Climate Change in Amitav Ghosh's The Great Derangement, The Hungry Tide and Gun Island

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Sous la direction de Prof. Marc DELREZ

Mémoire présenté par Mathilde DUTRIEUX en vue de l'obtention du grade de Master en Langues et Lettres Modernes, orientation Germaniques, à finalité spécialisée en didactique

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1. Introduction

"The Earth is what we all have in common"- Wendell Berry

Climate change is one of the most concerning issues of the era we live in, the Anthropocene. The extent of the crisis is unprecedented, and there is a global failure in its management. As the situation worsens at an unstoppable pace, the measures taken to deal with it are completely insufficient in view of the consequences now evidently on their way. Climate change is not only a political and environmental crisis, it reveals a failure of the imagination and is therefore a cultural crisis too. The issue may well be urgent, but it remains very abstract and utterly difficult to grasp imaginatively. The global failure to react is leading to a catastrophe, which is just like the scale of the problem, i.e. unprecedented. Therefore, '[i]f only professionals of imagination, such as novelists or screenwriters could give shape to it, it would be easier to take some effective course of action' (Vescovi 123). Here lies the most intricate task assigned to writers, who must concretise this global crisis and raise awareness on a large scale.

Fiction is thus potentially a way to make readers imaginatively engaged with the crisis. Cole argues that 'climate fiction may seem far removed from policy or policymaking, it [nevertheless] provides a window into what scholars refer to as the "climate imaginary" [...]: the symbols, narratives, and concepts through which climate change is represented and given meaning' (Cole 2). The role of writers is essential to the management of the climate crisis in the sense that '[w]hen future generations look back upon the Great Derangement they will certainly blame the leaders and politicians of this time for their failure to address the climate crisis. But they may well hold artists and writers to be equally culpable - for the imagining of possibilities is not, after all, the job of politicians and bureaucrats' (Ghosh 2016, 135). What is important in this quotation may not be the question of who is to blame but rather the very insightful remark about the role of writers: the power they hold is that of imagining possibilities, and enrich the climate imaginary. The contribution of fiction to the climate imaginary is important; the latter 'has stakes which extend beyond the investigation of climate fiction. It is an inescapable context for climate discourse, activism, and policy, and a critical arena in which the public's interpretation of and engagement with climate change is prefigured' (Cole 3). Therefore, it is the role of literature to 'give tangible form to the imagination' (Cole 2).

Nevertheless, there is a tendency among today's writers and artists to avoid the climate crisis in their works. Elizabeth Abbott points out that '[o]nly a tiny, noble group of writers (including J.G. Ballard, Margaret Atwood, Kurt Vonnegut, Barbara Kingsolver, Doris Lessing, Cormac McCarthy, Ian McEwan and T. Coraghessan Boyle) has confronted or at least evoked something of the changing world' (Abbott 370). This tiny group is obviously insufficient to bring a change. The fiction written by the Indian novelist and essayist Amitav Ghosh stands out in the way he manages to give imaginative substance to climate change. Ghosh blames modern writers for avoiding the issue when it is a necessity to address it, as he explains in his book-long essay *The Great Derangement*, published in 2016. In this non-fiction book, Ghosh wonders: '[a]re the currents of global warming too wild to be navigated in the accustomed barques of narration?' (Ghosh 2016, 8) He then engages in a reflection on the most appropriate genre to tackle climate change because it seems that 'when novelists choose to write about climate change it is almost always outside of fiction' (Ghosh 2016, 8).

To begin with, 'serious fiction' is repeatedly mentioned in *The Great Derangement*. The connotations and implications of this phrase may be gauged by going back to the origins of the novel. When talking about the novel, one should keep in mind that this genre 'was born from the same protestant mentality and positivistic attitude that invented the scientific method, carbon economy, and began the large-scale overexploitation of natural resources' (Vescovi 123). Indeed, the novel is a product of Western bourgeois civilization at its finest, in which everything happens according to a gradual continuum of events based on rationality and positivism. Thus, serious fiction is meant to be probable, rational and believable. This conception of fiction certainly does not help to incorporate global warming into one's mental universe, because climate change remains very uncanny and improbable in the collective imaginary. For Ghosh, 'improbable is not the opposite of probable but rather an inflexion of it, a gradient in a continuum of probability' (Ghosh 2016, 16). In fact, life is full of improbable events but the problem is that 'the modern novel has excised coincidences as bad writing; yet most people have gone through experiences that would actually be improbable if they were told in realistic fiction' (Vescovi 123). The fact that serious fiction narratives fail to acknowledge improbable events is then directly linked to its failure to deal with climate change. That is why climate emergency is thereby mainly approached under the form of essays, i.e., non-fictional works, or in science fiction.

Ghosh further reflects on what may constitute suitable genres to depict climate change: even though it is tackled in the genre of science fiction, the latter has been evicted from the literary mainstream. Indeed, science fiction came to be considered apart because of what Bruno Latour calls the '"partitioning", or deepening the imaginary gulf between Nature and Culture: the former comes to be relegated exclusively to the sciences and is regarded as being off-limits to the latter.' (Ghosh 2016, 68) This means that Nature and Culture have progressively grown apart, which becomes problematic in a world where climate change is not a hypothetical problem anymore but a problem to which we already are confronted. This gulf created between Nature and Culture 'hustles forward in its impatience to erase every archaic reminder of Man's kinship with the nonhuman' (Ghosh 2016, 70). The separation from the nonhuman is problematic when it comes to climate change because the latter is the ultimate Nature-Culture hybrid. Climate change is a wicked problem in that it connects culture, natural ecosystems, politics and humanity.

Even though science fiction gives a voice to the nonhuman, this does not mean that it is the best suited genre to tackle climate change. Sci-fi novels unfold in fictive settings, which tend to be poles apart from the undeniably real climate change. Ghosh insists on the fact that:

> The Anthropocene resists science fiction: it is precisely not an imagined "other" world apart from ours; nor is it located in another "time" or another "dimension". By no means are the events of the era of global warming akin to the stuff of wonder tales; yet it is also true that in relation to what we think of as normal now, they are in many ways uncanny; and they have indeed opened a doorway into what we might call a "spirit world" - a universe animated by nonhuman voices (Ghosh 2016, 72-73).

In this most interesting excerpt, it is made clear that the events that accompany the unfolding of global warming force us to recognize that such a thing as nonhuman agency exists. The Anthropocene leads us to rediscover the kinship we have with the realm of the nonhuman and this can be partly achieved through literature. Besides, science fiction can sometimes resonate with a sense of apocalyptic foreboding, which is 'the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal' (Cole 4). However, arguably apocalyptic writing is not satisfactory to tackle climate change in the sense that it fuels fear and will 'lead to denial, disillusionment, and apathy rather than action' (Cole 5). Apocalyptic narratives are thus 'disempowering at a personal level' and provoke 'feelings of helplessness, remoteness, and lack of control' (Cole 6), leading to the opposite of the desired effect.

Science fiction inspired the appearance of a new genre 'from which its name derives' (Cole 7): climate fiction. This genre is close to science fiction but, as its name implies, it is centred on climatic events. Even though the appellation sounds very suitable to tackle the issue, Ghosh reminds us that cli-fi most often deals with disaster stories set in the future. Yet, 'the future is but one aspect of the Anthropocene: this era also includes the recent past, and, most significantly, the present' (Ghosh 2016, 72). Thus, cli-fi narratives set in the future tend to miss out on the most important concern, which is the imminence of events. Ghosh truly has a point here, but his reflection should be nuanced in the sense that it is true that 'early climate fiction was overwhelmingly apocalyptic' (Cole 7) but, '[i]n the next decade, climate novels set in more recognizable presents or near-futures emerged' (Cole 7), as is the case with his 2019 novel *Gun Island*.

Climate change should not be tackled through the lens of surrealist or magic realist novels because those treat the matter as metaphorical or allegorical, which achieves the opposite effect of what is required: the issue remains abstract and goes against the aim of giving shape to the issue on an imaginative level. Coping with such an urgent issue abstractly would reduce its impact, and treating climatic events as 'improbable' (Ghosh 2016, 27) would 'rob them of precisely the quality that makes them so urgently compelling' (Ghosh 2016, 27). Although it is true that '[m]ost people know that a climate change is taking place, and yet [they] find it difficult to imagine what climate change actually means and entails' (Vescovi 123), these climatic events are compelling, 'overwhelmingly, urgently, astoundingly real' (Ghosh 2016, 27) because they are happening right now. As Ghosh rightfully claims, the conditions for a narrative to be accurate in terms of raising the awareness for climate change are that it should be set in a time that is recognizable as our own and communicate the uncanniness and interconnectedness of the transformations that are on their way.

The uncanniness of climate change challenges the conceptions entertained by most writers when it comes to the characteristics of serious fiction. The subject is therefore avoided because this aspect of climate change is in conflict with the regularity of the bourgeois life (i.e., the supposed absence of improbable events mentioned above). The West can be qualified as living by this very regularity of bourgeois life; this lifestyle does not take natural instincts into account and is highly non-alarmist, which paradoxically will inevitably lead to a disaster. We then witness a kind of reversal between the self-declared superiority of Western civilization and natural forces and

instincts now striking back. Precisely because this return of the nonhuman reveals itself to seem highly uncanny, the uncanniness that characterizes the nonhuman is 'far from being literary embellishments. These elements must be interpreted as a way of moving the boundaries of the secular novel in the realm of the non-secular, in other words, from the modes of knowledge of colonizers to the modes of knowledge that are deeply embedded in the Indian culture that the novel describes, where everything is interconnected' (Vescovi 221). In order to recall the interconnectedness of the humans and the nonhumans, it will perhaps be necessary also to shift away from the individualizing culture brought about by Western civilization. This individual aspect of civilization indeed shines through the paradigm of modern Western literature.

Ghosh argues that 'the trajectory of the modern novel represents […] a special case of a broader cultural phenomenon. The essence of this phenomenon is again captured by the words that John Updike used to characterize the modern novel: "individual moral adventure"' (Ghosh 2016, 127). The collective seems to be excluded from the novel as it is characterized as 'individual'. This is really problematic because a recognition of the primacy of the collective interest is a *sine qua non* condition for one to be able to handle the climate crisis. The other aspect focuses on the 'moral' character of the novel in the sense that it is supposed to be 'an interior journey guided by the conscience' (Ghosh 2016, 127) and relies on issues of identity. This concept is part of a bigger picture because what happens in literature is often paralleled in politics. Therefore, the concept of 'individual moral adventure' becomes increasingly interesting because 'politics become, for many, a search for personal authenticity, a journey of self-discovery' (Ghosh 2016, 127). As we shall see, Ghosh further addresses questions related to individuality, impersonal systems and the lack of interconnectedness in his novels *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Gun Island* (2019). Furthermore, he 'excavate[s] modes of collective action and shared responsibility which are informed by interdependencies among human communities and between humans and the non-human world' (Cole 9). By broaching those themes, Ghosh manages to put climate change in a bigger frame and he importantly reflects on the global significance of the issue.

In this dissertation, I shall therefore discuss the way Ghosh enriches the climate imaginary by tackling climate change in his novels. To achieve this, I will investigate the way climate change is depicted in his 2004 novel *The Hungry Tide* and then in his 2019 novel *Gun Island*, the latter is a response to his own reflections from *The Great Derangement* (2016) for, in both cases though in differing ways, the issue is approached in terms of a flouting of the rules of probability but also

with a recognition of the need for collective action. First and foremost, for purposes of clarity I will provide a synopsis for each book. Then, I shall begin with the analysis of the depiction of climate change in *The Hungry Tide* as a mainly local novel that nevertheless permits one to overcome a binary thought pattern while considering climate change, and more particularly in matters of nature vs. culture. This way, I will show the way Ghosh manages to address the interconnectedness, notably of the human and the nonhuman but also of apparently discrete areas of the globe, that is needed in order to tackle climate change. Then, I will discuss the way Ghosh depicts climate change as a global concern in *Gun Island*, mostly by setting the novel in a global space further indicating the interconnectedness already evoked in *The Hungry Tide*. I will also mention how this interconnectedness is facilitated by the inclusive setting of *Gun Island*, which reveals the way climate change brings political, environmental and humanitarian issues together. I shall then demonstrate the way Ghosh grasps the uncanniness of the issue and overcomes it to lead to an awakening: the recognition of our plight and the necessity for collective action. I shall finally mention how Ghosh thereby manages to enrich the climate imaginary and rewrite our conceptions about climate change.

2. Synopsis of the books

2.1. *The Great Derangement*

While Ghosh is known for his novels, *The Great Derangement* is a non-fiction book divided into three parts: 'Stories', 'History' and 'Politics'. In Part One, Ghosh points to something that could totally change the way this crisis is approached: he reminds us of the importance of nonhuman forces, or the inanimate, which is simply ignored in fiction and assumed to be dead whereas it may be alive. Ghosh approaches the genre of the novel as part of what he calls the ideology of 'bourgeois regularity', which is itself an offshoot of the Enlightenment. This means that the serious fiction novel is stuck within the constraints of the so-called regularity of physical phenomena, with their consequences in terms of perceived probability, even though human beings are constantly surrounded by improbable events. In order to believe a story, it has to be probable and the problem is that climate change is uncanny, or somehow unthinkable. Ghosh argues that one suitable genre to approach climate change would have been science fiction but it seems that this very genre has been evicted from the literary mainstream. Therefore, climate change is nearly absent within the spectrum of contemporary literature.

In Part Two, 'History', Ghosh addresses the role played by the carbon economy and capitalism in the unfolding of the climate crisis. Carbon economy refers to 'a world economy (such as ours) in which carbon plays an important role in energy generation and thus functioning of the entire world. With its growth, carbon has brought about higher pollution and global warming. As a result, the world today is trying to reach a future in which the amount of carbon used (the carbon footprint) is less, a low-carbon economy'[1]. Embedded in a Eurocentric discourse, the West keeps insisting on its own uniqueness and even seems to accuse Asia of being responsible for global warming. Ghosh then explains how European colonial countries prevented Asian colonized countries from developing, which only delayed the onset of climate change. The process of decolonization that now takes places rhymes with faster industrialization, economic expansion and thus with a greater impact on the environment; this is namely because of the size of this continent, and by extension the large population. On the other hand, the majority of potential victims is in Asia. In a world where the West stays centred on its own presumed unique modernity, the consumerism that prevails

[1] http://www.oilgae.com/ref/glos/carbon_economy.html

in this society leads to destruction. Industrial civilization is leading to the terminus of civilization, which encompasses all human actions over time.

The last part, 'Politics', deals with the failure of political leaders to address climate change. The interest of politics does not seem to lie in global warming but rather in identity issues and questions of moral value. Climate change is said to be a 'wicked problem' because it is at the same time domestic and a global crisis and individual efforts will not be enough to curb the trend. What is needed to overcome this crisis is what politicians seem unable to attain: namely, an insistence on collective effort and an abandonment of the individualistic mindset in which we are entrapped. Ghosh thus argues that imagining possibilities for another world is the task of writers. Nevertheless, *The Great Derangement* ends up on a note of hope: more and more activists speak up for climate, some alternative energy solutions are arising and some (religious) groups are acknowledging long-term solutions. Yet, the time left to act is very short: the derangement and disruptions of global climate are on their way. Ghosh finally adds that the new generation of human beings will find a way out of individualism and eventually rediscover their interrelatedness with each other on the one hand, and with nonhumans on the other hand. Ghosh thus insists on the necessity to conceive of setting in more inclusive terms, which certainly shows through in *Gun Island*.

2.2. *The Hungry Tide*

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* tells the story of Piya Roy, an American scientist studying cetacean species, and that of Kanai Dutt, a pragmatic businessman from New Delhi. Their paths cross from the very beginning of the story, in Kolkata. As Piya waits for the train that will bring her to Canning, Kanai spots her: despite her Indian features, she looks different. They happen to have a conversation on the train, and Kanai invites her to come to Lusibari if she wants to. Lusibari is an island situated in the Sundarbans, a very peculiar archipelago of more than 100 islands located between India and Bangladesh. Once in Canning, Piya somehow manages to get on a boat with forest guards to explore the meanders of the Sundarbans in the hope to see dolphins and interview some fishermen about the presence of this species in the area.

Concurrently, Kanai meets his aunt Nilima, also known as Mashima, and they go back together to Lusibari. Kanai had previously come to Lusibari as a child, as a punishment. His aunt is Nirmal's widow, a schoolteacher dreaming of a utopian society. Nilima is a well-known figure in Lusibari as she runs the Badabon Trust, a non-profit organisation concerned with the development of the

island. Kanai comes back because his aunt told him that his uncle Nirmal left him a manuscript and he is the one who has to read it. Kanai stays at his aunt's Guest House: Moyna works there as well as a nurse trainee at the hospital. Being there, Kanai recalls a memory of himself as a child and of Kusum, a girl, as they attended to *The Glory of Bon Bibi*, just before the girl vanished. Bon Bibi is a goddess worshipped in the Sundarbans; her story goes as follows: the legend begins in Arabia, in Medina, where twins, Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli, were born. When they have grown up, the archangel Gabriel tells them that they have been chosen for a divine mission. They have to travel to the tide country and make it an inhabitable place for human beings. What they do not know is that a demon king called Dokkhin Ray already reigns there with malevolent spirits. One day, Dokkhin Ray encounters Bon Bibi and her brother, which leads to a fight. Bon Bibi is the winner but stays merciful and they finally come to an agreement: one half of the forest will stay the realm of Dokkhin Ray and the other half will be suitable for human settlement. Everything subsequently goes well until human greed disturbs the fragile balance. A man named Dhona wants to make fortune in the jungle. His crew missed one man, so he calls Dukhey, a poor boy cursed with misfortune. Without knowing it, Dhona anchors on one of Dokkhin Ray's islands. The latter comes to Dhona in a dream and tells him that he would make the captain rich if he gave Dukhey to the demon. After loading his boats with honey and wax, Dhona sends the boy ashore. Alone on the island, he meets Dokkhin Ray under the form of a tiger and manages to call Bon Bibi for help before fainting. Bon Bibi immediately comes to rescue the boy: she heals him and sends him back home with honey and wax while her brother punishes the demon severely. The conclusion of Bon Bibi's legend is that the greedy are punished while the virtuous poor are rewarded.

In the meantime, it turns out that the forest guards accompanying Piya are not honest nor well-meaning and they end up throwing her in the water, where she is rescued by Fokir, a fisherman who saw the scene. She then stays with him and his son Tutul on their boat for a while. Fokir catches crabs for a living, and a major advantage is that he knows the rivers of the Sundarbans like nobody else. Fokir is in fact Kusum's son and Moyna's husband. He even leads Piya to what she was looking for: pools where she will be able to observe Irrawaddy dolphins (*Orcaella brevirostris*), which is very interesting for her and will provide her with data for a lifetime. After an unfortunate encounter with a crocodile, Fokir, Tutul and Piya head towards Lusibari, where Kanai and Piya will meet again.

As to Kanai, he begins to read what his uncle has left for him: even though he expected poems, he finds out that his uncle was not a prolific writer as he thought Nirmal would be. Instead, he wrote about his experience with some settlers in Morichjhapi, an island in the Sundarbans. In his manuscript, Nirmal tells how he found Kusum back with the settlers on Morichjhapi, with the help of Horen Naskor, a fisherman. Despite Nilima's disapproval, Nirmal wanted to help the refugees, and even be a teacher for them. Soon enough, the government learns about those settlers and decides to expel them. The refugees decide to resist and to stay where they are, which puts them in great trouble. This episode occurs in 1979 and is called a massacre. Horen and Nirmal manage to get on the island to save Fokir but his mother Kusum is killed by policemen.

Back in the present time, Piya lives in The Guest House with Kanai and Nilima. She asks to go back on a boat trip to find the dolphins she saw and further study them. She offers Fokir a decent amount of money, which encourages his wife Moyna to let him go with her. They rent a *bhobhoti*, a bigger boat, and start the journey with Horen, his grandson, Fokir, Piya, and Kanai who comes along to translate Bangla into English for Piya's sake. One evening, they see strange lights on an island: they quickly become aware that a tiger is stuck in a barn and that the inhabitants from the village are planning to burn it alive, which shocks Piya.

Some days later, Piya goes with Fokir a bit further on his little boat. While they are away, Kanai learns that a storm, specifically a cyclone, is on its way. They thus try to find Piya and Fokir in order to get them back but without success. They are forced to go back to Lusibari without them. Piya becomes aware that a storm is coming: they try to hurry to the boat but only to notice that it is gone. As Kanai is back to Lusibari, the storm is already blowing hard and he rushes to help Nilima. In the heat of the moment, Kanai loses his uncle's journal. Piya and Fokir have no other choice but to stay outside in the storm. Fokir has a plan: they climb up a tree on a nearby island, decide to sit on the higher branches and fasten themselves tight to the trunk with a sari. Fokir places himself behind Piya: he gets hit by projectiles due to the tempest and does not survive. He chooses to save Piya and gives up his life for her. When the storm has abated and, the flood and the tidal wave have receded, Kanai and Horen go back to fetch them.

