AL-AASAR Journal
Quarterly *Research Journal*
www. al-aasar.com
Vol. 3, No. 1 (2026)
Online ISSN: 3006-693X
Print ISSN: 3006-6921

Who Owns the Clock? Chronopolitics, Stratified Counter-Memory and the Authorless Name in Osama Siddique's *Snuffing Out the Moon*

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Abstract
This article reads Osama Siddique's *Snuffing Out the Moon* (2017) as a sustained fiction of chronopolitics, the contest over who may author, order and police time. Spanning six settings between Mohenjo-daro in 2084 BCE and a corporate water regime in 2084 CE, the novel has largely been received as a set of linked tales or as a cyclical philosophy of history. The article argues instead that its thirty chapters, distributed across five Books that move forward and then backward through the six eras, constitute a formal argument against the progress narratives by which each of its ruling orders legitimates itself. Drawing on Fabian's denial of coevalness, Foucault's analyses of power/knowledge, biopolitics and counter-memory, and Guha's account of dominance without hegemony, the reading traces three recurring operations, the authoring of the past, the sequencing of the present and the policing of memory, from the priesthood of Mohenjo-daro to the Knowledge Centres of 2084. Its principal contribution lies in a second finding. Counter-memory in the novel is stratified. Those who manage to leave a durable record against power are demoted insiders, an architect, a monk and a disgraced historian, while the governed majority leave little or nothing. The single act of remembering that defeats an official rewriting has no author at all. It is the vernacular name of a well at Ajnala, which outlasts a colonial monument inscribed in three scripts. The article names this authorless counter-memory and proposes it as a category for reading power and memory in South Asian historical fiction.

Keywords: chronopolitics, counter-memory, dominance without hegemony, Pakistani Anglophone fiction, historical novel, Osama Siddique, *Snuffing Out the Moon*

1. Introduction

Every regime in *Snuffing Out the Moon* wants the same possession. It wants the clock. The priests of a Bronze Age city want to own the sacred year, a monastery wants to own the time it takes to enter learning, an emperor wants to own the canon of the dead poets, a colonial officer wants to own the name of a well, a military government wants to own the constitutional calendar, and a corporation of the late twenty-first century wants to own the distinction between the history that matters and the history that may be left to rot. Osama Siddique's first novel stages these desires across more than four thousand years and six settings, from Mohenjo-daro in 2084 BCE to a privatised water order in 2084 CE. What joins the settings is not a family line or a single protagonist. It is a recurring relation between power and time, and the novel's formal design is built to make that relation visible.

The question this article pursues is simple to state but difficult to answer. What does the novel claim about the capacity of the governed to remember against those who govern them?

Existing responses to the novel have recognised its ambition and its concern with the longue durée of domination. Reviewers praised its six narratives as linked stories held together by time, humanity and the moon (Tirmizi, 2017), and later commentary read it as a parable of the cost of lost integrity (Kumar, 2025). The one sustained scholarly reading to date argues that the novel dismantles the Enlightenment assumption of linear and universal history in favour of a Spenglerian model of cyclical, civilisation-specific development (Habib & Qasmi, 2025). These readings are valuable, but they tend to treat time as the novel's theme rather than as the terrain on which its politics are fought. They say little about how its regimes administer history, and almost nothing about who is able to answer back.

The article takes up this neglected problem through the concept of chronopolitics. Its argument unfolds in two stages. The first stage shows that the novel's architecture, thirty chapters distributed across five Books that pass forward and backward through the same six eras, works as an argument rather than a container. By refusing to let the eras line up as a story of improvement, the form denies each regime the claim on which its legitimacy rests, namely the claim to be the summit of what came before. Within that architecture the article traces three chronopolitical operations that recur, with changing instruments, in every era. Regimes author the past, they sequence the present so that dissent appears backward, and they police what a population may remember.

The second stage develops the article's principal contribution. Reading the novel's acts of resistance side by side, it finds that counter-memory is unevenly distributed. The figures who succeed in preserving a record against official history are almost always insiders who have fallen, a master planner, a senior monk, a demoted theoretician. The humbler dissenter in contemporary Lahore acts anonymously and leaves only notes that are torn down. The hunted population of 2084 leaves no record at all. Yet the one instance in which popular memory defeats an official act of renaming belongs to no author whatsoever. At Ajnala, the colonial state fills a well with the bodies of executed sepoys, raises a mound over it and inscribes it in three scripts as the grave of rebels, and still the local name for the place survives against the monument. The article calls this authorless counter-memory.

After situating the study and defining its niche (Section 2) and setting out a compact framework (Section 3), the article reads the grid as formal argument (Section 4), moves through the eras (Section 5) and develops the argument about stratified and authorless counter-memory (Section 6).

