

RUINS AND REMAINS: URBAN WASTE, DECAY, AND SUBALTERN MEMORY IN PAKISTANI ANGLOPHONE FICTION

Dr. Shahid Imtiaz

HOD English Department,

Riphah International University Gulberg Campus Lahore

Email id: shahid.imtiaz@riphah.edu.pk

Saira Rauf

Riphah International University, Lahore

Email id: saira.rauf@riphah.edu.pk

Shahid Iqbal

PhD scholar, Department of English,

Lincoln University College, Malaysia

Nazish Jabeen

APS(Boys & Girls) Walton Cantt

Email id: naazijabeen@mail.com

ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is on the tropes of urban waste, material decay and infrastructural ruin in Pakistani Anglophone fiction, where the detritus serves as a material unconscious that encodes colonial extraction, postcolonial developmental failure and the subaltern survival. However, postcolonial critical engagement with the category of waste as a source of text material in South Asian urban contexts is limited and needs to be developed in the Pakistani context. This study aims to fill this void by examining the ways in which the relics of garbage, decaying architecture and body-waste are used to describe the affective and political economy of urban exclusion in the city of Karachi, Lahore and urban Punjab. The theoretical framework brings together the concepts theorized by Timothy Morton (hyper-object theory), Achille Mbembe (necro-politics) and Asef Bayat (quiet encroachment of the ordinary). Thematically, the study draws on material culture analysis and ecocritical close reading that focus on the process of colonial and postcolonial dispossession as temporal palimpsest of the text, classed boundary-marker that segregates formal and informal urban spaces, and subaltern resource that is reconceived by the waste-picker as economic and mnemonic capital. The analysis shows how Pakistani urban fiction not only presents an agentive force that speaks from the margin, but also acts as a witness to structural violence, and an agent of local resistance, making it a poetics of remainder that speaks after planned obsolescence and postcolonial ecocriticism.

KEYWORDS: Pakistani urban fiction, material decay, waste studies, subaltern urbanism, postcolonial ecocriticism, necropolitics.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Pakistani city is a paradoxical place of modernist dreams and infrastructural failure, of gated communities and open sewers, of a formal economy that is overshadowed by an informal economy processing the city's waste. The Pakistani city – and particularly Karachi, with more than 15 million residents – is a place of contradictory urbanism: modernist aspirations and infrastructural collapse, gated communities and open sewers, a formal economy shadowed by an informal one that deals with the city's waste. This material contradiction has not left the imagination of Pakistani Anglophone novelists behind who appear to have increasingly been focusing on the central theme and form of urban waste, decay, and ruin. However, the critical tools for reading waste are still not developed in the emerging field of post colonial literary studies, especially when it comes to the study of the waste of South Asian urban fiction.

This article suggests that the waste in the Pakistani Anglophone fiction is not only a setting of urban squalor, but also a dynamic narrative actor—a “material unconscious” that encodes multiple histories of colonial extraction, postcolonial developmental failures and subaltern survival. This study shows with the help of a corpus of three novels *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Muhammad Hanif (2011), *Home Boy* by H. M. Naqvi (2009), and *The Scatter Here Is Too Great* by Bilal Tanweer (2013), how textual waste works as a temporal palimpsest, as a classed boundary-marker, and as a subaltern resource. In this way, it manifests a developing interdisciplinary dialogue between postcolonial studies and waste studies and stays within the particular material and political context of Pakistani urbanism.

The importance of this research is that it takes a stand against two critical tendencies. First, it does not fall into the trap of postcolonial urban fiction being reduced to ‘narratives of development’, those that either celebrate or denounce modernisation but neglect the material particularities of urban decay (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010). Secondly, it inquires into the parochialism of South Asian literary criticism that prefers to see the rural or pastoral as the true site of postcolonial identity, while the urban is treated as a place of “corruption” or “Westernization. Secondly, it raises a challenge against the parochialism of South Asian

literary criticism that considers the rural or pastoral as the legitimate site of postcolonial identity while treating the urban as a place of mere corruption or Westernization. As Pablo Mukherjee suggests, the urban margins of the developing world are places "where, to a nearly unprecedented extent, the historical condition of unevenness is felt and lived as a toxic environmental condition—as the condition of postcoloniality itself" (Mukherjee, 2010, p. 58). This article begins with Mukherjee's insight, maintaining that Pakistani urban fiction provides an aesthetic tool to the city that is as much material as it is toxic.

