

**Decolonizing nature/knowledge: indigenous environmental thought and feminist praxis**

|                        |                            |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Nosheen Ali</b>     | nosheen.ali@aku.edu        |
| <b>Binish Samnani</b>  | b.samnani@gmail.com        |
| <b>Abdul Wali Khan</b> | abdulwali.abdali@gmail.com |
| <b>Najmi Khatoon</b>   | najmishah@gmail.com        |
| <b>Barkat Ali</b>      | barkatbami24@gmail.com     |
| <b>Sadia Asfundyar</b> | sadiayar89@gmail.com       |
| <b>Muhammad Aslam</b>  | aslamwaez@gmail.com        |
| <b>Sumaira Amirali</b> | sumaira.ali9990@gmail.com  |

All the authors are affiliated with the Institute for Educational Development, Aga Khan University, Pakistan.

**ABSTRACT**

This faculty-student collaborative article is a result of a graduate seminar on 'Environmental Education' taught at the Aga Khan University's Institute for Educational Development in Karachi, and it illuminates new perspectives and pedagogies of nature from the global South, specifically South Asia. Drawing inspiration from feminist and indigenous thought, the narratives of ecology shared here center the place of emotions, experience, memory and spiritual intimacy, offering one means of decolonizing environmental studies and expanding our understanding of 'environmental consciousness'. These narratives defy ontologies of nature-human separation, capturing not just the co-existence of animals, spirits and humans but their co-constitution. Such indigenous ecologies of knowledge and wisdom, we argue, offer a timely corrective to fragmented and exploitative constructions of the natural environment as mere resource, pleasure, or commodity, while providing a profound, alternative basis for a richly layered, spirited, environmental education.

## Introduction

In Spring 2017, we were part of a graduate seminar titled 'Environmental Education' at the Institute for Educational Development of Aga Khan University (AKU-IED), located in Karachi, Pakistan. The key questions inspiring the course were: where and what is the environment? How do we understand and address the present calamities of land, ecology and climate? What forms of human-nature interactions count in contemporary research and pedagogy of the environment, and what meanings are made invisible? This collaborative, faculty-student article emerged from the collective experience of the course as a 'learning outcome' that was wholly unexpected at the outset. It offers a mode and point of entry into the conversations and collaborations that we believe are necessary for decolonizing the limited perspectives and pedagogies of nature in mainstream environmental education.

Most of the learners in the course experienced their early-to-teen years in the Gilgit-Baltistan and Sindh regions of Pakistan, in places organized through customary rights over land and water. Their cultural frameworks of meaning and wellbeing are grounded in Muslim religious and ethical-spiritual practice. Their indigenous lifeworlds rarely found place in their educational experience, which, in Pakistan as elsewhere in the world, validates Western, Eurocentric modes of thought and English-dominant, urban, bourgeois sensibilities (Morarji 2010). Essential to the teaching of the course was a reflexive, feminist pedagogy that embraced self-disclosure, experiential learning, postcolonial and marginalized histories of South Asia, a critical understanding of interconnected systems of power, and learning-from-activism engagements with the Karachi Indigenous Rights Alliance.

The outlook of the course began to change as the participants in the course came to remember, activate, and reflect on their own ecological experiences, when exposed to theories of political ecology, feminist studies, indigenous knowledge traditions, and decolonization. The work of Leanne Simpson (2002, 2014) on indigenous environmental education in Canada was particularly inspiring in the classroom, both in encouraging students to express their own indigenous stories of nature and in communicating to them that another way of academic writing is possible. Valuing students' experiences and perspectives was a central method of engagement (Bignell 1996), requiring vulnerability and openness, and allowing of the flow of conversation to develop in response to unexpected discussions. Art-based approaches from ecopedagogy were additionally transformative and were put into practice by exploring nature-centered theatre, poetry, stories, sculpted displays, movement and walking, with the aim of enhancing our capacities "to feel, intuit, imagine, create, relate and express" ourselves (Practicing Freedom 2011). Such an embracing of creative self-expression helped to unravel educational dogmas and disciplinary regimes, creating space for a cooperative re-imagining of how we might inhabit ourselves, the classroom and the planet alike.



Figure 1. "Environmental Education" graduate seminar in progress, April 2017. Photograph courtesy: Sarfaroz Niyozov

The learning process also entailed greening projects, outdoor education, and initiatives for bringing institutional awareness and change in areas such as food waste and plastic use. Fundamentally, however, it was about rethinking how we connect with all forms of life through an engagement with our bodies, local histories, societies, politics and landscapes. The annihilation of rural social identities and ecological ways of being is deep in the current political-economic-social order, as well as in the Pakistani education system. While the privilege and power of the facilitator always remained, by the end of the course, all of us were co-relearning, living a shared attempt to decolonize nature and knowledge.

