

STICKY INFRASTRUCTURES AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFECT: GLACIERS, TERRAINS, AND THE CO-PRODUCTION OF STIGMA IN UZMA ASLAM KHAN'S THINNER THAN SKIN

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ABSTRACT

This article develops a novel theoretical synthesis by combining Sara Ahmed's concept of "sticky affects" which provides a lens to look at the ways in which emotions such as suspicion, fear, and outsidership circulate and adhere to particular bodies through repetition and association, with Jane Bennett's notion of "vibrant matter," which attributes active agency and vitality to nonhuman entities and forces. Applied to Uzma Aslam Khan's 2012 novel "Thinner Than Skin", this framework reveals how the extreme weather, moving glaciers, and treacherous terrain of northern Pakistan function not as passive backdrops but as "affective accomplices" to state power. Existing scholarship has largely treated checkpoints and bordering practices as exclusively human-political mechanisms of postcolonial oppression. This study intervenes by demonstrating how the natural environment actively collaborates with these infrastructures to isolate nomadic Gujjar communities, intensify their vulnerability, and make the stigma of being perceived as outsiders "stick" more tenaciously to their bodies. The article argues that the landscape co-produces biopolitical control and marginalisation in the Global South through detailed close reading. This method will help with the new materialist, affect and postcolonial ecocritical research and provide novel perspectives on climate-sensitive areas that accentuate existing inequalities.

Keywords: sticky affects, vibrant matter, agency, postcolonial oppression, ecocriticism, biopolitics

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The stunning but dangerous terrain of northern Pakistan, including the glaciers, mountains, rivers, and valleys of the Kaghan Valley and Saif-ul-Maluk Lake, is the backdrop for Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* (2012). The novel is set uniquely with the intertwining of the stories of Nadir, a Pakistani-American photographer

struggling with his sense of identity and guilt, his half-Pakistani girlfriend Farhana, who is engaged in glacier research, and the members of the indigenous Gujjar nomadic community, whose traditional herding way of life is being increasingly threatened. The ecology of the region is described in rich and imaginative terms, as something that

moves, relates, belongs and lives: something that is character. The nomadic Gujjars have traditionally been migrating along with their herds according to a seasonal routine, but now they face increasing restrictions by the state bureaucracy, checkpoints, corruption and the encroaching influence of terrorism and environmental changes. While checkpoints symbolise institutional control, Khan's prose animates the glaciers as "anthropomorphic" entities born of "mating ice," sensual yet dangerous, capable of both nurturing and destroying life.

This article reads the environment as "sticky infrastructure": material formations that actively participate in affective politics. The impact of extreme weather events, changing glacial flow and isolation of terrain is not just to make it difficult for the Gujjars; it also makes suspicion and fear cling to nomadic bodies, making them perpetual outsiders in their own lands under state-enforced bordering. This view echoes the global discussion on the impact of climate change on the world and its implications for Pakistan, one of the most climate-sensitive countries, where glacial melt, floods, and land instability combine with geopolitical conflict and internal marginalisation. Through the use of this interdisciplinary approach, the researcher hopes to further explore how the selected text is an ecological narrative, but also a complex political and affective text. Through this emphasis on the co-constitution of state power, affective adhesion, and nonhuman forces, it foregrounds the lived and narrated experiences of bordering. It goes beyond current ecocritical focus to explore the novel's discussion of the ways in which emotions such as fear and suspicion, for example can attach to bodies and spaces, the ways in which mountains and glaciers have political power, and the ways in which state and environmental assemblages mutually reinforce exclusion and violence. The novel's use of glaciers as sensual, powerful forces that shape memories, resistance, and identity is noted by critics. Research areas include threats to nomadic life as a result of climate change and globalisation, the cross-over of gender and environment, ecofeminism, ecological impacts of urbanism, and the suffering of biodiversity and indigenous people. There is a major gap in these readings,

though: they focus on the natural world as a place in which human activity occurs or as a place in which human activity takes place, instead of a place in which humans and nature are working together. No study has examined how glaciers, weather, and terrain themselves function as agential forces that enhance state power through affective mechanisms. This article offers a remedy for this by drawing on affect theory and new materialism, moving away from anthropocentric perspectives to a distributed notion of power, in which nonhuman matter co-creates stigma and vulnerability.

