Fear and Love in the Tide Country:
Affect, Environment, and Encounters
in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide**

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Abstract

This paper examines Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004) to explore Ghosh's dramatization of the affective impacts of a specific environment on local subjects, and the role cosmopolitan subjects play in translating those affects into knowable forms through their embodied and affective encounters with the local. My investigation draws upon recent theories of affect—negotiating between constructive and deconstructive views—and places the discussion in a framework of eco-cosmopolitan connections. By invoking the coexistence of the affects of fear and love, I seek to move beyond the concept of the uncanny, exploring affect both as emotions and intensity generated by the socio-ecological conditions of the wetlands. I take the affective encounters between the locals and the cosmopolitans as a relational medium through which modes of feeling and knowing on the part of cosmopolitan subjects can be transformed. The uncanny of the environment experienced by the local can also be translated into accessible forms through this medium, bringing into our sensory ken the slow violence that is far away and out of sight and thereby enabling ethical actions.

Keywords

affect, fear, love, the uncanny, eco-cosmopolitanism, the Sundarbans, slow violence, ecology

In his *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Rob Nixon calls upon writers and activists to engage in a consciousness-raising project in the face of environmental injustice by evoking our sense of apprehension for the insidious violence that lurks in the environment:

> Writer-activists can help us apprehend threats imaginatively that remain imperceptible to the senses, either because they are geographically remote, too vast or too minute in scale, or are played out across a time span that exceeds the instance of observation or even the physiological life of the human observer. In a world permeated by insidious, yet unseen or imperceptible violence, imaginative writing can help make the unapparent appear, making it accessible and tangible by humanizing drawn-out threats inaccessible to the immediate senses. Writing can challenge perceptual habits that downplay the damage slow violence inflicts and bring into imaginative focus apprehensions that elude sensory corroboration. The narrative imaginings of writer-activists may thus offer us a different kind of witnessing: of sights unseen. (15)

For Nixon, environmental hazards are often played out in a slow and protracted manner, void of immediate spectacular visuality and beyond our sensory ken. The challenges of this slow violence lie mainly in our habitual numbness to the dangers in the environment, which evolve so slowly and imperceptibly that we lose our sensitivity for ethical responses and necessary social actions. But not all of us are oblivious to forms of slow violence to the same degree. Nixon argues that sensory responses to the slow violence of the environment vary according to viewing subjects' positions and their temporal and spatial distances from environmental threats. Privileged visual positions are often occupied by those who are far away from the direct impacts and outcomes of slow violence. These empowered perspectives are codified as normative ways of seeing, obscuring those visual positions subjected to the insidious threats of the environment more immediately. Unlike the former, the latter positions are able to respond to such threats with apprehension, which Nixon defines as "perception, emotion, and action." Because apprehension is essential for ethical reactions to the slow violence of the environment, the "normative ways of seeing" need to be challenged, and those who occupy privileged perspectives have to become affectively connected with those who bear witness to and suffer from the imperceptible dangers of the environment. Nixon believes that the affective distance

between the privileged (who are unable or unwilling to see and feel) and the poor (whose apprehension of environmental hazards is often discounted by the dominant structure of feelings) can be minimized by scientific testimonies, as well as the narrative imaginings of writer-activists, which render visible and tangible all states of apprehension such as "trepidations, forebodings, shadows cast by the invisible" (15). All of these are necessary for prompting response and action in the pursuit of environmental justice.

Nixon's concern for unseen evils lurking in the environment and the role imaginative writings play in meeting these challenges resonates with the work of Amitav Ghosh, who, in his recently published nonfictional book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), also contemplates the role literature, especially novels, plays in representing the insidious presence of dangers created by climate change. If "slow" is the keyword Nixon uses to accentuate the stealthy and long-lasting nature of environmental deterioration, the term "uncanny" is used by Ghosh to delineate the affective impact that occurs when the environment we are familiar with suddenly wreaks havoc at the least expected moments of our social lives.

Ghosh specifically uses "uncanny" in the Freudian and Heideggerian senses to refer to two environmental events in which non-human forces intruded unexpectedly, begging for recognition. The first incident is described in Ghosh's first-hand account of a tornado that suddenly formed and struck the northern part of New Delhi on March 17, 1978 (*The Great Derangement* 11-15); the second is an episode drawn from a folk epic about the Sundarbans—the wetlands setting of *The Hungry Tide*—in which the tiger demon, Dokkhin Rai, encounters and locks eyes with the boy protagonist, Dukhey (29). For Ghosh these are moments of recognition, when one realizes "the urgent proximity of nonhuman presences" that may have their own purposes of which we are ignorant. Ghosh considers this sudden recognition of a nonhuman presence an experience of the uncanny inherent in climate change:

> In the tiger stories of the Sundarbans, as in my experience of the tornado, there is . . . an irreducible element of mystery. But what I am trying to suggest is perhaps better expressed by a different word, one that recurs frequently in translations of Freud and Heidegger. That word is *uncanny*—and it is indeed with uncanny accuracy that my experience of the tornado is evoked. . . .
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> It is surely no coincidence that the word *uncanny* has begun to be used, with ever greater frequency, in relation to climate change.

> Writing of the freakish events and objects of our era, Timothy Morton
> asks, "Isn't it the case, that the effect delivered to us in the
> [unaccustomed] rain, the weird cyclone, the oil slick is something
> uncanny?" George Marshall writes, "Climate change is inherently
> uncanny: Weather conditions, and the high-carbon lifestyles that are
> changing them, are extremely familiar and yet have now been given a
> new menace and uncertainty." (30; emphases in original)

That climate change is inherently uncanny implicates a time before climate change
when the relation between humans and the nonhuman was putatively homely, a time
that has since been disrupted and unsettled by the environment increasingly "acting"
weird. In "The Uncanny," Freud illuminates the idea of the uncanny through
elaborating on the term "*heimlich*" (homely) and its opposite, "*unheimlich*"
(unhomely) (220). In Freud's understanding, *heimlich* suggests, on the one hand, the
state of belonging to the house and the family, or a place free of ghostly influence,
something that is familiar, friendly, and intimate; on the other hand, it also evokes the
opposite idea of the *unheimlich*: that which is supposed to be concealed and kept out
of sight but has come to light ("The Uncanny" 224-25). The state of homeliness can
turn unhomely when what is supposed to be intimate, comfortable, or companionable
suddenly turns against us, becoming strange and rebellious, or when what is supposed
to be hidden—the will and consciousness that lie in the nonhuman worlds—comes to
light. In the human-nonhuman relation, the source of comfort and homeliness on
humans' part derives mainly from the secured inertness of the environment. When
the environment suddenly comes alive, gaining a force and will of its own, pressing
the human to recognize this other being, it constitutes an uncanny experience.

Importantly, Ghosh reminds us that the uncanny that derives from the sense of
the environment having its own will is the result of human activities: "the freakish
weather events of today, despite their radically non-human nature, are nonetheless
animated by cumulative human actions. . . . They are the mysterious work of our own
hands returning to haunt us in unthinkable shapes and forms" (*The Great
Derangement* 32).Thus, the affective impact of the uncanny not only forces us to
recognize nonhuman agency, but to face the ingrained connectivity between the
whimsicality of the environment and the human world. Ghosh especially underlines
the role of human colonization in bringing about the uncanny. According to Ghosh,
the consequence of climate change and the eruption of the uncanny often takes place
at locations where human settlements were established. The selection of sites for such
settlements were based upon a "modern" world view that sees catastrophe as un-

modern as well as improbable and takes "proximity to the water [as] a sign of affluence and education; a beachfront location [as] a status symbol; an ocean view [as an addition to] the value of real estate" (*The Great Derangement* 36). Cities of the world established following this logic often ignore the danger implicit in waterfronts and may incur unthinkable disasters.[1]

Some of Ghosh's observations of uncanny environmental events and critiques of colonial spatial management can be found in his novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004). As a novelist, Ghosh is famous for setting his cosmopolitan protagonists on journeys to foreign lands or alien cultures, leading to various dramas of cultural encounters between cosmopolitan subjects and local inhabitants.[2] Such is also the case in Ghosh's fictional rendition of uncanny environmental events in *The Hungry Tide*. The novel explores the way colonial history governs the formation of the Sundarbans wetlands, delineates the encounters between the Indian diaspora and the local fishermen, and unfolds a narrative of eco-cosmopolitan connections between human and nonhuman worlds. The textual representations of the Sundarbans resonate with Ghosh's persisting concerns with the global mobility of the Indian diaspora and extend the significance of the "local" to an ecosystem that is the basis of a renewed cosmopolitan imagination, one that is akin to what Ursula Heise has termed an "eco-

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[1] Ghosh points out that while the old port cities of the world are situated away from waterfronts and sheltered from natural disasters caused by the ocean, cities that were brought into being by processes of colonization, such as New York, Mumbai, Kolkata, Hong Kong, and Singapore were established to take advantage of the ocean view—a colonial vision of the world that disregards the environmental risks. He considers such spatial governmentality a great derangement inviting unthinkable disasters. See *The Great Derangement*, 36-44.