Decolonizing in research and teaching is about problematizing the content, pedagogy and approach towards education in multiple fields across the humanities and social sciences. It recognizes that colonial logics in society and the curriculum are part of the same process and need to be analyzed and resisted together (Furo 2018). The knowledge-power regimes of the global North and South have not only centered Western secular-epistemic modes of learning and Eurocentric histories, but also dispossessed people through several forms of exclusion, including racial domination, gendered oppression, capitalist accumulation and colonial occupation. They have treated people of the global South as repositories of data to be mined, as resources to be exploited, and as objects to be interrogated, instead of viewing them as self-determining creators of theory and knowledge. Decolonizing is thus about "shifting the identity of its object so as to re-position those who have been objects of research into questioners, critics, theorists, knowers, and communicators" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017:4). This joint article from educators and learners in the global South is written with this

spirit and intention. Developed after the course ended, it offers one way to shift the dominant paradigm of knowledge production by *voicing silenced experiences as forms of 'critical thinking'* and creative-ontological intervention.

As feminist scholars have long pointed out, academic notions of 'research', 'objectivity', 'method', and 'writing' carry inherent biases that deny epistemic equality to women, indigenous communities, and other marginalized identities. The place of emotions and feeling in the process of research and knowledge-making is particularly undermined, as emotions are understood as irrelevant, irrational and unscientific, separate from the concerns of reason and research (Hochschild 1983; Jagger 1989; Abu-Lughod & Lutz 1990). The analytical problem with this dualism between reason, thoughts, mind, fact and knowledge on the one hand, and sensations, emotions, body, values, and imagination on the other, is that it *"aligns meaning with the cognitive and thus dismisses quality, feeling, and emotion from any account of meaning"* (Johnson 2008:216, italics in original). The methodological implication is that accounts of an "objective reality" can and should be presented in abstract, universal, and detached terms to be counted as authoritative (Talbot 2000).

Our effort unsettles such assumptions, striving instead for a decolonizing, feminist environmentalism that — both in research and pedagogy — centers the place of emotions, experiences, narratives, memories, stories, and local understandings of nature from marginalized voices of the global South. And it does so through writing that strives to speak on its own terms. Student co-authors express their own understanding of life-nature, which they lived and/or received through intergenerational learning. Their narratives are untethered from academic concerns of detachment, and instead, emerge from a deeply lived, intimate and ethical understanding of nature. Contemporary research on ecology routinely assumes that the whole world is anthropocentric, denying that, for the most part, the majority of the world continues to inhabit a markedly different ethos of nature, and the place of humans within it, than the Euro-Western 'we' that is assumed to be the norm in academic thought and theory. Ecology in Muslim thought and practice, as well as in South Asia more broadly, is an evidently sacred concept, instead of an anthropocentric one.

The perspectives highlighted in this article thus emerge fundamentally from a spiritual perspective on the world, one that is routinely denied legitimacy in mainstream notions of science, social science and environmental education. Instead, the perspectives of the non-Western majority are relegated to some ancient, primordial past, classified as either 'indigenous', unscientific or impractical, while *the believers of human supremacy* are assumed to be universal, neutral, rational, and faith-free. We must qualify the 'human being' that is thought to have devastated the earth in the Anthropocene, which in any case is an edifice of Euro-American reality. In this edifice, it is even worse when the ecological ideas of the majority are repackaged in fancy, English language to make it sound as if Westerners have themselves come up with radically new, holistic solutions to their own destructive and fragmented, imperial visions of the world. In this paper, we are trying to resist such multiple dispossessions: first, the relegation of our modes of thinking to the zone of irrelevance, irrationality, backwardness, and ignorance; second, the arrogance of secular-epistemic modes of education as the only form of legitimate knowledge; and third, the contemporary theorizations of environment and the indigenous as confounding the political battles on the ground instead of servicing them. In the struggle for a new future, our voice is not merely contextual or place-based. Our voice is both theory and vision.

The teacher's role in the collective endeavor of this writing has been that of initiator and facilitator, proposing that we combine the fascinating insights and experiences that students shared during the course into a written publication. The teacher here is also a reluctant theorist, deeply aware that the article needs to be wrapped in a particular parcel of Western-centered knowledge to count as knowledge in the world of academia. However, apart from offering this introduction, and gentle editing and restructuring, the facilitator has otherwise tried to resist the urge to refine student viewpoints and ways of expression. This includes the urge to rigidly correct their English. As part of *practicing* decolonial pedagogy and research instead of just talking about it, and ensuring a "democratization of access" (Mbembe 2015:5), we must acknowledge that there are *many, perfectly understandable ways of speaking in English* in South Asia even if the standards of normative English sentence-construction are not adhered to. Our voices – the voices of people from formerly colonized nations – must be written and published as is. We cannot ordain imperial, academic systems of theory-complexity-power as the route for decolonizing education, as these are the very tools with which the master's house is constructed. The imposition of English has already stolen much, and further disciplining of our writing signifies a more intensified form of colonizing the core that still remains.

