

A Spatial Study in Arundhati Ghosh's
The Hungry Tide

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Abstract: Spatial theory has been a field of interest in various scopes of study. It has begun in sociology and entered the literary field recently. The aim of this research paper is to interpret Arundhati Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2006) using Lefebvre's spatial theory with its three adopted types – terrestrial, aquatic and littoral– and to show how they are related to memory and nature. Moreover, Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de memoire* will be introduced and used throughout the analysis since it is firmly connected to the spatial analysis and the historical approach, in that it explains how places can carry historical significance. Lastly, a short introduction to the field of ecocriticism will be provided, and the idea of nature as agentive will be explained and introduced.

Key words: *Spatial theory, The Hungry Tide, Ecocriticism, History, Colonialism.*

الملخص

لقد حظيت النظرية المكانية بمزيد من الاهتمام في مختلف مجالات الدراسة، وكانت بدايتها في علم الاجتماع ثم دخلت المجال الأدبي مؤخرًا وذلك للمساعدة في تفسير الرواية. ويهدف هذا البحث الى تفسير رواية "المد الجائع" لأرونداتي غوش (2006) باستخدام نظرية لوفيفر المكانية بأنواعها الثلاثة - الأرضية والمائية والساحلية - وإظهار كيفية ارتباطها بالذكريات والطبيعة. بالإضافة الى عرض مفهوم بيير نورا عن "أماكن الذكريات" واستخدامه في تحليل الرواية موضوع الدراسة لارتباطها الوثيق بالتحليل

المكاني والنهج التاريخي ، حيث يفسر كيف يمكن للأماكن أن تحمل أهمية تاريخية ، كما انه لن يتم تناول "التاريخ" ، في الرواية المعنية وفقاً للماضي الاستعماري ، لكن التركيز الرئيسي سينصب على احداث التاريخ والذكريات ، فضلا عن انه سيتم بحث الطرق التي يطرح بها غوش إشكاليات التسلسل الهرمي والسلطة و العلاقة بين البشر والطبيعة ومن ثم سيتم تناول " الطبيعة " كمبحث ثان حيث يتم فحص علاقات القوة لمعرفة ما إذا كانت الطبيعة يمكن التحكم فيها ام انها ذات طابع مهيمن وكذلك بحث العلاقة بين القوة "البشرية" و "الطبيعية".

1. Introduction

Spatial theory has been a field of interest in various scopes of study. It has begun in sociology and entered the literary field recently to help in the interpretation of fiction. The aim of this research paper is to interpret Arundhati Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2006) using Lefebvre's spatial theory with its three adopted types – terrestrial, aquatic and littoral– and to show how they are related to memory and nature. Moreover, Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de memoire* will be introduced and used throughout the analysis since it is firmly connected to the spatial analysis and the historical approach, in that it explains how places can carry historical significance. History, in the respective novel, will not be analysed with respect to the colonial past, but the main focus will lie on the processes of history and memory, and how narratives are dominated or domineering.

Furthermore, the ways in which Ghosh problematizes hierarchies and power will be explored as well. The novel has distinctly activist nature; Ghosh problematizes the relationship between human beings and nature. Hence, nature will be used as the second field where power–relations are examined by the author to see if nature is dominated or domineering and to investigate the relation between the "human" and the "natural" power.

Power, in the respective novel, is used as a background theme; when looking at silenced narratives and the relationship between nature and human beings, and how meaning is ascribed to places and spaces, power must be considered. Where there are contested spaces or narratives, there is always a domineering part, which implies power and inequality. The novel does not simply tell a story wherein humans dominate nature, and all other narratives are silenced. Rather, the places described in the novels often have agency: they influence the plot and seem to have “a will of their own” (Schliephake 579).

Spaces and places in the respective novel are tightly woven into the fabric of the story that is told. On the one hand, they carry marks of the past and awaken memories. On the other hand, they are contested: who gives them meaning? Why? Who decides?

Thus, they unify two strands of the narratives of the novel: the natural surroundings and the historical backdrop. So, in examining spaces and places, this paper aims to uncover the ways in which the author problematises power, in relation to history and nature. Besides, by comparing three kinds of spaces, and how they are connected to history and nature, this paper aims to uncover new meanings and interpretations to the novel.

In the first part of this paper, the theoretical framework of this study will be explained. "Space" and "Place" are understood as social construction, and Lefebvre's spatial theory will serve as a broad framework. Secondly, Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de memoire* will be introduced and used throughout the analysis since it is firmly connected to the spatial analysis and the historical approach. Lastly, a short introduction to the field of ecocriticism will be provided, and the idea of nature as agentive will be explained and introduced.

The second part of this paper will be devoted to the analysis of *The Hungry Tide* which will be separated into three parts: "terrestrial", "aquatic" and "littoral". The research paper aims to see if terrestrial spaces are portrayed as fixed, more closely connected to humans, and thus more likely to be *lieux de memoire*, whereas aquatic spaces are portrayed as fluid, ever-

changing, and more "natural," and whether or not this implies that they are "anti"-*lieux de mémoire*—in other words, obliterating the past. The littoral spaces will be viewed as the "border-zone" between the two, and how they are portrayed or challenged will be tackled as well.

2. Spatial Theory of Lefebvre

Place is often defined as "space that has been given meaning through personal, group, or cultural processes"(Altmann and Low 5). According to Cresswell, "places must have some relationship to humans to produce and consume meaning" (7). Thus, place as a concept is linked to humans, contrary to space, which is "a more abstract concept than place. Space is like "an empty container" which provides a realm to be filled with human meaning. "Space, then, has been seen in distinction to place as a realm without meaning— as a 'fact of life' which, like time, produces the basic coordinates for human life"(Cresswell 10). Nonetheless, place is understood as dynamic and constructed and, most importantly, historical: "In fact, place cannot be static, since, being a complex human construction, it is realized continuously through the attribution of meaning to concrete locales by people transforming over the course of a lifespan"(Easterlin 232).

Marxist critic Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, originally published in 1974, influences spatial theory until today and counters the aforementioned arguments about space as an empty container. He postulates that "(social) space is a (social) product"(Lefebvre 26). His work on space was his fifty-seventh book and has been translated into many languages (Merrifield 100). While his theory draws on many different concepts of space from Ancient Greece and Rome, this will not be covered in this short overview. Rather, the paper will focus on Lefebvre's spatial triad and will underline the temporal dimension in his theory and how this influences and is important to his conceptualization of space. Lefebvre's spatial triad has been highly influential and has been the base and groundwork for many spatial concepts. As stated above, Lefebvre opposes the idea of space as an empty container (Lefebvre 113). Lefebvre's approach reveals how space is socially constructed, and he clarifies this with the help of his spatial triad: spatial practice (perceived), representations of space (conceived) and representational space (lived).

Firstly, he defines *spatial practice*. This refers to space that is created by human beings in a "dialectical interaction"(Lefebvre 38) and is *perceived* space in the sense that it becomes visible and is created by everyday practices.