[2] One of the Indian writers in English who emerged in the wake of the Salman Rushdie phenomenon, Ghosh became popular in the 1980s and has quickly become a prominent figure among his generation of Indian writers in English. Since his early childhood, Ghosh has travelled extensively around the world. His broad outlook can be detected through his characters' global sojourns and the alien cultures their journeys bring them to. Holding a PhD in Social Anthropology from Oxford University, Ghosh displays a deep interest in culture, history, and the art of storytelling. His works are heavily researched, providing an in-depth understanding of the social and political history of the various countries and cultures that serve as the backgrounds of his fictions. In recent years, Ghosh's ongoing concern with time and history veered toward a concern for climate change, its impact on the future of humans, and the challenges climate events pose for the art of fiction. *The Hungry Tide* (2004) was his attempt to fictionalize the interlocking issues of colonialism, ecology, and the subaltern. He manages to examine them in a familiar framework of the encounters between cosmopolitan figures and local people in a specific setting whose ecological problems are intertwined with colonial policy and forebode climate change. The novel predates *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), a nonfictional work that examines the consequences of global warming and climate change. He also reflects upon the limits and potential of fiction in imagining other forms of human existence that can cope with the scale and violence of climate change.

cosmopolitan consciousness" in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet.* But Ghosh's novel complicates Heise's mode of consciousness by focusing on the affective connectivity between differently situated subjects, a micro-approach left out of Heise's conceptual framework.

The term "cosmopolitanism" as used by critics in the 1990s, such as Homi Bhabha, Pheng Cheah, Walter Mignolo, and Bruce Robbins, to name just a few, points to "a way of imagining forms of belonging beyond the local and the national" (Heise 6). While the term works to identify the rapid growth of global impacts upon specific locales in the age of globalization, it has been criticized by those invested in localism and place-based imagination.[3] Heise takes the concept of cosmopolitanism out of the context of debates over nationalism and globalization to serve as a basis for a theory of environmental connectivity, which stresses not a sense of place, but the connection between various natural and cultural places and the ways in which the human world affects the processes of connection. She coined the term "eco-cosmopolitanism" to introduce a bio-spherical connectedness beyond the circumference of human social experience and to establish linkages between "animate and inanimate networks of influence and exchange" (Heise 60-61).[4]

Heise's concept helps extend our environmental allegiances beyond the local and the national and encourages us "to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary 'imagined communities' of both human and nonhuman kinds" (61). But within this framework of eco-cosmopolitan interconnectedness, the mechanism of the connecting process requires more specific methods of examination. The mainstay of Heise's arguments lies in the promotion of a sense of the planet enabled by facilities of global connectedness, such as media, technology, transportation, and migration. This macro scheme of connecting networks relies more on cognition facilitated by modern technologies, which runs the risk of flattening our planetary consciousness and overlooking the operation of affects in forging an imagined community of the planet.

It is here that Nixon and Ghosh, two writers working from the perspective of

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[3] Critics from this camp include but are not limited to the following: Arif Dirlik, "Place-Based Imagination;" Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World*; and Ali Mirsepassi and Frederick Weaver, editors, *Localizing Knowledge in a Globalizing World*. See Heise (6-7).

[4] Alexa Weik provides a reading of *The Hungry Tide* informed by Heise's concepts. Weik takes "eco-cosmopolitanism" as a conceptual frame to investigate the connections between the global and the local, human and environment. She refers in particular to Yi-Fu Tuan's concept of topophilia to emphasize the attachment one holds to one's local place. My reading moves in a line similar to Weik's but seeks to elaborate on the complex operation of affects between agents situated at different positions within the bio-spherical links.

environmentalism of the poor, can contribute to further theorization of eco-cosmopolitanism. Their takes on "apprehension" of the environment and "the uncanny" of environmental events both point to the shock that remains far from and inaccessible to those who are well-connected within globalizing networks. These extraordinary affective experiences can be fruitful entry points to investigate the jagged connectivity between the local and the global, as well as human and nonhuman species, because they shed light on the nuanced methods of affective transmission that forge planetary consciousness from the bottom up.

But instead of taking the uncanny *per se* as my conceptual basis to examine *The Hungry Tide*, a critical practice already performed by critics such as Pramod K. Nayar, I intend to scrutinize the two-pronged affects implicated in the experience of the uncanny. The discussion above shows that the uncanny denotes an entanglement of the homely and the unhomely. A positive emotional state of belonging and intimacy, the homely generates love; whereas the unhomely, a state elicited by the sinister exposure of what had been previously concealed in a familiar environment, causes fear. My reading of the novel focuses upon Ghosh's delineation of the affects generated by the uncanny environment of the wetlands, which is familiar, therefore eliciting love, attachment, and connectivity, but also strange and frightening, thus giving rise to fear and apprehension. This bifurcated analysis allows careful examination of the two affects from a culturally informed perspective and provides a conceptual frame to observe the transmission of affect—namely, the processes of connection—between local and cosmopolitan subjects and human and nonhuman worlds. The shift from examining the uncanny state of the environment to tracing the dynamic becoming of the affects of fear and love means to move beyond a descriptive delineation of a place where one finds oneself both "at home" and "not at home" (Nayar 89), thereby highlighting affect's dynamic potential as an effective catalyst for ethical responses and social actions with regard to the environment.

Theorizing Affect

My examination of affect in relation to the environment rests on two seemingly contradictory assumptions that characterize recent theorizations of affect. On one hand, according to Deleuze (via the exposition of Massumi), affect is a preconscious intensity of the body that cannot be fully expressed by language; it prepares the body for action in a certain circumstance by infolding the context, giving the qualitative experience of the body (such as feelings) a quantitative dimension of intensity (Massumi 30). Since affect is a preconscious or nonconscious bodily intensity unable

to be named by language, it is often left unexplored by rational thought and intellectual models. Yet, the non-socially produced residue and excess of corporeal intensity, as Clare Hemmings claims, "constitutes the very fabric of our being" (549). In the contemporary conceptualization of affect, this residue or excess manifests itself as visceral forces responding to the environment in an automatic way, beneath, beyond, in excess of, and alongside consciousness and signification.

Furthermore, given that affect is unformed and unstructured, it is not a self-contained feeling, but the forces of encounter "born in *in-between-ness*" (Gregg and Seigworth 2); it is the *process* by which forces of intensity are transmitted between bodies. In Teresa Brennan's words: "The transmission of affect means that we are not self-contained in terms of our energies. There is no secure distinction between the 'individual' and the 'environment'" (6). This quality places affect in a dynamic, ongoing process of transmission between bodies and the environment (human or nonhuman). Eric Shouse further elaborates on the ways the transmission of affect brings bodies and environment together: "The transmission of affect is about the way that bodies affect one another. When your body infolds a context and another body (real or virtual) is expressing intensity in that context, one intensity is infolded into another. By resonating with the intensity of the contexts it infolds, the body attempts to ensure that it is prepared to respond appropriately to a given circumstance" (Shouse n. pag.). Affect is thus effective in triggering social and political actions that respond to the environment. Whereas moral judgment and cognition might bring us to recognize the importance of certain actions, without the sense of urgency prompted by corporeal intensity, one might not take action right away. As Shouse argues, following Silvan Tomkins, the affect mechanism, like the pain mechanism, amplifies the body's awareness of external stimuli and brings the body to act immediately (n. pag.).

In the meantime, affect can also be conceptualized more broadly, as an umbrella term that covers affect (as pre-personal intensity), emotion, and feeling. It can be understood as straddling the public and private, collective and individual. Unlike affect (as pre-personal intensity), a feeling is, as suggested by Shouse, *personal and biographical*; its sensation depends upon previous experiences, which help label and interpret such a feeling (n. pag.). Emotions, on the other hand, are the social expression of feelings: "An emotion is the projection/display of a feeling. Unlike feelings, the display of emotion can be either genuine or feigned" (n. pag.). When seen in this light, affect—now manifested as an emotion—is a historically situated cultural construct emerging out of a local condition. That is to say, emotions are socially constructed; they are the product of our cultural context, which guides us

toward what to feel and how to label our feeling. In that sense, emotions, as William Reddy claims, have a history.[5]

My take on the current theories of affect seeks to negotiate between the concept of affect as pre-personal intensity and that of social emotions shaped by specific cultures. More specifically, I attempt to encompass the constructionist perspective of emotions as culturally constructed and historically grounded, and the deconstructive view of affective intensity, experienced as an affective excess of a certain emotion that emerges during the encounters between differently situated social subjects. This approach considers affect both as a collective emotive process that is culturally conditioned (without foreclosing emotions' malleability), and as a singular intensity of affect transmitted between social bodies. That is to say, affect (as emotions) is both culturally generated and collectively defined, and maintains the potentiality and intensity of affect that either moves between bodies or functions as a basis for alternative modes of knowing outside language and rational thinking. Accordingly, what starts as a visceral, fleeting response to the environment might be coded and constructed by the local culture into a prevalent feeling and common emotion, which is the community's strategy for aiding the individual to cope with the demands of the environment. These emotions are, nevertheless, not without affective intensity when social bodies are engaged with relational encounters. In the public domain, the affective surplus of certain emotions can be channeled and manipulated. During individual encounters, the affective excess of certain emotions constitutes the force of intensity that works to connect differently situated subjects, activate alternative modes of knowing, and instigate ethical actions. In the following section, I will start my investigation with a brief survey of the history of neocolonial ecological projects in the region of the Sundarbans, followed by examinations of the novel's depictions of environment, affect, and encounters.

