

ALGORITHMIC WARFARE: A POSTHUMAN NECROPOLITICAL READING OF NADEEM ASLAM'S THE BLIND MAN'S GARDEN

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ABSTRACT

*This study explores how sovereignty transcends human actors to include ecological landscapes, technological infrastructures, and textual representations as control mechanisms by analyzing posthuman necropolitical techniques in Nadeem Aslam's (2013) *The Blind Man's Garden*. This study contends that modern warfare is conducted by a dispersed network of human and non-human technologies that together produce and maintain what Mbembe (2003) refers to as "death-worlds." This study makes the case that Aslam's fiction depicts a posthuman necropolitical order, where governance operates in nonhuman assemblages that exclude, discipline, and eliminate subjects rather than being limited to human decision-making. This connects Mbembe's (2003) necropolitics with Rosi Braidotti's posthumanism. The article's conclusion states that mapping the horrifying porosity between life and death in contemporary combat zones is Aslam's literary endeavor. *The Blind Man's Garden* is a critical literary intervention for comprehending the operational and ethical complexities of warfare in the twenty-first century because it challenges purely anthropocentric understandings of war by demonstrating how necropower is enacted through ecological, technological, and discursive systems.*

Introduction:

This study examines how Aslam's works of fiction subvert anthropocentric theories of power by portraying texts as archives of necropolitical memory, drones as disembodied sovereigns, and landscapes as zones of exception, all while drawing on Braidotti's (2013) critical posthumanism. She believes that "the posthuman turn can support and enhance this project in so far as it displaces the exclusive focus on the idea of Europe as the cradle of Humanism, driven by a form of universalism that endows it with a unique sense of historical purpose" (p. 53). These narratives reframe sovereignty as a vast network of material, technological, and discursive forces by combining imperial warfare, religious

fanaticism, and governmental monitoring to create a control mechanism that surpasses human agency. This study fills a significant void in the literature by placing Aslam's fictions at the nexus of posthumanism and necropolitics. Previous research has mostly concentrated on Aslam's interactions with colonial legacies, radicalism, and human rights. By closely examining *The Blind Man's Garden*, this study shows how Aslam's (2013) literary imagination reinterprets sovereignty in the twenty-first century, showing how authority uses nonhuman beings to uphold death, exclusion, and control regimes. In addition to broadening the theoretical application of necropolitics in literary studies, this interdisciplinary approach provides

fresh perspectives on how governance is changing in the posthuman era. Mbembe (2003) asserts that Contemporary wars belong to a new moment and can hardly be understood through earlier theories of “contractual violence” or typologies of ‘just’ and ‘unjust’ wars... Wars of the globalization era do not include the conquest, acquisition and takeover of a territory among their objectives. Ideally, they are hit-and-run affairs. (p.30)

This brings us to the non-localization of war where the enemy is always changing and is in a constant fluid form. The posthuman era’s shift in governance has drastically changed how power is used, extending beyond human actors to include ecological systems, technical infrastructures, and textual discourses as control mechanisms. Nonhuman actors that operate as sovereign agents in deciding life and death, such as drones, biometric monitoring, and algorithmic decision-making, are becoming more and more important in today’s international conflicts. This change is consistent with necropolitics, as defined by Mbembe (2003), who defines sovereignty as the authority to determine who must die and who may live (p. 11). Even though Mbembe’s (2003) theory has been widely used in postcolonial conflict areas, little is known about its posthuman aspects, or how sovereignty functions through nonhuman entities. This study argues that Aslam’s fiction reconfigures sovereignty as a distributed network of technical, ecological, and literary forces rather than a merely anthropocentric phenomenon, bringing necropolitics into dialogue with Braidotti’s (2013) posthumanism. The posthuman condition, according to Braidotti (2013), undermines conventional humanist structures of power and transfers authority to nonhuman entities like AI, digital monitoring, and securitized landscapes.

