

PALIMPSESTIC HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN IN NADEEM ASLAM'S THE WASTED VIGIL

Muhammad Shoaib

*Assistant Professor of English
Govt. Graduate College for Boys, Gulberg,
Lahore.*

Muhammad Karim Akhtar

*Lecturer in English
Riphah International University, Lahore*

***Corresponding author: (mshoaibenglish@gmail.com)**

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.71146/kjmr336>

Article Info



This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Abstract

The recent history of Afghanistan is characterized by multiple invasions, conflicts and untold stories of tortures and human rights violations. Various narratives of power and violence have been superimposed on the Afghan land and the psyche of the people especially in the wake of Russia's attack on Afghanistan, 9/11 and America's military foray into the country. Palimpsest, as a paradigm for exploring different layers of mind, body, language and narratives, seems to be very suitable to unearth and encounter the history of Afghanistan inscribed with multiple invasions and bloodsheds. This paper explores the layers of violence in Pakistani-British writer Nadeem Aslam's novel *The Wasted Vigil* (2008). Through a detailed textual analysis, it will be shown how land, body, memory and the environment are the surfaces where the discourse of violence is inscribed, erased and re-inscribed. The article critically examines the representations of violence directed against women, nature, art and the underprivileged. It identifies various types of palimpsests like spatial, topographical, historical, artistic and ideological. The analysis leads to the conclusion that by allowing multiple projections of the landscape, memory, body and history to comfortably coexist without losing distinction, the palimpsest structure of the novel promotes more inclusive discourse. The essay emphasizes the potential of palimpsest as a tool to force consideration of various aspects of historical, current, and future impacts on the social and cultural fabric, from both human and non-human sources.

Keywords:

Palimpsest, Afghanistan, Violence, Discourse, War, Land

Introduction

Nadeem Aslam is an accredited Pakistani-born British novelist. As a diasporic writer, Aslam's fiction covers the liminal space between his native culture and conventions, and his longing for modernity. His premiere novel, *Season of the Rainbirds* (1993), set in an unnamed small village of Pakistan, secured the Betty Trask and the Author's Club First Novel Award. His next novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) remains his most celebrated work. It is set in England and carries the predicaments of Pakistani community in England wrested between their traditional values and modernity, and highlights the issue of honour killing. His third novel, *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) is set in Afghanistan, and was short-listed for the Warwick Prize for Writing in 2011. His fourth novel *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) is set in Western Pakistan and Eastern Afghanistan and provides a local vantage on the War on Terror committed by the USA and its Allies in 2001. His most recent novel *The Golden Legend* (2017) is set in Lahore with a focus on violence and inter-communal relations. All of his novels "combine verbal fluency and operatic drama with a nuanced deconstruction of international socio-political conflicts, and a depiction of the way they impact local communities" (Samantara).

The Wasted Vigil has been written in the context of 9/11 and the American invasion of Afghanistan. The novel "recounts 30 years of war-torn Afghan history through the stories of several characters trapped together in a house" (Chambers 138). Five people of different nationalities gather at an English doctor's house in Usha, a small war-ravaged town. The house serves as "a hub of a transcultural space in which many personal memories and collective histories catalyze" (Waterman 86) and as "a microcosm of contemporary Afghanistan, a time/space compression of the various geopolitical forces at work which threaten from without" (Waterman 87-88). The narrative mainly follows three characters: Marcus Caldwell, a British doctor married and settled in Usha near Jalalabad, David Town, a pearl dealer and former CIA worker, and Lara, a Russian woman who comes to Afghanistan in search of the details about her brother who was killed during the Soviet attack on Afghanistan. As the three narratives converge, points of common interest develop among the three leading to the kind of understanding which is becoming more and more rampant in the world characterized by violence and bloodshed. In the words of Priyamvada Gopal (2016), the novel sets the stage for "the emergence of insight and understanding in the face of unspeakable violence and the brutal exigencies of realpolitik" (24).