English is the source of bourgeois power and success; it helps to service class inequality and constantly undermines the connection with popular commonality. It is also an alienating and stifling language for many learners as it carries deep inferiority signals. To live in English is the painful truth of our continuing colonial present. No matter how excitedly we talk about decolonizing, the global system of education dominated by English and Euro-American theory constantly robs us of our indigenous creative spirits and cultural possibilities because we are forced to speak in it in order to be counted, in order to thrive. It is hard work, and exhausting vigilance, to thrive in it without being defined and contained by it. To live in English requires us to self-colonize and un-inhabit our multiple cultural inheritances. It is often a second, third, or fourth language in South Asia, and the act of speaking it involves deep cognitive struggle as well as layers of translation from multiple local languages. If we are to continue using English as the medium of global exchange, the minimum demand is that this multilayered English-speaking and expressive reality of the postcolonial subject must be acknowledged and respected. In the narratives that follow, these layers are visible, adding to the beauty, complexity and authenticity of voice, and more fully bringing out the reflections on nature being expressed.

### **The Autobiography of Juniper (Sarozg) of Shunji Nala**

This reflection narrates the autobiography of a locally grown mountainous plant called SAROZG.<sup>1</sup>

My name is Sarozg and I enjoy having friendship with mountains. Although I exist in every naala (pasture) and several hilly areas but the current story stems from Hundrap pasture in Ghizer valley in Gilgit-Baltistan. The reason to narrate the story is to know whether nature whom I am part of is a self or a property. Upon telling the story I leave the decision on to the readers what they wish to learn from. Decision is yours.

---

<sup>1</sup> Idea of the "autobiography of a tree" was inspired by <https://www.studymode.com/essays/Auto-Biography-Of-a-Tree-39669988.html>

I was spending cherished life with fun in the pasture of Hundrap more than 45 years ago. My population spread over a vast areas starting from Shangil Hundrap to Dadrilli pass in the west to Khandia in the east. Being unique among other species of plants, I also performed certain functions needful of the people that included firewood for heating and cooking, burning to ignite life of others (remove diseases, dust and other hazardous things) and burning my leaves for good fortune. In addition, my leaves served medicinal activity to treat stomach ache by making a sip of tea. Above all, my body was used to make pillars, and other furniture work. I think I am little bit off-track in telling my uses rather than telling what unfortunate events came upon me.

From ancient time the local community in Hundrap was privileged to collect firewood from various naalas such as Khukush, Chomarkhand, Masholangol and Shunji. With the passage of time the local community faced scarcity of wood because of abundant use at homes and in the pasture. The condition grew worse ever that Herkush community could not prepare meal for the local raja (ruler). On the visit of the local raja the local community approached him and requested to allow Herkush, Gulaghtori and Boyandeh community to bring wood from other naalas. So, as an alternative measure, the ruler of the day allowed them to bring less quantity of wood from Hundrap naala across the river in winter time only to safeguard their families from chilly weather.

Since then Herkush, Gulaghtori and Boyandeh habitants bring fire wood from Shunji naala. Initially, it was very less but with the passage of time the amount and quantity of firewood was raised up to triple of the initial agreement. As per agreement the community were allowed to collect herbs, cow dung, and different local forms of firewood – boli, teli, crot, gangorok, xokh, and chakanz wa phapak. I do not remember that I was also part of their collection. To ensure the proper counting of the quantity of wood, a check post was also set up at the door of pasture, the check post is called Char.

A time came when Herkush community included me in their collection and set off for their home. Reaching on the check post, selected members separated me from other collection of wood and I was drop out which turned into a fight and there was hue and cry everywhere. Many people got injured and hospitalized but they did succeed to bring me to their homes.

Emotionally pumped, the community of Hundrap approached court and a filed a plea against the Herkush community. Till now the case is pending and decision is far beyond. The actual reason is that Hundrap associates me with honor and Herkush with humiliation.

Reflecting on my life sometimes I become happy and sometimes angry as people consider me a product to sell and use while the reality is that I am an entity having life made by God. I have the right to live – and enjoy and not to make or break people happiness. I am pleased that Hundrap has kept my species alive otherwise I would have wiped out and lived no more. But on the other hand I am a bone of contention between two communities. Both claim me as their property and try to supersede each other in the race.

Being misguided by lawyers and other actors both parties have lost more than four million rupees so far achieving nothing except family grievance, social boycott, religious tensions and hatred to each other. Instead of all the emotions if they come to the table and discuss and formulate a measure acceptable to both the parties that would also be guarantee for my survival.