Therefore, spatial practices are "structure lived reality"(Merrifield 110). This space has been understood as "space as physical form, *real* space that is generated and used"(Elden 190). Secondly, Lefebvre defines *representations of space*, "This is the dominant space in any society" (Lefebvre 38–39) and is constructed– *conceived* – by people like “scientists, planners urbanists” (38). Thus, this space is imagined, it is a mental construct which is connected to any dominant order of society and is deciphered via a "system of verbal signs" (39) While it is abstract, it plays a part in "social and political practice"(41) and is therefore connected to “ideology, and power [which] lurk within its representation” (Merrifield 111). Lastly, there is *representational space*, which is *lived* space–the space of everyday experience. It is "the dominated space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate"(Lefebvre 39). This space is constantly evolving and changing"(Elden 90). Crucially, these three spaces cannot be clearly separated, but "the lived, conceived and perceived realms should be interconnected" (Lefebvre 40).

The *representational space* will be the most important for my analysis, since it is "redolent with imagery and symbolic elements, [it has its source] in history"(Lefebvre 41) and

"implies time"(42). Thus, *representational space* is connected to history and memory, not least in the sense that it is both "real-and-imagined"(Elden 190). As will be seen in the following section, Lefebvre's *representational space* can and will be connected to Nora's concept of *lieux de memoire*.

In line with Lefebvre, this paper understands space as a heterogenous concept, one that is not fixed and clear, but constantly negotiated and redefined. "Space" is not simply an empty void to be filled with meaning but has a significance of its own. Furthermore, it is an agentive part of any story, not a simple backdrop or setting. Therefore, this paper rejects the simple dichotomy between "space" as the empty, natural and untouched environment and "place" as the area where human influence has transformed "space". Firstly, this distinction reinforces the separation between the "human" and the "natural "world". Secondly, as has been stated above, Lefebvre, among others, has emphasized space as a constructed and human-made category. By doing so, space has been conceptualized closer to "place": like place, space is constructed, historical and changing its meaning.

Hence in this paper, space will be understood as a large, unclessly designated area that has no well-defined borders—the

tide country; for example. Place, on the other hand, shall be understood as a narrowly defined space that has clear borders. By choosing size and scope as the defining factor the paper will be able to talk about how the characters in the novel inscribe meaning on both space *and* place. Thereby, this paper will regard both categories as human-made constructs, which are subject to interpretation and debate. Furthermore, space and place often cannot be clearly separated in the novel. Hence, both place and space are connected and at times interchangeable (Harcourt 161).

2.1 History and Memory

According to Winter, “When [*lieux de memoire*] join other men and women who come together in public to remember the past—their past—they construct a narrative that is not just ‘history’ and not just ‘memory’ but a story that partakes of them both (314). The moving away from history's "grand narratives" began after the Second World War, when social history became an important historical subfield. Social history's main concern was combining sociological and historical methodology and questions. As the field progressed, the term "history from the bottom up", coined by Frederick Jackson Turner, became more important (Rau 22). The new focus laid on silenced groups and their forgotten

narratives. Accordingly, methodology changed; in order to gain access to these more private spheres (24).

In line with these developments in historical research, the concepts of memory and history will be thought of closely together. History, in this paper, will mean the dominant and "official" narrative, whereas memories are the past as it is remembered by individual characters, which often counters history's version. Both terms are a version of history – they just have not received a voice, yet. Ghosh voices such versions in his novel – often with respect to places and spaces which are connected to the past. As Winter states: often, critics "base their arguments on a clear separation of history and memory. This position cannot be sustained. It makes no sense to juxtapose history and memory as separate concepts"(315).

Space is crucial to history – spaces and places carry meaning, change over time, and influence the way we remember and construct our past. In this paper, Pierre Nora's concept of "*lieux de memoire*" is used to help shed light on the way places and history interact in the novel. Nora thinks and postulates that memory is closely connected to history (13). Nonetheless, Nora distinguishes between history and memory in the sense that history is fixed and powerful, thereby destroying memory. In

Nora's understanding, the *lieux de memoire* become site of conflict, where the push and pull between memory and history is negotiated. History is a violent concept, as his vocabulary (besiege, deforming, penetrating, petrifying) suggests. The *lieux de memoire* do not represent either history or memory, but "construct a narrative that is not just 'history' and not just 'memory', but a story that partakes of them both"(Winter 314). This idea of a place where memory manifests itself and where history's abstract narratives are contested fits very well with *The Hungry Tide*. As will be shown, the places and spaces in the respective novels are contested, and the meanings of the past are negotiated. Both Lefebvre and Nora see place and space as something that is ever-changing, contested, and not necessarily material.

Of course, the *lieux de memoire* are not outside of power-relations. Rather, they are deliberate representations of the past, which are forged and constructed. Besides, there is always a dialogue between the past as preserved and the contested ways in which a contemporary society chooses to remember, memorialize, or indeed forget that past (Catterall 631). It is clear, then, that spaces and places in Ghosh's' novel – though they may be imagined and fictional – can and must be seen as social

spaces—mostly *representational spaces*— and *lieux de memoire* in the sense of Lefebvre and Nora.

2.2. Ecocriticism: Nature has agency

This paper will examine nature in terrestrial, aquatic, and littoral spaces. Do terrestrial spaces represent fixity and stability, and are they *lieux de memoire*? Are the aquatic spaces fluid and changing, and are they disconnected from history and memory—the anti-*lieux de memoire*, so to speak? Are the littoral spaces borders where the dichotomy between the aquatic and the terrestrial is reinforced? As will be shown, the separation is not as simple as that. Terrestrial spaces too are changing and evolving, while the aquatic spaces in the novels have a certain stability.

In analyzing the different spaces and places to show whether or not they are *lieux de memoire*, this paper does not look at the spaces as mere backdrops and settings. On the contrary, the spaces and places in the novels are changing, filled with meaning and they influence the plot and the characters. "[...] places are never self-explanatory per se, but rather need narratives and interpretations that attach meaning to abstract, geometrical space" (Schliephake 570). This process of giving meaning goes into both directions; while the characters give

meaning to places (as, for example, Fokir and his family give meaning to Garjontola). "Places therefore are not only storied; they do story" (Schliephake 579).

This idea of agency becomes crucial when looking at a text from an ecocritical perspective. A common criticism of "green studies" is that it considers nature as something passive, which needs to be saved by humanity (Cohen xx). Lefebvre also writes about nature and explains how human beings have transformed and destroyed natural space. 'Humanity' is killing 'nature' (Lefebvre 71). For Lefebvre, nature is the raw material for the construction of social spaces and as these spaces are built, nature is transformed, used up and destroyed. (Schmid 250).

The paper does not share Lefebvre's view of nature as a simple background, since this constructs nature as ultimately subjected to human agency. Even though human beings do transform and change natural space, this does not mean that nature is helpless, mute and passive. Rather, natural spaces can be seen as agentive and historical; they are not a mere "background of the picture"(Lefebvre 30). Natural spaces are historically constructed and change over time reflecting and constituting social change" (Barca 132).

