

The Politics of Knowledge in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract

Amitav Ghosh's 2005 novel *The Hungry Tide* provides readers with an immersive canvas in which to contemplate postcolonial studies, globalization, eco-materialism, and their respective political epistemologies. Filled with two generations of characters in the Sundarbans tidal country, the novel develops the environmental setting as actively and inexorably connected to alterations in characters' individuality. Clearly functioning as an eco-materialist chronotope in the novel, Ghosh's setting is both an object upon which human characters thrust meanings and a field of enunciation upon which human characters perform meaningful, transformational deeds. This field of enunciation enacts a politics of differing knowledges, sometimes competing and sometimes synthesizing, but all transformational and hybrid. The following study, begun during my graduate work with Dr. Patrick D. Murphy at the University of Central Florida in his Contemporary Movements in Literary, Cultural, and Textual Theory during spring 2016, is a mapping of three of the novel's characters inspired in survey rather than applied in a concentrated, single theoretical framework. Implementing concepts-in-assemblage from M. M. Bakhtin, Louis Althusser, Hayden White, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Patrick D. Murphy, this discussion will show that three speaking characters in the novel, Nirmal, Kanai, and Piya, are dialogically changed as their active contemplations transform into new synthetic modes of knowing which ultimately hybridize Western *epistêmê* with autochthonal *technê*.

Keywords: Chronotope, Interpellation, Eco-materialism, Metahistory, Subaltern, Dialogism

Introduction: An Intensely Contextualized Politics of Knowledge

Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* exemplifies Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee's eco-materialist assertion of the "indivisibility of humans and environment, the interpenetration of nature and history, [and] the dynamic relation between the two established via human" interaction (61). Even more, according to Shakti Jaising, Ghosh's novel directly involves the environment of the "tidal country" of the Sundarbans "as both setting and character" (74). The resultant dialogic performances between all the characters—human and non-human—affect one another tangibly throughout the course of dual histories—the first, a character-narrated history of the refugee massacre at Morichjhapi from a generation past, and the second, an aftermath history of the next generation returning to the Sundarbans. Altogether, the novel's polyvocality and metahistory allow us to experience, examine, and counterbalance an intensely contextualized

politics of knowledge, in particular, a politics between what Homi Bhabha designates as “epistemological” and “enunciative” strategies (195-96).

According to Patrick D. Murphy, the Sundarbans environment in *The Hungry Tide* is the touchstone character¹ interacting with all “four communities central to the story: the Badabon Trust village, the destroyed Morichjhapi community, the river tidal dolphin community, and the tiger community” (163). This “large tidal mangrove forest” is “in a constant process of change, some of it quite rapid and some of it very slow,” and it affects all past and present political relations in the novel (162). In brief, there is no story, and there are no other characters who stand dichotomously separate from the Sundarbans. Therefore, the tide country can be deemed what Mikhail Bakhtin conceptualizes as a *chronotope*,² a term by which he means a “time space” that attests “to the *intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships* that are artistically expressed in literature” (84, emphasis mine). Functioning as an *eco-materialist chronotope* in the novel, the Sundarbans tide country is both an object upon which human characters thrust meanings—the epistemological—and a field of enunciation upon which human characters perform meaningful, transformational deeds. Even more, as a character, the tide country dialogically transforms human meanings and influences human deeds. The Sundarbans manifest as an assemblage of connections between characters and their enunciative transformations. As Nirmal puts it in Ghosh’s novel, “in the tide country, transformation is the rule of life” (186).

Nirmal: Active and Passive Contemplations, Metahistories

Deepening our appreciation for interconnectedness in *The Hungry Tide*, Sebastiano Timpanaro’s “idea that the relationship of humans to nature contains simultaneously active and passive elements” (Mukherjee 62) augments the chronotopic-dialogical double-function that the Sundarbans play in the novel. For instance, in his *active contemplation* of the tide country, Nirmal, politically “a Marxist humanist,” subjectively interprets “the mudbanks and rivers of the Sundarbans” as a field of historical causality that acts to “inform the hybrid religion and social life of the region” (Jaising 70). Nirmal’s ideological overlay upon human life in the regional community reflects Marx’s own dictum in *The German Ideology*: “Consciousness does not

determine life, but life determines consciousness” (qtd. in Singer 53). In eco-materialist terms, dialogically, then, the Sundarbans determine or speak to and for human hybridity in the region.