Later on, Piya and Kanai leave the Sundarbans. Piya comes back some time later with a new project: even though a big part of her equipment and data were lost in the storm, she managed to save an inventory of the routes Fokir had shown to her. She wants to fund conservation and

environmental groups, and form an organization that would be called after Fokir. Piya also raised funds for Moyna and her son Tutul to help them after the loss of Fokir. Piya thus settles in the Sundarbans, with Nilima and Moyna.

2.3. *Gun Island*

Ghosh's *Gun Island* begins in Brooklyn, where Dinanath Datta (called Deen in the United States of America) lives. He is invited to a wedding in his family back in India, where he usually resides during winter. There, he meets his uncle Kanai, who introduces him to the story of the so-called *Bonduki Sadagar*, which means 'The Gun Merchant', an old Indian folktale. Being a rare book dealer, he is immediately intrigued by the story. He is told by Nilima, Kanai's aunt, that a shrine tied to the story still exists in the Sundarbans. After some hesitation, he agrees to take a trip down there and visit the shrine, called *dhaam* in Bangla. Nilima lives in Lusibari, a village on the edge of the Sundarbans, where she runs the Badabon Trust with the help of Piya Roy. Nilima tells Deen what she knows about the legend of the Gun Merchant: the story had only been told orally. It is about a merchant who had angered Manasa Devi, the goddess of snakes, by refusing to become her devotee. Pursued by snakes and natural disasters, he takes refuge on 'Gun Island', a presupposed imaginary place where he would be unreachable. One day, the Merchant sees the goddess on the pages of a book, he tries to hide but she eventually reaches him with venomous creatures. The Merchant has to escape and goes to the so-called 'Island of Chains' but Manasa Devi follows him there too. She makes the promise that if he builds her a shrine in West Bengal, she would give him his freedom back and make him rich. On his way to India, the Merchant gets attacked by Pirates but he nonetheless manages to get back to Bengal, now rich, and to build the shrine. The legend remains filled with mystery.

Deen then gets a random call from Cinta Schiavon, an Italian scholar and an old friend of his. She tells him that she recalled a memory from a time she visited him in India and attended a spectacle (a *jatra*) in a tent: that of Manasa Devi's folk tale. From then on, we get acquainted to Cinta's character: she became famous because of a tragedy that happened to her. Cinta had a relationship with the editor of an Italian newspaper, and she had a daughter with him, Lucia, but they both died in a car crash in the Dolomites. It is believed that the Mafia was somehow involved in the accident.

Piya, a cetacean expert and scientist, makes the necessary arrangements for Deen to visit the shrine on the next day: he first meets Moyna, a nurse working for the Badabon Trust and Fokir's widow

as well as Tutul's mother. Then, Deen boards Horen's boat with Tipu. The latter, previously called Tutul, decided to change his name when he went to the US, because people there had a hard time pronouncing his name and when he came back, he would only answer to the name Tipu. Since Fokir's death, Piya has provided Moyna and Tipu with everything they needed.

On the boat, Horen tells his version of the Gun Merchant, insisting more on the weather events that forced the Merchant to leave the places where he had landed: first, the drought that forced him to leave his homeland, then a tidal wave that had struck him on a river in Bengal, while floods and invasions of snakes followed. The Gun Merchant left and was held captive by pirates but Captain Ilyas saved him. They went on a journey before landing on 'Gun Island', setting on a 'land of sugar', a 'country made of cloth' and an 'island of chains'. It turns out that the Muslim boatman who told Horen the story still has a young grandson, Rafi. When they arrive at the shrine, Deen meets Rafi, who seems aghast when he sees Deen but we learn later on that it was because a cobra living in the shrine was following Deen. When Tipu and Horen, who had been looking for Rafi, come back, Tipu tries to catch the snake and gets bitten. Back on the boat to bring him to the hospital, he begins to shake, as if in a state of delirium, and talks about 'Rani'. Deen ends up calling Piya to bring some antidote to the hospital. Piya is intrigued because a dolphin named Rani has been stranded, which is probably a consequence of climate change and the fact that the water in the Sundarbans is polluted by a refinery upstream.

Back in Brooklyn, Deen cannot stop thinking about his overwhelming experience in the Sundarbans. Tipu manages to join him online, asking about *bhutas* (some sort of beings) or shamans and possession. Cinta invites Deen to a conference in Los Angeles, about *The Merchant of Venice*. Determined to enjoy the flight, Deen nevertheless causes panic on the plane and ends up screaming: 'Snake!'. In fact, wild fires are devastating Los Angeles and some birds of prey are taking advantage of the situation, and one probably caught a snake and Deen saw it through his window. At the museum, Deen learns about the Little Ice Age, which designates the 17th century because it was a time of heavy climatic disruption. He meets Cinta and they pay a visit to Gisa, Cinta's niece. They go together to the beach but there, a snake bites Gisa's dog and it succumbs to the poison of the yellow-bellied sea snake. In the meantime, Deen learns through Piya that the shrine has been destroyed by a storm. Back at the conference, Cinta tells how Venice etymologically comes from *Bundook*, giving the hint that Gun Island actually refers to Venice.

Deen decides to tell Cinta about the legend, and with her help he is able to unveil some secrets folded into it: the 'land of sugar' actually refers to Egypt, the 'country made of cloth' alludes to Turkey, and they come to the conclusion that the story may actually have some historical roots and concerns an Indian merchant who decided to go overseas because of climatic disturbances. During the journey, he was attacked by Portuguese pirates who sold him to Captain Ilyas, a Portuguese captain who set him free. They left again to the Maldives, where they acquired cowrie shells. Then, they went to Egypt, only to find that it was also struck by the disturbances of the 17th century. They thus decided to journey to Istanbul but there too, there was trouble: fires and drought were destabilizing the country. As a result, they went to Venice, the cosmopolitan capital of print and commerce. After being held on the 'island of chains', he finds his way back to Bengal where he builds the shrine for Manasa Devi.

Gisa calls Deen to invite him to Venice, for it turns out that she needs a Bengali translator because she wants to interview migrants and there are many Bengalis in Venice. While visiting Venice, Deen is almost crushed by a slab of masonry. This accident is the responsibility of Rafi and that is how Deen finds out that Rafi works there, under the protection of Lubna, who helps Bengali migrants, as she is herself from Bangladesh. Deen manages to get in touch with Rafi again, and while he is selling ice-cream, Deen notices a man observing them. Rafi remains silent about Tipu but Deen soon finds out what happened: Tipu and Rafi set off on a clandestine trip to immigrate to Europe. They first went to Bangladesh, where they were taken in charge by 'dalals', who brought them to the Turkish border. Unfortunately, they were separated and Tipu went to Egypt while Rafi followed the other migrants and found his way to Venice.

Rafi is assaulted and brought to hospital. Simultaneously, while Cinta and Deen visit the *Fondamente Nove* together, a shipworm-infested wooden structure falls on Cinta, who is brought to the same hospital as Rafi. Lubna then informs Deen that a 'Blue Boat' believed to bear migrants, and more specifically, Tipu, is heading to Italy. Lubna hires a boat, the *Lucania*, on which Gisa, Cinta, Rafi, Deen and some others will board to try to protect the migrants from the right-wing activists wishing to hinder them from settling on the Italian coast. Meanwhile, Cinta and Rafi manage to solve the last part of the legend. In the last part, the Merchant leaves Venice and is held captive by pirates on the island of Chains but there is a miracle and he is set free by creatures of the sky and the sea. This island is in reality Sicily, which is also where the Blue Boat is about to

arrive. On their way to Sicily, a storm is raging, and they even face a hailstorm and tornado but no one is harmed.

When they finally manage to board the rescue boat, Piya begins to observe Cetaceans in the Mediterranean with Rafi. The next day, the Blue Boat finally arrives but is blocked by many other vessels: some that are against the arrival of migrants in Europe, and others that are there to welcome them. Some unusual events take place: innumerable cetaceans are seen that day; a huge flock of birds fly over the Blue Boat, and a form of bioluminescence appears in the waters. Fortunately, Cinta is a close friend to Admiral Vigonovo, who is in charge of blocking the migrants, and she convinces him to let the migrants come: Tipu is safe at last. The novel ends with Cinta, feeling the presence of her deceased daughter and joining her, taking her last breath on the *Lucania*.

3. Climate change in *The Hungry Tide*

3.1. The Setting of the Story

The first element worth mentioning in an analysis of *The Hungry Tide* (2004) tackling the novel from the perspective of climate change is probably the setting. The story is set in the largest mangrove forest of the world: the Sundarbans. Situated in the delta of the Ganga and the Brahmaputra at the mouth of the Bay of Bengal in India and Bangladesh, it is 'an archipelago that hosts the largest estuarine mangrove forest in the world, a unique ecosystem of tidal waterways and islands that is home to a wide variety of plant and animal species, including a large population of tigers' (Prabhu 2). The area seems to be particularly well chosen to approach climate change. Kanksha Mahadevia and Mayank Vikas provide an explanation for this matter in their scientific article 'Climate Change- Impact on the Sundarbans: A Case Study':

> With rising sea levels, islands are disappearing and the increasing salinity in the water and soil has severely threatened the health of mangrove forests and the quality of soil and crops. Additionally, there have been serious disturbances to hydrological parameters and change in fishing patterns, resulting in disastrous consequences for fishermen. Frequent cyclones and erratic monsoon raining patterns are damaging ecology and humanity (Mahadevia 7).

Considering the fact that rising sea levels are a direct consequence of climate change and that the tropical forest of the Sundarbans is situated in a delta area, it takes little time to understand the seriousness of the issue. The mangroves function as an 'irreplaceable barrier against the destructive force of the cyclones that regularly batter this coast' (Weik 120). Beyond the lush greenery that is home to the man-eating Royal Bengal Tiger, the forest needs to be protected mainly because it serves as a protection against extreme weather events. After being listed in the UNESCO World Heritage in 1997[2], the Sundarbans were recognised as 'Wetland of International Importance' under the Ramsar Convention on 30 January 2020.[3] As pointed out in the article from *The Hindu*, 'Protecting the Sundarban Wetlands', the main reasons for protecting the area are that it serves as a shock absorber for natural disasters such as cyclones or tidal waves but it is also a critical place in terms of biodiversity.

The rich biodiversity is indeed mentioned in the novel as Piya, the cetologist, notices that 'there [are] more species of fish in the Sundarbans than could be found in the whole continent of

[2] https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/798/
[3] https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/protecting-the-sundarban-wetlands/article26482707.ece

Europe. This proliferation of aquatic life was thought to be the result of the unusually varied composition of the water itself' (Ghosh 2004, 124). The ecological value of the place is thus priceless and unique. In *The Hungry Tide,* Ghosh portrays the Sundarbans as a unique, strange and ever-changing eco-system. The singularity of the region is illustrated by what Piya thinks when she is on a boat:

> Staring at it now, she was struck by the way the greenery worked to confound the eye. [...] There was such a profusion of shapes, forms, hues and textures, that even things that were in plain view seemed to disappear, vanishing into the tangle of lines like the hidden objects in children's puzzles. (Ghosh 2004, 150)

It is striking in this excerpt that the uniqueness of the landscape lies in its misleading character. Piya has trouble distinguishing parts of the landscape, which rather presents itself as a dense mass. The imperceptibility of the forest is certainly due to the 'perpetually mutating topography' (Anand, 25) inherent in the Sundarbans. Indeed, it is a well-known fact that 'mangrove forests of the Sundarbans appear and disappear, merge and submerge, surprise and disrupt human lifestyles' (Vincent 2). The landscape just keeps changing from one day to the other, depending on the tides: '[t]he currents are so powerful as to reshape the islands almost daily' (Ghosh 2004, 7). As the tides ebb and flow, some islands are swallowed and the landscape drastically changes its appearance within just a few hours. Ghosh tried to convey this sense of mutability in his novel through Kanai as he says that 'the boundaries between land and water are always mutating, always unpredictable' (Ghosh 2004, 7) and also through Nirmal: '*But here, in the tide country, transformation is the rule of life: rivers stray from week to week, and islands are made and unmade in days*' (Ghosh 2004, 224, italics in original).

In an interview with Vescovi, Ghosh admitted that '[i]f [he were] to write ten books like *The Hungry Tide,* it would never do justice to the absolute magic of being there at night with the tide changing, under the moon, and to hear the tiger nearby' (Vescovi 140). The landscape is somehow elusive. Still, this unpredictability does not make it easy for the locals who live in the Sundarbans, or actually for any human being trying to settle there. In *The Hungry Tide,* the main island where the story unfolds is called Lusibari and in fact, '[t]here were no docks or jetties on Lusibari, for the currents and tides that flowed around it were too powerful to permit the construction of permanent structures' (Ghosh 2004, 37). It is made clear that human constructions hardly resist these surroundings and that human life is equally challenging for 'in Lusibari hunger and catastrophe were a way of life' (Ghosh 2004, 79). Hunger is actually a recurrent motif in the novel; the title

already initiates the hunger motif: '*The Hungry Tide*'. This refers to the water 'constantly swallowing and regurgitating land' (Anand 35): 'the rising waters of the mohona would swallow up the jungle as well as the rivers and their openings' (Ghosh 2004, 36). The theme of hunger is also an obvious reference to the hungry tigers, seeking a prey. Thus, hunger 'connect[s] the immanence of the tide and the tiger' (Anand 34). It is also hunger that 'drove [the settlers] to hunting and fishing and the results were often disastrous. Many died of drowning, and many more were picked off by crocodiles and estuarine sharks' (Ghosh 2004, 79). Hunger is an aspect of life in the Sundarbans and is manifested by both the humans and the nonhumans.

Still, we should keep in mind that the Sundarbans are home to more than 4.5 million people who struggle and battle their circumstances every day. On the fictitious island of Lusibari, life is manageable thanks to 'its *bãdh*, the tall embankment that encircled its perimeter, holding back the twice-daily flood' (Ghosh 2004, 59). The embankment enables human beings to live on the island, protecting the inhabitants, who would otherwise be at the mercy of the topography. In this respect, it can be claimed that life in the so-called 'tide country' (Ghosh 2004, 8) presents a certain fragility. The Sundarbans is also fragile inasmuch as it needs to be protected from human destruction. Despite its apparent fragility, the mangrove forest is nevertheless threatening and resistant to the dominion of human beings. The ambivalence of the place is put into words by Anand when she writes that what characterises 'the uniqueness of the Sundarbans, [is] the waterscape that alternates between being subject and object, victim and victimizer' (Anand 24). While the forest is a victim of climate change and deforestation, it also has the power to strike back and is sometimes treacherous. The harshness of the waterscape is experienced several times in the novel. A few examples are first when Piya falls off the guard boat into the water, only to find that '[r]ivers like the Ganga and the Brahmaputra shroud this window with a curtain of silt: in their occluded waters light loses its directionality within a few centimetres of the surface. [...] With no lighted portal to point the way, top and bottom and up and down become very quickly confused' (Ghosh 2004, 54). Although she is an experienced swimmer, the opacity of the waters in the Sundarbans confuses her to the point that she would have drowned if Fokir had not saved her.

The harshness of the place is further illustrated when Piya tries to walk on the mudbanks because 'the grip of the mud pulled her ankles backwards, away from her centre of gravity' (Ghosh 2004, 151). Piya is not the only one to have a hard time walking in the mud, it is also the case of Kanai who feels 'as though the earth had become alive and as reaching for his ankle. [...] He felt

his balance going and [...] [b]efore he could do anything to break the fall, the wetness of the mud slapped him full in the face' (Ghosh 2004, 325). This is echoed in *Gun Island* as Deen also falls in the mud (Ghosh 2019, 72-73). What is highly interesting in Kanai's incident is the way it is told. The earth seems to become animate and though language, Ghosh gives some agency to the mud by writing that it is the latter that slaps Kanai in the face. The mud is actually the subject and Kanai the object who suffers the action. At the same time passive and active, the forest should certainly not be perceived as inanimate. As a matter of fact, the whole setting has an agency of its own in *The Hungry Tide*. In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh writes that 'the land here [in the Sundarbans] is demonstrably alive; that it does not exist solely, or even incidentally, as a stage for the enactment for the human history; that it is [itself] a protagonist' (Ghosh 2016, 6). In this same non-fiction book, Ghosh insists on the importance of recognizing the agency of the non-human, which already seems to be a feature of his 2004 novel, even though it was written before *The Great Derangement*. The agency of the Sundarbans is expressed in the following way: '[a] mangrove forest is a universe unto itself, utterly unlike other woodlands or jungles. [...] Mangrove leaves are tough and leathery, the branches gnarled and the foliage often impassably dense. Visibility is short and the air still and fetid' (Ghosh 2004, 7-8). More than a wetland, it is qualified as a universe itself, and Ghosh then proceeds to remind us of the threatening character of the landscape, insisting on its toughness and unwelcoming aspect. Consequently, the Sundarbans are more than a mere setting, it is a 'larger-than-life' (Anand 24) character that permeates the whole book and makes the latter a novel *about* the Sundarbans rather than a novel which happens to be set *in* the Sundarbans. Indeed, Weik indicates that *The Hungry Tide* is 'a story about the Sundarbans themselves, the sort that helps us understand the fascinating and sensitive ecology of what in the novel is "the tide country", as well as the crucial importance of this region's continued existence' (Weik 120).

Ghosh draws attention to the nonhuman by giving the landscape an unmistakeable agency: '[t]hrough their inherent processuality, waterscapes and aquatic events make visible nonhuman agency' (Kluwick 67). The waterscape is depicted as threatening and this manner of describing the forest is functional; '[h]ighlighting the unproductive and predatory aspects of the Sundarbans, the text makes a concerted move to depict the Sundarbans as an animate environment, with the agential prowess to challenge, cofound, and even consume man' (Pirzadeh 111). Giving an agency to the 'tidal labyrinth' (Ghosh 2004, 340) is further achieved in the text by presenting it as a self-contained eco-system that consists of 'hundreds of different ecological niches' (Ghosh 2004, 124) and which

is home to many marine species, but especially to the Irrawaddy dolphin. This ecosystem has a unique pattern of watery ways: '[t]hese micro-environments were like balloons suspended in the water, and they had their own patterns of flow' (Ghosh 2004, 125). The unique pattern of the ebb and flow of the tides is described as being '*as untiring as the earth itself*' (Ghosh 2004, 275, italics in original). Nirmal wrote this in his journal and highlights the incessant movement of the tides. In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh writes about the Sundarbans in terms of a place 'where the flow of water and silt is such that geological processes that usually unfold in deep time appear to occur at a speed where they can be followed from week to week and month to month' (Ghosh 2016, 5).

The fact that the place has its own agency helps the reader come to the conclusion that the nonhuman itself has an agency and that human beings are not alone on Earth. Ghosh thus frames the story in a place that becomes essential to the narration. Moreover, the choice of the place is particularly accurate as it is tightly linked to climate change. Even though the issue is tackled here more obliquely than in *The Great Derangement* and *Gun Island, The Hungry Tide* provides the premises of Ghosh's concern for climate change, namely by drawing attention to the nonhuman, (eco-)cosmopolitanism, the global, the local and especially the lack of connectedness between those.

3.2. Cosmopolitan and Subaltern

By pinpointing the lack of connectedness between the human and the nonhuman, Ghosh also underlines the importance of the urge to reconnect. Accordingly, *The Hungry Tide* should be read in the light of eco-cosmopolitanism. In *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008), Ursula Heise introduces eco-cosmopolitanism in postcolonial studies. More than cosmopolitanism, which is 'circumscribed by human social experience' (Heise 87), it 'reaches toward what some environmental writers and philosophers have called the 'more-than-human world'- the realm of nonhuman species, but also that of connectedness with both animate and inanimate networks of influence and exchange' (Heise 87-88). Moving beyond this definition, Weik adds that '[f]rom cosmopolitanism, then, eco-cosmopolitanism takes its open-mindedness, its inclusiveness, and its concern for human solidarity across boundaries of nation, class, race, or religion. From eco-criticism, it takes its interest in connectedness that goes beyond the purely human - symbolic, mediated – realm' (Weik 123). It is interesting to consider *The Hungry Tide* through the lens of eco-cosmopolitanism because it allows one to identify and link up the various most important themes tackled in the novel: the plight of the nonhuman, climate change,

the tensions between the global and the local, as well as between the cosmopolitan and the subaltern. An essential idea conveyed in Alexa Weik's article is that a dichotomous pattern of thought is no longer acceptable. Indeed, an eco-cosmopolitan approach implies a 'connection between humans and their natural environment. It thus encourages us to move beyond the sort of dichotomous thinking that seems to necessitate a choice between human and ecological welfare, and to understand these rather as co-extensive' (Weik 135). Thus, dichotomies such as global in contrast to local, or human as opposed to nonhuman, should be sidestepped so that we may move towards a co-extensive understanding and find the inclusive paradigm that is necessary to deal with climate change, at least in the way Ghosh depicts it. Therefore, I am now going to discuss the ways in which Ghosh's novel deconstructs dichotomies by analysing the relations between global cosmopolitan characters such as Piya and Kanai and their experience with the local which is focalised around their interactions with Fokir. Then, I will demonstrate that the characters are actually difficult to classify, which helps the reader move away from a dichotomous pattern of categorisation. At last, I shall discuss the role of dichotomies, namely the human-animal dichotomy, in the Morichjhapi massacre. By blurring the lines between dichotomies, Ghosh suggests that there is a need to move beyond binary thinking and consider the world as a result of the interactions between the human, the nonhuman, the animate, the inanimate, the global and the local, as suggested by eco-cosmopolitanism.

