Novel Fictions: Resurgent Realism in the Age of Neoliberal Globalization

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Abstract

This dissertation develops a theoretical framework for the study of a *resurgent realism* in the context of contemporary global anglophone literature. By demonstrating the continuing relevance of Mikhail Bakhtin and Georg Lukács, and by expanding their theories of realism and the novel for the study of global texts and contexts, my project also outlines the political stakes of the debate about global realism. Reading the return of realism as an attempt to roll back the breakdown of our cognitive mapping function helps us understand that this is not merely a matter of generic distinction or literary style. The realist trajectory that defines the texts discussed in this dissertation—Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* (1991), Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), Arundhati Roy's *Walking with the Comrades* (2011), and Katherine Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity* (2012)—in fact, represents a renewed aesthetic investment in the representation of reality *as a socially experienced and fundamentally shared totality*. Thus, the theoretical goal of this dissertation is to formalize the analytic terms provided by Bakhtin and Lukács into a coherent framework that critically develops Fredric Jameson's concept of *cognitive mapping* as an approach to the study of global anglophone texts.

For this purpose, I foreground the discussion of two constitutive elements of cognitive mapping in this dissertation: *organization* (Sidhwa, Adiga) and *representation* (Roy, Boo). In other words, I argue that we should understand how contemporary realism *organizes narrative* and how it *represents reality* precisely because it is along those two axes that realism formulates its cognitive claims. While the former is the dominant principle of realism in fiction, the latter appears more prominently in nonfiction texts. Taken together, the study of contemporary realism in fiction and nonfiction—in terms of organization and representation—thus allows us to understand the fundamental process of mediation that shapes how they make their claims *about* reality *in narrative terms*.

Understanding the process of *how* contemporary realism represents reality ultimately helps identify the specific pressures that it is responding to—which in turn clarifies the relationship of contemporary realism to previous realisms and to the capitalist mode of production more broadly speaking. All of the texts I discuss, in one way or another, explore the processes that have shaped and continue to shape a global social totality (and its concrete, local experience). Whether they foreground *history*, the *individual*, *language*, or the *production of space*, these texts engage in essence with capitalism as the root cause of an increasing intensification of alienation, reification, social fragmentation, exploitation, expropriation, and violence in the age of neoliberal globalization.

Résumé

Cette thèse développe un cadre théorique pour l'étude d'un *réalisme renaissant* dans le contexte de la littérature anglophone mondiale contemporaine. En démontrant la pertinence continue de Mikhail Bakhtin et Georg Lukács et en offrant une extension de leurs théories du réalisme et du roman pour l'étude des textes et contextes mondiaux, mon projet met également en lumière les enjeux politiques du débat sur le réalisme mondial. J'interprète le retour du réalisme comme une tentative de faire reculer la dégradation de notre fonction de cartographie cognitive. Cela nous aide à comprendre que ce retour n'est pas simplement une question de distinction générique ou de style littéraire. La trajectoire réaliste qui définit les textes discutés dans cette thèse – *Cracking India* [*Casser l'Inde*] de Bapsi Sidhwa (1991), *The White Tiger* [*Le Tigre blanc*] d'Aravind Adiga (2008), *Walking with the Comrades* [*En marche avec les camarades*] (2011) d'Arundhati Roy et *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity* [*Annawadi : Vie, mort et espoir dans un bidonville de Mumbai*] de Katherine Boo (2012) – représente en fait un investissement esthétique renouvelé dans la représentation de la réalité *en tant que totalité vécue socialement et fondamentalement partagée*. Ainsi, le but théorique de cette thèse est de formaliser les termes analytiques fournis par Bakhtin et Lukács, en les intégrant dans un cadre cohérent qui développe de manière critique le concept de Fredric Jameson de *cartographie cognitive* en tant qu'approche pour l'étude des textes anglophones globaux.

À cette fin, je mets de l'avant la discussion de deux éléments constitutifs de la cartographie cognitive dans cette thèse : *l'organisation* (Sidhwa, Adiga) et *la représentation* (Roy, Boo). En d'autres termes, je soutiens que nous devons comprendre comment le réalisme contemporain *organise le récit* et comment il *représente la réalité*, précisément parce que c'est selon ces deux axes que le réalisme formule ses revendications cognitives. Alors que le premier est le principe dominant du réalisme dans la fiction, le second apparaît davantage dans les textes non fictifs. En prenant ces deux axes ensemble, l'étude du réalisme contemporain dans la fiction et la non-fiction – en termes d'organisation et de représentation – nous permet ainsi de comprendre le processus fondamental de médiation qui façonne la manière dont ces axes offrent leurs interprétations *à propos de* la réalité *en termes narratifs*.

Comprendre *la manière dont* le réalisme contemporain représente la réalité contemporaine aide finalement à identifier les pressions spécifiques auxquelles il répond – ce qui à son tour clarifie la relation du réalisme contemporain avec les réalismes antérieurs et avec le mode de production capitaliste en général. Tous les textes que j'analyse explorent, d'une manière ou d'une autre, les processus qui ont façonné et continuent de façonner une totalité sociale globale (et comment les gens vivent cette totalité concrètement et localement). Qu'ils se concentrent sur *l'histoire*, *l'individu*, *la langue* ou *la production de l'espace*, ces textes se penchent par essence sur le capitalisme comme cause profonde d'une intensification croissante de l'aliénation, de la réification, de la fragmentation sociale, de l'exploitation, de l'expropriation et de la violence à l'ère du néolibéralisme et de la mondialisation.

For my mother, Katharina Fuchs,

and in memory of my father, Wolfgang J. Fuchs.

Acknowledgments

A dissertation is considered the crowning achievement of a PhD student. But like all things in this world that contain hours and hours of congealed labor time, a thesis is the result of a process of production which, as Marx writes in *Capital*, "proceeds under specific material conditions, which are however also the bearers of specific social relations which the individuals enter into in the process of reproducing their life" (3: 957). In other words, the thing at the end is not the result of one person's labor, but it in fact conceals an entire set of social relations that made its existence possible. Let me try then, to acknowledge in some small way, the concrete acts of human kindness that have allowed this particular thesis to enter into the world.

I want to begin with my supervisor and mentor, Sandeep Banerjee, who has taught me that, as Marx put it "there is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous heights" (*Capital* 1: 104). I owe him a debt of gratitude for taking me under his wing and introducing me to the field of postcolonial studies, for his years of material support, his infinite patience, and delivering the occasional comradely kick in the butt when needed. This thesis would not have been possible to take its final shape without his advice and invaluable insights. But while the thesis is done now, and I am about to conclude my degree, I also have to thank him for setting me on a life-long path of learning. I will continue to deepen my knowledge about Marxism and dialectics, and thank him for introducing me to many folks who have become friends and comrades as well as to those Marxist thinkers—among them Aijaz Ahmad, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Raymond Williams—that will forever shape my thought. I can never repay him for getting me through this degree, teaching me all I know about decolonization and imperialism, and for guiding me on my way towards becoming a committed student of anti-colonial thought and the immortal science.

There are many other scholars, friends, comrades, and family I want to thank, but before I get to them, I want to thank Suvij Sudershan, my closest friend and comrade, who has been my constant companion on this path of learning, which we will continue to travel together. Thank you for your kind nature, for always listening patiently to my rants (and letting me listen to yours), for offering me advice in everything that life throws at me, for always being there for me, for always understanding me in a way that few ever will, and for being a comrade in spirit and commitment. Beyond this, I cannot begin to thank you for all the proofreading, editing, and invaluable feedback you have helped me out with over the years. I cannot wait to repay you in kind, and begin to work with you and Virginia on our future projects.

I am grateful for all the incredible scholars with whom I had the privilege of working closely. I thank Gavin Walker for supporting me throughout my degree, for involving me with the great work of *Critical Social Theory at McGill*, for all the encouragement and his mentorship, for letting me sit in on as many classes on Marxism as I want, and for introducing me to leftists in Montreal who have become close friends and comrades. Thank you as well to Monica Popescu and Katie Zien, who along with Sandeep Banerjee and Gavin Walker, have taught me so much about not just writing but writing *well*, and who have provided me with invaluable feedback and encouragement as part of the many committees that guide you through the program. Thank you all for helping me shape this project into what it has become, and for pushing me to push myself.

My dearest Ilgın, you get a special paragraph that is dedicated to only you. I cannot put into words what your love and friendship means to me, and how much I miss you. So, I will let a writer speak whose lost novel stood at the beginning of our friendship:

> But then they danced down the streets like dingledodies, and I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn, like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes "Awww!" (Kerouac 7)

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I also want to thank Jonathan Beard and Rachel Teilheimer for their friendship, for always welcoming me into their home, and for all the miles and meals we have shared over the years.

I owe a debt of gratitude to those friends of mine who have helped me by always listening to me—be it on a call, over a beer, or at the climbing gym. I want to thank Greg, in particular, for everything he has taught me about climbing as well as for his intellectual curiosity and his unquestioning willingness to always help me out. Thank you to all of my partner's friends who have welcomed me to Montreal. Thank you to my running buddies, Alyssa and Paulina for the shared miles, and a shoutout to Coach Bennett whose guided runs have allowed me to rediscover my love for running and helped me get all the way to my first marathon. I also thank Eve Wexler who has shared a lot of her knowledge about long distance running with me. Thank you for the long walks with Bodie and our equally long discussions about politics and the world. Your friendship has made the isolation in Saint-Hyacinthe during the pandemic so much more bearable.

Thank you to all of my old Munich pals as well, who have helped me get through this last year of the degree and of the pandemic on countless calls: Hendrik, Patrick, Rasmus, Marc as well as Steffi and Jonny.

Marc, Hendrik, and Rasmus in particular, I thank for listening to me go on and on about academia and my professional future, and who have helped me in countless ways with their patience and advice.

Last but not least, I thank Jeffrey Anyan, for his wisdom and support over the past few years. Without your help, I would not have been able to finish this degree. Our talks have helped me quiet my mind whenever I needed it the most.

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I owe a debt of gratitude to my parents Katharina and Wolfgang as well as to my sister Anna for their unwavering support and constant encouragement over the years. I wish my father was still here to see this dissertation finished and my degree completed. I thank my mother and sister for holding down the fort back in Munich, and for having been there for me during this past year of loss and isolation. One final note: This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, and to the many ways in which he has always inspired me, but I also dedicate it to my mother whose love for literature has truly made me who I am today. You have given me direction when I had none, and put me on the path I am today with your suggestion to take up English literature as a field of study.

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I have acknowledged the help and contributions of many friends, family, colleagues, and comrades here. But there is one more person to whom I owe the greatest debt and to whom I have dedicated much more than a dissertation: My best friend, my constant companion, and the love of my life, Alyssa. Without you, I would not have gotten here. In fact, I probably would have given up a long time ago. But you've given me the quiet encouragement and support that I needed to go on. I hope that I have been able to do the same for you throughout your career and our shared life. As this project comes to a conclusion, what I am most excited for is to see where we go next. As e e cummings writes "i carry your heart with me(i carry it in my heart)i am never without it(anywhere i go you go,my dear;and whatever is done by only me is your doing,my darling)."

There are some non-humans I want to acknowledge as well at the very end. They too have played a role in making this project possible, our two cats, Gaddis and Gramsci, have been my faithful companions throughout this degree, and our dog, Seamus, has accompanied me throughout the writing process on many walks that refreshed my mind and allowed me to return to my desk. They care very little for the the books and screens that distract us from them, but in this way the three of them have been our little anchors to reality that always prevent us from drifting out too far to sea.

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The last lines I reserve for the memory of those friends and family who have been a part of my life throughout my education and beyond—sometimes for a short time I wish had been longer, and often in relations of friendship or acquaintance that I wish had been granted the time to grow deeper: Karen Weilbrenner, Eugenie Fuchs, Nonna Tella, Hayden Muller, Wolfgang J. Fuchs, and Thea Diesner.

My father's sudden death in particular left me rattled in the last year or so of my degree. He passed away the same way as Carl Sagan who we both admired. In fact, one of the last things my father shared on social media was a video in which Sagan discusses how Eratosthenes calculated the earth's circumference as a way of illustrating the value of intellectual curiosity and human ingenuity. For this reason, I want to end this note with a final word of thanks to all of those who have been here for me throughout my life and studies, and with words by Carl Sagan that have always given me comfort:

> The significance of our lives and our fragile planet is then determined only by our own wisdom and courage. *We* are the custodians of life's meaning. We long for a Parent to care for us, to forgive us our errors, to save us from our childish mistakes. But knowledge is preferable to ignorance. Better by far to embrace the hard truth than a reassuring fable. If we crave some cosmic purpose, then let us find ourselves a worthy goal. (57)

<div align="right">Saint-Hyacinthe, April 2021</div>

NOVEL FICTIONS:

RESURGENT REALISM IN THE AGE OF NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION

> We need this recovery of wholeness, for the most ordinary
> business of living, yet the necessary learning and adjustment in
> experience can only take place in ways which the realistic novel
> alone can record.
> —Raymond Williams, "Realism and the Contemporary Novel" (25)

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation investigates the resurgence of realism in the context of contemporary global

anglophone literature. Specifically, I examine South Asian texts—both fiction and nonfiction—

which emerged during the period of the neoliberal reorganization of the Indian economy that

began in the 1990s. The four texts that form the core of my dissertation—Bapsi Sidhwa's

Cracking India (1991), Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), Arundhati Roy's *Walking with*

the Comrades (2011),[1] and Katherine Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and*

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[1] Sidhwa's *Cracking India* was originally published in 1988 in the UK under the title *Ice-Candy-Man*. It was published in the United States in 1991 under the new title, and then in 1992 in India

Hope in a Mumbai Undercity (2012)—gesture in their representation of the lives of ordinary

Indian citizens towards the lived dimension of globalization and the attendant violence which

undergirds the socio-economic processes of liberalization. In this way, they register a deep

disconnect between what Leela Fernandes and Patrick Heller call the global and "hegemonic

aspirations" of a rising New Middle Class (495; hereafter NMC), and the realities of a majority

of the population. In other words, these texts represent a renewed aesthetic investment in the

mimetic representation of reality as part of what Fredric Jameson calls a "project of *cognitive*

mapping [which] obviously stands or falls with the conception of some (unrepresentable,

imaginary) global social totality that was to have been mapped" ("Cognitive Mapping" 356;

emphasis added). They are examples of a reinvigorated realist mode of representation, a *global*

realism that responds in content and form to the pressures of globalization, grasping "life in its

totality, in motion, development and evolution" (Lukács, "Marx" 77).

All of the authors selected for this project are also exemplary in another way: they all

figure prominently in the literary *production* of India—both as a commodity in the context of the

literary market place and in terms of its place within the neoliberal order. Beyond engaging with

the lived experience *of* globalization, they also participate in *how* this experience is framed and

narrated in the sphere of global anglophone literature.[2] Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, for example,

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as well. Roy's *Walking with the Comrades* was similarly published under two titles, one drawn
from Roy's article of the same title in *Outlook India* and also under the title *Broken Republic*.
[2] Among the authors I engage with, Arundhati Roy stands out as the only author who has spent
most of her life in India. Bapsi Sidhwa is a Pakistani-American residing in the US, Aravind
Adiga is an Indian author who grew up in Australia but has since returned, and Katherine Boo is
an American journalist married to an Indian academic, Sunil Khilnani (himself the author of *The
Idea of India* about post-Partition economic development). It goes beyond the scope of this
project to engage with broader discussions about what constitutes authentic Indian literature, but
I mention this here in order to demonstrate to what degree the authors I engage with fit into that
category that Fernandes and Heller call the NMC. All of these authors engage with and appeal to
a largely anglophone audience that is itself composed of the small percentage of anglophone
speakers in India and, in the majority, English speakers in the US, UK, and Australia. For

represents not only a crucial feminist intervention in the historical remembrance of the 1947

Partition of India. It is also a part of a larger process of reshaping the vast body of South Asian

anglophone texts into a coherent contemporary canon that claims to be representative of the body

of literature emerging from the subcontinent, and positions itself as such to both academics and a

global consumer audience.[3] In a reflection of its important status as part of this process of

commodification, it was adapted by the Indian-Canadian Deepa Mehta into the well-known

movie *Earth* (1998), which in turn became the Indian submission in the Best Foreign Language

Film category of the 1999 Academy Awards in the US.

  Adiga and Roy are authors who take up a similarly central position in the postcolonial

canon that is composed largely of contemporary anglophone authors. Adiga's novel *The White*

Tiger, for example, won the prestigious Booker Prize in 2008 and was adapted into a Netflix

movie in 2021 by the Iranian American director Ramin Bahrani. Arundhati Roy won the Booker

Prize in 1997 for her debut novel *The God of Small Things* and has since received numerous

prizes and awards for her nonfiction work and activism. Her second novel, *The Ministry of*

Utmost Happiness (2017)*,* which appeared twenty years after her first novel, was included on the

long list of the Booker Prize. In the case of both these authors, this global recognition set the

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discussions of this larger complex of questions surrounding authenticity and its production as
part of a global publishing industry, see Sarah Brouillette's *Postcolonial Writers and the Global
Literary Marketplace*, Neil Lazarus's *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, and Lisa Lau's *Re-
Orientalism and Indian Writing in English.*
[3] For a key example of crafting a contemporary canon of Indian texts written in English, see
Salman Rushdie's introduction to the edited volume *Mirrorwork: 50 Years of Indian Writing
1947-1990* in which the British Indian novelist entirely dismisses vernacular literatures and
asserts that "the prose writing—both fiction and non-fiction—created in this period by Indian
writers *working in English*, is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than
most of what has been produced in the 16 'official languages' of India" and calls it "the most
valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books" (viii). The text also appears in
the June 23 issue of the *New Yorker*—itself an exercise in introducing anglophone writers from
India to the American mainstream—under the telling title "Damme, This is the Oriental Scene
for You!".

stage for their commodification as postcolonial anglophone writers from South Asia. Adiga and

Roy's global and immensely positive critical reception highlights the power dynamics,

hierarchies and discourses structuring what is considered to belong within the postcolonial

canon, a category whose definition is fraught in the first place.[4]

The case of Katherine Boo, an American journalist known for her investigative work, is

similar. Like Sidhwa, Adiga, and Roy, she is also a recognized anglophone writer who produces

for a global audience that is predominantly American. Her nonfiction novel, *Behind the Beautiful

Forevers* was shortlisted for the Samuel Johnson Prize in 2012 and won both the National Book

Award in Nonfiction and the Columbia Journalism Award that same year. The following year the

book was also awarded the prestigious PEN/John Kenneth Galbraith Award. However, she

positions herself differently than the other authors: not as an authentic voice *of* South Asia, but as

an authoritative source *about* the subcontinent. While all four authors foreground the experience

of those who are subjected to the forces of history, Boo's narrative—despite its embedded

journalism, its extensive research, and countless interviews—works its way from the abstract

processes of global capitalism towards its concrete effects rather than the other way around.

Taken together, these texts thus allow us to get a glimpse of the processes at the heart of

what Aijaz Ahmad calls the "emergence of a worldwide capitalist civilization" marked by the

complex political realities of neoliberal globalization (*Communalism* 103). If we are to

understand contemporary postcolonial literature as "a new synthesis that assumes the 'globe for a

theatre,'" we will need a formal analysis which can allow for a broader consideration of

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[4] The journal of *Comparative Literature Studies* dedicated a recent issue to the challenges posed by the study of contemporary South Asian literature. As the editors point out, one section poses this question bluntly: "How 'postcolonial' are contemporary South Asian literatures?" (Singh and Iyer 221). Graham Huggan also provides a good overview of the stakes of this debate in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, as does Ulka Anjaria in her introduction to *A History of the Indian Novel in English*. See also, Anjaria, *Reading India Now: Contemporary Formations in Literature and Popular Culture*.

contemporary realist representation in its own right (Ngũgĩ, *Globalectics* 51). In this context, I expand the theories of realism and the novel formulated by Georg Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin by reading them, with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *globalectically*: that is, spoken from their own historical and social contexts but in relation to a world-literature emerging with the advent of capitalist modernity, whose hyphen is "derived from that of 'world-system'" (Warwick Research Collective 8; hereafter WReC).

In this way, I develop their approaches for reading realism in each of the respective chapters of my dissertation and argue that they provide a theoretical framework that critically expands Jameson's project of *cognitive mapping*. Specifically, Lukács and Bakhtin provide us with the critical vocabulary to understand the *organizing function* of realist narratives and its importance for the historical novel, as I demonstrate in Chapter 1 about Sidhwa's *Cracking India*. In Chapter 2, I draw on both Lukács and Bakhtin to develop an analysis of what I call the *architectonics of social formation*, or in other words, the social mapping function of the contemporary *Bildungsroman* through my reading of Adiga's *White Tiger*. In Chapter 3, I contend with the *novelizing of nonfiction* in Roy's *Walking with the Comrades*, which describes the role that contemporary nonfiction plays in the context of the re-emergence of realism as dominant mode of representation. I also engage with the use of novelistic writing strategies, like *discourse* and *heteroglossia*, that are crucial for mapping lived experience. Lastly, I turn to Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* to examine how social relations are materialized in space through the use of what I call, with Bakhtin, a *neoliberal chronotope*, which I argue represents a return to a classic, realist representation and mapping function that correctly identifies the persistence of industrial capitalism in the contemporary moment.

Mapping (Non-)Fiction: The Shapes of Contemporary Realism

My dissertation is structured into four chapters that, in addition to developing an understanding of realism as a *global* mode of representation, explore how four of the narrative concerns of realism—history, the individual, language, and the production of space—are reflected in the historical novel, the novel of formation (or *Bildungsroman*), the reportage, and the nonfiction novel. I investigate how these respective forms register the complex social totality of neoliberal globalization. In each chapter, I identify the prominent elements that mark each genre as forms of contemporary realism. Expanding on Lukács's and Bakhtin's theories of realism and the novel, I outline how each form participates in Jameson's "project of cognitive mapping," which I argue has to be seen as the very core of contemporary realism if it is to be understood as a global paradigm ("Cognitive Mapping" 356). Through close readings of these various texts, I examine the ways in which contemporary fiction and nonfiction articulate the social totality of a globalized system. I argue that in analyzing the formal origins and aesthetic innovations of these contemporary forms, we can better understand their social function in representing the realities of uneven global development.

The first chapter focuses on the historical novel and examines Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* (1988/1991) as an early example of contemporary realism that anticipates many of its stylistic features and formal trajectories. Through close readings of Sidhwa's novel, I explore the ways in which the text maps out the emergence of the postcolonial nation in narrative terms. In particular, I argue that the *organizing function* of narrative perspective and characterization allows for a postcolonial re-framing of South Asian history that makes history legible as a social process right at a time when "the end of history" was proclaimed by Francis Fukuyama (4). By focusing on how individual experience shapes our perception of history, how history is both

shaped by and *shaping* human beings, and how national narratives are ultimately both narrative constructions and social enactments, I show that the historical novel reveals the present itself as historically contingent, and thus part of a continuous process of global development.

In particular, I suggest that Sidhwa makes strategic use of the first-person narration to map the Partition not as a spontaneous event but as a historic process shaped by class relations in British India. Breaking out of the individual perspective of a first-person narration, Sidhwa's novel opens itself up to a "presentation of history from 'below'" (Lukács, *Historical Novel* 283), which centers on the gendered structures of the colonial-capitalist regime and how these shape the possibilities for the postcolony. In this way, the contemporary historical novel, much like the novel of formation discussed in the second chapter, has acquired a much more global outlook reflective of the complex and intricate interconnections of a global system. *Cracking India* thus represents an example of "cognitive mapping" in so far as Sidhwa traces out the continuities of the past in the present. The following chapters consequently show how the texts of the early 2000s continue on this trajectory, essentially drawing up the "(unrepresentable, imaginary) global social totality that was to have been mapped," which in turn fundamentally depends on a renewed historical understanding of the present (Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping" 356).

The second chapter examines Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), a contemporary novel of formation. It tells the story of a chauffeur who escapes from poverty by killing his employer, stealing money that was intended as a government bribe, and setting up his own company in the south. Narrated in the first person, *White Tiger* is told from the point of view of the chauffeur Balram Halwai, a self-declared "social entrepreneur" (150), whose rags-to-riches story is both a neoliberal *Bildungsroman* and a confessional epistolary novel. Written in the form of letters, the first-person narrator addresses himself to the Chinese Premier, whom he wants to

show the *truth* about India's economic success. Here, Balram's rise to the top—by way of murder and against the social and ideological structures of domination in India—reveals the attendant violence underwriting economic development in the age of neoliberal globalization. The company he subsequently establishes with the stolen money, "White Tiger Drivers," thus stands in for the true drivers of the thriving Indian economy (258).

Similar to my understanding of the historical novel as a unique response to contemporary conditions, I argue that this novel does not simply constitute a derivative contemporary development that appropriates an outdated European form. Instead, it registers a systemic continuity in the cultural mode of production that puts it in a lineage with what is normatively understood to be a literary development of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. This is particularly true in the case of the novel of formation since it still fulfills an identical ideological function: representing the socialization of the individual into the changing conditions associated with the capitalist mode of production. In this, it resembles earlier European instantiations of the *Bildungsroman* in the ways in which it critically registers the alienation that comes with being integrated into a global market machine as a replaceable cog. Texts like Adiga's *White Tiger*, in other words, deal directly with the often violent process of neoliberal subject formation.

In the third and fourth chapter, in contrast, I discuss how contemporary nonfiction forms have adapted both realism and the novel as a result of dealing with the increasing gap between the official narrative of neoliberal development as a success story and the reality of the violence concomitant to capitalist development. The first of these texts, Arundhati Roy's *Walking with the Comrades* (2011), is a reportage about Maoist guerillas in the so-called Red Corridor in India which draws on standard travelogue motifs in its passionate account of resistance against the Indian State's expropriation of Adivasi (Indian First Nations) for the purpose of resource

exploitation. Like colonial travel writing and earlier orientalist discourses, the contemporary reportage often produces spaces for consumption within a global hierarchy. But whereas the travelogue has always been "primarily concerned with the production of cultural difference," I understand both the travelogue and reportage as having more recently "adjusted [themselves] to contemporary realities under the conditions of neoliberal globalization" (Bériault, "Navigating an Unequal World" 391).

In this sense, Roy's reportage documents the direct and violent exploitation of the land and its inhabitants by the neoliberal Indian state. Her reportage on Maoist guerillas, in fact, makes a case for the violence of the Maoists as a counter to the violence of the state. Roy's text is primarily concerned not just with registering the structures of domination and exploitation which undergird the socio-economic processes of post-1990 India, but with the responses it elicits from those that stand in the way of neoliberal globalization.

While the reportage, like other nonfiction genres such as the travelogue, is often overlooked in scholarship on realism, I propose a reading of Roy's reportage that underscores its privileged access to the realities of globalization. Roy's use of first-person narration, I argue, claims an access to the realities of global inequality, which have strategically been marginalized in the grand narrative of globalization, by opening itself up to the voices of the marginalized. I suggest that the shared feature of gaining consciousness of the totality of the world-system via a first-person narrator—in Roy's case as a witness/reporter, in the case of Sidhwa's historical novel as a first-person narrator remembering a historical event in personal terms—gestures towards a broader realist paradigm which distinguishes itself from its earlier incarnations by claiming a knowledge of a global totality from a decidedly individual standpoint.

The last chapter investigates Katherine Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity* (2012), which eschews this first-person narration in its entirety and instead draws on interviews and embedded reporting in order to explore the collective experience of those masses of people disenfranchised by globalization as well as the spatial manifestations of social relations that frame their experience. Boo's nonfiction novel shows the realities of slum life and the impossibility of escape, exemplified by Abdul, a garbage sorter accused of a crime he did not commit, and Asha, a woman who tries to rise through the ranks only to realize that with a position of power in the slums comes participation in corruption. Boo, like Roy, is interested in understanding what globalization means for those who stand in its path. The nonfiction novel, much like the reportage and nonfiction more broadly, thus provides an affective registration of social history as a subjectively lived process, a taking shape of form on the level of content and vice versa.[5] It is aware of the limits of any one eyewitness account, yet uses this knowledge in order to position the various accounts of events in the nonfiction novel in relation to a collective narrative and to a larger social context. Rather than offering a purely naturalist representation of subaltern histories, which rely on description without a broader historical context, the nonfiction novel thus narrates a social totality in which small stories and grand narratives shape and constitute one another. Like Roy, Boo refuses to follow the strict dichotomy between economic and social determinants and explores what Ranajit Guha and the Subaltern Studies group called "the small drama and fine detail of social existence" (36). In linking the individual stories of the slum dwellers in her story with the larger narratives that

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[5] Raymond Williams refers to such an affective registration as "*structures of feeling*": "a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which … has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics" (*Marxism* 132).

surround them, Boo explores the space they inhabit not just as a manifestation of neoliberal globalization in the abstract, but as the concretely lived experience of so-called development.

Uneven Narratives: Neoliberal Globalization and the Anglophone Imaginary

My dissertation joins recent debates about literary aesthetics in the context of global anglophone studies. These debates have sought to address the limited engagement with realism in postcolonial studies and the simultaneous privileging of modernist texts, particularly in the postcolonial canon. My focus on realism thus adds to a limited scholarly corpus of postcolonial literary studies that re-engages the realist mode of representation. Interventions, such as *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* by the Warwick Research Collective, have criticized a conception of world-literature that overlooks the expansive global networks which systemically link national literatures in a process that produces both difference and sameness simultaneously.

My project also joins Jameson in developing an understanding of globalization as the "*multinational* stage of capitalism" ("Notes" 54; emphasis added), in which the global system may *appear* to be transnational, while in fact being predicated on the (combined and uneven) competition between specific national economies. I contend that this logic of national competition and development results in an increasing emphasis on *individual* development in cultural responses to globalization. In this context, it is particularly useful to focus on precisely those narratives of globalization in which "*the story of the private individual destiny*" features prominently (Jameson, "Third-World Literature" 69).[6] My investigation engages, then, with the

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[6] While the concept of the "national allegory" informs my project, I do not intervene in the debate itself. The discussion surrounding Jameson's essay on "Third-World Literature" focuses on his claim that "*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" (69). Aijaz Ahmad famously

question of the relationship between globalization and literary form in the context of South Asia.

I have therefore put two novels which register globalization through the mediating lens of the individual in conversation with two works of nonfiction, that is, texts from a genre which, in common sense terms, is often understood to be un- or less mediated. This combination of fictional and nonfictional genres represents a strategic point of departure which enables me to think about realism in the age of neoliberal globalization in both *individual* and *social* terms.

In other words, as Suman Gupta, quoting Susie O'Brien and Imre Szeman, points out, the "fundamental entanglement" of globalization and literature still remains to be studied (O'Brien and Szeman 604 qtd. in Gupta 62). Additionally, while the relationship between literature and globalization has been picked up in general terms in the Euro-American academy, it has mostly been studied in the social sciences in the context of South Asia by authors like Rupal Oza or Leela Fernandes. More recent works which read postcolonial texts in decidedly aesthetic terms and in the context of larger, global structures—such as Gupta's *Globalization and Literature*, Kanishka Chowdhury's *The New India: Citizenship, Subjectivity, and Economic Liberalization*, Auritro Majumder's *Insurgent Imaginations: World Literature and the Periphery*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Globalectics*, and both Monica Popescu's *South African Literature Beyond the Cold War* and her latest book, *At Penpoint: African literatures, Postcolonial Studies, and the Cold War*—are the exception.

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took issue with the totalizing nature of this claim in "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" which is reproduced in *In Theory*. Others, however, like Neil Lazarus have more recently insisted that both Jameson's national allegory and the term "Third World" are fundamental concepts for materialist approaches within the field of postcolonial theory. See, for example, the second chapter of Lazarus's *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (89-113) and the interventions by Prasad, Sprinker, Szeman, McGonegal as well as the more recent article by Auritro Majumder, "The Case for Peripheral Aesthetics: Fredric Jameson, the World-System and Cultures of Emancipation."

Chowdhury's *The New India* and Majumder's *Insurgent Imaginations*, in particular, stand out as some of the only studies of anglophone writing from South Asia that attempt a pairing of literary with nonliterary forms of representation. At the same time, recent studies, like *Global Literary Journalism* by Richard Keeble and John Tulloch or Doug Underwood's *The Undeclared War between Journalism and Fiction*, point to the exciting potential for expanded analyses of nonfiction forms like the reportage or the travelogue.[7] However, such a project should not be limited to a study of the formal elements of nonfiction texts alone. Rather, it should emphasize the global context in which the text is embedded, its relationship to other literary forms, and, most importantly, the kinds of discourses which the text actively participates and intervenes in. Pairing the novels of this project with the nonfiction texts by Roy and Boo thus allows for a historical-materialist study which outlines the specific conditions and pressures that these texts, *qua* texts, register and respond to.[8]

A significant aspect of my exploration of contemporary realism is then the discussion of *nonfiction* alongside more normative literary forms like the *historical novel* and the *Bildungsroman*. In view of the explosive growth of nonfiction in the wider context of anglophone writing over the last two decades, it is remarkable that these forms have not received more critical attention. In the case of a writer like Arundhati Roy, it is especially striking that her nonfiction oeuvre, which consists of a large body of book-length studies as well as countless

[7] On the postcolonial travelogue, in particular, and how it functions as a radical form of critique that challenges the attendant violence of globalization, see Bériault, "'I guess that's another place they've ruined for us': A Spatial Struggle against the Development of Commercial Tourism in Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*."

[8] The focus on the reciprocal relationship of form and content allows me to examine the ways in which globalization and literature both are shaped by and shaping each other. Criticism in the field of postcolonial literature has engaged with this link in limited ways. Here, Keya Ganguly and Mrinali Chakravorty stand out as well as Deepika Bahri's *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics, and Postcolonial Literature*. Snehal Shingavi, for example, cautions us to think "beyond the current impasse produced by postcolonial theory in an era of transnational capitalism that too frequently forgets, underestimates, or represses the national in the transnational" (5).

essays and articles, has not been taken up in literary studies in the same way as her two novels,

The God of Small Things and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*—especially considering that

nonfiction represented the entire output of her work over the twenty years between the

publication of the first and second novel.[9] But Roy is only the tip of the iceberg: this narrative

reportage style of writing has become one of the major literary exports of anglophone South

Asian literature. There are countless others—among them Boo's *Behind the Beautiful*

Forevers—such as Rana Dasgupta's *Capital: A Portrait of Delhi in the Twenty-First Century*

(2014), Siddhartha Deb's *The Beautiful and the Damned: A Portrait of the New India* (2011), or

Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night: A Frontline Memoir of Life, Love and War in Kashmir* (2010).

Recent studies like Graham Huggan's *Extreme Pursuits: Travel/writing in an Age of*

Globalization and Debbie Lisle's *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* point

further to the exciting potential for expanded analyses of nonfiction forms.