However, Timpanaro’s simultaneous recognition that “sensation” has “an element of [human] passivity” (qtd. in Mukherjee 62) also shapes Nirmal’s *passive contemplations* and ultimately his outwardly apparent social and political inefficacy. Despite his consciously articulated revolutionary zeal, the tide country’s distracting intellectual/aesthetic impact overwhelms him so deeply that he takes no actively significant role politically, materially, or laboriously in the charitable work of his wife, Nilima, and the Badabon Trust. We read that, beyond naming the trust, “Nirmal was by no means wholly supportive of the Nilima’s efforts—for him they bore the ineradicable stigma of ‘social service’” (Ghosh 69). Nirmal also—again at a sufficient distance from the work of the trust—conceives of the cyclone shelter at Lusibari because of “his peculiar interest in geology and meteorology”—an environmentally-inspired interest, no doubt—but an interest which, as Nilima suggests, not even Nirmal himself would willingly recognize as revolutionary (320). Therefore, in thrall to the allure of the Sundarbans and in terms of Timpanaro’s “sensation/passivity,” Nirmal’s dreams of Marxist revolution are, at best, vicarious, even amid the crisis at Morichjhapi, where the refugee ward leader finds him useless in their struggle to survive:

‘Then what can you do for us?’ he [the ward leader] said, growing peevish. ‘Of what use could you be?’

...

‘There’s only one thing I know to do,’ I [Nirmal] said. ‘And that is to teach.’

‘Teach?’ I could see he was struggling to suppress a smile. ‘What could you teach here?’

‘I could teach your children about this place that you’ve come to, the tide country. I have time—I am soon to retire.’

He lost interest in me ‘Our children here have no time to waste,’ he said. ‘Most of them have to help their families find food to eat.’ (143)

Dramatically in counterpoint to Nirmal’s activist passivity stands his penchant for revolutionary storytelling, his cultivated practice of interweaving knowledge and history. As instances of what Hayden White calls “metahistory” in “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” Nirmal’s written and spoken narratives of the tide country’s history “are verbal fictions” (1384-85) that he transmits to his nephew, Kanai. Nirmal’s tales are biased reproductions of recorded events, mimetic instances that reflect Nirmal’s revolutionary ideology

and his aestheticism. Ghosh's chapter entitled "A Post Office on Sunday" (232-38) well exemplifies metahistory as mimesis within the novel. White identifies the fictive/narrative origins of historiography in multiple registers, but one of them, the Romantic/metaphorical (1394-96), suits Kanai's mimetic retelling of Nirmal's story of the hubristic fall of Port Canning. As a prologue to Nirmal's political history, Kanai ideologically characterizes his uncle in terms of eco-materialist relations: "For him [Nirmal] ... everything which existed was interconnected: the trees, the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature" (Ghosh 233). According to White, the Romantic figurative tendency skews toward metaphors, and, when "we stress the similarities among ... elements, we are working in the mode of metaphor" (1395). So, the interconnectedness and similitude of knowledge, environment, and history that Ghosh directly states through Kanai illuminate similarities that we are compelled to recognize in Nirmal's tale of Viceroy Canning, Henry Piddington, and the cyclone of 1867 (Ghosh 233-38).

Indeed, political connections proliferate in a mimetic-metaphoric multifunction throughout Ghosh's Port Canning matryoshka-like narrative. First, Kanai cannot simply relate the tale to Piya, he must imitate Nirmal telling the tale: "All right," said Kanai. "I'll tell it to you as he [Nirmal] would have" (Ghosh 234). Kanai's mimetic insistence is metaphoric in that it connects him to Nirmal and in effect nests him within Nirmal. Therefore, as we read the novel, we are encouraged to parallel Kanai to Nirmal and "stress the similarities among [their character] elements" (White 1395), namely similarities in their intellectualism and class consciousness. Second, Kanai-within-Nirmal catalyzes the Port Canning narrative by multiplying comparisons: Lady Canning becomes a "confection" (Ghosh 234), the Matla river becomes a mad man and double reflects Lord Canning and Mohammad bin Tughlaq, "the mad sultan," who, like Canning, was stung by "a bee from the same hive" (234-35). On the surface, Kanai-Nirmal's tale is a sardonic critique of colonialism and capitalism, demonstrating their connections and similarities: Port Canning would feature "hotels, promenades, parks, palaces, banks.... [T]his new capital on the banks of the mad Matla—it would lack for nothing," and "nothing could stop them," yet "the Matla lay still and waited" (235). Third, the tale posits its most unlikely romantic hero, Henry Piddington, who like Nirmal with Kusum,³ falls in love "not with a woman nor even with a dog" but with knowledge, specifically for Piddington "with storms," cyclones, hurricanes, and

typhoons (235). Initially, scorned and mocked for his knowledge, Piddington is avenged by the Matla fifteen years after he forecasts the destruction of Port Canning (236-37). Surely, this is Nirmal's wish fulfillment in view of his own social and political inefficacy: if Piddington was proven right over time, so too could Nirmal hope to be right someday when his storytelling may achieve revolutionary effects.