I cannot see them in fighting, rather I suggest the following to resolve the issue: discuss and agree on win-win situation; plantation should be focused rather than fighting with each other so that greenery of the world is maintained and people get fresh air and oxygen; push back emotions and discuss things in cool manner which will lead to a successful end which is well-suited to all.

I hope that parties agree to my suggestion and take great care of their children's education, rather than indulging into unending and unnecessary talks.

### **Niyashol, our Invisible Protectors**

"People living in this modern era do not believe that we are under protection of some invisible and visible creations." My grandmother always used to say like this. "These protections are from God, he creates such sources to protect us from the risks."

I belong to a village of District Ghizer, Gilgit Baltistan, Pakistan, the valley which is famous by the name of "The Land of Lakes". From my childhood, I have been heard stories about homes of fairies on willow trees. They also live with their families like humans. Some fairies are good; they are for the wellbeing of human. Some are hazardous and they are not human friendly. They can harm human being at any time. So we need to be careful that we should not tease them. Our grandparents used to share such experiences that were enough for us to believe that there are creatures which are not visible to all of us but they exist. Similarly, some trees are also considered as a sign of safety. People do not cut maple trees unless and until they have some genuine reason.

It is also believed that some invisible creatures are living with us in our homes. One of the creatures is "Niyashol". I don't know who named it but it is believed by almost all people in the villages of my district. It is our belief that Niyashol helps us in growing crops, vegetables and fruits (throughout the process of sowing to harvesting). They work with us in farming and growing. They eat, they drink, they sleep, and they work like us. Niyashol enters our home every year in the beginning of the spring season and remains with us till we harvest our last crop from the lands. They leave our homes when we done with the growing and harvesting processes. Each year people of our area celebrate their departure very respectfully. We celebrate a festival named "Dumakhiya". This festival is more happily celebrated than other festivals because it is last festival of the year. By celebrating Dumakhiya, our elders pay thanks to them and invite them for next year in advance.

Moreover, finding any white snake inside the house is also considered as a symbol of protector. I remember that one white snake was living under the ceiling of the roof of our traditional houses. The roof of this house was designed by traditional architectures in such a way that in every side, there were small shelves on the top of the walls. These shelves were used to put little things of kitchen usage. The snake was found in one of the shelves. My parents and grandparents did not try to kill the snake or make it run away from the house. In fact, they were happy that it is a symbol of happiness. Recently this house has been demolished and my grandmother is very worried about the snake. My grandmother always used to say that every skillful man has a supporter behind. Like a good hunter, farmer and shepherd. Hunting, farming and cattle-raising are their skills and their livelihoods as well. These invisible supporters are named as "Raachi". If these supporters got angry, people will be failed



to hunt, grow and their cattle will not be remain save until people make them happy by doing traditional practices.

The lesson I learnt from my elders is we are not the only creature in this world, there are other creatures. We have to accept and respect this diversity.

### **Miracles do happen**

God says if you have a strong faith and trust in me, I will definitely help you in your problems and fulfill all your wishes. We have observed that there are people who have blind faith in God and believe that in any circumstance, the creator of the universe will help them. The people believe that if we will seek help from the creator, He will send His angels on the earth for humankind's help. Similarly, my grandfather had the strong faith in this. The story that I am going to share with you is a real incident happened with my grandfather. He used to live in a small village Paswarya which is part of Gujarat, India. He had his own fields for farming and used to work in the fields whole night.

One night, when he left for the field, on his way he was stopped by a person wearing white clothes, carrying a lantern he said to my grandfather that do not go towards your fields. Your work will be done according to your will. But my grandfather ignored him and he moved towards his fields. Again, another person in the same appearance was standing and told my grandfather not to go in the fields. My grandfather this time got scared but did not turn back and proceeded towards the crops. One more time, the person having the same appearance stopped my grandfather and said: "didn't you get what two persons asked you to do?" And he said the same thing to my grandfather that do not go to your fields. This time my grandfather got frightened so much that he rushed towards his fields. What he saw were unbelievable that many people with the same appearance working together and harvesting the entire crops which was supposed to be done by my grandfather himself.

My grandfather, in his unconscious mind, ran towards his home after watching this. He shared whatever happened with him to his brother. His brother was trying to make him calm and asked him to sleep. In the next morning, my grandfather without asking anything from his family, he visited his fields again. There he saw that all the work was done accordingly and perfectly. All the crops were harvested, watering was done, and the harvested crops were stored in a proper place.

After watching all this he recalled every single moment when he has spent all his nights praying to God, seeking His help and mercifulness upon him. My grandfather always had a strong belief that if you seek help from God, He always helps you in any form. This incident changed my grandfather's life eternally. Now, he always gives moral to us from this incident to strengthen our belief in one and only creator because He is the ultimate power who can do miracles for His loyal and sincere humankind. Elsewhere, being a righteous man, my grandfather always teaches us that selfless good deeds really exist and that will pay in any form in this world or hereafter. This is how God will eradicate all your sorrows and hindrances from your path and He will shower His blessings on you. Call Him and you will find Him with you.