The research questions for this study are as follows: (1) How Pakistani Anglophone novelists portray urban waste and material decay as tropes in their narratives? (2) How do these texts use waste as a political and aesthetic practice and which theory best explains this use? (3) In what ways can waste be a representation of subaltern memory and resistance in the context of structural violence? The study is conducted with the structure of IMRaD which includes literature review, methodology, analysis, discussion, and conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Postcolonial Ecocriticism and the Urban Turn

The field of post-colonial studies and the field of ecocriticism have created an exciting body of work that looks at the effects of the colonial or neocolonial extractive practices on the environment in the global South. The field was set up by Huggan and Tiffin's landmark *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010), which showed the way in which postcolonial literary texts challenge the cause of development in the West and in which ecological imperialism is linked with racial and species hierarchies. It is important that their work is being postcolonial, with the important proviso that the subject of postcolonialism is colonialism, and that the environmental practices of the colonizing and colonized societies must be understood in terms of their colonial/imperial foundations (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010, p. 7).

But as Rob Nixon writes in his groundbreaking *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), most of the environmental criticism has gone for spectacular, visible violence, omitting from consideration what Nixon calls the "attritional lethality" of slow violence, namely the gradual, often unseen degradation of environments and bodies that now characterize postcolonial urban existence. Nixon's idea of "slow violence" is especially relevant in the context of Pakistani urban fiction, which is characterized by the presence of waste, the decay of infrastructure, and toxic exposures, not as major or catastrophic events, but as a condition of everyday existence. Slow violence does indeed make ecosystems and the poor, disempowered, and often involuntarily displaced more vulnerable, and intensifies social conflicts that emerge from desperation as life-sustaining conditions fail to hold (Nixon, 2011, p. 2).

The city and urban dimension of postcolonial ecocriticism has also been further developed within the framework of writings about "imperial debris," the material and psychological residue of colonial power that persists in postcolonial environments. In her edited collection *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (2013), Ann Laura Stoler turns the critical gaze from ruins as proof of the past to "ruination" as an ever-present process of imperial power inhabiting the present. Stoler's framework is particularly fruitful for reading the writings of urban fiction in Pakistan, allowing for the analysis of the colonial infrastructure (railways, cantonments, sewage systems) that continue to frame Pakistan's contemporary urban space while also rotting away and bringing about "the toxic but less perceptible corrosions and violent accruals of colonial aftermaths" (Stoler, 2013, p. 9).

2.2 Waste Studies: From Matter Out of Place to Vibrant Matter

The theoretical underpinning of waste reading in literary texts has been based on two large interdisciplinary discourses. Firstly, the anthropological and sociological tradition that began with *Purity and Danger* (1966) by Mary Douglas, which identifies dirt as "matter out of place"—not as part of the inherent nature of objects but as a created state of objects. The idea that "dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements" has been expanded upon by waste studies scholars, who study how waste is created as an inevitable byproduct of a system of values (Douglas, 1966, p. 44). This conceptual tool sheds light into the postcolonial environment, revealing how colonial and postcolonial regimes of order generate populations and spaces as 'waste', inconsequential, devalued, and excluded from the body politic.

Second, the "new materialism" or "vibrant matter" school, with its most recent expression in the book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010) authored by Jane Bennett, questions anthropocentric notions: it theorizes "the active participation of nonhuman forces in events. Bennett believes in a "vital materiality" that courses through humane and nonhumane bodies, and for him, agency "always emerges as the effect of ad hoc configurations of human and nonhuman forces" (p. vii). This structure is important as a way to understand the reading of waste not as a passive background but as an active agent that influences the possible narrative, the agency of the characters, and political imagination in Pakistani fiction.

2.3 Necropolitics and Subaltern Urbanism

"Necropolitics" is a term coined by Achille Mbembe in his 2003 essay and expanded upon in his 2019 book of the same name, whose general idea is that sovereignty is exercised through the space of "death-worlds"—where populations are made throwaway. For Mbembe, the concept of biopower is inadequate for explaining current forms of life's subjugation to the power of death, and he advances the concept of 'necropower': a form of sovereignty that manages mortality (Mbembe, 2003, p. 39;

Mbembe, 2019, p. 66). Necropolitics brings to light the construction of certain urban spaces in Pakistan as expendable spaces in which life is devalued through the explicit action of the state and parastatal actors in urban informal settlements, waste dumps, and industrial zones.