As an overarching authorial technique throughout the novel, Ghosh provides Nirmal's "historical narratives" which privilege the connectedness of all things in essentially revolutionary eco-materialist terms and which sensitize us toward the Sundarbans chronotope of the "present" action of the novel. Nirmal's metahistory raises our consciousness to the implications of the novel's "present-time" events and ongoing relationships. In this way, Nirmal's diegesis achieves the revolution he never accomplishes himself. In contrast to Nirmal's political or material inefficacy, by dint of his storytelling, the revolution "is immanent and consists in the new bonds it installs between people" (Deleuze and Guattari 177). These new bonds, in connection with the Sundarbans chronotope, specifically develop between Kanai, Piya, and their enunciative interface with Fokir and Moyna.

Taken together, the revolutionary bonds of Nirmal's metahistory are still further adumbrations of active and passive relations between human characters and the tide country which elicit transformations of all the central speakers in the novel. The most marked transformations, certainly, are those of Piya, the Americanized cetologist from Seattle, and Kanai, the Indian interpreter-entrepreneur from New Delhi. For them both, the journey to the Sundarbans initially articulates only their actively aware relationship to their surroundings—their intentionality—not those passive sensations which actual engagement with the Sundarbans will eventually draw out from within them. These passive—quite often *disarming*—elements in their relations with the Sundarbans chronotope become significant in Ghosh's novel. Piya arrives to study dolphins; Kanai arrives to fulfill a family obligation by retrieving the Morichjhapi journal that Nirmal, his deceased uncle, has left for him. Throughout the story, these ostensibly "epistemological" or teleological purposes, as Bhabha might designate them, are actively converted into an "enunciatory present" by the Sundarbans chronotope and the locals who are part of the novel's "present" time-space. Notably, Ghosh enunciates the indigenous fisherman,

Fokir, as the figure “empowered in the act of erasing the politics of binary opposition” which Piya and Kanai initially articulate (Bhabha 195-96). This eventually elided binary opposition disengages the hierarchy of knowledge or *epistêmê*⁴ as being privileged over skill or craft, *technê*: Piya’s active contemplation politically privileges scientific knowledge in her research to the exclusion of people and society⁵ while Kanai’s active contemplation politically privileges knowledge of the Indian middle-class world, a “sophisticated” knowledge of capitalism and bourgeois liberalism, to the exclusion of the subaltern population and the tidal environment itself.

Kanai: Interpellation and the “Hybrid Site of Cultural Negotiation”

For Kanai and Fokir, their “enunciatory present” occurs spontaneously when Kanai definitively “realizes the ways in which he is inevitably attached to a social class and ... a history of oppression that has not only dehumanized men like Fokir but also destroyed the Sundarbans’ ecological balance” (Jaising 77). However, before examining Kanai and Fokir’s enunciative moment, we must first establish Kanai’s active contemplation as a speaking subject so that we can better see him reified as an embodiment of globalization, an ever-present concern in the novel. Sankaran Krishna’s analysis of Indian urbanity in “The Bomb, Biography and the Indian Middle Class” is most illuminating for this discussion of Kanai as an interpellated subject⁶ of globalization. Krishna plainly defines the ideological delusion of class in India: “the Indian middle class often sees itself as living amongst, but not living with, the majority of its fellow citizens. This self-imposed distance between the middle class and the ‘masses’ sometimes partakes of a genocidal impulse” (2327). In Kanai’s actions we read the expression of this interpellated distance, this ideological-hegemonic-egoistic dwelling “amongst” others rather than living with “fellow citizens.”

For instance, in Moyna, who is Fokir’s wife and an “ambitious” nurse for the Badabon Trust hospital (Ghosh 163), Kanai finds affirmation of his class values without seriously regarding the realities of subaltern struggle. Kanai’s self-serving praise of Moyna works on multiple levels. First, he makes Moyna a foil to Fokir, who, in Kanai’s view, is nothing but a childish, illiterate fisherman with no profitable future and “a husband who could not keep up”

but instead keeps Moyna “held back” (112). Second, Kanai makes Moyna a foil to Piya which Piya internalizes as an interpellated critique of her own privilege:

‘Just think of the life [Moyna has] led,’ said Kanai. “She’s struggled to educate herself against heavy odds. Now she’s well on her way to becoming a nurse. She knows what she wants—for herself and her family—and nothing is going to keep her from pursuing it. She’s ambitious, she’s tough, and she’s going to go a long way.’