### **An Evil Spirit of Shiribadat: a predator of humans**

Culture, values and norms of any village is the identity of that area. But nowadays, these traditions are subjected to ignorance. I am the resident of Gilgit and my parents belong to the beautiful valley of Hunza. This valley has its own traditions, cultures and norms like other valleys in Gilgit. One of the traditional rituals of that valley is "Thumishalling". Thumishalling is celebrated on 21st December every year. It has a connection with the harvesting of new crops, which is usually in December, to protect the food and crops from the evil spirits. On that night all of the people of that valley donate some wood or bushes in order to burn the "Shiribadat." The story behind this ritual is that Shiribadat was considered to be taking a human as his meal. The people of Hunza believe that every year it is complementary to burn the evil spirit of Shiribadat otherwise he may wake up again and will be dangerous for the people and all living beings of valley.

The story of Shiribadat is that once upon a time, Shiribadat was ruling over the people of Hunza and he took the yearly tax from the people and people used to give something like wheat, animal, etc. from their home to the Shiribadat. At that time people were very poor, and it was the turn of an old lady to give the tax to an evil ruler and she had nothing to give him except a one and only sheep. She was taking care of sheep like her own child and even she used to feed sheep on her own milk. That's why she did not want to give it to the Shiribadat but she had no other option. On that night, dinner was ready for the Shiribadat and when he ate the dinner he realized that meat was too much delicious. He ordered his workers to ask the old lady that what she was giving as a feed to the sheep as the meat was too much delicious. She told them that she used to give her own milk to the sheep because she had no other things to give to the sheep. When the answer of the old woman was shared with Shiribadat, he said that "if the sheep has grown up on human milk and it is that much delicious then obviously humans themselves may be more delicious than this sheep". Then Shiribadat started to eat the human as his meal and as a tax, people of the valley had to sacrifice one person for the Shiribadat just for the sake of his meal. That tradition continued and people were hopeless, and as a result, the population of valley started to reduce rapidly. One day the wise people of the valley came to know that Shiribadat only listens to his daughter and always follows whatever advice she gave to him. The wise people told her to ask him: from which thing he has fear of? She asked from Shiribadat and came to know that fire is the only thing which can destroy him. She was kind-hearted and she was even fed up of her father's behavior. She plotted against her father with the people of the valley. They dig the deep trench and lit fire in the trench, later covered it with bushes to make it invisible. Shiribadat's daughter took out Shiribadat with her for a walk and went on that way where the fire had been lit up. And Shiribadat fell down into the trench and burnt to death. At last, people got rid of that evil creature and had a grand celebration. From that day up till now people of Hunza burn the Shiribadat every year believing that he may wake up again if they did not continue this tradition. But nowadays, it is not celebrated like it was celebrated earlier.

### **Pinch of Flour**

Today, we live in an era of high tech and scientific advancement and confined knowledge to that two spectrums. However, science itself proves that people living in different sets of the environment across the globe have more rich experiences to live happy, healthy and environmentally-friendly life.

I am a native of one of the indigenous societies of Pakistan. My homeland is Gilgit-Baltistan, the heaven on the mountains. It is incredible to see how the people lived and survived in rough and barren mountains for centuries. It is not that they lived a very easy breezy life, but there is no such report which reflected that people starved to death due to drought. People had a habit of living a very sustainable life. According to various media reports, the people living in Gilgit-Baltistan lived a healthy and long life. Values, traditional and cultural festivities performed in day-to-day life all reflected gratitude towards nature. I have observed that our elders have an immense respect for nature, including all the biodiversity existing in the region. The elders always taught us to have simple and natural life. Nevertheless, my generation and the younger generation of modern schooling look down on those values and traditions and see them as stereotypes. Now, we are opening to global arena gradually and the impacts can be seen in the lifestyle of local people. However, it is very important to translate and transmit the values of tradition to next generation.

My grandmother and parents taught us some basic values and principles to live a natural life. The first lesson was, I have never seen them using any kind of a language that trivializes the importance or value of animals, plants or insects. They used to say they are no less equal to human life. For instance, when I was very young, I was affected by an incident which has an impact on myself and my life till today. One day a 10-centimeter long poisonous centipede entered our living room. My siblings and I panicked to see the creeping creature. My mother rushed to bring a bowl of the flour from the box and handed over to my grandmother. They never thought for a second to kill it. In fact, it was treated like a guest from nature, for its respect, a very traditional exercise was performed. My grandmother took a pinch of the flour and sprinkled on the back of the centipede so it could leave the house with dignity and respect. Sprinkling flour is not a just any normal activity. It is always performed on special occasions and ceremonies when a new baby is born, when a groom and bride first enter the home, when a very special guest is invited, when an elder is back home from a special journey of life, like hunting, voyage or expedition. To our surprise, that centipede left the place and we never saw it again. Their act taught us that all the organisms living on the planet earth including human beings have a greater purpose. Living in harmony with all the creatures is the only sustainable solution. Lesson of living in harmony with nature was not taught in school and college. Today, there is a greater need of such lesson to revise because poisonous and harmful chemicals replaced the pinch of flour of grandma.