Rethinking Realism: A Framework for the Study of a Global Anglophone Aesthetic

Throughout this investigation of formal realism, I examine contemporary forms in view of

disparate realist traditions—distributed across time and space—to illuminate realism as a multi-

faceted aesthetic mode that has been and is responding to an uneven capitalist world-system. My

project therefore takes up the conception of realism as a representational mode that is

simultaneously aesthetic and cognitive. Developing the insights of Lukács and Bakhtin, in

particular, beyond the Euro-American academy, I seek to globalize our understandings of realism

as an aesthetic mode. Suggesting that realism is a global representational paradigm with multiple

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[9] Her nonfiction essays, produced over those twenty years, have recently been published in a collected edition under the title *My Seditious Heart* (2019). To give a sense of how her nonfiction writing relates to her two novels: the collected volume of essays is longer than both novels combined.

locales of (re-)emergence, my project joins recent scholarly trends in postcolonial and world

literary studies to rethink "realism outside of Europe" (Anjaria, *Realism* 9).

 With Jameson, I view "the discovery or invention of a radically new form" in parallel

with "the discovery or invention of radically new social relations and ways of living in the

world" ("Notes" 62). In other words, I conceive of form as an abstraction of social relations. As

discussed above, my engagement with realism focuses on the *historical novel*, the *novel of*

formation, as well as nonfiction forms such as the *reportage* and the *nonfiction novel*. I am

interested in these particular literary genres as they are transnational forms implicated in a global

process of class formation in the contemporary moment. Specifically, I focus on four elements—

the individual, history, language, and the production of space—that allow me to think about the

ways in which realist representation registers a transnational process of class formation which is

simultaneously economic and ideological. Next to the historical narrativization of modernity and

the socialization of the individual, it is especially the ideological production of social discourse

and public space that implicates realism in the formation of a global imaginary. The ways in

which all of these categories manifest the social totality at the level of the narrative is crucial for

helping us understand the fundamental relationship between reality and realism: realist

representation fulfills a *mapping function*, which Jameson calls "cognitive mapping," aimed at

representing the social complexities of the modern world-system ("Cognitive Mapping" 347).

Thus, I identify the structural continuities within the *long durée* development of the capitalist

mode of production by illuminating what Raymond Williams refers to as "an essential homology

or correspondence of structures" that describes the relationship between modes of production and

cultural development, between previous instantiations of realism and the forms it now takes—in

the contemporary moment in general and in the context of global anglophone literary production

in particular ("Base" 33).

In this introduction, I thus aim to establish the framework necessary for a reading which

globalizes the study of realism. Drawing in particular on Lukács's and Bakhtin's theorizations of

realism and the novel, I argue that there is, in fact, no such thing as a coherent European realist

tradition—at least not one that can be thought in isolation from or independently of a broader

tradition of realist writing that takes shape over the course of several centuries and in response to

capitalism as a global mode of production. Here, I mark the link between mode of production

and realism as an aesthetic paradigm. My approach emphasizes the structural logic that has

shaped (and continues to shape) realist representation, without collapsing its historically specific

instantiations. In this, I follow Jameson's concept of a *singular modernity*, in which the global

development of capitalism is not understood as a uniform development or one that can be

isolated, but as an uneven and totalizing systemic change that affects the entire planet.

My project makes its intervention specifically through the study of form, focusing on the

aesthetic response of literary texts to global conditions of combined and uneven development.

Rather than understanding the global novel as a cultural export of the colonizing country, I

emphasize that the novel is an organic response to changing social relations and material

conditions, and a point where the process of capitalist modernization brings together the local

and global. In this sense, the global novel is in each instance not just the result of a "radically

new zone … of maximally close contact between the represented object and contemporary

reality in all its inconclusiveness," as Bakhtin would put it, but itself newly radical in the ways it

responds to the changing material conditions of modernity and in the ways it begins to fulfill

ideological functions such as the socialization of the modern individual or citizen-subject ("Epic

and Novel" 31). This, in fact, does not deny the homologous evolution of form—which understands evolution in terms of a spatial distribution of fixed objects—but rather suggests that our understanding of how forms develop in a globalized system is, as of yet, incomplete.

In this sense, I argue that the comparative study of form which focuses on the four elements that mark realism as a modern representational paradigm—namely *history*, the *individual*, *language*, and the *production of space*—actually allows us to locate the common point of evolutionary origin not in the forms themselves, but in the material conditions which shape them. While it is common to characterize formal similarity as resulting from what we might call the "traveling" of forms (through reception, adaptation, or other forms of literary import/export), my project contends that the shared point of origin of such forms as the novel of formation, the historical novel, and the travelogue lies in fact in the conditions of a *singular modernity*. This puts me in conversation with both Edward Said's and Franco Moretti's conceptions of how both forms and theories spread globally. Identifying the ideological functions of contemporary realist texts through formal analysis thus allows me to unravel the structural logic that has shaped global realism as a representational paradigm. I propose that realism has not emerged as a singular representational mode in one specific geographic location and at one specific point in history, which was subsequently exported elsewhere. Instead, I argue that it is still very much actively developing precisely because it is a representational paradigm which is—like capitalism itself—only presently emerging in its mature and globalized form.

Realism as Traveling Theory: Bakhtin, Lukács, and "World-Literature with a Hyphen"
In the following, I will conclude my introduction by exploring the idea of *global realism* by expanding on Edward Said's concept of "Traveling Theory." In particular, I argue that to read

Lukács and Bakhtin globalectically—and to read globalectically *with* Lukács and Bakhtin—we must first develop a materialist conception of Said's traveling theory that allows us to understand how *contemporary realism* fits into a larger, global conception of realism as a response to periods of increasing socio-economic disparity and class conflict—in other words, as a response to those times when the expansionist drives of capitalism reach their (neo-)imperialist peaks.

In a sense, the kind of aesthetic analysis necessary to open up the discussion of postcolonial texts to a global context is what Ngũgĩ calls *globalectic reading*, or a mode of analysis that reads "any text from whatever times and places to allow its content and themes [to] form a free conversation with other texts of one's time and place" (*Globalectics* 60). But even more than placing it within its own historical contexts and conversations this means "allow[ing] it to speak to our own cultural present even as we speak to it from our own cultural present" (60). Globalectical reading, in other words, allows us to develop a formal analysis of postcolonial anglophone literature beyond approaches which views these texts either only in isolation, as if they stood separate from global developments, or only in terms of the global, as if their specific socio-historical context was irrelevant. It focuses on establishing and exploring what both *links* and *distinguishes* contemporary texts in the context of combined and uneven development.

Expanding on this idea of reading *literature* globalectically, I suggest that it is productive to read *theory* in this way as well. In the following, I therefore re-frame the theories of realism and the novel formulated by Lukács and Bakhtin as an analytical approach that, while focused on and developed in a (comparative) European context, in fact remains useful for the analysis of contemporary global anglophone literature precisely because it continues to identify general trends and tendencies of capitalist world-literature as they have developed (and continue to develop) *within* the complex and broad category of European literature. It should be added that

the category of European literature is itself fraught, to say the least. As the Warwick Research Collective points out, any attempt of turning the contradictory development between (and inside of) European nations into a coherent narrative "mystifies the history of Europe, as well as, of course, the relations between Europe and the rest of the world" (37). What is more, both Bakhtin and Lukács themselves occupy a similarly strange position in the canon of European literary theory. Lukács, for example, a Hungarian Marxist working within the Soviet academy on the other side of the Iron Curtain—while later integrated into what Perry Anderson refers to as a project that "can today *retrospectively* be called 'Western Marxism'" (25; emphasis added)—is already a complicated case, and Bakhtin, born in the Russian Empire and a prolific writer on aesthetics and literary theory in the Soviet Union, stands even more clearly outside of a framework that could be accused of being "Western."

Rather than being applicable only in the analysis of European literatures, Lukács and Bakhtin thus allow us to develop an analysis of a socio-historically specific aesthetic response to the "emergence of a worldwide capitalist civilization" (Ahmad, *Communalism* 103), which has in fact *continued* its long and contradictory process from the nineteenth century up to the present day. In other words, it is precisely because they discuss realism and the novel as terms for the comparative study of literature during the height of capitalist industrialization in Europe that they are relevant once again for the neoliberal moment—defined as it is by deregulation, privatization, and the violent integration of formerly socialist economies into a global market. In a sense, the period that Lukács and Bakhtin discuss in their writings broadly covers the time frame when capitalism truly came into itself as a global mode of production. If we follow the broad periodization of Eric Hobsbawm, they essentially discuss the various literatures of a period which extends from the late eighteenth century to World War I. My contention is that, in the

wake of the period identified in the last volume of Hobsbawm's series, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, as essentially ranging from World War I to the fall of the Soviet Union, we have not so much entered a new, neoliberal age as *returned* to the beginning of a cycle of capitalist development that is structurally similar in its monopolistic tendencies to previous moments of capitalist development. In this sense, we have never reached beyond imperialism as what Lenin called capitalism's "highest historical stage of development" (13). Instead, after a brief period of contention after World War II, the 1990s have seen the rollback of the gains made against imperialism by decolonization, social democracy, and socialism and thus returned us squarely to Hobsbawm's *Age of Empire*.

Jed Esty has similarly suggested that it might be productive to think, for example, about the ways in which Lukács's "theories of the novel can be extended and extrapolated beyond his own moment and into our own" (366). This, Esty argues, would allow us to "turn Lukács against Lukács and rethink the modernist novel not as a testament to late bourgeois inwardness and decadence but as an art form partially determined by objective social conditions in the Age of Empire" (366). However, I argue that we must extend this approach beyond merely re-*imagining* Lukács's (or Bakhtin's) views on realism, naturalism and modernism for our contemporary moment. Instead, we must re-*visit* them as *theories of literature under capitalism* that have not lost their relevance *precisely because we are still producing literature under capitalism today*. The conditions may have been *altered*, but they have not *changed*, at least not fundamentally.

To develop this argument, I now turn to Said's concept of the "traveling theory," which allows us to understand *capitalist globalization* itself as the mediating instance of literary production in the contemporary moment. Both with and against Said, outlining a materialist conception of literary form helps clarify the place Bakhtin and Lukács can take in the

contemporary analysis of world-literature despite—and maybe because of—their original, global trajectories and outlook. I read Said's two essays, "Traveling Theory" and "Traveling Theory Reconsidered," as two moments in a dialectic process of how not just theories but literary forms travel. In the original essay, Said suggests that "ideas and theories travel" from their point of socio-historical origin ("Traveling Theory" 226), but are progressively diluted and sterilized the further they travel in time and space. In his rejoinder, however, he re-evaluates his initial reading of Lukács by arguing that some ideas, rather than losing their critical sharpness, actually flourish in a new environment, as in the case of Frantz Fanon who applied a Left-Hegelian framework in an anti-colonial context.

Turning the historical materialism of Lukács *against* Lukács and Bakhtin thus allows us to conceptually grasp the continuities between colonialism and neocolonialism, between imperialist expansion and neoliberal globalization. Understanding the links and interconnections of globalization and literature in the realm of aesthetics in this way becomes very useful for examining the post-1990s moment of English writing in India: "this is indeed the relationship of formal and cultural change to … its social 'determinants,' which present a radically altered situation … to which a fresh and unprecedented aesthetic response is demanded, generally by way of formal, structural and linguistic invention" (Jameson, "Modernism" 156-57).

I am thus arguing for reading Lukács and Bakhtin not for a theory of European realism, but *for the theory of a global realism in its European instantiation* and thus as a theory of global realism *as such*. This allows us to identify the continuities between classic imperialism and neoliberal globalization in the formal elements which contemporary global realism at the same time shares with earlier realisms and develops far beyond them. What matters then is not so much their point of origin or the ways in which forms travel, but the way in which various kinds

of realism have been shaped in similar yet different ways by literary production in a capitalist world-system predicated on combined and uneven development. This pushes us to continue in the same vein as Esty, while at the same time allowing us to push beyond his discussion of Lukács. For Esty remains bound by Eurocentrism—not because of Lukács, but because of the way he frames Lukács's theories. While in his reading, Lukács—in allegedly ignoring both modernism and imperialism—proved to be unable to "conceptualize the European novel as a global form" (367), he also suggests that we therefore need to

> retain some of [Lukács's] basic methodological and critical insights in novel theory but peel them away from the guiding political premise of *History and Class Consciousness*, i.e., that the proletariat would be the metasubject of any aesthetically progressive literature in the twentieth century. (367)

But as Jameson suggests, the issue with modernist fiction is not simply its ignorance towards the "'dépossession du monde' of the colonized peoples," but that it is a response to a material "concealment" of an increasingly globalized division of labor ("Modernism" 156; 157).

The problem with Esty's approach, then, is precisely that he dismisses *tout court* Lukács's insights regarding a subaltern working class agency by dismissing *History and Class Consciousness*. To the contrary, we cannot make sense of Lukács's theory of realism and the novel without *History and Class Consciousness.* It should also be added that the assertion that imperialism represents a "blind spot" for Lukács is not just not true, but blatantly false (Esty 367). In *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of his Thought*—Lukács's contemporary response to misreadings and misrepresentations of *History and Class Consciousness*—outlines clearly how his theory of class consciousness fits squarely into "*the theory of the concrete world situation created by imperialism*" (*Lenin* 42). Lukács, in fact, dedicates an entire chapter to explaining

how imperialism is both the result of and factor in the global development of capitalism (*Lenin* 38-57). Thus, if we want to understand how reality is mediated in ideological and literary production, it becomes essential to take into account Lukács's views on mediation and representation as developed in *History and Class Consciousness*. What Lukács had laid out in his meditation on class consciousness was a basic theory of a perception structured by capitalist class society, and it is this theory of perception which allowed Fanon to recognize in it the Manichean logic of the colonial situation.[10] Lukács effectively developed a theory of how subaltern consciousness develops out of the struggle between the materially structured experience of reality for the working class and the ideologically constructed reality of the bourgeoisie.

It is thus not by dismissing *History and Class Consciousness* that we can expand Lukács's framework, but by reading it alongside such texts as *The Theory of the Novel* and his later texts on realism that we can develop Lukács beyond Lukács. As Jameson points out, "the earlier works [by Lukács] proved to be fully comprehensible only in the light of the later ones" (*Marxism* 163), and even more so, I would argue that the later works can only be fully understood in light of the earlier ones. Similarly, instead of attempting to "conceptualize the European novel as a global form" (Esty 367), we therefore have to understand the way Lukács and Bakhtin conceptualized the European novel as the *European novel under capitalism*. Only then can we truly conceptualize the novel *as* a global form which has historically found its

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[10] Said makes this link by pairing Fanon's dialectical approach to the colonial situation with the logic of realist representation developed by Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness*: "The Manicheanism Fanon describes as separating the clean, well-lighted colonial city and the vile, disease-ridden darkness of the *casbah* recalls the alienation of Lukács's reified world. And Fanon's whole project is first to illuminate and then to animate the separation between colonizer and colonized (subject and object) in order that what is false, brutalizing, and historically determined about the relationship might become clear, stimulate action, and lead to the overthrow of colonialism itself" (Said, "Traveling Theory Reconsidered" 445-46).

expression in Europe in nineteenth century realism. I am essentially arguing that reading Lukács and Bakhtin's theories of realism and the novel in terms of a historically concrete understanding of the *novel in Europe* allows us to ask whether, in fact, a unified theory of the *global novel form* is at all possible.

This all leads me to the question of *how*, especially in debates about world-literature, literary form and aesthetic paradigms are framed. One of the approaches that has figured prominently in literary theory is Franco Moretti's theory of how forms travel. More so than Esty, however, Moretti cannot offer a way to fully escape a Eurocentric conception of the novel. There are two related reasons which become apparent when reading his two essays on the "Conjectures of World Literature," namely his anti-utopian utopianism and his idealist conception of form. The former he illustrates in his response to criticisms of the original essay. In "More Conjectures," for example, he responds to the critique that his initial essay was shaped by a Eurocentric conception of creative productivity, and elaborates that in his view he is merely describing a relationship between center and periphery in which the "monopoly of creation" he observes is the result of the fact that "[c]ultures from the centre have more resources to pour into innovation (literary and otherwise), and are thus more likely to produce it" (76). He consequently dismisses this criticism as a confusion between theory and practice: "Theories will never abolish inequality: they can only hope to explain it" (77). But this only serves to obfuscate the issue: His critics point out that his theory undermines a genuine historical-materialist analysis of neo-imperialist relations by essentially accepting these relations as natural (rather than historically contingent). The critique is not that his theory cannot do away with inequality; it is that his theory ties cultural innovation to economic productivity.

This leads to the second point of contention, namely a conception of form which relies too much on a static model. Towards the end of his original "Conjectures" essay, Moretti elaborates on what he sees as the two theories of the "diffusion of the modern novel," the tree model and the wave model (59):

The tree describes the passage from unity to diversity: one tree, with many branches: from Indo-European, to dozens of different languages. The wave is the opposite: it observes uniformity engulfing an initial diversity: Hollywood films conquering one market after another (or English swallowing language after language). Trees need geographical *discontinuity* (in order to branch off from each other, languages must first be separated in space, just like animal species); waves dislike barriers, and thrive on geographical *continuity* (from the viewpoint of a wave, the ideal world is a pond). Trees and branches are what nation-states cling to; waves are what markets do. (67)

This general notion is quite useful for the comparative project, but the last sentence also reveals its structural problematics. If the tree model depends on nation-states, whereas waves depend on markets, what is overlooked is the fundamental complicity of nation-states and the market in the production of a capitalist world-system that is, as Moretti himself rightly emphasizes, "simultaneously one, and unequal" (56). Discontinuity and continuity are not independent of one another, they serve the same function and are both ruled by the logic of capital in the same way that development and underdevelopment are.

This is precisely the criticism put forth by the Warwick Research Collective in *Combined and Uneven Development*. They point out that Moretti's conception of the spread of literary form cannot do without the idea that, in the relationship between center and periphery, dispersal goes *only* outwards—from the former to the latter—making the spread of ideas and literary forms

essentially a "flow in one direction only" (WReC 56). Moretti does defend himself against this

general charge in his response as well, but not very convincingly. In fact, his doubling down on

the claim, if anything, reveals the problem with this particular part of his argument:

> What I know about European novels, for instance, suggests that hardly any forms "of
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> consequence" don't move at all; that movement from *one* periphery to *another* (without
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> passing through the centre) is almost unheard of; that movement from the periphery to *the*
>
> centre is less rare, but still quite unusual, while that from *the* centre to the periphery is by
>
> far the most frequent. (Moretti, "More Conjectures" 75-76; emphasis added)

The veiled judgement of "forms 'of consequence'" aside, what stands out is that in his

conception of literary form, everything must by necessity flow through the center. Hence he

speaks of *the center*, but allows for *multiple peripheries*. He even grants them the possibility of a

dialogue outside of the center, but dismisses the creative possibilities of such a conversation.

With one center and multiple peripheries, however, it seems as if those terms really just function

as euphemisms for the flattening categories Stuart Hall called "the West and the Rest" (276).

As the Warwick Research Collective points out, in analyzing the violence of colonial and

imperialist imposition, this point has a partial validity. But they also, correctly, argue against

Moretti—clearly drawing on David Harvey's broader conception of shifting imperial centers that

are the hallmark of capitalism's "uneven geographical development" (*New Imperialism* 103)—

that there is a much more complicated logic at work:

> It is not only that cores do not always remain cores, or peripheries peripheries (the world-
>
> system is the site of ceaseless struggle for power). It is also that in the literary and
>
> cultural spheres, at least, "incorporation" of foreign forms—accommodation,
>
> assimilation, even indigenisation—is altogether routine in the "core" sectors also: literary

forms and models developed in (semi-)peripheral locations are often pirated by core

writers—appropriated, translated, generally "borne across"—sometimes scoring

themselves very significantly into "core" productions and styles (WReC 56).

The argument of the Warwick Research Collective's chapter on "The Question of Peripheral

Realism" thus makes a convincing case that literary production produces formal innovations in

liminal spaces and (semi-)peripheral zones. Unevenness is not simply a matter reserved for the

non-core countries, it is a systemic affliction: "the unfolding of combined and uneven

development produces unevenness throughout the world capitalist system, and not merely across

the divide represented by the international division of labour" (57).

This allows us to productively expand Moretti's argument beyond the idea of a wave-like

dispersal from the center outwards, where the novel is slowly being diluted the further it strays

from the center. What we are looking for is a theory of the novel that applies still in what

Jameson calls "the multinational stage of capitalism, of which globalization is an intrinsic

feature" ("Notes" 54). Interestingly, and here we once again turn to the concept of *traveling*

theory, Edward Said too includes both Lukács and the novel in his original argument. By the

time he picks the idea up again in "Traveling Theory Reconsidered," however, his position has

changed to the point where he considers the complete opposite possibility, namely what he calls

"transgressive theory" (439): rather than losing its force, Said now allows for

an alternative mode of traveling theory, one that actually developed *away* from its

original formulation, but [in the case of Lukács] instead of becoming domesticated in the

terms of Lukács's desire for respite and resolution, flames out, so to speak, restates and

reaffirms its own inherent tensions by moving to another site. (438)

Yet Said, much like Moretti, still conceives of the travel of ideas as a one-directional movement, even in his reconsideration. Here, he cannot allow Fanon, for example, to develop a conception of reification in the process of writing *The Wretched of the Earth* without having to "speculate" that "Fanon seems to have read Lukács's book" (Said, "Traveling Theory Reconsidered" 445). It is for this reason, he suggests, that Fanon's "Manicheanism," the division of colonial society and colonial space along racial lines, thus "recalls the alienation of Lukács's reified world" (445). What this, however, risks to ignore is the fact that Lukács and Fanon inhabit the same world-system.[11] Both of them are formulating theories of difference and alienation that are similar not simply because the one borrowed from the other, but because they are both working within the same framework, Marxist dialectics, and because they are both trying to theorize various aspects of the same global mode of production, that is, capitalism in both the imperial European center and in its colonial periphery. Of course, it is entirely possible (even likely) that Fanon read Lukács. But it is just as conceivable that he simply arrived at the same conclusions by developing his own Left-Hegelian framework appropriate to the colonial situation.

All things considered, Lukács's writings on realism as well as his work on Marxist theory, reification, and class consciousness—all of which are intertwined to the point where viewing them as independent from one another is already missing the point—may well carry the appearance of being Eurocentric. But for Lukács, of all people, we should allow for a distinction between form and content and take a moment to consider how they relate in this case. The

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[11] The criticism I am putting forward here, in a sense, follows Ahmad's critique of Fredric Jameson in the debate over Jameson's "Third World Literatures" essay. Of course, while the Ahmad-Jameson debate is in many ways very different, Ahmad's main charge was that Jameson was not being dialectic in the way he conceptualized "Third World literature" as a stable category. There is no such clear cut dichotomy between the center and the periphery, between Lukács's Europe and Fanon's colonial context. What Said ignores is that there is a dialectic link, namely the exploitative relationship of the global division of labor, where difference and sameness are both produced by the capitalist world-system.

question then is not whether Lukács is Eurocentric or even whether we have to defend him against this charge. We have to ask rather—if we grant Lukács the development of a general theory of realism—why his theory has proven compelling enough to be engaged by readers from a wide variety of theoretical traditions time and again.

Where for Moretti it appears that the novel form, as a Saidian "traveling theory," emanates from the center to the periphery, I propose that literary form—while of course not developing entirely autonomously from literary traditions—develops in each instance in its respective locale as a unique response to the changing historical and material conditions. Anglophone novels from South Asia are not therefore derivative of English novels, but have developed as an instance of the novel form by merging literary traditions—local and global—in response to undergoing a structurally similar bourgeois development that Lukács observed in the context of the European novel. In other words, the novel is never a new invention, but always newly inventive. What is similar in terms of contemporary global realism and earlier instances of realist writing is not a shared point of origin, but a shared trajectory: the fact that they are all forms shaped by literary production in a capitalist world-system: they are all attempts at mediating what Raymond Williams refers to as the "crisis of experience" that is the hallmark of capitalism (*English Novel* 11).

Framing the issue this way allows for a historical-materialist reading of Lukács and Bakhtin that contextualizes their theories by recognizing not just the tradition they are affiliated with, but the historical and material conditions that shaped them. Their analysis of realism then is European in terms of content, but the form they are investigating, namely the bourgeois novel, is much more complex than this. This is especially important in reading Lukács, who focuses on the class character of the novel. If the bourgeoisie he is writing about is a transnational class,

then its experience must be (at least partially) also transnational. Lukács's study itself was already not focused on any one European national tradition, but attempted a comparative reading of several literatures (German, French, English, Russian) in order to investigate what he broadly refers to as critical or bourgeois realism. His analysis thus turns out to pick up where classic theorizations of imperialism like Lenin or Luxemburg left off, and anticipated later developments. As Harvey points out, in order to understand the historical continuities between older forms of imperialism and its contemporary forms under the regime of neoliberal globalization, we need to view "the imperialism that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century as 'the first stage in political rule of the bourgeoisie rather than the last stage of capitalism' as Lenin depicted it" (Arendt 32 qtd. in Harvey, *New Imperialism* 127). What Lukács thus theorized, while generally misunderstood as European realism, was in fact the realism of an emerging class that is global and transnational in its very definition and quite literal dis-location. And much like the class itself, the forms that try to mediate its transnational experience, would have to be transnational in scope and shape as well.

It is at this point that we can return, by way of conclusion, to Bakhtin and Lukács as theorists of world-literature with a "hyphen" (WReC 8). If we grant that—as Auritro Majumder recently pointed out, and as I have suggested above—the "present age of globalization resembles, ideationally, an earlier twentieth-century epoch of imperialism," we also have to consider why certain forms, like the novel, and certain modes of representation, like realism, have not at all lost their relevance (Majumder, "Gayatri Spivak" 16). In this context, reading Lukács and Bakhtin today allows us to understand the complicated relationship between the contemporary global novel and the realist texts of nineteenth century Europe in terms of the similarities and differences between the age of imperialism and that of globalization. In fact, if

we grasp imperialism itself "*as* the globalization of capital" (17; emphasis added), rather than thinking of globalization as a separate developmental process, we begin to see the continuity in the development of global capitalism emerge clearly as the fundamental framework of world-literature.

CHAPTER 1

Imagining Communities:

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* (1991) and the Novelization of History

Introduction

When Bapsi Sidhwa's Partition novel was published in 1988 in the UK under the title

Ice-Candy-Man, and in 1991 in the United States as *Cracking Indi*a, a "boom" in English language

novels was already well under way.[12] Yet, Sidhwa's *Cracking India* stands out precisely because

her novel does not fit in squarely with the types of works that were accepted into an increasingly

broad canon of postcolonial literature. This is partially owed to the fact that it is the first major

historical novel dealing with Partition in the contemporary moment in English, especially with

regards to a Pakistani experience (Didur 70).[13]

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[12] See Roanne L. Kantor's "A Case of Exploding Markets: Latin American and South Asian Literary 'Booms'" for a recent conceptualization of these seemingly sudden changes in the canon. She argues that the various literary booms that introduce regional literatures, for example, from Latin America or South Asia, into a global literary market operate essentially along three axes: "adopting stylistic innovations and subject matters" with a global (read: Euro-American) appeal, changing "economic and political conditions," and the matter of "curators" who shape consumption (467-68).

[13] The 1990s generally saw a turn towards feminist histories of Partition that attempted to break the silence surrounding the traumatic event. In this context, the work of Ritu Menon and Veena Das, co-founders of the feminist publishing house Kali for Women which operated from 1984 to 2003, stands out. See *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* by Menon as well as

But, more importantly, its publication in 1991 in the United States—especially under the new title which immediately frames the novel in national terms—anticipates an increasing turn away from the modernist aesthetic of writers like Rushdie, towards a distinctly realist aesthetic that seeks to map the fault lines of the postcolonial nation in the contemporary period by returning to its foundational moment.[14] To trace this emergent trajectory of a resurgent realism, I combine Mikhail Bakhtin's discussions of the *novel*—the only genre equipped to map the social totality of an ever evolving modernity, which he calls "the openended present" ("Epic" 7)—with Georg Lukács's historical-materialist theorization of the *historical novel* as a popular form of capitalist modernity.[15] I argue that this theorization of the (historical) novel is crucial for understanding how and why contemporary realism begins anew a continuous process of re-visiting national histories and re-imagining the past in light of changing historical circumstances. In this sense, I read "[t]he reality represented" in a contemporary historical novel like Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, just as in the

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"Moral Orientations to Suffering," *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*, and most recently *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* by Das. Apart from these, there have been projects that provide alternative histories to bridge the gaps in the official accounts of Partition. See, for example, Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* for an attempt to explore Partition through family history, government documents, and countless interviews and letters.

[14] See chapter one in Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* for a discussion of what he calls "the politics of postcolonial modernism" (21). Drawing on *The Politics of Modernism* by Raymond Williams, Lazarus critiques the way that a distorted conception of modernism has come to dominate postcolonial theory and the postcolonial canon in general. "Modernism," as Lazarus puts it, "displaced the received cultural formations of its time and consolidated itself at their expense" (27). See Simon During, "Postcolonialism and Globalisation" and Arif Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura" for the parallel critique of what During calls the attempt on the part of critics like Homi Bhabha to "fuse postcolonialism with postmodernism in their rejection of resistance along with any form of binarism, hierarchy or telos" (32).

[15] Developing the insights of Bakhtin and Lukács beyond the Euro-American academy has been key in developing a materialist conception of global forms and representational paradigms. My project joins recent trends in postcolonial and world literary studies to re-think "realism outside of Europe" (Anjaria, *Realism* 9). See Esty for a re-thinking of historical-materialist theories of the novel for the contemporary moment, as well as Dalley for a Lukácsian framework for reading the postcolonial historical novel.

case of earlier examples of what was referred to as the Indo-Anglian novel under the British Raj,

"not [as] an unmediated reflection of what actually existed, but an ideological reconstruction

moulded by an implicit political agenda" (M. Mukherjee, "Nation" 9).

As Fredric Jameson explains in his preface to Lukács's *The Historical Novel*, the genre in

this sense fulfills a dual mapping function because it represents "a narrative that is at once

archeologizing and *modernizing*" (3). While the historical novel is set in the past, its relationship

with history is more complicated because it can only ever imagine the past in terms of the present.

Just like the nation, the historical novel is a modern phenomenon that creates a linear narrative of

the past leading up to the present. Its logic is that of Janus-faced nationalism, which cannot "help

looking backwards into the past as well as forward into the future" (Nairn 67). By seemingly

foregrounding the *archeologizing function*, however, the historical novel shapes a modern,

contemporary narrative of the nation that appears to trace out an ancient tradition. This process of

"making the nation appear natural" makes up the very core of modern historical imaginaries

(Goswami 1). Narrating the past in terms of the present is thus the *modernizing*, narrative logic that

underwrites the development of the nation as what Benedict Anderson calls the emerging "new

form of imagined community" (46).[16] We can thus understand the critical realism of the

contemporary historical novel as a "socially symbolic act," that is, the kind of realism that is

invested in making reality itself legible because it is by "detecting the traces of that uninterrupted

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[16] Sandeep Banerjee's *Space, Utopia, and Indian Decolonization* provides a useful summary of
how different theorists have engaged with the nation as a modern invention. He draws attention to
the revised edition of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, and to Manu Goswami's
Producing India for the specific case of nationalism in South Asia. As he suggests, their points are
mutually reinforcing, but while Goswami acknowledges this naturalizing process superficially in
terms of its ideological function, it is Anderson's argument for the emergence of "'print
capitalism,' and especially the novel and the newspaper as harbingers of national consciousness"
that allows us to think about the close relationship of national narrative and historical fiction
(Banerjee 14n24).

narrative, in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history, that the doctrine of a political unconscious finds its function and its necessity" (Jameson, *Political Unconscious* 20). In other words, I argue that Sidhwa's *Cracking India* presents a fundamental trajectory of post-1990s critical realism because it rejects the very logic of bourgeois history and instead offers a novelistic conception of history. By representing the past in terms of the neoliberal present—that is, in the terms of an increasingly reactionary nationalism—Sidhwa effectively *novelizes* history in the same way that Bakhtin suggests the novel genre has shaped "other genres [in terms of] an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality" ("Epic" 7).

Mapping History: Bakhtin, Lukács, and Realism as Organizing Principle

The function of critical realism in this sense is not the representation of fragmentation, but of what Bakhtin calls "generating unity" ("Supplement" 310): "The novel's form, having become the expression of the author's attitude, creates the architectonic form, which orders and consummates the event, independently of the unitary, invariably pure event of being" (315). Realism is, in this sense, an architectonic mode of representation precisely because it represents an aesthetic that relies essentially on what Lukács calls *composition* or *narration* (as opposed to *description*) in an effort to organize our fragmented, reified reality into a legible whole (cf. Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?" 127). At the same time, this does not mean that realism is merely a mimetic reproduction of social totality. Instead it draws together the seemingly isolated facts of *individual experience* and puts them into a conversation with one another that allows for a coherent *collective narrative* to emerge. The conscious presentation of a mediated account thus allows "the *represented* world in the text" to emerge not as a *re*-presentation of facts, but as a narrative

re-organization that makes the processual nature of "the world that *creates* the text," and thus of reality itself, legible (Bakhtin "Forms" 253).

This realist impulse is very much present in both content and form, but it is not an exercise in either reproduction *or* fragmentation. The architectonic form that contemporary realism takes is very much interested in positioning itself towards the world and offering a narrative that allows us to access reality. As Bakhtin argues, this is the core of any form that puts the author in conversation with the reader as collaborator in order to elicit a response, and it demands—in Brechtian fashion—a judgment and self-positioning from us: "Thus, form is the expression of the active, axiological relationship of the author/creator and the recipient (who co-creates the form) to content" (Bakhtin, "Supplement" 306). The novel in particular, as Bakhtin suggests, is well-equipped for representing historical processes because it remains "a genre-in-the-making" even today ("Epic" 11). It is, in other words, the novel's closeness to the present that lets contemporary critical realism compose reality in terms that make it legible, because it reflects the world back not as a coherent whole but as fragments in the process of becoming whole: "The novel has become the leading hero in the drama of literary development in our time precisely because it best reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making; it is … the only genre born of this new world and in total affinity with it" (7). It thus becomes productive to expand on Bakhtin's notion of the novel as the ever-changing genre appropriate to the conditions of modernity with Lukács's conception of the historical novel as a *popular*, *national* response to a decidedly *global*, *capitalist* modernity.[17] Reading *Cracking India* with both Bakhtin and Lukács allows us to

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[17] Its emergence in the nineteenth century marks a decisive turn towards the novel in general as a popular form, and towards the historical novel specifically as a popular representation of what Lukács calls "the inner life of a nation" (*Historical Novel* 24). See Brennan, "The National Longing for Form," for a discussion of the relationship between the novel and nationalism, especially 49-56. Brennan's essay is one of the early examples of reading postcolonial literature

develop a theory of how both past and present are traced out or *mapped* as interconnecting and constitutive moments of the same continuous process. In this sense, I argue that a contemporary historical novel like Sidhwa's *Cracking India* develops a distinctly realist aesthetic that relies on the organizing function of *memory*. Its narrative draws together the fragments of the past into a coherent whole and simultaneously stages the collective experience of the national community in terms of what Lukács refers to as *typical* and *eccentric* characters.[18] Sidhwa's novel in this way also sets the stage for the later, mature developments of contemporary realism discussed in the chapters below.

