

Slow Violence – Displacement Leading to Nostalgic Anxiety and Solastalgic Distress: An Analysis of *Thinner than Skin* by Uzma Aslam Khan

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ABSTRACT: *This research, in the domain of psychological ecocriticism, underscores the need for environmental sustainability as depicted in *Thinner than Skin* (2012) by Uzma Aslam Khan. The theoretical framework of this qualitative research has been formulated by taking the tenets from Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) to corroborate that slow violence, with its attritional and incremental features, results in displacements. The textual exegesis of the novel accentuates that forced imposition of the official landscape on the vernacular landscape of the people of Pakistan turns the inhabitants into uninhabitants; thus, creating refugees out of place as well as refugees in place. The research elucidates the disruption of once-sustainable lifestyles of the herders and the inhabitants of Kaghan valley. By addressing these issues of ecological exploitation and human oppression, the research aims to contribute towards redressing inequities so as to reinstate environmental sustainability.*

Keywords: Literal displacement, nostalgia, slow violence, solastalgia, and stationary displacement.

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1. Introduction

Human and ecological exploitation lead to slow violence with its attritional, incremental, and exponential outcomes. This slow violence has long long-lasting impact upon the lives of the people as each incident of environmental exploitation causes dislocation. The poor “disposable people” consequently undergo displacement, be that stationary or literal; in the former case, the ecosystem people become “refugees in place” and in the latter case “refugees out of place” (Bales, Nixon 19). These poor disposable communities pitted against “differential precariousness, i.e., a condition of vulnerability that is politically induced against certain populations,” consequently undergo nostalgia and solastalgia (Butler 25). This research delves into the area of psychological ecocriticism, which is a comparatively recent offshoot of ecocriticism, particularly focusing on the psychological dimension of environmental challenges and apprehensions. This article underscores the physical and psychological challenges faced by the ecosystem people as presented in *Thinner than Skin* by analyzing their nostalgic anxiety and solastalgic distress.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Psychological Ecocriticism

The devastation caused by ecological exploitation and the victimization of humans has been the concern of ecocriticism since its origin, as it investigates “the global ecological crisis through the intersection of literature, culture, and the physical environment” (Gladwin). Psychological ecocriticism emerged as an offshoot of ecocriticism in the twenty-first century. However, there were critics who tried to probe the link between ecocriticism and psychology towards the end of the previous century. Scott Slovic in “Nature Writing and Environmental Psychology” (1996) testifies that nature writers such as Wendell Berry, Barry Lopez, and Edward Abbey are “literary psychologists” and natural historians (351). While they look at nature, their vision has an interiority; thus, their works are “constantly probing, traumatizing, thrilling, and soothing” their own minds and those of the readers (352). Slovic’s interest in psychological aspect of ecocriticism is further explored in *Numbers and Nerves* (2015) which exemplifies that data received from the environment is processed and communicated by the human mind and different forms of cultural expressions “serve to break through the psychological numbness caused by information overload” (Slovic, *Empiricism* 2).

This research is in the domain of psychological ecocriticism as it investigates the feelings of nostalgia and solastalgia owing to “temporal, geographical, rhetorical, and technological displacements” faced by the poor presented in *Thinner than*

Skin (Nixon 7). The analytical study of the text illustrates that each massive incident of environmental exploitation causes displacement, whether literal displacement or a stationary one. The research argues that the setback caused by displacement is not only on the spatial level, but more so on the psychological level. Hence, poor disposable people are smitten by nostalgia and solastalgia.

