jointure of the accord’ in this incalculable, unpossessed gift.

Notes

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- 1 Bishnupriya Ghosh's arguments regarding Amitav Ghosh's use of the vernacular in *The Calcutta Chromosome* have helped to inspire my application of Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* to epistemology and community in this novel.
- 2 I would argue that all of the ruptures and disjunctions of the novel can be taken as representative of the disruptions and dislocations imposed upon its characters by transnational corporate colonialism.
- 3 For example, in India Murugan meets Sonali and Urmila, two women who not only are connected—in various ways—with Mangala's cult of Silence but who also bear uncanny resemblances to Maria and Tara, two women Antar knows from his local doughnut shop.
- 4 Ava, the "AVA/Ile syste[m]" which Antar uses in his work, seeks encyclopedic knowledge of the world: "Anything she didn't recognize she'd take apart on screen [and s]he wouldn't stop until Antar had told her everything he knew about whatever it was that she was playing with on her screen" (Ghosh, *Calcutta* 4). Ava, representing the technology of data transfer which facilitates multinational capitalism, bridges much of the spatial separation within *The Calcutta Chromosome*.
- 5 By 'the present' I mean to indicate the scene in Antar's apartment between his awakening and his donning of the headgear (293–310).
- 6 As further contrast between economic power and communal benefit, it is worth noting that everything that contributes to Antar's financial well-being contributes also to his isolation: he left his home, via Moscow, for "a number-crunching job [that was] safe, secure, settled and [that] offered an American salary and a guaranteed visa"; the IWC provided him with a sinecure until retirement, but this required him to work from home rather than with people; and he continues to live in his apartment building because "he couldn't afford to move out of [the] rent-controlled apartment[, and e]very year the building grew emptier of people" (10, 9, 16). Murugan, by contrast, left for Calcutta in the face of Antar's finance-based argument for staying, and he gained not only his own place in the community but also Antar's opportunity for a place therein.
- 7 As Homi K. Bhabha asks, "Can the aim of freedom of knowledge be the simple inversion of the relation of oppressor and oppressed, center and periphery, negative image and positive image?" (28).
- 8 Ghosh writes, "It is one of the odder facts of history that oppression and coercion do not necessarily rob people for their capacity for joy and laughter: quite the contrary."
- 9 Chatterjee, in full, writes that:
anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial

power. It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains—the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the “outside,” of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the west had proved its superiority and the east had succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an ‘inner’ domain bearing the “essential” marks of cultural identity. The greater one’s success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one’s spiritual culture. This formula is, I think, a fundamental feature of anticolonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa. (6)

- 10 I set aside the relations of dreams, delirium, and visions to one another and to the permeability of the now. Suffice it to observe that the two sections are “Mosquito Day” and “The Day After,” implying some significance for that which connects them: a night. Night, in the novel, is the place not only of dreams and delirium but also of the vernacular, as the time of Phulboni’s encounter at Renupur station.
- 11 Bishnupriya Ghosh explores the vernacular stories as “both [...] tales of betrayal, and both [using] ghosts as literary devices for raising those ethical questions of exclusion and coercion” (201).
- 12 Cause-and-effect-based research is dependant upon a linear, non-recursive chronology. The effect must both temporally *and* causally follow its cause.
- 13 Heidegger writes, on translating the Anaximander fragment from Greek to German, “[...] our thinking must first, before translating, be translated to what is said in Greek. Thoughtful translation to what comes to speech in this fragment is a leap over an abyss [*Graben*]. [...] It is hard to leap, mainly because we stand right on its edge. We are so near the abyss that we do not have an adequate runway for such a broad jump; we easily fall short” (Heidegger 19).
- 14 Heidegger speaks to the relation Anaximander makes between the place of origin and the place of passing away. In his translation of the fragment Heidegger relates the origin and the surmounting of disorder such that I find it an apt figure for the transmigration of personality Mangala enacts: not a departure, but a withdrawal and a transiency of personality within each body rather than an absolute transiency of personality (57).
- 15 “A madman is beside himself, outside himself: he is away. We ask: away? Where to and where from? Away from the sheer oppression of what lies before us [...]. The seer is outside himself in the solitary region of the presencing of everything that in some way becomes present. Therefore he can find his way back from the ‘away’ of this region, and arrive at what has just presented itself, namely, the raging epidemic” (Heidegger 35).
- 16 Such crossing would rearticulate time without filling the temporal gap. It reaches across it, without acknowledging it as a wrong, and creates a present which will be a jointure held by (at least) Tara, Antar, and Murugan.

17 This moment, after lunch and before receiving Murugan's phone messages, in which Antar does and does not consider Murugan a part of the human side (as, specifically, opposed to accounts), alienates Antar from himself, as he attempts to separate himself from Murugan despite having been classed with him by the restaurant's other patrons and its manager. The asymmetry of "I've never had anything to do with him before, and I hope I never will again" further undermines this attempt (115).

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