

rMA Thesis Comparative Literary Studies

A Watery Cosmopolitanism

Imagining “Worlding” in Rural South Asia

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While working on this dissertation I have been from Utrecht to Leipzig, and beyond, to Varanasi in India in the real world; and the imaginaries that came to my during my research stretched even farther, from the vision of a Bengali polymath in 19th-century British India to the poetic landscapes of rural contemporary India. It would therefore be selfish of me to claim this writing as my own; these places and their people have seeped into my writing like the fresh monsoon rains into a thirsty field.

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Introduction

In preparation of this work, I took a short trip to India as a way of familiarising myself – to a humble degree – with rural India; as a reality check, so to speak. I had been traveling by bus for over 10 hours. I was headed from Simla to Kalpa, a small village in the Kinnaur valley of Himachal Pradesh, a secluded bit of rural India, safely tucked away in the foothills of the Himalayas. The reason for my visit was straightforward: I had spent most of my time in India in a number of its cities, and before leaving the country I wanted to catch a glimpse of the countryside in order to complement my impressions of urban South Asia. A little ambitious perhaps, for the faces of India are many, and I had limited time. Nonetheless, my short stay in a Himalayan village led to a number of encounters that left me with a number of thoughts; most of them originating from my observations on the interplay between literature and reality.

One of the first things that struck me was the villagers' dress. Many (if not most) wore a traditional felt cap on their heads, to identify themselves as inhabitants of the Kinnaur valley. The notion of traditional dress gave the village an atmosphere of distinct locality; a sense of uniformity that contrasted the heterogeneity of the city, which is increasingly multitrade – especially cities like Delhi and Mumbai, but also the less megalomaniac capital of the Himachal province, Simla. At the same time, the locals I met were hardly rooted in their place of birth. Some students I met had moved to distant cities to study; a mechanical engineer frequently travelled into other provinces for work; and even shopkeepers switched localities during winter. All while wearing their felt caps.

Another interesting issue surfaced when a group of students invited me to watch a cricket match with them. It was the time of the world championships; the match we watched, however, was New Zealand – Australia, so there was no need for any of us to align ourselves with one of the teams out of patriotic concerns. The students, I learned, were staying at the hotel to celebrate the birthday of one of them. They decided to do so in Kalpa because the Kinnaur valley was their homeland; all of them were born in the same village not far from Kalpa. The countryside had left a strong impression on them. Though they were students, and their fluency in English indicated a cosmopolitan disposition, they were not quite the urban middle class jet-set cosmopolites that are stereotypically associated with English speaking Indian youth. In addition, they felt strongly connected to the Kinnaur valley; they made a big point of inviting me to their village so they could show me the place they called home, and when discussing the situation of the countryside in India they proved profoundly sympathetic towards their often disadvantaged compatriots who lacked the benefits of higher education.

Interestingly, education for them was not a way of ‘getting out’; it provided them with a sense of empowerment, as they expressed their desire to apply their acquired expertise to the local community.

This observed example of a flexible cosmopolitanism, a combination of a strong identification with a local culture in combination with a way of being that transcends that same locality, is a distinct property of the countryside as imagined in contemporary Indian English literature. This work seeks to emphasise this voice, one that is arguably distinctive; namely, the voice of the imagined Indian countryside. It is a relevant notion to discuss in the light of the contemporary state of the discipline of comparative literature, because of its implied commentary on the definition of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism is often associated with the urban and with rootlessness, which is described by Ghassan Hage as “cosmo-multiculturalism” (204). Emily Johansen criticises this definition of cosmopolitanism: “Superficial cosmopolitanism demands a troubling disavowal of responsibility to specific places” (2). In fact, Johansen argues this superficial kind of cosmopolitanism to be destructive to rural environments (2).

Johansen’s critique of a superficial cosmopolitanism echoes the concerns voiced by Bruce Robbins in ‘Comparative Cosmopolitanism’. Robbins writes that “[i]n an unprecedented and somewhat mysterious way, what it means to be an intellectual or a critic seems to have become worldly or transnational or – to use a wilfully provocative word – cosmopolitan” (311). The situation of the discipline, according to him, is defined by a sense of stagnation, because the notion of privilege associated with a cosmopolitanism that is marked by transnational mobility and worldliness (312-313). This sharp criticism ties in with Gayatri Spivak’s contribution to the debate in *Death of a Discipline*. In the first chapter, titled ‘Crossing Borders’, Spivak expresses that “Comparative Literature must always cross borders. And crossing borders, as Derrida never ceases reminding us via Kant, is a problematic affair” (2003 16). Spivak then proceeds to describe the crux of the issue, as she concludes that the discipline is harmed by the lack of true border crossing, which entails recognition of the world on the other side of the border first of all. In her eyes, this requires a step forward from “metropolitan-based language work” (2003 10), towards the “irreducible work of translation, not from language to language but from body to ethical semiosis, that incessant shuttle that is a “life”” (2003 13). In other words, Spivak advocates an encounter between hemispheres rather than a clinical language exercise as the basis for a healthy discipline.

This encounter contributes to Robbins's criticism in the sense that the crossing of borders as proposed by Spivak performs an alternative to the superficial, transnationally mobile cosmopolitanism. It is therefore not surprising that Robbins refers to Spivak when suggesting alternatives: "This suggests the case for a certain cosmopolitanism – not one obsessed with embodying a preconceived totality, but one which does not judge in advance the macro-political scale of its units, which sees "worlding" as a process, to quote Gayatri Spivak, and a process in which more than one "world" may be realized, where "worlds" may be contested" (318). Robbins augments Spivak's concept of worlding, which she posited as an imperialist project, by adding the possibility of realising more than one world (Spivak 1985 243). As such, Robbins's sense of cosmopolitanism is defined by two things: firstly, transition rather than stagnation, as is made clear by the posited necessity of recognising worlding as a process; secondly, the acknowledgement of 'world' as plural; as such, a cosmopolitan disposition has much in common with Spivak's sense of crossing borders. In addition, Robbins adds the notion of a process, indicating a move towards cosmopolitanism as a sense of *becoming*. This is in line with Johansen's argument, who states that "[a] cosmopolitan sensibility is constantly in a state of *becoming*, rather than being" (3). This dissertation will utilise the critical notion of worlding, but with the added nuance that, indeed, multiple worlds need to be realised. As Robbins shows, the term is a relevant tool in the delineation of a cosmopolitanism defined by a sense of *becoming*; as such its use will be maintained. A nuance will be added however; namely, the notion that an ideal sense of worlding does not entail an imperialistic envelopment in a totality, but rather, it ought to be recognised as a natural process that drives the realisation of worlds – of which many can exist at the same time.

A responsible, non-superficial kind of cosmopolitanism then can be described as a cosmopolitanism that is 1) not static, but in transit, continually enveloped in the process of worlding; and 2) not oriented towards a singular totality, but rather, open to the existence of other worlds, and ready to respect difference. The notions of *becoming* and the plurality of worlds as such are paramount to a responsible cosmopolitanism. This work will attempt to discern the (im)possibilities of such a cosmopolitanism by observing rural South Asia as imagined in several prominent works of English language literature from India. As the anecdotal example of the Kinnaur valley appeared to indicate, the Indian countryside is not devoid of cosmopolitan sensibilities; instead, perhaps precisely because of its distance from the urban, it can be considered as a productive background on which to imagine a functional sense of cosmopolitanism. At the same time, the Indian countryside's troubled situation in the

face of global influences – such as multinational corporations like Coca-Cola using up the water of rural communities, and wildlife conservation programmes interfering with the lifestyles of traditional rural villages – necessitates a sense of prudence. The rural is also a site on which a destructive cosmopolitanism is produced; and as such, a critical examination of the imagined rural could help dispel unwarranted optimism about globalisation and institute a critical definition of cosmopolitanism that will help imagine a resistance against incorporative neo-colonial practices.

In order to do so, this work will follow Robbins's suggestion to critically examine agency as a manner to diffuse the totality of superficial cosmopolitanism. Robbins mentions that "the act of finding "agency" in text after text corresponds to a logic which is as much a part of our "professional" or "metropolitan" situatedness as the act of neglecting or denying it would be" (316). As such, this work strives to read for agency as a complex confluence of negotiations rather than a phenomenon that is either there or not. By examining in which ways rural subjects find themselves influenced by their societies, environments, and globalisation, this work seeks to contribute to a more sophisticated way of imagining cosmopolitanism.

The Local Environment

When considering cosmopolitanism in the countryside, the notion of the rural environment cannot be ignored. The reason why the localisation is important has been addressed by Robbins:

No one actually is or ever can be a cosmopolitan in the full sense of belonging everywhere. If such a thing were conceivable, it would not be desirable, for as Donna Haraway has pointed out, it could only exist in the form of complete cultural relativism. The interest of the term cosmopolitanism is located, then, not in its full theoretical extension, where it becomes a paranoid fantasy of ubiquity and omniscience, but rather (paradoxically) in its local applications, where the unrealizable ideal produces normative pressure against such alternatives as, say, the fashionable 'hybridization'" (Damrosch et a. 325).

This shows that an analysis of cosmopolitanism in a rural environment has something interesting to offer. Two things come to mind: firstly, the rural countryside emphatically considers itself localised – as shown, perhaps, by the Kinnaur Valley felt caps – and, furthermore, the imagined rural is more often than not the place where modernity and

tradition collide. The countryside does not fantasise about ubiquity and omniscience; rather, it becomes, through the workings of globalisation, the site on which the normative pressure of cosmopolitanism is most strongly felt.

The rural has been receiving growing attention in the past number of years; mostly from a combined ecocritical/post-colonial perspective. The crossover between these two theoretical movements has been referred to as 'green post-colonialism'. The main concept of green post-colonialism as articulated by Mukherjee in reference to Huggin consists of the idea that eco-critical and postcolonial studies need each other: "whereas the former could help centre the material environment as the primary focus of the latter's critical perspective, the latter could help combat 'the tendencies of some Green movements towards Western liberal universalism and [white] middle-class nature-protection elitism'" (Mukherjee 39). Mukherjee himself went on to further deepen the connection between eco-critical and post-colonial studies by focusing on their materialist common ground. Setting out with an eco-inspired materialist approach, Mukherjee engages with the post-colonial environment as presented in a number of contemporary Indian English novels – a number of which will also be discussed in this paper. Mukherjee's focus is consistently on incarnations of matter: he articulates form as the area in which the Indian English novel both enters the world market and resists it; and as such, his reading is centred on formal expressions of environments in order to, as borrowed from Adorno, historicise nature and naturalise history (Mukherjee 59). The confluence of the concepts of nature and history serves to criticise the material unevenness of the world, which results in poverty and, according to Mukherjee, is a consequence of the contemporary condition of global capitalism.

In his concluding remarks, Mukherjee writes: "[w]hat we call the environment enters [the postcolonial novel] as a theme, in its compulsive recording of the symbiosis between humans and non-humans, their physical surroundings, and the various movements and expressions of historical capital. But environment, understood precisely as the field of this symbiosis, is also registered in the formal architecture of the novel – in its absorption of the styles of the cultural and literary forms that surround it" (187). Mukherjee as such makes a valuable contribution to the sphere of postmodern ecocriticism. His proposed symbiosis between human individuals and their environment echoes the postmodern call for the abandonment of a humanist, man-centred criticism. This work will attempt to integrate such an ecological, post-colonial line of thought into the imagination of cosmopolitanism in order to improve on the notion of what a responsible cosmopolitanism entails. This will be done by examining the notion of agency, as mentioned before, in the light of the environment; as such,

the symbiosis between environment and humanity will, hopefully, remain preserved – yet, at the same time, by recognising agency as a complex but human quality, cosmopolitanism as a critical definition can continue to play a role. Environmental issues – natural and man-made – thus will be considered as factors that complicate the issue of cosmopolitanism. As such, this research will use a level of analysis grounded in a post-colonial/ecocritical perspective to answer Robbins’s call for complex agency, in order to contribute to the development of a responsible cosmopolitanism.

In this context, the rural takes up a crucial position because of its aforementioned association with locally inhabited tradition. It has been argued that the rural explicitly associates itself with a territorial environment (Johansen). If this is the case, the rural would be an interesting site to observe how identity is negotiated through the local, the global, and the national into different modes of cosmopolitanism. These imagined representations of cosmopolitan identities can shed new light on the issues surrounding cosmopolitanism; for instance, it will allow new perspectives on how local, rural environments with their associated histories can counteract the notion of incorporation associated with globalisation, while still allowing an identity that transcends the national.

Interpreting the Imagined

Methodologically speaking, a study of imagined cosmopolitan identities requires a solid framework in order to be successful. One of the important mistakes of the past was the Western effort to judge Southern (indeed, all literature) according to Western merits; this study seeks to prevent such a mistake by establishing a framework that is compatible, or at least inspired by, the Indian tradition. To this end, the first chapter will concern a critical examination of Rabindranath Tagore’s writing. A world-famous Bengali polymath, Tagore wrote extensively about politics; both in a poetic style as well as a more critical, non-fictional register, as exemplified by his work *Nationalism*. In addition, he is well known for being the first Indian author to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature; as such, his persona transcended global borders and entered the West from the South. These qualities make him a compelling voice on the issue of identity and nation, which will contribute to the formulation of an indigenous-inspired outlook on Indian cosmopolitanism.

Chapters 2 and 3 will then concern the application of said framework to two contemporary works of fiction: Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*. Roy’s status as a writer is an important contributing factor to this selection. Her oeuvre mainly consists from non-fictional, political – and oftentimes polemical

– writing. It can therefore be assumed that her novel is also written as a cultural critique. In addition, *The God of Small Things* is mainly set in a rural area in South India. Its characters clearly display notions typically associated with cosmopolitanism: Rahel, arguably the novel's main protagonist, for instance, lived in the United States for a number of years, while her uncle Chacko studied at Oxford. The combination of these factors make it a piece of writing that, through a literary mode, examines and strongly criticises man-made, or cultural environmental factors in order to show how a superficial cosmopolitanism has a tragical, destructive impact on the South Indian countryside. At the same time, *Small Things* offers a glimpse of hope by revealing the natural environment to possess redeeming qualities that encourage a responsible manner of worlding.

Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* operates in a similar manner. It portrays the countryside from the perspective of the protagonists Piya and Kanai. By utilising such an outsider's perspective, Ghosh craftily manipulates the reader into the outsider's role as well. At the same time, Ghosh's anthropological expertise allows him to paint a sympathetic yet accurate picture of the rural Sundarbans. As such, the novel features an interplay between the cosmopolitan protagonists and the rural environment, forcing the reader to re-evaluate the consequences of globalisation.

I

Finding an Indian Sense of Cosmopolitanism

Santiniketan: The abode of peace. Such rings the name of a small rural town about 180 kilometres north of Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Its name is telling, especially considering who provided it. It was formerly known as Bhubandanga, but in 1862, Maharshi Debendranath – Rabindranath Tagore’s father – gave it its new name. Rural Santiniketan contrasts Kolkata’s hustle and bustle, and as such, the name makes sense – “shanti” refers to peace, tranquillity, and quiet.

In the present day, rural Santiniketan is known for something else. It has become the site of one of India’s central universities, Visva-Bharati University, and an institute of primary and secondary education, Patha-Bhavana, both established by Rabindranath Tagore. He chose to found a school in this place to develop his vision on education, which is reflected in the ways in which the school is organised even today. The institutes’ defining features include open-air classes and an emphasis on interpersonal contact between teachers and students. As such, the school reflects an ideal that has the countryside at its heart. It also demonstrates a strong connection to India’s tradition; the emphasis on interpersonal contact has been linked to teaching methods employed at ashrams, and it calls to mind the traditional relationship between guru and discipline that is prominent in classical Indian literature.

Despite its rural location and traditional approach however, Santiniketan reflects a certain worldliness. As recalled in Tagore’s Nobel Prize memorial, Santiniketan has been the site on which worlds met when Rabindranath Tagore was awarded an honorary doctorate by Oxford University:

“In 1940, when he was given an honorary doctorate by Oxford University, in a ceremony arranged at his own educational establishment in Santiniketan (“In Gangem Defluit Isis,” Oxford helpfully explained), to the predictable “volley of Latin” Tagore responded “by a volley of Sanskrit,” as Marjorie Sykes, a Quaker friend of Rabindranath, reports” (Nobelprize.org).

Santiniketan therefore illustrates how the Indian countryside can be interconnected to the globe and play a relevant role in the development of worlding. Moreover, the rural, in contrast to the urban, provides Tagore with a strong *locale* from which he is able to make sure that

India can “hold its own”. Rural India, as such, is not necessarily a backwater; it can contain global connections and, by employing these, play an essential role in the worlding process of its inhabitants. In other words, *worlding* in the countryside can be understood as the ways in which the landscape enables and encourages participation in global processes, while allowing for the individual to remain territorialised locally. It is for these reasons that this work will attempt to develop a perspective on cosmopolitanism from the Indian countryside.

In order to do so accurately and productively, this chapter will strive to define an Indian sense of cosmopolitanism; or a sense of how cosmopolitanism operates in India. The example of Santiniketan demonstrates that the Indian countryside provides opportunities for a genuine cosmopolitanism; however, there are other relevant realities to be taken into account, such as the fact that a large part of rural India suffers the consequences of a global economy, which enables multinational corporations to buy out farmlands, for example. Therefore, this chapter, by using the figure of Rabindranath Tagore as an example, will endeavour to delineate the (im)possibilities for cosmopolitanism in India, and the relevance of the countryside in this respect. As such, two points will be discussed: Firstly, the problematics of cosmopolitanism and India; and secondly, the manner in which Tagore provides ways of imagining answers to these issues. Doing so will allow the development of a theoretical context in which to frame this work and illustrate how it will contribute to the contemporary debate on cosmopolitanism in comparative literary studies. Furthermore, it will shed light on the relevance of English language literature from India in this respect, and illustrate the urgency of discussing the novels in the following chapters.