According to Latour, nature's agency will be defined as “the ability to make a difference” (72); thus, this paper will examine how the spaces and places in the novel have agency and influence, block or suggest certain actions of human beings.

3. Analysis

In this section, Lefebvre's spatial triad will be used as a framework to underline that human beings influence and construct places and spaces. They are never static and simple settings, but are filled with meaning, which is often contested. Pierre Nora's concept of the *lieux de memoire* ties in well with Lefebvre because he looks at places that carry and display memory, and how these are constructed. The aim of this analysis is not to identify the different spaces Lefebvre defines, and it will not go into the difference between space and place in great detail. Rather, the paper will examine spaces and places in the novel and how it is filled with meaning, and in how far this meaning is connected to past events, be those official and big narratives (history) or personal narratives (memory). Nature and history are, of course, connected, since nature is not static, but changing and influenced by history. All spaces and places which the paper will examine are connected to both history and nature and they are often

contested and sites of struggles of power – power over narrative or power over nature.

3.1 Terrestrial Spaces:

3.1.1 Morichjhapi & Garjontola: Islands of History

The two islands, Morichjhapi and Garjontola, in *The Hungry Tide*, are both linked to the past. While Morichjhapi is the island where the massacre took place, Garjontola is *a lieu de memoire* for the protagonists. While they are terrestrial spaces, they are also connected to the water as the setting of the novel is, as a whole, deeply tied to aquatic spaces, and it is; therefore, impossible to talk about terrestrial and aquatic spaces as separated. As Gillis has stated: “Land and water constitute an ecological continuum. We need to be wary of distinguishing the marine too sharply from the terrestrial” (Gillis 163). Thus, the paper will focus on the islands as terrestrial spaces so as to uncover their importance as *lieux de memoire* and to carve out differences in meaning from the tides and rivers.

The focus of Morichjhapi's analysis will be on the incidents' contentious significance. Morichjhapi will also be examined, including how the island has evolved and how these changes are perceived. Furthermore, the paper will show how there are different meanings which can be validly ascribed to a place. As

for Garjontola, it will be argued that it is a *lieu de memoire* for the characters. Second, it will concentrate on the characters' impressions of the island.

Morichjhapi

The Morichjhapi massacre, which Ghosh describes in his novel, has really happened. In 1979, lower-caste and Untouchable refugees attempted to settle down at the protected forest reserves on Bengal's uninhabited islands. But the Left Front government of Bengal sent in troops to remove them forcibly resulting in large-scale raping and killing on the island of Morichjhapi (Tomsy 57). It was Ghosh who made the event visible and he gave voice to memories which would otherwise be forgotten (ibid.).

The first account of Morichjhapi the reader receives is from the conversation between Kanai, the wealthy businessman and Nilima, Nirmal's wife. Kanai has returned to Lusibari because he received a notebook from Nirmal, in which Nirmal tells the story of what happened at Morichjhapi.

When looking at how Nirmal describes Morichjhapi, two main points shall be examined: firstly, how the island is changed by the settlers and is transformed by their cultivation. Secondly, it becomes evident that the island is not simply a place where a

massacre occurred—in Nirmal's recounting, it stands as a symbol of the dream of Sir Daniel Hamilton, who attempted to build a communist utopia in Lusibari.

When Nirmal visits the island because of a storm and wakes up the next day, he finds not, as he expected:

[a]mere jumble, perhaps, untidy heaps of people but paths had been laid; the badh—that guarantor of island life – had been augmented; little plots of land had been enclosed with fences, fishing nets had been hung up to dry. There were men and women sitting outside their huts, repairing their nets and stringing their crab lines with bits of bait and bone. Such industry! Such diligence! (Ghosh 171)

Nirmal is astonished by how the refugees have cultivated the island; he mentions in detail how land has been demarcated by fences. They have claimed ownership of the island by transforming it thoroughly. By doing so, it becomes clear that he did not expect the refugees to work or organize their space – he adopts the gaze of a superior outsider. This gaze is distinctly hierarchical, and he sees himself as superior, much like the travellers which Arnold describes in his essay (Arnold 11). Nirmal's exclams convey his excitement and surprise at the fact that the settlers have created a civilization, and his descriptions

evoke the features of the tropicity discourse of Europeans which Arnold describes.

This parallel to European outsiders is reinforced through Nirmal's connection of the settlers' project with Daniel Hamilton's, a Scotsman who came to the tide country and attempted to build his own society. He invited all people on his island, regardless of their caste or religion, and even introduced his own currency. However, his experiment failed. When Nirmal explains to Kanai why Hamilton attempted to build this society, he says that "it was a dream", thereby connection is established between Nirmal and Hamilton. They both dream of a "new society, a new kind of country"(Ghosh 52), and want "to build a place where no one would exploit anyone and people would live together without petty social distinctions and differences"(53). As Nirmal visits Morichjhapi, the parallel between him and Hamilton is reinforced:

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 hitherto unseen. This, I thought, is what Daniel Hamilton must have felt when he stood upon the deck of his launch and watched the mangroves being shorn from the islands. But between what was happening at Morichjhapi and what Hamilton had done there was one vital aspect of difference: this was not one man's vision. This dream had been dreamt by the very people who were trying to make it real. (Ghosh 171).

Nirmal projects his own feelings on Hamilton, assuming that Hamilton felt the same way when he started to build his island. The building of a human habitat, though, means that the natural environment must be destroyed. While Hamilton "watched the mangroves being shorn from the island", Nirmal is admiring how the villagers utilize and partly destroy their "natural" environment, by building paths and fences. As I will expand on later on, the fight between "humans" and "nature" is a big part of the novel— one of the main tensions is how human beings have to fight back "nature"(and fail) in order to maintain their habitat. Here, however, what strikes Nirmal most is that the dream is not realized by one single man imposing it on the other people, rather, it is a collective dream by many people, who realize it together. Furthermore, Nirmal admires how the refugees have built the experiment despite their powerlessness: "How astonishing it was that I, an ageing bookish schoolmaster, should live to see this, an experiment, imagined not by those with learning and power, but by those without"(171). Interestingly, Nirmal underlines his own learnedness ("bookish schoolmaster") and by this, separates himself from the refugees, who have neither learning nor power. By doing so, he sets himself apart from them and adopts an outsider's gaze. This surprise is supportive of my paper that

Nirmal, while admiring the settlers, nonetheless looks down on them (172).

When Nirmal returns a few weeks later, the place has changed once more: “there had been many additions, many improvements (190–191). While he sees the many things that have been added, he ignores the hard work that went into creating those different things. Firstly, he uses passive constructions (“had been dammed”, “had been planted”), thereby erasing the subject from both the sentence and the building–process. Secondly, he describes the creation of the island–place as an “astonishing spectacle”, and describes it as “an entire civilization”. By doing so, he creates a collectivity; the subjects of the island are reduced to one group, one “civilization”. Lastly, it had “sprouted suddenly in the mud”—it is not, in his description, the hard work of the people on the island, but it seems like a natural process (“sprouting”) that happens by itself.