2.2. Nostalgia

Nostalgia is a term that was coined by the Swiss medical doctor, Johannes Hofer in 1688 in his dissertation written in Latin entitled *Dissertatio medica de nostalgia, oder Heimwehe*, that is, a “Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia, or Homesickness”. The term “describes a curious disorder, often found in young men and women sent abroad ... in which the sufferer is consumed by a desire for his or her native land” (Davis 18). Nostalgia is melancholia or homesickness experienced by individuals when separated from a loved home, which results in potentially fatal disruptions of the physical and psychological health of the nostalgics. The word nostalgia originates from the Greek *nostos*, meaning return to native place or home, and *algia*, meaning pain, suffering, or sickness. Hofer stated that “the symptoms of nostalgia included a whole range of psychological and bodily afflictions, ranging from intense sadness to palpitations of the heart” (Albrecht, *Earth Emotions* 31). It was only in the middle of the twentieth century that the word ‘nostalgia’ started being used in its present sense of ‘looking back wistfully’ with only its temporal dimension, without being bothered about spatial or geographical dimensions. However, the present research analyses feelings of nostalgia among different characters portrayed in *Thinner than Skin* in its original meaning, with its spatial, geographical, and temporal dimensions as faced by these victims of human and ecological exploitation. Hence, nostalgia is studied as a feeling of loss, and homesickness caused by ‘literal displacement’ faced by refugees out of place, whether forcefully removed from their homeland or migrated by choice.

2.3. Solastalgia

Solastalgia is a term that is linked with what Nixon calls “stationary displacement” or “displacement without moving” (Nixon 19). The term has been devised by Australian environmentalist Glenn Albrecht and was introduced in the 2003 Ecohealth Conference in Montreal and introduced in published form in 2005 in an article entitled *Solastalgia: A New Concept in Human Health and Identity*. Solastalgia is “the lived experience of distressing, negative environmental change” that leads to an “individual’s loss of an endemic sense of place” (Albrecht, *Earth Emotions* x). Albrecht felt that while place-related-distress has an expression for the people who are displaced; there was need for some terminology/word for similar feeling that is experienced by people who are

still at home “but experience a ‘homesickness’ similar to that caused by nostalgia. What these people lack is solace or comfort derived from their present relationship to ‘home’” (Albrecht et al, Solastalgia S95).

The word solastalgia is based on its prefix ‘sol’ from ‘solace’ and ‘desolation’ coupled with the suffix ‘algia’. Solastalgia is primarily a New Latin neologism: ‘solace’ is derived from the Latin solari, meaning alleviation of distress, ‘desolation’ from the Latin desolare, meaning deprivation of comfort, and algia from the Latin meaning suffering or pain. “If a person seeks solace or solitude in a much-loved place that is being desolated, then they will suffer distress... It also has meanings that relate to both psychological and physical context – a personal feeling of abandonment (isolation), and to a landscape or structure that has been devastated” (Albrecht, *Earth Emotions* 38). Hence, solastalgia relates to the pain and distress of the present living conditions of the inhabitants and their land: it “is not about looking back at some golden past, nor is it about seeking another place as home; it is the ‘lived experience’ of intense change, manifest in a feeling of dislocation and of being undermined by forces that destroy the potential for solace derived from the present” (Connor et al 47).

2.4. Existing Studies on *Thinner than Skin*

Uzma Aslam Khan is a Pakistani writer who has written five novels: *The Story of Noble Rot* (2001), *Trespassing* (2003), *The Geometry of God* (2010), *Thinner than Skin* (2012), and *Miraculous History of Nomi Ali* (2019). There are many critical writings present on *Trespassing* and *The Geometry of God*. However, there is not much critical work available on *Thinner than Skin*. Few studies were made on the novel from the perspective of the diaspora. For instance, in “Assimilative Tendencies in the Selected Diasporic Pakistani Anglophone Fiction,” Munir mentions Khan as a diasporic writer who is “capable of understanding different dynamics of different societies, cultures, nations” (3). In “Countering Western Feminism,” Wahab et al study the novel from the postcolonial feminist perspective, arguing that “Western feminism is hegemonic and tries to colonize the Third World through scholarship” (256). “Between Glaciers and Fossils” by Diviani Chaudhuri is a study of “strategies of representation of vernacular landscape” in Pakistani fiction, especially in *The Geometry of God* and *Thinner than Skin* (324). “Necropolitics and Biopolitics of Drone Warfare” by Liaqat and Raza gives a hermeneutic textual analysis of three Pakistani novels (*Thinner than Skin*, *The Wasted Vigil* and *Exit West*) from a posthuman perspective; seeing drone technology is a kind of “cultural violence,” the researchers argue that Pakistani literature in English makes a political statement against the necropolitical and biopolitical practice of drone technology in undeveloped countries (Azeem 108). To put it briefly, western feminism, drone technology, diaspora, and vernacular landscape are the areas in which

some critique is present in *Thinner than Skin*. To the best of my knowledge, the novel has not been studied from the perspective of environmental exploitation, slow violence, and psychological ecocriticism.

3. Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

The theoretical framework for this article has been taken from the tenets of Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence as presented in his book *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011). Slow violence, with its attritional and exponential character, has temporal and geographical implications; hence, its victims undergo displacement. Owing to human and ecological disposability, the environment and circumstances become unfavourable for continuing normal life because "one's place loses its self-sustaining features" (Nixon 19). "Conversion of inhabitant into uninhabitant has been a recurrent trauma" caused by slow violence, which has been presented in *Thinner than Skin* (Nixon 153). Displacement becomes unavoidable because the vernacular landscape, which is textured by "socioenvironmental dynamics of the community," is marred by global resource wars, which impose an official landscape (Nixon 17). Characters in *Thinner than Skin* undergo two types of displacement: literary displacement and stationary displacement. In case of literary displacement, or refugees out of place, 'the threatened community capitulates and is scattered (across refugee camps, placeless "relocation" sites, desperate favelas, and unwelcoming foreign lands)' (Nixon 19). In case of stationary displacement, or refugees in place, the threatened community becomes displaced even without moving because they are left "stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable" (Nixon 19).

Since the change of inhabitant into uninhabitant has been a recurring trauma in the face of slow violence, it results in not just physical and material loss but also emotional and psychological setbacks such as nostalgia and solastalgia. Poor disposable people, whether refugees in place or out of place, undergo nostalgia and solastalgia as they endeavour to adjust with the challenging circumstances after losing their vernacular landscape. As solastalgia is the pain one feels when a familiar place is being radically changed, this research links this concept with Nixon's concept of stationary displacement that implies the loss of the land and its resources by the inhabitants, which leaves the communities stranded in the places that are stripped of the very characteristics that once made them inhabitable. It conjoins human and ecological disposability by establishing a "relationship between ecosystem health, human health, and powerlessness" (Connor et al 47). The concept is important in the analysis of literary ecology from Pakistan because of its undeniable "universal relevance in any context where there is the direct experience of transformation or destruction of the physical environment (home) by forces that undermine a personal and

community sense of identity and control” (Albrecht, Solastalgia 46). By applying the textual analysis method, the research probes how *Thinner than Skin* portrays the overwhelming feelings of anxiety, distress, and disappointment, due to which the disposable people undergo nostalgic longing and solastalgic distress.

4. An Overview of *Thinner than Skin*

Thinner than Skin – often described as a story of love, jealousy, and revenge – has been written by Uzma Aslam Khan, a Pakistani-born diasporic writer in America. It is the tale of the visit of the Pakistani diaspora in America to the northern areas of Pakistan to capture the beauty of the land (by Nadir, who is a photographer by profession) and study the glaciers (by Farhana). In Kaghan valley, these tourists meet Kiran, the daughter of the herders Maryam and Suleiman. Farhana almost forcefully takes Kiran on the boat with the thought to impart some pleasure to the little child; however, the capsizing of the boat results in Kiran’s death. The bereaved parents are burdened by an increased sense of loss and helplessness while they have already been trying to grapple with multiple vulnerabilities, such as increased terrorism, dearth of food resources, restrictions by the state, and depredation by the law-enforcing agencies. The novel portrays how the lush green land of the Northern areas of Pakistan faces precariousness when pitted against ecological and human exploitation.