2. Critical Context and the Niche of the Study

Criticism of Pakistani fiction in English has been shaped largely by questions of space and event. Cilano (2013) reads the Pakistani novel in relation to the idea of the nation and the apparatus of the state, attending to the ways in which fiction negotiates territorial belonging and the official shaping of the national past. Kanwal (2015) reorients the field toward the aftermath of 11 September 2001, reading identity, surveillance and the global war on terror as central coordinates of contemporary Pakistani writing. The essays collected by Kanwal and Aslam (2018) consolidate these concerns, mapping nation, migration, gender, religion and political violence across the Anglophone tradition, while Shamsie (2017) provides a long literary history of the tradition's development. This body of scholarship has produced a rich understanding of the postcolonial Pakistani subject. Its dominant coordinates, however, remain place, border and

crisis. Time tends to appear as the medium through which these struggles unfold rather than as a political object in its own right.

That habit matters when the text under study refuses linear chronology. A novel that places Mohenjo-daro beside a corporate dystopia, and then turns its sequence back upon itself, asks for a vocabulary that treats the ordering of time as an exercise of power.

That vocabulary exists outside literary studies. Klinke (2013) proposes chronopolitics as a conceptual matrix for political geography, arguing that time and temporality are as fundamental to the exercise of power as space and territory. Esposito and Becker (2023) distinguish three related dimensions, the time of politics, the politics of time and politicised time, and propose chronopolitics as a framework for bringing historical temporality to the centre of historical and political analysis. Within postcolonial theory, the foundations of such an approach are older still. Fabian (1983) showed how anthropology constituted its object by placing the people it studied in another time, and Chakrabarty (2000) exposed the historicism that assigns the colonised a place in the waiting room of history. Yet this theoretical work has rarely been brought to bear on Pakistani Anglophone fiction, and it has not yet been used to read Siddique's novel.

The reception of *Snuffing Out the Moon* confirms the gap. Tirmizi (2017) likened the six plot lines to short stories told concurrently, and Kumar (2025) read the novel alongside Siddique's Urdu fiction as a meditation on societal decay. Habib and Qasmi (2025) come closer to the present concern by reading the novel's cyclical conception of history through Spengler, and their argument is persuasive at the level of the novel's philosophy of history. It does not, however, address the formal design as a vehicle of political meaning, nor does it examine how each regime within the novel manages time as an instrument of rule, nor who is able to resist that management.

The niche of the present study can therefore be stated with some precision. This frame makes three claims that the existing criticism does not. First, the novel's forward-and-backward architecture is itself an argument against the progress narratives of its regimes. Second, the instruments of temporal control change beyond recognition across the six eras while the operation they perform remains constant. Third, and most originally, the capacity to remember against power is stratified by proximity to power, and the only counter-memory that survives an official rewriting intact is one that has no author. This last claim connects the novel to Spivak's (1988) question about subaltern speech and to Nora's (1989) distinction between lived memory and official history, and it offers a category, authorless counter-memory, that can travel to other long-duration South Asian narratives.

3. A Chronopolitical Framework

The framework used here is deliberately compact. It rests on one governing premise and three analytical operations, supplemented by an account of the character of rule and an account of resistance, with a limiting caution drawn from Spivak.

3.1 The Governing Premise

The governing premise is that time is not a neutral container of events but a field of political contest. Two traditions support it. Fabian (1983) demonstrated that colonial knowledge was built on what he called the denial of coevalness, the refusal to recognise that the observer and the observed share the same present. The colonised were placed in an earlier time, and that placement did political work, because to be assigned to the past is to be denied standing in the present. Foucault's (1980) analysis of power/knowledge supplies the mechanism. Power does not

simply forbid. It produces the categories, records and truths through which reality becomes intelligible, so that the institution that writes the accepted past governs what can be thought in the present. Chakrabarty (2000) extends Fabian's insight to the whole structure of modern historicism, in which Europe arrives at modernity first and the rest of the world is imagined as arriving later. Taken together these positions suggest that whoever sets the calendar and keeps the chronicle holds a form of leverage that outlasts any particular territorial conquest.

3.2 Three Operations of Temporal Control

From this premise the article derives three operations that can be traced in each of the novel's eras. The first is the authoring of the past. Every regime in the novel possesses an official history and presents it as settled truth. In Foucault's (1980) sense, such history is not discovered but made. The second operation is the sequencing of the present. To rule time is to decide what counts as current and what counts as obsolete, and therefore to recode competing memories and practices as survivals of an earlier age. This is Fabian's manoeuvre turned inward, since the postcolonial state, no less than the colonial one, can declare its own peripheries backward. The third operation is the policing of memory. Authorship and sequencing require enforcement, so archives are guarded, inconvenient pasts are buried and access to knowledge is regulated. These three operations provide the categories through which Section 5 reads each era.

Two further Foucauldian tools refine the operations. Biopolitics names the modern administration of life at the level of populations. In a well-known formulation, Foucault (1978) describes how "the ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death" (p. 138). This concept will be essential for the novel's water regime of 2084. Genealogy, in turn, is Foucault's (1977) method for dissolving the appearance of necessity that official history lends to the present. It searches for descent and emergence, accident and reversal, beneath the story of smooth progress, and in doing so it gives the name counter-memory to the practice of keeping those discontinuities in view.

