Reading The Postcolonial Island in Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide

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Abstract – This paper suggests that literature has important consequences for the theoretical practice of island studies, not least because literary documents illustrate the conceptualization of the islands in various historical and cultural perspectives. To this end, Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide (2004) is addressed. This novel aggressively theories core ideas of island studies. Set in the "immense archipelago" of the Ganges delta, the Hungry Tide tells the mostly forgotten tale of forced evacuation from Morichjhãpi Island in 1979. The liminal space of the Sundarbans, the "tide nation," is an exceptional place to investigate the relationship of post-colonial geographies with identities. The portrayal of the "watery maze" (Ghosh, 2004: 72) and "storm-tossed reefs" (Sundarbans, 2004: 164) by Ghosh poses and answers issues that should be at the core of the crucial meta-discourse of island science.

Keywords: Amitav Ghosh, island studies, Sundarbans, The Hungry Tide.

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INTRODUCTION

"The island is the trailing threads of the cloth of India, the ragged edge of the sari, the ãchol that follows, half-wetted by the shore" (Ghosh, 2005: 6).

Amitav Ghosh 's 2004 novel The Hungry Tide is based in the Sundarbans, lower portion of the Ganges delta, about 250 kilometers from the West Bengal estuary of the Hugli River in India, to the river Meghna River in Bangladesh. The characters in the Ghosh novel refer to this area as 'the tide country;' the flat, marshy islands where the citizens of Ghosh are residing are part of the "immense archipelago" (Ghosh, 2005: 6). Embedded in The Hungry Tide is a comprehensive historical account of the colonial and post-colonial Settlements of the Sundarbans explaining the "perpetually mutating topography" of this area in great detail (Anand 2008: 25)[1]. In addition, this novel deliberately theories ideas which are fundamental to the analysis of islands. The essay argues that Ghosh 's discovery of the "imaginary geographies" (Aldama 2002:142)[2] of estuarine islands in The Hungry Tide encompasses the intellectual very territories that Icelandic scholars ought to explore if the connexon between island representation in various text fields can be truly regarded on an interdisciplinary basis (e.g. literature, culture, common fiction). If an essential aim of island studies is to recognize and challenge the forms of thought that manage speeches on islands, The Hungry Tide is a suitable document. This novel provides persuasive proof, particularly when the theoretical foundations for the study of the islands are established, that literature review should not be a secondary or subordinate task for island studies.

The Hungry Sea demonstrates, in general, that the function of science is not maintained by academic scholars. This is not a new argument about Ghosh. For starters, Mondal (2007) describe Ghosh as a post-colonial writer whose novels pose and challenge some main issues in post-colonial science; other reviewers make similar ecocritical claims (Gurr, 2010; Mukherjee, 2006; Weik, 2006)[3,4,5], and cosmopolitan theory (Grewal, 2008; Johansen, 2008; Tomsky, 2009)[6,7,8]. Mondal (2007:7)[9] also indicated that novels such as The Shadow Lines (1988), The Calcutta Chromosome (1995) and the Glass Palace (2002) interfere in more widespread public speeches regarding colonialism: "The simplicity of his writing, the manner in which his intellectualism is easily worn in the structure of his prose, is what really separates [Ghosh] from academia." This essay argues a parallel tale in regards to the involvement of The Hungry Tide and Ghosh in some of the key problems.

Speaking Up for the Sundarbans

In 1982, Ghosh earned his PhD in Social Anthropology from Oxford University. He clearly expresses his involvement in "representation in both his political and his discursive senses" in his

fictional and nonfictional work (Mondal, 2007: 25). Ghosh talks and advocates for the Sundarbans in The Starving Tide in these words. Ghosh spent a considerable period in Sundarbans (Kumar, 2007: 100)[10] in the planning of the book, including travelling to Annu Jalais (Ghosh, 2005: 401), a postgraduate fellow at the International Institute of Social History (IIS) in Amsterdam, Netherlands, and a recent monograph called Forest of Tiger: Citizens, Politics and the Climate in Sundarbans (Jalais, 2010)[11]. To make one clear argument, Ghosh tried with The Hungry Tide to say a fictional tale set in the Sundarbans and to offer a rigorously examined historical account of the remarkable past of the area. Ghosh says:

The protagonists in this book are fictional, much like Lusibari and Garjontola, two of their major environments. However, there do exist, and indeed were created or developed, secondary places such as Canning, Gosoba, Satjelia, Morichjhāpi and Emilybari in the manner described above (Ghosh, 2005: 401).