This study examines how Aslam’s (2013) works subvert anthropocentric theories of power by portraying texts as archives of necropolitical memory, drones as disembodied sovereigns, and landscapes as zones of exception, all while drawing on Braidotti’s critical posthumanism. These narratives reframe sovereignty as a vast network of material, technological, and discursive forces by combining imperial warfare, religious fanaticism, and governmental monitoring to create a control

mechanism that surpasses human agency. This study fills a significant void in the literature by placing Aslam’s fiction at the nexus of posthumanism and necropolitics. Previous research has mostly concentrated on Aslam’s interactions with colonial legacies, radicalism, and human rights. By closely examining *The Blind Man’s Garden*, this study shows how Aslam’s (2013) literary imagination reinterprets sovereignty in the twenty-first century, showing how authority uses nonhuman beings to uphold death, exclusion, and control regimes. In addition to broadening the theoretical application of necropolitics in literary studies, this interdisciplinary approach provides fresh perspectives on how governance is changing in the posthuman era.

Drones acting as disembodied sovereigns, securitized landscapes preserving necropolitical histories, and books acting as archival places of epistemic violence are some examples of how Aslam’s novels depict this shift. A type of spectral sovereignty is exercised by governmental surveillance technologies in *The Golden Legend*, turning people into objects of algorithmic examination and remotely directed violence (Aslam, 2017). Similar to this, in *The Blind Man’s Garden*, the militarization of public areas and the use of drones establish exceptional zones where sovereignty is exercised through posthuman, disembodied forms of government (Aslam, 2013). A close reading of *The Blind Man’s Garden* reveals the growing dependence on nonhuman infrastructures as sovereign entities in addition to criticizing imperial necropower and state violence. This study develops a fresh theoretical approach that investigates how power, violence, and governance operate through posthuman assemblages in contemporary South Asian fiction by utilizing Braidotti’s (2017) posthumanist framework to analyze Mbembe’s (2003) necropolitics. This paper examines how Aslam’s (2013) literary imagination reinterprets sovereignty in the twenty-first century through a close reading of *The Blind Man’s Garden*. It shows how textual, ecological, and technological infrastructures normalize necropolitical governance as an unavoidable reality.

Literature Review:

In recent years, the connection between necropolitics and posthuman governmentality has drawn more scholarly attention, especially in conversations on modern conflict literature. By highlighting the institutionalization of death as a political tool, Mbembe (2003) expands on Foucault's (1978) concept of biopower in her conceptualization of necropolitics. Although Mbembe's (2003) work has been crucial in the analysis of state-sanctioned violence in postcolonial settings, little is known about how it intersects with posthuman theory, especially when it comes to governance that transcends human agency. In her discussion of the posthuman situation, Braidotti (2013) makes the case that nonhuman actors, technical infrastructures, and algorithmic control are becoming more and more important in modern governance's efforts to manage populations (p. 94). By applying Braidotti's (2013) and Mbembe's (2003) paradigms to Aslam's novel, this paper shows how sovereignty operates through nonhuman (posthuman) entities, turning texts, technology, and landscapes into tools of necropower. This is also important to mention that posthuman does not mean antihuman but it is how as in Wilcox (2016) words "the Predator crew, out of a sense of intimacy and identification with the troops on the ground, seeks to shore up this masculine identity through the production of racialized 'others' that must be destroyed" (p. 13).

Theoretical Framework:

Theorizing posthuman necropolitical governance through Aslam's novels has not yet received enough attention in literary criticism, despite the fact that it has examined issues of colonial legacies and state tyranny. This study fills this vacuum by showing how Aslam (2013) imagines a future in which sovereignty is dispersed among technological, ecological, and literary infrastructures rather than functioning directly through human action. This study makes the case that Aslam (2013) reveals the changing nature of government in a time when sovereignty is exercised through nonhuman agents, in addition to criticizing necropolitical regimes, by referencing Braidotti's (2013) posthumanism. To understand her posthuman perspective, one thing is to be According to Liaqat and Raza (2021), "Drone

technology is one such dangerous technology which kills people as well as keeps an eye on their lives. In this sense, it is a necropolitical and biopolitical tool by its users" (p.118).

A critical framework for analyzing Aslam's (2013) novel via the prism of posthuman necropolitics is established by this review of the literature. Although earlier research has examined his work in light of postcolonial trauma and state oppression, this study broadens the conversation by fusing Mbembe's (2003) necropolitics with Braidotti's posthumanist framework, providing a fresh theoretical viewpoint on how governance functions through nonhuman entities, technological frameworks, and spatial regimes. This paper advances a more nuanced understanding of contemporary South Asian fiction by situating Aslam's (2013) work within the larger field of posthuman necropolitical studies. It does this by showing how literature expresses the changing nature of power, violence, and sovereignty in the twenty-first century.