3.3 The Character of Rule

Guha (1997) contested the application of this model to colonial South Asia. Analysing dominance as a relation of coercion and persuasion, he argued that the colonial state never achieved hegemony, because coercion always outweighed persuasion, and that the postcolonial state inherited this structure. The result was dominance without hegemony, power that commands obedience without earning consent. The framework uses Guha's formulation to ask, of each regime in the novel, how much of its authority rests on persuasion and how much on fear. It also follows a corollary. A regime that cannot win belief must control the record instead, so that the policing of memory becomes the complement of coercion rather than its substitute.

3.4 Counter-Memory and Its Limits

Resistance in the novel rarely takes the form of armed revolt. It takes the form of remembering. Four positions define it here. Guha's (1982) programme for subaltern historiography rejected the elitism of both colonialist and nationalist history and insisted on an autonomous domain of the politics of the people, which directs attention toward small refusals rather than only toward declared rebellions. Foucault's (1977) counter-memory names the practice of preserving what official history smooths away. Benjamin (1968), writing against the historicism that empathises with the victors, insisted that "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (p. 256) and charged the historian of the oppressed with the task "to brush history against the grain" (p. 257). Nora (1989) distinguished

between living memory, carried by communities, and the reconstructive history that increasingly replaces it, observing that sites of memory are established precisely where milieux of memory have disappeared.

Every act of counter-memory in the novel will be examined for its authorship, asking who remembers, on whose behalf and from what distance. It is this question that produces the article's central finding.

4. The Grid as Argument

Siddique came to fiction from legal scholarship. His critical history of Pakistan's formal legal system describes that system as an alien justice inherited from colonial rule (Siddique, 2013), and a comparable interest in how institutions encode authority runs through the novel. It is visible first in the design. *Snuffing Out the Moon* distributes its action across six settings, Mohenjo-daro in 2084 BCE, the Buddhist monastic world of Takshasila, Mughal Punjab under Jahangir, the Punjab of 1857, contemporary Lahore under military rule, and a corporate order of 2084 CE. These settings are arranged across five Books of six chapters each, so that every era returns in every Book. The sequence moves forward through the eras in the first, third and fifth Books and backward in the second and fourth, producing a pattern that can be described as boustrophedon, after the ancient manner of writing in which lines run alternately left to right and right to left.

The design matters because it prevents a particular kind of reading. A novel that proceeded once from the Bronze Age to 2084 would invite the reader to experience history as accumulation, each era leading to the next and the last era presenting itself as the outcome of the whole. Siddique's grid withholds that experience. Each time the reader reaches the corporate future, the next Book turns back toward Mohenjo-daro, and each time the reader reaches Mohenjo-daro, the sequence reverses again. No era is allowed to stand as the destination. The effect is comparative rather than developmental. Distant times are placed side by side and the reader is left to collate them.

This is significant because each of the novel's ruling orders justifies itself through a claim about time. The priests present their calendar as cosmic necessity, and the corporate order of 2084 presents itself as the culmination of an era devoted to science and progress. A linear novel would silently confirm such claims by placing the latest regime at the end. The boustrophedon grid places the claimant next to its predecessors and successors and lets the resemblance speak. In Foucault's (1977) terms, the form performs a genealogy. It dissolves the appearance of necessity by showing the present order as one more turn in a recurring pattern.

The mirrored dates of the two termini sharpen the point. The novel begins its range in 2084 BCE and ends it in 2084 CE, a symmetry that frames more than four millennia within a single repeated number. The date of the most distant future is thus also the date of the most ancient past. This collapse of temporal distance has a direct chronopolitical meaning. Fabian (1983) described power as the capacity to place others in another time. The symmetrical termini refuse that placement. They insist that the Bronze Age priest and the corporate custodian are coeval in the only sense that matters for this novel, which is that they belong to the same logic of rule.

The conversation between the demoted historian Alexander Al-Murtaza Afaqi and the official known as RRR gives this logic a direct expression. Afaqi recalls the great commercial consortiums and financial institutions of the past, and the British East India Company among

them, observing that such enterprises always retained local knowledge and native collaborators to give their rule a cosmopolitan face (Siddique, 2017). RRR answers with the regime's liturgy, which celebrates an era devoted to science and progress, a system of equal opportunity by merit and a prophetic vision that preserves and wisely multiplies valuable and scarce human resources (Siddique, 2017, p. 25).

5. Chronopolitics Across the Six Eras

5.1 Theocratic Time in the City of Bricks

The rule of High Priest Bhogi in Mohenjo-daro arrives not with an army but with a calendar. Public observances become so elaborate and so frequent that the city acquires a "cluttered annual calendar of sacred days" (Siddique, 2017, p. 156). No personal undertaking can proceed without sanctification, and priests stand at the beginning of every journey, whether of birth, travel or death (Siddique, 2017, p. 157). This is the first of the three operations in its plainest form. The priesthood does not merely interpret the sacred year. It manufactures it, and in doing so it takes possession of the time of every household in the city.

The same operation governs knowledge. The deity becomes ever more dependent on priestly interpretation (Siddique, 2017, p. 157), so that the god can be approached only through those who claim to speak for it. This is the circuit that Foucault (1980) describes, in which authority generates the categories through which reality becomes intelligible. A god who cannot be imagined without a priest cannot be invoked against the priest.