Literature Review and Research Gap

Ahmed's concept of "sticky affects" has become foundational for understanding how emotions such as fear, suspicion, or hatred adhere socially and materially to particular bodies, groups, and spaces, reinforcing boundaries and *Affect Theory*. Unlike traditional psychological approaches to affect as individual feelings, Ahmed approaches it as circulatory and relational, embedded within social repetition and power dynamics. This "third, hybrid tradition" of affect studies bridges psychological and philosophical perspectives to emphasise the social-material adhesion of emotions (Diaz-Fernandez & Evans, 2019).

The works of Ott (2017) and Thien (2005) situate Ahmed's theories alongside those of Grossberg and Böhme, emphasising affect as not merely internal but as constitutive of political and spatial processes. For example, the concept of "sticky atmospheres" marries Ahmed's theory with affective atmospheres to analyse pervasive socio-emotional climates, as demonstrated in studies of UK university "lad culture" that reveal the circulation of hostility and suspicion in masculinist spaces (Diaz-Fernandez & Evans, 2019). In political contexts, studies of far-right politics in Germany illustrate how destructive affects like fear and hatred normalise exclusionary ideologies, an extension of Ahmed's thesis on the political efficacy of sticky affects (Leser and Spissinger, 2020). Beyond politics, critical literacy education has drawn on Ahmed to advocate for affective awareness as a basis for ethical responsiveness to violence and suffering,

demonstrating the pedagogical value of integrating affect theory (Ahmed, 2015).

Cultural geography and border studies have applied sticky affects to examine how affective and material forces intertwine at contested sites such as state checkpoints and borders, producing social relations that exceed human bodies to include environmental and nonhuman actors. This work reveals the nuanced circulation of suspicion and power at the postcolonial border as an affective-material phenomenon (Preece et al., 2022). Ahmed's sticky affects thus provide a vital lens for understanding affective adhesion within postcolonial and socio-political spatialities relevant to *Thinner Than Skin* (2012).

Bennett's theorisation of "vibrant matter," or "thing-power," radically repositions nonhuman entities as active agents within political assemblages. Challenging anthropocentrism, Bennett argues for recognising objects, terrains, and weather as lively participants that co-constitute socio-political realities (Lemke, 2018; Bennett, 2005). This recognition has profound implications for border studies, particularly in understanding how environmental forces such as extreme weather or glaciers that serve as "affective accomplices" reinforce state power and bordering practices, as vividly illustrated in the geography mirroring Khan's novel's setting in northern Pakistan.

Though influential, Bennett's framework has been critiqued for sometimes underplaying material inequalities and hierarchical distributions of agency among vibrant entities (Lemke, 2018). Nonetheless, diverse extensions of her ideas include analyses of human-technology assemblages in health contexts, where the agency of nonhuman "things" actively shapes affective relations and political outcomes (Lupton, 2019), as well as investigations into cultural production that highlight nonhuman co-participation in creativity (Snake-Beings, 2017).

Intersections with posthumanist and new materialist debates further expand Bennett's thought toward considerations of ethics, agency, and politics beyond the human scale (Rekret, 2018; Blake, 2020). Bennett's vital materialism thus underpins a vibrant, more-than-human understanding of bordering regimes, emphasising

the political potency of nonhuman forces alongside human agency.

Critical postcolonial scholarship interrogates how colonial legacies persist in shaping postcolonial states' governance, including migration controls and border management. The concept of the "postcolonial migration state" illuminates how states in the Global South continue colonial strategies of surveillance and exclusion while navigating contradictions between sovereignty and nation-building (Sadiq and Tsourapas, 2021). Such scholarship reveals the process of border making as a multi-layered task involving affective and material aspects, not just bureaucratic work (Sharma, 2024). Postcolonial theory emphasises that the violence that is imprinted on bodies and spaces in border zones must be examined through wider lenses such as aesthetics, affect, and materiality (Jazeel, 2019; Hiddleston, 2009).

