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Transformative Currents: A Blue Humanities Reading of Fluid Agency in *There Are Rivers in the Sky*

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“Readers will gain insight into new trends in Intellectual culture and the enduring history of Human thinking with and about water”

- Steve Mentz

Abstract

Water is an essential and inseparable part of human life. Traditionally, aquatic spaces have been viewed as pathways for travel, sources of resources, and places of recreation.

However, Emerging interdisciplinary studies reframe aquatic spaces as active transformative forces that shape human identity, history, and culture. The relationship between humans and rivers is inextricable. Elif Sahfak's novel *There Are Rivers in the Sky*, presents water as a medium that connects past and present, memory, and history, and link characters across geographical boundaries. The novel illustrates how river bodies shape the characters' identity, emotions, memory, spirituality, and human interconnectedness. This study examines how fluid agencies are not passive elements but active active participants in influencing human and non-human existence. It focuses on how water bodies connects different civilizations, generations, cultures, and transforms human life.

Key Words: Blue Humanities, Fluid Agency, Aquatic transformation, Riverine Studies, and Human – Nature interconnectedness.

Introduction

Present-day environmental issues such as Climate change; rising sea levels, water pollution, and ecological destruction have prompted literary scholars to reconsider human relationship with nature. In traditional thought, aquatic spaces were primarily used for travel, trade and as economic resources. Water bodies are often treated as passive settings, while human activity is dominant. However, the global environmental crisis has shifted this perspective, highlighting human dependence on oceans, seas, and rivers.

The emerging field of Blue Humanities emphasizes the relational dynamics between humans and water. It explores how water functions as an active force that shapes life, culture, memory, spirituality, and emotion. The term 'Transformative currents' refers to processes through which Materials change from through movement, while 'currents' indicate continuous water flow. The phrase 'Fluid Agency' refers to the dynamic and ever changing nature of water, highlighting its capacity to reshape boundaries and influence existence.

Within this framework, water is understood not as scenery but as an active force carrying memory, history, and culture meaning. In *There Are Rivers in the Sky*, water shapes the lives of three central characters, linking stories across time and space. The novel positions water as a narrative force that demands ethical awareness of environmental interconnection. This study explores how the characters undergo emotional, psychological, and spiritual transformation through aquatic encounters.

Rivers as Transformative Currents

Riverine and aquatic spaces are constantly shifting, never stable, and always in motion. Similarly, human lives also move across emotional, spatial, and historical boundaries. The novel reflects this idea through the line, "Mighty Rivers that never cease to flow". (468) Rivers, rain, and other water bodies preserve histories and memories, and cultures. They redistribute these fragments and emphasize the interconnected relationship between rivers and human. The novel encompasses different geographical locations, such as Mesopotamia, London during the Victorian era, and modern day Iraq. The River Thames and the rivers of Mesopotamia particularly the river Tigris, along with rain, and other aquatic spaces act as mediums, physical entities that possess the power to shape, connect stories and histories across time and generations. In Arthur Smith's life, water act as a guiding force, his profound curiosity to learn about Mesopotamian civilization, history, and along with special his memories, supports his intellectual and emotional transformation. The aquatic environment of River Thames, where he lives and his intellectual engagement with rivers facilitate his connection with past and present histories. Arthur comes from a financially constrained background, works in a publishing house, and lives near the river Thames. His engagement with history and the river transforms him from a lonely individual into one who attains intellectual growth and self-awareness individual.

Therefore, this study argues that rain and the river Thames act as mediums that transform him intellectually and emotionally.

Narin, who belongs to the Yazidi community, is another remarkable character in the novel. In tradition human thinking water has always been treated as a symbol for spiritual offerings and sacred ceremonies, representing both beginnings and endings. However, the study of Blue Humanities challenges this notion by arguing that water is not merely a natural resource used for sacred rites; rather it acts as a powerful transformative force that carries inherited stories and trauma of collective memory. Modern developments and conflicts force the Yazidi's to move away from their homeland. The Tigris

River carries Yazidi cultural history, and redistributes memories of migration, displacement, and survival across generations, thereby connecting people through time. The river Tigris acts as an archive of memory that transforms

Narin's life. Conflict, violence, migration, and displacement transform her from an innocent child into someone burdened with painful historical awareness and involuntary maturity.