Motla, the Overseer of the Baths, gives the most exact account of the resulting order. The rulers, he says, "sit and stare vacantly while the priests dominate," and the priests behave more like "merchants" than like guardians of the sacred (Siddique, 2017, p. 138). Prkaa calls the new state an age of illusion-makers (Siddique, 2017, p. 139). The description names a form of government that does not argue. It performs. Robed figures sway at the great peepal tree, and Bhogi invokes the deity with the cry "Here is blood!" (Siddique, 2017, p. 147). Obeisance is required and submission comes with it (Siddique, 2017, p. 157). The ritual of water is staged as cosmological management, a performance that claims the power to hold back floods.

Nothing in this apparatus asks for consent. It produces awe, which is cheaper. The clearest evidence is the failure of exposure. Mahweel, Motla and Prkaa use hidden channels and levers to flood the Great Bath, hoping to reveal Bhogi's rituals as empty. The plan works mechanically and fails politically. The people are "so beleaguered by natural calamity and so overawed by this cult" (Siddique, 2017, p. 333) that they cannot accept what they are shown. Fearful submission of this kind is not hegemony in Gramsci's (1971) sense. It is what remains when persuasion has never been attempted, and it fits Guha's (1997) formulation closely.

The fit must be qualified. Guha's concept assumes a metropolitan bourgeois order against which the colonial balance of coercion and persuasion can be measured, and a Bronze Age priesthood has no such counterpart. The transposition is an extrapolation rather than an application, authorised by a grid built to invite collation across eras. The novel proposes that the coercive structure Guha identified is a recurring signature of organised power, and the critic's task is to test that proposal rather than assume it.

In Mohenjo-daro, too, counter-memory begins, and it begins in a technical rather than a textual form. Mahweel, once the city's renowned planner, is described as having "diligently kept at bay the collective amnesia" that accompanied the city's decline (Siddique, 2017, p. 334). He alone retains the hydraulic knowledge that others have forgotten. His resistance is a way of not

forgetting, and it is structurally parallel to the microchips that Afaqi will bury four millennia later.

5.2 Admission as Enclosure at Takshasila

In the Takshasila strand, the second operation appears in a quieter form. A young man sits in a corner of the central courtyard at Jaulian, waiting to learn whether poverty will bar him from learning (Siddique, 2017, p. 20). Tradition requires that each pupil be formally instructed by a named teacher and that gurudakshina, the gift of gratitude, be offered at the end of study (Siddique, 2017). Several sangharamas have quietly moved that gift from the end of study to its beginning, where it now takes the form of offerings at an initiation ceremony whose value reveals the candidate's resources. Gratitude has become a gate. The young man seeks the customary sponsorship from the local satrap and is refused, and the wealthy merchants of Sirsukh refuse him as well (Siddique, 2017, p. 21). The senior monk Mitradeva and his colleagues insist that the ritual obligation be observed. Buddhamitra offers to accept the boy without any gift, to the astonishment of colleagues who see in this a disregard for precedent (Siddique, 2017).

The dispute is not doctrinal. It concerns who may enter the room in which doctrine is kept. In Foucault terms, the monastery does more than house learning. It confers the credentials that make learning legitimate, and it does so through an admission protocol that presents itself as piety while functioning as property. Where the priesthood of Mohenjo-daro enclosed the sacred through ritual monopoly, Takshasila encloses it through custody of learning. The form of the enclosure differs. Its function does not. Nor does the sangha need to persuade anyone of the fairness of its rule. It need only appeal to precedent, and precedent is not an argument that the poor are able to answer.

Buddhamitra names the temporal cost of this arrangement with unusual precision. He tells the assembly that the monks have confined themselves within the walls of the sangharama, absorbed in ritual, while beyond the walls the world changes with the turning of the wheel of time (Siddique, 2017). He likens them to mushrooms clinging to the damp roots of great trees after rain, and describes their institution as a wilderness of owls, where wisdom is lost in the chatter of empty ritual and blind faith and where hours are spent disputing the correct procedure for lighting an altar lamp (Siddique, 2017). The observation is a diagnosis of institutional time. Within the walls, time has become a calendar of observances, and a calendar of observances cannot register change.

The result may be described as an inverted denial of coevalness. Fabian (1983) criticised a power that assigns others to an earlier time in order to rule them. The sangha performs the same manoeuvre upon itself, choosing to dwell in an imagined past and mistaking that choice for fidelity. The consequence is not innocence but blindness, and blindness has victims. The first is Ananda, the boy whom Buddhamitra admitted. In Sirsukh, the satrap Sanghasrava observes him carrying a wounded child on his shoulders and notices his affection for the child's sister, and he fashions a scandal from it (Siddique, 2017, p. 310), congratulating himself afterwards on killing two lizards with one shot of the catapult (Siddique, 2017). The calculation succeeds. Mitradeva expels the boy and dismisses Buddhamitra's protest that there is no evidence (Siddique, 2017, p. 321).

