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Violence, Militarism and the Environment in Contemporary South Asian Literature

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VIOLENCE, MILITARISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURE

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VIOLENCE, MILITARISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN CONTEMPORARY
SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

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Current literary scholarship on the rise in violence and militarism within South Asia is guided by an anthropocentric focus and lacks a sustained discussion of the environmental implications of the phenomenon. Tracing the buildup of this phenomenon, this dissertation uses literary explication to argue that colonial violence and postcolonial militarism subject the environment to teleological appraisal and material exploitation for purposes of utilitarianism. This analysis draws upon Anglophone South Asian novels from 1954-2013 written by Kamala Markandaya, Kiran Desai, Uzma Khan, Mirza Waheed and Nadeem Aslam. Despite their varying political and geographical contexts, these novels share an interest in the lived realities of human-environment interactions by highlighting how people rely on the land as dwelling, resource, borderland, and shelter.

Focusing on the literary and cultural representations of the environment within these novels, this dissertation examines the following processes—the colonial systemization of environmental objectification, the propagation of eco-conquest by ethno-nationalist movements, the reductive conceptualization or Othering of nature during war, and the ecological precarity generated by militaristic legacies. By paying attention to the narrative, visual and linguistic elements of the chosen novels this study

establishes how the onslaught of violence and militarism rupture the human-environment dynamic, recast the environment in utilitarian terms, produce natural degradation and endanger human existence. An explication of these processes underscores the productive and destructive ways in which violence determines conceptions and treatment of the environment. In doing so, this dissertation establishes environmental co-optation as an integral part of the politics and modus operandi of colonial exploitation, ethno-nationalist insurgencies and transnational militant conflicts in South Asia.

INTRODUCTION

This study explicates the evolution of violence and its environmental repercussions as depicted in Anglophone South Asian literature (published from 1954-2013). Historically contextualizing the trajectory of violence, this dissertation argues that colonial, ethno-nationalist and the more recent militaristic violence alter the environment (and its conceptions) in salient ways. Through its narrativization of violence “as politico-economic tool, material experience and symbolic domination” (Visweswaran 3), the chosen literature illuminates how violence not only depletes the environment but reworks it for purposes of consumption. The literary works include novels by Kamala Markandaya, Kiran Desai, Uzma Khan, Mirza Waheed and Nadeem Aslam which depict sociopolitical realities of India, Pakistan, Kashmir, and Afghanistan over the last sixty years.

Highlighting the ecocritical dimensions of violence through critical readings of these narratives the study explicates the following processes—the colonial systemization of environmental objectification, the propagation of eco-conquest by ethno-nationalist movements, the reductive conceptualization or Othering of nature during war, and the ecological precarity generated by militaristic legacies. In doing so, this dissertation draws attention to the ways that the environment is subjected to the organizational, ideological

and experiential aspects of violence and argues for the need to address the ecological fallout of these phenomenon.

Although the impact of violence in South Asia has been analyzed through an anthropocentric lens in history, anthropology, and feminist studies, it has not been examined extensively from an environmental perspective¹. Given the increasing conflict over natural spaces as boundary markers, nationalist territories, resource reserves and military bases within South Asia, it becomes imperative to study the ways in which violence is influencing the environment.

Building upon the intersectional approaches to militarism within existing scholarship, this study analyses selected literary works to trace a genealogy of violence across pre-Partition, post-Partition, and post 9/11 years. The texts span years of colonial occupation, nationalist/ ethno-national struggles, and global military campaigns which have indelibly shaped nation states and are key in understating evolution of violence in the region. Studies have shown that British colonizers employed violence as a repressive tactic “both in ordinary everyday life and during extraordinary moments of war” and in

¹ For additional discussions on violence in South Asia see the following scholars: Anuradha Chenoy. "Gender and International Politics: The Intersections of Patriarchy and Militarization." *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 11.1 (2004): 27-42. ProQuest. 16 March 2016; Bruce Kapferer. *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian. Inst. Press, 1988. Print; Cynthia Keppley Mahmood. *Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants*. Philadelphia: Univ. Penn. Press, 1996. Print; Ian Talbot. "Militarism in India: The Army and Civil Society in Consensus." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 62.3 (1999): 584-85. ProQuest, 16 March 2016; P Sahadevan. "Ethnic Conflicts and Militarism in South Asia." *International Studies* 39.2 (2002): 103-38. Print; Kamala Visweswaran, ed. *Everyday Occupations: Experiencing Militarism in South Asia and Middle East*. Philadelphia: U of Philadelphia P, 2013. Print; Savitri Goonesekere. *Violence, Law and Women's rights in South Asia*. New York: Sage, 2004. Print; Srila Roy. "The Ethical Ambivalence of Resistant Violence: Notes from Postcolonial South Asia." *Feminist Review* 91 (2009): 135-53. Print; Stanley Tambiah. *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia*. (Berkeley: Univ. Calif. Press, 1996. Print); Veena Das, ed. *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*. (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1990, Print).

turn introduced structures that “governed the delivery of colonial violence [by producing] new forms of law that sanctioned spectacular displays of power and violence” (Kolsky 1219)². The legal and social sanctioning of violence continued to inform the postcolonial condition³ after the dissolution of colonial rule⁴. The discriminatory and divisive policies of postcolonial states⁵ created unrest in the region and engendered ethno-nationalist insurgencies⁶ that demanded political autonomy on the basis of ethnicity. These movements were undergirded by violence and began to acquire a military characteristic especially in response to the brutal retaliatory state crackdowns. Local insurgencies relied on the valorization of militaristic violence as an effective tool for agency and control. With the unfolding of proxy and global wars, the valorization of militaristic violence⁷

² For historical studies on colonial violence see: David Arnold. “Industrial Violence in Colonial India.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22.2 (1980): 234-55. Print; Elizabeth Kolsky. *Colonial Justice in British India: White Violence and the Rule of Law*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. Print); Manali Desai. “Colonial Legacies and Repertoires of “Ethnic” Violence: The Case of Western India, 1941–2002.” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 22.2 (2009): 147-79. Print.

³ “The postcolonial states of South Asia inherited and willfully retained militarized structures and ideologies from their past no matter what their political orientation. The national security paradigm in all states is a militaristic and patriarchal one. Militarization in postcolonial South Asia has interlinked external and internal dimensions” (Chenoy 105). Anuradha Chenoy. “Militarization, Conflict and Women in South Asia.” *The Women and War Reader*.” Jennifer E. Turpin, ed. New York: NYU Press, 1998. 101-111. Print.

⁴ Though the Partition years that created new states were also brutally violent and resulted in colossal loss of human life, they are not a part of this particular study.

⁵ For discussions on the subject see: Arthur Rubinoff. “The Multilateral Implications of Ethno-nationalist Violence in South Asia.” *South Asian Survey* 7.2 (2000): 273-94. Print; Damien Kingsbury. “Post-colonial States, Ethnic Minorities and Separatist Conflicts: Case Studies from Southeast and South Asia.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34.5 (2011): 762-78. Print; Syed Bukhari and Riaz Ahmad. “Ethnic Conflicts and South Asian Security.” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research In Business* 5.1 (2013): 779-94. Print.

⁶ Though there have been countless ethno-nationalist struggles that span post-independence years and continue till today, this study focuses on 1980 insurgencies of Gorkha National Liberation Front (India) and Sind Separatists (Pakistan).

⁷ Militant violence is discussed in relation to the Kashmir conflict and the War on Terror, for additional analyses of the topic see: A.Z. Hilali. “Contemporary Geopolitics of FATA: An Analysis of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Border Region.” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 26.4 (2013): 595-638. Print; Faisal Devji, Saul Newman, Kevin McDonald, and Nathan Coombs. “Transnational Militancy in the 21st Century (roundtable Discussion).” *Journal of Critical Globalisation Studies (JCGS)* 1.2 (2010): 97-124.

gave way to its increased implementation and catalyzed its hegemonic dimensions. The onslaught of the War on Terror, proxy wars, arms race, and stockpiling of nuclear technologies⁸ has compounded the situation by accelerating militarism within the region. Actual and perceived threats of war to national sovereignty have pushed militaristic doctrines to the forefront of political agendas, state policies and public rhetoric. Militarism has structured policy, spaces, and psyche within South Asia and has brought about “a wide-ranging consent to militarized forms of life” (Roy 136). The militarization of everyday life however does not mean that other kinds of violence (gendered, religious, political, and ethnic) have disappeared, but that militaristic violence⁹ has become a preferred or dominant means of resolving conflicts.

Print; Rajat Ganguly "India, Pakistan and the Kashmir Insurgency: Causes, Dynamics and Prospects for Resolution." *Asian Studies Review* 25.3 (2001): 309-34. Print; Swati Parashar. "Gender, Jihad, and Jingoism 1: Women as Perpetrators, Planners, and Patrons of Militancy in Kashmir." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34.4 (2011): 295-317. Print; Umbreen Javaid. "Partnership in War on Terror and Mounting Militant Extremism in Pakistan." *South Asian Studies* 26.2 (2011): 227-39. Print.

⁸ For context and sociopolitical consequences of these phenomenon see: Andrew Phillips. "Horsemen of the Apocalypse? Jihadist Strategy and Nuclear Instability in South Asia." *International Politics* 49.3: 297-317. Print; Farish Noor. "How Washington's 'War on Terror' Became Everyone's: Islamophobia and the Impact of September 11 on the Political Terrain of South and Southeast Asia." *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 5.1 (2006): 29-50. Print; Kunal Mukherjee. "'New Wars' in Contemporary South Asia?" *Peace Review* 25.1 (2013): 89-96. Print; Mahesh Shankar and T. V. Paul. "Nuclear Doctrines and Stable Strategic Relationships: The Case of South Asia." *International Affairs* 92.1 (2016): 1-20. Web. Patryk Kugiel. "Double Game: Pakistan in the Global War on Terror." *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 19.3 (2010): 26-44. Print; Paul Rogers. "Lost Cause: Consequences and Implications of the War on Terror." *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 6.1 (2013): 13-28. Print; Paul S. Kapur. "Ten Years of Instability in a Nuclear South Asia." *International Security* 33.2 (2008): 71-94. Print; Ramnaurti Rajaraman. "Battlefield Weapons and Missile Defense: Worrisome Developments in Nuclear South Asia." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 70.2: 68-74. Print; Rajat Ganguly. "The Consequences of Partisan Intervention in Secessionist Wars: Lessons from South Asia." *Contemporary South Asia* 6 (1997): 5-26. Print; Scott Sagan. "The Perils of Proliferation in South Asia." *Asian Survey* 41.6 (2001): 1064-086. Print.

⁹ This dissertation uses the term militaristic violence to focus specifically on violence directed and deployed in line with militaristic thinking. This term is a narrower conception of militarism which has multiple connotations which are not solely limited to violence and refers to a “common strong reliance on organized violence, a privileged position of the military establishment, consistency in the buildup of the war machine, nationalistic attitudes, and a proneness to the limitation of democratic freedoms” (Thee 299). Marek Thee. "Militarism and Militarization in Contemporary International Relations." *Security Dialogue* 8.4 (1977): 296-309. Print. For discussion on the distinction and overlap between militarism and

Probing the discursive and material dimensions of this buildup of violence across different landscapes the novels addressed can be interpreted as environmental works¹⁰. I address how these novels intertwine human-natural history, allude to natural sentience, foreground ecological concerns and promote accountability to the environment. In doing so, these novels foreground the environment as a central thematic concern and direct attention to its intrinsic worth, thereby signifying the importance of literary texts as interventionist discourses that raise consciousness among readers and draw attention to the urgency of the causes they seek (Huggan and Tiffin ix). An explication of the novels' ecological modes would benefit from discussions of how land has been conceived and theorized in postcolonial studies.

Land and geography have been discussed in relation to colonial expansion and territorial differentiation (between East/West, colonizer/colonized) in earlier texts such as Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965), and Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1977) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon establishes the importance of the land to a community of colonized people: "For a colonized people the most essential value because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread, and above all, dignity" (9). Fanon highlights the value of

militarization see Andrew L. Ross. "Dimensions of Militarization in the Third World." *Armed Forces & Society* 13.4 (1987): 561-578. Print.

¹⁰ According to the checklist provided by major ecocritic Lawrence Buell, an environmentally oriented work should display the following characteristics: "1. *The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history* 2. *The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest* 3. *Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical framework* 4. *Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text*" (Buell 7-8). Lawrence Buell. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996. Print.

land as a source of restoration and nationalist identification for the colonized. He also urges colonized people to use violence to liberate their land and minds from colonial domination: “imperialism [...] sows seeds of decay here and there that must be mercilessly rooted out from land and from our minds” (Fanon 181). Fanon recognizes that since the colonial system was “established and perpetuated through violence, it must be destroyed through violence” (Burke III 132), and envisions land as a site of violent conflict for anti-colonial, nationalist struggles.

Expanding this notion of land as nationalist signifier, Edward Said analyzes the importance of land and contesting geographies to the project of empire making and ideological differentiation such as those of the Orient and the Occident. In *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* Said incorporates ecological thinking within postcolonial studies by focusing on the significance of geography for imperial expansion. Said declares the selective use of geography as one of the key factors for differentiating between the Orient (East) and the Occident (West). Said interprets the "Orient" and "Occident" as man-made constructions such that the “two geographical entities support and to an extent reflect each other” (*Orientalism* 4-5) and are designated in terms of “a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space...which is "theirs" thereby giving rise to geographical distinctions that *can be* entirely arbitrary (Said 55). Said observes how the ideological constructions of the Orient transform from being textual and contemplative to administrative, economic, military and geographical (195), which in turn generates his theory about the relationship “between geography on the one hand and civilized or uncivilized peoples on the other” (216).

Extending his ideas about the significance of place in *Culture and Imperialism*, Said talks about the relationship between geography, power and imperial conquest: “To think about distant places, to colonize them, to populate and depopulate them: all of this occurs on, about, or because of land. The actual geographical possession of land is what empire in the final analysis is all about” (78). Moreover, this imperial conquest is enabled by using the practices of codification and characterization to generate universalizing discourses about foreign lands (108), thereby highlighting the importance of knowledge production to the colonial project: “imperialism is after all an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control” (*Culture and Imperialism* 225). Said’s astute observations about imperial violence, geographical conquest, and the process of Othering are highly important in understanding how knowledge production of the environment is integral to expansionist designs.

Fanon’s and Said’s works enable readers to see how land becomes a site of active contestation for political domination, nationalist struggles and imperial violence. The questions they raise, such as what violence against the land looks like in the postcolonial era and to what degree it reworks existing models of violence, are important to this study. In addition, I ask how the environment is co-opted as material basis and discursive site for militaristic violence. To explore such questions through literary narratives then requires a careful attention to issues of content (what is said) and representation (how it is said).

The politics of representation has been an important point of debate within postcolonial studies, with the work of Gayatri Spivak, specifically her essay “Can the

Subaltern Speak”¹¹ (1983), being one of the most cited ones in the field. Extending Spivak’s ideas about subaltern advocacy to the environmental realm raises the question that “If the human subaltern cannot always be heard without the mediation of more privileged supporters, how much more so is this true of the subordinated non-human?” (Rigby 164). However, this question does not presume that nature is “entirely silent or truly subordinate” (Rigby 165) but instead asks us to reconsider the ways in which the environment can be represented in non-essentialist and now homogenizing terms. Keeping these concerns in view, this study has chosen literary narratives that represent the environment in relation to humans but that do so in a non-hierarchical manner by emphasizing the importance of the environment as autonomous, self-contained system(s).

The attention to the environment as an embodied presence has been further developed by postcolonial ecocriticism. Initially environmentalism and postcolonialism were seen as vastly different fields from one another especially in terms of “oppositions between bioregionalism and cosmopolitanism, between transcendentalism and transnationalism, between an ethics of place and the experience of displacement” (Nixon 721). However, the, trajectories of environmental studies began to change when critics realized that an exploration of non-Western environments would necessitate our rethinking of the relationships between cultural traditions, ecosystems, and social justice,

¹¹ Spivak questions the notion of the colonial (and Western) "subject" and provides an example of the limits of the ability of Western discourse, to interact with disparate cultures. She argues that European intellectuals have assumed that they know the "other" and can place it in the context of the narrative of the oppressed. In fact, through this act of epistemic knowing/violence, the essentialization of the other is always the reinforcement of the menace of empire. Like Said, Spivak wants to expose the complicit nature of literature and the intellectual elite, which often appears innocent in the political realm of oppression (Maggio 419-20). J Maggio. ““Can the Subaltern Be Heard?”: Political Theory, Translation, Representation, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*. 32.4 (2007): 419–443. Print.

as these entities are affected by foreign powers (Wright 5). Additionally, postcolonial studies also came to understand environmental issues as concepts inherent to the ideologies of imperialism and racism, which are key concerns within postcolonial studies (Huggan and Tiffin 6). The realization of commonalities within the two fields gave rise to postcolonial ecocriticism, which is now a rapidly growing sub-field within postcolonial studies.

The work of postcolonial ecocritic scholars such as Graham Huggan, Helen Tiffin, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, George B. Handley and Rob Nixon becomes relevant to understating the relationship between environment, conquest, and exploitation within the context of global South. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin argue for the need for a “broadly materialist understanding of the changing relationship between people, animals, and environment—one that requires attention in turn, to the cultural politics of representation [...] and the mediating function of social and environmental advocacy” (12). Their work examines how postcolonial writers from a variety of regions have adapted environmental discourses to their immediate ends (16). This question connects with my focus in this study, namely, how South Asian fiction has incorporated different modes of ecological thought across a variety of sociopolitical contexts.

This call for materialist understanding of the relationship between people and the environment requires a careful thinking of methodology and epistemology of ecocritical readings, topics tackled by Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley. Emphasizing the importance of history, DeLoughrey and Handley argue that it is imperative to enter into a historical dialogue with the land since the “decoupling of nature and history has helped to mystify colonialism’s histories of forced migration, suffering, and human

violence” (4). Building upon these critics’ insistence on historical model(s) of ecology (4), this study interweaves historicist approach with literary explication in order to deepen understanding about the temporal intensification of militaristic violence against the environment.

Another scholar whose work has been immensely important in re-thinking the manifestations of ecological violence is Rob Nixon, who argues that the environment is being devastated by slow violence which he defines as “a different kind of violence...that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (2). Recognizing that slow violence is a violence of delayed destruction, whose repercussions are not instantaneous, explosive, or sensationally visible (2-3), Nixon highlights its calamitous manifestations in exacerbating the vulnerabilities of people and ecosystems in the global South. Nixon’s discussion of the delayed destruction of slow violence becomes especially relevant to this project’s discussion of the legacies of militarism that continue to deplete and degrade the environment, even after the dissolution of war.

The accretive effects of militarism are compounded by its normalization as pointed out by feminist theorist Cynthia Enloe. Enloe traces the physical and psychological effects of militarization on women (and to a lesser extent men), and argues that militarization is a naturalized phenomenon that has seeped into our institutions, ways of thought, and everyday life. In this context, Enloe defines militarization as a process which involves “adopting militaristic values and priorities as one’s own, to see military solutions as particularly effective, [and] to see the world as a dangerous place best approached with militaristic attitudes” (4). In a similar vein, Neloufer De Mel argues that

militarization becomes the organizational means through which the ideology of militarism as a principle of coherence is constructed, and she contextualizes this phenomenon within the context of the Sri Lankan ethnic war. “It is through militarization that the ideology of militarism, which mediates aggressive, hypermasculinist, militant solutions to conflict, and justifies violence and terror, is ushered into our institutions and ways of thoughts” (12). Taking a cue from this definition, this study traces the cognitive aspects of militarism whereby ordinary people and predominantly men come to exhibit militaristic attitudes towards the environment—with the intent of dominating it or treating it as a threatening place.

Such damaging approaches to the environment then de-familiarize it and fix it within reductive definitions of resource reserve, militarized zone, and dangerous territory (among others). In doing so, nature is deprived of its value and rights as a living being. As an extension, the violation of the environment comes to be regarded as something not worth attention or concern, thus rendering it ungrievable. Here Judith Butler’s discussion on mourning and life in the context of War on Terror becomes relevant whereby she discusses how certain forms of grief become amplified whereas other losses are rendered ungrievable. This hierarchical conception of life also applies to the environment given that natural spaces are denied their right to Being, rendered into inanimate zones and declared essentially ungrievable which is defined as “that [which] cannot be mourned because it never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all” (Butler 38). Countering the dangerous implications of such divisive thinking, this dissertation attempts to foreground the environment as a distinct life-generating system (with its own inner workings) to restore it to the realm of the grievable. And so that the environment

becomes “worthy of protection [and is understood] as a subject with rights that ought to be honored” (Butler 41) thereby making us recognize the importance of the inherent worth of the environment outside of the frameworks of utilitarianism, war and exploitation.

In developing a nuanced ecocritical discussion on the above mentioned concepts through this inter-regional study (on India, Pakistan, Kashmir and Afghanistan) my goal is not to ignore distinct sociopolitical contexts or to present a homogenizing picture of South Asia. Instead the study provides a comparative analysis of the ecological implications of the intensification of violence and thus highlights the value of literature as “a site of discursive resistance to attitudes and practices that not only disrupt specific human individuals and societies, but [also] pose a threat to the entire "ecosphere" and its network of interdependent "biotic communities" (Huggan 703).

My scholarship will also contribute to the growing work on ecological security within Western ecocriticism, which deals with the nexus of environment/militarization/security and includes examinations of the environmental devastation caused by American nuclear testing (Elizabeth DeLoughrey), the slow violence that is destroying the environment (Rob Nixon), the long standing US military project of ‘arming’ mother nature (Jacob Darwin Hamblin), and the growing projection of climate change as a security concern (Mike Hill, Robert Marzec).

The dissertation is divided into four chapters that trace the evolution of violence and its repercussions for the natural world in South Asian Anglophone narratives. Chapter One analyzes Kamala Markandaya's novels *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and *The Coffer Dams* (1969) to argue that the ideological impetus for the targeting and mastery of

the environment was brought about by colonial rule. Colonization sustained itself through a strategic and sustained takeover of the land and the people of the subcontinent, thereby enabling it to expropriate human and natural resources for its purposes of economic growth, wealth accumulation, and geopolitical domination. Deploying the rhetoric of the need to develop or improve the ‘wilderness’, colonizers swiftly co-opted and took over land in the subcontinent, thereby disrupting the livelihood of indigenous people, changing local agricultural practices, introducing large-scale mechanization, mapping terrain into governable units, and stripping land for resource extraction.

These colonial processes not only brought about large scale ecological exploitation, but also caused a definitive shift in people’s affective associational relationships(s) with and material practices around nature. Eventually indigenous modes of existence, such as inhabitation gradually deteriorated, and locals began to physically and metaphorically disassociate themselves from their natural environment(s). Extending this discussion, this chapter uses Markandaya’s novels to examine the ways in which the idea of inhabitation as an alternative mode of existence within the natural environment was forcefully displaced by colonial policies that approached the environment with the definitive purposes of appropriation and resource extraction.

Set in India during or in the immediate aftermath of colonial rule, both novels describe the processes by which indigenous communities and the natural terrain are conclusively changed by the arrival of the British and their construction of a tannery (*Nectar in a Sieve*) and a dam (*The Coffey Dams*), since it purports to bring mechanization and modernization into the local environs. The British provide the financial and the ideological impetus to mechanize nature and forcefully implicate the

locals for their projects that cause the gradual yet irreversible destruction of the landscape. The novels show the backlash of mechanized modernization, which purports to bring about development but does so at the cost of human displacement, regional encroachment, and violence. Moreover, both novels depict how pre-existing modes of living are jeopardized by the colonial policies of encroachment.

Analyzing these novels' depiction of how British rule and capitalist ventures displace indigenous notions of ecological inhabitancy, this chapter argues that it was the dismantlement of the idea of inhabitation or living amidst the land that normalized the strictly anthropocentric viewing of the land. . Markandaya's use of unadorned realism to narrate the disruption of the local's eco-sustainable modes of living, also provides an effective counter-narrative to the Western celebratory rhetoric of industrialization, by highlighting how 'progress' was being gained at the cost of the instrumentalization of nature. This discussion draws upon Robert Marzec's study of inhabitancy, William Spanos' discourse on colonizing rationale, the environmental history of South Asia and scholarship on colonial expropriation. This chapter posits that the colonizers' anthropocentric approach deployed violence (material and metaphorical) against the environment, by dismantling the notion of inhabitancy and projecting nature as a passive resource that only exists to serve human interests. Colonial rapaciousness emerges as an originary violence which promotes the systematic targeting of nature and represents the preliminary stage of the emergence of the violence-militarism nexus.

Tracing the intensification of reductive conceptions of the environment as mere resource reserve, Chapter Two examines Uzma Aslam Khan's *Trespassing* (2005) and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) to show how postcolonial ethno-nationalist

movements use environmental objectification to justify their militant ideology and represent nature as inert territory meant to be violently conquered. The displacement of inhabitancy as a mode of existence within the colonial rule causes an ideological shift in human beings' approach(s) towards the environment—by perpetuating the idea of humans as tasked with the responsibility of coercively improving, enhancing and controlling the land through geographical expropriation, territorial division, mapping, and resource extraction, thereby changing conceptions of the land from that of shared commons to inert territory. The term inert territory here implies a conscious distancing of the human from the land, with the effect that land comes to be conceived as passive, inactive, and isolated terrain, that 'needs' be controlled through force or aggression. It is this notion of 'territoriality' that manifests itself in the geographical conflicts and area disputes during times of Partition.

This same issue becomes even more significant within the post-Partition era, since factors such as increasing population growth, insurgency movements, resource disputes, internal displacement, and ethnic politics center around the power-dynamics of land expropriation, thereby propagating the idea of 'owning' land as necessary step to securing socioeconomic dominance. One such instance can be seen in the case of separatist movements (within the subcontinent) which deliberately project the land as ethnic-coded territory in order to justify its violent appropriation. Using Uzma Aslam Khan's *Trespassing* (2005) and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) this chapter focuses on textual representations of post-Partition subcontinent separatist movements namely the Sind Separatist Movement (SSP) and the Gorkha National Liberation Front

(GNLF), which are waging wars to acquire and appropriate land in Sindh and Kalimpong respectively as a means of securing political autonomy for their specific communities.

In this regard, both texts show how insurgent factions make concerted attempts to ideologically and materially claim the land as their ‘property’ to use as they see fit. This kind of claim to the land entails a conceptualization of the land as inert territory—targeted specifically as an isolated area or geographical tract—that can be coded in ethnic/nationalist terms in order to justify its violent occupation and expropriation. Moreover, Desai and Khan show how the successful fulfillment of the ethno-nationalist goals of the SSP and GNLF depends on these factions’ strict adherence to militant masculine codes as typified by the experiences of its male members, Salaamat and Gyan. The novels effectively show how the leaders of the separatist faction movements use militant masculine codes to endorse the role of the combatant or soldier as a marker of masculinity, and thereby indoctrinate other members to consciously deploy violence, force, and aggression, against the local population as well as the indigenous environment as a means of ensuring dominance. Khan and Desai also use their narratives to showcase opposing viewpoints of the land to rework the notion of a passive natural picturesque and to instead establish the significance of land as a signifier of belonging, identity, citizenship, privilege, and power in the postcolonial context.

Building upon these observations, this chapter establishes that ethnic separatist movements endorse a militant masculine approach to the environment, by indoctrinating their (male) members to participate in the processes of ecological targeting and violent objectification. This discussion is supplemented by Robert Sacks’ discussion on human territoriality and political legitimacy, Cynthia Enloe’s discussions on the indoctrination of

militaristic values, Kavita Daiya's analysis of ethnic violence in South Asia, and Vandana Shiva's discussions on ecofeminist sustainability. While analyzing the material consequences of such militarized processes, this chapter also examines the linguistic components of war talk that deliberately aims to conceal the destructive and invasive aspects of these processes, and in turn enables ethno-nationalist movements to actively portray land only as an object of conquest. Overall, the goal of this chapter is to highlight the insidious backlash of masculine militant notions of ecological conquest, especially as opposed to an ecological ethics of care espoused by women characters in both novels that promotes the idea of nurturing/sustaining the land.

Exploring the repercussions of reducing nature to an object of conquest, Chapter Three uses Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator* (2011) and Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) to show how objectification gives way to the Othering of environments during war, specifically the Kashmir conflict and 9/11 war. The perpetuation of militant eco-conquest through the indoctrination of local insurgencies and ethno-nationalistic movements enables an aggressive objectification of the land, which in turn intensifies into the Othering of environments during wars. Since war is predicated upon the binary opposition of us vs. them, it casts people/populations and the environment in reductionist terms and the South Asian region is no exception to the rule. States strategically employ labels to reductively define and malign opponent countries, and in turn use the process as justification to destroy enemy homelands.

This kind of labeling has been regularly deployed by states to gain strategic and militaristic leverage during wars, but the analyses of the backlash of this process have pre-dominantly extended only to the realm of the human. Extensive work has been done

in the case of profiling of entire populations (as terrorists/enemies/infidels/savages) to justify their indiscriminate extermination (esp. in the case of 9/11 and the War on Terror), but such discussions have not extended to the sphere of environmental studies. The deployment of terms such as enemy base, dangerous territory, hostile terrain, and infested space (amidst others) to describe the geographical terrain of ‘enemy’ states requires an analysis of its ecological backlash. There is relatively little theorization about the ecocritical dimensions of contemporary warfare. Recognizing this gap in the existing scholarship, this chapter examines the material and ideological repercussions of war as it Others the environment.

By addressing Waheed’s and Aslam’s depictions of these repercussions, the chapter also probes the questions of militarization on the national scale, and of the linkages between ecology and war within South Asia, specifically Kashmir and Afghanistan. Waheed’s *The Collaborator* is set in a Kashmiri village situated between India and Pakistan, and the novel delineates the effects of (Indian and Pakistani sponsored) militancy, target killings and open burials on the environment. Aslam’s *The Blind Man’s Garden* uses the setting of post 9/11 Afghanistan to showcase the consequences of incessant warfare, militant attacks, ethnic in-fighting and sociopolitical conflict on the local topography. Despite differences in their chronological frames and territorial focus, *The Collaborator* and *The Blind Man’s Garden* both examine the ecological ramifications of war in engendering the exploitation, appropriation, and violation of landscapes, thereby Othering them for militaristic goals.

I analyze the two novels so as to disclose how the drastic reconfiguration of natural spaces ensures their Othering (as hostile or utilitarian spaces), unleashes

spectacular and slow violence on ecosystems, and indelibly changes their intrinsic characteristics. Drawing upon Said's and Derek Gregory's observations about colonial imagination and Orientalism, Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, Eyal Weizman's study of the architectural dimensions of occupation and Stephen Graham's work on the spatial politics of war, this chapter argues for the need to understand militaristic domination being enabled in and through the process of environmental Othering. Furthermore, I posit the process of Othering as a form of ecological profiling that undercuts the environment's complexity and instead fixes it within reductive conceptions that justify its occupation and invasion.

Extending these discussions of war's immediate effects to the long term legacies of its militaristic violence, Chapter Four interprets Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) to underscore how even after apparent cessation, war continues to act upon the environment in invasive and deleterious ways, specifically through generation of precarity. While the insidious process of ecological profiling during war co-opts, exploits, and destroys the environment in its single-minded pursuit of militaristic goals and strategic gains, it does not follow that the formal dissolution of war brings about an end to process of ecological degradation. In addition to subjecting the environment to dispersed violence, war also maims and destabilizes the environment, thus ensuring that the environment remains entrenched within the legacies of militaristic violence.

Building upon this observation, this chapter will identify and extrapolate the dimension of environmental weaponization, whereby different natural elements are assessed, appraised, and utilized as source materials, for creating weapons to be deployed against enemies. This process, in turn, violates ecosystems to such extreme and

permanent degrees, that they transform from being spaces of sustenance to predatory spaces that seem to actively pursue and aggressively decimate humans. *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) is an important text in this case since it provides a geographical dimension to understanding military expansionism highlighting how such a process takes place through the domination, invasion, and violent appropriation of natural spaces. The novel sheds light on the ways in which precarity eventually becomes a permanent part of the (Afghan) landscape.

The concept of precarity draws upon Judith Butler's work and indicates the particular vulnerability imposed on certain populations and the environment due to war. The chapter analyzes how the historically expansive scope (of the compounding effects of imperial, postcolonial and global civil wars) in *The Wasted Vigil* offers insights into both the affective, and technological dimensions of ecological precarity. It is important to remember that ecological precarity emerges as a self-perpetuating phenomenon due to the unending intensified militaristic campaigns in Afghanistan. Ecological precarity also encompasses issues of human precarity since humans are both perpetrators (armies and militias) and victims (civilian population) of militaristic violence inflicted upon nature during times of war. The novel depicts different dimensions of the phenomenon and highlights its impact, thereby showing how precarity becomes a permanent feature of human and non-human life in the region. It establishes that ecological precarity emerges from politics of fear, environmentality, and technological assault.

The chapter goes on to argue that precarity gives way to an environmental metastasis whereby nature transforms into a weaponized space that decimates humans and impedes life in varying degrees. One of the manifestations of this process is the

emergence of environmental weaponization that is portrayed in *The Wasted Vigil*. The novel depicts how the intensifying onslaught of war(s) on Afghanistan engenders environmental weaponization that has delayed and deadly implications for humanity. As a result, nature transforms into an armed power that threatens life itself and is characterized by volatile unpredictability, silent predation, non-selectivity and active retribution.

Thus by drawing upon the works of Judith Butler's work on war and precarity, Sara Ahmad's affective economies, Timothy Luke's work on ecogovernmentality and scholarship on war technologies, this chapter explicates the permanent and destabilizing manifestations of militaristic violence. I argue that by establishing how the unremitting invasiveness of war transforms the environment from a place of continual sustenance to a weaponized space of active decimation, the novel highlights how the very existence of humanity is dependent upon dismantling of militaristic ideology, the preservation of the environment and a cultivation of respect for the natural world (outside of the frameworks of utilitarian consumption).

By offering an in-depth comparative regional study of the linkages between militarism, violence, and the environment, this dissertation will add to the relatively under-theorized scholarship on the representation of ecology and violence in South Asian literature and bring more indigenous works into prominence within mainstream ecocritical literary studies. Bringing into *visibility* the expansive geographical scope and temporal urgency of the phenomenon, my approach counters the normalization of violence and denounces its destruction of natural spaces as well as its continued endangerment of human and non-human life.

CHAPTER 1. ATTACKING INHABITANCY: COLONIAL RULE AND ENVIRONMENTAL EXPLOITATION

While the human repercussions of violence in the global South are being studied in various fields, the ecological repercussions of this issue have yet to be examined extensively. Given the undeniable importance of the environment in sustaining, sheltering and preserving humans it is imperative to examine the issue from an ecological perspective and to probe the sociopolitical factors that contribute to violence against the environment. Colonization emerges as an important period in this regard given that colonial rule changed the lives of indigenous people, modified local agricultural practices, introduced large-scale mechanization, mapped terrain into governable units, and stripped land for resource extraction.

