

## **The Calamities of Climate Change in A Migration Fiction: A Study of the Novel *The Wall* by John Lanchester**

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### **Abstract:**

The Wall, John Lanchester's Booker Long-listed novel about Post Climate change future. As a work of genre fiction, a cli-fi dystopia, it is derivative and stale. This paper examines how nowadays many fiction-nonfiction reflects on anticipated cases of climate dislocation. Focusing on existing research about migrants agency, climate fiction and human right, it tackles the results of climate migration descant before analysing the novel. The Wall compels us to re-examine the massive dispersion beyond the norms of institutional control. Zooming on the story of The Wall that predicted the of the refugees of a apocalyptic world, this paper exposes the social norms, explores survival mind set and questions false sympathy to humanity.

**Keywords:** Climate change, refugees, Others, migration, Britain, Amitabh Ghosh, fictions, Brexit.

### **Introduction:**

What are climate refugees? Well, this is a hard question to answer, as there is no existing definition about the concept. But climate refugee is not synonymous to environmental refugees. It excludes people who move as a result of displacement caused by environmental disaster like subsidence, volcanic eruption, earthquake which are not effected by climate reasons. Therefore, climate refugees perhaps defined as a person or group of people who are displaced by environmental situations which are resulted by climate change and can no longer gain a possible livelihood in their homeland, thus in a way forcefully or voluntarily leave their home either permanently or temporarily within their country or abroad.

Climate change pose an important threat to many countries, places, cultural heritage on earth on the present day. And one of the ensuing effects of climate change is the issue of climate induced displacement and the consequent migrants. And now the severe results of climate change have compelled some fiction writers to deal with these real and imagined stories regarding climate migration have shaped the way contemporary culture deal with this issues climate change manifests itself in contemporary culture in many ways. But representation of climate change in popular fiction is a difficult task, as every fiction is capable of handling these problematic notion of climate refugees. But nowadays as global warming has a hot topic, the concept of climate refugee has gained a considerable attention in many literary writings. Many journalists, intellectuals as well as social scientists and literary writers have talked about this issue. This is understandable as predictions of mass climate migration make for attention grabbing headlines. It has been now several decades since commentators are discussing about rising tides and waves of people forced to move by climate change. Recently a think tank report warned no that climate crisis could displace 1.2 billion people by 2050. Some commentators now even debating that, as the New York Times cited in a recent headline “The Great Climate Migration Has Began” and that the climate refugees we’ve warned and talked about, are, in fact, already here. But this concept of migration in response to changes in the environment is not new, indeed it is part of the story a lot human inhabitation of our planet. Many intellectuals have also highlighted the broader ties between racial justice and the climate crisis, by pointing out how the Western countries and their economic supremacy have shaped the entire world’s response to climate crisis. Turning to discussion of depiction of climate crisis in literary works, many writers have dealt with this emergence issue of climate change. The renowned author, Amitabh Ghosh, has pointed out on his writing ‘*The Great Derangements*’ how even before the term ecological refugees was invented, his distance ancestors, from Bangladesh were part of it. This book talks about how climate change and its consequences will soon eclipse everything else and this book exposes the way everyone one of is trying to pretend it’s not happening. Here he also draws attention on the Wests’ reaction to climate change. The book’s play on words and contemplation on the absence of climate change in serious literature might not be for everyone. With politics and history, he explains at length the bitter truth, political negotiation and the reportage of climate change. This book is on our burning planet for those who are burning with it. ‘*The Uninhabitable Earth*’ is a New York magazine article by American journalist David Wallace Well which very clearly portrays a worst-case

scenario of what is about to happen in the near future due to global warming. It explains how humanity's complacency and negligence have put this world on a course to soon to be unliveable unless we each do our small part to improve how we care for this beautiful planet we live on. Like Ghosh, here we talked about the role of European in handling climate refugee. He sites the example of Syrian refugees, who were unleashed on Europe by a civil war inflamed by climate change and drought and the entire West is suffering from huddle of masses coming from all over the world. Nowadays movies about the end times, post-apocalyptic and zombie films are so popular these days. Movies like *Max: Fury Road*, *Children of Men*, *The Colony* and most recently the *Bird Box* continue to draw massive audience. The popularities of these movies make us wonder what is it about humanity's bleak future that is so entertaining to us? Well, one of the most appropriate answers to that, these fictionalised films accounts of what our earth might be like after suffering the ravages of toxic air, water shortage, ice caps become all too real. The chilling thought of our planet damaged beyond repair is frightening prospect indeed. And tis terrifying global nightmare is closer than we might think. Fiction dealing with climate change as both scientific and cultural phenomenon demands a complexity on fictional representation. Because when the author represents climate change as global networked complicated controversial phenomenon, they go beyond simply referring the environment as a setting as start to deal with its consequences on plot, on fictional characters making innovation in characterization creating narratives that are different from traditional narratives.

