



Book Review

Environmental Ethics: Life Narratives from Kashmir and Palestine

Shumaila Noreen

Lecturer, Department of English, University of Wah
PhD Scholar (English Literature), NUML, Islamabad
shumaila.noreen@uow.edu.pk

Environmental Ethics: Life Narratives from Kashmir and Palestine by Rabia Aamir offers an engrossing debate between contemporary “eco-politics” (Aamir 5) and the resultant counterfeit image of the environmental movement. By providing a much-needed postcolonial critique of environmentalism in postcolonial spaces, Aamir cements social justice with environmental justice and validates both as the cornerstones of environmental ethics. In doing so, she tends to “deconstruct the political, economic, and environmental myths” which have led to an “economic Orientalism,” “economic expansion,” and an “ecological apocalypticism” (5). Creating a research niche within the war-torn zones of Kashmir and Palestine, Aamir foregrounds how dominant postcolonial narratives portray East and West as part of a global imaginary where the postcolonial consciousness of once colonized spaces is relegated to global consciousness. This merger, according to Aamir, leads to a cosmological trauma in the natives who are disempowered, fragmented, and suffer from a terrible loss of identity. Aamir criticizes the dichotomous nature of avant-garde environmental scholarship prevailing in the Western world, and dubs it as “environmental ethnocide” (2). Using the theoretical frameworks of Deane Curtin’s environmental ethics, Louis Althusser’s theory of ideology and interpellation, and Edward Said’s *idées reçues*, Aamir theorizes that an overriding “colonial asphyxiation” (69) exists in all third world spaces which is causing a lacuna in establishing independent and self-reliant postcolonial regimes globally.

Divided into three parts with nineteen chapters, the book journeys into a

medley of environmentalism, postcolonialism, and its subsequent merger through the coinage of the term, “implonialism” (176). Part 1 presents a contextual understanding of Kashmir and Palestine through a historical lens and supports a historiographic study by opting for life narratives as case studies. Part 2 of the book explains the theoretical toolkit employed. It sheds light on the tenets of environmental justice, environmental ethics and postcolonial environmentalism. Through a critical analysis of resistance literature borrowed from the troubled lands of Kashmir and Palestine, Aamir presents unnerving comparisons between the misconceived “blanket assertions” (248) of the environmentalist status quo and its aberrant twist in the form of “green criminology” (5).

In the first part of the book, Aamir delinks the Palestinian resistance movement from the clutches of oppressive configurations such as racism, colonialism, and environmentalism and highlights the incompatibility of the dominant capitalist structures through a “transnational ethics of place” surrounding the “global claustrophobia” of environmentalist narrative (71). The book desists from ethnic pigeonholing and moves strategically to safeguard the larger canvas of the contemporary globalized world.

Hinting at the dialectics of postcolonialism and ecocriticism, the author navigates through the notion of eco-postcolonial ethic extracted from Deane Curtin’s *Environmental Ethics for a Postcolonial World* and following Curtin, envisions “environmental justice, social justice, and economic justice as parts of the same world, not as dissonant competitors” (5). By bringing to the fore the inherent contradictions, erasures, marginalization, and silencing of historical epistemic knowledge about postcolonial spaces, Aamir fleshes out and yokes together many significant themes such as historical amnesia, ideological colonial structures, moral philosophy, Islamofascism, terrorism and Global War on Terror (GWOT), and nationalism. Through all these themes, the book deconstructs the problematisation of protean power structures surrounding the global flashpoints such as Kashmir and Palestine and situates the normative narratives in an intersectional space.

The ontological, social, and political ramifications of the book are substantiated through multi-pronged theoretical standpoints as voiced by Graham Huggan, Helen Tiffin, Ramachandra Guha, Rob Nixon, Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt all of whom have unequivocally articulated the dogmatic nature of settler colonialism and environmentalism which hinges on the bigoted mindset of the first world countries which privileges the chosen few. The book extensively takes issue with the disputatious nature of narratives fabricated around both Kashmir and Palestine and by placing the narratives of exilic intellectuals in mainstream

resistance literature, it presents the oppression levied against Kashmir as demonstrated through the “fearsome crescendo in the wake of August 5th, 2019” (21). In support of her arguments, Aamir uses Alastair Lamb’s *Incomplete Partition: The Genesis of the Kashmir Dispute, 1947-1948* and J. M. N. Jeffries’s *Palestine: The Reality: The Inside Story of the Balfour Declaration*; both Lamb and Jeffries have presented chronological records of hegemonic practices going on in Kashmir and Palestine, respectively.

Merging together “pervasive propaganda” (Aamir 388), that is, *idées reçues* from Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and the notion of polyvocality or multivocality from Hamid Dabashi’s *Post Orientalism* in Chapter 3 that is, “Pursuit of Liberty and Justice”, the book stages the “central problem of representation” under the (mis)pronounced “environmental ethical canopy” (69) which, according to Aamir, is predominantly the main culprit for the linguistic, social, cultural, and racial marginalization of geographical spaces anywhere in the world. Using Ghada Karmi’s *Return: A Palestinian Memoir* and Basharat Peer’s *Curfewed Night*, the book delves into the crises of heterotopias and outlines both Kashmir and Palestine as discursive spaces where multiple layers of political interpretation or associations can be investigated.