There was an edge to his voice that implied a comparison of some kind and Piya could not help wondering how she herself would fare by these lights—she who’d never had much ambition and had never had to battle her circumstances in order to get her education. (163)

Third, Kanai rationalizes “his better lot in life” as the result of his own “merit and hard work” while smugly applauding “Moyna’s clumsy and earnest mimicry of the aspirations of the urban middle class” just so long as her emulation of “his [own] ‘achievements’” ends up “falling short” of his own success (Krishna 2327). Altogether, then, until his enunciative moment with Fokir, Kanai, remaining unthreatened, can profess liberal egalitarian admiration and “political” support of Moyna’s “professional” goals—an effete intellectualism and a class consciousness he shares with Nirmal⁷—so long as her efforts only continue to be “mimetic, aspirational and ultimately futile” (2328). To be clear, in Kanai’s view, Moyna’s “mimetic” efforts are not like his own nostalgic and reverent mimesis of Nirmal; rather, Kanai processes Moyna’s mimesis as mawkish, as endearingly austere but only in effigy of himself.⁸ Simultaneously, he remains bemused by Fokir whom he likens to a childlike inferior.

In light of Kanai’s middle class “self-imposed distance,” his active contemplation, his enunciative moment with Fokir can now be examined in some detail. In terms of Bhabha’s enunciative and epistemological strategies, the epistemological value of Fokir “luring” Kanai to the island of Garjontola works within shifting hierarchies of multiple “knowledges.” To begin, there is the epistemology of class distance already established in our discussion of Krishna’s analysis of the Indian middle class. Concomitant to this knowledge is the hierarchy of Kanai’s knowledge of entrepreneurial “worldly” success as a translator—*epistêmê*—versus Fokir’s “lesser” skill—*technê*—as a fisherman and autochthon. Into this contest of knowledges we must also add the epistemology of gender and sexuality, for the long-developed, contentious, yet unconsummated love triangle among Kanai and Piya and Fokir persists throughout the majority

of the novel. In the midst of this combined, agonistic epistemology, Kanai is driven into his chronotopic encounter with danger at Garjontola.

As Ghosh's chapter title for the Garjontola episode indicates, "Signs" are privileged over interpellated language and culture. Readers are trapped in Kanai's point of view as the action progresses. Hence, we experience Kanai's language-based, entrepreneurial tendency, his *epistêmê*, metaphorically reshape Fokir's sighting of tiger prints on Garjontola into an exaggeration and an egoistic "bluff" based solely on Kanai's own competitive experience as a translator:

Kanai understood all too well how the dynamics of their situation might induce Fokir to exaggerate the menace of their surroundings. [As a professional translator, he] himself had often stood in Fokir's place, serving as some hapless traveler's window on an unfamiliar world. He remembered how, in those circumstances, he too had often been tempted to heighten the inscrutability of the surroundings through subtly slanted glosses. To do this required no particularly malicious intent; it was just a way of underscoring the insider's indispensability: every new peril was proof of his importance, each new threat evidence of his worth. These temptations were all too readily available to every guide and translator—not to succumb was to make yourself dispensable; to give in was to destroy the value of your word, and thus your work. It was because of his awareness of this dilemma that he knew too that there were times when a translator's bluff had to be called." (Ghosh 265)

So caught up in his *epistêmê*, Kanai does not *see* his surroundings: "the mangrove forest, the water, the boat" are "suddenly blotted," and "his mind had decided to revert to the functions for which it had been trained and equipped by years of practice. At that moment nothing existed for him but language" (265-66). Language here for Kanai is a *blind endeavor* and is much different from Fokir's sighting [citation] of signs at Garjontola. In short, Fokir sees things for what they are.⁹ Still, Kanai's blindness, his active contemplation, will open him up to Garjontola as the chronotope where passive contemplation becomes knowledge.¹⁰