1.1 Defining Cosmopolitanism

Before embarking upon a reading for the place of cosmopolitan identity as imagined in the contemporary Indian novel, it would be fitting to first of all consider the meaning of cosmopolitanism in the context of this paper first and foremost. In the Oxford English dictionary, a definition is given as follows: “Having the characteristics which arise from, or are suited to, a range over many different countries; free from national limitations or attachments” (OED). This appears simple enough; but as mentioned in the introduction, however, the notion of cosmopolitanism within post-colonial studies is still surrounded by debate. It is to a degree associated with incorporation into Western culture; for instance, in many cases, cosmopolitanism equates with access to global culture, which often manifests itself through Western luxuries: internet access, the ability to purchase Western-made accessories, wearing Western attire, and many more. As such, the characteristics that “range

over many different countries” are often actually Western characteristics, and ones of doubtful merit – consumerism and corporatism, for example, are often mentioned as examples of neo-colonisation; a problem that can be defined as, according to Robbins, “totalizing Western liberalism” (Damrosch et al. 320).

The mere definition of cosmopolitan as a freedom from nationalism is, as such, too limited for a critical attitude towards globalisation. As argued by Glick Schiller and other scholars, agents of incorporative globalisation, such as multinational corporations, but also, to an extent, NGO-like instances such as wildlife protection programmes and cultural forms such as film and cinema, function transnationally – they operate, to a degree, free from national ties. Instead, they are tied to a more obscure, fractured web of power that finds its epicentre at the Western hegemony. The current challenge, as recognised by Robbins, is to develop a cosmopolitanism that can be critical towards these incorporative devices as well as imagine ways in which identities can be cosmopolitan without being forced into the model of the Western style urban middle class subject. Clearly, the latter is hardly cosmopolitan at all, as such a conception of a cosmopolite leads to a colourless monoculture; and moreover, it reeks of neo-colonialism: The post-colonial subject is invited into the global hegemony only when he or she conforms to its Western standards.

At this point, then, Robbins’s criticism of the state of the art when it comes to cosmopolitanism manages to strike at the heart of the issue. There are two important points in Robbins’s writing that deserve a pivotal role in this discussion. First of all, Robbins criticises the ways in which agency is generalised and celebrated – but that it needs to be discussed nonetheless: “[I]f we do not need “easy generalizations”, we do need difficult ones – for example, the more difficult though less pious procedure of *not* assuming agency to be everywhere present, but trying to explain why it is where it is and why it isn’t where it isn’t” (Damrosch 316). Complicating agency in such a way “suggests the case for a certain cosmopolitanism – not one obsessed with embodying a preconceived totality, but one which does not judge in advance the macro-political scale of its units, which sees “worlding” as a process, to quote Gayatri Spivak, and a process in which more than one “world” may be realized, where “worlds” may be contested” (Damrosch 317-318). As such, in order to develop a healthy perspective on cosmopolitanism, a sense of plurality is necessary; it needs to leave room for other worlds, instead of incorporating the Other into the same. Cosmopolitanism is as such closely tied to the responsibility towards the Other that is much talked about in Attridge’s *The Singularity of Literature*. Without straying too far from the

subject, it is still appropriate to recognise that a responsible cosmopolitanism in this case appears strongly connected to a responsible sense of criticism.

At the same time, the notion of pluralities of worlds comes with a difficulty of understanding. In this sense, it appears the crucial issue in cosmopolitanism closely resembles the problematics of translation; namely, the question that always remains is whether someone who inhabits another world can ever be fully understood. Nonetheless, the aforementioned responsibility ought to illustrate that, even when full mutual understanding is hardly attainable, even small steps are worthwhile; if only to attain, as Robbins calls it, “the best that is known and thought” (Damrosch 326) It is for this reason worlding should be taken as a work in progress. The cosmopolite as such becomes a subject in transition; a transition that is not necessarily defined by transnational mobility, but instead by a confluence of worlds.

Having stated the necessity of recognising different worlds, the notion of environment is called to the foreground. While it has been stated that worlding is not necessarily tied to mobility, the formation of a world is a process negotiated by the environment; as such, an essential component to a cosmopolitan eye is the acknowledgement of the role of the environment. As stated by Johansen, taking physical environments into account when considering cosmopolitanism prevents considering the cosmopolitan subject as a mere rootless, floating subject (2). It is especially the rural environment that offers opportunities here; the rural cosmopolite contrasts and resists Hage’s mega-urban cosmopolitan figure (Johansen 2). This superficial image of the urban cosmopolite leaves little room for different worlds, as it considers the cosmopolite as “detached from strong affiliation with roots and consequently open to all forms of otherness” (Hage 201). As such, to maintain a responsible sense of cosmopolitanism, the environment has to be taken into account as an important factor that contributes – or takes away from – the subject’s agency.

Cosmopolitanism as used in this work is thus strongly associated with a responsibility towards the rural Indian subject. This responsibility entails the recognition of the world inhabited by this subject; because, as has been shown in the example of Santiniketan, the Indian countryside is embedded in a global web, and its inhabitants as such are presented with opportunities of worlding. At the same time, globalisation works as an incorporative force on the Indian countryside as well; which emphasises the necessity of discerning a responsible cosmopolitanism from the superficial kind. The following paragraphs will illustrate how an Indian English perspective shaped by the imagination of Rabindranath Tagore can help discern the two and contribute to the discussion.

The South Asian subcontinent has a rich history of cultural exchange with other parts of the world. There are many examples of Indian writers who went abroad to study, to work, or otherwise, out of their own volition. An example that will be put forward in this chapter is Rabindranath Tagore. His life is marked by his position in-between nations: his thought, as expressed in his writing, is defined by a deep connection to South Asian poetical and philosophical traditions; at the same time, he had a Western education, was proficient in English, and developed lasting relationships with people from all over the world – examples include William Butler Yeats, Albert Einstein, and Victoria Ocampo. At the same time, Tagore refused to be incorporated into the Western hegemony; his writing remained political and critical, especially towards imperialism and nationalism. His writing, therefore, constitutes a space in-between South Asia and the West; a comfortable yet critical imaginary from which to comment on political and cultural realities.

In Tagore's time, such a space was essential. South Asia was still under British colonial rule, and an imagined independent India was a powerful idea that strengthened the struggle for independence. The India Tagore imagined, however, was more than just a freedom from British rule; Tagore imagined a society ordered according to an ideology that was radically different from British imperialism. His vehement criticism of nationalism, orientalism, and imperialism means that his writing is still of value in our contemporary time. This is because Tagore's vision for India did not merely imagine a future without British rule; it proposed an India organised not as a nation state, but as a developed, open society that relies on humanity rather than patriotism. As such, it appears Tagore's thought can make a valuable contribution to the imagination of cosmopolitanism.

What is furthermore important to mention, is the fact that Tagore's sense of being as a citizen of the world is not deterritorialised. While the idea of global exchange lies at the base of Tagore's philosophy, he never ceased to identify with Indian culture. Indeed, the very idea of exchange between East and West does take for granted that there is a fundamental difference between the two – however, not to such an extent that 'ne'er the twain shall meet'; the latter being an expression sharply criticised by Tagore. Instead of encapsulating the differences between East and West in a language of racial and/or technological determinism, Tagore emphasises that inequality is sometimes a matter of cultural difference gone awry. This is shown by his reluctance to dismiss an entire people – such as the British – because of their wrongdoings in the sphere of politics. As such, Tagore's sense of the world is informed by the awareness of a distance; both cultural and spatial. In the context of the rural, this is an important fact to note. The countryside emphasises its own distance from both the city and the

rest of the world by stressing both its cultural and spatial difference; the former in the shape of local traditions, the latter by emphasising the natural environment (Johansen 4).

Tagore's cosmopolitanism, then, appears to illustrate that the rural has a place in the debate on cosmopolitan identity: through his writing and his person, he proves to be an example of a cosmopolite who uses his rootedness in a localised environment to resist the hegemony of global Westernisation. His imaginary, as it surfaces from his writing, engages with the problematic notions currently associated with cosmopolitanism: First of all, Tagore emphasises the issue of (neo-)colonialism and the necessity to recognise its politics in order to develop a responsible sense of cosmopolitanism; and secondly, Tagore's writing constitutes a way of imagining cosmopolitanism that is inclusive but not incorporative. All in all, a critical reading of Tagore contributes to the formation of a cosmopolitanism that is defined by transition and exchange. Forgoing simple definitions, such as (global) mobility and access to (higher) education, Tagore forces the reader to deconstruct both notions, which brings a complex cosmopolitanism to the surface.

The key to unravelling these threads of transition, exchange, and confluence is the problematisation of agency. Cosmopolitanism in a simple sense is closely tied to the Western concept of the liberal subject; in other words, the rational, self-serving agent. This definition has led to a superficial emphasis on reporting agency as proof of cosmopolitanism in post-colonial contexts (Damrosch 316). Tagore challenges the essential notion of such agency by demonstrating the artificiality of these kinds of agents by showing how colonial and global systems construct such superficial cosmopolitan agents. This chapter will bring these notions to the surface by discussing three points. First of all, Tagore's imaginative retelling of his childhood education in *My Reminiscences* will be connected to the colonial system of education in order to demonstrate how the formation of identities in a colonial context leads to incorporation. This will illustrate the ways in which cosmopolitanism in an Indian context is closely tied to the notion of an educated urban elite, and as such reveal the necessity of recognising these practises of incorporation in order to work towards a critical cosmopolitanism.

A second point that will be discussed is Tagore's critical work *Nationalism*. An analysis from this work will be made in order to demonstrate the contributions an Indian English voice can make in the debate on cosmopolitanism. Tagore's critique of the nation from his non-national perspective – India was not independent at the time – illustrates how the non-affiliation of a real cosmopolitanism operates. Tagore contrasts the individual as an agent to the incorporative politics of the nation, which serves to underline the necessity of dissecting

the matter of agency. Both this and the former point will contribute to the framework of this work by showing that thinking about cosmopolitanism needs a critical perspective towards agency, and that in order to acquire such a perspective, cosmopolitanism ought to be redefined in terms of worlding and *becoming* rather than global mobility.

1.2 Resisting the World Flood

When it comes to the cosmopolitan identity, an important point to consider is the formation of said identity. Several things are important to consider in this context; in the specific case of Tagore, the focus will be on his relationship with the British education system, and on the other hand, the contributions to his formation by the familial environment in which he was raised. This will serve to illustrate that the formation of Tagore as a cosmopolite with a broad worldview is closely connected to his upbringing; at the same time, it will also serve to illuminate another site on which the struggle between global incorporation and local resistance plays out.

During the late 19th century – the time when Tagore was educated – the British sought to conquer the mind of India by instituting their own education policy. This policy mainly consisted of an emphasis on Western cultural superiority. In *The Argumentative Indian*, Amartya Sen connects the British education policy to their greater goal of ruling India. In an essay that strongly criticises British imperialism, Sen illustrates how colonial rule was rationalised:

A good example of a magisterial approach to India is the classic book on India written by James Mill, published in 1817, on the strength of which he was appointed as an official of the East India Company. Mill's *The History of British India* played a major role in introducing the British governors of India to a particular characterization of the country. Mill disputed and dismissed practically every claim ever made on behalf of Indian culture and its intellectual traditions, concluding that it was totally primitive and rude. This diagnosis went well with Mill's general attitude, which supported the idea of bringing a rather barbaric nation under the benign and reformist administration of the British Empire (Sen 147).

The way of thinking illustrated by Sen had its consequences for the British education policy:

This view of the poverty of Indian intellectual traditions played a major part in educational reform in British India, as is readily seen from the 1835 ‘Minute on Indian Education’, written by Macaulay himself. The priorities in Indian education were determined, henceforth, by a different emphasis – by the need, as Macauley argued, for a class of English-educated Indians who could be ‘interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern’ (Sen 149).

Practically, this meant that schools would be organised according to a Western system: the language used was English, the study of literature was limited to the Western canon, and more often than not, the schools were religiously affiliated with a branch of Christianity. These things show how the education system implemented by the British was aimed at incorporating their students into their hegemony: there was little room for cultural exchange. Instead, the students were inscribed with Western norms and values, and taught to disregard their own cultural heritage. The consequence of such an education system is twofold. First of all, it leads to a student with a rootless identity: through education, the student is forced to affiliate itself with the West; at the same time, the student is taught that he (little to no women received any education at British institutions) cannot be part of Western society. As such, the British-educated Indian runs the risk of becoming a rootless in-between, at home in neither England nor India. Secondly, this education system has a particular goal, namely, to create loyal subjects that can function as “interpreters”. In other words, education does not carry the goal of helping an individual attain the best they can; on the contrary, it serves to dehumanise the student into a subject; a tool with an end.

Education, then, in the context of the British Empire in India during the 19th century, can be equated to a mental conquest of the subcontinent, albeit under the (rather thin) veil of benevolent tutelage. It is therefore not a surprise that Tagore’s criticism of his education at St. Xavier’s is centred on the aspects of deliberate construction. The following paragraphs concern the manner in which Tagore criticises the education system as he experienced it. Roughly speaking, his criticism runs along the following lines. First of all, Tagore is concerned with the ‘mechanical’ method of teaching employed by the schools he was in. Secondly, Tagore criticises the notion of class associated with the British education system by addressing accessibility and the necessity for education. Contemplating these two notions will contribute to an understanding of Tagore’s nuanced criticism: his problem is not necessarily the subject matter or the fact that Western thought seeps into the curriculum; rather, he takes issue with the instrumental teaching method which leads to depersonalisation instead of

personal development. Lastly, Tagore stresses the severed connection between the local environment and the teaching environment. It is important to consider this notion, as it ties in directly to the connection between cosmopolitanism and environment.

In *My Reminiscences*, Tagore looks back as follows: “I resorted to all manner of subterfuges to escape the Bengal Academy. Then they tried putting me at St. Xavier’s. But the result was no better” (45). St. Xavier is critiqued most severely: “As it is, the educational engine is remorselessly powerful; when to it is coupled the stone mill of the outward forms of religion the heart of youth is crushed dry indeed. This power-propelled grindstone type we had at St. Xavier’s” (45). There are a number of things to note in these short passages. Apart from concisely illustrating Tagore’s stance on schools in general, the three-fold connection he makes between outward religion, education, and the mechanical device of an engine is telling.

The connection between education and mechanics is not the first instance in which Tagore uses the notion of a mechanism to criticise a system. It calls to mind his definition of the nation in *Nationalism*, which goes as follows: “A nation, in the sense of the political and economic union of a people, is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose” (9). This citation will be elaborated on later in this chapter; for now however, it helps illustrate what Tagore means when he employs the notion of a “mechanical purpose”. By criticising education as mechanical, Tagore means to show that an education that has a means to an end, other than educating for the sake of educating, is problematic.

This issue is further illustrated in one of Tagore’s politically charged fables, namely, ‘The Parrot’s Training’. The short story stars an “ignorant bird”, that is educated under orders of the king. Utilising the rather crude method of shoving pieces of scripture in the bird’s mouth, the king’s administrators hope to educate the bird, and turn it into a useful subject. Apart from a critique of education methods, the story tells something more about Tagore’s opinion on the ontology of education. The king’s order to educate the bird does not come from the kindness of his heart; rather, it is motivated by economic concerns: “Said the Raja to himself: ‘Ignorance is costly in the long run. For fools consume as much food as their betters, and yet give nothing in return’” (Tagore, Tagoreweb.in). The Raja’s rather utilitarian perspective on things is strikingly compatible with the perspective of the British rulers in the 19th century. James Mill, the influential author of *The History of British India* mentioned before, was a staunch utilitarian himself; and it was under his influence that the British sought to reform land ownership in India in order to make colonialism in India economically viable.

As such, profit enters the scene, and a connection between education and economy becomes apparent. Ultimately, this shows that the economy is the end-all purpose of the

British imperial project. Education as instituted by the British serves only to increase the efficiency – and as such, profitability – of administrating India. In the context of cosmopolitan consciousness in India, this means that the British were not aiming for cultural exchange; rather, the goal was economic dominance, which was to be achieved by replacing one cultural form by another. This is not a temporary issue; it recalls, in fact, the contemporary situation, where Western institutes demand confirmation to their standard under the guise of international cooperation – be it in the context of academia or otherwise. Tagore, however, strives to show that there is another way to make education cosmopolitan.

In order to illustrate how Tagore imagines an alternative education, the added notion of outward religion that surfaced in his earlier criticism of St. Xavier is important. As mentioned before, the British employed a policy that sought to replace the native, ‘barbaric’ cultural form with their own. Tagore, however, observes that the only way they managed to be productive in this respect is by imposing outward forms of behaviour, made manifest as “outward religion”. Religion, especially in the context of Tagore, concerns the heart. For example, his own poetical style, employed in the Nobel Prize winning *Gitanjali*, is deeply infused with a bhakti-style of poetics that recalls the likes of Kabir, perhaps the most famous of bhakti saints. One of the properties of bhakti is the notion of whole-hearted devotion, often contrasted with outward, or ritualistic, forms of religion. At the heart of bhakti stands the relationship – often one defined by a deep, heart-felt longing – between the devotee and the deity. This ideal relationship, exemplified by Radha’s devotion to Krishna, should also be reflected in the traditional relationship between teacher and student. Tagore, by criticising the education system at St. Xavier’s for its outward religiosity, implies the superiority of an inward-based approach to learning; a method without ulterior motives, so to speak. That Tagore favoured such a method becomes clear from his reflections on education:

The main object of teaching is not to explain meanings, but to knock at the door of the mind. If any boy is asked to give an account of what is awakened in him by such knocking, he will probably say something very silly. For what happens within is much bigger than what he can express in words. Those who pin their faith on University examinations as a test of all educational results take no account of this fact (*My Reminiscences* 32).

