

CLIMATE CHANGE, MIGRATION, AND BORDERS: A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE ON LANCHESTER'S THE WALL

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Abstract

*The issue of climate change is a universal issue threatening the nations extensively. Nevertheless, postcolonial politics appear to have been affected more severely by this issue, particularly when other grave issues such as poverty, poor infrastructure and economic disparity, coincide with this phenomenon, creating a forceful impact on migration across the borders, particularly north-wards. This study investigates *The Wall* (2019) by John Lanchester through the framework of postcolonial critique, particularly focusing on Edward Said's concept of orientalism to examine the entwined issues of climate change, migration and border security. The research hypothesizes that the cli-fi, *The Wall*, is a dystopian prophesy, preempting that potential threats of climate change might lead to mass displacement and intensified border control. The narrative analysis of the novel offers an understanding to the portrayal of Northern/Western societies' response to the influx of climate migrants, assessing critically whether the narrative inadvertently underlines orientalist tropes while depicting the displaced. Eventually, the study purposes to comprehend *The Wall* for potentially reflecting and critiquing the intertwined concepts of imminent climate crisis, mounting migrations to the North/West and the hardening of border security and control, in postcolonial context.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the hottest debates of today is climate change, a global issue affecting all regions indiscriminately. The situation is becoming alarming with everyday passing (Malla, 2008). Climate change can be defined as a long-term modification in the patterns of regional and global climates. In particular, it refers to a mount in the temperature since 20th C to date. Human activities are more likely to be the reason for climatic change also known as anthropogenic climate change (Hulme, 2001). The cli-fi, *The Wall*, is a dystopian fiction of contemporary times (McEvilley, 1992). The text reveals the current scenario of the

world under severe issues of climate crisis, migrations and border security. The novel starts with the depiction of the Wall; a physical as well was metaphorical divide between the global North and the global south of the world. Kavanagh, the protagonists and narrator of the story, is working as a Defender of the Wall. So, the story is told from the perspective of Kavanagh, the way he feels, thinks and conceptualizes the whole phenomena of the Wall, providing insights into the current world scenario in the backdrop of climate-change. The narrative, like the Wall, is also divided between two world, the post-

climate-change dystopian world and a pre-climate-change apocalyptic world which serves as the precursor of the former.

The novel highlights issues like climate change, immigrant issues, refugee crisis, submerging of coastal areas, Brexit, crop failures and capitalism. The present study, however, is primarily concerned with the division and huge displacement of the people and the resultant issues from the lens of orientalism by Edward Said. Postcolonialism basically deals with borders, migration, displacement and marginalization etc. Identity, hybridity, language, decolonization struggle, dislocation and diaspora are the major concepts of the theory. Nonetheless, climate change is an emerging concept and new dimension to the postcolonial discourse. This study is a new and timely addition to the literary reservoirs of knowledge, analyzing Lanchester's *The Wall* from the perspective of migration and climate change by applying the framework of postcolonial orientalist concepts. The study will be a significant contribution to the debate of migration, climate change and border security and will open new horizons for future research.

1.1. Statement of the problem

Migration and borders have existed since ancient times, but the way that the borders and migration have been treated, has changed over time. In postcolonial discourse, frontiers and borders are treated as a third space, in betweenness or hibridity; a liminal phase which creates a divide between worlds, one of the colonizer and the other of the colonized. Now the climate change has become another reason for the divide in the world between the global South (orient) and global North (occident). Due to this climatic cleft in the world the people of the global south are compelled to migrate (legally or illegally) to better living conditions which the North promises. Under such situation, the national borders security is seriously threatened, giving rise to hardened guard at the borders which has led to the revival of colonial breach between the orient and the occident, us and others. This paper examines the issues of migration, climate crisis and the resultant border security with respect to Lanchester's latest cli-fi, *The Wall*, grounding the study in the framework of Said's Orientalism.

1.2. Objectives

Examine Lanchester's *The Wall* as a prophetic anticipation of migration and climate crisis.

Evaluate the novel through the orientalist theoretical perspectives as given by Edward Said.

Investigate the response of Western/Northern societies to the influx of calamite affected migrants to the Wall in *The Wall*.

1.3. Research questions

How does Lanchester's *The Wall* become a dystopian apocalyptic narrative, forecasting the consequences of environmental crisis and resultant migration of South to North?

How does the novel reinscribe the orientalist tropes as critiqued by Said?