5. Textual Analysis of *Thinner than Skin* – Displacements, Nostalgia and Solastalgia

Human and ecological disposability lead to the displacement of the characters in *Thinner than Skin*. Khan, in a conversation at Karachi Literary Festival, says that the novel portrays that “certain people are getting displaced.” Ghafoor, a herder from Kaghan, faces literal displacement and thus nostalgia as he lives the life of an exile because of raising a voice against the hegemony of the timber mafia and its accomplices. While herders, like Maryam and her family, are compelled towards sedentariness by the state, they experience stationary displacement, especially when staying in the lowlands, which become increasingly inaccessible and less fertile over the years. Maryam undergoes nostalgia as well as solastalgia throughout the literary ecology and recalls the times when the valley was more fertile and accessible for the herders. Limitations imposed upon the herders, fines and taxes, compulsion to rear foreign breeds of cattle instead of the local hardy ones, and placating the policemen/ religious preachers/ forest inspectors/ tax collectors are the reasons that make Maryam feel stranded in the very place that was once inhabitable. Moreover, poor disposable communities like Uyghurs in China and victims of GWOT in Pakistan also experience solastalgia as their socioenvironmental dynamics are marred.

5.1. Forced Sedentarization of the Herders, Stationary Displacement and Solastalgia

Khan portrays the herders as a threatened community that is confronted with forced sedentarization and thus gradually capitulates. Steppe nomads are the ecosystem people for whom bioregions matter much more than geopolitical boundaries. However, the British “invented the whole business, the whole revenue-generating forest policy” of imposing taxes and restrictions on the herders – a policy that is carried up with even greater emphasis after the end of colonial rule (Khan 257). Hence, herders’ access to the ecological resources of Kaghan valley is curtailed by the colonial and neocolonial practices. The primacy of movement for the herders is nullified by the state policies of forced sedentarization. Maryam remembers the harassment of the people of her dera by the state official who declared that “their grazing permit was fake” (Khan 294). Suleiman’s indicating the state stamp on the permit is categorically rejected by the official as the state has already introduced a new design stamp so as to make all the previous permits invalid. Illiteracy of the herders makes them succumb more promptly. They face heavy fines, are advised to learn farming, forced to accept a settlement program as meagre plots are allotted to them. This results in literal displacement of many herders who leave the valley to find jobs in other parts of the country. Those who stay in the valley confront stationary displacement as their place gradually loses its inhabitable characteristics.

5.2. Maryam – Literal Displacement and Nostalgic Longing

Maryam belongs to the semi-nomadic tribes that make their summer homes in the highland beside the shores of Lake Saiful Maluk and move to the lowlands in winter. Maryam feels solace and is at home in the highland, as “up here in the mountains she could do as she pleased” (Khan 78). But because of the harsh winters in the highlands, she is bound to spend a greater part of the year in the lowlands. She feels the highland to be more of a home as there are fewer restrictions imposed by the state institutions: no barbed wires, no one slashing the trees, and no forest inspector to issue decree to them. Moving from the highland to the lowland itself becomes a displacement for her because of the increasingly uncongenial circumstances in the lowland. Maryam “is consumed by a desire for... her native land when she is away from the highland (Davis 18). She nostalgically recalls the times of her mother and grandmother when there was freedom of movement along with an abundance of greenery, food, and other resources. For instance, Maryam is nostalgic about the old cattle breeds that were attuned to the native seasons. The thin desi kind of sheep were replaced by the fat Australian sheep under the direction of the state officials. Though they were fat and thus gave more meat and wool they were not made to combat “the icy winds and sudden snowdrifts of Kaghan Valley” (Khan 195). They ate too much,

produced low-quality wool, moved slowly, and hardly accepted the nomadic way of living. Moreover, their excessive hunger made the herders pay fines as they frequently entered the forbidden pastures. Like the sheep, indigenous Kaghani and Kilan goats were also replaced by the government with fatty ones, which led to more consumption of feed. Gradual extinction of local breeds of sheep, goats, and horses results in incremental slow violence, which leads to a drastic decrease of the sources of sustenance for Maryam and her family, thus causing stationary displacement.