Discussion and Analysis

In response to the 9/11 terror attacks on American territory, US-led forces invaded Afghanistan in late 2001 and early 2002, which is when Aslam's (2013) novel takes place. The narrative centers on the lives of an old man with sight impairment named Rohan, his daughter-in-law Naheed, who loses her husband Jeo in the war, Jeo's foster brother and Naheed's boyfriend Mikal, who is wrongfully detained and subjected to torture by the US military, her mother Tara, Mikal's brother Basie, and his wife Yasmin. The family resides in the made-up town of Heer, which is situated on the shaky, porous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The story addresses a number of problems that affect Afghanistan and the surrounding area, including the invasion by Western powers, the geopolitics of conflict, the use of religion as a political tool where the implicit violence has kept the reader as a digital entity such as the vulnerable characters of the novel *The Blind Man's Garden* who have been photographed "against the height chart and then they shave his beard and hair off and photograph him again" (Aslam, 2013, p. 200). The novel under study reflects technological, ecological, biopolitical, infrastructural and informational posthuman

necropolitical perspectives. The cyber and surveillance technologies and carceral architectures like slums, prison houses, refugee camps as well as environmental destruction and resource extraction are some of the contemporary technologies where power diverges from human flesh to other non-living or ruling technological figurines. The discourse of martyrdom also sold heavily for those who are made the subject of this necropolitical conviction. Mbembe (2003) writes, “In the logic of martyrdom, the will to die is fused with the willingness to take the enemy with you... This logic seems contrary to another one, which consists in wishing to impose death on others while preserving one’s own life” (p.17). The power of sovereign shifts in this posthuman necropolitical relationship of martyrdom and suicidal death where one chooses to eliminate oneself simultaneously claiming the power of the sovereign.

In Aslam’s (2013) fiction, posthuman necropolitics refers to a world in which the human flesh is transformed into data, signal, and code rather than the primary location of dominance. In reality, the technologies that make this claim reframe the right to murder into automated governance structures. Jeo and Mikal, two bothers, where the latter one is adopted and has a little or no interest in war after having witnessed the dehumanizing conditions in which the new recruiters, too young to be the fighters of wars are kept by the warlords as Sethna (2013) describes “There are detailed, harrowing scenes of boys being raped in Taliban compounds and descriptions of American-led torture (interrogations that Bagram and Guantanamo prisoners are known to have suffered)”. The necropolitical power that Mbembe (2003) ascribes to the sovereign in this posthuman realm, the capacity to determine who must perish and who may survive, is no longer embodied in a single individual or even a government. The decision of which lives are expendable is made in secret by machines, drones, satellites, surveillance grids, and climate infrastructures. This metamorphosis is frequently depicted in Aslam’s works with poetic intimacy. For example, American drones over Pakistani skies in *The Blind Man’s Garden* produce a ghostly atmosphere in which death lurks imperceptibly through distant screens thousands of miles away.

The victims are viewed as ‘thermal signatures’ rather than as real beings, turning them into an algorithmic abstraction. In this case, political dehumanization and technology translation both obliterate the human body. Since the drone murders without seeing, registers without feeling, and controls without accountability, its gaze is essentially the gaze of posthuman necropolitics.

The posthuman necropolitical paradigm is consistent with Aslam’s (2013, 2017) works, especially *The Golden Legend* and *The Blind Man’s Garden*, which deal with the technologicalization of conflict, the securitization of space, and the systematic exclusion of the Other. The current study has particularly focused on the widespread use of drone warfare and surveillance technology in *The Blind Man’s Garden* which serves as an example of how governmental authority functions outside of human judgment. Massud, an architect and historian, is a victim of this enlarged necropolitical regime, where the surveillance state makes his life and his intellectual endeavors expendable (Aslam, 2017, p. 56). Nasr El-Hag Ali (2015) talks about the blurred binaries between a friend and enemy after the change in technology in warfare and proclaims that, the “Drones prove not only efficient in the transgression of rights, but their key feature has been that of little to no risk. Accountability, as I have previously stated, becomes extremely complex in the case of drone warfare” (p. 9). The new understanding of personhood changes in posthuman era, silence for example works as a character, terror and slow violence also work as personas in the situation where these characters are used to reduce some populations to expendability. Braidotti (2013) contents that “the posthumanist position I am defending builds on the anti-humanist legacy, more specifically on the epistemological and political foundations of the poststructuralist generation, and moves further” (p. 38). In a similar vein, Nargis’s coerced confession by security guards demonstrates how the state maintains power through a system of ongoing monitoring and discursive manipulation in addition to physical assault (p. 148). These scenes demonstrate how Aslam’s (2013) work transcends conventional depictions of necropolitical violence by showing how governance is carried out by technology and physical infrastructures rather than