Literature Review

Oxford English Dictionary defines palimpsest as "a manuscript or piece of writing material on which later writing has been superimposed on effaced earlier writing" and as something 'reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form' ('Palimpsest'). The palimpsest literally refers to an old manuscript on which the original narrative is erased, scratched away and superimposed with a new narrative. As the object ages and with enhanced technologies, the old and new narratives can be viewed simultaneously as interwoven layers. In other words, a palimpsest is a multi-layered parchment bringing together different layers to add a unique semantic aspect to the text. In the Middle Ages, these parchments were created from vellum, which was then recycled due to scarcity of paper. Chemical agents were used in the recycling process to erase the first text in order to create space for a second writing. With the passage of time, however, the traces of the first writing reappeared, leading to the creation of a palimpsest or a multi-layered text. Richard Galpin, in his essay "Erasure in Art: Destruction, Deconstruction and the Palimpsest" (1998) splits the art of palimpsest into three phases: writing, erasure and re-writing. He goes on to assert that a palimpsest "introduces the idea of erasure as part of a layering process. There can be a fluid relationship between these layers. Texts and erasures are superimposed to bring about other texts or erasures. A new erasure creates text; a new text creates erasure" (Galpin). Roland Barthes's description of the slippery nature of an 'ideal textuality' matches that of the palimpsest:

In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend as far as the eye can reach, they are indeterminable [...] the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language. (qtd. in Lopiparo 79)

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary gives palimpsest the extended definition of “something having usually diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface” (‘Palimpsest’), leaving a broad range of possible applications for the term.

In the metaphorical sense, the term palimpsest can be applied to a broad range of fields like history, memory, art, geography and cultural studies. McDonagh notes that “the palimpsest became a recurrent metaphor in the nineteenth century for the human psyche and for history” (208). Romantic writer Thomas de Quincey is credited with highlighting the figurative use of the idea of palimpsest. In *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), De Quincey compares the structure of the human brain with a palimpsest:

What else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain?... Everlasting layers of ideas, images and feelings, have fallen upon your brain softly as light. Each succession has seemed to bury all that went before. And yet in reality not one has been extinguished.... They are not dead but sleeping... there is none of passion or disease that can scorch away these immortal impulses. (217)

Thus, the true nature of a palimpsest in a duality between the existing layers of meaning accumulated through time and the act of erasing them to make room for the new to appear, and therefore to allow life to continue on it. Superimposition of information is the core of the palimpsest concept, used within a range of scientific as well as cultural fields. While dealing with any word or discourse, palimpsest aims to find out “multiple meanings of any word and the multiple layers or levels of meaning in any text” (Murfin and Ray 264). It hints at a process that looks at the surface as well as the deeper meanings of a text.

Research Methodology

The present paper concentrates on the multiplicity of perspectives and meanings in Nadeem Aslam’s novel *The Wasted Vigil*. These perspectives are generated through layering of different physical, historical and artistic surfaces. The research design adopted for this purpose is hermeneutic and interpretive. Maritz and Visagie (2006) suggest that good qualitative research methods focus on the research process and textual analysis is one of the tools to be used (26). This research will mainly rely on the textual analysis of the selected fictional work. Data collection, in a textual analysis, exclusively focuses on words and meanings, in order to maximize understanding of events and characters. It will be shown how the production of history, art and narratives has different layers where on each layer, there are traces of the previous.

Data Analysis

A landscape or site, which has been inhabited for long, consists of layers of history. This history is sometimes reserved in forms of small physical remnants, monuments, memorials, names or collective memories of destruction and reconstruction. In Nadeem Aslam’s novel *The Wasted Vigil*, narratives of art, history, memory and culture are not based on a single layer because these are much more complex phenomena. Art, history and memory frequently intersect to form the picture of Afghanistan as a site or area which has been inhabited for long consisting layers of history.

In *The Wasted Vigil*, history is not constructed as a linear monologic discourse. Rather it is presented as a layered structure where truth comes from multiple sources. Like an archeologist, Aslam excavates layers of historical inscriptions and erasures. The past is presented as a palimpsest, a text that is written over and over from different perspectives, driven by different personal, religious and political agenda. In their introduction to *Landscape, Memory and History* (2003), Pamela Stewart and Andrew Strathern see history as “involved continuously in the making and remaking of ideas about place, realigning or differentiating place in relation to notions of community” (3). Aslam’s novel can be read as a palimpsest in which the historical discourses held by the Russians, Americans and the Taliban are overwritten through a detailed look into the individual lives. Mark Jenkins (2007) writes of the palimpsestic nature of the Afghan history:

Afghanistan is a palimpsest of conquest. The Persians ruled the region in the sixth century BC, then came Alexander the Great 200 years later. The White Huns in the fourth century AD, Islamic armies in the seventh, Genghis Khan and the Mongols in the thirteenth. It wasn’t until the eighteenth century that a united Afghan empire emerged, then came the British, then, in 1979, the Russians. And now the Americans and their allies. (226)

