4. Reimagining Ecological Citizenship: Environmental Nostalgia and Diasporic Intimacy in the Poetry of Agha Shahid Ali

Like Derek Walcott, Agha Shahid Ali is a poet of migration born in a former British colony whose poetry reaches toward the transnational and the environmental. Or rather, as I propose, Ali's poetry reaches toward the *translocal* and the environmental as it engages with a crowded cartogram of U.S.-American places, histories, literatures, and art. In this light and unlike much of what has been written about Ali to this date, my analysis of his work does not focus on his poetry about Kashmir, his place of origin, nor does it focus on his *ghazals*, the poetic form Ali promoted in the United States and used in most of his later poetry, as can be seen for example in the posthumous collection *Call Me Ishmael Tonight: A Book of Ghazals* (2003). Rather, I turn to one of Ali's mid-career collections, *A Nostalgist's Map of America* (1991), to explore the form (eco)poetic place-making takes in his poems about the United States. Many of Ali's poems are what Jahan Ramazani calls "gloco-descriptive" (*Poetry in a Global Age* 66), that is to say, filled with references to one specific place as well as with references to places elsewhere. In *A Nostalgist's Map of America*, his poems revolve around desert landscapes in the U.S. Southwest, while also suggesting that the speaker of the poems, a Kashmiri migrant and poet who calls himself Shahid, has already moved on to the East Coast. In his texts about the American Southwest as well as in poems featured in the collection that are set elsewhere in the United States, such as the Northeast and New England, Ali does not just express longing for Kashmir. Contrary to what might be expected from a migrant poet living in self-imposed exile from his war-torn homeland, Ali's speaker also expresses a desire to develop meaningful relationships to his new place(s) of residence, including those parts of the United States he only passes through. It is this backward but also forward-oriented nostalgic longing for place-attachment without an insistence on permanent emplacement, I show in the following, that characterizes the project of (eco)poetic place-making in *A Nostalgist's Map of America*.

Ali often employs highly figurative language and figures of memory to evoke complex human-nature encounters in his place-based poems. As I posit, however,

many of his poems about the United States do not rely with the same authority on personal and collective memories of place as his poems about Kashmir. As a migrant who lived in the U.S. Southwest only for a short time before moving on to the Northeast, that is to say, as an arrivant who remained mobile after migrating to the United States, such personal and collective memories about his different places of residence in the U.S., his poems suggest, were not always available to him. Neither were large parts of the Indigenous history and culture in the Southwest, not only due to historical erasures by European colonial powers and the U.S. settler-state that succeeded them, but also due to the complex position that non-white immigrants occupy in relation to both settlers and Native peoples in a settler-colonial nation such as the United States. In response to these limitations of knowledge and lived experience, Ali combines in his poetry about the Southwest the personal experiences and memories of the places he has encountered with the place-experiences and place-memories of other residents. What is more, he supplements the available human and environmental histories of the Sonoran Desert with imagined ones.

Pervaded by an intense sense of loss as well as longing, Ali's poetic engagements with nonhuman environments in the United States acknowledge the profound and varied ways in which human-place relations in the United States are shaped by human mobilities, both voluntary and forced. His poems about nature and mobility, or rather, about place and displacement, are both nostalgic and environmentally suggestive, two qualities that have sometimes been considered incompatible by scholars who promote realist modes of environmental writing (see Ramazani, *Poetry in a Global Age* 172). Relying heavily on a place-based yet mobile poetic imagination, highly figurative language, and suggestive intertextual references for his project of place-making, Ali embraces an ecopoetics of mobility informed by environmental nostalgia that depicts places as lived-and-imagined and as complexly layered and translocal formations. By evoking physical human-nature encounters as well as encounters with places in memory and through literature, I show in the following, *A Nostalgist's Map of America* points not only toward mobile forms of place-attachment, it also points to what I understand in expanding on Svetlana Boym's notion of "diasporic intimacy" as a migrant's *diasporic intimacy with the world*. This diasporic intimacy with the world, I argue, challenges exclusive notions of ecological citizenship, instead affirming the mobile subjects' desire and ability to forge meaningful connections to the places they only pass through as well as their capacity to care deeply for places they only inhabit temporarily.

Agha Shahid Ali: A Kashmiri-American Poet in the Sonoran Desert

Born in Delhi and raised in Kashmir, a conflict-torn region in the northernmost part of South Asia that is divided between India, Pakistan, and China, Agha Shahid Ali

spent three years in the U.S. as a teenager. Later, he began his university education in India before moving once more to the United States, where he earned a Ph.D. in English from Pennsylvania State University and an MFA in creative writing from the University of Arizona. After finishing his studies, Ali remained in the United States, teaching at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Princeton College, in the MFA program at Warren Wilson College, and at the University of Utah until his premature death from brain cancer in 2001, shortly after he became naturalized as an American citizen. Due to Agha Shahid Ali's migration history, his divided cultural allegiances, and the multi-locality of his poetry, scholars have alternatively identified him as an Indian postcolonial poet, a diasporic Kashmiri poet in exile, an immigrant or Asian American poet, or as a diasporic, transcultural, or transnational poet. Ali himself sometimes used the phrase "Kashmiri-American-Kashmiri" to indicate his non-unidirectional migratory identity as well as the mobile cultural location and geographic locale from which he wrote his poetry (Shankar and Srikanth 378). In using the double hyphen, Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Rajini Srikanth suggest, Ali followed Arjun Appadurai who, in his essay "The Heart of Whiteness" (1993), pointed to the increasing tensions between traditional, nation-based conceptions of Americanness and the "large variety of trans-nations" (804) constituting the United States in the late twentieth century. In light of these changes, Appadurai observes, "the hyphenated American might have to be twice hyphenated [...] as diasporic identities stay mobile and grow more protean" (804). Mindful of the importance of place-attachments for the migratory subject, Ali's poetry about the United States carefully examines how such a new kind of diasporic identity that remains mobile and withholds permanent arrival shapes human-place relations in the U.S. trans-nation of the Southwest.

Reflecting on questions of the *postnational* and *transnational*, Appadurai advocates for a "widening of the sphere of the postcolony [...] beyond the geographical spaces of the ex-colonial world" ("The Heart" 796). More specifically, he claims,

> the study of postcolonial discourse should include the United States, where debates about race, urban violence and affirmative action index more general anxieties about multiculturalism, about diasporic diversity and thus about *new forms of transnationality*. (807; emphasis added)

Agha Shahid Ali's poetry evokes such "new forms of transnationality," or more precisely, as I read it, of *translocality*, a point I will come back to later. For where Appadurai's "*transnation*[*s*]" as well as the diasporic identities and collectivities that emerge from them are profoundly "delocalized" (804), as Appadurai insists, Ali's poetry imagines diasporic identities and collectivities that retain attachments to place and affinities for the local and the regional. Moreover, rather than associating these identities and collectivities primarily with urban spaces, as Appadurai does in the excerpt above, Ali's tentatively environmental imaginaries of belonging emerge

from a distinctly mobile perspective as well as from a sustained engagement with nonurban landscapes and environments.

Pervaded by postcolonial and transnational, modernist and postmodernist sensibilities (see Needham, Ramazani *A Transnational Poetics*), Agha Shahid Ali's poetry is critical of objective truths and fixed origins. Although his poems show acute awareness toward the complexities of personal and cultural identity formation, the precariousness of memory, and the instability of language, Ali does not engage in complacent language games or universalizing abstraction in his poetic works, nor does he use irony or biting wit to draw attention to the violence of history and the everyday injustices of life as a migrant of color in the United States, as Walcott does. Reflecting on the tenuous relationship of displaced subjects to the world, including the more-than-human world, his texts use highly figurative poetic language and a gentle lyric voice enriched with narrative elements to create meaning and coherence where meaning and coherence seem to be lacking (King 258). Much like Walcott's *Omeros*, Ali's poems about the United States feature nonurban environments as sites of encounter with other cultures and times as well as with the nonhuman world, casting places both as cultural and natural spaces, metaphorical and literal landscapes. Indeed, many of his poems refer to the natural world as a touchstone for poetic and philosophical reflection on experiences of displacement and matters of belonging.

In the poem "No," Ali for instance employs ostensibly figurative language to evoke the materiality as well as the cultural texture of places:

> [No,]
> not in the clear stream,
> I went fishing in the desert sky.
> With rain-hooks at the sun's end,
> I caught a rainbow, its colors
> slippery in my hands.
> I gently separated,
> like the bones of a trout,
> the blue from the red,
> the green from the yellow,
> my knife sharp, silver-exact,
> each color lean,
> impeccably carved.
>
> (Ali 85)

Ali uses synesthesia in the quoted passage to make tangible what can only be seen and thus creates a concrete, albeit in no sense realist representation of a "desert" landscape in his poem. "No," points to a world outside the text, but more importantly, it draws attention to itself as poetic text by evoking literary forbearers, whose

works raise questions about human-world-text relations. Indeed, this passage echoes not only Emily Dickinson's poem "Split the Lark – and you'll find the Music" (Fr905), an ironic, metapoetic text that foregrounds problems of representation and artistic production; the poem also echoes the famous dialogue between Hermit and Poet from the ecocritical ur-text *Walden: or, Life in the Woods* (1854) by Henry David Thoreau, in which fishing is described as "the true industry for poets" (Thoreau 296).[1] As different critics have remarked, fishing in *Walden* stands for "truth seeking," whereby the truth sought is that of man's position in relation to nature and civilization (Lee 134, Dolis 131). While I would not describe Ali as a truth-seeker in the Thoreauvian sense, he carefully examines the poet's position in relation to the natural environments and cultures of different places, a process made literal in lines quoted above.

Ali's poetic engagement with human-place relations shows a particular sensitivity to those historical processes that make places contested territories, whether politically or culturally. The natural environments he depicts frequently function as repositories of histories, memories, and imaginaries for voluntarily mobile or violently displaced subjects. His poem "Desert Landscape" can help to illustrate this approach:

> Stringing red serrano peppers, crushing
> cilantro seeds—just a few yards from where,
> in 1693, a Jesuit priest
> began to build a boat, bringing rumors
> of water to an earth still forgetting
>
> the sea it had lost over two hundred
> million years ago—three white-haired women,
> their faces young, are guarding the desert
> as it gives up its memories of water
> (the fossils of vanished species) […]
>
> (Ali 94)

Employing a startling line-break between "hundred" and "million years" and mentioning both the year "1693" and "fossils of vanished species," the above passage draws attention to the clash of human and nonhuman time-scales, human memories and nonhuman histories, as well as the different kinds of loss and longing that result from this clash. Alluding to the history of European mission, colonization, and settlement of the Southwest, "Desert Landscape" references the Tyrolean Jesuit Eusebio

1 I want to thank Christoph Irmscher for pointing out this particular intertextual connection to me in a discussion about a conference paper, in which I developed an earlier version of this reading.

Kino, who had just "beg[u]n to build a boat" (Ali 94) in order to expand the Jesuit mission from what is now Arizona across the Gulf of California, when a gift of blue shells from local Indigenous peoples caused him to change his plans, because the shells indicated to him that what is now Baja California was not in fact an island but could be reached and had been reach by the Native peoples of the Southwest via land.[2] When Ali includes this story in his poem, he suggests that the Indigenous peoples of the Southwest have always been highly mobile. He also portrays the Southwest as a place that has been marked by many different kinds of human (and nonhuman) mobilities. Among these, European colonization and settlement stand out not only because they dramatically changed Indigenous social and political life in the region, but also because they had lasting effects on human-nature relations in the Sonoran Desert.