And while colonial policies were successful in terms of developing infrastructure, this development was predicated on aggressive resource extraction and environmental exploitation¹². Using the deceptive rhetoric of modernization and development, the

¹² I will be focusing on the literary depiction of colonial appropriation of the environment. For historical studies on the colonial management and utilization of natural resources refer to Arun Agrawal and K. Sivaramakrishnan. *Agrarian Environment: Resources, Representations, and Rule in India*. Durham: Duke UP, 2000. Print; Anker Peder. *Imperial Ecology Environmental Order in the British Empire, 1895-1945*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001. Print); David Arnold. *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape, and Science, 1800-1856*. (Seattle: U of Washington, 2006. Print); Greg Barton. *Empire Forestry and the Origins of Environmentalism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. Print); Richard Grove. *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1995. Print); Richard Harry Drayton. *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the 'Improvement' of the World*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000. Print); Vinita Damodaran, Anna Winterbottom and Alan Lester (Eds.), *The East India Company and the Natural World*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Print).

British legitimized and institutionalized their policies of environmental expropriation to sustain their empire. Extending these observations, this chapter uses Kamala Markandaya's social realist novels to explicate how colonial rule irrevocably changed conceptions of nature from habitat to mere resource to be aggressively exploited, and set in place a utilitarian approach towards the environment.

A major Indo-Anglian novelist, Kamala Markandaya, wrote ten novels from the years 1954-1982 and has been hailed for writing socio-literature that espoused humanist values and focused on social amelioration in general (Prasad xvi-vii). As an Indian married to an Englishman and settled in London, Markandaya occupied an insider-outsider status and her novels focused on the cultural clash between Western and Eastern modes such as tradition versus modernity, the village versus the town, faith versus reason, mysticism versus science and spiritualism versus materialism (Chadha 4-6). Markandaya's works are praised for their imaginative exploration of the matrix of human experiences against the backdrop of the changing traditions of modern India (Rao and Menon 181), as seen in her novels *Nectar in a Sieve* and *The Coffer Dams* which highlight the human and environmental impact of socioeconomic change in India and form the crux of this chapter.

This chapter uses *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) to explore how people in the subcontinent adhered to the idea of inhabitancy and felt intimately connected to the natural world on the physical, emotional and spiritual levels. This mode of being, however, was disrupted and successively displaced by the advent of British proto-industrial policies that resulted in ecological exploitation. As a result, the idea of inhabitation gradually deteriorated, and locals began to physically and metaphorically

disassociate themselves from their natural environments. The displacement of the idea of inhabitancy then becomes supplanted by the idea of land as a standing reserve that can be controlled through violent means as seen in the analysis of *The Coffey Dams* (1969). This disturbing ideological shift then signifies the emergence of a utilitarian approach towards the environment.

A first person narrative, *Nectar in a Sieve* provides an intimate and detailed account into the life of Rukmani and her husband, Nathan, who are small scale tenant farmers based in an unnamed location in colonial India in an unspecified time possibly the 1950s. Focusing on Rukmani and Nathan's intimate associational relationship with the land, the novel serves as an extrapolation of the idea of inhabitancy which "names a constitution of the human as coexisting with a community and within an environment" (Marzec 424). Inhabitancy in this case indicates an intimate environmental connection based on an understanding of the concepts of perpetual struggle, climatic unpredictability, aesthetic appreciation, and indigenous knowledge of the land.

The concept of perpetual struggle unsettles the idea of a predictably tranquil relationship between humans and the environment by drawing our attention to the everyday physical and emotional toil that the farmers have to undergo in order to farm the land and ensure a successful harvest. Markandaya portrays how physical labor is a necessary requirement for subsistence through farming. The novel contrasts the different farming tasks of Rukmani and Nathan depending on the labor-intensiveness of the various tasks.

Rukmani is the primary in charge of a small tract of land by the house where she grows vegetables to feed her family and sells the surplus to a local market. Farming this

land requires consistent effort on Rukmani's part starting with the plantation of a few pumpkin seeds: "The seeds sprouted quickly, sending up delicate green shoots that I kept carefully watered [...] Soon pumpkins began to form which, fattening on soil and sun and water, swelled [and] ripened. [After that I] planted beans and sweet potatoes, brinjals and chillis [...] so that we even ate better than we had before" (Markandaya, *Nectar* 19).

Rukmani's detailed account gives us an insight into the care and constant effort that goes into growing even seemingly ordinary plants such as vegetables. It also showcases the interplay of human and natural forces in working together to convert a hard, dry pellet into a juicy, edible vegetable, as seen in the way that Rukmani keeps a constant watch on the growth process and tends to the vegetables accordingly. By including references to sun, soil and water, the passage highlights the transformative and life-sustaining power of natural elements without which the growth process would not be impossible.

Following the success with the pumpkins, Rukmani decides to plant a variety of other vegetables that then grow in abundance and serve as extra food for the family, which proves her success as a farmer. The evocative description of sprouting, swelling and fattening vegetables also makes readers recognize that working on the land requires patience, understanding and adjustment to the various rhythms of nature. And though Rukmani uses simple and direct language to recount the process, she in fact dispenses complex and specialized ecological knowledge which is based on a careful observation and intuitive knowledge of the land.

In contrast to Rukmani, Nathan is responsible for growing crops on a tract of land, owned by his landlord. Given the larger scale of the job, Nathan expends a lot of energy

in tilling the land which eventually results in his physical deterioration, as noted by Rukmani: “Nathan began to suffer from rheumatism...sometimes in the middle of sowing or reaping or tilling, or the innumerable tasks the land demanded, he would stop and straighten up, breathing hard and trembling [...] Ira and I did what we could; but the land is mistress to man, not to woman: the heavy work needed is beyond her strength” (Markandaya, *Nectar* 175). Nathan’s rheumatism and its everyday manifestations show the far-reaching physical repercussions of hard labor on a farmer’s body. The fact that Nathan continues to work in the fields despite suffering from rheumatism, makes us recognize the unremitting and labor-intensive demands of farming which does not offer any reprieve or break to farmers.

The references to Nathan’s laborious breathing and trembling state become evidence of his prolonged and continuous suffering while performing everyday tasks. And even though Rukmani and her daughter try to help Nathan in his work, Rukmani acknowledges that, “the land is mistress to man, not woman,” using the metaphor of a mistress to denote that the temperamental and demanding dimensions of the challenging terrain demands active and intense effort before it yields any crops. Even though there might be a difference in the degree of labor-intensiveness between Rukmani and Nathan’s jobs, both examples establish the physically exacting and demanding nature of tending the land and making us appreciate the strong work ethic of farmers.

Performing the laborious tasks of sowing, tilling and reaping, however, at first rewards the farmers with abundant and healthy crops (for the most part). Rukmani remarks that, “There is nothing equal to the rich satisfaction of a gathered harvest, when the grain is set before you in shining mounds and your hands are whitened with the dust

of the good rice [...] one after the other sacks are filled and put away, with rejoicing and thankfulness. Later we go to offer prayers [...] Our hearts are very grateful”

(Markandaya, *Nectar* 143). Using evocative images of shining mounds of grain and hands dusted with good rice, the novel conveys the relief and joy experienced by the farmer as he/she revels at the sight of a good harvest, and offers grateful prayers to celebrate the plentitude of nature.

However, this quality of plentitude cannot be taken for granted since nature can be highly unpredictable. One example of this unpredictability are climatic extremities that can cause irreparable damage, as seen in the unfortunate tragedy that befalls Rukmani’s family when a severe storm destroys the fields:

Nature is like a wild animal [...] So long as you are vigilant and walk warily with thought and care, so long will it give you its aid; but look away for an instant, be heedless or forgetful, and it has you by the throat [...] That year the monsoon broke early with an evil intensity such as none could remember before...It rained so hard, so long and so incessantly...[that]...the water pitilessly found every hole in the thatched roof to come in, dripping [...] Nathan and I watched with heavy hearts while the waters rose and rose and the tender green of the paddy field sank under and was lost. (Markandaya, *Nectar* 58)

This passage uses the metaphor of a wild animal to underscore the potency of nature which can overwhelm and subdue human beings at will, thereby exhorting humans to be careful, vigilant and respectful of nature. Extending the idea of nature’s agential prowess, the narrative recounts the destructive effects of heavy and unexpected monsoon showers,

and reminds us of the unpredictability of nature. Being subjected to the onslaught of unending, heavy, and intense rain, Rukmani declares the rain to be characterized by “evil intensity,” thereby drawing our attention to the destructive potential of natural forces as they mercilessly flood Rukmani and Nathan’s house and ravage the paddy fields, an important source of livelihood.

This monsoon showers only increase in their ferocity as observed by Rukmani: “The winds increased, whining and howling around our hut. Lightning kept clawing at the sky almost continuously, thunder shook the earth. I shivered as I looked [and] there was a tremendous clap of thunder, and when I uncovered my shrinking eyes I saw that our coconut palm had been struck” (Markandaya, *Nectar* 58-9). Rukmani’s description of the “increased, whining, and howling winds” signifies the unremitting ferocity and overpowering force of the torrential rains that seem bent on destroying Rukmani and Nathan’s house.

In this instance, the rains threaten to uproot and dispossess Rukmani and her family, and showing how nature can suddenly turn into menacing force. Employing visual (“lightening clawing the sky”) and auditory (“tremendous clap of thunder”) imagery, the narrative recreates the horror, angst and awe and that human beings like Rukmani experience when confronted with the ferocity of nature. In doing so, the narrative also points out the unknowability of nature which can be “life giving, life-sustaining, creative as well as destructive and hence in its uncertain movement falls alternately in the magnetic fields of both home and of not-home concepts” (Srivastava 29).

The complete destruction of the paddy fields leaves Rukmani's family distraught and desperate: "The paddy was completely destroyed; there would be no rice until the next harvesting. Meanwhile, we lived on what remained of our salted fish, roots and leaves, the fruit of the prickly pear, and on the plantains from our tree" (Markandaya *Nectar in a Sieve* 64). Forced into a state of helplessness and desperation, the family fights back by deciding to use their stored food supply and supplement it by picking pears and plantains from nearby trees. These improvisational strategies make us recognize how living amidst nature requires humans to be willing to deal with any kind of hardship, thereby highlighting adaptability as a key part of inhabitancy.

Later, in an opposite extreme of climatic conditions, the text narrates the suffering that Rukmani's family undergoes when faced with the absence of rains for weeks. "That year the rain failed. A week went by, two. We stared at the cruel sky, calm, blue, indifferent to our need. We threw ourselves on the earth and we prayed [...] We went out and scanned the heavens [...] deadly beautiful, not one cloud to mar its serenity [...] Each day the level of the water dropped and [...] the paddy hung lower" (Markandaya, *Nectar* 101). This passage portrays the cruelty of nature in withholding resources from humans, making them distraught and anxious. Personifying the sky as "cruel, calm, indifferent," the narrative builds upon the paradoxical dualisms of nature wherein the calm appearance of the sky belies the calamity and fear that it is introducing into the lives of farmers such as Rukmani and Nathan.

Resorting to impassioned prayer and tearful postulation as a last means, Rukmani and Nathan invoke divine powers to counteract nature's cruelty. This supplication shows human vulnerability in the face of nature whereby farmers like Rukmani and Nathan turn

to religious supplication as a last resort of tempering or balancing nature's extremities. Describing how Rukmani and her husband patiently stare and scan the heavens for any signs of rain, the text depicts the sheer desperation of their situation and indicates how they submit themselves to nature. This act of humble supplication then subverts the anthropocentric notion of arrogantly demanding nature, to yield resources according to human will.

The extended absence of rain soon gives way to a prolonged drought that completely ravages the earth and annihilates many living beings, as witnessed by Rukmani and her family:

The drought continued until we lost count of the time. Day after day the pitiless sun blazed down, scorching whatever still struggled to grow and baking the earth hard until at last it split and great regular fissures gaped in the land. Plants died and the grass rotted, cattle and sheep crept to the river that was no more and perished there for lack of water, lizards and squirrels lay prone and gasping in the blistering sunlight. (Markandaya, *Nectar* 108-9)

This account of the drought highlights its destructive intensity in terms of time and scale. Rukmani's experiences also serve as possible indirect allusion to the horrors of 1943 Bengal famine that is said to have destroyed three million lives and that was caused by natural factors but compounded by colonial profiteering and human incompetence at the administrative level(s). While the Indian government officials tried to downplay the magnitude of the crisis, the British rulers refused to permit more food imports into India through as an emergency measure to tackle the famine thereby showing how the vital

problems of India were treated by Churchill's Government with neglect, even sometime with hostility and contempt (Sen 78-9).

Though this overt political commentary about the causes of the famine is absent from Rukmani's speech, it is in keeping with her character's limited knowledge and access to the outside world. Nonetheless, Rukmani's observations are highly invaluable in revealing the human and environmental repercussions of the catastrophe. Given that "in the famine period, the worst affected groups seem to have been [...] paddy huskers and agricultural laborers" (Sen 72), Rukmani in functions emerges as a relevant authority on the subject. The chosen passage shows the desperation and suffering of the people who were reduced to living skeletons as the difference between life and death got increasingly blurred (Uppal 122). Rukmani's declaration that the "drought continued until we lost count of the time" points to the unending assault of the drought and also makes us realize human failure at predicting, managing or mitigating natural phenomenon.

The inclusion of descriptive modifiers such as 'pitiless, blazing, and scorching' effectively showcases the annihilative power of the sun. Disrupting the growth processes of the earth, the sun ends up "baking the earth hard until...great regular fissures gaped," reflecting the irony that the force that once sustained the ground, is now it systematically destroying it. The fissures left by the drought then become permanent markers of ecological catastrophe and the use of word gaping acts as referent to the absence, loss or injury left by the drought.

Rukmani highlights the acute suffering of the different plants and animals that are killed by the drought: "plants died and the grass rotted, cattle and sheep crept to the river that was no more and perished there for lack of water, lizards and squirrels lay prone and

gasping in the blistering sunlight.” This listing of all the different non-human members of the ecosystem that were exterminated in the process shows the spatial and topographical expansiveness of the drought that exterminates without any discrimination, and the use of words such as “gasping, rotted, perished” also conveys the pathos of the deaths, thereby conveying respect for all non-human members of the landscape.

By emphasizing the immobilizing and enervating effects of the drought, the text sheds light on the pitiful plight of the victims who were abandoned by the rulers in a time of crisis and ultimately met gruesome deaths. The administrative apathy and incompetence in this situation only added to the destructive fallout of the drought. As an extension, the narrative raises questions about the human inefficacy of “managing” nature and emphasizes how nature can “transform into something simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, feared and desired”(Groenveld 149), thereby forcing humans to adapt to the contradictory dualisms of nature as a powerful source of both sustenance and devastation.

As pointed out by Rukmani, encountering the multiple challenges of ecological calamities and perpetual strife, farmers remain in a constant state of emotional unrest: “In that grain which had not yet begun to form, lay our future and our hope. Hope, and fear. Twin forces that tugged at us in one direction and then in another [...]Of the latter we never spoke, but it was always with us. Fear, constant companion of the peasant” (Markandaya, *Nectar* 110). Giving us an insight into the farmer’s psyche as it consistently oscillates between the extremes of hope and fear, Rukmani draws attention to the emotional dimensions of inhabitancy. This emotional state is then characterized by flux and insecurity, wherein the farmer’s fate is intertwined with that of the fields such that both become equally susceptible and vulnerable to changing natural cycles. By

presenting inhabitancy as a mode of life that nourishes the farmers, but also causes their suffering by subjecting them to “hunger, starvation, death, degradation, and vagaries of nature [the novel employs] grim and shocking realism in its content” (Abidi 76).

Even though Rukmani and Nathan constantly battle emotional and physical hardships as farmers they still recognize and appreciate the inherent beauty of the land that they inhabit, as portrayed in Rukmani’s statement: “While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before, and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you...what more can a woman ask for?” (Markandaya, *Nectar* 17).

This passage delineates the beauty of the shining sun, the green fields and a plentiful yield, thereby alluding to the aesthetic and sustaining quality of nature. Aesthetic value in this instance is not predicated on a subject/object positioning where humans choose to accord value to nature, but based on a non-hierarchical conception of the environment wherein human beings (like Rukmani and Nathan) regard the beautiful abundance of nature as an extension of their personal lives. It is due to the fact that Rukmani and Nathan inhabit the land, that they come to regard natural aesthetics in the form of a non-hierarchical continuum.

A non-hierarchical conception of natural beauty suggests an intimate association with the land, which in turn promotes an awareness of the unique characteristics of different ecosystems. Living in and off the land allows inhabitants to develop indigenous knowledge about the terrain, which they hope to pass onto the younger generation. A similar situation can be observed in Nathan’s case as he teaches his sons about different agricultural processes:

One day in each week, when the tannery stopped work, Arjun and Thambi would help their father on the land, and this gave Nathan great pleasure. He liked to see his sons beside him, to teach them the ways of earth: how to sow; to transplant; to reap [...] In all these matters he had no master [and it] helped him to know he could impart knowledge to his sons, more skilled though they were in other things, and able to read and write better than any in the town. (Markandaya, *Nectar* 89)

This passage indicates how collective experiential learning forms an indelible component of indigenous knowledge. Instructing his sons about “the ways of the earth” allows him to pass crucial life-skills to his children and thus creates an ideal setting for strengthening family bonds. However, the fact that the sons can participate in the learning process only when they are not working at the tannery alludes to the indirect threat posed by industrialization as it claims the younger generation, and alienates them from the active acquisition of indigenous knowledge.

Addressing this issue of the marginalization of indigenous knowledge, the novel emphasizes Nathan’s experiential knowledge as an imperative mode of understanding the landscape. The conflation of knowledge with mastery also points to how an intuitive and rational grasp of the processes of nature also intellectually empowers Nathan and offsets his marginalized position as a sharecropper on feudal land.

The emphasis on the efficacy of indigenous knowledge becomes highly imperative given that this form of knowledge was slowly getting erased, thereby reflecting the larger concern of the rupture in inhabitancy. As an inhabitant, Rukmani values land-based ethos as an integral part of her family’s identity and it is this ethos that

faces erasure by the changing socioeconomic milieu. Thereby for inhabitants like Rukmani and Nathan the land is not just appraised for mercantile purposes, but instead is revered as a source of sustenance. A detailed discussion of the concepts of perpetual struggle, climatic unpredictability, aesthetic appreciation, and indigenous knowledge enables us to see the different dimensions of inhabitancy which promotes an intimate and intuitive connection with the environment. Moreover Nathan and Rukmini's physical, psychological and emotional connections with the land depict how inhabitancy is predicated on the idea of a human-nature continuum such that the "self and the land are not thought of as unrelated entities and that inhabitants are constituted by dwelling and having dealings with a particular place" (Marzec 13).

Dwelling amidst nature enables Nathan and Rukmini to develop an acute ecological awareness as seen in their impressive knowledge about the topography, climate and soil constituency of their region which helps them immensely in sowing, tilling, irrigating and harvesting the land. This indigenous knowledge about the environment is acquired through years of dwelling or living amidst the land, which makes inhabitants revere nature as an intrinsic part of their identity on the physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological level(s).

Inhabitants (like Rukmani and Nathan) respect the land and its sanctity, and do not approve of its large scale expropriation for commercial purposes. The novel then presents inhabitancy as a mode of being that is based on a non-hierarchical conception of the natural world and highlights "human enmeshment with the natural world [to] reveal our interdependence and responsibility to the environment as something other than mere 'setting'" (Groeneveld 143).

It is this mode of being that comes under direct threat by the presumably colonial policy of industrialization, as signified by the construction of a tannery in Rukmani and Nathan's village. Working against the precept of non-hierarchical conception of the natural world and promoting the idea of natural expropriation, the tannery begins to undermine inhabitancy as a mode of being. A powerful indicator of this disjuncture can be seen in the shift in traditional norms of the village—the younger generation abandon farming to go work in the tannery and start becoming alienated from the natural world. Tracing the rupture in inhabitancy, the narrative shows how the tannery degrades the human-environment relationship by normalizing the ideas of territorial expropriation and natural degradation.

The sudden appearance of a white man and a local construction crew surprises becomes a source of great speculation for the villagers. The speculation is soon put to rest as the outsiders begin to lay down the structure for a tannery in the middle of the village ground, as narrated by Rukmani: The line of bullock carts came in laden with bricks and stones and cement, sheets of tin and corrugated iron. Around the maidan they built their huts. Then one day the building was completed. In the unwonted quiet we all wondered apprehensively what would happen next. There were some who regretted their going. Not I. They had invaded our village with clatter and din and had made the bazaar prices too high for us. I was not sorry to see them go (Markandaya, *Nectar* 41-2).

The construction of the tannery starts becoming an indicator of the physical and ideological ramifications of proto-industrialization, which was supported by both the colonizers and certain segments of the local population, as reflected in the constituency of the construction crew that arrives in the village. This crew starts to rapidly bring in raw

materials into the village which include “bricks and stones and cement, sheets of tin and corrugated iron,” a process that on an apparent level facilitates the building process but on a metaphorical level also alludes to the impending negative atmospheric changes which will occur due to the large-scale processing of these industrial materials.

Rukmani observes that the crew construct their huts around the maidan. The word maidan a Hindi/Urdu word that means an open or common ground. The fact that the huts enclose the maidan gives us a sense of how a shared communal space becomes infringed upon and occupied by the new worker’s huts, thereby exemplifying the process of territorial co-optation. One of these changes becomes the increased market prices in the village which poses a financial challenge for local people like Rukmani who dislike the outsiders: “They had invaded our village with clatter and din [...] and had made the bazaar prices too high for us.” This statement relays how the forceful intrusion of the outsiders causes an atmospheric and environmental disruption for the inhabitants of the village.

After setting up the tannery though, the outsiders depart from the village. The tannery building however does not remain limited to its original foundation but continues to increase in size by swallowing up more land:

It was a great sprawling growth, this tannery. It grew and flourished and spread. Not a month went by but somebody’s land was swallowed up, another building appeared. Night and day the tanning went on. A never ending line of carts brought the raw material in—thousands of skins, goat, calf, lizard, and snake skin—and took them away again tanned, dyed, and finished. It seemed impossible that markets could be found for such

quantities—or that so many animals existed—but so it was, incredibly
(Markandaya, *Nectar* 68).

Giving us a sense of the heightened pace of the tannery's development Rukmani's description subverts the idea of the gradual development of the tannery and instead alerts us to the dangers of its rapid and unchecked expansion. Moreover, by alluding to the act of "swallowing" the text demonstrates how the tannery sustains itself through a violation of local people's rights and engages in aggressive territorial expropriation. Increased growth means a marked increase in product output as seen in the huge amount of raw material brought to the tannery.

Rukmani's bewilderment at the number of animal skins being tanned and dyed establishes the enormous scale of production of the tannery, and it also raises an important question about the environmental fallout of this business. The bafflement on the protagonist's part here is meant to draw attention to the hidden yet deadly costs of industrialization which was mercilessly killing thousands of animals and destroying entire ecosystems, in the name of progress and advancement.

This account also reflects the historical impact of western commerce on the natural environment of colonies, as noted by historian John McNeill who states that "economic integration often commodified nature suddenly. When groups of consumers, through the magic of the market were presented with the opportunity to buy something hitherto unavailable, they often did so [...] the linkup between consumer and source of supply changed ecology in the zone of supply - often drastically" (320). Overall then the textual juxtaposition of the depletion of the raw materials with their consumption in

foreign markets highlights the rapacious drives of the empire that ravaged colonies' resources to build and expand mercantile interests at home.

Linking the tannery's growth to its aggressive usurping of the maidan and people's land, the text highlights the territorial appropriation that underlie colonial projects such as the tannery that promise progress and advancement. In doing so, the appropriative politics (of colonial projects) severely undermines the mode of inhabitancy by perpetuating an aggressive exploitation of the land for short-term, commercial gains without any concern for the ecological fallout which is deliberately occluded from public purview.

Addressing the issue of invisibility of environmental degradation, the novel shows us the subtle yet detrimental consequences of the tannery on the landscape. Rukmani witnesses the changes in the landscape when she and Nathan sit outside to enjoy the scenery: "We sat down together on the brown earth that was part of us, [...] At one time there had been kingfishers here, flashing between the young shoots for our fish; and paddy birds; and sometimes [...] flamingos, striding with ungainly precision among the water reeds [...] Now birds came no more, for the tannery lay close—except crows and kites and such scavenging birds, eager for the town's offal" (Markandaya *Nectar*, 98).

Regarding the earth as a part of their identity, Rukmani and Nathan remain intimately connected to the land and reminisce about the different changes in their immediate environment. One marked change is the disruption in the local bird population: kingfishers, paddy birds, and flamingoes have left the land, in a forceful and abrupt displacement. Instead, scavenger birds such as crows and kites now visit the land

in pursuit of the offal, t showing how the tannery's environmentally hazardous activities have ravaged the biotic processes of the natural ecosystem.

Despite its negative ecological impact, the tannery remains in business and continues to flourish. Rukmani comes to accept the tannery as an unwelcome yet permanent part of the landscape: "I had got used to the noise and the smell of the tannery; they no longer affected me. I had seen the slow, calm beauty of our village wilt in the blast from the town, and I grieved no more" (Markandaya, *Nectar* 88). Rukmani's reluctant acceptance of the odious smells and noise indicates that the tannery continues to function without regulating any of its hazardous procedures and continues to harm the health of the local people, who are rendered dispensable in the pursuit of wealth. Rukmani's metaphor about the wilting of the calm beauty of the village, then also typifies her deep sorrow at the rapid disintegration of subsistence-based, peaceful agrarian living which is being assaulted by the violence of proto-industrialization.

Ultimately the tannery leads to the development of a town that ends up relegating the natural world and its inhabitants to the margins, as recounted by Rukmani:

In the town [...] all that was natural had long been sacrificed [...] there were the crowds, and streets battened down upon the earth, and the filth that men had put upon it; and one walked with care for what might [...] threaten from before or behind; and in this preoccupation forgot to look at the sun or the stars...But for us, who lived by the green, quiet fields, perilously close though these were to the town, nature still gave its muted message. (Markandaya, *Nectar* 156)

Correlating the sacrifice of the natural world with the town's expansion, Rukmani reworks the definition of a town as a social development marker by directing attention to the environmental loss that is incurred because of urban growth. Outlining the ways in which the earth is forcefully bound and contaminated by man-made architecture, the novel reveals the insidious underside of human civilization. By highlighting the commotion, claustrophobia, fear and insecurity of the lives of the townspeople, Rukmani conveys her distaste and revulsion toward town life which consumes human beings and distances them from nature, causing a rupture in inhabitancy.

This rupture then means that the natural world faces increasing co-optation and control due to modernization. This threat is reflected in Rukmani's acknowledgement of the perilous proximity of the fields to the town which highlights the spatial marginalization of the natural world and the perpetual threat of encroachment faced by its inhabitants that continue to be guided by "nature's muted message," the word muted being a powerful indicator of how the symbolic power of nature is being increasingly subdued and silenced due to industrialization.

Depicting the ways in which the tannery usurps land, disrupts ecosystem(s), and contaminates the region, the novel highlights the environmental repercussions of proto-industrialization. And while the village is transformed because of the processes of territorial expropriation and natural degradation, a more substantial transformation occurs at the ideological level is a rupture in inhabitancy. The rupture entails a distantiating from the natural world that enables objectification, co-optation and appraisal of the land for purely mercantile purposes (a process which the locals start to participate in by leaving agrarian lifestyles and working at the tannery as laborers). As a result, the idea of

intimate and respectful identification with the natural world starts to lose its relevance, thereby signaling the increasing de-legitimization and disintegration of inhabitancy as a mode of life.

One of the marked instances of the disintegration of inhabitancy as a mode of being becomes evident in the rapid socioeconomic deterioration in Rukmani and Nathan's life. Following their sons' decision to abandon farming to follow other financially lucrative jobs, Rukmani and Nathan have to make up for the dearth of manpower in the fields, and also worry about the sustainability of their family profession.

The sons' departure then marks a splintering of the traditional family structure, thereby subjecting the parents to pain and anxiety. This pain intensifies into tortured anguish when Rukmani and Nathan are handed their son, Raja's dead body who died mysteriously, most probably was killed by the authorities for protesting against the tannery's violation of workers' economic rights. Raja's tragic and horrific death also serves as a potent reminder of the brutal violence that undergirded colonial projects of industrialization that aggressively exterminated all forms of opposition—be it in the form of indigenous people (Raja) or prior modes of life (inhabitancy).

Thus the failing fortunes of Rukmani and Nathan symbolize the rupture in inhabitancy, which reaches its culmination in their forceful and abrupt expulsion from the land. Rukmani recounts her family's abrupt removal from the land, which has been bought out by the tannery: "This hut with all its memories was to be taken from us, for it stood on land that belonged to another. And the land itself by which we lived. It is a cruel thing, I thought" (Markandaya, *Nectar* 182).

These lines convey the pain, loss, and helplessness of Rukmani's family as they are forcefully expelled from the land which is their only source of livelihood. Moreover this expulsion also points out how British policies heightened socioeconomic disparity as observed by Rekha Jha's analysis of this textual moment: "When the land [Nathan] tills is taken away from him so that he is forced to leave the village, it is the ultimate in social inequality and economic disparity that has arisen out of the system of western system of intermediary landholders" (91).

It is to be noted that even though Rukmani and Nathan do not legally own the land, they have lived on it for thirty years in the course of which they have formed deep material, emotional, and spiritual bonds with the land as its inhabitants. This bond however is effectively terminated by the commercialization process due to which the land will become an inanimate and sterile part of the tannery's ever expanding structure, thereby reflecting the insidious side of industrialization that brings about human and natural dispossession.

Moreover, the continuous speed with which the tannery keeps growing indicates that it is a potent and permanent threat for all of the village's inhabitants as observed by Rukmani: "Somehow I had always felt that the tannery would eventually be our undoing...it had spread like weeds in an untended garden, strangling whatever life grew in its way. It had [...] altered the lives of its inhabitants in a myriad ways [...] And because it grew and flourished it got the power that money brings, so that to attempt to withstand it was like trying to stop the onward rush of the great juggernaut (Markandaya, *Nectar* 180). The devastation wreaked by the tannery on Rukmani and Nathan's

individual and familial life signifies the ways that proto industrialization functions as an assault on peasants and their mode of being.

Analogizing the tannery to “weeds in an untended garden,” the text underscores the invasive, threatening, and harmful dimensions of tannery that started to aggressively erase other ways of existence, namely inhabitancy. And as the tannery amasses more wealth its power exponentially increases thereby turning it into a “great juggernaut” that actively consumes the land and ruins indigenous people’s existence as seen in Nathan and Rukmani’s acute hardship upon their migration to the city in in search of work. Nathan’s tragic death due to the appalling living conditions of the city not only conveys the pathos of those dispossessed because of the onset of industrialization, but also signals a definitive de-legitimization of inhabitancy as a normative way of life in the subcontinent.

It is this de-legitimization of inhabitancy that enables an objectification of the land as an inert or passive reserve to be manipulated through domination and force. While *Nectar in a Sieve* alludes to the forceful impetus underlying proto-industrialization or colonial projects, Kamala Markandaya’s later novel *The Coffee Dams* (1969) serves as a more direct exploration of colonial environmental domination in the postcolonial period. Though the limited first-person perspective of Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* does not offer a clear historical context, it offers an intimate, honest and moving account of the ways that colonial policies caused territorial encroachment, communal breakdown and natural degradation. *The Coffee Dams*, uses third-person perspective and a well-defined timeline (early post-Partition years) to offer readers an expansive and contextualized account of events. But even though “the novel’s politics tell us clearly where our

sympathies should lie, but in terms of character and voice the text is far more interested in movement than stasis” (Jani 85).

The Coffey Dams moves between two realities: the physical-natural reality of the construction of a dam and the psychological historical reality of the residual colonial past (Bande 57). Beginning mid action, the novel delineates the experiences of a British engineer, Howard Clinton, whose company has been hired to construct a huge dam in the Southern highlands of recently Partitioned India. Faced with the challenges of navigating a difficult terrain and an impending deadline (the monsoon season) Clinton views the natural world in an antagonistic manner and engages in a violent manipulation of the land. Clinton and his crew, composed of locals and foreigners, adhere to the colonial ideology of aggressive environmental exploitation. *The Coffey Dams* expands the themes of ruptures in inhabitancy and colonial environmental exploitation found in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Moreover, the novel depicts how the proliferation and perpetuation of colonial principles even after the cessation of British rule, continues to wreak immense human and environmental damage and requires further consideration. A discussion of the novel focuses on its exposition of issues of human dispossession, colonial ecopolitics and ecological backlash.

The issue of human dispossession builds upon the idea of rupture in inhabitancy that has already been discussed in detail. While *Nectar in a Sieve* showed the sociocultural deterioration inhabitants’ lives due to the tannery’s construction and British-initiated taxation policies, *The Coffey Dams* describes the economic dispossession faced by tribal people as they are expelled from the land to clear space for the dams. Faced with countless “pressures, divine, man-made, and natural” (Markandaya, *Coffey Dams* 57), the

tribe has had to consistently struggle to defend its mode of life against multiple external threats.

These external threats only compound the anxieties of the people who have to be prepared for any seasonal or natural threats, as seen by Clinton wife's Helen during her visit: "The fragile huts that a man and a boy could put up in a day or a determined wind demolished in less: the primitive patches of surface-root crops of a community with one harvest in mind [...] the haphazard clearing, overshadowed by encroaching forest: on these impermanent, flyaway foundations whole people built whole lives" (Markandaya, *Coffer Dams* 51).

Helen's observation of the "fragile huts, primitive patches, haphazard clearing [and] encroaching forest" that form the layout of the tribe's land reveals the strife and tenuousness of life amidst nature. While recognizing the impermanence of this lifestyle, Helen still admires the way in which "whole people built whole lives," a sign of the tenacity of those that inhabit the land. The reference to the impermanence and haphazardness of the living conditions can also point to the constant instability that characterizes tribal India whose way of life is becoming increasingly devalued and diminished in the outside world¹³.