5.3. Maryam – Stationary Displacement and Solastalgic Distress

Over the years, living conditions changed for the herders who migrated to the lowlands at the end of summer each year. State-defined policies of grazing, imposition of taxes and fines for crossing the specified area, rearing of less productive breeds of cattle, coupled with the hegemony of different overlords, results in slow violence. This attritional and incremental slow violence makes Maryam and other herders undergo stationary displacement as they get stranded in the valley that is losing its inhabitable characteristics.

The herders try to put up with “the grazing fees and cutting fees and annual permits and taxes and fines” (Khan 258). Maryam and Ghafoor feel the pain of losing the freedom to use the grazing lands which they could utilize freely in the past, while now even the area around Saiful Maluk was not safe for them. “Anyone can rob our cattle, even our children” (Khan 251). They undergo the lived experience of painful, negative environmental change, which leads to deprivation and loss of sense of place. Grazing restrictions lead to malnutrition and starvation for the cattle and, therefore for the herders. The buffalo grow lean with the bones of their hips clearly visible. Suleiman buys supplementary food once, but because of meagre and dwindling resources, cannot afford that again. In such a situation, Maryam can foresee that many of the animals would not be able to survive through the upcoming winter.

When herding does not remain a sustainable profession, the family more and more succumbs to settling. Many members of Maryam’s extended family are “tricked into buying” small plots, they give up their grazing rights, and are told to cultivate “the same cash crops, year after year,” monocropping that leads to lack of fertility of the soil (Khan 257). Maryam’s brother, like many others who were herders for generations, buys a small plot. But soon he leaves that “ice-encrusted plot” and joins mining (Khan 220). The mining contractor confiscates his pay and out of dejection he takes to drinking. The sad tale of his literal as well as stationary displacement is the tale of many other herders who undergo solastalgic distress to such an extent that emotional and physical survival becomes difficult for them. Maryam had never imagined that her son would be

joining any other profession but herding. However, seeing the dreadful circumstances she allows him to work in the market. “A personal feeling of abandonment” pervades as the family of herders is compelled to leave its ancestral profession as well as way of living (Albrecht, *Earth Emotions* 38).

Maryam’s stationary displacement is also aggravated by the worsening law and order situation and interference and exploitation by the police on the pretext of restoring peace in the valley. Two police officers – different persons each time but intrinsically the same – frequently visit her home in the lowland, take tea, eat breakfast, leer at her with lusty eyes, and threaten the poor family while pretending to look for the terrorists. One of the reasons for their depleting supplies of food was that they were bound to give away a lot of food in order “to placate the men who now occupied her valley” (Khan 294). When the herders do not have money to pay the fine, they have to pay through their food resources, for example daily supply of milk, butter, ghee for a month etc. There is a whole chain of hegemonic overlords that makes her abode more and more difficult: the forest inspector, the tax collector, the policemen, soldiers, spies, and the wrongly turbaned men from the religious groups could all be appeased with sugar, ghee, bread, mutton etc. while serving these people from different power groups, Maryam apprehends the running out of her supplies. Maryam hopelessly tries to seek solace in her native place that is increasingly being desolated because of slow violence; therefore, her solastalgic distress is “both psychological and physical” (Albrecht, *Earth Emotions* 38). Distressed by depleting resources, mounting desolation, and frequent visits by policemen or plainclothesmen, she stays in her bed in the morning “with a listlessness coated in dread” (Khan 299). Her endemic sense of place has been lost – in spite of being at home she lives in a state of homelessness: “whether the men showed or not, they now resided in their home... They could appear at any time. They were already there ... She mostly stayed inside her hut, worse, she stayed inside herself” (Khan 299-300). In short, she undergoes literal as well as stationary displacement and thus undergoes nostalgia and solastalgia.