The more recent studies of the borders interweave postcolonial critique and post-human perspectives, introducing environmental and corporeal affects as part of the analysis of sovereignty and state power (Ozguc and Burridge, 2023). The interdisciplinary approach puts nonhuman actors as co-agents with human actors in postcolonial bordering assemblages, adding affective and material ecologies to the political analysis. New work in border studies calls into question anthropocentric borders and includes nonhuman actors and affective elements in bordering practices. Analyses are extended to encompass environmental, objects, and affective atmospheres as co-producers of border realities (Ozguc and Burridge, 2023).

Though few studies bring Ahmed's sticky affects, Bennett's vibrant matter, and postcolonial border theory into direct conjunction, multiple works engage these perspectives separately or in combinations across diverse texts. For example, analyses of sexism and misogyny in UK universities applying sticky atmospheres offer methodological templates for affective critique (Diaz-Fernandez and Evans, 2019). Postcolonial literary criticism has incorporated materiality and affect into its reconsideration of technique and representation, revitalising postcolonial reading practices (Etherington and Zimble, 2014). Migration literature in Arabic also has contexts

that use postcolonial and border studies to explore affective precarities and belonging amid forced migration (Sellman, 2018). Belser (2016) has studied how disability and queer theory enrich Bennett's vital materialism through studies of relational agency between humans and objects, such as wheelchairs, demonstrating political and aesthetic performativity. Research into critical human-animal relations further shows how nonhuman actors participate in socio-political assemblages (Wadham, 2020).

Several scholarly works have engaged with Ahmed's concept of sticky affects and Bennett's vibrant matter to deepen readings of English-language postcolonial and diasporic literatures, expanding both formal and thematic understandings through interdisciplinary insights. Etherington and Zimble (2014) emphasise postcolonial literary criticism's revitalisation through attention to technique, materiality, and literary craft. Their studies demonstrate how recognising the agency of literary form and material dimensions can open new interpretive pathways in Caribbean and South African literatures, resonating with Bennett's notion of vibrant matter's political implications for acknowledging nonhuman agency and liveliness within cultural production (Etherington and Zimble, 2014).

Similarly, analysis of South African literature elucidates how postcolonial works negotiate the material and embodied to represent histories of colonial and apartheid violence. Works by South African writers like J.M. Coetzee and later the voices take up postcolonial and affective lenses to examine temporality, trauma, and spatial politics, while also inviting readers to consider a range of interdisciplinary approaches, including affect theory and material agency (Vlies, 2019; Attwell et al., 2012).

Research on contemporary Arabic migration literature to Europe applies a postcolonial and border studies lens, including affective precarity that aligns with Ahmed's formulations of sticky affects at the border and Bennett's vibrant matter as environmental and material forces shaping migrant experiences and narratives. This co-theorisation highlights borders as affective and spatial locations where subjectivities are

remediated, thus revealing the embodied and environmental dimensions of migration in the present day (Sellman, 2018). Similarly, studies of British Black and Asian literatures map cultural identities and political belonging, often through rich affective registers that engage sticky affect dynamics related to racism, xenophobia, and belonging, reflecting how emotions and social histories adhere to bodies and spaces in diasporic contexts (Osborne, 2016).

Race, American Literature and Transnational Modernisms is a study of the racial and national crossing of modernist poetry by Patterson, who investigates the influences of the imperial and migratory worlds on the making of modernist American poetry. This approach adds to affective and material analyses by highlighting the convergence of affective and material histories in literature through a transnational frame, which finds an echo in the focus on 'sticky affects' on socially circulated affects, and the postcolonial emphasis on power that shapes material conditions (Patterson, 2008).