Demystifying Fragmentation: Eccentric Lives, Typical Histories

Cracking India was published right around the time that the Indian economy was gradually deregulated and opened up to the flows of multi-national capitalism. Not only does the novel in this context shine a spotlight on the past by revisiting the foundational trauma of Partition, it also registers the continuing impact of a past that weighs, as Marx put it, like a nightmare upon the present. By revisiting the founding trauma of the breaking up of British India in this historical moment, the text simultaneously maps the failures of decolonization by highlighting the continuities between the past and the present, between the colonial power, the postcolonial state, and the neoliberal regimes of global capital. Unlike classical historical novels, this text relies on a highly idiosyncratic narrative style to capture this complicated temporal reality. It also shifts decisively away from the so-called 'grand narratives' of history and focuses entirely on the

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through the combined lens of Bakhtin and Lukács.

[18] *Typical* in this context, refers to a popular or common experience that is representative of social experience in general, whereas *eccentric* essentially describes the exceptional, social experience of, say, the bourgeoisie. The latter is not representative of the social totality as such, but, as Lukács explains, it *affirms* it by positioning the eccentric experience *as the social exception from the social rule*. See Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, 282-300.

singular perspective of a child. In this way, it breaks with several conventions of the genre: the narrative is told from the first-person point of view of a young child, and strictly kept in the present tense (with some important exceptions I will discuss below). This has the simultaneous effect of making the past accessible in its innocent immediacy for the reader and of gradually revealing its impact upon the present.

At the same time, while history shapes the conditions of possibility for the present, it is thus the present which dictates how the past is remembered. As Aijaz Ahmad suggests in *Lineages of the Present*: "There is an obvious sense in which no present is ever *sui generis*, no lives ever lived merely in the present tense; the lineages of historical time that went into the making of a present remain a sedimented part—often a *fatal* part—of that present" (x). Sidhwa's novel, in this sense, can be read as a "project of cognitive mapping," which aims to overcome the fragmentation of bourgeois historiography that conceptualizes history in terms of distinct key events and historic individuals, rather than as a process of continuous and interconnected changes that are both socially and historically conditioned (Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping" 356). For this purpose, *Cracking India* constructs a counter-history to reactionary nationalisms and their fragmented appropriation of a shared cultural heritage by representing culture as an organic development.

This is—not coincidentally—also the kind of mapping that Jameson has in mind when he talks about the essential function of realist representation in *The Antinomies of Realism.* He argues that realism itself is an organizing principle and a representational paradigm that fulfills both its classical "function of demystification," and today additionally represents a more "modernist impulse" that has "transformed [demystification] into defamiliarization and the renewal of perception" (4; 5). As he elaborates, it is

the very ideology of realism [which] also tends to stage it in terms of content, and here

clearly the realist mode is closely associated with the bourgeoisie and the coming into

being of bourgeois daily life: this … is also very much a construction, and it is a

construction in which realism and narrative participate. (5)

The question of mimetic representation at the very heart of this conception of realism is

nonetheless "at least tendentially critical" since "holding up a mirror to nature, in this case

bourgeois society, never really shows people what they want to see, and is always to that degree

demystifying" (5).

Sidhwa's novel, in its commitment to a realist mapping of societal change, uses the

first-person narration as a prism that breaks up the child protagonist Lenny's *eccentric* experience

into the various, *typical* fates of her friends and acquaintances. Lenny's narrative position reveals a

compositional organization of the past that—rather than anticipating the future—narrates the past

in terms of the present in order to identify continuities with the past. The novel's focus on gender

in particular reveals a fundamental failure of decolonization in the way that the patriarchal

structures of the colonial-capitalist regime did not just become central to the event of Partition but

carried over into the postcolonial nation itself. In narrating the past, the contemporary historical

novel thus expresses its anxieties about the future in terms of a critical pre-history of a reactionary

nationalism that would begin to fully develop in the aftermath of economic liberalization.

Excess of Realism: From Individual Memories to Collective History

The retrospective narration of Lenny Sethi, who recounts her childhood memories from the

position of a contemporary present, is fragmented and often hazy or inflected with dreams. Yet it is

precisely this perspective of the child-narrator that presents the reader with a gradually growing

consciousness of the structures that will shape the emerging nation. We learn about Lenny's Parsee

family,[19] and about the entirety of her social universe that is largely constructed around her immediate family and especially around her caretaker Shanta/Ayah and her various admirers.[20] While it is implied that the speaker is a contemporary to the reader, the first-person narration provides little insight into the present of the narrator. Even in the few glimpses that are afforded us, we learn next to nothing about the later life of the protagonist. The only instances in which the narrative breaks with this commitment to the past-as-present are the three interventions of the present speaker—who marks precisely those moments that represent either a key experience or a traumatic memory for Lenny—in which the narration shifts into the past tense that positions us, along with Lenny, as contemporaries re-living the past.

These few, key moments in which the temporality of the text shifts allow us to experience the past in terms of the present. In other words, the narration here allows us to revisit the past with the added benefit of our own familiarity with the history of the postcolonial nations of South Asia, which it pairs with the knowledge of the child who presents a historic event *in terms of an individual insight*. Encountering Gandhi during his visit to Lahore, for example, even amid the atmosphere of increasing communal tensions, what the little girl Lenny picks up on is not his historical stature but his patriarchal control over the women in his life and over their bodies. This is why Lenny, the outgoing trouble-maker, averts her gaze when Gandhi touches her face in what she calls "a burst of shyness" (Sidhwa 96). But more than a mere moment of passing sentiment, it is here that the speaker chooses to make her first intervention and shifts from the present into the past. Ending the paragraph by pointing out that this represents "the first time I have lowered my

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[19] The Zoroastrian community in Lahore can be spelled both "Parsi" or "Parsee," which simply refers to its Persian heritage. I use Sidhwa's spelling throughout.

[20] Her caretaker is referred to by her given name, Shanta, only twice. That she is simply called *ayah*, that is, *nanny*, gives a sense of the clear class-alignment with which Sidhwa infuses Lenny's narration. Lenny's relationship to her Ayah is one of emotional bonding, but it also has a clear functional component to it.

eyes before man," the chapter concludes with two sentences that are visibly set off from the rest

both in tense and through a blank line:

> It wasn't until some years later—when I realized the full scope and dimension of the
>
> massacres—that I comprehended the concealed nature of the ice lurking deep beneath the
>
> hypnotic and dynamic femininity of Gandhi's non-violent exterior. And then, when I
>
> raised my head again, the men lowered their eyes. (96)

Within the context of the narrator's interventions, this sets up the framework for how to read these

narrative breaks as historic moments precisely because it shows how the abstract societal

structures affect individuals in a way that can be continuously traced through past and present. The

violence of Partition is here linked to an underlying gendered dynamic that Lenny picks up on only

retroactively and through the process of narration. While this temporal shift has not been discussed

in the extant literature, the gendered structures it highlights are a key focus in readings of the

novel. Hakyoung Anh focuses specifically on the resulting "developmental trauma," which in her

reading of the novel "is explicitly gendered through its focus on female sexuality" (603). While

this captures the novel's concern with gender as a crucial and overarching social determinant in the

history of partition, Anh overstates the case by arguing that Partition is therefore merely a

"backdrop to her [Lenny's] coming-of-age" (603). The novel, I want to suggest, is concerned

precisely with providing a corrective to a sharp distinction between individual and social

experience. Lenny's perspective is not that of a private individual, but one that opens the narrative

towards the entirety of Lahore's social universe. Lenny herself is, in this sense, what Raymond

Williams, drawing on Lucien Goldmann, calls "the 'collective subject'" (Goldmann 114 qtd. in

Williams, *Marxism* 195): an individual whose experience re-inscribes the *social* in the abstractions

of collective history.[21]

In fact, any reading that ignores this risks participating in a process of overwriting and making invisible the structures of power that shape colonial history. Anh, for example, continues: "The competing conservative-national imaginaries *that arise at the end of British rule* in India *intersect with the patriarchal power relations that circulate in Lenny's household and community*" (603; emphasis added). In the first instance this implies that these "conservative-national imaginaries" are a spontaneous result of national liberation struggles, and not a result of a century of British rule that has consciously exacerbated communal tensions in which the nationalist imaginary was also increasingly formulated in terms of gender. More importantly, it implies that gender and "patriarchal power relations" are simply touching points between Partition on the one hand and household/community on the other. Instead, these gendered power structures do not exist in a vacuum but are historically conditioned and inextricably linked. The gendered violence in the novel is as much enabled by a broader colonial-capitalist framework as it is integral part of its continued functioning.

Reading Partition as a coincidental setting at the same time allows theorists like Anh to read the novel as representing "a version of solidarity among women across classes through Lenny's decentred perspective, which views the women's suffering as interrelated rather than hierarchical" (604). While she does mention Sangeeta Ray and Ambreen Hai's work on the intersections of class and gender in *Cracking India*, her argument—albeit not excising class in its entirety from the reading of the novel—at the very least reduces class to a mere facet of oppression. But patriarchal power does not operate by itself; its logic is interwoven into the

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[21] Williams offers a similar critique of reading tendencies that suggest such a sharp distinction. Pushing back against a use of the term "'social'" that "has been deformed to the 'collective'" that parallels a "bourgeois tradition, [in which] the 'individual' has been deformed as the 'private'" (*Marxism* 194).

functioning of colonial-capitalism.[22] This is also the crucial difference between consciousness and awareness that the novel develops in these sudden instances that confront us with the past in terms of the present.

But even more than that, the occasional interventions in the narrative on the part of the adult narrator underline the critical role of mediation in realist representation. In drawing our attention to the fact that this narrative is located in the past, it reminds us also that the *act* of narration is located in the present. As Jill Didur suggests, it is "Lenny's naive narrative perspective [which] also dramatizes the way the tension between text and context opens up a space for interpretation … in literary representations of 'everyday' history" (72). As she points out, it is in fact the very "act of narrating her memories [that] gives the adult Lenny the opportunity to reflect on and intervene in the various struggles over the meaning of historical events" (72). The adult narrator thus makes an implicit but important temporal claim: *history* is shaped by and shaping human beings acting in their immediate present, but *historical narrative* is an act of re-telling the lived experience of the past in the terms of the present. Looking back at her experience of the last days of the British Raj in this way does not just open up a discursive "space for interpretation … in literary representations of 'everyday' history," but in fact shows how both personal trauma and national history emerge from the structures of everyday life (72).

At the same time, while *Cracking India* is a novel about gender, it is more than a mere "trope of India as ravaged body subject" as Ambreen Hai argues (412). Rather, the allegorical aspect of the story is precisely woven into the narrative position of the child-narrator. Her present position of re-telling the past through fragmented memories becomes a representation of a national

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[22] Silvia Federici discusses at length how "the similarities in treatments to which the populations of Europe and the Americas were subjected are sufficient to demonstrate the existence of one single logic governing the development of capitalism and the structural character of the atrocities perpetrated in this process" (220).

origin story that is as cracked along the various fault-lines—communal and gendered—and deeply

traumatic at both an individual and a collective level. It also recognizes that while the trauma in

general is collective, its individual experience is fraught with silences that are exacerbated into

blind-spots by the realities of class.[23] In this way, the adult narrator also makes an important

temporal claim: history is shaped by and shaping human beings but, unlike human beings,

historical narratives are not products of the past but of the present. Thus, the adult narrator—a

Pakistani citizen—can claim to write about the birth of two nations only by virtue of the fact that

they have come into existence.

Parallel to the narrative breaks—which mark the narrative present of the speaker as

circumscribed by the realities of the postcolonial nation—the narrator also consciously frames her

perspective in a similarly demarcated way. The narrator thus begins the exposition by establishing

quite literally from the first line onwards the limits of Lenny's bounded universe: "My world is

compressed. Warris Road, lined with rain gutters lies between Queens Road and Jail Road: both

wide, clean, orderly streets at the affluent fringes of Lahore" (Sidhwa 11). That this theme of

limitation is not accidental becomes increasingly clear. Her family's position in society can be

clearly located, even through the eyes of a child, on both the margins and in the well-off suburbs.

As Lenny continues to outline for the reader who she is, who her family is, and how they fit into the

social universe of pre-Partition Lahore, she relies heavily on spatial terms. The first-person

narration in this way—itself limited in the sense of being able to only represent a singular

perspective on the event of Partition—places itself quite consciously on the periphery of history as

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[23] Another instance in which this becomes clear is Hai's suggestion that Sidhwa's novel
"[capitalizes] upon the subaltern for whom it purports to speak" (414). But Sidhwa's novel
actually provides a deeply sympathetic portrayal of Ayah—from a specific class position, but
sympathetic nonetheless—that constructs a growing consciousness through the character of Lenny
of the patriarchal structures that affect both public and private spaces, both lower and upper class
women in the novel.

well. Rather than laying claim to a universal or representative point of view, it makes the peripheral and the exceptional its theme.

For even within her small universe, Lenny finds herself in a position that is both isolated and unique. As the only daughter and as a young child, she is neither very conscious of what is truly going on, nor is she necessarily included in the increasingly heated political discussions at home. This too is set up in the opening pages, when Lenny points out that—as much as her home is quite literally a sheltered existence—her position is even more limited in terms of how she fits into it. For her harbor within this small universe is not even within the family compound itself, but at her godmother's house just up the road: "This is my haven. My refuge from the perplexing unrealities of my home on Warris Road" (11). What lies beyond the road both her grandmother's house and the family compound are located on, on the other hand, does not just exceed her grasp of childish understanding, but becomes the very limit of her world: "A few furlongs away Jail Road vanishes into the dense bazaars of Mozang Chungi. At the other end a distant canal cuts the road at the periphery of my world" (11).

Of course, her universe quickly begins to open up. But even as she becomes aware of the increasingly heated political discussions over Partition, she still can only think about the event in terms that immediately apply to her, her family, and the compound where they live and that represents almost the totality of her social universe:

> There is much disturbing talk. India is going to be broken. Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris Road? How will I ever get to Godmother's then?
>
> . . . .
>
> Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Iqbal, Tara Singh, Mountbatten are names I hear.

And I become aware of religious differences.

It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves—and the next day they are Hindu,

Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just my

all-encompassing Ayah—she is also a token. A Hindu. Carried away by a renewed

devotional fervor she expends a small fortune in joss-sticks, flowers and sweets on the gods

and goddesses in the temples. (101)

As much as Lenny's perspective is limited *to* and *by* her own experience, it is also effectively

opening up the narrative to the perspectives and experiences of those surrounding her. Matters of

history, suddenly become questions that pertain even to children. Names and descriptors that

previously were mere labels now begin to take on new meaning for Lenny and everyone else.

It is thus through the focalizing center of the first-person narrator that Sidhwa manages to

accumulate what Bakhtin calls an "excess of seeing" which relies on the idea that it precisely the

multiplicity inherent *to* individual experience that allows us to go beyond it:

This ever-present *excess* of my seeing, knowing, and possessing in relation to any other

human being is founded in the uniqueness and irreplaceability of my place in the world.

For only I—the one-and-only I—occupy in a given set of circumstances this particular

place at this particular time; all other human beings are situated outside me. (Bakhtin,

"Author" 23)

Bakhtin calls this "excess" not because of the flood of information that cognition provides, but

because, *in the relation to other human beings*, an individual can recognize "the *delimitation* of a

human being in the world," which is precisely what allows us to understand the extent to which an

individual can see beyond what others can see as individuals (36). In other words, it is the fact that

we can see *more* than what others can see from their own position which uniquely equips

first-person narration with a fundamental capacity for representing social constellations.

Accepting that totality itself is fundamentally unrepresentable (other than through abstractions), there are thus two basic ways of mapping it in concrete ways, one of which has already been hinted at above: *allegorical representation*, where structures and connections are registered at the level of the narrative, and the *accumulation of stories themselves*, that can be framed in such a way as to present a more complete picture. But allegorical representation operates at the level of *compositional form*, whereas the accumulation of stories is an *architectonic form*—the other mapping strategy—which organizes different perspectives and experiences into a coherent account of the world. Bakhtin refers to this shaping of a coherent narrative as "consummating form" (25):

> The excess of my seeing is the bud in which slumbers form, and whence form unfolds like a blossom.
>
> But in order that this bud should really unfold into the blossom of consummating form, the excess of my seeing must "fill in" the horizon of the other human being who is being contemplated, must render his horizon complete, without at the same time forfeiting his distinctiveness. I must empathize or project myself into this other human being, see his world axiologically from within him as *he* sees this world; I must put myself in his place and then, after returning to my own place, "fill in" his horizon through that excess of seeing which opens out from this, my own, place outside him. I must enframe him, create a consummating environment for him out of this excess of my own seeing, knowing, desiring, and feeling. ("Author" 24-25)

Cracking India provides this excess of perspectives through the various people that crowd the stage of Lenny's consciousness, especially her Ayah who becomes the refracting element that

opens her mind to the world. In this way, Lenny's narrative is more than the mere memory of a

child. By putting the different lives she encounters in touch with one another *in terms of her own*

experience, she effectively 'fills in' the various ways in which these individual fates are connected

to one another. The text in this sense never loses sight of the totality it registers through the

different stories that make up the novel.

Fragment or Fragmentation: The Organizing Function of Narrative Perspective

As Lenny's story progresses, the Partition of India as an event thus begins to increasingly take

shape through this excess or accumulation of experience. As the child begins to grapple with the

creeping changes affecting her social universe, the narrative breaks—rather than fragmenting the

text—become the very organizing principle that makes the complex relationship between

communal violence, nationalism, and gender increasingly apparent. As the title of the American

edition reminds us, *Cracking India* is a novel not about fragments, but about the very process of

fragmentation. It is not interested in seeing historic events as fragments or isolated memories, but it

makes an effort to fill in what connects them. The narrative breaks in this way register the inverted

relationship between traumatic experience and traumatic memory: it is not the event itself that

makes the experience traumatic, but its repetition in memory that solidifies its significance. As a

key element of Sidhwa's novel, these narrative interventions become the structuring framework

that organizes the text and gives it coherence by identifying those moments that have persisted in

memory across time, and by assembling the story around them. As Hai points out, it is precisely

the composition of the text that "blurs the distinction between memory and fictive (re)creation,

between personal and national experience" (390). Both the individual re-construction of a life

through re-collection and the telling of national histories as such share this logic of selection.

In this sense, the story is more than a mere childhood recollection of the historical event precisely because it represents the very process of tracing out "the pre-history of the Partition" in the act of individual recollection itself (Daiya 32).[24] Rather than a novel about an event, it is a narrative concerned with the forces that have shaped it. *Cracking India* thus pushes back against the sort of modern historical novel—defined by its relationship to bourgeois historiography and its "tendency towards *biography*" (Lukács, *Historical Novel* 300)—that Lukács warns against:

> If the great figure of the past is really the sole embodier of the great historical idea, if the
>
> historical novel is interested in the prehistory of the ideas which are being fought out today,
>
> then writers may understandably see the real historical genesis of these ideas and therewith
>
> of present-day problems in the development of the historical personalities who have
>
> championed and embodied these ideas in the past. (301)

Sidhwa's novel picks up this biographical form, but it subverts any abstracting idealist notions of history as the history of great men, and re-imagines the birth of the two nations instead in terms of Lenny, the girl-child, that is, very much the opposite of a "historical personality." At the same time, it is precisely Lenny's eccentric socio-historical position that allows her to identify the gradual changes that the city undergoes as a whole.

At the level of both individual and collective experience, Lenny's narrative therefore manages to capture the way in which the intensity of a traumatic experience can prevent the absorption of an event into the past, and fixes it in a persistent relationship to the immediate

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[24] Daiya's study of Partition novels, *Violent Belongings*, focuses specifically on how literary representations attempt to capture the "production of Hindus and Muslims as inimical, politically opposed, and homogeneous communities that belonged in two different nations," a process which was structured "through both the British constitutional provision of separate electorates and the generation of fear in colonial discourse—fears of Muslims being minoritized and marginalized in independent India" (35). For context, especially with regards to the British strategy of divide-and-rule and how it created a communal divide "in a bid to break the strength and communal solidarity of the *swadeshi* movement" (33), see Daiya, 32-35.

present. Lenny's memory of the fires in Lahore and the destructive mob violence is, for example, stretched out to represent the centrality of this experience to her personal development in particular and to Lahore in general:

> Despite its brick and mortar construction: despite its steel girders and the density of its terraces that run in an uneven high-low, broad-narrow continuity for miles on either side: despite the small bathrooms and godowns and corrugated tin shelters for charpoys deployed to sleep on the roof and its doors and wooden rafters—the buildings could not have burned for months. Despite the residue of passion and regret, and loss of those who have in panic fled—the fire could not have burned for…Despite all the ruptured dreams, broken lives, buried gold, bricked-in rupees, secreted jewelry, lingering hopes…the fire could not have burned for months and months…
>
> But in my memory it is branded over an inordinate length of time: memory demands poetic license. (Sidhwa 149; emphasis in original)

Not only does this paragraph give a sense of the vastness of the destruction and the completeness of its effect upon Lenny's childhood, but it also frames memory and recollection in specifically narrative terms. By staking out the impact and persistence of these experiences, the narrator draws attention to the ways in which these key moments of Lenny's experience simultaneously *have shaped* and *continue to shape* her life and that of her entire community.[25] As in the first instance of narrative intervention that is marked by the literal intrusion of the past (tense)—her encounter with Gandhi—the burning city shows how closely her fate and that of India are intertwined.

However, it is the third narrative intervention that links the other two instances together

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[25] As Didur puts it, "[as] the adult narrator of a fictional autobiography, Lenny is figured as coming to recognize how her memories of the partition and the birth of the Pakistani state are shaped and mediated by her subject position" (68).

into a chain of events that makes Lenny's historic experience legible in terms of a broader history of the Partition. This is crucial because it also allows us to understand how the fragment functions in the novel in general, and it is here that I depart from other readings that foreground *the fragment*, rather than *the mapping of fragmentation itself.*[26] For it is in fact the very "act of narrating her memories [that] gives the adult Lenny the opportunity to reflect on and intervene in the various struggles over the meaning of historical events" (Didur 72). In other words, narration is a matter of *constructing coherence* rather than *representing fragmentation*.

This reading of the novel pushes back against much of the consensus on Sidhwa's novel as a fragmentary assemblage of historic events. Veena Das, for example, reads the novel as a collection of "a part or various parts that may be assembled together to make up a picture of totality" (Das, *Life* 5). But, as I have suggested above, the crucial difference between this reductive understanding of the concept of totality—as a mere collection of fragments—and the historical materialist idea of totality—as the very structure of social relations that gives our experience both shape and meaning—is the very essence of realism: a narrative that makes fragmentation legible *as a process*, rather than simply depicting it as a fact of nature. It is neither, as Das suggests, "a sketch that may be executed on a different scale from the final picture one draws, or that may lack all the details of the picture but still contain the imagination of the whole," nor does "the *fragment* [mark] the impossibility of such an imagination" (5). Instead, I argue that *Cracking India* represents a narrative that challenges both the conception of the fragment as a condensed experience from which a totality can be extrapolated and to the fragment as an isolated moment that may "allude to a particular way of inhabiting the world, say, in a gesture of mourning" without

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[26] The focus on the fragmentary nature of the text dominates recent close readings of the novel. See, for example, Bahri, "Telling Tales: Women and the Trauma of Partition in Sidhwa's *Cracking India*" as well as Hai, Ray, and Bhatia, who all discuss the narrative in terms of the fragment and narrative/historical silences. Didur alone differs on this point.

any access to the totality of historical experience (Das, *Life* 5).

Rather than reading the novel, in other words, as Deepika Bahri suggests, as "attempting to reconstruct a narrative fashioned from shards of memory and fragments of whispered stories, [from which] emerges a fractured tale that can only be partial in its perceptions," I contend that it is the very fact of how consciously the novel foregrounds historical narration as *fragmentary in nature* that we can see take shape a counter-logic of *selection*, or what in narrative terms can be called *organization* ("Telling Tales" 233). By aligning the key memory fragments in the way she does, the narrator organizes the entirety of the narrative into a version of events that makes history accessible in terms of an experiential process. In re-constructing how her own experiences gradually lead her to gain consciousness of the forces that structure her life and the historical event of Partition, the text gradually identifies the lines along which the fractures will occur. While the triad of parental care, familial love, and class privilege is shaken—but not shattered—by the violent events, it is the Godmother's fight to extricate Shanta/Ayah from the marriage that Ice-candy-man has forced upon her after her abduction and rape that ultimately breaks through Lenny's defenses. The recognition that gender is the overarching structure that frames her experience *and* the experience of Partition is in this way spelled out in the last narrative intervention:

> The innocence that my parents' vigilance, the servants' care and Godmother's love
>
> sheltered me, that neither Cousin's carnal cravings, nor the stories of the violence of the
>
> mobs, could quite destroy, was laid to waste that evening by the emotional storm that raged
>
> round me. The confrontation between Ice-candy-man and Godmother opened my eyes to
>
> the wisdom of righteous indignation over compassion. To the demands of
>
> gratification—and the unscrupulous nature of desire.

To the pitiless face of love. (Sidhwa 264)

Here, Shanta/Ayah's traumatic experience of Partition and Lenny's secondary trauma are linked in a way that does not simply mark the childhood loss of innocence but in fact registers a much more radical shift in consciousness. It is in this moment, during this entire encounter in which the Godmother confronts Ice-candy-man for his role in Shanta/Ayah's abduction and for his continued abuse, that Lenny grasps the warped and gendered objectifying power at the heart of colonial-capitalism.

In this way, the narration reveals itself to be fragmented only in a very superficial sense. What is broken up here is only the speaker's memory, while the act of narration in fact organizes these fragments into a coherent narrative. Her social observations in particular, as these interventions suggest, make links between specific elements of her memory that otherwise might not become apparent: the "ice lurking deep beneath the hypnotic and dynamic femininity of Gandhi's non-violent exterior" is in this way tied—through the narratives central metaphor: ice—to the predatory and all pervasive male presence in the novel, Ice-candy-man, and ultimately to Lenny's experience of the gendered violence of Partition represented by the elemental opposite, that is, the city engulfed in fire (96).

It is thus ultimately the organizing function of the first-person narrative that makes up the very core of the text's realist representation. Lenny's perspective, what Bakhtin would call her "world view," is precisely what "organizes and unifies man's *horizon*" ("Author" 205). Through the lens of the retrospective narration of her childhood, Lenny's entire social universe is composed into a coherent whole. As Bakhtin explains in "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," it is in fact the very act of narrative composition that "collects the world scattered in meaning and condenses it into a finished and self-contained image" (191). This, for Bakhtin, means that an act of narration

essentially has to be understood as a cognitive processing of reality, which selects moments of lived experience and structures them into a meaningful and coherent narrative, which he describes as *architectonics*: "as the intuitionally necessary, nonfortuitous disposition and integration of concrete, unique parts and moments into a consummated whole—[which] can exist only around a given human being as a hero" ("Author" 209).

The first-person narration of Sidhwa's historical novel in this sense is not coincidental, but a crucial feature of contemporary forms that structures their relationship both *to reality* and *to how it is represented*. More than a contingent authorial choice, the highly mediated form of representation, which refracts the first-person narration into multiple dialogic relationships, thus consciously emphasizes the organization of the text. In fact, everything in Sidhwa's historical novel is centered on the first-person as the organizing entity of the narrative. In this way, the text self-consciously maps in its very composition the constitutive relationships that shape our reality. Architectonic form registers how the world itself is read and understood, represents its fundamental structures, and integrates them into the very composition of the text itself by way of the mediating instance of individual consciousness: "A *world view* organizes and unifies the performed acts (and anything can be understood from within as a performed act); it imparts unity to a life's act-performing directedness to meaning—the unity of a life's answerability, the unity of its going beyond itself, of surmounting itself" (Bakhtin, "Author" 205).

The text's focalization and narrative voice, then, allow for the mapping of a social totality in terms of historical experience precisely because the narrative is structured around the mediating voice of the narrator who puts the individual experiences and facts into relation to one another, effectively representing them not as a collection of isolated fragments but as parts of a larger whole that are intricately connected and interdependent. It is in this sense that the seemingly loose

arrangement of memory fragments in *Cracking India* can be understood as a form of *critical realism* that captures in its composition the underlying realities "of some (unrepresentable, imaginary) global social totality that was to have been mapped" (Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping" 356). Bakhtin here fills in the missing link between cognitive process and literary form that Jameson hints at. In other words, cognitive mapping represents the very essence of the realist mode of representation because it has a stake in understanding and representing the abstract links and connections that remain invisible at the level of immediate reality.

Eccentric Characters, Typical Fates: Narrating History from 'Below'

While the first-person point of view of the text puts a clear emphasis on making historical processes legible through individual experience, it simultaneously opens the narrative up towards a multitude of historical characters that crowd the setting of her childhood. Lenny's perspective is not simply what Didur would call "off-centre" however (73). Rather, it represents what Lukács calls a "presentation of history from 'below'" (*Historical Novel* 283). As Lukács explains, writing "history from 'below'" is not simply a matter of writing a "historical novel which portrays only the oppressed sections of society," but a question of whether the story is able to depict the realities of popular life (283). In this context, the conscious use of the first-person perspective has to be understood as a key feature of the contemporary historical novel because it allows the narrative to engage a fundamental problem of the historical novel, and more broadly speaking realist representation as a contemporary representational paradigm: the question of what Lukács calls *typicality*.

In fact, the entire question of what the historical novel is meant to achieve—from a Marxist point of view that conceives of cultural production as a site of struggle—hinges on this very

question of how typical fates that are representative of a popular, national experience can be captured. Lukács definition, however, lays out the matter of typicality in terms of its (seeming) opposite, namely the *eccentric* position of the bourgeois subject:

> What is the aim of the historical novel? First, it is to portray the kind of individual destiny that can be *directly* and at the same time typically express the problems of an epoch. The modern novel in its shift to the world "above" has portrayed destinies which are socially eccentric. Eccentric because the upper sections of society have ceased to be the leaders of progress for the entire nation. The only proper way of expressing this eccentricity is to indicate its social basis, to show that it is the social position of the characters which distances them from the everyday life of the people. They must appear eccentric from a social standpoint. For as the characteristic of a particular stratum of society this eccentricity is *also* typical. But the decisive thing is the social and psychological content of the particular personal destiny; that is, is this destiny inwardly connected with the great, typical questions of popular life or not? (Lukács, *Historical Novel* 284)

As Lukács lays out here, eccentricity is not necessarily opposed to typicality, but can in fact become *a representation of it*. Writing "history from 'below'" (hence his quotation marks) does not need to appropriate a subaltern perspective in order to represent the social structures that create these hierarchies realistically *as long as it marks its eccentric position as such vis-à-vis the typical*.

In *Cracking India*, Lenny does indeed find herself in such an eccentric position within the narrative. In fact, as members of Lahore's Parsee community, her entire family occupies a position that is in a sense marginal to the historic events about to unfold. Because they are neither Muslim nor Sikh or Hindu, they do not represent the typical fates of partition that dominate the national

narratives of Partition in India and Pakistan.[27] Yet it is precisely this "eccentricity" that allows the text to avoid telling a story disconnected from popular life and experience. What underscores this eccentricity even further is the fact that Lenny, as a child-narrator, is observing things from a position of innocent ignorance and limited information about the adult world. And as Lukács suggests, this is precisely what allows her to pick up on the gradual changes affecting Lahore society. Her limited perspective is one that parallels her experience of growing up with the development of her consciousness of a gendered class society that structures the events of Partition, and in turn limits the possibilities and tendencies that can emerge from this present. Instead of putting the narration out of touch, Lenny's eccentric position thus allows her to become particularly attuned to the small changes and abrupt shifts in the collective mood. As Didur points out, it is "Lenny's intimate relationship with her nanny, Ayah, [that] takes her outside the bourgeois circles of the Parsi community and makes her aware of the heterogeneous cultural context of her society at large" (71). As her awareness of the "hegemonic structures of meaning that infuse her 'everyday' experiences" sharpens, things that held no meaning before begin to suddenly affect her perception (71). More than a sort of innocent re-shaping of how she sees people, these recollections register the increasingly hostile mood in Lahore that crystallizes along communal lines.

Through her eyes, we thus come to understand that the gradual changes that affect Lahore have little to do with ancient communal differences and everything with the dividing of spoils during the birth of a new nation. From Lenny's (*eccentric*) point of view, the changing shape of the (*typical*) life of her community materializes for the reader. In this context, space itself becomes the

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[27] See Luhrmann for a discussion of Parsee identity in colonial and postcolonial society. In the context of *Cracking India*, Didur 74-78 provides a discussion of the relationship of Lenny's community to the other religious groups in British India.

way in which change is expressed visually in the text and mapped by Lenny, quite literally, as she

sees it. After she has become aware of religious differences among her friends, family, and

acquaintances—something that initially was beyond her scope of comprehension but which she

begins to pick up on—it is the very structure of public space—specifically in the Queen's Garden

which she frequents daily with her Ayah—which fully manifests religious difference before her

eyes as a definite social fact:

> That's when I realize what has changed. The Sikhs, only their rowdy little boys running
>
> about with hair piled in topknots, are keeping mostly to themselves. . . .
>
> We walk past a Muslim family. With their burka-veiled women they too sit apart. I
>
> turn to look back. . . .
>
> A group of smooth-skinned Brahmins and their pampered male offspring form a
>
> tight circle of supercilious exclusivity near ours. (105)

This is, of course, more than just a spontaneous sorting of space. As the different social groups

gathered here become legible to Lenny in terms of their religious communities—Sikh, Muslim,

Hindu—she is able to identify the extent to which religion has come to re-arrange space itself

according to those religious affiliations. As the social climate begins to heat up in anticipation of

the actual event of Partition, this shift becomes increasingly clear. It also foreshadows the way in

which Lenny's close circle, which is essentially made up of Ayah's many admirers, will break up.