The Struggle between Endangered Species and the Subaltern

The Hungry Tide takes as its setting the Sundarbans—an area of wetlands in the

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[5] In *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotion*, William Reddy draws upon research on cognitive psychology, anthropology, and speech act theories to trace the change of emotion in France from 1700 to 1850. By examining the ways in which emotions shape the formation of history and how different social orders facilitate or constrain emotional life, Reddy constructs a theory of emotions that both contributes to our understanding of historical change and endows a historical dimension to the social formation of emotion.

Bay of Bengal composed of an immense labyrinth of tiny islands and entangled waterways—to explore the complex and traumatic histories of settlements in this region, an environment that proves to be hostile in all senses of the word. The hostility of the environment points not only to the barren land from which the settlers can only eke out a meager living, but also the threats of predators such as tigers, crocodiles, snakes, and sharks lurking around their habitats, and the natural disasters of cyclones and storms that routinely plague the region. Moreover, the settlers have been consistently subjected to neocolonial maneuvers, manifested in the proposal and implementation of various projects over the years for development and conservation, which have jeopardized the settlers' ability to establish residence in the region. The Sundarbans is renowned for its unique ecosystem and biodiversity, providing home to numerous rare and endangered flora and fauna. Its mangrove forest is the only one in the world inhabited by the Bengal tiger, and the saline tidal rivers breed dolphins, crocodiles, crabs, and other species seen only in this region. Yet, despite the abundant species and geological diversity, the Sundarbans, unlike famous natural resorts such as the Serengeti, is in fact quite dull in terms of visual experience. As Ghosh admits, it will take a prolonged stay in the region for tourists to really see the beauty of the landscape.[6]

The contradiction between tourists looking for spectacle but having nothing to see at first sight and the incredible beauty that unfolds over a prolonged period of time through slow and careful appreciation registers the tide country's layered topographical and complex biological qualities. With its lack of spectacle, the Sundarbans can easily be taken as a virgin land waiting for cultivation and development. Nonetheless, the profuse wildlife hidden underneath the surface calls out for conservation projects to preserve the rare and endangered species. In both visual practices, as Laura White argues, human existence is excluded from the perspectives of the developers as well as the conservationists (515). This mode of seeing and knowing serves as the epistemological ground for various discursive constructions and nomenclature for the region, ranging from "virgin islands" by land developers (Jalais 2), to "a beautiful garden" by tourist literature (Jalais 3), to a

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[6] Ghosh describes the Sundarbans' lack of tourist value in an interview: "For the ordinary tourist, the Sundarbans doesn't offer much. You will never see the tigers; there is no wildlife to be seen. Sometimes you may see a crocodile, a few birds, but it is not like going to the Serengeti or some resort; it offers nothing to tourists as such. But at the same time, it is a place of incredible beauty and presence. To appreciate it tourists would have to be there for quite a long time—for three or four days at least—because the beauty of it reveals itself very slowly" ("The Chronicle" 40). See also Laura White's reading of the paragraph as part of an examination of the multiple modes of knowing provided by the novel ("Novel Vision" 513-14).

"wasteland" by the British colonialists (Jalais 3), to a "World Heritage Site" for conserving the Royal Bengal Tiger by the government and international conservation organizations (Jalais 5). In the meantime, it justifies development and conservation projects and proposals built upon the extermination or removal of the impoverished settlers who have been living around this region throughout recorded history.

Competing claims to the wetlands by conservationists and developers have caused disastrous outcomes for the poor fishermen who live on the fringe of the mangrove forests. In the 1970s, then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi launched a conservation project, Project Tiger, which showcased the conservation of the endangered Royal Bengal Tiger in order to put India abreast of advanced countries. The project, in Rajender Kaur's words, "was . . . a means of winning international approval and raising India's profile and diplomatic strength as an enlightened nation" (129). Since the Sundarbans happens to be one of the most populous habitats of the Royal Bengal tiger, the project placed the region into the limelight of international wildlife conservation. While it was meant to incorporate India into the ranks of modern nations, the project ineluctably sent the human inhabitants of the area into oblivion and erased their images from public memory.[7]

The Hungry Tide can be seen as Ghosh's attempt to tell the human stories silenced by the dominant narratives underpinning the aforementioned environmental policies. To challenge the narratives of an empty or virgin land mobilized by developers and conservationists, Ghosh focuses upon the impoverished settlers, unveiling the palimpsestic histories of exploitation and suppression that have plagued the region, as well as the unhomely natural landscape that makes human settlement a constant struggle. To fully display their complex relations with the dominant regime, and the topography and ecology in which they have to eke out a living, Ghosh pays special attention to their affective and sensory responses to the environment, human or nonhuman. Ghosh's ongoing concern with the significant role cosmopolitan

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[7] The lopsided policy favoring the rights of the wildlife over those of the poor led to disastrous results. In 1979, former refugees who fled from eastern Bengal (East Pakistan at the Partition of India in 1947) and came to settle on the island of Morichjhāpi in the Sundarbans under the false promise of the Communist government were violently evicted and massacred by forest guards on the grounds of protecting the forest (an event Ghosh incorporates into *The Hungry Tide*). In 2000, the government proposed to set up a nuclear power plant on the island of Jharkhali, which was subsequently revoked by the court; in 2002, the supreme court of India ruled in favor of the capitalist investment on the wetlands and ordered the eviction of fishermen from the island of Jambudwip to make way for a mega-project, proposed by the Sahara Group of India and approved by the West Bengal government, to build "a modern tourism blockbuster," including a tiger breeding center (Jalais 2). All the while, the region was under consideration for becoming a World Heritage Site by the international society.

subjects play in the struggle of local, marginalized subjects against neocolonial projects further complicates the narrative of struggle. He weaves a story of manifold affective encounters between the local settlers and the cosmopolitan outsiders, creating an interactive milieu where alternative knowledge and affective testimonies can be achieved.

Earlier critical attempts to tackle the exchanges between the locals and the cosmopolitans can be found in Terri Tomsky's "Amitav Ghosh's Anxious Witnessing and the Ethics of Action in *The Hungry Tide*" (2016) and Alexa Weik's "The Home, the Tide, and the World: Eco-cosmopolitan Encounters in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*" (2007). Tomsky initiates an affective reading of Ghosh's novel by asserting affect's ability to produce a new form of power and knowledge: "Ghosh recognizes the productive capabilities of affect and bodily sensations. Unlike traditional enlightenment thought, where emotions are often negated as 'a sign of the primitive,' Ghosh's turn to affect presents a rethinking of modernist and rationalist forms and an attempt to move towards new forms of power and knowledge" (59). For Tomsky, "the affective excess of other histories, experiences, and places" can fracture one's protected space and modes of knowing (62). Tomsky's affective reading focuses upon altruism, the love for others, which is evoked in the encounters between the novel's cosmopolitan subjects and the local settlers, resulting in an affective excess that moves the former from their rooted sociopolitical position to becoming empathetic for the plight of the latter. The pattern of reading Tomsky offers foregrounds the cosmopolitan intellectual's affective response to subaltern suffering and sketches the ensuing ethical actions that manifest their transformation. Yet Tomsky bypasses the environmental threats that underpin the plight of the settlers and overlooks the affect of the refugee settlers as they are recorded in Nirmal's diary and represented in Kanai's narrative.

In contrast, Alexa Weik offers a reading of the novel from an eco-cosmopolitan perspective, which expands the connection between the global and the local to include the relation between the human and the nonhuman—a concept advanced by Ursula Heise, as I have mentioned above. In doing so, Weik takes an affective turn by invoking the concept of topophilia, as proposed by Yi-Fu Tuan, to address the sentiment between people and place and people's affective bond with places far away from one's home (Weik 122; Tuan 113). As a sentiment for a certain place, topophilia suggests an emotional identification with places, emphasizing its force of connectivity to a stable place. Although Weik's cosmopolitan critique integrates ecological consciousness as part of a local attachment, its examination of the linkage between ecology and sentiment for places remains stable and one-sided, failing to

grasp the Sundarbans settlers' shifting courses of navigation through an affective landscape as precarious as its corresponding wetland topography.