What the elders defend in this episode is neither truth, since no inquiry is held, nor doctrine, since the charge was invented by an outsider with an interest in the outcome. They

defend the reputation of the institution that certifies them. The official memory of the monastery closes around a fabrication, and the record will show a disciplinary matter properly concluded. Ananda walks back toward Sirsukh, a city Buddhamitra has warned of an approaching horde and whose people, the satrap included, have largely laughed at the warning (Siddique, 2017). He goes because a girl he loves is inside. Buddhamitra, weeping, calls him the bravest of them all (Siddique, 2017, p. 359). The novel does not reward this courage. It records that it happened, which is the only honour available in an era that recognises no other kind.

One passage in this strand carries particular weight for the argument of the whole novel. Reflecting on Mara, Buddhamitra dwells on texts that speak of Maras in the plural and of Maras in the distant past, and he concludes that if such powers existed before the Buddha, there may be Maras in a distant future as well (Siddique, 2017). In a monastery of the fifth century, a character articulates the recurrence thesis that the novel's grid enacts across four millennia. The novel places its own argument in the mouth of a figure who cannot yet prove it, and in doing so it instructs the reader in how to read the design.

5.3 The Firman and the Statute

The Mughal and colonial strands show the administration of time becoming codified. Jahangir's authority rests on inheritance and conquest. His forebears, the narrative recalls, built and held an empire governed with an "iron fist" (Siddique, 2017, p. 182). The imperial titulature completes the claim. A firman issued in the name of the "Seizer of the World and Allah's Shadow on this Earth" (Siddique, 2017, p. 377) orders a mansabdar to stop composing verse. It informs him that his verses have been collected, examined and heard, and that his versification causes grave offence to masters living and dead (Siddique, 2017, p. 377). The decree is worth reading closely because it is an act of temporal governance disguised as literary criticism. It makes poetic tradition the property of the state and makes the emperor the custodian of a canon that extends backward to the dead and forward to the living. An empire secure in its armies nonetheless attends to the private writing of a minor official.

The same strand shows memory being managed at its most intimate scale. Sohaila Bi and Ameena Bi, banished to the margins of the harem, leave Lahore swearing one another to keep the fact of their banishment secret (Siddique, 2017, p. 380). The silence is not imposed by any institution. It is administered by the two women themselves, which is precisely what Foucault's (1980) account of power predicts, since power is most effective where it is carried by its subjects as habit. From a dungeon, Sikander-e-Sani asks whether Jahangir's famous justice has been "reduced to a chain of gold" hanging from the palace (Siddique, 2017, p. 375), measuring the distance between the reign's proclaimed legitimacy and its practice. Even the emperor is not free of the anxiety his apparatus produces. Confronted with ancient bones in the hunting grounds near Sheikhupura, Jahangir falls into a gloom that the narrative pointedly marks as unrecorded (Siddique, 2017, p. 183). The ruler of the record fears his own erasure.

Colonial rule inherits this machinery and converts it into text. Mir Sahib, with a century of British rule in view, understands the colonisers' law through the dastan tradition's figure of a sorcerer's grimoire. The "Book of Samri" will supply "the most potent edicts and incantations" for bringing "all local law, norm and practice of long provenance" under control (Siddique, 2017, p. 196). The figure is exact. It renders codification as magic, a body of writing that rests on no shared premise and admits no appeal. The law arrives not as an instrument to which the governed

consent but as an alien device of subjugation, which is Guha's (1997) point rendered as a figure of speech.

The massacre at Ajnala provides the counter-evidence to any civilising claim. The narrative follows Frederic Cooper as he takes charge of men of the 26th Bengal Infantry, strips them of the janeu and the taweez and leads them bound toward the police station. The novel describes them as "homogenized in their status and destiny as prisoners of the Raj" (Siddique, 2017, p. 386). This is Fabian's (1983) denial of coevalness enacted on the body. Difference is removed before life is. The executions take place on Bakr Eid, which Cooper describes as a "sacrifice of a different kind" (Siddique, 2017, p. 387). Two hundred and thirty-seven men are killed before him (Siddique, 2017, p. 388), and forty-five more die in the tower. Cooper is satisfied that the account with Cawnpore has been balanced (Siddique, 2017, p. 389) and later declares that no mock philanthropy prevented him from doing what he took to be his duty (Siddique, 2017, p. 391).

What follows the killing matters as much as the killing. A letter from Montgomery instructs Cooper to submit an official report and to place the whole affair on record (Siddique, 2017, p. 390). The archive is commissioned in the same breath as the massacre, so that domination and its documentation form a single act. Among the dying is Prakash Singh, who lies near the top of the heap, alive, looking up at a patch of grey-blue sky and hoping that his friend Sohan Singh will fight bravely and die bravely (Siddique, 2017). No account of his was ever written, and the novel preserves only his name. Then the well is filled and mounded, and an inscription reading "rebels' grave" is set up in English, Gurmukhi and Persian for the instruction of travellers on the road (Siddique, 2017, p. 392). A monument is raised in order to educate. The chronopolitical meaning of that monument, and the manner in which it fails, are taken up in Section 6.

A related scene at Mian Mir completes the colonial picture. The Indian dead there are unnamed and their burial place unknown, and the narrative states plainly that the victor, as ever, decided which memories were sacred (Siddique, 2017, p. 296), while three British officers are named on a memorial tablet. Benjamin's (1968) proposition needs no adjustment here. The document of civilisation and the document of barbarism are the same slab of stone.