This mixture of fictional and realistic story's and geographies is important for Ghosh's The Hungry Tide project, and refers to Ghosh 's view of the book as "a meta-form that crosses the boundaries of other literature, making unimportant the traditional differences in working days among historians, journalists, anthropologists etc." (Hawley, 2005: 166)[12]. In brief, Ghosh's depiction of Sundarbans' interstitial space represents and encourages him to discuss spaces between academic and literary disciplines. Most notably, Ghosh's fictional and non-fictional work is characteristic of the intensive focus on the spatial specificities of those areas and their history. He is evidently intrigued by interstitial spaces including seas, estuaries, waterways and, inevitably, islands, and also uses those areas as environments for scrutinizing and denouncing nationalistic narratives of British colonization and its consequences. In novels such as The Glass Palace, a destructive familial and political story on the coasts of India, Burma and Malia, Ghosh's analysis of the immense brutality that domestic strategies and foreign wars are perpetrated on families and living populations, is important for the mutableness and indeterminacy of his environments, in political and geographical terms.

As much of Ghosh 's fiction, The Hungry Tide examines the value of location (in many ways) to shape and convey personal and social identities in India and the Indian diaspora. Ghosh is well known to reject the term "postcolonial." In a 2007 interview he claimed that he preferred to pay attention to the individual features of each location (Kumar, 2007: 105) rather than "imagine," for example, that "the India post colony is the same as the Pakistan post colony" (Kumar, 2007:105). Ghosh describes the influence of this perspective on his novels approach:

I don't want to write in a specific position about the guy. I also want to explain what happens, the geology, the period deep beyond, the immediacy of period and the periods in each part of the situation (Kumar, 2007: 103).

For Ghosh – as Hungry Tide confirms – the exposure to the particular features of individual locations requires considering them in spatial and time terms: "All tales really unfold occurrences in time" (Aldama, 202: 90). And in relation to the Sundarbans, a landscape which is usually characterized by 'design,' and hence by 'the lack of background' (Kumar, 2007:105), he proposed that the 'dense layering of... background is what makes this place possible, which gives it a place [and] still makes it shocking.' The normal portrait of the Sundarbans is that of an exotic mangrove forest filled with Royal tigers rather than the area that is often referred to as a 'mager mulleuk' of the lawlessness and violence which characterizes it,1 and the lack of fundamental infrastructure, such as electricity, drinking water and health centers, is making it one of the poorest regions of the world. Jalais (2005: 1760) Jalais writes: The Hungry Tide asks readers to pay heed to the historical and contemporary attitudes of the Sundarbans' islands and rivers, a region that is unfamiliar outside of India. In this relation, Nirmal, one of the key characters, resonates extra textually with the words:

I am writing those words in a location you possibly never heard about: an island on the southern edge of the tide nation, Morichjhāpi ... (Ghosh, 2005: 67).

Ghosh uses the novel type to convey a tale often ignored beyond the Sundarbans. In 1979, tens of thousands of refugees were forcibly expelled from the island of Morichjāpi in the most north forested portion of the Sundarbans by the newly installed Communist government of West Bengal. Just four years ago, the mangroves on the island were cleared for an agriculture program funded by government (Jalais, 2005: 1758). However, the deportation of refugees was justified on environmental grounds. Jyoti Basu, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, identified Morichjhāpi as an unlawful intrusion on a state forest reserve and tiger preserve property (Mallick, 1999: 115). There is no historical documentation of this event's definitive history (referred to as a 'Morichjhāpi attack' or a 'Morichjhāpi massacre'); however, Mallick (1999: 114) figures that 17,000 refugees remaining on the island have died from famine or illness and are submerged when the police scuttle their vessels, fired or violently murdered by the police There are little documented evidence. Jalais (2005: 1761) states that, while there would never be any certitude as to the amount of casualties, local locals have regularly stated that only one in four of the refugees survived: "This statistic is significant because it represents what the villagers believe, rather than the true reality of

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the case" A large amount of these refugees were held in the east-central India resettlement camps. They were not only bleak and hazardous camps, they "were totally isolated from the world of refugees, both psychologically and physically" (Jalais, 2005: 1758). As Ghosh (2005: 402) notes in The Hungry Tide's 'Author's Statement' although at the moment when he wrote his reports, the Morichjhãpi incidence was reported by the Calcutta papers, in Mallick's essay (1999) 'The displacement of refugees in the forest reserves: West Bengal's Policy Reversal and Marichjhapi's Massacre, there were only one scholarly account available. "Before fictionalizing Morichjhãpi 's past in Ghosh 's book, all but lapsed into oblivion."