Indeed, the reasons why Kino is still known today is not only because he helped to establish the first mission in the region, but because he introduced European practices of agriculture. This second intervention had drastic effects on Indigenous ways of living in and with the desert, a fact I will come back to later in this chapter. Viewed in this context, the "three white-haired women" (94) mentioned in the second stanza of "Desert Landscape" can be seen as Indigenous survivors of a long history of European colonization and settlement in the Southwest. The disastrous consequences of this history are powerfully, if obliquely, evoked in the second part of Ali's poem, which fuses nature and religious imagery to turn the description of a heavy rain shower during sunset into an apocalyptic vision of death and destruction. While the three women are "guarding the desert" (Ali 94)

> […] the sky opens its hands above
> a city being brought to memory by rain:
> as silver veins erupt over the peaks
> and the mountains catch fire, the three women
> can see across the veiled miles the streets turn
>
> to streams, then rivers, the poor running from
> one another into each other's arms;
> can see the moon drown, its dimmed heart gone out
> like a hungry child's; can see its corpse rising—
>
> (Ali 94–95)

2 For Father Eusebio Kino's own account of his missionary work and travels in those parts of the Sonoran Desert that are now part of Northern Mexico, Arizona, and Southern California, see *Kino's Historical Memoir of Pimería Alta: Contemporary Account of the Beginnings of California, Sonora, and Arizona, by Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, S. J., Pioneer Missionary Explorer, Cartographer, and Ranchman (1687–1711)*, a transcription and translation of Kino's original manuscripts published by Herbert E. Bolton in 1919.

Highly figurative and full of allusions, the above passage describes a desert landscape completely transformed before the Native women's eyes by a great flood, a scene reminiscent of Indigenous stories about floods as much as of the Bible story of the great deluge. Apart from pointing back to the long history of colonial violence, the poem's ending can also be said to conjure a future destruction of those settlements established in the desert by missionaries, colonizers, and settlers. Indeed, the second half of the poem refers back to the poem's epigraph, which quotes Isaiah 40:12, a bible verse that suggests that, next to God's creation, even the most powerful "nations are like a drop in a bucket" and "dust on the scale" (Isaiah 40:15). Referencing the Bible to emphasize the grandeur of Southwestern desert landscape, but also, I would argue, the vulnerability of human cultures to destruction, the poem imagines the devastating losses experienced by the Indigenous nations of the Southwest and possible future devastations of the two settler nations that claim territorial control over the desert landscapes north and south of the U.S.-Mexico border. The image of the spring flood in Ali's poem is particularly resonant in this context, given that the increasingly extreme weather conditions in the American Southwest caused by anthropogenic climate change have not only led to ever more severe draughts in the three decades that have passed since the publication of Ali's poem, they have also led to ever more severe floods in the region.

Saturated with accounts of troubled colonial past and present by a migrant poet whose sense of place is shaped by deep emotional connections to places and cultures elsewhere, the desert environments figured in Ali's collection come to hold multiple, at times divergent meanings. While most of the topographical poems in Ali's larger oeuvre focus on Kashmir, Ali's topographical poems about the United States present readers with just as much attention to the arresting beauty as well as the embattled nature of some of those places that hold particular meaning for the (myths of the) nation. Ali's collection *A Nostalgist's Map of America* (1991) was written in large parts, if not entirely, before the political conflict between Indian, Pakistani, and separatist Kashmiri forces escalated in 1989/1990. It is this escalation, Raza Ali Hasan suggests, that caused Ali to concentrate more intensively on his place of origin in his later poetry (Hasan 118–119), collected for example in *The Country Without a Post Office* (1997) and the posthumous *Rooms Are Never Finished* (2002). In contrast to these collections from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, *A Nostalgist's Map of America* prominently features the Sonoran Desert and U.S. Southwest, a region that resembles Kashmir in that it is characterized by great natural beauty and dazzling cultural diversity, while also having a long history of colonization and territorial conflict.

The Sonoran Desert is a subtropical North American desert that not only covers parts of Arizona and California but also reaches into the Mexican states of Baja California, Baja California Sur and Sonora. Divided by the U.S.-Mexican border, the Sonoran Desert forms an extraordinarily diverse bioregion that supports many different kinds of vegetation zones and a great variety of species. Home to cities such

as Hermosillo and Guaymas on the Mexican side and to Tucson and Phoenix on the American side as well as to several Indigenous communities inhabiting land on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border, the region covered by the Sonoran Desert is culturally diverse and marked by a complicated history of settlement, displacement, and migration. This history continues to this day in the form of uncontrolled urban sprawl and the resulting encroachment of non-Indigenous settlement on Indigenous lands. Despite this urban expansion, the region still comprises vast areas of scarcely populated land. This fact has made the Sonoran Desert a popular but also deadly route for illegal border crossings, ever since border control near the region's urban centers was intensified during the late 1990s and early 2000s. *A Nostalgist's Map of America* was published before the fortification of the U.S.-Mexican border under Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. It was also published before the effects of climate change became increasingly visible in the Southwest in the form of the devastating droughts that present an acute threat to the ecosystem of the Sonoran Desert today. And yet, although Ali's collection does not explicitly address environmental degradation and climate change, whether in relation to the Sonoran Desert or beyond, *A Nostalgist's Map of America* can be read as ecopoetry of migration that registers the complex ways in which human-nature relations in the U.S. Southwest have been affected and continue to be affected by human mobility, whether socially, culturally, or ecologically.

A Nostalgist's Map of America intertwines lyrical evocations of personal loss with historical and mythical evocations of collective loss. While only some of the poems in the volume mention their speaker by name, the speaker of the topographical poems set in the Sonoran Desert can be identified as the migrant poet Shahid. Together with selected other poems featuring Shahid on the road, these desert poems speak to the sustained struggle of their continuously mobile speaker for a meaningful sense of place. Frequent intertextual and intermedial references serve a double function in the poems: on the one hand, they help to deepen the emotional connection between the migratory poet and the places he encounters, while on the other, they challenge those theories of place-attachment that consider long-term inhabitation and personal experience as the most important factors for an individual's sense of place and belonging. Resisting such a logic, Ali not only describes personal encounters with the nonhuman world; he also draws on the accounts of others, infusing his poems about U.S. landscapes with a multiplicity of histories of mobility and place-based imaginaries. It is this multiplicity of histories and imaginaries that shapes Ali's ecopoetics of mobility and allows *A Nostalgist's Map of America* to resist exclusionary notions of belonging and place-attachment. When examined with a double-focus on nature and mobility, Ali's U.S.-centered poetry thus provides valuable insights into how the changing realities of an increasingly globalized world come to matter in relation to the changing demands of an increasingly burdened ecosphere.

Moving Beyond Memory in the Poetry of Agha Shahid Ali

Even as scholars increasingly address the transnational and transcultural orientation of Ali's poetry (see Islam, Ramazani *A Transnational Poetics*, Sajid) much of the existing scholarship on his work remains within the recognizable bounds of postcolonial critique, discussing questions of identity, loss, exile, as well as issues of cultural translation (see Needham, Tageldin, Kabir, Woodland). Influenced by the spatial turn in literary studies, some scholars have drawn attention to the importance of issues of space and place in Ali's poems (see Newman, Islam, Katrak, Ramazani *Poetry in a Global Age*). Ketu Katrak, for example, suggests that Ali provides what she calls an "imagistic recreation of actual spaces" (130) and then goes on to argue that Ali's poetry portrays "acutely observed geographical locations" (130), while also comingling times and places in ways that create "imaginative ways of returning home through the imagination" (136).[3] Jahan Ramazani, on his part, argues that Ali's poetry illustrates "the translocational nature of loco-descriptive poetry, particularly in a global age" (*Poetry in a Global Age* 73) and thus "poetry's peculiar ways of articulating the translocalization of locality and […] its reinvigoration of the topographical imagination for our time" (75). Pointing beyond a spatial toward the possibility of an ecocritical reading, Robert T. Hayashi notes that "[t]he American landscape" in Ali's poetry "becomes a multifaceted and multilayered place, one more faithful to historical reality and the range of traditions that have shaped the environment" than to the "literature and scholarship that has [traditionally] defined what the land has meant to us" (62). Advocating for a widening of the range of texts considered in ecocritical analysis in general, Hayashi urges critics to reconsider their definition of texts deemed fit for ecocritical analysis and lists Ali's works as an example of the kind of poetry that may "offer new perspectives on the relationship of the self to the environment" (63). As I will suggest by reading *A Nostalgist's Map of America* from an ecocritical perspective enriched by considerations of mobility, Ali's translocational and multilayered poetry of place about the United States offers such new perspectives on human-environment relationships by rethinking conceptualizations of place and traditional notions of place-attachment in the context of displacement.

One of the issues frequently addressed in relation to Ali's poetry is his treatment of memory and nostalgia (see Freitag, Katrak, King, Tageldin, Woodland). More or

3 By calling Ali's use of language "imagistic," Ketu Katrak establishes a link between the Kashmiri-American poet and American modernist poetry, in particular the writings of T. S. Eliot. The link between Eliot and Ali is undeniable, not least because Ali published *T. S. Eliot as Editor,* a critical study based on his graduate work on the modernist poet, in which he examines Eliot's work for *The Criterion*, while also repeatedly commenting on Eliot as poet. Indeed, several scholars analyzing Ali's poetry have suggested that it was influenced by Eliot (see Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics*; Ghosh; King).

less explicitly, all of these readings participate in a larger theoretical debate on the role of nostalgia in postcolonial, ethnic, and world literatures.[4] They either reject nostalgia as "ersatz, vulgar, demeaning, misguided, inauthentic, sacrilegious, retrograde, reactionary, criminal, fraudulent, sinister, and morbid" (Lowenthal 27) or argue for its rightful place in the postcolonial or transnational poetic repertoire. Of the scholars writing about memory and nostalgia in Ali's works, many favor memory over nostalgia. Lawrence Needham, for instance, posits that Ali's poetry "safeguards against nostalgia by refusing to sentimentalize the past" (Needham 69). In a similar vein, Kornelia Freitag argues that Ali performs a "careful balancing act between […] nostalgia and reality check" (211) in his self-conscious engagement with personal and cultural memory, and ultimately uses "ironic deflation" to counter moments in which "memory [threatens] to become arresting nostalgia" (221). While most critics thus acknowledge the importance of nostalgia in Ali's work, they tend to see its presence in the text critically. We can observe this, for example, in Malcom Woodland's reading of Ali's poetry, which suggests that Ali's ghazals leave "a real but *problematical* place for nostalgia in the hybrid text" (267; emphasis added). Where nostalgia is not considered ideologically or ethically questionable, it often figures as an emotional affliction expressed through poetic means. In his reading of a poem from Ali's collection *The Half-Inch Himalayas* (1987), Shaden M. Tageldin, for example, describes the "impossible nostalgia" experienced by the postcolonial migrant living in (self-imposed) exile as a torturous, unescapable condition to which poets like Ali react by "violently disrupt[ing] the syntax of language, identity, geography, and temporality" (Tageldin 234). Rather than viewing nostalgia as a problem, I will explore nostalgia's critical potential as "expansive memory" (Hashmi 183) and as a means of evoking place-attachments despite geographical and temporal disruptions that are suggestive in environmental terms because they challenge the idea that meaningful emplacement can only result from long-term inhabitation.