The construction of the coffer dams introduces only more uncertainty and instability into the tribe's life as they are forced off their land. Describing the living setup

¹³ According to the Anthropological survey of India there are 461 tribal communities in India which constitute 8.08 per cent of the total population, and their existence is closely linked with administrative and political considerations, hence leading to increasing demand by groups and communities for their inclusion in the list of scheduled tribes of the Indian Constitution (Xaxa 3589). Virginius Xaxa. "Tribes as Indigenous People of India." *Economic and Political Weekly* 34.51 (1999): 3589–3595. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 Feb. 2016.

to Clinton's wife, Helen, the tribal chief acknowledges the importance of the river as a source of sustenance:

They were tied to the river. But downstream the ramifications of building [made the terrain] untenable. Upstream beyond the sheltering hill, they and their huts would be in the path of the southwest monsoon winds. [...] Physically speaking no further retreat was left. So they stayed where they were, while the bed of the valley quaked, and dust flew through the thatch in their ramshackle huts. (Markandaya, *Coffer Dams* 120)

Forced off their land and deprived of their livelihood (i.e. farming) the indigenous people have to relocate upriver, but the new place proves to be an unfavorable living space because of the tremors and contaminants caused by the dam construction. If the tribe were to move further upriver they would have to deal with inclement weather, thereby leaving them with no option but to stay in their current location, given that the river is integral to their survival. Highlighting the spatial circumscription of the tribe due to natural and man-made factors, the text underscores the physical and mental toll of adhering to inhabitancy as a mode of life. In the face of ever mounting logistic and material challenges of maintaining a traditional lifestyle, the tribespeople begin to abandon their age-old values, which disgusts and saddens their chief: "The tribesmen [...] had felt the glancing blow of social change [...] The chief was full of his disgust. 'They moan here too, they miss the money they have not had. Money, money. They are becoming as money-mad as [the] foreigners'" (Markandaya, *Coffer Dams* 84).

The chief's exasperated admission that the tribespeople have become obsessed with money just like the foreigners indicates that indigenous people have largely moved

on from the ideology of inhabitancy to materialism, which in turn promotes co-optation and exploitation of the natural world for profit. By portraying how contact with foreigners has brought about moral degeneration and economic dispossession for the tribespeople, the narrative highlights the communal disintegration caused by the de-legitimization of inhabitancy, so extending the discussion of the social repercussions of rupture(s) in inhabitancy as set forth in *Nectar in a Sieve*.

The de-legitimization of inhabitancy as a guiding principle marks the decline of traditional modes of life, which in turn enables the imposition of colonial ecopolitics that indelibly transforms the ways that people approach the natural world. This ideology justifies and legitimizes aggressive environmental expropriation as a necessary means of socioeconomic advancement, as seen in the novel's representation of the environmental repercussions of the process of construction. The novel then offers a detailed insight into different aspects of colonial ecopolitics—terrain transformation, tyranny of machinery, and anthropocentric mastery—that endorse the use of force and aggression to ‘develop’ the natural world.

Terrain transformation functions as a tool for the colonial empire in terms of assessing and co-opting land for use. The process of terrain transformation however, is accompanied by natural mapping to convert the area into a construction site.

It was virtually a small industrial town, gouged and blasted out of the hillside. Mackendrick [hovered] in a helicopter above the site of which all he could see was a uniform, impenetrable green. Nevertheless it had been done, neatly within the time allocated to it. By the end of the first year the labor force had been assembled, the access routes mapped, the lines of

communication established, a road cut down the craggy hillside from worksite to base came for the heavy trucks that brought up equipment and supplies. (Markandaya, *Coffer Dams* 10-11)

Placed in the introduction to the novel, this passage gives us an insight into the origins of the industrial town. The process of mapping serves as a necessary precedent to urban growth, whereby Mackendrick (a crew member) engages in an aerial surveillance of the land which appears as a “uniform, impenetrable green,” indicating its limited visibility and topographical inaccessibility which could pose a challenge for the crew. However, the crew remains undaunted by the challenge and decides to gouge and blast out the hillside, indicating the aggressive manner in which the landscape is excavated to clear way for an industrial town. This instance then reflects the intent behind the colonial gaze that refuses to let anything remain occluded from its view, since it approaches “the ‘unimproved’ space of the ‘wilderness’ ... as a potentially knowable and usable unknown” (Spanos 43).

Narrating how within a year “the labor force had been assembled, the access routes mapped, the lines of communication established, [and] a road cut down the craggy hillside” the text establishes the massive scale of the project, that requires an extensive logistics base to ensure its timely completion. And while this extensive network serves as an impressive feat of colonial engineering, its daunting presence also directs attention to what has been aggressively erased in the process i.e. the flora and fauna of the region. Thus the passage shows how the seemingly benign act of mapping is undergirded by an impetus for land expropriation.

In addition to mapping, colonizers also engage in a re-organization of the land according to their needs, as reflected in the establishment of the British workers' quarters in the jungle:

In a clearing hacked out of the jungle, were the British worker's quarters [...] they had [carried] their Englishness into the jungle with them. Making his first rounds[...] Clinton was conscious of pleasure in the orderly scene: the trim square plots of emerging gardens [...] the white-washed boulders that demarcated and upheld private property rights [...] it was indeed like a home from home. (Markandaya, *Coffer Dams* 14)

While the quarters are discussed at other times throughout the novel as a place of rest and reprieve for the workers, this passage is important in highlighting the ideological dimensions to this housing project. The hacked clearing implies that the English have no regard for the natural surroundings and have callously removed them to make way for their houses, which then become a foreign presence in the jungle.

“Carrying their Englishness,” the British officers deliberately change the jungle to create an orderly scene: suggesting their hubris in forcefully manipulating the land to conform to their wishes. The “trim square plots, and the white washed boulders that...upheld private property right” appear to be comforting terrain markers for British officers away from home, but on a deeper level this scene also signifies the insidious aspects of the empire that deployed the rhetoric of privatization, property demarcation and order as a means of usurping colonies' resources for their vested interests.

Both the instances discussed show how terrain transformation is used by the British to divide the land into mappable and controllable units. The same impulse to

control the land is seen in the case of the coffer dams: “Construction had only reached the preliminary phase [...] They were working on the plateau now: splitting it open with dynamite to create the channel into which the river would flow at its full length, twenty thousand cubic feet per second” (Markandaya, *Coffer Dams* 40). Right from the outset, the crew starts using dynamite to blast the plateau and create a new channel for the river’s flow, thus engaging in violent terrain transformation. While the splitting of the plateau is seen as a necessary move for the construction, this move also symbolizes the symbolic wounding of the earth for human needs. The increased water output with the creation of a new water channel flowing at twenty thousand cubic feet per second also indicates the deliberate move to maximize resource extraction, thereby symbolizing the rapaciousness of so-called “development” projects.

The instances described above show how the seemingly benign premise of the projects masks its violent impulse which becomes solidified in the case of construction. Historically technology played an integral part in colonization since it helped the empire to lower the cost, in both financial and human terms, of penetrating, conquering and exploiting new territories. Technology made imperialism so cost effective that both national governments and lesser groups could now play a part in it (Headrick 206). This fact is reflected aptly in *The Coffer Dams*, which shows that the heavy machinery is routinely employed to co-opt control the river through violent force, thereby drawing attention to the tyrannical aspects of machinery.

Tyranny of machinery here refers to the enforced incorporation and utilization of mechanical apparatus that disrupts and viciously destroys the landscape through sensory assault, wounding, and destabilization. Emphasizing the noise made by the running

machines, the novel points out how the machines change the atmosphere of life in the valley: “The machines were screaming again. The silence that preceded the blasting was gone: it only fell once by day in the valley, and would not return until nightfall. Now the excavators coughed and grunted, biting into granite torn loose by dynamite”

(Markandaya, *Coffer Dams* 64). These lines underscore how the increasingly intense machine noise overpowers the silence in the valley, introducing chaos into the terrain. The use of words such as “screaming, coughing and grunting” points to the harshness of machine noises as they successively subject the valley’s inhabitants to a sensory assault.

The negative atmospheric impact of the machines is compounded by their destructive material repercussions. In their quest to clear the land for the dam infrastructure, the machines regularly deploy violence against the natural world:

In the phased rhythms of the day the bore-holes had been drilled and explosive charges laid. The valley lay empty now, the jagged cavities torn in its rocky flanks exposed, open to the sun and deserted [...] The first explosion came with a great roar, singly, followed by the others in twos and threes, impacted blasts that rocked the ground on which they stood [...] Twenty explosions [split] open the valley in symmetrical calculated pattern. (Markandaya, *Coffer Dams* 61)

The passage points out the precise and speedy manner in which the explosives are planted and detonated to excavate the valley, which on one level signifies the prowess of machinery. The textual description of the “exposed rocky flanks left open to the sun and deserted” signifies the acute wounding of the earth which is left exposed and abandoned, so encouraging readers to reflect on the pain of the disfigurement of the natural world.

Moreover, what perpetuates this environmental exploitation is the idea of natural world as mere untapped resource. The crew's use of twenty explosions to split open the valley, thereby indicating that the valley is seen as an inanimate space to be exploited to its maximum potential.

The systematic wounding of the valley permanently shifts the topography and brings about destabilization in the region: "In the shattered plateau, dwarfed by the debris left from blasting, men were at work; blue flame leaped and spurted from the machines they wielded [...] machines thundered and pounded; land and air vibrated spasmodically to the dull crump of explosions, the shock waves traveling to the barracks, the bungalows, the leisure blocks and the tribal settlements" (*Coffer Dams* 118-9). The shattered plateau and the overwhelming amount of debris underscore how construction destroys topography and causes disintegration at the elemental level.

The leaping and spurning blue flame of the machines reminds us of the active threat posed as they reconfigure the valley. Their pounding sends spasmodic vibrations and shock waves through the region, and end up destabilizing the ecosystems(s) and depleting the terrain. Machines formed an important part of colonial ideology which believed that greater social harmony would ensue when people concentrated in controlling nature rather than dominating each other (Adas 213). By underscoring the tyranny of machinery, Markandaya subverts the celebratory colonial rhetoric around technology, and instead shows machines to be an unwanted and brutal presence that generate chaos in the region, destroys the environment, and threatens inhabitants' lives.

While it is important to understand the environmental devastation generated by machinery, it is equally important to note the ideological impetus behind the destruction,

namely the concept of anthropocentric mastery that presupposes human superiority and justifies the expropriation of natural resources. Clinton's character then exemplifies this ideology, as seen in his iron will to overcome any human or natural challenges to build the dams that will co-opt and "tame" the river. The narrative then explicates Clinton's drive to mastery: "surrounded by powerful machines and powerless tribesmen, Clinton with his vast powers begins to feel himself as God or, more appropriately as a mechanized god" (Srivastava 214).

The drive for anthropocentric mastery is not merely a fictional construct but reflective of the material realities of colonial rule and the European mindset which believed in maximizing use of natural reserves to sustain development. This fact is reiterated by Michael Adas in his study of the relationship between scientific development and European imperialism where he states that: "From early in the nineteenth century the notion that it was European's destiny and duty to develop the resources of the globe was included in the mixture [...] of cultural arrogance and self-serving rationalization that advocates of imperial expansion blended into civilizing mission ideology" (Adas 220).

Clinton is shown to be deeply invested in the project from its inception and monitors every stage of the project:

In the long course of the settlement the plans for the dam had [been] minutely scrutinized and modified at each stage. Clinton traveled with them, an iron will checking his intolerance of any curbs in return for freedom of execution. He was a builder; this was his province: with patient tenacity he wrested it from the hands of central authority, who in

the end were not sorry to see it go. There were nearer problems than the execution of a project a thousand miles away, under difficulties of climate and terrain that they suspected the preliminary plans had only partially exposed. (Markandaya, *Coffer Dams* 20)

From the outset we can see Clinton's fixation with and deep emotional investment in the project it since he physically travels with the plans to ensure they are not altered without his approval. The phrase "intolerance of any curbs in return for freedom of execution" alludes to Clinton's strong-willed and unyielding character wherein he will not tolerate any restrictions placed on his plans for the dams. The builder-province analogy suggests Clinton's expertise in construction and also indicates his impulse to control as seen in his tenacious attempts to claim the project from central authority figures. Thus Clinton is shown as a man who willfully takes on challenges and works to triumph over them, a portentous sign of the upcoming environmental challenges that he will have to encounter during construction.

Along with the challenges of unknown weather and terrain that Clinton has to encounter, the most difficult one is that posed by the river along which the dam infrastructure has to be set up. The text highlights the wonder and fear that the river inspires due to its daunting size:

In ran deeply [the] river whom two thousand men and ten thousand tons of equipment had so far assembled to tame. On either side the banks rose in a steep incline [...] whose weathered surfaces belied the intractable nature of the igneous rock layers below [...] Here, in the jagged clefts left by that ancient encounter, the waters eddied and tumbled, churned into foam and

spume of a blinding whiteness where they cascaded down. [Here] Clinton planned his dam. (Markandaya, *Coffer Dams* 39)

Noting the assemblage of two thousand men and ten thousand tons of equipment to tame the river, the passage foreshadows the aggressive dimensions of Clinton's project which aims to subdue and control the river. The river is also presented as a formidable challenge on account of its steep gradient and intractable slopes composed of igneous rocks that have hardened over time. Moreover, the water running through churns and foams into “blinding whiteness” giving a sense of the rapid speed and overpowering ferocity of the river. Contrasting the technological prowess of Clinton’s crew with the ancient potency of the river, the text sets up an anticipatory tone for the conflict between man and nature where both entities seek to overpower the other.

The erection of the dams then becomes a determining factor in the conflict with nature and Clinton becomes single-mindedly focused on transforming his vision into reality:

[Clinton] saw himself only as a builder, a man whose conceptions of concrete and steel his highly polished and perfected technical skills could translate into reality [...] The word ran through his mind with a clear keen pleasure as he walked briskly past the living area to the busy work site, seeing not the welter of men and machines but only his vision, the dam that would arise with blueprint precision at this point [...] The Great Dam, it had come to be called. (Markandaya, *Coffer Dams* 10)

The passage gives us an insight into the pleasure that Clinton derives from the project wherein he believes that his “perfected technical skills” will bring about the precise and

instantaneous transformation of the “conceptions of concrete” into material reality. Deliberately dismissive of the crew’s and machines' role in the construction process, Clinton values himself as the sole agent behind the erection of the "Great Dam.”

Aiming for the timely completion of the "Great Dam," Clinton employs the strategies of knowledge acquisition, and seasonal charting to ensure that his vision comes to fruition thereby reaffirming his strong will. Faced with an utterly unfamiliar terrain he instructs his second incharge, Lefevre to undertake an extensive appraisal of the river in order to gain knowledge about it:

Lefevre [remembered] the long strained months in which he and his team had assembled, patiently, collating and testing, piece by piece—a knowledge of the river—its flux and flow, the structure of its granite flank, the depth and formation of its bed, the nature of its sludge—a knowledge which controlled fear, and upon which they could base their design and building. When they had finished they knew as much about the river [...] as anyone could. (Markandaya, *Coffer Dams* 125)

Laboring for months under stressful conditions, Lefevre and the crew perform a comprehensive analysis of the different features of the river which include the water flow, the bed formation, the structure, and the sludge composition. It’s interesting to note how the analysis is made possible through a compartmentalization of the river, invoking the ways that the colonizers used classificatory scales to generate knowledge about natural spaces. The knowledge then serves the dual function of tactical advantage (for construction) and psychological buffer (information as reassurance) thereby making the crew feel well equipped for the building stages. However, the statement that the crew

“knew as much about the river [...] as anyone could” hints at the inadequacy of the knowledge and points out the limitations of the process itself. In doing so, the text then subverts the authority of knowledge production that was used by the colonizers as a form of control.

Along with knowledge acquisition, Clinton engages in seasonal charting so as to circumvent any damage to the dams:

[His thoughts] leaped forward to June when the monsoon would break and the river would be in spate. [By then] the installation of the control gates would have to be finished. [If not] the flood water would take substantial portions of the coffers. That gave him three months [...] to compete and pit the strength of his structures against the river and the monsoon. (Markandaya, *Coffer Dams* 112)

Clinton knows his crew has to finish construction before June since the monsoons start around that time and would flood the rivers, which in turn would wreck the coffers if they are not structurally fortified by then. Imagining that scenario of devastation inculcates a sense of urgency within Clinton who realizes that the construction process could be vulnerable to climatic extremities (of heavy rain and flooding). Nonetheless the realization of the potential power of nature does not make Clinton respect it, but instead only hardens his resolve "to compete and pit the strength of his structures against the river and the monsoon," a further indication that he chooses to regard nature as an antagonistic foe that has to be subdued and overpowered. Engaging in a battle with the natural world Clinton employs violent force to reconfigure the terrain, a process that turns his character into an extension of anthropocentric mastery. The resistance to colonial

dominion emerges from both the human and the environmental realm but differs vastly in scope and efficacy. Exploring the lives of the locals under colonial rule Markandaya uses stark realism to depict how the British use their power to dispossess and displace the tribespeople to such an extent that they are forced to rely on the colonizers for survival.

In the absence of support from local authorities and with dwindling means of earnings, the tribespeople are forced to comply with colonial dictates, as seen in their reluctant yet necessary decision to join the dam construction team as laborers. As a result, the traditional modes of living are abandoned and the village starts to get increasingly neglected “as more and more [...] men were sucked in, like cogs around the restless core” (*Coffer Dams* 166). The irony of the situation is that the tribesmen “receive a wage for the construction of the very dams that are destroying their homes” (Jani 82), showing how they are unwitting accomplices to systems of exploitation.

Nonetheless, the novel includes references to moments where the tribespeople negotiate with the existing power structure and attempt to exercise their agency (even if it is in a limited capacity). These include the tribespeople’s warnings about the impending inclement weather (i.e. cyclones) that could stop the construction, their insistent efforts at making the British realize the impossibility of taming the river, and their refusal to work till their fellow construction workers were killed in a ghastly accident are granted a proper burial.

And though the British, especially Clinton demean the tribespeople and arrogantly dismiss their advice, they do concede to the demand for burial of the slain workers as they cannot afford to jeopardize the construction timeline, thereby showing how the

tribesmen understand the motivations of the British. However, other than this one minor victory the novel shows how the indigenous people are largely subjugated and silenced.

This offers an unromanticized realist representation and endorses the responsibility of learning to learn the subaltern perspective without an implicit assumption of cultural supremacy (Spivak 293). Thus the narrative points out that even though current structures silence and subjugate indigenous people they still have the perspicacity and willingness to strategically fight back (given the right conditions)¹⁴. In this situation, the environment then becomes an extension of the tribespeople who inhabit the land and offers formidable resistance to Clinton's hubris. While Clinton believes that he will be able to successfully "tame" the river, he does not anticipate an ecological backlash that is later shown by the narrative, which in turn subverts the idea of colonial dominion over nature (and expands the concept of environmental unpredictability that was invoked in *Nectar in a Sieve*).

The ecological backlash then functions as a textual and metaphorical resistance to the colonial drive for mastery, wherein the river's agential prowess becomes a formidable opponent to Clinton's strong will. Though Clinton regards the river and the natural world as an expansive yet inanimate space that can easily be mastered, the text subverts such myopic thinking by drawing attention to nature's inherent power and emphasizing how it

¹⁴While this novel does not fully delve into the idea of resistance, historically indigenous people have rebelled against colonial rule. For historical studies on peasant and tribal resistance see: Akshayakumar Desai. *Peasant Struggles in India*. (Bombay: Oxford UP, 1979. Print); Blair B. Kling. *The Blue Mutiny: The Indigo Disturbances in Bengal, 1859-1862*. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 1966. Print); David Hardiman. *Peasant Resistance in India, 1858-1914*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1992. Print); Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha. *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993. Print); Ramachandra Guha. *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*. (Berkeley: U of California, 2000. Print); Ranajit Guha. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. (Delhi: Oxford, 1983. Print).

fighters back co-optation through construction. The text delineates how the agential prowess of the river and natural world hinders building plans, claims human lives, and destroys the construction site.

Building a dam of mammoth proportions requires that the crew follows the blueprint and make sure the plans are implemented accordingly. However, the novel narrates how the river creates hindrances during the building phase. One example of these problems is the increased elevation in the river as a result of construction: "As the dam advanced the river began to rise. Imperceptibly, edging up its banks, appropriating territory inch by inch[...]Through the narrow gap that still remained the river forced its way, foaming and churning around the coffer dams that were rising to block its path" (*Coffer Dams* 125). While the increase in water elevation can be an effect of the construction, the narrative makes a deliberate effort to posit the rising waters as an instance of the river's agency; recalling Pranav Jani's observations that the "fighting obstacles such as the monsoon and mudslides that are portrayed in the novel as the resistance of the land and the environment themselves to capitalist modernity" (82).

The river rises in proportion to the level of construction, suggesting the ongoing aspects of this phenomenon which is "imperceptibly appropriating territory inch by inch" (*Coffer Dams* 125). The imperceptibility of this change indicates the gradual yet definite way in which the river is resisting human attempts to co-opt it. Another attempt at resistance is also the way that the river forces its way through the river gap and starts "churning around the coffer dams that were rising to block its path" (*Coffer Dams* 125), with the submerging of the coffer dams acting as a symbolic move to fight back the crew's

attempt to alter the river course by introducing artificial structures (i.e. coffer) into its ecosystem.

The continual rise in the water level becomes a source of consternation for the crew: “The patterns grew steadily clearer. Across the river, ridge-backed dinosaurs, strode the twin coffer [...] On the east bank, unless one noticed the heightened flurry of water flowing over submerged obstacles, there was no sign of the dam”(*Coffer Dams* 125). The submerged status of the one of the coffer indicates how the increased water flow creates a structural disruption for the crew by submerging an entire part of the dam, thereby creating an unforeseen problem during building and causing delays to the process.

Along with these gradual instances of natural resistance there are also more direct and obvious ways in which the terrain fights back against the attempts to control it, namely through claiming human lives. The text recounts a series of successive incidents in which the natural terrain creates unanticipated complications during crucial buildings stages which have fatal consequences. One such instance happens prior to a blasting operation:

Bore holes [were set] in a neat pattern along the natural rock barrier upstream [...] so that the river would turn as told and flow over its new bed. Charges of dynamite laid. When Clinton looked again the signals were dissolved whether by trick of light or the hoaxing wind, no one would ever be sure [...] Except for the pair whom Clinton saw, in a great clarity above the flash, ascending and falling like starfish in a neat parabola that ended in the river, smack. (*Coffer Dams* 182)

Describing in detail how the bore holes and explosives are drilled into the rocky terrain, the passage shows the crew's methodical preparation before what they anticipate will be a systematic and efficient stripping of the terrain to realign the river's trajectory.

However, the crew's plans are unexpectedly foiled by a "trick of light or the hoaxing wind" that disrupts coordination and causes a premature explosion that claims the lives of two tribespeople who were a part of the crew. .

The explosion causes the bodies to literally fly in the air before they plummet into the river, with the text comparing the descent to that of starfish falling a neat parabola: this comparison in turn momentarily deflects from the tragedy of the incident and instead aestheticizes its swift violence. The state of the dead bodies however provides a closer look at the violent impact of the explosion: "The [construction] was halted. By the corpses of men, who lay on the rocky bed, pinned by the rock boulder, their limbs flowing with the tide though attached to the trunk (Markandaya *The Coffer Dams* 186).

In addition to the two gruesome deaths the incident also causes an avalanche that crushes and maims forty other tribespeople, thereby showing the severe human loss incurred because of the tragedy which in turn halts work for the day. The textual refusal to name or identify the tribespeople points to the colonial impulse to treat indigenous people as a homogenous labor force that could be expended for British interests.

This tragic event is then followed by another accident involving another crew named Bailey who is adjusting a cone at the construction site when a gust of wind starts blowing and causes a horrible accident: "Bailey waved back—it was his last natural act. Then his arms shot up and pinned themselves against the metal wall of the machine [...] his mouth opened in a wide incredulous O as the rotor began to turn. Poised on jagged

rock, Bailey fell to his knees and disappeared from sight beneath the rim of the cone” (*Coffer Dams* 128). Following a pattern of the similar accident, the shift in natural conditions has fatal repercussions, thereby reaffirming the deadly instantaneity with which nature can strike and annihilate humans.

Offering a breakdown of the incident, the narrative shows how the strong wind causes Bailey to stumble and get caught in the machine rotor which results in his grisly death and also causes another man named Wilkins to lose his life. Both bodies are later found by the crew in a pulped and indistinguishable state such that their shredded flesh has fallen clean away from the bone (*Coffer Dams* 131), the gory visual then effectively mediates the shock, horror, and dread of witnessing the violence inflicted on these bodies.

Stunned and traumatized by the gruesome deaths of their peers, the crew bury Bailey and Wilkins in a short ceremony: “Clinton read the prayer, scrappily as the light was failing. Clods of earth, held together by severed threads and rootlets of the distant trees, clumped heavily on the coffins. No one had brought flowers. The simple graves, in the shadow of the towering jungle, were suddenly forlorn and pathetic” (Markandaya *The Coffer Dams* 138-9).

The brutal deaths of Bailey and Wilkins’s result in a chaotic, rushed, and poorly planned funeral that fails to provide proper closure to those departed. Enclosed in the “shadow of the towering jungle” the graves look “forlorn and pathetic,” indicating the foreboding presence of nature that spatially circumscribes the graves and is full of foreboding. Nature also alters the appearance of Bailey and Wilkin’s graves as clods of earth clump heavily on the coffins, and thus ends up subsuming the same bodies that it exterminated.

An analysis of the numerous deaths caused by the intervention and interference of natural elements thus points to the agential capability of the river in resisting human attempts at control. Disrupting construction plans in swift and shocking ways, the natural world co-opts the machinery being used to tyrannize it and instead re-directs it to inflict deadly violence on the human operators, namely local and foreign crew members, who are killed in ghastly and horrific ways. The mutilated corpses of the crew members also function as the literal and symbolic price that the environment extracts in exchange for the material violence inflicted upon it.

Modulating reality in differently disruptive ways, nature then uses its agential prowess to establish its hegemony over the humans and the construction process itself. The most obvious manifestation of this agency is seen in the arrival of the monsoons, which marks the climactic showdown between the crew and the river. Providing a detailed look at the monsoon season, the text showcases the unfolding of this natural phenomenon as the rain starts to mark and imprint the terrain. But with the increase in intensity even the imprints are “blurred and obliterated in a wash of water that seeped and scoured” (*Coffer Dams* 227). The rain does not give any sign of cessation and intensifies to the point of a full blown torrent that falls in densely packed needles that reduced the range of vision (*Coffer Dams* 227), as the rain severely debilitates the crew and renders them vulnerable. The crew struggles ineffectively to save the machinery and gear at the construction site: “Laboring and foundering, side by side in the mud [...] they strove to oil and grease, and repair where the wind had rent, and cover and tether their exposed machines which the weather had bonded, the bowed figures acquiring the same anonymity as sheeted steel” (*Coffer Dams* 229).

These lines relay desperate efforts of the crew members to grease, repair and protect their machines that have been left exposed and bonded due to the onslaught of the wind gusts that accompany the monsoons. Analogizing these crew members to anonymous sheeted steel, the narrative points out the annihilative power of nature as it destroys the machines that formed the backbone of the construction operation and reduces the crew members to pitiful, helpless figures that try to salvage the damage caused by the rains.

As the monsoon progresses, it brings about a marked increase in the river levels which begin to cover the coffer dams that were built over a period of months: “The river levels rose [...] the crests of the coffer dams, which had ridden high and proud over the flow, no longer seemed so mighty [...] they watched the waters mount, reaching and engulfing mark after mark that was notched in the granite [...] by which they had measured their achievement” (*Coffer Dams* 243). The alarming speed with which the water flow begins to escalate stuns and worries the crewmembers as they despondently witness the successive submergence of the coffer dams. Given that the coffer dams are linked to human might and achievement, their inundation then signifies a powerful moment of the natural world reasserting its hegemony over man. Thus it becomes evident that the torrential monsoon enervates the crew on the physical and psychological levels and becomes evidence of nature’s potency to battle human endeavors to contain, control or co-opt it.

However, this battle between nature and man moves towards an eventual resolution with the end of the monsoons and the stabilization of the river flow. And though the coffer dams seem to be purified by the rains as they emerge “bleached and clean in the washed air above the turbulent river” (Markandaya *The Coffer Dams* 256),

this purification only comes as a result of surviving the onslaught and fury of nature's prowess.

And even though the crew is relieved at the sight of these standing coffer dams, there is a melancholy that accompanies this relief given that they still have the "memories of craters upon which they had been lately perched" (*Coffer Dams* 255), thus highlighting the suffering that the crew underwent to reach this point and leaving us with the "irony and the hope of ongoing confrontation and resistance" (Jani 96).

It is to be noted that even though the edifice survived it does not mean the triumph of human agency for it is only because nature decides to end its climatic onslaught of its own volition that the coffer dams and the crew can persist, thereby establishing the agential prowess of nature in resisting endeavors to control it. *The Coffer Dams* then underscores nature's agency to counter the anthropocentric hubris that "theoretical data, technological devices and determination" (Nayar 107) can be used to mold the land; and subverts the mentality that undergirded colonial rule and now manifests itself in the neo-colonial era. Reading this novel from an ecocritical perspective establishes how Kamala Markandaya was immensely advanced for her times since she raised "the issue of destruction of nature versus development long before it became the focal point of debate in recent years" (Bande 60).

Thus Markandaya's works are significant in their contribution to raising ecological awareness especially as seen in *Nectar in a Sieve* and *The Coffer Dams* which "construct a sense of sacred Nature which can help mobilize a general ecological mindset beyond the reasonable and self-interested terms of long term global survival" (Spivak 275). A close reading of these novels also explicates the ways in which colonizers

ruptured the human-nature connection, caused a distancing from nature, and perpetuated the use of force or violence to appropriate the undeveloped or wild nature.

Robert Marzec makes a similar observation about the violence that the colonial empire deploys to co-opt land and deprive it of its 'active intensity': "The meaning of the land lies not in the conception that it is an inert corporeality waiting to be given signification and rationality [...] It exists as an active intensity, as that which refuses the imposition of a metaphysical center [...] Treating the land as wild, savage, primitive, and exotic is only a derivative sign that something else has already occurred; it only hides a more originary [...] violence of colonization" (Marzec 75).

Thus by highlighting the insidious and aggressive dimensions of the 'originary violence' that colonizers deployed towards the natural world, Markandaya's novels explicate the introduction of a utilitarian approach to the environment. This utilitarian approach ruptures the human-nature continuum and instead promotes a hierarchical conception of nature as a resource reserve that only exists to serve human needs. This approach then presupposes that nature has an inferior status and has to be accorded anthropocentric signification. This teleological reasoning then normalizes and intensifies in the post-colonial period.

CHAPTER 2. CONTESTED TERRAIN: ETHNO-NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONQUEST

In the previous chapter I argued that the displacement of inhabitancy as a mode of existence coupled with the originary violence of colonial rule causes an ideological shift in approach towards the environment by promoting the idea of anthropocentric mastery and positing nature as standing reserve for human needs. This ideological impetus justifies the co-optation and control of the land—the same processes undergird the violent territorial division(s) of the 1947 Partition. The issue becomes even more significant after decolonization in the post-Partition era, and when increasing population, resource disputes, development disparities and ethnic politics all center around the power-dynamics of land expropriation, thereby propagating the notion of ‘owning’ the land as necessary step to securing socioeconomic dominance. One such instance can be seen in the case of separatist movements within South Asia which deliberately project the land as ethnic-coded territory in order to justify its violent appropriation.

The two novels I will examine in this chapter, Uzma Aslam Khan’s *Trespassing* (2003) and Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) offer insightful representations into separatist movements within Pakistan and India respectively, by delving into their

socioeconomic contexts, discursive practices, and material outcomes¹⁵. Both novels deal with different historical contexts, and share an overarching interest in the environmental repercussions of ethno-nationalist movements especially in the ways that insurgent factions make concerted attempts to ideologically and materially claim the land as their ‘property’ to use as they see fit.

Trespassing and *The Inheritance of Loss* offer key insights into the ecopolitics of insurgencies which conscript the natural world (as rationale and result for their movements) and reduce it to an object to be conquered. Explicating this process within Khan and Desai’s works, this chapter explicates the rationale and repercussions of ethno-nationalist movements by focusing on the following processes—the sociopolitical marginalization of ethnic groups, Salaamat and Gyan’s transformation to insurgents, the material and ideological co-optation of the environment within ethno-nationalist rhetoric, and the destructive consequences of the movement’s militant ideologies. After addressing the untenability of ethno-nationalist ideologies of conquest, the chapter then examines the concept of environmental respect (as depicted in both novels), as an alternative mode of relating to nature in order to imagine new ways of belonging and identification in the postcolonial context.

Despite the different geographical contexts, Desai’s and Khan’s narratives underscore how the unequal demarcation, distribution and consumption of natural resources points out to neo-colonial policies being employed to subjugate and

¹⁵ The issues of displacement, assimilation, violence, and minority rights that are explored through ethnic insurgencies are also invoked within depictions of immigration and the migrant experience in *Trespassing* and *The Inheritance of Loss*, thus showing how the novels provide an expansive view of the issue of socioeconomic inequalities (across local and global spaces).

marginalize minority communities within India and Pakistan respectively. The narrative attention to the active contestation of the environment within nationalist and ethno-militant rhetoric enables readers to see how the process of natural resource allocation ties into larger concerns of political governance, communal rights, and nationalist identification within the postcolonial context. In so doing, the novels offer ecocritical perspectives on the fissures within nationalist discourse by exposing how “national cultures are cross-cut by deep internal divisions and differences” (Hall 297) , and thus add to discussions of ethnic politics within South Asian literature¹⁶.

Understanding the evolution of the ethno-nationalist movements requires an examination of their causes, namely decades of sociopolitical marginalization that have brought about dispossession, deprivation and disempowerment of numerous generations of Sindis and Nepalis. Uzma Aslam Khan’s *Trespassing* focuses on the marginalized character of Salaamat, a Sindi fisherman, and uses his experiences to explore issues of class politics and belonging in Pakistan. Recounting Salaamat’s journey from an outsider to the member of a local insurgency, the text highlights how resource scarcity and social

¹⁶ For literary works on issues of ethnic and/or communal politics within Pakistan and India see: Anungla Aier. "Perspective of Folklore and Identity from Northeast India: In the Context of Naga Ethnicity." *Folklore, across the Boundaries of the SAARC Region: Towards a Comparative Perspective*. Eds. K. Satchidanandan and Ajeet Cour. New Delhi, India: Foundation of SAARC Writers and Literature, 2010. 113-124. *ProQuest*. Web. 24 Feb. 2016; Anup Beniwal, and Amrita Mehat. "Communalism and the Poetic Imagination: A Study of Indian English Women's Poetry." *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* 25 (2011) *ProQuest*. Web. 24 Feb. 2016; Bede Scott. "City of Sieges: Literature, Communal Violence and Urban Space." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 44.4 (2008): 345-54. *ProQuest*. Web. 24 Feb. 2016; Cara Cilano. *National Identities in Pakistan: The 1971 War in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction*. (New York: Routledge, 2014. Print); Minoli Salgado. "Tribal Stories, Scribal Worlds: Mahashweta Devi and the Unreliable Translator." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 35.1 (2000): 131-45. *ProQuest*. Web. 24 Feb. 2016; Peter Morey, and Alex Tickell, eds. *Alternative Indias: Writing, Nation and Communalism*. (New York: Rodopi, 2005. Print); Susana B.C. Devalle. "Saadat Hasan Manto: Escritor Testigo: Un Primer Acercamiento." *Estudios de Asia y Africa* 30.1 (1995): 91-121. *ProQuest*. Web. 24 Feb. 2016.

expulsion force Sindis to lead lives of desperation. Salaamat becomes a representative of the Sindi community that has been subjected to multiple displacements, with the result that the community traditional modes of livelihood have become increasingly endangered.