While "the group around Ayah" thus initially "remains unchanged" and allows for the fact

that "Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsee are, as always, unified around her," it eventually comes to mark

the point where historical and personal crisis will converge (Sidhwa 105). As Bahri observes,

Shanta/Ayah in this way at first "functions as the locus of a democratic unity for a diverse range of

men" ("Telling Tales" 222). But this "democratic unity" that centers on Shanta/Ayah is from its

inception infused with a chauvinistic nationalism: "[D]espite assurances of protection from her

lovers when news of rioting and rapes comes closer home, Ayah is eventually betrayed by a

patriarchal system in which her very comeliness ensures the exercise of privileged right to women

customary during war" (222). Indeed, it does not take long before Lenny can see this unity slowly

being eroded along the same communal lines, and soon she can discern "dissension in the ranks of

Ayah's admirers" who now no longer come to see Ayah as a group, and also no longer seek her out

in the park (Sidhwa 157).

Similarly, when Lenny eventually re-enters the public scene of the park after Partition,

change is once more mapped out in terms of space. This time, however, she registers change not in

terms of social divisions along religious/communal lines, but in terms of the sudden absences that

the split along those fault lines has caused:

> I cannot believe my eyes. The Queen has gone! The space between the marble canopy and
>
> the marble platform is empty. A group of children, playing knuckles, squat where the
>
> gunmetal queen sat enthroned. Bereft of her presence, the structure looks unwomaned.
>
> The garden scene has depressingly altered. Muslim families who added color when
>
> scattered among the Hindus and Sikhs, now monopolize the garden, depriving it of color.
>
> Even the children, covered in brocades and satins, cannot alleviate the austerity of the
>
> black burkas and white *chuddars* that shroud the women. It is astonishing. The absence of
>
> the brown skin that showed through the fine veils of Hindu and Sikh women, and beneath
>
> the dhoties and shorts of the men, has changed the complexion of the queenless garden.
>
> There are fewer women. More men. (249)

The new social landscape in Queen Victoria park takes on an uncanny appearance in which even

the departure of Ayah is registered not just as a mere fact but as a fundamental change in both the

religious and social make-up of public space. Not only does the missing statue of the Queen register the absence of the British colonial forces, it also becomes emblematic of Ayah's absence. It marks a fundamental shift towards a more openly patriarchal structuring of public space, and it highlights again that the historical change is wound up intricately with Lenny's own personal experiences. Just as the communal violence has changed the social make-up of Lahore along religious lines, Lenny is becoming increasingly aware of her own status as a girl in a gendered world, and how she will fit into this new society.

Thus, when we get our first close-up glimpse of the mobs, Lenny's observation is at first that of a raucous multitude of men who are carted together into the family compound: "Then they are roaring and charging up our drive, wheels creaking, hooves clattering as the whipped horses stretch their scabby necks and knotted hocks to haul the load for the short gallop" (Sidhwa 190). Yet, as randomly patched together a crowd as they appear to be, Lenny also quickly picks up on the smallest common denominator of the plundering hoard: "Calculating men, whose ideals and passions have cooled to ice" (190). As in much of the text, ice here again functions as key metaphor for the cold-hearted and contriving nature that in truth underlies the seemingly hot and passionately fought out issue of Partition as much as it represents the shrewd and calculating nature of the men's desires in the novel who, like Ice-candy-man, think of their constant harassment and unwanted advances on women as loving pursuit rather than as the predatory stalking that it is.[28]

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[28] Hai in this context argues that "Sidhwa's plot device of expelling the Hindu Ayah could just as easily be read as an indictment of the political and cultural exigencies that allowed no place for such a figure in the new Pakistan" (392). She elaborates that "as the ayah becomes allegorized, the text does not seem to know how to reconcile the desire to build heterogeneous gender alliances across class and international boundaries with the conflicting need to construct an intranational homogenous Pakistani feminism" (392). This, however, misses the entire point of Sidhwa's novel. It is a narrative that seeks to reveal the fault-lines of a fracturing polity along communal lines in a

Yet, just as there is a calculating streak running through the mob that is at its surface nothing but chauvinistic fervor, the crowd is also only seemingly made up of strangers. In Lenny's eyes the crowd quite literally begins to sharpen increasingly into an image of familiarity:

> "He's Ramzana-the-butcher's brother," says Papoo, nudging me excitedly.
>
> I notice the resemblance to the butcher. And then the men are no longer just fragmented parts of a procession: they become individual personalities whose faces I study, seeking friends. (Sidhwa 192)

Suddenly, Lenny becomes aware of the faces in the crowd she recognizes. They are no longer strangers, but instead emerge as the very people who populate her universe.

This sudden recognition on Lenny's part is heightened when the entire crowd merges into one representative character:

> Something strange happened then. The whole disorderly melee dissolved and consolidated into a single face. The face, amber-eyed, spread before me: hypnotic, reassuring, blotting out the ugly frightening crowd. Ice-candy-man's versatile face transformed into a savior's in our hour of need. (193)

It is in this instance—and again, marked by a sudden shift to the past tense—that Ice-candy-man

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context that is structured by class relations that are simultaneously expressed in communal and gendered terms. As such, the text does not attempt to forge a nationalist alliance but demonstrates its impossibility as long as it is forged in the fires of a reactionary nationalism that does not seek to abolish class society but to perpetuate it in the postcolony. Hai expands on her criticisms of the novel, arguing that it represents a "narrative [which] constructs its world as divided into lower-class rapable victims and upper-class rescuers," which similarly flattens the scope of the novel (402). *Cracking India* provides a clear challenge to this reading in the various instances when it centers on the sexual harassment of Lenny by her older cousin—who in fact later in the text darkly answers her question of what it means that Ayah was raped by saying "I'll show you someday" (Sidhwa 278)—and importantly by showing how Lenny learns about the fact that her father beats her mother when she sees her bruised in the bath. Violence in *Cracking India* is not restricted to lower-class women, but it is qualitatively different in the ways that class (especially in combination with caste and religious affiliation) affects what protections are afforded by society and the State in transition from a colonial to a postcolonial polity.

ceases to be just one of Ayah's most obsessed and persistent admirers. Instead he draws Lenny into history, when he asks for Shanta/Ayah's whereabouts. Without thinking, mesmerized by the familiarity, she gives her away. And just as Ice-candy-man had appeared he—along with the other familiar faces—melts again into the mass of people who drag out her caretaker. Now, another face takes on the haunting vision of Partition: "The last thing I noticed was Ayah, her mouth slack and piteously gaping, her disheveled hair flying into her kidnappers' faces, staring at us as if she wanted to leave behind her wide-open and terrified eyes" (195). Lenny in this way makes her entrance into history. Acting as Lukács's world-historical individual, she betrays her Ayah and delivers her into the hands of the mob. All the strands of communal tension and gendered violence run together in the character of this child who, by virtue of her innocent connection to all the characters, turns into the focal point of history.

Conclusion: Presenting the Past, Or the Novelizing of History

In the case of *Cracking India*, it is precisely the "eccentricity" of the protagonist that allows the text to avoid telling a story disconnected from popular life. Lenny, as a character, is anything but representative of the wider society. Her life is one of class privilege, and even in terms of her religious affiliation she is safeguarded from the rifts that increasingly separate her circle of acquaintances along religious lines. The result is a narrative that quite consciously subverts the readers expectations of what a Partition narrative should look like while at the same time weaving together narrative strands that represent key points of the historical experience. Showing the fault-lines along which India begins to 'crack' allows Sidhwa to shape a narrative that actually defies the very logic of fragmentation and simultaneously rejects the logic of selective, bourgeois historiography. Instead, it offers a logic of composition and organization that makes history legible

in terms of both the (eccentric) subject and the (typical) fate of the community. In other words, Sidhwa makes history accessible as a process by mapping the constitutive social moments of the historic event of Partition.

This organizing principle is essentially what Georg Lukács calls *realism*—a representational paradigm that maps "a 'hierarchy of significance' in the situations and characters presented" and allows us to understand history in light of its social significance (Lukács, *Meaning* 34). Bakhtin, on the other hand, refers to it simply as that "[a]esthetic activity [which] collects the world scattered in meaning and condenses it into a finished and self-contained image" ("Author" 191). Bakhtin's conception of both perception and representation is grounded in an inherently dialectical conception of the subject vis-à-vis the world that cannot think the one without the other. In his understanding of aesthetic activity, "lived experience" is thus understood as the foundation of any "relationship *to* meaning and *to* an object" (115). This, for Bakhtin, is the shared point of origin of the author, narrator, and hero of the novel, since they all can claim that they "start out from within myself and I am directed forward, ahead of myself, upon the world, upon an object" (38). For Lukács, of course, to take the individual as a point of departure risks veering into a bourgeois individualism that mystifies more than it reveals. Yet, at the same time, he recognizes that the path to any meaningful understanding of the historic processes leads through the demystification of the bourgeois individual. In other words, he recognizes that the individual is a crucial focal point for the realist representation of historic process *as long as it is represented critically*. As he explains, it is in the very "characters [of the historical novel] in whom personal and social-historical fates closely conjoin" (Lukács, *Historical Novel* 285). History, as Lukács recognizes, cannot be comprehended concretely as long as it remains a mere abstraction. History makes sense only if understood not as a force in and of itself but as the result of human activity:

This indirect contact between individual lives and historical events is the most decisive

thing of all. For the people experience history directly. History is their own upsurge and

decline, the chain of their joys and sorrows. If the historical novelist can succeed in

creating characters and destinies in which the important social-human contents, problems,

movements, etc., of an epoch appear directly, then he can present history "from below,"

from the standpoint of popular life. (285)

As I have argued in my reading of Sidhwa's novel, it is her representation of Partition through the

eyes of the child-protagonist Lenny, which allows the novel to make these lives and events legible

in precisely this sense. By drawing them together through Lenny's first-person narration, Sidhwa

manages to map them in terms of their respective social milieus. This in turn allows her to

construct a social totality that traces out the colonial-capitalist context which sets the stage for

Partition and reveals how these forces actively shape the emergence of the independent

post-colonial state.

Unlike the reifying tendency and selective nature of bourgeois historiography, however,

Sidhwa creates a historical novel that *novelizes* history by presenting the past itself in terms of

what Bakhtin calls "the spontaneity of the inconclusive present" ("Epic" 27). In this way,

Sidhwa's novel is much more true to a Lukácsian conception of the world-historical individual

than one might imagine. "With the classics," as Lukács writes, "and their conception the historical

figures practically never *develop before our eyes*. The genesis and development of the

'world-historical individual' take place *among the people*" (*Historical Novel* 312). With the child

protagonist Lenny we get precisely the opposite at first, yet end up with the same result: The child

who experiences history innocently on the one hand allows us to understand how the people who

populate her bounded universe participate in the making of history, what motivates them, and how

their actions are structured by the convergence of class and gender at the most crucial moments in the (historical) narrative. As Sidhwa's novel demonstrates, it is contemporary realism which is uniquely equipped to project the fate of the community onto the experience of the individual. The following chapter, therefore turns from imagining communities to the question of how individuals are constituted within them and how this process of social formation is mapped.

CHAPTER 2

Tracing Trajectories:

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* and the Neoliberal *Bildungsroman*

Introduction

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) marks the coming-of-age of a South Asian bourgeois

realism in the contemporary moment.[29] Blending the genres of the confessional epistolary novel

and the novel of social formation, *The White Tiger* (hereafter *WT*) is part of a broader trend

within the last several decades toward a distinctly neoliberal resurgence of the *Bildungsroman*.[30]

These novels share a concern with processes of subject formation, the class tensions concretized

in urban space, and the postcolonial nation (especially in terms of the failures of decolonization).

Importantly, they also share a realist desire to chronicle what Raymond Williams refers to as

"changes in structures of feeling" (*Marxism* 132). These novels track "a social experience *which

is still in process*, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic,

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[29] I use the term South Asian broadly here, referring both to South Asian writers and diaspora
writers writing about (rather than from) South Asia.

[30] When I talk about the *neoliberal Bildungsroman* I specifically mean a genre which responds to
a distinctly neoliberal context, mirroring its logics in a way that is *inherently* critical—not
because it is *explicitly* critical but because realism, as Fredric Jameson points out, participates in
the narrative construction of bourgeois norms in a way that is "at least *tendentially* critical" since
"holding up a mirror to nature, in this case bourgeois society, never really shows people what
they want to see, and is always to that degree demystifying" (*Antinomies* 5; emphasis added). For
the same reason, I use critical realism and bourgeois realism interchangeably.

and even isolating," but which, in actuality, possesses "emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics" (132; emphasis added). In other words, as a neoliberal *Bildungsroman*, *WT* maps the shifting social structures of neoliberal globalization in order to make sense of the increasingly fragmented and isolating social experience of growing up within a fully deregulated capitalist world-system. As Auritro Majumder puts it in *Insurgent Imaginations: World Literature and the Periphery*, it is the novel's "formalization of the new periphery and its unevenness" that ultimately allows us to understand "the ways in which fiction registers … the foreign, local, and *subterranean* forces within a given social formation" (166).[31]

This chapter puts Georg Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin's analyses of the *Bildungsroman* into a productive conversation to explore *WT*'s representation of *the world in its totality* through the process of *subject formation*. While subjectivity and interiority are more commonly considered as features of modernist texts, I argue alongside Lukács and Bakhtin that they also serve as the organizing centers of a contemporary *critical* or *bourgeois realism* invested in the representation of the world and its norms through the mediating lens of the individual. In their discussion of the genre, both Lukács and Bakhtin focus on what Lukács refers to as the "socio-historical character of perspective" (Lukács, *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus* 60).[32] That is to say, we cannot understand the world represented in the text without understanding it in relation to the individual world view and experience of the narrator which are shaped by

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[31] Majumder's chapter on *WT* marks an important intervention in the discussion of the text by focusing on "the formal elements of the novel [which] gesture toward the broader aspects of peripheral internationalism" (*Insurgent Imaginations* 168). This reading provides an important corrective that frames the novel in terms of what Ulka Anjaria calls "new social realism" (Anjaria, "Realist Hieroglyphics" 114 qtd. in Majumder, *Insurgent Imaginations* 168).

[32] The text I am referencing is available in English translation under the title *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*. However, I refer on occasion to the 1958 German edition under the title *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus* [*Against a Misunderstood Realism*] because the available English text is in some instances so freely translated that it severely undercuts the points made in the original. All translations from *Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus* are mine.

historically contingent social structures. This matters in narrative terms because, as Bakhtin writes, it is "[a] given human being [that] constitutes the center of value in the architectonics of an aesthetic object; it is around him that the uniqueness of every object, its integral concrete diversity, is actualized" (Bakhtin, "Author" 230).[33]

Bakhtin argues that it is this "*world view* [that] organizes and unifies the performed acts" and thus "imparts unity to a life's act-performing directedness to meaning—the unity of a life's answerability, the unity of its going beyond itself, of surmounting itself" (205). Key, then, for this conception of realism is the way in which connections in the world are registered through the mediating world view of an architectonic consciousness rooted in the individual perspective of a narrator that ultimately determines how the narrative world itself is read and understood. Contemporary critical realism, in other words, makes reality itself legible as a process that is subject to the historical forces of the capitalist mode of production by representing it through the eyes of the neoliberal subject. As Sharae Deckard puts it, this represents a realist desire to *order* the contemporary world in terms of a "world mapping [that] takes the system of global capitalism as its interpretative horizon" (60). Realism, here, is the mode of representation that captures the neoliberal moment in its own terms in order to show how it essentially operates. Adiga's first-person narrator, then, functions not only as a framing device, but also as a *positioning* device that infuses the story with a clear class perspective. Tracing out the process of the protagonist's gradual integration into what Leela Fernandes and Patrick Heller call the "New Middle Class" allows Adiga to identify the limits of this bounded universe that structure class

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[33] Lukács similarly argues that "[t]he center, the very core of this form-giving content is in the last instance always a human being" (*Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus* 15). Instances such as this, where Bakhtin and Lukács make almost identical points in different terms, underline how profoundly their concerns with representation and human agency overlap conceptually despite their methodological differences. It is this interplay between their similarities and differences that makes the complementary application of their theorizations so productive.

mobility both socially and spatially (495; hereafter NMC).[34] In this way, *WT* offers a coherent

representation of globalization as a collectively lived experience by accessing a complex and

diverse web of social relations, as witnessed and interpreted by its first-person narrator. The

novel essentially demonstrates that the key to critical realism today is to understand the

architectonics of social formation, or in other words, that social structures can be represented

through individuals and their concrete experience.

Subjective Totality: Lukács, Bakhtin and the Architectonics of Social Formation

The novel of education and the novel of formation feature in both Bakhtin and Lukács's

theorizations of a realist aesthetic.[35] Bakhtin's "The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the

History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)" here stands out as his concrete

attempt to provide his own typology of the *Bildungsroman* as a separate form. He therefore

discusses the *Bildungsroman* as a sub-genre of a broader realist literary tradition, showing that it

can be differentiated from other types of novels thanks to its emphasis on the dynamic

developments of its characters. Crucially, he argues, what distinguishes the *Bildungsroman* is its

relationship to "time-space," and more specifically its representation of human beings not as

static but as subject to a continuous process of "*becoming*" (19; 20). He elaborates that "this type

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[34] Ana Christina Mendes and Lisa Lau refer to this structural relationship between text and reality as the "texture of representation," which brings together "the twin strands of textuality in space and the spatiality of text" (60).

[35] Bakhtin specifically talks about the "*Erziehungsroman* or *Bildungsroman*" ("*Bildungsroman*" 19). Where the former is translated as "novel of education," the latter is usually rendered as "novel of social formation" since the two German words *Erziehung* (the act of raising someone) and *Bildung* (more broadly speaking education) are similar but different since the latter has an etymological root in *Bild* (German for image), which suggests a more structured shaping of someone in the image of someone or something else. It should be noted that Lukács, even when it is rendered as *Bildungsroman* in the English translation, uses the term *Erziehungsroman* denoting a use that puts a greater emphasis on the bourgeois individual.

of novel can be designated in the most general sense as the novel of human emergence" in which the bourgeois subject itself takes on a new historical form (21). This new type of novel importantly "led to a radical reinterpretation of the elements of the novel's plot and opened up for the novel new and realistically productive points for viewing the world" (23). Lukács refers to this same dynamic of the foregrounding of the individual as the "creative function of perspective" (*Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus* 60).

Whereas Bakhtin discusses perspective only insofar as it pertains to the world view of the characters in a story, Lukács offers a useful complementary interpretation that deepens this understanding of narrative world view into a theory of perspective. He argues that it is the "dynamic interrelation of perspective and type (*Typus*)" which allows realism "to capture and compose the tendencies and directions of socio-historic development realistically" because it makes legible the connection between the individual (via *perspective* as a singular access *to* reality) and the social (via representative *types* that provide a collective representation *of* reality) (*Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus* 61). As he puts it, "[c]ertain facts of their present beget a certain change among human beings, and not just in terms of character formation (*Charakterbildung*) of the individual person, but rather also in the sense that some matters shift into the center, while others become peripheral" (61).

In other words, the defining feature that makes realism stand out compared to other modes of representation is its ability to narrate *subject formation as a social process.* Bakhtin calls this the shift from a novel of emergence as "man's own private affair" to the emergence of the bourgeois subject "*along with the world*" which in turn "reflects the historical emergence of the world itself" (Bakhtin, "*Bildungsroman*" 23). In this way, Bakhtin and Lukács provide us with a vocabulary to analyze the first-person narration in the contemporary novel of social

formation in terms of *composition*. In other words, their theorization of the *Bildungsroman* as a realist form which centers on the relationship between narrative perspective and character formation allows us to read contemporary critical realism as the kind of "[a]esthetic activity" that "collects the world scattered in meaning and condenses it into a finished and self-contained image" (Bakhtin, "Author" 191).

This mode of representation is precisely what Jameson refers to as "cognitive mapping," a project which has a stake in both understanding *and* representing the abstract links and connections that remain invisible at the level of immediate reality ("Cognitive Mapping" 356). It depends not just on an abstract conception of a global totality, but on a concrete notion, which Deckard refers to, citing Hrvoje Tutek, as "operative totality": a functional map of how the totality of the capitalist world-system operates in each individual instance (Deckard 60).[36] Against the backdrop of the official narratives of capitalist development, *WT*'s narrator thus carefully unfolds his own story about what the process of social formation requires of those who find themselves on the periphery of the NMC by making the dynamic violence—what Harvey calls "creative destruction" (*Brief History* 3)—that underwrites neoliberal development blatantly obvious. The matter of emergence—of the subject, but also of a social tendency—is thus inscribed into the very structure of the contemporary *Bildungsroman* by way of individual *perspective* and *type*.

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[36] Deckard cites a conference paper, but Tutek expands on the concept usefully in the essay "The Form of Resistance: Literary Narration and Contemporary Radical Political Experience." Here, Tutek observes that "one of the instruments that obscure the vision of the systemic dynamics of the world-system is the logic of fragmentation operative in the hegemonic discourses," which in turn necessitates a way of seeing as I have described it here that counters this logic of fragmentation. In this sense, an "operative totality" describes "the need to create a way of perceiving a historically consequential whole" that allows us to imagine political action with a concrete conception of a global totality (Tutek 262).

Structured Perspectives: Subject, Class, and the Mapping Function of Allegory

This link between individual and social totality expressed through literary form plays out to great

effect in Adiga's neoliberal *Bildungsroman*. Adiga's use of first-person narration, for example,

allows for the social totality—defined by unfettered competition, social atomization, and radical

individualism—to be mapped, precisely because the narrative is structured around the mediating

voice of a narrator who puts subjective experience and the facts of the world into relation with

one another, effectively representing them not as isolated glimpses of truth but as parts of a

larger whole that are intricately connected and interdependent. To use Bakhtin's framing,

Adiga's neoliberal *Bildungsroman* situates the "emergence" of an individual protagonist as

embedded within the emergence of an entirely new global, neoliberal socio-political totality.

In this way, novels like Adiga's *WT* are the result of the 1990 period of unfettered

neoliberal deregulation that Kanishka Chowdhury describes as a time when "conflicting

ideologies of nation, diaspora, religion, capital, and consumerism collided and coalesced as

[India] tried to shape a new postcolonial identity" (4). At the heart of this process of restructuring

national identity stands the neoliberal subject, the citizen of Chowdhury's *New India*. The novels

of the early 2000s consequently focus on subject formation as "an attempt by the state and the

corporate media to construct a new Indian citizen, one who was integral to a larger effort to

narrate a new, liberalized nation" (4). He describes how "in response to these hegemonic claims

about a new Indian subject, various artists, activists, and ordinary Indians put forward alternative

visions of an Indian subject" (4). It is here that we can consider *WT* as a challenge to this "new

subject." Balram, Adiga's first-person narrator, is characterized as a "social entrepreneur" who

has made himself in the *image* of the New India *precisely by giving fully into the violence that

undergirds global modernity* (Adiga 150).

The individual in Adiga's novel, then, functions essentially as an *allegory*, as a "structure that designates difficulties, if not outright impossibilities, in meaning and representation, and also designates its own peculiar structure as a failure to mean and to represent in the conventional way" (Jameson, "From Metaphor to Allegory" 27). The point of view of the narrator is, in this context, clearly marked as both limited and open from the beginning because it is the narrator's "lived experience" that establishes the text's "relationship *to* meaning and *to* an object" (Bakhtin, "Author" 115). The narrator of *WT* presents himself both as *sharing* the myopic field of vision of the NMC, and *transcending* it through his understanding of its contemporary emergence as what Lukács describes as a "bourgeois individualism, which only subconsciously and unwillingly absorbs the social" (*Wider den Mißverstandenen Realismus* 123).

It is useful in this context to draw on Franco Moretti's discussion of the *Bildungsroman* as the "'symbolic form' of modernity" (*Way* 5). As the novel of subject formation in the age of bourgeois class constitution, it maps the seemingly internal process of subject formation and exposes it as a normative process of socialization: the bourgeois novel represents modernity itself as a product of the enlightenment, education and personal achievement. But, as Moretti shows, reading it against the grain reveals that this formation is in fact the formation of a *class*. The constitution of the subject is thus not simply an education of the mind, but a repressive confinement that allows for the reproduction of a specific set of social relations: "if the hero wishes to enjoy absolute freedom in a specific domain of his existence, in other sectors of social activity there must prevail instead complete *conformity*" (55). Drawing on Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*, Moretti explains that the experience represented by the *Bildungsroman* is the experience of a totalizing system. "Meaning," Moretti argues,

is no longer 'assigned' by an *act* both subjective and precarious: it has become an

ontological *fact* enclosed within a stable system of relationships. It can only be reached

by *belonging* to this system, which is Lukács's concrete and organic totality. (55)

WT, I contend, inherits both the ruptures and continuities which mark contemporary critical

realism. While the *Bildungsroman* shows the inseparable link between the constitution of a

capitalist world-system and the genesis of the novel over the course of the past centuries, *WT* is

concerned with the changes that affect both the individual and society at large in the period of

neoliberal globalization. In this sense, it is both the *product* of a global system in the process of

being reshaped by neoliberal class politics, facing a reversal of the gains made by decolonization,

and its *allegorical representation*.

True to the Real: *White Tiger* and the Structural Blindness of the New Middle Class

Adiga's *WT* represents certainly one of the more recent and more famous examples, but the

novel does not stand alone. The contemporary *Bildungsroman* has, in fact, been a broad and

popular genre of post-1990s anglophone South Asian Literature. Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine*

Balance (1995) is one of the earlier novels of social formation, and certainly one of the most epic

in both scope and length, which is also fittingly set in the period leading right up to economic

deregulation. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) could also be categorized, albeit

with reservations, as a postmodern *Bildungsroman*. Similar in their poetic style, but more

straightforward in their plots are Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) and Kiran Desai's *The*

Inheritance of Loss (2006). But it is only with *WT* and novels like Vikas Swarup's *Q&A* (2005)[37]

or the novels of Mohsin Hamid—certainly *Moth Smoke* (2000) and *The Reluctant*

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[37] The novel was adapted for the screen as the Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) by director Danny Boyle. See Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic* as well as Brouillette on the dynamic of integrating iconic postcolonial authors into the global culture industry.

Fundamentalist (2007),[38] but especially *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) which is

closest in style and plot to *WT*—that the genre has come fully into itself as the *neoliberal*

Bildungsroman.[39]

These novels show an increasing emphasis on the very act of subject formation in the age

of neoliberal globalization and place themselves very consciously in this context—in terms of

their stories, but also in terms of the geopolitical contexts into which they embed themselves.

Thus, even before the narrative of *WT* begins, the address field that precedes the text informs us

of its supposed addressee into whose position the reader is invited to put themselves: Wen

Jiabao, the (then) Premier of the People's Republic of China. This gives us an immediate sense

of the peculiar and grandiose position of the speaker which is at the same time local and global,

national and market driven: Balram Halwai, "Thinking Man" and "Entrepreneur" who resides in

Bangalore or in other words "in the world's center of Technology and Outsourcing" (Adiga 1).

The text thus establishes a conversation between China and India, two nations that have been

propelled onto the economic world stage by neoliberal policies that opened up their closed

economies. In India, this economic restructuring took place in the aftermath of an economic

crisis in 1991. At risk of defaulting, the Indian government approached the International

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[38] Also, like *Q&A*, turned into a major motion picture by director Mira Nair in 2012 under the same title, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

[39] My discussion of the neoliberal *Bildungsroman* focuses on the contemporary moment to explore the genre a specific subset of texts in the South Asian context. Scholarship on the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* has discussed the genre either very broadly, as in the case of Julie Mullaney's *Postcolonial Literatures in Context*, in view of specific continental constellations across a larger time period as in the case of Ogaga Okuyade's "Traversing Geography, Attaining Recognition: The Utility of Journey in the Postcolonial African *Bildungsroman*," Ralph Austen's "Struggling with the African *Bildungsroman*," and Susan Andrade's *The Nation Writ Small, African Fictions and Feminisms, 1958-1988*, or by focusing on specific writers and their novels like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) or Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991). See, for example, Michael Donnelly's "The *Bildungsroman* and Biafran Sovereignty in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*" and José Sabtuafie Fernández Vázquez's "Recharting the Geography of Genre: Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* as a Postcolonial *Bildungsroman*."

Monetary Fund (IMF) to ask for an emergency loan. After securing guarantees in the form of 67 tons of gold and airlifting them to Europe, the IMF granted a loan of 2.2 billion dollars. In addition to providing securities, the government had to agree to a fundamental restructuring of the Indian economy. Through privatization and deregulation, the formerly closed economy was opened to the world-market.[40] It is within this context of neoliberal globalization that *WT* draws out the link between the very act of subject formation and the geopolitical condition into which it is embedded.

India's NMC emerged within the economic context I have just described. However, as the novel makes clear, they are simultaneously constituted by, and blind to, these forces. The structural blindness of the NMC is contoured both linguistically and spatially in the novel. The tensions which this invocation of global, economic and political forces suggests are mirrored by the position of English writing in India. From the first page, Balram's monologue is framed by its uneasy relationship with English: "Neither you nor I speak English," Balram begins, "but there are some things that can be said only in English" (Adiga 1). But what is it that can be said only in English? Balram assures us that it is the phrase commonly uttered by his employer's ex-wife—"*What a fucking joke*" (5)—but that, of course, is not the entire truth. For we encounter English repeatedly in the text in its various functions: as a *marker of class position*, as an *expression of class dominance*, and as the *language of secrets*. His boss, Mr. Ashok, and Ashok's

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[40] The case of China is even more complicated and contentious. David Harvey's describes the economic reforms implemented following the death of Mao in 1976 as "Neoliberalism 'with Chinese Characteristics'" (*A Brief History* 120-151), that is, a neoliberalism under a socialist banner, but neoliberalism nonetheless. For a consideration of the consequences of the neoliberal policy shift in the subcontinent, see the volume *India's New Economic Policy* edited by Waquar Ahmed, et al. As they point out it in their introduction, neoliberalism, rather than creating a burst of change and development, "has meant lots more money and power for a relative few, located in the elite spaces of India's glittering cities, and utter deprivation and exploitation for the masses" (10). For more on neoliberalism in China, see Wang Hui, *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity*, especially the first two essays on the historical context of neoliberalism.

(soon-to-be) ex-wife, Pinky Madam, for example, frequently mix English and Hindi when they "sit in the back of the car, chatting about life, about India, about America" in the back of the car, and it is this class privilege which is giving Balram—a self-professed good listener—his basic education in class difference (and English) (39). Building his vocabulary by listening attentively, he gains access to a different world, the world of middle class experience. But English is also the language of business in which Ashok and his brother discuss the bribes they have to pay to government officials. It is also the language in which Balram—from the social position of the entrepreneur—now addresses the Chinese Premier: the language of international relations.

His fluency is at first very limited, and he is painfully aware that, besides its more casual applications, English is frequently used to speak *for* him. In one telling passage, for example, Ashok's brother carries a letter from Balram's grandmother, written in Hindi. Instead of handing it to him, Ashok's brother reads it aloud. Ashok seems to question the action in English, but his brother replies in the same language that Balram "won't mind" and in fact "has no sense of *privacy*" (162). Balram, while not capable of literally understanding what is being said, "guessed, rather than understood, his meaning," both in terms of what is actually being said and that he is speaking *for* Balram (162). In other words, he is fluent in understanding English *in terms of class difference*, albeit (at first) not the literal meaning of words. English is thus what *marks* their difference, and ensures Balram's silence. What underlines this function of language as an expression of *class dominance*, is that linguistic switches into Hindi only occur when the brothers want to make sure they are understood *by the driver*, as, for example, when they outline "entirely for [Balram's] benefit" (and in response to Balram giving a single rupee to a beggar) the various kinds of charities they generously donate to despite the horrendously high taxes that are unfairly imposed on them (205-06).

Consequently, English is presented as the language of exclusion and domination. It is frequently employed when matters concerning Balram himself are discussed in the back of the car while he is driving. As usual, Balram can piece together what is being discussed—namely his potential replacement by a driver who knows the streets and can navigate without problems. In the first instance, it is Ashok's response in Hindi which allows him to guess the meaning of the conversation. But when the topic comes up again, and Ashok ultimately gives in to his mistress's request to replace Balram, however, the conversation is conducted entirely in English. Only this time, Balram manages to make out some of the words and realizes that they are—this time seriously—discussing the possibility of hiring another driver (229). What can only be said—or rather expressed—in English, then, is class position and class dominance. Both serve the function of excluding those who have no access to it. It is the language of the global middle class, the language of the "new cosmopolitanism," and the language in which the elite speaks *about* and *for* those it employs (Brennan, *At Home* 38).[41] It is this context in which Balram's monologue acquires a special importance. His words are not merely the ramblings of a madman, but turn into a story of personal progress that is meant to perform his fluency and cement his own claim to class mobility.

Right from the start, English is thus consciously constructed as the dominant language not by virtue of some inherent distinction, but as the medium that consequently reproduces the universalizing logic of capital: English functions to simultaneously distinguish classes and further the production of sameness necessary for international exchange; and the novel here

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[41] Language here also registers the complicated authorial position of anglophone writers who employ English in order to write about and for India. The complex issue of writing in English goes beyond the scope of this essay, but in the context of world literature it is necessary to at least briefly mention Ngũgĩ's *Decolonising the Mind* and Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory*. The former makes an important case for writing in national languages as an anticolonial stance. Ahmad's study, on the other hand, outlines the stakes of debates around the so-called category of "Third-World Literature" in the context of a comparative study of literature in South Asia.

seems to suggest that middle class ideology has therefore to be taken on within the medium of English. For Balram does not write without purpose. At the outset of his monologue he assures Wen Jiabao that it is *for his benefit* (mimicking the patronizing attitude of his employer) that he writes these letters. In a radio report, Balram has heard of the visiting Premier who "'wants to know the truth about Bangalore,'" and his reaction is one of exhilarated shock: "My blood froze. If anyone knows the truth about Bangalore, it's *me*" (Adiga 2). Balram then picks up the Premier's declared intention of coming to India in order "to learn how to make a few Chinese entrepreneurs," and stages his intervention against the official government narratives about India's economic success—represented by the government booklets and pamphlets which Balram frequently singles out as symbols of the official narrative in his counter-story about how to—to borrow from Mohsin Hamid—get rich in rising Asia (Adiga 3).

It is in this light, then, that we must read Balram's invocation of American business advice and self-help books with titles like "Ten Secrets of Business Success" or "Become an Entrepreneur in Seven Easy Days" (Adiga 4). As he warns: "Don't waste your money on those American books. They're so yesterday. I am tomorrow" (4). Adiga thus places Balram's own success story not merely in opposition to that of the Indian government, as one among many competing truths, but suggests that Balram's individual experience and the narrative of the government are complementary parts of the same story that allow a grasp of the social totality only when viewed together. As Nichole Aschoff has recently pointed out, there is something deeply unsettling about a development discourse which accepts the co-existence of growth and improvement on the one hand, and large-scale human suffering on the other, without making a connection: "What should we make of this schizophrenic picture, where on the one hand we are

told that humanity is better off than it's ever been, while on the other these gains seem like a mirage amid growing volatility, inequality, and uncertainty?" (4).