### **Shawanan**

I grew up in Ghizer District of Gilgit-Baltistan which is famous for its bio-diversity especially of Himalayan ibexes. My village Hunadarap is attached with the famous Shonji valley which is known worldwide for its ibexes and for the famous trout fish. Therefore, this village is full of hunters and hunting experiences. Being part of the society, my family also possessed three famous hunters (my grandfather, my uncle and his eldest son). So, I had the opportunity to observe closely the life of those hunters. Listening to stories from the hunters was the most fascinating hobby of my early days but as a child, I could not make sense of many of their words and actions which I realize today. This piece of writing is a combination of my personal reflection on those early experiences, and my recent discussion with the oldest hunter of this time Jaffer Ali.

When I reflect on the life of the hunters, I find that their relationship with the ibexes was not a relationship of a killer and prey who victimize the ibexes for any material gain rather I find the relationship full of sanctity and love. The hunters used to consider ibexes as animals of Holy Spirit locally called Shawanan (imaginary owner of the ibexes). They used to believe that ibexes can be accessed only by pleasing the Shawanan. I remember once, my eldest brother asked my uncle, “why do you bear such hardship for hunting ibexes despite being rich in cattle wealth – it is better to kill a goat and eat”. My uncle laughed and said, “ibexes are different from your goat and sheep. These are animals of Holy Spirit and can be accessed only through pleasing her”.

Keeping in view the sacred relationship of hunting and hunters, there used to be different rituals and customs that the hunters would secretly follow. They used to call Shawanan for help in a way as if they worshipped the spirit. When I asked the famous hunter Jaffer Ali how he used to plan for hunting he said: “I used to see in my dream that I am cutting trees in a jungle. This was a type of call from Shawanan for hunting. I have never been successful in my hunting without the call.” This is common belief among the professional hunters that they are being called by unseen spirit for hunting through dream. This shows a sacred relationship in the process of hunting. Likewise, there are certain rituals that hunters use to perform which have strong meaning about hunters and hunting relationship.

The journey of hunting used to be very different from a common journey. The hunters used to get up early in the morning and used to seek help from the Shawanan for success in hunting. Their language for Shawanan used to be very humble and full of love. They used to call “shokore Shawanan” in Khowar language which means sweet Shawnan. They also used the word “Nan” – meaning Mother – to the Shawanan. Likewise, they use to call Guyatoon to the ibex in Khowar language. Guyatoon is such a powerful expression of love, that I could not find any alternative word in English which could give same powerful sense of love for anything. After seeking help from the spirit, the hunter used to set out for hunting. Before exiting from their home, they would make sure that their first meeting on their way should be with a person who is considered to be pious. Therefore, they would tell any of the pious person of their family to wait outside their home while they exit from their home before their first meeting with anybody impious. This process is called Muhha Nisik in local language. They would also manage to remove dirty things from their exit point otherwise that was considered to be bad omen.

There is also a ritual locally called as “Iskiyaik”. It used to be performed in a way that the hunters would make traditional bread “Fiti” for Shawanan. There used to be an imaginary jurisdiction of Shawnanan in different areas of pastures. When the hunters use to enter into that area, they would seek permission from the Shawanan. They would cut the bread into seven pieces and keep it on a stone. They would keep a piece of leaf of Juniper tree on each piece of bread and then would call the Holy Spirit by saying “O Mother Shawanan, I beg your pardon for entering into your area and I with due respect seek your grace for success in my hunting.” This whole process is called “Iskiyaik”. They used to believe that if they would not perform these rituals than the imaginary mother would be “naghuji” meaning angry. But the word “angry” does not give such powerful sense of anger as naghuji. It means an anger but one that is full of love and compassion from somebody higher to its follower.

After hunting ibexes, they used to show their respect for the meat, skin, and head of the ibex. They would make sure that they will not present these things to a person who is not physically clean. They used to believe that eating meat with dirty hands make Shawnan angry “naghuji”. In such a case, the

hunter will be deprived from the grace of spirit and will not succeed in hunting. If in any case, they will not be successful in hunting more than one time, they will understand that the Holy Spirit is not happy with the hunter and therefore he will present any gift to please her.