There is no doubt that climate change has brought several problems in the present era, but the notion of climate refugee is particularly problematic, as there is no exact definition of this term. Unlike traditional concept of migration, the nexus between climate change and human migration is intricate, since cause and effect relationship can be difficult to establish. Any migrant's decision to displacement can be influenced by numerous and sometimes interrelated factors. It is often become daunting and impossible to point out to what extent exactly is a migrant Pushed out of his homeland by environmental degradation or pulled away from it by the promise of better life. This many social scientists have argued that we should treat climate migration discourse with considerable caution. Ascribing the entire movement or drift to climate change derived environmental degradation would be illogical, as all people movement in the present context take place within wider context of global trends including population growth, urbanisations, globalisation but at the same time dismissing climate change as a casual factor of equally enterable.

Thus scholar debate that we should rethink the concept of movement caused by climate change but “as displaces of globalised network of inspecting mobility regimes fueled by fuel extraction”. Nevertheless, the past two decades have seen an increasing amount of fiction dealing with this issue. Many novelists have dealt with this issue of climate change in various kinds of way. Megan Hunter’s *The End We Start From*, Claire Value Watkins *Gold Fame Citrus* which are at in draught wrecked California and flooded UK. In their various way of talking the issue of climate change these works remind us a world ending slowly by climate change. Writings on climate change have their own contribution of spreading awareness of climate injustice, by fading the fine line between the privileged and the victims. Creative stories in climate literature might play a critical role in reconstructing our future. But once again, as the concept of climate migration is complicated, so it’s depiction in literature is also difficult. Lack of current data and being oblivious to current disturbance in climate system, may cause failure and this failure will be counted as a facet of the broader ingenious and cultural failure that lies at the centre of the climate crisis. So, we have to be more cautious about fiction’s role on our disastrous pattern of behaviour. Similarly, difficulty questions should be raised in thinking about climate migration fiction, as these writings make us see side of the future refugees, we should critically reflect on their seemingly effortless appropriation of the migrant experience.

Well, after giving an overview of climate migration discourse this paper will analyse how the UK based novelist and journalist John Lanchester on his novel *The Wall* taking a dig at climate change. The representation of the refugees displaced by client change make this novel a productive example to think in this context of climate refugee. *The Wall* depicts the aftermath of world ravages by catastrophic climate change. It is a alarming but beautifully written novel that speaks not only to the ambiguities of life in the upcoming future but also recent discourses related to racial, economic division, current political situation, nationalism immigration. Taking all these into consideration this paper will examine how this novel has imagined the future by linking climate and conflict and the anxiety about the emergence of migrants.

### **Discussion:**

This novel joins the trend in which recent British fiction get on with “contemporary political discourses that see the coast – the space illuminates a Britain’s relation to the wider world-

as a potent site to explore a current crisis of national identity” (Packham2019, p. 206). The novel speaks about current political injustice, migration, as a consequence of climate change. President Trump’s pledge to build a border wall had been invented by his advisers a ‘memory trick’ (Nevala Lee 2019, p 1)- to keep an unpredictable candidate focused on the issue of immigration. In a way this step tells a lot about Trump, but also speaks a to power of the wall as a symbol, which is elusive enough to sustain ‘the dispossessed’-on which side of it the observer happens to stand. This novel with its powerful narratives reaches at a moment in which the definition of a wall is a matter of national debate, and it actively invites such association. As the protagonist utters at the very beginning of the novel, as he, looks for words to describe the wall of the title “you look for metaphor.” (Lanchester 2019, p. 1)

*The Wall* is set in an island nation in the north Atlantic that some astute reader thinks to have some strong similarity to Britain. And because of rising sea levels and million starving displaced people fleeing, they’ve surrounded the whole island 15-foot-high concrete wall. This wall has two purposes, one is polder when sea level is higher than land, partly it is a fortification to keep people out. The millions of starving people outside is simply referred to by citizens of this country as ‘others’. Many will say this is clearly a dystopian novel written in a kind of Orwell, Huxley dystopian tradition. But actually, in a way it is something likely perhaps even grimmer, it is almost more like a non-fiction that had one central premise about this catastrophic thing has happened and in the process of writing it the author has unfolded that premise imagining what it would be like or what the consequences would be if This kind of situation actually occurred.