In my view, the novel is Ghosh's critical response to environmental policies that favor endangered species over the livelihood of lower caste settlers. Hence, the environment of the Sundarbans wetlands, including its topographical particularity, ecological specificity, and the sociopolitical policies that seek to manage and capitalize upon the wetland resources, has to be taken into consideration when engaging in an affective reading of the novel. That is to say, the settlers' affective responses to the geographical and geological environments and the attendant sociopolitical domination are also important elements for an affect-oriented examination of the text. The uncanniness of a place such as the Sundarbans, I suggest, will elicit entangled feelings far less cohesive than topophilia. In dealing with the encounters between the local and the cosmopolitan, Tomsky focuses on Nirmal and Kanai—two cosmopolitan intellectuals who sojourn in the tide country at different times. She examines the former's encounter and obsession with the female refugee Kusum, and the latter's encounter with and reading of his uncle Nirmal's diary. I will broaden the scope of affective examination to incorporate the settlers' affective relation with their environment, scrutinizing the way in which these affective intensities are managed or coded in the local culture. In the meantime, given that affect is not a self-contained emotion, but an intensity to affect and be affected, the transmission of affect in the relational networks between differently situated social agents will be closely explored to trace its impact on cosmopolitan subjects in reconstructing their modes of sensing and knowing.

Encounters between the Cosmopolitans and the Locals

To attend to the theme of multiple encounters, Ghosh introduces a specific narrative formula that braids the ebb and flow of two different tides of actions and events to correspond to the topography of the tide country. The two intertwined narrative strands unfold by turns the synchronic actions of the two major characters on their respective journeys across the Sundarbans. One narrative focuses on the events surrounding the Seattle-based Indian American cetologist Piyali Roy, who comes to the tide country to conduct field work on a specific species of river dolphin called Irrawaddy dolphins, also known as *Orcaella brevirostris* by marine biologists. The other strand of narrative focuses on the journey taken by Kanai Dutt to visit his aunt Nilima in Lusibari, one of the islands in the Sundarbans. Kanai is the entrepreneur who runs a successful translation agency in New Delhi that allows him

to mix with "foreign diplomats, aid workers, charitable organizations, multinationals and the like" (*The Hungry Tide* 17). [8] These two characters are urban and cosmopolitan in their appearance and world views. Their journeys echo and intersect with Kanai's uncle Nirmal's and aunt Nilima's past history of migration and resettlement in the tide country. As Tomsky suggests, quoting Amanda Anderson, these four cosmopolitan subjects "all operate at a 'reflective distance from [their] original or primary cultural affiliations, [and possess] a broad understanding of other cultures and customs and a belief in universal humanity'" (56). They are related to the Bengal culture, but have no previous connection with the tide country. Each of them holds a specific cosmopolitan vision in their initial contacts with the settlers. Nirmal and Nilima relocate from Calcutta to Lusibari with an abstract belief in socialism; Kanai is versed in six languages and runs a translation agency serving transnational capitalism and his belief in modernization; Piya is part of the Indian diaspora and a global traveler who is influenced by scientific rationalism. These world views and grand narratives, however, prove to be insufficient when the cosmopolitan characters try to make sense of the destitute social conditions of people in this region. Piya's rational thinking and the scientific precision behind her ecological concerns are challenged by the illiterate fisherman Fokir's hybrid feelings for the ecology and environment of the tide country; Kanai's urban smugness and intellectual hubris alienate him from the subaltern culture. Nirmal and Nilima's Marxist class beliefs fail to account for the plight and cultural diversity of rural Bengal.

Piya and Kanai's journeys involve the stories of several encounters with the locals. Piya meets the illiterate fisherman Fokir, the son of a victim of the Morichjhāpi massacre, with whom she quickly forms a bond based upon their intuitive mutual trust and their shared concern for the dolphins. In the Kanai plot line, it is Fokir's mother, Kusum, who serves as the pivot of a few different narratives. Kanai was invited by his aunt Nilima to receive a notebook that his deceased uncle Nirmal left for him. In the Kanai-Nirmal plot, the absent presence of Kusum embodies the fate of the impoverished people living and moving around the tide country. Kusum was the daughter of a local fisherman who perished in an attack by a Bengal tiger. The family once lived on one of the islands in the tide country, but after her father's death, Kusum's mother was sold by a human trafficker to a nearby town. Kusum escaped from the Sundarbans to try to find her mother in the town; eventually she got married, gave birth to a son, and found her mother. Soon her luck ran out and her mother

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8　Subsequent citations from this work are marked as *HT* in the main text.

passed away, while her husband died in a train accident. She followed the march of the people who headed east to resettle in the tide country and finally joined the crowd to claim the island of Morichjhãpi, where she was eventually killed in the massacre.[9] Layers of accounts of these encounters with Kusum unfold in Kanai's memory, through his aunt Nilima's recollections, and more importantly, through his uncle Nirmal's journal. The journal Kanai's uncle bequeathed him recorded Nirmal's encounter with Kusum in 1979, when he witnessed the refugee settlers establishing their community on the island of Morichjhãpi only to be decimated and evicted by the West Bengal Left Front government under the pretext of protecting the forest and the tiger reservation. Nilima's recollections of Kusum as a teen back in 1970 and a mother in 1978 place her in a broader context of the collective lives of the women in the Sundarbans. Kanai first met 15-year-old Kusum when he was 10 at his aunt and uncle's settlement on the island of Lusibari. They developed an inter-caste bond. But the friendship was cut short because Kusum suddenly disappeared from the island.

Through Kusum's tumultuous life story, Ghosh offers a glimpse of the history of the dispossessed who are out of place in an unhomely place. In the novel, Ghosh lists a series of failed colonization projects in the Sundarbans to highlight the impossibility of human colonialization here. Not only do the predators threaten the everyday life of the fishermen, but with the tide rising and ebbing, the islands cannot serve as stable and secure grounds for a home. But without a place to go and no land to claim, the refugees have no choice but to remain at the Sundarbans. In this uncanny space, where the refugees are both at home and not at home, they develop specific emotional responses toward the place. Fear and love, as I mentioned briefly above, are the two cultural emotions that the islanders on this hostile ground harbor for the land. On the surface, these emotions are contradictory, but they are in fact complementary emotions that sustain their difficult identification with this uncanny

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[9] The fictional account of this massacre recorded in Kanai's uncle's journal is based upon a historical incident in the aftermath of the 1947 Partition of India. After the partition, Pakistan was divided into two parts with India in the middle. East Pakistan, later Bangladesh, was created for the Bangla-speaking Muslim majority, which led to the influx of Hindus from East Pakistan into India's West Bengal region. The Sundarbans was also divided into two parts. 40% of the mangrove-covered wetlands were incorporated into East Pakistan territory. The refugees who fled the civil war from East Pakistan were mainly lower caste Hindus, who after being placed in a concentration camp by the government for more than 20 years, surrounded by cultures and languages they were unable to adjust to, decided to move to Morichjhãpi, an island in the Indian part of the wetland, to build a homeland of their own. Because the Indian part of the Sundarbans was declared a tiger reserve in 1973 to preserve the Royal Bengal tigers, the refugees' settlement on the island was considered a legal transgression. The police eviction started with besiege and blockage, which led to a massacre (Anand 29-33).

home.

Fear

Given the hazardous environment in which the settlers must struggle to survive, fear is the predominant feeling that permeates the temporal and spatial experiences of the tide country in the past and present. But the settlers' fear regarding the social and natural environment, I argue, is not a case of ecophobia as Simon Estok has defined it, but a dubious emotion that signifies the settlers' ambiguous agency of powerlessness. Ecophobia is understood by Estok as "an irrational and groundless fear or hatred of the natural world" which is fused with real and imagined uncontrollability and unpredictability (4). This pathological fear of nature is symptomatic of the anxiety of Western humanism in its effort to rein in and domesticate an unruly nature that constantly threatens to break out of human control. In Ghosh's tide country, fear of the environment is not a phobic reaction to an unpredictable nature outside the human world, but an ordinary affect already accounted for not just in the settlers' cultural imaginaries but also in their domestic practices.

The settlers are often driven by hunger to risk their lives hunting and fishing in territory either infested by tigers, crocodiles, and sharks or susceptible to the sudden rise of tides and storms. Under such circumstances, fear is a necessary component of survival. The affect of fear comes in various forms, ranging from a visceral response to the environment to a chronic, normalized social emotion. As an affective intensity, fear serves as a warning signal of the proximity of the otherness of nature. On the social level, fear is manifested as an overwhelming powerlessness that is needed to maintain the precarious existence of the local community. Furthermore, fear of the uncanny environment, which the villagers have a hard time living in yet are unable to live without, is accompanied by love for the nature that both provides and deprives, shelters and endangers the settlers. Ghosh's text brings our attention to the ambivalent coexistence of fear and love, both as affective intensity and prominent social emotions, by foregrounding the local cultural forms that document and codify the complex operation of the contradictory affects.