Tagore sketches a contrast between explaining meanings, which comes down to a manner of inscription, and “knocking on the door of the mind”. Knocking on someone’s door is done

with the intention of drawing him or her out; teaching, as such, becomes an invitation to explore, rather than an act of incorporation. To further exemplify how this works in practice, Tagore recalls the education received from his father, Debendranath Tagore. As he grew into adolescence, his father took him on a journey through India to the Himalayas. They remain here for a while, and during their stay, Tagore's father educated his son. This calls to mind the traditional relationship between the 'guru' and the 'shishya', or teacher and student that was mentioned before. The devotional aspect of this relationship is illustrated by Tagore's dedication to his father; this shows that in this form of education, there is no question of hollow outwardness. Instead, Debendranath's education method serves to help Rabindranath develop his own identity by safeguarding his independence. Tagore comments on his father's method as follows:

To the end of his life [...] he never stood in the way of our independence. [...] A passive acceptance by us of the correct and the proper did not satisfy him; he wanted us to love truth with our whole hearts; he knew that mere acquiescence without love is empty. He also knew that truth, if strayed from, can be found again, but a forced or blind acceptance of it from the outside effectually bars the way in (*My Reminiscences* 40).

This manner of educating stands in contrast to the impersonal, mechanic, factual approach that Tagore considers part of the schools he went to.

At the same time, Tagore creates room for nuance. While Debendranath "held up a standard, not a disciplinary rod", he did not dismiss the importance of academic proficiency altogether. The difference, however, is that in Debendranath's case, education is not achieved through mindless parroting, but through a process of interpersonal exchange. Tagore illustrates this process by recounting how Debendranath made him read his brother's letters in order to teach him how to write. When Tagore's rewording of his brother's phrases is unsatisfactory, Debendranath attempts to correct him by patiently hearing him out and justifying his own views to him (*My Reminiscences* 42). When applying this style of education to the contemporary debate surrounding globalisation and comparative literature, it appears to come remarkably close to Spivak's ideal of "collectivities", as addressed in *Death of a Discipline* (23).

Such a comparison would not be far off indeed, most importantly because the view on education of both Rabindranath and Debendranath Tagore does not equal a superficial dismissal of all things Western. In fact, Debendranath continued to encourage his son to study

English, even after Rabindranath dropped out of St. Xavier's (*My Reminiscences* 40). Furthermore, while Tagore voices his criticism on way the system works at St. Xavier's, he recognises that what lies at the heart of the problem is the imperial policy behind it. As exemplified by his praise for one of his teachers, Tagore does not seek to participate in cultural dualism. His favourite teacher, Father DePeneranda, is described as follows: "I cannot speak for the other boys but I felt in him the presence of a great soul, and even today the recollection of it seems to give me a passport into the silent seclusion of the temple of God" (*My Reminiscences* 46). Ironically however, Father DePeneranda is as much a victim of the educational system as Tagore himself. Suffering from a speaking impediment, the teaching ability of Father DePeneranda was hampered, leading to inattentiveness during his lectures. Tagore writes: "It seemed to me that this inattentiveness of his pupils hurt him, but he bore it meekly day after day" (*My Reminiscences* 45). It appears the soul of Father DePeneranda was swiftly crushed by the school mill in the same way it aims to do so with its pupils. A sense of comradeship exists between teacher and student; interestingly, a connectedness arises that transcends barriers both cultural and religious.

The fact that Tagore, as a – albeit openminded – Hindu¹ devotee catches a glimpse of God through DePeneranda's teaching indicates that a collectivity existed between the two. It goes to show that intercultural exchange is possible through education; even when people exist within a system that operates in a mode of incorporation, genuine exchange is still a possibility. In reference to the (im)possibilities of 'border crossing' in Spivak's sense, Tagore posits a difference between the inward and the outward as a way of separating the metaphorical baby from the bathwater. Globalisation, as judged from Tagore's perspective on education, comes with responsibilities and possibilities; a responsible, non-superficial cosmopolite would recognise them both, instead of merely considering the latter.

1.3 The Spirit versus the Nation

The aforementioned difference between inward and outward, exchange and incorporation, is an idea Tagore developed further in his criticism of nationalism. In *Nationalism*, Tagore gives a critical commentary on the notion of nation and its consequences in global politics. In his speech on nationalism in the West, Tagore speaks from the perspective of the 'no-nation'; the inhabitant of a territory that has not organised itself as a sovereign nation state. Instead, it is

¹ I realise it is problematic to characterise Rabindranath Tagore as a Hindu; in this instance, I have chosen to do so in order to emphasise Tagore's cultural affiliation as opposite to the Catholic Father. I feel it is warranted, seeing as how the Brahma Samaj is often characterised as a Hindu reform movement, rather than a religion of its own.

ruled as part of the British Empire. Tagore's analysis of the workings of the nation's politics and its consequences for the no-nation foreshadows a transnational awareness. Tagore does not take the model of the nation for granted; instead, he thoroughly criticises it, arguing that it dehumanises its subjects. This is an observation that ties in closely with the contemporary debate on cosmopolitanism; for it concerns a similar manner of dehumanisation: incorporation within the hegemony of global culture implies the loss of an individual's own cultural heritage, and by extension, his or her identity.

Tagore's criticism of nation, as such, appears to be applicable to the contemporary issues surrounding globalisation. If it is true that, as argued by Adorno, standardisation and pseudo-individualisation mould the individuals incorporated into the sphere of late capitalism into a colourless grey mass, Tagore was not far off when he emphasised the economic as well as political union of a people as the driving force behind a nation. The following paragraphs will serve to illustrate how Tagore's criticism of the economic aspects of the nation ties in with the issue of cosmopolitanism and global capitalism. This will be done by first of all examining how Tagore creates a dichotomy between *spirit* and *nation*. Furthermore, the relation between economy and nation as described by Tagore will be examined.

As established earlier, Tagore's criticism of imperialism is strictly limited to a strong disapproval of the system; he maintains an interest and openness towards the culture of the West, as exemplified by his relationship with Yeats and other writers, but also by the way in which he recognised the scholarship of Father DePeneranda. In *Nationalism*, Tagore takes a comparable stance against the phenomenon of the nation. In the words of Collins, Tagore's sentiment can be described as follows: "There is confusion afoot, Tagore says, when equating the idea of „nation“ with „people“. It leads to „a hopeless moral blindness“. The „ideal of the social man is unselfishness“ whereas that of the nation is selfishness" (6). As such, Tagore advocates an anti-political civil society as an alternative to the nation. At the heart of Tagore's argument against the nation lies a strong belief in a goal for mankind, which he refers to as the "higher life of man" (*Nationalism* 34). Collins, in his analysis of Tagore's criticism of nationalism, argues that Tagore's higher goal constitutes a moral universalism.

For Tagore, [...] nationalism leads the people to 'ignore the moral law which is universal and uses it only within the bounds of its narrow sphere'. This, in an important sense, is the crux of Tagore's critique of the modern nation. He is an insistent universalist in his belief that moral truth is one, indivisible and omnipresent;

hence, any 'external' organisational form which seeks to contradict that truth is a moral offence" (7).

While it has to be stated that the notions of universalism and historical determinism, both part of Tagore's thought, are slightly out-dated, his conception of a singular moral truth is valuable when it comes to thinking beyond the nation. Namely, what Tagore means to illustrate is that at the heart of it, humanity is not divided; rather, these divisions are created by political constructs. Tagore does not attempt to lay down the law of the universe. Instead, he imagines a future in which "power becomes ashamed to occupy its throne and is ready to make way for love" (*Nationalism* 63). It should be noted that Tagore is always a poet first; however, it is precisely because of his poetical imagination that his vision resists accusations of utopianism. It would be easy to dismiss his treatise on nationalism if it would promise a utopia of freedom in the near future. Tagore's vision is something different. It comprises a well-articulated critique, wrapped in words that stir the imagination, and for that reason they can contribute to a critique of reality.

It is from this perspective that Tagore's dichotomy between spirit and nation ought to be read. One way in which Tagore distinguishes one from the other is by referring to the natural. The nation, as mentioned earlier, is defined as a mechanical construct, designed to have a single political and economic purpose. A society that is not organised as a nation is defined as follows: "Society as such has no ulterior purpose. It is an end in itself. It is a spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being. It is a natural regulation of human relationships, so that men can develop ideals of life in co-operation with one another" (*Nationalism* 37). The first striking feature of Tagore's definition of society is perhaps its humanistic aspect, illustrated by the focus on the self-expression. At the same time, it ought to be recognised that Tagore's humanism is, in this context, pragmatic. It does not seek to elevate man to the pinnacle of all creation; instead, it forces the reader to consider a social reality, namely that the social context of the individual is what defines his or her purpose. The organisation of people in a society is posited as spontaneous and natural, because social connections between individuals develop spontaneously.

In contrast to this spontaneity, Tagore argues, stands the construct of the nation state. It is "merely the side of power, not of human ideals" (*Nationalism* 37); in other words, incorporation within the nation state requires the individual to surrender his or her own ideals to those of the nation. A thing to note; because, earlier, it appeared Tagore lauded selflessness, and it appears the nation demands such a surrender of the self. Upon closer examination,

however, Tagore appears to say something more profound. In his eyes the nation, as a construct, takes on a shape as an “abstract being”; a “human automaton” (*Nationalism* 37). In demanding its subjects’ surrender, this automaton is the most selfish of all. True selflessness, according to Tagore, lies in “mutual self-surrender” (*Nationalism* 38) between individuals, instead of a blind surrender to the construct of the nation.

In fact, it is this notion of selfishness that feeds into global relations as well. Tagore mentions the strengthening of bonds between Japan and Russia in his time (which only lasted for a short while): “The recognition of the fraternal bond of love between Japan and Russia, which has lately been celebrated with an immense display of rejoicing in Japan, was not owing to any sudden recrudescence of the spirit of Christianity or of Buddhism, but it was a bond established according to the modern faith in a surer relationship of mutual menace of bloodshedding” (*Nationalism* 50). Tagore once again employs the image of religion as a reference to the heart, or the spirit of a people. Instead of it facilitating a mutual approach between peoples, Tagore sees the nation as a danger to global politics. The irony of the situation leads Tagore to state that “the Nation is the greatest evil for the Nation”, and that “any new birth of its fellow in the world is always followed in its mind by the dread of a new peril” (*Nationalism* 52). As illustrated by these examples, Tagore criticises the nation for incorporating its own subjects, denying their individuality; even going as far as to state that it distorts the natural order of things.

The latter can be read as a comment on inter-human relationships: a natural curiosity is replaced by a sense of xenophobia. As soon as the nation is used as a container for society, global politics is under threat, according to Tagore; its militant focus on self-preservation leads to a thinking of us versus them, of West versus East, resulting in a political stand-off rather than cultural exchange. If Tagore’s imagined ideal could be related to Spivak’s collectivities, then the nation is, from his point of view, exactly the issue that stands in the way.

As such, Tagore’s criticism of the nation by distinguishing nation and spirit is helpful when imagining the harmful role of imperial politics on global relations, and as such allows an informed critique of cosmopolitanism through its imagination of a transnational ideal. At the same time, it has to be recognised that Tagore is writing from the perspective of the early 20th century. Many things have changed since then. When it comes to nationalism, the most important event may have been the Second World War. This violent outburst, accompanied by cruelties that still stir the conscience of the Western nations involved, led to a unanimous denunciation of racially informed nationalism in the West. At the same time, the subsequent

struggle for global domination between the United States and Russia – as it was framed during the cold war – saw the rise of a new manner of political division: that between capitalism and communism. Capitalism soon became associated with Western culture in general, and eventually with wealth and prosperity; at the same time, it has been criticised for standardising culture and consolidating the Western hegemony by the likes of Adorno and Said.

Jameson in particular defined the condition of late capitalism as a state in which its extensive global reach leads to a multinational form of capitalism in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (48). Interestingly, Tagore incorporated the importance of economic imperialism in his critique of nationalism; to an extent, his writing is expectant of the rise of late capitalism. His perspective on commercialism is illustrated as follows: “In the West the national machinery of commerce and politics turns out neatly compressed bales of humanity which have their use and high market value” (*Nationalism* 35). Two things are worth noting: the observation of standardisation, and the connection to market value. Tagore subsequently connects the notion of mechanical reproduction to the British imperial project:

We have seen in our country some brand of tinned food advertised as entirely made and packed without being touched by hand. This description applies to the governing of India, which is as little touched by the human hand as possible. The governors need not know our language, need not come into personal touch with us except as officials; they can aid or hinder our aspirations from a disdainful distance, they can lead us on a certain path of policy and then pull us back again with the manipulation of office red tape (*Nationalism* 40).

The observation made here is closely connected to Tagore’s criticism of the education system discussed earlier. The notion of a mass-produced class of subjects surfaces in a similar way at this place. As such, the project of British Imperialism is once again connected to the notion of profitability. The idea of governance by a mechanism instead of human contact calls to mind the traditional capitalist concept of the self-regulating market. Tagore even goes as far as to consider the notion of alienation, by arguing that the machine of commerce and politics leads to dehumanisation: “Take away man from his natural surroundings, from the fullness of his communal life, with all its living associations of beauty and love and social obligations, and you will be able to turn him into so many fragments of a machine for the production of wealth on a gigantic scale. Turn a tree into a log and it will burn for you, but it will never bear living

flowers and fruit” (*Nationalism* 57). According to Tagore, incorporation into the commercial machine of nation leads to alienation from the individual’s natural environment.

Of course, it would be inappropriate and superficial to ascribe to Tagore a contemporary Marxist critical perspective. What would be more justifiable is recognise Tagore’s perspective as an Indian-based contribution to the Marxist-informed framework posed by contemporary post-colonial ecocriticism. Two lines of thought by Tagore have been explored in this chapter; first of all, his vision on education, and secondly, his criticism of the nation. The former illustrated – as ultimately shown in the example of Santiniketan – the necessity of openness and dialogue between worlds. The latter illustrated Tagore’s conviction of an opposition between a natural social state of being and a constructed incorporated mode of being. The thread connecting the two is the notion of nature, or *naturalness*. Rural Santiniketan, where life takes place in a rhythm according to that of the natural land that surrounds it, encourages in its inhabitants a territorialised sense of being – a connection to the *locale*, so to speak. Tagore prefers this as a proper teaching atmosphere because it encouraged a natural state of being. This natural state of being is to inform the relationship between people – students and teachers, but also those of other nations, as was illustrated by the exposition of Tagore’s vision – to be all the more productive; productivity, in this instance, refers to the success attained in endeavours of education but also of transnational exchange. As such, Tagore appears to encourage a sense of exchange between worlds, acknowledging the necessity of pluralising the world and envisioning this process to be more successful against a natural background.

A similar sentiment is expressed in the second line of Tagore’s thinking traced in this chapter, namely the analysis of *Nationalism*. Tagore insists on the importance of recognising the natural state of man as opposite to that of the incorporative nation. While it is necessary to recognise that Tagore posits this binary opposition as a hyperbole that cannot easily be translated to the real world, the opposition of the two succeeds in delineating a key component of Tagore’s thought; namely, the importance of the natural in successful, responsible cosmopolitanism – which can be considered the opposite of nationalism in Tagore’s view. Tagore recognises the impact of two distinct forces on the individual agent: those of the natural environment and the man-made construct of the nation. While the latter leads to a loss of individuality and decreases the size of the world, the former encourages a fluid mode of being in tune with the natural environment instead of the meticulous machinelike nation. The former is also markedly less xenophobic; in fact, this sense of nature

“produces diversity”, and encourages to treat “life in all truth where it is manifold” (*Nationalism* 77).

Tagore then makes an essential connection between nature and worlding. It should be recognised that this is not a superficial, stereotypical manner of back-to-nature environmentalism; rather, Tagore recognises the importance of acknowledging nature as the essential environment of mankind. As such, his views line up with Mukherjee’s definition of the human-nature relationship as symbiotic; it extends in two ways, as exemplified by Tagore’s celebration of the cultivation of nature at Santiniketan. An Indian-informed sense of cosmopolitanism then is defined by a recognition of a ‘natural state’ that encourages an exchange between environments and worlds. The recognition of the place of the individual in the environment surfaces as a crucial notion in the development of a responsible cosmopolitanism. The following chapters will attempt to demonstrate how such a cosmopolitanism can be imagined by performing a reading of two representative Indian English novels in which the relationship between the individual and the environment in rural India forms an important theme.

II

Breaking Laws, Crossing Boundaries: (Im)Possibilities in *The God of Small Things*

The previous chapter illustrated, through the lens of Santiniketan and the writing of Rabindranath Tagore, that India's countryside provides for an interesting setting on which to imagine cosmopolitanism. The workings of globalisation and the presence of strong ties to a local tradition make it a useful place to observe how a cosmopolitan identity comes into being. It has been established that cosmopolitanism refers not to global mobility, but instead to a sense of worlding and *becoming*; at the same time, a connectedness with the local was demonstrated to be part of a responsible cosmopolitanism. As such, what can be established as complementary to a cosmopolitan disposition is a willingness to go out into the world and meet the Other, so to speak; in other words, cosmopolitanism surfaces through manifestations of agency; for example, expressions of interest, or efforts to engage in intercultural dialogues.

India's countryside is a fertile ground on which to hypothesise the emergence of this notion of cosmopolitanism. Because it contains a mixture of local tradition and the influence of globalisation, the way in which agency surfaces – or refuses to surface – can illustrate whether the influx of globalisation always has the positive effect of spreading a cosmopolitan consciousness. At the same time, the rural represents a place dominated by factors that encourage a superficial sense of cosmopolitanism, defined by perhaps a level of global mobility and worldliness, but marked by stagnation in its refusal to recognise and acknowledge new and different worlds.