The place of the island changes drastically as the pressure on the settlers increases. “It was clear at a glance that much had changed in the meanwhile: the euphoria of the time before had given way to fear and slow, nagging doubts. A wooden watchtower had been erected; for instance, and there were groups of settlers patrolling the island's shore”(223). The fear of

the refugees manifests itself on the island: they fortify the borders on the island's shore. From these descriptions, it is clear that the peaceful times are gone: the refugees prepare to maintain their borders and defend them against possible intruders.

The transformation of the island does not go unnoticed by Nirmal. As Gillis states, "islands are notorious shape changers [...]. They change with every tide, with major storms and earthquakes" (Gillis 162). As became visible in Nirmal's description of Morichjhapi, the settlers transformed the place through their hard labour with every visit, the island changes a bit more. The short-lived and changing nature of islands is clear to Nirmal, too, and he addresses this in his notebook, while reflecting on his role of narrating and giving meaning to the events on the island:

The birds were vanishing, the fish were dwindling and from day to day the land was being reclaimed by the sea. What would it take, to submerge the tide country? Not much –a minuscule change in the level of the sea would be enough. As I contemplated this prospect, it seemed to me that this might not be such a terrible outcome. These islands had seen so much suffering, so much hardship, and poverty, so many catastrophes, so many failed dreams that perhaps humankind would not be ill-served by its loss? Then I thought

of Morichjhapi: what I saw as a vale of tears was for others truly more precious than gold. [Nirmal lists why people love the island] In what way could I ever do justice to this place? What could I write of it that would equal the power of their longing and their dreams? What indeed would be the form of the lines? Even this I could not resolve: would they flow, as the rivers did, or would they follow rhythms, as did the tides. (Ghosh 215–216).

In his description of the island, Nirmal emphasizes the role of the islands of the tide country as *lieux de memoire*. When he thinks about the impact climate change has on the tide country, he contemplates what it would mean if they would vanish altogether. As he clarifies, a "minuscule change" would be enough—thereby asserting the agency and power of aquatic spaces. In his reflections, he acknowledges the islands of the tide country as *lieux de memoire*, by stressing that they have "seen" what happened—the islands become witnesses of the “hardship, poverty, catastrophes” and “failed dreams”. The memories and past events he lists here are clearly all negatively connotated. Thus, it might not be such a terrible outcome for humankind to lose the islands. Implicitly, the islands stand for the negative memories and histories of the tide country would it really be so

bad to lose them? Crucially, Nirmal himself phrases this thought as a question: he never fully answers it.

However, his notebook then turns to another paragraph, which is about Morichjhapi. In this paragraph, he underlines the double nature of this island; while for him, it is a "vale of tears", carrying negative memories, for others, it is "more precious than gold". By differentiating between his view and that of other people, Nirmal affirms the subjective meaning which is inscribed on places like Morichjhapi. Furthermore, he questions his ability to do these views fairly: how can his writing equal "the power of their longing and their dreams?" and, more importantly: What "would be the form of the lines?" Thus, he not only problematizes how he could represent their view but addresses the problem of language itself. How can language represent a place like Morichjhapi, the longings, dreams and memories it contains? While Nirmal cannot fully resolve this question, he nonetheless hints at an answer: either they – flow "like rivers", or they "follow rhythms" like the tides. Thus, Nirmal realizes that a place like Morichjhapi requires a language that is reminiscent of aquatic spaces: it needs to be fluid and changing, it cannot be static and silent. While this reinforces the image of aquatic spaces as ever-changing and flowing, it also acknowledges that the

island of Morichjhapi is changing and can be interpreted in different ways. As Kanai tells Piya, Nirmal thinks of himself as a historical materialist, which to him means that “[Kanai speaking] everything which existed was interconnected: the trees, the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature” (Ghosh 282). Accepting this connection means, to Nirmal, that he needs to find a new language which reflects this connection—this cannot be the static, human-made language, but needs to be flowing and changing, just like the tide-country.

Thus, Nirmal undergoes a change, and it is the place that causes this change. He is no longer a detached, patronizing observer who makes invisible the labour that went into transforming the island. Rather, he is aware of different points of view and tries to incorporate them into his narrative. "No longer the detached observer, he remains with the refugees to share their suffering, learning that the risk of involvement may be pain and death, and putting into practice the ethical demands of his historical materialism"(Giles 237).

Garjontola

The second *lieu de memoire* is the island of Garjontola. The island is visited frequently by several characters, and many significant plot points take place there. To name just a few: Kanai

learns to fear the tiger, Kusum's father survives a storm, Fokir remembers his mother there and Fokir dies in order to protect Piya. Moreover, it is also a place of contact, where Nirmal learns to accept and acknowledge the Bon Bibi myth.

To Fokir, the island of Garjontola has always been part of his knowledge, even before he saw it:

I cannot remember the time when I didn't know about this place. Back when I was very little, long before I had seen these islands and these rivers, I had heard about Garjontola from my mother. She would sing to me and tell me tales about this island. This was a place, my mother said, where no one who was good at heart would ever have cause for fear. (Ghosh 307).

Garjontola is not just a real island that Fokir's mother tells him about. It is both "real-and-imagined". Kusum, with her stories, creates the place anew and fills it with meaning, namely that people who are "good at heart" will not have to fear anything on the island. Clearly, even though the island of Garjontola exists physically, what makes it a *lieu de memoire* is its meaning, the fact that Kusum and her family "invest it with a symbolic aura"(Nora 19) Importantly, the meaning she gives the island is not Kusum's or Fokir's own –it has been passed down to them by Kusum's father, who survived a storm there. Garjontola and its

meaning are woven into the family history of Kusum's father. Kusum herself and Fokir, spanning three generations.

When Kusum takes Nirmal along to a visit to Garjontola, she tells him the story of her father, who once survived a storm on the island, by tying himself to a tree. When he heard a tiger's roar, he was frightened, but Bon Bibi came to him and told him that he should not be frightened, because "this place you've come to, I value it as my own; if you're good at heart, here, you'll never be alone" (Ghosh 234). Bon Bibi further told him that her "messengers" her "eyes and ears" would keep him company, and that he would be rescued by a boat. Kusum's father was rescued and, to give thanks to Bon Bibi, he built a shrine on the island, which the family still visit every year. When Kusum tells Nirmal the story, he just laughs it off and replies ironically: "[Me?] An unbelieving secularist? I too am to be granted this privilege?"(234).