5.4. Literal Displacement and Nostalgic Distress – A Thousand Different Skins of Ghafoor

Ghafoor is “spatially othered and an urban outcast” as he resists the hegemony of timber mafia and state machinery that have quite a strong hold in Kaghan valley (Saleem et al 20). The legend of Ghafoor burning the villa of the forest inspector was shaped over a year or more. Though Khan does not specify a definite reason behind the clash between Ghafoor and the power ups, she makes it clear that whatever be the incident the main reason was his ecocritical stance against human and ecological exploitation as probably it had started after the herders were charged two hundred rupees for two stems of ginger, or when the

thirtieth water well was despoiled by stockpiling of logs, or when a horse was burnt dead by a barbed wire fence, or when Ghafoor's friend was murdered after he filed a case against the timber mafia. In short, he was an impediment in the way of imposing official landscape over the vernacular landscape, so he was told to leave the valley. Ironically, he who tries to save the fertility of the land and rights of its ecosystem people is declared "a threat to the entire community" and thus displaced (Khan 201).

As an exile, Ghafoor has intense feelings of nostalgia, an agonising pain of aloneness and deprivation as he says: "A life of exile is worse than death. You will forever be alone" (Khan 331). "He did not have a country... He did not have a city. He did not have a field. Nor even a buffalo. Or a friend" (Khan 211). Living a life of perpetual displacement, he moves from one country to another – China, Turkey, Kazakhstan etc. Wandering as a refugee out of place, when he meets the Turkic nomads, he feels as if a mountain were melting within him and he feels himself cleansed, "entirely in his skin, the skin he used to inhabit in the valley of his youth" (Khan 141). Nostalgia for a lost land dominates as with each passing year as "he had to don a thousand different skins" (Khan 141). He also faces an identity crisis as he changes his name frequently while travelling from one place to another: Ghafoor or "Rahman or Rahmanov. Umar or Umarov. What was he now?... You were always donning skins" (Khan 210). When he revisits his hometown, looks at the new villa of the forest inspector, and ponders over the anguish wrought on his people, solastalgic distress adds up with the feeling of nostalgia. Loss of his land and his people ignites a desire to avenge the suffering brought to him and his community. Seeing the military convoys moving across 'his' valley is a painful sight as he knows that the list of the shadowy overlords leading to the change of inhabitant into uninhabitant by making the living conditions worse for the native people was becoming longer.

5.5. Uyghurs' Victimization, Human Exploitation, and Forced Displacement

Exploitation of human beings and their ecology is not just restricted to the herders in the northern areas of Pakistan but to other lands also; the Kazakh cattle-breeders, the Uzbek herders and Uyghurs face displacement owing to slow violence. The novel documents "a history evanesce" forced by displacement of native Kashgaris from Uyghur and planned settlement of Han migrants in their place (Khan 138). The vernacular landscape of the Uyghurs is being forcefully changed into an official landscape as the Chinese government paves the cobbled roads to cut through Old Kashgar, and compel the native Kashgaris to abandon their abode. Many native Kashgaris are put in detention camps where they face torture, some others leave as their land is confiscated by the Chinese government, but many of them refuse to be exiled "even when the cobbles beneath their feet were smashed" (Khan 138). So they are either refugees out of place that face

literal displacement or refugees in place that face stationary displacement. The native Kashgaris' land is being snatched from them as open fields are concretised and only petty compensation is paid to those the ecosystem people who lose their land. Ghafoor can empathize with them because he himself knows "what it was to be forced out, to roam from field to field as though you were an upal in a buffalo's ass" (Khan 137).

The natural landscape of the Uyghurs is turned into an urbanised one as the chiming of horse bells is dimming down under the clatter of cranes. Feelings of nostalgia and solastalgia are reflected in the statement of an aged native man whose family left the place under the pressure of the state: "This is our al-Quds, I will never leave" (Khan 138). China's twelve new highways projects that will connect Asian countries drastically change the vernacular landscape as the land of the natives is used while they only get petty compensation in the face of literal or stationary displacement. Likewise, the building of pipeline from Kazakhstan to Xinjiang merely brings displacement and deprivation for the poor: though billions of dollars have been invested, the Kazakhs and Uyghurs are stripped of their ancestral homes and live below the poverty line. For the native Pakistani people, developmental projects like Gwadar seaport with an extended road to enable China to have a trade route from Central Asia pose a threat of literal and stationary displacement; Nur Shah laments about it in his discussion with Irfan "What will become of us, without our homes? Without our past" (Khan 234).