To understand the interaction between the global and the local as depicted in *The Hungry Tide*, we should first acknowledge that the local is represented in the novel in terms of subaltern agency. The latter is an important aspect of the character called Fokir and is put in sharp contrast with cosmopolitan characters such as Kanai, Piya and Nirmal. In fact, 'Piya exemplifies cultural hybridity and simultaneously subscribes to the universal discourse of secular rational science. Kanai, on the other hand, speaks six languages and mobilizes his professional translation skills in the service of multinational capital' (Tomsky 56). Throughout the whole novel, there is a certain tension between the locals and the outsiders residing in the Sundarbans. Yet, 'choosing the Sundarbans as his setting allows Ghosh to "create a setting where everyone is on an even footing... the hostile environment erases all social strata because everyone is an equal in the struggle to survive in the hostile environment"' (Anand 25). The harsh lifestyle in the Sundarbans brings the characters on a similar footing since they will all be confronted to the same threats: tigers, crocodiles, storms, floods, and many other dangers hidden behind the canopy of the mangroves.

The confrontation to nature and its dangers can reveal the gap between the cosmopolitan and the subaltern, and in this context cosmopolitan characters such as Piya and Kanai will become aware of their own decentred position. This means that their alleged 'superiority' will be denied and in Kanai's case, the reader even witnesses a reversal in the dynamics of power between him and Fokir.

On the one hand, Kanai seems to be keen to radiate open-mindedness and a sense of democracy. This is noticed by Piya who remarks that '[i]t was important for him to believe that his values were, at bottom, egalitarian, liberal, meritocratic' (Ghosh 2004, 219). But this image is soon deconstructed as 'Kanai's exposure to Fokir forces him to reevaluate his privilege as an urban, middle class Indian man' (Jaising 77). One specific passage in the novel highlights the social gap between the two men. At some point, Kanai and Fokir travel together to Garjontola, one of the many islands of the Sundarbans. There, Fokir feels the presence of a tiger nearby and an argument starts between the two of them because Fokir affirms that '[i]t's the fear that tells [him]' (Ghosh 2004, 322) that a tiger is nearby. Kanai, with his rational, 'educated' mind, stays sceptical vis-à-vis Fokir's statement for he knows that 'fear was not - contrary to what was often said - an instinct. It was something learnt, something that accumulated in the mind, through knowledge, experience and upbringing' (Ghosh 2004, 322). The conflict evidently results from the deep differences between the two characters. As Anand puts it, '[t]he friction between people of different economic status, the urban and the rural poor, plays out when Fokir deserts Kanai in one of the mangrove islands' (Anand 37). Indeed, what happens next is that Kanai loses his temper and begins to insult Fokir: '[h]is anger came welling up with an atavistic explosiveness, rising from sources whose very existence he would have denied: the master's suspicion of the menial; the pride of caste; the townsman's mistrust over the rustic; the city's antagonism towards the village' (Ghosh 2004, 326). The dichotomy between the local and the global is really emphasised in this passage and reveals its presence in Kanai's cosmopolitan mindset. The situation thus unveils Kanai's deep-seated beliefs, which are so profoundly embedded in his thought patterns that he had actually never realised the extent to which they were imprinted in his bourgeois mind, just waiting to resurface. In other words, '[w]hen he insults Fokir, Kanai becomes conscious of how entrenched his class and cultural convictions are within him' (Tomsky 61). Kanai comes to the realisation that he might be on the side of the oppressor and suddenly sees himself as 'someone standing in for the men who had destroyed Fokir's village, burnt his home and killed his mother; he had become a token for a

vision of human beings in which a man such as Fokir counted for nothing, a man whose value was less than that of an animal' (Ghosh 2004, 327).

While insulting Fokir, Kanai further demands that Fokir should leave, which he does. Thereafter, Kanai is left alone on the island at the mercy of the tiger and of the surroundings. This reveals a 'radical shift in the power dynamics that existed between them' (Anand 37). When Kanai catches sight of the tiger, he is paralysed by fear and finds himself stuck in the mud. At the very moment of the 'surreal encounter with the tiger' (Anand 37), something meaningful happens: '[Kanai] could not recall the word, not even the euphemisms Fokir had used: it was as if his mind, in its panic, had emptied itself of language' (Ghosh 2004, 329). Being an interpret and a translator, thus having based his whole career on words, it can be said that Kanai's power resides in them. This is further exemplified when he talks with Moyna. She says he would not understand why she loves Fokir, to which he replies: ''*I* wouldn't understand?'[...] 'I know five languages; I've travelled all over the world. Why wouldn't I understand?' (Ghosh 2004, 156). Kanai clearly asserts his power and authority through language and words. Symbolically, losing his words on Garjontola makes him helpless and vulnerable. He understands that 'Fokir had brought him here not because he wanted him to die, but because he wanted him to be judged' (Ghosh 2004, 327). This pivotal moment in the story enables Kanai to '[grasp] the structures of violence and oppression operating within the dominant social order' (Tomsky 61), in which he apparently is implicated but '[t]his natural encounter [also] becomes the point where Kanai genuinely unlearns his socio-cultural prejudices and pretensions' (Anand 37). He becomes aware of his complicity in oppressing the subaltern, firstly because he does not do anything to help them and also because, deep inside, he is disdainful towards people like Fokir. Thus, it is implied that Kanai has internalised discrimination towards lower-caste people and he was not even conscious that it was the case. On the island, Fokir holds more power because of his knowledge of the surroundings, so that he is empowered by the place. Undoubtedly, the kind of knowledge he holds is very different from that of Kanai. The reversal of power operated here confronts Kanai to the fact that he should not consider his knowledge superior to that of Fokir. In any case, the further point is that neither kind of knowledge can prevent climatic disasters from happening.

On the other hand, Piya experiences a similar realization with Fokir. Firstly, 'Piya, in particular, is prone to romanticising the connection that the local people have with their environment' (Prabhu 6). She sees Fokir to be in symbiosis with his surroundings, understanding

the rivers, the tides, and knowing where the dolphins reside. The fact that Piya and Fokir cannot communicate through language further amplifies Piya's idealization of their relationship, for she 'had seen a muscular quality of innocence in him, a likeable kind of naïveté' (Ghosh 2004, 99). Fokir is further depicted as the stereotype of the 'noble savage', as indicated by his name:

> William H. Hunter mentions forest guides called "fakirs" who accompanied woodcutters and hunters on their expeditions to the forest. [They] were so superstitious that they would not venture into the forest unaccompanied by a *fakir*, "who is supposed to receive power from the presiding deity - whom he propitiates with offerings - over the tigers and other animals" (Anand 24).

Fokir's knowledge of the forest is then congruent with the meaning of his name, and it is therefore apt that he is the one who leads Piya through the meanders of the rivers to find the dolphins. Fokir and Piya embody different modes of knowledge: '[i]n Piya and Fokir's unspoken empathy, Ghosh is bringing closer these two modes of interacting with the environment, the indigenous wisdom of the subaltern and the scientific sensibilities of the global cosmopolitan, revealing them to be complementary rather than contradictory' (Prabhu 10). It is true that they still manage to understand each other and to find the dolphins, which Fokir has known his whole life in their natural environment while Piya studied them from a distance, and surprisingly their collaboration is quite fruitful. However, a conflict happens and reminds Piya of the differences that separate them. Kanai tries to warn her about that when reminding her that '[h]e's a fisherman and [she is] a scientist. What [she] see[s] as fauna he sees as food. He's never sat in a chair, for heaven's sake' (Ghosh 2004, 268). Piya maintains that she cannot understand Fokir but 'there [is] so much between [them] it didn't matter' (Ghosh 2004, 268). At least, until the incident happens. Naturally, their differences create a friction at some point: Kanai, Piya, Fokir and Horen happen to witness a tiger getting burnt alive by villagers. The tiger had crept into a stable and killed the cattle there. The villagers had seized the opportunity to imprison the beast and set the stable on fire. Piya is struck by the violence of the mob 'screaming in a kind of maddened bloodlust, *Maar! Maar!*' (Ghosh 2004, 295). She tries to react and prevent the tiger from dying but Fokir holds her back. She is in utter shock as she says: '[t]hat's the most horrifying thing I've ever seen - a tiger set on fire' (Ghosh 2004, 295). She thus becomes aware that Fokir is a villager too and that he is acquainted with those practices.

Kanai asks Piya if she thought Fokir 'was some kind of grass-roots ecologist' (Ghosh 2004, 297). He reminds her that '[h]e's not. He's a fisherman - he kills animals for a living' (Ghosh 2004, 297). Piya is clearly disillusioned about Fokir's relation to nature. Kanai goes further in his

reflection and asks: 'Aren't we part of the horror as well?' (Ghosh 2004, 300). Because after all, '[i]f there were killings on that scale anywhere else on earth, it would be called a genocide, and yet here it goes almost unremarked: these killings are never reported, never written about in the papers. And the reason is just that these people are too poor to matter. We all know it but we choose not to see it' (Ghosh 2004, 300). Kanai raises an important question about subaltern agency. It is true that many people in the Sundarbans are killed by tigers, as Nilima remarks. She indicates that 'there are many more deaths than the authorities admit [...] [t]hese attacks have been going on for centuries' (Ghosh 2004, 240). These tiger attacks are more frequent in the Sundarbans than elsewhere due to the singularity of the surroundings. In fact, the 'incessant tide washing away the scent of the tiger's prey and the dead human bodies floating in the water during the frequent floods are also cited as reasons for the tiger's man-eating habit' (Anand 26). Once again, the harshness of the landscape complicates human life in the tide country. There seems to be no reaction from the government, so that the deaths resulting from tiger attacks are very frequent and yet they are not registered, leaving the subaltern to their fate.

However, the fact that Ghosh represents interactions between the global and the local as co-extensive gives the hope that the marginalized could be heard and made visible. Ghosh himself thereby makes them more visible. This concern is depicted in *The Hungry Tide* as both Kanai and Piya, after the realization of their responsibility in the plight of the subaltern, try to act somehow and show that the global and the local are not in opposition but rather co-extensive. To begin with Piya, she spreads information on the internet about Fokir's history and how he died and she begins to raise funds for Moyna and Tutul. In this way, she gives visibility to the plight of the inhabitants of the Sundarbans. Furthermore, she seems to realise the importance of working with locals in terms of environment protection policies. She creates an association to protect the dolphins 'under the sponsorship of the Badabon Trust, so the local fishermen would be involved. And the Trust would benefit too' (Ghosh 2004, 397). To this aim, she plans to use the data that Fokir provided her before he died in the storm:

> 'All the routes that Fokir had showed me are stored here. Look.' She pointed to a sinuous zig-zag line that had appeared on the screen. [...] Fokir took the boat into every little creek and gully where he'd ever seen a dolphin. That one map represents decades of work and volumes of knowledge. It's going to be the foundation of my own project. That's why I think it should be named after him' (Ghosh 2004, 398).

This ending may seem a bit utopic, but it underscores the importance of taking the locals into account when it comes to the protection of the environment: 'Piya is collaborating with Nilima; a union between the global and the local that promises to empower the subaltern inhabitants of the tide country through Piya's academic and international contacts' (Tomsky 63). More importantly, this collaboration allows them to go beyond the global-local dichotomy and move towards a genuine form of interconnectedness.

As to Kanai, he has read his uncle's notebook about a massacre that happened in the Sundarbans in the late 1970s. Unfortunately, he lost the journal in the storm. Nevertheless, he decides to publish 'Nirmal's notebook, with the aim of reaching international communities of readers and scholars' (Tomsky 63). Kanai's case is particularly interesting because it echoes Ghosh's own role. Indeed, as an author, Ghosh himself raises awareness about the situation in the Sundarbans. What is more, Nirmal's journal is wholly contained in Ghosh's novel. In this respect, '*The Hungry Tide* helps us to understand better why the combination and interface of cosmopolitan and local approaches to environmental concerns and ecological crises are of particular importance in the postcolonial moment' (Weik 121). Showing how the cosmopolitan higher-class and the local subaltern agency should collaborate, '[t]he novel moves us beyond narrow nationalistic, ethnic, and racial binaries to embrace an ecological perspective that is compelled by the understanding that we live, not in many, but in one world' (Kaur 127). Indeed, the various characters share the same world: they are bound by the place, the Sundarbans.

The co-extensive understanding of the global-and-local interface is further conveyed in the novel through the difficulty of classifying the characters. It seems that Ghosh tried to prevent the reader from categorising some characters such as Piya, Kanai, or Nirmal as entirely cosmopolitan and global, and other characters such as Fokir as entirely local and bound to the place. Piya is of Indian origin and she has kept a bond with her cultural roots through her mother. Indeed, when she is on the boat with Fokir, he cooks a meal and as she watches him, a memory from her childhood is revived; she sees 'her mother's hands' (Ghosh 2004, 96) and is reminded of 'the smells of home; she would sniff them on her mother, on the way back from school' (Ghosh 2004, 96). Despite the fact that she is American and only knows English, the bond that connects her to India is quite intimate and it is her Indian origin which allows her to stay longer in the Sundarbans as well: she is 'eligible for a card that would allow [her] to stay on indefinitely - something about being a person of Indian origin' (Ghosh 2004, 398). It is made clear that Piya progressively reconnects with her

origins and that, despite her 'global appearance', she takes action on a local scale, as discussed in the following paragraph. Nirmal is also difficult to categorise as a character because, as Weik argues, he has a cosmopolitan, global mindset, indeed he is a 'devoted, if frustrated, *cosmopolitan*' (Weik 129). His difficult categorisation comes from the fact that he is a refugee from Dhaka who then moved to Kolkata where, under pressure from the government because of his radical leftism, he had to leave again, this time for Lusibari in the 1950s. Nirmal's global ideas are further illustrated by his Marxist 'historical materialism', which leads him to believe that 'everything which exist[s] [is] interconnected: the trees, the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature' (Ghosh 2004, 282-83). Nirmal's mind might then be cosmopolitan but, like Piya, he manages to take action on a local scale. His local contribution is not slight: he insisted on getting a shelter built in case a cyclone was ever to happen in the Sundarbans, which was very likely according to him. Nilima, his widow, says: 'It was Nirmal who convinced us to build it. If it weren't for his peculiar interest in geology meteorology we would never have thought of it' (Ghosh 2004, 388). Nilima even adds that 'it was probably the most important thing he did in his whole life' (Ghosh 2004, 388). This shelter saves hundreds of lives during the cyclone that breaks out at the end of the novel. Nirmal's local impact is thus important and makes him an embodiment of the conciliation between the global and the local. In the case of Fokir, who tends to be categorised as a local, which he in fact is, there is also an element about him that is evocative of the hybridity of the other characters, even though it is less striking in his case. Even though he is perceived as being in symbiosis with his environment, he was not born on Lusibari, for he travelled to the Sundarbans. Consequently, he is not 'fully "native"' (Weik 125). This way, Ghosh resists the global-local dichotomy by avoiding a clear-cut categorisation of the main protagonists.

As argued above, Kanai and Piya become aware of their own 'global' attitude when they are confronted to their limits, with the tiger killing for Piya and with the tiger encounter on Garjontola in Kanai's case. Still, *The Hungry Tide* is not limited to conflicts between human beings, or even within human beings in the case of Piya or Kanai, for example. Ghosh goes further than that. In the first place, he puts forward a conflict between the human and the nonhuman, as exemplified by the Morichjhapi Massacre. The latter takes an important place in the novel and shows the way climate, migration, postcolonialism and protection of the environment are intertwined. As Jones explains, the origin of this historical event is to be found in 1947, after the Partition of India, when Bangladeshi refugees were placed in camps in Dandakaranya, in central

India. The climate there was drastically different from what it was in their homeland: indeed, the climate was semi-arid and dry whereas they were familiar with water-soaked landscapes. As soon as the refugees had the opportunity to leave, they did and they chose to settle in West Bengal in the late 1970s, which was well-known to them as it resembled their original territory. Aside from this, Indira Ghandi launched a project to protect the Bengal Tiger, which had become an endangered species. This project is referred to as the Project Tiger and it states that no human beings are allowed on the wildlife reserves distributed across India. Unfortunately for the refugees, they decided to settle on an island which was part of one of those natural reserves. The government began to take action on January 26, 1979: in addition to getting deprived of food supplies and fresh water, 'the community was tear-gassed, huts were razed, and fisheries and tube wells were destroyed, in an attempt to deprive refugees of food and water' (Mallick 108). The government even denied their deeds but continued the blockade. On May 14, 1979, they hired off-duty policemen and gangs to kill and force the resisting refugees out with shocking violence: bodies were dumped in the Ganges and the death toll is unclear. After the massacre, 'the Left Front insisted that the eviction had been an ecological necessity, a step taken to prevent these and future refugee-settlers from destroying a precious ecological space' (Weik 133). In *The Hungry Tide*, the reader perceives the massacre through Nirmal's eyes thanks to his journal. Nirmal, animated by a utopian and Marxist ideal, desires to help the refugees and is most impressed by the way they organise life on the island: '*[b]ut what I saw was quite different from the picture in my mind's eye. Paths had been laid; the* bãdh *- that guarantor of island life - had been augmented; little plots of island had been enclosed with fences; fishing nets had been hung up to dry*' (Ghosh 2004, 171, italics in original). Nirmal, this middle-class bookish schoolteacher, had not expected to see such a civilisation emerging among refugees. He provides the reader with more information about life on the island before the disaster strikes. He is fascinated by the refugees and wants to help them but his wife Nilima categorically refuses, saying that '*[t]hose people are squatters; that land doesn't belong to them; it's government property. How can they just seize it? If they're allowed to remain, people will think every island in the tide country can be seized. What will become of the forest, the environment?*' (Ghosh 2004, 213, italics in original). What Nilima says presents a concern for the environment and raises ethical questions at the same time. At what cost should the environment be protected?

Through Kusum's voice, we also get a glimpse of the tension between human and nonhuman forms of agency. Kusum is a refugee on Morichjhapi, who had crossd paths with Kanai

when they were children and is Fokir's mother. At Morichjhapi, human lives were sacrificed in the name of animal rights and environment protection. Kusum voices this issue:

> *The worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless, and listen to the policemen making announcements, hearing them say that our lives, our existence, were worth less than dirt or dust. "This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is a part of a reserve forest, it belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid by people from all around the world." Every day, sitting here, with hunger gnawing at our bellies, we would listen to these words, over and over again. Who are these people, I wondered, who love animals so much they are willing to kill us for them?* (Ghosh 2004, 261-262, italics in original)

Kusum's poignant testimony clearly reveals the way their lives are considered as if they did not matter at all. Through her voice, Ghosh points an accusing finger at the government: 'By looking back on the state's role in Morichjhapi, Ghosh challenges an environmentalist politics that ignores human histories in areas deemed nature reserves' (Jaising 66). Kusum goes further:

> *It seemed to me that this whole world had become a place of animals, and our fault, our crime, was that we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have, from the water and the soil. No one could think this a crime unless they have forgotten that this is how humans have always lived - by fishing, by clearing land and by planting the soil*.' (Ghosh 2004, 262, italics in original)

By stating this, Kusum emphasises the remoteness of the people who want to protect the animals. Those people do not seem to be acquainted with rural practices anymore. In addition to pointing to the remoteness of the people who support the project, she highlights the gap created between the global and the local, resulting in a massacre and eviction. Refusing to leave, the refugees on the boat scream: '*Who are we? We are the dispossessed'* (Ghosh 2004, 254, italics in original). Anand writes that '[t]o dispossess these peoples for the sake of western models of conservation results in violence, as narrativized in the Morichjhapi incident of the novel. In the case of Morichjhapi, western conservation values served as the perfect pretense for pursuing political ends in the name of the tiger and environment' (Anand 39). Doing so, the novel problematises western models of conservation, which are depicted as out of touch with local realities, and it therefore further underscores the need of a co-existence of local and global modes of conservation, as argued above in the case of Piya. The latter was indeed confronted to this issue of animal rights when the tiger gets killed and she makes an insightful remark about it: '[o]nce we decide we can kill off other species, it'll be people next - just the kind of people you're thinking of, people who're poor and unnoticed' (Ghosh 2004, 301). In the instance of the Morichjhapi massacre, it is indeed the case

that human beings are killed because they seem to be worth less than others due to their status as refugees, dispossessed people who rather needed help from the state.