A key study engaging with Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* has approached the novel through an ecocritical lens, charting its thematic engagement with ecological crisis and climate change (Rabani & Mishra, 2024). This article aims to critically examine the novel in regard to the environmental issues of the Kaghan Valley in Northern Pakistan and their impact on biodiversity, local communities and the natural environment, caused by capitalism and urbanisation. Environmental and ecosystem degeneration is foregrounded in the novel, placing it within the global, ecocritical conversation about climate change and loss, thus highlighting the novel's socio-environmental urgency. This perspective reveals the novel as a narrative reflecting the tangible material and ecological stakes in contemporary postcolonial contexts. But the emphasis is still on issues of environment, with little discussion of emotion or politics of bordering, state power, or nonhumans other than environmental damage.

While the ecocritical approach has illustrated the novel as an environmental critique, existing scholarship has not yet fully employed

interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks that integrate affect theory, postcolonial state power, and more-than-human agency to explore the novel's socio-political and material complexities. Specifically, current research has not sufficiently addressed the ways in which affective dynamics, such as Sara Ahmed's notion of "sticky affects," circulate and adhere to bodies, places, and communities in postcolonial borderlands, producing social exclusions and epistemic violences implicit in the novel's depiction of bordering practices. Nonhuman agency, conceptualised through Jane Bennett's "vibrant matter," acts alongside human actors within the novel's geopolitical and ecological assemblages such as the mountain terrains, glaciers, and weather phenomena of northern Pakistan to shape political power and affective relations. Postcolonial state power and bordering regimes intersect with affective and material forces, revealing the novel's portrayal of the postcolonial migration state and state surveillance as an assemblage of human and nonhuman actors, emotions, and spatial practices extending beyond conventional political analyses.

Research Objectives and Questions

The main objective is to show how nonhuman environmental factors in *Thinner Than Skin* (2012) are dynamic and sticky infrastructures which co-produce stigma and marginalisation for nomadic Gujar communities.

Key research questions include:

- i. How do moving glaciers, extreme weather patterns, and treacherous terrain exhibit "vibrant matter" agency, thereby influencing human mobility, isolation, and survival?
- ii. In what specific ways do these elements facilitate the "stickiness" of negative affects such as suspicion, fear, and outsider stigma onto Gujar bodies, extending Sara Ahmed's framework?
- iii. How does the novel portray the environment as an affective accomplice to state checkpoints and postcolonial governance, transforming passive scenery into active enforcer?

Theoretical Framework

This qualitative literary study relies on close reading of *Thinner Than Skin* (2012), supplemented

by contextual references to Pakistan's northern ecology, Gujar histories, and climate dynamics.

This study synthesises Ahmed's sticky affects and Bennett's vibrant matter into the hybrid concept of "sticky infrastructures." Ahmed's *Sticky Affects*: In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed conceptualises emotions as circulatory and relational rather than interior states. They "stick" on some bodies and objects through repetition, association, and cultural circulation and produce surfaces on individual and collective bodies. Negative emotions, such as fear, disgust, suspicion, pool on marginalised figures, consolidate communities and identify others as threats or outsiders. This stickiness is historical and performative, making certain bodies "stickier" to stigma.

Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* and vital materialism challenge anthropocentrism by attributing "thing-power" and distributive agency to nonhuman entities. Rocks, rivers, glaciers, weather, etc., are not passive; they have trajectories, propensities, and vitality which work in assemblies containing humans. This distributed agency requires a more ecological politics that recognises the contribution of nonhumans to the outcomes. The environment in Khan's novel emerges as vibrant matter that intensifies affective stickiness. Glaciers and terrain do not merely backdrops for state checkpoints; they actively isolate nomads, heighten visibility and vulnerability during crossings, and make suspicion adhere more durably. This co-production reveals power as an assemblage of human governance and nonhuman forces, particularly relevant in climate-stressed postcolonial settings.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The analysis proceeds through close readings of key passages and motifs in *Thinner Than Skin*, tracking how environmental elements function as vibrant matter that enables the circulation and adhesion of stigmatising affects. Khan's descriptions consistently portray the northern Pakistani landscape as alive and agential, collaborating with state mechanisms to marginalise the Gujar nomads. Specific textual evidence reveals multi-layered assemblages where

glaciers, terrain, and weather actively co-produce outsider stigma. This section analyses these elements through the theoretical synthesis of Ahmed's "sticky affects" and Bennett's "vibrant matter," demonstrating the novel's depiction of "sticky infrastructures."