Garjontola, thus, uniquely becomes Homi Bhabha's "hybrid site of cultural negotiation" (196) in the Sundarbans chronotope, a site where Kanai's active contemplation is displaced by his passive contemplation, disclosing his interpellated jealousy and fear. Both Kanai's sexual jealousy of Fokir and his cynical bourgeois experience inform "what he considers a treacherous ploy by Fokir to frighten him by pointing out the fresh spoor of a tiger on the river bank" (Krishna 2327). The volatility of these multiple, alternating knowledges heightens the

complexity of the scene when Kanai falls in the mud and Fokir taunts him for his clumsiness (Ghosh 268-70). Fokir's *technê* in the tidal mangrove forest spontaneously shifts to become the dominant *epistêmê* of the Sundarbans chronotope. Because of this inversion of knowledges, Krishna explains that Kanai's mask of liberal egalitarianism is decisively stripped away: "[I]n proximity to nature rather than culture, Kanai's superiority to Fokir is reversed" (2327). Kanai "turns vicious, and a repressed inner-self surfaces with incredible hatred toward the subaltern" (2328), conjuring Kanai's middle class "genocidal impulse" (2327). Ghosh writes that Kanai's "anger came welling up with an atavistic explosiveness ... the master's suspicion of the menial; the pride of caste; the townsman's mistrust of the rustic; the city's antagonism toward the village" (269). Certainly in Kanai's incensed view, Garjontola results in "an encounter between two men only in name—when push comes to shove, one of them sincerely believes that the other is unworthy of existence" (Krishna 2328). Kanai genocidally ideates Fokir as "a man whose value was less than that of an animal" (Ghosh 270).

Drawing on Krishna's dichotomy of "nature rather than culture," Kanai and Fokir's "enunciatory present" is predominantly political and anthropocentric, thereby requiring greater interpretation in terms of Bhabha's articulation of "the language of rights and obligations, so central to the modern myth of people" (193). After the Garjontola episode, Kanai is chastened, visibly shaken by his horrific recognition of his own elitist false egalitarianism. Piya observes a change in Kanai: "she stepped back in surprise, as if the man before her were not the one she had expected to see. Kanai's face and body were scrubbed clean and he was dressed in a lungi and vest he had borrowed" (Ghosh 274). The hegemonic "rights and obligations" Kanai had assumed about social mobility and even his urbane sexuality are not merely reinscribed but, as in Bhabha's iteration, erased, "scrubbed clean," as signified in Kanai's physical appearance. Since he is "scrubbed clean," he no longer patronizes the mimicry of Moyna's ambition, and he no longer considers Moyna or Piya as the disposable objects of a "fling" as he did earlier in the novel (183). Instead, assuming a "borrowed" guise—just like his borrowed clothing, he courts Piya with a translation of "The Miracles of Bon Bibi"—a translation informed by his own experience of the Sundarbans, his mostly delusional confrontation with Fokir, and his memory of Nirmal's metahistories, including, significantly, the Morichjhapi journal. Kanai's dialogical

moment with Fokir and with the Sundarbans's chronotope at Garjontola overturns his hegemonic epistemology, and he humbly takes refuge in the metahistorical enunciations of Nirmal's eco-materialism.

Piya: Synthetic *Epistêmê* and the “Hybrid Site of Cultural Negotiation”

The effect, then, of Kanai and Fokir's disturbingly violent enunciative moment is chronologically, diametrically, and emotively different from Piya and Fokir's enunciative moment. However, this is not to say that there is not any violence in the Piya-Fokir relationship. Instead, their enunciative moment reverses the climactic order we have already seen between Kanai-Fokir. The Kanai-Fokir moment escalates agonistically as a largely imaginary¹¹ showdown between the two men. The Piya-Fokir moment, contrarily, begins as a harmonious simultaneity and resolves itself later in the novel, *after their enunciative moment*, thanks to a violent incident as well as dialectical examination of the incident. This processing of the enunciative moment culminates in a forward-thinking or progressive synthesis for Piya rather than the *purgation* or *catharsis* of Kanai's being “scrubbed clean.” In plain diegetic terms, Ghosh's plot order reverses with Piya-Fokir versus what we have already seen with Kanai-Fokir. The Piya-Fokir moment precedes its synthetic culmination at the end of the novel, and this difference entails tracing the enunciative moment as process in which we must begin with the moment and follow its development from there.