While scholarly examinations of the role of nostalgia for people's place-sense are a comparatively recent phenomenon, the role of places for individual and collective memory as well as the role of memory in the production of places have long been

4 For a brief summary of different arguments about the place of nostalgia in postcolonial literature and literatures of migration, see, for example, Malcom Woodland's discussion of Homi Bhabha's and Jahan Ramazani's takes on the subject (Woodland 253–54). As Woodland suggests, nostalgia is surpassed by the hybrid text according to Bhabha (see *The Location of Culture*), whereas Ramazani explores the role nostalgia continues to play in postcolonial literatures (see *The Hybrid Muse* 83–84). For a more in-depth study of nostalgia in the context of (im)migration, see Andreea Deciu Ritivoi's study, *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity* (2002), which examines the function of nostalgia as "an interpretive stance in which a person is aware of the element of discordance in her life" (165). Nostalgia in this account allows immigrants to construe coherent life-narratives, which in turn help them come to terms with the ruptures and discrepancies following from displacement.

a concern of scholars interested in questions of memory and spatiality.[5] Ecocritics, too, examine memory as a constitutive element of the process by which people forge a sense of place over time (see Buell *The Future* 71–76; Goodbody; and Gerhardt "Nothing Stays Put"). Some of these scholars use the term "environmental memory" to indicate the need for a more systematic discussion of issues of memory and environmental politics. According to Lawrence Buell, environmental memory can be defined as

> the sense (whether or not conscious, whether or not accurate, whether or not shared) of environments as lived experience in the fourth dimension – i.e., the intimation of human life and history as unfolding within the context of human embeddedness in webs of shifting environmental circumstance of some duration, whether these be finite time spans (a lifetime, a generation, an epoch, a dynasty), or stretching back indefinitely into remotest pre-history. ("Uses and Abuses" 96)

In his definition, Buell describes environmental memory as the awareness of the temporal dimensions of environments and people's sense of place. He implies that this awareness is only on one level the product of personal memory; on another, he suggests, it is in conversation with cultural memory, an observation that Axel Goodbody makes as well. Reconfiguring Aleida and Jan Assmann's "figurations of memory" for an ecocritical context, Goodbody defines the concept as "a constantly evolving archive of narratives and images deriving from the Bible, Greek myth, fairy tales, history, world literature, etc." (59) and then argues that "figurations of memory focusing on places serve as particularly important vehicles for the communication and redefinition of understandings of our relationship with the natural environment" (59). Both Buell's insistence on the importance of individual and collective "environmental memory narrative[s]" ("Uses and Abuses" 107) as a means to counter "environmental generational amnesia" (Kahn, qtd. in Buell "Uses and Abuses" 96) and Goodbody's emphasis on the crucial role that cultural "narratives and images" play for the constitution of environmental figurations of memory are pertinent here, especially because Ali relies so heavily on the repository of American as well as non-

5 In *The Poetics of Space* (1969, Fr. 1958), philosopher Gaston Bachelard undertakes a phenomenological investigation of space that makes repeated use of poetry to think about how humans come to understand the "specific reality" (xv) of poetic images and is very much interested in the imagination as well as the memory of places. French historian Pierre Nora, author of the multi-volume *Les lieux de mémoire* (1984–92), on his part discusses "realms" and "sites" where "memory crystallizes and secretes itself" ("Between Memory and History" 7). Aleida Assmannn, a key figure in the field of memory studies, in turn, has extensively written about the role of (sacred) places as media for collective or cultural memory (see, for example, part V "Orte" of her study *Erinnerungsräume*). For a discussion of the many ways memory and place can be thought together, see Dylan Trigg's *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny* (2012).

American myths, literature, and art in his depiction of the Southwest. Rather than only evoking "figurations of memory," however, Ali's project of place-making also self-consciously evokes complex "figurations of nostalgia." Indeed, at the end of his article "Sense of Place and Lieu De Mémoire: A Cultural Memory Approach to Environmental Texts" (2011), Goodbody concludes in part in drawing on Ursula K. Heise, that despite the obvious importance of memory for a person's environmentally-oriented place-sense, "[i]t may be unwise to dismiss place-identity, and even the nostalgic idealization of places, as factors contributing to a caring attitude toward the environment" (66). Building on these and similar insights, I am interested for my discussion of Ali's poetry in the environmental affordances of an environmental nostalgia informed by what Kate Soper and Jennifer K. Ladino refer to as "avant-garde nostalgia" (Soper) and "counter-nostalgia" (Ladino) respectively.

Environmental philosopher Kate Soper defines "avant-garde nostalgia" as "a movement of thought that remembers, and mourns, that which is irretrievable, but also attains to a more complex political wisdom and energy in the memorializing process itself" ("Passing Glories" 23). Nostalgia, in her reformulation, allows for critical reflection on the past and is thus able to "stimulate desire for a future that will be at once less environmentally destructive and more sensually gratifying" (24). In her book *Reclaiming Nostalgia: Longing for Nature in American Literature* (2012), Jennifer K. Ladino, too, suggests that what she calls "counter-nostalgia" can be "a mechanism for social change, a model for ethical relationships, and a motivating force for social and environmental justice" (8). "Nostalgia," she notes in her concluding remarks, which touches on questions on migration, "can highlight the material and political dimensions of dislocations" and in the process "inspire empathy and, potentially, alert more people to a future we should take steps to avoid" (230). Ladino here alludes to what Svetlana Boym, in her influential monograph of the same title, famously refers to as "the future of nostalgia." Indeed, revisiting *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) with a focus on questions of place and displacement allows me to sketch how an overtly nostalgic ecopoetry of migration like Ali's might go beyond merely commemorating an invented past in order to imagine more eco-ethical futures in the context of mobility.[6]

In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Boym defines nostalgia as "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed," which expresses itself in "a sentiment of loss and displacement" but also represents "a romance with one's own fantasy" (xiii). Nostalgia, she notes, "can be retrospective but also prospective" (xvi) and is a political

6 The term "environmental nostalgia" also appears in the works of film studies scholars Robin Murray and Joseph Heumann. Both in a 2007 essay on Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* and in their monograph *Ecology and Popular Film* (2009), which includes a revised version of the essay, they define the term as "a nostalgia we share for a better, cleaner world" (n. p.; 196), a definition my analysis of Ali's poetry seeks to complicate.

force insomuch as "[f]antasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future" (xi). Whether it takes the form of an emotional attachment to a (partially) invented past or whether the longed-for conditions are projected into the future, nostalgia comes in one of two shapes, Boym explains: while "[r]estorative nostalgia protects absolute truth" (xviii) and tends toward simplification for the sake of false coherence, "reflective nostalgia" (xviii) is complex and contradictory. This is why it can produce critical awareness as well as a drive to action. As Boym puts it:

> Reflective nostalgia dwells on the *ambivalences of human longing and belonging* and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. […] Reflective nostalgia does not follow a single plot but *explores ways of inhabiting many places at once* and imagining different time zones; it loves details, not symbols. At best, reflective nostalgia can present an ethical and creative challenge. (xviii; emphasis added)

Boym here emphasizes nostalgia as an at-once spatial and temporal phenomenon with an explicitly political, ethical, and creative set of dimensions, and proposes reflective nostalgia as a generative combination of "longing and critical thinking" (49). Such a complex understanding of nostalgia is crucial for my analysis of environmental nostalgia in Ali's poetry. Indeed, one can say that his nostalgic ecopoetics of mobility "explores ways of inhabiting many places at once." At the same time, it is invested in balancing migrants' "longing" for meaningful relationships to their temporary places of residence with the "critical thinking" necessary to challenge exclusionary notions of "belonging" and place-attachment in the context of mobility, U.S. settler-colonialism, and environmental change.

Ali does not reject nostalgia in favor of memory as a seemingly more reliable and ethical basis for poetic creation. Instead, he embraces reflective nostalgia in *A Nostalgist's Map of America* as a place-, history-, and ultimately environmentally conscious affect that is especially well suited for migrants who cannot depend on memories and experiences alone in order to build meaningful relationships to the places they only encounter in passing. Ali's nostalgic ecopoetics of mobility manifests in two main ways: first, in a translocal sense of place that relies in crucial ways on migratory perspectives and literary imaginaries of displacement to evoke mobile forms of place-attachment and, second, in a nostalgic longing for a diasporic intimacy with the world that abandons the desire for an original or ultimate home without relinquishing the desire for meaningful human-place relations. Overall, Ali's nostalgic ecopoetics of mobility challenges theories of belonging that privilege long-term residency, personal experience, and/or first-hand knowledge as the basis of meaningful place-attachment. Instead, it points toward non-localist, anti-nativist models of ecological citizenship that take seriously displaced people's desire for place-attachment and mobile perspectives on human-nature relations. For the theorization of such alternative models of diasporic belonging and ecological citizenship as well as

of the mobile environmental imaginaries on which they might be based, literature and art more generally are of crucial importance, Ali's poetry insists. This is one of the reasons, I propose, why Ali relies on intertextual references, including in particular the works of desert poet Richard Shelton, the nature poems of Emily Dickinson, the desert paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe, and the ethnobotanist writings of Gary Paul Nabhan.

Mobile Forms of Place-Attachment

Subjects in motion and evocations of various kinds of mobility abound in *A Nostalgist's Map of America*. The motif of travel not only appears in poems such as "I Dream I Return to Tucson in the Monsoons," "Leaving Sonora," "A Nostalgist's Map of America," "In Search of Evanescence," "I See Chile in My Rearview Mirror," and "Snow on the Desert," poems I address in some detail in this chapter, it is ubiquitous throughout Ali's collection. In "Beyond the Ash Rains," the speaker first leaves his home to join his lover in "the northern canyons" and then leads said lover away for both to "walk through the streets/ of an emptied world" together (Ali 23); in "A Rehearsal of Loss," the speaker is driving through the desert and away from his lover's house at night (25), while the poem "Crucifixion" depicts someone who is driving through New Mexico, noticing many different kinds of landmarks and contemplating many different kinds of mobilities (26–28). Given this ubiquity of different forms of mobility, one might even go so far as to call the title of Agha Shahid Ali's collection a misnomer in that it hardly constitutes a "Map of America." Rather, *A Nostalgist's Map of America* stages ongoing processes of mapping that Ali's mobile subjects engage in while traversing the Sonoran Desert and other regions across the United States.

While the many journeys in the collection conjure the "*topoi* of the travelling American" (King, *Modern Indian Poetry* 271), the poems in which Shahid travels by car recall the classic American road narrative (see also Kazim Ali, "Introduction" 1). Like the topoi of the traveling American, this literary genre evokes American ideals of individuality and freedom, qualities also associated with mobility more generally (Tölölyan 67; Cresswell 3; Leyda 25). When the traveler is a transnational migrant, like Shahid or Walcott's narrator Derek, the conventional interpretation of the American road narrative has to be rethought, however. After all, displacement rather than emplacement, routedness rather than rootedness, are the norm for many migrants. In consequence, rather than a desire to assert his individuality and independence, it is a want of community, belonging, and place-attachment that preoccupies the migratory subject in *A Nostalgist's Map of America*. For Ali's speaker, establishing and maintaining meaningful connections to the places and communities he encounters, and not breaking free from them, seem to be the primary goal. By depicting Shahid as both highly place-conscious and highly mobile,

A Nostalgist's Map of America suggests that place-attachment is anything but a given, especially for migratory subjects. At the same time, Ali's poetry indicates, mobility is not necessarily the obverse of place-attachment. Rather, as I will show, in Ali's poems, place-attachment is portrayed as the accumulative effect of place-making that the migrant subject engages in while constantly being on the move. Because this ongoing process of place-making continues to integrate different perspectives of mobility, ranging from travel and voluntary migration to forced displacement, it does not lead to traditional emplacement or a purely local sense of place. Instead, it produces a *trans*local sense of place and mobile forms of place-attachment.

When I use the term "translocal" to describe the environmentally suggestive sense of place evoked in *A Nostalgist's Map of America*, I do so in reference to Jahan Ramazani's influential work on transnational and translocal poetics. In his study, *A Transnational Poetics* (2009), and in his later publications, Ramazani invokes the translocal as "an alternative to understandings of the relation of poetry to place as either rooted or rootless, local or universal" (*A Transnational Poetics* xiii; emphasis original). Borrowed from the Prologue of James Clifford's *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997) and employed by Ramazani in distinction to "the transnational," the translocal indicates a move away from purely abstract cultural spaces to concrete places, and from too exclusive an emphasis on mobility to an acknowledgement of those forces of emplacement at work in imaginaries of place. In suggesting that the sense of place Ali's poetry evokes is translocal rather than transnational, I thus mean to highlight the ways in which his poems sidestep the nation as a privileged site of territorial attachment and identity construction, despite what the title of his collection suggests. When I speak of mobile forms of place-attachment, I am building on Christine Gerhardt's notion of a "mobile sense of place." According to Gerhardt, a mobile sense of place "becomes tangible" ("Imagining a Mobile Sense of Place" 425) in the contemporary poems she analyzes

> through three interrelated poetic tactics: the construction of places that are significantly shaped by nonhuman mobilities, of speakers whose environmental insights are critically informed by their geographical movement, and of broader cultural frameworks characterized by overlapping movements of people, materials, goods and ideas. (425–26)

Many of Ali's poems represent the kinds of mobilities Gerhardt mentions here. What is more, a nostalgic place-based literature and art sensible to past and present mobilities constitute a broader cultural framework of mobility that shapes the poems' depiction of places as translocal and of place-attachments as "mobile."