What is the reaction of Western/Northern societies to the incursion of environmental refugees in the novel?

2. Literature Review

Published in 2019, the cli-fi *The Wall* by Lanchester, is relatively a recent novel in the market, so, no or little research is available academia. Given that, the literature review for this study aims at reviewing the previous database for postcolonial theory, discourse on climate change and the issues related to migration and border security.

2.1. Climate Change & Migration

A recent report on climate crisis reads that rapid climate change, prone to getting warmer, owes to human activities (Turrentine, 2022). This human-induced or anthropogenic climate change has been caused by the access of CO₂ in the environment, directly impacting the greenhouse effect. This atmospheric change is resulting into global warming and mounting temperatures. International Immigration Organization, writers a report, has reckoned that this global warming and environmental change will cause mass migration of the people from warmer regions (Andersen et al, 2010). Yet another study has anticipated migration patterns as well as numerous migrants forced to the Global North till 2050 due to climatic conditions (Stern, 2006). Still another research discusses the notion of environmental citizenship in the backdrop of climate disaster (Baldwin, 2012). Baedsely exposes

the issue of migration as alteration strategy for natural disasters and climate change (2010). According to another study the forced environmental refugee-ship will lead to disrupt North-South relationships (Castles, 2003). Adamson (2006) studies globalization, migration policies and national security.

2.2. Establishment and Development of Postcolonialism

Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin co-authored a book, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, in 1989 and the term postcolonialism first appeared in this work. Till the end of the 20th Century, postcolonialism emerged as a separate and distinct literary field. Said, Bhabha and Spivak, dubbed as “Holy Trinity” by Young (2016), are the major theorists of postcolonial studies. However, Bhabha and Spivak feel themselves obligated to Said and his magisterial work, *Orientalism* (1978), for their inspiration and source, paying tribute to his work being the inaugural and a forceful work in the discipline of postcolonialism (Moore-Gilbert, 1997).

Young (2016) describes postcolonialism as any creative and scholarly work that deals with the issues of colonial occupation of Asia, Africa and the Caribbean in particular, and the other parts of the world in general; and, also deals with not only what the colonizers did but also what kind of response was recorded by the colonized: the way they represented themselves; fought back; showed agency in face of European discursive practices and tools; and, claimed their essentialism. Young also suggest an alternative term, tricontinentalism, for postcolonialism, pointing to the major countries with history of colonization i.e. Asia, Africa and the Caribbean.

Needless to mention here that ‘post’ in the postcolonialism does not imply end of colonialism, it rather alludes to a period marked by the enduring legacies and multifaceted impacts of colonialism, even after the formal cessation of colonial rule. Additionally it encompasses all forms of neo-colonialism and re-orientalism. Mcewan rightly claims that though the physical occupation of the traditional colonial period is over, yet the imperialist ideologies persist in neo-colonial practices, specifically seen in economic and political hegemony

on the world (2008). Postcolonial feminism, postcolonial Marxism and postcolonial historiography are the sub-fields of postcolonialism that continue looking at the legacy of colonialism and its fatal aftereffects even after decolonization. Furthermore, environmental postcolonialism is also an emerging sub-field dealing with the depletion of natural resources, loss of biodiversity and soil degradation in the onslaught of postcolonialism. Climate change and migration, the basic concerns of the present study, are the offshoots of environmental postcolonialism.

2.3. Postcolonial Literature

Since the publication of *Orientalism*, the concept of orient/other has become the center of debate in postcolonial discourse. Researchers have ever since used orientalism and other concepts of Said such as self and other to investigate various literary works. (Moosavinia et al, 2011) discuss the concept of self and other to analyze Orwell’s novel *Burmese Days* using the framework of orientalism. In another study (Maliyana, 1997) it has been pointed out that the Eurocentric approach towards colonial literature is misleading and false. A research by (Inokuchi & Nozaki, 2005) illustrates the relationship between Japan and the US using the lens of orientalism, studying the false images the US has created about Japan.

In short, the literature review above is quite obvious on the fact that global warming and the resultant environmental crisis gives rise to sea levels and submerging of coastal areas, making them vulnerable to the impact of upsurge in sea level and Pakistan is not an exception. This study addresses the issue of the volcanic nature of the current injustices of climate change along with its effects on migration rate and resultant border security and control between the oriental and occidental regions of the globe.