This chapter will focus on the latter, in order to demonstrate the complexity of agency and in doing so contribute to the development of an imagined true cosmopolitanism. This analysis, as such, will approach the subject from a negative side: In order to define a responsible cosmopolitanism, the superficial will be discussed, in the hopes that by casting a ray of light on the superficial, a truthful sense of cosmopolitanism will reveal itself in its shadow. In order to do so, a reading will be performed of Arundhati Roy's 1997 novel *The God of Small Things*². Roy is a writer well known for her polemical political publications. She is a staunch critic of globalisation and the influence of global capitalism, and in many cases takes the side of rural India, which often finds itself trampled beneath the wheels of progress. *Small Things* can be seen as a poetical, literary work with a similar political message. Roy portrays the Indian countryside through the eyes of the twins Rahel and Estha, who find

² From here on referred to as *Small Things*.

themselves in the midst of rural India's struggle with tradition, modernity, capitalism, and oppression. The tragic narrative of their lives is defined by a deterministic view of history. The novel has been criticised for presenting history "not only as a determining force but as a self-evidently explanatory category" (Gopal 158). This chapter argues that Roy's emphasis on a deterministic history serves to underscore the issue of agency in the Indian countryside. By unravelling the way in which Roy imagines agency to be constrained by forces outside of the individual, this chapter seeks to highlight the difficulties associated with cosmopolitanism in rural India. It will be shown that the countryside is not deprived of global influences, quite the contrary; the influx of Western media, the aftereffects of colonisation, and the intermingling of global religious and ideological movements all illustrate the Indian countryside's entanglement with the rest of the world. On the other hand, while these global forces may lead to degrees of worldliness, the development of a non-superficial cosmopolitanism is severely hampered by the controlling social milieu, which limits personal freedom.

This way, this chapter seeks to contribute to the matter of cosmopolitanism by addressing Robbins's plea for a more nuanced understanding of agency. According to Robbins, agency is too often brought up in order to legitimise generalisations (316); in order to move beyond these "easy generalisations", as he calls them, Robbins states that we "need difficult ones – for example, the more difficult though less pious procedure of *not* assuming agency to be everywhere present, but trying to explain why it is where it is and why it isn't where it isn't" (316). Examining agency in *Small Things* will prevent harmful generalisations; because the link between agency and resistance persists, and because resistance has been considered a possible property of the countryside in the face of incorporative globalisation in the previous chapter, a careful analysis of agency in the countryside is necessary.

In order to determine the ways in which globalisation enables or prevents the presence of agency in the inhabitants of rural India, this chapter will analyse the ways in which Roy imagines agency in several of *Small Things*'s characters. The first character to be explored is Chacko. As the brother of Ammu and the uncle of Rahel and Estha, he plays a relatively important role in the events in the book. His character also demonstrates notions of worldliness: He studied at Oxford, married an English woman during his time in England, and – as a self-proclaimed Marxist – imagines himself as part of a larger socio-political movement. At the same time, his character proves to be increasingly self-absorbed. As his idealism fades away, he becomes an example that illustrates the limitations of agency; the global system in which he operates is eventually shown to incorporate him as a member of the

Western-educated ruling class. Chacko, then, serves to illustrate that a cosmopolitan ideal can easily dissolve into moral platitudes when it is corrupted by the temptation of power.

The second character to be discussed is Baby Kochamma. She could be described as the antagonist of the novel; her bitter scheming is what leads to the dark tragedy that scars Estha and Rahel for the rest of their lives. Her life is defined by her strict traditional outlook on life; and, more secretly, her love and devotion to Father Mulligan, a priest she met when she was young. He symbolises her first interaction with the world outside of India; however, instead of it leading to openness and connectedness, Baby Kochamma's narrative illustrates how the constraints of tradition limit the possibilities of cosmopolitanism. As she grows older, more and more of the world seeps into her own life, mainly through radio and television. These factors contribute to her eventually becoming a bitter individual; the way in which she employs her agency to deny to others what has been denied to her serving as an illustration of how access to global media are not necessary the recipe for a rural cosmopolitanism.

Lastly, the characters of Estha and Rahel illustrate the notions of home that is closely tied to the concept of cosmopolitanism. Both Estha and Rahel are individuals adrift in the world; Rahel migrates to the United States and has an unsuccessful marriage, and Estha drifts around India. Roy employs the word "re-Return" (1997 20) to define the twins' mobility. Roy emphasises the notion of the Return, marking it as an inescapable point in the life of the migrant. As a consequence, the ideal of the rootless cosmopolite is challenged: The individual cannot escape his or her roots, and a Return inevitably becomes part of the migrant's life.

A number of issues seem to be held in common by several, or even all, of *Small Things*'s characters, playing a role like threads that are woven together to create a narrative. The following paragraphs will discuss the role of three of these narratological threads. The first is the influx of the global into the worlds of the respective characters. Their interaction with global media, for instance, leads to a degree of worldliness, or familiarity with the world as opposed to their local community. At the same time, the conception of the world is negotiated by the backgrounds of the characters. Examining this notion, taking into account the characters' agency in the matter, will shed light on how the world, as an effect of globalisation, introduces itself to the countryside, and how this relates to cosmopolitanism.

The second notion to be discussed is that of the Departure. Characters such as Chacko leave their home town behind and travel to new places, contributing to their worldliness. Their motivations for doing so will be examined, and their use of agency in the matter as well – do they leave out of free will? And, to which degree does this contribute to their identities? The development of a cosmopolitan character is closely related to redefining the notion of

home; the question whether these characters successfully manage to do so will be taken into account.

The third issue to be addressed is that of the Return. As mentioned earlier, Roy's writing posits the Return as inevitable; it is employed as a narratological climax, a point of convergence. When observed from the point of view of cosmopolitanism in the countryside, the emphasis on the Return suggests that the locality of the countryside inscribes itself on the individual as if hewn in stone; inerasable.

The final point of this chapter will be a discussion of the imaginative side of Roy's poetics. *Small Things* takes up an interesting place as a fictional work in the corpus of a non-fiction activist; especially seeing as Roy herself has claimed that *Small Things* is as political as her other works. Roy uses a satirical voice as a literary device. Taking a closer look on the way Roy utilises literature as a way to discuss politics will shed light on the position literature can take in the debate surrounding globalisation, which has a political dimension as well. In addition, the way in which Roy imagines the natural environment will be brought up. It will be shown that, to Roy, nature is a space in which a cosmopolitan disposition flourishes; as such, she contributes to an environmental critical voice in a way that echoes Tagore. In a similar manner as Tagore, Roy illustrates the natural environment as redemptive in the face of harmful instances of globalisation; it can even be stated that in *Small Things* nature becomes a place of resistance where the so-called Love Laws – Roy's literary vehicle in which the oppression of society finds its expression – are resisted and broken.

Carefully examining these issues will provide a perspective on how the countryside and the global interact with each other in *Small Things*. In turn, this contributes to an understanding of the imagined rural in Indian English literature. *Small Things* posits the rural as an inescapable localised imprint on its inhabitants; at the same time, the world inserts itself in the rural space through globalisation, and rural individuals migrate and return. This will illustrate that though it is local, the rural has a global reach. Though it is hard to argue that the characters in *Small Things* become true cosmopolites, they nonetheless illustrate that the rural subject is not disconnected from the global. It could even be said that the Indian countryside as a site of inequality and power politics, as it is imagined in *Small Things*, is constructed and maintained by globalisation. Recognising the countryside as such calls for a renewal of the cosmopolitan ideal as a true synthesis of locality and globality; *Small Things*, then, imagines the contours of cosmopolitanism by criticising the superficial form associated with mobility and introducing a nature-informed manner of worlding, which emphasises locality and plurality, as an alternative.

2.1 The Sound of Western Music

The previous paragraphs discussed the way in which the worldly rural Indian is often the product of an incorporative system that continues to construct a ruling class, even in a post-colonial period. In *Small Things*, this project also takes the shape of a “colonization of the mind”, as Mukherjee calls it (100); a manner of cultural indoctrination, spearheaded by radio and film. The following paragraphs will attempt to illustrate how the distribution of cultural capital, through channels such as the Abhilash Talkies or American television, introduces globalisation to the countryside in *Small Things*. Reading for these signs will illustrate that exposure to global culture does not necessarily entail cultural exchange and, subsequently, a cosmopolitan worldview. This is important to note, because it will contribute to the understanding that the influence of globalisation on the Indian countryside does not automatically lead to an emergence of a responsible cosmopolitanism. Instead, globalisation, including the influx of global media, creates a sense of distance rather than closeness – which entails a continuous reproduction of rurality.

An example from *Small Things* in which this becomes clear is the Abhilash Talkies movie theatre. The building asserts its own worldliness through its décor: The neon lighting displays the name of the cinema both in English and in Malayalam (94). The rest of the interior takes a similar shape: the English signs on the bathrooms as well as the presence of global commodities such as Coca-Cola illustrate the place as a global theatre. The family attends the cinema to see *The Sound of Music*, Rahel and Estha’s favourite film. As they take their seats, the film becomes the centre of their attention: “Off with the torch. On with the World Hit” (Roy 1997 99). It becomes immediately clear that the experience of *The Sound of Music* is not localised, but is envisioned as the participation in a global ritual; a communion of cosmopolites, so to speak. At the same time, Roy’s use of capital letters in this case illustrates the irony of the situation. In reality, the invocation of another place in the world does not lead to a feeling of closeness. Instead, the West, as it introduces itself through *The Sound of Music*, is imagined as being exotic. Moreover, the depictions of Austria and the Von Trapp family lead the audience, in this case exemplified by Estha and Rahel, to become aware of their own shortcomings. In their imagination, Captain Von Trapp addresses the twins as follows:

‘Then I’m sorry,’ Captain von Clapp-Trapp said. ‘It’s out of the question. I cannot love them. I cannot be their Baba. Oh no.’ Captain von Clapp-Trapp couldn’t (Roy 1997 107).

Moments before this exchange, Estha was molested by the ‘Orangedrink Lemondrink Man’. The soft-drink stall salesman’s abuse of Estha is a manifestation of a power fantasy; Estha is from a well-to-do family, while the man is from a working class background. The cinema, serving as a backdrop to this event, becomes a space where a line is drawn between the affluent and the poor. Those with access to the film screen, as consumers, are contrasted to the poor people who work there, such as the lemondrink man. Mukherjee analyses the fragment as such:

The class resentment that finds expression in this act of abuse has specific local connotations, but it is also conditioned by the space of the cinema hall, which taunts the casual labourers who service it with unreachable dreams of global bliss enjoyed by rich blondes in their alpine palaces (102).

The global space of the cinema thus has a disastrous effect on its inhabitants – both the public and the workers. Globalisation inserts itself not as a uniting force, but rather as something creating division. This is further exemplified by the way in which Estha and Rahel become painfully aware of their global position, illustrated by the way they imagine Sophie Mol’s superiority: She is the kind of girl von Trapp could love (Roy 1997 106). Sophie, being half-white and raised in England, is associated with the “clean, white children” (Roy 1997 105) of *The Sound of Music*. As such, the screening of the Global Hit does not serve to further a sense of worldliness in the audience; instead, it emphasises the distance between them and the world – as the West positions itself through media such as *The Sound of Music*.

Another medium through which the world enters rural Ayemenem is the television. American television in particular plays an important role in the lives of Maria Kochu and, even more so, Baby Kochamma. The relationship between Maria and Baby is related to the relationship established between the consumers and the workers in Abhilesh Talkies, in the sense that Maria Kochu is Baby Kochamma’s maid servant and housekeeper. As such, the two symbolise another instance of class difference, which permeates rural culture. In one fragment, the narrator observes Maria and Baby watching a TV-show together. The television appears to have created a coming together of lower and upper class: “In an unconscious gesture of television-enforced democracy, mistress and servant both scrabbled unseeingly in the same bowl of nuts. Kochu Maria tossed nuts into her mouth, Baby Kochamma *placed* them decorously in hers” (Roy 1997 88). The difference in eating style, however, suggests that the class difference – which exists solely of decorum, unveiling it as a social construct –

persists. More interesting is the notion of “television-enforced democracy”. It calls to mind the notion of freedom and democracy often posited as successful export products of the United States. If interpreted that way, the television set becomes a channel for the colonisation of the mind mentioned earlier.

The programme *Baby and Maria watch* is a television show in which a street artist is brought into the studio to perform his act. The song the man performs is ‘Somewhere Over The Rainbow’; a song with a dreamy optimistic message that contrasts the singer’s desolate situation. The way *Small Things* describes the scene makes clear that, even though it was the singer’s dream to perform on a TV show, it will not redeem him from his “life of privation and despair”. The street singer was used to being interrupted by trains on the station he performed; now, on the TV show, he is interrupted by the host, American icon Phil Donahue. Though the singer “glowed with Prime-Time Happiness”, he was robbed of his dream of appearing in the TV show by it coming true. Television, then, provides Prime-Time Happiness as a commodity, with a promise of dreams come true; what it does, however, is kill dreams. Considering the issue of agency, all the television appears capable of in the case of *Baby Kochamma* is lull her to sleep with commodity happiness. There is no encouragement of agency, and no active response from the viewer.

Small Things contains another instance in which the arrival of the outside world succeeds in compelling the characters into action, however; namely, the arrival of Sophie Mol. Sophie is the daughter of Chacko and Margaret, his British ex-wife. Sophie is, according to the twins’ imagination, everything they are not; in other words, a ‘clean white girl’. The family, quite aware of the image of India in the West, sees it as their mission to show India in good daylight. Instead of genuinely welcoming Margaret and Sophie, however, the narrator explains that the family puts on a play: “The rehearsals had been rehearsed. It was the Day of the Play. The culmination of the *What Will Sophie Mol Think? week*” (Roy 1997 136). What is staged as a family visit becomes an elaborate play designed to impress the British visitors instead.

Estha and Rahel, perhaps because their young minds are comparatively unspoilt, refuse to partake in the effort of showing off. Despite being reminded by *Baby Kochamma* that they are “Ambassadors of India” who will form Sophie and Margaret’s “First Impression of [their] country” (Roy 1997 139), Estha and Rahel fail to act out the rehearsed ‘hello, how are you?’. In the case of Estha, it appears that the pressure to perform is too much on him. Feeling foreign eyes lingering heavily on him, it is explained that Estha “didn’t have a How do YOU do? in him” (Roy 1997 145). This leads to Ammu being very upset:

‘Esthappen!’ Ammu said. And an angry feeling rose in her and stopped around her heart. A Far More Angry Than Necessary feeling. She felt somehow humiliated by this public revolt in her area of jurisdiction. She had wanted a smooth performance. A prize for her children in the Indo-British Behaviour Competition (Roy 1997 145).

Ammu, normally seen as composed and even cynical towards social norms – being a divorced single mother, this can be seen as a survival instinct – becomes angry; more angry than necessary, even. The reason why she is so very disappointed with the twins in this moment is given later, when Baby Kochamma sneers that the children are disobedient because they lack a father. Ammu firmly believes that this is not the case, and this instant would have been her chance to prove once and for all that she is perfectly capable of raising the twins to be well-behaved on her own.

The twins interpret Ammu’s outburst as a sign of her loving them a little less. Since Estha and Rahel saw *The Sound of Music* and were introduced to the existence of perfect white children they have started to worry that a white, clean child might take their place in their mother’s heart. The effect of the global making its way to rural Kerala in the shape of first *The Sound of Music* and then the arrival of a British girl thus takes a curious shape. The former serves to institute a standard that is impossible to reach, igniting a feeling of jealousy and fear within the twins; jealousy of Sophie Mol, and fear for losing their mother’s love. Sophie Mol’s visit complicates this situation by casting the twins in the role of ambassadors. The interaction between the two worlds as such is reduced to a performance staged to impress, rather than an attempt at cross-cultural communication.

The divisive politics of the staged play are even more clearly visible in the performance of Baby Kochamma. Her attempt at impressing the British visitors is coloured by her apparent conviction that in order to impress them, one has to be like them. As such, she puts on a “strange new British accent” (Roy 1997 144). When she greets Sophie Mol, she tries at great lengths to impress Margaret with her familiarity with English literature:

She said Sophie Mol was so beautiful that she reminded her of a wood-sprite. Of Ariel.

‘D’you know who Ariel was?’ Baby Kochamma asked Sophie Mol. ‘Ariel in *The Tempest*?’

Sophie Mol said she didn’t.

“Where the bee sucks there suck I?” Baby Kochamma said.

Sophie Mol said she didn't.

“In a cowslip's bell I lie?”

Sophie Mol said she didn't.

‘Shakespeare's *The Tempest*?’ Baby Kochamma persisted.

All this was of course primarily to announce her credentials to Margaret Kochamma.

To set herself apart from the Sweeper Class (Ibid. 144).

In this particular passage, world literature is reduced to a prestige object rather than a device that enables cultural exchange. To make matters worse, Margaret probably could not care less about Shakespeare; she is not a scholar of literature, but a waitress. In this passage then, Baby Kochamma tries to impress not Margaret as such, but an imagined British upper-class jury that will judge her according to standards she has created herself. Her behaviour, being someone of an older generation, is informed by the remnants of colonialism, illustrating the lingering effects of Empire and the failure of cultural exchange through media such as film and radio to dispel these aftereffects.

One of these aftereffects appears to be a lingering notion of divide and conquer. The division created by the (neo-) colonial influence of Britain and TV runs not only along the lines of West and South, but also between the people in the local rural community. Baby Kochamma can again be brought up as an example. In the same instance, the arrival of Sophie Mol, Baby attempts to make herself appear better not just by performing an out-dated stereotype; she also kicks down at the other family members to emphasise her own sophistication. The first time this happens, she makes fun of Estha's hair and the fact that he identifies with Elvis Presley. Her comment is that Estha is “behind the times” (Roy 145). Apart from it being a nasty comment in general, it echoes her attempts to present herself as worldly. By showing her awareness of the fact that India is behind the times (whose times?), Baby Kochamma displays a worldliness that serves to set her apart from her own family. They might not be aware that Elvis is dead – but she is. As such, Baby Kochamma posits herself as part of a global elite rather than a local community.

The effect of globalisation as embodied by the influx of Western radio, TV, and even people in the rural community of Ayemenem, then, has a number of effects. As shown by the example of *The Sound of Music*, Western cinema creates an unattainable standard that, by illustrating the differences between India and the West, only serves to highlight the distance between hemispheres. Moreover, it divides the local community as well, by incorporating

those who have access to the media into a global elite that seeks to enrich itself at the cost of the lower class. The effect of the matter is that individual agency is reduced to a performance, like the “play” performed on Sophie and Margaret’s arrival at the airport. As such, the notion of the colonisation of the mind goes deeper than expected. The project of mental colonisation has its effects on the agency of the characters. The family in *Small Things* is not lower-class; yet, their behaviour is determined by constraints, dictated – in the novel, at least – by forces that travel the globe. The God of Big Things, if you will.