Nirmal's diary and Kanai's childhood encounter with Kusum both register a Bon Bibi myth, a belief system that serves both as a survival guide for the locals in the harsh environment and a broad ecological conception resulting from layers of cultural encounters in this region throughout the millennia. Bon Bibi is the merciful god who defeated Dokkhin Rai, the demon king who used to rule the jungles of the

tide country and harbored a hatred for humankind. After she won the battle, Bon Bibi decided to share the tide country with Dokkhin Rai. One half of the territory there remained a wilderness for Dokkhin Rai to rule, while Bon Bibi ruled the other half of the country and turned it into a safe place for human settlement. The myth can be seen as the locals' response to the danger and challenges posed by the unruly tide country, where the inhabitants are constantly facing the threats of cyclones, floods, crocodiles, sharks, and tigers. In the dramatic plot of the myth, a young orphaned boy, Dukhey, is abandoned by his companions on an island within Dokkhin Rai's territory. Before he falls prey to the tiger—the embodiment of the evil God—Dukhey calls on Bon Bibi and is brought to safety by her timely rescue. The message of the Bon Bibi myth is clear and simple: instead of promoting a human-centered decree of total conquest and domestication of the wilderness, the myth urges the acknowledgement of the territory of the dark force; that is, the *alterity* of nature needs to be respected by and is off limits to the human. Thus, the ability to accept the unpredictability of the wetland environment is a prerequisite for the settlers to claim the land as home. Speaking in terms of affect, the fear of nature's whimsicality and unpredictability is considered a legitimate feeling by the locals, which becomes part of their affective education. In the meantime, Ghosh unravels this local cultural practice through the eyes of the metropolitan outsiders to examine the transmission of affects between local and metropolitan subjects, and the ethical actions prompted by such affective witnessing.

In excavating the myth's potent affective transmission, Ghosh stages two scenes which accentuate the myth's affective strength to nudge cosmopolitan subjects from their inert relation with the natural environment into forming a renewed mode of sensing and "knowing" the environment. In Kanai's memory text, 10-year-old Kanai attends the annual stage performance of the *Jatra*,[10] which puts on stage the legend of Bon Bibi. The drama takes Kanai and the teenage Kusum on an emotional journey of fear and joy: despite the flaws of the production, "[the] *terror* he had felt when the demon charged Dukhey was real and immediate. . . . No less real were the tears of *joy* and gratitude that flowed from his eyes when Bon Bibi appeared at Dukhey's side" (*HT* 88; emphasis added). The dramatic performance is used in the region as a pedagogical medium to infuse the ecological thought of living with the *unnamable* as a necessary choice of life. But its affective impact is such that the outsiders, once positioned in the same visual trajectory, can "feel" and" know" like a local. The visuality of the play creates the sensory responses of fear (and joy) that allow Kanai

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[10] Jatras are the oral folk-tales of the Sundarbans. See Mukherjee (124-25).

to relive the feelings when, later, Kusum recounts the tiger's brutal attack on her father. It is as if Kanai, too, had been one of the villagers witnessing the gruesome event in which a man died as prey of a carnivore. Here Kanai's imagined pain and terror, evoked by Kusum's story, merges with his earlier sensory experience of terror in watching the play and paves the way for him to break the caste divide—"the most primeval divide in creation" (*HT* 76). This allows him to embrace her as a person—or even as a damsel in distress, since he is on the verge of developing a crush:

> Kusum's body had crumpled as she was telling this story, leaving her slumped against Kanai's shoulder, and he could feel her hair on his skin. Her story had caused an upwelling of emotion in him that constricted his throat; he wanted to fold her in his arms, to ward off her grief; he wanted to wipe away her tears; he wanted his body to become a buffer between her and the world. This was the most intense physical sensation he had ever experienced, this need to protect, to defend, to make *a bodily expression of his sympathy*. (*HT* 91; emphasis added)

Kanai's sympathy, though enabling a crossing of the gulf of caste, is compromised by the gender division in which Kusum's fear and plight are sexualized and turned into a trait of female vulnerability in Kanai's eyes; as a result, the sympathy Kanai harbors for Kusum returns to assert his own budding sense of masculine domination. The power of Kanai's sympathetic intervention dissolves, and the scene turns into a melodramatic cliché. Furthermore, because of Kusum's sudden disappearance from the tide country, the brief intersubjective encounter in which Kanai seems to be able to transcend his limited urban life experience and accept the local feelings and mindset is cut short before it leaves a permanent impression on his social cognition.

For Nirmal, fear of the environment is introduced in a more direct manner; he was brought to the scene of terror twice. Like Kanai, Nirmal has his share of encounters with the Bon Bibi myth and the dark force it ascribes to the landscape. After his reunion with Kusum, Nirmal follows Horen, a local elder and a family friend of Kusum, to the shore of Garjontola—an island where Kusum's father built a shrine to worship Bon Bibi. Before they set foot on the island where the proximity of the tiger is more palpable than on other islands, Horen admonishes Nirmal to *feel* the "fear" as a way to protect himself from harm: "'Tell me, Saar. . . . Do you feel the fear?'/ 'The fear?' I said. 'What do you mean, Horen? Why should I be afraid? Aren't you with me?' 'Because it's the fear that protects you, Saar; it's what keeps you alive. Without it the danger doubles'" (*HT* 202). Horen's emphasis on the importance of

feeling the fear goes against a predominant mode of sensing and knowing which takes fear as a negative feeling to be denied, dissipated, and overcome. For Horen, as well as the locals, fear is the bodily intensity that keeps one on one's toes with the environment, a warning mechanism against its threats. Its affective excess is already recognized and accounted for on a cognitive level to produce social actions that strive to protect the human and the tiger in the same breath. And since affect is not merely a self-contained emotion, but a bodily intensity that passes from one body to another, the affective intensity of Horen's fear is passed on to Nirmal without aesthetic mediation: ". . . I could see something out of the ordinary on his face—an alertness, a gravity, a sharpening of the eyes. The tension was of a kind that communicated itself readily: it didn't take long before I could say to Horen, truthfully, that I was just as afraid as he was" (202). While Horen's fear is an augmentation of a natural response to danger with due respect to the tiger's rights to its habitat, Nirmal's fear is the proof of his openness to a different mode of sensing and knowing the environment. With Nirmal, fear is a harbinger not of chaos and muddle, but of an acute sense of one's surroundings and an openness to nature and the alterity of the other's culture. It is a bridge for him to be cognitively aware of the hybrid cultural components of the Bon Bibi myth when it is sung by the old fisherman Horen; the entirety of the experience includes its rhythm of a Hindu *puja* and the content of Arabic invocations, spoken in a mixture of Bangla, Arabic, and Persian.

Interestingly, Nirmal's capability to empathize with others' feelings and his success in performing an "analogical transference between the 'imagined' emotion of the self and the 'real emotion of the other'" (Spandri 132) without requesting sentimental feedback—as in Kanai's case—actually stems from his marginal position in the Badabon Trust that Nilima founded. An incorrigible romantic idealist who lacks the ability to put his ideals into pragmatic social construction, Nirmal is superfluous to the community Nilima established on his behalf. But his superfluous existence also frees him from a limited focus on the welfare of one island, one community and enables him to contemplate the universal good of the tide country.[11] The poet in him remains untarnished because of his lack of social involvement, even if he has been silent as a writer throughout his years of relocation in the tide country.

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[11] Nilima, for example, is so dedicated to the everyday operation of the Badabon Trust that she refuses Kusum's request for help in providing medical supplies for the people in Morichjhāpi, for fear that it will anger the government, whose approval is fundamental to the survival of the Trust, and jeopardize the operation of the organization. Given the restriction of social resources, the Trust can sustain itself only by means of the support of the Forest Department. The reliance upon the government compromises the Trust's ability to form a coalition with settlers on other islands.

Tomsky argues that the *worldliness* of Nirmal's "anxious witnessing" of the massacre in Morihjhāpi is "underpinned by a fervent, empathic emoting" (59), namely the process in which an altruistic love is expressed as such through the affective intensity one experienced "by putting one's self in unfamiliar spaces, in proximity to the other" (59). I will push his argument further and suggest that what is behind his act of "anxious witnessing" is the mutual working of fear and love, which are Nirmal's complex affective responses to the emergence of a fragile, fleeting socialist community led by the consensus of the downtrodden.