Ghosh even talked in the news media for the Sundarbans. For e.g., soon after the novel was written, Ghosh (2004) wrote an article for Indian weekly news magazine Outlook in which he disclosed – and denounced – a business proposal to create a big Sundarbans tourism complex. The proposal recalled the archipelago as an "arena for water activities and a refuge for amateurs of beaches" (Ghosh, 2004: n.p.). Ghosh (ibid) states that the project suggested was focused on a utopian approach to island tourism. He says: He writes:

This is a region of mangrove islands and mud flats. No 'pristine beaches' or marine gardens are located (ibid.).

The mission collapsed, but the Sundarbans were underlined in his ardent condemnation as an area in which the "imaginary geographies" of islanders and foreigners collide:

The Sahara Parivar [the project proposal company] promises to open virgin areas to visitors. But the Sundarbans [sic] islands are not, in any way, 'virgin.' The Indian portion of the Sundarbans serves a community of approximately four million, equal to the entirety of the New Zealand community. The Sundarbans are a big and tiny archipelago of islands. Most, if not most of the islands, were often inhabited. Indeed, many islands have been physically relocated to create way for the Tiger Project (Ghosh, 2004: n. p.).

The Sundarbans' portrayal of the region as 'virgin' - a farmland in its pristine natural condition - is both unknown and constitutes a significant denigration of local awareness and identity. The Hungry Tide nevertheless portrays the Sundarbans as the region in which strong opponents of insiders against the outsider and awareness of ignorance break down and become unsustainable; the topography of the estuarine Islands is emblematic of the tenuous existence of human sense and identification, particularly in relation to our ties with the location.

The Hungry Tide and Key Issues for Island Studies

One of the most significant contradictions in island studies, as its definitions and guidelines are becoming more and more apparent, is the dedication to the "location" of the islands and the recognition that study on most island studies is undertaken by "outsiders" or from the point of view of relative 'externality' (See Baldacchino, 2004; Baldacchino, 2008)[13,14]. The profoundly moving story of the "outsiders" who visit and then settle in the Sundarbans could help to map the path beyond the conceptual impasse created by this island / outsider dualism (see Fletcher, 2010)[15]. This story is quite moving. In other words, the prevalent insider / outsider dualism in island studies might strengthen the presumption that Icelanders, the identification that is confused by this novel, are the most true and reliable of the island's interpretations. The Hungry Tide poses a fundamental issue which needs to be dealt with if island studies are to theories properly core concepts like "Icelandic" and "Icelandic": what do we use to characterize relationships between places and people. Literature uses a typical vocabulary, a decent starting point to answer the question; it most definitely contains words like "plot," "setting," "actor," and "step." Johansen (2008: 10) commends The Hungry Tide for failing to regard numerous Sundarbans locals as "static contexts" for human life. "Far more than some of its protagonists," the book reviewer for The Economist (2004: 73) states, "a sense of location ... occupies the story." Mondal also claims in his monograph on Ghosh (2007: 18) that the Sundarbans themselves "include the most important 'plot' in the story." "[I]n placing this novel in a setting like Sundarbans, location appears as a character of a broader existence" for Anand (2008: 15). But: what does it simply by suggesting the Ghosh rises from the "setting" to the "character?" What hypotheses – about people and locations, literature and geography – underlie these claims? The literature discussions in the platform for island study should extensively investigate the "where and why" of island myths and thus explore the discursive stereotypes that underlie the conceptualization of islands as environments for "locally" or "externally." This means that island literary studies are twofold: the discovery and analysis of the literary past of individual islands or island regions; and, more generally, the consolidation of such study through archipelago tracing similarities and variations between island ideas into various literatures.

The Hungry Tide is a concerted effort to prompt readers in narrative and ideological terms to anew think about the position and sense of location. In brief, Ghosh 's representation of Sundarbans reveals the limitations of creation and classification as distinct (and opposite) groups. Moreover, this opposition and its associated ones (people / place; fiction / reality; culture / nature, and so on) have been successfully deconstructed.