The plurality of the pre-Taliban Afghanistan is asserted by the variety of books in Marcus’ house. The books range from the Greek classics like *Iliad* and *Antigone* to Persian poetry. Lara travels to the land that “Alexander the Great had passed through on his unicorn, an area of fabled orchards and thick mulberry forests, of pomegranates that appear in the border decorations of Persian manuscripts written one thousand years ago” (6). There are different points of reference about the history of Afghanistan: Russian, American, Pakistani and Afghan, fictional and non-fictional, and Buddhist and Muslim. As the present of Afghanistan presents a devastated and ravished landscape, the past is constructed through memory, historical discourse and artistic representation. Layers of invasions are superimposed on the historical narrative of the country. Given the complex nature of the history of the country, it is not easy to establish who is most to blame for all that has happened to the land. Marcus Caldwell, the novel’s main character, ponders that it seems the whole world “had fought in this country, had made mistakes in this country, but mistakes had consequences and he didn’t know who to blame for those consequences. Afghanistan itself, Russia, the United States, Britain, Arabia, Pakistan?” (39). David, while trying to locate the culprits behind Zameen’s murder found that “he had been stepping on his own footsteps” (184) which means that he has to confront the bitter reality of his own country’s involvement in Afghanistan long before the tragedy of 9/11. The excavated Buddha is called “a face from another time” (21) as it is related that the area was an important site of Buddhist pilgrimage many centuries ago. The narrative points out that the founder of Buddhism “is said to have visited this valley to slay the demon Gopala, and Chinese pilgrims have written of the sacred relics once housed in shrines here” (54). All this makes the Afghan history multi-layered. Even the modern events of Afghan history like Russia’s invasion in 1979 and 9/11 cannot be straightforwardly described as there are many political and cultural threads which need to be disentangled. Cara Cilano (2014) argues that “Aslam’s novel provides a unique vantage point on the layers of representation at work within espionage thrillers... Terrorism’s self-awareness means that representations of terrorist event add layers of interpretation on the top of an event already highly overdetermined” (30).

Aslam presents the physical geography of Afghanistan as a palimpsest of different discourses. All the layers of the land carry the traces of violence. Throughout the history, different political and religious discourses have been superimposed on the land. Afghanistan is the land famous for its precious stones. The Afghan lapis lazuli “was always desired by the world, brushed by Cleopatra onto her eyelids, employed by Michelangelo to paint the blues on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel” (18). But a horrible erasure takes place as a result of landmines and bombing in the past four decades. The people like Marcus would not consider it unsurprising “if the trees and vines of Afghanistan suspended their growth one day, fearful that if their roots were to lengthen they might come into contact with a landmine buried near by”

(6). The “mine-laden cities and countryside” (74) are always a lingering threat in the Afghan psyche. Khalid Hosseini’s novel *The Kite Runner* (2003) reveals that under the occupation of USSR, “mines were planted like seeds of death” (Hosseini 119). Marcus finds himself as much broken as any other person in the country as the whole country “had collapsed and everyone’s life now lies broken at different levels within the rubble” (39). Another novel by Nadeem Aslam *The Blind Man’s Garden* (2013) provides further examples of the mutilation of the traditional landscape of Afghanistan as a result of the American bombing. When Rohan and the bird-pardoner enter Afghanistan in search of the latter’s son, they observe a lot of damage done to the landscape of Afghanistan. They cross “a broad flat valley with a river and river flats in it, every bit of it scorched black where a Daisy Cutter bomb had been dropped, reducing everything to ash, pumice, lava, the sides of the hills torn up into segments” (126). *The Wasted Vigil* brings into visibility the fact that the aerial space of the country is also layered with the traces of violence. The flying planes and cluster bombs have had a heavy toll in the shape of huge loss of bird life and environmental imbalance.

Even the air of this country has a story to tell about warfare. It is possible here to lift a piece of bread from a plate and, following it back to its origins, collect a dozen stories concerning war—how it affected the hand that pulled it out of the oven, the hand that kneaded the dough, how war impinged upon the field where the wheat was grown. (56-57)

Here also lies the olfactory palimpsest as different layers of the topographical and social fabric carry different smells. The smell of bombs and human bodies is countered by the perfume of Marcus’ factory and natural fragrance of the Afghan landscape. Peshawar, a Pakistani city, has also seen a lot of inscriptions and erasures on its surface and identity due to its geographical, cultural and linguistic proximity to Afghanistan. It is termed as the city of flowers and grains and much more. But the Afghan war brings many changes to its environment and identity.