Here every citizen of the country has to spend two years guarding the wall and there is a very simple and brutal rule that if the others get over the wall when you are on tour of duty of your section of the wall, the other that get over the it faced with the choice, they can be euthanized or they can be put back to sea again or that can be turned into what’s called ‘the help’. And helps are effectively slaves or indenture servants, at the same time the defenders who are on guards when the other got over are put to sea and become themselves others in a one-to-one exchange. We see how the world’s geo political situations have been described by the elite member in this speech to defenders guarding the wall" The change was not an event but a process that in some places, some unlucky places, has not stopped. In many of the hotter places of the world, in particular the change is still continuing still reshaping landscape, still impacting people’s lives.” (Lanchester 2019, p.

111).. The fine border between the other and the defenders keep floating through the protagonist's wondering of the situation of the others-

“I could imagine what it would be like to be an Other floating in the dark on some makeshift boat or raft or some inflatable, staring at the shoreline, looking at the Wall, at the sprinkling of lights above and the steep black dark below. Men fled from it...tried to make new lives for themselves...to climb higher ground, to find a ledge, a cave, a well, an oasis, a place for them where they could find safety for them and their families. But the Change did not stop. The shelter blew away, the water rose to the higher ground, the ground baked, the crops died, ledge crumbled, the well dried up. So, the unfortunate must flee, and they have again, in number, like the numbers from many years ago when the Change first struck. Big numbers.” (65)

As the story progresses, we see how the protagonist gradually transform from being a defender to the other himself. This generally proves the point how the government xenophobic worldview actually put the privileged citizens and irregular migrants in a same situation, despite their militarized surveillance compelled all of us all with or without borders.

The kind of brutally stark and bare version of life established in the wall remind us of something like world war, if we look into at the map of its four-degree warmer world, it is very difficult to imagine living through it without being something like the order of change and the order of impact on every aspect of society they people go through during a world war, except in this instance the enemy is war is climate. The thing about climate change is that when you get to this four-degree warmer world within one or two generations you must have situation where people had effectively grown up with different planets, you'd have parents and children and grand parents with generational conflicts which is beautifully shown in this novel, where the narrator and his generation blame the older for their mistakes and as a consequence of their fault, they had lived in a world defending the wall. This passage brings out the young generation feelings about the current situation:

“none of us can talk to our parents, by us I mean my generation, I mean people born after the Change, you know the thing when you broke with someone, and you say it's not, its me... its them. Generational guilt, the old feel they irretrievably fucked up the world, then allowed us to be born into it, you what its true, that's exactly what they did, they know it, we know it, everybody knows

it...so the world wasn't needed... something about which the old have no clue...why don't you travel back to world and unfuck up and then travel back and maybe then we can talk." (56)

One of the main characteristics of climate fictions is that it profoundly deals with a degraded future, as climate change promises to destroy any land ever existed, it will only remain in our memory and we can do nothing but to mourn the places that we lost. Such instances can be seen.

Where the protagonist visits his parents and reflects their generational guilt as they have succumbed to the disastrous results of climate change and can do nothing about it but being nostalgic about the previous world and witness with load of guilt how generations after generations after them have to suffer the dark ages that climate change has brought into the forefront. Their lounging for beaches points out the desperate situation that they have to live in.

One of the things that the author conveyed in the above passage was that apart from the various things about intergenerational inequality and so on that the narrator is completely telling the truth about his feelings, his perspective, his reality, how he sees things. Someone can entirely tell the truth and yet what they saying isn't really fair. So there's difference between truth and being fair and someone's deeply felt truth isn't necessarily fair to the overall balance of perspective and in the above passage the author try to get the feeling that while the narrator completely telling the truth about how he sees it and yet at the same time you wonder how his poor old parents are sitting there on the sofa watching television while he sees s attributing awful lot of energy to them , maybe they didn't actually, directly , personally break the as no one wants to live in a world where one has to get the feeling of beach from watching TV. That is one of the brilliances of this novel of how it suggests thing through the gap between the narrator's perspective and our perspective.