3. Theoretical framework

This research employs a postcolonial theoretical framework, primarily drawing upon Edward Said’s concept of *Orientalism* as outlined in his seminal work (1978). This framework provides the analytical tools to deconstruct the power dynamics and representational strategies employed in John

Lanchester's *The Wall*. Specifically, the research will focus on how the novel constructs binary oppositions between the 'Self' (the wealthy, protected nation behind the Wall) and the 'Other' (the migrants), mirroring the historical and ongoing construction of the 'Orient' by the 'Occident'.

The Wall represents a world clouded with climate change. The narrative anticipates a horrible picture of the planet, all laid devastated by climate change. Lanchester fixes the responsibility of this dystopian apocalypse on the human beings, claiming them all guilty of this change and the subsequent destruction. The novel also presents a geographical divide of the world through a Wall which segregates the people hit by climate change (Global South or tropical regions) and the ones in safer regions (Global North). The purpose of the wall is to keep the southern people (the desperate migrant Others) from the north (with better socio-economic opportunities). This establishes the juxtaposition of orientalist concepts of the occident and the orient with the self and other, more specifically, the North and the South. These other, Lanchester views as not an invading army but as individuals dislocated from their homelands in the onslaught of climate disasters, simply referred to as 'Change' in the story. The purpose of the wall is to keep these Others from entering the North which is being guarded by the defenders. Every defender, who himself is an Others, is hired for a period of two years to protect the Wall, patrolling 10,000 KM concrete road spying at the Others that can appear any moment out of the sea. Fear of the Others, marauding from the sea in a great number has made the air strange. The relation of the Defenders with Others also carries symbolic importance in the similar vein as that of the Orient and the Occident. Like the exotics in the Orientalism, the Others in *The Wall* have been portrayed as inferior, desperate and dangerous. The Change in the narrative represents climate change and the Wall stands for strict policies of migration and legal or illegal transportation of the people across.

This research operates under the following assumptions:

Literary texts, including *The Wall*, are not neutral but actively engage with and reflect prevailing socio-politico-ideological discourses.

The research assumes that climate change is a significant and growing driver of human displacement, leading to increased migration flows and heightened tensions around national borders and resource allocation.

The research posits that national borders are not natural or immutable entities but are socially and politically constructed to define territories, regulate movement, and establish identities.

Discussion

4.1 The Wall: A Future Prediction

At present when climate change is irrefutably evident, numerous concerns emerge as a result. What is likely to happen as the consequence of climate change in the different parts of the world? What would happen if the coastline drowns and crops die all over the world? The world is apprehensive about global warming, sea level rise, climate migrants, and national security. This research article intends to answer these rhetorical questions by analyzing *The Wall*, a climate dystopia, a cli-fi portraying a future prediction of our planet.

The Wall is set in the future_ and realistically close to our present time simultaneously. Lanchester shows us a world divided into two era Post-Change world, time before the climate disaster and Post-Change world, time after the climate disaster, also demonstrated as "new world" in the novel. "The whole human life has turned upside down, everything has irrevocably changed for everyone" (p. 149). The Change, in both pre and post era is a turning point. The Change is written with the capital C throughout the novel which is symbolic, the indication of something big and disasters. In literature these kind of writing gestures always turn out to be some symbols. Considering that, the Change does not only refer to the irrevocable climate disaster, but also a huge cultural and emotional Change. "The Change was not an event but a process" (p. 110). A major Change is the narrative of already existing narrative.

The post-Change world is painful, harsh, and difficult to survive narrated by the Kavanagh, one of the guards on the wall and also a main character of the story. Through his eyes, the readers not only witness the climate change destruction but also the cultural and emotional distress as well. "What

happened to the world we here have a name for it, we call it the Change” (p. 80). And he got the answer, “Kuishia” meaning the end of the world. In the Post-Change world, “The shelter blew away, the water rose higher to the ground, the ground baked, the crops died, the ledge crumbled, the well dried up” (p. 111), he remarks further. This indicates the irreversible collapse of the planet and pain of those who are suffering. Lanchester specifies:

The Change, in some places, some unlucky places, has not stopped. In many of the hotter places of the world, in particular, the Change is still continuing, still reshaping landscapes, still impacting people’s lives (p. 111).

It clearly shows, the hotter regions of the world are the most susceptible and vulnerable to the devastating consequences of climate change. Scientific predictions of climate departure also suggest that the tropical zones of the Earth will experience irreversible shifts in climate patterns approximately fifteen years earlier than the rest of the planet. This impending reality is mirrored in the novel, as the narrator describes the desperate human response to these hostile conditions:

Men and women fled from it, fled from its consequences, tried to make new lives for themselves, to scramble for new shelter, to climb the higher grounds, to find a ledge, a cave, a well, an oasis, a place where they could find safety for them and their families (p. 111).