The novel vividly animates glaciers with vitality and distributed agency, aligning closely with Bennett's concept of vibrant matter. Glaciers are not passive backdrops but possess "thing-power" with propensities for movement, pressure, and destruction. Early in the text, Maryam observes:

It was the snowmelt of the two peaks that created the lake where she now paused. The melt had been too strong this year, obsessive even. "As if last year's vices had not been smoked out completely" (pp. 4–5).

This obsessive snowmelt disrupts seasonal patterns critical to nomadic life. Further anthropomorphic imagery reinforces their agency:

...the taller mountain, Nanga Parbat, could not be seen from here so much as felt... when undressed, the taller mountain had as many angles as a buffalo hip. He moved in much the same way. A slow slip into a socket, a turn of the tail, a shadow sloping deep into a crotch (pp. 4–5).

In Bennett's framework, these glaciers form vibrant assemblages with humans and animals. For Gujar nomads, shifting glacial flows and floods enforce isolation and redirect movement toward state-controlled checkpoints. The text evokes a flood as the glacier "done with keeping all that pressure locked inside," unleashing wrath that buries fields, homes, cattle, and grain, which Maryam interprets as the goddess unleashing "the full weight of her wrath." Displaced nomads arrive at bureaucratic barriers exhausted and disoriented, their bodies physically marked by environmental hardship.

Linking to Ahmed's sticky affects, these encounters circulate and accumulate negative emotions such as suspicion and fear onto nomadic bodies through repetition. The nomads' traditional mobility, once harmonious with the land "always on the move" with seasons and stars, becomes associated with instability and threat in a climate-altered zone. The glacier thus functions as an affective accomplice, intensifying state narratives that position Gujjars as perpetual

outsiders or potential insurgents. The vibrant matter of the glacier makes the stigma "stick" more tenaciously by physically constraining routes and heightening visibility during state interactions.

Mountains, rivers, and valleys are active barriers to mobility and intensifiers of vulnerability, as examples of Bennett's distributive agency. The landscape is dynamic and enclosing:

Tonight, the peaks were draped in a deep blue sheet of mist. No windows. No footloops. She had lived with them her entire life... (p. 4).

Mountains are mythologised as doors and walls:

The Karakoram was the black door. The Pamirs the white door. The Himalayas the abyss... at times... all the mountains became, simply, the wall (p. 4).

This vibrant matter creates natural borders that align with and reinforce state-imposed ones. For Maryam's Gujar family, the landscape disrupts traditional rhythms: free grazing lands turn into state farms, forests diminish, and treacherous paths, avalanches, and mist force encounters with checkpoints and forest inspectors. Animals sense the danger alongside humans:

Every living creature had felt the horse impale himself just before his cry rang through the valley like a series of barbed wires (p.4).

The terrain's agency, such as the rocks inscribed with ancient histories, isolating valleys, and obsessive snowmelt, carries layered histories of migration that adhere to present-day nomads. Through Ahmed's lens, stickiness operates via repetition: each arduous crossing in bad weather reinforces associations between Gujar bodies, erratic movement, and danger. The landscape turns routine herding into a visibly deviant act, making stigma durable. Nomads navigating diminished forests or flooded lowlands encounter inspectors who view their presence as encroachment

...no forest inspectors telling the nomads to stretch their limbs barely as far as the length of a blanket, only to deprive them of a blanket altogether (pp. 5–6).