just by human actors and the power of the sovereign is seen subverted with a strong religious bigotry creating sub-groups of us vs them. In Pak-Afghan borders, the war lords and the American soldiers are distributing death considering themselves a superior being while major Kyra can be heard saying that “Do you think that we don’t have plans to undermine the American army in this part of the world, an army made up of homosexuals and women?” (p. 331). Similarly, Jeo, a young medical student, is drawn into the militarized zones of exception in *The Blind Man’s Garden*, where sovereignty is exercised through the disembodied authority of military checkpoints and drone surveillance rather than through explicit political decree (Aslam, 2013, p. 202). In the novel, drones act as posthuman sovereigns, killing people without direct human involvement. This is an example of what Braidotti (2017) refers to as “algorithmic necropolitics,” in which technical infrastructures decide who lives and who dies (p. 115). By demonstrating how both state and non-state entities use posthuman mechanisms to manipulate and eradicate populations, the book further challenges religious fundamentalism as a manifestation of necropower. Aslam’s (2013) construction of posthuman necropolitical worlds, where sovereignty functions through the manipulation of texts, landscapes, and technological infrastructures rather than through outright violence, has received little notice, nevertheless. Aslam regularly turns rural and urban areas into securitized, deadly places where necropolitical history are encoded in the architecture itself. According to the novel, for example, the Pakistani landscape is a ‘cartography of disappearance,’ where people disappear into drone-stricken communities and detention facilities, leaving behind a history of the dispossessed that has been obliterated (Aslam, 2017, p. 223) and this technological posthuman personhood of the drone can best be understood what Braidotti (2013) calls it, “tele-thenatological devices” (p.126). That “the necropolitical state is inscribed onto space itself, turning landscapes into zones of erasure” (p. 84) is consistent with Mbembe’s (2019) assertion. Furthermore, Aslam employs textuality as a necropolitical archive, a place where government and memory converge. Books and historical records are frequently destroyed or

altered in *The Golden Legend* in order to manipulate historical accounts (Aslam, 2017, p. 89).

The recurrent theme, the garden, of *The Blind Man’s Garden*, facilitates in ensnaring the birds to be captured by the bird pardoner, and it ceases to be Edenic turning into an entropic representation of the moral failings of civilization. Another posthuman necropolitical area is encapsulated by the idea of ‘inner slums’ in *The Blind Man’s Garden*. These areas of neglect, where both human and non-human existence are reduced to subsistence, are not only urban slums but also psychological and social ones. Once a place of faith and education, the blind man's home devolves into a moral and physical wreck. Abandoned to political corruption and outside dominance, it reflects the country itself. The infrastructure has been brutally mutilated which the state still existed which brought the reader to a point where non-human personas are taking over the shape of dismemberment so much so that the reader feels that his/her limbs are being involved in the unrest such as the “rooms, trucks and trees are on fire, as is the golden dome of the mosque” (Aslam, 2013, p. 74).

These behaviors support posthuman governmentality, in which authority is exercised through the methodical erasure and rewriting of collective memory rather than just through acts of physical violence. Violence frequently functions as a creeping corrosion rather than an explosion in Aslam’s (2013) literary world. The destruction that occurs gradually, imperceptibly, and unevenly over people and landscapes as ‘slow violence.’ This slowness blends with technology when necropolitics becoming posthuman: power is extended without physical contact using ‘wireless’ control systems like drones, satellites, surveillance cameras, and digital propaganda. Baidotti (2013) warns that “As they become smarter and more widespread, autonomous machines are bound to make life-or-death decisions and thus assume agency” (p.44). This reasoning is best exemplified by drone warfare, which reduces the distance between observer and target and makes human life a variable that can be calculated within algorithmically precise surveillance networks. Both the loss of empathy and the institutionalization of fear as a controlling mechanism, where dominance is exercised through both visibility and invisibility,

precision and abstraction, are revealed by the dehumanization implied in this process. In this way, the *The Blind Man's Garden* addresses the broader necropolitical state of the twenty-first century, in which the handling of death has become more automated, depersonalized, and accepted under the pretense of security and efficiency which Mbembe (2003) has put it as “thanks to a military-technological revolution that has multiplied the capacity for destruction in unprecedented ways” (p. 30).