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Mondal (2007: 4) sees in Ghosh 's oeuvre "a perception that space is not an inert spatial dimension beyond human consciousness but is intimately influenced by its own way of thought ..." This Ghosh interpretation is particular applicable to island study and its focus on "systematic treatment of the world [...] backed by significant treatment of the insular phenomena." Thinking of islands in "systematic" forms would require a detailed and diligent study of the hypothetical aspects and corresponding definitions of "island." This research could also be accessible to the use of approaches and analytical constructs in other interdisciplinary study fields that take into consideration the interplay between geography, culture and social systems. This essay illustrates the synergies between island science and postcolonial studies, yet there is a far broader interdisciplinary framework for island analysis. Where are the linkages between island studies and gender studies, for instance? What might the growing interdisciplinary area of animal studies add to the intellectual debate on the islands by examining ties between people, animals and their ecosystem (a valid question given the popularity of the Hungry Tidal tigers here)?

One of the most widely mentioned objectives for academics that agree with insular studies is "the study of islands on their own terms" according to the often-quoted words of McCall (1994: 2)[16]. Under what way would the islands be considered "own conditions?" McCall 's concept may either be construed as an emphasis on the local features of island awareness or as an argument that different islands share a variety of words or concepts that separate them from mainland areas. Reading the Hungry Tide exposes some big issues with such a declaration of intent, whether "their words" apply to the singularity of those islands or to the mutual values and interactions that are often identified as "insula." The book is in the third person; two individual viewpoints are alternated through chapters: Kanai Dutt and Piya Roy. Both protagonists toured the islands in 2002; both, in separate respects, set out to be "studied."

The novel opens into the platform of a train station at Kolkata, where Kanai and Piya wait for the train to Canning, a port on Sundarbans threshold (Ghosh, 2005: 9). Piya is a biologist and a ketologist and has arranged a field trip in order to explore the Sundarbans' marine mammal community. At the behest of its aunt, Nilima, Kanai, who owns a lucrative translation firm, is on his way to Lusibari Island. She wants him to review some papers his uncle Nirmal has just found for him decades after his passing. The first chapter is recounted by Kanai, who "went to the crowded platform at [Piya]" (Ghosh 2005: 3). Whereas Kanai feels and prepares a trustworthy cosmopolitanism, Piya is disturbed from the beginning by becoming more like a "stranger" in West Bengal than in field trips to other locations (Ghosh, 2005: 34). On the train station in Kolkata, she "is struck by the way that Kanai looked at

everybody, brought them in, sized them up, and organized them into position" (Ghosh, 2005: 10). In comparison, Piya is painfully conscious of her inability to recognize "its own position ... in the big scheme of things" (Ghosh, 2005: 35). Kanai instantly realized that Piya was "out of place" (Ghosh, 2005:3), but in this setting he was less willing to focus on his own foreignness. "One other 'external' on the network" is Kanai (Ghosh, 2005: 4). His presence as 'middle-aged success and urban riches' (Ghosh 2005: 5) suggests that he too is out of position and "firstly attracting his own publicity" (Ghosh 2005: 4). However, as the plot continues, it becomes apparent more and more obviously that neither Piya nor Kanai is an "outsider" in the archipelago in any straightforward way. It is not just because of the complicated connexons between family and memory they are linked to the location, but also because everybody in the Sundarbans becomes an "outsider." As Mukherjee states (2006: 150), the characters of this novel "[act] in the form of migration" instead of indigenous belonging. Even Fokir, Morichjhāpi's survivor and the character with the region's most personal experience, is more migrants than native islanders. The aim of researching islands "in its own right," however the statement is read, presumes that such islands or island areas can better be understood from secure, recognizable perspectives. As the Hungry Tide demonstrates, enriching one 's understanding of and "water" information and science on the islands can require both a broad variety of viewpoints and a feeling that no particular lens can be used in its essence and depth. The novel shows that the uncertainty and unpredictability of the islands does not only rely on the boundaries of human potential, but also on the inherent quality of the locations where land and water meet.