This is only the position of the privileged. No doubt, they are struggling with the circumstances the change has brought, bit still they have something very important, that the other can't even imagine ' home'. What is more cruel, is that the immigrants who are able to break in are turned into help in other words Slave. A character in the novel justifies why she has taken one of the other as help-

“I know it’s terrible to have Help... another human being at one’s beck and call...in effect of one’s personal property.. though of course... it isn’t at all like such arrangements in benighted. It is a form of providing welfare...refuge to the wretched of the world -but m, still. I would not have believed you. It is See.. lessening of one’s own humanity. But what could I do? I am not getting any younger people of our time in life don’t understand this but (this is) perhaps the only thing true for humans everywhere, the terribleness of age..”(148-9)

But this self justification feels empty of humanity as this person is actually using human as help, contributing to the notion of slavery. But the novel tells us that not everyone accepts this concept of help. As the young elite says in his speech:

“some of your own countrymen don’t agree with the Wall. They think you need the Wall to keep out the water but not to keep out the human beings. Some of them don’t agree with turning people into Help. They think its slavery It’s a big network, much bigger than you realise.”(191) Every step of the novel the author dig at the various political movement of a world affected by climate change.

But even after several negative aspects of living in a dystopian world, Lanchester does provide some narrative of hope. As the novel progresses, we realize even in a world of restricted political views and social agency, even in frenzied future people with constant movement not always find themselves at a closed door. The way Lanchester presented the image of home in this novel has proved it-

“Home- it didn’t just seem as if home was a long way away...it actually feels as if the whole concept was strange, a thing you used to believe in, an ideology you’d once been passionate about had now abandoned. Home: the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in. Somebody had said that. But once you had spent time on the Wall, you stop believing in the idea that anybody, ever, has no choice but to take you in. Nobody has to take you in. They can choose to, or not.” (54) And also we see at the story’s conclusion that Kavanagh and Hifa were taken by the Hermit, and the message that stranger will even make you feel welcome in a hazardous situation has been emphasized. And this hospitable act of the Hermit proves that the idea of home is not entirely abandoned in this novel.

One of the things that the author has beautifully captured in this novel is that it shows how climate change and living in a hot planet with the cruel division of the other and the dominant can shape someone's thinking. For one time we see how the narrator ponders on the meaning of crucial world as he visits his parents but on the other hand the narrator does have some moral or ethical blinkers on, he doesn't see the strangeness of the society he is living in, he doesn't see that it's effectively a slave state, there are lot of things he doesn't see about how different life would be for others, what their reality or world is like. Though through various things happened in this book that eventually forced him to see those things. The narrator has this very precise categorization of type 1 and type 2 colds, that make this profound difference for the lives of the folks defending the wall and the introduction of him as narrator and then in later section where violence intercedes both show that as a narrator, he is kind of an unusual one, he is sort of an analytic bit he is not deeply reflective about the world, he is not very curious about the others. There are times that we wish him to be, so that his curiosity could bring us more details about the history, about how this came to pass but as we got into him we realize portraying him as he is kind of intentional because he grew up into a world of change ,thus he has nothing to compare his world to, though he knows that the world used be different but such world doesn't exit anymore, he has to live in this while coping with the constant change, so he has this sort of numbness to his reality that seemed almost like a evolved survival instinct. He is grown up with it, his reality is entirely normal and familiar to him in a way that child's reality is.

As a novel *The Wall* is pacy and readable. Even perhaps the non-Kavanagh characters are well developed. And as satire, it is powerful. It exposes the economic and ethical lack of justification for the current fashion for isolationism. It heavily deals with Brexit, it means love it or leave it, it means current prediction with finding the enemies within and stripping them of their citizenship. And we are currently in the middle of Covid-19 pandemic, in the news today are reports of plight of desperate immigrants trying to reach our shores hoping for better life. It is an appropriate book to read at this time. A dystopian tale of a world affected by climate change, rising sea levels and fear.

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