Elif Shafak writes "What happens after catastrophes? Those who survive nurse their broken hearts and start all over again, as one always does, as one always must".(219) Narin and her grandmother spent much of their her time on the banks of the Tigris River. It is a place where their ancestors lived for generations, marking her emotionally and deeply connected to the river and its forgotten histories. The river acts as a silent witness of violence, migration, displacement, and survival. Water always preserves memory at any cost, it cannot be erased. As the novel states, "Water remembers, it is humans who forget". (18) At the beginning of the novel, Narin lives in a world of innocence, but her Baptism ceremony later leads her into deep grief and historical awareness. Eventually, she gains emotional strength through her connection with the cultural memory. This symbolizes how water changes yet continues its flow; similarly, Narin gains adaptability and endurance through water. Thus water functions as a symbol of healing, continuity, and survival.

Zaleekhah Clarke is a hydrologist, who lives in a Thames houseboat on the River Thames to escape from her troubled married life, as her marital relationship is not harmonious. Early in the novel, she feels disconnected from her surroundings, loses interest in everything, becomes hopeless, and remains emotionally devastated. The aquatic spaces in the novel reflect how the river continuously flows and changes direction, symbolizes instability and transformation. She preoccupied with loneliness and experiences emotional stagnation in her life. However, her stay in the houseboat and research on water bodies gradually make her emotionally responsive. The River Thames vividly reflects her unstable emotional state, and through relationship with the river, she undergoes and she undergoes emotional and psychological transformation. The river facilitates her inner healing and psychological growth. Water bodies act as channels through which she reimagines herself; their serenity and calmness help her confront her emotional and psychological suppression. Through the connection with the river, she realizes that human life is inextricably linked with nature. This study explores rivers and other aquatic spaces hold memories, histories, and witness's human lives across generations. It emphasizes human's interconnectedness and dependence on water. Thus, the study proves that, Fluid Agencies actively shapes human lives, history, and culture.

Fluid Agency and Blue Humanities

Fluid Agencies include rivers, rain, and other aquatic spaces. In this novel, a single rain drop plays a pivotal role and acts as a fluid agency in transforming lives. From the perspective of Blue Humanities the river functions as a living archive; it carries memory, history, migration, displacement, and survival and, plays a significant role in transforming human lives. A single rain drop takes various forms as it falls into Oceans, seas, rivers. It may witness ancient civilizations, holds memories, observe suffering, and travel across geographical boundaries over generations. Though small in size, it possesses immense transformative power because of its continuity and movement. "Taking the 'tidalectic' between land and sea as a dynamic starting point..." (DeLoughrey 1) Through the concept of fluid agency, a rain drop becomes proactive and dynamic participant in transforming history, culture, and human lives. It possesses agency because it can continually move, transform, remember, and connect all forms of life.

In recent years, Blue Humanities has gained wider attention among the research scholars. Sadia Muzaffar analyzes the novel from the perspective of post humanism through the lens of anthropocentrism.

The study examines Water's dynamic agency, and interconnectedness, while also arguing beyond traditional human-centered thinking and emphasizing forces beyond human control. Aama tu Rehman, Humaria Qasim, and Mohamed Aashir Zia study the complexities of identity formation and crisis through the theories of hybridity and mimicry.

Mohammad Ali Raza and Aqsa Mushtaq explore water control, human vulnerability, and the ways in which man made water ways influence people physically and emotionally. These studies demonstrate the significance of Blue Humanities as a field of study. Therefore the study titled "Transformative Currents: A Blue Humanities Reading of Fluid Agencies in *There Are Rivers in the Sky*" analyzes how fluid agencies transform identity, history, and culture, while also connecting stories across generations.

Conclusion

The study attempts to investigate how the novel *There Are Rivers in the Sky* represents Fluid Agencies as active transformative forces that shape human existence, history, memory, and culture through the lens of Blue Humanities. It examines the rivers, rain, and other aquatic spaces are not passive; rather they deeply influence both individuals and collective experiences. The study emphasizes that, the rivers and rain act as carrier of memory, history, and ancestral stories, connect all three characters across time and over generations. Water functions as a living entity that connects the past and the present demonstrating the interconnection between the human and non-human worlds. Moreover, it assists to attain transformation like the movements of currents the characters in the novel attain intellectual, emotional, and psychological and ecological transformation. Ultimately, the study positions fluid agency within Blue Humanities as a framework that redefines water not as a resource alone, but as an active, memory-bearing force that sustains life and continuity.

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