5.4 Legality as Ornament in Contemporary Lahore

The contemporary Lahore strand, set in 2009 (Tirmizi, 2017), relocates the statute book to the service of military rule. Its central figure, the aged lawyer Aminuddin Ameerzada, moves through a labyrinth of colonial-era laws, ordinances on cattle trespass, vagrancy, smoking, slaughter and writing on walls, whose very absurdity makes a point. An authoritarian regime is held up not only by the general's fist but by the fine grain of legal administration. The regime requires the lawyer's paper-book to give its seizures of power a legal face, and pliable judges supply the rest. In Guha's (1997) terms this is ideological veneer laid over an authority that is at root dictatorial. The population is not consulted. It is administered. The colonial "Book of Samri" has become the constitution of a sovereign state without changing its function.

This strand also contains the novel's most unrefined act of counter-memory. Someone inside Ameerzada's household begins leaving notes wherever the old lawyer will find them, in his photographs, in the tea thermos, folded into the gaps where electrical wires pass through the wall, in the soap dish and beside the coat hanger (Siddique, 2017). The notes are not threats but accusations. One declares that he who steals the dreams of a whole nation is the most accursed

criminal of all, and another asks how long the earth will have to bear his great sin (Siddique, 2017, p. 397). Collages set the coup-makers of earlier decades against the figure of the lawyer lurking in the background. The campaign succeeds in its own way. Ameerzada discards whatever the notes have touched, abandons the chambers he has occupied for decades and dies four days after leaving them of a burst artery (Siddique, 2017). He never learns who the writer was, and the not knowing embitters his remaining years (Siddique, 2017, p. 399).

The notes change nothing in the regime he served. What the anonymous writer achieves is a private reckoning, a counter-record addressed to one man and destroyed by him, and the episode is instructive because its author is the humblest of the novel's rememberers and its record the most ephemeral.

5.5 Biopolitical Time and the Water Conglomerate of 2084

The final era makes the administration of memory into an institution with a budget. Alexander Al-Murtaza Afaqi, once a Theoretician, Instructor and Author at the Knowledge Centres Syndicate at Mohenjo-daro, sits in a period chair holding a potsherd from the Indus Valley while a video loop of half his life plays behind him, including images of the woman he loved, now present only as a digitised memory (Siddique, 2017, p. 239).

The academy that demoted him is the novel's most explicit institutional statement. Near History Studies, which concerns the last hundred years, is prestigious and powerful. Its scholars write the treatises, textbooks, manuals and synopses that govern social reorganisation, political manoeuvre, diplomacy and warfare, and they have supplied the ideologies of space and planetary colonisation (Siddique, 2017, p. 240). Deep History Studies at Taxila is a backwater. The novel sets out its purposes as a matter of administrative record. Deep History research exists, first, to reveal the condition of past civilisations and so to emphasise the advancement of the present one. It exists, second, to demonstrate that the present understands the past fully and is therefore best placed to discard the baggage of past failures. It exists, third, to house, sustain and effectively put away people like Afaqi (Siddique, 2017). The quiet terms of this confinement are recorded as a classification, since its inmates are judged not yet volatile or seditious enough to be surgically or chemically reoriented (Siddique, 2017, p. 242).

The policing of memory, a by-product of priesthood, sovereignty or empire in earlier eras, has here become a department with staff, a budget line and a risk category. Afaqi is disciplined not for sedition but for doubt, which crept into writing that had once affirmed the irrefutable advances of the human civilisational project (Siddique, 2017). His monograph on the Water Wars was withdrawn from circulation, and two subsequent books failed to pass the editorial filters (Siddique, 2017, p. 241).

Bodies are administered by the same logic. The Regressives, regarded as the half-human residue of earlier ages, are hunted by Air Riders and subjected to what the narrative calls "clinical savagery" and "techniques of mass rationalization" (Siddique, 2017, p. 256). When the war for North Asia requires the movement of troops, the containment of the Regressives is postponed (Siddique, 2017). The elimination of a population has become a routine operation, deferrable when other priorities intervene and resumable when they do not.

Fabian (1983) describes the conceptual shift that makes such deferral thinkable. The Regressives are assigned to a time earlier than the present so that they may be disposed of in the present, and their very name carries the whole argument. A regressive is not a contemporary with claims but a remnant awaiting clearance. Foucault's (1978) account of biopower describes the

other half of the operation. By controlling fresh water, the Conglomerate fosters life where it is useful and disallows it elsewhere. The concept must be applied with care. Foucault developed biopolitics to account for the modern European state's management of its national population through census, hygiene, birth rate and public health. A privatised water cartel in a post-catastrophe world has no citizens and no public to which it answers. It is therefore an extension of biopolitics rather than an instance of it, a vision of biopower that survives the end of the state Foucault described.

It is within this order that Afaqi performs the novel's most deliberate act of counter-memory. Watched, censored and demoted, he drills tiny holes and hides microchips containing all that he has learned and will not say, legible only to a reader as learned in the buried past as he is (Siddique, 2017, p. 426). He does not attempt to change 2084. He attempts to reach a reader who may not yet exist. In the terms of Baccolini and Moylan (2003), this is the gesture that distinguishes a critical dystopia, which keeps a horizon of hope open through an act of memory or resistance that outlives the regime, from the closed pessimism of the classical form.