From the viewpoint of island studies, Ghosh 's representation of the Sundarbans illustrates the significance of the land / water dualism to the dominant views on islands. The portrayal Ghosh of the island's waterscape challenges the well-known notion of an island as a definite land mass surrounded by rivers, streams, seas or oceans, but separate from them. Rather, land and water are in a continuous fluid exchange arrangement in which none prevails. The deconstruction of the Hungarian Tide's simple binary starts, of course, with the title and evoking of the everyday fight to conquer "unpredictable and unfriendly environment" (Ghosh, 2005: 33) and the ever-present danger to settlements on the shore of natural disasters. Moreover, Ghosh uses the tide as a structuring tool, the book being named "The Ebb: Bhatta" in two sections and the other "The Flood: Jowar" in the other pieces, and as the main metaphor in its deconstruction of the bilateral that handles official records of places like the Sundarbans. For e.g., he reveals that the history and present of Sundarbans are in a fluid partnership between the Ebb and Flow, in which

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no image of the islands is set or invulnerable, by intertwining the contemporary account with excerpts from Nirmal 's diaries. Likewise, Ghosh strengthens the "strong" foundation of the novel and inspires hope regarding our ability to learn how to look at the universe again, by changing the viewpoints of Kanai and Piya and demonstrating their aversion to affection.

How to Read Islands

As Mondal (2007: 19) says, Ghosh 's novels also weaken the hierarchy of reality to fantasy in national identity discourses. They ask: "Are historiography or research, claim, actually more real than fictitious narratives? "Nirmal, retired head of school, offers support to the Morichjhāpi settlers by teaching Sundarbans to their girls. His first lesson was to begin by giving the kids an outline of the Bay of Bengal, not as a way to say truth, but more as a way to tell the region's tales. "This map reveals that, in geology, there is, in mythology, a clear ganga and a secret ganga. (Ghosh, 2005: 181). Though Nirmal has never been able to teach Morichjāpi students, his Sundarbans story shows his nephew how to "learn" the islands, understanding that there is no final or full reading:

There was an error. A landscape is no different from a novel — a set of pages that intersect without the two being the same. People open the book at their own convenience and experience, memories and desires: the collection for a geologist opens on one side, for a boatman on another and yet another for a pilot for the aero plane, a designer, and so on. Often these places are occupied by lines that are invisible to others, but real to others, as real, as loaded and as unpredictable as high voltage cables (Ghosh 2005: 224).

In the process of the book, both Kanai and Piya discover that they gaze through tiny gaps at the islands. The binoculars that search Piya 's water for the dorsal ends of dolphins symbolizes both her experience — her information power — and her visual limitations. She looks at Kanai "a textual scholar who depicts an unrecovered manuscript: it was like she was confused by a codex formed by the planet itself" (Ghosh, 2005: 269). She looks, that is, in "trance," like Kanai himself, at the "closely written Bengali language" (Ghosh, 2005:6) of the notebook of his uncle, a literary text in Ghosh 's novel. The Hungry Tide asks us to take seriously the position played by diverse texts, whether fictional or not, to enrich or even turn our awareness of the area such as the Sundarbans, thereby demonstrating how the literature may contribute to the island 's theoretical mission.

The notion that any account or site review is partial and imperfect applies to the novel's portrayal of the opposition between the "science" perception of the universe of Piya and the "literary" sensibilities of Kanai. Piya describes herself in her "vocation" (Ghosh, 2005: 112) and is dedicated to data processing and documenting processes and routines. Similarly, a crucial element of his characterization is the working life of Kanai as a translator. He is quite conscious that the text gives importance to materiality and experience: "Language was both a subsistence of him and a weakness of him" (Ghosh, 2005: 4). Kanai needs to learn about the Sundarbans by listening to other characters' tales and reading the notebook of his uncle Nirmal, whose lengthy portions are included in the document. Nirmal 's writings depict Morichjhāpi's doomed settlement and illustrate the local mythology of Bon Bibi, the deities of the jungle, as well as her profound role in local story's regarding island existence for Kanai. Kanai witnessed the local output The Beauty of Bon Bibi, while he was a boy visiting Lusibari. He recalled that his uncle conveyed annoyance before the success that the islanders favored fiction to reality:

You hope that people are paying good attention to the true mysteries of existence surrounding them in a location like this. But no, they like gods and saints' imagined wonders (Ghosh, 2005: 102).

As a boy, Kanai was "absorbed entirely" by Bon Bibi's tale (Ghosh, 2005: 105). Nirmal's paper shows that he was pulled into the 'imaginary' Sundarban background as well over time.