Balram's answer refuses to embrace either side of this "schizophrenic picture." His "truth" about Bangalore is that the picture is only complete if it includes both the shiny surface and its dark underbelly. The side effect of the *idée fixe* of the NMC, as Balram points out, is ignorance: "What blindness you people are capable of. Here you are, sitting in glass buildings and talking on the phone night after night to Americans who are thousands of miles away, but you don't have the faintest idea what's happening to the man who's driving your car!" (Adiga 220). They are simultaneously incredible connected with the world, yet disconnected from their own working class (who are merely visible from their glass buildings as part of the landscape). We see in Balram a character driven mad not by a mad world, but by the realization that nobody is capable (or willing) to *see* the "truth." If it is the world that is split into two kinds of experience, into two kinds of discourse, to bring them together must look like madness.

In addition to the demarcating effects of English, the NMC protects itself against this dual vision, against an experience of the contradictions inherent to a neoliberal social totality, by both crafting obfuscating fantasies and spatially fortifying itself against possible encounters. Its experience of reality, then, is myopic at best. While Mr. Ashok, a representative of this class, is well aware of the rampant corruption in the capital, and fashions a self-image as a kind employer which fails to fool anyone but himself. The government pamphlets—which Balram repeatedly mentions as a sort of example of a national effort in self-delusion—are a similarly constructed self-image, "full of information about India's past, present, and future," that paints a picture of a shining India precisely to gloss over the obvious contradictions of capitalism (Adiga 3). They represent what Chowdhury calls the "fundamental ideological project of the New India, which is

an attempt to designate a specific class subject" (43). Both the middle class subject and the

neoliberal state are shaping "a new imaginary consisting of phantasmic images and utopian

dreams, linked to a globalized world of privatized comfort, luxurious ease, and seemingly

endless opportunities, *especially in the urban areas where the majority of the wealthy reside*"

(Chowdhury 29; emphasis added).This process of mystification limits the awareness to the

violence always lurking beneath the surface.

It is here that the perspective of the first-person narration reveals the simultaneously

limited and open nature of its vision. By simultaneously offering access to both what *seems to be*

and what *is*, the novel in other words makes legible how the glossy appearance of global capital

and the violence undergirding it are intricately linked. It is through Balram's"lived experience"

that the novel thus realizes its "relationship *to* meaning and *to* an object" in what Bakhtin calls

"the *delimitation* of a human being in the world" ("Author" 115, 36). *Perspective*, in other

words, as a means of representing the structures which shape it, simultaneously reflects and

inflects that which is beyond it:

> This ever-present *excess* of my seeing, knowing, and possessing in relation to any other
>
> human being is founded in the uniqueness and irreplaceability of my place in the world.
>
> For only I—the one-and-only I—occupy in a given set of circumstances this particular
>
> place at this particular time; all other human beings are situated outside me. (23)

For Balram, then, comfort and struggle are merely different aspects of the same experience. His

"*excess*" of seeing, in fact, reflects the co-constitutive relationship of development and violence

as development *through* violence. As he explains to his interlocutor, the gory crime stories

popular among his fellow chauffeurs share a sinister connection to the government pamphlets for

visitors which celebrate India's successes. As Balram points out, the *Murder Weekly* magazine is

successful among the working class because "a billion servants are secretly fantasizing about strangling their bosses" (Adiga 104). He also points out that the magazine is published—like the pamphlets—by the government itself, at a low price "so that even the poor can buy it" (104-05).[42] But, as he assures the Premier, "the murderer in the magazine is so mentally disturbed and sexually deranged that not one reader would want to be like him— and in the end he always gets caught by some honest, hardworking police officer" (105). The stories thus deny any possibility to imagine violence as a way out of the cycle of exploitation. The violence of accumulation and expropriation is mystified among the middle classes who depend on it, while violence for the lower strata of society is imagined as deviant and punishable. Class difference is entrenched, class mobility simultaneously promised and denied. These stories, as Balram assures the premier, are thus no reason for concern: "It's when your driver starts to read about Gandhi and the Buddha that it's time to wet your pants, Mr. Jiabao" (105).

What he encounters in his role as chauffeur to the rich and powerful is the mystifying logic of a representationalist realism, where the middle class consumer experience and a rags-to-riches ideology have come to dislocate the experience of the masses. As Mr. Ashok's chauffeur, Balram catches glimpses of how this limited view is constructed by traversing the city with him. In the confined space of Ashok's Honda, the city rushes past on highways, effectively collapsing the distance between Ashok's apartment, the government district, the malls, the hotel bars, and the brothels he frequents. Ashok's spatial experience is thus not only limited to the car but to the back seat. It is a confined vision, framed as it is by the car window, but at the same time it registers in one sweeping glance the sheer overwhelming breadth of experiences that the

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[42] While it is not explicitly stated, the context of the novel allows us to assume that *Murder Weekl*y is published in Hindi, whereas the government pamphlets for international visitors are likely in English. The middle class phantasy of a neoliberal utopia of unproblematic modernization can thus be seen as a local instantiation of a global phantasy.

narrative cannot possibly capture or even claim to adequately represent. The kind of vision that the car window facilitates—embedded, situated, and local—is thus similar to the glass windows of the high-rises. Only that what obscures difference in this case is not distance but *speed*, which means that every time the car stops, the disconnected vision of the NMC is briefly interrupted by the focused glimpses that afford a more accurate view of reality. Yet, precisely in this gesture of unrepresentability, the narrator reclaims the explanatory power of narration. For it is in these structured perceptions of reality that we can observe the "construction of imagined geographies of India" as consciously positioned vis-à-vis lived space (Mendes and Lau 62). The individual scenes and experiences that the frequent car rides brush over are then structured by the first-person narrator, and integrated into a coherent narrative in which they become representations of the collective experience of urban space. What ultimately *emerges* as real is the story that is *prescribed* by both middle class ideology and government policy. In this context, Bakhtin's recognition of a general, societal structure of experience, which frames and organizes individual experience, thus allows us to understand the crucial link between what Lukács calls the "dynamic interrelation" of narrative *perspective* and the *type* of subject represented in a text (*Wider den mißverstandenen Realismus* 61). As Bakhtin allows us to fully appreciate, it is at this interstice between the boundary of perspective and the generality of the social type that we can locate the "historical emergence of the world itself" alongside the neoliberal subject (Bakhtin, "*Bildungsroman*" 23).

In the Rooster Coop: The Combined and Uneven Development of Social Totality

The resulting split between middle and working class perspectives, as mentioned above, is also registered in the *spaces* that Balram traverses in the novel. Rather than being presented with a

partial middle class view, Balram's movements constantly remind the readers of the literal

distance between his quarters in the dilapidated basement and Mr. Ashok's apartment when they

move to the capital. The novel maps the hierarchy that exists between the underdeveloped rural

regions Balram grew up in and the urban center of New Delhi onto the uneven spaces of the city

itself. For underdevelopment exists not just in the relationship between the country and the city,

but in the city itself. In a particularly graphic illustration of uneven development, Balram

encounters "the Darkness" (his expression for the rural areas) within "the Light" (his expression

for the city), when he makes an excursion outside the apartment complex (Adiga 82).[43]

Standing outside the closed malls in the morning light, Balram is looking for a clue to

help him decide what to do next when he stumbles across paw prints embedded in the cement.

Following them out of boredom, he is led "all the way around the malls, and then behind the

malls, and at last, where the pavement ended and raw earth began, they vanished" (222). At this

threshold between pavement and earth, Balram runs into the latrine of a slum built by

construction workers: "They were from a village in the Darkness … The men were defecating in

the open like a defensive wall in front of the slum: making a line that no respectable human

should cross" (222). But Balram also explains the connection between this spectacle and the

surrounding malls he has just left behind: "These people were building homes for the rich, but

they lived in tents covered with blue tarpaulin sheets, and partitioned into lanes by lines of

sewage" (222). Sewage, latrines, and makeshift housing: these graphic designators of life in the

slum are the very signs of underdevelopment that are not just an unfortunate byproduct of the

economic boom, or somehow a space that has not yet been lifted—quite literally—out of the

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[43] As Betty Joseph points out in "Neoliberalism and Allegory," her analysis of *WT*, this "cognitive mapping of India into darkness and light is a brilliant parody of the 'India Shining' slogan of the Bharatiya Janata Party in the 2004 national elections, where the BJP tried without success to showcase India's globalizing urban economy as a world in which all Indians benefited equally" (74).

mud and sewage. As Balram's tracing of the paw prints illustrates, he finds these signs not by venturing outside of the city, but by navigating into the underbelly of the city itself. There is a direct link between the lives of the poor and the lives of the rich, and if we follow Balram in his exploration of these connections, we find that underdevelopment is at the core of the project of development.

Social experience, this passage clearly maps, is structured spatially. Crucially, Balram experiences the sudden appearance of the "Darkness" in the "Light" as a vision of his past but as an encounter with those who simultaneously construct this spatial division and are subjected to it. They may be "building homes for the rich," but their own lives are "partitioned into lanes by lines of sewage" flowing from the very dwellings they erect (222). The "blindness" of Mr. Ashok—and, by extension, the middle and upper classes—is not just entrenched linguistically and ideologically; it equally depends on a labyrinthine urban landscape that represents a simultaneous expansion and compression of space. These spaces are at the same time constructed by those who are meant to be excluded from them, and commissioned by those who do not want to see those who build them. The encounters between these two worlds are both *constructive* (the literal building of walls and infrastructure meant to secure the elite) and *destructive* (in moments when the inchoate violence embedded in the system reveals itself).

In the only instance, for example, when Ashok and his wife, Pinky Madam, take over the wheel from Balram—who knows, in more than one sense, how to navigate the streets—leads to disaster as they drunkenly run over a pavement dweller. Balram is immediately asked to reassure them in their constructed ignorance that they merely ran over a stray dog (138). The bitter irony, of course, is that to them, the distinction matters only in word, not in fact. For Ashok, the encounter represents the uncanny realization that his actions on the lighted road *do* have an

impact on those who dwell in its shadows: "The streetlights were too dim, and the object—a large black lump—was too far behind us already to be seen clearly. There was no other car in sight. No other living human being in sight" (138). The poor are quite literally peripheral to the vision of the NMC. They are out of focus, hard to make out, an undistinguished and undifferentiated mass.

But while Ashok manages to put the event out of his mind quickly, it is too much for Pinky Madam to bear. She demands to stop and help, but before she can say or do anything, Ashok, with Balram's help, overpowers her and they drive back to the apartment where it is up to Balram to face the grim realities and to wash the car. The only proof that remains of what really happened is "a piece of bloodied green fabric that had got stuck to the wheel" (139). Later, when Ashok comes into the basement to check on Balram—or rather, on his progress with concealing any evidence of the accident—the proof at first horrifies him. Then, another realization settles in:

> "God, Balram, what will we do now—what will we—" He slapped his hand to his thigh.
>
> "What are these children doing, walking about Delhi at one in the morning, with no one to look after them?"
>
>> When he said this, his eyes lit up.
>>
>> "Oh, she was one of *those* people."
>>
>> "Who live under the flyovers and bridges, sir. That's my guess too."
>>
>> "In that case, will anyone miss her…?" (140).

Ashok realizes that their transgression will likely go unpunished. But these spaces are not meant to touch, and even the potential threat of being held responsible for their actions causes the entire Ashok family to launch full countermeasures. The family lawyer is sent for to draft a letter, for

which Balram is called to be present. Balram does not have a clue what is going on, and is sitting innocently "on the floor, happy as a dog" to be treated very respectfully by Ashok's brother (141). His self-description as a happy, subservient "dog" subtly foreshadows what comes next: to his employers he is just that, another animal like the "dog" Pinky Madam ran over.

For, as he soon finds out, he was in fact called up to sign a declaration under oath that he alone was in the car, and is fully responsible for the act and the failure to help. In the end, the Ashoks's connections to the police prevent anything from happening, but Balram learns once and for all that—like the pavement dwellers—the Ashoks will readily throw him under the wheels. "Yes, that's right," as he puts it, "we all live in the world's greatest democracy. *What a fucking joke*" (145). Here, the only thing that is socialized is the culpability of the rich. It is their servants, drivers, workers, and those in their path who have to pay for their transgressions. Through this unfolding of space before the reader, the novel draws out the connection between social space and social structure. While the road is technically a *social* space, it is clearly designed for a certain kind of *use*—the use of the elite in their shiny automobiles. Anyone who has to find a space in the margins will suffer the consequences. Consequently, the moment Balram realizes the intent of his employers in the aftermath of the accident also marks the moment when his class consciousness sharpens, as he recognizes the denial of class mobility that is literally built into the very landscape of the city.

It is no coincidence that the story of the accident is immediately followed by one of the central passages of the novel. In fact, the entire next "letter"—which represents the fifth night in which Balram tells his story to Wen Jiabao—is dedicated to one of Balram's more philosophically elaborate explanations of his journey toward class consciousness that marks a pivotal moment in his education and social formation. Laden with vivid images of violence and

confinement, the letter maps the social space that delineates the (im-)possibilities of class

mobility through the metaphor of the "Great Indian Rooster Coop" (Adiga 149). Like his later

encounter with the slum of the construction workers, the allegory maps out the route we have to

trace out to get from the spaces of the NMC experience to that of the general population:

> Go to Old Delhi, behind the Jama Masjid, and look at the way they keep chickens there in
>
> the market. Hundreds of pale hens and brightly colored roosters, stuffed tightly into
>
> wiremesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other and shitting on
>
> each other, jostling just for breathing space; the whole cage giving off a horrible stench—
>
> the stench of terrified, feathered flesh. On the wooden desk above this coop sits a
>
> grinning young butcher, showing off the flesh and organs of a recently chopped-up
>
> chicken, still oleaginous with a coating of dark blood. The roosters in the coop smell the
>
> blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know
>
> they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. (147)

Combining visual, tactile and olfactory markers—"pale hens and brightly colored roosters" that

are "stuffed tightly" into cages amid a "horrible stench"—Adiga here achieves a dual effect.

While the absence of sound in this scene heightens the horrifying sense of inescapability and

determination, it simultaneously serves to underline the powerful visual availability of reality.

This, the narrator tells his imagined interlocutor, is right there, readily available and *meant to be*

seen. But the likes of Ashok are still unwilling to turn their gaze towards this spectacle. To drive

his point home and to leave no doubt about his interpretation, Balram has to spell even the most

vivid of allegories out: "The very same thing is done with human beings in this country" (147).

Why then, he asks, is it that those on the lower ranks of the social ladder do not rebel? Is it

"[b]ecause Indians are the world's most honest people, like the prime minister's booklet will

inform you" (148)? Clearly, he thinks that there is something else at work here, and he promptly

elaborates on the two questions he sees as central in this context: "Why does the Rooster Coop

work?" and "How does it trap so many millions of men and women so effectively?" His

response:

> The answer to the first question is that the pride and glory of our nation, the repository of
>
> all our love and sacrifice, the subject of no doubt considerable space in the pamphlet that
>
> the prime minister will hand over to you, the Indian family, is the reason we are trapped
>
> and tied to the coop. The answer to the second question is that only a man who is
>
> prepared to see his family destroyed—hunted, beaten, and burned alive by the masters—
>
> can break out of the coop. That would take no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert
>
> of nature. (150)

What keeps him from betraying his employer is thus not his loyalty to Mr. Ashok, but the threat

the landlords pose to his family. When he eventually decides to kill Mr. Ashok, he knows full

well that in retaliation Mr. Ashok's father will have his family members killed. Balram's "coop"

is thus not just an allegory for the control that the landed class exerts over those without

property, it also demystifies the continued function of caste as a configuration of class under the

capitalist mode of production: Balram is the representative of the lower ranks of a caste system

that still exists but, in his words, has been radically reduced: "in the old days there were one

thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big

Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat—or get eaten up" (54).

It is here that the concept of combined and uneven development becomes central to

understanding what Adiga is mapping out conceptually.[44] As the geographer Doreen Massey has

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[44] Originally formulated by Trotsky in *The History of the Russian Revolution*, the law of
combined and uneven development refers to the way in which capitalist development represents

pointed out, "[if] the social is inextricably spatial and the spatial impossible to divorce from its social construction and content, it follows not only that social processes should be analysed as taking place spatially but also that what have been thought of as spatial patterns can be conceptualised in terms of social processes" (65). In this sense, capitalist modernization becomes what Jameson has called "an uneven moment of social development" (*Postmodernism* 307). The universal logic of capitalist globalization pulls together different lives in an uneven hierarchy of development. It is the simultaneous production of *difference* and *sameness* at the heart of the process of economic modernization. The effect of this combined and uneven development in the cultural sphere is extremely complex. Raymond Williams, in order to capture what he calls "the dynamic interrelations, at every point in the process, of historically varied and variable elements," uses the term "residual" to emphasis the persistence of culture: The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present (Williams, *Marxism* 121; 122).

The Warwick Research Collective also points usefully to the ways in which Ernst Bloch's concept of the "*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* ['the simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous']" has been picked up by Jameson and others to discuss this persistence of the residual as the dialectical other to the "*singularity* of modernity as a social form" (WReC 12).[45]

"a drawing together of the different stages of the journey" and is in fact the "amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms" (5). See Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*; for the use in dependency theory, see Andre Gunder Frank's *On Capitalist Underdevelopment*, as well as Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.
[45] As WReC points out, Bloch discusses this "simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous" in a chapter from his 1935 publication *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (12n23). For a more recent translation than the 1991 edition of *Heritage of Our Times*, see Bloch's "Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics" in which Mark Ritter translates "'(*un*)*gleichzeitigkeit*' as '(non)synchronism,'" avoiding what he rightfully identifies as the more confusing rendering as "'simultaneous'" (translator's note 22).

Whereas the "singular" moment of, for example, Jameson's *Postmodernism* or *A Singular Modernity,* describes the totalizing effects of capitalist development, "simultaneity" describes the co-existence of lived realities that by the standards of modernization, and in the partial experience of the NMC, are a thing of the past: "Modernity is to be understood as governed always—that is to say, definitionally—by *unevenness*, the historically determinate 'coexistence,' in any given place and time, 'of realities from radically different moments of history— handicrafts alongside the great cartels, peasant fields with the Krupp factories or the Ford plant in the distance'" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 307 qtd. in WReC 12). What is at work in Balram's Rooster Coop, is thus the residual social organization which has been incorporated into the New India as means of asserting class dominance and disciplining resistant subjects. The novel thus complicates Chowdhury's analysis of how the neoliberal subject of the New India is constructed around the tensions between the "old" and the "new":

> This duality of the old and the new is an important ideological trope employed by advocates of neoliberalism. In order to establish the famous point made by Thatcher (that "there is no alternative" to neoliberal capitalism), a necessary accompaniment of the new economic order is to link the "old" to an antiquated and outdated economic system. What constitutes the old, according to the lords of liberalization, in a postcolonial economy such as India's? On the one hand, any institution or law, such as a regulatory commission or a system of tariffs, that is seen as a barrier to the accumulation of wealth and the free flow of international capital; on the other, the specter of workers' and agricultural laborers' rights, or public investment or expenditure. Over the last twenty years, an unprecedented combination of dispossession, legislation, and intimidation has been set in motion to abolish these remnants of the "old." (Chowdhury 30)

Here, Chowdhury describes the ways in which the neoliberal state constructs a specific socialist

vision of India before the government's turn to full economic liberalization and deregulation in

the 1990s, positioning it as "old." Yet, as he elaborates in his analysis of the BJP construction of

the consumer citizen, the proponents of neoliberalism simultaneously draw on another kind of

tradition. By "appealing to fetishized, depoliticized traditions" the ideal neoliberal subject is

imagined as both opposed to the economically backward and dedicated to the culturally valuable.

But as Chowdhury explains, "[w]hat these calls for traditions and culture mask is, of course, a

specific class project that poses a privatized notion of citizenship" (88). The Rooster Coop, then,

is tradition employed to keep in check the inhabitants of the "Old Delhi" by the ruling elites who

inhabit the spaces of "New Delhi" where tradition has no longer any place and function beyond

selling "the comforts of the West, such as private housing estates and luxury goods, along with

the nostalgic traces of 'home'" (Chowdhury 74). But the construction of a consumer class and its

attendant ideology necessitated a physical restructuring of the economic landscape.

The Age of the Social Entrepreneur: Critical Realism and Neoliberal Globalization

Despite the structures which are meant to contain the individual, there remains, as Balram

ultimately realizes, a window of opportunity that allows for a kind of class mobility. But it

involves a process that the novel presents as literal dehumanization. As the prophetic

pronouncement of a school inspector at the beginning of the novel establishes, Balram himself is

the White Tiger of the title, "the rarest of animals—the creature that comes along only once in a

generation" (Adiga 30). When he later explains that "only a man who is prepared to see his

family destroyed … can break out of the coop" he brings back this initial episode by

pronouncing that not only would it take "a freak, a pervert of nature" to do this: "It would, in

fact, take a White Tiger" (150). It is in the following sentence that he refers to himself tellingly as a "social entrepreneur," merging the notion of class mobility with the ruthlessness and violence of capital accumulation. But becoming a social entrepreneur is more than a matter of becoming an animal—vividly illustrated in his hallucinatory vision of a white zoo tiger attacking him right before he makes his decision to abandon his family and kill Ashok. Visiting the National Zoo in New Delhi with his nephew Dharam, who has been sent to live with him, Balram recognizes himself in the zoo's caged white tiger and is once again reminded of his own social confinement:

> I watched him walk behind the bamboo bars. … He was hypnotizing himself by walking like this—that was the only way he could tolerate his cage. Then the thing behind the bamboo bars stopped moving. It turned its face to my face. The tiger's eyes met my eyes, like my master's eyes have met mine so often in the mirror of the car. All at once, the tiger vanished. (237)

A sudden horror grips Balram. He is about to faint, when he imagines the ground trembling: "Something was digging its way toward me, and then claws tore out of mud and dug into my flesh and pulled me down into the dark earth" (238). When he regains consciousness, he knows what he has to do in order to break out of the Rooster Cage. In this system that incorporates traditional social structures for the purpose of asserting class dominance, he needs to break with his family in order to break out of the cage. From the beginning of the novel, Balram had imagined the landlords and money lenders in his village as animals—"the Buffalo," "the Stork," "the Wild Boar" (20-21)—and what his becoming the White Tiger in turn now entails, is losing his humanity.

Shortly following this episode, Balram commits the ultimate act of rebellion: he kills his employer, sacrifices his family, and even takes on his dead employer's name. The transformation is thus complete: Balram has given up his individuality by giving up his social ties to become a function within the system, to gain a rank, to himself gain the status of an animal. This, however, as Balram explains on the last pages of the novel, is not so much an anomaly as the exception that confirms the rule. He has merely done what other animals have done before him. The system depends on White Tigers:

> See, sometimes I think I will never get caught. I think the rooster coop needs people like me to break out of it. It needs masters like Mr. Ashok—who, for all his numerous virtues, was not much of a master—to be weeded out, and exceptional servants like me to replace them. At such times, I gloat that Mr. Ashok's family can put up a reward of a million dollars on my head, and it will not matter. I have switched sides: I am now one of those who cannot be caught in India. At such moments, I look up at this chandelier, and I just want to throw my hands up and holler, so loudly that my voice would carry over the phones in the call-center rooms all the way to the people in America: I've made it! I've broken out of the coop! But at other times someone in the street calls out, "Balram," and I turn my head and think, I've given myself away. (275)

Balram, now that he has escaped the 'coop,' thinks about his identity solely in abstract economic terms where individuals become interchangeable, and his last words should be taken quite literally as a giving up of the self. This process plays out not only on the level of content: it is also reflected in the novel's specific form. As a *Bildungsroman* in the age of neoliberal globalization, it is representative of a critical realism which registers quite consciously the process of subject formation in neoliberal India. This is the kind of novel that is marked by what

Lukács calls a "bourgeois realism, which only subconsciously and unwillingly absorbs the

social" (*Wider den Mißverstandenen Realismus* 123). And yet, this contemporary critical realism

represents "no path into solitude, … but quite to the contrary one that leads from solitude into the

incipient adherence to the societal forces" (123). Lukács, crucially, is talking about a new type of

critical realism that he sees emerging in the societies of really-existing socialism. I use it

differently here to describe a critical realism that is both diverging from classical bourgeois

realism and from the kind of socialist realism Lukács envisions as leading to a "higher form of

personhood," namely the contemporary critical realism that shows the simultaneous emergence

of the neoliberal subject and the neoliberal world-system (123).

For what is represented here is a nonsynchronous existence structured by time and space,

and brought together by the systemic logic of capital. In other words, cultural and historical

differences which have been shaped in their respective contexts by the capitalist mode of

production. In texts like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795/96)

or Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), as Franco Moretti explains in *The Way of the

World*, the bourgeois novel is reluctant to visibly include the attendant violence of capitalist

accumulation, but rather "retreats when confronted with those moments of truth—political or

military—which were the substance of tragedy and epic, and which … are 'strangely' distant or

absent" (54).[46] *WT*, on the other hand, is a novel that maps the "blindness" of the middle and

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[46] Edward Said has forcefully made this point in *Culture and Imperialism*. Here, he outlines how
the mystification of colonial violence nevertheless has the residual effect of inscribing an
"imperial attitude underlying colonial rule" in such texts Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*
(Said, *Culture* 17). The powerful mystification in these narratives, he explains, stems from the
fact that emphasis is shifted from the horror of accumulation to its progressive appearance:
"Whatever is lost or elided or even simply made up in Marlow's immensely compelling
recitation is compensated for in the narrative's sheer historical momentum, the temporal forward
movement" (23). It is this reading for the underlying structures registered by such texts which
allows him to link a text like Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) to Walter Rodney's *How*

upper classes openly and looks for the "truth" behind entrepreneurial success in India by revealing the inextricable link between the shiny surface and its dark underside.

WT, in this sense, registers not so much the establishment of a class structure *against* an existing ruling class, but the *restoration* of power to an elite who has been kept in check by regulatory mechanisms and distributive social regimes. It is the push back against the achievements of the socialized economy of the Indian state before the opening of the economy in 1990. Drawing on definitions of imperialism from the early twentieth century, Chowdhury thus makes the link between the imperialism(s) of past and present: "Looking back at Lenin's definition of imperialism, one finds that the richer countries continue to divide the spoils, and imperial wanderings across the globe—albeit through proxy agencies in many cases—are as numerous as ever" (112). There is a clear parallel in how Lenin and, later, Harvey and others have talked about the imperialism(s) of the early and late twentieth century. What is, in both cases, at stake in imperialist projects—national, international, or transnational—is either the formation or restoration of class power. As Harvey explains, the contemporary form of the imperialist project draws even more "heavily on surpluses extracted from the rest of the world through international flows and structural adjustment practices" (*Brief History* 29-31).

In the case of India, this has meant the forceful opening of the formerly closed economy through privatization and deregulation in the aftermath of the 1991 Indian economic crisis. The billion dollar emergency loan which the International Monetary Fund provided was purchased by providing 67 tons of gold deposits as security, and agreeing to this "structural adjustment." Yet the neoliberal rollback has, especially in its early stages, not been a full-scale assault on social institutions. Instead, it took the shape of a slow scaling back of regulations, rights, and

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Europe Underdeveloped Africa via its hushed remarks on the origins of British wealth (Said, *Culture* 59).

guarantees, and resembles more generally Gramsci's "passive revolution": a resurgence and revival of class domination.[47] This is also the sense in which Harvey has described neoliberalism as a form of "creative destruction": "a political scheme aimed at reestablishing the conditions for capital accumulation and the restoration of class power" ("Neoliberalism" 26; 29).[48]

Here, forms of social organization like the caste system are not eliminated as "archaic," but are integrated into the class formation of the New India as "residual" forms. When Adiga thus outlines the social modes of control which are employed by the rural and urban elites in order to guarantee the stability and continued functioning of the system, his metaphor of the "Rooster Coop" is spot on. As a symbol for the traditional family, it not only captures the confinement that is here ascribed to the "old," but shows that it is central to the ruthless operation of the "new." This integration of the old as a function which supports the new follows a colonial logic. In the case of India, for example, "Delhi as the imperial power centre of India was coupled with its projection as a museum of India's past" (Banerjee and Basu 125).

So, like Moretti does with regards to the nineteenth century European novel, we can observe that Adiga's novel is an attempt to cope with changes to traditional social relations, traditional class formations, even tradition itself: constituting what we can call a "crisis of experience" (Williams, *English Novel* 11). As Balram recognizes, however, for the NMC this

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[47] Gramsci defines this in the *Prison Notebooks* as the hegemonic struggle for ideological dominance in the context of the nationalist Risorgimento (unification of Italy). See, "The Concept of Passive Revolution" (106-114).

[48] As the euphemistic "creative" implies, there exist various defenses of imperialism and (neo-) colonialism, especially in the context of the neoliberal assault on the gains of decolonization, which like to portray the violence of accumulation through dispossession in much kinder terms. See, for example, Mark Tunick's "Tolerant Imperialism: J.S. Mill's Defense of British Rule in India" or Bruce Gilley's more caustic (and more recent) "The Case for Colonialism." Another example, focusing specifically on major critical interventions in postcolonial theory, is Erin O'Connor's "Preface for a Post-Postcolonial Criticism" which advocates for a return to the reading of *great novels* unsullied by uncomfortable readings focusing on the complicities of culture and imperialism.

does not represent a threat, but instead an *opportunity* because it promises to do away with all those social ties that are said to—quite literally—hold India back. The new global bourgeoisie emerging from the Indian middle class in this sense revels in the idea that it has a world to win and, in fact, nothing to lose but its regulatory chains.

A confession-*cum*-coming-of-age narrative like *WT*—with its marked textuality (as epistolary novel) and its radical subjectivity (in its first person narration)—thus betrays a keen awareness of the fact that in a world ruled by the logic of capital, there is no stability to be found. The only certitude is constant change and the subjection to market fluctuation and accumulation through dispossession emanating from shifting imperial and sub-imperial centers. In this world, the individual experiences alienation and fragmentation on a never-before known scale. At the same time, it is an inherently localized process: the class mobility of the few is based on the immobility of the many. Drawing on the Jameson-Ahmad debate about "Third World Literature," Betty Joseph thus reads Adiga's *WT* correctly as a "neoliberal allegory":

> In this scenario, despite the suggestion of a historical break, neoliberal allegory still figures the nation as a struggling individual emerging finally from long-term postcolonial economic woes and ready to take its rightful place on the international stage. [Here] … the nation is held back, not by colonialism or imperialism but by forces within itself. (69)

But more than this being merely an allegorical representation of the neoliberal subject along the lines of Jameson's "national allegory," I think we can in fact observe that this process of subject formation is interwoven with the form of the novel itself. The contemporary anglophone novel of formation has Chowdhury's "duality of the old and the new" as its founding principle. For the neoliberal subject is not socialized and introduced into society in an unproblematic process of education and growth.

Instead the formation of the protagonist of *WT* is one of *un*-becoming: throughout the novel, Balram strives for a better life, but class mobility is constantly denied until he realizes how to "break out" of the determinations that keep him in check. It may thus be the case that the *Bildungsroman* in the age of neoliberal globalization is still very much Moretti's "'symbolic form' of modernity" (*Way* 5). But it also registers the radical and, quite literally, dehumanizing process subject formation has become. The traditional *Bildungsroman* presented bourgeois subject formation as a process of individual growth and education, effectively creating a narrative that psychologized the normative process of socialization. External determination was mystified as internal development, and class formation was presented as personal success.

But in *WT*, all pretense is dropped. The entire structure—confessional *and* educational, individual *and* social, national *and* global—is angled towards Balram's eventual cutting of all social links. Every letter represents a step in the process wherein Balram realizes that his only way out is to break with the structures of the old which have been integrated as controlling mechanisms into the new economy. His narrative is thus a mirror image of the business books he mentions at the very beginning. Yet, where these books promise to turn you into an entrepreneur in "seven easy days," Balram promises to do the same in seven not-so-easy nights, with each letter, each lesson describing his gradual turn inwards against himself and every social instinct he has. The ruthlessness with which the self-declared "social entrepreneur" eventually breaks with his family and everything "holding him back," is the lesson at the heart of this novel of neoliberal subject formation: that exceptional violence is precisely not an exception. It is not a bug in the system but the very feature that actually allows it to function and reproduce itself time and again.

Conclusion: From Emergence to Submergence

What we see take shape with *WT*, then, is an emerging critical realism that is not so much

radically new as newly radical in its registration of the fundamental operation of the capitalist

world-system. In formal terms, we can observe this in the shift away from the *Bildungsroman* as

a novel of unproblematic self-making towards the "creative destruction" of neoliberal subject

formation (Harvey, *Brief History* 3). As its hybridization with the confessional narrative

suggests, the formation of the bourgeois subject is no longer a process of stabilization, neither is

it a purely national struggle.[49] It has become a process of class war, waged by a global economic

elite against humanity itself. In this context, Lukács is once again useful for helping us develp an

understanding of how the *Bildungsroman* in general functions as a realist form. In *The Meaning*

of Contemporary Realism he locates its revolutionary potential precisely in its commitment to a

realist depiction of reality.

     Lukács refers to Hegel's definition of the *Bildungsroman*: "'During his years of

apprenticeship the hero is permitted to sow his wild oats; he learns to subordinate his wishes and

views to the interests of the society; he then enters that society's hierarchic scheme and finds in it

a comfortable niche'" (Hegel qtd. in *Meaning* 112).[50] But Lukács emphasizes that this process is

ultimately not one of quiet acceptance but one of (often forceful) social integration:

     The realization of youthful convictions and dreams is obstructed by the pressures of

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[49] For an example of how confession narratives have been employed in a colonial context as a form of veiled critique, see Mary Poovey, "Ambiguity and Historicism: Interpreting Confessions of a Thug." Poovey positions her own reading against the backdrop of contemporary nineteenth century interpretations, which in fact understood the text as a defense of Empire. This ambiguity of parallel interpretations is similar to the partial experience of neoliberalism which Adiga's novel tries to undermine precisely by revealing their essential links. Adiga's novel is in this sense a reworking of the trope of the confessional novel.