6. Stratified Counter-Memory and the Authorless Name

The eras examined above reveal a striking constancy. The instruments of temporal control could hardly be more different. A priesthood monopolises ritual, a monastery charges admission to learning and calls it tradition, an emperor legislates the private writing of his officials, a colonial officer carves an official name into stone in three scripts, a military government borrows a colonial statute book and hires a lawyer to make it look legal, and a corporation creates a department to decide which pasts may be studied and by whom. Yet the operation these instruments perform does not change. In every era a person is first classified, then administered and finally forgotten, and the forgetting is the most durable achievement of each institution.

Against this constancy the novel sets the persistence of remembering. The question the framework requires, however, is not only whether counter-memory persists but who is able to practise it. When the novel's rememberers are read side by side with that question in mind, a pattern emerges that the existing criticism has not noticed. Counter-memory in *Snuffing Out the Moon* is stratified.

6.1 The Demoted Elite

The figures who succeed in leaving a durable record against official history share a social position. Mahweel was the city's great planner, Buddhamitra is a senior teacher of the sangha and Afaqi was a theoretician of the ruling academy. Each is an insider who has fallen or dissented, and each resists with knowledge the institution once valued, whether engineering expertise acquired in the city's service, command of the monastic texts or the scholarly training and technology with which Afaqi encodes his findings.

The durability of their records follows from this position. In the year 2084, a community at a place called the Hill has saved what it can of the past before the storm of change engulfs it. Among the materials it preserves are the memoirs of a learned ascetic of the twelfth century, who recorded the tales, legends and oral histories of the wise people who had lived on or visited the Hill in earlier centuries (Siddique, 2017). One entry describes a meeting between a revered ascetic and a passing Buddhist monk, both of whom lived in the fifth century of the Common Era (Siddique, 2017, p. 418). What was said in one age is recorded in another, some seven centuries later, and read in a third. No character in the novel lives long enough to witness the whole chain.

The record does. But the chain depends at every link on learned custodians, a monk, an ascetic, a community with the means to preserve manuscripts. It is the memory of those who could write.

The novel does not hide this dependence, and Mahweel's final exchange with Prkaa makes it poignant rather than triumphant. After the failed exposure, Prkaa concludes that a handful of people can no more tame a people than tame a storm. The nearly blind architect answers with the image of the peepal sapling, which takes root in a dry and rocky crack or between bricks, with little soil and little water, clinging high above the ground, and yet persists and grows stronger (Siddique, 2017). The city may falter and fall, but the capacity that built it does not wholly die. The promise is one of preservation, not of victory, and it is made by a man whose authority rests on what he once was.

6.2 The Descending Record

As the social position of the rememberer descends, the record becomes more fragile. The anonymous note-writer of contemporary Lahore stands nearest to the governed among the novel's dissenters. The writer never signs a name and never shows a face, and the notes are addressed to one man, who destroys them. The counter-record exists, but it survives only as the torment it inflicted and as the unanswered question that embittered Ameerzada's last years. It leaves no archive.

At the bottom of the scale are the Regressives of 2084. They are spoken of, hunted, sorted and scattered. They do not write, they are not consulted and no one in the novel writes on their behalf. Afaqi preserves a history of the Water Wars, and in doing so he preserves something of the world that produced the Regressives, but his counter-archive is written from above. It is generous, and it remains second-hand.

This is where Spivak's (1988) caution ceases to be a formality. Her argument was that the subaltern cannot be heard within the discourses of the dominant and that projects of recovery risk re-silencing those whom they set out to raise. *Snuffing Out the Moon* does not escape this charge. It stages it. Across six eras, counter-memory is overwhelmingly the work of the demoted elite, and the novel is candid about the fact. It does not offer the Regressives a voice that it cannot credibly give them. It shows instead a hierarchy of remembering in which the capacity to answer back is distributed much as power itself is distributed, and it leaves the reader to register the gap between speaking for others and being heard.

6.3 Kalian Wala Khu and Authorless Counter-Memory

There is one exception to this pattern, and it is the most powerful act of remembering in the novel. At Ajnala, the colonial state does everything within its power to fix the meaning of the well into which the bodies of the executed sepoys were thrown. The Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar hopes that the well will henceforth be known as the rebels' hole and is confident that the fitting name has already found favour locally (Siddique, 2017). The well is filled with charcoal and lime and a tumulus is raised over it so that it can be seen from a distance, and the inscription "rebels' grave" is set up in English, Gurmukhi and Persian for the benefit and instruction of travellers on the high road (Siddique, 2017, p. 392). The state deploys a monument, three languages and an official etymology.

It does not take. The name that survives is Kalian Wala Khu, the Well of the Blacks. The novel declines to authenticate the name's origin. It is uncertain, the narrative concedes, whether the name recalls the dark-skinned men of the regiment who filled it or whether it predates them (Siddique, 2017). Then, in a single clause, the narrative amends the official register. The well

received at least two hundred and eighty-two men, and they were not rebels but men of that land, to which they were at last returned (Siddique, 2017, p. 393).