It was transformed into a city filled with conjecture, with unprovable suspicions and frenzied distrust. Everyone’s nerves were raw and everyone had something hidden going on. For most of its history it was one of the main trading centers linked to the Silk Road, and now the United States was sending arms into Afghanistan through here. Wherever David looked he could find evidence of the war in which those weapons were being used. (147)

Cultural identity of Afghanistan is presented as a palimpsest of different religions and schools of thought. Buddhism is the oldest religion of the land whose traces can be found at various places, the statues of Bamiyan among them. Islam came to Afghanistan much later. Even during the theocratic regime of the Taliban, the traces of Buddhism remain which the Taliban try to erase by destroying the statues. But all this cannot destroy the Buddhist layer of the Afghan cultural history. Rather, this effort to erase the Buddhist past of Afghanistan contributes to its revival as more of the people in the world come to know about these historical treasures. Katrina and Marcus are atheists, but they cannot erase the traces of Islam from their actions and way of thinking. Casa, Dunia and the cleric in Usha represent different strands of Islam while David has a Christian background. The social fabric of Afghanistan and Pakistan is not shown as a single surface but as a palimpsest of various influences and mindsets. The Americans and Russians did not “know about such parts of the world, of the layer upon layer of savagery that made them up? They had arrived in these places without realizing how fragile were the defenses that most people had erected against cruelty and degradation here” (179).

Aslam explores human body as a surface where the discourse of power, exploitation and violence has been written by politics and ideology. Rape, murder, imprisonment, war and bomb blasts contribute to this discourse of violence on body. Aslam presents body especially female body as a contested site and demonstrates its exploitation by the hegemonic society. The analogy of the palimpsest will show how the

Afghan body is inscribed by hegemony in ways that evict it from the mainstream society. Zameen's body carries layers of violence and mistreatment. Her body is violated by the Russian officer Bendikt, the CIA spy David and possibly other men in the refugee camp of Peshawar. Her son is the progeny of that layered violence, and no one knows about his actual father. David remembers twice seeing Zameen waking up "screaming from a dream of being assaulted by the Soviet soldier. Memories rising in her like bruises as he held her. A dream of lying lifeless on the floor, the attacker manipulating her body as when a corpse is washed before burial, arranging her limbs before beginning" (98). Marcus' body bears the signs of violent inscriptions. One of his hands is cut by the Taliban soldiers on charges of theft. Many people are killed and their bodies are mutilated each time when there is a bombing incident. In this way, the female body in this novel has many parallels with the Afghan land which has a long history of foreign occupation and exploitation.

Nadeem Aslam also lays bare various layers of mind and memory in the novel. Nora (1992) has discussed how certain sites, by provoking emotional effects, may rediscover some hidden or forgotten memories of a nation. She asserts that the self-reflexivity of memorial sites plays an important role in embodying certain memories because the real memory withers away with the passage of time. (Nora 12). As a lot of the plot depends on the memory of the characters, memory itself is presented as a palimpsest. Aslam delves deep into the individual as well as collective memory in order to make visible its complex structure. Mind is a surface which is inscribed with different ecritures at different times. The story of Zameen's past is not constructed from one source. Rather, there is a frequent shift among the narratives of David, Marcus and Lara.

She bent to clear away the sheets of paper bearing the outlines of foliage, flowers, dragonflies, and vines. They were embroidery patterns and he remembered being told how, just before the First World War, patriotic young Germans had entered the French countryside with butterfly nets, catching specimens and sketching wing patterns to take back to Germany. Encrypted in the designs of the butterfly wings were maps of strategic information, such as the exact locations of bridges and roads (154-55).

David finds a lot of similarities between his brother's killing during the Vietnam war and his involvement with CIA and the Afghan war. Zameen, Benedikt and Qatrina are not actually present at the time the story takes place, yet they play the role of ghost characters as they influence much of the plot. They are brought back to life through the memories of David, Marcus and Lara.