The vibrant matter of the terrain thus co-produces outsider status, accumulating fear and suspicion on nomadic bodies and aligning them as threats within postcolonial governance structures. Extreme weather events entangle with human infrastructures, heightening the co-production of power.

The wind carried a similar foreboding, not in the shape of a scent but of a wingbeat, and the lake froze in anticipation (p. 4).

Nomads arriving fatigued or displaced by snowmelt, floods, or storms appear more “out of place” at checkpoints, facilitating the circulation of suspicion. The novel contrasts sedentary perspectives with nomadic life under pressure, where “motion had no rhythm” due to combined environmental and bureaucratic restrictions. In Bennett’s terms, weather and terrain form assemblages with state checkpoints and inspectors, distributing agency beyond human actors. Gujjars, who are adaptable herders, are put at risk due to restrictions on grazing rights and the need to lease timber. These environmental dynamisms accentuate bureaucratic repression; stormy weather or avalanches of snow make delays worse, and profiling nomads as strangers despite their roots.

Ahmed’s sticky affects illuminate how these repeated encounters produce durable surfaces: the nomad body accumulates layers of fear, disgust, and suspicion. Maryam’s family exemplifies compounded vulnerabilities, where gender, ethnicity, and environmental forces intersect. The environment does not merely backdrop oppression but actively co-authors it, making nomadic life visibly precarious and “other.”

Across the novel, power emerges from human-nonhuman interactions in distributed networks. State corruption, military convoys, and surveillance find accomplices in the vibrant terrain, yet the landscape also holds potential for resistance through local knowledge (e.g., medicinal plants and seasonal wisdom) and its own memory as an archive of trauma and resilience. Maryam’s attunement to the landscape contrasts with outsiders’ scientific gaze, suggesting counter-affective flows when humans align with vibrant matter.

This analysis reveals the novel’s sophisticated ecopolitics and shows how the environmental forces are co-authors of marginalisation in climate-vulnerable postcolonial settings. The hybrid “sticky infrastructures” framework, which advocates that vibrant matter intensifies affective stickiness, illuminates how glacial melt, obsessive snowmelt, treacherous terrain, and weather

deepen stigma and control for Gujjar communities. It requires post-anthropocentric readings that recognise the nonhuman in biopolitical bordering and provide insights into climate justice in the Global South and nomadic rights. These entanglements foreground Khan’s critique of the way in which climate change reinforces historical marginalisation in different ways.

One of the most striking aspects of the novel is its portrayal of glaciers as sensual, powerful forces “born of mating ice.” Farhana’s glaciological research frames them scientifically, yet the narrative animates them with vitality: they “galloped and groaned, cracked and crept,” exhibiting foul-mouthed serenity or sudden wrath. In Bennett’s terms, these are vibrant assemblages — ice masses with their own propensities for movement, melt, and destruction. Glacial growth and decline signal global warming, but locally they enforce isolation. For Gujjar nomads, whose seasonal migrations depend on predictable rhythms, shifting glaciers disrupt traditional routes, pushing them toward state-controlled areas and checkpoints. This physical restriction makes nomads more visible and suspect to authorities, allowing affects of fear and outsidership to “stick.” A pivotal example occurs in descriptions of glacial activity around Saif-ul-Maluk lake, where glaciers are mythologised as fertile beings conceived through mating rituals. Nadir tells tales of “mating glaciers” and how the beauty, strength, and sensuality of humans mirror those of the glaciers. As an anthropomorphism, it reinforces their agency: Glaciers are not stationary, but relational, nurturing and punishing. One of these scenes depicts a flood caused by the glacier “done with keeping all that pressure locked inside,” resulting in a wrath that buries fields, homes, cattle, and grain. Maryam sees this as the goddess releasing “the full weight of her wrath” and “burying people under the debris. It is not an isolated event and happens alongside increased state monitoring and checkpoints in the area. Nomads forced to leave such “vibrant” glacial pulses are disheartened and disoriented when they reach bureaucratic buffers, their bodies bearing the marks of environmental stress. In a changed climate and geopolitical landscape, the nomads’ mobility, once in harmony