2.2 Departures and Arrivals

So far, it has been shown that *Small Things* challenges the positive aura around globalisation and cosmopolitanism by having the characters perform a sense of agency that is severely constrained by forces of globalisation. At the same time, by having characters from a rural, localised environment interact with the global, Roy illustrates that there is an inherent connection between the local and the global. This connection will be further explored by connecting the notion of agency, as discussed in the previous paragraphs, to that of mobility.

Small Things contains a number of characters that travel the globe. Each of them for their own reasons: Chacko, for instance, is educated at Oxford, England; Rahel, on the other hand, marries an American, and follows him to the United States. Both narratives appear to challenge the migrant success story; their stint abroad is not enough to lead them into new lives. As such, the notion of return is irrevocably linked to the departure. By connecting these two things, *Small Things* emphasises the imprint the local leaves on the individual. The notion of departure/return, then, ties into the discussion on cosmopolitanism by illustrating the futility of rootlessness by positing the local as inescapable. The novel does this in two ways: Firstly, by portraying the difficulty of rooting in a new place, as exemplified by Chacko; and secondly, by illustrating the impossibility of a true farewell through the character of Rahel. By doing so, the novel complicates the issues of globalisation and cosmopolitanism by introducing the local roots as inescapable.

Chacko is Ammu’s brother, and the uncle of Estha and Rahel. His character is defined, to a large degree, by his education in Oxford; this has led him to develop a sense of entitlement. At the same time, his time at Oxford is seen as a highly prestigious achievement, which means that some members of the family – most notably his mother, Mammachi. This is because an Oxford education is still associated with power:

Mammachi often said that Chacko was easily one of the cleverest men in India. ‘According to whom?’ Ammu would say. ‘On what basis?’ Mammachi loved to tell the story (Chacko’s story) of how one of the dons at Oxford had said that in his opinion, Chacko was brilliant, and made of prime ministerial material (Roy 1997 56).

It appears, then, that education proves a site where notions of power converge, in the same way as the British sought to use it during their project to educate a ruling class in India; the notion is still very much alive, as becomes clear from the fact that Chacko might even be made out of “prime ministerial material”. As such, Chacko’s departure, motivated by the prestige of Oxford, already foreshadows his return. He is expected to come back to India after his education to consolidate his position in society – which will contribute to the overall prestige of the family; an important issue in rural India. In the light of agency, discussed earlier in this chapter, this once again shows how the influence of a global institution – in this case, Oxford University – has an impact on the individual’s freedom of choice. An analysis of Chacko’s mobility, then, ought to include the grander scheme of things. His mobility is not just a consequence of his own desires; it is deeply rooted in the local politics of rural India. His affluent family sends him off to Oxford, expecting greatness upon return, and a prestige bonus for the entire family.

As such, Chacko’s failure to realise any of the imagined potential that comes with his worldliness is striking. In a passage just after the one cited above, Chacko’s hobby is brought up. He enjoys building model planes, and orders a new one every month. Every single time he fails to put it together properly, leading them to crash on their first flights (Roy 1997 56-57). Ammu, his sister, calls this fact an “impartial measure of his abilities” (56). Chacko, as such, illustrates how a cosmopolitan subject is not necessarily a productive and successful individual. In addition, it may also be worth noting that Chacko’s obsession concerns airplanes – the typical transnational mode of transportation. It appears that Chacko’s period abroad realised in him a dislocation from the place he was born. The building of model planes in this light becomes a compulsive act; it is as if Chacko uses it to express his desire to go back to England. At the same time, the added note that, despite the planes crashing every time, Chacko “never blamed the crashes on the kit” (57) illustrates an awareness of his own position. Chacko’s compulsive plane-building can be seen as a manic way of coping with his in-betweenness. It illustrates his own powerlessness in the face of his family’s expectations; which, in turn, shows that transnational mobility is not necessary a realisation of agency. Instead, in connection to the Indian countryside, *Small Things* emphasises that individual

worldliness often manifests from interactions between global and local forces, rather than individual curiosity.

Chacko's failed marriage with Margaret is an additional illustration of the limitations of the individual. While the initial attraction between the two might hint at the possibilities of intercultural exchange being facilitated by the forces that propelled Chacko abroad, the incompatibility between the two signifies the difficulty of attaining a cosmopolitan identity that can surpass the constraints imposed by mutual otherness.

Margaret is described as being typically English, with the fact that she lives together with "[a]nother waitress in another café" (Roy 1997 241) illustrating how she is one of the many English girls her age. As such, Roy constructs her as the quintessential English young woman. In the case of Margaret, the love she feels for Chacko turns out to be nothing more than a "timorous acceptance of herself" (Roy 1997 245). Even though Chacko is from a background entirely different from hers, Margaret's horizon does not expand in his direction; the emphasis remains on how, from seeing herself as "nothing special" (245), she grows into seeing herself as something more. Chacko, on the other hand, loves Margaret because of her self-sufficiency, practicality, and for her not being his mother (245-246). While this appears as a respectable way of loving someone, it loses its value when considering the fact that there is no further mention of a real interest in Margaret. Quite the contrary: As the narrator mentions, what makes Margaret remarkable to Chacko, she also has in common with the average English woman (245); in other words, Chacko's love appears to go no deeper than a superficial attraction based on notions of exoticism, seeing as the answer to why Chacko loved Margaret and not any other English woman cannot be answered.

The eventual collapse of the marriage is hardly surprising, considering the reasons mentioned above. The reasons why Chacko and Margaret separated however, illustrate a little more about the notion of rootlessness. Margaret starts to realise that she and Chacko are incompatible when his charm begins to wear off. Chacko fails to adapt to Margaret's way of life – which is, as was established before, the quintessential English way of life. In short, the novel states, "[i]t no longer amused her that while she went to work, the flat remained in the same filthy mess that she left it in" (247). Chacko fails to take part in Margaret's way of life, which illustrates his inability to adapt to the country to which he relocated. His attempt at cosmopolitanism proves unsuccessful; his worldly experience still does not enable him to be at home anywhere on the globe, as the word 'cosmopolite' would imply.

Interestingly, despite Chacko's attempts at relocating to England, he fails to disconnect himself from the local community in Ayemenem. Though he "hardly ever read a

whole letter” (Roy 1997 246) of the ones his mother sent him, he is eventually compelled to write her for money when he is unable to find a job, which prompts Mammachi to sell her jewellery to send her son the money he needs. However, “[i]t was never enough” (248) – Chacko, the prospective prime minister, turns out to be a drain on the rural family. In this example, Roy turns the dynamic of the foreign labour migrant around; instead of working in England for his poor family in India, Chacko finds himself asking his rural Indian family for money. This can be read as an effort to counter the glamour of migrant success stories; instead, Roy highlights the limitations of the South Asian migrant in the West, even when possessing an Oxford degree. Chacko’s education does not allow him to become truly Western, and neither does it allow him independence from his South Asian family. All in all, the character of Chacko invites a reconsideration of agency in the face of globalisation. Though he is posited as a cosmopolitan transnational, his identity shows a remarkable lack of curiosity, as demonstrated by the way in which he exercises agency. His departure and return appear more or less forced upon him; the former by his family’s expectations, and the latter by his divorce and lack of a job. Chacko, as such, lacks the agency and resourcefulness often associated with the migrant in literature.

A similar example of a reconsideration of agency in the face of globalisation can be found in the character of Rahel. The part of the narrative that takes place in the present revolves around her return to Ayemenem; as such, she can be considered the protagonist. At the same time, the ambiguity of Rahel’s position as such is another way in which Roy draws attention to the issue of agency. Rahel’s position as a protagonist is troubled in two ways: First of all by her apparent lack of agency; and secondly, by the voice of the narrator, who operates as all-knowing and omnipresent, but also appears remarkably partial to Rahel’s side of the narrative. By troubling the position of Rahel, *Small Things* posits itself as a novel without a clear protagonist. It could even be said that the novel revolves around the ‘God of Small Things’ from the title. Instead of telling the story of an individual, *Small Things* pits the Small - the local, the individual - against the Big – caste, history, community, the world.

Rahel’s narrative symbolises this struggle. The traumatic event in her childhood, recalled in the novel as a “blind date with history” (Roy 1997 282), instilled within her a sense of emptiness. Her being separated from her twin brother Estha had a similar effect; the greater narrative of history, positioned by the novel as a deterministic, mechanical construct, made an impact on the day Sophie Mol and Velutha died. Rahel continues to be affected by this event. Because she was considered partially responsible for the death of Sophie, Rahel was neglected by her family – and, as the novel writes: “Oddly, neglect seemed to have

resulted in an accidental release of the spirit” (Roy 1997 17). As a consequence, she lives the rest of her life without expressing any sense of assertiveness. Her education makes for a good example:

When she finished school, she won admission into a mediocre college of Architecture in Delhi. It wasn't the outcome of any serious interest in Architecture. Nor even, in fact, of a superficial one. She just happened to take the entrance exam, and happened to get through. The staff were impressed by the size (enormous), rather than the skill, of her charcoal still-life sketches. The careless, reckless lines were mistaken for artistic confidence, though in truth, their creator was no artist (Roy 1997 17).

Rahel, after being violently disturbed by the intervention of the Big God in her childhood, meekly conforms to the machinations of the world around her, instead of forging a path for herself. Her obsession with the big and disregard for the small, as expressed by the size of her sketches and their careless nature, demonstrate how Rahel appears to have lost interest in the God of Small Things who resides in details. Her creations are not the work of an artist. In other words, it appears they are reproductions; crude, grotesque representations of Rahel's reality. Her marriage to Larry McCaslin follows a similar path: “Rahel drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge. With a *Sitting Down* sense” (Roy 1997 18). A more passive simile could hardly be imagined. Rahel appears to wilfully discard her agency. As such, Rahel's lack of assertiveness can be interpreted as a wilful surrender to circumstance.

Rahel's passivity, then, is shown to be a consequence of the triumph of the Big God over the Small God, which makes her indifferent. The novel links the Big God to the “public turmoil of a nation”, while the Small God concerns the “cosy and contained, private and limited” (Roy 1997 19). What keeps Rahel from giving up on life altogether is a strange sense of optimism, that the Small God is able to provide her with because of the “relative smallness of his misfortune” (Ibid.). The God of Small Things, then, is the source of Rahel's agency. She is kept alive by the idea that her own unhappiness is not the end of the world – “Worse Things had happened” (Ibid.). *Small Things*, then, constructs Rahel as a curious kind of protagonist. She displays a lack of assertiveness, which compels the reader to imagine her as an individual without agency. At the same time, Rahel's mode of indifference is linked to the “inconsequence” (Ibid.) of the Small God in the country that she is from. It is therefore not the case that Rahel happens to be an individual without agency; instead, it is the influence of her

locality, the place she grew up, that inscribed the Big God on all of her being, and in doing so stole her agency away.

Through the character of Rahel, then, the matter of agency is shown to be complex. There is no such thing as inherent agency; nor does the liberation from her childhood milieu allow Rahel to adopt a new mode of assertiveness. Instead, the workings of the Big God are shown to travel the globe with her, illustrating – just as was the case for Chacko – that globalisation cannot separate the individual from the local. *Small Things*, as such, draws the reader towards a concept of society that suffocates the individual. In the context of cosmopolitanism, then, Chacko and Rahel can be read as characters designed to criticise the optimistic model of globalisation. When observing globalisation critically, they appear to show, the local cannot be dismissed; lest the Small God, residing in the details, be considered, the assertive cosmopolite is little more than a dream.

2.3 Poetics and Politics

Taking into account Roy's depiction of both the global entering the rural sphere through media and the rural entering the global through individual mobility, it can be discerned that *Small Things* is written not merely to illustrate how intertwined the local and the global are; it also performs a layered critique of globalisation by its invocation of familiar characters – such as the transnational migrant – in which a cosmopolitan identity fails to manifest itself. As was seen in the former paragraphs, these characters complicate and diffuse the concept of agency, and in doing so lead the reader to question the redemptive qualities of transnational mobility and globalisation. In doing so the novel aligns itself quite clearly with Roy's political essay writing. Roy's voice in works like *Listening to Grasshoppers* and *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire* is polemic, sharp, and factual. The subjects in these works range from India's nuclear programme to the destructive policies of Coca Cola in the Indian countryside. Though broad, the subject range is marked by Roy's attention for the global and its consequences in the local. *Small Things* can be seen as a literary extension of this line of thought. As such, *Small Things* illustrates the possibilities of utilising the literary imaginative as a culture critical device.

In a sense, this is what Roy herself called for in the introduction to *Listening to Grasshoppers*, where she states that in order to effectively criticise the power structures operating in India, “maybe what we need is a feral howl, or the transformative power and real precision of poetry” (Roy 2009 XIV). In other words, the poetic can contribute to the critical debate surrounding globalisation and cosmopolitanism; and, more specifically, *Small Things'*

imaginative invocation of rural Ayemenem makes a valuable contribution to the debate on cosmopolitanism by its depictions of global and rural interconnections. In fact, because of its highly poetical register, *Small Things* manages to address the nuance that ought to be kept in mind in order to prevent the “easy generalizations” (316) Robbins warns against. It does so in two ways: First of all by introducing a strong satirical voice that augments the notion of criticism; and secondly, by utilising the literary device of the nonlinear narrative as well as a poetics of love to infuse the narrative with a sense of hope.

Roy’s depiction of the political scene in Ayemenem is an obvious start when delineating the novel’s use of political satire. The Indian state of Kerala has long been ruled by the communist party; as such, Ayemenem’s political scene is also dominated by the local communists. It is an interesting choice to focus on the communist party; mainly because it is often associated with resistance to the patriarchal Congress-led government of India, but also because of its idealistic connotations. The communistic lingo – in *Small Things* – is infused with haughty themes such as the worker’s struggle and empowerment of the masses (268); yet, in reality, the communist party, embodied by Comrade K.N.M. Pillai, has fallen victim to petty local politics that play a significant role in the death of Velutha. Towards the ending of the novel, Chacko has a discussion with Pillai about the workers in the pickle factory. It is striking how Pillai utilises left-wing lingo – he even goes as far as to quote Mao Zedong in Malayalam – to try and convince Chacko to send Velutha off; the reason being, of course, the fact that Velutha is untouchable, and his presence in the factory disturbs the other workers (Roy 1997 279-280). Pillai, as such, becomes a grotesque representation of the rural politician. He disregards the idealistic side of the communist left; instead, he appropriates it as a way to garner power for himself, even utilising caste delineations as a way to empower himself politically.

Chacko, at the same time, is not a better communist. In fact, he does the same thing:

Chacko was a self-proclaimed Marxist. He would call pretty women who worked in the factory to his room, and on the pretext of lecturing them on labour rights and trade union law, flirt with them outrageously. He would call them Comrade, and insist that they call him Comrade back (which made them giggle). Much to their embarrassment and Mammachi’s dismay, he forced them to sit at table with him and drink tea (Roy 1997 65).

In this fragment, Chacko's Marxism is shown to be a farce that only serves for his own pleasure. Instead of subverting the traditional gender roles to allow the women of Ayemenem to reach a new potential, Chacko employs his curious mode of gender equality only to further his own sexual desires. It is therefore all the more fitting that Ammu summarises Chacko's politics as "[j]ust a case of a spoiled princeling playing *Comrade! Comrade!*" (Roy 1997 65).

By depicting the politics of Ayemenem as a children's game, *Small Things* satirises the way in which rural politics operate. The exaggerated self-absorbedness of Chacko and Pillai, veiled under a thin layer of facetious communist lingo, illustrates the limitations of idealism in the face of human selfishness. It also illustrates how the rural government, in theory a representation of the people, fails to actually represent the rural struggle. To their political leaders, the struggle of Ayemenem's rural population is only a game; a problematic issue that presents little hope in the face of global forces that seek to exploit those very people. As such, Roy's employment of satire as a literary device lays bare a painful discrepancy between rural politics and the realistic need of the rural population for a representational government.

At the same time, *Small Things* creates a literary space that exists outside of the communal-political sphere. The image of the Small God, who exists in fragmentary details, infuses *Small Things* with a sense of nuance that's often absent in Roy's political essays. By doing so, *Small Things* creates an imaginary space in which the oppressed and rejected find their happiness. This is perhaps best illustrated by the final chapter of the book, which, in the form of a flashback, describes an intimate moment in which Ammu and Velutha have sex at the river bank. In this particular passage, Roy's eloquent poetics elevates the sexual experience to the lyrical, allowing the couple of Ammu and Velutha to transcend as not just lovers, but also as a Platonic ideal of love. The relationship between the two transgresses the border of caste, which fills the couple with fear as well as desire. Yet, as the encounter progresses, "fear was derailed and biology took over" (Roy 1997 336), suggesting that in this moment, there is freedom from the communal love-laws at last. And indeed, for Ammu this appears to be the case:

She danced for him. On that boat-shaped piece of earth. She lived. [...] Seven years of oblivion lifted off her and flew into the shadows on weighty, quaking wings. Like a dull, steel peahen. And on Ammu's Road (to Age and Death) a small, sunny meadow appeared. Copper grass spangled with blue butterflies. Beyond it, an abyss (Roy 1997 337).

The love between Velutha and Ammu is presented as a purifying and redemptive experience; which is a strong image, especially as it concerns transgression. As such, the encounter emphasises the brokenness of the Big God's world, in which Ammu's sunny meadow is deemed a transgression, and therefore has to be followed by an abyss – a foreboding of Velutha's death.

Foreboding would not be the right word, however; this passage takes place in the last chapter of the book, and Velutha's death has already passed. Yet, the novel's nonlinearity allows it to end on a redemptive note, despite the disaster and its traumatic consequences that stand at the centre of the narrative. In doing so, Ammu and Velutha are placed outside of history and constructed as an ideal. The presence of an ideal, redemptive love that transgresses boundaries of caste in a narrative about constraints and oppression is a powerful image; an image that can instil hope for a better future, a future without abysses and constraints.