As already noted, Ghosh uses the estuarine tide as a complex metaphor for the flux of the novel's characters and locations between current and past. The new tale of the emotional and academic transition of Piya and Kanai in the Sundarbans intersects with and is told by the testimony of Nirmal 's transformation 20 years ago. Likewise, the original disagreement between Kanai's and the worldviews of Piya resembles the friction between Nirmal and his mom, Nilima, which in the months leading up to the Morichjhapi incident reached its height. When Piya starts her fieldwork, she is sure that the effectiveness of field trips to other countries depends on the absence of an outside individual, on preventing "intimate involvements" (Ghosh 2005: 112). But her time on the riverboat with Fokir — a "remote island of quiet, floating on the river's bustle" (Ghosh, 2005: 84) — shifts her perception of her position dramatically in relation to her "vocation" and her Bengali roots. Piya begins her second study of the rivers' dolphin community in the second semester of the novel with Fokir as a guide and Kanai as a translator. Early on the trip, Kanai informs Piya the tale of Morichjhāpi and its effect on the partnership between his aunt and uncle. Nillima, he states, interpreted the assistance of Nirmal to the refugees as an attempt to keep his youth in line with the Marxist values, "she would inform us that the reason he had mixed up in Morichjāpi with the settlers was that he could not let go of

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revolutionary ideas" (Ghosh, 2005: 282). Kanai disagrees: "Nirmal had more vocabulary than politics, as I see. Some people survive through poetry, and he was one of them "(ibid.). For Kanai, Nirmal 's poetic attitude to the environment — in particular through reading Rainer Maria Rilke — indicates that the conviction in historical materialism of his uncle was based on an idiosyncratic understanding of the Marxist philosophy:

For him everything was connected: plants, the world, the wind, people, art, research, nature. He followed the truth about how a magpie gathers bright things. But when he put them together, they were tales of some kind – of a nature (Ghosh, 2005: 282-3).

In a way, this definition of Nirmal 's approach to facts and history illustrates the type of The Hungry Sea and represents Ghosh's own opinion about the possible riches of the novel as a literary form that can encompass "poetic" and "material" discourses. Kanai continues to tell Piya of the Sundarbans visit to his childhood and of the "outraged" (ibid) reaction of Nirmal when he mentions Canning as "an awful muddy town" (ibid.). Nirmal screamed: "What you are doing is a place" (ibid). This enthusiastic declaration parallels the entire novel and covers Kanai and Piya 's lessons. At the end of the book, Kanai and Piya are receptive to their desire to completely understand the Sundarbans and are open to new ways of thinking about this area. The Hungry Tide does not simply represent the island by providing a real and factual image of it, but still demands that any person's interpretation of the area and its past depends on a variety of vectors of identification and thus, is still incomplete and sensitive to alteration.

The tenuousness of every opposition between the islanders 'and non-islanders' viewpoints – between the terms of the islands and the terms of other locations – is often shown by the portrayal of an archipelago that is "always mutating and still uncertain." In the Sundarbans' landscape, traditional island topography photos-distance, distance, smallness-break apart. At low tide, Lusibari – a fictitious island shaped on real locations – is a "gigantic earthen ark, which floats peacefully over its surroundings. It was clear only in high tide that the island's interior remained just below the sea level ... a slippery saucer that would spill over at any point ... "(Ghosh, 2005: 37). Life on Lusibari can only be accomplished by the "tall terrain that engulfed the region and kept back the flood twice a day" (Ghosh 2005: 59). The Hungry Tide is a potent reflection of the weakness and utter impermanence of the human race. This novel opposes the naturalization of international affairs. Instead, it demonstrates to what extent those ties are often linguistic and cultural constructions. The narrator appears similar to Kanai in this way.

However, it is necessary to remember that The Hungry Tide does not imply the identity or allegiance to the site is incorrect or founded on false premises.