This is a concept developed by Asef Bayat, 1997, *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran*, which I want to expand on. Asef Bayat's concept of the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" describes "the silent, protracted, but pervasive advancement of the ordinary people on the propertied, powerful, or the public, in order to survive and improve their lives" (Bayat, 1997, p. 46). While Bayat's framework is vital to understand how subaltern urban populations not only are victims of structural violence, they are also subjects who reclaim, rework and resignify waste. As Bayat makes clear, these practices are "non-ideological and necessity driven, but they can also be effective offensive maneuvers in order to defend incremental gains" (Bayat, 1997, p. 10).

3. Theoretical Framework

In the present study, four strands of theory are brought together as a holistic analytical framework to look at waste, decay and infrastructural ruin in Pakistani Anglophone fiction.

Postcolonial Ecocriticism offers the basic orientation, embedding environmental degradation in the histories of colonial and neocolonial extraction. This strand of writing draws on the work of Huggan and Tiffin (2010), Nixon (2011) and Stoler (2013) to focus on the representation of environmental harm as structurally produced rather than incidentally produced, and the "slow violence" of the attritional degradation of urban infrastructures and bodies.

Waste Studies and New Materialism provide the conceptual frameworks for theorizing waste beyond the systemic metaphor. The concept of dirt as 'matter out of place' (Mary Douglas, 1966) allows for an examination of how a colonial and postcolonial regimes of order creates expendable populations and spaces. The "vibrant matter" theory of Jane Bennett (2010) argues against anthropocentric readings, and instead considers waste as an active, agentive force that influences possible narratives and character agency. The notion of hyperobjects, as developed by Timothy Morton (2013) entities that are "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans", adds another dimension to how the accumulation of urban wastes—whether they be landfills, contaminated waterways or decaying infrastructure—defy individual understanding and create what Morton termed an "oppressive claustrophobic horror of actually being inside it".

The term necropolitics as theorized by Achille Mbembe (2003, 2019) captures the role of sovereign power in the creation of what he calls "death-worlds" or urban spaces in which populations are made disposable and in which life is devalued. This strand sheds light on the structural violence that makes informal settlements, waste dumps, and industrial areas areas of expendability.

To correct the necropolitical fatalism, Subaltern Urbanism is based on Asef Bayat's (1997) concept of "quiet encroachment of the ordinary," which documents the process by which subaltern populations reclaim, reappropriate, and resignify waste as economic and mnemonic capital. This strand does not allow subaltern actors to be treated as victims of structural violence, but sees them as agents of change in the material world.

When combined, these four theoretical dimensions allow a more subtle discussion of the representation of waste as an element of structural violence while also being a tool for subaltern agency in Pakistani Anglophone fiction. The structure is intentionally interdisciplinary, combining perspectives from literary studies, anthropology, urban studies and political theory to reflect the multivalent character of waste as social object, material reality, political status and narrative metaphor.

4. Methodology

The study uses a qualitative interpretive method of ecocritical close reading of literary texts combined with material culture analysis in order to explore the portrayal of urban waste, decay and infrastructural ruin in Pakistani Anglophone fiction. Nonetheless, the emphasis is on the analysis of the material debris as a literary and political category, rather than as an empirical or quantitative variable. The study is carried out on a purposive sample of three novels namely H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* (2009), Muhammad Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) and Bilal Tanweer's *The Scatter Here Is Too Great* (2013) which have strong focus on city, material decay and postcolonial urban Pakistan.

First, textual evidence for waste, debris, decay, and informal material practices are identified; second, systematic coding of the identified instances is done into three analytical categories, namely, the temporal palimpsest, the classed boundary-marker, and the subaltern resource; and third, interpretive synthesis is carried out under specific theoretical lenses such as postcolonial ecocriticism, necropolitics, new materialism, and subaltern urbanism. Readers use a comparative reading approach to recognize similarities and differences between texts and stay focused on the differences in urban and narrative settings.

Each interpretation is based on very close attention to the text with support from the engagement with scholarly literature. This study is non-experimental in nature because no human subjects and no field data were involved in the study.