This imagined future appears only attainable by breaking the 'Love Laws' that come into play during the novel. These laws are laid down as a superstructure on which society is based; *Small Things* presents them as the root of the tragedy addressed in the narrative: "[I]t could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. Long before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar [...]. That it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much" (Roy 1997 33). From this perspective, the comical, satirised version of Marxism gains another meaning. Namely, Roy's sharp satirical depiction of the rural Marxist politics are unveiled to be little more than a following of an age-old decree; in that sense, the revolution that is professed is as far away as it has always been. Instead, the real revolution takes place where the Love Laws are broken. In a sense, this requires a display of cosmopolitan force; worlds longing to run into another build up, like a flood breaking through a dam, allowing waters to finally meet and mix. The union of Ammu and Velutha – and the more controversial union of Estha and Rahel – illustrates the courage it takes to defy these laws, and subsequently draws attention to the complexity of cosmopolitanism in the countryside.

2.4 The Last Laugh

All things considered, then, *Small Things* stands as a sharply written literary critique of the relationship between globalisation and the Indian countryside. The narrative posits history as a deterministic force; at the same time, the novel's nonlinearity subverts the very notion of

determinism by allowing the Small God the last laugh, as the book closes with Velutha and Ammu's moment by the river. In its literary style, then, *Small Things* contributes to Roy's array of criticism of globalisation and capitalism; and, moreover, it adds to the discussion on cosmopolitanism by imagining the Indian countryside as a place in which tradition, modernity, local, and global find each other at odds. First of all, the novel traces the influx of globalisation into the countryside. In doing so, *Small Things* illustrates how globalisation does not necessarily create cosmopolitan subjects; rather, it performs a colonisation of the mind, reducing the agency of the characters in the novel to a performance of stereotypes instead of self-realisation. Secondly, *Small Things* criticises the notion of transnational mobility by imagining two characters that subvert the success story of the transnational migrant. Chacko and Rahel are both inscribed with the laws and expectations of their community, constraining their possibilities abroad. Chacko proves unable to realise the expectations of his family; the same family's neglect causes Rahel to live in perfect indifference. As such, both characters demonstrate that cosmopolitanism is not a simple matter of individual worlding; agency is constrained and dictated by communal laws. Lastly, the satirical depiction of Ayemenem's political scene illustrates the countryside's lack of political force in the face of globalisation. The failure of the local politicians to protect the rights and safety of the rural population, including the untouchables, shows that political movements aimed at the empowerment of the lower classes are at risk of being hijacked for personal ends – both to enforce communal law, and to enrich and empower local politicians.

As a contrast to her criticism of these harmful forms that are informed by a superficial sense of worldliness, the natural environment endures as a free space in which worlds are able to melt into one another – like the lower caste world of Velutha and Ammu's Syriac Christian bubble find their union on the banks of the local river. Nature itself, as such, is characterised as playful and subversive, recalling the Small God that has little regard for Big God's *Love Laws*; a sentiment that resonates in the way Roy describes the locale of Ayemenem: “[B]y early June the south-west monsoon breaks and there are three months of wind and water with short spells of sharp, glittering sunshine that thrilled children snatch to play with. The countryside turns an immodest green. Boundaries blur as tapioca fences take root and bloom” (Roy 1997 1). The countryside, in its immodesty, allows for boundaries to blur, for worlds to seep into each other. Arguably, this is where Tagore's voice echoes on, as a whisper between the trees that suggests a symbiotic turn to nature as an alternative to superficial cosmopolitanism and neo-colonial politics.

III

Where Waters Meet and Mix: A Brackish Cosmopolitanism

The Sundarbans, the large mangrove forest that covers the delta of the majestic Ganges, is an environment of opposites. Its position is perhaps best illustrated by its function as a place where waters meet: The salty Gulf of Bengal meets the fresh water of the Ganges, creating an in-between brackish water mix. It is a fluid country. Water is everywhere, and the many islands are at its mercy; the ebb and flow of the ocean combined with hurricanes and river torrents during the Monsoon continually reshape and alter the landscape. Islands come and go, just as the tide country, as it is often referred to, has seen civilisations arrive and depart. Until the 14th century it displayed a broadly ranged culture, reflected by a ruling class of both Buddhist and Hindu rulers. As a part of the Sultanate of Bengal, it came under Muslim rule in the 15th century; a few hundred years later, the English sailed up the Ganges to eventually settle Calcutta as the East Indian Company's base of operations. The tide country thus finds itself a very cosmopolitan space, which appears to contrast its rural character.

Even in the present day, this trend is still recognisable. In 1978, the incidents surrounding the island of Morichjhapi highlighted the countryside's global position: Refugees that sought to settle the island were violently massacred by the local government. The eviction, as it has been referred to, was legitimised under the guise of environmentalism; the government judged that the refugees had "trespassed into the habitat of the endangered tigers" (Mukherjee 110). Global environmentalism, here in the form of the conservation of the Bengal Tiger, was used as a motive for violent political action – demonstrating that the aims of the local and the global do not always align, and, moreover, that they are not free from political power games.

The tide country, as such, can be seen as distinctly local; it has an environment of its own, but also a unique local culture that has come into existence through a mixing and matching of Hindu and Islamic religious imagery and their associated cultural forms, such as music, dance, and theatre. It is a rural culture that contrasts the urban cosmopolitanism of metropolitan Kolkata. As such, it can be seen as a productive site on which to imagine a different kind of cosmopolitanism, in order to challenge the hegemonic style of cosmopolitanism that Robbins criticised. In order to determine whether this is the case, this chapter seeks to perform a critical reading of Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide*.

Set in the Sundarbans, *The Hungry Tide* concerns the experiences of Kanai, a Delhi cosmopolite, and Piya, an American scientist with an Indian heritage. The local rural is at first experienced as exotic and backward through their eyes; however, as the narrative progresses, the protagonists discover that it has its own mode of engaging with the global. As such, the novel interacts with cosmopolitanism on two levels: Firstly, by portraying a rural environment as unexpectedly cosmopolitan; and secondly, by having the characters of Kanai and Piya develop an openness towards this rural cosmopolitanism. Both factors serve to illustrate ways to imagine a plurality of cosmopolitanisms. As the novel shows, it is the recognition of this plurality that leads to a productive mode of criticism towards the hegemonic model – which includes, for example, government violence under the guise of environmentalism. As such, an analysis of the novel would support Robbins’s call for an education of “future citizens of the world rather than future world policemen” (326).

This chapter, then, will engage with the matter of alternatives, the promise of which was the ending notion of the chapter on Roy. In doing so, the matter of agency will again be the focal point of the analysis. A discussion of Roy illustrated that a superficial concept of agency leads to a superficial concept of cosmopolitanism; and that complicating the matter of agency allows for new and elaborate ways to criticise the ways in which globalisation functions as a force of incorporation instead of redemption. Examining the kinds of agency as they are imagined in *The Hungry Tide* will allow a step forward in this theme; namely, in addition to further illustrating the ways in which metropolitan cosmopolitanism lacks the ability to truly interact across cultures, the novel shows that the rural has its own ways of representing itself to the rest of the world. This demonstrates that, instead of adhering the myth that the countryside needs to adopt globalisation in order to transcend into a cosmopolitan way of being, thinking about cosmopolitanism should instead be informed by pluralities and, perhaps, Spivak’s collectivities – ways of existing together without descending into a ‘colourless’ cosmopolitanism, as Tagore called it (*Nationalism* 34).

The former chapters utilised an analysis of the notion of agency to explore cosmopolitan identities. The same method will be applied to *The Hungry Tide*. First of all, in order to determine the way in which the rural character of the tide country enables and/or prevents agency, the environment and the effect it has on the inhabitants will be discussed. The second point this chapter seeks to address are the notions of cosmopolitanism that are present in the rural environment and its inhabitants. It will be shown that the countryside, despite its difference from the urban sphere, is not constructed as a walled community. Instead, it is marked by a culture that has come into being through a confluence of global

cultural streams. The last point to be addressed is the development of Piya's cosmopolitan character. The way in which she applies the rural cosmopolitan way of being to enhance her own identities illustrates the way in which a plurality of cosmopolitanisms can be imagined. A thorough examination of these three notions will illustrate that agency in the matter of cosmopolitanism *is* complicated, and *should* be complicated in order to formulate a productive criticism of the ways in which global capitalism can take the shape of neo-colonial practices.

3.1 The Difference the Environment Makes

As has been illustrated by the discussion of Tagore and Roy, the notion of agency is relevant to cosmopolitanism, but not in a superficial way: A real, productive cosmopolitan identity cannot simply be linked to the notion of the Western liberal sense of agency, because this particular sense of agency proves to be incorporative – in other words, it seeks to erase local identities and replace them with generalisations. In order to make room for a real cosmopolitanism, then, it would be appropriate to consider the way in which agency operates in local areas, and which possibilities of worlding arise from these conditions. Spivak's concept of worlding is used here to illustrate that a true cosmopolitanism is not to be defined as a sense of being; instead, it ought to be seen as a *becoming*, as argued by Robbins (318) and Johansen (3). Cosmopolitanism, as such, is not defined by global mobility *per sé*; instead, it is connected to a mode of existing that allows the realisation of more than one world, and the contestation of these worlds (Robbins 318). This definition necessitates fluidity in the subject's conception of world, rather than global mobility. The countryside in Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* appears a suitable place to discover this sense of cosmopolitanism; first of all because its inhabitants often suffer from a lack of global mobility – especially those in *The Hungry Tide* – and furthermore, because of the way in which the landscape is brought to the forefront, necessitating the consideration of world in a very physical way.

The following paragraphs, then, will discuss the ways in which the countryside encourages a cosmopolitan sense of being through the physical environment in *The Hungry Tide*. The first notion to be discussed is the tide country itself and the ways in which its fluidity and in-betweenness leave an impression on its inhabitants, by focusing first on the presence of water and next on that of the forest. Secondly, attention will be paid to the way in which the omnipresence of the natural environment and its dangers leads the subject to different ways of worlding. The final notion that will be discussed is the way in which the

rural constructs itself as a local place, and how this is a significant notion in the face of cosmopolitanism.

As was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the landscape of the Sundarbans is marked by its fluidity. The many islands change shape, and at times even cease to exist – and others take their place. Furthermore, the influx of both salt and fresh water defines it as a country in-between worlds. The novel eloquently describes these features of the landscape in an early passage, where Kanai reads a page from his uncle Nirmal's diary. The rivers are described as follows:

The rivers' channels are spread across the land like a fine-mesh net, creating a terrain where the boundaries between land and water area always mutating, always unpredictable. [...] [E]ach of these channels is a 'river' in its own right, each possessed of its own strangely evocative name. When these channels meet, it is often in clusters of four, five or even six: at these confluences, the water stretches to the far edges of the landscape and the forest dwindles into a distant rumour of land, echoing back from the horizon. In the language of the place, such a confluence is spoken of as *mohana* – an oddly seductive word, wrapped in many layers of beguilement (Ghosh 7).

It is striking how the language used in this passage translates the physicality of the river's landscape to the realm of the poetic imagination. Moreover, the notions of confluence and mutation call to mind the terminology typically associated with post-colonial cultural studies; for instance, Bhabha's hybridity, or Glissant's creolisation, or even Anzaldúa's *mestiza*. It would take too much time and stray into unrelated territories to discuss the practical relevance of each of these concepts in this particular discussion; but what can be recognised here, is that the physical landscape of the Sundarbans in this example embodies the features typically associated with post-colonial subjectivity. The landscape, as such, is key to understanding the manifestations of hybrid identities and imagined pluralities of worlds in its inhabitants.

The way in which the landscape and its inhabitants reflect one another becomes clear in a passage in which the relationship between Kusum and Horen is described. As mentioned before, the tide country was a place where many refugees sought to find a place to live. Kusum, a female character, symbolises the marginalised refugee group. She arrives in the Lusibari community when she is young; however, misfortune in her family causes her to leave again – until she returns with the group of refugees who seek to make a new home for

themselves on Morichjhapi. Horen, on the other hand, is native to the tide country; his character displays little to no mobility at all. The events surrounding Morichjhapi, however, leads to Kusum and Horen's roads crossing once again, leading to an intimate relationship. The night before the Morichjhapi massacre, the two share an intimate moment:

‘She led me to my boat and there she gave me proof of her love – all that a man might need. It was high tide and the boat, which I had hidden among the mangroves, was rocking gently in the water. We climbed in and I wiped the mud from her ankles with my *gamchha*. Then she took my feet between her hands and washed them clean. It was as if the barriers of our bodies had melted and we flowed into each other as the river does with the sea. There was nothing to say and nothing to be said; there were no words to chafe upon our senses: just an intermingling like that of fresh water and salt, a rising and a falling as of the tides’ (Ghosh 364).

This passage illustrates how the landscape facilitates as well as mirrors the relationship between its inhabitants. The use of the intermingling of the river and the sea to illustrate the coming together of Horen and Kusum underlines the possibility of differences to coexist, even flow into each other and create new “rivers in their own right”. Furthermore, this passage illustrates how, through lives flowing into each other, a character like Horen, though locally tied, acquires a sense of mobility by entering Kusum's world. The water in the tide country's landscape as such becomes a metaphor for cosmopolitanism seeping into the countryside, like a river flowing into the sea.

At the same time, as a counterweight to the water's fluidity, the mangrove forests that populate the tide country provide it with a sense of impenetrability: “Mangrove leaves are tough and leathery, the branches gnarled and the foliage often impassably dense. Visibility is short and the air still and fetid. At no moment can human beings have any doubt of the terrain's hostility to their presence, of its cunning and resourcefulness, of its determination to destroy or expel them” (Ghosh 7-8). The landscape's unwelcoming nature illustrates itself as an area of resistance; as such, it contrasts and challenges the incorporative force of globalisation. Unlike the urban city, this is not a place that is easily incorporated into the global hegemony; it is too different. The singularity of the tide country does not merely lie in its difference from the city however; its difference is more specific – it sets it apart even from other equally rural areas, as the forests are described as “a universe unto itself, utterly unlike other woodlands or jungles” (Ghosh 7).

At the same time, the Sundarbans are cherished, in a manner, by its inhabitants, as reflected by its name: ‘Sundar’ translates to ‘beautiful, and ‘bon’ to forest – a curious name, that illustrates the way in which even an area as unwelcoming and dangerous as the Sunderbans’ mangrove forest attains the status of a home that is cherished by its inhabitants. In fact, the forest, despite – or perhaps because of – its impenetrability, is the guardian of the tide country’s most cherished cultural traditions. One of the markers of the tide country’s culture that weaves its way through the narrative is the figure of Bon Bibi, the forest deity, and her associated mythology. One of the most sacred places dedicated to her worship is found in an island area called Garjontola. As Piya, Kanai, and the others approach the island in the latter part of the novel, it is described as follows: “From the deck the island of Garjontola looked like a jewelled inlay on the rim of a gigantic silver shield. The spectacle was at once elemental and intimate, immense in its scale, and yet in this moment of tranquillity, oddly gentle” (Ghosh 316). The area that contains the sacred site is described as being a shield, which corresponds with the idea of the forest as a protective layer that encapsulates the local traditions. However, it also possesses notions of tranquillity and gentleness, illustrating that apart from wild and dangerous, the forest can be precious as well.

The forest as such reflects a feature often associated with the rural; namely, a strong sense of protectionism surrounding local traditions, which may appear impenetrable and perhaps even aggressive to outsiders. There is more to be said about the mangrove forests, however. Namely, despite the fact that they are associated with locality and tradition, the very tradition they serve to maintain is shown to be cosmopolitan in nature. In this case it concerns a true cosmopolitanism that manages to imagine several worlds, and even succeeds at having these worlds blend together seamlessly. To illustrate how this operates, the novel utilises the tradition associated with the worship of Bon Bibi. Bon Bibi is a complicated figure; she can be referred to as a forest goddess perhaps, though this would be slightly limiting. She is worshiped by Hindus and Muslims; as such, her status is perhaps more akin to that of the Indian Sufi/Bhakti saints, many of whom – including Kabir, for instance – had and have Hindu as well as Muslim followers.

The fact that she can be referred to as such is supported by the surrounding mythology. According to legend, Bon Bibi is the daughter of a *faqir* from Mecca, sent to the tide country to spread the message of Islam. At the time, the mangrove forest was the realm of a demon named Dokkhin Ray. Bon Bibi battles the demon forces, led by Dokkhin Ray’s demon mother, and wins. After the following negotiations, Bon Bibi claims half of the tide country for herself, and leaves the other half to Dokkhin Ray (Renard 301). The latter,

associated with the Bengal tigers lurking in the forests, continues to harass the tide country's inhabitants; as such, the worship of Bon Bibi is an important part of the inhabitants' lives, as they require her protection against the demon.

What is striking to note here, is Bon Bibi's mobility; she is a transnational saint, connecting the worlds of Mecca and the tide country. In addition, despite her association with Islam, she finds a place in the lives of Muslims and Hindus alike. This makes her a plural figure; which is further emphasised by the fact that, according to Uddin, "Bon Bibi is not a saint who teaches individuals the Path to Allah, but a saint whom God has asked to provide physical protection to those who seek it" (Uddin in Renard 303). In other words, Bon Bibi herself appears to be open towards other worlds, as she does not insist upon a particular path or discriminate when providing protection.

The local tradition in the tide country thus presents a layered cosmopolitanism; it is woven together from strands of different worlds: Mecca and the tide country are woven together in a spiritual tapestry that resembles the country's river delta. The country's insistence on preserving its own cultural traditions, symbolised by the unwelcoming forest, appears as a metaphor for backwardness at first; however, the mythology of Bon Bibi illustrate that even a local custom safely tucked away can be cosmopolitan. The environment of the countryside then, as expressed by Ghosh's description of water and forest, does not limit its connection to the global. It illustrates that the countryside can be home to a cosmopolitanism of its own, that differs from the urban cosmopolitanism and its associated politics, the dangerous side of which was explored in the previous chapter. In order to demonstrate the manifestations of the cosmopolitanism facilitated by the rural environment, it is now time to discuss the ways in which agency surfaces in its inhabitants.