The "bādh" embankment symbolizes the importance and need of creative geographies. In his notebook, Nirmal describes, "... there is not only bādh as a guarantor of human existence on our island, but also our abacus and records, our history collection" (Ghosh, 2005: 202). During the Morichjhāpi crisis, he looks at Fokir, then five years old, at Bādh: "Look how delicate and frail it is. See the rivers that rush through it and how infinite it is, how calm it is and how softly the period is. To look at this is to know why it is important for the waters to reign, later, if not earlier "(Ghosh, 2005: 205). Nirmal tries to "rest the young mind" (ibid.), but he chooses not to cheat him: "There is a wind, the waters are rising and the bādh, partly or in whole, is succumbing. It's just about time "(ibid). Nirmal advises the kid to place his head on the bādh, he sees the "multitudes of crabs ... burrowing into the bādh" scratch (Ghosh, 2005:206). This main scene encompasses the theories regarding humans and estuarine islands at the core of this book. Nirmal informs Fokir that the Bādh's "faint barrier" is broken by the crabs, winds and storms' "monstrous appetites." Nirmal informs the boy, "Not angels or humans will hear us when the next storm arrives, and the animals will not hear us either" (ibid.). He cites Rilke in order to justify his point: "the animals realize by instinct that we are not happy at home / in our interpreted environment" (ibid.). Talks at Bādh by Nirmal and Fokir are a symbol of the large and destructive tempest in the closing chapters of the book, in which Fokir dies to shield Piya from large waves and flying pieces. In short, it is "translated" into language and tale that is rendered a house, but the "epic mutability" of the Sundarbans (Ghosh 2005: 154) shows the tenuous existence of this method.

The island environment metaphor as a library — massive and delicate — is heavily emphasized late in the book when Kanai loses Nirmal's notebook in the ups and downs of the coming storm:

... It was like wind waiting for the one moment unguarded: it whipped around him and knocked him later in the sea. He flung his hands into the dirt and leapt up. He scratched to his knees just in time to see the new notebook bobble a few meters down. It sat on the top for a few minutes until it sunk (Ghosh, 2005: 376).

Piya and Kanai escape the storm and they decide to live in Lusibari at least for a bit. In the final segment of the book, "Home: An Epilogue," Piya starts to prepare an island-based study project that she wishes to call following Fokir because the data he has given would be important, "Fokir brought the boat to every tiny creek and gully that a dolphin has ever seen. This one chart [recorded on Pia 's GPS] reveals decades of work and information amounts "(Ghosh, 2005: 398). Kanai plans to "write the Nirmal notebook storey — how it fell into his possession, what it held inside, and

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how it was lost" (Ghosh, 2005: 399). The relationship between the Sundarbans' physicality and their textual representation — waterways, fokirs and GPS data; Nirmal Note sheet / Morichjhãpi / storm 2002—reviews a metaphysical Möbius strip on which the archipelago of Sundarbans can only be interpreted in relation to truth and imagination.

CONCLUSION

Nirmal wrote in his notebook: "The channels of the rivers are scattered like a fine mesh net across the world, forming an environment where the borders between land and water change constantly, constantly impermissible" (Ghosh, 2005: 7). He said in an interview just prior to Ghosh 's trip, supporting The Hungry Tide:

What fascinated me first regarding frontiers is their arbitrariness, their construction — the aspects that current democratic theories "naturalize" them. I think the concern emerged due to some form of innately mistrustful suspicion of something that seems to be "free" or acknowledged. Therefore, I still mistrust the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. I assume that these lines are used to exploit our forms of thinking: that is why they have to be avoided. (Haws, 2005: 9).

As I read, the Hungry Tide can both provoke reflection on the geopolitics and ecology of the island, and trigger self-reflection on the priority of "non-fictional" media. Ghosh's (2005:72) portrayal of Sundarbans' "watery maze" in The Hungry Tide has several items to add to the philosophy of island studies as it provides an enduring and complex answer to questions which ought to be the center of our essential metadiscoursal: What is an island? What are the definitions and ideals of the islands in diverse areas of community, history, politics and academia? How do we characterize the relationship between the islands' "truth" and their different textual representations? What chances are these images privileged? These problems must be discussed in the central sector of island studies.

The Hungry Tide allows one to recognize that the human perception of an island or a community of islands relies on a set of geographical, expression and material influences. In this way, this new book unwittingly adds to the discovery of the interdisciplinary capacity of island since it reveals the degree to which given island or archipelago is not a task within any specific disciplinary system. The Hungry Tide might cause readers to learn about the settling of citizens on islands in different ways. It criticizes the notion of belonging to the islands now defined by British colonization. This is particularly important to the theoretical work of island research, since the field attempts to establish a complex language to explain the different forms in which individuals and communities may conceptualize and express their perceptions of and in unique islands.

Any connexon to position is often rendered and susceptible to transformation. Though Nirmal's "A place is what you make of it" dictate that people have agency in terms of their climate, the representation of the "terrain 's aggression" in Sundarbans recalls that in the final analysis, we may read but we do not own or influence the places in which we reside.

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