Thus, the dichotomous opposition between humans and nonhumans becomes irrelevant as it is presented as a 'false dichotomy' (Weik 132). Indeed, it is not a dichotomy but rather 'one of many situations where the marginalized are just that - marginalized. Their needs remain on the margins of the equation, and so discussion does not range around how to balance the various needs of an ecosystem that always already includes human beings, but rather revolves around how to protect a species threatened by extinction from the depredations of the careless poor' (Weik 132). The fact that the subaltern are denied agency is striking and a recognition thereof is a milestone in the deconstruction of traditional dichotomies. What is actually implied here is that human beings and animals should be considered as part of a continuum. The opposition alluded to in the novel is a result of the marginalization of the poor who are not taken into account at all. Through the tiger killing and the massacre, Ghosh raises an interesting issue: '[i]nhumanity towards human and animal others, then, springs from and feeds off a lack of connection with both other humans and the natural environment' (Weik 135). In both cases, the real issue comes from an absence of connection to others and to the environment. In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh refers to this issue as well. He qualifies climate change as 'uncanny' since '[n]o other word comes close to expressing the strangeness of what is unfolding around us. For these changes are not merely strange in the sense of being unknown or alien; their uncanniness lies precisely in the fact that in these encounters we recognize something we had turned away from: that is to say the presence and proximity of nonhuman interlocutors' (Ghosh 2016, 30). Ghosh insists on the lack of recognition of the nonhuman agency but also on the 'isolation in which humanity was entrapped in the time of its derangement' (Ghosh 2016, 162). Even though *The Hungry Tide* was published before *The Great Derangement*, it already problematises dichotomies that reveal a lack of interconnectedness. The fact that humanity turned away from the nonhuman originates from, and results in, a dichotomous thought pattern. By deconstructing dichotomies on several layers in *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh lays the groundwork for reflections on climate change because the latter necessitates a reconnection between the human and the non-human as well as between the global and the local.

3.3. Narration

The idea of interconnectedness is also conveyed on the level of narration. *The Hungry Tide* is composed of embedded narratives resulting in shifting focalisation. The chapters mainly shift

between focalisation on Piya and Kanai as the readers follow their adventures till the point when they are reunited. It is also important to note that Fokir, despite being one of the main characters, has no voice in the novel, apparently because 'Ghosh is aware of the danger of appropriation and therefore does not give us "unmediated access" to Fokir's thoughts and knowledge' (Jaising 78-79). Instead, the reader perceives Fokir through Piya's and Kanai's eyes and sometimes, a translation is needed. At some point in the novel, Piya hears Fokir sing a sort of Arabic prayer, which is actually Bon Bibi's story, or rather a part of it: '*The Story of Dukhey's Redemption*' (Ghosh 2004, 354; italics in original). Bon Bibi's legend is a folktale, widely spread among the Sundarbans. Bon Bibi being a sort of Mother Earth, this story is told in *The Hungry Tide* as well, firstly through a memory of Kanai's as he recalls a performance of the legend that he witnessed on stage in the company of Kusum when he was a child. Piya is intrigued by the meaning of the prayer and Kanai translates this part of the story for her, in a letter. Kanai, right before his translation, specifies that, for Fokir, 'those words were much more than a part of a legend: it was the story that gave this land its life' (Ghosh 2004, 354). Kanai here conveys the idea that the narrative is embedded in the landscape, inherent in the land, and even shaping its identity. What Kanai offers to Piya is thus more than a mere translation, it is a sort of profound understanding of the identity of the Sundarbans. By translating the song, it is almost as if he had translated a part of the local culture: 'In those words there was a history that is not just his own but also of this place, the tide country' (Ghosh 2004, 354). The gift Kanai offers Piya is a 'story that is also a song, these words are part of Fokir' (Ghosh 2004, 354). The fact that words and stories are intertwined in local culture gives the insight that language and words actually have a more than symbolic value in the Sundarbans.

Furthermore, it is the landscape that binds all the layers of narrative present in the novel: Bon Bibi is essential to the culture of the Sundarbans, the Morichjhapi massacre that is told in Nirmal's journal happened there, and the main plot unfolds in the Sundarbans, too. Bon Bibi's legend is syncretic inasmuch as 'Bon Bibi herself is a deity of Middle-Eastern Islamic origins, but over time her worshippers have come to embrace Hindu ritual practices as well. Thus, for instance, Piya is surprised to find Fokir, a Hindu, singing out an Arabic prayer at the shrine of Bon Bibi. The local population's devout belief in Bon Bibi is a case of the cultural syncreticism reflecting the ecological syncreticism of the Sund[a]rbans itself' (Kaur 134). The legend thus reinforces the cultural and ecological syncretism that exists in the Sundarbans. Certainly, the notion of

syncretism, which refers to a blending of different religions and cultural paradigms, is related to the ideas of interconnectedness and cosmopolitanism pervasive to the novel. Nirmal reinforces this idea in his description of the landscape:

> *The mudbanks of the tide country are shaped not only by rivers of silt, but also by rivers of language: Bengali, English, Arabic, Hindi, Arakanese and who knows what else? Flowing into one another they create a proliferation of small worlds that hang suspended in the flow. And so it dawned on me: the tide country's faith is something like one of its great mohonas, a meeting not just of many rivers, but a round-about people can use to pass in many directions - from country to country and even between faiths and religions*. (Ghosh 2004, 247; italics in original)

Nirmal highlights the way languages are intrinsic to the mixed identity of the Sundarbans and he compares the flow of languages to the flow of rivers. The Sundarbans as a place is thus described as a bridge between faiths and religions for many waves of settlers moved to the tide country in the course of the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, therefore leading to the establishment of a cross-cultural space. This depiction of the tide country evokes interconnectedness between language and land, and *in extenso* between nature and culture, which should not be considered in a dichotomous way.

Not only is the story of the Glory of Bon Bibi told in the novel, there are also other stories told obliquely, resulting in a multi-layered narrative. Aside from the main plot, there is Nirmal's journal read by Kanai, that the reader discovers at the same time as Kanai. As already mentioned, Nirmal's journal is a 'first-person account of the events leading up to the 1979 Morichjhapi massacre, written in italics and pulled directly from the pages of the journal of Kanai's uncle' (Jones 640). The journal is also the reason why Kanai journeys to the Sundarbans, which provides the starting-point for the story. Narratives have an important role within the story as they shape the understanding of the outsiders concerning the place, its inhabitants and their beliefs. Ghosh stages this network of narratives, creating a multi-layered story which reproduces at the level of the text the 'unique biotic space that is the Sundarbans in all its complex verisimilitude and beauty' (Kaur 132), thereby connecting the landscape to its culture.

Narratives have an important role but, in *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh argues that there is a general failure among fictional writers to tackle climate change. He writes that 'considering what climate change actually portends for the future of the earth, it should surely follow that this would be the principal preoccupation of writers the world over - and this, I think, is very far from being the case' (Ghosh 2016, 8). He further argues that writers choose not to write about this issue

because the current turmoil caused by climate change seems too uncanny for what he calls serious fiction. He even admits:

> I too have been preoccupied with climate change for a long time, but it is true of my own work as well, that this subject figures only obliquely in my fiction. In thinking about the mismatch between my personal concerns and the content of my published work, I have come to be convinced that the discrepancy is not the result of personal predilections: it arises out of the peculiar forms of resistance that climate change presents to what is now regarded as serious fiction. (Ghosh 2016, 9)

The Hungry Tide was indeed published before *The Great Derangement*; Ghosh states that climate change is only treated obliquely in his fiction, thus including *The Hungry Tide*. Ghosh's underlying wish to evoke climate change pervades the novel as he places water and weather events at the epicentre of the plot, probably as a way of referring to the most obvious consequences of climate change. In an interview with Alessandro Vescovi, Ghosh talks about the responsibility of writers in the climate crisis:

> I do think that writers of my generation have a duty to address issues of the environment. When we look at writers of the Thirties and Forties, we ask "where did you stand on fascism?" In the future, they will look at us and say "where did you stand on the environment?" I think this is absolutely the fundamental question of our time (Vescovi 137).

Ghosh actually identifies the role of writers; by using the word 'duty', he implies that it is necessary to write about climate change and that writers might influence the management of the crisis. Even though *The Hungry Tide* does not tackle climate change in a direct way, or at least it does so in a less direct way than is the case in *Gun Island*, it still had a massive impact in the sense that the 'publication of *The Hungry Tide* played a crucial role in garnering worldwide support against the Sahara project, which led the Central Ministry of Environment and Forests to terminate the project' (Anand 39). As Jalais explains, this project intended 'to build a world class city-centre spread over 250 km^2 of water surface planning to include a business centre, a cinema theatre, a cultural centre, club houses, health clubs, a helipad, etc' (Jalais 335) and making the Sundarbans a touristic attraction, which would have led to the demise of the fragile ecosystem of the Sundarbans. The fact that the novel had such an impact proves that writers hold a certain power and this reinforces the necessity of writing on climate change in fiction, in the hope that it may stir the pot. In the following paragraph, I shall develop the manner in which climate change is depicted through genre and narration in *The Hungry Tide*.

First of all, *The Hungry Tide* is referred to as what Ursula Kluwick calls 'Anthropocene water fiction', which she defines as 'texts that engage with environmental change caused by humans and that use water to convey this change, through its function as setting or plot element.' (Kluwick 64). As discussed above, water is indeed predominant in the landscapes of the Sundarbans, which came to be called 'waterscapes' (Anand 24). In *The Hungry Tide*, water constitutes both a setting, through the tide country, and a plot element, in view of the part played by the tides, the floods and especially the climax of the novel, consisting in a cyclone. The pervasiveness of water is to be found first of all in the language itself, and equally in some crucial events in the novel. To begin with, the novel is structured by water inasmuch as the two parts that divide the novel are entitled 'Part One, The Ebb: *Bhata*' and 'Part Two, The Flood: *Jowar*' (Kluwick 67). This suggests that the rhythm of the novel is equal to an ebb-and-flow movement, which is modelled on the Sundarbans, known for the incessant motion of its tides.

The pervasiveness of water is further exemplified in the language, which is itself flooded by words or expressions reminiscent of water. For example, the narrator claims that, 'in the tide country, where life was lived on the margins, it was useful also to be reminded that no place was so remote as to escape the flood of history' (Ghosh 2004, 77). In this case, water seeps into the metaphor of the flood, openly described as unescapable, indeed like the course of history. This idea is reinforced by Nirmal, as he concludes that '*nothing escapes the maw of the tides*' (Ghosh 2004, 225; italics in original). Similarly, Kanai describes how '[s]omewhere in the distance a generator was switched on and a flood of light came pouring out of a nearby window' (Ghosh 2004, 184). Light too is compared to water, as if it appeared in a liquid state, 'pouring out of' a window. The concept of water is sometimes used to describe something overwhelming, as for example when Kanai recalls clients who lose their temper in situations where they are unable to understand the language, finding themselves in a 'tide of incomprehension' (Ghosh 2004, 326).

Another instance of water being used in a metaphor for something overwhelming is when Piya recalls a memory of her parents quarrelling as she was younger. Piya remembers that '[t]here was a time once when the Bengali language was an angry flood trying to break down the door [...] the sounds of their quarrels would always find ways of trickling in, under the door and through the cracks, the level rising until she thought she would drown in the flood' (Ghosh 2004, 93). Once again, water is represented as a forceful element, imposing itself on Piya's mind through Bengali language. The metaphor is developed further as the 'angry flood' not only creates a threatening

atmosphere, but also something destructive, since it always finds a way to her, once more proving unescapable. There is even the idea of being submerged by water and drowning, which foreshadows the cyclone at the end of the novel. The pervasiveness of water is further illustrated when Piya thinks about crabs and their crucial role within the ecological balance of the Sundarbans. She mentions that she was born in July and that she 'had often wondered why the ancients had included a crab in the zodiac when there were so many other more interesting animals' (Ghosh 2004, 142). Consequently, Piya is a cancer, which is a water sign in astrology; this adds to the permeating aspect of water. She concludes by saying that '[p]erhaps it was the crabs that ruled the tide of her destiny' (Ghosh 2004, 142). The tide here is used as a metaphor to convey the inescapability of her 'destiny', again something unstoppable. Further on in the novel, Nirmal writes about the disappearance of Kusum; Kanai is the last person to have seen her. Nirmal recounts: '*[t]hat year, on the eve of the performance of the Bon Bibi Johuranama, she vanished as if into the eye of a storm*' (Ghosh 2004, 143; italics in original). Even though the link to water is rather indirect in this particular case, the imagery continues to evoke the theme of water and weather events, which are linked. The image conveyed here mirrors the climatic cyclone described at the end.

One characteristic of water is its mutability, as has already been discussed in the case of tides, which swallow up to entire islands at high tide. Still, water also comes in different states: liquid as mostly depicted in *The Hungry Tide*, but also solid or gaseous. In the novel, the Sundarbans are described as being frequently immersed in fog or mist, which are examples of water in a gaseous state. As Kanai remarks, 'the quiet was more like a fog or a mist, creeping in slowly, from a distance' (Ghosh 2004, 154). Kanai compares the quiet to fog, and the common feature with the other metaphors and comparisons is that water, in a liquid or gaseous state, always serves to illustrate something unescapable, 'creeping in'. In the word 'flood', there is something overwhelming, possibly coming from the fact that water overpowers land in case of flood. Therefore, it can be asserted that water has a central role in the novel: its omnipresence subjects the reader to a flood of watery imagery. The inescapability conveyed in the examples above suggests the inescapability of climate change: no one can escape a flood and climate change seems to be creeping in in a similar manner, as a tsunami that is slowly progressing but remains unstoppable.

As discussed above, not only does water pervade the language of *The Hungry Tide*, it also imposes itself on the level of the plot, namely through storms. These storms function as reminders

that the nonhuman is and has always been around us, despite the fact that it has massively been ignored for a long time, as Ghosh underscores in *The Great Derangement*. He states that 'the uncanny and improbable events that are beating at our doors seem to have stirred a sense of recognition, an awareness that humans were never alone, that we have always been surrounded by beings of all sorts' (Ghosh 2016, 30). The idea expressed in *The Great Derangement* was already present in Ghosh's mind when he wrote *The Hungry Tide*, in which cataclysmic weather events serve as warnings that were perceived as so improbable that they tend to be ignored, while on the other hand the frequency of storms is reminiscent that the nonhuman can always greatly impact on human destinies.

To begin with, the denial of nonhuman agency is apparent in the story of Port Canning, which is recounted both in *The Hungry Tide* and in *The Great Derangement*. It constitutes a historical element that serves to blur the boundary between fiction and non-fiction. An Englishman named Henry Piddington used to live in Calcutta in the late 19th century, where he was a 'shipping inspector by profession' (Ghosh 2016, 57). He proved particularly interested in storms to the point that it was he who invented the word cyclone. He was an expert in 'storm surges' or '"storm waves" as it was then called' (Ghosh 2016, 57) and was aware of the disturbances and deterioration that storm surges had caused in Bengal. As narrated through Kanai in *The Hungry Tide*, 'it's no secret that the word *matla* means 'mad' in Bangla - and everyone who knows the river knows that this name has not been lightly earned' (Ghosh 2004, 284). Therefore, it seemed clear that the river tended to rise and flood the area, sometimes unexpectedly. Lord Canning insisted on building a port on the banks of the river Matla even though Mr Piddington had beseeched him not to do so, given that 'the proposed port on the Matla River would be exposed to extreme cyclonic hazard' (Ghosh 2016, 57). He made 'a prediction: if the port was built at this location, he said, it would not last more than fifteen years. There would come a day when a great mass of salt water would rise up, in the midst of a cyclone, and drown the whole settlement; on this he would stake his reputation, as a man and as a scientist' (Ghosh 2004, 286). Piddington's concern was such that he wrote a pamphlet to the 'then governor-general, in which he issued this ominous warning: "Every one and everything must be prepared to see a day when, in the midst of the horrors of a hurricane, [...] the whole settlement will be inundated to a depth from five to fifteen feet"' (Ghosh 2016, 57). Unfortunately, Piddington's prediction 'fell on deaf ears' (Ghosh 2016, 58) and was not taken into account. As a result, only three years after the opening ceremony, a cyclone struck the port and

‘[i]n a matter of hours, the town was all but gone; only the bleached skeleton remained’ (Ghosh 2004, 287). The storm surge was ‘a modest one, rising only to six feet’ (Ghosh 2016, 58); it is striking that the storm surge was not as huge as expected but it still had considerable consequences. In fact, ‘[t]he destruction came about just as Mr Piddington had said it would: it was caused not by some great *tufaan* but by a relatively minor storm. Nor was it the storm’s wind that wrecked the city: it was a wave, a surge’ (Ghosh 2004, 287). As told in *The Hungry Tide*, Port Canning was deserted in 1871 and since then, it has been what Kanai compares to a Sunday post office, that is to say, a ghost town.

This story is an example of the rationalist, non-alarmist behaviour which leads to catastrophes, as Ghosh points out in *The Great Derangement.* Port Canning is part of the setting at the beginning of the novel. The conclusion of this story is that warnings about climatic events are not taken seriously most of the time, certainly because of the apparent improbability of the predicted disaster. The novel itself seems to be a prediction. It is true that the region is particularly prone to cyclones and tidal waves but the way it is told leads one to think that, when it does occur, it is more than a mere coincidence. In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh writes:

> *The Hungry Tide* was published in the summer of 2004. A few months after the publication, on the night of December 25, I was back in my family home in Kolkata. The next morning, logging on the web, I learned that a cataclysmic tsunami had been set off by a massive undersea earthquake in the Indian Ocean. Measuring 9.0 on the Richter scale, the quake’s epicenter lay between the northernmost tip of Sumatra and the southernmost island in the Adaman and Nicobar chain (Ghosh 2016, 33-34).

The similitude between the two events is striking and the ‘news had a deeply unsettling effect on’ (Ghosh 2016, 34) Ghosh. As a writer, he had to do more research on storms to describe this sort of event as accurately as possible. In fact, ‘the images that had been implanted in [his] mind by writing *The Hungry Tide* merged with live television footage of the tsunami in a way that was almost overwhelming (Ghosh 2016, 34). The accuracy of his intuition is almost disturbing, but at the same time, it reminds us that ‘climate change may indeed alter patterns of cyclonic activity around the world’ (Ghosh 2016, 40). This sense of the recurrence of natural disasters resulting from the Anthropocene calls Nirmal’s prediction to mind: ‘*[m]y friend, not only* could *it happen again - it* will *happen again. A storm will come, the waters will rise, and the* bãdh *will succumb, in part or in whole. It is only a matter of time*’ (Ghosh 2004, 205; italics in original). Even in the novel this

pattern of reoccurrence is described through the parallel established between the 1970 storm and the cyclone.

Still, cyclones are described as 'lived experience[s]' (Kluwick 69) in *The Hungry Tide*, which hinders the novel to reach a global scale and makes it rather focus on 'local consequences' (Kluwick 69). To begin with, Horen experienced a storm in 1970 and the way it is told leads one to think that the experience certainly was traumatic but it stays a local one, pertaining only to himself and some other locals. As he describes the storm, he tells that '[t]here were corpses everywhere, and the land was carpeted with dead fish and livestock. They found out that three hundred thousand people had died' (Ghosh 2004, 350). The human toll is massive and it clearly was a disaster; it is mentioned that 'the memory of it would last him through a second lifetime - he never wanted to have it repeated' (Ghosh 2004, 350). This faculty of storms to stay with a person applies to Ghosh, too. In *The Great Derangement*, he recounts the 'hellish fury' (Ghosh 2016, 14) of a tornado he experienced in New Delhi in 1978. Ghosh argues that '[n]ovelists inevitably mine their own experience when they write' (Ghosh 2016, 15). In his case, Ghosh specifies that '[n]o less than any other writer have I dug into my own past while writing fiction' (Ghosh 2016, 15). In *The Hungry Tide*, it is indeed the case that the storm is told as a lived experience, presented essentially as a local event. This is apparent when the storm is on its way and Piya and Kanai get separated, providing two different perspectives to account for the cyclone. On the one hand, there is Piya, who is left outside with Fokir, and on the other hand, there is Kanai, who goes back to safety with Horen and the others sheltering at the hospital, where Nirmal had had a refuge built. What happens is that Kanai, Horen, Piya and Fokir are together on the *bhobhoti*. Then, Piya and Fokir decide to go on a smaller boat to explore. After some time, they realise that a storm is coming their way. Unfortunately, Horen and Kanai have no other choice but to let Fokir and Piya out there at the mercy of the elements. Piya, for her part, also becomes aware that a storm is coming, even though it 'needed some stretching of the mind to imagine that bad weather could be on its way' (Ghosh 2004, 344). Stating this, Piya underscores the improbability of such events ever happening. Nevertheless, as the storm approaches, the realness of the situation can be felt as the nonhuman (in this case the cyclone) slowly gets the upper hand on everything else. In other words, the 'storm and flood are depicted in terms of a gradual ascendency of environmental over human agency' (Kluwick 70). Gradually, the waves get more and more powerful, and the wind blows even more strongly:

> Piya found herself rowing with her back to the wind. It was oddly disorienting to be hit by a wave coming from her blind side; after it had lifted her up there would be a dizzying moment when the boat seemed to hang on the crest of the watery ridge. Then suddenly she would find herself tobogganing backwards into the wave's trough, clutching at the gunwales to keep her balance. Water came sluicing over the bow with each wave and it felt as if a bucket were being emptied on her back (Ghosh 2004, 370).