5. Analysis

5.1 Waste as Temporal Palimpsest: Layering Colonial and Postcolonial Dispossession

In *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, Muhammad Hanif creates the Sacred Heart Hospital as a site of multiple temporal layers of violence in the material environment. The hospital itself is a colonial era institution; its architecture characterized by "the high

ceilings and cracked marble floors of a building that had once been proud but was now resigned to its decline" (Hanif, 2011, p. 12). When the ceilings leak, the windows are broken and the equipment is rusted, the physical deterioration is a material documentation of the shift from colonial modernity to colonial neglect. Joseph Bhatti, Alice's father and a municipal sweeper, represents this layering of time, and his work is the cleaning up of "the shit of the very people who had built the systems that kept him at the bottom" (Hanif, 2011, p. 1). In his waste he deals not only with modern trash but also with all the refuse of a social system that has been around since the period of colonial and postcolonial rule.

Alice finds piles of old medical records, X-rays of patients long dead, surgical instruments that are rusted and jars of formaldehyde containing unidentifiable organs floating like forgotten planets in the hospital's basement (Hanif, 2011, p. 89), the novel's most evocative use of waste as temporal palimpsest. This collection of medical waste serves as a repository of "imperial debris" (Stoler, 2013, p. 9)—traces that "mark the fragility of power and the force of destruction" and at the same time "encode alternative senses of history" (p. 9). The basement is not just a storage room, it is a "death-world" according to Mbembe: a space in which the necropolitical logic of the hospital comes into being as a material condition. The presence of the "unidentifiable organs" in formaldehyde and the "patients long dead" extend the violence of the subaltern to the future proliferating generations.

H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* is also a temporal palimpsest, but with a spatial paper-folding that takes place simultaneously in Karachi and NYC. Chuck (Shehzad) remanences the childhood memories of Karachi recalling images of material decay, the uncompleted construction sites where rebar sticks had been protruding from concrete like the ribs of prehistoric beasts, open sewers in the neighborhood that carried the city's secrets to the sea (Naqvi, 2009, p. 34). These images become what Rob Nixon calls "slow violence" – the attritional or slow decay of urban environments which encode histories of disinvestment and abandonment. The "prehistoric beasts" metaphor references a deeper temporal level as if the ruins of the city go back to a primal past, while the "city's secrets" suggests that there is narrative memory in waste that is not included into the official histories.

In New York, Chuck finds himself in a new regime of waste: one governed by the logic of global capitalism and not by postcolonial state failure. In this post-9/11 city, the image of "sudden, spectacular waste" is the debris of the Twin Towers, the discarded belongings of detained immigrants, the "mountains of garbage that accumulated in the streets during the sanitation workers' strike" (Naqvi, 2009, p. 156). But Naqvi argues that there is continuity between the two waste regimes, as the "war on terror" perpetuates the idea of dispensability that governed the urbanization of Karachi. The way Chuck's property is treated by police – they took my books, my clothes, my carefully compiled collection of jazz CDs, into black garbage bags as if my life were trash – signifies the de/subjecting of the Muslim immigrant body to garbage (Naqvi, 2009, p. 201).

In the case of Bilal Tanweer's *The Scatter Here Is Too Great* perhaps the most formally innovative use of waste as temporal palimpsest is provided. The novel's framework in which the nine stories all converge on the bomb blast, anticipates the way that urban debris is often scattered and fragmented. The railway station where the blast takes place is described as "a building that was once grand, in British times, and had high arches and polished floors, but is now a shell, black with soot, and full of people who have nowhere else to go" (Tanweer, 2013, p. 45). The decay of the station reflects the shift from colonial infrastructure to the postcolonial overload, and the "soot" refers to the pollution that has built up over all these years.

The bomb blast itself creates a new layer of waste – body parts, broken glass, bends in metal, etc. – which is on top of the previous material decay. This new waste is a temporal condensation in the driver of the ambulance, Akbar, who collects the dead and the injured, "who saw in the faces of the dead the faces of all the dead he had ever known: his grandfather, who had died in the partition riots; his uncle, killed in the war of 1971; the neighbor's son, shot dead by the police during a strike" (Tanweer, 2013, p. 112). The waste of the blast is here medium of historical memory, tying current violence to the greater phenomenon of Pakistani history.