For Piya and Fokir, the “enunciatory present” occurs spontaneously, passively, when Piya recognizes that her labor and Fokir's labor merge harmoniously in the Sundarbans chronotope. To depict Piya's recognition, Ghosh writes from her point of view: “At the start she had thought they might end up disrupting each other's work—that her soundings would get in the way of his fishing or the other way around. But to her surprise no such difficulties arose: the stops required for the laying of the line seemed to be ideally timed for the taking of soundings” (118). Unmistakably, both Piya and Fokir have a dialogical relation with the environment through their compatible work. Piya's intentional *epistêmê*, her active contemplation, *asks* the environment through “her soundings” so that the environment may *tell* her what she needs to know to map the area, and, in turn, she may better understand or *translate* what the environment *tells* her about itself and its *relationship* to the dolphins. At the same time, Fokir, using his fishing line with “no

hooks” is dialoguing with Piya and her labor of taking soundings through a complementary pattern of “traversing the water in straight lines.” Importantly, Fokir’s *technê*, his active contemplation, has already informed him that the environment is a place to fish with “no hooks” in order to avoid hurting dolphins. As a skilled fisherman, he innately adapts to the current conditions of Piya’s work, and he understands the *nature* of crabs who will snap at his hook-less fishing line and stubbornly cling to the line’s bait so that he may catch them (117).

The complexity and the elegance of this scene is further heightened for us by the fact, as Piya observes, that she and Fokir “could not exchange a word with each other and had no idea of what was going on in one another’s heads” (Ghosh 118). This freedom from the interpellated restraints of language, experienced as a sensation, a passive contemplation, certainly by Piya, echoes Bhabha’s elision of “the language of rights and obligations” (193). In other words, free of language’s values and internalizations, Piya and Fokir’s enunciative moment maximizes dialogue between all three characters: Piya, Fokir, and, yes, the tidal-environment-as-a-character. Piya and Fokir’s language-less sensation—Timpanaro’s “sensation/passivity”—which Piya describes as “almost miraculous” (Ghosh 118), aligns with Bhabha’s discussion of the enunciative rather than the epistemological. Piya’s “almost miraculous” sensation at this moment in the novel is “a more dialogic process ... subverting the rationale of the hegemonic moment [by] relocating alternative, hybrid sites of cultural negotiation” (Bhabha 195-96). The so-designated “hegemonic moment” of the scene can be understood as the typically privileged position of Piya’s science (*epistêmê*) over and above Fokir’s *unscientific* skill (*technê*) of fishing/crabbing. However, of course, that hierarchical epistemology is renegotiated in a hybrid, synchronous environmental site of an unspoken, depoliticized, and passive moment between two people laboring. Indeed, “it had proved possible for two such different people to pursue their own ends simultaneously” (Ghosh 118).

By the end of the novel, for Piya, this enunciative moment, which we take as Piya’s hypothesis of difference—“*such different people [can] pursue their own ends simultaneously*” (Ghosh 118, emphasis mine)—ultimately transforms into a synthetic *epistêmê* which will eventually inform her decision to return to Lusibari as her new home where she will labor with the Badabon Trust as well as the local fishermen in Fokir’s name¹² (Ghosh 327). However, in

order to reach this hybrid synthesis of knowledges, we must pass through and process Ghosh's "A Killing" chapter. At the beginning of this chapter, Piya is still impressed by her subjective experience of the enunciative moment with Fokir; she, in effect, is still in that moment's afterglow.¹³ Nonetheless, Piya is still quite attached to her scientific *epistêmê*, and she has hypothetically refigured Fokir as different *but complementary* to her *epistêmê*. Hence, when she inveighs against the villagers' blinding and burning of a tiger, she expects Fokir will take her side in protecting the tiger that has "been preying on" the "village for years." Incensed by the event, she resists Kanai's urging that she leave the scene: "'You can go if you like,' she said, shaking off his [Kanai's] hand. 'But I'm not going to run off like a coward. If you're not going to do anything about this, then I will. *And Fokir will—I know he will*'" (242, emphasis mine). Instead, Fokir restrains Piya and carries her away from the violent scene (243-44). Through this action, at the end of the chapter, Fokir's *technê* immediately supersedes Piya's *epistêmê*:

She could hear the flames crackling in the distance and she smelled the reek of burning fur and flesh. Then Fokir said something to her directly, in her ear; and she turned to Kanai: 'What was that? What did he say?'
'Fokir says you shouldn't be so upset?'
'How can I not be upset? That's the most horrifying thing I've ever seen—a tiger set on fire.'
'He [Fokir] says when a tiger comes into a human settlement, it's because it wants to die.' (244)