### **The Chimpanzee and the Bread, and Other Stories**

I belong to Bilhanz, a small village in Ishkoman Tehsil of Ghizer district of Gilgit-Baltistan. This story, “the chimpanzee and the bread” is so common in our Wakhi-speaking region. I used to hear from my elders in my childhood that the mother of all chimpanzees used to be a normal human being like us. One fine day, she was cooking bread. She was yet to start eating it that a man from her neighborhood, who was hungry for many hours, entered her home. As she saw the man coming in, she quickly hid the bread by sitting on it. The hungry man asked for something to eat but the chimpanzee (who was then a lady), refused and told him that she had nothing to give him to eat. The hungry man went out. When the lady turned to take the bread she couldn't find it. Instead of the bread there was a white round spot on her back and to her surprise, she had converted into an animal. She cried and appealed for forgiveness but nothing could happen as she was punished for disrespecting God's blessing, the bread and a fellow human being, the hungry man.

Although it is a fiction but very powerful story which elders in our society tell their children to teach them the importance and sacredness of bread and importance of helping those in need. In the Wakhi speaking region of Ishkoman valley in Gilgit Baltistan, interesting stories are found about origin and nature of almost all animals living there. Mongoose is one of those animals. It is said that there used to be two brothers fighting over a piece of field. Actually, the field belonged to the younger brother who was a very simple and straight man while his elder brother was very clever and greedy. He wanted to take the field from his younger brother by hook or by crook. The younger brother had proven it various times that the field belongs to him but the elder one would never accept it. One day the elder brother made a very clever plan to take the field from his brother forever. He told him that next day they should ask the field itself whom it belonged to. “Whatever the field's response would be, we will accept it”, suggested the elder brother. The younger one accepted this proposed solution. That night, the greedy man made a hole in the field and put his son in that hole. He advised him to say ‘I belong to you’ only when he (his father) will ask him in the morning, and to remain silent upon the question of his younger brother.

The next day both of the brothers came to the field to ask about its owner. The younger brother asked the field first but there was no response from the field; however, when the elder one asked “whom do you belong to?” a voice came from the field “I belong to you.” Finally, the elder brother succeeded to take the field from his brother. But to his surprise, when he came back at night to take his son back, he could not find him because he had changed into a mongoose. There were holes all around in the field made by his son. He tried hard to catch him but he could not do so as the animal was too fast coming out of one hole and then disappearing in the other. Since that day, mongoose was made and since then it is busy in making holes in the fields. The greedy man cried and appealed for forgiveness but nothing could happen as he had been punished for taking land of someone else, through deception and greed. Elders quote example of this greedy man whenever they need to talk against greed, deception and cheating.

Finally, I wish to end with my childhood experiences with nature. Wakhi-speaking people in Ishkoman valley of Ghizer District in Gilgit-Baltistan mostly used to rely on their livestock for their livelihood.

Most of the people used to move to higher mountainous pastures (grazing lands) in summer (before the trend of unnecessary migration to big cities). I too used to go to our pasture with my grandparents. I had a very close interaction with nature during my childhood therefore I have various memorable experiences. Here I want to share some of them. We had a hut at a very high altitude on the mountain where we used to live the whole summer. I remember the advices and speeches of my grandparents which they used to give about manners and etiquettes to be followed to live in the area with safety and harmony. They used to teach us to always be kind, respectful and generous to everyone because according to them anyone might encounter a mountain witch, fairy, an angel or other creature, disguised in the form of a needy or poor man because that is how, according to them, our character and intentions are judged by those creatures.

My grandparents used to stop us from using bad language and making disturbing noises as such disturbances would keep the angels, who were responsible for bringing blessings from God, away from our hut. They consistently used to tell us that the more you will live in-harmony and cleanliness with the unseen creatures the more safe and blessed you will be. One day my grandmother told us that she occasionally sees a white light at a distance from the hut, early in the morning. She told us that the light is actually an angel which takes care of us but it has gone quite far now. She added that this light used to be just around our hut many years ago, when she used to be young. The angel has gone far, she said, because many people have started living in the surrounding who do not care about these creatures. They fight each other, use bad language, make noise and don't keep the surrounding clean which disturbs the angels and other creatures.

I had seen similar care for animals and trees as well. I and one of my cousins, used to go into the woods with our grandfather to collect wood. We used to play there with stones and sticks while my grandfather would collect wood. We used to play by throwing sticks and stones down the slopes which would produce interesting patterns of sounds, or sometimes searching for circle-shaped stones to roll them down the slope. Once my grandfather saw us and scolded us for this. He told us that these stones may hit the nests of the birds, insects or they may even disturb the unseen creatures so we should take care while playing in the woods. I never noticed my grandfather hurting any green tree or even a bush while cutting dry woods. He would say that green trees have similar lives as human beings and they feel the same pain as we do when our body parts are cut.