This portrayal reflects both the emotional and physical dislocation caused by environmental collapse, highlighting the severe and unequal impact climate change inflicts on different regions of the globe.

In *The Wall*, individuals from the planet’s hottest and most climate-affected regions are identified as the “Others.” Much like “*The Change*,” the term “Others” is consistently capitalized throughout the novel, signaling its deep symbolic significance. The Others represent displaced populations – those seeking refuge and safety from environmental catastrophe. They can be understood as climate migrants or climate refugees, individuals forced to leave their homes in search of habitable, secure, and elevated locations. The novel portrays them as arriving in overwhelming and increasingly threatening numbers, reflecting both their

desperation and the host society’s perception of them as a looming danger.

One of the most undeniable indicators of climate change and global warming is the rise in sea levels. *The Wall* explicitly addresses this phenomenon, as reflected in the line: “The water rose to the higher ground” (p. 111). For the generation to which Kavanagh, the narrator and Defender, belongs, the experience of a beach is entirely foreign. They have never known what it feels like to walk along a shoreline, lie on warm sand, or enjoy surfing – these are experiences available only through old films and television. As Kavanagh remarks:

Show me an actual beach, and I’ll express some interest in beaches. But you know what? The level of my interest exactly corresponds to the number of existing beaches. And there isn’t a single beach left, anywhere in the world (p. 56).

This dystopian world also raises a deeper, more pressing ethical question: Who is responsible for this ecological collapse? Kavanagh makes no attempt to soften the blame and directly holds the previous generation accountable, saying it was “the people...our parents – them and their generation” who allowed the world to reach this point (p. 57).

He accuses the generation before his own, especially their parents, of destroying the planet, leaving it in ruins for those born after the Change. His frustration is evident when he explains:

None of us talk to our parents. By ‘us’ I mean my generation, people born after the Change. You know that thing where you break up with someone and say, it’s not you, it’s me? That’s the opposite. It’s not us, it’s them. Everyone knows what the problem is. The diagnosis isn’t hard, the diagnosis isn’t even controversial. It’s guilt, mass guilt, generational guilt. The olds feel they irrevocably fucked up the world, then allowed us to be born into it. You know what, it’s true. That’s exactly what they did. You know it. We know it. Everybody knows it (Lanchester, p. 55).

In his view, the older generation is entirely responsible for the destruction of the planet. His judgment is sharp and direct: “Who broke the world? They did not say they did. And yet it broke on their watch” (Lanchester, p. 151).

Through Kavanagh’s voice, Lanchester frames a powerful critique of human behavior, exposing the undeniable role of human actions or more

specifically, human negligence in accelerating climate change. The novel's underlying argument clearly points toward anthropogenic climate change: the damage is not random, but a direct result of human-induced environmental mismanagement.

This discussion serves as a sobering reminder of the scale and reality of climate-related disasters. It also leaves readers grappling with difficult questions: could such a scenario repeat itself? Would any nation truly be capable of managing such large-scale displacements or rebuilding in the face of such devastation? If global warming and the degradation of Earth's atmosphere continue unchecked, the world will inevitably witness more frequent and more destructive hurricanes, as well as waves of climate refugees seeking shelter from the consequences.

4.2 Orientalism and The Wall

The concept of Otherness has long been linked to geographical distinctions, especially from the early 1980s onward. Prior to that period, geographical inquiry focused on different concerns. For instance, Homer imagined mythical and dreamlike landscapes, Herodotus was deeply absorbed in examining Persian society, and Hippocrates explored how environmental factors shaped social diversity. The Renaissance, meanwhile, was defined by the spirit of exploration and discovery. It wasn't until the late 19th century, with the rise of colonial geography as an academic discipline in Europe, that geographers turned their attention to documenting the physical environments and social structures of tropical and colonized regions (Staszak).

In *The Wall*, the phrase "The Others are coming" recurs often, creating a sense of looming threat and mystery. But who exactly are these "Others," and where do they instigate? Kavanagh, the protagonist and a Defender, describes them as "clever, desperate, and ruthless – fighting for their lives" (p. 36). Early in the novel, readers are introduced to the term "Others," but it is later revealed that these people are migrating from the South (p. 246), highlighting the fact that nations in the Global South are disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (Bulkeley et al., 2013).