As has been established earlier, Nirmal only learns to change his point of view after some time. While this process starts when he thinks about Morichjhapi and the meaning people give to the island, it is only fully completed after he visits Garjontola, because he accepts that not only can one associate positive feelings with a place, but also there can be a mythical

supernatural dimension. In this context, Garjontola could be read as a contact-zone; “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict”(Pratt 6). While Nirmal is not a colonizer, he nonetheless has an outsider's gaze, as has been established before. He is dismissive of the myth in the beginning, but once he reaches the island, he feels like an outsider. While Fokir easily jumps into the mud and pushes the boat, Nirmal “had never felt so much an outsider as I did at that moment” (Ghosh 245). While for Fokir, the “river is in his veins”(ibid.), Nirmal feels out of place and does not know how to behave, he is no longer the superior person in this encounter, but realizes that he does not know his way around. Once more, Nirmal sees connections, and is fascinated by them – he sees the tide country in a new light and better understands the importance and history of the Bon Bibi myth –it reflects the comings and goings of people in the tide country, and reveals the many influences and interconnections that have happened there.

As has been established, a *lieu de memoire* is always constructed and needs to be upheld by someone. I would argue that after Fokir's death, Garjontola loses its "symbolic aura". Firstly, Fokir dies on that island, from objects flying through the air. Kanai believes that Fokir will be safe on the island and that he "will know what to do, don't worry. Others have survived storms on that island, his grandfather included"(380). The fact that Fokir dies, though, subverts the idea of it being a safe haven, where all that are good at heart will have nothing to fear. Secondly, during the big storm, when Piya and Fokir are tied to the tree, Piya sees the shrine flying by. "All at once the bamboo casing splintered and the images inside went hurling off with the wind"(Ghosh 382).The shrine is destroyed in the storm, meaning that the material manifestation of Fokir's family's belief in Bon Bibi is destroyed. Garjontola is not mentioned again, apart from the necessity of going back there to cut Fokir's body down. Importantly, it is left open whether the island will gain significance outside the novel's narrative frame: Will Tutul remember, and uphold the family tradition? The fact that Fokir died on Garjontola; however, does not necessarily mean that it will become the place where he is remembered – as has been seen with Kusum, the

place with which one is connected need not necessarily be their place of death.

In conclusion, Ghosh uses terrestrial settings in his novel to document the past, and illustrate the processes of how it is remembered, and which power–struggles this might create. By analyzing the places in the framework of the concept of *lieux de memoire*, processes of giving meaning and significance have been demonstrated, Ghosh uses islands and how they are changed by human beings to illustrate how they carry meaning and memory. The terrestrial places are not static antitheses to the aquatic spaces and change noticeably throughout the novel. Nirmal's outsider's gaze and his desire to write down and document everything, thereby assuming power over the narrative, evolves as the novel progresses. As Nirmal grows closer to the settlers, especially Kusum and Fokir, he learns to appreciate different points of view and narratives; he no longer only believes in his version, but accepts plurality.

3.2 The Rivers of the Tide Country: Erasing History

Aquatic spaces in *The Hungry Tide* are associated with the obliteration of history and memory. When Kanai speaks with Horen, the boat pilot who used to accompany Nirmal to

Morichjhapi, and wants to find out what exactly happened, Horen cannot give him a clear answer:

'I know no more than anyone else knows. It was all just rumour. 'And what were the rumours?' [Horen recounts how the huts were burnt, fields destroyed and boats sunk.] 'No one knows for sure, but what I've heard is that a group of women were taken away by force, Kusum among them. People say they were used and thrown into the rivers, so that they would be washed away by the tides. Dozens of settlers were killed that day. The sea claimed them all.' (Ghosh 278–279).

What happened at Morichjhapi is reduced to rumours and hearsay. Horen, in his account, rejects responsibility for what he is telling, firstly, by emphasising that he is no particular authority and knows "no more than anyone else". Secondly, he introduces most information with sentences like "no one knows", "I've heard", "[p]eople say"—thereby highlighting that this information is neither confirmed nor necessarily accurate. Crucially, The rivers, tides and the sea are used by the perpetrators to obscure what they did—the aquatic space around the island is utilized by human beings to hide the evidence of what they did to the settlers of Morichjhapi. However, this is the only notable instance where

aquatic spaces are strategically used by humans. More often, it is the other way around: human beings are devoid of agency and must endure the agency of the tide country.

When Kanai starts reading Nirmal's notebook, the latter makes clear why he started writing down what he experienced on Morichjhapi: he wants to make sure that what happened is remembered, thereby fulfilling the role of a historian. A dichotomy is established between agentive nature and powerless human beings. This dichotomy is further reinforced as time is structured differently: in the beginning, nature is what separates temporal dimensions, whereas in the paragraph circling around Nirmal's writing, it is the spatial dimensions which separate time.

All night long, I have been asking, what is it I am afraid [...] with the rising of the sun, I've understood what it is, I am afraid because I know that after the storm passes, the events [...] will be forgotten [...].

There is nothing I can do to stop lies ahead. But I was sure perhaps I can make sure at least that what happened here leaves some trace some hold upon the memory of the world. (Ghosh 69).

Two fronts, the human writer striving to preserve memory, and the natural space fighting to obliterate memory, are introduced

and reinforced by the two paragraphs they are structured in. The first paragraph describes Nirmal's fear that what happened at Morichihapi will be forgotten. He structures time according to natural phenomena: "the rising of the sun", rather than the "morning" or "upon waking up" are used, and time is separated into "before" the storm and "after" the storm. All that was before the storm will not be remembered. By using the storm as time referent, its importance becomes evident; it has agency in the that it causes the forgetting of what happened, obliterates history. The tide country is described as "skillful"(Ghosh 69), which suggests several things. Firstly, it attests agency to the tide country; it has the power to obliterate the past. Secondly, the sentence suggests a rational quality to what the tide country does. Skillful, according to the OED, means "having practical ability, possessing skill, expert, dexterous, clever"(OED "skillful"). This rationality of the tide country suggests, thirdly, that the "silting over the past"(Ghosh 70) is intentional.

In the second paragraph, Nirmal is constructed as the one person fighting this obliteration of history. While he is aware that he cannot "stop what lies ahead", and thus is left without power against the tide country, he nonetheless tries to keep history alive, Interestingly, contrary to the first paragraph of the passage, spatial

terms are used to describe temporal dimensions. Nirmal worries about what "lies ahead" and aims to "leave some trace, some hold upon the memory of this world". Crucially, Nirmal uses "world", rather than "human being" or "India", thereby constructing the image of one big, shared memory, on which he aims to leave a trace. Thus, Nirmal's (albeit futile) attempt to preserve history and "leave a mark" is countered with descriptions of agentive natural spaces, which subvert and erase history. It is not just the differences in making time graspable that mark this passage; it establishes the antagonistic relationship between human beings and nature which, while it prevails during the novel for quite some time, is also subverted, as will be examined later. In light of this obvious dualism between agentive, silencing tides and Nirmal's attempt to record and write down what happened, it becomes clear that Nirmal is not just "a solitary figure who challenges the silencing of history, rebuking the failures of academics and the international community to speak of the violence perpetrated on the refugees"(Tomsky 58–59). While the international community and power–struggles between elite and settlers are important to the novel, it is really the tides that are his direct opponent.