5.2 Waste as Classed Boundary-Marker: Segregating Formal and Informal Urban Spaces

This section centers on waste as a classed boundary-marker which segregates formal and informal urban spaces. Waste is used as a key way of signifying and sustaining class divisions in the urban terrain in each of the three novels. In *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, the city is literally divided between Joseph Bhatti cleaning up the "public" spaces (the streets, government buildings, hospitals) and his family living in a "Christian colony", on the outskirts of the city, with "the municipal dump, the sewage treatment plant and the abattoir" (Hanif, 2011, p. 23) nearby. This configuration echoes Frantz Fanon's conception of the colonial city's basic structure: "the colonist's sector is a sector of lights and paved roads, where all the trash cans overflow constantly with strange and wonderful garbage; the colonized's sector is a famished sector, hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal, and light" (Fanon, 1961/2004, p. 4). Hanif elaborates on Fanon's analysis for the postcolonial context by demonstrating how the Pakistani state re-creates colonial spatial logics through the control of waste and the racialization of labour.

Alice's body is a place of classed boundary-marking. She is a Christian woman from a family of sweepers, and what Mary Douglas would call "matter out of place": in the corridors of the hospital, she is a "dirty" one, and thus causes anxiety that she enters the "clean" space of medical modernity. He is a senior physician who tells her that she and her people are "born to clean,

not to heal," stating the ideological role of trash in the maintenance of class. When a senior doctor says to her, "You people are born to clean, not to heal," he expresses the ideology of waste and the maintenance of class (Hanif, 2011, p. 67). However, Hanif blurs this line by revealing that Alice has more knowledge of the hospital's materialities than the doctors who nominally have the authority: Hanif reveals that "many doctors couldn't find out" the materialities of the hospital, such as which pipes leaked, which drains clogged, which corners accumulated the most blood and pus" (Hanif, 2011, p. 91).

Home Boy is about the classed boundaries of waste as Naqvi compares the affluent and fancy areas of Karachi with the slums. In the above cited booklet, Naqvi, 2009, p. 56 - 57, he remembers visiting his grandfather in a part of the city where the streets were unpaved, where the open drains ran with greenish water, where children played in piles of garbage that towered above their heads. The "greenish water" and "piles of garbage" are a sign of class exclusion, and the children's play, a resignification of waste, anticipates Bayat's notion of "quiet encroachment. As an adult, Chuck sees that the city has spread out, encroaching on villages and farmland, forming new slum layers along the highways "like barnacles" (Naqvi, 2009, p. 234). The "barnacles" metaphor refers to the organic endurance of the informal settlements as well as their marginality in the official geography of the city.

The diasporic frame of Home Boy can be extended to the global scale. Chuck and his friends live in an ambiguous middle zone of the "formal" and the "informal" in New York: between the Wall Street economy and the economy of immigrant workers. The city's trash, not only garbage but "the human garbage of globalization, the undocumented, the unemployed, the uncounted" (Naqvi, 2009, p. 112) piles up in their apartment in Queens. The local waste management is explicitly linked to global political economy, showing that the production of waste is a structural characteristic of capitalist development, which is scale dependent. The mapping of waste as classed boundary-marker is the most complex in Tanweer's *The Scatter Here Is Too Great*. The various narrators of the novel occupy different spheres in the class system of Karachi and their attitude towards the concept of waste differs in accordance with that. The old communist poet writes on the bus as an eye witness to the city, and documents that "the new buildings are perched behind the walls, the old ones are falling apart, and the spaces between are filled with those who were banished from the city's narrative" (Tanweer, 2013 p. 23). The "walls" between the new buildings and the old, and the "spaces in between" themselves are a code for class boundaries, and informal zones of waste and subaltern life.

In the bank's "recovery department" (which takes cars from defaulters), the character Sadeq exemplifies classed violence of waste management. His work is to "take things from people who had already lost everything", this work is productive of waste, either in the shape of dispossessed property or displaced persons (Tanweer, 2013, p. 78). Other forms of waste are the waste of boundary markers like Sadeq's girlfriend Asma, who tells stories to her younger brother to suppress her personal and emotional loss. The novel implies that these types of waste - material, economic, emotional - all can be linked to each other and that the formed "scatter" is "too great" to be captured by any narrative or by any single perspective of class.

5.3 Waste as Subaltern Resource: Reclaiming Detritus as Economic and Mnemonic Capital

The third axis of analysis looks into how subaltern characters in these novels produce waste as a resource for survival and memory; waste as agential capital. It is a concept that is similar to Asef Bayat's notion of quiet encroachment, defined as the "slow, patient advance by ordinary people on the propertied and powerful to survive and improve life" (Bayat, 1997, p. 17). It is also in accord with Jane Bennett's notion of "vibrant matter," which indicates that "nonhuman" forces are involved in the making of political possibility.