The displacement is a cyclical phenomenon—with the first displacement involving the mass migrations during the 1947 Partition and the second displacement brought on by the growing encroachment of multinational corporations. *Trespassing* shows how the Sindi community is rendered vulnerable after being subject to both phases of the enforced displacement. The first displacement occurred as a result of the massive migrant inflows during Partition, which forcefully expelled the Sindis, from their homeland Karachi, a small fishing village at the time. “[The Sindis] were the original inhabitants of Karachi [...] the buses, streets, shops, migrants from other provinces [...] were mere appendages to a place that for centuries had thrived as a tranquil fishing village. But [...] those villages were pushed to the periphery and the native populations forced to work under outsiders who claimed the city belonged to them” (Khan 129-30). These lines offer a preface to history of the Karachi and raises questions of belonging, citizenship and population makeup within the economic hub of Pakistan. Prior to Partition, Karachi existed and thrived as a small fishing village. However with Partition, the city underwent substantial demographic and economic shifts. Millions of refugees

poured in from India and a majority decided to settle in Sind, which caused a major upheaval in the province's existing communal makeup¹⁷.

The refugees or Mohajirs were also a well-educated and well-off class, and therefore able to use their cultural capital along with their numerical strength as a strategic advantage in securing key political positions in Karachi; in effect they declared themselves the rightful citizens of the city. In addition to political disenfranchisement, the Sindis also faced economic deprivation (the land the Sindi farmers had tilled for years for the previous Hindu owners was given to the incoming refugees) and cultural discrimination as the Mohajirs looked down upon the Sindi culture as feudal, primitive, and backward (Adeel Khan 130). In multiple ways, Sindis faced socioeconomic discrimination within their homeland.

As a result, the "original inhabitants" of the land were expelled and forced to resettle at the periphery of the city, where they built their settlements from scratch. And in the novel the fact the inhabitants, the Sindis/Salaamat's community, continue to work for the outsiders shows the inversion of socioeconomic structures within the city, whereby those who once owned the city and its resources are now left helpless and dependent on the new claimants to the city. Providing an insight into Karachi's evolution from a fishing village to a mega-city, the text not only recovers marginalized history of the city but also points out the ethnic and economic factors that bring about the statelessness of Sindi community constituted by their loss of rights, humanity and personhood (Daiya 17).

¹⁷ In sheer terror for their lives eight million Muslims came over to Punjab and Sind, and five million Hindus arrived from India, with a majority of the refugees swarming in Karachi which at that time was a small fishing village (323). Sidney Lens. "Letter from Karachi." *The Antioch Review* 14.3 (1954): 323-332. Print.

The novel gives us a background to the different causes for the marginalization of the Sindis, and the cyclical nature of the process:

[Salaamat's] mood is suddenly ruffled by thoughts of his fathers and uncles who did not go out tonight. They say the foreign trawlers have stolen their sea. They trespass. Fish once abundant close to shore are now disappearing even in the deep. And the fishermen's boats cannot go out that far, even for the fish still left to catch [...] They will move to the city.

(Khan 2)

These lines establish how the indigenous people's lives remain in a constant flux because of the destabilizing forces of the past and present. Partition expelled these people from their original settlement area namely Karachi and now globalization forces them back inwards to the same urban center since foreign trawlers monopolize the fish supply in the sea and destroying the livelihood of local fishermen like Salaamat's family members. Analogizing the trawlers' presence to the act of trespassing, the passage indicates the criminal or illegal dimensions of such encroachment on indigenous people's territories. Khan draws attention to the ways that globalization introduces new vulnerability to those already fighting for survival on a daily basis.

The successive images of massive trawlers, tiny fishermen boats and disappearing fish symbolizes the insatiable drives of neo-liberal economics that steal and devour natural resources for profit accumulation. The destruction of natural habitats and livelihoods signals the dark underside of development which has brought about "the ecological and cultural rupture of bonds with nature, and within society, it has meant the transformation of organic communities into groups of uprooted and alienated individuals"

(Shiva, *Ecofeminism* 99). Against the backdrop of this alarming situation, Salaamat's pain and sorrow is overlaid by a sense of resignation that conditions will only get successively worse, given that the State will not intervene to secure their rights and disenfranchised people like him will have to migrate to Karachi in order to search for new sources of livelihood.

Salaamat is forced to migrate to Karachi, a decision that is thrust upon him by his grandmother and one to which he resentfully agrees to: "He thought angrily of his father, who mourned uselessly at home, while his mother labored at a shrimp-peeling factory set up by the foreigners. He looked at the gaudy hulks anchored nearby. She worked for *them*. She swallowed her outrage and gave her life to the enemy. They gave back two rupees for every pound of stolen shrimp she cleaned" (Khan 122). The passage indicates how traditional family structures breakdown and are fractured due to the intensifying forces of globalization. Salaamat's helplessness is punctuated by bouts of anger as he thinks about his mother working in a foreign shrimp factory for less than minimum wage.

Salaamat views these multinational companies as the "enemy" that create conditions that force poor people, especially women like Salaamat's mother, to slave under exploitative conditions. Casting the "gaudy hulks" as a visual signifier of the multinational companies, the novel not only points to their prowess but also their mechanized approach to the people and the environment of under-developed countries. The novel establishes how traditional modes of livelihood become threatened and eventually aborted by multinational companies, thereby focusing on the double marginalization faced by the Sindis who are expelled from the land that they had to re-settle in after their first expulsion (from the provincial mainland).

Once he arrives in Karachi, Salaamat has to encounter discrimination, humiliation and rejection on an everyday basis:

For the next several months, daily, Salaamat was told to go back home. Everything about him —his looks, accent, language, carriage—was mocked and shredded by the thirty or so workers who poured their lives out on bus art. All of them belonged to one of two groups. The Punjabis, like Handsome and his family, did most of the metalwork. And the Pathans, like Hero, handled the painting. Salaamat alone belonged to a third group. He became the ajnabi. The alien. (Khan 129)

Working a series of odd jobs to land a permanent one in a bus workshop grants Salaamat economic stability, but does not offer him any social inclusivity as seen by the references to the constant discrimination and harassment that Salaamat has to withstand. The narrative notes that “everything about him —his looks, accent, language, carriage—was mocked and shredded” showing how the supposed difference of his appearance, dialect, and posture are singled out, mocked, and ridiculed consistently by his peers.

Thus the workplace itself might appear as a collective but is actually split along ethnic lines—with the major groups being that of Punjabis (from the Punjab province) and Pathans (from the Northwestern province). Furthermore, the collective identity of being a Pakistani is rejected in favor of ethnic signification, thereby indicating how different ethnic groups fiercely compete with each other for access to limited economic sources.

It is to be noted that work is also strictly demarcated between the ethnic groups wherein the Punjabis handle the metalwork and the Pathans paint the trucks. Within this

bifurcated work environment, Salaamat is seen as an anomaly and excluded membership from both groups, which render him the *ajnabi*. *Ajanbi* is an Urdu word that means stranger, foreigner, or alien, and the etymology of this word then effectively captures and connotes the alienation, anger, frustration and humiliation that Salaamat experiences during his time in Karachi. It also pinpoints the ways in which Salaamat is forced to remain at the social periphery (despite his best efforts) and how he is not allowed to leave that position (since he has no other employment opportunities).

Thus *Trespassing* uses Salaamat's perspective to bring attention to the ways in which the disruptive historical forces coupled with the ferocious onslaught of neo globalization have displaced the Sindis, ruptured their family structures and deprive them off their livelihood. Similarly, *The Inheritance of Loss* uses Gyan's perspective to provide us a background to how the ill-conceived Partition policies coupled with the State's apathy, have deliberately disempowered the Nepalis and politically reduced them to second rate citizens in their own homeland. Tired of their powerlessness, humiliation, and deprivation in the current setup, the Nepalis have started to demand political autonomy through the creation of a separate state called Gorkhaland. Frustrated and angered at his lack of sociopolitical mobility as a Nepali, Gyan leaves Sai and joins the GNLF movement which promises agency through violence.

While the geographical distance and small size of the Sindi community render their discrimination relatively invisible, the marginalization faced by the Nepalis becomes highlighted in more direct and confrontational ways given their demographic strength and the influence of growing separatist insurgencies (within the country). It is telling that the introductory chapters of Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* focus on the

protagonists' love story but they also interweave the romance with reports of growing unrest, and protest within their town of Kalimpong: "It was February 1986. Sai was sixteen, and her romance with Gyan the mathematics tutor was [...] a year old" (Desai 10). The hopeful optimism of this new relationship is overshadowed by reports of growing insurgency in Kalimpong:

The newspaper read: 'In Bombay a concert was being performed [...] in Delhi, a technology fair on cow dung was being held [...] Kalimpong [...] there was a report of new dissatisfaction in the hills, gathering insurgency, men and guns. It was the Indian-Nepalis this time, fed up with being treated like the minority in a place where they were the majority. They wanted [...] their own state, in which to manage their affairs. (Desai 10)

This passage is our first introduction to the separatist movement which is signified by the visual markers of men and guns, which in turn indicates the violent masculinity that undergirds the movement as it gains momentum. The phrase "Indian Nepalis this time" points out the ethnic dimensions of the movement and indicates that the movement is not an isolated phenomenon but part of an ongoing continuum of other ethno-nationalistic struggles, which indicates the Nepalis' "identification with majority/minority binary and their recourse to [...] notions of autonomy and a universally shared sense of national community in the formulation of their separatist demands" (Didur 57). The reference to the "gathering insurgency" as an afterthought to cultural events (in major cities) in a national newspaper gives us an insight into the State and media apathy that propels the separatist movement to demand political autonomy for the Nepalis. The portentous tone of the passage, in turn, establishes the causality of the movement and signals how it will

eventually build up into an all-encompassing cataclysmic event with definitive repercussions for the entire region.

While the State is to be held accountable for its role in the economic marginalization of the Nepalis, the novel shows how social prejudices against the Nepalis compound the situation. Everyday conversations among the community members about the state of affairs are telling. Overhearing, Lola and Nonita, (members of the Bengali Anglophone class living in Kalimpong for the past twenty years), who are hired as Sai's tutors, about the growing Nepali dissent, Sai is reminded of other conversations about the complicated politics surrounding the town's assimilation into the Indian state:

Sai [...] had heard the story so many times before: Indira Gandhi had maneuvered a plebiscite and [...] India had swallowed the jewel-colored kingdom, whose blue hills they could see in the distance, where the wonderful oranges came from [...] it had proved all the easier to destroy [...] "Obviously the Nepalis are worried," said Noni. "They've been here, most of them, several generations. Why Nepali shouldn't be taught in schools?" Lola replied: "Because on that basis they can start statehood demands. Separatist movement here, separatist movement there, terrorists, guerrillas, insurgents, rebels [...] they all learn from each other. (Desai 142-3)

The conversations refers to the 1975 plebiscite that demonstrated politics of manipulation used by Indira Gandhi's government to merge Kalimpong into the Indian union (those opposing to the merger were jailed while the referendum itself was conducted at gun-point by the Indian paramilitaries). The text offers background information about the

conditions that gave rise to the insurgency and portrays an alternative version of historical events from indigenous people's perspective. While this alternative version has a factual basis, it is important to note how it is relegated to a story showing how this account of reality has been delegitimized and suppressed by official narratives.

Alternately, however, the presentation of this marginalized history as a distant story also allows the text to emphasize the violent subjugation of Kalimpong by the Indian government. Analogizing Kalimpong to an ethereal beauty that was "swallowed" by the Indian government not only generates pathos for the demise of the "jewel colored kingdom" but also highlights the stark power imbalance that enabled the takeover: the small, farming region did not have the military or political prowess to withstand the coercive tactics of the Indian state.

The juxtaposition of subjugated history with the contemporary discussions between Lola and Nonita's about the rising dissent within the Nepalis, shows how the brutal forces of history continues to influence and maintain the marginalized status of the Nepalis whose language is not taught in schools, and whose culture is deliberately erased from educational systems. The flawed education policy is then used as a tactic by the state to maintain their subjugation of the Nepalis by depriving them off opportunities for growth in terms of economic improvement and political mobility, as shown by Lola's concern that educational representation would lead to Nepalis demands of statehood.

Ironically, however, the state policy only brings about a consciousness awakening within the Nepalis, who have decided to confront the state head-on by launching a separatist movement. The line "Separatist movement here, separatist movement there, terrorists, guerrillas, insurgents, rebels [...] they all learn from each other" highlights how

the numerous separatist movements being waged across India under different labels, draw support from each other in terms of logistics, networks and modus operandi. Thus the narrative indirectly but effectively emphasizes the ways in which the Indian state uses policies of coercive manipulation to marginalize certain ethnic groups and to maintain its hegemony.

The Inheritance of Loss, however, also focuses on how society supplements the State's process of ethnic marginalization, by treating the Nepalis in a discriminatory manner in everyday life, for example, as seen in Sai's cook's surprise at discovering that Gyan, a Nepali, could be skilled in mathematics "Everyone knows," said the cook. "Coastal people eat fish and see how much cleverer they are, Bengalis, Malayalis, Tamils. Inland they eat too much grain, and it slows the digestion [...] The blood goes to the stomach and not to the head. Nepalis make good soldiers, coolies, but they are not so bright at their studies." (Desai 82).

The cook's statement presents an instance of micro aggression whereby the dietary patterns of the Nepalis are interpreted as proof of their ability or their overall worth. Ethnic identity is used as a concrete marker to fix Nepalis within predetermined socioeconomic positions, thereby showing how ethnic prejudices are normalized. Predisposed by his bias, the cook then uses his knowledge of food to reinforce essentialist notions about the Nepalis and their intellect.

The narrative provides us with a background to the social biases and political disempowerment that contributes to the subjugation of the Nepalis community, and allows us to understand Gyan's disenfranchised position. Against this background we are also given a brief insight into Gyan's struggles as the son of a teacher at a tea plantation

school. These struggles are more acute of late, given that the family has been deprived of the great-grandfather's supplemental income who despite fighting on behalf of the British army was never paid for his services by the state (Desai 142).

The chosen passages from *Trespassing* and *The Inheritance of Loss* establish the numerous difficulties that Salaamat and Gyan experience as members of marginalized communities and how social exclusion only adds to their sense of isolation, self-doubt, and anxiety. Through this representation, the texts show us how the protagonists suffer due to policies of discrimination and provides us a context to their decision to join the separatist movements. Both characters, however, come into contact with the insurgency faction members under different circumstances. Understanding the background to the (Sindi and Nepalis) insurgencies along with the protagonists' allegiance to the movements, enables us to see the factions' strategic co-optation of young men and the environment.

Uzma Aslam Khan's novel narrates the grueling dimensions of Salaamat's job. Having spent a few months in Karachi in his unappreciated job, Salaamat decides to take a break and explore the city to find a gift for his sister. Salaamat ends up venturing into an unsafe locality, called Orangi, to purchase a gift and where he has a run-in with members of a Sindi separatist movement who exhort him to join their movement. Initially, Salaamat is shown to be reluctant about the proposition: however, moments after the meeting he suffers a horrific experience whereby he is drugged, assaulted and robbed by unknown men who leave him in the middle of a street. When Salaamat finally regains consciousness, he discovers that there has been an outbreak of violent protests and a mob has set the street on fire:

When he came to, Salaamat's head was an inferno. He touched it. His fingers came away sticky. Squinting, he saw he lay in the middle of a street in flames. Tires burned. A mob threw stones [...] The stench of charred rubber mingled with singed hair, food, and plastic, and his stomach heaved [...] Instead of a single shot he heard a burst of several dozen in succession [and] began to run. (Khan 244-5)

Assaulted and drugged, Salaamat wakes up disoriented in an unknown street in the middle of a scene of mob violence. Watching the excessive violence that annihilates humans and objects (i.e food, plastic), Salaamat is paralyzed and repulsed by the scene unfolding in front of his eyes. His physical crisis then gives way to a psychological one during which he relives “the three years of drudgery and humiliation” (Khan 244) that he had incurred away from his home and family. However, the firing of successive shots jolts Salaamat into action and he hurriedly flees from the scene. The scene gives us an insight into the visceral impact of violence as opposed to a clinical description. The readers are provided an intimate insight into Salaamat’s troubled interiority in this moment, wherein the experience of (urban) violence fractures the strong exterior that he has projected throughout all the trying times in the city.

Still recovering from the shock, fear and strain of the earlier scene of mob violence, Salaamat runs back to his workshop to discover that his precious bus (that he has been working on patiently for months) has been set ablaze in the political riots as well.

The paint, metal, and pictures were all singed and furled. Only one wooden plank still burned. Orange flames rose [as] Salaamat walked

around his bus. His. His months of barely any sleep, his runny eyes, his hands sliced by steel, his glittery fish [and] his chronology [...] He shut his eyes, overcome by an exhaustion that was absolute [...] There were no beautiful things to focus on in his life. He had to begin another. (Khan 246-7)

Contrary to Salaamat's expectations that the workshop will be safe from the riots, the workshop also has been invaded and vandalized by the rioters who set his bus ablaze. Witnessing the aftereffects of fire, Salaamat notices that all the metalwork and paint has melted leaving behind only a lone burning wooden plank. Walking around the remains of the bus, Salaamat is overwhelmed by the cruel and instantaneous decimation of his labor. The text signals the close affinity between Salaamat's hardship (sliced hands, runny eyes) and the bus's different components (the steel work, the glittery fish painting), to suggest how Salaamat's painstaking efforts in decorating the bus bring about an anatomical and psychological fusion with the bus—thereby rendering the bus a tangible marker of his chronology. The destruction of the bus indicates not only signals the termination of Salaamat's livelihood but also a stripping away of his identity, since the bus tethered Salaamat to the alien and unwelcoming surroundings of Karachi. Exhausted and enervated by his harrowing experiences, Salaamat is overcome by the gaping emptiness that has descended with the elimination of the only beautiful object in his life namely the bus and decides to join the separatist movement to exercise his agency.

Just like Salaamat, Gyan in Desai's novel is also abruptly introduced and thrust into the GNLF (Gorkha National Liberation Front) which mushrooms from a group of fifty members to a sizable "liberation army" (Desai 139). GNLF demands the formation

of a separate state called Gorkhaland. Gyan does not go looking for entry into GNLF, but happens to stumble across them in a marketplace where they are sloganeering as a part of a large group.

In the mess of faces he saw college friends [who] were shouting, “Victory to the Gorkha Liberation Army” [as] they melded into a single being [...] Gyan could not help but look on the scene [from] the position of a revolutionary [...] He shouted along with the crowd, and the very mingling of his voice with largeness and lustiness seemed to create a relevancy, an affirmation he’d never felt before, and he was pulled back into the making of history. (Desai 173)

Recognizing some of his friends as part of the group, Gyan joins in and starts shouting victory slogans for the Gorkha Liberation Army. Being in the group makes Gyan feel important and significant, making this instance a reflection of the power of collective that functions as a “melded single being.” Marching along with the group, Gyan’s speech and actions start become part of a “largeness [that] seemed to create a relevancy” (Desai 173) and grant him social inclusivity (that he has been denied before). As he looks at the march as history in the making, Gyan feels himself elevated to the position of a revolutionary as he challenges the writ of the State by joining the GNLF. The emphasis on the euphoria, excitement, and promise of the moment signals the powerful pull of the separatist movement as a means of political empowerment and social entry for those who have been forced to live a marginal disparate existence.

Joining the movement because of curiosity, Gyan initially exhibits skepticism about the group's commitment: “The men were shouting, and he saw from their faces that

they didn't have his cynicism. They meant what they were saying; they felt a lack of justice [...] They came to a stop outside the police station, where the policemen who could usually be found outside gossiping had vanished [...] Gyan who had gathered up accidentally in the procession [...] found the fervor had affected him" (Desai 174).

Despite his enthusiastic participation in the group march, Gyan initially doubts the intent and motivations of the group. However, the longer he spends time with the group he comes to believe in the movement and its commitment to seeking justice (for the Nepalis community). The group decides to march up to the police station to protest the gross incompetence and failure of the officials in safeguarding the rights of the masses. The direct confrontation with the law authorities makes Gyan recognize not only the serious intent of the movement but also its symbolic power given that the arrival of the protestors literally scares the police into hiding.

After Gyan travels with the GNLF and participates in their sloganeering, he comes to feel an affinity with the group members and starts to open up to them about his experiences of marginalization. Recalling how his present marginalization was a mere extension of the systematic discrimination meted out to his grandfather in the British army, Gyan suddenly feels an onslaught of shame at the suffering he has incurred silently throughout the years. But amidst the presence of friends and now comrades, the shameful experiences give way to fury, a "distilled, liberating" moment of truth about the need to reclaim their land and fight for their socioeconomic rights. This fury then becomes a prelude or signal that the movement will employ aggression to achieve its aims as seen in Gyan's adamant assertion that "the Gorkha movement take the harshest route possible" (Desai 177), establishing the violent masculine impetus of the movement.

While the Sindi movement in *Trespassing* and GNLF movement in *The Inheritance of Loss* might differ in their scope and momentum, both movements aim to re-legitimize ethnic identification¹⁸ and offer the potential to empower subaltern individuals like Salaamat and Gyan to exercise agency. The significance of movements is that they offer individuals not just the opportunity to merely *be* in the group, but to actively *become* that which they aspire (or to which they are conditioned to aspire to, as the texts later reveal). However, this agency is promised to those who willingly adhere to and fully participate in the incremental violence used by movements to achieve their goals of total conquest (of people and the environment). The narrative accounts of the protagonists' membership and training enables readers to understand how the Sindi Separatists and the GNLF deploy ideology to justify their goals and thereby engage with "histories of violence and displacement as well as the production of citizen in the nation state" (Daiya 19).

Arguing for the need to violently reclaim the land and resources that are rightfully theirs, both the Sindi separatists and the GNLF promulgate the idea of environmental ownership as a major ideological tenet. The process of environmental appropriation then becomes an example of territoriality which is "a socially and geographically rooted [strategy that is] intimately related to how people use the land, how they organize themselves in space, and how they give meaning to place" (Sacks 2). As an extension, the

¹⁸ "Ethnonationalist insurgencies, by definition, inevitably occur on the basis of ethnic identity but identity alone is not the primary catalyst behind mobilization [...] ethnic identity must be catalyzed by [...] competition between ethnic leaders and central state elites. The latter is mostly likely to occur either when the central leadership emphasizes a majoritarian conception of 'national identity' excluding minor ethnic groups, or when the leadership centralizes power at the expense of cooperative federalism" (Chima 3-4). Jugdep S. Chima. "An Introduction." *Ethnic Subnationalist Insurgencies in South Asia: Identities, Interests and Challenges to State Authority*. New York: Routledge, 2015. Print. 1-16.

separatists use historical geography to rework the meaning of the environment and conscript it as a material foundation (*Trespassing*) and ideological impetus (*Trespassing* and *The Inheritance of Loss*) for their respective movements.

Trespassing shows how the environment forms the material foundation for a separatist movement, since the Sindi separatist set up their camp in a remote, rural terrain on the outskirts of Karachi. Using the anonymous location and sparsely populated terrain to their advantage, the fighters complete their training in the area. Salaamat's perspective on the camp gives us an insight into the landscape: "The sun was rising behind them. On the opposite bank, the sandstone cliffs glowed a pale beach and a cormorant stretched its wings. The other men were slowly emerging from their tents [...] they stumbled to the river's edge to perform the morning [rituals]" (Khan 339). The training camp for the movement is located in an unnamed river bank on the outskirts of Karachi. The stillness and leisure of the morning at the river's edge (the glowing cliffs, stretched cormorant) is contrasted with the stirring figures of fighters (emerging from the tents) who have set up base in the area for the purposes of training.

Presenting the chronological progression of the camp activities, the text uses the time of dawn or morning to signify the anticipation of the unfolding of the day (as seen through Salaamat's perspective) and to underscore the strict schedule used to discipline the fighters. The training is physically intensive as depicted by the description of the training: "Then there were sit-ups, push-ups, jogs along the length of the beach in the blazing heat with weighted backpacks. Or the men wrestled—half scuffling, half kicking. Or scaled the steepest reaches of the cliffs while the Commander frowned deeply behind the little stopwatch" (Khan 342). The references to how the men perform sit-ups, push-

ups, jogs, wrestling, and climbing along different topographical features of the area (beach, cliffs) uses the run-on effect of language to establish the demanding and ceaseless dimensions of training, which is used to regulate, discipline and prime bodies for combat.

The successful maximization of physical prowess then entails a deliberate distancing from the environment as seen in the Commander's forceful edict to the fighters: "You have to temper your longings, to stop answering to this environment. You have to shut down, and then you have to shrink. You have to will yourself into a tiny steel nugget [...] You will not simply use rounds. You will become them. In this camp, there are exactly twenty seven Bullets." (Khan 341). The direct and forceful tone of the speech highlights the Commander's authoritativeness and points out the hierarchical structure of the camp. The top-down structure of the movement means that the fighters are conditioned to submit or yield to orders without questioning them. In this particular situation, the commander directly orders them to 'temper their longings and to stop answering to the environment', thereby pitching the fracturing of the human-nature connection as an imposed, imperative component of training.

To 'stop answering to the environment', the men have to deliberately stop recognizing and responding to the various stimuli provided by the environment. The environment could not only restore the men on a physical but intellectual level: by observing the workings of their natural surroundings may make them question the brutal tactics being adopted by the movement—involving but not limited to the skilled assemblage and firing of machine guns(341). This fear can be seen reflected in the second part of the order that directs men to "shut down, shrink and will [themselves] into a tiny steel nugget" thereby suggesting that the men are being actively asked to shut

down their humanity to be reduced instruments for combat, similar to how environment is also instrumentalized as a training base and backdrop for the movement.

While the physical training prepares the men to become agile fighters, it is the indoctrination that conditions the followers to valorize the movements aims of declaring war on the state thereby showing that “war is a paradigmatic masculine enterprise, and that masculinity as an idea is what befits the most from militarization” (Enloe *The Curious Feminist* 133). The indoctrination justifies the movements’ existence and entails the processes of environmental objectification (in *Trespassing*) and territorial re-signification (in *The Inheritance of Loss*). Environmental objectification involves the Sindi leaders’ selective presentation of nature as a symbol of socioeconomic grievance to rationalize their demand for a separate province. The GNLF on the other hand engages in a process of territorial re-signification, through which it labels the land as the rightful property for the Nepalis, thereby legitimizing its (forced) takeover.

The process of environmental objectification shows how “as identity shifts from the soil to the state [...] ethnic, religious and regional differences [...] are forced into a strait-jacket of 'narrow nationalism'. Instead of being rooted spiritually in soil and earth [...] communities attempt to reinsert themselves by fighting for fragmented statehood and narrow nationalism” (Shiva *Ecofeminism* 112). The narrow conceptualization of the environment then bring about its containment within rigid, limiting and teleological constructs.

In *Trespassing*, the objectification process involves a direct conflation of the natural world with human anatomy, as seen in several moments.

In the first of these moments, the commander of the Sindi separatists addresses his followers and invokes natural imagery (of a local fish) to highlight the urgent need for the movement: “What has the nation done for you? You are illiterate, homeless, and hungry. You have been cut from your mothers too early, ripped from her womb like the slimy yellow fish eggs in a mahasher’s gut! See how they drift in the river? That is you. Filthy, ugly, destined to drift from current to current. God cannot even grant you the mercy of camouflage”(Khan 340). This speech is important since it gives us an insight into the character of the commander, who is otherwise shown to be a silent yet powerful figure within the faction.

The commander compares the disenfranchisement of the indigent and illiterate Sindi population to the sheer vulnerability of the eggs of a mahasher, a local fish. Floating without any protection the mahasher’s eggs then become extremely easy prey to predators, similar to the marginalized Sindis whose existence is constantly threatened by external political factors, leaving them struggling for basic survival. Mocking the vulnerability of the indigenous population, the commander declares the Sindis a despicable abomination which is “filthy, ugly, [and] destined to drift from current to current.” The commander uses natural imagery for political commentary, recognizing that neither the nation nor the state has worked for Pakistanis and that re-theorizing conceptions of the ecosystem (the land, sea, plants, and animals) can be used as a powerful tool of reflection and propaganda (Rahman 277).

Using the political commentary as part of the separatist ideology, the commander invokes the anger of the men at their precarious situation and passionately exhorts them to fight back against the unjust state of affairs. By invoking the pathos of the situation to

convert it into a moment of violent awakening, the commander's speech then shows the careful deployment of language as a means of connecting with the men and exuding control over them.

Furthermore, the speech strategically uses the a familiar natural image to create a precedent for the separatist movement—since the masher is a local animal and hence visible presence, whenever the men see the mahasher they will be reminded of the commander's speech, which in turn will reinforce the movement's ideology. The conception of the mahasher then undergoes a definitive shift whereby the precariousness of its birth cycle is re-presented as a sign of the vulnerable existence of the Sindis, thereby showing how nature is objectified as a sign of social grievance to supplement the Sindi movement's ideology.

Another instance of environmental objectification can be seen in Salaamat's conversation with his friend and training comrade Fatah about the country's geopolitics. Presented as an educated and articulate character, Fatah becomes Salaamat's guide. In their free time between training, Fatah teaches Salaamat about how the unjust distribution of provincial resources is the primary cause for the disenfranchisement of the Sindis. A firm believer in the philosophy of "who we are and how we end up depends entirely on geography" (Khan 343), Fatah paints a vivid yet disturbing picture of the country's skewed economic system.

Painting a map of Pakistan on an outcrop, Fatah compares Pakistan's geographical contours to that of an arm stretching from China to the Arabian Sea and designates Sind as the thumb that once "had pride [but] now has a cuff around it. Its been bent and beaten and the blood's been shut off. It dangles impotently. To stand erect, it has

to break free” (Khan 345). Fatah’s words resonate deeply with Salaamat as seen in the following description: “Salaamat knew that by blood Fatah meant the Indus. He’d spoken many times of the dams in the Punjab that were choking off the supply. [...] In much of Sind, the Indus had dwindled to a trickle” (Khan 345).

Fatah highlights the importance of geographical positioning as a deciding factor for one’s identity and class politics, by employing the metaphor of the human anatomy to represent the map of Pakistan. Designating Sind as the “bent, beaten and impotent” thumb that has had its blood supply cut off, Fatah expresses his rage at the exploitative violence of the skewed federal policies that have deprived Sind of its natural resources (i.e. the water from the Indus river), harmed its development, and severely compromised its political prowess. In this context, the construction of major dams on the Indus ensured that most of the water was reserved for Punjab (the largest and agricultural hub of the country), leaving only a dwindling supply of water for Sind which exacerbated the region’s socioeconomic problems. Summing up the inherent unjustness of the situation through the analogy of a mutilated thumb with a shriveled blood supply, Fatah envisions the natural topography (of Sind) in terms of dismembered anatomy, and thereby re-casts nature as a fleshy embodiment.

This unilateral and deliberate equation of the terrain of Sind with human anatomy generates a deliberate objectification of the natural world as a signpost or symbol of the Sindis’ economic grievance, which are then channeled by the separatists. These instances of objectification then change conceptions about the environment which comes to be appraised as an interconnected network of natural resources whose control must be fought over, as seen in Fatah’s declaration to Salaamat that the terrain is made of the

classificatory parts of land, sea and air that outsiders are fighting over, followed by the warning that if Sindis don't control these resources (vis-a-vis the separatist movement), they will be condemning themselves to a life of subjugated misery (Khan 359). Thus *Trespassing* shows how separatist discourse singles out and projects different environmental elements as symbols of the socioeconomic marginalization of the Sindi community.

The Inheritance of Loss takes a different route and portrays the GNLF's appropriation of the natural world through the process of territorial re-signification in order to label the land as the Nepalis' rightful property and legitimize its forced takeover. Territorial resignification first entails a process of historical revisionism as seen in the GNLF's fiery speech that is meant to rouse the public into political awakening, as shown through Gyan's perspective: "A man clambered up on the bench [...] In April of 1947, the Communist party of India demanded a Gorkhastan, but the request was ignored [...] We are laborers on the tea plantations, coolies dragging heavy loads, soldiers. And are we allowed to become doctors and government workers, owners of the tea plantations? No! We are kept at the level of the servants" (Desai 174). Referring to the Partition years where the demand for a separate state (i.e. Gorkhastan) was quelled by the British, the GNLF leader decries the unjust decisions of the British which ensured the economic servitude of the Nepalis who continue to work as "laborers on the tea plantations, coolies dragging heavy loads, [and] soldiers" but are not allowed to be doctors and government workers, owners of the tea plantations."

The GNLF engages in historical reinterpretation through its evaluation of the colonial politics¹⁹ preceding Partition as the primary cause for the oppressed existence of the Nepalis, given that “colonialism [...] transformed land and soil from being a source of life and a commons from which people draw sustenance, into private property to be bought and sold and conquered (Shiva, *Ecofeminism* 105). In the novel, the GNLF denounces the historical injustices committed against the Nepalis and promises to set them right through the creation of a separate homeland which would grant political autonomy to the Nepalis. Exemplifying the manifestations of this autonomy, in another speech at a follow up rally, the GNLF confidently declares to its growing legion of followers that in the new state the Nepalis will be in control of the same resources that they are currently being stolen from them: “Every day the lorries leave bearing away our forests, sold [...] to fill the pockets of foreigners. Every day our stones are carried from the riverbed of the Teesta to build their houses and cities” (Desai 176).

These lines are important since they show us how historical re-visitation²⁰ then becomes a prelude to environmental appropriation, as seen in the GNLF leader’s

¹⁹ Poor policymaking during the last decade of the colonial rule exacerbated economic problems in the region by causing decline in employment in tea gardens, the extensive destruction of forest resources, and constriction of recruitment in social sector thereby giving more impetus to the demands of the GNLF. For detailed discussions on the history of the movement see: Atis Dasgupta. “Ethnic Problems and Movements for Autonomy in Darjeeling.” *Social Scientist* 27.11/12 (1999): 47–68. Web; Miriam Wenner. “Challenging the State by Reproducing Its Principles: The Demand for “Gorkhaland” Between Regional Autonomy and the National Belonging.” *Asian Ethnology* 72.2 (2013): 199–220. Web; Selma K. Sonntag. “Autonomous Councils in India: Contesting the Liberal Nation-state.” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 24.4 (1999): 415–434. Web.