In a sense, the waves seem to almost attack Piya, sometimes unexpectedly, and she feels her 'own agency slipping away' (Kluwick 70). Their ascendency on human beings is conveyed through Piya being passive and trying her best to stay afloat whereas the waves are active and lead to the unfolding of the events; she is 'associated with the passive voice and the object case' (Kluwick 70) as she 'found herself rowing' and 'would find herself tobogganing', therefore having no control on the situation. In this sense, it seems that 'Piya has clearly lost control over her own movements; instead, this passage highlights the fragility of the boat and its passengers as they are thrown about by the increasingly ferocious waters' (Kluwick 70) The force of the waves soon hands over to the violence of the wind gusts; '[i]t was as if the wind were a clawed animal doing all it could to tear the boat apart' (Ghosh 2004, 372). The wind is presented as a predator, endowed with agency. This way, Ghosh presents an inanimate thing, the wind, as something animate.

While Piya braves the elements, Kanai is heading back to Lusibari. He encounters the same raging animal that is the wind as the 'ladder was exposed to the wind and he felt the gusts clawing at him as he put his foot on the first rung - had he been wearing sandals, they would have been torn from his feet' (Ghosh 2004, 373). The wind seems to assert its power, again paired with the verb 'to claw', which reminds one of a ferocious animal. As the storm goes by, the sense of inanimate/nonhuman agency is further amplified. Fokir decides to 'tie them both to the tree trunk' (Ghosh 2004, 378), a ploy that will allow Piya to survive. As the storm progresses, the characters have less and less control over the situation and the wind itself begins to look like a grotesque character: '[i]t sounded no longer like the wind but like some other element - the usual blowing, sighing and rustling had turned into a deep, ear-splitting rumble, as if the earth itself had begun to move' (Ghosh 2004, 379). The wind, like the water, is clearly cast as uncanny. Here, the usual breeze transforms into something violent and unrecognizable. Referring to the 'earth itself', the inanimate comes to life in a fierce way, overpowering everything in its path, as exemplified when 'she caught a glimpse of a shack spinning above them. She recognised it immediately: it was the shrine' (Ghosh 2004, 382). Even this shrine, representative of the forest goddess Bon Bibi, is swiped by the storm. Then comes the tidal wave: '[i]t was as if a city block had suddenly begun to

move: the river was like pavement lying at its feet, while its crest reared high above, dwarfing the tallest trees' (Ghosh 2004, 383). In this description, the tidal wave is a merciless giant dominating everything else, even the 'tallest trees'. The tigers, usually known as predators, are also struggling to survive, for Piya sees 'a tiger pulling itself out of the water and into a tree on the far side of the island. It seemed to have been following the storm's eye, like the birds, resting whenever it could' (Ghosh 2004, 389). The animals equally have to cope with climatic disruptions. Therefore, everyone and everything is 'rendered clueless and powerless against the wrath of an environment that is indiscriminate in its deconstruction of every animate and inanimate entity on its path' (Pirzadeh 111). What emerges from the narration of the event is that it is told as a lived experience and therefore, difficult to generalise about; it is so specific that it is almost impossible to consider the storm from the perspective of climate change. However, the importance of nonhuman agency is put in the spotlight: what humans had ignored for so long seems to come alive and the inanimate suddenly becomes animate and reminiscent of the power the earth actually holds. This then testifies to the oblique manner in which climate change is thematized in *The Hungry Tide*.

Nevertheless, there are some more explicit references to climate change scattered in the novel, as some events directly point to this phenomenon. Firstly, on his way to Lusibari, Kanai meets his aunt Nilima, who is quite surprised that he chose to come via Canning because, as she says, no one uses this way anymore. When Kanai wonders why this is so, he soon gets an answer: ''[b]ecause of the river', she said. 'It's changed'' (Ghosh 2004, 23). The observation of the impact of climate change on the environment is not a new thing. The fact that concerns about climate change have become particularly compelling does not mean that it is a new issue. Indeed, Nirmal already saw the first signs of a decline in climate matters and the state of the environment:

> *Age teaches you to recognize the signs of death. You do not see them suddenly; you become aware of them very slowly over a period of many, many years. Now it was as if I could see those signs everywhere, not just in myself, but in this place that I had lived in for almost thirty years. The birds were vanishing, the fish were dwindling and from day to day the land was being reclaimed by the sea. What would it take, to submerge the tide country? Not much - a minuscule change in the level of the sea would be enough* (Ghosh 2004, 215; italics in original).

Nirmal's clear-sightedness about the future of the tide country is striking: the sea levels are actually rising and the consequences on the tide country are bound to become disastrous, as argued above. Nirmal also observes the first signs that testify to an ecological change: the disappearance of birds

and the lessening in the fish population are so many indicators of an alteration in the habitat. Piya confirms what Nirmal had sensed when she has a conversation with Kanai about the marine mammal population in the waters of the Sundarbans. She tells Kanai that she knows for sure that there used to be more of them in the past. Kanai then asks what happened to them, to which Piya answers that '[t]here seems to have been some sort of drastic change in the habitat [...] [s]ome kind of dramatic deterioration' (Ghosh 2004, 266). As an expert in marine biology, she states that '[w]hen marine mammals begin to disappear from an established habitat it means something's gone very, very wrong' (Ghosh 2004, 266-267). Piya refers to the drastic changes caused by climate change, pinpointing the increase in the salinity of the water as well as climatic disruptions. The impact of climate change is thus mainly considered indirectly in *The Hungry Tide* though there are also some explicit references at times, pointing at least to an incipient concern with climate change.

3.4. Conclusion

Climate change is tackled obliquely in Ghosh's 2004 novel. As argued above, *The Hungry Tide* still presents some intuitive elements that indicate Ghosh's concerns despite some inbuilt inability of fiction to approach the issue in a direct way. The remarkable elements that prepare further discussion about climate change are the following: as I tried to demonstrate, Ghosh chooses a very pertinent setting, the Sundarbans, for his novel. This mangrove forest is unique in terms of biodiversity but suffers from the consequences of climate change and is very prone to weather events such as cyclones and tidal waves. Furthermore, Ghosh places his novel in a perspective that favours a deconstruction of dichotomies, thus allowing us to approach a sense of interconnectedness, namely to recognize affinities between the global, the local, the human, the nonhuman, culture and nature, which are part of a continuum rather than being clear-cut categories. The language in *The Hungry Tide* further serves to construct this oblique approach to climate: through its watery imagery, the novel makes nonhuman agency visible. This is also exemplified on the level of the plot, since the cyclone and the tidal wave coincide with the climax of the novel. Still, the reach of the novel remains local and is difficult to expand as the weather events are described as personal, lived experiences. In the next section, I shall compare how *Gun Island*, Ghosh's 2019 novel, differs from *The Hungry Tide*, and I will point to the ways in which Ghosh's art of narrative evolved, giving his novel a larger scope in terms of climate change.

4. Climate change in *Gun Island*

Gun Island was published fifteen years after *The Hungry Tide* and, as already mentioned, three years after *The Great Derangement*, and we shall see the impact of Ghosh's reflections in the latter when he wrote *Gun Island*. In this section, I will mention the way climate change is depicted through an inclusive setting, storytelling, migration and politics, as the author moves towards a global reach and a recognition of the importance of collective action. To achieve this, I shall also refer to Ghosh's 2004 novel for comparative purposes. A comparative approach between the novels is useful inasmuch as the two novels are interconnected: some critics had found the ending of *The Hungry Tide* unsatisfactory; the reason was maybe that it was not the end of the story. *Gun Island* indeed forms what Kluwick calls a 'loose sequel' (Kluwick 69) to *The Hungry Tide*. The main characters of *The Hungry Tide* are back: Kanai is one of Deen's uncles. Deen meets him at a wedding in Kolkata at the beginning of the story. It is Kanai who incites Deen to journey to the Sundarbans and who introduces him to the story of Manasa Devi. Thus, even though he is otherwise absent in the novel, his contribution is necessary for the plot to unfold. Then, the continuity between the two novels is further maintained by Piya, the cetologist involved in the protection of marine mammals in the Sundarbans with the partnership of Nilima, also known as Mashima, Kanai's aunt. Along with them, there is Horen the fisherman and Moyna, Fokir's widow, as well as their son Tutul, from now on called Tipu. Indeed, Piya, feeling sorry for the incident with Fokir, promised to take care of Tipu and brought him to the United States with her, where his name 'was difficult for Americans so he had changed it to Tipu. He had insisted that everyone get used to his new name and wouldn't answer to any other' (Ghosh 2019, 55). He is now grown up and forms one of the main characters of *Gun Island*, along with Rafi, another boy from the Sundarbans who will become his lover. The comparative approach that I will provide between the two novels is encouraged by the similarities between the two main characters: i.e., Deen and Kanai respectively. They both have careers based on words: Kanai is an interpret and a translator while Deen is a 'dealer in rare books and Asian antiquities' (Ghosh 2019, 3). They both seem to struggle with love and are convinced rationalists with a middle-class background. Still, they are also different: Deen is not as successful, he is less self-absorbed than his uncle and he actually ends up with Piya, which Kanai also wanted but failed to achieve. Another striking feature that further binds the two novels is the setting, the Sundarbans in West Bengal, though parts of *Gun Island* are set elsewhere, too.

4.1. The Setting

In a similar manner as in *The Hungry Tide*, the setting of the story is meaningful. In the case of *The Hungry Tide*, the story is almost exclusively set in the Sundarbans: the link to climate change was quite clear given that the biodiversity of the mangrove forest is deeply affected by climate change and that this natural barrier protecting the continent is in danger because of rising sea levels. Therefore, choosing this place was a way to highlight the impact of climate change on the environment. This place is back in *Gun Island* but this time along with many other places, which contributes to the global reach of the novel, because after all, climate change is a global issue, more than ever. As we shall see, the novel unfolds in different significant places: beginning in the Sundarbans, moving to Deen's city New York but also Los Angeles and most importantly to Italy, especially Venice. Climate-related events happen in these different places, displaying the global nature of the crisis.

The Sundarbans, which follows on from *The Hungry Tide*, is the first crucial place involved in the narration. As already discussed in the section about the 2004 novel, the area holds the largest mangrove forest of the world and is located in the Bengal Delta. What is striking is that the depiction of the Sundarbans in Ghosh's 2004 novel *The Hungry Tide* already shows concerns about a decaying biodiversity, which is further depicted in *Gun Island*. As predicted in *The Hungry Tide*, the situation in the Sundarbans has not become any better. As expected, it even became worse, with storms sweeping across the landscape more and more regularly and human trafficking organizations attracted there by the poverty. In tune with the description given in *The Hungry Tide*, the landscape is described as 'unreadable' (Ghosh 2019, 71) and unique. Deen is mesmerized and describes it in the following way: '[t]he falling tide had lowered the steamer and raised the mangroves above us, so that the channel was now overlooked on both sides by impenetrable battlements of mud and tangled foliage. There was scarcely a creature to be seen but every element of the landscape - forest, water, earth - seemed to be seething with life' (Ghosh 2019, 62). However, another moment that indexes the harshness of the landscape, as perceived through Piya and Kanai in *The Hungry Tide*, is the moment Deen tries to walk in the mud: '[n]ext thing I knew I was lying face down in the velvety, melting mire, with Tipu's laughter ringing in my ears' (Ghosh 2019, 73). This mishap is representative of his status as a 'stranger' there, in the same manner as for Kanai and Piya.

Life in the Sundarbans is given its rhythm by its tides. Yet, the rising of sea levels has disastrous consequences: the many islands forming the archipelago begin to disappear. The potential disappearance of the mangrove forest is evoked several times in the novel. First, when Nilima expresses her concern about the temple: 'I believe the dhaam[4]'s still there but who knows how much longer it'll remain? The islands of the Sundarbans are constantly being swallowed up by the sea; they're disappearing before our eyes' (Ghosh 2019, 19). Clearly, the Sundarbans is particularly sensitive to the slightest change in sea levels. As a result, it registers the effects of climate change and highlights the extent to which it menaces the earth. Not only are floods making life in the Sundarbans extremely gruelling, 'it seemed as though both land and water were turning against those who lived in the Sundarbans' (Ghosh 2019, 53): fishermen hardly catch anything, and those who try to dig wells are confronted to 'an arsenic-laced brew' (Ghosh 2019, 53). Another change is visible in the Sundarbans: the improvements in technology allowed people to prepare better for cyclones but this also brought about an unexpected consequence. As a matter of fact, the 'Cyclone Aila, which hit the Sundarbans in 2009' (Ghosh 2019, 52), happened differently compared to previous cyclones: they 'no longer signify a temporary rupture but a permanent structural change' (Kluwick 72). Thanks to the alarm system, people have had time to prepare and to leave. Consequently, the casualties were very limited but 'the evacuations too had produced effects that no one could have foretold' (Ghosh 2019, 53): indeed, 'many evacuees had decided not to return, knowing that their lives, always hard would be even more precarious now' (Ghosh 2019, 53). Actually, the 2009 cyclone was less deadly than any other cyclone but its 'long-term consequences were even more devastating' (Ghosh 2019, 52) as salt water pervaded land where it had never been before, rendering it too salty to cultivate and breaking the embankments, as predicted by Nirmal in *The Hungry Tide*: '*the* bãdh *will succumb, in part or in whole. It is only a matter of time*' (Ghosh 2004, 205; italics in original). His prediction revealed itself to be true; it is an actual disaster for the inhabitants of the Sundarbans, who mainly make a living from fishing and agriculture. Once out of the village and realising that there was no future in the Sundarbans, people began to immigrate, 'the exodus of the young was accelerating every year: boys and girls were borrowing and stealing to pay agents to find them work' (Ghosh 2019, 53).

This way, a network of human traffickers has come to further poison the Sundarbans: '[t]he Sundarbans had always attracted traffickers, because of its poverty, but never in such numbers as

[4] 'Dhaam' refers to the temple and is one of the many instances where Ghosh uses Bangla words without a translation.

after Aila; they had descended in swarms, spiriting women off to distant brothels and transporting able-bodied men to work sites in faraway cities or even abroad' (Ghosh 2019, 53). This of course was already the fate threatening Kusum in *The Hungry Tide*. However, despite the fact that the mangrove forest is described in apparently the same way as in the 2004 novel; the changes imposed by climate change are felt more keenly and bring about major changes in terms of viability in the Sundarbans. The Sundarbans is thus quite well-chosen as a setting, if Ghosh's purpose was to convey the effects of climatic disruption.

Another place where climate change is felt heavier than anywhere else is probably Venice. Just like the Sundarbans, 'Venice and its lagoon are a UNESCO World Heritage Site' (Alba 363). Both places are also surrounded by water, depending on the tides. Water and, by extension, flooding, thus become inherent in the Venetian landscape. Ghosh conveys this idea in *The Great Derangement*: 'Can anyone write about Venice any more without mentioning the *aqua alta*, when the waters of the lagoon swamp the city's streets and courtyards?' (Ghosh 2016, 63). Before writing *Gun Island*, Ghosh already had Venice in mind as a sensitive location to climate change. The similarities between Venice and the Sundarbans are then exploited, as Ghosh draws a clear comparison between the two places in *Gun Island*, which is conveyed as Deen looks through his plane window:

> When I turned to look out of the window I found myself gazing down at a sight that reminded me of the patch of Bengal countryside that I had glimpsed on my last flight out of Calcutta, a little more than two years before: an estuarine landscape of lagoons, marshes and winding rivers. From that height, it was possible to mistake the Venetian lagoon for the Sundarbans. (Ghosh 2019, 162)

The resemblance between Venice and the Sundarbans lies in the overall layout of the landscape, consisting in an estuary and meanders of rivers. Whereas the inhabitants of the Sundarbans live in the midst of tides and dampness, Venetians also have to adjust their lifestyle to the slowly but steadily rising water. The pervasiveness of water is also expressed in the novel as illustrated by Cinta's building. The latter used to have a main entrance but the 'lobby's marble floor was now underwater much of the time' (Ghosh 2019, 179). Furthermore, '[o]f late the floods had become so frequent that the residents had more or less stopped using the front entrance: they now went in and out through a walled garden at the back, where there was a small door' (Ghosh 2019, 180). Venice, though extremely different from the Sundarbans, is then surprisingly reminiscent of the watery landscapes of West Bengal.

Water is not the only element to cause disruption; on a different note, fire is equally the result of climatic disruption. Wildfire activity has been increasing recently and makes anthropogenic climate change even more noticeable; it is certainly no coincidence that Ghosh chose to stage a wildfire in Los Angeles, California. This is in recognition of the fact that '[h]uman-caused warming has already significantly enhanced wildfire activity in California, particularly in the forests of the Sierra Nevada and North Coast, and will likely continue to do so in the coming decades' (Williams 892). Anthropogenic climate change is thus a sizeable factor in wildfire activity, along with other causes such as 'global surface wind speed' and '[i]ncreases in the frequency and intensity of heat waves' (Xu, 2173). In *Gun Island*, wildfires are raging in Los Angeles when Deen gets there. At first not aware of what is going on, he overhears the words 'fire' and 'evacuation' but is far from imagining what is happening: 'I thought, at first, that they were talking about a film' (Ghosh 2019, 126). Deen's reaction reveals the extent to which the situation is uncanny and difficult to imagine, even 'unthinkable' (Ghosh 2016). Still, the turmoil caused by those wildfires is quite considerable. For instance, Cinta's niece Gisa, who lives in Los Angeles, 'had kept the children home from school because of concerns about the air quality. There was too much smoke in the air, for one, but she also did not want to be separated from them at a time when wildfires were raging just a few miles away' (Ghosh 2019, 143). Deen and Cinta also suffer from the consequences of the event: '[t]he wildfires had caused so much disruption that we were soon trapped in bumper-to-bumper traffic' (Ghosh 2019, 145). The usual scene transforms into what Ghosh refers to as a 'inferno-like landscape' (Ghosh 2019, 146), caused mainly by climate change. Another occurrence that can be thought to be a direct consequence of climate change is the fact that a 'yellow-bellied snake' bit Gisa's dog, which resulted in the death of the latter. A beach guard remarks that ''[w]hat you've got over here is a yellow-bellied sea snake; its venom's lethal.' [...] 'But we've had a bunch of yellow-bellies washing up here in the last few months. Wish I knew where the hell they're coming from'' (Ghosh 2019, 145). Those snakes did not use to be seen there but they migrated northwards as Piya explains: '[t]hese snakes generally lived in warmer waters, to the south, but sightings in southern California had become increasingly common: their distribution was changing with the warming of the oceans and they were migrating northwards' (Ghosh 2019, 147). Climate change caused the snake to move to the shores of southern California and results in a change in biodiversity.

It can be concluded that Ghosh sets his story in places where signs of a changing climate are visible and emphasise the globality of the issue, slowly progressing all around the globe and manifesting through climatic and uncanny events, such as floods for Venice and the Sundarbans, then wildfires and the presence of yellow-bellied snakes in Los Angeles.

4.2. The Uncanny

Gun Island is in fact sprinkled with a series of uncanny events. *The Hungry Tide* already displayed this sort of feature, as exemplified by Piddington's prediction for Port Canning or Ghosh's description of the storm at the end of the novel - which was strangely reminiscent of a storm that happened in the Sundarbans some time thereafter. In both cases, it may appear as a coincidence because of the improbability of these situations. Still, in *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh develops his idea that the probable and improbable are not polar opposites at all: as he explains, 'improbable is not the opposite of probable, but rather an inflexion of it, a gradient in a continuum of probability' (Ghosh 2016, 16). Still, 'improbability' seems to be incompatible with the realm of serious fiction as mentioned earlier in this dissertation. Improbability seems to be out of place in the world of bourgeois regularity that characterises the novel as a genre. Nevertheless, Ghosh is out to find a way of reconciling the uncanny with his own fiction, as part of his search for a medium that might make it possible to write about climate change, which is inherently and highly improbable in the eyes of writers. In an interview given in 2019, Ghosh states that '[t]he world of fact is outrunning the world of fiction' (Shapiro, interview). This means that, in the 'actual' world, inexplicable coincidences happen sometimes and some situations, such as global warming, seem so improbable that they even outrun the boundaries of fiction. Throughout *Gun Island*, Ghosh conveys the uncanny through the following events, and the result is a kind of awakening.