Nirmal's encounter with Kusum and the group of refugees on the island of Morichjhāpi, who have built the community in an efficient and orderly way, jolts him out of his state of lethargy and expands his previous world view in which only Sir Daniel Hamilton can be the hero of social experiments:

> Such industry! Such diligence! Yet it was only a few weeks since they had come. Taking in these sights, I felt the onrush of a strange, heady excitement: suddenly it dawned on me that I was watching the birth of something new, something hitherto unseen. . . . I felt something changing within me; how astonishing it was that I, an aging, bookish schoolmaster, should live to see this, an experiment, imagined not by those with learning and power, but by those without. (141)

His passion for revolution, previously drifting, aimless, and almost extinguished, is now rekindled and refocused. The intensity of his love for this new world is channeled toward Kusum, who now becomes a love-object, a stand-in for a different India that he fervently wants to be a part of. Nirmal's love for this burgeoning world quickly turns into fear of its demise when the political reality looms against its flimsy, too-good-to-be-true existence. It is this fear of the disappearance of his love-object, literally and literarily, that provides the affective excess needed to prompt him into action—not courting, but writing. The beginning of his journal is sprinkled with accounts that register the impossible tension between the strong affective intensity of fear and its bursting creative energy as he waits for the violent event of the eviction to unfold:

> . . . I am afraid because I know that after the storm passes, the events that have preceded its coming will be forgotten. No one knows better than I how skillful the tide country is in silting over its past.
>
> There is nothing I can do to stop what lies ahead. But I was once

> a writer; perhaps I can make sure at least that what happened here
> leaves some trace, some hold upon the memory of the world. The
> thought of this, along with *the fear* that preceded it, has made it
> possible for me to do what I have not been able to for the last thirty
> years—to put my pen to paper again. (*HT* 58-59; emphasis added)

Even more powerful than the fear of the impending violent event is the fear of the oblivion the event is doomed to fall into. The intensity of the fear unclogs the writer's block he has suffered from for the last thirty years. His reference to Rilke's poem further captures the ambiguous power of the affect of fear: "beauty's nothing / but the start by *terror* we can hardly bear, / and we adore it because of the serene scorn / it could kill us with. . . "(*HT* 58; emphasis added). The passage from Rilke's poem vivifies the entangled affective correlations between the beauty-begetting fear and the irony that arises from the interaction between terrible events, strong affect, and powerful writing.

Nirmal bequeathed the journal to Kanai, the only heir in whom he could find a reader of this hidden history, but the journal's affective power and historical revelation only accounts for half of Kanai's transformation. The adult Kanai, despite his childhood encounter with the terror and pain of the locals, grows into an insufferable womanizer and arrogant outsider who peers down from the height of his urban, capitalist bourgeois mindset and dismisses local fishermen such as Fokir, Kusum's son. While Ghosh portrays Kanai as an indispensable cultural go-between, translating and negotiating between the world of Bengali culture, languages, and values and the globalized world of urban, metropolitan, diasporic hybrid culture, he also paints Kanai as a flawed character blind to the lifeworld of the local people. This is the reason why, despite his ability with languages, he is far from effective in accomplishing an intersubjective exchange with the locals.

The novel opens with Kanai on his way to Lusibari, a journey that brings him the chance to "see" the wetland again, this time through the aid of his uncle's account. In the process of navigating through his uncle's journal, the buried history of the 1979 massacre is revealed to the reader, while Kanai is engaged with the drama of the here and now. Unlike his childhood sympathy with Kusum's terror, Kanai displays no such affective bond with her son Fokir. On their trip to Garjontola, the same island where Nirmal was first taught to *feel* fear two decades ago, Fokir tries to prove to Kanai the vicinity of a tiger by means of the bodily sensation he experiences as fear. Like Horen, Fokir claims "that's how I know. . . . It's the fear that tells me" (*HT* 265). Yet, despite "the goosebumps bristling on the moist surface of Fokir's skin" that Fokir forces

Kanai to touch, he fails to *feel* his fear. Fear, as Kanai reflects, "was not . . . an instinct. It was something learned, something that accumulated in the mind through knowledge, experience and upbringing. Nothing was harder to share than another person's fear" (*HT* 266). Learned in a worldly sense, Kanai is insightful about the sensation of fear as a cultural construct produced by learning and experiences. His insight, however, is used as a pretext for him to explain away his incapacity to be affectively receptive to Fokir's feeling. One could argue that Kanai's lack of affective response to Fokir's feeling of fear is the result of his caste bias against Fokir, whom he regards, in Piya's opinion, as "a figure glimpsed through a rear-view mirror, a rapidly diminishing presence, a ghost from the perpetual past that was Lusibari" (*HT* 183). In fact, Kanai is torn between the awareness of his complicity with the outside world, which "had destroyed Fokir's village, burnt his home and killed his mother" (*HT* 270), and his inability to be affectively related to people like Fokir, whose means of existence he disapproves of. This rupture is finally sutured when he, like the boy Dukhey, is left alone on Garjontola to face the thing itself—the Bengal tiger. Before his eyes have confirmed the existence of the tiger, it is his body that reacts to the intensity of the environment. The sensation of fear comes before and beyond language:

> [H]is mind was swamped by a flood of pure sensation. The words he had been searching for, the euphemisms that were the source of his panic, had been replaced by the thing itself, except that without words it could not be apprehended or understood. It was an artifact of pure intuition, so real that the thing itself could not have dreamed of existing so intensely. (*HT* 272)

The affect of fear that is without words *roots* him, like the mud and the entangled webs of mangrove ventilators, putting him into the affective position of the locals: "his fear of tigers and crocodiles forc[ed] him to 'see himself' in a new and humbling light, stripping him of his false cosmopolitan superiority" (Goh 354).

Besides being an intensity that is able to affect and transform metropolitan subjects, the locals' fear can prompt social practices and become the basis of solidarity. When Nilima first came to Lusibari, she noticed a weird custom practiced by the local women, who were dressed as widows even if their husbands were still alive:

> Nilima noticed that a startlingly large proportion of the island's women

were dressed as widows. These women were easily identified because of their borderless white saris and their lack of adornment: no bangles or vermilion. . . . Making inquiries, she learned that in the tide country girls were brought up on the assumption that if they married, they would be widowed in their twenties—their thirties if they were lucky. *This assumption was woven, like a skein of dark wool, into the fabric of their lives*: when the menfolk went fishing it was the custom for their wives to change into the garments of widowhood. . . . It was as though they were trying to hold misfortune at bay by living through it over and over again. (*HT* 68; emphasis added)

Here, fear of the impending death of their husbands drove the women in the tide country to perform the ritualistic manifestation of their presumed widowhood so as to turn the fear of death into something mundane and manageable. To cope with fear, they tried to get ahead of it, or to live it again and again through everyday practices. The shared affect of fear of death caused by the environment inadvertently sparked Nilima's inspiration to capitalize on this universal corporeal experience. Unlike most regions in India, where the boundaries of caste, race, and religion are rigidly guarded, the tide country observes no such clear divisions. Here, "it was impossible to tell who was who, and what the inhabitants' castes and religions and beliefs were" (*HT* 66). The only thing these women had in common was their unanimous fear of their husbands' deaths and the premature rituals they performed to control and reckon with their fear. In this instance, fear as an unconscious intensity in the face of a hostile environment was named, registered, and transformed by the fishermen's wives into a conscious mode of knowing and relating to the environment. Nilima found the potentiality in this affective mode of knowing and managed to turn the cognition of fear into a shared basis for cooperation and collaboration among the women. What started as a pragmatic way to manage the women's fear soon turned into a non-government organization. She established a women's union to share the profits of trade with the women, which grew into the Badabon Development Trust, providing medical, paralegal, agricultural, and educational services fundamental to the livelihood of the villagers. The founding of the Trust on Lusibari continued the legacy of Sir Daniel Hamilton's vision and realized Nirmal's dream of social experimentation.

Given the unique cultural, biological, and geological conditions of the tide country, fear commands a range of affective variations sustained by various degrees of intensity. On one end of the spectrum, it is rationalized and integrated into

everyday practice, such as the women's performative rituals of widowhood; on the far end of the spectrum, fear retains its full intensity as a visceral, sensory experience of terror beyond words. Most of the villagers, however, take fear as an expected social emotion in the face of the sinister force of the environment, which includes elements of terror, awe, and respect, with terror serving as the intensity that prevents the other emotions from falling into inert routines and sustains the possibility of social transformation. It is worth noting that when fear is transmitted from the local bodies to the cosmopolitan ones, it is translated from physical fear of the surroundings into fear of the absence of cultural representation and historical inscription. Nirmal's and Kanai's fears are thus sublimated into gestures of witnessing and recording that translate the affective articulations of the locals into accessible forms for global readers.