5.6. Warfare, Ecologies of the Aftermath, and Displacements

War and terrorism build the background of *Thinner than Skin*. It presents the adverse impacts of GWOT in South Asia as the US drone warfare led to increased terrorist attacks across Pakistan and heightened interference of police and military in the lives of the people. Warfare brings thorough transmogrification of the known into the unfamiliar which causes literal as well as stationary displacements. Abbasi in her article "Impact of Terrorism on Pakistan" (2013) documents mass displacement in FATA and KPK due to GWOT, terrorism, and counter operations by the military: "A report published in June 2013 by the International Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), claims that around 5 million people have become internally displaced as a result of conflict in the North West of Pakistan since 2004" out of which only 1.1 million are registered (45-6). "According to the data collected by the PTM (Pashtun Tahafuz Movement), military operations during the last two decades displaced 5.7 million people, out of which at least 2.3 million are still homeless" (Pirzada). Most of these Internally Displaced People (IDPs) are from FATA, South Waziristan, Khyber, Kurram and Orakzai Agencies.

The text presents militarism leading to displacement in Waziristan as a shepherd loses his limbs when he accidentally kicks an unexploded cluster bomb. Khan exemplifies that the neocolonial strategy of drone warfare causes casualties, some imminent and on the spot while many other casualties are long term. Warfare not only puts the lives of the people at risk but also has “ecologies of the aftermath” (Nixon 199). Natural richness of the land is badly affected by drone attacks and the land that was there before the attack is not the same anymore: the person at the control end of this precision warfare looks “down on a land that wasn’t even down there, as you were about to destroy it” (Khan 105). The phrase ‘that wasn’t even down there’ depicts the vulnerability and thus resultant displacement of the poor people. Liaquat and Raza describe drone warfare as “a posthuman military tactic which is ravaging the developing nations’ ecology” (122). Thus the affected communities are stranded in a place that is denuded of the very features that made it inhabitable. This “violence of delayed destruction” causes literal displacement leading to nostalgia for many and stationary displacement leading to solastalgia for many others (Nixon 2).

The US hegemony is established through dissociational dynamics that is at work in drone attacks. Drone is “the weaponry of globalization... mysterious, distant, deadly” (Ahmed 2). A missile thrown by an American drone kills thirty civilians while the poor victims or their families cannot do anything in retaliation because a drone is just a drone with no enemy within it. Khan deconstructs the simplistic trope devised by the West to justify its presence in the area by portraying the presence of the West as colonial buccaneering with the panoptic surveillance through the robotised drone warfare. Drones are intrusive and omnipresent, “both spies and weapons in the hands of imperial powers” (Liaquat and Raza 120).

Terrorism penetrates throughout the country be it Waziristan, or Karachi or the farthest areas in the north like Kaghan and Gilgit. Kaghan becomes a hideout for militants and suicide bombers; so much so that natives cannot identify who is who and working for whom. The Americans and their Allies are the short-termers who come to bombard the country for their benefit, while the native long-termers are bound to face displacement and to live inside the ecological repercussions. Khan documents “the disproportionate impact that U.S. global ambitions and policies have exerted over socio-environmental landscapes internationally” by portraying how the lives of the people settled in the farthest areas in the north of Pakistan are affected by GWOT (Nixon 34).

6. Conclusion

Thinner than Skin is “a site of resistance against imperialistic policies of globalized commerce and industry” as it portrays a link between social justice and ecological justice (Hussaini 15). The sustainable lifestyles of the herders and

inhabitants of the valley are disrupted by tourism, war, and state institutions, leading them to displacement. Their ecology, their lives, and resources are at stake because of slow violence, owing to which they become refugees in place and refugees out of place. As the novel ends, Maryam, left with only half of her surviving family, is trying to grapple with the physical and emotional challenges that come her way. The violence of delayed destruction causes literal displacement, leading to nostalgia for many and stationary displacement, leading to solastalgia for many others, putting the lives of the ecosystem people at stake.

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