with the land, is now associated with instability and threat. The glacier becomes an effective accomplice, enhancing state stories of nomads as perpetual wanderers or as potential insurgents. The mountains, rivers and valleys actively hinder mobility and increase vulnerability. Bureaucratic restrictions on forests and free grazing lands, combined with shrinking forests, disrupt the nomads' cycles, which have traditionally been "always on the move," in sync with the seasons and stars, like Maryam's family. Treacherous paths, avalanches, and unpredictable weather force encounters at checkpoints, where environmental exhaustion renders bodies more legible as "suspicious outsiders."

Khan details how "snowmelt had been too strong this year, obsessive even," and how indigenous breeds die while grazing restrictions tighten. Terrain inscribed with ancient histories like the rocks with petroglyphs, mist-shrouded peaks, and isolating valleys creates natural "borders" that align with state ones. Characters crossing these terrains "mix fingerprints with ancient scripts," symbolising how vibrant matter carries layered histories of migration and conflict that stick to present-day nomads. Ahmed's stickiness operates through repetition: each arduous journey in bad weather reinforces associations between Gujar bodies, erratic movement, and danger. The landscape's agency turns routine herding into a visibly deviant act, making stigma durable. For instance, when nomads navigate diminished forests or flooded lowlands to reach markets or pastures, they encounter forest inspectors and state agents who view their presence as encroachment. The terrain's vibrancy e.g., obsessive snowmelt, glacial pulses exacerbates this, producing sticky surfaces where the nomad body accumulates layers of fear and disgust.

Extreme weather events entangle with human infrastructure. Checkpoints, often analysed solely as postcolonial tools, gain potency when combined with snowmelt, floods, or storms. Nomads arriving fatigued or displaced by weather appear more "out of place," facilitating the circulation of suspicion. The novel contrasts sedentary urbanites with nomads whose "motion had no rhythm" under modern pressures. Gujjars, once in control through adaptive herding, become

vulnerable as "free grazing lands are turned to state farms" and they must lease timber from the forest department. Environmental vibrancy intensifies bureaucratic oppression: a storm or avalanche delays a crossing, heightening scrutiny at checkpoints where nomads are profiled as outsiders despite ancestral ties.

This produces what Ahmed calls sticky surfaces. Maryam's family, entangled in personal tragedy amid these forces, exemplifies how gender compounds the assemblage, and nomadic women navigate both environmental and patriarchal and state controls. The environment does not merely backdrop oppression; it co-authors it by making nomadic life visibly precarious and "other."

These elements form distributed networks where power emerges from human-nonhuman interactions. State corruption and terrorism threats find accomplices in the terrain, yet the novel hints at resistance through local knowledge (e.g., medicinal plants like diar, bhentri, chalai) and the landscape's own memory. Rivers and mountains act as archives of trauma and resilience, suggesting potential for counter-affective flows if humans attune to vibrant matter. It is this attunement that often appears in Maryam's perspective, in contrast with outsiders' scientific view.

Conclusion

This analysis shows the novel's sophisticated ecopolitics: environmental forces are not neutral, but they are co-authors of marginalisation; a post-anthropocentric perspective is needed to understand the postcolonial power in areas exposed to climate change. The sticky infrastructures concept brings to the fore that climate change in Pakistan does not happen uniformly but adds to the historical marginalisation and increases the stigma and control.

This article advances "sticky infrastructures" as a productive hybrid for environmental humanities, enriching affect studies and new materialism with postcolonial and South Asian specificity. It also provides the first sustained reading of environmental collaboration with state bordering in *Thinner Than Skin*, deepening appreciation of Khan's ecological sophistication. In Pakistan and

similar Global South contexts, the analysis highlights how climate change exacerbates inequalities and state control. It also informs climate justice, nomadic rights, and eco-activism.

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