3.2 Rural Agency

In the previous chapter, it was discovered that Robbins's criticism of easy generalisations is supported by the ways in which agency is imagined in rural Ayemenem. Even though the characters were in touch with global culture through their interaction with Western cinema, they did not develop an openness towards the lower-class world; and despite some of the characters' mobility, they did not manage to surmount the oppressive world of their own communities. These notions were reflected in the way the characters expressed their agency, demonstrating that merely recognising agency is not enough to determine whether a subject acquires a true cosmopolitan sense of being. Roy's novel illustrated that an incorporative

cosmopolitanism influences and even limits the agency of characters by enforcing neo-colonial ways of thinking that promote caste hierarchies and petty localised politics.

A discussion of agency in *The Hungry Tide* strives to illustrate that the opposite is also possible. True cosmopolitanism can manifest itself in a rural area, even without the “help” of global capitalism – in fact, the countryside is *already* cosmopolitan, as was illustrated in the previous paragraphs. The following paragraphs will illustrate how the inhabitants’ being in the cosmopolitan rural landscape influences their agency by examining their motives in the narrative. *The Hungry Tide* makes for an interesting case in this respect, because the rural subjects are viewed from a cosmopolitan perspective; namely, that of Kanai and Piya. Their interactions with rural individuals such as Fokir and Moyna slowly open their eyes to the rural ability to imagine plural worlds, despite its perceived backwater nature. Examining this process will lead to an understanding of how cosmopolitanism is imagined to take shape in rural individuals, without it being a way of incorporation into a global hegemony. The analysis will be done by observing the rural characters of Fokir, Moyna, and Kusum.

The first and arguably the most prominent rural character introduced to the reader is Fokir, the fisherman. Piya meets him when she is looking for the Orcaella dolphin, her reason for visiting the tide country. The experience has not been very pleasing; the personnel sent with her by the Forest Department are deliberately obtuse and disrespectful. Their primary motivation is revealed to be money (Ghosh 58). Fokir is described as the opposite: He respects Piya’s privacy by providing a place for her to change. This moment is described as carrying a deeper meaning than just illustrating a common rural practice. In fact, it presents Fokir as a subject aware of Piya’s personhood:

It was not just that he had thought to create a space for her; it was as if he had chosen to include her in some simple, practised family ritual, found a way to let her know that despite the inescapable muteness of their exchanges, she was a person to him and not, as it were, a representative of a species, a faceless, tongueless foreigner (Ghosh 71).

Fokir, in this instance, is presented as possessing a sense of agency, and employing it to assist Piya. He is not merely considering the traditional difference between men and women, which was emphasised in the rural community in Ayemenem; he considers Piya as a singular person. Fokir as such serves to underline that the rural subject is not necessarily controlled by the laws of his or her community – the mere fact that Fokir acts according to tradition by allowing

Piya her own privacy as a woman, does not mean that he only does it because he feels obliged to.

The security guard, who made obscene gestures in Piya's direction as soon as he was relieved of his official duties towards her, can be brought up as a polar opposite. A representative of the Forest Department, he is associated with a national institution that is, in turn, related to the global structure of environmentalism. As such, he would be expected to display a certain worldliness; perhaps in the shape of a manner of courteousness towards a foreigner. The fact that Fokir demonstrates such consideration for his international guest, who quite literally fell from the brown water into his lap, asserts the possibility that agency in the rural lies deeper than the mere following of tradition.

A similar observation concerning agency can be made when considering Fokir's wife, Moyna. Though she and Fokir share a similar background, namely, a rural village with low literacy, she is introduced as "ambitious and bright" (Ghosh 129), which is further illustrated by the fact that she is educated as a nurse and makes her living working in the hospital on Lusibari. These few facts already make Moyna an exceptional character, in the sense that she does not comply to the stereotypical woman from a rural village at all – which is shown by Kanai's surprise at her brightness (Ghosh 129). It also shows that the countryside is not devoid of opportunities for women; Moyna is depicted as possessing willpower and conviction. At the same time, this might seem as a simple way of introducing agency, in order to make a simple generalisation of the countryside – exactly the thing Robbins has been warning about. Interestingly, *The Hungry Tide* keeps things complicated.

The first indication of complexity is the fact that Moyna's ambitious career as a nurse has not been a walk in the park: "[H]er family had balked at the prospect of her departure and to thwart her plans had insisted she get married" (Ghosh 129). Her marriage with Fokir is, in this instance, introduced as an elaborate ruse by her family to make sure she stays in the village. Moyna, however, is determined to work as a nurse – interestingly, not for simple reasons such as prestige and money; instead, she is described as a full-fledged agent: "[H]er dream of becoming a nurse was no ordinary yearning: it was the product of a desire as rich and completely imagined as a novel or a poem" (Ghosh 135).

A second thing to note is that Moyna does not necessarily consider her marriage with Fokir as an obligation either. Though in its design it appears to be a straightjacket, used to tie her down to the village she was born in, Moyna herself is shown to care about Fokir and her marriage in a way that surpasses superficial notions of obligation and forcefulness. This is illustrated by the way in which she responds to Kanai's advances. Kanai, who is initially

depicted as quite the womaniser, is impressed by Moyna's assertiveness and – probably out of a certain kind of curiosity – decides to question her motives for staying with Fokir, mentioning the contrast between their ambitions:

‘Tell me, Moyna, don't you ever wonder what it would be like to be with a different kind of man? Aren't you ever curious?’

He had said it in a light, mocking way and this time he succeeded in provoking her.

She rose angrily to her feet. ‘Kanai-babu, you're just making a fool of me, aren't you? You want me to say yes and then you'll laugh in my face. You'll tell everybody what I said. I may be a village girl, Kanai-babu, but I'm not so foolish as to answer a question like that. I can see that you play this game with every woman who crosses your path.’ (Ghosh 258-259)

This passage illustrates two things: First of all, that Moyna's agency is more complicated than it seems; she clearly has difficulty balancing the importance of her marriage and her career in her life. At the same time, it shows that she knows what she wants in life; her struggle should therefore be regarded as a conscious sacrifice, rather than a submissive lack of agency. This is shown by the way in which she firmly dismisses Kanai's insidious question. The exchange, in which Kanai takes the high ground and attempts to make Moyna confess her marriage as problematic, with the subtle implication that she would be better off with a man like him, ends with Moyna having the last word. Her finishing remark strikingly reveals Kanai's feigned concern about her situation as a foolish game, effectively forcing him to recognise her as an individual agent who has made her choice and has chosen Fokir.

Moyna's marriage as such illustrates the way in which the rural has different ways according to different traditions, as exemplified by the contrast between Kanai's preference to not be tied down to a woman and Moyna's dedication to Fokir. Moreover, the exchange discussed above illustrates that Kanai's way of ‘doing relationships’ is not necessarily the better one; it appears that Moyna's dedication to Fokir is far more grounded in reality, as it also concerns practical matters such as the care for her son (Ghosh 258), while Kanai's flirting is dismissed as a game. Ghosh's depiction of agency is therefore more complicated than a mere difference between agent and non-agent; different manners of expressing and developing the self are compared and contrasted, with the stereotypically backward one – the countryside – proving to be more complex than expected.

Moyna's expression of agency can also be connected to the notion of cosmopolitanism. Her dismissal of Kanai's probing questions may at first indicate an inability to inhabit his world; as if she cannot imagine herself living with anyone else than Fokir. However, her answer is more complicated than that, seeing as she merely refuses to answer the question, instead of answering it with a negation. In fact, moments before Kanai asked her this question, Moyna had an issue of her own for which she required Kanai's assistance. Piya and Fokir have been working together for a number of days, and Moyna fears that Fokir might develop feelings for Piya. She asks Kanai to intervene and talk to the two of them, explaining that she needs a stranger to do so. When Kanai asks why, she answers:

‘Because words are just air, Kanai-babu,’ Moyna said. ‘When the wind blows on the water, you see ripples and waves, but the real river lies beneath, unseen and unheard. You can't blow on the water's surface from below, Kanai-babu. Only someone who's outside can do that, someone like you’ (Ghosh 258).

Again, the landscape – in this case, in the form of the water – serves to illustrate the complex issue of plural worlds. Moyna understands the notion of discourse; she herself cannot address the issue to her husband, because they exist in a particular world together. Kanai's intervention is required, because his world overlaps both Fokir's and Piya's; the reason being, in part, his ability to speak both English and Bengali. Moyna says that it is he “who stands between them” (Ghosh 257), which illustrates her awareness of plurality and overlap. Moyna's worldview, as such, is one that accommodates for the existence of other worlds – worlds that she herself can only partly imagine, but that she acknowledges nonetheless.

Furthermore, the way in which she imagines Kanai's position marks her ability to imagine worlds as connections between people; just as Kanai forms a link between her and Piya, she considers herself an essential link between Fokir and their son, Tusul. In doing so, she has a similar attitude towards Kanai as Fokir had towards Piya in the beginning of the novel. She does not see him as a representative of a certain group, but rather, as an individual with a unique position.

Moyna and Fokir, then, as rural subjects, illustrate two things. First of all, their motivation and attitude towards Piya, Kanai, and each other demonstrates a complex sense of agency. While they conform, in some ways, to what is expected from a traditional rural subject, their inner motivation is shown to be complex; they make choices and sacrifice, which repeals the notion that agency in a rural context can be easily generalised. Secondly,

their interactions with ‘outsiders’ Kanai and Piya demonstrate that, despite their local, traditional backgrounds, they are able to imagine a world different from their own. The rural subject is thus portrayed as having a certain cosmopolitan consciousness, as demonstrated by the ability to engage with worlds outside their own.

3.3 The Rural and Worlding Opportunities

Having discussed the ways in which a rural cosmopolitanism is expressed in *The Hungry Tide* by looking first of all at the landscape and secondly at the rural subjects, the following paragraphs will concern the ways in which the rural environment provides opportunities for worlding to the cosmopolitan outsider Piya. Worlding is a term borrowed from Spivak, which is tied to the issue of cosmopolitanism by Robbins (326). At its heart lies the necessity to conceptualise cosmopolitanism as a matter of *becoming*, rather than ‘being’ (Johansen 3). Concerning the literary imagination, such a cosmopolitanism would be expressed through character development; for example, by having a character encounter other worlds and imagining the effect of these encounters on the character’s being. These considerations are important because of the invocation of movement and becoming; conceptualising cosmopolitanism in such a way allows for optimism concerning the future, in the same way as Spivak encourages a “definitive future anteriority” (2003 6) concerning the future of literary studies. By imagining cosmopolitanism as becoming it will be possible to think constructively about globalisation’s influence on the subject; mainly because the individual is, in a similar way, always becoming. In addition, in order to move towards a better future – which is a necessity, considering the problems concerning globalisation discussed in chapter two – ways of *becoming* have to be imagined; the becoming of the cosmopolite can contribute to this debate.

Further analysis of *The Hungry Tide* will prove valuable in this respect. The previous paragraphs have shown how the rural is displayed as being at the same time a world in itself, as well as always connected to the global. As such, it is a place where distinct worlds meet, which is relatively different from the way in which urban cultural landscapes are dominated by global capitalist forces. In order to contribute to the conception of meeting worlds, the following paragraphs will discuss the ways in which Piya is subjected to worlding, or, in other words, in which ways the countryside not just enlarges her world, but also invites her to consider and acknowledge different worlds that coexist and at times overlap.

The character of Piya already appears quintessentially cosmopolitan. Her parents emigrated from India to the United States, which gives her a mixed heritage; there is a remnant of Bengali culture – although she lost the ability to speak the language – but grew up in the United States, which provided her with a distinct Western character. Interestingly, Ghosh problematises the notion of a mixed heritage by emphasising how little remains from Piya’s Indian side. Her Indianness is mostly there because of familial ties – she still has family in Kolkata, where she stays before heading out into the tide country – and the colour of her skin. This puts her in a rather awkward situation, as illustrated by her encounter with the security guard and boat captain in the beginning of the novel. Mej-Da, the captain, makes fun about the fact that their skin colour is the same, but their language – and sex – is not. The exchange makes Piya consider her position in the tide country:

It was ironic that here – in a place where she felt even more a stranger than elsewhere – her appearance had robbed her of that protection. Would these men have adopted the same attitude if she had been, say, a white European, or Japanese? She doubted it. Nor for that matter would they have dared to behave similarly with her Kolkata cousins, who wielded the insignia of their upper-middle-class upbringing like laser-guided weaponry. They would have known how to deploy those armaments against men like these and they would have called it ‘putting them in their place’. But as for herself, she had no more idea of what her own place was in the great scheme of things than she did of theirs – and it was exactly this, she knew, that had occasioned their behaviour (Ghosh 34-35).

What is striking about this passage is the sense of placelessness that Piya feels. In a similar vein to Roy’s characters’ impossibility of uprooting themselves, the cosmopolitan Piya suffers from her transnational status, rather than celebrating it. It might appear from this passage that this is only because of her Indian heritage; however, as she relates her disappointing love life to Kanai, it becomes clear that this is not the first time Piya is confronted with loneliness. In fact, her experiences as a transnational subject have already convinced her that it is best to “get used to the idea of being on [her] own” (Ghosh 314). The rootless cosmopolite, as exemplified by Piya, is thus shown to be dispossessed, rather than fortunate.

Over the course of the novel, however, Piya acquires that which she apparently never truly had – a home. At the very end of the narrative, she tells Nilima: “For me, home is where the Orcaella are, so there’s no reason why this couldn’t be it” (Ghosh 400). As such, Piya’s

experiences during the narrative grant her what she, as a transnational character, has been missing. In relation to cosmopolitanism, her narrative becomes an illustration of the necessity of a certain rootedness for a cosmopolitan identity to be successful, rather than harmful. In addition, the nature of Piya's definition of home contributes to the concept of *becoming* as essential to cosmopolitanism, as she defines her home not according to a certain point in time or space, but connects it to her mission – the observation of the Orcaella dolphin. A final contribution that her character makes to the imagination of cosmopolitanism is her acceptance of worlds other than her own, as becomes clear in her relationship to Fokir and other inhabitants of the tide country.

Piya's initial stance, despite her transnationalism, is not one that encourages intercultural exchange. The loneliness she has condemned herself to has much to do with her lack of integration; as she tells Kanai, it is because of her difference that she never had any successful relationships with other people while working abroad (Ghosh 313-314). It is revealed that this has to do with language: "You're always going to find yourself in some small town where there's never anyone to talk to but this one guy who knows some English. And everything you tell him will be all over the town before you've said it. So just keep your mouth shut and get used to being on your own" (Ghosh 314). The fact that the issue revolves around language, and English specifically, draws the reader's attention to Piya's relationship with Fokir – a relationship marked by their inability to directly communicate through language. Fokir as such embodies a different kind of foreigner than the ones she engaged with in her earlier research trips – the ones that would speak English, and in doing so, would demand little to no adaptations from her side. On the other hand, these English-speaking locals also revealed their inability to respect her otherness by leaving her for a local girl when Piya started to take the relationship seriously (Ghosh 313).

Fokir is of a different kind, as could already be seen from the way in which he is portrayed to view Piya as a person first and foremost. At first, however, Piya ignorantly refuses to do the same in return; instead, she projects her exotic conceptions of a rural Indian subject on Fokir, imagining him to be some kind of tribal fisherman. She pictures his father "a fisherman like him, with long stringy limbs"; his mother a "sturdy but tired woman, worn to the bone by the daily labour of carrying baskets full of fish and crabs to the market". She imagines a family of the poor-but-happy stereotype: "[A]lthough they were poor their lives did not lack for warmth or companionship" (Ghosh 158). She imagines Fokir's world to be much smaller than it is in reality; he is the child of Kusum, who was an immigrant to the tide country. It reveals the hesitance of the privileged cosmopolite, here embodied by Piya, to

imagine a similar manner of mobility and cultural mixing in a rural context. In addition, her ideas about Fokir's family being poor but happy lays bare an issue at the heart of the cosmopolitan debate; namely, that of exoticist preconceptions getting in the way of a true cosmopolitanism. Piya imagines the world in absolutes: The rural subject is categorised according to her preconceived view of the world.

Piya's hermetic view on the countryside is further shown by the way in which she imagines Fokir's wife. She pictures an arranged marriage, but chooses to imagine a rather ideal version – one that contrasts the harsh reality of Moyna and Fokir's wedding being a ploy to keep Moyna from becoming an educated nurse. Instead, she imagines Moyna to be filled with wonder at the moment she laid eyes upon her husband to be: "Only then would she allow herself to look at this boy who was her man and thank her fate for giving her a husband who was young, with fine, clean limbs and wide, deep eyes, someone who could almost have been the dark god of her prayers and dreams" (Ghosh 158). Perhaps the strongest point that can be taken away from this passage is the way in which the tide country itself – with its local culture, religion, and tradition – contrasts Piya's exoticist imagination. The 'dark god' Piya has in mind is, most likely, a reference to Krishna, who is often referred to as Shyam ('dark-complexioned lord') and is known for his dark-blue skin. As was seen before, however, such a god would have no place in the imagination of Fokir's wife; the tide country's resistance to hermetic religious lines, as demonstrated by its syncretic worship of Bon Bibi, rules out the possibility of categorising its inhabitants according to religious stereotypes – be they Hindu or Muslim.

Interestingly, Piya's meditations on Fokir's background are featured in a chapter titled "Listening" (Ghosh 156). Reading the passages with this notion in mind reveals the problems that come with a language barrier. The lack of a common language forces Piya to listen to Fokir in other ways in order to get to know him better; at the same time, the way in which she listens is shown to be little more than projecting her own exotic ideas on Fokir. Yet, in a moment of clarity at the end of the chapter, Piya realises how fruitless her attempt to understand Fokir really is: "The two of them, Fokir and herself, they could have been boulders or trees for all they knew of each other: and wasn't it better in a way, more honest, that they could not speak? For if you compared it to the ways in which dolphins' echoes mirrored the world, speech was only a bag of tricks that fooled you into believing that you could see through the eyes of another being" (Ghosh 159). In this passage, two important notions can be discerned. First of all, Piya moves the issue of language to the background. In doing so, she effectively recognises a real issue in the sphere of cosmopolitanism; namely, the

(im)possibilities of arriving at an understanding. The notion of becoming apparently also applies to dialogue and communication, as Piya slowly begins to realise that she and Fokir inhabit different worlds; something she recognises because of the lack of a shared language. At the same time, Piya's situation has been like this all the time; no matter how well-spoken the English of her foreign love interests, they were always as distant as Fokir – illustrating the honesty that is shared in silence.