At the beginning of the novel, Deen journeys to the Sundarbans to see a temple dedicated to the goddess of snakes, Manasa Devi. As a tourist, he is not used to the muddy soil and falls headfirst in the mud. Afterwards, a weird feeling gets over him: '[i]t was as if some living thing had entered my body, something ancient that had long lain dormant in the mud' (Ghosh 2019, 113). This 'thing' is the awareness of the uncanny, the first step towards the acknowledgment of the climate crisis. The character realises that what feels uncanny, as improbable as it may seem, is actually happening in front of our very eyes. Using a subtle mix and blurring the line between fiction and non-fiction, Ghosh incorporates real events in his fictitious writing, making the story

‘believable’ for his readers while inserting the Uncanny in the novel. Thus, Ghosh manages to find a way of conveying climate change in ‘serious fiction’.

First and foremost, there are some occurrences of predictions that happen within the plot of the novel. The most obvious one is probably Tipu: he is bitten by the cobra keeping the temple. This bite can actually be seen as symbolic; it is as if Tipu had been bitten by the nonhuman in the sense that, after this bite, he seems to retrieve a certain acquaintance with the nonhuman. Tipu goes into a sort of trance after the venom of the snake reached his system: ‘his body began to twitch and shake, making spasmodic little motions’ (Ghosh 2019, 88). In his delirium, Tipu sees shadows of snakes, which represent the shadows of the ignored nonhuman beings. As a big rationalist, Deen is ‘deeply unsettled’ (Ghosh 2019, 89) and replies that ‘[t]here’s nothing and no one here but us...’ (Ghosh 2019, 89). This remark represents the dominant state of mind that hinders climate change from being tackled in the contemporary literary landscape. In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh reminds us that the uncanniness of climate change ‘lies precisely in the fact that in these encounters we recognize something we had turned away from: that is to say, the presence and proximity of nonhuman interlocutors’ (Ghosh 2016, 30). Rafi, who has a closer bond to nature and to the nonhuman, gets angry at this statement: ‘[h]ow do you know [...] that there’s no one here but us?’ (Ghosh 2019, 89). By saying that, he raises the question of the presence of the nonhuman. Just before passing out, Tipu utters ‘a woman’s name - “Rani”’ (Ghosh 2019, 92). This name is actually a prediction: Rani is the name of a dolphin under Piya’s protection. It is only afterwards that she comes to the realization that Tipu had predicted that something was wrong with this particular dolphin. She asks Deen when Tipu made the warning, only to notice that it was at the exact same time when her alarm went off to inform her that the dolphin was in trouble. Tipu seems to be connected to the nonhuman; he knew the dolphin was in danger. Further in the novel, when Tipu is on his clandestine journey to migrate, he talks about an Ethiopian woman, who will actually be present on the Blue Boat and represent a kind of Mother Nature, as if Tipu had been in contact with Mother Nature, or a sort of Manasa Devi. The fact that a column of birds and all sorts of marine mammals gather around her boat is a manifestation of her own kinship with the nonhuman, which is staged at the end of the novel in a sort of awakening, claiming back its recognition and position. Through the snake bite, Tipu seems to open his eyes on the fact the we share the world with the nonhuman realm and that we need to cohabitate. His ‘visions’ reinforce the idea that the nonhuman is ignored at the moment and that both human and nonhuman creatures are actually interconnected.

Another instance of uncanniness and of an inexplicable event is Cinta's intuition. During a discussion with Deen, she argues that 'there are many well-documented instances of things that cannot be explained by so-called "natural causes"' (Ghosh 2019, 38). She takes the example of 'foreknowledge - [...] pre-cognition' (Ghosh 2019, 38). Deen is very sceptical and even offended by the fact that she defended her argument. Cinta indeed takes the example of the Aztecs: 'But have you not heard about the Aztec predictions? Long before the Spanish arrived the Aztecs knew invaders would be coming across the seas [....]. People think that knowing the future can help you prepare for what is to come - but often it only makes you powerless' (Ghosh 2019, 39). This strangely reminds of the current situation: everyone knows what is bound to happen with climate change if a radical move away from the carbon economy, and a corresponding shift in our lifestyle, is not made, but still, we are helpless and powerless in front of the unstoppable crisis coming upon us. In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh points to the 'lack of transitive connection between political mobilization, on the one hand, and global warming, on the other' (Ghosh 2016, 126). In the future, people will be curious to know what prevented us from perceiving what was happening: 'ours was a time when most forms of art and literature were drawn into the modes of concealment that prevented people from recognizing the realities of their plight[.] Quite possibly, then, this era, which so congratulates itself on its self-awareness, will come to be known as the time of the Great Derangement' (Ghosh 2016, 11). The time of the 'Great Derangement' refers to the insanity of the situation; 'it not as if we had not been warned; it is not as if we were ignorant of the risks' (Ghosh 2016, 55) and, despite the warning, there is a struggle to come to action. This is exactly where the uncanniness of our relation to the environment lies. 'Predictions' and 'warnings' are not taken seriously because modernity does not acknowledge these modes of knowledge, which are not deemed 'scientific'.

This happened to Cinta: she is a renowned historian, but she is also famous for a personal disaster. In fact, her husband and her daughter tragically died in a car crash and the mafia seems to have been involved in this. For some reason, Cinta did not travel with them that time but she felt anxious: 'that morning, the sense of foreboding was unusually strong' and she 'begged him to call off the trip' (Ghosh 2019, 41). When her husband tells her that she could call him whenever she wanted during the journey, '[t]he mention of advanced technology had made Cinta doubt her intuitions' (Ghosh 2019, 42). Her intuition is actually repressed by modernity and she does not want to be seen as a 'credulous fool' (Ghosh 2019, 42). Yet it turns out that her instinct was

justified: at the moment of the accident, she heard her daughter's voice saying '*Mamma! Mamma! Ti voglio bene*... I love you!' (Ghosh 2019, 42). Cinta admits that she has not told anyone about this before and she still hears her daughter's voice sometimes. The improbability of the situation is striking: Cinta's instinct was right for some reason, and sometimes there is no explanation.

Another example of a general refusal to believe a prediction is Piya's college roommate Lisa. She is an 'entomologist and teaches in a community college up here, in the mountains' (Ghosh 2019, 119). Lisa researches the expansion of bark beetles, which eat up the trees from the inside, leaving the wood so dry that a drought would inevitably lead to a wildfire. When Lisa found out about the invasive insects, she tried to warn the mayor but no one paid attention. Of course, there was a drought during the summer, which is more and more frequent due to climate change (Xu 2173) and a fire broke out. Two conclusions can be drawn from the incident: people refused to believe there was an actual risk before it affected them and instead of thanking Lisa for trying to protect them, they 'blamed *her*' (Ghosh 2019, 119; italics in original). Once again, the typical reaction towards a prediction of a catastrophe is dismissal. By displaying the way people ignored the prediction, which revealed itself to be true, Ghosh documents the general disbelief prevailing with regard to predictions about climate change. In *The Great Derangement*, he emphasises the fact that climate change is not a prediction anymore but is already on its way; and what is absolutely unbelievable is that in the change forcing itself upon us, one thing remains unchanged, the refusal to believe what awaits us for, after all, '[t]he struggle for action will no doubt be difficult and hard-fought, and no matter what it achieves, it is already too late to avoid some serious disruptions of the global climate' (Ghosh 2016, 161).

The two last occurrences of the uncanny that I shall mention reach beyond the narrative frame of the novel. The first instance is the case of the temple described in *Gun Island*:

> The roof had a convex outline of an upturned boat, and it was this, I guessed, that reminded Nilima of the temples of Bishnupur. Nor was that surprising, for everything about its structure - its burnt sienna colour, the shape of the roof, and the panels on its façade - spoke of Bengal's most celebrated style of architecture, which had originated in the kingdom of Bishnupur in the seventeenth century (Ghosh 2019, 74).

The temple was not supposed to be based on an actual one existing in the Sundarbans. But as uncanny as it may seem, Ghosh received a picture of a similar shrine located in the Sundarbans. He was flabbergasted by the coincidence. In his blog, Ghosh writes:

> At the time of writing I didn't know of any such temple in the Sundarbans. It is nothing short of uncanny then that the Shakher temple so closely fits the description: it dates back to the seventeenth century and was indeed built in the Bishnupuri style, with thin, hard bricks, and a convex roof. The only difference is that the temple in *Gun Island* was dedicated to Manasa Devi, the Goddess of Snakes, while the Shakher temple is consecrated to Ma Kali. Also, fortunately, the Shakher temple, unlike its fictional counterpart, has survived, and an annual puja is still held there.[5]

This coincidence results in a subtle blend between fiction and nonfiction, which reinforces the accuracy of the novel because it gives us a sense that anything in the novel could actually happen and this is reminiscent of Ghosh's statement that writers are left with the task of 'finding other ways in which to imagine the unthinkable beings and events of this era' (Ghosh 2016, 33).

At some point in the novel, Deen goes to a convention in Los Angeles, where a young historian talks about 'Climate and Apocalypse in the Seventeenth Century' (Ghosh 2019, 135), which is a bit ironic, or even ominous, given the apocalyptical landscape created by the wildfires. The conference is about climatic disruptions that happened during the so-called 'Little Ice Age':

> The seventeenth century, declared the historian, was a period of such severe disruption that it was sometimes described as the 'Little Ice Age'. During this time, the temperatures across the globe had dropped sharply, maybe because of the fluctuations in solar activity, or a spate of volcanic eruptions - or possibly even because of the reforestation of vast tracts of land following on the genocide of Amerindian peoples after the European conquests of the Americas. (Ghosh 2019, 135)

The historian ends his speech by saying that 'the climatic perturbations of the Little Ice Age were trivial compared to what is in store for us now. What our ancestors experienced is but a pale foreshadowing of what the future holds!' (Ghosh 2019, 137-138). The theme of the convention is very well-chosen and parallels the wildfires that result in the interruption of the convention. The group then receives the order to leave the museum because the wind is blowing in a different direction than expected and 'the wildfires are moving faster than expected' (Ghosh 2019, 138). Therefore, they have to leave. This event strangely reminds us of an actual event that happened after this chapter of *Gun Island* was written. In an interview, Ghosh talks about the uncanny and mentions the fact he 'wrote that chapter six months before it happened' (Shapiro, interview). Indeed, 'the Skirball fire burned near The Getty Center in December 2017' (Shapiro, interview). It is true that Ghosh did not mention that it was this exact museum but, in the interview, he specifies

[5] https://amitavghosh.com/blog/

that '[he] didn't name it, but […] that was what was in [his] head' (Shapiro, interview). This is really uncanny, as if Ghosh had predicted what was going to happen.

To sum up, the uncanny is deeply embedded in *Gun Island*. From Tipu's visions to Lisa's warning, Aztec predictions and Ghosh's own accuracy in terms of climatic disruptions, fiction and nonfiction become intermingled. Especially because fiction has the power to imagine possibilities, *Gun Island* confirms Ghosh's argument that 'fiction allows us to look at the world in a different way' (Shapiro, interview). This 'different way' includes the depiction of the uncanny, of the nonhuman and the wish to open 'those parts of our consciousnesses that can actually accommodate different ways of thinking about the world' (Shapiro interview). This creates the possibility of acknowledging climate change within the scope of modern literature.

4.3. Narration

In his exploration of literary techniques that can convey climate change, Ghosh also glances back to old legends. First and foremost, the question of stories, storytelling and their role is evoked in *Gun Island*. The attitude towards stories used to be different in the past. The status of fiction and stories was more deeply embedded in societies. This is highlighted in the following excerpt:

> At that time people recognized that stories could tap into dimensions that were beyond the ordinary, beyond the human even. They knew that only through stories was it possible to enter the most inward mysteries of our existence where nothing that is really important can be proven to exist - like love, or loyalty, or even the faculty that makes us turn around when we feel the gaze of a stranger or an animal. Only through stories can invisible or inarticulate or silent beings speak to us; it is they who allow the past to reach out to us. (Ghosh 2019, 141)

It is said that the power of stories relies on their faculty to go beyond perceptible reality and explore themes that would otherwise have no voice, like for example the nonhuman. They can also lead to realizations and be eye-openers. However, the perception of the importance of stories has changed: '[i]n the seventeenth century no one would have said of something that it was "just a story" as we moderns do' (Ghosh 2019, 140). Therefore, the way Ghosh looks back to the legend of Manasa Devi, and reinvents it, serves as a reinvention of contemporary fiction. The themes addressed in the legend are surprisingly relevant to our current climate crisis. On the one hand, there is the profit against nature motif: '[i]n a talk held in New Delhi after the release of the novel, Ghosh stated that the merchant "was a trope for trade." The merchant and the goddess dramatize "the conflict between profit and the world." In the novel, the goddess pursues the merchant to make him aware

of other realities like the animal world' (Joshi 1). The thematization of the search for profit against the interests of nature is apparent in the fact that the Merchant wants to be rich and acquire cowrie shells, while on the other hand a series of catastrophic events that mirror climate-induced disasters happen to him: the legend is telling 'exactly what we are living through today – […] catastrophic floods, droughts, famines, storms' (Shapiro, interview). It is thus highly interesting to rewrite the legend in the style of the day, as happens in *Gun Island*.

To begin with, the legend carries the Merchant, the 'Bonduki Sadagar' (Ghosh 2019, 152), around the globe, from his homeland in eastern India to the Maldive Islands and then in the 'Land of Palm Sugar Candy', 'Land of Kerchieves', 'Gun Island' and the 'Island of Chains'. As the story unfolds, Deen, with the help of Cinta and Rafi, unravels the mysteries of the legend, only to find that these places that 'sound like items from a book of marvels' (Ghosh 2019, 152) are real, i.e. historically documented places. The fairytale-sounding names etymologically refer to actual places: the Land of Sugar Candy refers to Egypt while the land of Kerchieves refers to Turkey, then known under the name of Ottoman Empire (Ghosh 2019, 153), and the Island of Chains refers to Sicily (Ghosh 2019, 269). On top of that, the name of Bonduki Sadagar, initially translated into 'the Gun Merchant', actually means 'The Merchant who visited Venice' (Ghosh 2019, 152) because 'through Arabic the name of Venice has travelled far afield, to Persia and parts of India, where to this day guns are known as *bundook* - which is, of course, none other than "Venice" or "Venetian"!' (Ghosh 2019, 151; italics in original). Therefore, 'Gun Island' is another name for Venice. The places evoked in the legend ring a bell: they remind one of the journey of the refugees among which Tipu and Rafi rank. Indeed, they leave India together, travel through the Middle East until they are separated at the Turkish border. Thereafter, Rafi manages to reach Venice but Tipu decides otherwise: he had a dream in which he saw an Ethiopian woman and 'he became desperate to find her' (Ghosh 2019, 263). He is finally able to meet her in Egypt, and that is how Tipu lands on the Blue Boat. The Merchant's route thus parallels the places crossed by the migrants.

Furthermore, the Merchant leaves his homeland in India because it is 'struck by drought and floods brought on by climatic disturbances of the Little Ice Age' (Ghosh 2019, 155). From this perspective, it can be argued that the Merchant was an ecological refugee: he left his homeland because of the difficult conditions caused by climatic events. Of course, the situation of the Merchant echoes the situation of Rafi and Tipu and many others who decide to leave the Sundarbans due to the harsh conditions, worsened by climate change. Tipu explains how people

used to live by fishing, farming and collecting honey but now 'the fish catch is down, the land's turning salty, and you can't go into the jungle without bribing the forest guards' (Ghosh 2019, 65). He adds that storms happen frequently and wreak no end of havoc. Tipu concludes that it would be absurd for young people to stay there and just wait 'till [they] starve to death' (Ghosh 2019, 65). The background of the legend and of *Gun Island* is then shared as both unfold in a climatic-disturbed world.

In addition to the climatic disturbances, the legend further echoes the situation nowadays in the following way: amidst the Thirty Years War and the Little Ice Age, the plague broke out. The city of Venice enacted measures to deal with the epidemic and '[c]urfews and quarantines' (Ghosh 2019, 242) were put into place. Very soon, '[a]ll public places were closed and people were forbidden to leave their houses; [...] The streets were so empty that plants began to sprout between the paving stones' (Ghosh 2019, 242). This strangely reminds us of the current sanitary situation under Covid-19. The ecological impact of lockdown on Venice was almost immediately visible: the 'lagoon water was clearer with less suspended matter in the channels surrounding the city' (Braga 3) and fish were to be seen in the canals, which is not common. The main difference between then and now is the response: in an interview, Ghosh insists on the difference regarding responses to disasters, comparing the epoch of the Little Ice Age and the present world:

> At that time, people could respond. You know, they could create paintings. They could create buildings. I mean, in Venice, the basilica of Santa Maria della Salute, which is its greatest landmark, is actually a commemoration of a great catastrophe. You know, […] the plague - when we have these catastrophes unfolding around us, we don't seem to be able to even imaginatively grapple with what's in front of us (Shapiro, interview).

The Basilica of Santa Maria della Salute is part of the setting in *Gun Island* and further connects the legend of Manasa Devi to Deen and the present: 'it could also be said that it is a monument to a catastrophe, a memorial to the terrible afflictions of the Little Ice Age' (Ghosh 2019, 243). Inside this church, there is a 'gilded icon of a dark-skinned Madonna and Child' (Ghosh 2019, 243). This goddess-like figure surprisingly recalls Manasa Devi inasmuch as '[s]he is the Black Madonna [...] Madonna the Mediator: it is she who stands between us and the incarnate Earth, with all its blessings and furies' (Ghosh 2019, 243). In a similar way as Manasa Devi, she is an intermediary between human beings and the nonhuman in a certain way, and therefore she has the status of 'Mediator' and is the 'Minoan goddess of snakes' (Ghosh 2019, 244). Manasa Devi desperately tries to bring the Merchant's attention to the natural world by sending him natural phenomena of

all kinds (Shapiro, interview). It seems that, at the time of the legend, the basic conflict between the human and the nonhuman, or between the human and the natural world, was understood. By pointing to our lack of response nowadays, Ghosh encourages us to take action.

The legend is additionally reenacted as the Merchant also takes a human shape towards the end of the novel: as the characters are on their way to the Blue Boat, a tornado strikes and leaves them blinded in a gust of dusty air; their way is blocked by a tree that has fallen on the ground. It is at this moment that 'a dimly visible figure had materialized out of the dust cloud like some unearthly apparition' (Ghosh 2019, 273). The man is described as 'dressed in a flowing yellow robe; wrapped around his head was something that looked like an ochre-coloured turban; his face was brown, with a trimmed, greying beard' (Ghosh 2019, 273). He walks in their direction to tell them that there is another road to reach their destination: Marghera. Rafi suddenly expresses his thought that the man is 'the Bonduki Sadagar. It's him' (Ghosh 2019, 275). Deen refuses to believe this and the driver goes further, saying that 'there are many Moroccans around here; they work on the farms' (Ghosh 2019, 274). This uncanny occurrence further binds the plotline of the novel with that of the legend. Even though there is a seemingly rational explanation, the uncanniness of the scene leads us to think that it was not a coincidence and that the legend is still topical in the sense that it provides an insight on the kinship with the nonhuman, which should be rediscovered as Ghosh does by rewriting the legend.

The clear parallel between the plotline of *Gun Island* and that of the legend is further exemplified in the way the story ends. At the end of the legend, the Merchant gives in to Manasa Devi and builds a shrine for her. Therefore, it can be argued that Manasa Devi is successful in her wish to keep human beings from turning away from other forms of life. It is important to note that Manasa Devi is not an authoritative, uncontested goddess. She is rather 'a translator [...] between two species that ha[ve] no language in common and no shared means of communication. Without her mediation there could be no relationship between animal and human except hatred and aggression' (Ghosh 2019, 167). Her role is thus to mediate between different forms of life, notably the human and the nonhuman, to maintain a balance between them and protect them from a world ruled by greed and profit. Manasa Devi needs human beings to acknowledge her voice 'for if he [the Merchant] and others like him, were to disavow her authority then all those unseen boundaries would vanish, and humans - driven, as was the Merchant, by the quest for profit - would recognize no restraint in relation to other living things' (Ghosh 2019, 167). Her role as a mediator between

the human and the nonhuman is reverberated at the end of the novel and at the end of the legend as well. In the same manner as the Gun Merchant surrenders and abandons resistance, the 'Admiral Vigonovo' who had first received the order to block the Blue Boat and not let the refugees enter the territory, changes his mind, and thus disobeys the orders of the Minister. Indeed, '[w]hat the Minister has said, in public, was that only in the event of a miracle would these refugees be allowed to Italy' (Ghosh 2019, 309). This, of course, was a way to say that the refugees would not be rescued. Still, the Admiral takes him literally: '[a]nd I believe that what we witnessed today was indeed a miracle' (Ghosh 2019, 309). Whereas the Merchant gives in due to the accumulation of natural disasters and strange encounters with the nonhuman, i.e. snakes and spiders mainly, the Admiral decides to rescue the migrants on the Blue Boat after witnessing a demonstration of the importance of nonhuman agency in the last chapter, meaningfully named 'The Storm'. The final scene brings the story and the legend to a close. In the legend, 'there is a *miracolo* and [the Merchant] is set free by the creatures of the sky and sea' (Ghosh 2019, 269), which happens on the Isle of Chains, which actually refers to Sicily. Deen and the others on the Blue Boat witness a same kind of 'miracle' at the Sicilian seaside: '[f]or a few moments more we were transfixed by this miraculous spectacle: the storm of birds circling above, like a whirling funnel, and the graceful shadows of the leviathans in the glowing green water below' (Ghosh 2019, 307). This scene matches what happens in the legend, as Rafi notices: '[i]t's just as it says in the story - the creatures of the sky and sea rising up...' (Ghosh 2019, 306). The end of the legend brings the Merchant to acknowledge Manasa Devi's voice. The legend thereby depicts a recognition of the nonhuman and natural world as the latter find a balance with human greed. The end of the novel also converges on an awareness of the non-human world, manifesting itself in various appearances: marine mammals, birds and the phenomenon of bioluminescence in particular. There is also a kind of reconciliation, a first step towards the refugees.