In *A Nostalgist's Map of America*, histories of human displacement are often discussed in association with specific landscapes that the speaker encounters during his travels. Places that might initially seem bounded and neatly circumscribed are revealed to be translocal spaces: they are open to and constituted by different forms

of human and nonhuman mobility and connected to places elsewhere through these mobilities. In "Crucifixion," for instance, the speaker follows an unnamed traveler who is "driving clear of memory,/ north from Las Cruces" (Ali 26). On his journey, the traveler passes different geographical landmarks, including "dunes of whitest gypsum" (26), that is, geological formations moved by the wind, "the timbered forests of the Penitentes" where "the blue pines / are like men, descending from the summits" (26) and "the rock that once sprouted wings and bore/ the besieged Navajos to safety" (26). Referred to as *Tsé Bit'a'í* or "winged rock" by the Navajo (Diné), Shiprock is situated in San Juan County, New Mexico, and plays a crucial role in a number of ancient Diné myths that explain how the Navajo Nation came to be located in the Southwest. According to these myths, "the rock that once sprouted wings" carried the Navajo from the lower worlds of the Holy People to their traditional homeland of Dinétah.[7] When the Navajo came to the Southwest, the area that is now northeastern Arizona, northwestern New Mexico, parts of southeastern Utah, and parts of southwestern Colorado was already inhabited by the Pueblo people commonly known as the Anasazi. Navajo and Anasazi population movements, together with the consequences of colonization, led to an extremely complex history of mobility and displacements in the region.[8] Ali's reference to Shiprock points to these precolonial migrations of Indigenous peoples as well as to colonial histories of displacement. Indeed, the English name of this natural site, Shiprock, alludes both to the colonization of the Southwest by European missionaries and seafaring nations, such as the Spanish, and to the region's mid-nineteenth-century incorporation into the United States, which led, amongst other things, to the so-called "Long Walk," a term used to describe the forced removal of thousands of Navajos from Dinétah and onto a reservation in southwestern New Mexico.

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7 For accounts of the Navajo myth referred to here, see, for example, Marta Weigle and Peter White's book *The Lore of New Mexico* (1988, p. 27) and the entry on "Shiprock Pinnacle" in Laurance D. Linford's *Navajo Places: History, Legend, Landscape* (2000). Archeological finds and studies of the Athabaskan language family from the early twentieth century have led anthropologists and linguists to argue that the ancestors of the people today known as the Navajos and the Apache may have migrated to the Southwest from what is now West Canada. Given the possible political implications of such arguments, they have not been without controversy. In his guide to Navajo places, myths, and histories, Linford—who collaborated for his book with members of the Navajo Nation—, for example, notes that the name of Shiprock "gave rise to a White man's myth in the first half of [the twentieth] century: that the Navajos once lived on the Pacific Coast" (265).

8 For a reconstruction of the history of Anasazi and Navajo settlement of the Southwest including New Mexico, see for example *Anasazi America: Seventeen Centuries on the Road from Center Place* (2000) by David E. Stuart, where he suggests that the challenge of building sustainable communities, both in environmental and non-environmental terms, can help to explain precolonial migrations in the Southwest, including those of the Navajo and the Anasazi.

By alluding to Indigenous and settler-colonial histories of mobility in poems that chronicle a migrant's travels and acts of poetic place-making, Ali's collection highlights the fact that powerful place-attachments can arise from story-telling and figurative language-use—crystalized in his poems in such names as *Tsé Bit'a'í*, "winged rock," or Shiprock. It also alludes to the fact that stories/metaphors can be used to naturalize some forms of movement (such as settler migration) and certain kinds of human-place-relations (such as settler-colonial notions of individualized landownership), while delegitimizing others (such as Indigenous notions of place-belonging or Indigenous semi-nomadic lifestyles). Human mobilities and their representations, *A Nostalgist's Map of America* indicates, can have far-reaching consequences for an individual's or a community's sense of place and place-attachment; so can narratives of rootedness, whether they come in the form of stories or metaphors. Ali's poetry shows awareness of the power of story-telling and poetic language in the context of place-making, as can be seen in his mentions of storied places such as Shiprock. It also shows awareness toward the complex position that migrants such as Ali's speaker, Shahid, occupy as arrivants in a nation marked by a centuries-old conflict between natives and settlers. Rather than abandoning place-making in the context of settler histories of place-taking, Ali gives expression to the migrant's desire for place-attachment and responds to the challenges place-making poses in the American (post-)colony/settler-colonial America by enriching the representations of places in his poems with a variety of Indigenous and non-Indigenous stories and histories of mobility. In doing so, he evokes a form of mobile place-attachment that tries to avoid settler logics of place-taking without conflating the position of migrants with that of Indigenous peoples, whether they have been displaced or remain on their ancestral homelands and whether they live more mobile or more sedentary lives.

A Nostalgist's Map of America highlights the fact that, despite their migrations and the ravages of settler-colonialism, Indigenous peoples of the Southwest, whom Ali's speaker in one poem explicitly refers to as "survivors of Dispersal" (Ali 44), have been able to forge and retain meaningful connections to the places they (used to) inhabit, also in environmental terms. At the same time, Ali's poems draw attention to the fact that Indigenous survivors of displacement, like other displaced peoples, experience the fragility of human-place relations in particularly acute ways. Ali's poetry refuses to romanticize sedentarism and in doing so offers material for a critique of the "place-essentialism" (Ray 26) and environmental nativism that discourses of belonging and sustainable living sometimes fall into.[9] Ali's poetry suggests that migratory subjects like his speaker do not have to become sedentary (let alone settlers) in

9 In her book, *The Ecological Other: Environmental Exclusion in American Culture* (2013), Sarah Jaquette Ray speaks of "blood-and-soil nativism," a form of environmentalism that operates by "denying other places and processes that constitute any given place" (26) and thus can be

order to develop meaningful place-attachments. Instead, the mobile forms of place-attachment his poetry evokes are built on the notion that a shared experience of displacement and longing for a meaningful sense of place can be the basis for viable alliances between (im)migrants and Indigenous peoples, even if their respective experiences of displacement are vastly dissimilar.

Many poems in *A Nostalgist's Map of America* feature multilayered places as well as mobile subjects who engage with these places on different levels and through different means. They explore how migratory, displaced, or traveling subjects interact with the spaces they cross by experiencing their environs with all senses. They also explore the ways in which mobile subjects revalidate existing place-attachments or form new ones by imbuing places with personal and cultural memories and thus with historical depth and emotional investment. Poems, such as "I Dream I Return to Tucson in the Monsoons" or "Leaving Sonora," highlight the importance of experiences as well as of memory when it comes to establishing meaningful human-place relationships in the context of migration. They also represent moments in Ali's work when experience and memory give way to a poetic imagination informed by complex feelings of loss and longing.

As other poems in the collection confirm, the title of "I Dream I Return to Tucson in the Monsoons" alludes to Ali's speaker's return to the Southwest after his move away to the Northeast of the United States. The fact that Shahid returns to Tucson "in the Monsoons" (Ali 30) hints at his migratory background, linking the U.S. Southwest to Kashmir by way of a weather phenomenon that occurs in both regions. As the poem's speaker dreams about driving toward the Tucson Mountains in "the afternoon sun" (30), sensory perceptions begin to trigger memories of a walk the poet took in the desert at nightfall. The sight of sunlit streets wet with rain as well as "pieces of blue glass" (30) scattered in the desert bring to mind an earlier time in the speaker's life "when [he] was alone" (30) and "there was nothing but the rain/ [...] nothing but silence" (30). Gradually, the speaker's experiences, memories, and dream images begin to blur, as do timeframes and locations in the poem. "I Dream" disorients its readers spatially and temporally by omitting all punctuation and using irregular capitalization at the beginning of lines. Adding narrative layer upon layer—the speaker relates a dream of a visit to Tucson, which conjures memories of a night walk in the desert, which in turn causes the speaker to reflect on a "vanished love" (30)—the poem draws the reader into the speaker's past as well as into his imagination. Shahid's dream and his memories of a walk among the "rocks" near "Gates Pass" (30), a scenic road along the crest of the Tucson Mountains, are suffused with feelings of loss and intense longing. The emphatically imaginary nature of the poet's return to the desert does not lessen its emotional effect on the speaker, however. Rather, both the remembered

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linked to what historian Peter Coates calls "the eco-racism of American nativism" (187) in his study *American Perspectives of Immigrant and Invasive Species: Strangers on the Land* (2006).

and the imagined encounters with the landscape affirm Shahid's attachment to the Sonoran Desert, even as he has already moved elsewhere.

The intense feelings of loss and longing that pervade the speaker's dream of the Southwest are neither strictly personal nor strictly anthropocentric, insomuch as the mourned "vanished love" does not necessarily refer only to an individual human being. Heavily indebted to the poets Mirza Ghalib and Faiz Ahmed Faiz in its use of imagery, language, and tone, "I Dream" recalls a tradition of Urdu poetry in which the longed-for beloved can stand in for anything from a lost political cause to the loss of one's cultural heritage, sense of identity, or homeland.[10] The "vanished love" Shahid thinks of during his walk in the desert can thus represent many different things. Among them are lost Indigenous cultures of the Southwest, as the poem preceding "I Dream" indicates, which mourns the "perished tribes" (Ali 29) and the "vanished village[s]" (29) of Sonora ("Leaving Sonora"). The migrant poet also mourns the loss of his former home of Kashmir and the loss of his temporary home in the Southwest. Indeed, by revisiting past encounters with the landscapes of the Sonoran Desert, Ali's multilayered, polylocal, and polytemporal poem, to return to Ramazani's description of translocal poems in global age, produces a deepening of these attachments as well as a deepening sense of loss of, and longing for, the different places he has left behind. "I Dream" thus engages in a form of poetic place-making that emphasizes an emphatically retrospective yet persisting desire for meaningful place-attachment.

As the references to ancient Indigenous cultures in poems such as "Desert Landscape" and "I Dream" indicate, the layering of places in Ali's desert poems does not merely rely on personal experiences and memories. It also relies on the poet's imaginative engagement with the region's long human and nonhuman history, or what Lawrence Buell calls "'biogeological' time" ("Uses and Abuses" 97):

> The moon touched my shoulder
> and I longed for a vanished love
>
> The moon turned the desert to water
>
> For a moment I saw islands
> as they began to sink

10 Several scholars have remarked on the influence of Urdu poetry on Ali's work (see Caplan, Islam, Tageldin, Woodland). In his introduction to *The Rebel's Silhouette: Selected Poems*, a translation of the ghazals of Faiz Ahmed Faiz that appeared in the same year as *A Nostalgist's Map of America*, Ali himself not only talks about the "highly sensuous language" and key motifs of Urdu poetry, such as the moon, he also discusses how Faiz's ghazals extended the meaning of the figure of the longed-for Beloved, which Ali calls "an archetype of Urdu poetry," so that it could refer to the revolution.