The North-South divide, formalized in the 1980s through the Brandt Line, visually distinguished the

world into wealthier and poorer regions. Edward Said, in his theory of Orientalism, interpreted this same global division as a binary contrast between East and West – or Orient and Occident – a system of thought where the West projected false, ignorant, and inferior images onto the East to reinforce its own dominance, using both power and knowledge to maintain control. In Lanchester's novel, this same dynamic plays out as waves of climate refugees, referred to as Others (always capitalized), attempt to escape devastation by seeking refuge in higher, safer territories. These migrants, coming largely from the Global South, former colonies lacking the economic strength to survive environmental catastrophe, are met with resistance from the wealthier, more fortified Global North, which constructs the Wall to block their passage.

This colossal Wall, stretching over ten thousand kilometers, is guarded by Defenders stationed every two hundred meters, whose duty is to repel the approaching Others. The novel states: "More than three hundred thousand people are involved in defending the wall. That's why everybody goes to the Wall, no exceptions. That's the rule" (Lanchester, p. 34). The Defenders form an army whose purpose is to shield their land from migrants who are driven by both desperation and the search for survival.

A pivotal moment in the narrative comes when it's revealed that the Defenders' own captain is, in fact, an Other: "The captain was an Other. He got here ten years ago, before the laws changed. That's why he is so hardcore. That's why he is so strict. He knows what it's like out there" (p. 46).

Despite his origins, the Captain has proven his loyalty to the system by completing multiple tours on the Wall, even defending it against his own people. That's literally a story of every Other. However, after the Change, new policies were introduced to limit migration, as the increasing flow of Others seeking refuge in the Global North had become a growing concern.

From a Postcolonial perspective, the novel illustrates the lingering position of migrants as perpetual outsiders. Even when they manage to reach wealthier nations, climate migrants remain marginalized – viewed as rootless, hybrid, and excluded from mainstream society. They often accept low-paying jobs and perform menial labor, as reflected in the

novel when Kavanagh and his fellow Defenders, during their time off, employ Help to carry their belongings, cook, pitch tents, and handle various other small tasks. Kavanagh even admits that having Help gives them a feeling of status and privilege.

Edward Said's Orientalism critically analyzes how the West constructs and represents the East. According to Said, the Orient or East is not an objective reality but rather a manufactured and manipulated concept created by the West to justify its superiority. The East has been stereotyped as backward, illiterate, and uncivilized, while the West has positioned itself as cultured, advanced, and rational. Said asserts that these false images were institutionalized in order to lend them an air of legitimacy. By embedding these ideas into academic and cultural systems, Western nations managed to turn fantasies into accepted truths, reinforcing their dominance over the East.

Lanchester's novel reimagines this classic relationship through the roles of the Defenders and the Others. They function as modern embodiments of Said's Orient and Occident. The descriptions given to the Others desperate, clever, unarmed, untrained echo the historical labels the West once attached to the East. The Defenders, meanwhile, are the new face of the global elite, reinforcing barriers against those considered inferior and alien.

The novel ultimately suggests that geography has been instrumental in the construction of Otherness. This spatial divide not only defines who becomes an "Other" but also shapes global attitudes toward migration and survival. As Said emphasized, the West's sense of self has always relied on contrasting itself against the Other and in *The Wall*, this geographic and cultural division remains as relevant as ever.

Conclusion

The Wall is a future prediction of our world. Lanchester addresses the issues of climate change, migration and borders in this cli-fi. Through the picture of a Post-Change change Lanchester has conveyed that climate change is approaching us and the world would be irreversibly changed after the disasters. Lanchester blames human beings to be responsible for climate change disasters on Earth especially the "Olds". The division of the world as Global South and Global North, Periphery and

center, first world and third world is not only geographical and economical but also climatic. The Global North is not as hot and vulnerable to climate change as Global South. This fact has accelerated climate change related migration from South towards North. With climate change Lanchester has also predicted that there would be climate migrants in the future that would create a serious threat to national border security. The concrete Wall of 10,000 km, Others on South of the Wall, Defenders on North of the wall are evident to it. Others on the South side of the Wall are actually displaced climate migrants, trying to get off the Wall for a safe place. The big news of their coming in huge numbers, dangerous numbers indicates the future climate migrants crisis. The geographical division of the world has a significant contribution in making of "Others". It's the geographical division of the world that had made these climate migrants as Others.

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