[50] Lukács fails to provide a citation, but the quote is taken from Hegel's lectures on aesthetics. The English translation is free, but presents the content of what Hegel says very accurately. For a more literal (but less accurate) translation, see Hegel, *Aesthetics* 1: 593. For the German original, see Hegel, *Vorlesungen* 2: 220.

society; the rebellious hero is broken, and driven into isolation, but the reconciliation

with society of which Hegel speaks is not always extracted. On the other hand, since the

individual's conflict with society often ends in resignation, the end-effect is not so

different from what Hegel suggests. For society emerges triumphant, in spite of the

hero's struggles. (112)

In both definitions, the essential function of the *Bildungsroman* is realist in the sense that it maps

the protagonist's (and by extension the readers') education in what we can call, with Franco

Moretti, the real ways of the world. It is precisely this logic of integration, however, that Adiga's

novel subverts. For Balram does the precise opposite: by breaking with his family in order to

carve out his place in the social order (rather than "find his comfortable niche"), he

simultaneously rejects the *apparent innocence* of neoliberal development and reaffirms the

violence that represents the *essential logic* of wealth accumulation. In this way Adiga's novel

becomes the *Bildungsroman* of a world that has been subjected to totally accelerated and

unfettered capitalist modernization. With Lukács, we can observe that in its realist representation

Adiga brings together the different moments of the *Bildungsroman* and reveals their dialectical

relation: not just reconciliation *through* resignation, but resignation *as* reconciliation.

In Bakhtin's terms, this *neoliberal Bildungsroman* thus represents not the "*emergence*" of

a *new* subject, but rather the submission of the subject to *new forms of regulation*, or in other

words, a *sub*-mergence of the individual in the process of the reproduction of the capitalist

world-system. Rather than providing us with "new and realistically productive points for viewing

the world," the novel of social formation offers new and realistically *re*-productive points for

viewing the world in the age of neoliberal globalization ("*Bildungsroman*" 23). Like the

contemporary historical novel, the *Bildungsroman* thus fulfills a function of mapping that

responds to the increasingly complex and dynamic web of global social relations by laying bare the structures that shape it. This allows us to understand a key dynamic of how contemporary forms respond to the pressures of globalization: *novelization*, or, in other words, the return to a realist aesthetic that allows the novel to increase our understanding of the world. As the next chapter outlines, nonfiction forms, in particular, have undergone this process of novelization. As a form, the contemporary reportage thus mediates between the universal logic of capitalism and the particularity of the local and gestures towards the lived dimension of globalization by drawing on the adaptability and fluid nature of the novel in order to map the concrete violence undergirding the abstract socio-economic processes of liberalization.

CHAPTER 3

Heteroglossic Life-Worlds:

Arundhati Roy's *Walking with the Comrades* (2011) and the Mapping Function of

Novelistic Discourse

Introduction

Arundhati Roy's 2011 essay anthology *Walking with the Comrades* (hereafter *WWC*) is among

the most prominent anglophone nonfiction texts about the Naxalites,[51] Maoist guerrillas in the

heartland of India who are waging an armed struggle against the state-led expropriation of

indigenous tribal communities known as Adivasi.[52] The events covered in Roy's reportage deal

with the first intense strategic escalation shaped by the Congress Party's 2010 Integrated Action

Plan (IAP), which combined repression with regional development. In the aftermath of the 2014

elections, and with the subsequent rise of Hindu nationalism on an unprecedented scale, "the

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This chapter is an expanded version of my previously published article "Novelizing Non-Fiction:
Arundhati Roy's *Walking with the Comrades* and the Critical Realism of Global Anglophone
Literature" (2020). Taylor & Francis offers reuses of its content for dissertations free of charge
contingent on the resubmission of a permission request if the work is published.

[51] The term Naxalite derives from a 1967 peasant uprising in the village of Naxalbari in the state
of West Bengal and is used to refer to members of the Communist Party of India (Maoist).
[52] For more on the complexities of the term Adivasi as well as for a critical analysis of the
political use of indigeneity, see Bates and Shah.

Maoist movement has been forced into ebb tide" (D'Mello 254).[53] While Roy is sympathetic to

the cause of the Maoists and to the struggles of the tribals, her account of the Indian state's

gradual privatization of mineral-rich indigenous lands into the ownership of multinational

corporations is highly critical. Roy's account describes in no unclear terms what Priyamvada

Gopal calls "a postcolonial national democracy that . . . act[s] like a colonizing power toward

large sections of its citizenry" (117).

Re-thinking theorizations of the novel and realism by Mikhail Bakhtin and Georg Lukács

in the context of global anglophone writing, I read Roy's reportage as a form of realist writing

which represents a global totality through a novelistic discourse that combines a multitude of

voices, sociolects, and discourses.[54] Bakhtin calls this literary assemblage of social relations the

"structured stylistic system that expresses the differentiated socio-ideological position of the

author" in relation to the multilingual landscape within which the writer is situated ("Discourse"

300). Bakhtin refers to this narrative strategy as "heteroglossia": the presence of multiple

languages and dialects in one language. Heteroglossia is a feature of novelistic discourse which

captures a "*diversity of speech*" rather than "*the unity of a normative shared language*" (308). In

Roy's reportage, it is the narrative's focalization, its first person voice, which opens the text

toward the collective experience of globalization. In this way, Roy's text registers a deep

disconnect between what the global and "hegemonic aspirations" of a rising "New Middle Class"

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[53] Even though the war the Congress Party has waged since 2010 is largely responsible for this decline, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under Narendra Modi can take at least partial "credit" in part because it put an even greater emphasis on repression (Oxford Analytica). This has created a climate in which even journalists like Gauri Lankesh are targeted and killed simply because of their reporting that is deemed too "sympathetic" to the Naxalites (Deb, "Killing").

[54] As Michael Holquist's points out in the glossary of *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin uses the term discourse in a broader sense "signifying both an individual word and a method of using words . . . that presumes a type of authority" (427).

(hereafter NMC) and the realities of a vast segment of the world's population (495).[55] What we can see take shape here is a critical realism which responds in both content and form to the pressures of globalization.

The defining feature of this critical realism then is not a sort of naïve mimeticism that is limited to a merely realistic representation of reality. Instead, it is the ability to make a literary judgment in representing a "'hierarchy of significance' in the situations and characters presented" (Lukács, *Meaning* 34). In other words, critical realism is not interested in representing reality merely as the sum total of naturalistic details, but in drawing out the connections and links among these seemingly unrelated elements to construct a narrative which makes a truth-claim about reality. In such a conception of realism, a nonfiction text like Arundhati Roy's *WWC* stands out because it consciously positions the stories of the guerrillas and tribals it documents against dominant Indian political narratives and the middle-class perspective of the city. What is at stake in Roy's reportage is the representation of the lived experience of those who are directly affected by neoliberalism and who feel the effects of the fluctuation of global markets in the most immediate ways. As a narrative intervention against a global development discourse, Roy's text performs a "socially symbolic act" by "restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history" (Jameson, *Political Unconscious* 20).

Theorizing Totality: Globalizing Bakhtin and Lukács

Lukács offers a detailed analysis of the reportage genre and outlines what he sees as its drawbacks when merged with the novel in a 1932 essay titled "Reportage or Composition?".[56]

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[55] It should be added that the term NMC describes a complex class formation. Here, the emphasis is less on any reified conception of class, and more on the "hegemonic aspirations" that are representative of a broad political and economic class consensus that actively and passively shapes the discourse, opinions, and desires of large swaths of the population.

Writing on the German novelist Ernst Ottwalt, he criticizes what he perceives as a static

representation of the social totality which is blind to its processual nature. While he generally

points to the merits of reportage as a journalistic form, he nevertheless argues that only properly

"literary" texts (which nonfiction for Lukács decidedly is not) can represent the complexity of

life in a way that accurately represents reality as a historical process. In his discussion of the

reportage genre he consequently outlines his rejection of the bourgeois psychological novel in

general—and of the reportage novel in particular—because it mystifies societal and economic

determinations by turning all of history into a matter of individual consciousness.[57] Here it

becomes necessary to complement Lukács's theorization with Bakhtin's understanding that the

novel, in fact, when "taken as the totality of all the languages and consciousnesses of language

embodied in it, is a *hybrid*" (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 366). This combination works since language,

as Auritro Majumder points out, "in the Bakhtinian sense is not anterior to, disengaged from, or

passively chronicling history," but instead represents "an index of the development of social and

historical forms" ("Mikhail Bakhtin" 327).

     As Jed Esty has suggested, it is precisely this radical focus on process and history that

makes it productive to think about the ways in which Lukács's "theories of the novel can be

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[56] Translations mine; while Rodney Livingstone's translations of Lukács are generally very reliable, he translates the German noun "*Gestaltung*" as "portrayal." While the word is vaguely related to "*Darstellung*" (depiction/representation) or "*Schilderung*" (description), it cannot be used synonymously. In fact, the best translation to capture Lukács usage is "composition" (in the sense of structuring or shaping a narrative). For here, Lukács is essentially opposing *nonfiction* (reportage) and *creative fiction* (novel). The essay has been generally ignored in discussions of Realism, likely due to the confusing translation that does not bring out sharply this contrast between fiction and nonfiction.

[57] Not coincidentally, this is the very angle Aijaz Ahmad pursues in his critique of Roy's first novel in "Reading Arundhati Roy Politically."

extended and extrapolated beyond his own moment and into our own" (366).[58] This allows us to identify the continuity within the historical ruptures separating the colonial from the post-colonial, between imperialist expansion and neoliberal globalization, and to ultimately "turn Lukács against Lukács" (366). In his essay on reportage, Lukács essentially argues that the issue is not so much individual consciousness, but a consciousness divorced from its social relations. For Lukács, in order to represent reality accurately, what becomes necessary is a dialectical form which is capable of grasping social processes by looking at the interdependent constitution of both the individual and society from the bottom up.

We see such a dialectical logic very much at work in Roy's reportage, and generally in her nonfiction writing. Roy is conscious of both the small stories and the grand narratives, without collapsing them into a static binary that leaves no potential or hope for change. As Pranav Jani points out in his reading of *The God of Small Things*, we can very easily trace out "Roy's big/small paradigm," which is more subtly present in her novels, in such nonfiction texts as "The Greater Common Good" (Jani 201). In *WWC,* Roy pairs this radical subversion of any claim to omniscience with a deeper, more concrete knowledge of the lived realities of global modernity. It is thus not a de-centering of a typically realist omniscience, but in fact a re-centering that ascribes the ability to know in the individual. As a critical realism, that is also profoundly self-critical, both novel and reportage strategically employ heteroglossia, which allows for a "diversity of social speech types … and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 262). While the multitude of voices is in each case mediated through a first person narrator, it nevertheless suggests that the narrator mediates between the reader and a reality, which in the normative narratives of globalization has no voice. If we then

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[58] See Majumder, "Toward a Materialist Critique of the Postnational" for another recent example of such an extension of the Lukácsian framework for postcolonial studies.

"turn Lukács against Lukács" as Esty proposes, the reportage which has been "novelized" in this sense must be understood not as a muddling of genres, but as a hybrid of fiction and nonfiction which merges both to achieve a more immediate representation of reality.

Reportage as Composition: The Novelization of Contemporary Nonfiction

Within this framework that brings together Bakhtin and Lukács, a text like *WWC* can be read as integrating the narrative strategies of the novel into the reportage form by historicizing the essentially social nature of narrative as a verbal act. Roy creates a dialogic structure which "novelizes" the reportage or, in Bakhtin's words, "inserts into … [it] an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)" ("Epic" 7). This novelization of nonfiction is thus not a new phenomenon, but it has become a prominent issue again in the era of globalization because it allows for a kind of flexibility and openness that reflects the indeterminacy and anxiety of our time at the level of form. "Only that which is itself developing," as Bakhtin points out, "can comprehend development as a process" (7). The distinguishing features of Roy's writing are thus her focus on change and process as well as the recognition that rigid notions of objectivity can be challenged only by multiple voices that are put into conversation with the narrator's own.

Roy achieves this "dialogic orientation" by walking the thin line between speaking of, for, and with the subjects of her nonfiction (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 279). Rather than foregrounding her own point of view, this formal strategy allows Roy to put into conversation the life-world, experiences, and thoughts of Naxalites and Adivasi with those of her urban audience. The narrative that emerges captures both the stories of the fighters themselves and the official Party history on their own terms, while at the same time putting them into the context of

a broader national and, in fact, global context. She shows that these stories and histories relate to the official government narratives in the same way in which the "hegemonic aspirations" of the NMC relate to the realities of the Adivasi who are driven from their ancestral lands for the purpose of resource extraction (Fernandes and Heller 496). These are the counter-narratives that have been sidelined, silenced, and excluded from the national consciousness and conversation not because they are marginal, but precisely because these stories are central to how the capitalist system operates.

In this way, *WWC* manages to map the entire web of socio-economic connections in a way that localizes the experience of a global system of capitalist exploitation. This is what makes her text feel so organic in its reproduction of reality. Her reportage here registers history not as an abstract process but as a subjectively lived and fundamentally social process. Raymond Williams refers to this sort of registration on an affective level as "*structures of feeling*," or, in other words, "a social experience which is still *in process*, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which . . . has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics" (*Marxism* 132).

Because the text is so self-aware of its limited point of view, it remains capable of positioning itself in relation to the social context by including other voices. Rather than offering a static representation of subaltern histories without providing a broader societal and historical context, the novelized reportage narrates a social totality in which small stories and grand narratives shape and constitute one another. Roy, in this sense, refuses to follow the strict dichotomy between economic, social, and historical determinants and what Ranajit Guha and the Subaltern Studies group call the "small drama and fine detail of social existence" (Guha 36). Instead, the text registers a break between subjective experience and social representation: a

"crisis of experience" that expresses itself as a crisis of mediation (Williams, *English Novel* 11).

While the world in its totality of abstract connections is too complex to be adequately

represented from an individual point of view, it is paradoxically the individual that becomes the

mediating agent who can draw together these different strands of experience through

heteroglossic first-person discourse, thus capturing the complex social totality of neoliberal

globalization in India without veering into mere abstract objectivism.

Positioning Narratives: Reportage Writing and the Focalization of Class

If we take a look at Arundhati Roy's overall oeuvre—two novels and over a dozen book length

studies that fall broadly into the reportage genre—and at the general trajectory of anglophone

writing in South Asia, we can observe that the last two decades have seen an explosive growth of

nonfiction in English. In this context, Roy's reportage is certainly among the best-known texts

reporting on the Naxalite insurgency in the so-called Red-Corridor,[59] but it does not stand alone.

The Naxalite reportage has in fact become something of a subgenre of nonfiction writing. Other

recent examples include Satnam's *Jangalnama: Travels inside a Maoist Guerrilla Zone*

(2002/2010), originally published in Punjabi;[60] *Red Sun: Travels in Naxalite Country* (2008) by

Sudeep Chakravarti; *Let's Call Him Vasu: With the Maoists in Chhattisgarh* (2012) by

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[59] Red Corridor refers to areas either under Maoist control or with significant insurgent activity. It stretches across ten Indian states, especially Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.

[60] Gurmeet Singh, writing under the pseudonym Satnam, stands out in comparison to Roy and some of the other authors mentioned here. Until his tragic suicide in 2016, he had been active as a revolutionary, activist, labor organizer, and contributor to *People's March*, a banned far left magazine, under the name G. Fellow. While *Jangalnama* begins in much the same way as Roy's text—with the tropes of *making contact* and *entering the jungle*—it is a much more partisan text. It also stands out because it originally appeared in Punjabi as early as 2001 and, as Asis Ranjan Sengupta points out in his obituary, was only translated and picked up by Penguin Books once "the reading public of the World became aware of the phenomenon named 'Bastar'" through anglophone writers like Roy.

Shubhranshu Choudhary; and *Days and Nights in the Heartland of Rebellion* (2012) by Gautam

Navlakha. Unlike the government and the mainstream media, these authors are generally more

sympathetic to the Maoist insurgents themselves, and, importantly, more willing to listen. What

stands out, especially in the case of high profile authors like Roy, is that these journalists come

almost exclusively from an urban middle-class background and address an anglophone audience

from the same demographic. Consequently, when the urban writers enter the jungle of the Bastar

District of Chhattisgarh, their narratives are structured as encounters of city and country, or

center and periphery, which begin with their arrival as visitors from "outside." From the outset,

their relationship to both Adivasi and Naxalites is thus shaped by the systemic relation between

country and city. As Raymond Williams argues, it is this "fundamental division" at the heart of

the capitalist mode of production which has given rise to the many "symptoms of this division":

from the division of labor at both a national and global level, to the physical organization of

space, to the very "idea and practice of social classes" (*Country* 305). Crucially, how this

"fundamental division" is understood—whether in terms of an uncritical and linear conception of

development and progress or as an inherently reifying and exploitative process of capitalist

accumulation—is first and foremost "a problem of perspective" that is simultaneously social and

spatial in nature (9).

It is thus the very structure of these texts that makes the class position of the authors, or,

in a more literary sense, the *focalization* of these texts a key concern. As an essentially colonial

trope, the encounter—as the encounter of a civilizational Other—also makes the connection

between the reportage as a form and the ethnographic travelogue more explicit. The dynamic of

the outsider who ventures into a foreign and unknown territory is also what has opened up

writers like Roy to criticism for her descriptions of tribals as romanticizing or neo-orientalist.[61]

However, the position of the transgressive journalist-narrator is not a simple, one-dimensional

reflection of the dichotomy of urban center and rural periphery, where the privileged urban

writers take it upon themselves to represent those who *cannot represent themselves*.[62]

Neil Lazarus has elaborated on the wider history of this question of representation in the

field of postcolonial criticism, warning of its pitfalls. He locates this tendency for wholesale

rejection of any representation, be it colonial or anti-colonial, in the writings of Ranajit Guha and

the Subaltern Studies group. For Guha, Lazarus explains, any representation, even a "counter-

representation" meant to reclaim a subaltern identity as part of a decolonizing effort, "must be

understood as *appropriation*" (Lazarus 123). This stance, as Lazarus cautions, ignores the

original purpose of creating these anti-colonial counter-histories. Rather than merely replacing a

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[61] Alpa Shah has criticized Roy for using "well-worn stereotypes about indigeneity" ("Eco-Incarceration" 32). Her concern is that this collapses the complexity of "significant social transformations that are taking shape and the contradictions and conflicts which result" (34). In her more recent travelogue-*cum*-anthropological-study, *Nightmarch* (2019), Shah qualifies this criticism somewhat by emphasizing that her concern is a collapsing of the complexity of social relations and political reality even in sympathetic accounts like Roy's (Shah, *Nightmarch* 209). While Shah's text may do this complexity more justice than Roy's brief reportage can, it is important to emphasize that Shah too observes that the relationship between the Naxalites and Adivasi has become shaped by an organic and reciprocal influence.

[62] Edward Said famously used this phrase from Karl Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* as his epigraph in *Orientalism* in order to illustrate the colonialist logic of "speaking for the Other." While at first glance Marx's phrase—"They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" (Said, *Orientalism* xiii)—does seem to have a clear colonial undertone of speaking for non-European peoples, in fact the sentence originally addressed the question of whether French farmers constituted a unified class, and how they related to and identified with the counterrevolution. A reading of the entire paragraph from which the above quotation is pulled shows that Marx by no means endorsed this view; in fact, he rehearsed its logic in order to illustrate its authoritarian tone—a tone Said conflates with Marx's own voice. Additionally, the manner in which Said ventriloquizes Marx entirely ignores the distinction in German between *vertreten* (the term Marx uses) and *darstellen* (the term Said implies). The difference is crucial, as Spivak points out in "Can the Subaltern Speak?"—it is the difference between "proxy [*vertreten*] and portrait [*darstellen*]" (276). For an exhaustive discussion and important corrective of Said's general writings on Marx, see Aijaz Ahmad's chapter, "Marx on India: A Clarification," in *In Theory*.

colonial truth claim with a simple anti-colonial inversion, this "project of reclaiming the history of those who have been un- or under-represented in histories and narratives hitherto . . . obviously involves restoring subjectivity" (141). It is by "attributing agency and volition . . . to people or communities or groups previously figured, for the most part, either (indifferently) as objects or (sympathetically) as pure victims," that a commitment to the representation of a totality of social relations is expressed despite and against the impossibility of capturing it unproblematically and without being reductive (141).

Yet, it is precisely by positioning the authorial voice as that of an outsider that Roy opens up the tension between the stories of the guerilla fighters and a mainstream media discourse that rehearses the government's propaganda uncritically. Roy, in fact, writes less about the guerillas and tribals and more about the disconnect between their lived reality and that of an urban audience that consumes news about them. The text thus mediates between two versions of the same story, and approaches the subject of her reporting with a certain necessary humility and willingness to listen. It also anticipates and includes its audience's limited knowledge as a central point of critique. By exposing the dominant narrative to scrutiny, Roy illustrates the absence of any possibility of self-representation for either Adivasi or guerillas within the dominant narrative of progress. At the same time, she reveals the subjective class-bias of the state-based narrative that belies its claims to present reality objectively. This is the difference between the literary "alignment" of an author with their "real social relations" and a certain class perspective, and a writer's literary-political "commitment" (Williams, *Marxism* 203). Texts are shaped by "certain real pressures and limits—genuine determinations—within which the scope of commitment as individual action and gesture must be defined," and it is against these pressures that commitment is registered in political texts as a "conscious change of alignment" (204).

This re-alignment takes the form of narrative interventions which challenge the public perception of the so-called development of districts like Bastar. While Roy's narrative begins with a note slipped under her door that gives her instructions for establishing contact with the guerillas, she does not immediately talk about her first encounter. Instead she begins with the description of the small town of Dantewada where she is supposed to meet them. Here she remembers the ten hour drive from Raipur, the largest city in the State of Chhattisgarh, to Dantewada, evoking images of highways and the urban landscape, only to contextualize them:

> On the outskirts of Raipur, a massive billboard advertises Vedanta (the company our
>
> home minister once worked with) Cancer Hospital. In Orissa, where it is mining bauxite,
>
> Vedanta is financing a university. In these creeping, innocuous ways mining corporations
>
> enter our imaginations: the Gentle Giants Who Really Care. (Roy, *WWC* 48)

This "corporate social responsibility," however, "masks the outrageous economics that underpins the mining sector in India," where billions of rupees are made with only marginal royalties paid to the state (48). In this process of mapping the limitations of the dominant discourse, Roy offers her interventions as self-conscious corrective that foreshadows the vast global connections:

> I don't remember seeing Vedanta's name on the long list of MoUs [Memoranda of
>
> Understanding] signed by the Chhattisgarh government. But I'm twisted enough to
>
> suspect that if there's a cancer hospital, there must be a flat-topped bauxite mountain
>
> somewhere. (48-49)

Later, of course, we find out that there are indeed "reports of bauxite deposits—three million tonnes—that a company called Vedanta has its eye on" (100).[63]

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[63] Roy cites a report by Dandekar and Choudhury describing how state governments have repeatedly used MoUs "'to forcibly acquire individual and community land for private industry'" (qtd. in Roy, *WWC* 172).

Through this repeated and strategic drawing of connections, the text makes a link between corporate interest and public opinion to show how the latter is gradually bent to match the former's shape. The town of Kanker, near the new deposit, is about three hours from Raipur, the provincial capital of Chhattisgarh, and has a mere 30,000 inhabitants. While the mining will take place near Kanker, the cancer hospital Roy mentions is located in Raipur in what can only be called a vivid illustration of combined and uneven development. It is the urban centers which benefit from the mining, while small towns and rural areas rich in resources have to deal with the consequences. In other words, development is a systemic process which affects nations as a whole, but in drastically uneven ways. There is a link between the poverty and wealth that is simultaneously created at the center and in the periphery. As Michael Parenti puts it, "the Third World is not 'underdeveloped' but overexploited" (66).

Interestingly, and this is easy to overlook, Roy's use of the possessive pronoun "our" positions her in relation to this ideology of development. This gives us an immediate sense of Roy's imagined audience—educated, urban, anglophone—and of her own status as an urban intruder who has come to speak to those who are blanked out of the public imagination by billboards, brand-new universities and big medical complexes. What the text never conceals is who it is addressing or who is speaking. Instead it positions the audience along with the author in between the ready-made propaganda of the media-industrial complex and the lived realities of civilians and guerillas who inhabit the "areas known to be 'Maoist infested'" (Roy, *WWC* 45). This conscious authorial self-positioning vis-a-vis the subjects of her reportage is not a mere performance of letting the subaltern speak. Instead it has to be understood as a mapping gesture that inscribes the social and spatial nature, the *materiality* in other words, of ideology in the very act of discursive engagement.

This explains the rigorous way in which *WWC* contextualizes the insurrection so as to allow the reader to place the war waged in the forests of Chhattisgarh within a broader economic narrative. Nothing in Roy's text is ever simply depicted as a given, rather it is always narrated in terms of its relationship to, and role in, a global structure of exploitation. The reportage consequently focuses less on the description of the place visited and experienced, but rather strikes up a direct conversation with the writer's own class and the everyday experience of the urban center:

> [The] governments of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal have signed
>
> hundreds of MoUs with corporate houses, worth several billion rupees, all of them secret,
>
> for steel plants, sponge-iron factories, power plants, aluminium refineries, dams and
>
> mines. In order for the MoUs to translate into real money, tribal people must be moved.
>
> Therefore, this war. (44)

Clearly, this context is inconvenient for the government which depends on the investment of these companies. As Roy repeatedly points out, these MoUs are nothing short of IOUs, except that rather than money, what is owed here is property which has not yet been expropriated from the indigenous populations who have a claim to it.

Though there is little research being done on these so-called MoUs, they have repeatedly featured in Roy's writing. In the other two essays which frame the original reportage for *Outlook India* republished as part of *WWC*, she offers some more insights on the matter. In another essay in the collection, "Trickle Down Revolution," for example, she cites from a censored chapter of an official report on the MoU's by Ajay Dandekar and Chitrangada Choudhury, describing how state governments have repeatedly used MoUs and the Land Acquisition Act, a law from the colonial period, "'to forcibly acquire individual and community land for private industry'" (qtd.

in Roy 172). The authors of this report also point out that the process allows state governments the "'sale of tribal lands to non-tribals'" which is prohibited in many of these states (qtd. in Roy 173).[64]

The official government narrative Roy focuses on, of course, paints the so-called "Operation Green Hunt, which was launched by the police to root out Left-wing extremists," as the suppression of "India's single biggest internal security challenge" (*WWC* 108; 37). But this decontextualization of course conveniently ignores that "Operation Green Hunt" is also essentially the military cover for the mining industries development of Chhattisgarh. In this official version of events, the Adivasi are not the victims of a neoliberal regime of expropriation and displacement. Instead, the government has come up with the so-called "Sandwich Theory," which alleges that "'ordinary' tribals [are] being caught in the crossfire between the State and the Maoists" (44). This adds yet another layer, since Roy not only criticizes the government, but directly confronts her anticipated reader:

> It's easier on the liberal conscience to believe that the war in the forests is a war between the Government of India and the Maoists, who call elections a sham, Parliament a pigsty and have openly declared their intention to overthrow the Indian State. It's convenient to forget that tribal people in central India have a history of resistance that predates Mao by centuries. (That's a truism of course. If they didn't they wouldn't exist). (42)

Roy frames these narrative interventions to reveal a strategic myopia which serves the purpose of "excluding/repressing/being blind to other aspects of social reality" (Wolff 173). Roy's reportage is not a travelogue that performs a neo-oriental journey into the heart of darkness. Her

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[64] See also, *Out of This Earth: East India Adivasis and the Aluminium Cartel* by Felix Padel and Samarendra Das which Roy herself recommends in the essay in *WWC* titled "Mr. Chidambaram's War" (23).

juxtaposition of the government narrative, her own report, and her interviews with the guerillas shows that the class she comes from, and to which she is speaking, is very much implicated in the efforts of mystifying the realities of the forests.

Reporting Totality: Nonfiction and "Cognitive Mapping"

Not only is *WWC* in this sense structured by the various levels of narrative discourse it engages with, it is also, once more represents an example of Jameson's "project of cognitive mapping," which has a stake in representing the abstract links and connections (that normally remain invisible at the level of immediate perception) through a fundamental restructuring of reality in the very act of narration ("Cognitive Mapping" 356). Roy achieves this by creating a narrative that integrates abstract, global contexts into the immediately lived experience of both Adivasi and Naxalites and vice-versa. Her text in this way provides a rejoinder to the debate within postcolonial theory about the question of grand narratives and small stories. Homi Bhabha and Arjun Appadurai, for example, represent the dominant postcolonial-postmodern approach of postcolonial theory which generally dismisses grand narratives as "holistic forms of social explanation" and advocates for a "postcolonial perspective" marked by its non-hierarchical ambiguity and its focus on individual experience (Bhabha 248). This approach, however, discards materialist theorizations of capitalism as a system which produces difference and sameness simultaneously in favor of an "imagination … now central to all forms of agency" (Appadurai 31).[65] In Roy, there is no such dichotomy between economic, social, and historical determinants and Guha's "small drama and fine detail of social existence" (Guha 36). There is a clear relationship between both, seen in the struggle for land and autonomous existence.

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[65] See Lazarus *Postcolonial Unconscious*, 114-160 for a critique of this dominant paradigm.

Against the backdrop of the official narrative of rural development, Roy thus begins by carefully outlining the government's relationship to tribal people in India. Where the government speaks of "'bringing tribals into the mainstream' or of giving them 'the fruits of modern development'" (*WWC* 43), Roy points to a history of abuse, displacement, and exploitation. With the signing of the 1950 Indian constitution—which "ratified colonial policy and made the state custodian of tribal homelands"—began the history of "tens of millions of internally displaced people (more than thirty million by big dams alone), refugees of India's 'progress,' the great majority [of which] are tribal people" (43). She foregrounds the direct and violent exploitation of the land and its inhabitants by the neoliberal Indian state that all the while draws on a vocabulary of euphemisms ranging from "progress" and "democratic rights" to "development" and "integration." It is against this background that Roy strategically contextualizes the Maoist insurgency. While the government gives out MoUs which promise tribal lands to international corporations for the exploitation of mineral resources, the tribals who are left have no choice but to fight for sheer survival in view of broken promises and treaties. As Leela Fernandes and Patrick Heller argue, we see here "[t]he hegemonic aspirations of the NMC [which] have taken the form of a politics of reaction, blending market liberalism and political and social illiberalism" (497). While the State promises progress and development, it becomes clear that this "progress" in fact signifies the progressive exploitation of resources, and that the promised "development" refers uniquely to new business opportunities in otherwise inaccessible regions of the country.

In addition to her discussion of both the historical context and the official government narrative, Roy outlines the unbalanced struggle in the affected districts where the government has amplified its war against the Maoists. Dantewada, where she begins her journey, is described as an "oxymoron," where "the police wear plain clothes and the rebels wear uniforms" (Roy,

WWC 38): "On one side is a massive paramilitary force armed with the money, the firepower, the media, and the hubris of an emerging Superpower. On the other, ordinary villagers armed with traditional weapons, backed by a superbly organized, hugely motivated Maoist guerilla fighting force with an extraordinary and violent history of armed rebellion" (39). In this context, Roy questions whether the so-called "Sandwich Theory … of 'ordinary' tribals being caught in the crossfire between the State and the Maoists" propagated by the state and the media indeed holds up (44). The dominant narratives of the government and state/corporate media map resistance in the forests by classifying anyone who does not follow state directives as a Maoist. The categories of "Maoist" and "Tribals" are in fact much more fluid and intertwined than the official narrative would have us believe.

Roy's critical account of her visit to the areas under Maoist control is very much structured by a realist desire "to open a totalizing and mapping access to society as a whole" (Jameson, Introduction 7). In fact, she attempts to reveal the official narrative and the insurgent counter-history as the deeply-linked paradoxes that they are. The same approach that shapes her discussion of the government's relationship to international money flows also organizes her representation of the guerilla fighters she meets. For the State, they are simply "'India's single biggest internal security challenge'" (Roy, *WWC* 37),[66] mere abstractions, and not the multifaceted human beings Roy encounters:

> Even now I think of Comrade Kamla all the time, every day. She's seventeen. She wears a homemade pistol on her hip. And boy, what a smile. But if the police come across her, they will kill her. They might rape her first. No questions will be asked. Because she's an Internal Security Challenge. (64)

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[66] This statement is attributed to then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and subsequently began to proliferate in public discourse.

This dehumanization is how the people become the enemy of the state, and how the state becomes the enemy of the people.[67] The experience of the ruling elites, who perceive the Maoist insurgency as a threat, is in this way turned into a hegemonic experience which is superimposed on the concrete realities that challenge the perception of "'Maoists' and 'tribals' [as] two entirely discrete categories" (44). The reportage, in adopting the dialogic structure of the novel, combines two essential moments of realist representation: the mapping of abstract relationships on the one hand, and their expression in concretely lived experience on the other.

Roy's account thus blurs the lines between the Manichean categories of the mainstream media. Instead, it confronts the reader with the far more complex reality of a community of resistance which pushes back against land expropriation in the guise of development. This community depends on what Alpa Shah calls "the development of relations of intimacy between the mobilizing forces and the people in its area of expansion" ("Intimacy" 486).[68] What exactly that means becomes apparent later in the text, when the group Roy travels with arrives at a congregation to commemorate a historical uprising. There are speeches, plays, food, and dances. The latter Roy describes in vivid detail:

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[67] The use of gendered violence to brutally suppress and punish resistance and Naxalites uprisings has a well-documented history. An important representation of gendered violence is Mahasveta Devi's short story "Draupadi." As Spivak, who has translated the story from Bengali, points out in her short preface to the translation, what makes this story particularly central to an understanding of gendered violence is the way in which the state's knowing figures in the story not as a way of understanding the resistant subject out of solidarity, but in the purely categorizing logic of "a colonialist theory of most efficient information retrieval" ("'Draupadi'" 382). See the chapter "Black Blood: Fictions of the Tribal in Mahasweta Devi and Arundhati Roy" in Majumder's *Insurgent Imaginations* for a discussion of Devi's short story and Roy's *WWC* in terms of "the persistent and braided relation between subaltern social movements and internationalist writing" (119).

[68] See Shah's *Nightmarch* (2019) for a recent example of a nonfiction text that is structurally similar to Roy's reportage/travelogue, but which provides a deeper insight into the relationship between Adivasi and Naxalites. *Nightmarch* also contains a bibliographic essay that provides an excellent introductory survey of academic and literary texts on the Naxalite insurgency.

Gradually, the crowd begins to sway. And then it begins to dance. They dance in little

lines of six or seven, men and women separate, with their arms around each other's

waists. Thousands of people. This is what they've come for. For this. Happiness is taken

very seriously here, in the Dandakaranya forest. People will walk for miles, for days

together to feast and sing, to put feathers in their turbans and flowers in their hair, to put

their arms around each other and drink mahua and dance through the night. No one sings

or dances alone. This, more than anything else, signals their defiance towards a

civilization that seeks to annihilate them. (*WWC* 116-17)

A passage like this can easily be dismissed as romanticizing either the armed struggle of the

Maoists or the strife of the Adivasi in general (or both).[69] Yet the text offers less a romantic

image than one of humanist defiance. Rather than romanticizing resistance, Roy's reportage

attempts to give voice to what can be called "narratives of resistance."[70] Here are people who

know and care for one another and are bonded in their fight against a common enemy. They are

more than just an "internal security challenge," they are a community—or rather, they are an

"internal security challenge" precisely because they provide an alternative social organization.