Three features of this episode make it decisive for the argument. First, the contest is explicitly chronopolitical. The colonial state seeks to author the past of the well, to fix its meaning for all future travellers and to enforce that meaning through inscription. Every one of the three operations identified in Section 3 is present in miniature. Second, the counter-memory that defeats the inscription has no author. No dissenter is credited, no document is preserved and no one speaks against the monument. A name simply persists in local speech. Third, the novel's refusal to explain the name's origin is itself significant. By declining to supply an etymology, the narrative refuses to convert the vernacular name into one more authored history. The uncertainty is the evidence that something survives beyond the reach of the record.

Nora's (1989) distinction clarifies what is at stake. The tumulus with its three scripts is a site of memory in Nora's sense, an artificial support established because the state wishes to replace living memory with official history. Kalian Wala Khu belongs instead to a milieu of memory, the lived and unwritten remembering of a community. The novel stages the confrontation between the two and allows the unwritten to prevail. Benjamin's (1968) injunction to brush history against the grain is here fulfilled not by a historian but by a place-name.

The episode qualifies the Spivakian reading of Section 6.2 without cancelling it. The men in the well do not speak, and the name that survives does not tell their story. What the novel suggests is narrower and more durable. Memory that belongs to no one cannot be demoted, censored or bought. Mahweel can be forgotten, Buddhamitra overruled and Afaqi confined, but a name carried in common speech offers no such target. It is the one form of counter-memory against which each of the novel's instruments of control, the calendar, the admission fee, the firman, the statute, the monument and the editorial filter, has no purchase.

The article therefore proposes authorless counter-memory as a category for reading the relationship between power and memory in South Asian historical fiction. The term designates remembering that resists official rewriting precisely because it has no author, custodian or archive through which power could reach it. It is distinct from the elite counter-archive, which depends on learned custodians and is exposed to their vulnerabilities, and from subaltern testimony, which Spivak's critique makes difficult to claim. It is also, as the novel is careful to show, limited. Kalian Wala Khu does not restore the dead or overturn the Raj. It ensures only that the official name is not the only name.

6.4 The Accounting

When the six eras are set side by side, the accounting is sobering. No act of counter-memory topples a regime. The priests keep the Bath, the empire keeps the Punjab and the Conglomerate keeps the water. What the rememberers achieve is smaller and stranger. They ensure that the official version is never the only version. They transmit a difference without any guarantee that it will be received.

Guha's (1997) framework explains why this is not futility. A regime that rules without consent never secures its legitimacy once and for all. Its authority remains precarious because the governed have never believed in it, and a concealed record is a claim upon a future that the present cannot foreclose. The novel's title carries this double meaning. A moon that has been snuffed out may be relit, but no one can promise that anyone will read by its light.

7. Conclusion

This article has argued that *Snuffing Out the Moon* is a chronopolitical novel in the strict sense. Its regimes contest time as other regimes contest territory, and its forward-and-backward architecture denies every ruling order the claim to stand at the summit of history. Across four millennia, power authors the past, sequences the present so that dissent appears backward and polices what may be remembered. The instruments change from ritual calendar to editorial filter. The operation does not.

The article's more distinctive contribution concerns resistance and the uneven distribution of memory. Reading the novel's acts of remembering together shows that counter-memory is stratified. Durable counter-records are the work of demoted insiders whose authority derives from their former place within the institutions they oppose. Humbler dissent leaves ephemeral traces, and the most dispossessed leave none. The novel does not conceal this hierarchy. It stages Spivak's (1988) difficulty rather than dissolving it. At the same time it identifies, at Ajnala, a form of remembering that escapes the hierarchy altogether. The vernacular name Kalian Wala Khu survives a monument, three scripts and an official etymology because it belongs to no one. Authorless counter-memory, as this article has termed it, is fragile and limited, but it is the one form of memory that none of the novel's regimes can reach.

These findings have implications beyond this single novel. For criticism of Pakistani Anglophone fiction, they suggest that the government of time deserves the analytical weight long given to the government of space. The denial of coevalness that Fabian (1983) identified in colonial knowledge does not disappear with decolonisation. It persists in national calendars, curricula and official histories, available to native as well as foreign authority. For postcolonial memory studies, the category of authorless counter-memory offers a way to hold together Spivak's scepticism about subaltern recovery and the evident persistence of popular remembering. It locates resistance not in a recovered voice but in a practice that no single voice owns.

Three directions for further work follow. The reading of form as argument can be tested on other multi-era South Asian narratives. Vernacular place-names in South Asian fiction can be examined for whether authorless counter-memory recurs wherever states rename the sites of their violence. And the novel can be read alongside Siddique's legal scholarship (Siddique, 2013), with which its preoccupation with codified domination is in evident dialogue.

Siddique's novel does not promise that memory will prevail. It shows instead that, when every other ground has been taken, the act of remembering is the last territory the powerless hold. The regimes of *Snuffing Out the Moon* possess the clock in every age. What they never quite possess is the name that people go on calling a place when the monument has told them otherwise.

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