²⁰ The re-telling of history emerges as a powerful strategy to disrupt the socioeconomic hegemony of the privileged classes. According to Gyanendra Pandey the consolidation of communal politics in post-independent years became inevitable given “that the privileged and propertied classes were not [ready] to share the fruits of development; that the oppressed and downtrodden, but now enfranchised, were threatening more and more to take matters into their own hands and to meet upper-class violence with violence; in a word, that [...] the right to continued rule [was] not so easily secured” (6). Gyanendra

declaration that it is their trees and stones that are being sold to the foreigners, thereby showing how these natural elements are claimed as the property of humans, i.e. the Nepalis in this case. This environmental appropriation then builds into the process of territorial re-signification whereby the whole landscape gets coded as the rightful property of the Nepalis, thereby preempting its forced takeover by the GNLF members.

Growing in popularity with the population, the GNLF starts to assert itself in more direct and decisive ways, one of which becomes the forceful usurping of local people's land. The people in this case are Lola and Noni, two old women who are support themselves and are in a relatively vulnerable position (given that they live without any other men or other family members). The GNLF members raid the sisters' house for food supplies one time and threaten them menacingly but ultimately leave them unharmed.

However, Lola and Noni barely recovered from the harrowing incident when a month later they discover to their horror that the GNLF has illegally moved in on their land and started building houses there (given that the land is in close proximity to the town, schools, and market). "The sisters woke one morning to find that, under a cover of night, a hut had come up like a mushroom on a newly cut gash at the bottom of the vegetable patch. They watched with horror as two boys calmly chopped down a bamboo from their property and carried it off right in front of their nose" (Desai 263).

Thus the GNLF starts to illegally occupy other people's land, thoughtlessly destroy the terrain to build their houses and openly steal any plants or resources from the region. In doing so, the GNLF members "break down the previous sense of place, which

Pandey. "By Way of Introduction." *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 1-21. Print.

they associate with social inequality and the oppression of the Gorkhas, and they build up a new sense within which they have a right to the land and to haven from the law” (Ferguson 46). And despite Lola and Nonita’s tearful pleas to the leader to ask his followers to vacate their land, the GNLF continues its coercive occupation of the place and instead dismisses the sisters by declaring that they are taking back ‘their’ land (Desai 264) thereby showing how the land becomes re-signified as the property of Nepalis.

In addition to its ethnic component, this strategy of territorial re-signification also acquires a religious dimension as seen in the narrative account of how in the months following the takeover of the sisters’ land, the GNLF starts to rapidly grab more land in the region and starts to build shrines over all the occupied territory: “Among the row of illegal huts, the sisters had noticed a small temple flying a red and gold flag, ensuring that [...] no official [...] would dare dispute the legitimacy of the land grab. The gods themselves had blessed it now. Little shrines were springing up all over Kalimpong” (Desai 308).

These lines show how the GNLF’s power gets strengthened in the coming months, thereby emboldening them to illegally occupy more territory. To conceal the illegality of their actions, however, the GNLF starts to construct shrines over the occupied terrain to re-signify it as religious or sanctified place, to perpetuate its ideology and to prevent any punitive backlash from the authorities. And while at a surface this strategy seems a benign one, it is important to recognize how this re-signification disguises an inherently violent impulse towards nature whereby “violence functions as a means of breaking down space in order to rebuild the place to the aggressor’s

specifications” (Ferguson 42), as seen in the designation of land as (ethnic) property that can be (mis)used and abused by the GNLF for its vested interests.

The above mentioned processes of environmental appropriation used by the Sindi separatists and the GNLF then co-opt the natural world as the material and ideological foundation(s) for the successful execution of the goals of their movements. The strategic environmental conscription underscores how territoriality forms an integral crux of the separatist discourse given that it is a key geographic strategy to control people and things by controlling area. Through its promotion of political territories and private ownership of land, territoriality acts a primary geographical expression of social power (Sacks 5). The Sindi separatists in Pakistan and the GNLF in India then rely on territoriality as a form of power and insist that ultimate goal of their movements is the forceful reclamation of land and natural resources.

The process of reclamation is underscored as the only means of securing socioeconomic justice for the Sindis and Nepalis, and it sets the precedent for the conquest of the environment. The idea of the conquest highlights the relationship between territorialization and violence whereby the raw material for violence is not merely the immediate political/economic context or a desire to control space, but a larger reservoir of cultural imaginings that give meaning to the space, which in this case is the idea of land as the rightful property of the Sindi community in *Trespassing* and Nepali community in *The Inheritance of Loss* (Sundar 333).

The overarching discourse (of the movements) then precipitates a definitive and debilitating shift in the ontology of the environment such that it is no longer a be-ing in itself, but is actively rendered as a desired object of conquest for both movements, and

thereby necessitates the use of exponential violence. It is to be noted that the exercise of violence is also intertwined with notions of militarized masculinity that is defined as “a mode that [valorizes] soldiering especially and often accords primacy to toughness, skilled use of violence, presumption of an enemy, male camaraderie, submerging one's emotions, and discipline” (Enloe *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* 149-50).

The discussion of weapon training, the disciplining of bodies, the emphasis on emotional reticence, the repeated invocation of the state as enemy and the male makeup of the camps points out to how militarized masculinity is reinforced and celebrated as an identity marker for the fighters. The adherence to modes of militarized masculinity then normalize the use of violence as a means of approaching and engaging with the world. The use of violent force becomes a modus operandi of both movements, which is implicitly suggested in *Trespassing* given the limited scope of the Sindi separatists but described in detail in *The Inheritance of Loss* given the growing momentum of the GNLF and thereby requiring a deeper analysis.

Emboldened by an influx of followers and popular support, the GNLF starts to employ increasingly violent means to “reclaim” the land and in doing so, also acts as a symbolic extension of the Sindi separatist movement. Tracing the progression of the GNLF, the narrative describes how GNLF launches a month long strike to demand land (from Bengal to Assam) during which it assumes complete control of Kalimpong, attacks the police station and halts all socioeconomic activities such that “finally the shops and the offices didn't open at all [...] everyone was terrorized to keep their shutters down” (Desai 259). Operating through a politics of fear, violence and intimidation, the GNLF has a climactic showdown with the authorities when it decides to burn the Nepalis

constitution in an act of symbolic defiance, which results in a horrific disaster as the police opens fire on the GNLFF rally, killing thirteen local boys.

This incident then precipitates a State sanctioned crackdown on the GNLFF, accompanied by an indefinite curfew that paralyses everyday life and traps “Kalimpong [...] in its own madness” (Desai 307). In reaction to the crackdown, the GNLFF sets government offices on fire, with the result that the fire spreads into the nearby forest and starts to corrode the trees (Desai 308). In addition to the use of arson, the GNLFF also resorts to other conventional methods of war to inflict maximum damage in the area as “detonators set off landslides as negotiations went nowhere” (Desai 309), thereby showing how the GNLFF guerilla tactics lead to a destabilizing and disastrous repercussions for the natural world.

“Whatever point they GNLFF might have had, it [got] severely out of hand” (Desai 308), with the result that the incendiary violence of the movement becomes a totalized unstoppable force that brings about an undoing of the movement itself. Furthermore, the text shows how the discourse of conquest espoused by the GNLFF unleashes an annihilative violence that ultimately destroys that which it seeks i.e. the land.

While Desai shows the material untenability of the discourse of environmental conquest, Khan uses her narrative to undermine the teleology of the discourse. Questioning the ideology of “owning” the land that undergirds the Sindi separation movement, Salaamat begins to re-assess the brutal methods employed by the separatists to achieve their aims. This questioning is preceded by Salaamat’s resistance to the separatists’ insistence on alienating oneself from the environment:

The truth was sometimes that he wished the camp weren't in such a beautiful place. It should have been in a filthy burning city street [...] He'd joined the camp thinking it would be his last way to shrivel up and die, but if anything the opposite had happened. Salaamat was beginning to like his world again. The sand beneath his toes, the scent of the river [...] the sky free of dust and haze, the feathery sisky leaves—all refreshed him [...] Instead of distancing himself from the land he was entering it. And he grew unconvinced that the answer to all his troubles was a separate state. If anything, this land and the others wanted to split was showing him how to glue back his splintered pieces. (Khan 344)

Turned off from the abhorrent violence of the separatist movement, Salaamat undergoes a moment of personal crisis where he begins to question the very premise of the movement itself. Rejecting the movement's edict of environmental distancing (which is meant to appropriate the men's bodies for combat purposes) Salaamat instead starts to reconnect with his surroundings, with the result that the natural elements (sky, sand, and trees) begin to rejuvenate his senses, and his body. As opposed to the expectation that joining the camp would mean that it would be "his last way to shrivel up and die, but if anything the opposite had happened" (364) shows how nature revives Salaamat on a psycho-emotional level, causing him to have a renewed appreciation for life. Immersing himself in the environment, Salaamat begins to undergo an epiphany as seen in the following lines—"unconvinced that the answer to all his troubles was a separate state. If anything, this land and the others wanted to split was showing him how to glue back his splintered pieces" (Khan 344). Alluding to the independent yet intertwined dimensions of

the natural world, the narrative shows how witnessing environmental holism makes Salaamat denounce the doctrine of destructive divisiveness that is a characteristic of the Sindi movement.

It is important to note however that in this critical moment, the text emphasizes that it is a sustained engagement with the natural world that brings about consciousness raising. This consciousness raising becomes concretized in Salaamat's argument with Fatah about the destructive ways of the Sindi movement whereby Salaamat declares that "You can belong to the land, instead of forcing it to belong to you" (Khan 359). Rejecting the concept of a violent assault on the land, Salaamat instead advocates the idea of belonging as a mode of existence, and ultimately decides to leave the movement.

The text underscores that it is a re-connection with the natural world that convinces Salaamat of the untenability of the movement and also makes him recognize the futility of adhering to militant masculine codes of violent subjugation, thereby highlighting the cognitive function of environmental aesthetics. Refusing to ascribe to the notions of control and power espoused by the militant males at the camp, Salaamat instead gravitates towards the idea of belonging—namely an intimate association with the land—as a means of identity formation on the individual and collective levels(s). In doing so he "displays an attachment to the land, sea, and turtles of the region instead of the expected attachment to nationalist political ideology" (Rahman 264). This identity shift then also draws attention to an alternative model of identity which is based on the ideas of power-sharing, non-violence, and emotional identification especially in relation to the natural world; thereby promoting the idea of respecting the environment.

Extending the idea of respect in a real life context, *Trespassing* shows how the guiding principle of respect can lead to symbiotic, and sustainable human-environment relationships, as seen in the references to the silkworm farm established by Riffat Mansoor (another major character in the novel). The narrative, however, does not set up an essentialist binary of men as destroyers and women as caretakers given that "both non-violence and violence are socially constructed" (Shiva 51). Instead, the novel promotes the concept of environmental respect as a gender-inclusive value system that can be appreciated, endorsed and followed by people in different ways.

As a man from an unprivileged background, Salaamat, can endorse the need to respect the environment and counter the militant mindset of his separatist faction, while Riffat Mansoor, a foreign-educated woman hailing from a privileged background can concretize the idea of environmental respect on a communal level by setting up an eco-friendly business. *Trespassing* does not compare the actions of these two characters (and others who exhibit deep affection for the environment) on a moral or ethical ranking, but instead points out how issues of class, capital and access determine the degrees to which individuals can adhere to a given value-system. However, by offering descriptions of the silkworm business, the text effectively shows how the concept of environmental care can be materially incorporated in a business, thereby signaling the need to examine the farm's origins and its practices.

Hailing from a privileged, educated background Riffat Mansoor decides to use her dowry inheritance to set up a silkworm farm which helps her find personal fulfillment and pursue social activism: "As a wedding gift, her father gave her several acres of land outside Karachi. She'd do something with this land [...] She was going to revive what had

lain latent for thousands of years. She'd watch it grow into something soft and durable, so that when she, a tiny speck in time, vanished, it would still be there" (Khan 406).

While on the surface it seems that the farm is more centered around Riffat's personal desires, but the text indicates that on a deeper level Riffat intimately connects with nature and values its longevity that will precede her own existence wherein "when she, a tiny speck in time, vanished, it would still be there." This connection with and concern for nature then signifies how caring for the environment becomes a guiding principle for the silkworm farm.

Given its commercial success, the farm serves as a successful example of ecofeminist business given its women-centric approach, adherence to idea of environmental partnership, and use of indigenous practices, which require further discussion. From the outset, a unique feature of the farm is its women-centric approach. The farm functions as an inclusionary space that hires local women to run and oversee the operations, as observed by Riffat's daughter, Dia, during her visit to the farm:

The interior was [...] was divided into four sections. The first, empty during this season, would soon hold the eggs laid by the current batch. In the second room was a long table with trays of wriggling larvae feeding on finely chopped mulberry leaves. Dia walked past the trays, greeting the women who tended the maggots [...] With the exception of the gardeners and the security guards, the farm was entirely run by them, which is why they were allowed to work at all. (Khan 102)

The description of the farm establishes the attention given to planning its layout, whereby each room houses silkworms at different stages of growth (spanning from eggs to larvae

stage). The women are in charge of the silkworms and they tend to them conscientiously as indicated by the image of the trays of "finely chopped mulberry leaves," which points to the women's careful patience in preparing food for the silkworms on a daily basis. This detail about the room arrangement also indicates how the structure of the farm is synchronized with the successive stages of silkworms' cycle, thereby pointing to an ecofeminist consciousness which shows how "the new insight provided by [...] women in the Third World is that women and nature are associated not in passivity but in creativity" (Shiva 45).

Moreover, the fact that the farm is entirely run by women "with the exception of the gardeners and the security guards" points to Riffat's feminist standpoint in deliberately hiring women from low income backgrounds to help them gain socioeconomic empowerment. This decision is all the more meaningful given that these women are otherwise deliberately excluded from the public sphere because of patriarchal culture: "the farm was entirely run by [the women], which is why they were allowed to work at all" (Khan 102).

Another distinguishing feature of the farm is its incorporation of the concept of environmental partnership as seen in the description of the farm land as a valued and valuable ecosystem that is an inextricable part of Riffat's textile mill business:

The sericulture project had been entirely Riffat Mansoor's. [She had] questioned the wisdom of importing the seeds when silkworms could be bred at home. The climate suited the growth of the mulberries, the food of the insect, and she owned a large plot of land near Thatta on which to cultivate the trees [...] It had taken [Riffat's] vigor to make the project

work, but eventually, after several false starts, fifteen acres of mulberry trees successfully yielded the sixty tons of leaves required to feed the one and a half million silkworms needed to produce roughly nine hundred pounds of raw silk. Riffat's fully self-sufficient side business gave the mill, already successful in cotton, an added allure. (Khan 96)

The passage recounts how Riffat Mansoor both conceived and championed the idea of a sericulture project. Recognizing the feasibility of the climate, terrain, and soil for starting the project, Riffat decided to utilize local land to establish the farm to rear silkworms, as opposed to importing them at exorbitant rates from other countries. After numerous, failed attempts Riffat's passion and perseverance finally pay off when "fifteen acres of mulberry trees successfully yielded the sixty tons of leaves required to feed the one and a half million silkworms needed to produce roughly nine hundred pounds of raw silk," thereby showing how gradual knowledge and careful nurturing of the land are integral processes for a plentiful yield.

As a "fully self-sufficient side business," the sericulture project becomes an important supplement to the mill and exemplifies the ecofeminist principle of "a relocation of action and activity to create life-enhancing, not life-reducing and life-threatening societies" (Shiva 51). In doing so, the "life-enhancing" sericulture project promotes a subsistence-driven, non-exploitative and equally participatory relationship with the environment.

Extending this idea of subsistence to the production process, Riffat revives and employs indigenous practices of cloth dying to replace chemical dying which is a hazardous and expensive process:

Though organic dying was a method none of the factories relied on, it had once flourished in the subcontinent [...] Three-thousand-year-old madder-dyed cloth and indigo vats had been excavated in Moenjodaro. The technique seemed right outside Riffat's doorstep [...] She discovered most colors could be obtained from plants easily grown here. She also learned which part of the plant needed to be harvested [...] So she reserved the remaining five acres of the farmland for cultivating the crops. Within two years, they yielded consistently, and the contract with the dying company was annulled. (Khan 98)

While organic dyeing is largely seen as an anomaly in contemporary times, it was once a commonly used process that "flourished in the subcontinent" as evident by the discovery of three-thousand-year- madder-dyed old cloth and indigo vats in Moenjodaro (one of the largest settlements of the Indus Valley Civilization located in Larkana District, Sind). Realizing the accessibility of this local dyeing technique, Riffat decides to reuse the process, by figuring out how to grow specific plant species and harvest their parts to make dyes over a period of two years. This decision can be also be interpreted as a desire to reviving an ancient Pakistani tradition whereby "the ethics of natural fibre and dye can be traced to the desire in reconstructing history for the real Pakistani, to re-embed that history within an organic revival of the region's indigenous arts and crafts" (Kabir 182).

And though the process is time consuming, it ultimately becomes scalable to the extent that Riffat cancels her contract with the chemical dye company and instead uses her organic dyes for cloth treatment at the mill. The decision to reuse the indigenous technique generates profit, and minimizes the environmental impact of the cloth

production process. Moreover, the revival of a subjugated indigenous practice, then functions an eco-feminist principle of recovery which counters the multiple dominations and deprivations of nature and non-western cultures (Shiva *Staying Alive* 50), and in turn emphasizes the value of indigenous knowledge.

Giving us insights into the processes of the silkworm farm, the narrative emphasizes how intimate knowledge of the landscape coupled with sustainable and indigenous techniques, helps Riffat expand her business and generate income flows in the nearby community. However, the narrative also perceptively points out the various problems that hinder or threaten the farm. One major challenge is the social repercussions of eco-sustainability which signals how an ecocentric policy becomes a threat to other vested interests, as seen in the blackmail calls that Riffat starts to receive once she cancels her contract with the chemical dye company (Khan 98), and the water mafia that she has to pay off so that they don't cut off her water supply (Khan 392).

Another formidable challenge to the farm is the issue of security, as seen on the communal level wherein bouts of turmoil in the province shut down transport and prevent workers from coming to the farm (Khan 392), and on the individual level whereby the farm is constantly protected by armed guards (Khan 100), thereby showing how the issue of securitization is a constant concern.

By indicating these problems, the text astutely points out how a long-term commitment to environmental sustainability is predicated on constant negotiation with the status quo and other socioeconomic factors. Nonetheless, despite the immense pressure, Riffat Mansoor and her employees remain undeterred in their efforts and

expend all their energies in ensuring the productivity of the silkworm farm so that it remains profitable.

Driven by the goals of ecological sustainability (preserving the local ecosystems) and social justice (hiring underprivileged women to give them empowerment), the farm then emerges as an effective model of ecofeminist philosophy based on the ideas of resourcefulness, regeneration and conservation. Through its promotion of the concept of environmental respect, ecofeminism emerges as a material and symbolic counter to the militant masculine discourse of environmental conquest. Extending the idea of respecting the natural world to respectfully living in it, both novels endorse the concept of belonging to the environment as another form of citizenship.

This citizenship denounces the violence of environmental co-optation and instead underscores the power within human-environment partnership, thereby challenging “the dominant concept of power as violence with the alternative concept of non-violence as power” (Shiva *Staying Alive* xv). By doing so, *Trespassing and The Inheritance of Loss* effectively use an ecocritical lens to bring about critical reflection on how land gets increasingly claimed and contested within discourses of communal politics in the postcolonial context.

CHAPTER 3. ENVIRONMENTAL OTHERING: WARFARE, SPATIAL APPRAISAL, AND TERRITORIAL EXPLOITATION

The previous chapter established that the sustained propagation of environmental conquest within ethno-nationalist discourse brings about an objectification and codification of nature as the property of ethnic communities. The concept of property means that the environment comes to be interpreted as the possession of a sect of people, and subsequently comes to be understood as the symbolic extension of the people that possess it. This process gains great traction during times of war wherein the vilification and targeting of a population also disproportionately endangers surrounding natural spaces.

Relying on gross misappropriations, dangerous stereotypes and decontextualized representations, war discourse projects the people and the terrain of opponent countries as intrinsically dangerous or threatening in order to justify their destruction. The deployment of us vs. them rhetoric has also been routinely used within South Asia to justify and sustain martial assaults on different populations and territories during inter-and intra-wars. Contemporary examples of this phenomenon include the War on Terror and the Kashmir conflict. Literary narratives about the War on Terror and Kashmir conflict have examined how the deployment of the us vs. them rhetoric has undergirded these wars

which in turn has brought about socioeconomic disruption, exterminated countless lives, and militarized everyday existence within the region²¹.

And while criticism²² on these works has focused on the human repercussions of militant conflict, it has not extensively focused on the environmental dimensions of the phenomenon. Wars redefine and recast land in binary discourse to justify military campaigns and I term this process as environmental Othering²³. This term refers to the deliberate labeling of the terrain of opponent countries as enemy base, hostile terrain, volatile territory, and infested space (amidst others) to create a precedent for its invasion and occupation. Promoting de-contextualized and myopic conceptions, environmental Othering, reduces the land to an alien, inhospitable, and dangerous space with the effect that civilians and non-civilians (on both sides of the conflict) begin to distance themselves from the natural world and interpret it as a space that needs to be secured or

²¹For novels on religious fundamentalism and 9/11 in Pakistan and Afghanistan see H.M. Naqvi. *Home Boy*. (New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 2011. Print); Kamila Shamsie. *Burnt Shadows*. (New York: Picador, 2009. Print); Khalid Hosseini. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. (New York: Riverhead, 2007. Print); Mohsin Hamid. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. (Orlando: Harcourt, 2007. Print); Omar Akbar. *A Fort of Nine Towers*. (Canada: Knopf, 2013. Print); For memoirs and novels on the Kashmir conflict see Suddha Koul. *The Tiger Ladies*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003. Print); Basharat Peer, *Curfewed Night*. (New York: Scribner, 2014. Print); Jaspreet Singh. *Chef*. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010. Print); Salman Rushdie. *Shalimar the Clown*. (New York: Random House, 2005. Print).

²²For criticism on 9/11 literature see: Asma Mansoor. "Post 9/11 Identity Crisis in H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy*." *Pakistaniaat* 4.2 (2012): 8-44. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 Aug. 2015; Harleen Singh. "Decentering 9/11 in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*." *ARIEL* 43.1 (2012): 23-44, 138. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 Aug. 2015; Margaret Scanlan. "Migrating from Terror: The Postcolonial Novel after September 11." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 46.3-4 (2010): 266. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 Aug. 2015. For criticism on literary representations of Kashmir see Ananya Kabir, *Territory of Desire*. Minnesota: U of Minnesota P, 2009. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 Aug. 2015; Geeta Ganapathy-Doré. "Projections of Paradise in Salman Rushdie and Agha Shahid Ali." *Projections of Paradise*. Ed. Helga Ramsey-Kurz.(Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011. 29-47. Print); Maurice O'Connor. "A Paradise Lost: Kashmir as a Motif of Rift in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*." *India in the World*. Eds. Antonia Navarro-Tejero. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2011. 211-219. Print).

²³This concept builds upon Edward Said's work on colonialism and Othering and is discussed later in the chapter.

controlled. Given the pronounced impact of ecological Othering in circumscribing, and corroding the environment, it becomes imperative to study the unfolding of the process.

Positioning the environment as a central structural and thematic concern, Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator* (2011) and Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) draw attention to the ways that environmental holism is disrupted and targeted by war (namely Kashmir conflict and War on Terror). Employing rhetorical questioning, situational irony, piercing language, harrowing imagery, and temporal shifts, both texts highlight how war violence not only fractures the terrain but changes conceptions about it. This chapter analyzes *The Collaborator* and *The Blind Man's Garden* to establish the causality between war and ecological Othering. A comparative analysis of the novels posits that war produces different degrees of Othering (latent and active). While latent Othering interpellates the environment in terms of security, active Othering transforms the environment into militarized zones. The simultaneity of these processes shifts conceptions about nature which gets interpreted as threat (for civilians) and antagonist (for non-civilians).

Militaristic discourse then casts ecology in reductive terms, and targets landscape(s) for strategic advancement as shown by both novels. Thus nature comes to be evaluated in terms of its utilitarian potential and is considered expendable outside the context of war. This expendability of nature can be seen in instances of territorial desecration (*The Collaborator*) and war on non-human life (*The Blind Man's Garden*). However, by positioning gardens as intact ecosystems that counter divisive war rhetoric Aslam and Waheed refuse to depict Othering as a totalized takeover of nature.

The chapter then explicates the resistant potential of these gardens as spaces of comfort, rumination, and restoration, specifically for the denizens of war-torn lands.

The Collaborator is set in early 1990s in Nowgam, a Kashmiri village situated between India and Pakistan, where an unnamed, young, man is employed by an Indian captain to scavenge the corpses of freedom fighters (shot while trying to illegally cross into Indian held Kashmir to attack the Indian army), and is instructed to collect their identification cards. These ID cards are later used by the Indian army as war propaganda—to issue press releases about the dangerous militants entering from Pakistan, and to indict it as an exporter of terrorism. The novel delineates the effects of (Indian and Pakistani sponsored) militancy, target killings and open burials on the community and the environment.

The Blind Man's Garden uses the setting of post 9/11 Afghanistan to delineate the story of two brothers, Mikal and Jeo, who run away from their home in Pakistan to travel to Afghanistan and help the civilians wounded in the War on Terror. However, despite their noble intentions, the brothers end up being kidnapped and sold to the Taliban and end up witnessing firsthand the horror, trauma and anguish of war. Jeo gets massacred in a militant assault, while Mikal eventually escapes from a warlord's prison, and faces grave dangers as he navigates the unfamiliar Afghan terrain to return home. Layering Jeo and Mikal's narrative with other characters' experiences of war, the novel showcases the consequences of incessant warfare, militant attacks, ethnic in-fighting and sociopolitical conflict on the local population and the landscape.

Despite differences in their chronological frames and regional focus, *The Collaborator* and *The Blind Man's Garden* examine the ecological ramifications of war

in engendering the exploitation, appropriation, and violation of landscapes, thereby Othering them for the sole purpose of fulfilling militaristic goals. This concept builds upon Edward Said's treatise on Orientalism, in which he identifies the selective use of geography by imperialist powers as one of the key factors for differentiating between the Orient (East) and the Occident (West). Said interprets the "Orient" and "Occident" as man-made constructions that are designated in terms of "a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space...which is "theirs" thereby giving rise to geographical distinctions that *can be* entirely arbitrary (*Orientalism* 55).

Extending these ideas about the significance of place in *Culture and Imperialism*, Said talks about the linkages between geography, power and imperial conquest: "To think about distant places, to colonize them, to populate and depopulate them: all of this occurs on, about, or because of land. The actual geographical possession of land is what empire in the final analysis is all about" (78). Moreover, this imperial conquest is enabled by using the practices of codification and characterization to generate universalizing discourses about foreign lands (108), thereby highlighting the importance of knowledge production to the colonial project: "imperialism is after all an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control" (225).

Drawing upon Said's observations about power being sustained through the nexus of conquest, geographical violence, and man-made construction of 'difference', ecological Othering refers to the material and symbolic co-optation of nature for militant goals. The divisive "us vs. them" war rhetoric extends from humans to the landscape and designates it as enemy territory. The epistemological shift in understanding of the land it

is imagined in terms of security and danger. This approach to nature is then used as a justification for its occupation and transformation by the agents of war. A comparative analysis of Aslam and Waheed's novels establishes the latent and active dimensions of environmental Othering furthered by the occupiers and the occupied in war-torn countries.

Latent Othering refers to the process by which geographical knowledge is used to re-imagine and co-opt land as a site of military maneuvers. Depicting the unfolding of this process, *The Collaborator* shows the strategic mapping of border land (between Kashmir and Pakistan) and *The Blind Man's Garden* depicts the surreptitious infiltration of natural enclaves (in Afghanistan). The novels depict how unarmed and armed locals use these processes to gain strategic advantage over occupied forces—namely the Indian and American military forces—thereby signaling the need to examine these processes.

To understand the process of latent Othering in *The Collaborator*, it is helpful to consider the history of conflict in Kashmir. *The Collaborator* portrays how Kashmir's geographical proximity with India and Pakistan has been a source of aggressive militant conflict which continues till today²⁴. In this fraught situation, natural terrain gets politicized and divided between India (Jammu Kashmir) and Pakistan (Azad Kashmir). While Azad Kashmir is a self-governing division of Pakistan, Jammu Kashmir remains a heavily militarized, Indian-occupied region and forms the subject matter of Waheed's

²⁴ Given its geopolitical and economic importance, Kashmir has remained a major source of tension between India and Pakistan. While both India and Pakistan have territorial claim over Kashmir they continue to aggressively battle for total control of the region. Since 1947 India and Pakistan have fought three wars (1948, 1965, 1999) over Kashmir and developed nuclear weapons due to the conflict.

novel. *The Collaborator* explicates how natural spaces acquires geopolitical and tactical significance due to the continued militant conflict.

One example of tactical significance is the idea of natural spaces as boundary markers, as reflected in the protagonist's description the vast mountain ranges that encompass his village: "These undulating rows of peaks, some shining, some white, some brown, like layers of piled-up fabrics [...] hide in their folds the secret tracks into Azad Kashmir, into Pakistan. The pass [...] into Indian Kashmir [...] to where the Indian check-post starts: *this* is where most of the action takes place" (Waheed 4). Placed at the beginning of the narrative, these lines not only help readers geographically situate the protagonist but also alert readers to the geopolitics of the region whereby phrases such as "undulating rows of peaks," "layers of piled up fabrics" and "secret tracks" draw attention to the covert military operations taking place within these mountains.

The use of words such as "shining, white, brown" highlights the beauty and mineral diversity of these mountains which surround the village and form an important part of the local topography. Additionally these lines refer to the spatial expansiveness of this mountain range, which consists of "undulating rows of peaks" that "hide the secret tracks into Azad Kashmir" while also connecting to the region of Indian Kashmir. Describing the proxy war as comprising of "action" that takes place within the mountain peaks of Indian and Pakistani Kashmir, the novel establishes how the reinforcement of territorial demarcation is of integral importance to the project of war itself and underscores how Kashmir remains under a permanent state of threat due to the postcolonial pathologies of both India and Pakistan (Kabir 46).

This idea of territorial boundaries also impacts locals, whose lives are spent exploring and living in an arbitrarily divided landscape between India and Pakistan. Being familiar with the landscape, some of the locals choose to later become border guides and assist the movement of freedom fighters into Pakistan: “Border lads [...] became natural guides across the border—they already know every dirt track, every gorge, every crevasse and every valley [...] and had a mental map of all the check-posts dotting the silly Line of Control separating this Kashmir from that Kashmir” (Waheed 47). Representing the Line of Control as a “silly” separation, the narrative uses elements of ridicule and absurdism to cast it as a flimsy and untenable means of the territorial demarcation of Kashmir. Moreover, this description of the Line of Control refers to the arbitrariness of the imposed divisions of the natural landscape, which are deemed integral by nation-states in order to maintain their sovereignty. The presence of this cartographic division forces locals to learn the art of strategic (and occasionally stealthy) movement by mapping “every dirt track, every gorge, every crevasse and every valley” and gaining intimate knowledge of the terrain.

This mapping ability then becomes an important asset as seen in the protagonist’s admission that war has made the youth abandon their pastoral modes of life for militant ones: “the boys either became guides and clandestinely scouted city boys across the border, into training camps in Pakistan, or became militants themselves to relive their parents of their yoke of shepherds’ lives” (Waheed 6-7). In this instance intuitive awareness of the land allows local people to engage in a strategic geographical visualization so that they or their peers can cross into Pakistan to receive militant training (to become freedom fighters). These lines also highlight the phenomenon of permeability

of cartographic divisions which in turn ruptures the synchronicity of natural places as humans routinely violate these places to strategically enter/exit other states during times of militaristic conflict.

In addition to the strategic subversion of border lands, the valley hills also become havens for anti-state elements, as shown by the protagonist's observation about the arrival of newly trained freedom fighters into their village, who make inroads to the main village area but eventually disappear and disperse into the hills at night time: "Amber glows of last cigarettes bobbed up and down in the distance, got smaller and then disappeared. They melted into the darkness of our hills" (Waheed 78). Set against the backdrop of the protagonist's anxious wondering about whether his missing friends could be amongst this group, this passage also hints at the protagonists' deeper anxiety about being a solitary and inept individual who cannot participate in the freedom movement (due to his fear of abandoning his infirm parents).

These lines depict how these freedom fighters disappear into the hilly terrain, thereby indicating that as opposed to residing in the monitored area of the village (which is under the watch of Indian soldiers), these people prefer to meld into nature to escape detection and maintain their anonymity. In doing so, the men become part of the natural environment but also interpellate it for war, since nature comes to be seen as a source of camouflage or concealment for militant fighters. This metaphorical co-optation resembles the dynamics of contact zones²⁵ where both agent (militants and guides) and the acted-

²⁵ In her book *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt invokes the phrase contact zone which she uses to 'invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographical and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect' (6-7). Mary Louise Pratt. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Routledge: New York, 1992. Print.

upon (nature) change *each other*. As a result of this hybridity, *the land no longer remains nature* but becomes a logistic element for militant action²⁶. Thus *The Collaborator* shows how latent Othering re-creates the land as a site of productivity for militant maneuvers. Given the fact that the covert operation is carried out by small factions across border territory, the process of latent Othering marks specific spaces and generates a more subtle epistemological shift—where land is understood as both familiar and threatening.

In contrast, *The Blind Man's Garden* depicts how more traditional military confrontations rely on a definitive appraisal of the land in terms of security as seen in the American operation in Afghanistan. The Afghanis terrain is viewed as 'hostile' space by the American forces whose neo-imperialist mode of thinking marks the Afghan people and their land as the irredeemable 'Other' and licenses the unleashing of extraordinary violence against them (Gregory 16). The imagined and actual projections of Afghan terrain as hostile space are highlighted primarily through Mikal's navigation of the unfamiliar terrain during his return to Pakistan, thereby highlighting the journey motif as a form of narrative progression and ecocritical signification. By doing so, the chapter expands upon the notion that contemporary warfare is "fuelled by dichotomized, Manichean constructions of 'us' and an othered 'them' – the target, the enemy, the hated" (Graham 36), which in turn constructs binary generalizations about both 'foreign' and colonized territories, and are therefore crucial to the "splitting of reality" (Graham 36-7).