Some names in the novel also carry palimpsest structures. The narrator contemplates that "[t]here is a trace of acacia scent in the air as there is the faint presence of Alexander's name in the word Kandahar, as there is the presence of Ahmed in Anna Akhmatova's surname" (105). David sees a small boy selling a book entitled 'The CrUSAders', in which USA is conspicuously present "and also *Mein Kampf* translated as *Jihadi*" (164). Aslam's novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) also employs certain palimpsestic names. In the fictional town named Dashte Tanhai, as Lemke points out, "[t]he process of renaming varies according to the cultural background of the immigrants and thus becomes an enormous palimpsest. However, it soon becomes evident that each layer is suspiciously guarded by the respective community" (172). Each community maps out its own culture onto the grid of the town regardless of its former meaning. Some of the names of the characters are also suggestive in *The Wasted Vigil*. 'Zameen' is a Persian word which means 'earth'. The character of Zameen is symbolic as her rape desecration stands for the violation of the land. Zameen's name links her with the mother Earth as both of them suffer at the hands of the patriarchal discourse and the madness of the war. 'Dunia' is an Arabic word meaning 'the world'. Dunia, the daughter of the doctor in Usha, is also the victim of religious extremism and patriarchal ideology. She runs a school in Usha but has to flee her house because she feels threatened by the people who are against the education of the girls. At the end, Dunia goes missing from Marcus' house without any trace and Lara keeps

wondering about what may have happened to her. The disappearance of Dunia stands for the abduction of the world by those who are against its welfare and those who are against its peaceful existence.

The Wasted Vigil also brings into focus the various levels of violence against arts. The novel demonstrates how art and creativity negotiate fear and censorship amidst unfavorable political and social conditions. In Marcus' house, Lara finds "hundreds of books, each held in place by an iron nail hammered through it. A spike driven through the pages of history, a spike through the pages of love, a spike through the sacred" (5). All this is done to save the books from being burnt by the Taliban. The paintings on the walls of Marcus' house are covered under the layers of mud. There are many historical paintings at different places in caves of Afghanistan covered with mud to be saved them from being ravaged by the invaders. The mud walls stand for the country whose rich artistic heritage is threatened by the extremists. Marcus' is the hand behind all this layering.

He worked in the garden, or, book in hand, sat on the threshold where there grew five cypress trees as tall as a house fire, or he wetted a small piece of cloth in warm water and carefully lifted away the earth smeared onto the men and women on the walls, layer by patient layer, taking three hours to uncover the arm entwined around the stem of a small-blossom-laden tree. A red vein in a petal, like a mild thrill. Rubbing off the thick crust from the woman's wristband he discovered an emerald painted underneath. (20)

The Afghan land is not only layered with violence but also with artistic treasures. During the digging work for the building of perfume factory, a large statue of Buddha is discovered which vertically "measured ten feet from one ear to the other. Horizontally it was fifteen feet from the topknot to the decapitated neck" (21). Lara also tries to complete the images on the wall by joining various fragments. The war and looting have "emptied this country's museums. One 190-carat diamond in the scepter of Russia's Catherine, bought by her from an Armenian gem merchant, was first the eye of a god in a temple in India, and so it is that no one can be certain where most of Afghanistan's looted treasures have ended up" (70). Ekphrastic references are also used to superimpose artistic layer on the bare Afghan reality in order to create parallels between art and history. There are frequent intersections between historical and fictional narratives.

Marcus takes down Virgil from the shelf. On the cover is a painting of Aeneas fleeing the burning destruction of Troy. The great broken heart of the city in the background. Aeneas is accompanied by his young son—a path to the future—and is carrying his aged father over his shoulder—the reminder of the past. The old man clutches the statues of the household gods in his right hand, and because the other hand is out of sight in the folds of his cloak, absent beyond the wrist, Marcus thinks for a moment of himself. If so, then David is Aeneas—he had offered to carry Marcus up the tall minaret in Jalalabad. The little boy, is he Bihzad? (109)

The characters are also presented as palimpsest as in many of the main characters, there are the traces of other real and mythological characters. While going through illustrated books at Marcus' house, Lara "stops at an illustration of a youth tied to the back of a wild-seeming horse, stretched out naked along the beast's spine. The horse he is fastened to is racing through a night forest, the hooves plunged into thick foliage. A moment from the verse of Byron" (262). Same is the fate of Lara, Marcus, Qatrina, Zameen and Dunia. Lara is somewhat Sophoclean Antigone who wants the remains of her brother in order to restore his honour. On each visit to Afghanistan, Lara discovers something new about her brother. The whereabouts of Benedikt and the identity of Zameen's son, Bihzad, are fragmented and layered like the land itself. In a way, Lara's narrative intersects with that of Princess Marya of Russia who learnt of her brother's wounds only "through newspapers and having no definite information, was getting ready to go in search of him" (67). Different layers of Lara's character open as she reflects on her past while staying at Marcus' house. She remembers visiting her mother's house after her death.