The ultimate blow to Nirmal's attempt at preserving the history of Morichjhapi happens at the end of the novel, when

Kanai loses the notebook after the cyclone, and it vanishes in the tides. Once more, the wind is described as agentive and purposeful, deliberately making the written account vanish: "And then it was as if the wind had been waiting for this one unguarded moment: it spun him around and knocked him sideways into the water. [...] He scrambled to his feet just in time to see the notebook bobbing in the current, some ten metres away (Ghosh 375–376). The wind "was waiting" until Kanai let his guard down, and much like Horen and Nirmal, Kanai is "spun around" and cannot do anything to save the notebook. The one written account of the events at Morichjhapi is, like so many other things, destroyed by the tides.

This antagonistic relationship between nature and human beings becomes most explicit in the scene where Kusum tells Kanai about the way her father died. In this passage, the wind seems to be deliberately hindering the human beings from warning her father of the approaching tiger. They all make noise "but it made no difference, for the wind was against them—the sound did not carry to the man on the far bank"(Ghosh 108). "Against them" has a double meaning, here. While it can be interpreted literally, that the wind blows in their faces, it can also suggest an intent; that the wind is working deliberately against

their attempts to warn Kusum's father. The tiger is using the wind tactically and is described as superior to the humans. It is “skilled in dealing with the wind” and knows that the human beings are "powerless against these gusts"(ibid.). The description of the tiger emphasizes that it is expertly using the wind to help in killing Kusum's father.

As Pirzadeh states "reductive thinking perpetuates the idea that the environment is passive and static based on the premise that natural processes are predictable and mappable"(Pirzadeh 113). She calls the way Ghosh describes the tide country and its dynamism as “defamiliarized representation"(ibid.). This defamiliarization is visible in Nirmal’s description of the wind, since the wind is described as agentive and hostile. The day Nirmal hears about Morichjhapi for the first time, he and Horen are caught in a storm on their way home.

Horen and I set off to return to Lusibari. We were on the river, heading home, when the wind suddenly started up. Within moments it was on us – it attacked with that peculiar, wilful malevolence that causes people to think of these storms as something other than wholly natural. The river had been calm minutes before, but now we found ourselves picked up and shaken by huge waves. Before Horen had been sweating to

make the boat move, now we were being swept along against our will. (Ghosh177).

In his description, the two human beings are powerless against the wind—they have no agency, whereas the wind is described as if it willfully persecuted them. Firstly, the lack of agency of Horen and Nirmal is highlighted by the use of passive constructions: they are "picked up and shaken" and are "swept along". Secondly, the storm catches them unaware – the speed with which the weather changes is emphasized: the wind comes "suddenly" and "within moments" whereas the river moves from being calm to rough in "minutes". Thirdly, an antagonism between wind and humans is established. The wind "attacks" with a "peculiar, wilful malevolence"— taken together with the emphasis on speed, it seems almost as if the wind and the water had waited until the two men were on the river, to maximize the effect of the attack.

The storm brings the two men to Morichihapi, where they wait until it is over and meet Kusum. As has been made clear in my earlier analysis, the visit to Morichjhapi changes Nirmal – and Horen notices this, too. When they talk about it, Nirmal's disbelief in nature's agency comes to the fore once again:

'You are right, Horen. I am not my old self anymore. And it's you who's responsible.' [...] 'Wasn't it you who took me to Morichjhapi?' 'No, Saar, it was the storm. 'Forever modest, our

Horen.' All right, then. It was the storm', I laughed.' It was the storm that showed me that a man can be transformed even in retirement, that he can begin again. (Ghosh 179)

In talking about Horen, Nirmal takes the outsider's gaze: he looks down on Horen. "Forever modest, our Horen" and "all right, then" both suggest that Nirmal is humouring Horen by agreeing with him –and he thinks that Horen does not seriously believe in the storm's agency. However, later in the novel, Nirmal comes to realize and respect that Horen believes in the agency of nature. When they visit Garjontola, they cross "the border that separates the realm of human beings from the domain of Dokkhin Raj and his demons"(Ghosh 224).

I realized, with a sense of shock, that this chimerical line was, to her and to Horen, as real as a barbed-wire fence might be to me. [...]in a way a landscape too is not unlike a book—a compilation of pages that overlap without any two ever being the same. People open the book according to their taste and training, their memories and desires: for a geologist the compilation opens at one page, for a boatman at another, [. . .] and so on. On occasion, these pages are ruled with lines that are invisible to some people, while being for other, as real, as charged and as volatile as high-voltage cables. (Ghosh 224)

As has been examined earlier, Nirmal accepts that there are always several layers of interpretation of a space or place. While

for him, the border is invisible, for Horen and Kusum, it is “as real as a barbed-wire fence”. By likening the space around him to a book, and indicating that its pages may overlap, but none are ever the same, the subjectivity of experiencing a place or space is accentuated. Depending on what “taste”, “training”, “memories” or “desires” someone has, they will see the space (or, in the metaphor; the book) differently. The comparison to a book evokes the notion of “reading” a space or a place; depending on one’s own past, what is seen in the landscape may be different. Thus, in applying Nirmal’s own reflection to his character, it becomes clear that Nirmal’s training, memories, and desires lead him to see Morichjhapi as a Marxist utopia. Coming to the realization of the subjectivity of perceiving a landscape leads him to reconfigure the way he thinks about the tide country as a whole.

To me, a townsman, the tide-country’s jungle was an emptiness, a place where time stood still. I saw now that this was an illusion, that exactly the opposite was true. What was happening here, I realized, was that the wheel of time was spinning too fast to be seen. In other places it took decades, even centuries, for a river to change course; it took an epoch for an island to appear. But here, in the tide country, transformation is the rule of life: rivers stray from week to week, and islands are made and unmade in days. In other places forests take centuries, even millenia, to regenerate; but mangroves can recolonize a denuded island in

ten to fifteen years. Could it be that the very rhythms of the earth were quickened here so that they unfolded at an accelerated pace? [...] But today on those sites [where ships sank] nothing is to be seen, nothing escapes the maw of the tides; everything is ground to fine slit, becomes something else. (Ghosh 224-225)

While Nirmal has, from the beginning, emphasized the tide country's ability to erase the past, he is now applying the same to the terrestrial spaces. While before, from his outsider's perspective ("a townsman"), he assumed that the jungle was a timeless space, he now changes his opinion. The tide country becomes one big place, which functions differently from all other places, since "transformation is the rule of life" there. Contrary to Nirmal's belief that "time stood still", it is actually too fast to be seen. Just like in the passage where the storm "attacks" Nirmal and Horen, it is speed which is the defining factor in the tide country. His description attaches an almost mythological quality to the tide country: "the very rhythms of the earth were quickened here." Of course, time does not pass more quickly in the tide country – it is the places that change faster than anywhere else. Thus, the pace at which the places transform prohibits them to become *lieux de memoire* – they are against history, they prevent anything from being remembered. This becomes evident when

Nirmal talks about sunken ships, and how, “on those sites nothing is to be seen”: the places where the ships have sunk cannot become *lieux de memoire* because there is no visible trace of them ever having been there.