> The ocean was a dried floor
>
> Below me is a world without footprints
> I am alone I'm still alone
> and there's no trace anywhere of the drowned
>
> The sun is setting over
> what was once an ocean
>
> (Ali 30–31)

While walking through the Tucson Mountains, Shahid imagines the desert landscape before him as the "dried floor" of an "ocean" that swallows entire "islands." Apart from conjuring the myth of Atlantis, and thus the sudden loss of an entire society and culture, the reference can also be read as a nod to the geological history of the Tucson area and the Sonoran Desert more generally. Rather than suggesting, however, that "fossils of vanished species" (Ali 94) can be unearthed as physical manifestations of the past, as in the poem "Desert Landscape," the speaker of "I Dream" emphasizes the limits of the natural world when it comes to preserving records of the displaced and the disappeared. Where the poem's migrant speaker hopes to find traces of those who used to walk the Sonoran Desert before him, he only sees "a world without footprints" that bears "no trace anywhere of the drowned" (31). Like those passages in Walcott's *Omeros* that contemplate the impossibility of pinpointing a precise location for the Trail of Tears, "I Dream" suggests that it is the poet's task to imagine those histories that colonial violence and natural processes have erased.

The traveling poet's responsibility toward former inhabitants of the Southwest and, by consequence, his determination to testify to the powerful human-place relations of others, is most explicitly addressed in the poem "Leaving Sonora." Placed right before "I Dream," the text stresses the complex layering of places and the importance of imagination in the migrant's poetic quest for a meaningful sense of place, while also emphasizing how the speaker's feelings of loss and nostalgic longing blur the lines between personal and extra-personal place-imaginaries. "Leaving Sonora" begins with a quotation attributed to Richard Shelton, whom the speaker identifies as "a poet of this desert" (Ali 29). Shelton is an environmentalist writer and poet who published several collections of poetry and nonfiction about the Sonoran Desert during the 1970s, '80s, and '90s after moving to Arizona for his studies.[11] "*Liv-*

11 Richard Shelton is the author of eleven books of poetry, including *The Tattooed Desert* (1971), *Among the Stones* (1973), *Chosen Place* (1975), *The Bus to Veracruz* (1978) and *Hohokam* (1986), all of which seem to have had a great influence on Ali's desert poems. He has also written several nonfiction books such as the memoir *Going Back to Bisbee* (1992). In an interview published together with his poem "Local Knowledge," as part of W. T. Pfefferle's *Poets of Place: Interviews & Tales From the Road* (2005), Shelton summarizes his place-bound environmental poetics as

ing in the desert," Ali quotes Shelton in the epigraph of "Leaving Sonora," *"has taught me to go inside myself / for shade"* (Ali 29; emphasis original), a lesson Ali's speaker seems to have learned as well. Instead of suggesting that the poet withdraws from the external world into an internal one in which he himself becomes the center of poetic inquiry, however, Ali's speaker advocates for critical introspection enriched by a place-based imagination as a means to commemorate those at risk of being forgotten or written out of dominant histories of such places as the U.S. Southwest. Concrete natural environments and specific geographic locations play an important role in this process of commemoration, itself also an act of (re-)imagination. "Certain landscapes insist on fidelity," Shahid notes and, in doing so, establishes himself as "a poet of this desert" (Ali 29) in Shelton's footsteps. Like Shelton, Ali's migrant speaker takes his cues from the iconic landscapes of the Southwest, testifying to the history of the place and to the intense human-place relationships engendered by the extreme environmental conditions of the desert, while also forging a connection between himself and the desert's (former) inhabitants across time and across cultures.

"Leaving Sonora" suggests that people who are aware of the histories of the Southwest and those have engaged with the region's literatures experience a more intense appreciation when they encounter the landscapes of the Sonoran Desert. They also experience a more acute sense of loss and, consequently, of responsibility. This sense of loss and responsibility is based on a shared experience of place and displacement rather than on a shared cultural, ethnic, or racial background. "The desert insists, always: Be faithful, / even to those who no longer exist" (Ali 29), Shahid reminds himself and the reader, revealing the maxim of his place-based, yet mobility-conscious poetics of witness. In "Leaving Sonora" and several other desert poems in *A Nostalgist's Map of America*, those who no longer exist are "[t]he Hohokam [who] lived here for 1500 years" (29).[12] Contemplating the disappearance

follows: "I think what I have done in my poetry is [that I have] interpreted the desert, the Sonoran desert, through the lens of my own despair at its destruction" (130).

12 As Shepard Krech notes in his chapter on the Hohokam in *The Ecological Indian: History and Myth* (1999), the history of the Hohokam is difficult to reconstruct. There are no written records by the Hohokam and the oral histories of the Akimel O'odham, who live in the same parts of Arizona where relics of the Hohokam have been found, are divided on whether the local Native peoples descend from the Hohokam or whether they had left the region before the O'odham arrived. The accounts also provide different reasons for why the Hohokam disappeared. In the language of the Akimel O'odham, the word *Hohokam* is not only used for this ancient people, but also as an adjective, in which case it refers to people and things that have "vanished" or "perished" or that are "gone" or "finished" (Krech 45). From an ecological perspective, the Hohokam practices is noteworthy because they relied on elaborate dry and floodwater farming techniques to build a civilization under difficult environmental conditions. This fact, Krech explains, led many archeologists to celebrate the Hohokam's agricultural ingenuity and adaptability to the desert. At the same time, other scholars have argued that, as a result of waterlogging and salinization, the very methods of irrigation that allowed

of these precolonial Indigenous desert people, about whose culture and ultimate fate relatively little is known, Ali's speaker goes "deep inside himself for shade" (29), the only place where "the perished tribes live" (29). Imagining a scene from the everyday life of the Hohokam, Shahid envisions "one of their women, / beautiful, her voice low as summer thunder" (29), tending to "the culinary ashes" (29). What her "fire" achieves "in minutes" (29), the poet suggests, "earth" achieves "only through a terrible pressure": transforming "coal into diamonds" (29). Read as meta-poetic commentary, this image highlights the underlying premise of Ali's ecopoetics: writing place-based poetry that is conscious of histories of displacement is a laborious and emotionally taxing process. Yet, it is the poet's responsibility to translate the many layers of places—as well as the various experiences, memories, histories, and literary imaginaries that shape them—into multilayered poetic formations of heightened beauty and expressivity.

The third and last stanza of "Leaving Sonora" reiterates this portrayal of poetry writing (and the place-making it both represents and constitutes) as a place-based and simultaneously mobile practice that depends on textual strategies of layering descriptions, allusions, and thus meanings. At the same time, it illustrates how Ali's poetics of place is shaped by a perspective of migration similar to, but not entirely identical to Shelton's, who, as Scott Sanders observes, "made the major theme of his poetry his desire to join spiritually with a land not of his birth, but of his choosing" (n. p.). At the beginning of the final stanza of "Leaving Sonora," Shahid recalls watching the desert from a plane right after takeoff from Tucson international airport. Halfway through the poem, the text thus reframes the speaker's earlier musings about human-place relations by highlighting the speaker's perspective of mobility and pointing to his identity as a transnational migrant. Shahid remarks that he "left the desert at night – to return/ to the East" (Ali 29), that is, presumably to the East Coast of the United States, where Ali spent the last years of his life, even while occasionally traveling even further "East" to Kashmir. Looking back at the day when he left the Southwest, the speaker of "Leaving Sonora" remembers how he "saw Tucson's lights/ shatter into blue diamonds" (29), when his airplane rose above the clouds—an image that refers back to the poem's second stanza, creating a link between the migrant Shahid and the Hohokam woman of his earlier vision. Traveling by airplane, Shahid remembers looking down at "Tucson's lights" through "a thin cloud" and suddenly seeing, or rather imagining "blue lights fade/ into the outlines of a vanished village" (29). It is thus in a situation that has perhaps come to symbolize the life of

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the Hohokam to survive in the Arizona desert for centuries may have eventually turned the land infertile and thus caused their culture's demise. Other explanations, usually inspired by the environmental issue of most concern at the time, point to earthquakes, droughts, and catastrophic floods as events that drove the Hohokam away from their settlements by the Salt and Gila rivers (Krech 57–64).

transnational migrants at the end of the twentieth century like no other—that of aeromobility, also briefly discussed in the previous chapter—that Ali's speaker conjures up traces of "the perished tribes" (29), mentioned throughout the collection. For a short instant captured in the poem, the speaker imaginatively superimposes the region's precolonial past onto a present that is characterized by urban sprawl as well as increasing (trans)national mobility. This momentary convergence of vastly different time-periods is represented in explicitly spatial terms. Such a textual layering of places is environmentally resonant because it takes the migrant's desire for a sense of place seriously and suggests that mobile forms of place-attachment and meaningful relationships of mobile peoples with the natural environment may be achieved through sustained engagement with the many dimensions of places, ranging from physical to symbolic spaces and from material environments to their representations in (literary) texts.

Longing for Diasporic Intimacy with the World

The collection's title poem "A Nostalgist's Map of America" is a particularly interesting example for how Ali's uses intertextual references to produce a complex layering of places suffused with environmental undertones as well as a sense of loss and longing. Like several other poems in the collection, including the poem "No," discussed earlier, Ali's title poem engages in poetic place-making from a perspective of mobility by referencing the poetry of Emily Dickinson. In "A Nostalgist's Map of America," most of these references allude to Dickinson's famous poem "A Route of Evanescence." Quoted in full and placed before "A Nostalgist's Map of America," Dickinson's short nature poem engages with themes of loss as well as the sense of environmental nostalgia that pervades Ali's title poem and *A Nostalgist's Map of America* at large.

Dickinson wrote extensively about both nature and loss. In effect, her poetry stands out among her contemporaries for her scientifically accurate and detailed depictions of the natural world (Gerhardt, *A Place for Humility* 27–29). Like in Ali's poetry, Emily Dickinson's descriptions of places, such as her garden, are both detailed and richly textured, creating the effect of a tangible, though not necessarily easily graspable natural world through highly metaphorical language (Knickerbocker 9–13). "A Route of Evanescence," one of Dickinson's most well-known poems about "small nature" (Gerhardt, *A Place for Humility* 31, 35), exemplifies the way in which Dickinson combined concreteness and elusiveness, materiality and mobility in her poetry. The version of "A Route of Evanescence" reprinted in *A Nostalgist's Map of America* reads as follows:

A Route of Evanescence
With a revolving Wheel –
A Resonance of Emerald –
A Rush of Cochineal –
And every Blossom on the Bush
Adjusts its tumbled Head –
The mail from Tunis, probably,
An easy Morning's Ride –
– *Emily Dickinson*

(Dickinson qtd. in Ali 33)

Despite its brevity, "A Route of Evanescence" renders the minutiae of natural phenomena in vivid detail, producing an arresting double effect of tangibility and ephemerality. Like many of Dickinson's poems, "A Route of Evanescence" is a poem "of aftermath" (Benfey, "A Route of Evanescence" 90) that reflects on and seeks to capture the traces of a vanishing object (Kang 57–58.). The focus on the "loss" of a hummingbird and the effects of this loss on the consciousness of the speaker, however, do not necessarily imply a transcendence of the physical world, or a mere "bracketing of reality" (Hagenbüchle 34). On the contrary, in Dickinson's poetry as in Ali's, the "minute revelatory elements" of the more-than-human world in and of themselves are "worthy of careful attention and veneration" (Martin 364). Aside from alluding to the fact that Ali worked for many years as a director of the writing program at the University of Massachusetts in Dickinson's hometown, Amherst, where he would also die and be buried (Merrill 88), Ali's integration of Dickinson's poems into his collection speaks to the fact that his poetry too relies on the careful direction, via rhythm and sentence structure, toward the minute revelatory elements drawn together by a certain locale and woven together into intricate poetic patterns in his texts.

Dickinson's poems frequently and skillfully draw attention to material processes and matters of perception—here, the immediate effects that the hummingbird's movements have on its surroundings, including the speaker. By linking sounds and sights through synesthesia, the poem explores the manifold sensory impressions that the bird produces, focusing especially on the gradually intensifying feelings of loss and longing that its disappearance engenders in the onlooker. When re-contextualized and integrated into poems such as "A Nostalgist's Map of America" or "In Search of Evanescence," the act of producing a feeling of (imminent) loss and (anticipatory) longing, oriented also, though certainly not exclusively, toward the physical world, becomes part of what I describe as Ali's nostalgic ecopoetics of mobility. Indeed, a "Nostalgist," one might say, is not just be a person who feels nostalgic, but potentially also someone whose aim or even vocation it is to evoke nostalgia in oth-

ers.[13] As Ali integrates quotations and poetic features of "A Route of Evanescence" into his own text, the tangible yet ephemeral, and subtly nostalgic quality of Dickinson's natural world carries over into Ali's poem (see Newman).