Today when I look back, I realize how important were the lessons my grandparents used to teach me; lessons which were never taught that powerfully till the completion of my sixteen years of education, lessons of keeping our environment clean, lessons of loving every creature, lessons of civilization, lessons of spirituality, lessons of togetherness which are all very essential for true humanity which is endangered in today's selfish and unjust capitalized world.

## **Conclusion**

The course on Environmental Education at AKU-IED placed special emphasis on listening, emotions, forgotten histories and presents, and a questioning of privilege and oppressions. It experimented with

art-centered approaches that served to validate our deepest thought-feelings, memories and experiences, and allowed learners to develop their “own vision and personal voice” (Moahi & Costandius 2018:33). This paper is an outcome of such a decolonizing pedagogy, struggle and initiative.

Our endeavor brings to light an indigenous view of nature, ecology and society by highlighting experiences and memories of life-nature from voices of the global South based in Pakistan. The narratives inform, guide and enlighten in multiple ways. For example, Shiribadat’s story is essentially a commentary on political power and injustice, and is filled with feminist, familial, and popular resistance. The ‘chimpanzee and other stories’ section defies ontologies of nature-human separation, capturing not just the co-existence of animals, spirits and humans but their co-constitution. Such indigenous ecologies of knowledge and wisdom, we argue, offer a timely corrective to fragmented and exploitative constructions of the natural environment as mere resource, pleasure, or commodity, while providing a profound, alternative basis for a richly layered, spirited, environmental education.

We understand that we have been colonized and the supremacy of colonizers still exists in the form of hegemony. However, we also understand that because of globalization, the flow of information from one cultural context to the other has become fast. There is a view that globalization means westernization and smugness of the power of the United States. Ours is an interesting article on how living in a global era, we can project and produce strong local voices to be accepted in the globe at large. It is mechanically injected in our education that the indigenous life is outdated, and not compatible with modern perspectives. However, our analysis of the stories shows a different side of the coin. Our way teaches that environment and ecology are not separated from us. They are not something external; rather they are we, in totality.

The stories shared in this collaborative article are self-reflective, and a contribution to preserve the indigenous knowledge of human, nature, culture, beliefs and traditions. These traditions, beliefs and practices of the people in the rural mountainous regions reflect their unique ways of perceiving, creating and disseminating knowledge and reality. Through these practices, people teach their kids the ethics and values such as care, generosity, unity, honesty, and so on, and avoid bad deeds like selfishness, cruelty, greed, and deception towards nature and humans alike.

### Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Dia Da Costa, Zahra Malkani, Shahana Rajani and Sarfaroz Niyozov for their thoughtful guidance on the class, as well as to two anonymous reviewers for their feedback on an earlier version of this paper.

### References

Abu-Lughod, L & Lutz, C. (eds.) 1990. Introduction: emotion, discourse, and the politics of everyday life. In Lutz, C & Abu-Lughod, L. (eds.) *Language and the Politics of Emotion* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Bignell, K. 1996. Building feminist praxis out of feminist pedagogy: the importance of students' perspectives. *Women's Studies International Forum* 19(3): 315-325.
- Furo, A. 2018. Decolonizing the classroom curriculum: indigenous knowledges, colonial logics, and ethical spaces. Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada.
- Hochschild, A. 1983. *The managed heart: commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Jagger, A. 1989. Love and knowledge: emotion in feminist epistemology. In Garry, A & Pearsall, M (eds.) *Women, knowledge and reality: explorations in feminist philosophy*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 129-155.
- Johnson, M. 2008. *The meaning of the body: aesthetics of human understanding*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mbembe, A. 2015. Decolonizing knowledge and the question of the archive. *An Africa is a Country Ebook*. Available: <https://africaisacountry.atavist.com/decolonizing-knowledge-and-the-question-of-the-archive> Accessed 10 January 2019.
- Moahi, D & Costandius, E. 2018. When art informs: challenging stereotypes in a multicultural educational setting in Botswana. *SOTL in the South* 2(2): 18-36.
- Morarji, K. 2010. Where does the rural educated person fit? Development and social reproduction in contemporary India. In McMichael, P. (ed.) *Contesting Development, Critical Struggles for Social Change*. Routledge, 50-63.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. 2007. Decolonising research methodology must include undoing its dirty history. *The Conversation*, 27 September.
- Practicing Freedom. 2011. Ecopedagogy. [O]. Available: <http://www.practicingfreedom.org/offerings/ecopedagogy/> Accessed 10 January 2019.
- Simpson, L. 2002. Indigenous Environmental Education for Cultural Survival. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* 7(1): 13-25.
- Simpson, LB. 2014. Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3(3): 1-25.
- Talbot, S. 2000. *Partial Reason: critical and constructive transformations of ethics and epistemology*. Westport: Greenwood.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>