Coming back to the conversation between Nirmal and Horen, it is evident that even Nirmal himself cannot escape the effects of the tide country; when Nirmal says jokingly that "it was the storm that showed me that a man can be transformed even in retirement, that he can begin again"(179), in the context of this passage, its irony evaporates. Nirmal has transformed in the tide country – of course, Morichjhapi and Kusum have an influence on him but, arguably, it was the storm that drove him on the island in the first place, thereby setting off the chain of events that led to his transformation and, ultimately, to his death.

As has been asserted in the analysis so far, aquatic spaces are connected to the obliteration of memory and history. Furthermore, agency is ascribed to the aquatic spaces–tides and rivers– and wind, rather than the mangrove forests. While it is possible to assume that Ghosh portrays humans as being confronted by hostile natural forces, the situation is thought to be more complicated. Bon Bibi's legend–which is to be taken very seriously in this novel–is crucial to borders and border–

maintenance. Furthermore, it also gives aquatic spaces a less hostile quality. Bon Bibi's messengers, the Irrawady Dolphins, are repeatedly described as gentle which help and support human beings. Fokir, the fisherman who helps Piya, an American who comes to the tide country to do research on the dolphins, tells her about them.

In conclusion, Ghosh's novel represents nature, in particular aquatic spaces, as powerful forces with agency, against which the human beings have no chance. The tides change the space daily, and thereby erase the past. The rules in the tide country are different from other places—time appears to pass differently, and its borders and spaces continuously change. Even Nirmal, the historian and great sceptic of all things supernatural comes to accept nature's agency and, as has been touched upon in the section on Garjontola, accepts that places and spaces can have different meanings for different people.

3.2.1 The Badh: Resisting the Tides

As has been shown in the analysis of the islands of Morichjhapi and Garjontola, even the seemingly terrestrial spaces in *The Hungry Tide* follow a littoral logic. There are, I would proclaim, hardly any fixed and stable places and spaces; the tide country, as a whole, is fluid and ever-changing. But when looking at littoral

space in the context of borders and border-making, it is clear that the badh is a special place to examine. The badh is a human-made construction, an attempt to ward off the waters of the tide and keep the lands—where human beings live and farm—dry. However, its construction is ultimately futile: the rivers of the tide country always find a way through it, and it is constantly "under attack".

But these elements of ordinary rural existence [paths, fields] did not entirely conceal the fact that life in Lusibari was lived at the sufferance of a single feature of its topography. This was its *badh*, the tall embankment that encircled its perimeter, holding back the twice-daily flood. (Ghosh 59, emphasis original)

Living in the tide country is special—it is not “ordinary rural existence” (ibid.), even if it may not appear so from the outside. Rather, there is just one “single feature” of Lusibari’s environment which enables people to live there—the badh. By describing its existence as "sufferance", the badh is ascribed a double-meaning: while sufferance can mean “[s]enses relating to patience or suffering” (OED, “sufferance”), it can also refer to “[s]enses relating to permission or toleration” (OED, “sufferance”). Thus the badh both suffers to protect the people of Lusibari, and yet is the only thing permitting human existence in this place. The "twice-daily flood" is only held back by its enduring presence,

which “encircles” (Ghosh 59) the perimeter of Lusibari—thereby forming an artificial, seemingly static and human-made border between land and sea. The work that went into this “tall embankment” is erased in this description – it seems to always have been there, rather than being created by human beings, which is further underlined by the fact that the word “sufferance” is in many contexts deemed “archaic” by the OED.

Even though the embankment seems static, it carries the marks of every storm and flood that happened. This enhances its meaning. When Nirmal speaks to Fokir and attempts to entertain the child, the latter points to the *badh*. Nirmal is thrilled because it “is not just the guarantor of human life on our island: it is also our abacus and archive, our library of stories. So long as I had the *badh* in sight, I knew I would not lack for something to say” (Ghosh 202, emphasis original). He proceeds by telling Fokir to “look again; look carefully. Let’s see if you can pick out the spots where the embankment has been repaired. For each such repair, I’ll give you a story”(202). Thus, even though the *badh* seems static and human-made, and as such not a littoral space as; for example, a beach would be, it nonetheless changes and transforms because of the tides. As floods and storms happened, the *badh* has been repaired countless times—and it carries the

marks of each such repair. It marks the border between terrestrial, human-made territory and the aquatic space that surrounds it. For Nirmal, the badh is a *lieu de memoire*, it is the “abacus and archive, our library of stories”—it is where memories and stories are stored, and are made visible.

The stories it tells are about incidents where the embankment broke, and the effects this had on the people living in Lusibari. Interestingly, Nirmal starts with breaks that were caused by human beings; one "was made by a man who wanted to settle a score", causing the land to be infertile for ten years. Another was caused by an insufficient repair because the contractor used “only half the materials he had been paid for. "As Fokir points to a repaired spot that connects to politics, Nirmal refuses to talk about it, and changes the topic. He then proceeds to tell the stories of storms and breaks in the badh that were caused by the tides. He points to the place "where a kilometre of the embankment had been beaten down, in the 1930's, by a storm" and urges Fokir to imagine all the work their ancestors had put into making this land fertile and imagine how they:

watched the waters, rising, rising, gnawing at the mud and the sand they had laid down to hold the river off. Imagine what went through their heads as they watched this devouring tide eating its way through the earthworks, stalking them wherever they

were. There was not one among them [...] who would not rather have stood before a tiger than have looked into the maws of that tide. (Ghosh 203).

Once again, the agency of nature is underlined. The waters are “gnawing” and are “devouring” and “stalking” the people and the embankment they created. Of course, devouring and stalking are both actions which are associated with tigers in the novel. Looking back on the scene where the tiger eats Kusum’s father, it, too, is described as “stalking” him. Ghosh does not limit the parallel to the verbs, though, it is made into an explicit comparison in the end of the passage. In it, the tide is even more frightening than the tiger, since the villagers would rather encounter the animal than look “into the maws of that tide”. “Maw” refers to “the stomach of an animal” (OED, “maws”)—by describing the tide as having a stomach, it’s equated to an animal which is hungrily eating up the embankment created by human beings. Of course, the title of the novel itself points to this aspect of the tide – it is *The Hungry Tide*, and it will eat if it wants to.

Even after all these years of improving and changing the structure of the embankment, the badh is not sufficient to ward off the enormous forces of the tides – given time, it cannot and will not hold since the tides are too powerful to be fended off:

Look at it, my friend, look at the badh. See how frail it is, how fragile. Look at the waters that flow past it and how limitless they are, how patient, how quietly they bide their time. Just to look at it is to know the waters must prevail, later, if not sooner. But if you're not convinced by evidence of your eyes, then perhaps you will have to use your ears. [...] [Fokir hears a scratching sound –crabs] Even as we stand here, untold multitudes of crabs are burrowing into our badh. Now ask yourself, how long can this frail fence last against these monstrous appetites–like crabs and the tides, the winds and the storms? (Ghosh 205–206).