In conclusion, Ghosh decides to reinvent contemporary literature by turning to an ancient legend, from a time when stories had a different impact than today. As a result, the power they held was considerable. Ghosh showed, by rewriting this ancient legend, which remains relevant to contemporary times and the climate crisis we are experiencing, that it is necessary to become aware of our kinship and interconnectedness with the nonhuman and to other humans as a first step. By decoding the mysteries of an old legend, Deen learns more about the world he lives in, the era of the Anthropocene, than he ever thought possible.

4.4. Refugees

The failure of writers to tackle climate change in an efficient way and the inability of politics and institutions to act in order to redress the situation are highlighted in *Gun Island*. This inability stems from the fact that climate change remains 'unthinkable' (Ghosh 2016) and therefore translates a failure of imagination before anything else. Therefore, it is the task of writers to 'render it more tangible and affectively resonant' (Cole 2). Ghosh contributes to the climate imaginary through his writing in *Gun Island*: the novel presents 'the redemptive possibilities of a changing world' (Cole 12). This means that new possibilities arise from a context such as that of climate change. The latter is characterised by an unprecedented crisis that renders the future of the Earth uncertain. Those possibilities are conveyed in *Gun Island*; namely by the 'overtly political storyline' (Cole 13). formed by the Blue Boat and the political questions it raises. The Blue Boat is the symbol of the outcome of human actions over time, the process of history that led to the very moment when the Blue Boat gets closer to the Italian border in great controversy. The turmoil created by the arrival of the Blue Boat is the 'flashpoint in this civilizational drama' (Cole 13). Even though Deen and the others are on the *Lucania* to greet the refugees, resistance is equally present. Right-wing opposition rages: 'right-wing parties have so much money now' (Ghosh 2019, 287), demanding to close the borders. Deen notices 'young men, many with their faces painted in the colours of their football clubs. Many appeared to be drunk' (Ghosh 2019, 299). These men are shouting, reclaiming their land for themselves: Italy for Italians only. Deen notices something 'truly apocalyptic' (Ghosh 2019, 299) about them: their apparent anger is 'fuelled by fear' (Ghosh 2019, 299). This fear, Deen understands, is the backlash of centuries of history and oppression; 'through the prism of the vessel, they could glimpse the unravelling of a centuries-old project that had conferred vast privilege on them in relation to the rest of the world' (Ghosh 2019, 305). Of course, privilege tends to be relative and these hooligans are representative of the system to which they adhere. This means that it is difficult to qualify them as activists- their fear is unfocused and was instilled into them by another class of people who are the true detainees of privilege.

As Ghosh emphasises in *The Great Derangement,* '[t]o look at the climate crisis through the prism of empire is to recognize, first, that the continent of Asia is conceptually critical to every aspect of global warming. [...] Yet, [...] the discourse around the Anthropocene, and climate matters generally, remains largely Eurocentric' (Ghosh 2016, 87). Eurocentrism places Europe before other continents and acknowledges its supremacy, but in contrast the Blue Boat confronts this ideology

and ‘connects the issues regarding climate justice and climate refugees to longer-running patterns of inequity in human history.’ (Cole 13). Therefore, the Blue Boat confronts centuries-old issues and fuels fear: ‘Ghosh further contextualizes the standoff within the broader political and historical relationship between Europe and the inhabitants of its former colonies’ (Cole 13). Ghosh indeed retraces the origins of the current situation with refugees to colonialism, though with a major difference between the ‘slaves and coolies’ and the refugees, since the latter ‘had launched their own journeys [...] enabled by their own networks’ (Cole 13). Certainly, what remains unaltered is the fact that ‘trafficking in human beings had [always] been an immensely lucrative form of commerce’ (Ghosh 2019, 303). Cole argues that ‘Deen perceives a direct line from colonialism and chattel slavery, ‘the greatest and most cruel experiment in planetary remaking that history has ever known’ […], to the ‘world-shaping powers wielded in the Anthropocene’ (Cole 13). As a result, the Blue Boat becomes a powerful symbol: it ‘has become a symbol of everything that’s going wrong with the world – inequality, climate change, capitalism, corruption, the oil industry’ (Ghosh 2019, 218). In *Gun Island*, Ghosh shows the way climate change is also a cultural crisis and how the consequences caused by the latter are unequally distributed:

> Among these are legal, political, and economic frameworks which prioritize the interests of the powerful over the less powerful, the human over the non-human, and the pursuit of profit over the preservation of human and non-human life. Climate change is not a discrete problem to be managed or solved within existing institutions, instead it appears as a consequence of such institutions (Cole 15).

The wide gap between the privileged and the unprivileged is striking in the novel.

As Gupta points out, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published a report in 1990 stating that:

> The greatest impact of climate change might be on human migration - with millions of people displaced by shoreline erosion, coastal flooding and agricultural disruption. Since then, successive reports have argued that environmental degradation, and in particular climate change, is poised to become a major driver of population displacement - a crisis in the making (IPCC 11).

Climate change is a catalyst for migration, rendering places such as the Sundarbans uninhabitable in the future. Climatic events are raging all over the world and are the backdrop of a long process of history, recently impacted by human actions to a certain extent. Consequently, climate change and migration cannot be considered apart: populations are displaced as a result of climate change and Ghosh pays particular attention to the realities of some migrants. In *Gun Island*, Ghosh highlights the social inequalities created, or rather intensified by climate change. Therefore, *Gun*

Island is ‘unique in the depth of attention it affords to climate justice, a topic largely neglected in climate fiction’ (Cole 15). In Venice, Deen ‘delves deep into a world of migrant labourers whose presence makes visible the exploitative global connections that the climate crisis reinforces’ (Kluwick 73).

Furthermore, inequity is portrayed within the city of Venice: well-to-do tourists perceive Venice as a ‘fantasy’ (Ghosh 2019, 291) and expect to ‘experience Italian history and eat authentic Italian food’ (Ghosh 2019, 291). Ironically, this fantasy is made possible by Bengalis, who ‘[cook] their food and [wash] their plates and [make] their beds’ (Ghosh 2019, 91) because ‘no Italian does that kind of work anymore’ (Ghosh 2019, 291). Deen meets Bilal, a migrant who works in Venice. While Deen casually came by plane, Bilal’s route was far more complicated; he tells his story to Deen. After an argument that led to death threats, Bilal decided to leave his country with a friend. Misinformed, they found themselves stuck in an airport in Sharjah. Trapped, they had no choice but to continue on their journey. Their dalal advised them to go through Libya like many other Bengalis, but war was raging and they were kidnapped once they got there. This is when the nightmare began: they had to work all day long and were hardly paid; indeed they were considered ‘like slaves; what [they] went through was something that should not happen to any human being’ (Ghosh 2019, 211). Then, they managed to get out and paid a *dalal* to bring them to Europe by boat. They were brought to a ‘connection house’. The conditions on board were terrible: they were sitting next to the engine and were squeezed by others in the midst of engine fumes. Unfortunately, the boat was slowly sinking and, by the time they were rescued, Bilal’s friend had drifted away and he was never seen again. Now, Bilal is working and sends money to his friend’s family. Despite the language Deen and Bilal share, their backgrounds are not similar at all. It is to this extent that the novel points to social inequalities that shape our modern world. Similarly, when the water rises in Venice and causes floods, which is called *acqua alta*, Bengalis sell boots and plastic shoe-protectors: ‘[w]e earn well on days like this. For us it’s like home - we’re used to floods’ (Ghosh 2019, 255). Ghosh reinforces the parallel between Venice and Bengal, while acknowledging the fate of Bengalis in Venice. Still, Ghosh calls for a collective effort to ‘take action’ (Cole 12) and make a change.

In the novel, Deen [does] not begin […] with strong political inclinations but [is] moved to action as the crisis intensifies, joining […] the Blue Boat - which allow[s] [him] to overcome [his] initial passivity’ (Cole 15) When Palash, a man working for Lubna, asks him to join them on the

Lucania, Deen is astonished and does not know what to answer. He retorts that '[he is] no activist' (Ghosh 2019, 218). Still, the strive for action is not to be considered as an individual process but rather a collective one. This is conveyed in *Gun Island*, too. As mentioned above, Deen does not consider himself to be an activist but then, he is incited to board on the *Lucania* to help the rescue of the refugees on the Blue Boat. Cole argues that '[c]onfronting climate change as isolated individuals leaves citizens powerless, but these novels locate their protagonists within networks that foster reciprocal awareness and enable cooperative action' (Cole 15). Thus, Deen feels powerless at the beginning but once he is involved on the *Lucania*, he feels empowered by belonging to a group which fights for a cause. This shift from individualism to collectivity is also expressed through language in the novel: as a helicopter hovers over the Blue Boat and announces their rescue, shouts of joy are heard on the *Lucania*: '[o]n the *Lucania* there was an amazed, disbelieving silence. Then a great cheer of relief rose from our throats' (Ghosh 2019, 308). The novel is mainly told from a first-person perspective, and it is striking to see the collectivity showing through language, when 'I' becomes 'we'; it is not any more 'my throat' but 'our throats'. The crew on the *Lucania* seems to experience emotions in a collective way. This is also illustrated when warships order them to keep their distance from the Blue Boat: '[o]n the *Lucania* there was a general feeling of disappointment when it came to be realized that we were to be mere spectators' (Ghosh 2019, 301). They also meet other boats there that 'had come a long way to support their cause - from Germany, Hungary, Russia, Singapore and Australia' (Ghosh 2019, 298). This way, Ghosh depicts the need for collaborative action: '[e]ven organized as such, they cannot "save the planet," but they do discover new possibilities, political projects into which their efforts may be invested and out of which practices for sharing vulnerability and responsibility may develop' (Cole 15). Shared vulnerability is further emphasized by the inclusive set of characters in *Gun Island*. Through his set of varied characters, Ghosh creates an inclusive setting. Kluwick notes that:

> Ghosh touches on homophobia, xenophobia, the mafia and mob killings, dolphin beachings, trafficking, and prostitution; his cast of characters includes an antiquarian bookseller (Deen), a cetologist (Piya), an eminent historian (Cinta), a nurse (Moya), gay couples, human rights activists, journalists, refugees, and immigrant labourers. They are brought together to suggest that nothing lies outside the reach of climate change and that everything contributes to and is implicated in the present state of the world (Kluwick 73).

This inclusive setting allows one to consider the interconnectedness between human beings in the face of climate change.

Speaking of sharing vulnerability, human beings are not the only climate refugees. In the novel, a parallel is made between animals and humans in terms of migration. Even though it is a natural habit for some animals to migrate, the correlation between the migratory movement of dolphins and that of the human migrants on the Blue Boat is worth noting upon. Cole addresses this parallel:

> The alliance between the Blue Boat refugees and the dolphins – who […] are also climate refugees – underscores their shared vulnerability but also, quite literally, illuminates the situation such that the admiral understands he must take responsibility for their fates, in defiance of political authority grounded on exclusion and hierarchy (Cole 14).

The convergence of migrants and migrating animals such as birds and dolphins of many kinds reinforces the kinship between the human and the nonhuman and makes the Admiral realise that he has a responsibility in their rescue and that this is an opportunity to take action, which he does. Admiral Di Vignovo then organises the rescue of the migrants. When interviewed on TV, he is asked what he has to say for having broken the law, and he responds in the following way: 'I have nothing to fear from the law,' said the admiral, standing ramrod straight. '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 I will answer to' (Ghosh 2019, 310). Stating that on TV, the admiral reaches a great audience and will maybe bring people to think and engage in a process of self-questioning, just as Ghosh aims to achieve with his novel. In the context of climate change, 'the magnitude of the crisis and the vast sprawl of its consequences enables improbable alliances that stretch across societies and even across species' (Cole 15).

To put it in a nutshell, the central idea pervasive to Ghosh's 2019 novel is that actions, even modest ones, can make a difference. As climate change is challenging the established institutions, Ghosh chooses to depict their growing irrelevance and consequent dilapidation. Undoubtedly, the most important conclusion to be drawn concerns 'how, amidst the crisis, we might devise an ethos of cooperative action and shared responsibility' (Cole 16). The urgency for us to take action is shaped by 'climate justice and the necessity of ongoing adaptation' (Cole 17) in a world slowly turning unrecognizable.

4.5. Awakening

The necessity of taking action is conveyed on another level in *Gun Island*. The idea that the world is possessed pervades the novel. It is mainly Cinta and Rafi who bring up this idea. More than

possession, the novel suggests that a kind of awakening is required. The awakening that Deen experiences is meaningful and leads him to take action. Throughout the novel, the theme of possession recurs, whether in a past or present context. As we have seen, the novel challenges established institutions and systems, which proved their inadequacy in the context of the climate crisis and reinforces the cultural nature of the crisis. In addition, beliefs are also challenged. For Ghosh, this is a way of exposing the beliefs that prevail in society. The main character, Deen, is 'such a big rationalist' (Ghosh 2019, 45) and he wants to appear very down-to-earth. From the very beginning, Tipu makes Deen realise that contrary to what he wants others to see, he still has beliefs embedded in his way of life that he is not aware of. At some point, Tipu talks about the ease with which he crosses the border to Bangladesh, without a passport. Deen is taken aback as Tipu asks him: 'So I guess you believe in passports and shit like that?' (Ghosh 2019, 64). Deen instantly replies that passports are not a question of belief but, after a short moment of consideration, he 'realize[s] then that [Tipu]was right: [he] did indeed believe in passports, visas, permits, green cards and the like. For [him] these weren't jut pieces of paper or plastic; they possessed a certain kind of sacredness that attached also to the institutions that issued them' (Ghosh 2019, 64). This happens at the beginning of the novel and it is the first time Deen questions the institutions and the way he behaves in accordance with them. He boasts about being a rationalist and in fact convinces himself that he is one: 'I forced myself to say aloud "This is all chance and coincidence, nothing else"' (Ghosh 2019, 205); but he finally reaches the conclusion that all these man-made institutions are constructed and therefore need the complicity of human beings to work: they need others to believe in their system, which depends on consensus. This realisation that he believes in passports, credit cards, visas, permits, etc is the first instance of his awakening, and it takes place in the Sundarbans.

By suggesting that man-made institutions and beliefs hinder the handling of the climate crisis, Ghosh attempts a deconstruction of them with the aim of retrieving a sense of kinship with the natural world. This is mainly conveyed through Cinta, who is the main instigator of Deen's awakening. Cinta is a renowned historian and expert in the history of Venice; she wrote a book about the Inquisition that led her to the following conclusion:

> It was the Inquisitor's job to stamp out "superstition" and replace it with true religion. It was the Inquisitor also who decided what was "natural" and what was "supernatural". So to say that you don't believe in the "supernatural" is a contradiction in terms - because it means that you also don't believe in the "natural". Neither can exist without the other. (Ghosh 2019, 37)

She casts light on the fact that the Inquisitor decides what kind of belief is suitable and which one is not. The long-term impact on society is a neglection of the natural world because, as Cinta explains, banishing the supernatural is also a refusal to acknowledge the natural.

When Deen goes to the Sundarbans, he falls in the mud and this creates a weird feeling within him: he feels as if some kind of bacteria had entered his body and 'it was much older than [him], some submerged aspect of time that had been brought suddenly to life when [he] entered that shrine - something fearsome, venomous and overwhelmingly powerful, something that would not allow [him] to be rid of it' (Ghosh 2019, 113). This 'thing' is actually the understanding and the recognition of the natural world encompassing the nonhuman, that has been neglected for so long. He has a hard time identifying what happens to him but, as the novel unfolds, his awareness grows.

When he gets back home in Brooklyn, it feels at first like 'a return to sanity' (Ghosh 2019, 111) but then, he begins to lose motivation and experiences a bout of crippling anxiety: 'time became meaningless to [him] now' (Ghosh 2019, 115). As he dwells on his problems, he suddenly gets a video call from Tipu. They have a discussion about the word 'bhuta' (Ghosh 2019, 114), which apparently means '"a being" or "an existing presence".' They conclude that they could be qualified as bhutas but then Tipu asks whether animals should also be considered as *bhutas*, to which Deen responds that, 'in the sense that they exist and are beings, yes, animals are bhutas too' (Ghosh 2019, 115). Stating this, Deen recognizes their agency. Further in the novel, the concept of *bhutas* reoccurs: 'Rafi and I were both *bhutas* in the sense of being at once conjunctions and disjunctions in the continuum of time, space, and being' (Ghosh 2019, 170). Deen begins to realise his position as a human being, connected to other things in the world such as time, his surroundings and yet other forms of alterity.

From then on, Deen 'feel[s] [himself] fading away, that [he is] losing [his] will' (Ghosh 2019, 235). He mentions the way he feels to Cinta, who comes up with an unexpected explanation: she claims that, during the Inquisition, there were many cases of people presenting the same symptoms as Deen, and who were 'beset by a feeling that inexplicable forces [were] acting upon them in such a way that they [were] no longer in control of what happens to them. Most cases of possession are exactly like that' (Ghosh 2019, 235). Deen, who is quite sceptical, is not sure to understand what she means. Cinta goes on: 'You and I don't live in a world where it is possible to be possessed in the old sense. These things happened to our ancestors because their will, their sense

of their presence in the world, were essential to their very survival' (Ghosh 2019, 236). They depended on the resources of the Earth and other people. The 'loss of presence' meant their loss as a person. But nowadays 'we live in a world of impersonal systems. [...] The sense of presence slowly fades, or is lost or forgotten - it's easier to let the systems take over' (Ghosh 2019, 236). The emphasis on the fact that impersonal systems, by which Cinta means cell phones, cash machines, computers etc, encourages a questioning regarding the role of human beings and their presence: '[t]he world had changed too much, too fast; the systems that were in control now did not obey any human master; they followed their own imperatives, inscrutable as demons' (Ghosh 2019, 305). Cinta concludes that 'the world of today presents all the symptoms of demonic possession' (Ghosh 2019 236). She further explains the lack of presence and lack of action pervading humanity, the general passivity in the face of the climate crisis:

> Everybody knows what must be done if the world is to continue to be a liveable place, if our homes are not to be invaded by the sea, or by creatures like that spider. Everybody knows... and yet we are powerless, even the most powerful among us. We go about our daily business through habit, as though we were in the grip of forces that have overwhelmed our will; we see shocking and monstrous things happening all around us and we avert our eyes; we surrender ourselves willingly to what has us in its power. (Ghosh 2019, 237)

Thus Cinta refers to the biggest issue that hinders the resolution of the climate crisis and the lack of action that guarantees the continuation of the downward spiral in which we are entrapped. Her theory is in tune with what Ghosh calls the era of the great derangement. In fact, the 'essence of humanity's present derangement', Ghosh writes, is that 'our lives and our choices are enframed in a pattern of history that seems to leave us nowhere to turn but toward our self-annihilation' (Ghosh 2016, 110). This means that it seems insane to let climate change happen while remainng passive spectators but this is actually what is happening. One major factor that prevents action is the individualism that characterises our era. In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh remarks that 'the individual conscience is now increasingly seen as the battleground of choice for a conflict that is self-evidently a problem of the global commons, requiring collective action' (Ghosh 2016, 132). Here, Ghosh points to the discrepancy between the extent of the problem and the measures that are taken. The problem is that the climate issue is evidently a collective one, but for some reason, humanity is entrapped in an individualistic consideration of the world. Accordingly, the scale of action and the scale of the concern diverge, which leads to an impasse. The passivity and individualism that Cinta circumscribes out are powerful and ensnare a majority of human beings. In this sense, the weird feelings and events that Deen experiences in *Gun Island* are not symptoms

of possession but rather '[w]hat is happening to [him] is a '*risveglio*, a kind of awakening' (Ghosh 2019, 237). This awakening is further depicted towards the end of the novel: on the *Lucania*, Deen feels thankful for the Merchant and Manasa Devi because, through the rewriting of their legend, 'it was as if they had broken a spell of bewitchment and set [him] free' (Ghosh 2019, 294) from the impersonality of the systems that ruled his life, and from the individualistic lifestyle he used to have. Suddenly, he feels connected to his surroundings and to other beings through feeling of love and collectivity:

> My eyes wandered to the moonlit sea and I was reminded of a phrase that recurs often in the Merchant legend of Bengal: sasagara basumati - 'the ocean'd earth'. At that moment I felt I was surrounded by all that was best about our world - the wide open sea, the horizon, the bright moonlight, leaping dolphins, and also the outpouring of hope, goodness, love, charity and generosity that I could feel surging around me. (Ghosh 2019, 295)

Through this moment, Ghosh translates his hope 'that the new generation will be able to transcend the isolation in which humanity was entrapped in the time of its derangement; that they will rediscover their kinship with other beings, and that this vision, at once new and ancient, will find expression in a transformed and renewed art and literature' (Ghosh 2016, 162). The awakening depicted at the end of *Gun Island* follows this idea and underscores the urge to take action. The potential in a collective action is crucial and could mean a glimmer of light in these dark times. The end depicts an instance of collective action and Ghosh chooses to correlate this moment with a manifestation of the nonhuman, creating 'a storm of living beings, *bhutas*' (Ghosh 2019, 307). The characters in *Gun Island* attend 'a miracolo [...] It is! Everything we had hoped for is coming true. There is an awakening happening around the world - this could be the moment everything changes...' (Ghosh 2019, 310); and they achieve this by taking action and by putting forward the need to do so collectively.