²⁶ In fact, 'contact zone' correlates loosely with the introduction of the term [...] into recent anthropological work on colonial warfare 'that area continuously affected by the proximity of a state, but not under state administration' (Ferguson and Whitehead, eds 1992, p.3). In both cases the use of the word 'zone' indicates the importance of seeing the colonial encounter as productive of novelty—new spaces, new languages, new tribes—rather than simply a matter of subjugation or imposition. (Barker and Hulme 6). Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margeret Iverson. "Introduction." *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996. 1-23. Print.

The novel describes how American forces relentlessly scour the Afghan landscape with a view to hunting down the terrorist figures hiding within it: “the soles of several boots have left deep imprints on the muddy ground [...] America is everywhere [...] the war had quickly devolved into an endless series of raids and manhunts for terrorist leaders and [...] a possible Osama bin Laden hideout” (Aslam 129). Though a cursory reading suggests an emphasis on the interventionist and destructive aspects of the post 9/11 War on Terror, it also subtly alludes to the imprinting of this militant takeover on the Afghan landscape. The contrasting images of boot prints, the muddy ground and endless manhunts, signals an ideological reduction of the Afghan geographical terrain into a hostile space which is aggressively scoured, by the American forces in their single-minded pursuit of possible terrorist hideouts.

The idea of land as hostile terrain then gives license to militarized forces to occupy and expropriate it for purposes of attack and capture, as Mikal observes during his brief stakeout in a river bed in the Megiddo hills, where he hides to escape detection by the American forces who are scouring the terrain for enemies:

Going along the water he comes out to the road leading to Megiddo [...] three quarters of an hour he is crouched in the dry-bed of a spring, watching the group of dark figures in the distance. He wonders if they are Americans. They are fifty yards away from him across a wide band of gravel [...] They are moving slowly across the slope of the hill and seem to be searching the network of caves. Looking for terrorists. And suddenly a group of figures emerges from one cave and they run and struggle with the searchers. Each one as angry as a snake in an eagle’s claws. Some of

them fall to the ground and the dust blows in the air and the wind brings him their shouts [...] which the apprehended figures utter at each bit of pain and each restraining grip. (Aslam 298)

There is a concerted appraisal of the terrain in terms of numeric calculation and clinical evaluation as shown by the phrases “they are fifty yards away from him,” “searching the network of caves,” “looking for terrorists.” The geographical appraisal coupled with the foreboding tone signals Mikal’s apprehensiveness at being forced to fend for himself in a land occupied by terrorists. The terrain then becomes coded and Othered in terms of conflict, which in turn marks it as a zone of violence, where the search operation results in a heated battle between the American army and the terrorists. Aslam chooses to analogize the battle between the two factions as one between deadly animals—“Each one as angry as a snake in an eagle’s claws. Some of them fall to the ground and the dust blows in the air and the wind brings him their shouts”—thus depicting how war marks nature as a site of assault and introduces vulnerability into natural spaces.

Given that the land comes to be projected as hostile, the practice of surveillance becomes normalized as a mechanism (for civilians and non-civilians) for interacting with the landscape, as can be seen in Mikal’s traversal across the vast Afghan terrain, in order to return to Pakistan:

After fifteen minutes he comes to a field at the base of a row of hills, a meadow the size of four cricket grounds, full of tall yellow flowers, the color so intense it makes the eyes ache. He conducts a brief search among them but not knowing what he is expecting to find he just stands looking

at the hills in the end. *Who would he meet here at dawn? The Pakistani soldiers? The Americans?* (Aslam 213)

In this instance when Mikal encounters an unfamiliar meadow, he instantly starts to appraise and survey it in terms of its threatening potential, as opposed to relaxing amidst the scenic nature: “a meadow the size of four cricket grounds, full of tall yellow flowers...He conducts a brief search among them not knowing what he is expecting to find he just stands looking at the hills in the end. *The Pakistani soldiers? The Americans?*”(Aslam 213). The choice of words such as “conduct, search, expecting” alludes to a pre-determined distancing and alienation from the land, with the effect that Mikal makes a conscious choice to scrutinize and scan the land as an enemy territory. This instance exemplifies explores the link between latent Othering and militarized gaze which includes the mobilization of a vigilant visuality during the War on Terror (Amoore 215). This watchful mode is informed by an etymological sense of prejudice and occludes the possibility of seeing differently (Amoore 230), as seen in the anticipatory logic of Mikal’s visuality which projects the Self/other dichotomy onto the land. Thus *The Blind Man’s Garden* shows how War on Terror invokes the us vs. them rhetoric to Other the land into hostile territory.

The Collaborator and *The Blind Man’s Garden* show different degree of latent Othering as it projects the land as threatening space. The surreptitious militant actions of Kashmiri fighters (necessitated by their carceral existence) produces limited latent Othering—which employs the forest as a strategic territory but does not aggressively transform it in material terms. Thus even though the land is subsumed into a productive military network (as a logistical site) it still retains some of its familiarity. However, in

The Blind Man's Garden the foreign invasion of Afghanistan during the War on Terror redeploys reductive discourse that produces a latent Othering of the land as hostile territory in material and visual terms.

Such environmental Othering sets in motion what Derek Gregory describes as a “metonymic relationship between territorialization and terrorism, in which each endlessly stands for the other: ‘terrorism’ is made to mean these territories, and these territories are made to mean terrorism” (Gregory 60). In doing so, this Othering renders the land into an alien and threatening space (that also terrifies local people) and forecloses the possibility of any alternative conceptualizations of the land.

Discussions of latent Othering direct attention to the ways that the environment becomes interpellated within discourses of security and threat, thereby marking nature as an integral site of enabling and optimizing military maneuvers. The process of latent Othering intensifies into the process of active Othering which employs calculated appraisal of the land and its aggressive transformation into militaristic zones, as shown by the novels I discuss in this chapter. The novels depict different forms of militarized zones—*The Collaborator* portrays the transformation of the Kashmir valley into a deathscape and *The Blind Man's Garden* traces the co-optation of natural spaces into military bases.

Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator* shows how the regional valley the land transforms a living space to a mass gravesite (of Kashmiri fighters), thereby indicating its active Othering. Paying attention to the different structural, spatial and ideological components of this mass gravesite explicates how Indian army recasts the natural valley into a war spectacle to terrorize and paralyze the population on the level of the everyday.

According to Samuel Weber, “There is a necessary relationship between war, terrorism, and spectacle. And that [...] is new in a very specific way [...] when a certain type of spectacle, or as I would prefer to call it, *theatricalization*, seems to constitute one of the essential components of war rather than merely the celebration of its victorious outcome (15).

The novel describes how Captain Kadian (the Indian army captain stationed in Indian-held Kashmir) defiles a beautiful valley in the region, by converting it into a dumping ground for militants’ bodies. And though there are numerous textual references to the ecological impact of this militant strategy, it is the introductory passage mentioned below that captures the intensity and horror of this phenomenon. During his first day of collecting IDs from the corpses, the protagonist is appalled at the sight of decapitated and violated bodies spread throughout the valley:

I look at the first few corpses and am immediately horrified at the prospects of what my first ever job entails [...] Ugly grins, unbelievable, almost inhuman, postures, and a grotesque intermingling of broken limbs make me dig my teeth deep, and hard, into my clenched fists. What an elaborate litter! [...] Bodies after bodies—some huddled together, others forlorn and lonesome [...] in various stages of decay. Wretched human remains lie on the green grass like cracked toys. Teeth, shoes. For God knows how long I just cannot remove my eyes from this landscape, heaps of them, big and small, body parts, belongings littered amidst the rubble of legs and arms [...] Macabre, horrid ghouls on either side of the brook watch me from their melancholic black-hole eye sockets [...] The stench

is so powerful that your guts begin to pull your throat down, sort of strangle you from within, if you know what I mean. (Waheed 7-8)

Providing this graphic and disturbing portrait of dead bodies littering the landscape as an introductory passage allows the narrative to create empathy for the protagonist's ghastly job, to initiate us into the horrors of war in Kashmir and to show us the ecological imprint of its unremitting violence. And while there are other textual references to the corpse-infested valley, this scene is highly significant in the ways that it brings a potent stillness to the narrative which plunges readers directly into a macabre, and repulsive deathscape, without any authorial intervention to temper or mediate its horror. The minuteness of linguistic detail in this scene also generates an almost claustrophobic, effect wherein the reader is stripped of the agency of looking away from war violence. Bombarding us with the disturbing imagery of the macabre state of the rotting bodies with their "ugly grins, unbelievable, almost inhuman... postures, and a grotesque intermingling of broken limbs," the text makes us experience firsthand, the acute and overwhelming horror of the depravity of war, which consumes human lives with impunity.

This discussion of the horror and depravity of the mass gravesite needs to be supplemented by attention to its structural makeup, i.e. the countless corpses that populate the valley. The desecrated bodies "huddled together [...] in various stages of decay" end up creating a community of expelled bodies, thereby signifying the sheer expendability of Kashmiri lives. The overwhelming presence of the decaying bodies becomes a potent reminder of Indian army's routine use of torture and abuse to sustain their political control over the region. In addition, this process is informed by a "stereotyping [of] the occupied, defining them through reductionist categories, and

denying them history and humanity [so that] they are turned into *natural* targets of violence, a violence that raises no or very few ethical questions” (Junaid 176). In addition, the spatial concentration and high volume of these bodies serves to reinforce Indian hegemony in the region. Subjected to “humiliation, recreation and exhibition” (Rajaram 478) these bodies become permanent markers of the disciplinary mechanism and brutal power of the “Indian economy of colonial power” (Rajaram 478).

Supplementing the discussion with a focus on the spatial dimensions of this gravesite directs attention to its repercussions for the surrounding places. The pervasive infestation of death renders the valley into a visually terrifying place while the spatial expansiveness of the littered parts stifles the native flora and fauna, thereby disturbing and terminating the biotic processes of the valley. In addition to its direct depletive effects on natural ecology, the ever-expanding gravesite also symbolically marks surrounding areas with death and terror. Thus recognizing that the space of the spectacle “is no ordinary locality [but] a place *in relation to other places*” (Weber 18) the Indian army deliberately chooses to convert the main valley into a gravesite, thereby using its central location and clear visibility to maximize the psychologically debilitating effects of this war spectacle.

Another aspect of consideration is the ideological component of the valley as deathscape, which can be explicated through Achille Mbembe’s theory of necropolitics since it discusses modern forms of occupation, wherein endless states of terror are used to justify the concatenation of disciplinary and biopolitical powers (29). By assassinating freedom fighters, Captain Kadian comes to embody the sovereign figure, who in Mbembe’s paradigm establishes his sovereignty by exercising control over mortality and

thus defining life as the deployment and manifestation of power (12). Moreover, “by framing the enemy insurgents who cross the checkpoint in miniature through the visual technology of his binoculars, Captain Kadian represents his military operation as a war game” (Morton 26) and thereby legitimizes the act of killing as an extension of play (Mbembe 19). In doing so, he perpetuates the notion of human and ecological violation as a routine and incontestable outcome of war.

Moreover, a sustained pursuit of an environmentally hazardous strategy normalizes the idea of the open burial as seen in Kadian’s justification for the act: “I don’t do mass graves...I don’t believe in them. You see, by burying them somewhere secretly you’re inviting scandal, you are inviting discovery, you’re asking for a ‘uncovering’, you’re making news...But by leaving them like this, I have already made them acceptable, you see its all open, kind of common, maybe a bit ugly, but normal” (Waheed 293). These lines emphatically signal the sustained use of open burial to subvert the notion of discovering or un-earthing hidden bodies, which might direct criticism towards the Indian army on terms of human rights violations and challenge its status quo. However, this same idea of violation can be extended to the valley itself which becomes actively populated by corpses and changes indelibly because of this process into a deathscape “in which the limit of death is done away with, death is present in it [and] its presence defines that world of violence” (Mbembe 16), thereby aggressively legitimizing death as a definitive component of the valley’s ecosystem.

An explication of the structural, spatial, and ideological dimensions of the mass gravesite reveals the multiple ways in which the Indian army co-opts natural space as part of the war spectacle. Thus *The Collaborator* shows how active Othering co-opts and

aggressively transforms the environment into a part of the machinery of permanent war (Duschinski 692). In this context, the conversion of the Kashmir valley into an open gravesite is integral to Indian hegemony by reminding residents of how they remain in a constant state of “intensive surveillance and coercive control [and] punitive containment” (Duschinski 711).

Continuing the explication of active Othering, *The Blind Man's Garden* depicts another dimension of the process by depicting how natural spaces are appraised and incorporated into the structure of military bases. Though its primary focus is the American invasion of Afghanistan in the wake of 9/11 attacks, *The Blind Man's Garden* does not attribute the war to the policies of the American forces, but provides a nuanced picture of the conflict by referring to other local civilian and military factions participating in the conflict for their vested interests. As an extension, the novel offers insightful descriptions of these factions' strongholds, thereby allowing us to analyze the geographical positioning of their different bases, and drawing attention to the geostrategic aspects of construction in terms of security, inaccessibility and visibility. Giving an account of Jeo's kidnapping by the Taliban, the novel delineates how he is taken in a truck to a Taliban headquarter situated on a hill top:

In the evening they arrive at a mud-built village on the lower slope of a hill. The fort at the top is the area's Taliban headquarters [...]As they move on towards the fort, another thin dog appears and follows them for a distance and then stands watching them. There are tank trucks in the dust leading out of the fort's tall arched gate. The truck goes through it and

stops before a complex of buildings inside, the gate closing behind them.

(Aslam 51-2)

In this particular example, the truck travels to the Taliban's military foothold—a fort built at the top of a hill, composed of a complex of buildings, and protected by a tall arched gate. The sequential breakdown of the trucks' movement enables us to visualize the Taliban headquarters in terms of its geostrategic dimensions. As an extension, the daunting size and military prowess of the fort is supplemented by its geographical positioning that involves an appropriation of elevated topography in order to give the Taliban the tactical leverage of spatial security and ground surveillance.

Additionally, all the paths to the fort are barricaded by the houses of the adjacent villages, “the paths out of the fort have been blocked. Out there is the gathering of half a dozen villages from the surrounding area, a flash of bayonets in an unbroken circle around the base of the hill (Aslam 55). This description indicates how human settlements set up amidst natural places now function as a security parameter (for the Taliban stronghold), thereby showing how the dynamic between man and nature becomes framed in terms of securitization and threat containment, due to the militaristic discourse of war or conflict.

The idea of spatial appropriation of natural places is also used by local warlords in building their mansions which serve the dual function of residence as well as imprisonment center, as seen in Mikal's attempts to escape a warlords' mansion where he is being kept as prisoner:

The house is surrounded by towering pines and snow-covered peaks, most of its rooms locked [...]The mansion has high walls of stones without

lookout posts, and five large Alsatians roam the compound at night. In spite of this, he has made three attempts at escape, getting further on each successive occasion, and it was only the sub-zero cold that forced him back [...] he couldn't walk fast enough to generate the necessary heat, the mountainside locked in the white iron of winter. (Aslam 125-7)

This passage offers brief yet insightful descriptions of the close relationship between structure and natural surroundings of the mansion, whereby the warlord builds his mansion in the mountains, surrounded by towering pines and snow-covered peaks. In such harsh conditions, Mikal's escape attempts repeatedly fail because he cannot walk fast enough to generate necessary body heat since the mountainside locked in the white iron of winter, thereby showing how the extreme climatic conditions are used to enervate prisoners so as to deter them from fleeing or escaping.

Moreover, the specific geographical positioning of the warlord's mansion strategically employs the advantages of the high altitude, freezing temperatures, and dense natural growth to strengthen the inaccessibility of this area. This passage establishes how natural scenery comes to play a significant part as a structural reinforcement of the mansion by repelling attacks from the external or internal fronts and thus proving to be a valuable source of strategic deterrence.

Providing an expansive view of the different factions involved in profiteering from war, the novel also includes the example of a gun factory, owned and run by a large Afghan family (whose house is adjacent to this factory). Seeking temporary refuge in the factory owner's house also allows Mikal access to the gun factory premises which he frequently roams to familiarize himself with his new (albeit temporary) surroundings.

Mikal looks through the window of the gun factory [...] The floor is covered with ash and strewn with pieces of metal the thickness and size of books and magazines [...] There are piles of woods meant to be burned in the smelting and there are carved pieces of wood that will become stocks of rifles and shotguns. Long low skeins of mist rise from the river that flows in a half circle around the house, its densely wooded bank enclosing three sides of the large building. (Aslam 204-5)

The gun factory operates through an expropriation of the environment whereby natural materials form the basis of the ammunition production process, while the surrounding landscape is strategically used to hide the gun factory and escape easy detection. The emphasis on the strewn ash, the stocked wood pieces, and the metal pieces highlights the process of gun-making, and this process in turn also becomes an extended metaphor for the willful co-optation and melding of natural elements for the purposes of war and conflict. Working in tandem with this process, is the expropriation of natural surroundings at the structural level as seen in this passage's description of the factory's exterior. The fact that the "river flows in a half circle around the house" and the "densely wooded bank enclose three sides of the building" point to the strategic impetus behind building this factory amongst specific topography that would provide a natural barrier to the factory—by concealing the factory and limiting easy visibility of the place.

Analyzing the topographical positioning of the military bases or local warlords' hideouts highlights the geopolitics of architecture during war, which is predicated on a calculated appraisal and appropriation of the natural terrain for strategic leverage: "More than anything else ...the terrain dictates the nature, intensity and focal points of

confrontation [and] the conflict manifests itself most clearly in the adaptation, construction and obliteration of landscape and...environment” (Weizman). This sustained regional expropriation brings about a permanent and material transformation in the terrain, by enabling militant or combatant factions to reside there undetected and thus subject the terrain to Othering as hostile space.

The discussion so far shows how the simultaneity of latent and active Othering shifts conceptions about nature which gets interpreted as threat (for civilians) and antagonist (for non-civilians). Militaristic discourse then casts ecology in reductive terms, and targets landscape(s) for strategic advancement as shown by both novels. Thus nature comes to be evaluated in terms of its utilitarian potential and is considered expendable outside the context of war. This expendability of nature can be seen in instances of territorial desecration (*The Collaborator*) and war on non-human life (*The Blind Man's Garden*).

A discussion of the territorial desecration in *The Collaborator* focuses on the ecological damage caused by the open gravesite specifically aspects of include contamination and desecration. The novel makes us think of the ecological impact of littering a natural space with decaying corpses, such as contamination. The normalized presence of rotting corpses continually contaminates the valley, but could also substantially threaten other ecosystems, as the protagonist informs readers that these decaying corpses are carried away by the valley's rivers to other larger water bodies: “In the stream I stand waist-deep and follow its leisured journey as far as it stretches, as long as the meadow goes, to some unknown point where it probably trickles into some bigger river, carrying with it many childhood dreams, unfulfilled wishes and bloated corpses.

Blood too” (Waheed 19). In providing a visual mapping of the flow of the water, the text also establishes the interconnectedness of different water bodies and makes us think of the subsequent pollution they will be subjected to by becoming reservoirs for dead, decaying bodies.

Another more direct example of contamination is the concept of ecological rupture Captain Kadian converts the region’s thriving valley into a fetid space marked by death, decay and degeneration, thereby disrupting and perverting its biotic processes. This concern is reflected in the protagonists’ musings about high probability that animals have started feasting on the corpses:

The other day, I was thinking how I’d come to assume that the big gashes on the relatively newer bodies were made my carrion birds—and some of these boys have entire limbs missing, half-legs astride from their torsos. What if those dogs who always stare at me from near the foothills have joined in the feast as well and, for that matter, what if all the animals of the neighborhood have taken to eating rotten human flesh, what if most of them now breakfast on decomposing men. It would get quite horrific then, wouldn’t it? All the cats and all the dogs, all the wolves from the forest and all the foxes from the fields, the tigers and the hyenas, birds of both the carrion and the non-carrion denomination, all the rats and the mongoose—all of them tearing their meals off young men like me. I get a terrifying, gasping shiver every time I think of that. (Waheed 15)

This passage emphasizes that the corpses are such permanent features of the valley that in addition to feeding the carrion birds, they have also become food sources for a wide

variety of animals (cats, dogs, tigers, birds, rats) who did not previously feed on human flesh as part of their regular diet. Combining the devices of rhetorical questioning, biological cataloguing and imaginative projection, the text makes us actively re-imagine the valley as a site of ruptured hierarchy, in order to alert us to the vicious and troubling perversion of animals' behavioral modes such that they start feeding upon decaying bodies for sustenance. The protagonist's unease and terror at the prospect of animals "tearing their meals off young men" also effectively suggests that war definitively brings about a definitive undoing of a natural order, to the effect that humans, the once superior and dominant beings now face a regular and potent threat from the animals in their immediate environment. Thus the novel portrays how war introduces degrees of abnormality into existing ecosystems.

The continued presence of these corpses also continues to be a source of revulsion, fear, and anguish for the community, especially as typified by the reactions of the protagonist who has to go scouring through these corpses on a daily basis. Deciding to erase their abhorrent presence, the protagonist decides to burn all the corpses as a form of cleansing:

I stand near the river and see the scene twice over, first the burning pyres I have created along the center of the valley [...] I spread the sheaves of grass over the burning circles and watch them instantly consumed in the restless flames. I spread the tinder trash, twisted tendrils and bent strands everywhere. I want everything burned to ash. I don't want to see a single foot, hand, arm, finger, toe, buttock, ear, nose, that is half-burned or not

burned [...] To hell with all this [...] It must all end, all end. (Waheed
301)

Trying to ensure that he covers and clears the maximum area, the protagonist creates two burning pyres which he fuels by adding sheaves of grass, twisted tendrils, tinder trash and bent strands, showing how cleansing the valley through cremation comes at the cost of burning the flora of the valley, and thereby highlighting the destructive effects of this decontamination. This image of the valley as a place of burning and annihilation contrasts starkly with its conventional interpretation as a place of peace and tranquility (as suggested by the protagonist's childhood memories of the valley), and raises the issue of ecological degradation caused by war. The idea that the protagonist has to burn all the dismembered body parts to gain personal closure might quell his inner anxiety and fears, but should also make us think of how land becomes specifically targeted because of the pain and anguish it invokes given its transformation into a utilitarian graveyard. Thus *The Collaborator* effectively shows how the unabated perversion of natural spaces subject them to desecration and de-values their inherent worth.

The Blind Man's Garden also extends discussions of natural de-valuation by showing how war targets non-human life through assault and extermination. The issue of assault is invoked through a depiction of trees being attacked as part of military strategy. A pertinent example is that of the attack on a Christian missionary school (St. Joesph's) by the Ardent sprit Jihadis (local militia), who commandeer a violent takeover of the school to take hostages in exchange for release of their imprisoned group members. The first step to this plan entails a brutal assault on the trees that surround the school

premises, and this process is witnessed by a teacher Joseph Mede during one of his routine walks around the school premises:

He resumes his walk. At the south wall is a grove composed mainly of dense rosewoods and cypresses [...] The ground shudders and he looks around, earthquake being his first thought. He attempts to steady himself against a rosewood but the mighty trunk lightly swivels away from him [...] and the tree begins to fall [...] He realizes that the trunks of all the trees have been severed, someone's blade going through them at sternum height. They were just standing in place waiting for the merest touch, the meshed canopies providing the minimum steadiness until now, and they are crashing around him [...] nothing but the torn leaves and branches around him as he attempts to gain a place of safety [...] the green limbs come down and he stands mercifully unscathed and watches [...] the sky painfully exposed. (Aslam 217-18)

Trees are traditionally thought of as sources of protection, shelter and sustenance, a function which they offer as part of the boundary markers of this particular school, and hence which is why they are specifically targeted and hacked by the Cairo House/Ardent spirit Jihadis in their plan to invade the school and take hostages. Employing the metaphor of an earthquake, the text underscores the destabilizing force and violent potency of the act of environmental dismemberment, namely the aggressive hacking of the trees. Giving a temporal breakdown of the incident, the author makes a conscious decision to show the cruelty of targeting nature by providing the following sensory cues: auditory—comparing the resounding impact of the hacked trees crashing to that of an

earthquake; the tactile—Joseph’s futile attempt to touch a falling tree to steady himself, and the visual—the stark image of Joseph Mede’s left standing alone and vulnerable under a “painfully exposed” sky. Using the metaphor of green limbs to describe the hacked trees, the text also reminds us of the living status of these trees, which are dispensed cruelly and thoughtlessly for the purposes of war. In doing so, Aslam presents the experiential and raw violence of this act to illuminate its inherently aberrational dimensions, and to present it as a symbol of the war waged against nature during militaristic campaigns.

Another example of the de-valuation of nature is the incorporation of animals into the war economy, as depicted by *The Blind Man’s Garden* wherein militant factions train dogs specifically for militaristic purposes. The concept of de-valuation is invoked in indirect ways—the dogs are only accorded value as part of the disciplinary mechanism of war but ironically this very process renders them vulnerable since they then become reduced to war targets (by opponent armies). *The Blind Man’s Garden* shows how dogs’ behavioral modes are definitively changed or heightened due to war, either because of their deployment for protective purposes by militant factions.

The Blind Man’s Garden shows how the routine training of dogs as aggressive creatures gains greater resonance in post 9/11 Afghanistan, where dogs are used with the singular aim of ensuring the discipline and safety of the places, owned and operated by the military and civilians respectively. Taken captive to an American prison based in an unknown location in Afghanistan, Mikal’s finds himself in a prison that is patrolled by dogs: “Getting him to open his mouth they shine beams of light into his throat [...] He hears the barking of dogs. Perhaps the prisoner who has just died was trying to escape

[...] In another room where the dogs are louder they overpower him [...] and they cut off all his clothes [...] and as he stands there naked [...] they perform a cavity search”

(Aslam 157-8).

This emphasis on the use of hostile and aggressive dogs in the prison area, serves to frighten prisoners into immobility, such that the dogs effectively thwart any unwanted movement and maintain discipline through “the terrorization of prisoners...beginning with the arrival process (Tindol 106). The deliberate inclusion of dogs in rooms where prisoners are subjected to invasive procedures and other kinds of abuse also ends up making the dogs symbolic signifiers of the depraved violence of the prison, such that seeing them afterwards makes prisoners re-live or re-visit the pain, trauma, fear, and humiliation of incarceration.

Dogs come to form a continuous presence in the prison space, as seen by Mikal’s observations about hearing their barking intermingling with the sounds made by his fellow prisoners: “The boy continues to talk as Mikal hears the noise of someone weeping in a nearby cage, the sound of someone praying, the barking of dogs” (Aslam 162). Establishing the permanent and threatening presence of these aggressive dogs, the text also alerts us to how their constant barking comes to function as an physical and psychological assault on the prisoners, whose bodies are already extremely vulnerable due to the infliction of intermittent torture and abuse (by their captors). Both these instances establish the ways in which dogs are being actively trained to be dangerous and hostile creatures, so that they become an integral part of the prison complex and become an “ideal means of keeping watch on prisoners and others under surveillance with a minimum expenditure of effort, cost and resources” (Tindol 118).

Outside the prison area, dogs are also used by local war participants for the purposes of protection, as seen in Mikal's subsequent stay at an locally operated gun factory, which is guarded by aggressive Airedale dogs: "The grass is clogged with dew and out of it three enormous Airedale dogs stand up at his approach long before he notices them [...] Aggression has clearly been bred into them but they are chained to the tree trunks" (Aslam 204). Trained to guard the premises, these dogs preemptively sense Mikal's arrival by using their acute senses of observation, and their ferocious stance proves that these dogs have been actively conditioned to exhibit aggressive behavior, which in turn is compounded by their chained state since it limits their freedom and mobility.

However this militaristic utilitarianism ends up endangering the lives of these dogs which become marked as war targets and are casually exterminated. A pertinent example is Mikal's return to the gun factory after a prolonged period of time, where he finds the whole place completely destroyed by militant assaults, with its residents gone and the guard dogs massacred in the process:

There have been explosions in several rooms. Rockets, bombs. The soldiers must have thrown in grenades before entering [...] He moves through the wings [...] and only when he unlatches the very last door he finds two of the three Airedales. The bodies have entered rigor mortis. They are lying a few yards apart in the middle of the floor—boot prints join one pool of blood with the other and then walk away towards a window. (Aslam 297)

Assessing the ruins of the place and retrospectively imagining the details of the horrifying and barbaric assault on the factory and its residents, Mikal stumbles upon the bloody corpses of the Airedales whose pitiful unrecognizable state becomes a resounding reminder of the unending cruelty of war violence, which claims the lives of both humans and non-humans. This incident also makes us think of the repercussions of militarization, whereby a focus on securitization under such conditions entailed a sustained conversion of these dogs into killing machines in order to make them integral parts of the war machinery.

Furthermore, the militaristic training of dogs in this case, depicts how animals are deliberately drawn into human conflict by being forced into an engagement that they cannot possibly understand in advance, thereby establishing how war overrides individual agency and choice, be it of animals or humans (Hediger 17). And though this process might have generated a sense of security for their owners, it has ironically ended up endangering these dogs, such that they were reduced to targets, subsumed as part of collateral damage and essentially deprived of their right to life.

An overall discussion of the direct and indirect ramifications of environmental Othering during war has underscored and disclosed the ways in which warfare exploits and endangers natural spaces in successively detrimental ways. However, while this process is prevalent phenomenon, it is not to be understood as a totalized or absolute reality for entire regions, since even under such dire conditions there are certain natural spaces that resist this expropriation, as shown with the example of gardens in the chosen novels. Thus both novels explicate the resistant potential of these gardens as spaces of comfort, rumination, and restoration, specifically for the denizens of war-torn lands

Reminiscent of the colonial history of landscaping and cultivation, the garden has been posited as a site of imperial desire within colonial texts. Contemporary postcolonial writers have reworked the concept of the garden such that it functions as a space that critiques imperialism, examines power relations (in terms of gender and race), enables negotiation of identity, and functions as a visual representation of the themes of cartography, nationality and nationhood²⁷.

Building upon existing postcolonial conceptions of the garden as a space of critical examination, Waheed's and Aslam's works highlight the garden as place of physical escape and emotional succor in order to critique the violent ramifications of militant conflict and to offer a counter to the process of ecological Othering. Showing the different incidents where characters voluntarily and willingly retreat to gardens, the novels depict how these cultivated natural spaces offer a viable escape from war violence. In *The Collaborator* the vegetable garden behind the protagonist's house offers the much needed mental and emotional respite from the horrors of war, as seen in the numerous accounts of the times the protagonist and his mother spend time there, and represented in the passage below:

[My mother] spends most of the day in her kitchen garden at the back of the house. There's a majestic view of the mountains from there—a

²⁷For detailed discussions on the thematic, visual and metaphorical significance of the garden in postcolonial literature see Andrew Husband, "Postcolonial 'Greenery': Surreal Garden Imagery in Nuruddin Farah's *Maps*." *ISLE* 17.1 (2010): 73-83. *ProQuest*. Web. 24 Aug. 2015; Sara Phillips Casteel, "New World Pastoral: The Caribbean Garden and Emplacement in Gisèle Pineau and Shani Mootoo." *Interventions* 5.1 (2003): 12-28. *ProQuest*. Web. 24 Aug. 2015; Shelly Saguro, *Garden Plots: The Politics and Poetics of Gardens*. (Surrey: Ashgate, 2006. Print); Wendy Knepper, "'How does Your Garden Grow?' Or Jamaica Kincaid's Spatial Praxis in My Garden (Book): And Among the Flowers." *Postcolonial Spaces: The Politics of Place in Contemporary Culture*. Eds. Andrew Teverson, Sara Upstone. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 40-56. Print).

soaring, suddenly rising sheet of rich dark green throbbing with mysterious life beneath the foliage. Someone always whistles in the dark. Its a neat little patch she's cultivated here, my mother, all by herself. I like it too [...] She doesn't mind my being there with her while she's tending to her creations. I do precious little by way of helping but I watch. Ma reaches and bends, plucks and mends—the various inhabitants of her magic grove bowing to her every wish [...] The chilies are thin but gleaming green. I like looking at them, hanging as they are from their slender branches, and managing to suggest promise in their lopsided aspect on the plant. (Waheed 50)

Physically and metaphorically removed from the ravages of war, the garden becomes a space of growth, thereby making it an important retreat for the protagonist and his mother. Situated in proximity to this garden are the magnificent mountains of the region, which are described as a “rising sheet of rich dark green throbbing with mysterious life beneath the foliage.” This evocative visual highlights the abundance, grandeur and plenitude of the mountains, and portrays them as space of regeneration and greenery, and provides an effective counterpoint to their descriptions as foreboding, barren, and stark places suspect to territorial takeover by armies (as signified by earlier instances in the novel). The garden then also becomes an extension of this life-generating realm, where the mother aids natural processes through the act of cultivation.

In this regard, cultivation is not predicated on a detached and impersonal appraisal of the garden as a space that needs improvement, but is instead based on the need to protect, nurture, and sustain the different vegetables and plants in the garden. Witnessing

his mother lavish the garden with love and care enables the protagonist to experience peace and quiet, bringing this experience almost close to the realm of the magical as seen in the following analogy “Ma reaches and bends, plucks and mends—the various inhabitants of her magic grove bowing to her every wish.” This analogy of the magical grove suggests how the protagonist and his mother experience (albeit momentarily) an alternate existence away from the horrors of war—which allows the protagonist and his mother to focus on the positivity and expectancy of life.

And the fact that the mother is the person in charge of the upkeep, cultivation, and nurturing of the plants—“my mother, all by herself [tends] to her creations”—points to how the maintenance of the garden enables her to exercise agency (even if in a limited manner). Agency here should not be understood as a domineering impulse (to control the garden), but as a restorative strategy that helps the mother hold onto a sense of order and stability to counter the war anarchy that consistently threatens her and her family. Functioning as a site of individual agency, the garden becomes an important psychological buffer for inhabitants, and provides “mechanisms of human survival...by instinctually appealing as a symbolic landscape of sustenance” (Helphand 6).

Building upon the notion of the garden as resistant space, we also find its importance as a site of reverential association, emotional identification, and healing as seen in *The Blind Man’s Garden*. The idea of reverential association indicates the ways in which the garden functions as a source of comfort and inspiration, especially for a character like Rohan (Mikal and Jeo’s aging father):

[Rohan] places his hand on a tree’s bark, as if transferring forbearance and spirit up into the creatures. He was the founder and the headmaster of a

school, and his affection for the tree lies in its links with scholarship.

Writing tablets have been made from its wood since antiquity [...]