The embankment is “frail” and “fragile” when compared to the waters surrounding it. These are “limitless” and “patient”, and they “quietly bide their time”. By using words like "patient", the hostile and antagonistic relationship between the badh and the river is illustrated. This power of the water cannot solely be conveyed via vision; hearing how the embankment is literally eaten up by crabs further emphasises its fragility. Despite the presence of Nirmal and Fokir on the embankment, “untold multitudes of crabs” eat up the embankment. Neither Nirmal nor Fokir intimidates them, and the number of crabs cannot be grasped by a concrete number. The crabs, tides, winds and storms are very powerful in this passage, they have “monstrous appetites”, and are too many to count. The two human beings standing on the embankment are

powerless against them; the border they created between aquatic and terrestrial space will, given time, break down. Acknowledging the power of the tides means reconfiguring the embankment; it is no longer "the tall embankment", but a mere "frail fence"—helpless against the forces of the tide country. According to Giles, "Telling stories to the child Fokir about past cyclones as they listen to crabs burrow in the levee, Nirmal describes the feeling of being dwarfed by the dynamical sublime: Here, Nirmal's encounter with the sublime suggests omnipotent nature's indifference to humanity" (230).

Nirmal closes his speech by speaking about what happens if the badh breaks down, concluding that human beings will be on their own as they do not belong to the tide country. Humans will not have anywhere or anyone to turn to and ask for help—no supernatural beings ("angels") nor other human beings ("men") (Gosh 206) or animals can hear them. The badh, in a way, is the effort of the local community to impose their notions of borders onto the tide country – the clearly constructed separation between land and water is fragile and cannot withstand the forces of the tide country.

In conclusion, the description of the badh highlights the fact that an artificial, human-made separation between land and water

cannot persist, because the waters of the tide country are too strong. Observing and understanding the tide country according to "terrestrial logic" cannot work because it follows different rules and principles. Its fluidity, vastness and constant change cannot be grasped by human words or concepts – the "maws of the tide" are far superior to the "frail fence" which humans built. The littoral space between water and land functions well enough without human intervention, the mangroves and the tide country as a whole absorb "nature's fury", and it is only because of human mingling and intervention that the balance is disrupted. Therefore, in the description of the badh, nature is once more described as agentic and forceful, while human beings remain powerless objects of its will.

4. Conclusion

This research paper has examined *The Hungry Tide* within a spatial, historical and ecocritical framework. The novel treats power structures and problematises the suppression of people and their narratives, and portrays nature as agentic. Ghosh focuses on the relationship between human beings and nature. Using spatial, ecocritical and historical concepts as a framework to analyze the novel has proven to be an effective approach. Such a broad scope has helped to uncover the multi-layered and

complex meanings of the places and spaces in the novel showing the interconnection of nature, history and space.

The terrestrial spaces in the novel have been examined in close connection to their fixity and their relation to the past. *The Hungry Tide* is clearly a *lieu de memoire* and is inscribed with both colonial history and the history of suppression. The island Garjontola is a familial *lieu de memoire*, dedicated to Kusum's father, and later Kusum herself. However, it also has a spiritual dimension: the shrine to Bon Bibi is located on the island. Morichjhapi is constantly changing, the settlers cultivate and use their natural environment to build a community. Both islands have been analyzed with respect to the descriptions provided by Nirmal, and how he comes to realize that their meaning is not static but depends on who speaks of them. Accordingly, he reflects on his own capability to speak of the islands and comes to the conclusion that he must adapt his language to account for the ever-changing and liminal state of the islands and their meaning. The islands are not terrestrial places per se, since they are located in the tide country, whereby ebbs and floods, everything changes twice a day. Thus, the terrestrial places are connected to memory, narrative, and history, but rather than being

static backdrops to the plot of the novel, they influence it and change as the stories in the novel progress.

The aquatic spaces are described as hyperagentive (Richter 5). The rivers of the tide country actively dominate human actions: they drive Nirmal to Morichjhapi, and constantly attack the badh. They obliterate history and fight against Nirmal's attempts to document it; in the end, they swallow the notebook. Aquatic spaces are used to underline different struggles. Ghosh uses the rivers and water to demonstrate the power and agency of nature vis a vis the powerless human beings, who stand no chance against it. By constructing an antagonistic relationship between human beings and the natural space surrounding them, he stresses the futility of the attempt to dominate and exploit nature; nature has not, as Lefebvre thinks, "been defeated, and now waits only for its ultimate voidance and destruction"(Lefebvre 30–31). Rather, it is immensely powerful, and will prevail in a fight. While this antagonism could be seen as Ghosh reinforcing the dichotomy between nature and human beings, the myth of Bon Bibi and her messengers underlines that, in fact, human beings are part of nature.

The littoral spaces do indeed signify borders. However, rather than supporting and strengthening divisions, the littoral

spaces are used in the novel to underline the crossings and destructions of them. In *The Hungry Tide*, the badh is used to illustrate the power of the tides, and the futility in attempting to control or contain the waters of the tide country. This is due to the fact that human beings cannot grasp the power of the tides; their vocabulary and logic do not apply in a place like the tide country.

All three categories of spaces –terrestrial, aquatic and littoral are connected to both memory and nature. Even though their functions within the novel differ, they all change and are agentic, albeit to varying degrees. The novel deliberately characterizes nature as an agentive force, thereby highlighting that it is not just an empty space human beings inhabit and invest with meaning, but that it influences them as well. By underlining that human logic cannot grasp, know or describe nature, the novel subverts a narrative that would equate silenced narratives with helpless dominated natural spaces. Furthermore, it reveals the complexities of questions of power, the relationship between human beings and nature and the construction of historical narratives. Rather than constructing a simplistic antagonism between humans and nature, Ghosh subverts this dichotomy at several points in his novel.

Looking at three different kinds of spaces—terrestrial, aquatic and littoral—has likewise proven to be a broad and fruitful basis for the analysis. Through this approach, spaces and places that have been neglected by previous studies could be considered. Separating places and spaces into these three categories, and comparing them, has helped to uncover new layers of meaning for spaces and places that, despite having been examined by many different scholars, have gone unnoticed so far.

As this research has revealed, spaces and places are laden with meaning that is constantly challenged, re-evaluated, and transformed. A new layer of interpretation has been added to the discourse about *The Hungry Tide*. For sure, there will be more publications about this novel, each taking a different angle and possibly complementing or contradicting these readings. Literary texts may not be notable or intriguing on their own, but by disputing the various interpretations and adding additional layers to them, the novels gain significance beyond themselves; they, too, may become *lieux de mémoire* – contested and debated, but ultimately vital and fascinating.

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