The relationship between Piya and Fokir develops further, marked by a slow bouncing back between understanding and misunderstanding. At first, Piya is enthusiastic about working with Fokir, and despite Kanai's comments on their difference, she is quite convinced that in the way she and Fokir are tied to the water, they have so much in common between them that the lack of a shared language does not matter (Ghosh 268). Only a day later however, Piya is confronted with a significant difference between them. The party arrives in a village where a tiger is caught and put to death – with a helping hand from Fokir. It is this instance that drives Piya to accept that Fokir's world is radically different from hers; in her view, the killing of the tiger was a horrific thing; in Fokir's world, it is an issue that the people "have learned to take it in their stride" (Ghosh 300). As such, a distance exists between Fokir and Piya; one that is not essentially defined by the lack of a common language, but by a lack understanding that lies even deeper; namely, the difficulty of conceiving of one another's worlds.

At the same time, the issue is portrayed to be not as black and white as it might appear. Piya's object of study, the Orcaella, is revealed to be of special importance to Fokir as well. When, with the help of Kanai, Piya asks Fokir about his connection to the dolphins and the place they are found, Fokir explains: "I came here time and again and it happened that the *shush* [the dolphins, J.S.Z.] became like my friends. I followed them where they went" (Ghosh 308). The way in which Fokir attaches to the Orcaella is not very different to Piya's; in her own way, Piya has followed them as well – all around the globe, from Australia to Thailand and, at last, to India (Ghosh 307). Worlds, it appears, can overlap. Even in their difference, the worlds inhabited by Piya and Fokir are shared. The redemptive notion in this account is the environment: The tide country functions as a space in which worlds meet, overlap, and cosmopolitanism comes into existence. This confluence of worlds is finally illustrated as Piya, with the help of Kanai's translation, listens – at long last, truthfully listens – to Fokir's rendition of the legend of Bon Bibi: "[Fokir] hesitated momentarily before yielding to [Piya's] plea. Tilting back his head, he began to chant, and suddenly the language and the music were all around her, flowing like a river, and all of it made sense; she

understood it all. Although the sound of the voice was Fokir's, the meaning was Kanai's, and in the depths of her heart she knew she would always be torn between one and the other" (Ghosh 360). Piya's partaking of the tide country's locality is facilitated by the notion of exchange, as evidenced by the necessity of Kanai's translation; and in addition, the legend of Bon Bibi, itself a cosmopolitan confluence of worlds, invites Piya and draws her in to Fokir's world. It is the final step before, in a dramatic and tragic fashion, Fokir and Piya enter the storm out of which only the latter emerges. Yet, this tragic loss only serves to underline the role of the environment in the facilitation of worlding, as the chapter concludes: "She could feel the bones of his cheeks as if they had been superimposed on her own; it was as if the storm had given them what life could not; it had fused them together and made them one" (Ghosh 390).

Conclusions

Until this point, this work has attempted to complicate the issue of whether and how the Indian countryside as imagined in Indian English literature portrays cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism was illustrated first of all to be a term under debate; following the guidelines of Robbins, Spivak, and Johansen, this work attempted to establish a functional definition of cosmopolitanism that attains two goals: First of all to demonstrate the inherent cosmopolitan disposition of the Indian countryside; and secondly, to criticise the notion of a superficial cosmopolitanism, i.e. a rootless cosmopolitanism that plays a destructive role in a system of incorporative neo-colonialism. In order to do so productively, an analysis of the role of agency in the Indian countryside has been made. Using a number of works of the influential Indian author Rabindranath Tagore, this work attempted to delineate the contours of an Indian cosmopolitanism. This has been a necessary and important contribution; especially considering Robbins's observation that cosmopolitanism is "neither a Western invention nor a Western privilege" (324). By discussing a number of Tagore's viewpoints, it has become clear that the concept of worlding as an essential contribution to the definition of cosmopolitanism echoes throughout Tagore's writing. The space of Santiniketan, set in the rural countryside, demonstrated that indeed, the countryside is filled to the brim with global connections; furthermore, it illustrated the ability of the countryside to "hold its own" (*Nobelprize.org*) in the face of the "world-flood" (Tagore *Nationalism* 35). As such, examining Tagore revealed the necessity to acknowledge other cosmopolitan imaginaries that arise from the sphere of Indian English literature.

This framework proves to be an effective analytical tool when considering the notion of criticism. One of the essential problems surrounding cosmopolitanism was established to be its association with a destructive mode of globalisation. This harmful force, often embodied by multinational corporations but also by wildlife preservation efforts, is criticised thoroughly in the work of Arundhati Roy. *The God of Small Things*, her literary work, is infused with a similar strain of political criticism. At the same time, writing in a poetic mode allows her to delineate in a sophisticated way the problematics of cosmopolitanism. A number of characters that surfaced in the novel display superficial cosmopolitan traits; Chacko, the uncle of the protagonist twins, studied at Oxford, and Rahel, the twin sister, lived in the United States as an adult. Despite their worldliness, these characters display a desperate sense of stagnation, as opposed to the notions of transition and *becoming* that were found to be essential for a true, responsible cosmopolitanism in the first chapter. The confluence of worlds

that is considered necessary for such a cosmopolitan disposition was inhibited by the existence of Love Laws; a literary image employed by Roy to illustrate the way in which the subject finds itself manipulated into a certain lifestyle that leaves no room for worlding.

The God of Small Things as such illustrated the complexity of agency in the matter of cosmopolitanism. The narrative is, to a large degree, defined by a strong sense of determinism; at the same time, there are moments in which characters succeed in breaking the love laws, and have their worlds flow into one another. In the cases when this happens, it takes the shape of an act that is considered taboo, further illustrating the limitations placed upon the subject, but also forcing the reader to consider the challenge of a true cosmopolitanism by associating worlding with subversion. As such, the novel demonstrates that a cosmopolitan disposition is not simply created by performing transnational mobility or taking part in global culture. Furthermore, it contributes to Robbins's criticism by illustrating the complexity of agency; the ways in which characters find themselves negotiating between global, local, and environmental forces shows that the mere presence of agency is not necessarily redemptive. On the other hand, the emphatic presence of the natural environment in the final chapter of the novel demonstrates that, in the line of Tagore, who argued that worlding lies in line with human nature, there is a natural tendency to the breaking of taboos, laws, and barriers between worlds; as such, *The God of Small Things* leaves the reader – and Comparative Literature – with a sense of hope for what is perhaps, in Spivak's words, a “definitive future anteriority” (2003 6). As such, through its tragic narrative, *Small Things* illustrates the necessity of acknowledging true cosmopolitanism in definitions of *becoming*.

Though narratologically quite different, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* inspires a similar outlook on cosmopolitanism. The protagonist, Piya, is transnationally mobile; yet, at the same time, she is described as incomplete. It takes time for her to recognise this fact, and in the meantime, she displays a sense of stagnation; her world is monolithic, which is demonstrated by the fact that she categorises Fokir according to her own preconceptions when she meets him. The contrast between the two forces the reader to recognise a rural sense of cosmopolitanism: Fokir's affinity with the tide country imbued him with a sense of worlding that is inherent to the country's locality, which is displayed both in the way Ghosh articulates the natural environment and in the cultural-religious background provided by the cult of Bon Bibi. In this narrative, then, it is the countryside that displays a true cosmopolitanism first and foremost: First of all by the composition of its environment, which is defined as a confluence both in the sense of landscape but also in the sense of culture and tradition; and secondly by the cosmopolitan disposition of its inhabitants, as demonstrated by Fokir and Moyna. Fokir's

tendency to acknowledge and accept Piya despite her difference illustrates his ability to conceptualise plurality in his worldview, and Moyna's ability to play roles that are associated with different worlds – that of Kanai, that of Piya, and her own traditional background – illustrate a similar sense of worlding.

Piya's confrontation with these notions of cosmopolitanism, both by interacting with the characters and with the landscape, entice her into questioning her monolithic worldview, which includes the way in which she values the natural environment. The local, as such, proves to be an important contributor to the way in which worlds are imagined; the final moments she shares with Fokir illustrating the worlding force of the natural environment. *The Hungry Tide* as such answers to the challenge of worlding set by *The God of Small Things*. The matter of agency is still revealed as complex: The marriage between Fokir and Moyna, for instance, which was revealed to be arranged, is not to be read as a token of the absence of agency; the faithfulness of both towards the other demonstrates this as a fact.

Both novels thus leave a hopeful future by introducing the natural environment into the narrative. In *Small Things*, nature was the only thing that compelled the characters to break the law, and also the only place where these laws were deemed an obscenity instead of the other way around. In *The Hungry Tide*, the environment of the tide country becomes a marker for the countryside's inherent cosmopolitanism, and the way in which it infuses its inhabitants with a sense of worlding emphasises the need to recognise the environment in matters of cosmopolitanism.

It would at this point be appropriate to recall the main purpose of this work as laid out in the introduction. The mission this dissertation set out upon was to critically engage with the definition of cosmopolitanism; first of all because of its importance in the contemporary field of Comparative Literature, but also because of the difficulties associated with it. The most prominent of these difficulties are those concerned with notions of superficiality, in which cosmopolitanism is superficially defined in terms of global mobility and access to what can – somewhat controversially – be referred to as 'global culture'. In an attempt to contribute towards a more responsible sense of cosmopolitanism, this paper strives to argue that cosmopolitanism, following Robbins and Spivak, should be defined as a sense of worlding; here defined as 1) a process of becoming that is rooted in a metaphysical sense of transition rather than spatial mobility, in which the individual grows into the ability to recognise, acknowledge, and inhabit different worlds; and 2) an orientation that resists the idea of a singular, all-enveloping totality in favour of a plurality of worlds.

It has been shown that a critical reading of the imagined spaces of the Indian countryside support such a manner of cosmopolitanism. In its spatial distance and environmental difference from the urban, the rural appears to be a place in which cosmopolitanism can be defined not according to the tropes of the rootless, mobile, worldly city-dweller, but as a state of mind that, infused by a sense of locality, opens up a plural, transitory imaginary that contrasts totality and stagnation. Interestingly, this sense of cosmopolitanism appears to be strongly informed by the natural environment. A symbiotic conception of the relationship between man and nature, as was illustrated to be not only the perspective of contemporary scholars in the field of post-colonial ecocriticism, but also the late Rabindranath Tagore, reveals a cosmopolitanism in the Indian rural to arise more or less naturally.

Tagore contributes to the imagination of such a symbiotic, natural cosmopolitanism in two ways: first of all positively, by imagining a rural space – Santiniketan – as an essential place from which to engage in a global cultural and intellectual exchange. Secondly, by criticising the incorporative structure of the monocultural nation state – a totality if there ever was one – Tagore by extension illustrates how destructive neo-colonial forces often associated with globalisation run counter to the rural cosmopolitanism mentioned before. As such, a definition of cosmopolitanism informed by Tagore appears to be successful at the discrimination between a superficial and a responsible cosmopolitanism. This notion is supported by the analysis of the two novels. *The God of Small Things* illustrated the destructive nature of globalisation, echoing Tagore's critique of nationalism's totality, but also portrayed the natural environment as a space that enables resistance against these very totalitarian forces. The analysis of *The Hungry Tide* further illustrated this point by introducing the natural environment as possessing qualities of cosmopolitanism – the confluence of waters, the shifting of the islands in the tide country. The natural environment, in this novel, enables a responsible mode of cosmopolitanism in the inhabitants of the countryside; in the original population, but also in transnational actors such as Piya and Kanai.

As such, this dissertation proves successful in two ways. First of all, a contribution has been made to the discussion of globalisation and cosmopolitanism in the wider context of Comparative Literature by engaging with the notion of agency in relation to cosmopolitanism as suggested by Robbins in 'Comparative Cosmopolitanism'. Secondly, by introducing the environment into this debate, this work may have found new, interesting ways in which to

imagine the cosmopolitan, the environment, and the human in the way in which water appears as a powerful literary symbol.

The first of these points has hopefully become relatively clear at this point. Robbins's emphasis on agency as a notion with which cosmopolitanism can be made more complex, and as such more accommodating towards the disenfranchised and more critical towards the privileged, has been at the centre of this work. Exploring agency in tandem with the environment, the latter considered from the perspective of Mukherjee complemented by Tagore's imaginary, appears to successfully encourage a departure from a binary perspective on agency – defined by simply observing whether agency is present or not – to a more complex point of view. The more sophisticated way of looking at agency, as this work has attempted to perform, considers the individual in a certain relationship to the environment. The impact of the environment on the individual manifests itself in the agency performed by the individual; as shown, for example, by Baby Kochamma in *Small Things*, an unhealthy environment creates destructive individuals. This example illustrates that, even though Baby Kochamma is in control, her destructiveness is not just hers, it is also that of the harmful social environment. In addition, it is also shown that the presence of worldliness, education, and relative self-awareness – notions arguably present in the figure of Chacko in the same novel – do not necessarily lead to a non-superficial cosmopolitan disposition. In contrast to these oppressive environments, the natural environments of rural Ayemenem and the tide country in *The Hungry Tide* provide a place in which a natural, cosmopolitan-inflected agency has room to flourish. Ammu and Velutha's flowing into each other by the banks of the river posits their relationship as an extension of the natural environment, inviting a symbiotic perspective on the interaction between humans and nature. Such a symbiotic exchange between the individual and nature is made even more implicit in *The Hungry Tide*, where the fluidity of the country itself evokes a similar manner of fluidity between the worlds that converge when Piya, Fokir, Moyna, and Kanai meet and mingle on the shifting banks of the Ganges delta. As such, introducing the environment adds considerable depth to the discussion on the relationship between cosmopolitanism and agency.

It appears, however, that the emphatic presence of water in both novels is an important issue to note in itself as well. Both novels present a successful manner of intercultural exchange, one that can be associated with a merging of different worlds and the attainment of a level of understanding, against the background of watery landscapes. In addition, the vocabulary used to poetically delineate these transitional events is laden with references to water. Individuals are described to flow into one another (Ghosh 364), drink from each

other's bowls (Roy 1997 337), and more. The ubiquity of these watery signs raise the question whether water is really only a sign in this matter, or perhaps part of the signified as well. It invites the possibility of water, in its indiscriminate fluidity, being more essential to the human condition than generally assumed; it appears that the common adage that man is for 60% made up of water rings true on deeper levels than previously imagined. It would be prudent not to draw any conclusions from this notion on an existential level; besides, many such notions – some fanciful, others trite – already exist: it was the ancient Greeks who already referred to the passing of life as a watery stream, proverbially encased in the thought that *panta rhei* – everything flows. On a conceptual level, however, the emphatic presence of water in the literature discussed in this work might suggest a new manner of exploring ways in which the symbiotic relationship between man and nature, as proposed by contemporary scholars in ecocriticism, can be imagined.

The last point, clearly, still requires additional reading, analysis, and debate. It would be prudent to recognise the limitations of this dissertation, and the reader is invited to do so critically and enthusiastically. The corpus of literature examined in this work is very limited in scope. Though *Small Things* and *The Hungry Tide* have proven relevant in their contribution to the specific questions asked in this work, the analysis and discussion of these novels has led to a number of new questions that cannot be answered. First of all, a problem that needs to be recognised is one of definitions. While cosmopolitanism has been successfully made more complex, this work has reduced another complexity to a relatively simple binary; namely, that of the urban and the rural. This work has sought to establish the rural according to a number of properties that could also be classified as tropes: the spatial distance from the city, a strong presence of tradition, a sense of closeness to the natural environment, and perhaps more. It would be unjust to state that these notions cannot exist in urban environments, and they might not even be present in every rural environment. As such, the essential dichotomy between rural and urban persists throughout this work, and though it is arguably a strategic essentialism that hopefully reflects a sense of responsibility, it should not be ignored. As such, it would be appropriate to read this work not as a confirmation of an essential difference between rural and urban. Instead, the responsible cosmopolitanism that manifests itself in imagined rural spaces according to this work might be a first step towards a cosmopolitanism that is neither essentially urban nor rural; as such, this work hopes to work towards an absolving of the dichotomy between the two.

A second point that requires mentioning in the discussion on limitations is one related to geography, language, and culture. The novels discussed in this work are all English

language novels; as such, they represent a specific kind of literature from India. The country is vast, multicultural, and multilingual; as such, this work holds little, if any authority over the notion of cosmopolitanism, the rural, and environment in all of India's literatures. It does appear, however, that this is a theme worth exploring further. The countryside has an important position in India's literatures; an attempt to discover differences, similarities, and other ways in which to engage with these literatures could prove productive in developing a more complete sense of how cosmopolitanism relates to the imagined Indian countryside. The notion of environment might then lead into entirely different directions; while South Asia's rivers are many and grand, there are regions that are defined by different geological features. The mountains of the Himalayas are the first that spring to mind. The immobile, monolithic mountain might play a role very different to that of the river.

Even then, the world proves much larger and diverse still. This work has attempted to apply a South Asian perspective on cosmopolitanism by borrowing from Rabindranath Tagore. At the same time, it ought to be acknowledged that South Asia's intellectual history is far more rich and diverse than this one writer. The presence of Tagore in this work, then, ought to be recognised not as a definitive attempt to create an end-all Tagorian cosmopolitanism; rather, it should be read as evidence that illustrates the possibility of integrating somewhat local indigenous imaginaries into a global discourse. As such, this work itself strives to exemplify a plural cosmopolitanism by using a world-famous Indian cosmopolite's imagination without offering it as the final totality.

As such, the perspective provided in this work is far from exhaustive; if anything, it encourages future readings of different literatures featuring different landscapes to lead Comparative Literature to new places – both in a physical and in a metaphorical sense.

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