

Acknowledgments

I started thinking about writing a book about Bengali ghosts more than a decade ago, but somehow the time was never right to give these Beings the attention they deserved. In the interregnum, many monsters appeared on the political scene, and I abandoned my ghosts to write a few books on feminism and Marxist theory. But I remained haunted.

I came back to the project while visiting a sugar plantation in the Caribbean, full of its own ghosts crying out for historical voice. That is a story for another day. However, since this book has been brewing for years, I have accumulated more debts than I can repay or even catalog.

A history of ghosts is, as I discovered, as difficult to write as it is rewarding. The difficulty was in its not having any predecessors in the field, even though, as a field, nineteenth-century Bengali history is one of the most oversubscribed. This challenge, however, enclosed its own reward. It allowed me to create my own archive as I worked and brought me in contact with some of the most generous scholars, friends, and comrades, whose contribution to shaping this project is as important as my own. The work of academic scholarship is so often performed in seclusion. It is the contribution of colleagues and comrades that help situate that work in the wider field and give it the context and bearing it needs.

I first discussed my ghosts with Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar, and both, in their characteristic fashion, gave me the indulgence I needed to begin this very odd project. Mandakranta Bose and Tirthankar Bose welcomed me as a family member when I was struggling to define the project on a postdoc at the University of British Columbia. My friend for many decades, Prachi Deshpande, was one of the first people to host my ghosts when I gave

a talk at Berkeley on her invitation. Judith Misrahi-Barak at the University of Paul Valéry brought many of us ghost hunters together at her conference, Postcolonial Ghosts. There, in the stunning city of Montpellier, I first tested my argument about spectral spatiality. It was about the same time that Rangan Chakraborty, then in charge of the Sunday section of the Bengali daily, *Anandabazar Patrika*, asked me to write about my research for the paper. I am very grateful to Rangan da, as that Bangla piece really was the kernel of this book. Rebekah Sheldon at Indiana University shares my interest in ghosts and goblins but does a much better job of articulating their connection to the modern; she gave me the opportunity to present my work to a group of brilliant co-thinkers whose rich comments and contributions helped me enormously.

I thought I was misreading my email when Amitav Ghosh agreed to read a copy of this manuscript. His excitement and encouragement for this book are more a testament to his generosity than to my competence. I will never be able to write such history-haunted novels, so I satisfied myself by writing a history about haunting.

Over the years I received several grants from Purdue University to make trips to the archives; without those, this book would have taken even longer than it did. My colleagues in the History Department at Purdue, Whitney Walton and Susan Curtis in particular, let me impose my many ideas and written drafts on them. Whitney and Susan are mentors that every woman faculty deserves; they remain intellectual godmothers to many projects, including my ghosts. My research assistant, Xuening Kong, was invaluable in locating typos and providing stimulating conversations about Chinese ghosts. Matthew Sayers, whose book *Feeding the Dead* was an important contribution to the field, turned out in person to be a wonderful interlocutor, with scholarly impulses both generous and generative.

David McNally's work on capitalism's monstrosity was such a delight and inspiration for this book. David is a comrade who shares his time and ideas enthusiastically with anyone wanting to understand capitalism. We are all lucky that he fights the system with the same vigor.

As a Marxist feminist I am naturally suspicious of families, but Pablo, Eliza, and Levi defy all misgivings and drown me in both memories and joy while making me greedy for more.

Gareth Dale became a cheerleader of my ghosts from the moment I took the book off the back burner. In a similar vein, Indranil Roychowdhury provided a home for me in Kolkata in the warmest, and most capacious, sense of the word. When I told my editor at Duke, Courtney Berger, that the

book was about real ghosts rather than metaphorical ones, she said, “All the better.” That’s when I knew that both my Beings and I had found a home at Duke. My thanks go to the entire team at Duke and to my very careful copy-editor, Erin Davis.

Bill was away for some of the book’s writing. I am grateful he came back.

The book, among other things, explores why and how precolonial ghosts were exiled out of the domain of fear (and into humor/children’s literature) and their place usurped by the modern gothic. I ask why occultism and spiritualism among the Bhadrakok intelligentsia emerged as “accepted” modes of reflecting on the afterlife and try to make sense of how such practices were imbricated in an ambient, but ever present, Hindu revivalism.

But why ghosts? One way to answer that question is to ask, “Why not?” After all, these Beings who dominated precolonial lifeworlds and provided meaning to them deserve the attention of the modern historian. But there is another reason. Since 1992 (the year of the destruction of the Babri Masjid by the far right), as scholars and citizens, we have all been trying to make sense of the rise of Hindutva. A lot of historical analysis of this “rise” has involved tracing its roots to nineteenth-century nationalism and the nation-state. While that kind of scholarship is important, I understand it to be akin to looking at the main avenues of social change. In this book I am interested in the alleyways, the by-lanes along which this change accreted. The exile and defanging of premodern ghosts and the crowning of the modern gothic as the *sole* mode of articulating fear were processes that helped compose a new lifeworld of the Hinduized nation. The ghostly world was a contested one. I study the contestations in order to better understand the consequences.

Which is why this book is for Shayari, the mightiest of Beings and the inheritor of the world we build.

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