Love

The affect of fear, however, does not stand on its own; it is part of the complicated economy of affect that binds fear with love and characterizes the emotional life of the region. The fishermen's fear of the wetlands is accompanied by their love for the ecology of the place, as the Bon Bibi myth has neatly translated, with the tiger embodying human beings' fear of the wilderness, while the dolphin serves as the messenger of Bon Bibi's love for human beings and the latter's love for nature. Here I define love both in its ordinary sense as an emotional ability to identify with, embrace, and attach to certain people, places, objects, and things with affective intensity, and as an excess that infolds the environment—with all of its frightful, menacing potential—through a full, sensory engagement. The affect of love is displayed by Kusum's son, Fokir.

As a receding figure in the rearview mirror of modernity, Fokir occupies a precarious position on the fault line between "the hurried history of the emergent nation" and "the deep time of geology" (Ghosh, "Town" 2). He is the absent presence of the forgotten history of the Morichjhãpi massacre, bearing the mark of state violence against refugees in the name of modernization. In that sense, he is one of the ghosts whose "unseen presences" and "murmurings could never quite be silenced no matter how low you spoke" (*HT* 183). But instead of grounding Fokir in the past of a modernist temporality, Ghosh aligns him with a different temporality—the deep time of the wetland ecology that appears only in Nirmal's imagination. An illiterate fisherman who speaks only Bengali, Fokir lives with the rhythms of the tide coursing through his body (Kaur 136); he can be seen as one of the "geohistorically located

and embodied knowers" (White 515) capable of affectively relating himself to the tide country on a scale transcending the limited sense of community such as that of Lusibari. As a fisherman who sticks to the old ways of following the "messages" of the dolphins, Fokir lives mostly on the rivers and becomes a marginal figure in the forward-looking community of the Badabon Trust where his wife Moyna works. At the confined space which is his "home" on the island of Lusibari, he is shown to be "not at home," in Piya's eyes: "somehow in the setting of his own home his clothes looked frayed and seedy. . . . There was a fugitive sullenness about his posture that suggested he would rather be anywhere but where he was" (*HT* 173). Instead of staying inside the home protected by the relatively safe topography of Lusibari, and secured by Moyna's dexterous household management, Fokir prefers claiming the river and the wilderness of the tide country as his home. Fokir is the only character in the novel not given a voice or space of interiority, except when Kanai is around to interpret his words. But the reader can perceive his ease with the geology of the wetlands through Ghosh's choice of words. The wetlands provide layers of sensory experiences (the sight, smell, and sound of the wetlands), the rhythmic alteration of absence and presence (of land, water, and species), and the sense of deep time that is in touch with the elements of the tidal ecology and in accordance with his religious belief in the Bon Bibi myth.

Piya cannot be further from Fokir's world. As a scientist, Piya's relation with the tide country is purely empirical at the outset. Piya comes from an intellectual community composed of natural scientists and marine biologists. Her heroes are nineteenth-century English cetacean zoologists, such as William Roxburgh, John Anderson, and Edward Blyth, who had worked in Calcutta's Botanic Gardens. Their efforts in identifying, categorizing, and naming what later came to be named Irrawaddy dolphins paved the foundation of her work in tracing the migration of the species. While her predecessors' contribution to biology rested on the production of knowledge which, if unintentionally, helped build the imperialist world view of the colonized country as a land of wildlife to be contained, measured, and exploited, Piya's aim as a scientist in a postcolonial world is more progressive. She seeks to conserve, instead of domesticating and exploiting, the species she examines. Her predecessors lived at a historical moment when the research of nature was still rooted in a human-centered world view. Piya, on the contrary, is species-centered. Yet her progressive outlook often fails to take into account the humans who cohabitate with these species. Kanai, for example, criticizes Piya for being the person "who made a push to protect the wildlife here, without regard for the human costs" (*HT* 248).

Piya came from a middle-class Indian-American family in Seattle. Emigrating

to the States when she was still a young child, Piya is estranged and aloof from her own native culture. Although she still retains fragmentary memories of Kolkata, where she was born, Piya consciously refuses to align herself with her Indian cultural heritage. The unhappy childhood memories of her mother's maladjustment to the new life in America inhibit her interest in her original culture and the language she was born with. The language she prefers is the scientific language of precision and pure reason, devoid of emotion and blurredness: "she wanted words with the heft of stainless steel, sounds that had been boiled clean, like a surgeon's instruments, tools with nothing attached except meanings that could be looked up in a dictionary— empty of pain and memory and inwardness" (*HT* 78). The array of scientific gadgets and tools she carries for fieldwork—a GPS monitor, a rangefinder, a depth sounder, and a pair of binoculars—becomes a prosthetics, an extension of her body signifying her neutral and rational relation with the environment. In the meantime, these instruments facilitate her privileged occupation of a detached, panoptical visual stance suited for surveillance and penetration.

It is on the common ground of their shared interest in dolphins that Fokir and Piya bind with each other, despite the fact that their attachments to the dolphins are grounded in two different cultural or intellectual systems. Whereas Fokir's perceptions of the dolphins are formed within the totality of a cultural imaginary of the environment of the tide country as a place of habitation surrounded by wilderness, Piya's conception of the dolphins is contextualized by a scientific discourse that fails to take into account the cultural framework and living conditions of the settlers. However, on the common ground of their shared passion for the dolphins, Fokir is able to change her cold isolation, drawing upon a different affective literacy specific to the tide country. Despite their language barrier, Fokir seems to be able to pass on affective catalysts that cast old things in a new light. While Piya is looking for precision and reasoning, data and figures, Fokir offers hospitality and connectivity. What Piya marks as "field," Fokir claims as "home." He makes her feel at home in his boat on the river, and through sharing the "domestic" space of the boat on the river, the two form an emotional attachment to each other. An exile from human habitats, Fokir claims the river as his home, turning it into a domestic space where he lives and works, paying heed to the pulse of the tides and tracing the migrant routes of the dolphins. Fokir invites Piya to enter into his way of life, to participate in the ways in which he inhabits the tide country. He immerses her in the lived experience of the place. As Sara Ahmed suggests, home can be "theorised as the *lived experience of locality*":

The immersion of a self in a locality is not simply about inhabiting an already constituted space (from which one could depart and remain the same). Rather, the locality intrudes into the senses: it defines what one smells, hears, touches, feels, remembers. The lived experience of being-at-home hence involves the enveloping of subjects in a space which is not simply outside them: being-at-home suggests that the subject and space leak into each other, *inhabit each other.* (89; emphasis in original)

As Fokir welcomes her to the home-space of his boat, Piya is led to revisit the significance of those Indian "things" which she previously found incongruous with her American life. The *sari* Fokir uses as a curtain to veil her space in his boat reminds her of her mother's *saris*, which "had been a great grievance for her once . . . it was impossible to bring friends to a home where the mother was dressed in something that looked like an old bedsheet" (*HT* 60-61). Fokir's *gamchha*, which he wears during the day and turns into a towel for Piya's bath at night, reminds her of her father's *gamchha* and the great importance he placed upon this piece of cloth, as if it was part of his body. The sudden recognition of her parents' sense of at-homeness through their attachment to these traditional Indian fabrics comes only when she puts the *gamchha* to her nose and smells the salty scent of Fokir's sweat. It is as if her neutralized body had finally regained its skin, allowing the locality of the surrounding to penetrate and become "home." Here Ghosh demonstrates the connection between the global and the local through Piya's opening to the sensory experiences of two localities simultaneously, thus achieving her sense of at-home-ness in both places at the same time.

Fokir creates an audience in Piya, whose insight into nature has been confined and conditioned by Western hegemonic cultural literacy. He opens up her ability to feel, react, and become attached to her surroundings, including the human and nonhuman. This perfect harmony between global traveler and local inhabitant is achieved through an auditory experience, when she listens to Fokir's song at night. The melody Fokir sings "mirrored her mood and she felt a sense of perfect contentment as she sat there listening to his voice against the percussive counterpoint of the dolphins' breathing. What greater happiness could there be than this: to be on the water with someone you trusted at the magical hour, listening to the serene sound of these animals" (*HT* 130-31).