According to Wilcox (2016) “Aside from fears of automated machines with the ability to kill outside of human agency or supervision, perhaps one of the most controversial uses of algorithms, ‘big data’, and artificial intelligence is the practice of targeting individuals in what is known as ‘drone warfare’”. The Pakistani environment itself serves as a testing ground for this distant necropower in *The Blind Man's Garden*. There is a spectral anxiety in the air, as drones hover over settlements like unseen gods. Death is not seen to those below; they only sense its imminence. The drones' capacity to destroy without human intervention is a reflection of posthuman sovereignty, which is a networked system of governance that relies on data rather than judgment. The very thing that allows us to breathe, the air, becomes a deadly vector. The atmosphere is political here, and the surroundings are turned into a military zone. Wilcox (2016) explain this fear as ““In drone warfare, fear circulates through the affective connections that members of the drone assemblage have for the troops on the ground as well as through the emotion of hate” (p.13). The moral and political emptiness brought about by systematic cruelty is reflected in the ecological catastrophe. According to a posthuman necropolitical interpretation, this environmental damage is a type of necropower and is not distinct from surveillance or conflict. As Mbembe (2003) points out in his later works on the Anthropocene, climate damage turns into a continuation of colonial dominance, when the most toxic, uninhabitable areas are forced upon people who are already marginalized. The impoverished, members of religious minorities, and refugees in Aslam live in a world of literal waste, without access to safe drinking water or clean air. The ecological necropolitics is the gradual disposability of both the

planet and its inhabitants. Nature itself becomes a tool of exclusion due to the state's disregard for infrastructure, militarization of natural resources, and commercialization of survival. The entire definition of the survival changes when a strong religious discourse takes over for instance “the day after the West invaded Afghanistan, a piety discount was introduced for those who wished to buy the weapon to go to the jihad” (p. 17)

Dehumanizing enemy helps evading guilt and eventually reducing them to social and literal deaths are justified. The narratives are developed by using such language against them which diminishes their human agency and human existence, from treating them as a digital entity of yet another enemy whose extermination will only make the other more secure. The language, Liaqat and Raza (2021) posit, is one of the powerful tools “used for the surveillance images of the human activity [which] clearly indicates that the status of human beings is reduced to reptiles or insects who are slithering through one street into another” (p. 130) and the texts like *The Blind Man's Garden*, portrays how the panopticon-like forces are being employed to maintain those who can be pushed to the boundaries of social strata are lesser than human beings, while he doesn't miss a chance to remind the reader that the imperial and neo-colonial forces are at work: “Watch your manner, you... you running dog of imperialism” (Aslam, 2013, p. 304). This spatialized type of power, which erases distance and redefines territory, is what one could refer to as the wireless necropolitical field. In addition to being immediate (bombings), the violence is long-lasting, as the aftermath of the attack is still shaped by radiation, environmental destruction, and psychological anguish. Aslam's (2013) focus on destroyed orchards, scorched ground, and quiet birds turns these landscapes into eco-necropolitical commentary: under a technocratic military regime, both humans and non-humans perish together.

Conclusion

Aslam's (2013) *The Blind Man's Garden* serves as a significant literary map of the porous line separating life and death that characterizes modern battlegrounds. Aslam exposes the necropolitical mechanisms that underpin contemporary power by

following the lives of persons caught up in religious extremism, imperial conflict, and humanitarian tragedies. War cannot be contained inside anthropocentric frameworks that only value human agency, according to his story. Rather, it places necropower in the context of a posthuman conglomerate of ideologies, algorithmic monitoring, technological warfare, and ecological degradation that together control the conditions of life and death. He reveals the moral and practical intricacies of warfare in the twenty-first century, as the lines separating victim and perpetrator, life and death, and human and machine become perilously blurred. *The Blind Man's Garden* is ultimately a critical literary intervention that forces readers to consider how, in the modern world, life is not only threatened by human violence but is also controlled and put out by entwined networks of matter, power, and technology which are some of the classic example of posthuman necropolitics.

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