Our Lady of Alice Bhatti is the most obvious of the waste reclaimed, in Alice's family's Christian colony. The colony is located around "the municipal dump where people went to get something they could sell, reuse or make something new of" (Hanif, 2011, p. 45). These aspects of the economy are described by Hanif (2011, p. 46): "A woman collecting broken bangles and melting them to make new jewelry, a man who gathered and sold discarded tires for sandals and rubber, and children who dug through trash to find metal pieces that could be weighed and converted into coins. These practices are a form of Kevin Lynch's (1990) "conversion of worthless or unused material into new forms of value" (p. xi).

Alice is involved in a kind of waste reclamation which is her nursing practice. Under her bed she has a box with the small things patients left behind—a comb, a photograph, a prayer card—and it is a museum of abandoned lives, according to Hanif (2011, p. 102). This "museum", serves as the opposite of the medical care's "official" archive, it is a repository for the remains of subaltern lives, which the medical system is willing to forget. Alice's collection is an example of the "connective tissue that continues to bind human potentials to degraded environments, and degraded personhoods to the material refuse of imperial projects" (Stoler, 2013, p. 193). Alice's performance of mnemonic labour is a resistance to the necropolitical logic of the hospital, by retaining these "abandoned lives".

Reclaiming the waste has a diasporic element in Home Boy. Chuck's friend AC is a long-settled immigrant who runs a "vintage" clothes shop, "which involves 'buying discarded garments from thrift stores, estate sales and garbage dumps and selling them to hipsters who paid premium prices for authenticity' (Naqvi, 2009, p. 89). This business model makes manifest the racialisation of cultural capital, the "authenticity" bought by white hipsters generated by the work of immigrants in the production of society's junk. AC's business is a testament to what Michael Thompson (1979, p. 10) refers to as the "social malleability" of waste, its

tendency to undergo a social transformation to meet social needs and pressures.

In the most heartbreaking moments of the novel, Chuck take to his trash cart after 9/11 to pick up “the free newspapers that had been piling up in the subway stations, the flyers for concerts and protests that littered the streets, the discarded books left on park benches” (Naqvi, 2009, p. 178). They are his “archive of the city's lost time”, a counter-history to the official history of New York's ‘recovery’. Chuck's collection also mirrors Alice's “museum of abandoned lives” and defies conventional geographic definitions of memory through the medium of the waste.

The Scatter Here Is Too Great, a book by Tanweer shows waste reclamation as a communal and not individual task. The polyphonic structure of the novel itself is also a reclamation, a process in which the unknown narrator, a writer, brings together the “fragments that the city tried to sweep away” (Tanweer, 2013, p. 156) of the stories of the survivors and the victims. This is a narrative act, and it brings the violence, the broken bodies, shattered lives, and scattered debris together and makes them into a whole if not coherent. The writer's labour is similar to that of the “waste-pickers” who are encountered in the novel: “They were people who worked with things people had thrown away, who knew the city better than anyone else because they had been in contact with its discarded things” (Tanweer, 2013, p. 134).

The most serious relations with waste as subaltern resource are the character of an ambulance driver, Akbar. In his work, he must deal with the “waste” of violence, the dead bodies, cut-off arms, blood and flesh—his work is the witness of this abject labor. Post-blast he encounters “two strange-looking men that nobody else seemed to notice,” possibly ghosts, angels or visions, unrecognized and unseen by the sanctioned history of the city (Tanweer, 2013, p. 112). Sustained engagement with waste engenders types of perception and knowledge that exceed normative perception and knowledge, a “slow” or subaltern epistemology that works through the body not rational cognition, as suggested by Akbar's vision.

6. DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that the Pakistani Anglophone fiction utilizes waste from three interwoven angles, and cannot be reduced to mere metaphor or backdrop. First, as temporal palimpsest, waste reveals the multiple histories of colonial extraction, and post-colonial failure, that are hidden in official narratives, and thus makes visible the “slow violence.” First, as temporal palimpsest, waste exposes the multiple histories of colonial extraction, and post-colonial failure, that are hidden in official narratives, and thus makes visible the “slow violence.” The basements of these hospitals, railway stations, and immigrant apartments serve as objects of material archive, holding remnants of violence across generations in these novels. All of the medical refuse—rusty surgical implements, formaldehyde jars, patient charts—at Hanif's Sacred Heart Hospital, Ann Laura Stoler calls “imperial debris,” material residue that conveys an alternate history and the fragility of power. The objects do not just refer to decay—they are physically representative and witness to the ongoing legacy of colonial modernity to postcolonial neglect, across time. The ‘unidentifiable organs’, as in the basement archive of Our Lady of Alice Bhatti, make the ‘disposable matter’ of subaltern bodies material, and the ‘patients long dead’ refer to the intergenerational continuity of subaltern violence. Likewise, the railway station at Tanweer is a “building that was once grand” (colonial) that is now “overcome by postcolonial density” (colonial sediment). What Rob Nixon refers to as the “attritional lethality” of slow violence is revealed in the bomb blast, which does not create a single catastrophic moment, but rather a new layer of waste – body parts, broken glass, twisted metal – that simply piles up on top of the existing decay. This temporal logic is extended across the Atlantic by Naqvi's diasporic frame, which shows that dispensability of the colonial subject is generated through waste-producing logics of global capitalism. The dumping of Chuck's property into garbage bags by Homeland Security officials is a literalization of the reduction of the body of Muslim immigrants to trash, of the colonial necropolitics in the present.

Second, from the perspective of classed boundary-marker, waste actively creates and sustains social hierarchies when they are present in the urban landscape. These are all means of the logic of “matter out of place,” as described by Mary Douglas, who is the formal segregation of formal and informal settlements, the racializing of waste labor, and the connection of subaltern bodies with dirt. In Hanif's novel, Joseph Bhatti's job as a municipal sweeper and his family's dwelling in the Christian colony, surrounded by “the municipal dump, the sewage treatment plant, and the abattoir”, become the essence of the colonial city, as established by Frantz Fanon as the division between the “sector of lights” of the colonist and the “sector of darkness” of the colonized. Hanif revises this analysis for the postcolonial condition and shows how the Pakistani state continues to colonially produce space via the management of waste and the racialization of labour. Alice's body is itself a site of classed boundary-marking: her presence in the space of the hospital's corridors evokes anxiety because she is occupying the space that is supposed to be kept clean by the medical modernity of the hospital, and the space that is kept dirty by the subalterns' labor. He tells her that “you people are born to clean, not to heal. But Hanif blurs this distinction by revealing the intimate knowledge, not of the doctors, but of the material systems in the hospital, which the doctors purport to know – which pipes leaked, which corners accumulated the most blood and pus. The classed geography of waste accumulation is captured in Comrade Sukhansaz's comment in Tanweer: “the new buildings that were being built behind the walls, the old buildings that were falling down, the spaces that were being filled with people who had been pushed out of the city's official story.” The “walls” contain class lines, and the “spaces in between” represent the non-formal spaces where waste is generated and other forms of life continue. The

dispossessed property and the displaced people are the waste of Sadeq's work in the bank's "recovery department," where he repossesses cars from defaulters. Naqvi takes this analysis a step further into the diasporic sphere, where Chuck and his associates are caught "between the formal and informal economy" of Wall Street and the informal economy of immigrant labor. They live in their apartment in Queens, where the city's waste can be found, not just garbage but "the human refuse of globalization. Their apartment in Queens is characterized as "a place where the city's waste accumulated... not just garbage, but the human refuse of globalization," which explicitly links local waste management to global political economy.

Third, when subaltern resources are scarce, waste is a vehicle for survival, memory and resistance. Waste-pickers make "abject" subjects in the "quiet encroachment" of their presence and activities, while the abandoned objects form a counter-archive, and the narratives of trash collection makes "abject" objects into agentive capital in the form of mnemonic labor. This process resonates with the "vibrant matter" theory of Jane Bennett, explaining how non-human entities are involved in the making of "political possibility" and with Timothy Morton's "hyperobjects"—the idea that waste is not only incomprehensible for one human but also that it helps to shape collective life. In Hanif's Christian colony, there is an entire informal economy that depends on the municipal dump, such as "a woman who collected broken bangles and melted them into new jewelry, a man who gathered discarded tires and made sandals from the rubber and children who picked through the garbage for metal scraps. These practices can be seen as the process of making the "worthless or unused" matter appreciate in new forms, a process in which the subaltern populations act as active agents and reclaim, rework and resignify discarded materials. In the museum of abandoned lives, her collection of 'the small things patients left behind – a comb, a photograph, a prayer card', Alice's work is a counter-archive to the official records of the hospital, holding on to the traces of subaltern lives discarded by the medical system. It is an assortment of what Stoler calls "the connective tissue that continues to bind human potentials to degraded environments," which do mnemonic labour that is not in accord with the necropolitical logic of the hospital. In Naqvi's novel, the "vintage" clothing business of AC, which acquires preloved garments from trash sites and thrift shops and sells them to hippies for "authenticity," becomes a physical manifestation of the creation of value from trash, while it critiques the racial politics of cultural capital. After 9/11, Chuck collects "free newspapers, flyers, and discarded books" that are his "archive of the city's lost time," an alternative to official history. The polyphonic structure of Tanweer itself is an act of reclamation: the undifferentiated voice collects the "fragments that the city tried to sweep away" to form a whole text, making the waste of violence into a text itself. As a result of being continually drawn to waste, Akbar's visionary perception after the explosion—"two strange-looking men whom nobody else seemed to notice"—indicate that in the absence of normal rationality, there are alternative modes of knowledge, which we might call a subaltern epistemology, operating through the body.