She found her notebooks scattered on the pavement. Only the first page in each was filled. The rest were blank. She hadn't turned over a new page, had written and drawn on the same one repeatedly so that the feelings and ideas were juxtaposed onto each other, indecipherable, the way a book of glass would be, the eye having access to its depth through the overlapping layers of contents. (306-7)

The statue of the Buddha which has a central significance in the novel also seems to have different superimpositions and erasures. The persona of the Buddha underwent a great change in Afghanistan. In this country, the founder of Buddhism "had received a human face, the earlier representations of him having been symbols—a parasol, a throne, a footprint. A begging bowl. The Greeks in Afghanistan gave him the features of Apollo, the god of knowledge, the god who repented. The only Asian addition to Apollo was a dot on the forehead and the top-knotted locks" (220). There is also a palimpsest of meaning attached to the statue of Buddha. A palimpsest of meaning is the succession of meanings acquired by an individual object, site, theory or the like, through the different modes of use and associations connected to it, gradually changing through time until its final abandonment or current use. The statue of Buddha was once an object of worship. Later during the Taliban regime, it became the symbol of idolatry and polytheism. In the post-Taliban time, the same statue is considered an artifact, a token of the glorious art of the past.

...utilizing the concept of palimpsests in heritage studies either for research or future developments in relation to the heritage sites may facilitate in uncovering traces of the destruction/oblivion or at least acknowledging the potential for the presence of these layers. Considering each heritage site as a potential palimpsest assists the heritage and other neighboring disciplines' researchers to decipher the history in its layers while according the written history to the built one. (Farhani et al 229)

Reading the text of the novel is like digging an archaeological site and exploring the layers of the land to excavate different narratives. The novel is indebted for its flexibility of narrative and anatomize investigation of the historical truth to the boisterous engagement of the palimpsest art and emphasis, both of which imply an ever-changing, fluctuating mode of depiction. Peter Childs and James Green describe it as:

Aslam's novels are not national allegories, but situated, cross-national portrayals of complex, imbricated lives that describe the movements of individuals alongside the larger military, diasporic and economic waves that wash across continents. The reference points are not narrowly colonial or national history, but diversely cultural and ethnic in ways that trace the multiple lines leading to contact zones of East and West in any part of the globe. (123)

The same trickiness surrounds Zameen's disappearance as she "would disappear from Marcus's life but enter David's at a point farther down the line, and then, time moving on, David would meet Marcus. How stories travel—what mouths and what minds they end up in" (23). Different stories are told by the Russian authorities about the whereabouts of Bendikt. This anti-authentic subversion of the representational and historical transparency illustrates Foucault's analysis of the three anti-Platonic purposes of genealogical histories:

The first [historical sense] is parodic, directed against reality, and opposes the theme of history as reminiscence or recognition; the second is dissociative, directed against identity, and opposes history given as continuity or representative of a tradition; the third is sacrificial, directed against truth, and opposes history as knowledge. They imply a use of history that severs its connection to memory, its metaphysical and anthropological model, and constructs a counter-memory—a transformation of history into a totally different form of time. (160)

This surveillance explicates the tenacity of Aslam's palimpsestic narration and his intertwining into the official history of his own imagination and interpretations.

Conclusion

This article has tried to prove that Nadeem Aslam's novel *The Wasted Vigil* explores violence as a complex web of cause and effect. In today's world, violence is normally associated with one country, group or ideology which often leads to false conclusions and unjustified wars. For a proper and veritable study of violence, each layer of history, politics and mind has to be taken into contemplation. In order to be tackled, all the layers of violence need to be explored, faced and understood in continuum, not in isolation. Aslam is in favor of polyphonality of history. Past is established as a fluid entity as it is constantly rediscovered and re-defined. By permitting manifold prognostications of the landscape, memory and history to contentedly harmonize without losing distinction, the palimpsest structure of the novel promotes more inclusive discourse. In addition, the palimpsest has the prospective to move beyond fictional discourse and enter public discourse as an instrument to force contemplation of numerous characteristics of historical, current, and future influences on the social and cultural fabric, from both human and non-human sources. In a nutshell, operating the concept of palimpsest for the analysis of historical memory centers can help reinstate the imperceptible remnants of history, which might or might not be a part of its present day culture, into the argument for the designing of its future.