The first lines of "A Nostalgist's Map of America" take up the excess of sense impressions evoked in Emily Dickinson's hummingbird poem and projects them onto the landscapes his speaker encountered while driving through "the dead center of Pennsylvania" to "Philadelphia" (Ali 35). As the reader learns later in the poem, Shahid remembered the car ride, which took place some years earlier, when he received a call from his friend Phil, the poem's addressee and driver of the car, who revealed to him that he was dying. In the speaker's poetic recollection of the drive, which is colored in retrospect with a painful sense of the anticipated loss of his friend, the trees alongside Route 322 appear ominously "hushed in the resonance/ of darkest emerald" (35), as the whispering of their leaves is drowned out by the car and transmuted into color effects. The trees fly by and disappear in the distance. Just like Dickinson's hummingbird, they become symbols of transience, while retaining their material presence. Neither a mere backdrop, nor a conventional symbol of life and renewal, the trees in the poem rouse a sense of longing in Ali's speaker. Rather than trapping the poet in the past, his nostalgic longing for a time (and place) before he learned of Phil's sickness also points the speaker toward the future. At the end of a "Nostalgist's Map of America," Shahid sets out for a poetic quest: he begins to seek a place of refuge, a search that acquires subtle environmental undertones.

Shahid recited "A Route of Evanescence," the reader eventually learns, on a road trip through Philadelphia, a scene that part of the poem describes. Inspired by Dickinson's poem and the landscape flashing by outside the car window, Ali's speaker, he tells us, began to muse about the possibility of making a home in Pennsylvania or elsewhere in America, a thought that still preoccupies him many years later when he remembers the trip:

> [...] The signs
> on Schuylkill Expressway fell neat behind us.
> I went further: "Let's pretend your city
>
> is Evanescence – There has to be one –
> in Pennsylvania – . . .
>
> (Ali 35)

13 Thanks to Mahshid Mayar for alerting me to the potential relevance of the common connotations in English of the suffix *-ist* (as in nostal*gist*) compared to the suffix *-ic* (nostal*gic*), a fact I had never considered in connection to the title of Ali's poem and my thinking about his project of poetic place-making.

Looking back at numerous exit signs, a line of vision that emphasizes the speaker's nostalgic perspective, Shahid fails to find the kind of place he is longing for. He thus continues driving and eventually proceeds to invent a home for Phil, the imaginary "boyhood town" of "Evanescence" (36). Referencing the central word in Dickinson's poem, the town's name evokes both a "gradual removal" and a "fleeting moment" (Kang 58). Yet, even while the speaker imagines that he and Phil are driving on a "route that takes [them] back, back to Evanescence" (Ali 36), it becomes obvious that the return to such a place of origin is impossible. When the imaginary city of Evanescence reappears at the end of the poem, it is no longer only Phil's boyhood town but also the imaginary home that the migrant poet Shahid is in search of in America. As we read on, Shahid conjures different versions of Evanescence, all of which he offers to Phil (and himself): first, a safe haven, he built himself, "for America/ was without one" (37); then a mysterious, shadowy place he "found – though/ not in Pennsylvania" (37); and, finally, his poem, which is filled with imaginary "souvenirs of Evanescence" (37). This last despairing gesture speaks not only to the speaker's struggle to cope with the impending loss of his friend, it also speaks to Shahid's own unfulfilled desire for a sense of belonging that emplacement promises and the role that a nostalgic longing for real and imagined places plays in his project of (eco)poetic place-making.

Despite the public image of Dickinson as an almost excessively local, immobile, and firmly rooted poet, a closer examination of "A Nostalgist's Map of America" reveals that Ali responds not only to Dickinson's nature poetry of loss and nostalgic longing. He also responds to what Jane Eberwein calls the "global impetus" (34) of Dickinson's poetic imagination and to what Christine Gerhardt describes as Dickinson's poetic "*Vision of Global Dwelling*" (*A Place for Humility* 197, emphasis and capitalization original). While the importance of the small nature of Amherst and its immediate surroundings for much of her poetry cannot be denied, Dickinson showed significant interest in foreign countries and geographies (see Hallen, Hamada, Giles). Indeed, much like Ali, Dickinson frequently references places beyond the U.S. in her poetry, specifically ones in South America, North Africa, and Southeast Asia (see Hamada). Importantly, then, "A Route of Evanescence" ends with the lines "[t]he mail from Tunis, probably,/ An easy Morning's Ride" (Dickinson qtd. in Ali 33), lines which Ali takes up in "A Nostalgist's Map of America," along with Dickinson's imagery and her idiosyncratic punctuation. Thinking back to his car ride with Phil, Shahid addresses his absent friend, musing:

Let's pretend […] that some day –
the Bird will carry – my letters – to you –
from Tunis – or Casablanca – the mail

an easy night's ride – from North Africa."

(Ali 35)

In comparison to Dickinson's poem, in which the speaker receives "mail from Tunis" (Dickinson qtd. in Ali 33), while she is at home in New England observing a hummingbird in her garden, Ali's speaker is a migrant and traveler who imagines sending "letters" back to the U.S. "from North Africa." More so than Dickinson's text, Ali's poem emphasizes the concrete geographical location of Tunis by associating it with a city from the same region, Casablanca, and by naming the exact part of the world in which both are situated. Shahid's reformulation of Dickinson's "easy Morning's Ride" into an "an easy night's ride" can be read as a comment on what has been described as the "time-space compression" (Harvey 260–307) brought on by globalization and commercial air travel. While Dickinson's "easy Morning's Ride" can refer either to the act of imaginary travel by reading (letters) or perhaps to telegraphy, in Ali's late 20th-century poem a plane (a steel "Bird") carries people around the world at least as swiftly as it does letters. By drawing from and transforming Dickinson's poem, then, the title poem goes beyond reiterating the tension between the local and the global, the familiar and the exotic in Dickinson's nineteenth-century lyric. It rearticulates such an impetus from the perspective of mobility of a late-twentieth-century migrant, who continues to look back at the places he has left behind—Kashmir, Pennsylvania, the Sonoran Desert—and in doing so expresses a longing for belonging and a longing for a meaningful relationship to places, including the natural world that makes these places both alike and distinct.

Just like Ali, Emily Dickinson not only paid minute attention to natural phenomena, she also frequently translated these natural phenomena into movement in her poetry. Her poems rarely describe specific isolated objects. Instead, she tends to put these objects in relation to their environments and dissolves them "in pure movement" (Hagenbüchle 34), a poetic technique for which "A Route of Evanescence" serves as a case in point. Indeed, the key characteristic ascribed to the hummingbird in Dickinson's poem is its startling mobility. Rather than representing a static tableau of the natural world, "A Route of Evanescence" presents a micro-environment marked by movement. Ali capitalizes on this dimension of the poem, using the idea of a place/home of Evanescence as the central theme of the sequence "In Search of Evanescence." In addition to emulating Dickinson's idiosyncratic poetic diction, his poem translates Dickinson's images of a markedly mobile nature into a reflection on human mobilities and human-place relations at a much grander scale. It is this transposition of Dickinson's nature-oriented, mournful, and subtly mobile po-

etic sensibilities onto the place-based, nostalgic, and diasporic sensibilities of Ali's poetry that allows for a distinctly mobile perspective on the natural world and on the process of poetic place-making to emerge in his poetry.

Many poems in *A Nostalgist's Map of America* express a sense of loss of home as well as nostalgic longing for a sense of place that is meaningful because it is intimate. The speaker's longing for place-attachment relies heavily on an engagement with places he has left behind, yet the feelings of nostalgia he expresses are not purely retrospective. They are also "prospective," to borrow again from Svetlana Boym, that is, they are also directed at the speaker's present and future. The sequence "In Search of Evanescence" indicates how such a nostalgic longing for place-attachment without permanent emplacement may transform into a more mobile and environmentally suggestive longing for belonging that one may describe, with Boym, as a longing for a diasporic "sense of intimacy with the world" (251). Rather than glorifying rootedness or giving priority to places of origin, such a "diasporic intimacy" (Boym 254) with the world describes a being in the world (and, as I submit, in place and with nature) that "is not opposed to uprootedness and defamiliarization but is constituted by it" (252). According to Boym, a nostalgic longing for diasporic intimacy with the world does not depend on "utopian images of intimacy as transparency, authenticity, and ultimate belonging" (252). Instead, it is characterized by "a suspicion of a single home" and by "shared longing without belonging" (252). This emphasis on "shared longing without belonging" resonates with my reading of Ali's poems because it revises traditional notions of emplacement and gestures toward alternative forms of place-attachment in light of mobility. It is also suggestive for my analysis of *A Nostalgist's Map of America* because it allows for a reconceptualization of community and community building in an age of global environmental change and mass mobility in which notions of national borders and nation states are frequently called into question, even as they are being reasserted through violence, oppression, and practices of exclusion.

Intertextual references help to establish a diasporic intimacy between Ali's mobile speaker and the places he encounters throughout "In Search of Evanescence." According to Roland Hagenbüchle, the final lines of Emily Dickinson's "A Route of Evanescence" ("The mail from Tunis, probably,/ An easy Morning's Ride –," Ali 33) correlate that which is "infinitely far away [...] to what is nearest" (48). Hagenbüchle's choice of words resonates especially with section 5 of "In Search of Evanescence," which not only borrows Dickinson's characteristic staccato phrases and idiosyncratic capitalization (Islam 266), but also alludes to Georgia O'Keeffe's famous desert painting *From the Faraway, Nearby* (1937). Modeling his speaker's ruminations about the relationship between the faraway and the nearby after Dickinson's formally innovative yet also famously constrained poetry, Ali's poem alternates between stanzas composed almost entirely of titles or descriptions of paintings by O'Keeffe (stanzas one and three) and stanzas consisting of quotes from a letter O'Keeffe

wrote to Alfred Stieglitz in September 1916 (O'Keeffe, Stieglitz, and Greenough 26). In my rendering of the poem below, I have italicized direct references to titles of paintings by Georgia O'Keeffe (capitalized by Ali in an allusion to Dickinson's own idiosyncratic capitalization); I have also italicized indirect references to O'Keeffe's paintings (un-capitalized in Ali's poem). Section 5 of "In Search" reads:

From the Faraway Nearby –
Of Georgia O'Keeffe – these words –
Black Iris – Dark Iris – Abstraction, Blue –
her hands – around – a *skull* –

"The plains – the wonderful –
great big sky – makes me –
want to breathe – so deep –
that I'll break –"

From her *Train – at Night – in the Desert* –
I its only – passenger –
I see – as they pass by – her *red hills* –
black petals – landscapes with skulls –

"There is – so much – of it –
I want to get outside – of it all –
I would – if I could –
Even if it killed me –

(Ali 46; emphasis added)

O'Keeffe's painting *From the Faraway, Nearby* (1937) depicts a giant deer scull floating above a desert landscape. According to the painting's description on the website of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, O'Keeffe's *From the Faraway Nearby* uses a "realistic painting technique" without regard to scenic "verisimilitude," while the painting's "poetic title" conveys "longing and loneliness," depicting "an emotional state of mind as well as a physical location" (n. p.). Ali's poem invokes similar themes by using textual instead of visual means to express a sense of loss, longing, and loneliness as well as his speaker's desire to develop a close connection with a natural environment that is so grandiose and undeniably physical that it threatens to overwhelm the onlooker.