To produce the synthetic *epistêmê* which resolves Fokir's *technê* superseding Piya's *epistêmê*, the following chapter, "Interrogations," involves what initially amounts to a Platonic dialogue between Piya and Kanai. In the first iteration of this dialogue, Kanai leads Piya to recognize the differences between Fokir and herself when he asks Piya, "'Did you think he [Fokir] was some kind of grass-roots ecologist?'" (245). In the second iteration, Kanai switches to become an interrogator—as the title's chapter indicates—by questioning Piya's motivations as well as the complexities of wildlife preservation or captivity. This amounts to a crystallization whereby Piya hypothesizes a newly synthesized *epistêmê* involving her in a sense of self-sacrifice, a commitment toward communal effort, and an integrated application of Fokir's *technê* (249). After the cyclone and Fokir's death, Piya's synthesized *epistêmê* culminates in her tangibly founding Homi Bhabha's "hybrid site of cultural negotiation" in Lusbari. Most significantly, this hybrid site is backed by the Badabon Trust and Fokir's "data" from before the cyclone, which

Piya recorded through GPS (328). This newly synthesized *epistêmê* transforms science, technology, and community into a unity, into a new sense of home for Piya, Kanai, Nilima, Moyna, Tutul, the Badabon Trust community, the dolphin community, and the tiger community.

Conclusion: Purgation, Synthesis, and Answerable Contemplation

As we have seen, in *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh orchestrates polyvocality and metahistory in a chronotopically contextualized politics of knowledge. In particular, Kanai and Fokir's enunciative moment works apocalyptically by exposing the hidden genocidal elitism of liberal egalitarianism. Their enunciative moment is *purgative* for Kanai. The admonishment in this episode is determined and transmitted through the intellectual passivity amidst nature as exemplified by Nirmal's metahistories: "The story of Morichjhapi is one that [Nirmal's] nephew, Kanai, will eventually retell and publish as his cosmopolitan contribution to the survival of local communities and cultural difference" (Murphy 164). Through the enunciative moment between Piya and Fokir, we recognize the compatibility of scientific knowledge and indigenous knowledge through shared labor in the environment. After further dialogical processing between Kanai and Piya this enunciative moment is *synthetic* for Piya. As Terri Tomsy explains, "Piya is collaborating with Nilima; a union between the global and the local that promises to empower the subaltern inhabitants of the tide country through Piya's academic and international contacts" (qtd. in Murphy 165).

Such a summary of the novel, however, can be quite deceiving, oversimplified, and necessarily incomplete. Simply stated, *The Hungry Tide* is not foolishly tuned to be a "happily ever after" melody. While the central characters and community of the novel reach a novelistic conclusion, we can only speculate on the complexities that may ensue in a series of problematizations—a series of questions. We may recognize the metaphoric equivalencies in the union of science and local knowledge, but can the Piya-Fokir "almost miraculous" moment (Ghosh 118) be repeated on large scale over an expansively longer time? Will Kanai's metahistorical account of the Morichjhapi Massacre be anything more than yet another account of an atrocity safely distant from us with which we briefly empathize as an outrage of the past without necessarily contextualizing its relevance to contemporary displacements of subaltern populations in favor of nature preserves? In light of such questions, if nothing else, Ghosh's

novel does not so much resolve or conclude, but, rather, it rests for our *answerable contemplation*¹⁴ and action as readers, students, laborers, professionals, citizens, activists, and beings-among-beings-in-the-world.

End Notes

1. Further substantiating the Sundarbans as a character in the novel, Ghosh remarks in his “Author’s Note”: “The characters in this novel are fictitious, as are its two principal settings, Lusibari and Garjontola” (331). This proximate syntactical pairing of “fictitious” characters with “fictitious” settings is thus, at least circumstantially, evidence of Ghosh’s innately dialogical design and his novel’s *plan d’immanence*.
2. Further elaborating the significance of the chronotope, Bakhtin writes, “In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (84). Undoubtedly, for Ghosh, the Sundarbans chronotope is a “carefully thought-out, concrete whole” as we shall see throughout our analysis.
3. This comparison between Nirmal and Piddington is established through Kanai’s dialogue with Piya:
Kanai smiled. ‘I think, without knowing it, [Nirmal] may have been half in love with Kusum.’
...
‘Being what he was,’ Kanai said, ‘a man of his time and place, with his convictions—he’d have thought it frivolous.’
...
‘In fact, if you were to ask my aunt Nilima, she would tell you that the reason he got mixed up with the settlers in Morichjhapi was because he couldn’t let go of the idea of revolution.’ (232-33)
4. Here and throughout our study *epistêmê* is certainly not being used strictly in any Foucauldian sense; however, reading our study *in the spirit of the dynamism and fluidity* of Foucauldian *epistêmê*, as developed in his *Archaeology of Knowledge*, is encouraged so that we see the politics of knowledge expressed in *The Hungry Tide* as “the totality of relations that can be discovered ... between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities. ... to cover an indefinite field of relations” (Foucault 211).
5. Piya’s scientific objectivity, in fact, is her initial intentional or active characteristic; everyone and everything else is other to herself: “She had thought of these concepts—keystone species, biomass—as ideas that applied to things other than herself” (Ghosh 119).
6. Here, of course, we are referencing Louis Althusser’s concept of interpellation in his “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” wherein Althusser states, “*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*” (173), and, further, “ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: *individuals are always-already subjects*” of the dominant ideology (175-76), which for Kanai-as-concrete-subject is the ideology of global capitalism.
7. To evince the shared class consciousness of Nirmal and Kanai, we must consider Kanai’s explication/accusation that he pontificates to Piya after a tiger has been killed in a small village. His