The paper has further shown that Aslam's attempt to read traces of historical inscriptions, erasures and re-inscriptions aims at restoring lost fragments and severed connections among people and the land. The novelist's excavation of layers of cultural history reveals connections between apparently divergent civilizations, nationalities and religions. Islam, Buddhism, Christianity are brought together, and a constant dialogue takes places among different discourses so that each one finds its own fault lines. Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, USA, Vietnam, Persia and Greece become one through historical and fictional parallels.

Bibliography

- Aslam, Nadeem. *The Blind Man's Garden*. Gurgaon: Random House India, 2014.
- . *The Wasted Vigil*. London: Faber and Faber, 2008.
- Chambers, Clairs. *British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary Writers*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Childs, Peter and James Green. *Aesthetics and Ethics in Twenty-First Century British Novels*. Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Cilano, Cara. *Post-9/11 Espionage Fiction in the US and Pakistan: Spies and "Terrorists"*. Routledge, 2014.
- De Quincey, Thomas. *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. 1821. Edited by Richard Garnett, Kegan Paul. Trench & Co., 1885.
- Dillon, Sarah. "Reinscribing De Quincey's Palimpsest: The Significance of the Palimpsest in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Studies." *Textual Practice* 19, no. 3 (2005): 243-263. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233241422_Reinscribing_De_Quincey's_palimpsest_The_significance_of_the_palimpsest_in_contemporary_literary_and_cultural_studies.
- . *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory*. Continuum, 2007.
- Foucault, Michel. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. Translated by Donald F. Bouchand and Sherry Simon. Cornell UP, 1992.
- Farahani, Leila M., and et al. "Contextualizing Palimpsest of Collective Memory in an Urban Heritage Site: Case Study of Chahar Bagh, Shiraz – Iran." *International Journal of Architectural Research* 9, no. 1(2015): 218-231.
- Gaplin, Richard. "Erasure in Art: Destruction, Deconstruction, and Palimpsest." *Richard Galpin*. 1998. <<http://www.richardgalpin.co.uk/archive/erasure.htm>>.
- Gopal, Priyamvada. "Of Capitalism and Critique: 'Af-Pak' Fiction in the Wake of 9/11." *South Asian Fiction in English: Contemporary Transformations*. Edited by Alex Tickell 21-36. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Hosseini, Khalid. *The Kite Runner*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007.
- Jenkins Mark. *A Man's Life: Dispatches from Dangerous Places*. Modern Times, 2007.
- Lopiparo, Jeanne. "A Second Voice: Crafting Cosmos." *The Languages of Archaeology: Dialogue, Narrative, and Writing*. Edited by Rosemary Joyce 68-99. Blackwell Publishers, 2002.
- Lemke, Cordula. "Racism in the Diaspora: Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004)." *Multi-Ethnic Britain 2000+ New Perspective in Literature, Film and the Arts*. Edited by Lars Eckstein, et al 171-183. Amstebdam/New York, 2008.
- Maritz, J. and R. Visagie. *Exploring Qualitative Research*. Generative Conversations, 2006.
- Murfin Ross and Supriya M. Ray. "Palimpsest". *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. Macmillan, 1997.

- Nora, P. and David P. Jordan. *Rethinking France: Les lieux de mémoire*, vol. 3: Legacies. 1992. University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- “Palimpsest.” Merriam-Webster Dictionary. *Merriam-Webster*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/palimpsest>. Accessed 27 Jan. 2019.
- “Palimpsest.” Oxford English Dictionary. *Oxford Living Dictionaries*. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/palimpsest>. Accessed 10 Feb. 2018.
- Samantara, Pratiek Sparsh. “Nadeem Aslam: Cultural Exchange and Postcolonial Identity.” *Culture Trip*. 14 Dec. 2016, <https://theculturetrip.com/asia/pakistan/articles/nadeem-aslam-cultural-exchange-and-postcolonial-identity/>.
- Stewart, Pamela J. and Andrew Strathern, editors. *Landscape, Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives*. Pluto Press, 2003.
- Waterman, David. *Where Worlds Collide: Pakistani Fiction in the New Millennium*. Oxford University Press, 2015.