By referring to Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings and letters, section 5 of "In Search of Evanescence" approaches the desert through the eyes and art of another temporary inhabitant of the Southwest who maintained strong connections to the East Coast.[14]

14 O'Keeffe had fallen in love with the desert landscapes of the Southwest during several visits and shorter stays in the region during the 1920s. In 1929, she established herself more perma-

Like many poems in Ali's collection, Georgia O'Keeffe's abstract-realist paintings can be seen as a mobile subject's artistic engagement with her temporary place of residence that link the "faraway" to the "nearby" and vice versa. Also like many poems in *A Nostalgist's Map of America*, O'Keeffe's letters comment on the artist's struggle to capture the overwhelming grandeur of the southwestern desert landscapes in her art. Even while acknowledging the impossibility of such an endeavor, both of these representations—the paintings as well as the poetry—fulfill an important function. As section 5 of "In Search" implies, approaching the natural world through someone else's art can intensify a person's affective connection to the place represented. Ali's itinerant speaker completely immerses himself in O'Keeffe's desert paintings by imagining himself as the "only – passenger" of her "*Train – At Night – In the Desert*." It is from this imagined perspective of mobility that Ali's speaker observes O'Keeffe's "red hills –" and her "*landscapes with skulls –*," landscapes that resonate with the loss and nostalgic longing discussed in so many of Ali's poems. In the complex textual configuration of the poem, place-based art that accounts for perspectives of mobility is reaffirmed as a crucial means of place-making in the context of displacement. By imitating the characteristic form of an Emily Dickinson poem and referencing O'Keeffe's abstract representations of the desert, the text interrogates the potential and the limits of poetry as a means of expressing the migrant's longing for a diasporic intimacy—in the sense of a strong affinity coupled with the desire for (mutual) understanding, appreciation, and proximity—with the nonhuman world, especially when confronted with landscapes that resist such intimacy even more so perhaps than other environments. "In Search of Evanescence" recounts Shahid's poetic quest for a home in displacement. This home remains forever fleeting, forever eluding. What Shahid finds during his journey instead, is a precarious intimacy with "the near – faraways – of the heart" (53), that is to say, a diasporic intimacy with the places he encounters and then leaves behind. Ultimately, it is by withholding the comfort of arrival while still emphasizing the importance of place-making for the mobile subject that Ali's poems imagine a way of being in the world that balances diasporic and environmental sensibilities.

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nently in New Mexico, even as she continued to move back and forth between the Southwest and New York City. For more information on Georgia O'Keeffe's life, works, and aesthetics, see, for example, Jan Garden Castro's *The Art & Life of Georgia O'Keeffe* (1985), Barbara Haskell's *Georgia O'Keeffe: Abstraction* (2010), and Debra Bricker Balken's book on O'Keeffe and her fellow modernist Arthur Dove, *Dove/O'Keeffe: Circles of Influence* (2009).

Environmental Nostalgia and Ecological Citizenship

A Nostalgist's Map of America traces the geographical and imaginary journeys of a migrant speaker, whose nostalgic longing for a home is gradually supplemented by a diasporic sense of intimacy with the world. And yet, if Boym notes in the conclusion to *The Future of Nostalgia* that such a "[d]iasporic intimacy could be seen as the mutual attraction of two immigrants from different parts of the world or the sense of a precarious coziness of a foreign home" (254), my reading of Ali's poems seeks to demonstrate how such affinities can acquire environmental significance. In this vein, I attempt here to highlight moments in *A Nostalgist's Map of America* where a place- and nature-oriented diasporic intimacy with the world allows for the emergence of a sense of community—or at least a sense of imagined communalities, to harken back to my proposal of this alternative term in my chapter on Derek Walcott—between mobile subjects with vastly different histories of displacement (even if the affinity must remain one-sided in Ali's lyrical poetry). More broadly, then, I wish to point to moments in contemporary poetries of migration where evocations of the "precarious coziness" (Boym 254) of a temporary home entail an awareness of the precariousness of human-nature relations and perhaps even a sense of responsibility for the nonhuman environment. Toward the end of *A Nostalgist's Map of America*, Ali's poems begin to express exactly such an awareness of precariousness and sense of responsibility, suggesting how traditional notions of belonging may be revised in ways that help us to mobilize notions of ecological citizenship.

In *Citizenship and the Environment* (2004), Andrew Dobson uses the term "ecological citizenship" to refer to a "specifically ecological form of post-cosmopolitan citizenship" (89) that is concerned with "non-contractual responsibility […and] the private as well as the public sphere" (89). I opt for the term "ecological citizenship" rather than for the alternative "environmental citizenship" here both because I am interested in human-world relations that reach beyond the legal, political, and geographical frameworks that the nation-state has historically established in its definitions of citizenship and because it points to a sense of responsibility for the more-than-human world that is important for discussions of belonging and place-attachment without emplacement. Such an expansive notion of ecological citizenship is similar to the one Joni Adamson and Kimberly N. Ruffin discuss in their introduction to *American Studies, Ecocriticism, and Citizenship* (2013). For Adamson and Ruffin, the term "ecological citizenship" brings to the fore questions surrounding "the 'politics of life,' 'nature,' 'environment,' 'justice,' 'citizenship,' and 'belonging'" (2) that matter most in the context of discussions of "cosmopolitanism, nationalism, localism, and environmentalism" (2). Ali's poetry addresses many of the issues just mentioned and in doing so offers glimpses at an expansive, radical kind of ecological citizenship that acknowledges histories of displacement, experiences of migration, and other per-

spectives of mobility, without erasing the harm that can be caused for human and nonhuman others by people's desire for emplacement.

Maybe more clearly than any other poem in *A Nostalgist's Map of America*, "I See Chile in My Rearview Mirror," the second to last poem in the collection, exposes the extent to which Ali's "mapping of America," his physical, mnemonic, and poetic place-making, depends on a similar sense of critical environmental nostalgia that is informed by perspectives of mobility. The poem depicts the speaker as he is "driving in the desert" in Arizona, where "the rocks/ are under fog, the cedars a temple" (Ali 96, 97). Later in the text, he arrives "in Utah," where he continues "driving, still north" (98), even while continuously looking back south, "keeping the entire hemisphere in view" (96). At the break of the third and fourth stanzas, the speaker notes: "There's Sedona, Nogales// far behind" (96). With the startling economy of an elliptical sentence, Ali here evokes three locations at once: "Sedona" Arizona, as well as the two towns of "Nogales," abutting cities located in the Sonoran Desert on opposite sides of the U.S-Mexican border. The poem alludes to the cities' special geographical position through the line and stanza break "Nogales // far behind" (96), which signals both proximity and distance and calls attention to the arbitrary drawing of borders in service of the modern settler-colonial nation-state. Although the poem does not explicitly address questions of immigration, the speaker's ruminations about the political situation of countries such as Chile, Paraguay, Colombia, and Peru during his own unimpeded northward journey through the United States gestures toward other, more perilous northward journeys undertaken by individuals living southward of the U.S. border with Mexico. At least implicitly, then, the speaker's own mobile perspective—as a recent migrant to the U.S. and temporary inhabitant of the Southwest—raises questions about U.S. immigration policies in the context of the Americas' complex colonial history and the political conflicts that have both fed into and resulted from that history. What is more, it points toward alternative forms of (ecological) citizenship and belonging that do not rely on an anti-immigrant rhetoric of fortified borders.

The beginning of "I See Chile in My Rearview Mirror" evokes the colonial history of the Americas through metaphors of map-making and painting and as such "grimly elaborates the playfully fantastical evocations of Elizabeth Bishop's 'The Map' [1946]" (Ramazani, *Poetry in a Global Age* 73). The allusions to different forms of spatial visualization in the poem draw attention to (geopolitical) processes of territorialization as well as to the (artistic) processes of representation involved in such a project:

> The dream of water – what does it harbor?
> I see Argentina and Paraguay
> under a curfew of glass, their colors
> breaking, like oil. The night in Uruguay

is black salt. I'm driving toward Utah,
keeping the entire hemisphere in view –
Colombia vermilion, Brazil blue tar,
some countries wiped clean of color: Peru

is titanium white. […]

(Ali 96)

By comparing the night in Uruguay to "black salt" and by associating Colombia with "vermillion," Brazil with "blue tar" and Peru with "titanium white," while the "colors" of Argentina and Paraguay are described as "breaking, like oil" (Ali 96), Ali produces a rich tableau of Central and South America in several senses of the word: on one level, his description sketches a portrait of Latin America that seems to emphasize geo- and biodiversity; on another level, it hints at centuries-long economic and environmental exploitation of the region by way of resource extraction. On yet another level, the above lines conjure up a brightly colored schematic map that links the geopolitical (re-)organization of the Americas to the violence of colonization as well as to its legacies. This violence becomes manifest on the continent's map in the form of "countries [that have been] wiped clean of color" (Ali 96), a metaphor alluding to the erasure of Indigenous cultures and the extermination of Indigenous peoples in the Americas by European, and later U.S.-American, colonial powers and their twentieth-century authoritarian successors.

Shahid is in the Southwest driving toward Utah when he commemorates "the disappeared" (Ali 98) of General Pinochet's rule in Chile, people who are all too easily forgotten in the global North. The traveling poet's act of poetic commemoration, his act of poetic witnessing, relies on a critical look back in time and beyond the southern border of the United States, which keeps U.S. settler-colonial and imperial histories in view. What is more, it evokes environmental degradation as a current and future threat to the Americas at large:

. . . And what else will
this mirror now reason, filled with water?
I see Peru without rain, Brazil
without forests – and here in Utah a dagger

of sunlight: it's splitting – it's the summer
solstice – the quartz center of a spiral.
Did the Anasazi know the darker
answer also – given now in crystal
by the mirrored continent? […]

(Ali 98)

The above lines play with the notion of turning points and reversals, as marked by the allusion to "the summer/ solstice" and the spiraled stone constructions the Anasazi used to record significant solar events such as the solstice.[15] Apart from acknowledging the scientific achievements of one of the foremost pre-modern high cultures of the Americas, this passage once more centers on the mirror as the poem's pivotal image: it is a symbol of poetic language as a means of representation and a symbol of the speaker's perspective of mobility and retrospection.

According to Jahan Ramazani, the mirror in "I See Chile" constitutes "both a spatial and a temporal metaphor for reflecting on the global South, even as [the poem's speaker] journey's northward" (*Poetry in a Global Age* 72). Ali's poem, he adds, also brings to mind Jean Baudrillard's philosophical travel diary *America* (1989), which begins with an account of a drive through U.S. American deserts that comes to stand metaphorically for "endless futurity and the obliteration of the past in an instantaneous time" (Ramazani, *Poetry in a Global Age* 72). By choosing the image of the mirror, a metaphor that also features in the poem "Amsterdam" by James Merrill quoted in the epigraph to "I See Chile," Ali's poem suggests that it is art's purpose to make visible what could otherwise not be seen, even if artistic representations are necessarily selective and distorting. What is more, Shahid's poem acknowledges and writes against these distortions, as it projects faraway geographies and histories of violence back onto the U.S. If the Americas are figured as a "mirrored continent" in Ali's text, this is also to imply that the (post-)colonial violence and environmental destruction that Shahid observes in Latin America have their counterpart in the U.S. The last poem of the collection, "Snow on the Desert" suggests as much, while also tentatively evoking place-based affiliations between different migratory and displaced peoples that are tentatively decolonial and environmental and thus point to the particular kind of ecological citizenship I believe emerges in Ali's text.

"Snow on the Desert" begins by situating the speaker precisely in time and space. Shahid is driving through the Sonoran Desert in order to take his sister Sameetah to Tucson International Airport "on January 19, 1987" (Ali 100). Together with the speaker's memories of a concert by Begum Akthar, the "Queen of Ghazals," in New Delhi also mentioned in the text, the poem's narrative once more alludes to Shahid's migratory background and his identity as a world traveler among other world travelers. On the way to the airport, Shahid contemplates the frozen cacti on the roadside and then muses:

15 See, among others, the archeological site described by Anna Sofaer, Volker Zinser, and Rolf M. Sinclair in their article "A Unique Solar Marking Construct" from the October 19, 1979, issue of *Science*.