4.6. Climate change and modernity

Whereas *The Hungry Tide* has a local reach in terms of climate change, *Gun Island* is global on many levels. In *The Hungry Tide*, storms and cyclones are related in detail and in terms of their individual consequences as discussed above. In contrast, Ghosh manages to reach out more widely with his 2019 novel: the setting is global instead of unfolding mainly in Kolkata and the Sundarbans as was the case for *The Hungry Tide*. Indeed, *Gun Island* unfolds on a global scale and mirrors climate change as a global issue. The storms and climatic events happening in the novel are not told in such detail nor are they individual. Kluwick concurs:

> While *The Hungry Tide* clearly acknowledges global connections through its engagement with environmental justice and the impact of international NGO conservation projects on the population of the Sundarbans, it is nevertheless an essentially local novel, almost exclusively set in the Gulf of Bengal. *Gun Island*, by contrast, is an emphatically global text (Kluwick 71).

Ghosh manages to convey the global aspect of the crisis, not only through climatic and strange encounters with displaced animals due to climate change, but also through one specific aspect of modernity, i.e. technology. The latter has acquired an omnipresent status, and allows information to circulate at an unprecedented speed: this shows through in *Gun Island* as for example Deen shares a picture of the spider he encounters in Cinta's apartment in Venice for Piya to see it; it also allows Tipu to contact Deen from India or during his journey to Europe. The omnipresence of technology and the effect it has is conveyed by Palash, a man who works with Lubna. He explains that books allowed him to escape reality and create his own fantasy. But he wonders:

> If mere words could have this effect, then what of the pictures and videos that scroll continuously past our eyes on laptops and cellphones? If it is true that a picture is worth a thousand words then what is the power of the billions of images that now permeate every corner of the globe? What is the potency of the dreams and desires they generate? Of the restlessness they breed? (Ghosh 2019, 292-293)

The 'restlessness' bred by this continuous exposition to images is indicative of our time: the velocity of the world seems to have increased. This is expressed in *Gun Island*: 'it was as if the very rotation of the planet had accelerated, moving all living things at unstoppable velocities' (Ghosh 2019, 181); and this is especially the case for places: 'the outward appearance of a place might stay the same while its core was whisked away to some other time and location' (Ghosh 2019, 181).

Technology is mainly conveyed in the novel by Internet access and Wi-fi, cellphones and social media. Gupta argues that 'Ghosh dwells on the role of technology especially in the form of the Internet and social media which has completely disrupted and transformed human life' (Gupta 119). Technology is indeed in tune with the modern world, which is pervaded with impersonal systems, as Deen experiences when his love interest blocks him on every platform without any explanation. He responds to this as to '[g]hosting, an experience that is as humiliating as it is painful' (Ghosh 2019, 4). Technology also fits the 'rational' mentality that rules the world in which it appeared. As we have seen, Cinta has the intuition that something is wrong with her husband and

her daughter, though the 'mention of advanced technology[6] had made Cinta doubt her intuitions' (Ghosh 2019, 42). Another aspect of this 'transformed human life' is the effect technology has on the inhabitants of the Sundarbans. They are 'poor and illiterate' (Ghosh 2019, 66) and still learn to use cellphones at an impressive pace, which truly impresses Deen as he notices that 'young Indians, no matter whether rich or poor, educated or not, had an ability to deal with phones and computers that far surpassed [his] own' (Ghosh 2019, 94). Tipu explains to Deen: '[y]ou'd be amazed how good people get at it, and how quickly. That's how the journey starts, not by buying a ticket or getting a passport. It starts with a phone and voice recognition technology' (Gosh 2019, 66). He even refers to the Internet as 'the migrants' magic carpet' (Ghosh 2019, 66) because it functions as a window on another world that they would not have imagined otherwise. Tipu further asks Deen 'where [he] think[s] they even get an idea of what a better life *is*' (Ghosh 2019, 66; italics in original). The inhabitants of the Sundarbans live in hostile conditions but, through their phones, 'they see pictures of other countries; that's where they view ads where everything looks fabulous; they see stuff on social media, posted by neighbours who've already made the journey' (Ghosh 2019, 66). Therefore, it provides them with both a reason and a motivation to leave and engage in the global process of human migration.

The era of the Anthropocene should really be considered in its globality and especially regarding the issue of climate change. *Gun Island* successfully expands its scope to reach a global scale; in comparison with *The Hungry Tide*, Kluwick notes that there is 'a shift from depictions of cyclones as lived experience to storms and floods as signs of climatic and harbingers of social change' (Kluwick 69). Climatic events are hence perceived as hints of a bigger change, which is both climatic and social. As argued above, these two dimensions of the climate issue are imbricated with each other. First of all, the many climatic events narrated in the novel happen on a global scale and have a direct impact on animals, which creates turmoil in the natural world and presents new dangers for human beings. While *The Hungry Tide* focuses on an impending alteration of the landscape in the Sundarbans, *Gun Island* envisages a global scale of alteration: '[w]e're in a new world now. No one knows where they belong anymore, neither humans nor animals' (Ghosh 2019, 106). This suggests that humans as well as animals are impacted upon by climate change, which indexes the way climate change spares no one and makes no difference between humans and nonhumans.

[6] 'Advanced technology' refers to a special GPS at the cutting edge of technology.

At some point in the novel, the origin of the climate crisis is discussed. During a conference, the historian giving a speech argues that the crisis sprouted in the seventeenth century, which is by the way the period in which the legend of the Merchant and Manasa Devi unfolds. He states that 'it was then that Londoners began to use coal on a large scale, for heating, which was how our dependence on fossil fuels started' (Ghosh 2019, 137). He actually refers to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. He further says that those people 'seemed to have understood that a process had been launched that could lead ultimately to catastrophe: what they didn't know was that the story might take a few hundred years to play out' (Ghosh 2019, 137). Here, it is suggested that climate change is the outcome of a human-induced process: '[i]t is here because of our history; because of things human beings have done' (Ghosh 2019, 235).

This idea is further explored in the novel as Deen and Cinta have a conversation about global warming and altered weather patterns, and more specifically about greenhouse gases. These gases, Cinta asks, '[d]o they not come from cars and planes and factories that make [...] whistling kettles and electric toasters and espresso machines? Is this all natural too - that we should need those things that nobody needed a hundred years ago?' (Ghosh 2019, 234). She incriminates modernity as a driver of climate change; in *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh expresses the opinion that 'the pattern of life modernity engenders can only be practiced by a small minority of the world's population. [...] Every family in the world cannot have two cars, a washing machine, and a refrigerator - not because of technical or economic limitations but because humanity would asphyxiate in the process' (Ghosh 2016, 92). Modernity, besides being one of the drivers of climate change, also causes inequity and widens the gap between those who can afford material affluence and those who cannot. In any case, the current state of affairs regarding the climate crisis is a result of human behaviour and of so-called modernity, and the consequences are visible on a global scale. Elements that testify to this alteration of the world are scattered all through *Gun Island*.

In the case of the Sundarbans, climate change is felt through alterations in animal behaviour in first instance. Piya, the cetologist, had begun to study the Irrawaddy dolphins residing in the waters of the Gulf of Bengal in *The Hungry Tide*. It is striking that, in the short time that has elapsed between the two novels, the change is already felt. Indeed, the altered behaviour of the dolphins is due 'to changes in the composition of the waters of the Sundarbans. As sea levels rose, and the flow of fresh water diminished, salt water had begun to intrude deeper upstream, making certain stretches too saline for the dolphins' (Ghosh 2019, 102). The consequences of climate change

become more and more serious. Furthermore, another problem arises, but this time, it does not only apply to the Sundarbans but on a global scale in view of the multiplication of the oceanic dead zones. Piya explains that these are:

> These vast stretches of water that have a very low oxygen content - loo low for fish to survive. Those zones have been growing at a phenomenal pace, mostly because of the residues from chemical fertilizers. [...] And those zones have now spread over tens of thousands of square miles of ocean - some of them as large as middle-sized countries.' (Ghosh 2019, 104)

Here, Piya points to another cause for the pollution of waters, i.e. the industry. In the novel, it is depicted through the refinery that pollutes the waters of the Sundarbans. Piya sues the refinery and has hired environmental lawyers as she feels that she 'can't just let them get away with poisoning the Sundarbans' (Ghosh 2019, 105). The consequences are not only felt by the dolphins but also by another species that is essential to the biodiversity of the Sundarbans, i.e., crabs. Piya expresses her concern to Deen, as she says that there was a 'big crab die-off – a huge swarm of them lying dead on a mud bank. That's seriously bad news because crabs are a keystone species in the Sundarbans' (Ghosh 2019, 119). The refinery will have 'long-term impacts' (Ghosh 2019, 194) and the first visible signs can already be seen through 'the mass mortality events that they [Piya's assistants] had recently witnessed: shoals of dead fish; the decline of crab populations and so on' (Ghosh 2019, 194). Not only in the Sundarbans does climate change cause alterations in biodiversity, for this is globally the case.

In *Gun Island*, Ghosh shows the situation in Venice: as they stroll through the city, Cinta recounts the legend of the monster of the Venetian lagoon, '*il mostro'* (Ghosh 2019, 250), but Cinta then decides to show Deen 'a different kind of monster, much more dangerous' (Ghosh 2019, 250). She is in fact referring to the threat represented by shipworms, tiny molluscs that ravage wood by nibbling it from the inside, and which are infesting the pontoons of Venice. Cinta explains that '[m]ore and more of these are invading Venice, with the warming of the lagoon's water. They eat up the wood from the inside, in huge quantities. It has become a big problem because Venice is built on wooden pilings. They are literally eating the foundations of the city' (Ghosh 2019, 251). This parallels the case of the bark beetles in Oregon and the way they 'have been extending their range, as the mountains warm up' (Ghosh 2019, 119) and have invaded the forests where, just like the shipworms in Venice, they 'eat up the trees from the inside' (Ghosh 2019, 119). The rising of the temperatures around the globe thus has consequences on animals, which appear in places where they had never been seen before and in such quantities that the damage they create leads to

disasters. Another case of displaced animal is the spider Deen notices on his computer in Venice. He learns thereafter that the spider 'is a brown recluse, *Loxosceles reclusa*. Its bite can be very painful; its venom is more potent, by weight, than that of a rattlesnake; it breaks down the skin and eats into the flesh. [...] The brown recluse has been increasing its range very quickly because it's getting so much hotter in Europe' (Ghosh 2019, 223). This spider actually 'turns out to be a species native to the southeastern states of the USA' (Kluwick 73). It is not only in Europe that the rising of temperatures causes new species to arrive in unusual places: as we know, in America, the yellow-bellied snake migrates northwards because of the temperature of the water and presents a new danger as its venom is lethal. In fact, 'animal migrations are being hugely impacted by climate change so nothing is surprising now' (Ghosh 2019, 309).

The fact that 'nothing is surprising now' also applies to weather patterns, as those are equally altered all around the globe. Throughout the novel, climatic events are described as recurrent and happening on a global scale. Those that occur during the novel are indexes of a greater change and are not narrated as apocalyptic catastrophes but rather as indicators of a general change, an ongoing transition that has an impact on the whole earth, and requires 'ongoing adaptation' (Cole 17). Indeed, there are some weather events in the novel that reveal the globality of the issue. First and foremost, storms and cyclones keep hitting the Sundarbans as mentioned with cyclone Aila, which struck the Sundarbans in 2009, and which caused 'social upheaval, putting more and more pressure on communities already on the edge' (Kluwick 72). As already discussed, this is at the root of the mass migration from the Sundarbans: it is made clear that the future in the Sundarbans is just like the storms that hit it, i.e., unpredictable and destructive. The frequent storms are illustrated in the novels by the fact that the temple Deen visited has been destroyed: '[t]here was a bad storm a couple of months ago and it was swept away' (Ghosh 2019, 148). Other weather events such as wildfires, floods (*acqua alta*) and tornadoes are mentioned. The wildfires that rage in Los Angeles are described in a peculiar manner that is reminiscent of a flood and therefore reinforces the link existing between climatic disturbances happening on a global scale (Kluwick 73-74). Ghosh achieves this effect through imagery, as the wildfire is depicted as a 'tsunami of smoke' (Ghosh 2019, 138), therefore linking the wildfire to the trope of flooding as a means to represent the extent of climate change. Deen, heading out of the museum, perceives that 'a dark cloud had reared up above the horizon, taking the shape of an immense wave, complete with a frothing white top. From where we stood it looked as though a gigantic tsunami were advancing

upon the distant outskirts of the city' (Ghosh 2019, 134). Clearly, climate change is experienced globally: this global aspect is represented in *Gun Island* by the connections between the different places, whether Europe (Venice and Rome), Asia (the Sundarbans) or America (Los Angeles and Oregon).

Towards the end of the novel, Northern Africa enters the picture. The reader learns that the connection house in Egypt has been hit by a tornado and 'the journalists had confirmed, from meteorological data, that a tornado had indeed hit that stretch of coast at around that time. They had learnt that such freak storms were becoming increasingly common in that area; this was thought to be an effect of changing weather patterns' (Ghosh 2019, 286). Changing weather patterns happen on a global scale and Europe, albeit a historical site of privilege, is not spared. In Venice, Deen and Cinta experience a flood: the water begins to rise and they do not leave on time, which results in their being stuck in water. Deen wonders: [h]ow was it possible that in this most civilized of cities we should be so utterly alone and helpless, so completely at the mercy of the earth?' (Ghosh 2019, 252-253). This passage suggests that climate change concerns everyone, regardless of their place of birth or residence, and will end up, sooner or later, having an impact on human life across the globe. Another example of this is when Deen and the other activists are on the *Lucania*. A storm has hit Rome and Gisa is worried about her partner Imma and their daughter: 'a tree had indeed crashed into their apartment, breaking many windows' (Ghosh 2019, 277). Even in Rome, then, weather events cause trouble, and Imma and her daughter consequently have to spend the night elsewhere. Gisa explains with surprise: 'Can you believe it? In Rome - of all places! - my family have become refugees' (Ghosh 2019, 278). This event is most meaningful: it reminds us that climate change is a global issue that needs to be tackled on a global scale; it also alerts us to the fact that the increased frequency of weather disturbances due to climate change will only keep increasing. Last but not least, Gisa compares her family to climate refugees, a comparison which enhances one major impact of climate change, i.e. the migration which climate change entails on a global scale as well.

In conclusion, Ghosh manages to portray climate change as a global crisis in *Gun Island*. One aspect of the modern world that reinforces globalization is technology in the sense that it is a tool that provides a link with the rest of the world, especially through social media, as is the case for so many migrants who find inspiration to start their journey for a better life. Not only are humans wishing to migrate because of the alteration of their environment, it is also the case of

animals. The displacement of species is happening in different places all around the globe and further conveys the global aspect of climate change. Finally, weather events are not described as catastrophes experienced individually but they rather fit into the bigger frame of climate change and are hints of a worldwide issue that cannot be contained within an individual perspective anymore.

4.7. Conclusion

To conclude, Ghosh's 2019 novel unfolds in a transformative context which creates new possibilities for welcoming change. Climate change is depicted as a global issue: this is first achieved through the way the author imparts a global significance to *Gun Island*. The setting of the novel expands from the Sundarbans to Los Angeles and then to Venice, Egypt and Sicily. Climate change affects all these places, in confirmation that the disruptions induced by climate change happen on a global level. Furthermore, there is a general passivity pervading our era. Ghosh depicts it through the metaphor of possession and allows the main character to go through a kind of awakening, by dint of which Deen will become aware of the impersonal systems that have taken over the world. It is not only the case for him; it seems that the whole of humanity is in the grip of those systems that hinder us from taking action. Ghosh then indicates the necessity to adapt and to take action on different levels in the novel. In line with *The Hungry Tide*, he gives a voice to the nonhuman in his novel and therefore incites us to recognize its existence and agency: in this case, it is achieved through the uncanny events that pervade *Gun Island* and through the rewriting of the legend of Manasa Devi, which is transposed to a contemporary context. This old legend had in fact appeared in a climatic disrupted time, oddly reminiscent of ours. The legend points to a reconciliation and the necessity of a sense of balance between human beings and the natural world. Deen grasps this idea towards the end of the novel. Most importantly, Ghosh points to the need to take action and to do so collectively. With *Gun Island*, he thus tries to enrich the literary imagination faced with the challenges of climate change and suggests that we can take advantage of the situation to imagine new possibilities for the future and rewrite our behaviour in this transitional state of the world.

5. Conclusion

Providing a tangible aesthetic form in which to represent climate change is a way to enrich the climate imaginary. It has been argued in this dissertation that, with his fiction, Ghosh successfully contributes to the concretisation of climate change in the collective imaginary. At a time when climate change seems to be slipping through the fingers of most authors, Ghosh manages to address the issue within the framework of his fiction to express the necessity for change and adaptation. I have discussed the way Ghosh conveyed this in his novels *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. The two novels stand in a continuum: while the first sets the groundwork for a new brand of inclusive thinking, the second goes further and suggests that the situation is transitory and requires a general and collective adaptation.

To begin with, we have seen that *The Hungry Tide* leads to a reflection on the human and non-human world, on the opposition between nature and culture, and between the global and the local. Ghosh's reflection favours a vision of the world in which its constitutive parts are seen as interdependent and interconnected. This means that everything is connected and that climate change cannot be solved unless it is seen as a problem that encompasses the natural world and the world of humans. Considering this, *The Hungry Tide* can be read in light of eco-cosmopolitanism, which promotes the understanding of the world as co-extensive and inclusive, connecting the human with what lies beyond its boundaries. While interconnectedness lies at the heart of the novel, Ghosh insists on the duty of writers to use their power to write about it and provoke a reaction, which will lead to an increased awareness. Indeed, the general passivity in the face of climate change also translates into the denial of predictions, as was the case for Piddington and Port Canning. These warnings are also present in *Gun Island* and represent the failure to imaginatively grasp the consequences of climate change.

Whereas *The Hungry Tide* establishes the premises for a comprehensive and non-binary reflection on climate change, *Gun Island* brings this reflection to a head by choosing a global and inclusive setting, where climate change is increasingly reflected through the lens of climate justice. Accordingly, while climate change is represented rather obliquely in *The Hungry Tide*, by contrast *Gun Island* testifies to the maturation of those ideas that were already present in a subliminal way in Ghosh’s 2004 novel. Thus, the stage is set for addressing climate change in a more direct way, and indeed, Ghosh presents the climate crisis as a context of change that creates new possibilities

for rewriting our imaginary. Furthermore, it can be argued that this situation is enhanced by the sanitary crisis of Covid-19, which forces us to reconsider the way we conceive the world. Of course, it cannot be expected that novels, or fiction in general, will extricate us from this unprecedented crisis. However, Ghosh shows through the climax of *Gun Island* how we must turn to a collaborative endeavour and break out of the passivity in which we have been entrapped.

Through *Gun Island*, Ghosh responds to his own argument, deployed in *The Great Derangement*, according to which serious fiction seems unable to address climate change because of its uncanny, unthinkable nature - hence its absence in modern fiction. In his 2019 novel, Ghosh incorporates the uncanny in the very structure of the novel and, through the rewriting of an old legend, he manages to rewrite the present. The novel leads to the awakening of the main character, who realises that the world is possessed by impersonal systems and drowned in its own passivity. Therefore, taking action, no matter how small it is, can be an invitation to go further and bring about new solutions. In summary, climate change is not an easy issue to address in modern literature, but what is certain is that addressing it is more than ever the duty of writers. Ghosh's work helps us to imagine new ways of acting in a changing world that can be seen to be characterised by its relentlessness. Ghosh further suggests the need to become aware of the connectedness between the human and the natural world and to pay attention to those entities that have been crushed or made invisible in the processes of industrialisation and globalisation. This is how climate change can take shape in the collective imaginary: it should be recognized not as an isolated problem but above all as a reconsideration of our place within the planet, where we are not alone.

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