Carrying his lantern he begins to walk to the house that stands at the very center of the garden.(Aslam 8)

This passage is significant in its reworking of the normative conception of the garden as a passive place of idyllic retreat, by instead presenting it as a space teeming with life, vigor and energy as seen in the Rohan's act of "transference of forbearance and spirit" to the trees in the garden, which links him and the trees at an elemental level and generates a symbiotic relationship between them. Moreover, Rohan values these trees for their significant contribution to scholarship, since their wood has been used since antiquity to make writing tablets, thereby adding a dimension of reverence to Rohan's interaction with these trees.

This idea of reverence for the trees, and the garden by extension, is also manifested in Rohan's choice of constructing his house in the middle of the garden, so that the garden becomes a central component of the layout of the house, as opposed to being relegated to a spatial periphery. Overall, "the garden [then]...has the capacity to both generate and absorb a multiplicity of mental associations" (Helphand 2), and continues to inspire and guide Rohan's endeavors in both his personal and professional life.

And though one cannot deny the importance of the garden as a material and architectural foundation for Rohan's house and school, it is also equally important as a self-sustained space, which characters are drawn to because of their emotional associations with it. Dealing with the pain of his wife's death, Rohan turns to the garden:

“The limes and the acacia trees seemed to mourn her, the rosewood and the Persian lilacs, the peepals and the corals [...] Inside the earth the roots mourned her even without having seen her [...] In grief, he had whispered her name as he walked [...] in the garden (Aslam 39). By indicating how the various flowers, plants, trees, and roots of the garden participate in Rohan’s grief and mourning for his wife, the text highlights the ways in which Rohan forms an intimate connection with the garden.

This intimate connection also becomes evident in the instance when Rohan starts going to the garden on account of the sleepless nights that he suffers because of his acute concern for his sons (Mikal and Jeo) who have run away to Afghanistan: “Night, and he walks in his garden, hands outstretched [...] He moves beside the night scent of flowers, feels on the bark the names Jeo and Mikal had scratched when they were children” (Aslam 147). In this instance the garden does not form a passive backdrop to Rohan’s troubled state of mind, but plays an active part in the process, whereby the sensory impact (of the scented air) and tactile experience (of feeling the tree bark scratched by his sons) of being in the garden helps Rohan to alleviate his fears about his sons.

Overall these examples allude to the importance of the garden as a place reminiscent of life events, evocative of the senses, emotions and feelings, such that characters’ lives are inextricably caught in the “social imaginary surrounding the place” (Junaid 177). And so, characters’ lives become intertwined with that of the garden, thereby turning it into a place of familiarity, nostalgia, catharsis and emotional association.

Adding another layer of complexity to the significance of the garden is its depiction as a place of healing for different individuals. A relevant example is the yearly visits of an old woman to the garden in hopes of seeking consolation and solace:

Once or twice a year [...] a woman visits the garden, her face ancient [...] as she approaches the rosewood tree and begins to pick and examine each fallen leaf [...] Many decades ago [...] she had discovered the name of God on a rosewood leaf, the green veins curving into scared calligraphy. She picks each small leaf now, hoping for the repetition of the miracle, holding it in her palms in a gesture identical to prayer [...] What need her search fulfills is not known. Perhaps healing had existed before wounds and bodies were created to be its recipient. (Aslam 25)

Maintaining the anonymity of the old woman, the narrative does not give any details about her life but only highlights her visits to the garden in hopes of re-living the miraculous phenomenon of the discovery of God's name on a rosewood leaf, and in doing so ensures a concerted focus on the garden as a place of marvels. The idea that the miracle appeared on a single rosewood leaf, and that the woman now also picks through each leaf individually, draws attention to the fact that a single and inconspicuous thing like a leaf becomes representative of God's existence, thereby positing nature as a source of spiritual rejuvenation. In this regard, it is not the veracity of the phenomenon that is important but the suggestion that the miraculous discovery or the "scared calligraphy" in the rosewood tree, brings about such a powerful affirmative impact on the woman's soul that she returns to the garden every year in hopes of healing. This power of the garden to

heal wounded bodies and souls acquires even greater significance during times of chaos, conflict, and turmoil.

A direct manifestation of the restorative power of the garden becomes evident in Mikal's reunion with his beloved Naheed, after facing months of struggle, strife, and danger in traversing the Afghan terrain to return home:

When he enters the garden [...] the next day he sees Naheed immediately. The grass is strewn with the red blooms of the gulmohar trees [...] holding onto light long after they are dead. She is at the opposite end of the garden. This is the other side of the wound. After the war and the violence and the madness of being inside pain, and the ugliness of intention and deed [...] What it means to be alive long enough to love someone. (Aslam 273)

This reunion does not merely invoke the garden as a convenient or passive backdrop to the characters' meeting, but instead posits the vitality and promise of the garden as complementing or enhancing the potency of this poignant and romantic moment, whereby Naheed stands amidst grass "strewn with the red blooms of the gulmohar trees." Analogized to the "other side of the wound" inflicted by war, the garden then becomes a space antithetical to the violence, madness, pain and ugliness of war, thereby making it a restorative site that serves as a material escape from the conflict, and has the potential to heal war victims (like Mikal) on the physical, psychological, and emotional levels. This is similar to Kenneth Helphand's argument that "gardens are familiar, comprehensible, sane, and pleasing [and] the sensory richness and pleasures of the garden contrast with the sensory repulsiveness of war" (17).

The emphasis on the garden as a space of stability, restoration, memory, and vitality in *The Collaborator* and *The Blind Man's Garden* establishes it as a place that counters the corrupting and sinister influences of militaristic conflict. Moreover, the novels rework the notion of the garden as an aesthetic yet fleeting visual that remains at the periphery of the narrative, and instead consciously incorporate the garden as a central structural component that is indispensable to plot progression, character exposition and thematic explication. In contrast to depictions of the terrain being battered by the physical and ideological violence of war, the novels emphasize how the garden remains a secluded, impervious and intact natural space.

Positioned as a structural, symbolic, and psychological safeguard in Waheed and Aslam's works, the garden emerges as a space of critical intervention which allows human beings to undergo catharsis, reflect on their perilous existence, strengthen their emotional bonds, seek respite from the deadly surroundings, and to exercise agency in different degrees. In doing so, *The Collaborator* and *The Blind Man's Garden* present the garden as a safe and enabling environment that gives readers key insights into character interiority. Furthermore, by allowing characters to exist as they *are*, the garden functions as a space of active resistance which counters the dehumanizing effects of war—by enabling humans to withstand emotional despair, by celebrating human perseverance and asserting the dignity of human and non-human life (Helphand 212).

A detailed discussion of the spatial appropriation, material transformation and vulnerability of the landscape in *The Blind Man's Garden* and *The Collaborator*, has revealed micro-and macro manifestations of ecological Othering during times of war. This phenomenon of Othering also involves the process of profiling the terrain as the

homeland or base for enemy factions, thereby generating reductive conceptions about the environment and rationalizing its indiscriminate destruction.

By underscoring issues of terrain encroachment, environmental exploitation, habitat destruction, and desecration of landscapes, the novels effectively showcase the insidious dimensions of environmental Othering, which employs targeted and aggressive geographical expropriation for militaristic utilitarianism. However, presenting a counterpoint to this argument, the novels depict gardens as spaces which offer material escape from war and help restore balance in the lives of different characters by functioning as a psychological buffer, and as a place of reverential association, emotional identification, and healing.

And so, *The Collaborator* and *The Blind Man's Garden* present a complex and nuanced depiction of the process of ecological Othering, to shed light on its insidious repercussions on natural spaces and non-human creatures. Aslam and Waheed make a concerted effort to remove and reclaim environments from the exceptional spaces of war—whereby they are only appraised in terms of their militaristic utilitarianism, rendered into inanimate spaces and hence denounced as ungrievable which is defined as “that [which] cannot be mourned because it never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all” (Butler 38). The novels expose and renounce the deceptive discursive practices of war that undermine the complexity of the environment and instead fetishize it for purposes of consumption. In doing so, Nadeem Aslam and Mirza Waheed exhort readers to recognize the importance of the inherent worth of the environment outside of the context of war and militant conflict.

CHAPTER 4. MILITARISTIC LEGACIES: PRECARITY, WAR TECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL WEAPONIZATION

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter the perpetuation of environmental Othering during times of war undercuts the biotic complexity of natural spaces and reduces them to signifiers of threat and danger that need to be secured, and dominated. As a result, the process of Othering brings about a concerted attempt to occupy and modify natural spaces through violence. The immediate effects of war then give way to legacies of its militaristic violence, wherein the modus operandi and technologies of war(s) continue to deplete the landscape by generating ecological precarity even after the dissolution of the conflict(s).

Explicating this issue, this chapter analyzes Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) to underscore how the overlapping aspects of war continue to act upon the environment in invasive and deleterious ways. Set in post 9/11 Afghanistan, the narrative probes the effects of invasive warfare on both the people and the terrain. The novel brings together four major characters from different walks of life—a British doctor who embraces Islam to marry an Afghan woman, a Russian woman who arrives in Afghanistan in search of her missing brother, a former CIA agent who struggles with his past experiences, and a young extremist—to depict the physical psychological and emotional repercussions of war across successive generations.

The novel is historically expansive in its outlook: “Though the novel’s present day, though, is the ‘civil war’ period, it also includes the takeover by the Taliban as well as the occupation by the Americans and British coalition following 9/11. The civil war in Afghanistan is ‘global’ in the sense that it is the product of many forces beyond Afghanistan itself” (Frawley 455). Linking together the seemingly disparate and distinct Soviet, British and American wars in Afghanistan, the novel “provides a sense of the ways in which all empires have functioned: by taking over space, by invading, by asserting control through brutality” (Frawley 448). The novel thus traces the genealogy of imperial warfare within the region, and depicts how war violence continues to consume bodies and the landscape, thereby indicating how the post in a post-war Afghanistan never arrives and instead remains an elusive idea.

Explicating the overlapping and accretive repercussions of global civil wars in Afghanistan, this chapter argues that militaristic violence engenders precarity within the region with the result that it becomes a permeant feature of the terrain. The concept builds upon Butler’s discussion of the enforced and unequal distribution of precarity²⁸, specifically in the in relation to the vulnerability imposed on certain populations and environments.

²⁸ “And yet, ‘precarity’ designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death. Such populations are at heightened risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection. Precarity also characterizes that politically induced condition of maximized vulnerability and exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection” (Butler ii). Judith Butler. “Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics.” *AIBR: Revista De Antropología Ibero Americana* 4.3 (2009): i-xiii. Print.

Examining the phenomenon of precarity within the war-torn landscape of Afghanistan, this chapter explicates the affective, managerial, and technological dimensions of war that destabilize and destroy life within the region. This precarity then gives way to an environmental metastasis whereby nature transforms into a weaponized space that actively decimates unwitting humans. Thus the legacies of militaristic violence transform the environment from a place of continual sustenance to one of enduring predation.

The Wasted Vigil shows how war introduces and intensifies ecological precarity. The term derives from Butler's conceptions of precariousness and precarity as explained by Janell Watson "precariousness [...] designates the corporeal vulnerability shared by all mortals including the privileged, but the term precarity [...] signifies the particular vulnerability imposed on the poor, the disenfranchised, and those endangered by war or natural disaster [...] Precariousness is shared by all; precarity is "distributed unequally" (Watson).

Building upon these ideas, ecological precarity focuses on how certain environments more than others are rendered more susceptible and permeable to harm in ways because of their designation as collateral damage of war. This is the dynamic in *The Wasted Vigil's* representation of the war ridden Afghan landscape. It is important to remember that precarity within Afghanistan emerges as a self-perpetuating and renewable phenomenon.

This phenomenon is not rigidly bound by temporal demarcations; with the effect that the inherent periodizations of past, present and future spillover, foreshadow and stalk each other (Puar xix), as seen in the depiction of how war only creates horrific new

realities but also exposes old realities (such as the 1970s war, American and Pakistani recruitment and training of 'jihadis', global networks supporting terrorism, international intervention in Afghan policy) that in turn perpetuate more acts of terror and violence.

Ecological precarity also encompasses issues of human precarity since humans are both perpetrators (armies and militias) and victims (civilian population) of militaristic violence inflicted upon nature during times of war. The novel depicts different dimensions of the phenomenon and highlights its impact, thereby showing how precarity becomes a permanent feature of human and non-human life in the region. Tracing this phenomenon, the chapter undertakes a critical reading of the novel to establish how war(s) generate ecological precarity through the following processes—the biotic paralysis caused by the politics of fear, the tactical harnessing of natural elements through environmentality and the chaotic wastefulness unleashed by technological assault. This precarity in turn gives way to a metastasis whereby the environment becomes a volatile hyper power that targets life itself, thereby pointing to the need for an in-depth exploration of this phenomenon .

The spatial and bodily dimensions of fear become portentously concretized in times of war as depicted in *The Wasted Vigil*. The death and destruction meted out by incessant wars in Afghanistan (including the Soviet war, American invasion and local infighting) results in the pervasiveness of fear that in turn shapes the environment and the bodies that reside within it. Fear in this instance works as part of an affective economy, as discussed by Sara Ahmed. In this economy, emotions work in “concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective” (Ahmed 119). The affective economy in the novel grows

around politics of fear, wherein fear manifests itself as a pervasive, enervating, mobilizing and distancing phenomenon which marks bodies and the environment in detrimental ways.

The omniscient narrator of the novel describes how the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 spread panic and anxiety among other countries which decided to undermine Soviet power by sending in their spies through Peshawar, a neighboring Pakistani city: “secret agents from around the world began to congregate in the Pakistani frontier city of Peshawar [...] The City of Flowers. The City of Grain [...] was transformed into a city filled with conjecture, with unprovable suspicions and frenzied distrust [...]it was one of the main trading centers linked to the Silk Road, and now the United States was sending arms into Afghanistan through there” (Aslam 111).

The retrospective perspective on the counter-insurgency sheds light on how the tactical and logistic planning of war substantially transforms Peshawar. Though the environment does not seem to be invoked directly in this passage the former titles of the place as the “the city of flowers” and “the city of grain” shows how nature is an essential part of the cultural imaginary around the city both as aesthetic component (flowers) and economic goods/ exchange (grain).

Due to its connections to the Silk Road, Peshawar served as a major trading hub within the region but war supplanted the passage of local produce with that of American weapons, thus converting the city into a “city filled with conjecture, with unprovable suspicions and frenzied distrust” (Aslam 111). War erases the eco-centric makeup of the city and instead converts it into a militaristic space which is characterized by varying degrees of fear as suggested by the words conjecture, suspicion and distrust. This process

follows the pattern identified by Ahmed: “fear works to create a sense of being overwhelmed [and] is intensified by the impossibility of containment” (Ahmed 124). This all-pervasive quality of fear subjugates the human and non-human elements within the city and gives rise to a frenzied anxiety on account of its omnipresence.

Fear does not only mark bodies and places on an external level, but it also becomes subsumed on an internal level with the effect that it impedes natural processes as observed by outside characters like Lara. She is a Russian woman who leaves her homeland and travels to Afghanistan to search for her lost brother, a soldier who disappeared during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. As an outsider Lara struggles to make sense of this stark and scarred landscape:

This land that Alexander the Great had passed through on his unicorn, an area of fabled orchards and thick mulberry forests, of pomegranates that appear in the border decorations of Persian manuscripts. [However now] no explanations are needed in this country. It would be no surprise if the trees and vines of Afghanistan suspended their growth one day, fearful that if their roots were to lengthen they might come into contact with a landmine buried nearby. (Aslam 6)

Recounting Lara’s adjustment to her unfamiliar surroundings, the narrative underscores the contradictory realities of Afghanistan. Given the rich history and the natural abundance of the region namely “its fabled orchards and thick mulberry forests” it has been a place of geopolitical importance (as evident from Alexander the Great’s passage through the region) and cultural import (as evident from its invocation in ancient Persian manuscripts). However, in the wake of war(s), the region has become torn by chaos, strife

and unpredictability as summed up succinctly by the phrase that “no explanations are needed in this country.”

The incessant onslaught of war has permanently scarred the region and left invisible yet insidious repercussions for the terrain as reflected in the prediction that the trees and vines of Afghanistan could suspend their growth one day “fearful that if their roots were to lengthen they might come into contact with a landmine buried nearby.” In this instance what is at work is the futurity of fear which is signified by an object, the landmine, and generates a reaction to that which is approaching rather than already here (Ahmed 125). Thus the unrealized yet palpable threat of landmine detonation shows how fear functions as an enervating phenomenon that suspends biotic processes as it threatens to annihilate and erase entire ecosystems.

The paralyzing effects of fear are contrasted by its mobilizing potential during the exceptional circumstances of war. The fear experienced by the American public in the wake of 9/11 was seized to gain support for an all-out war against the enemy country, namely Afghanistan, that was identified as the country which served as a base for the terrorists of 9/11 attacks. Alluding to the fallout of war, *The Wasted Vigil* describes the American army exterminates the terrorists within the Afghan mountain ranges and prior to its departure buries debris from the World Trade tower in the mountains:

The mountain range looms above the house. On those quartz and feldspar heights at the end of 2001, American soldiers had ceremoniously buried a piece of debris taken from the ruins of the World Trade Center, after the terrorists up there had been slaughtered or been made to flee. Before these

soldiers flew out to attack Afghanistan, the U.S. secretary of defense told them they had been ‘commissioned by history’. (Aslam 27)

The panic and anxiety experienced by Americans in the wake of 9/11 attacks was soon co-opted within narratives of patriotism and defense of the American homeland through the extermination of the enemy namely the Afghan Taliban. The swift invasion, occupation and decimation of Afghan people and the terrain shows how fear functions as a mobilizing phenomenon that manages to activate latent impulses (of preservation through retribution) of a national collective, that is the American public in this case. The process recalls Rachel Pain’s observation that “fear is viewed as driving political actions, as well as being used and affected by them; ‘responses’ to terrorism such as the [...] invasion by the USA and its allies are driven by powerful emotions and the overwhelming desire to exert control in response to them” (470).

Mobilized into action and indiscriminate aggression by the attack on the homeland, the American army seeks to completely obliterate its enemy in order to send a strong message about their resilience in the face of tragedy, and it buries the debris as a reminder about its might. The piece of debris then comes to signify territorial conquest as an expression of love for the nation (patriotism) whereby one is “with others” and “against other others” (Ahmed 129).

As an extension the mobilizing power of fear (namely the human slaughter and symbolic burial) intersperses nature into the war narrative by transforming the mountains from a local natural feature to a symbol of American hegemonic power, thereby showing how “the rite of internment is affective, signaling retribution [...] and the act of territorial

violation – what might be taken as an implantation of symbolic US soil into that of a conquered Afghanistan” (Flannery 300).

As seen in Aslam’s work during times of war and chaos, fear intensifies and also turns inward where it is projected on those within who are termed as a threat, thereby creating a distancing effect between bodies. After assuming control of the region, the Taliban ban girls’ education, restrict women’s mobility, prohibit them from working, force women to observe strict purdah and corporeally punish (in the form of public whipping or worse) those that do not abide by the rules. As a parallel nature is also rendered vulnerable under the rule of the fundamentalists as seen in the instance where trees considered sacred for the Hindu minority within the city are viciously attacked and mutilated (Aslam 133). Underlying this brutality and hatred for nature and women is the fear that they are potent threats or challenges to the Taliban rule.

Fear in this situation creates demarcating and distancing effects, in that it does not bring bodies together but works to differentiate between bodies. Such differentiation in turn can lead to a declaration of crisis that then acquires a life of its own, and eventually becomes the grounds for declarations of war against that which is read as the source of the threat (Ahmed 126-32). Thus fear is used to negatively differentiate women and nature and to denounce them as deviant, disruptive and ultimately dangerous threats to the myopic, regressive and religio-patriarchal narratives of the Taliban. In turn, the fundamentalists rework fear to declare a state of crisis (against their rule) and justify the violation and subjugation of women and nature.

A discussion of the affective dimensions of fear gives us an insight into the politics of fear as it comes to define, divide and degrade both humans and the terrain,

such that it becomes an indelible part of Afghanistan which comes to be known as “a land whose geology [is] fear instead of rock, where you [breathe] terror not air” (Aslam 178). This fear comes to permanently reside within the land as a debilitating and terrorizing force that continues to contribute to ecological precarity in the war torn region.

As noted earlier another dimension of ecological precarity is the process of environmentality. Governmentality refers to the process by which previously untapped natural elements are being opened and exploited in the interests of militarization²⁹ (Lemke 8), thereby making them an integral part of the economy of war. Thus governmentality acts on the environment to systematically modify its variables and rather than enabling a standardization, these environmental shifts produce variables that are constantly in flux (De Mel 148). And though governmentality conventionally alludes to the control exuded by the state,³⁰ the onset of war widens this phenomenon to include non-state actors such as militant combatants and even civilians who seek to co-opt and

²⁹ This definition applies Lekme’s conception of governmentality in a capitalist context to a militarist paradigm.

³⁰ Governmentality conventionally relates to what Foucault called the “art of government” (Foucault 1991), which emphasizes the multiplicity and widely dispersed “forms of government” that sought to reorder the relations between ‘economy’, ‘resources’ and ‘citizens’. The art of government also includes, on the one hand, the *making* of the modern rational subject and, on the other hand, the intensified regulation of the relation of these subjects to their natural territory. These productive relations of government—with their emphasis on “knowing” and “clarifying” one’s relationship to nature and the environment as mediated through new institutions—are termed as *eco-governmentality*. (Michael Goldman. "Constructing an Environmental State: Eco-governmentality and other Transnational Practices of a 'Green' World Bank." *Social Problems* 48.4 (2001): 499-523). For application of the concept in fields of political ecology, geography, climate change and security studies see Arun Agrawal. *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects*.(Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. Print); Bruce Braun. "Producing Vertical Territory: Geology and Governmentality in Late Victorian Canada." *Cultural Geographies* 7.1 (2000): 7-46. Print; Eric Darier. "Foucault and the Environment: An Introduction." *Discourses of the Environment* (1999): 1-33. Print; Sebastian Malette. "Foucault for the Next Century: Eco-governmentality." *A Foucault for the 21st century: Governmentality, Biopolitics and Discipline in the New Millennium*. (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009: 221-239. Print); Thomas Lemke. "Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique." *Rethinking Marxism* 14.3 (2002): 49-64. Print.

harness the power of the environment as tactical leverage for war. This is similar to de Mel's observation that a new phase of biopolitics has emerged in which the civilian sphere is annexed by the military and that civilians are paramilitarized to the extent that the opposition between civil and military no longer holds (De Mel 148-9).

The process becomes more pronounced, deliberate and sustained during war as shown in *The Wasted Vigil* wherein different actors seek to systematically modify environmental variables such as fruits, food products and animals so that they can act as vessels or tools of war. A local example includes Afghan fruit vendors injecting poison into the oranges, melons and pomegranates that they sold Soviet soldiers (Aslam 69), which draws attention to the ways that the local population resisted Soviet occupation through engagement in guerilla war tactics.

The agency in this case is equally reliant on the action and the intended object, namely the fruits. In a similar vein, the novel gives us insights into Casa's training at a jihadi camp where he would extract cyanide from apricots, distill it and inject it into the bodies of creatures (Aslam 89). Both these instances depict how manipulation of the fruits' chemical composition transforms them from sources of nourishment to that of annihilation. In addition, these instances show that the fruits are no longer just another component of the landscape but in fact potent death traps that are directed at other living beings.

This modification of environmental variables then produces crises constituted by their anytime anywhere potential, thereby pointing to a consequence of environmentality (De Mel 148). The crisis in this case becomes the immanent and imminent assault on non-human life which the novel shows as occurring in different spaces—ranging from

open habitats where ancient flight patterns of birds are displaced by the constant presence of missiles and warplanes to the hidden spaces of jihadi camps that slaughter horses and sheep for training purposes. By violently displacing and killing animals, war tactics disrupt natural spaces, create an imbalance in existing ecosystem(s) and render non-human creatures vulnerable.

The spatial and symbolic encroachment of war then isolates and targets elements within nature as material for its execution and continuation³¹. The deliberate singling out of non-human beings gives way to a crisis of ecological assault, which seeks to erase the embodiment of animals and biota and reduces them to (unintended and intended) war casualties. Moreover, the dispersed and uninterrupted aspects of the process engender its ‘anytime anywhere potential’ (De Mel) as it diminishes the worth and agency of nonhuman life.

The assault on non-human life is accompanied by the rational management of nature, which according to Thomas Luke is another dimension of environmentality (58). Luke’s ideas can be extended to the realm of the war whereby the drive to manage, and harness nature becomes an important war strategy. The management of natural spaces then brings about an enforced “separation of organisms from their environments” (Luke 63) as seen in *The Wasted Vigil* where animals become subsumed into war zone, such as the process through which the demoiselle cranes that originally live on lakes but are captured to serve as watch guards in a Pakistani madrassa (Aslam 182). In other instances

³¹ “Nature, which once meant an independent space clearly demarcated from the social with an independent power to act and regulated by autonomous laws, increasingly becomes the “environment” of a [militarized] system” (Lemke 8). Thomas Lemke. "Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique." *Rethinking Marxism* 14.3 (2002): 49-64. Print.

the kidnapping of jackals, lynx, and hare for laboratory experiments in al-Qaeda training camps ending with the animals' death in gas chambers (Aslam 301).

It is to be noted that while the madrassa does not outwardly seem a militarized space, it does provide the ideological and logistic support to terrorist factions of like that of al-Qaeda, thereby designating it as a key participant and proponent (of religiously-coded) war in the region. Serving as the logistic and material fronts for war, the madrassa and the al-Qaeda camp rely equally on human and natural power for their functioning. The decision to capture and retain cranes, jackals, lynx, and hare in service of these places involves a careful selection of animals based on their usefulness and easy availability. This selection is followed by the animals' capture from the environment, which in turn represents the invasive and totalized aspects of the production of geo-power as it validates the indiscriminate pillaging of nature for its specific interests.

In contrast to the modification of natural elements, these particular examples show how nature is instrumentalized to acquire knowledge. Knowledge becomes an important part of geo power and the animals in both cases serve as conduits to knowledge—with the cranes functioning as a form of undetected surveillance mechanism and the lynx, jackals, and hares rendered as passive receptacles or expelled bodies that are exterminated in the quest for refining methods of warfare. The chosen instances show that while the insertion of natural bodies into the machinery of war is seen as a necessary step for of the generation of geo-power and eco-knowledge (Luke 58), it ultimately reduces the environment to an expendable commodity used to sustain the economies of war.

The concept of eco-knowledge or information acquisition also gets increasingly transformed into tactical arsenal that can be deployed against one's enemies, as seen in *The Wasted Vigil's* reference to climate engineering as the next modus operandi of war. While chasing terrorists across the Afghan terrain, David, an American CIA agent, notices the darkening skies and wonders if it is a natural shift in weather patterns or if it is an artificially introduced change:

The cloud is thickening above David as though someone wishes to hinder his progress by hiding his surroundings from him [...] there's barely a landmark for him as he drives toward Usha [...] Cloud cover and fog banks are to be some of the weapons the United States plans to use in the wars of the future, a summoning of hailstorms and lightning strikes against the enemy on the ground, the owning of the weather. (Aslam 302)

The description of David's journey points out the challenges of navigating the vast terrain (of Afghanistan) which appears homogeneous or undifferentiated to an outsider like David who can barely detect a landmark as he drives through it. The situation is compounded by the challenges posed by the weather, as it gets increasingly menacing thereby hindering David's progress. Using temporal juxtaposition (of the immediate present and the near future) the text alerts us how knowledge acquisition about nature is now being geared towards climate engineering, thereby conflating the environment with securitization: "Cloud cover and fog banks are to be some of the weapons the United States plans to use in the wars of the future, a summoning of hailstorms and lightning strikes against the enemy on the ground, the owning of the weather" (Aslam 302).

The ability to generate cloud cover, fog banks, and hailstorms would enable the US army (and others) to easily exterminate entire populations and ecosystems within a span of few days, thereby accelerating the annihilative capabilities of war. The link between climate engineering and war also alerts us to the ways that environmentality works to entrap nature such that it can be disassembled, recombined, and subjected to the disciplinary designs of management (Luke 65). By doing so the process of environmentality not only manages nature, but actively works to seize, securitize and control it for militaristic purposes.

This is similar to Jacob Hamblin's observation about the increasing partnerships between scientists and military to figure out large-scale alterations to the natural world which would represent the next stage of warfare wherein "the enemy might undertake a vast engineering project to change the climate of a whole region leading gradually to economic ruin and loss of strength, without ever having to declare war" (138).

The modification, management and manipulation of nature creates instability for the land as well as its human and nonhuman inhabitants. This instability is compounded by the simultaneous process of mechanized assault wherein war technologies convert the environment and civilians of an opponent country into discounted casualties, thereby pointing to how ecological precarity is intertwined with human precarity. Paying careful attention to the deployment and detonation of war technologies shows the different dimensions of precarity.

A crucial precedent to the deployment process is acquiring extensive information about the configuration, composition and penetrability of the selected terrain. Depicting this process of information acquisition, the novel gives an insight into the operation

carried out by a Special Forces officer, James Palantine and his team members. Working in tandem with the U.S Army to defeat the Taliban, this team is charged with the responsibility of infiltrating territory and acquiring information about Taliban bases:

Under cover of darkness, James Palantine had been dropped with three other Special Forces soldiers onto the saw tooth ridges of Afghanistan and left to fend for himself [...] The war to punish and destroy the theocratic tyranny of the Taliban and al-Qaeda was under way around them as his team moved back and forth through the icy moonscape of the mountains [...] he did not lose focus for a single moment, sleeping on snow, on sleet or cold rock [...] Teams like his were the eyes and ears of this air assault. As sensitive as wild animals to their environment, noticing the smallest changes in the surroundings, they prowled deep inside hostile territory, in the vicinity of airports, forts, and enemy troop concentrations. He would use an infra-red laser to ‘paint’ a target on the ground and, his voice crackling into the cockpit three, four, or five miles above him, tell the crew of the warplane to send bombs down onto it. (Aslam 239)

Though the novel presents other narrative instances of the terrain being searched and examined for the purposes of launching assault, this passage is important in highlighting the environmentally invasive dimensions of search operations. The passage gives a step-by-step breakdown of the reconnaissance operation meant to survey the terrain and identify Taliban hideouts, without engaging in direct combat with the enemy faction. Dropped off in the “icy moonscape of the mountains,” the Special Forces team endures the extreme weather and treks through the challenging terrain in search of their intended

targets. The Special Forces soldiers then become an extension of the war technology (i.e. warplanes) thereby showing how “the art of using men and weapons to win battles, generates machine-like assemblages when, instead of concentrating all information processing at the top, it lowers decision-making thresholds, granting soldiers and officers local responsibility” (De Landa 83).

The decision making abilities of the soldiers necessitates that the soldiers become extremely alert and sensitive to the changes in the surroundings by almost morphing into “wild animals” and showing their adaptability. In this instance, however, adaptability is not used with the intent of becoming part of the terrain but rather to symbolically take it apart by scouting the terrain for “airports, forts, and enemy troop concentrations” that can be wiped out as part of the war operations.

This kind of operation sets in a place an insidious rationalizing impulse where the landscape is emptied of its vitality and instead comes to be seen as an extension of the sterile structures of functionality, such as “airports, forts and enemy troop concentrations.” This transformation has negative and far-reaching implications since it invalidates the inherent value of nature (to exist) and instead designates it as a politicized space, as seen in the Special Forces’ infra-red marking of the ground, signaling its impending obliteration through bombing by warplanes. The deployment of war technologies reinforces the idea of the environment as a targetable singularity to be obliterated. And though the Taliban hideouts are the primary targets of this mission, it cannot be ruled out that innocent bystanders are also wiped out as a result of this operation, thus drawing attention to the destructive repercussions of the rationalizing logic of technology.

In addition to exposing the deleterious outcomes of the operational logic of war technologies, *The Wasted Vigil* provides detailed insights into the aftermath of technological detonation. The frequency of these instances also points to the impunity with which war generates long-term havoc that remains unseen and unaddressed. “Public debate is overdue on war’s hidden human and environmental costs, a debate that acknowledges major shifts in the ways that contemporary wars kill” (Nixon 200). Recognizing the need to highlight the human and ecological fallout of wars, Nadeem Aslam de-glorifies war by countering the idea of its finality and pointing instead to the chaotic wastefulness that it unleashes through successive technological assaults. Here it is also important to note that while the use of technologies might have occurred in previous wars, it continues to impact human and non-human lives in the region thus reminding us of the lingering longevity of war.

The novel’s de-glorification entails a careful dismantling of the distancing effect, spectacular instantaneity and deceptive discourse surrounding smart technology, in order to expose the annihilative impact of these killing machines. The concept of distance is integral to the functioning of war technologies since being removed from the immediate spatial context of the battleground allows pilots and the operators to carry out their jobs without ever having to encounter the consequences of their decisions i.e. condemning people to unexpected and ghastly deaths. An example of the distancing effect of technologies can be seen in the textual reference to the air assaults carried out by Soviet military on a refugee camp in order to wipe out enemy combatants:

The Soviet military would be carrying out an air attack on a refugee camp
[...] The refugee camps of Peshawar were the hub of the anti-Soviet

guerillas, where commanders and warriors came to regroup and recuperate after fighting the Soviet Army in Afghanistan. Tested beyond endurance, the Soviets had violated air space to bomb the camps many times before—and that afternoon they would be doing it again [...] The place was of course a furnace, smoke issuing from it in enraged billows as though demons had been set free by the bombing. All paths to the part of the camps [...] were impassable, row upon row of burning homes. (Aslam 127)

This passage offers insight into the spatial politics of war by pointing to how human settlements are converted into spaces of camouflage, recruitment and reorganization for purposes of combat, specifically guerilla warfare. This spatial transformation not only changes the make-up of the population but also indelible marks the space as a militaristic target, as seen in the chosen example above, in which the Soviet forces decide to invade and bomb a refugee camp since it has turned into a central hub of anti-Soviet guerillas and warriors.

This is not an isolated instance. In the passage quoted above, the narrative informs us that—“tested beyond endurance, the Soviets had violated air space to bomb the camps many times before—and that afternoon they would be doing it again,” pointing to the incessant invasiveness of Soviet army as it literally bludgeons the people and terrain into submission. Driven by the singular purpose of destroying the Afghan warriors, the Soviet military proceeds to wipe out entire settlements like the refugee camp, without any moral concern for the innocent civilian lives lost in the process.

Of course, what helps with this process is the distancing effect of technology that offers a “numbing emotional distance between the trigger act of killing and the earthly consequences below” (Nixon 220) thereby removing the Soviet pilots from the immediate context of the targeted site, that is the refugee camp, and shielding them from witnessing the carnage that they are primarily responsible for. The distance between the pilot and his invisible victims also functions as an extension of the geographical distance between imperial metropolis and invisible colony (Nixon 220), thereby pointing to the inherent power imbalances of a war waged by an imperial power, like Russia, to colonize an underdeveloped and defenseless country like Afghanistan.