- discourse likens the villagers by their economic poverty not by their subaltern [non]status; Kanai characterizes them more as a kind of lumpenproletariat we find in Marx:
'I don't think it's quite that simple, Piya. I mean, aren't we a part of the horror as well? You and me and people like us?'
- ...
- 'Because it was people like you,' said Kanai, 'who made a push to protect the wildlife here, without regard for the human costs. And I'm complicit because people like me—Indians of my class, that is—have chosen to hide these costs, basically in order to curry favor with their Western patrons. It's not hard to ignore the people who're dying—after all, they are the poorest of the poor.' (Ghosh 248-49)
For more on this distinction between lumpenproletariat and subaltern, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?":
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. ""Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, edited by Rosalind C. Morris Columbia UP, 2010, pp. 21-78. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/morr14384.5.
8. Ghosh writes from Kanai's point of view that Moyna's "ambition was so plainly written on her face that Kanai was assailed by the kind of tenderness we sometimes feel when we come across childhood pictures of ourselves—photographs that reveal all too unguardedly the desires of people spend a lifetime learning to dissimulate" (113).
 9. We are here reminded of George Santayana's definition of intelligence: "intelligence is quickness in seeing things as they are" (20).
 10. Repeatedly in the "Signs" chapter, Fokir cites [sights] Garjontola as a matrix of knowledge that gives answers and reveals character: "Garjontola ... show[s] you whatever you wanted to know" (267); "No one who is good at heart has anything to fear" in Garjontola (268). Importantly, Fokir's source for understanding Garjontola is his mother, Kusum, whereas Kanai's source is Nirmal. Ghosh thus valorizes matrifocal intelligence over patrifocal [albeit avuncular] intelligence.
 11. We say "largely imaginary" because, once again, Ghosh uses Kanai's interpellated point of view throughout the Garjontola episode, and this point of view demonizes Fokir only in Kanai's mind. Additionally, Kanai's "vision" of the tiger and his defamation of Fokir at Garjontola is entirely dismissed upon the investigations of Piya and Horen:
'Kanai, you were there just ten minutes,' she [Piya] said. 'Apparently it was you who sent Fokir away. He came hurrying back to get us and we came as quickly as we could.'
'I saw it, Piya. I saw the tiger.' Now Horen and Fokir crowded around him too, so he added in Bangla, 'It was there, the cat—I saw it.'
Horen shook his head, 'There was nothing there,' he said. 'We looked, Fokir and I. We looked and saw nothing. And if it had been there, you wouldn't be here now' (273).
 12. We must see Piya's enunciative moment as tentative about Fokir. Doing so cites Piya's scientific *epistêmê* which privileges the hypothetical-empirical-inductive process, so she is "open" to revising her relations with or understanding of Fokir. In the immediacy of their enunciative moment, Piya posits a *hypothetical Fokir* which will be open to revision as events test her hypothesis and she correspondingly reformulates that hypothesis.
 13. The use of "afterglow" here is tinged with the romantic, for we certainly understand that for a time Piya ideates Fokir as a love interest. In her so doing, we must consider that Piya invests in Fokir as being the very opposite of her earlier lover, Rath, whom she equated with manipulative treachery (Ghosh 257-59).
 14. My concluding thoughts here reflect Bakhtin's concrete ethics in his *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Bakhtinian *answerability* detranscendentalizes ethics from the abstract to the environmentally connected, uniquely individual act(s) of a person, here myself, my readers, and Ghosh's readers. Bakhtin urges us to act in-the-world even in our aesthetic experiences like reading Ghosh's novel, for

“the answerably performed act is posited as something-to-be-attained *qua* synthetical truth” (29). The “synthetical truth” of our discussion of the politics of knowledge “is not a passive psychic reaction, but is a certain ought-to-be attitude of consciousness, an attitude that is morally valid and answerably active” (36).

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