The theoretical implications of this research are that postcolonial ecocriticism must take into consideration the material localities of urban wastes in the global South. Previous scholarship on rural environmental problems, resource extraction and climate change has focused on rural spaces but the urban condition, as Mukherjee puts it, of "postcoloniality" demands a different analytical approach which can engage with the informality, toxicity and density of South Asian urban spaces. Pakistani Anglophone writers offer a wealth of resources to this end, since novelists of Pakistan have been singularly interested in the aesthetic and political potentialities of waste. This study also makes a valuable contribution to the waste studies as it serves as a demonstration of the literary aspect of material reclamation. Although sociological and anthropological research has recorded the economics of waste-pickers and informal recyclers, a literary analysis of these texts uncovers how the work uses narrative, character, and formal innovation to document the economics of waste-pickers and informal recyclers. Through this study, I have sought to develop a critical frame of reference for reading waste in postcolonial fiction that, instead of abjection or romanticization, embraces the "poetics of remainder.

There are a number of limitations of this study that must be recognized. The corpus consists of three novels (all male authors), and all published in a 4-year span. For the future, the corpus should include more texts by women writers like Kamila Shamsie, Uzma Aslam Khan and Fatima Bhutto as well as earlier and later texts of Pakistani Anglophone fiction and Urdu and other Pakistani language texts. Further, the study's emphasis on text analysis might be enriched by ethnographic study of material practices of waste management in Pakistani cities, and by the involvement with policy debates concerning urban infrastructure and environmental justice in Pakistani cities.

CONCLUSION

This study has suggested that the Pakistani Anglophone fiction can be seen as an active agent in the narrative space, to produce histories of violence, class divisions, and to allow agency for the subalterns. The analysis explores how waste is not just a metaphor or a backdrop but is actually a temporal palimpsest, a classed boundary-marker, and a subaltern resource, through close readings of Muhammad Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, H. M. Naqvi's *Home Boy*, and Bilal Tanweer's *The Scatter Here Is Too Great*.

The postcolonial ecocriticism, waste studies, new materialism, and subaltern urbanism were combined into a theoretical framework for this study that provides a fruitful way to approach waste in postcolonial fiction in general. These concepts of slow violence (Nixon, 2011), of imperial debris (Stoler, 2013), of necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003, 2019), of the quiet

encroachment of waste (Bayat, 1997), of the vibrant matter of waste (Bennett, 2010), and of hyperobjects (Morton, 2013) together allow an analysis that considers both the structural violence encoded within waste and the agentic possibilities of waste reclamation.

The "poetics of remainder" that is proposed here is not the binary of ruin and development that is found in the official discourse and in much literary criticism. Rather, it suggests a politics and an aesthetics that allow for the persistence of life, both human and non-human, in a material sense of decay. Urban fiction in Pakistan is an ideal app for this approach, since the city is not an impure space that needs to be purged but a central element of urban life, the story space, character agency and political imagination.

With the growing population of cities in Pakistan, like Karachi which is expected to become one of the world's biggest cities by 2030, the presence of waste in literature will become more and more relevant. Future investigations of these novelists will be able to further develop the critical tools to read the novelists' aesthetic strategies for narrating the material conditions of urban life, but will require a focus on lived experiences of those who deal with the city's waste. The "scatter" may be "too great" but this scatter must be gathered, as Tanweer's novel argues, narratively, critically, and gradually, patiently, through the work of subaltern reclamation.

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