Part 3 of the book laments the horrid predicament of environmentalist claims as narrativized in Peer’s *Curfewed Night*. Through an informed postcolonial critique, the book foregrounds the principles of social justice and environmental ethics against exclusionary environmentalist practices propagated globally. In her introduction to Chapter 13 titled “Absences, Invisible Presence(s), and Militant Nationalism”, Aamir contends:

[J]ust as postcolonial studies have emerged from its borderland status and eventually established their validity against the pervasive universalist Eurocentric claims, the textualized borderland of Kashmir, being one of the highest militant zones in the world, extends the capacity of a postcolonial appraisal. (159)

A polyphonic reading of the land of Kashmir as a postcolonial space presents an analytical debate of eco-politics while infusing moral dimension to it. The book indisputably refers to how a “war of terror” (168) is waged by India against the demilitarized Kashmiri people and questions how Kashmiris are interpellated as perpetrators who are to be silenced and subjugated. Categorizing Yasmin Khan as a “modern-day Islamophobe” (Aamir 172) who, in her book, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* underscores partition as the most horrendous experience of decolonization, Aamir maintains “what else may be expected when

we see this neo-colonialism's resolve to annihilate the living population of this [Kashmiri] land" (172) and provides environmental ethics as a universal remedy to quash global disputes. The book not only makes inroads into the domains of economic orientalism through the engravings of ideological hegemonies but also extends a counter argumentation through subversive strategies employed by Peer in *Curfewed Night*.

Chapter 17 titled as "Ecological Apocalypse in 'Gaza Strip of Kashmir'" stamps the prototypical argument of the book as it adds a significant humanitarian dimension to the existing scholarship available in the domains of postcoloniality and environmentalism. The poignant description of Srinagar, "a medieval city dying of a modern war" with "empty streets, locked shops, angry soldiers, and boys with stones" (qtd. in Aamir 269) blatantly exposes the mythical nature of environmentalist narratives and the subsequent hollow debates taking place in the cosy environs of the Western think tanks including state institutions, peace centres, councils, corporations, and most importantly, the literary arenas.

Similar underpinnings are extrapolated in Chapter 18 of the book titled "'Changed Landscape' of an 'Arab Place': A Study of Interpellated Realm of Ghada Karmi's *Return*" which draws the "journey of an 'outside insider,' who is 'not Arab enough' in Palestine, but 'too Arab in England" (299). The in-depth insights as well as keen observations made by the writer manifest the cataclysmic nature of colonial as well as environmental verbiage associated with the holy land of Palestine. Aamir's insightful deliberations into Peer's *Curfewed Night* and Karmi's *Return* staples together Kashmiri as well as Palestinian resistance with the exaggerated slogans of environmentalism. The shuddering depiction of the confiscated land as a place that "looked deserted, unnaturally quiet, like a ghost town" with "slogans onto the wall about freedom for Palestinians and chatting to each other" (313) reflects how the environmental narrative is a fiasco in protecting both the natural as well as ethical environment of these places. The author theorizes that the troubled geographical terrains as painted by these authors in their memoirs highlight the contextual ambiguities of the Western environmentalism which result in environmentalism of the poor.

The slender boundary between "colonialisms" and "imperialisms", neologized by Aamir as "implonialism" (391) in her book effectively weaves together the deep-rooted inconsistencies and complexities of so-called debates of colonialism, neo-colonialism and the contemporaneous focus on decolonization. Through her coinage of the term, implonialism, Aamir provides a critique on the political nature of the environmental movement and strictly follows

a moral approach throughout the book. The writer argues in support of “an ecodevelopment that is inherently diverse. It must begin at the local level because communities and places are diverse...the implication of this idea is that the first world cannot be free while the third world is enslaved” (qtd. in Aamir 390).

Environmental Politics, as is evident through the consistent debates going on in the Western academia during the last few decades, is a significant aspect of the global political milieu. The interventionist and interdisciplinary assessment of the book, through its focus on environmental ethics, makes it a valuable and accessible resource material for scholars, researchers, and academics of Environmentalism. The concepts touched upon here draw attention to only a few of the many meticulous and critical positions advanced in this book which keep the readers fruitfully engaged till the end. The book would invariably help the readers understand the eurocentric focus of environmental debates which challenges the prevalent misconceived notions. In the contemporary post 9/11 scenario of neo-Orientalism and green postcolonialism, the book is an admirable contribution to the debates on postcolonial environmental ethics. Simultaneously, the symbiosis of literal exegesis incorporated in the book makes it an engaging resource book in the existing literary scholarship.

Works Cited

Aamir, Rabia. *Environmental Ethics: Life Narratives from Kashmir and Palestine*. Vanguard Books, 2023.