Here, life and struggle are not separate categories: the one depends on the other.

The text reveals an entire section of Indian society—hidden in the jungle and excluded

from the official discourse—that operates in complete autonomy from the state. In fact, their

autonomy is, to a certain degree, contingent on their exclusion from official discourse. In this

self-regulated space, inequalities within tribal society and within the Communist Party—

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[69] For a critical exploration of literary representations of the Naxalites, see Gorman-DaRif as
well as Shah, *Nightmarch*, especially 270-295.
[70] Barbara Harlowe's *Resistance Literature* (1987) has usefully expanded the theorization of
"narratives of resistance" to include works of nonfiction, such as autobiographical texts and
prison writings. The reportage today continues in this tradition.

especially the uneven gender dynamics—are challenged and worked through independently by those who are immediately affected by them, and in the complete absence of the dominant state structure. At the same time, the Maoists provide help against landlords and even run an alternative irrigation system. Essentially, as Roy puts it,

> [t]here are two parallel systems of government here, Janatana Sarkar [the people's government] and Looti Sarkar [the government of looters]. I think of what Comrade Venu said to me: They want to crush us, not only because of the minerals, but because we are offering the world an alternative model. It's not an Alternative [sic] yet . . . . There is too much hunger, too much sickness here. But it has certainly created the possibilities for an alternative. Not for the whole world, not for Alaska, or New Delhi, nor even for the whole of Chhattisgarh, but for itself. For Dandakaranya. It's the world's best-kept secret. It has laid the foundations for an alternative to its own annihilation. It has defied history. It needs help and imagination, it needs doctors, teachers, farmers. It does not need war. But if war is all it gets, it will fight back. (*WWC* 132)

As Joel Nickels points out, "the Naxalites represent not so much an empirical guerrilla organization in a specific phase of struggle as a socio-political impulse toward forms of nonstate modernization and internationalism that are still almost impossible to conceive in contemporary neoliberal India" (126). In Roy's text, the alternative, however, is at least allowed to take on concrete forms.[71]

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[71] It is important to note that the alternative is by no means Utopian. While Roy highlights positive infrastructural initiatives such as the alternative irrigation system constructed by tribals and Maoist insurgents, she draws equal attention to the ways in which gender inequality remains operative in the jungle. Roy draws on the example of the Party organization that adopted the traditional practice of forcing Maadiya women to "remove their blouses and remain bare-breasted after they married" (Roy, *WWC* 101). Roy notes that this was, in fact, "the first women's issue the Party decided to campaign against" (102). The Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan

This lively and complex alternative—realized through the daily actions of the Naxalites outside of the regulatory machinations imposed by the neoliberal state—is conveyed to the reader not through the re-establishment of a reifying and totalizing authorial omniscience, but through a chorus of individual voices insistent on their positions of dissent. It is through the individual that we are reminded of concrete, lived realities, juxtaposed with the abstract perspectives of the neoliberal state. For example, in many instances Roy includes fighters' stories of what brought them into the struggle. One of the comrades, Maase, quizzes Roy about the outside world, but also offers a glimpse of her own experience:

> She asks again and again, "What do they think of us outside? What do students say? Tell me about the women's movement, what are their big issues now?" She asks about me, my writing. . . . Then she starts to talk about herself, how she joined the Party. She tells me that her partner was killed last May, in a fake encounter. He was arrested in Nashik, and taken to Warangal to be killed. "They must have tortured him badly." She was on her way to meet him when she heard he had been arrested. She's been in the forest ever since. After a long silence she tells me she was married once before, years ago. "He was killed in an encounter too," she says, and adds with heartbreaking precision, "but in a real one." (*WWC* 122-23)[72]

Here again we see "the speech of another [being] introduced into the author's discourse (the story) in concealed form" (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 303). Roy's heteroglossic, multi-vocal

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(hereafter KAMS)—an organization of the CPI (Maoist)—tackles issues of gender justice within both tribal culture and within the Party itself, and "could well be the largest women's organization in the country" (102).The alternative represented by the Party thus seems more amenable to fixing what Comrade Venu calls "'inner contradictions'" (Roy, *WWC* 101).

[72] In South Asia, "encounter" refers to violent confrontations between police or military and insurgents. A "fake" encounter is the murder of a prisoner made to look like self-defense.

representation of other voices results in a "speech diversity" or "stratification of literary language" that invests the novelistic discourse with a certain humanist autonomy (311).

Roy narrates these voices in a mix of reported and direct speech, giving glimpses of how the guerillas themselves have lost partners and friends in the struggle. The comrades help Roy map a history of collective abuse through the prism of their own suffering. However, what emerges alongside this catalogue of horrors is also a history of hope and resistance. Sukhiari, one of three sisters who have been members of KAMS for over a decade, offers one of the many facets that resistance can take: "'Once they took away the whole village, saying the men were all Naxals.' Sukhiari followed with all the women and children. They surrounded the police station and refused to leave until the men were freed" (133). When asked what the Party means to her, Sukhiari responds: "Naxalvaad ka matlab humaara parivaar [Naxalism means our family]. When we hear of an attack, it is like our family has been hurt,' Sukhiari said" (134).

While the multitude of voices in Roy's text is mediated through a first person narrator who cites and reports, they nonetheless confront the reader with a reality that has no voice in the normative narratives of globalization. In fact, the narrative position of the author becomes crucial for this opening up of the narrative. Roy's narration relies on an individual who can bear witness, because to deal merely in abstract discourses would result in a blindness to the totality. She recognizes here that it is only in the concrete, in the subjective, that totality finds its expression. It is in the personal histories which Roy includes that a history of struggle emerges. Thus, the struggle is represented in all of its complexity, going far beyond a simplified account of state violence and the impact of globalization. We see a narrative take shape in which subaltern subjects speak and act to improve their living situation as a community.

Speaking of Reality: Reportage Writing and "Dialogic Imagination"

While *WWC* is structured temporally and spatially by the linearity of the travel narrative, Roy

uses the subjective point of view of a first-person voice to "refract," to use Bakhtin's phrase,

rather than merely "reflect" a complex situation: it is the first-person voice, the focalization on

the witness, that collects and contains the different stages, moments, and elements of the social

landscape she is trying to map. Instead of limiting its perspective, Roy's subjective engagement

with multiple voices opens the text up to often divergent positions in an act of what Deepika

Bahri calls "artistic refraction" (*Native Intelligence* 201). If there is a guiding principle to Roy's

style, it is the idea that discourse is the site where the individual and collective encounter each

other and construct their reality through language-based "social interaction" (Vološinov 11). In

fact, her text represents a conscious effort to construct what we can call with Bakhtin a "dialogic

imagination" that understands every utterance as "born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within

it" and "shaped in [a] dialogic interaction" that constantly points beyond itself (Bakhtin,

"Discourse" 279).

It is in this way that Roy's text undermines any strict generic distinctions—that

commonly consider nonfiction genres to fall outside the realm of the properly literary—at the

level of narrative structure by novelizing its very logic.[73] As Bakhtin points out, it is the "contact

with the spontaneity of the inconclusive present" that prevents the novel from "congealing" as a

genre ("Epic" 27). It is this generic fluidity that many nonfiction texts of post-1990s India adopt.

This allows us to read Arundhati Roy's *WWC* as a productive form of discursive resistance

which complicates classic definitions of literary realism, and allows for a broader understanding

of generic responses to the pressures of globalization. Language and discourse here become two

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[73] See Rao for the genre bending nature of Roy's nonfiction texts.

formal elements with which the text has to consciously engage. In this context, Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia allows me to complicate the discussion of English writing in India, by reading *WWC* as a formal attempt to mediate between the universal logic of capitalist modernization and the particularity and multiplicity of the local. Developing Bakhtin's terminology is particularly useful in trying to understand what Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee calls "the conditions under which genres mutate, cultural forms absorb each other's generic codes, and forms such as the novel are able to absorb other cultural voices" (107). This approach, as Mukherjee suggests, seems justified when looking at authors like Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Indra Sinha or others whose writings are very much concerned with mediating the complex linguistic terrain and class dynamics of India in the age of neoliberal globalization.

Mukherjee also provides a broad overview of critical responses to Roy's first novel, including Aijaz Ahmad's critical acknowledgement of her realist writing in his *Frontline* article "Reading Arundhati Roy Politically," which at the same time takes issue with her focus on Subaltern Studies style "small drama" and her "privatisation of pleasure and politics" (qtd. in U. Mukherjee 85: 104). Citing Susan Stanford Friedman's essay "Spatial Poetics and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*," Mukherjee further points out that it is Friedman's analysis of the "novel's spatialization of its own story," which "draws our attention to the relationship between narrative style and the material reality that this style attempts to embody and mediate" (87). This is also where he locates his own critical intervention: the intersection of the aesthetic and the real. He is thus one of the few writers to engage with globalization not merely as a general framework or an ontological condition in which cultural production occurs. Instead, he suggests that in trying to understand the ways in which "the postcolonial novel form embodies this historical-environmental condition of unevenness" that is the hallmark of globalization, we

can develop an understanding how new forms of the postcolonial novel are shaped in the interaction of local styles and global forms, "enabling it to embody the material reality of postcolonial environment" (103; 106).

Roy's concern for language in her writing can thus be seen as a response to a "contemporary global reality so complex and contradictory that it constantly threatens to overwhelm all available literary and linguistic forms" (U. Mukherjee 88). Citing a passage from *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*, another of her nonfiction texts, he suggests that—thanks to her understanding of how capitalism spatializes the development of underdevelopment—Roy is "attentive to the specific elements of this global (and local) condition that challenges language— a condition of unevenness that throws together people apparently living in different eras" (88).[74] "As a writer then," Mukherjee explains, "what concerns Roy is to find a language and a style that can help us imagine these simultaneous yet non-synchronized ways of being" (89). In this context, it is useful to revisit Bakhtin to understand what this link between narrative form and material reality specifically looks like.

In fact, the reportage effectively spatializes the hierarchies that structure the simultaneous existence of highly modernized urban spaces and underdeveloped and exploited rural areas. It does so by using the authorial voice of the first person in order to include the personal and collective histories, which are normally marginalized or silenced, through direct and reported speech. The social distance between Roy and the guerilla fighters she interviews is clear from the outset. While the text is in English, Roy points out that in the group she travels with there are

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[74] Roy's text is thus very much attuned to these changes without creating a hierarchy of "good" or "bad" culture. For Roy, much like for Raymond Williams, "culture is ordinary" (Williams, "Culture" 92). It is in the arena of popular culture that we see the global and local intersect. It is here that society mediates between its particular needs and desires, and the outside pressures which it is forced to respond to.

native speakers of "Gondi, Halbi, Telugu, Punjabi and Malayalam" (*WWC* 62). Thus, the language they are all forced to communicate in is Hindi. Is this the exclusion or flattening of linguistic reality? *WWC* seems to suggest the opposite by making an effort to bring together various discourses and speech registers; be it the government's talk of "'India's single biggest internal security challenge,'" the "creeping, innocuous ways mining corporations enter our imaginations" or the "partisan's version" of the history of the Maoist insurgency narrated by Comrade Venu (37; 48; 64), Roy's authorial voice is anything but monologic. Her narrative style positions competing histories against one another and puts them into conversation.

In a telling instance, Roy presents these competing discourses and allows them both to speak. After citing an article on the government's war in the forests, the euphemistically named "Operation Green Hunt," Roy interviews the Gudsa Usendi, the guerilla's chronicler: "'The worst thing about being Gudsa Usendi,' he says, 'is issuing clarifications that are never published. We could bring out a thick book of our unpublished clarifications, about the lies they tell about us'" (108-9). In Bakhtin's terms, Roy here "makes use of words that are already populated with the social intentions of others and compels them to serve [the author's] own new intentions" (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 299-300). Her own voice here is of course immediately "refracted at different angles" (300). The narrative is productively opened towards the collective by the voices which reflect the intentions of others from within the authorial voice. It is Roy's goal to capture both individual consciousness and ideological expression as a "social interaction" (Vološinov 11); one, however, that is in reality denied by the hierarchies which structure the relationship between these different discourses hegemonically. The counter-discourse which is given voice here is in everyday speech the one excluded by the dominant expression of the mainstream media.

English is here not just the dominant language of globalization, but the medium in which the linguistic diversity of the resistance against neoliberal modernization is simultaneously condensed and exposed. This inclusion-by-reduction of different languages into the English text is a testament to the universalizing logic that forcefully combines the realities of a vast set of peoples who fall under the very wide umbrella term of Adivasi. What Roy's reportage registers on both the level of language and the level of novelistic discourse is "the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions . . . between different socio-ideological groups in the present" (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 291). This does not imply that English has some inherently distinctive feature which allows it to function as a cosmopolitan medium of representation for this complex linguistic reality. Rather it shows that "[l]anguage—like the living concrete environment in which the consciousness of the verbal artist lives—is never unitary" (288). Language, even when supposedly fixed and static, as Bakhtin suggests, is instead always "stratified and heteroglot" ("Discourse" 288). In other words, the means Roy has to report on the insurgency—through translation and reported speech—makes her own speech-act, by definition, a combined and uneven one.

The narrative style of Roy's reportage here reveals itself as a literary language in Bakhtin's definition, which identifies it as a fundamental element of the novel. In other words, the reportage relies not just on what Lukács calls *description* or *report*, but on *narration* and *composition* to portray the story of the guerillas in the context of a larger conflict, rather than as dislocated and decontextualized instances of rebellion. "Narration," as Lukács puts it, "establishes proportion, description merely levels" ("Narrate or Describe" 127). To narrate or to compose is thus to draw out connections that otherwise might remain invisible, to describe or report is to offer details without a narrative framing or a contextualizing composition. It is this

shift from report to narration that Roy's reportage utilizes, representing a novelization of the genre in the Bakhtinian sense:

> Novelistic dialogue is pregnant with an endless multitude of dialogic confrontations, which do not and cannot resolve it, and which, as it were, only locally . . . illustrate this endless, deep-lying dialogue of languages; novel dialogue is determined by the very socio-ideological evolution of languages and society. A dialogue of languages is a dialogue of social forces perceived not only in their static co-existence, but also as a dialogue of different times, epochs and days, a dialogue that is forever dying, living, being born: co-existence and becoming are here fused into an indissoluble concrete unity that is contradictory, multi-speeched and heterogeneous. (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 365)

Roy's inclusion of multiple voices, languages, speeches, and discourses in her writing is what gives a sense of the social totality which has shaped it. What is registered is the way in which social relations are embodied by linguistic connections and discursive links. The multiple layers we see interact in *WWC* are reflective of the complex reality wherein local and global narratives are constantly mediated along shifting lines. It is a complex reality, an unrepresentable totality, but Roy's dialogic imagination shows a desire to tip the scales so that we become aware of the multitude of voices that are not heard. The text thus ultimately pushes "us [to] imagine these simultaneous yet non-synchronized ways of being" (U. Mukherjee 89).

These dichotomies—narration/description and report/composition—additionally place Roy's nonfiction in the larger discussion regarding the question of genre classification as it has been outlined by Lukács. To him, a text that relies purely on description is inevitably limited to a naturalist depiction of real conditions that remains at best static and at worst becomes an ossifying and mystified representation of reality even when it is, as Bakhtin writes of the novel,

"in a zone of direct contact with developing reality" ("Epic" 39). This is also Lukács overall criticism of modernist literature which he dismisses as representing contemporary capitalist reality as an unchanging fact of life, undermining any progressive imagination or social change. What naturalism and modernism share is an aesthetic mode of representation that relies on description over narration. It is in this sense that these two styles for Lukács—and counter to any common definition of literary realism—represent a mere mimetic reflection of reality in which all mediation is lost. Realism, on the other hand, relies on narration and composition in order to reveal the processual nature and the social conditions that shape reality.

Lukács elaborates on this idea in "The Ideology of Modernism," which is part of his 1963 exploration of literary style, titled *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*. Linking both modernism and naturalism to a static representation of the status quo, he explains his radical rejection: "The protest expressed by this flight into psychopathology is an abstract gesture; its rejection of reality is wholesale and summary, containing no concrete criticism. It is a gesture, moreover, that is destined to lead nowhere; it is an escape into nothingness" (29). What he means here is that a representation of an individualized reality obfuscates the constantly changing reality of social relations: "Thus the propagators of this ideology are mistaken in thinking that such a protest could ever be fruitful in literature. In any protest against particular social conditions, these conditions themselves must have the central place" (29).

In his 1932 discussion of the reportage novel in, "Reportage or Composition?", this is consequently the main thrust of his criticism of any attempt to merge fiction and nonfiction. In his view, such a merger risks uncritically allowing the individual point of view of the middle class author to structure the content of the text, thus limiting the field of vision of what he refers to as the reportage novel. The result is a representation of reality which is not only static and

unchanging, but distorted in the sense that a subjective and limited class position is substituted for the objective portrayal of the totality of social relations. Lukács emphasizes that with such a limited point of view what is collapsed entirely is the complicated dialectic which binds subject and object. Ultimately, he argues that to understand the totality of social relations it is limiting if we rely on a purely descriptive account of these determinants. For Lukács, in order to represent reality accurately what becomes necessary is a dialectical form which is capable of grasping social processes by looking at the interdependent constitution of individual and society. It is precisely this dialectical logic which we see very much at work in Roy's reportage. Her text is at the same time conscious of the small stories and of the grand narratives, without collapsing them into a static binary that leaves no potential or hope for radical change or, at the very least, a somewhat better future.

Conclusion: Critical Realism in the Age of Neoliberal Globalization

Looking at the post-1990s period in the context of India, with the opening of its closed economy towards a world-market in the process of fully establishing an unfettered and increasingly unregulated (and unregulatable) global regime of production, we see a renewed interest in "the mapping of the new imperial world system" (Jameson, "Modernism" 156). Roy's reportage in this context can be understood as a form which registers the "social 'determinants'" of a new, global order, of "a radically altered situation" (157). In this sense, it is an example of what Jameson is referring to when he calls the forms which are emerging today "a fresh and unprecedented aesthetic response" (157). What makes these forms newly critical is that this claim to a total transparency necessitates a merging of their realist and modernist aesthetics.

As Jameson has pointed out in the context of the so-called realism-modernism debate between Lukács, Brecht and others—where a formalist kind of realism is pitched against Modernist representations of fragmentation—we benefit from collapsing the stark dichotomy this suggests by periodizing both in the context of the capitalist mode of production. Here, the "renewal of modernism" in the period of the post-postmodern takes the shape of a "new realism" (Jameson, "Reflections" 211; 212). What is new about this realism is precisely its attempt to roll back the consequences of reification, "a process that affects our cognitive relationship with the social totality" and is in fact "a disease of that mapping function whereby the individual subject projects and models his or her insertion into the collectivity" (212).

In other words, the critical realism of Roy's fiction and nonfiction mediates the reality of global capitalism by simultaneously drawing on realist forms of representation and a modernist interiority of perspective. The mapping of the subject here becomes a way of mapping the effects of the "emergence of a worldwide capitalist civilization, in which national, regional and local cultures are being organized as so many variants of that singular civilization" (Ahmad, *Communalism* 103).[75] This new realism thus reaches beyond what Jameson had imagined when he suggested this dialectical understanding of realism and modernism. For while its aim is not "to resist the power of reification in consumer society," it does re-imagine our way of seeing (Jameson, "Reflections" 212):

> If the diagnosis is correct, the intensification of class consciousness will be less a matter
> of . . . a single class by itself, than of the forcible reopening of access to a sense of society
> as a totality, and of the reinvention of possibilities of cognition and perception that allow

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[75] See Shingavi on the often easily overlooked relation between "the national in the transnational" (5).

social phenomena once again to become transparent, as moments of the struggle *between*

classes. (212)

The totality this new realism wants to represent is what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has in mind when he

writes of "postcoloniality" as a "new synthesis that assumes the 'globe for a theatre'" (51): it is

the world of combined and uneven development, where the realities of capitalist modernization

are mystified and violence in the peripheral regions is as invisible as the abject poverty in its

centers. That the subject here becomes the crucial point of entry for any representation of

contemporary globalization represents in turn both a result of, and a response to, the particular

pressures of commodification on postcolonial literature. As Deepika Bahri points out,

globalization has made literary representation "particularly susceptible to the new order that

privileges information and emphasizes the subjective idea at the expense of the 'multiplicity' that

constitutes its truth-content" (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 131 qtd. in Bahri, *Native Intelligence*

201).[76] Yet at the same time, it is the very act of narration (and art more generally speaking) that

"has the capacity to negotiate the particular by transcending the individual subject and pointing

'back to the collective subject' in a philosophical universality" (201). As *WWC* shows, it is

precisely first-person narration which in this context has to be understood as both the boundary

of realist representation and the means of reaching beyond it.

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[76] For a discussion of the potential of postcolonial literature to resist the commodifying pressures of globalization in general, as well as the narrative strategies of Roy's first novel, *The God of Small Things*, in particular, see Bahri, *Native Intelligence* 200-46.

CHAPTER 4

Neoliberal Chronotope:

Materializing Space and Social Relations

in Katherine Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (2012)

Introduction

While the previous chapter examined Roy's use of the reportage form, this chapter will go

beyond theorizations of the novel and realism in order to explore the concrete ways in which the

novelization of nonfiction affects not just the *linguistic* and *discursive* aspects of representation,

but the narrative mapping of social landscapes as well. Here, I shift my focus to another key

characteristic of contemporary critical realism: that is, *space* and the crucial function it plays in

mapping social totality within the context of anglophone literature. I explore this notion through

a close reading of the 2012 nonfiction novel, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and*

Hope in a Mumbai Undercity (hereafter *BBF*) by American journalist Katherine Boo.[77] Two

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[77] In the context of anglophone literature, the term *nonfiction novel* generally refers to "a form of
nonfiction that relies upon the narrative techniques and intuitive insights of the novelist to
chronicle contemporary events" (Hollowell ix). As such, it is closely related to the New
Journalism of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as to the narrative style of writers such as Truman
Capote and Norman Mailer. This style relies heavily on "the available repertory of narrative
devices (e.g., plot, character, interior monologue)" (Vanderauwera 188), as well as the crucial
"use of scenes" associated with fiction (Conolly and Haydar 348). This pattern points to the

related theoretical concepts frame and orient my reading of Boo's text: Bakhtin's *chronotope*,

and, once again, the reading strategy that Jameson calls "cognitive mapping" ("Cognitive

Mapping" 356). The former, which Bakhtin describes as the interdependent element of narrative

time and space, is particularly useful here as it represents "an optic for reading texts as x-rays of

the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring" (Holquist 425-26). Chronotopes

in this sense are the "organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel"

(Bakhtin, "Forms" 250), and as such allow us to understand how nonfiction texts incorporate

different "ways of seeing" into their narrative that are in turn shaped by the material reality of

urban space (Williams, "Culture" 18). The latter, Jameson's "cognitive mapping," describes the

narrative charting of a social totality that is simultaneously defined by abstract global processes

and the concretely lived experience of those who are most immediately exposed to the effects of

neoliberal economic shock therapy.

      Taken together, it is precisely Bakhtin's material analysis of narrative space that fleshes

out Jameson's reading strategy. With Bakhtin we can expand on Jameson's own spatial analysis,

which in turn allows us to understand the ways in which Boo's narrative charts the social totality

of the Annawadi slum; a totality simultaneously defined by abstract global processes and the

concretely lived experience of those who are most immediately exposed to the effects of

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importance of space in nonfiction narration. The nonfiction novel transplants these conventions—typically associated with fictional work—and strategically redeploys them. See Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965), which investigates a multiple homicide in rural Kansas in 1959, and Mailer's *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, the Novel as History* (1968), which recounts a famous March on the Pentagon in October 1967, as two of the best known founding texts of the genre. Similarly, John Hersey's *Hiroshima* (1946), about survivors of the atomic bombing of Japan, is commonly acknowledged as a predecessor of these founding texts of New Journalism. They represent a type of literary nonfiction that has seen a global revival with nonfiction novels such as Dominique Lapierre and Javier Moro's reportage *Five Past Midnight in Bhopal* (2000), about the 1984 Bhopal disaster, and Matthew Desmond's *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (2016), about poverty and homelessness in the US in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

neoliberal economic shock therapy. While Roy's text primarily represents social relations from the refracting, first-person point of view of the reporter/witness who maps the varying sociolects in relation to a hegemonic discourse, both texts nonetheless rely on a similar dialogic structure in mapping social relations. Although Boo's third-person narration does not foreground the position of the narrator as self-consciously as the first-person does in *WWC*, her authorial voice is not *entirely* absent, either. We hear it in her many observations and digressions throughout the text that tie the different narrative strands of the slum into a much larger context, as well as in the brief author's note appended to the text that underlines these interventions and contextualizations as a key framing device of the text. It is in the absence of first-person narration that the representation of *space* takes on the function of representing events and structuring the narrative in terms of these interventions.[78] Boo privileges *space* over *discourse* in her attempt at mapping the social landscape of the slum, and the neoliberal "infrastructure of opportunity" that shapes both the slum and the lives of its inhabitants (248). Like the nonfiction of Arundhati Roy, Boo's narrative, especially her representation of space, can in this sense be understood in terms of what I call a *neoliberal chronotope* that reverses the general emphasis on time as the dominant marker

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[78] The use of third-person narration is at the same time reflective of Boo's own position as both an outsider to the society she writes about and as a member of a global middle class whose point of view merges with the "hegemonic aspirations" of the New Middle Class in India (Fernandes and Heller 495; hereafter NMC). Boo, while not herself a part of the Indian NMC, is married to Sunil Khilnani, director of the India Institute of King's College in London and author of nonfiction about India. His book, *The Idea of India* (1998), falls squarely within the range of contemporary texts that cater to the interest in rising Asia, both on the part of the global publishing industry and the global economic system. I point this out here to underline that Boo's inclusion in my discussion of contemporary anglophone nonfiction that focuses on South Asia is not coincidental. My project, while focused on South Asia in terms of content, is not limited by essentialist conceptions of national literatures. Rather, I am to make a case for understanding the emerging critical realism in the South Asian context as representative of a global trend shaped by a broad transnational convergence of class in the halls of academic institutions and in the publishing houses that set the boundaries of the "field of cultural production" according to what Bourdieu calls "the dominant principle of domination" (322), and which Fernandes and Heller today more succinctly call the "hegemonic aspirations" of the NMC.

of representation and instead foregrounds the material and structural aspects of space in the

representation of capitalism in the age of globalization.[79]

Representing Totality: Bakhtinian Explorations of Postcolonial Nonfiction

As Katherine Boo explains in her author's note, the material of the text has been compiled from

hours and hours of interviews, translations, court documents, and reports, rendered in narrative

form. Boo's narration is not structured by the first-person point of view of the witness/reporter,

but nonetheless remains grounded in the individual experience of the central characters—Abdul,

the garbage trader; Asha, an aspiring slumlord; Sunil, a young scavenger; and Manju, Asha's

idealistic daughter—around whom the stories of success and failure revolve. The result is similar

to what Georg Lukács calls a "reportage novel", which presents social issues by way of

fictionalized narrative (Lukács, "Reportage" 38). Unlike the reportage novel, however, the

nonfiction novel draws on a distinct literary style of narration that speaks of real-life stories as if

they were a novel in order to overcome "the limitations of existing narrative forms," thus going

beyond the fact-fiction distinction Lukács describes (Olster 44).[80]

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[79] Georg Lukács comments on this *spatialization of time* in his analysis of the reification of consciousness under capitalism in *History and Class Consciousness*: "Thus time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' (the reified, mechanically objectified 'performance' of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality): in short, it becomes space" (90). While *History and Class Consciousness* is not commonly discussed in terms of its relationship to Lukács's literary theory, it actually complements his analysis of narrative.

[80] This will be explained further in the following section. The crucial distinction here is that the kind of reportage novel discussed by Lukács refers to a completely fictional text based on sociological research and historical fact, whereas Boo's text is a reportage that relies heavily on novelistic narration and operates with a certain poetic license, but without substantially deviating from the objective facts of a pre-existing event. In this sense, the nonfiction novel can be understood as the most obvious case of novelized nonfiction.

As a "creative method," Lukács explains, the reportage has always been an example of a broader "literary tendency" which sees itself in opposition to the subjectivity and psychologism of the bourgeois novel ("Reportage" 35).[81] A hybrid form like the reportage novel, which presents a fictional story in order to criticize a concrete social issue, is a sterile composition whose narrative is confined to a catalog of facts and consequently cannot go beyond a static representation of social totality.[82] What distinguishes fiction from the reportage for Lukács is precisely that the former can draw out "the combination of facts and their interconnections, as well as of the particular and the general, the individual and the typical, the accidental and the necessary" by way of creative composition (40).

In other words, to narrate or compose is to make connections legible that might otherwise remain invisible, whereas to describe or report is to offer examples in support of an argument without providing a structured whole that can be grasped at an intuitive level. The contemporary nonfiction novel thus avoids the shortcomings of the reportage novel by fictionalizing fact, rather than by factualizing fiction. Instead of *weakening* its cognitive claims, this hybrid genre *strengthens* them by producing (rather than *re*-producing) an organic representation of reality. I propose therefore to supplement recent interventions of postcolonial theory by thinking about the problematic of narrative representation with the insights developed by Lukács and Bakhtin. Their

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[81] The kind of reportage novel that Georg Lukács describes in "Reportage or Composition" is, in fact, closer to the novels of the Progressive Era, with writers such as Upton Sinclair and the naturalism of Emile Zola: a fictional account informed by investigative journalism and detailed social research. Lukács's analysis of the reportage genre is, however, useful insofar as it outlines a general reservation towards the merger of fiction and nonfiction which informs my reading of Boo.

[82] See Barbara Foley's *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction* for a broader consideration of "modes of empirical authentication" in the documentary novel (16). She also provides a helpful discussion of Lukács's theory of mimetic representation which "necessitates, by definition, the penetration beneath appearance to essence—actually, to essence-in-motion" and hinges on the representation of "specific historical processes" (77; 78).

analytical apparatus overlaps in significant ways because of their shared interest in cultural

processes that reject static notions of development and ahistorical readings of literary texts. As

Lakshmi Bandlamudi and E.V. Ramakrishnan point out in their 2018 edited volume, with its

telling title *Bakhtinian Explorations of Indian Culture: Pluralism, Dogma and Dialogue Through*

History, Bakhtin in particular lends himself to postcolonial theory as his entire methodology is

fundamentally "rooted in ground realities and lived life is of paramount importance" (9). The

dynamism of Bakhtin's analytical framework emerges from the close attention he pays to

language and communication more broadly. This is why, for him, dialogue represents the

fundamental structure of the literary text, not just in terms of its dramatic function but as the very

logic of narrative itself.[83] At the same time, this "dialogism" is present in the text not just in

terms of novelistic discourse or heteroglossia,[84] but in the *chronotope* which makes the cognitive

link between the concrete spaces of our neoliberal moment and the social relations congealed in

them (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 279).

Contemporary Realism and the Chronotope: The Mapping Function of Narrative Space

Here we might supplement our discussion of Bakhtin and Lukács by way of Jameson's notion of

"cognitive mapping." Part of his broader "project for [the] spatial analysis of culture," cognitive

mapping describes a process of "'realistic' demystification" that aims to provide literary form

and structure to our "conception of some (unrepresentable, imaginary) global social totality"

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[83] Ramakrishnan emphasizes that for Bakhtin it is precisely this "dialogism [which] is inherent in the very act of communication where the social constitutes the verbal sphere" (106). As he elaborates, "'Monologism' [on the other hand] implies a social world where its diversity of thought and action are curbed by a hegemonic unified consciousness that controls all values and meanings."

[84] Here, the presence of many sociolects and linguistic layers of meaning within one text.

(348; 349; 356).[85] As Bakhtin explains in "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," the literary chronotope is defined, first and foremost, by its relationship to narrative *structure* and to the totality of the text: "In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" (84). In other words, narrative for Bakhtin is a compression of complex social relations both in terms of its process of production and in its mode of representation. Importantly, the totality of time and space that is inscribed into the act of representation through this compression—of the temporal position of author, narrator, audience, etc.—also makes the chronotope contingent on the material reality of its socio-historic moment. Chronotopes, in this sense, are historically concrete representations of how both author and text relate to their respective worlds and moments. "Time," Bakhtin elaborates, "thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (84). Jameson's project thus aims to theorize how one might attempt to critically *map* the concrete social totality represented in a text, which, as Bakhtin argues, is always already *contained in it*.

In this sense, both Jameson and Bakhtin go beyond even a dialectical theory of representation, arguing instead for a conception of the world that not only challenges abstract, one-dimensional claims with their negating opposites, but that in fact completes this totality in terms of a positive surplus of *re*-cognition. This is further supported by the fact that Jameson acknowledges Darko Suvin as the inspiration for his discussion of the "cognitive" aspects of mapping (348). In the essay which Jameson refers to, Suvin argues precisely for the kind of

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[85] At the heart of this act of demystification is a fundamentally Hegelian differentiation between the various moments of rational thought. Hegel summarizes his position from the *Encyclopedia* in *The Philosophical Propaedeutic* accordingly: "Understanding stops short at concepts in their fixed determinateness and difference from one another; dialectic exhibits them in their transition and dissolution; speculation or Reason grasps their unity in their opposition" (126).

conception of mimetic representation that is at the heart of my theorization of realism. As Suvin outlines, a representation that goes beyond mere *copying* adds to both its own conception of reality, and to that of the reader: "All of this together enables the resulting views of relationships among people, elaborated by the restructured piece of fiction, to return into our understanding of reality or ideology *with a cognitive increment*" (Suvin 666). It is this investment in theorizing representation in terms of an accumulation of knowledge in the process of mediation that links Jameson's theory of cognitive mapping with Bakhtin. For like Jameson and Suvin, Bakhtin is interested in the cognitive function of artistic composition.

Bakhtin, like Jameson, frames his project in much broader terms than just as a discussion of time and space in the novel. Rather, his goal is to develop "a historical poetics" that allows us to theorize the shifting, historically constituted representations of time and space in the novel ("Forms" 84). In other words, he does not propose the chronotope as a static model, but as a dynamic and changing theoretical framework that can be used to develop an understanding of different hegemonic chronotopes that emerge throughout history. It is in this sense that we can speak of contemporary critical realism in terms of a *neoliberal chronotope,* or more accurately in terms of a *neoliberal chronotope* in which time is no longer, as Bakhtin suggested, "the dominant principle" (86). This new chronotope, which structures the realism of contemporary anglophone nonfiction, is defined by *space* as its dominant principle. This fundamental shift, I want to suggest, is owed to the fact that the reification of space—and the concomitant congealing of social relations—rests at the heart of the process of restructuring a fully globalized capitalist mode of production around the increasingly urbanized, industrial settings of neoliberal globalization; a process that is marked by not just the *persistence* of space as a dominant principle but its *expansion* to all spheres of life.