The song, as we realize later through Nirmal's diary, is the tune of the Bon Bibi legend passed on from Horen to Fokir. Nirmal detects in Horen's recitation a cultural

hybrid formed by the region's multiple heritages of Hindu, Arabic, Persian, Muslim, Bengali, and English cultures. Piya, however, is moved by the song's pure affective force and equates Fokir's voice with dolphins' breathing. This aesthetic moment brings forth a sensuous connection between the metropolitan subjects, the local fisherman, and the dolphins. Based on this moment of perceptual, sensuous enchantment, Piya weaves a life story for Fokir in her imagination (which is a far cry from reality). In that imaginative narrative, Fokir is a perceptive and sentient social being, surrounded by a loving family. The lack of language between the two, plus the aesthetic mediation of Fokir's song, frees Piya from her limited conceptual relation with the world and transforms the environment from an object—a thing out there— to an interactive milieu in which the dynamic exchange of affect, perception, and meaning can be conducted.[12]

For a short while, Piya seems to be able to achieve the kind of eco-cosmopolitanism sketched by Heise when Piya reaches out to the wetlands through her sensuous connection with Fokir while perceiving the interdependence between humans and other species. In her research on the peculiar life cycles of the Irrawaddy dolphin, Piya stumbles upon a breakthrough—a realization that the dolphins in the region have compressed their annual seasonal migration to a daily cycle in order to adapt themselves to the daily rhythm of tides. With this, she enters a state of epiphany—grasping the link between the waters of river and sea and the proliferation of a variety of aquatic life forms. As she sits brooding on "these connections and interrelations" (*HT* 105), Piya has achieved what Timothy Morton terms "the ecological thought," i.e., a kind of thinking that embraces the "vast, sprawling mesh of interconnection" among species (8). What lies beneath this thinking is the "ecological love" that Morton defines as the emotional ability "to look after all sentient beings" (96). Though this affective pattern suggests a departure from an anthropocentric vision of the environment and seemingly matches Fokir's affect for the wetlands, it is, nevertheless, partial and insufficient. For the uncanny nature of the tide country requests and gives rise to complex and often contradictory affective interactions with the milieu, where love is often sustained by fear, and vice versa. Conditioned by her liberal thinking, Piya is less sensible to the ambivalent nature of one's affective relation to the uncanny environment of the tide country. This is exemplified by her falling out with Fokir over the villagers' angry attack on the tiger,

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[12] I adopt the term "interactive milieu" from Adrian Ivakhiv. Following Whitehead, Ivakhiv suggests "[w]hen things encounter each other, there is an exchange between them, a response or ripple that is affective or 'emotional' in nature . . . and that has to do with a 'taking account of,' a meaning-making and responding to what is encountered" (35).

which trespasses the boundary between the human and nonhuman worlds. Between the villagers' anger and fear, and the tiger's cry of agony, Piya is affectively more responsive to the tiger, whose pain is visible and immediate, whereas the pain of the villagers caused by the routine attacks of tigers is less obvious and often concealed by official reports. My previous discussion of the local people's fear of the tiger highlights the affect of fear as a physical awareness of the tiger's claim to its rightful territory. Central to the affect of fear is the respect for others' spaces of existence and a consensus on who deserves which space. In other words, the connectivity between the species is founded upon a law of spatial distribution which guarantees safe cohabitation. The element of space in the local affective response to tigers and other predators is an important factor for consideration when facing the conundrum between the rights of animals and those of the poor, who are forced to live in close proximity to the carnivore.

Critics such as Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, who, like Piya, advocate anti-anthropocentrism on behalf of animals, find the locals' treatment of the tiger in the novel disturbing and Ghosh's overall regard for the rights and agency of animals inadequate. They lament: "even when a provisional solution to the social/ecological preservation of the Sundarbans is found at the end of Ghosh's novel, it fails to dispel the residual unease surrounding the earlier episode of the tortured tiger" (188). They continue to argue that "while the episode [of the tiger killing] certainly reminds Piya of the fundamental difference between her environmentalist view and Fokir's, any 'properly ecological ethics' should surely include the right of the tiger to occupy its traditional environment, as well as an acknowledgement of the significant role it plays in the Sundarbans ecosystem to which it belongs" (189). Piya's perspective, as well as that of critics such as Huggan and Tiffin, see the tiger as an individual species that deserves human acknowledgement of its role in the ecosystem of the tide country. Although the claim itself is a progressive view in accordance with the tenets of anti-anthropocentrism, the possibility to make such a claim already suggests a safe distance between the commentators and the object of commentary and a stable division between human and nonhuman species. Piya's luxury of safe distance from the tiger, both spatially and conceptually, is unavailable to the local people of the wetlands, whose human status is tenuous, easily degenerating into prey or meat under the daily threat of the tiger's stealthy and fatal attack.

Besides challenging the Western conservation projects whose sweeping, albeit well-meaning, promotion of equal rights for all species comes at the expense of subsistence communities, Ghosh simultaneously reinvents his portrayal of the tiger on a rhetorical level. The Bengal tiger is recast as a metonymy of a sinister force

lurking outside human ken—an agent of fear whom Kanai has the bad luck to come across (an anecdote Ghosh reiterates in *The Great Derangement*). In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh casts the tiger as the power of the uncanny, but instead of dismissing its agency—as he is accused of doing by Huggan and Tiffin—he advocates the recognition of such nonhuman agency because "nonhuman forces have the ability to intervene directly in human thought" (31). As my above reading of Kanai's close encounter with the tiger suggests, the recognition of this agency is achieved through the affective excess of fear, whose visceral force *moves* him, placing him in the affective position of the locals, hence fracturing his former arrogance and nonchalance toward the settlers. One can say that his decision to translate the legend of Bon Bibi for Piya to read—thus incidentally serving as a bridge between Fokir and Piya—is a labor of love deriving from this humbling experience of fear.

　　The Bengal tiger, however, is not the only agent of fear that Ghosh utilizes to carry the weight of the uncanniness of the Sundarbans landscapes. In the final major episode of the novel, Ghosh places his two protagonists, Fokir and Piya, in the midst of a sudden cyclone, foreshadowing the climate change coming to this part of the world. Fokir dies after being struck by a whirling tree stump while shielding Piya's body from the howling gale. The incident gives Piya her first experience of the environmental whimsicality of the wetlands and triggers feelings of fear, which makes it possible for her to be empathetic to the same feelings experienced by the villagers in their alertness to the danger of the landscape. The amorous way in which Ghosh depicts the scene in which Piya and Fokir witness together this "sight unseen" by the outside world blends fear with love and activates other modes of feeling and knowing in Piya: "Their bodies were so close, so finely merged, that she could sense the blows raining down on his back. She could feel the bones of his cheeks as if they had been superimposed on her own; it was as if the storm had given them what life could not; it had fused them together and made them one" (*HT* 321). The romantic overtone in the relationship between Fokir and Piya is rendered physical and affective because the fusing of their bodies transmits not just love, but also fear and pain. Piya becomes empathetic because her fear is doubled: she feels her own fear, but also Fokir's. This incident helps Piya recognize the uncanniness of the place that Fokir calls home through being affected by the mixture of the two emotions that are the basis of local modes of knowing. Her reading of the legend of Bon Bibi, translated by Kanai before the onset of the cyclone, might influence her recognition of the culture and history of the tide country, but it is not powerful enough to generate ethical action. The affective impact of fear and love, which she receives through her

fusion with Fokir, finally compels her to act and react in an ethical manner. She volunteers to stay at the Badabon Trust so that she no longer "places the burden of conservation on those who can least afford it" (*HT* 327).

Conclusion

In exploring the ways in which imperceptible environmental threats can be brought to the attention of those who are not within the range of its immediate impact, Ghosh places the micro—the affective and sensory aspects of ecological thinking—against a macro-backdrop of deep time and sociopolitical history. Ghosh's focus on the role affect plays in generating ecological thinking is in line with the affective turn in recent ecocritical practices, as conducted by critics such as Simon Estok, Adrian Ivakhiv, and Lisa Ottum and Seth T. Reno. The common belief in affect as a powerful term for environmental thinking lies in the multifarious potentiality of the concept. As mentioned, affect is an intensity that instigates cognition and action in a dynamic manner. One's affective reaction to ecology thus deserves scrutiny, for it is the basis on which cognition and ethical action toward the environment can be elicited. Yet, Ghosh's affective engagement with ecology breaks new ground by contextualizing the examination of affect and ecology in a specific location, and by exploring the process in which local people navigate their affective reactions to a particular ecology and environment in ways that are unimaginable to outsiders. Above all, Ghosh stresses the importance of making hitherto unrecognized environmental violence (and the locals' affective reactions to them) accessible by exploring the affective encounters in which the locals and the cosmopolitans are connected, thereby confronting and resolving environmental challenges. Given their affective intensity, love and fear are powerful components which constitute and propel the interactive milieu "where sensation and sensory organs, bodies and desires, social groups and mediating formations become connected in specific ways" (Ivakhiv 35). My examination of affect in Ghosh's text thus shifts the focus from sympathy and altruism—which revolves around cosmopolitans' affective reaction to the plight of the locals—to one anchored in local people's emotive navigation and the transmission of love and fear from the local to the cosmopolitan as a way of enforcing witnessing.

My study bears similarity to but departs from Weik's eco-cosmopolitan approach, for I complicate the idea of affect, highlighting its progressive relationality—not merely as a force of linkage, identification, and solidarity, but as a dynamic force of affecting that is specific to a hazardous topography that keeps the alliance between the global and the local open, alive, and alert. By translating the

uncanny experienced by the locals into accessible forms, Ghosh's novel brings into our sensory ken the slow violence—caused by biased policies—that is far away and out of sight. In this vein, we see Ghosh's full contribution to cosmopolitan studies, affect studies, and postcolonial ecocriticism as a whole.

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