The attacks add only to the vulnerability of the region, by viciously exterminating an entire settlement and inflicting more suffering upon the people. The bombing converts the once-safe haven into “a furnace [with] smoke issuing from it in enraged billows as though demons had been set free by the bombing” and forces civilians to become a part of the same war that they had run away from. The images of burning rows of home, smoking furnace, enraged billows and demons invoke an apocalyptic scenario to denote the unimaginable pain and agony inflicted upon the people.

By employing this imagery, Aslam counters the distancing logic of technology by bombarding us with its harrowing aftermath, and highlights the corporeality of the victims that otherwise appear as meaningless dots on the screens of war machine(s). Moreover, the visual mapping of noncombatants as distant mobile or stationary targets dehumanizes them and denies them their right to life, and in turn empowers the operators of war technologies to dispense death and violence without any moral misgivings. The destruction that is inflicted upon war ridden countries, such as Afghanistan in this case,

however continues to endanger the people and the surrounding landscape for years to come, regardless whether or when the war ends.

Another aspect that continues to obfuscate the human and environmental costs of technology is the unilateral projection of its spectacular instantaneity. The aestheticizing representation of spectacular instantaneity reconfigures perceptions about war technologies, since they come to be seen as positive indicators of prowess and progress during war. The sheer scale and speed of the technologies also pitches the spectacle of detonation as a “multi-sensory event worth watching” (Bakogianni 2). Exploring the concept of spectacular instantaneity of war, *The Wasted Vigil* recounts the David, a CIA agent’s experiences of being caught in the middle of a massive explosion in an Afghan market:

The ground falls away from his feet and a light as hard as the sun in a mirror fills his vision. The tar on a part of the road below him has caught fire [...] The explosion has created static and a spark leaps from his thumb towards a smoking fragment of metal flying past him. Then he is on the ground. Beside him has landed a child’s wooden leg, in flames [...] A woman in a burka on fire crosses his vision. (Aslam 54)

This description is important in making readers think about the politics of the spectacular instantaneity, given that “war can never break free from the magical spectacle because its very purpose is to *produce* that spectacle: to fell the enemy is not as much to capture as to ‘captivate’ him, to instill the fear of death before he actually dies” (Virilio 5). This observation about the purposeful production of the spectacle as a means of captivating and intimidating the enemy can also be applied to civilians, who are also consistently

targeted as part of the *modus operandi* of war. Building upon this idea, this passage points to how the hypnotic finiteness of the spectacle of war betrays its ground impact on the bodies and spaces that it engulfs.

The explosion causes the ground to shake and overwhelms people with a “light as hard as the sun.” The all-too familiar simile of the sun relays the intensity of the explosion, and draws attention to the ways that the war technologies are naturalized within military discourse, as seen in the case of weapons of mass destruction which are linked to the harnessing power of the sun, while their radioactive products are depicted as no less dangerous than the sun (DeLoughrey 236). The discourse of naturalization detracts from the annihilative potency of weapons by presenting them as more powerful extension of pre-existing natural symbols, thereby clouding people’s perceptions about them.

Countering the obfuscating discourses around technologies, Aslam subverts the spectacular instantaneousness of the explosion by depicting the anarchic violence that follows in its aftermath as seen in the references to the charged air, the flying metal, dismembered body parts and burning people that litter the ground after the explosion. By linguistically embedding the minute, jarring and gory details of the destabilizing violence of the explosion the narrative refuses to let readers remove or detangle themselves from the heinous repercussions of war, and thereby undercuts the voyeurism or pleasure that is associated with viewing the spectacle (of weaponry). Dismantling the aestheticizing and transfixing dimensions of the spectacle of war Aslam underscores the ways in which the spectacle gives way to slow, catastrophic, and mostly unresolved violence of deterred

effects (Nixon 221), thereby exposing and critiquing the annihilative potential that undergirds the spectacular instantaneity of technology.

A critical reflection on the fallout of technology also requires an explication of the deceptive discourse surrounding unmanned combat technology such as drones and missiles. The discourse employs strategies of appropriation and euphemisms to emphasize the efficiency, intelligence and accuracy of unmanned aerial vehicles and to emphasize their minimum collateral impact. By doing so, such technology is promoted as a low-risk, low-cost and effective way of waging war in order to generate public support for its use. *The Wasted Vigil* dismantles the deceptive discourse around such smart technologies by highlighting their problematic politics and complicating ideas about their efficacy.

The carefully constructed discourse around smart technology (like drones and missiles) works to market them as a necessary and strategic war option(s). This discourse employs variety of methods for this purpose, one of them being the process of appropriation given that names of the weapons are drawn from pre-existing cultural markers. Aslam alludes to this practice by pointing out that the American missiles that invade the Afghan region and claim lives with impunity have names derived from the Native American culture: “The missiles that landed were named Tomahawk [...] Comanche and Apache and Chinook. First the Americans exterminate the Indians, then name their weapons and warplanes after them” (Aslam 159).

Providing a historical context to the naming process, the narrative informs us that the names of the missiles such as Tomahawk, Comanche and Apache and Chinook are based on the names of Native American tribes and weapons (specifically the Tomahawk).

These names refer to the American Indian wars that entailed multiple, brutal battles between the indigenous people of North America and the colonial settlers and United States government from the time of the colonial settlement until 1890. Though the indigenous tribes put up great resistance during the wars they were outflanked by the technological prowess of the colonial settlers who ended up massacring thousands of indigenous people and usurping their land and resources.

As a result, indigenous people were expelled from their homes and forced into a marginalized existence, to this day, as is well-known. Alluding to this traumatic history, the narrative offers a casual observation about how the Americans first exterminated the Indians, then named their weapons and warplanes after them. This casual and offhanded tone of the remark alerts readers to the implicit irony of the situation whereby American weapons ends up memorializing the same people that were brutally massacred during the originary stages of American expansionism. This memorialization however is not meant to be a form of commiseration or commemoration of the indigenous people, but a form of appropriation wherein the names invoke the bravery and resilience of the indigenous people during the brutal wars *but* recast it as a positive identification marker for the missiles.

The ideological conflation between violence and those violated points to the insidious politics of war rhetoric as it anthropomorphizes weapons in order to ensure their use as seen in the narrative references to the numerous missiles (Tomahawk, Comanche, Apache and Chinook) that invade the landscape. Pointing out the militaristic use of a variety of missiles to hunt down people in Afghanistan the novel also points to the commerce of war which increases the demand for weapons. And while the American

military-industrial complex earns billions of dollars through weapons sales, the process outsources death and destruction to discredited countries like Afghanistan which are populated, poisoned and persecuted by such war technologies as alluded to in *The Wasted Vigil*.

Another way in which technological discourse underscores the superiority of modern weaponry is through the use of linguistic euphemisms, whereby unmanned aerial vehicles such as drones are touted as symbols of smart wars. The novel gives an insight into the process by which drones collect intelligence to identify targets and subsequently exterminate them:

There is a faint continuous rumble from the sky above the street. An unmanned Predator drone collecting intelligence on behalf of the CIA [...] calling down a missile strike on a hiding place of insurgents. The information that selects the targets isn't always without its faults [...] In Usha at the end of 2001, the house of the warlord Nabi Khan was reduced to rubble from the air, everything and everyone inside a hundred-yard radius was charred, but later it turned out that he had not been in the vicinity. His rival, Gul Rasool, had lied to the Americans just to see the building decimated. (Aslam 51)

The novel gives us an insight into how smart weapons such as drones and missiles are integral to the process of covert warfare as seen in the narrative reference to the predator drone's continuous monitoring and surveillance of the landscape to collect key information. The information is then used to activate missiles by directing them to the intended target, such as the insurgent hideout in this case. The stealthy subterfuge and

data-processing capabilities of these weapons represents the next stage of evolution whereby smart weapons act as extensions of a continent wide electronic war which ensures total visibility, cuts through distance and natural obstacles, and makes military commanders clairvoyant, since response time is substantially shortened by the technological processes of foresight and anticipation (Virilio 77). This total visibility coupled with dramatically shorter response time enables surgical strikes such as the one waged by the American military against the warlord Nabi Khan that reduces his house to rubble.

The instance of decimation of the warlord's house however does not limit the scope of the violence since the text informs readers that the air "everything and everyone inside a hundred-yard radius was charred." The spatially dispersed effects of the missile strikes show how countless other innocent lives are casually exterminated and effaced as part of the attack thereby challenging the veracity of discourse around smart warfare by pointing to the imprecision of current technologies.

Moreover, the additional discoveries that Nabi Khan survived the attack and that American army was fed false information about him provides more evidence about the imprecision of smart warfare which is otherwise lauded as an accelerating series of technological upgrades that not only promise more marvels than the last but exhibit a morally exact intelligence (Nixon 207). Negating the idea of the "enhanced ethical potency" (Nixon 207) of these war technologies, Aslam instead points to the ways that smart warfare is prone to error, misdirection and misjudgment, and establishes the moral ambiguity of these advanced technologies that consume other innocent lives in their predatory quests.

A detailed textual analysis of the detonation and impact of technologies across the Afghan landscape helps complicate popular notions about war weaponry as representing human advancement and/or the mitigation of war casualties. *The Wasted Vigil* critically explicates the distancing effect, spectacular instantaneity and deceptive discourse surrounding smart technology, in order to expose its pernicious politics and to highlight its annihilative impact. In doing so, the narrative provides a counter discourse to the sanitized representation and marketing of these machines by the military-industrial complex.

It is also to be remembered that the deleterious outcomes of these machines outlive the moment of their impact—war technologies do not only decimate humans and non-human beings, but also mutilate, maim and endanger life in permanent ways (as seen in the textual moments discussed above). What is even sadder in the case of countries like Afghanistan is that war batters a country that has already suffered through countless military campaigns and is extremely vulnerable on the socioeconomic and political fronts. “Afghanistan’s economy is in a shambles. In fact, the problem for an invading army is that Afghanistan has no conventional coordinates or signposts to plot on a military map [...] Farms have been turned into mass graves. The countryside is littered with land mines—10 million is the most recent estimate. The UN estimates that there are eight million Afghan citizens who need emergency aid” (Roy 333). These dismal and depressing facts about life in the region show how military invasions, such as the post-9/11 American operation, only add to the insecurity and instability of everyday existence in an acutely under-developed country.

Due to the continuous militaristic campaigns and civil wars, the country remains torn by strife, suffering and chaos. The land and the people of Afghanistan become collateral damage as they are massacred, mutilated and poisoned by militant conflicts, thereby pointing to precarity of their existence. This precarity denotes maximized vulnerability and exposure to violence and other forms of aggression engendered by war against which states do not offer adequate protection (Butler *Performativity, Politics and Precarity* 2). Explicating the phenomenon through affective, managerial and technological dimensions, *The Wasted Vigil* enables reader to see its pernicious repercussions for both humans and nature in Afghanistan.

The spatiotemporal buildup of the phenomenon then gives way to environmental metastasis whereby the aberrant changes in the form and function of the environment impede life in varying degrees. One of the manifestations of this process is the emergence of environmental weaponization that is discussed in *The Wasted Vigil*. The novel depicts how the intensifying onslaught of war(s) on Afghanistan engenders environmental weaponization that has delayed and deadly implications for humanity. As a result, nature transforms into an armed power that threatens life itself and is characterized by volatile unpredictability, silent predation, non-selectivity and active retribution.

The belated effects of war transform the environment into a weaponized zone that is marked by volatile unpredictability. Interweaving and camouflaging technologies of killing with the natural elements heightens the potency of a weaponized environment that can be activated with the slightest stimuli thereby contributing to its volatile unpredictability. As an extension, the volatility makes it extremely hard for humans

living amongst this weaponized environment to anticipate and evade its life-threatening potency, as seen in *The Wasted Vigil*.

One such instance relates to Casa, a militia member who is forced to travel alone through the unknown terrain after being abandoned by his faction and eventually stumbles across a grove of acacia trees laced with weapons such as daggers and guns. It is only the accidental sound of the moving daggers that warns Casa of the imminent danger:

He hears a small sweet-edged noise [...] like metal coming into contact with something, giving a small ring. A blade or iron nail. He becomes still and parts his lips slightly—a hunter’s trick to increase the sharpness of hearing [...] He switches on his flashlight [and sees] the gun pointed at him in the high grass and weeds [...] They are flintlock guns [...] concealed in the foliage. He identifies the tripwire stretching across his path [...] The entire grove is crisscrossed by these lengths of wire [...] He looks up with the beam [and] sees the dagger hanging from a cord fifteen feet above him, gently swaying. There are others, dozens of them, and they flash in the canopies. (Aslam 105)

Caught unaware in a dangerous area, Casa resorts to an old hunting trick to sharpen his hearing in order to detect the density and distribution of weapons in the woods. This reference to the recourse to hunting skills also denotes a shift in the conception of nature since in this case the woods no longer remain a welcoming space, but turns into a death trap forcing humans into their flight or fight mode. Casa in this situation switches to the flight mode whereby he proceeds to further investigate the area in order to escape it

unharméd. Using his flashlight to survey the area he discovers that the woods are rigged with manual and automatic weapons, namely daggers and flintlock guns. While the daggers hang from cords from the tree branches, the flintlock guns are connected through tripwires and concealed within the grass, thereby pointing to how the natural area has been transformed into a weaponized area that could easily exterminate any living being.

The volatility of the place is unleashed when Casa tries to run away and instead trips over a crosswire that sets off a hidden landmine. There is a blinding explosion which tears off skin and tissue from Casa's skull and makes the dry grass burst into flames headed toward him. Though Casa barely escapes, his body is wounded and disfigured as a result of the incident, thereby becoming an effective (if unwilling) marker of the volatile unpredictability of the weaponized earth which can kill, maim and mutilate humans at will.

The text reinforces the idea of volatile unpredictability in another context to underscore the sprawling reach of the process. The novel recounts how the proximity of weapons warehouses to residential areas ends up endangering the lives of civilians:

The United States had given about one thousand Stinger missiles to Pakistan, in October 1986, to be passed onto Afghan guerillas [...] Two Afghans were arrested in Pakistan for attempting to sell Stingers to representatives of the Iranian government [...] This led to a United States investigation [...] the ISI, its alleged corruption and duplicity, about to be exposed, set fire to the massive warehouse with the result that \$100 million worth of rockets and missiles had rained down on the surrounding

area, killing an estimated thousand people and maiming countless others for life. (Aslam 157)

On a cursory reading this event is meant to be a critique of the duplicity and corruption of the Pakistani military intelligence, ISI that stockpiles American missiles meant for Afghan guerillas and instead sells them for profit to the Iranian government (a staunch US opponent). Fearful of being exposed for their double-handed dealings in an upcoming US audit, the ISI proceeds sets fire to the massive warehouse and destroys ammunition worth \$100 million that ends up killing thousand people. This tragic incident however is not just an insight into the profiteering aspects of war but also a commentary on the how the economies of war influence built-environments in deleterious ways, as seen in the textual account of how setting the weapons warehouse on fire caused rockets and missiles to rain down “on the surrounding area, killing an estimated thousand people and maiming countless others for life.”

The analogy of rain is an effective reminder of how a natural process linked to growth and regeneration instead becomes conflated with the militaristic aims of death by design. In this instance it is also important to note that the tragedy occurs despite the purported claims of the safety protocols followed for missiles and rockets storage, thereby showing that the concentrated presence of ammunition in the region gives way to a highly charged weaponized environment.

Thus both textual instances show how troubling modification schemes affect the earth by generating instability, with the result that the earth’s potential energy can be unleashed against humans who are relatively powerless in the face of enormous energies of nature (Hamblin 160). Such a modified environment is a charged environment which

is always on the precipice of activation and regardless of the intentionality behind its activation, the volatile unpredictability of this weaponized environment will target all life forms around it and generate catastrophic changes on a permanent basis.

In addition to its cataclysm workings, the weaponized environment is also characterized by active predation, which refers to the ways that nature starts to consume human beings and in doing so transforms into a formidable threat to life itself. Building upon this concept, *The Wasted Vigil* underscores how the continued co-optation of abiotic ecological factors (specifically air) as modes of transmission for war technologies converts the environment into a predatory space that terrorizes people and targets them in stealthy ways.

Charting the history of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the text informs readers how the Soviet army used chemical weapons as part of its warfare strategy to intimidate and force the Afghan people into submission: “One year soon after the Soviet Army invaded, the air [...] turned yellow, thick billows of the color arriving on the breeze, falling from the sky, every heart fearful at the sight because there had been reports of attacks with chemical weapons” (Aslam 314). The description of the covert chemical attack effectively captures the horror, and panic that spreads amongst the public upon its discovery.

In this instance it needs to be noted that the choice to release chemicals into the atmosphere is a deliberate one, whereby air currents are made to function as carriers for dispersing and maximizing the toxicity as seen in the text’s reference to the permeability of the chemical munitions: “the air turned yellow [with] thick billows of the color arriving on the breeze, falling from the sky.” The aerial dispersal of the chemicals also

enables the Soviets to navigate “the rough, mountainous and difficult terrain of Afghanistan [and to terrorize] the civilian population that is also resisting, if only passively, the occupation of their country” (Schwartzstein 270). Thus the conversion of the air into a large-scale chemical carrier marks its weaponization and alludes to the terror that it spreads amongst people.

The weaponized environment then actively preys on humans as shown in the narrative reference to a young victim of chemical warfare who is in a critical state and has to be treated by an Afghan doctor. At her house: “A patient was brought to the house [...], the victim of a Soviet chemical weapon [...] his body already rotting when he was discovered in a field an hour after the attack, his fingers still looped with the rosary he had been holding. He must have been in unimaginable pain” (Aslam 13). The text provides us with details about the attack wherein the young man, who was praying at the time, was caught unaware in a chemical attack. Given that the chemicals were distributed through the air (a preferred Soviet war tactic) this dispersal marks environmental weaponization and its silent predation.

The relationship between environment and humans indelibly changes from that of dwelling-dweller to one of predator-prey, thereby marking a shift from natural symbiosis to aberration. The aberration then results in a biotic imbalance where the environment marks people as prey and silently strikes them with deadly force. Moreover, in contrast to the conventional patterns of predation wherein prey organisms develop anti-predator mechanisms to help them escape detection and ward off predators, humans remain unaware of their marked state (till it is too late) and are defenseless against the weaponized environment. The environment then strikes with silent yet deadly force as

evident in the text's description of the young man's body which starts rotting within an hour of coming into contact with the toxic air. The weaponized air literally consumes the body of its intended victim, thereby marking a symbolic merging of the victim with its agent of extermination, i.e. the toxic environment.

It is also important to note that in this instance the aerial dispersal of the toxins also causes them to come into contact with the fields, thereby causing the earth to absorb the toxic substances with the result that the radioactive elements deposited into water supplies and soils will be absorbed by plants and the bone tissues of humans (DeLoughrey 244). This deposition and successive absorption of the radioactive elements shows the unmitigated and far-reaching power of the weaponized environment that will continue to consume human bodies in covert and invisible ways, beyond the immediate frame of a singular or isolated attack³².

Armed nature thus continues to target and destroy all living beings, thereby pointing to its characteristics of non-selectivity. This indicates that the weaponized land does not distinguish between those guilty of perpetrating environmental damage (such as military or militia factions) and those bearing the brunt of it (like civilians). Instead it seeks to destroy all living beings, thereby adding to the vulnerability of marginalized

³² The Soviet army has been charged for using mustard or nerve agents against the Afghan population. The United States asserts that at least 3137 Afghans have been killed due to the chemical warfare. For detailed study of the repercussions of chemical warfare see Lloyd Williams and Arthur Westing. "Yellow Rain' and the New Threat of Chemical Warfare." *Ambio* (1983): 239-244. Print. For additional discussions on the issue see: Anthony H. Cordesman, and Abraham R. Wagner. *The Lessons of Modern War*. (Colorado: Westview, 1999. Print); Benjamin A. Valentino. *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2013. Print); Joseph J. Collins. "The Soviet-Afghan war: The First Four Years." *Parameters* 14.2 (1984): 49-57. *ProQuest*. Web. 26 Mar. 2016.

segments of the population, a fact reiterated through the experiences of a young woman named Zameen whose life is increasingly threatened within her own war-torn country.

The narrative gives us an insight into her thoughts as she travels with a group of refugees all trying to seek shelter in the neighboring country of Pakistan: “In their own country the land wanted to strike them dead and so did the sky, and everyone wanted to get to a refugee camp in Pakistan where their suffering would come to an end at last” (Aslam 254). Zameen’s interiority helps us acutely realize the dangers posed by a weaponized environment which is bent upon exterminating local people, thereby forcing them to abandon their homes, and migrate to other places for safety and shelter. The weaponized environment thus becomes a part of the traumatic memories of the Afghan populace already suffering due to the destabilizing effects of war.

Extending the scope of the trauma generated by the armed environment, the narrative shows how this trauma manifests on the physiological level(s) by explicating how the Soviet’ army’s premeditated choice to deploys cluster mines has deadly ramifications for Afghan children:

The Soviets had designed them especially for use in the war. Made of green plastic and shaped like a butterfly, with a wing to allow them to spin to earth slowly. Things designed to attract children. They fell from the air into houses and streets and the result was meant to encourage parents to vacate a village [...] These villages harbored guerillas [...] The butterflies would blow off a foot or a hand and half a face, maiming rather than killing, though the long distance which had to be traversed to reach a

medical facility would ensure that the victim died of blood loss, gangrene or simple shock. (Aslam 254)

Ensnared within deceptive designs of butterflies, the Soviet cluster mines flutter through the air to lure unsuspecting children who can easily be annihilated on contact. As a result, this tactic spreads fear, panic and anxiety amongst the children's parents who are forced to vacate their villages which harbor guerrillas, thereby weakening local resistance to the Soviet forces. Spinning through the air, the cluster mines appear as butterflies to the unassuming children, and become a structural marker of the camouflage employed by armed nature to strike through deception.

The subsequent description of the dismembering, debilitating and deadly violence inflicted on the children's bodies reaffirms how the weaponized environment continues to seek retribution in an unselective manner. Furthermore, armed nature continues to generate long-term instability and chaos across the region thereby alluding to how "armies move one [and] despots may be deposed, but environmental mayhem outlives regime change" (Nixon 231).

Discussions of the far-reaching and unremitting predation of an armed environment offers segue to the issue of active retribution. The instrumentalization and weaponization of the environment generates a backlash wherein it seeks to exact retribution for its incremental violation during war. One powerful example of environmental violation, is the act of planting landmines as discussed in *The Wasted Vigil*. Landmines are explosive devices concealed within in the ground and act as defensive barriers and area-denial weapons. "The landmine [is] used for many reasons: to instill fear in soldiers, to protect anti-tank mines, as a general hindrance and to slow down

attacks [...] The presence of just a handful of mines was enough to render a huge area unsafe. Landmines were a constant and unseen threat” (Monin and Gallimore 63).

Though planting landmines is easy and quick process, removing them is a costly and time consuming procedure due to which landmines remain entrenched in the land after the cessation of war, and continue to endanger local population as depicted in *The Wasted Vigil*. The novel explicates the ways in which the presence of the landmines continues to alter, arm, and adulterate the earth³³. As a result, the weaponized terrain actively seeks retribution for the irrevocable harm inflicted on it. The retributive dimensions of a weaponized environment are interweaved throughout the narrative, whereby in a war-torn country like Afghanistan where people are not only threatened by other humans but are also by a weaponized environment bent on retribution.

A relevant example is the reference to landmine planation in a local poetry book, discovered by Lara, the Russian woman visiting Afghanistan (in search of her brother): “Opening the book on the floor she began to read, sitting chin-on-knee beside it. “Tell the earth thieves/ To plant no more orchards of death/Beneath this star of ours/ Or the fruit will eat them up”” (Aslam 12). Confrontational and belligerent in tone, the poem directly addresses those who harm the landscape by planting landmines and warns them of severe consequences if they continue their actions.

The placement of this poem in the novel’s introduction is also meant to highlight how weaponization marks the landscape in such permanent and pervasive ways that it

³³ For detailed case study of the ecological repercussions of landmines such as access denial, loss of biodiversity, micro-relief disruption, chemical contamination, and loss of productivity see A.A. Berhe. “The Contribution of Landmines to Land Degradation.” *Land Degradation & Development* 18.1 (2007): 1-15. Print.

becomes recorded as part of the literary history of the region. The metaphors of earth thieves and plantations of death in the poem accentuate the ways that nature is exploited, wronged and estranged into a threatening space that starts to exact retribution from humans as signified by the phrase the “fruit will eat them up.”

The concept of retribution extends from the metaphorical to the material realm as indicated through the reference to the accidental deaths of al-Qaeda fighters due to landmines. The text explains that as part of their militant training, new recruits had to plant landmines in an area and then return to the same area some time later to retrace the location of the weapon itself: “[They] had practiced laying minefields [...] As the procedure allowed no carelessness, everything was mapped out beforehand with precise coordinates: a few days later [they] would have to come back and find the mines as part of the training. An inattentive [...] warrior could be killed by a mine he had laid himself’ (Aslam 182).

An explication of the practices at a militant camp establish how an integral part of combat preparation is gaining expertise in handling and deploying weapons, specifically landmines. The process of laying landmines requires the fighter to acquire specialized knowledge of the area through techniques of mapping and calculation. However, following the implantation the fighter has to return to the same area and using his memory traverse it without setting off the mines. The slightest mistake or inattentiveness in traversing the weaponized terrain can result in an untimely and grotesque end to a fighter’s life.

This untimely end then becomes proof of the active potency of the armed environment, which seeks retribution from those that have infiltrated and violated it for

the utilitarian purposes of militarism. The instant extermination of the training fighters then also echoes the metaphorical warning about the severe punishments that will be meted out to those who plant orchards of death (as seen in earlier discussion of a local poem).

The armed environment becomes a potent threat to life itself as it actively seeks revenge on all living creatures in its domain. The weaponized environment brings about an acute crisis in everyday living whereby “whole provinces inhabit a twilight realm in which life remains semimilitarized [...] and in which the earth itself must be treated with permanent suspicion, as armed and dangerous” (Nixon 227). Living amongst this militarized situation means that people’s lives are defined, dictated and constrained by the constant fear of becoming the victim of an armed and vengeful landscape, as seen in the textual depictions.

The narrative offers one such example through its focus on the interiority of a young Afghan boy named Bihzad as he ruminates on the deathly fear of having to walk in an area not checked for landmines. “He feels as though his heart is clamped in someone’s fist [...] He experiences [...] dread whenever he is in an area not swept for landmines—wanting always to pull his shadow closer to him, thinking the weight of it is enough to set of whatever death-dealing device is hidden there” (Aslam 50).

The insight into Bihzad’s thoughts allows readers to see how his fear is linked too survival which is constantly threatened by the presence of landmines, specifically those that lay undiscovered within the post-war Afghan land. The fear is so potent and pervasive that even when Bihzad is in safe and familiar ground, he feels the deadly pull of the landmine. The fear of traversing an uncombed landmine area then paralyzes

Bihzad on a psycho-emotive level, thereby pointing to the crisis engendered by a weaponized environment.

This crisis does not only remain limited to merely an individual but comes to encompass and effect the entire community. Keeping in view that large tracts of a poor country like Afghanistan remain unmined, the only way of dealing with the crisis is to inform and educate local people about the potent threats of weaponized landscape, as seen in the text's reference to the erection of a "large signboard that shows the public how to recognize different landmines" (Aslam 44).

Thus in the post-war context, people have to cultivate vigilance and watchfulness to grapple with the crisis engendered by a retributive armed environment. However, despite such vigilance, the armed terrain continues to wound, disable and destroy countless lives across the planet: "The scale of landmine pollution remains forbidding: 100 million unexploded mines lie inches beneath our planet's skin. Each year they kill 24,000 civilians and maim many times that number. They kill and maim on behalf of wars that ended long ago; [...] spreading social and environmental havoc" (Nixon 222).

Through its depiction of the unremitting assaults by armed natural spaces, *The Wasted Vigil* offers a powerful depiction of the environmental mayhem unleashed by the legacies of war. Furthermore, by underscoring the environmental destruction and aberrations that are caused by military operations Aslam also draws attention to the ways that the deliberate dismissal of the intrinsic worth of the natural world is used to justify its subsequent degradation. "To degrade is to reduce in rank or diminish in capacity or value [...] Degradation disables, disfigures, diminishes, or is contemptuous of the elements of a being that grounds respect" (Card 29). The novel encourages the idea of respecting the

sanctity of the environment as a network of “living systems [which] possess a certain internal unity and integrity” (Card 35), thereby foregrounding an environmental ethics. And as an extension, the narrative shows how the continued devaluation and debasement of the environment harms it to such an extreme extent that it starts to exact revenge for its violation.

Overall, a detailed explication of the nexus of the precarity, war technology and ecological weaponization exhorts readers to reflect on the ecological metastasis being engendered by war, that if not addressed in a timely fashion could permanently transform the entire earth into a toxic hyper power: “If we continue to glorify poisonous weapons of fake precision [...] We will face an unbounded war, as the planet itself [turns] into a combatant: the ultimate, toxic hyper power, a force of random, abiding retribution [...] No homeland can be secure if we convert the earth into a biological weapon that threatens biology itself” (Nixon 232). By poignantly and potently reminding us of the environmental and chemical perils that await humanity if it continues to wage war against nature, *The Wasted Vigil* serves as a powerful indictment of the ideological and tactical practices of invasive militaristic violence.

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VITA

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Dissertation: Violence, Militarism and the Environment in Contemporary South Asian Literature (May 2016)

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Minor: Women and Gender Studies Certificate, 2013.

M.A. English (Distinction), 2009

Kinnaird College, Lahore, Pakistan

Thesis: Exploring Parallel Realities: Magical Realism in Timothy Findley's *The Pilgrim*.

B.A. English (Distinction), 2007

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Thesis: Search for the Self in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.

ACADEMIC AWARDS AND HONORS

Fulbright PhD Fellowship, US Department of Education, 2011-present.

Honor List for Academic Distinction in M.A. English Literature, Kinnaird College, 2009.

Angoori Award for Highest GPA in B.A. Humanities, Kinnaird College, 2007.

PUBLICATIONS

"Children of Ravaged Worlds: Exploring Environmentalism in Paolo Bacigalupi's *Ship Breaker* and Cameron Stracher's *The Water Wars*." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 22.2 (Spring 2015): 203-221.

"Persecution vs. Protection: Examining the Pernicious Politics of Environmental Conservation in *The Hungry Tide*." *South Asian Review* 36.2 (2015): 107-120.

UNDER CONSIDERATION

“Arthurian Eco-conquest: Tracing the Once and Future of a King’s Natural and Martial Imperialism.” (Under consideration for an upcoming issue of *Parergon*)

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

“Environmental Weaponization and Trauma in Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil*.” Northeast Modern Language Association 2016 Annual Convention. Hartford, Connecticut. 17-20 March, 2016.

“Territorial Dominion and Natural Appropriation in *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *Alliterative Morte Arthur*.” Indiana Medieval Graduate Consortium 2016. Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana. March 4-5 March, 2016.

“No sir! Na janaab! Ehtesaab bas ehtesaab!": Pakistani Popular Music as Resistance." South Asian Literary Association Annual Conference. Austin, Texas. 5-6 January, 2016.

“War and Re-imagined Landscape in post-9/11 Afghanistan.” 24th Annual British Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies Conference. Savannah, Georgia. 13-14 February, 2015.

“Militaristic Warfare and Environmental Othering in Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator* and Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden*.” South Atlantic Modern Language Association, 86th Annual Conference. Atlanta, Georgia. 7-9 November, 2014.

“Marginalized Bodies and the Politics of Respectability in Shoaib Mansoor’s *Bol*.” 43rd Annual Conference on South Asia. Madison, Wisconsin. 17-19 October, 2014.

“Strategic Visuality in Daniel Defoe’s *Captain Singleton*.” Early Atlantic Studies Colloquium. Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana. 11-12 April, 2014.

“Un-Naming the Environment: Disfixation of Representation in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*.” Northeast Modern Language Association 2014 Annual Convention. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. 3-6 April, 2014.

“Urban Space and Terroristic Simmerings: The City Remapped in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Uzma Aslam Khan's *Trespassing*.” South Asian Literary Association Annual Conference. Chicago. 8-9 January, 2014.

“We Voice as Stylistic Innovation in Julie Otsuka's *The Buddha in the Attic*.” Fifth Biannual Conference, Reception Study Society. Milwaukee, Wisconsin. 27-28 September, 2013.

“Children of Ravaged Worlds: Exploring Environmentalism in Paolo Bacigalupi's *ShipBreaker* and Cameron Stracher's *The Water Wars*.” Interdisciplinary Graduate Program Spring Reception. Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana. 4 April, 2012.

DEPARTMENTAL TALKS

“Ecocritical Perspectives on Colonial Development in Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve*” for Eng 366: Postcolonial Literatures, Dr. Aparajita Sagar. Purdue University, February 2016.

“Fantasy and Defamiliarization in Diana Wynne Jones’ *Howl’s Moving Castle*” for Eng 301: Ways of Reading, Dr. Derek Pacheco. Purdue University, November 2015.

“Gender Performance and Subversive Temporality in Charles Perrault’s *Sleeping Beauty*” for Eng 301: Ways of Reading, Dr. Derek Pacheco. Purdue University, October 2015.

“Adolescent Agency and Dystopian Literature” for Eng 106: Introductory Composition—Composing Through Literature, Arielle McKee. Purdue University, October 2015.

“Structuralism: An Overview” for Eng 301: Ways of Reading, Dr. Derek Pacheco. Purdue University, September 2015.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Beaconhouse School System, Lahore, Pakistan
Teacher (Senior School), English Language and Literature, 2009-2011.

Kinnaird College, Lahore, Pakistan
Teaching Assistant, Department of English, Spring 2009.

SERVICE

Project Manager. Leadership Program Proposal. Asian Pacific American Caucus (APAC), Purdue University, 2016.

Mentor. TECH 120 Final Project, Purdue University, 2015.

Evaluator. Oral English Proficiency Student Presentations, Purdue University, 2015.

Guest Lecturer. Asian Pacific American Caucus (APAC) Film Series: Like Stars on Earth, Purdue University, 2014.

Editor. *Johar Journal*, Beaconhouse School, 2009-2011.

Advisor. Debate Society, Beaconhouse School, 2009.-

Coordinator. Undergraduate Admissions Committee, Department of English, Kinnaird College, 2006.

Co-Editor. *The Last Word*, Kinnaird College, 2004-2005.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Modern Language Association (MLA)

South Asian Literary Association (SALA)

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