The Desert Smells Like Rain: in it I read:
The syrup from which sacred wine is made

is extracted from the saguaros each
summer. The Papagos place it in jars,

where the last of it softens, then darkens
into a color of blood […]

(Ali 100–101; emphasis original)

The Desert Smells Like Rain is the title of a 1982 book by the renowned agricultural ecologist, conservation biologist, sustainability activist, and poet Gary Paul Nabhan. Nabhan's book about the Sonoran Desert carries the subtitle *A Naturalist in O'odham Country*, a phrasing that resonates with the title of *A Nostalgist's Map of America*. An ethnobotanical study, *The Desert Smells Like Rain* not only provides detailed descriptions of the flora of the Sonoran Desert, it also records stories and cultural practices of the Tohono O'odham, who are referred to by their Anglo-American name, Papago, in Ali's poem.[16] In particular, Nabhan's book describes the *O'odham Himdag*, or the "Papago Way" of cultivating the desert, a sustainable form of agriculture that has been practiced by the Tohono for centuries (Nabhan xi). Having survived in competition with other agricultural techniques introduced to the Tohono by early Spanish missionaries, the *O'odham Himdag* is nowadays threatened due to urban expansion and the increasingly severe droughts plaguing the Southwest. Together with Tohono-led projects, the work of non-Indigenous ethnobotanists such as Nabhan has been part of an effort to keep Tohono environmental knowledges about the deserts of the Southwest alive and, where possible, learn from the century-old practices in order to respond more effectively to the current climate crisis.

Ali's reference to Nabhan's book in "Snow on the Desert" suggests that the speaker's perception of the natural world around him is, at least in part, influenced by the Tohono view of the desert. Or, more accurately, it is influenced by the poet's

16 The Indigenous people today referred to by their own name as the "O'odham" were once considered three separate tribes by anthropologists who used settlement patterns to differentiate between the sedentary Pima (also known as the Akimel O'odham or "River People"), the nomadic Hia C'ed O'odams or "Sand People," and the seasonally migratory Papago (also Tohono O'odham or "Desert People"). As Peter M. Booth observes, the Tohono O'odham abandoned their seasonal migrations at the beginning of the twentieth century, when U.S. government-sponsored wells allowed for new methods of year-round irrigation and farming ("Tohono O'odham"). For a short history of the Tohono O'odham, see Booth's entry on the Tohono O'odham in the *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*. For a more detailed account of the O'odham of Santa Cruz Valley, located between Tucson and the Mexican border town of Nogales, see Thomas E. Sheridan's *Landscapes of Fraud: Mission Tumacácori, the Baca Float, and the Betrayal of the O'odham* (2007).

reading of *The Desert Smells Like Rain*, that is, of a book by a non-Tohono naturalist and environmental activist of Lebanese-American descent, who is known for his interdisciplinary and community-focused writing and his Thoreau-inspired "practice of sauntering in the Sonoran borderlands" (Fiskio 141). Nabhan's own ethnic background, family history of migration, and habit of walking and driving in the desert to connect with different people, cultures, and knowledges meaningfully link the author to the migrant poet Shahid and to the mobile as well as environmental sensibilities Ali expresses in "Snow on the Desert." The Lebanese-American ethnobotanist's commitment to recording and transmitting the cultural and environmental knowledges and practices of the Tohono O'odham to a broader audience, where such knowledges furthermore echoes Ali's interest in the human and geological histories of the Sonoran Desert.

Much like *The Desert Smells Like Rain*, "Snow on the Desert" reflects on the strange beauty of the desert environments of the Southwest, the conditions of human existence in view of the unfathomable geological age of the desert, the land-based wisdom of Tohono ritualistic practices, and the region's complex history of settlement and displacement. Like the references to Richard Shelton and Georgia O'Keeffe discussed earlier, the juxtaposition of quotes from Nabhan's book with Shahid's personal impressions and memories of the desert emphasize the speaker's desire to engage deeply, and through a range of different source materials, with his temporary place of residence. The fact that Ali does not engage with Indigenous sources here, but instead turns to Nabhan's book about the Tohono, just as he turns to Shelton and O'Keefe's representations of the desert, must be acknowledged. What I would argue, though, is that Ali's choice of source materials, whether intentional or not, is what makes his approach to ecopoetic place-making so intriguing: it is an approach to place-making that highlights the perspective of migrants and arrivants like himself, without disavowing the vastly different place-sense that comes from long-term inhabitation and the place-specific and community-centered cultural and environmental practices that can emerge from this kind of emplacement.

By entwining descriptions of Sonoran Desert landscapes with quotations from literary and non-literary texts about them, "Snow on the Desert" depicts places as material and cultural, real and imagined. At the same time, the representations of human-nature relations in the poem acquire a distinctly social and ethical dimension, especially because they link people of different origins through their shared experience of particular geographies as well as through their collaborative production (in the case of Nabhan and the Tohono as well as in the case of Nabhan and Ali) of environmentally resonant texts about them. After situating Ali on the road toward Tucson International Airport, "Snow on the Desert" continues:

the saguaros have opened themselves, stretched
out their arms to rays millions of years old,

in each ray a secret of the planet's
origin, the rays hurting each cactus

into memory, a human memory –
for they are human, the Papagos say:

not only because they have arms and veins
and secrets. But because they too are a tribe,

vulnerable to massacre. […]

(Ali 101–02)

Probably the most iconic mega-flora of the Southwest, Saguaros are endemic to the Sonoran Desert and threatened in particularly dramatic ways by urbanization, pollution, and the effects of climate change on the region. By calling these giant cacti a "tribe," Ali evokes a community of victims of violence, oppression, and displacement that includes both his speaker Shahid and the Tohono, whose culture barely survived Spanish colonization and settlement, Mexican rule, and, later, the U.S.-American take-over of the region since the second half of the nineteenth century (Nabhan 68). Ali's acknowledgment of O'odham oral traditions and mythology as the source for his representation of Saguaros as a tribe ("for they are human, the Papago say," Ali 102) constitute an attempt to establish trans-ethnic affiliations with the Tohono. Or at least it imagines that (temporary) peaceful cohabitation is possible and that the sense of place of mobile subjects, but especially of arrivants like Ali's speaker can be enriched by an encounter with the place-based culture and history of displacement of natives like the Tohono, as long as the encounter is based on a shared appreciation for the local natural world and respectful engagement with the cultural practices it has inspired—be they dry-gardening or story-telling.

By including in his poem aspects of the traditional Tohono worldview that challenge anthropocentrism, "Snow on the Desert" draws attention to the limits of settler-European perspectives on nature and nature poetry. What if one were to read the reference to the personhood of the Saguaros not only as a metaphor? The arising implications would certainly be of an eco-ethical nature, raising urgent questions of the kind addressed by Joni Adamson and Kimberly N. Ruffin in their introduction to *American Studies, Ecocriticism, and Citizenship* (2013), which discusses radical notions of ecological citizenship in order to explore "ancient and new trans-species understandings of who and *what* can be granted the right to exist, maintain, and regenerate life cycles and evolutionary processes" (11–12). By figuring the endangered

nonhuman species of the Saguaros as a tribe "vulnerable to massacre," Ali's poem establishes an ethical framework in which the cacti may be granted a "right to exist, maintain, and regenerate life cycles and evolutionary processes" (Adamson and Ruffin 4). What is more, the poem opens a space of social-ecological inquiry in which such a right must be negotiated with an eye to the region's colonial history while also attention to the different forms of marginalization that are relevant to debates surrounding (ecological) citizenship in the U.S., debates which include the ongoing marginalization of Indigenous people and (im)migrants when it comes to environmental concerns.

Aside from reinforcing the poem's environmental implications, the references to Nabhan's book in the poem pay respect to the traditional Tohono O'odham way of thinking about and inhabiting the desert, which, if we believe Nabhan and researchers like him, can provide valuable lessons for more sustainable ways of living in the deserts of the Southwest and, perhaps, in the expanding deserts of the world at large. One of these lessons is the importance of taking seriously precarious Indigenous environmental knowledges, a point I also address in my chapter on CHamoru poet Craig Santos Perez. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s when Ali wrote and published *A Nostalgist's Map of America*, lessons of "ecosystem people" (Gadgil and Guha qtd. in Buell, "Uses and Abuses" 108) such as the Tohono O'odham have perhaps become even more valuable, not least because the ecosystems they inhabit have become more precarious. After all, water shortage and irresponsible urban planning are not only increasingly infringing on already limited Indigenous land rights but also increasingly putting bioregions such as the Sonoran Desert at risk. The works of contemporary ecopoets writing about the deserts of the Southwest such as poet and geographer Eric Magrane, co-editor with poet and nonfiction writer Christopher Cokinos of *The Sonoran Desert: A Literary Field Guide* (2016) and with Linda Russo, Sarah de Leeuw, and Craig Santos Perez of *Geopoetics in Practice* (2019), testify to the environmental challenges the region faces. Written several decades earlier, Ali's collection is less explicit about these changes and challenges, while highlighting all the more forcefully why emerging environmental imaginaries for the Southwest must acknowledge histories of displacement and perspectives of mobility.

While comparisons of humans and trees are common in ecopoetry, such as in Eric Magrane's Sonoran Desert poem "Mesquite," probably because such a comparison is expedient from an environmental perspective, images of rootedness cannot do full justice to the mobile environmental imaginaries that emerge in Ali's poems about transitory desert dwellers. As noted earlier, Ali does not compare Saguaros to human beings on accounts of their roots (Saguaros commonly only have one deep root, the tap root, and otherwise rely on a rhizomatic network of shallow roots near the surface), but on accounts of their shared vulnerability to violence. *A Nostalgist's Map of America* is environmentally resonant, then, not because every poem in the collection is explicitly environmentalist, but because it employs figurations of environ-

mental nostalgia together with other poetic strategies of place-making to imagine alternative forms of place-attachments that are attuned to perspectives of mobility. Toward the end of Ali's collection, his nostalgic ecopoetics of mobility begins to gesture not only toward the migrant's longing for a diasporic intimacy with the world but also toward alternative kinds of ecological citizenship, suggesting that histories of oppression and displacement do not preclude an individual's ability to establish meaningful relationships to the land, while also acknowledging that these kinds of histories and experiences affect people's relationship with the nonhuman world in crucial ways.

A critical and open notion of ecological citizenship, I want to suggest in closing, must be based on environmental imaginaries that acknowledge perspectives of mobility and engage in one way or another with the ongoing impact of settler-colonialism, environmental racism, and eco-nativism. Acknowledging the place-making practices of migrants and victims of displacement, Ali's poems affirm, is crucial for the development of more mobile environmental imaginaries and more inclusive forms of ecological citizenship, as is creating opportunities for migrants to engage with a variety of literary and non-literary texts as well as with works of art about the places they inhabit, whether only temporarily or more permanently. Although *A Nostalgist's Map of America* is pervaded by the poet's intense longing for community, belonging, and a home, this longing is never fulfilled. While the collection thus offers clues about what a diasporic intimacy with the world and more inclusive forms of ecological citizenships might look like, it can do so mainly because it continues to place its migrant speaker into a world devoid of people except an occasional close friend or relative. Put differently, the reasons why migrants such as Ali might look for a sense of belonging and meaningful place-connection in nature rather than in the company of people may not only or even primarily stem from an environmental interest in and care for the nonhuman world of a certain place, but also from the experience of not being welcomed into the *human* community of a certain place, region, or nation. In order for alternative forms of ecological citizenship to effectively counter econativist arguments for why some people, and specifically people of color and migrants from the former colonies of the Global South, should not be or live in certain places, they need to be attentive to environmental racism and xenophobia, even as they have to acknowledge the right of some marginalized communities, including Indigenous communities, to make decisions about who is welcome on their land and for how long.