Uneven Lives: Spatializing Historical Process and Concrete Experience

Boo's text creates its own unique blend of fiction and nonfiction by merging investigative

journalism, ethnography, and the novel in order to achieve a distinct form of realist

representation.[86] Living in Annawadi, one of the slums near Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji

Maharaj International airport, Boo's process involved the recording of countless interviews and

incidents over the course of four years, from 2007 to 2011, with the help of several translators,

including Mrinmayee Ranade, Kavita Mishra, and, especially, Unnati Tripathi, a Mumbai

University student who "became a fierce co-investigator and critical interlocutor" despite initial

reservations about "a Westerner writing about slumdwellers" (Boo 251). To give a sense of the

overall scale and scope of the project: the investigative work conducted in the aftermath of the

"burning incident" alone, one of the book's key plot points, "derives from repeated interviews of

168 people, as well as records from the police department, the public hospital, the morgue, and

the courts" (252). It is this extensive research that allows Boo to narrate in intimate detail the

lives of the slumdwellers and to create a compelling representation of Annawadi as a whole.

The prologue of *BBF* begins by gradually establishing the central action and characters

around which the narrative is structured. There is Abdul, the garbage trader who buys waste from

scavengers to sell it in bulk as recyclable raw material, and Fatima, his family's neighbor who is

referred to as "the One Leg" by the slumdwellers due to a congenital disability affecting her gait

(Boo xvi). Fatima, jealous and frustrated about the moderate economic success of Abdul's

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[86] See Bornstein for a discussion of the relationship between fiction, nonfiction, and
ethnography. In many ways, Bornstein's argument dismisses what I see as the strength of realist
representation and cultural production in general, but her comparative reading of Boo alongside
Akhil Gupta's *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India* (2012), an
ethnographic account of the issues surrounding state planning in India, and Jeet Thayil's
Narcopolis (2012), a semi-autobiographical novel about drug-addiction in India, is nonetheless
useful in putting these different genres into conversation.

family, decides to sabotage the renovation efforts of a shared wall by burning herself severely and blaming Abdul and his family for her self-inflicted injury. The ensuing legal battle provides the background against which the other characters and their daily strife is laid out. The first section, titled "undercitizens," introduces the four other main characters of Boo's narrative, the aspiring slumlord Asha who is dead-set on raising her family out of poverty by any means necessary, the child scavenger Sunil who spends his days searching for plastic bottles and scrap metal to sell, and the student-teacher Manju who is perpetually suspended between her idealistic enthusiasm for education and her mother Asha's more strategic considerations.

Importantly, the fourth 'character' introduced in the opening section of the text is the slum Annawadi itself, "the land of annas, a respectful Tamil word for older brothers," named after the Tamil laborers who helped construct the international airport and then settled in the swampy area nearby (Boo 5). The prominent role that the slum adjacent to the airport plays in this first section underlines the fact that Boo's reportage is concerned not just with the individual slumdwellers but with the entirety of their social universe. From the very start, characters and space are represented as interdependent entities that build and shape one another.

Thus, while the individuals that make up the cast of the story are all introduced in the prologue and the first section, the emphasis is clearly put on the exposition of the slum as a whole. A palpable tension is built into the narrative here in the way that the individual, the collective, and space are put into conversation with one another. The relationship between the spaces of neoliberal globalization and its inhabitants is portrayed not as static, but rather as a dynamic process of mutual constitution. This hints at one of the key contradictions that Fredric Jameson describes in *The Antinomies of Realism* as constitutive of the realist mode of representation. As Jameson argues, realism is sustained at the narrative level by the

chronological tension between the very "narrative situation itself and the telling of a tale as such" on the one hand, and the present tense of what he calls "the realm of affect" on the other (10). Jameson essentially understands realism as an aesthetic that is inherently dialogic in the way that it pulls together the present act of narration that is facing toward the past with the narrative present of concrete experience that is facing toward the future. In other words, "we now have in our grasp the two chronological end points of realism: its genealogy in storytelling and the tale, its future dissolution in the literary representation of affect" (10). Realism in this sense represents "the symbiosis of this pure form of storytelling with impulses of scenic elaboration, description and above all affective investment, which allow it to develop towards a scenic present" (11).

This theorization of realism in terms of its temporality is helpful for understanding the importance of Bakhtin's classic concept of the chronotope as the site where past, present, and future encounter one another within Boo's text. Reading Bakhtin through Jameson enables us to approach the critical realism of contemporary nonfiction in a way that moves beyond a focus on privileging of authorial voice, speech, and contextual intervention that all address the reader directly. Instead, we can focus our attention on *how* critical realism maps the spaces it represents. In this context, the interdependent nature of time and space that Bakhtin observes is crucial for developing an understanding of how critical realism captures the social relations that have shaped (and are in turn shaped by) the spaces of neoliberal globalization.

It is no accident, then, that Boo begins *BBF* with descriptions of the slum setting that are saturated with historical time and the life experiences and labor of its inhabitants. In this way, the opening shots of the nonfiction novel outline, through "impulses of scenic elaboration" and a clear "affective investment," both the dynamic and changing nature of space in neoliberal India and its historical development (*Antinomies* 11):

Annawadi sat two hundred yards off the Sahar Airport Road, a stretch where new India

and old India collided and made new India late. Chauffeurs in SUVs honked furiously at

the bicycle delivery boys peeling off from a slum chicken shop, each carrying a rack of

three hundred eggs. Annawadi itself was nothing special, in the context of the slums of

Mumbai. Every house was off-kilter, so less off-kilter looked like straight. Sewage and

sickness looked like life. (Boo 5)

The tension built up here between the "new India" and the "old" frames the complex temporality

of neoliberal globalization in spatial terms right away. For the "new" and "old" do not refer to a

mere temporal split, but to a spatial division between the (unequal) participants in a process of

capitalist modernization. This spatial division is defined by what Ernst Bloch famously referred

to as the "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous" or, in other words, a capitalist modernity which

is "governed always—that is to say, definitionally—by *unevenness*, the historically determinate

'coexistence,' in any given place and time, 'of realities from radically different moments of

history'" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 307 in WReC 12).

Not only does Boo here give a sense of the slum as a geographically specific place, she

also positions it in relation to a larger social context. This description essentially formulates a

realist aesthetic in which "each descriptive detail is both individual and typical" (Lukács,

Meaning 43). In other words, this particular slum is presented both as "nothing special" with

regard to its position of low-status within wider social and historical context *and* as something

that is, for precisely this reason, representative of a collective experience. Despite the fact that

"the citizens of the undercity remain largely unseen, unmapped, and unrecognized by law and

society," their experiences are nonetheless "emblematic of the underclass within most

metropolitan areas" (Hashmi 189). Here, where all houses are "off-kilter," an unconventional

standard may determine what passes for "straight," but a standard rules nonetheless. The central

issue in representing social experience, which the nonfiction novel is uniquely equipped to deal

with, is thus tied to competing ways of seeing that represent the three central axes of what Boo,

in the author's note at the end of the text, calls "infrastructure of opportunity" (Boo 247): politics

(and by extension corruption), education, and business.

Grasping the temporality of the opening scene is key as it allows us to understand the

ways in which it essentially materializes the space of the Sahar Airport Road in terms of the

uneven development of capitalist modernization in *general*, and in terms of the resulting unequal

social relations of the airport slum in *particular*. The "rich" and the "poor" encounter one

another as the representatives of the "new" and the "old," as the inhabitants of the spaces

included or excluded from the benefits of modernization. That Boo plays with this relationship

consciously here is evidenced by the image of the house that concludes the paragraph. The space

of the slum is one where the uneven is normalized, where "less off-kilter looked like straight"

because *everything* is off (Boo 5). She juxtaposes a general, hegemonic experience of

contemporary modernity by the NMC minority with the particular experience of the inhabitants

of the slum—the experience of the disenfranchised masses for whom "[s]ewage and sickness

looked like life" (5). In Jameson's terms, the "scenic present" that this passage unfolds now

brings us back to Bakhtin and the chronotope. The time-space that Boo's exposition constructs in

order to represent the slum in its social totality narrates the fundamental spatial divisions of

neoliberal India. It infuses the "scenic elaboration" and "description" Jameson describes as

constituent moments of realism with the "affective investment" that privileges the concrete

experience of the slum inhabitants (*Antinomies* 11). More importantly, however, it includes in its

narration the temporal markers that define the historical process of uneven development and

expresses them in terms of space. This is precisely the way in which Bakhtin's concept of the

chronotope operates "as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as the center

for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel" (Bakhtin, "Forms"

250).

In this way, the exposition of *BBF* becomes a crucial way of framing the narrative as it

delineates the physical *and* the social landscapes of the slum in terms of their spatial

organization. Boo focuses in particular on two experiences that are both fundamentally *opposed*

and deeply *linked* to one another through the hybrid space of slum/airport. One is shaped by the

experience of slum life, the other is defined by the dominant (or rather dominating) experience of

India's rising NMC. While it is the masses who directly experience the slum, it is the NMC that

sets the standards of how development is represented and framed ideologically. It is this

hegemonic perception that allows Boo to frame the experience of the slumdwellers both spatially

and ideologically as a "part of one of the most stirring success narratives in the modern history

of global market capitalism, a narrative still unfolding" (Boo 6).

It is also against this hegemonic narrative that Boo, much like Roy, position her text as a

counter-narrative that gives voice to those whose experiences are overwritten.[87] Able to

understand herself as both part and not-part of slum life, Boo can challenge the NMC narrative

by putting it in relation to the concrete collective experience of the slumdwellers. This informs

many of the sections that pair these two perspectives:

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[87] In her afterword, Boo elaborates on the way she places her text in relation to this dominant
narrative: "I had felt a shortage in nonfiction about India: of deeply reported accounts showing
how ordinary low-income people—particularly women and children—were negotiating the age
of global markets" (Boo 249). This also bespeaks a clear self-positioning within the nonfiction
boom of the last two to three decades, despite the fact that Boo's novel is not necessarily part of
narrow definitions of what constitutes Indian literature.

> Wealthy citizens accused the slumdwellers of making the city filthy and unlivable, even
>
> as an oversupply of human capital kept the wages of their maids and chauffeurs low.
>
> Slumdwellers complained about the obstacles the rich and powerful erected to prevent
>
> them from sharing in new profit. Everyone, everywhere, complained about their
>
> neighbors. (Boo 20)

Framed in this way, these perspectives are clearly tied to class relations and the economic system that (re-)produces them. From the very first pages, Boo's nonfiction novel draws together the abstract dynamics of a global system and demonstrates how they affect the lives of the slumdwellers in concrete ways, and, more importantly, that the ways these social relations are perceived by the poor and rich alike is infused with ideas of spatial organization. The very phrase at the end of this paragraph—"[e]veryone, everywhere"—registers this link between physical location and social position. Where one stands in this context, from where one complains, so to speak, is a matter of class, and it is therefore linked to the limitations and privileges that space affords and imposes on our perspectives.

Exclusive Space: Urban Landscapes, Ways of Seeing, and the Mapping of Social Relations

Focalization is thus crucial in Boo's nonfiction novel. Roy, however, uses the first-person voice as the refracting moment that breaks up the singular narrative of her account and opens it toward both the hegemonic discourse of the NMC and the counter-narrative of the marginalized masses. *BBF*, on the other hand, is written almost exclusively in the third-person. Yet, the authorial note at the end, in which Boo switches into the first-person of the reporter/witness, signals that the kind of omniscient narration that is applied throughout the text is identical with the third-person of classical realism. Just as in Roy's *WWC*, *BBF* opens up the *singular* narrative towards a

collective experience by including the many voices of the slum in her *overarching* narrative. In fact, the narrative voice in this way maps out the interdependent relationship between social relations and narrative space: "The book is written in a third-person voice that focalizes a number of different perspectives from the Annawadi community, building a narrative of space through the vantage points of many characters" (Claycomb 410). In drawing out the connections among the various characters populating the narrative, Boo constructs "a communal narrative presence" for space, which simultaneously allows us to understand the ways in which space in turn structures the lives of the slumdwellers. It is in this sense that, as Claycomb argues, the "narrative spaces" that are described throughout *BBF* are more than mere backdrop: "Annawadi, in this sense, exists in historical time even as it generates, through this collective narration, narrative time. The space is the story. And the space is itself full of characters and voices" (410-411).[88] The neoliberal chronotope, as theorized in the previous sections, represents precisely this process of spatializing social relations, a crucial mechanism for critical realism to map the dialectic between the global and the local.

Unsurprisingly, Boo herself describes this mapping of the contemporary neoliberal moment in her author's note in terms that infuses spatial organization with a sense of social reproduction. Thus, when she poses the question of what limits class mobility in Annawadi—"What is the infrastructure of opportunity in this society?" (247)—she explicitly links the structures of the everyday that shape the conditions for this infrastructure. It is class mobility—structured as it is in the slum by the three axes of politics, education, and entrepreneurship—that delineates the experience of the central focalizers of the text in spatial terms. All of the main characters introduced in the prologue and exposition experience class and class mobility as a

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[88] Here, Claycomb draws on Friedman's essay on Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Friedman's essay will be discussed separately in the last section of this chapter.

matter of space: Abdul, the garbage trader, wants to quite literally stabilize his family's house; Sunil, the philosophically inclined scavenger boy depends on his knowledge of the slum and airport in order to make a living; Asha, the aspiring slumlord with a plan for success, envisions achieving a middle class existence in terms of an air-conditioned apartment; and her daughter, Manju, the idealistic student and teacher, sees the classroom as the way out for both herself and her students. Taken together, they register the collective experience of the slum itself. As a collective, their experience is what shapes life under neoliberal globalization, by either continuously pushing against the limits of their social position (as, for example, in the case of Abdul and Sunil) or helping to reproduce it (as in the case of Asha).[89] The "infrastructure of opportunity" which Boo speaks of is, however, not the only element of the text that registers the individual and collective hopes and aspirations of the slumdwellers in spatial terms. It can also be found in the way narrative uses space quite literally in order to delineate the boundaries of this social universe.

In this context, fences and concrete walls quickly emerge as the defining feature of the liminal space of the road which simultaneously links and separates slum and airport. Like the formal and informal sectors of the economy they represent, these spaces are simultaneously kept apart and yet remain intrinsically linked. The only slumdwellers to venture across the divide are the scavenging boys who search along the road for recyclables and scrap metal or those lucky enough to have found employment at one of the large airport hotels. Barriers in this context are the visible manifestation of a lived reality which is marked by a deep class divide that is perpetually reproduced and carefully maintained. The sociologist Saskia Sassen refers to this as

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[89] Manju occupies an intermediate position. While she herself sees education as a way to achieve class mobility, and tries to offer this opportunity to her students, she is also limited by the educational apparatus of which she is a part.

the "embeddedness of the global," or, in other words, the local or national instantiation of the

logic of capital "which has been encased in an elaborate set of national laws and administrative

capacities that constitute the exclusive territoriality of the national state" (242). By mapping the

spatial divisions of the slum/airport, Boo thus provides an overview of the neoliberal geography

that simultaneously registers the ways in which the capitalist mode of production shapes space

and represents a manifestation of the conditioning effect this landscape in turn has on its

inhabitants.

The image of the border wall, more than a mere barrier, here becomes a representation of

the kind of spatial division that is the hallmark of a new kind of "exclusionary geography,"

which we associate with the spaces of neoliberal globalization (Davis 97). The walls and barriers

in Boo's text take on an important allegorical function, registering the marks that structural

adjustment has on the physical and social landscape. In a key scene of Boos's narrative, the child

scavenger Sunil recognizes that there is a concrete vision built into the barrier between slum and

airport:

> It interested him that from Airport Road, only the smoke plumes of Annawadi's cooking
>
> fires could now be seen. The airport people had erected tall, gleaming aluminum fences
>
> on the side of the slum that most drivers passed before turning into the international
>
> terminal. Drivers approaching the terminal from the other direction would see only a
>
> concrete wall covered with sunshine-yellow advertisements. The ads were for Italianate
>
> floor tiles, and the corporate slogan ran the wall's length: BEAUTIFUL FOREVER
>
> BEAUTIFUL FOREVER BEAUTIFUL FOREVER. (36-37)

What is and is not visible from the airport emphasizes the class relations contained in the barrier,

registering two distinct "ways of seeing" which are tied up with this social landscape (Williams,

"Culture" 18).[90] Perspective, in this sense, is crucial for how representations of reality register the ways in which they simultaneously shape and reflect how we see the world. The barrier is both a physical manifestation of class division *and* of a bounded NMC worldview that is quite literally circumscribed by the beautiful forevers that lend the novel its title. The slogan of the advertisement underlines this with sinister precision. The world of the airport travelers is one that will be "beautiful forever," so long as the massive barrier between the lived reality of the "airport people" and that of the "undercitizens" of the Annawadi slum remains permanently in place. For the masses, the wall represents the harsh limits imposed on their social mobility; for the NMC, it is the rampart that is the very condition for the smooth operation of its world amidst the chaos and strife of the slum outside. The promise of the advertisement thus quite literally depends on leaving in place this underlying exclusive logic, and in this way becomes effectually a threat: this beauty depends on keeping out the rabble. Inversely: if the wall was to come down as part of the further 'development' of the airport and its surrounding environment, it would surely be in order to displace the inhabitants of the slum for whom there can be no space within (or in sight of) the glass and concrete world of the "new India."

Boo's reportage relies heavily on this social element that is congealed in spatial division. Subtly but consistently, the narrative emphasizes that urban space in particular is no mere given reality, but one constructed with a purpose. As Henri Lefebvre argues in *The Production of Space*, space comprises a complicated web of social relations because it is the result of a concrete "productive activity" (26). In fact, "space has taken on," as Lefebvre explains, "within the present mode of production, within society as it actually is, a sort of reality of its own" (26).

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[90] Similar to Williams, Nancy Armstrong, for example, discusses the picturesque as a certain "way of seeing" as a crucial aspect of how realist representation has been shaped by visual representations (68).

This gives urban space a peculiar quality it shares with narrative: both are the result of a concrete history, both are products of human activity, and both can shape how we perceive reality in ways that either highlight or hide the social relations that have shaped their production. An urban landscape is in this sense "both an outcome and the medium of social relations, both the result of and an input to specific relations of production and reproduction" (Mitchell 49). This is especially true for the city in the age of neoliberal globalization. As Kanishka Chowdhury points out, urban space in India today is never static but subject to an "ongoing remapping of the urban landscape" (184). If we understand "the production of urban space as the territory of 'liberalization,'" it becomes clear that "the reproduction of space as an arena for urban privilege and for the social control of marginalized populations" is a continuous and fundamental process of the capitalist system (Chowdhury 184).

The text constantly emphasizes that nothing is forever in this universe of constantly shifting walls and crumbling buildings, and barriers will be readily torn down when it serves profit: "The Beautiful Forever wall came down, and in two days, the sewage lake that had brought dengue fever and malaria to the slum was filled in, its expanse leveled in preparation for some new development. The slumdwellers consoled one another, 'It's not us yet, just at the edges'" (Boo 233). It is thus no coincidence that the title itself—*Behind the Beautiful Forevers*— refers to this corporate slogan. In fact, the title prepares the reader for the tearing down of the wall as a key moment of defamiliarization which ultimately structures the entire narrative. The recognition of the relationship between the mysterious and poetic title and its harsh reality serves to highlight the allegorical function of the wall motif in the narrative as a whole, and forces the readers to confront how their own ways of seeing are structured by the social space they inhabit.

The above discussion further illustrates the ways in which the cognitive function of the chronotope maps narrative space in terms of the dynamic processes that shape the real spaces it aims to represent. Grasping the relationship between narrative and real space—what Bakhtin calls "the *representational* importance of the chronotope"—is in fact crucial for understanding how contemporary nonfiction approaches representation in general since the chronotope is where "the meaning that shapes narrative" resides ("Forms" 250). It is consequently space, the dominant principle of the *neoliberal chronotope*, which here takes on a similar narrative function as novelistic discourse does for Roy: it allows the text to register the complex makeup of social relations in a way that inscribes a multiplicity of (either opposing or simply limited) points of view in the very structure of the text, thus putting them into conversation.[91]

Bakhtin, however, distinguishes clearly between "the *represented* world in the text" and the real world, "the world that *creates* the text" ("Forms" 253). In following Bakhtin's own insistence, the implications of this relative autonomy between world and text are such that the text itself can never be defined by an individual act of creation or reception (or a singular meaning, for that matter. Rather, "all its aspects—the reality reflected in the text, the authors creating the text, the performers of the text (if they exist) and finally the listeners or readers who recreate and in so doing renew the text—participate equally in the creation of the represented world in the text" (253). It is this multilateral relationship between represented and created world which is crucial for understanding contemporary critical realism: "Out of the actual chronotopes

[91] This is, in fact, a point Bakhtin himself makes, albeit only in passing: "Language, as a treasure-house of images, is fundamentally chronotopic" ("Forms" 251). He does not elaborate on this matter, but as I have hinted at here, there is a clear overlap in this sense between his concept of heteroglossia and chronotope in terms of their representational function as well as their importance for realism.

of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and *created*

chronotopes of the world represented in the work (in the text)" (253).

But it is important for grasping the ways in which works of nonfiction such as Boo's

allow us to read a text in relation to our own world and come away with that "*cognitive*

increment" which adds to our understanding of the Real (Suvin 666). Bakhtin himself identifies

this constitutive relationship between the world of the text and reality itself as its own "*creative*

chronotope," a sort of liminal space reflective of the relationship between the world of the text

and our world: "The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and

the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation, as well as part

of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of

listeners and readers" ("Forms" 254). The surplus value that is created in the interplay of text and

reality is thus what Jameson refers to as cognitive mapping: it is a deeper understanding of the

world that the text realizes in the way it positions itself toward the world.

For Bakhtin, this relationship thus allows us to distinguish critical realism from a "naive

realism" in which "the *represented* world [is confused] with the world outside the text" ("Forms"

253). This is also the kind of "relationship between reality and representation" that, as Ulka

Anjaria argues, "is premised on an active rethinking of that relationship" (*Realism* 169). It is

important to emphasize that the theorizations of realism that we have so far examined are all

concerned either with canonical realist fiction or more contemporary examples of conventional

realism. On the other hand, what my discussion of Boo (and previously Roy) aims to

demonstrate is that contemporary nonfiction has appropriated many of the narrative strategies of

realism in a way that fundamentally alters what realism looks like. What this new critical realism

shares with conventional realism is, however, the logic of cognitive mapping: a negative (in the

dialectical sense) assessment of reality which upends our conception of reality and forces us to acknowledge the real conditions of our existence in the contemporary moment. The allegorical function of the border wall in *BBF* makes this unequivocally clear. The text does not simply *tell* us that a class division is inscribed in the barriers surrounding the airport but *shows* us by forcing us to confront in the text the spatial divisions that reflect the economic, political, ideological, and material limitations of life under capitalism in the age of globalization. By deconstructing the ways of seeing imposed by space within the world of the text, we are forced to confront our own limited perspective.

Dialogic Divisions: The Allegorical Function of Space in Critical Realism

Division, then, becomes the fundamental structural marker of this bounded universe. The spaces of globalization are in this way represented as an essential extension of what Fanon called the "compartmentalized world": a "world divided in two" between exploiters and exploited (5). However, the allegorical function of space extends beyond merely registering the abstract economic superstructures of globalization in the spatial division between slum and airport. Space, in fact, becomes the exclusive category through which social conflicts within the text are narrated. The "Beautiful Forever wall" thus provides not just a setting for the narrative, but the very key to mapping the social relations that shape the neoliberal chronotope and are in turn shaped by it. We might understand the wall as what Jameson calls a "genuine allegory [which] does not seek the 'meaning' of a work, but rather functions to reveal its structure of multiple meanings" (*Allegory* 10). By scaling down the abstract social relations of a global capitalist system, the narrative identifies how they are embedded in the structures of everyday life at every

level, and how, in fact, the global capitalist system sustains itself by reshaping the very fabric of

our social existence.

The fundamental conflict at the heart of the narrative—aptly summarized by the title of

the second section, "the business of burning" (Boo 69)—involves the two families of Zehrunisa,

Abdul's mother, and of Fatima, their neighbor.[92] After Abdul's father Karam returns from a

hospital stay due to breathing problems—which are a byproduct of the garbage trade—Zehrunisa

decides that it is time to invest some of the family's moderate gains in the garbage business into

their living quarters to improve the standard of living for her smaller children in particular:

> She wanted a more hygienic home here, in the name of her children's vitality. She
>
> wanted a shelf on which to cook without rat intrusions—a stone shelf, not some cast-off
>
> piece of plywood. She wanted a small window to vent the cooking smoke that caused the
>
> little ones to cough like their father. On the floors she wanted ceramic tiles like the ones
>
> advertised on the Beautiful Forever wall—tiles that could be scrubbed clean, instead of
>
> broken concrete that harbored filth in each striation. (83)

What Zehrunisa envisions is a small improvement of their daily life that would allow them to

eliminate some of the inevitable health hazards of slum life. This project of home improvement

must also be read as a calculated investment in a future that is, by all accounts, precarious: the

destruction of the slums is always a possibility. However, Zehrunisa's renovations will not have

been in vain: the more solid a structure, the higher the owner's chances of getting one of the

much sought-after apartments given by the government as restitution to slumdwellers. It is by no

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[92] In terms of narrative organization, I have so far focused on the prologue and first section, while here I am covering the second section. It is the fundamental basis for the rest of the narrative which Boo follows over two further sections titled "a little wilderness" and "up and out" (133-174; 175-244). Since I am focusing in this chapter on the way that narrative space is used to materialize and map social relations, I focus on the first two sections where this is more prominently foregrounded.

coincidence that the ceramic tiles advertised at the airport are a key component of this improvement. In the slum context, these small improvements also serve as demonstrations of moderate wealth. In investing in their home, the Husains show their neighbors that they are making enough money in the garbage trade to set some aside for renovations. That this is a potentially risky undertaking is made clear from the outset, as Boo foreshadows the impending catastrophe set in motion by the planned renovations: "Before she'd even finished making her petition, her husband had assented, setting into motion the chain of contingency that would damage two families forever" (83).

The literal division of space by the wall between airport and slum is thus only one manifestation of spatial division in Boo's narrative. In fact, the central action of the plot itself—a conflict over a spatial division between living quarters that leads to the vengeful self-immolation which devastates the dreams and hopes of two families and upsets the entire social landscape of the slum—expresses questions of social status and class mobility in terms of space and division (both literal and figurative). Space here registers not just a differentiation but becomes what Bakhtin calls "the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied" ("Forms" 250). In this way, the nonfiction novel captures the lived experiences and social relations that are congealed in space, and translates them in terms of a neoliberal chronotope that makes them legible as part of a broader story about how globalization concretely affects people. Space is the dominant mode of narrative mediation, and the way in which the "structures of *experience*" of globalization are effectively communicated (Williams, *Marxism* 132). It represents not just the abstract dynamics of capitalism as a whole, but also how the experience of each individual contributes to shaping and reproducing it spatially and socially.

When the construction begins, the entire Husain family gets involved. The children are kept home from school to help guard their belongings that are moved into the street outside their hut, Karam is charged with procuring the tiles for the kitchen corner, while Abdul and a neighbor begin the construction. In order for them to put in place the cooking shelf safely, however, Abdul realizes that they will need to make more fundamental changes to the wall they share with Fatima, who had already complained about the noise throughout the entire project. With this, the stage is set for the confrontation between the two families. For this landscape is not just shaped by what is shared, but also by how people stake out their own private spaces within it:

> Abdul kept working. He was a categorizer of people as well as garbage, and as distinctive as Fatima looked, he considered her a common type. At the heart of her bad nature, like many bad natures, was probably envy. And at the heart of envy was possibly hope—that the good fortune of others might one day be hers. …
>
> "You bastards! You're going to break down my wall!"
>
> Fatima, again.
>
> "*Your* wall?" said Zehrunisa, irritated. "We built this wall and never took a paisa from you. Shouldn't we be allowed to put a nail in it from time to time? Be patient. If anything happens, we'll repair it once the shelf is in." (Boo 88)

The grievance is thus one driven by both envy of *and* hope for class mobility, as Abdul puts it, but it is also a struggle over the question of who can lay claim to a wall the two families share. Who built it and who improves it ultimately makes no difference to either family, but the threat of a wall crumbling suddenly makes a moderate social division that was wound up with it stand out in stark contrast. Showing the various ways in which social relations are both produced and reproduced by space, Boo in this way scales down the abstract nature of a global system to its

concrete manifestation in the environment the slumdwellers inhabit, and shows how they relate to each other as parts of a larger whole. In the compartmentalized world of neoliberal India, space represents more than just the changing physical landscape: it also lays bare the social relations that are congealed in it and in the ongoing historical processes of capitalist development.

It is these features of a realist aesthetic that ultimately allow a reportage novel like Boo's *BBF* to represent social reality as a subjectively lived process defined by competing perspectives and social relations that are marked by class divisions and expressed at the level of ideology as well as concretely manifested in space. When these divisions come to a head, they reveal the explosive nature of their underlying contradiction. This also explains the extreme measure Fatima is driven to. Fatima self-immolates with the intention to blame Abdul for setting her on fire, thereby sabotaging the renovation effort while gaining the sympathies of the other inhabitants. However, Fatima underestimates the dangers of this fabricated scandal, and subsequently dies from her injuries. But just as the event itself is symbolic of the fundamental class divisions that structure every interaction in the slum, Boo also shows how this small event is embedded in neoliberal space, and, by extension, the social relations it represents:

> At this hour, cooking fires were being lit all over Annawadi, the spumes converging to form a great smoke column over the slum. In the Hyatt, people staying on the top floors would soon start calling the lobby. "A big fire is coming toward the hotel!" Or, "I think there's been an explosion!" The complaints about the cow-dung ash settling in the hotel swimming pool would start half an hour later.
>
> And now came one more fire, in Fatima's hut. (94)

Within the larger context, one more small fire in the slum makes no difference, but, taken by itself, it upsets the entire social universe of both Zehrunisa and Fatima's families. The way in which Boo, similar to the visual of the Beautiful Forever wall, here draws a spatial parallel between how the hotel guests view the slum from above (a threatening, homogeneous mass encroaching upon the airport) and what its experience concretely means for its inhabitants (survival, social reproduction, or in this case, the explosive fall-out of envy and competition) again emphasizes the deep connection between these seemingly alien and disconnected worlds of slum and NMC.

Importantly, the distinction of part/whole that is assumed here is not a binary opposition, it is a dialectical pair. Part and whole are not distinct *from* one another in *BBF*, they are at a very basic level incomprehensible *without* one another. Boo's text thus leads us to a broader discussion of contemporary critical realism. For when we think about the part/whole division in terms of a binary, the implication is that they are fundamentally opposed. Their relationship is in this sense posited as one of radical difference. To look at things either in their concrete specificity or in their abstract generality therefore implies a loss of perspective, rather than what Bakhtin refers to as "excess of seeing" ("Author" 25). The differentiation suggests that the one cannot fully comprehend or encompass the other. However, the exact opposite is the case, the whole is incomprehensible *without* its constituent parts, and vice versa. While the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, the parts are also more than mere fractions of the whole. This surplus of meaning is the net yield of their relationship. This is precisely why the term *totality* is particularly useful in mapping this relationship between part and whole. Totality is thus not just a synonym for the whole, but describes the complex relationship between the whole *and* its parts.

This is why the creative method of *BBF* succeeds at a very fundamental level in registering social relations that are built into the environment of the slum. The social landscape of the slum does not merely *contain* its vast set of characters but *defines* them. At the same time, their relations to one another are what *defines* the slum as a whole. As individuals, they are representative of their reality, precisely because their individual experiences are the threads that make up the fabric of the whole. Their unique stories are the content that gives shape to the general form of their experience, but at the same time the social relations that dominate their lives structure the limits of their experience.

There is thus a fundamental tension built up in *BBF* between *subjective* and *objective* representation that is essentially about the question of mediation. The basic aesthetic claim of the reportage is, of course, that it is a true reproduction of facts. What the journalistic obsession with this sort truthful objectivity betrays, however, is often its exact opposite: it is the expression of a deeply alienated and reified consciousness that mistakes its own point of view for that of a neutral observer. This ultimately leads to a fetishized understanding of objectivity which is also at the heart of a fundamental misunderstanding about *realism* as a creative method.

The standard literary definitions of realism conceive of it as a method of naïve mimetic reproduction which aims to represent objective reality without distortion. Realism in this view is understood as an attempt at unmediated representation. It claims to show reality without observer, without judgment. Lukács, however, makes an instructive distinction that defines realism as a *creative* method against naturalism, which he sees as fundamentally static in its decontextualized representation of reality. Naturalism, he argues, seems to provide an unmediated reproduction only insofar as it eliminates the kind of conscious connections and claims that a genuine realist aesthetic can make. Realism, on the other hand, does not simply

reproduce a mimetic image of reality, but explores the underlying processes and constituent components. What distinguishes the contemporary realism of a nonfiction novel like Boo's *BBF* is precisely that it does not hide the fact that it is a mediated representation of reality. Instead, contemporary nonfiction challenges the very idea that such a thing as unmediated representation can exist. Any narrative that does not position itself towards reality, in this view, risks (mis-) representing reality as a whole consisting of individual moments that are linked only by accident. In other words, naturalism is limited to *description* and *reportage*, whereas realism relies on *narration* and *composition*. The authors of this kind of static representation, as Lukács points out in "Reportage or Composition?", are merely able to "recognize certain isolated facts (or in the best case constellations of facts) in separation" (39). In other words, this kind of representation is at best partial in its recognition of certain moments within what he calls the "contradictory unity of the total process in motion" (39).

This is precisely why Lukács is just as wary of hybrid genres like the reportage novel as he is of the bourgeois psychological novel and its emphasis on a purely psychological causation which elides both the social and the historical. As he puts it:

> While the authors of the bourgeois psychological novel, as subjective idealists, fall for the illusion that allows for the "inflation of the egoistic individual of bourgeois society, … with its nonsensical imagination and its lifeless abstractions, into the constituent unit of reality itself," the representatives of the reportage commit the mistake of the old materialism and do not recognize the dialectic, which allows the "driving forces" of society and history to act "through the heads" of human beings. (39)[93]

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[93] Lukács does not directly cite from another source here, but marks these quotations as essential borrowings from Fredrick Engels's *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*.

Realism, on the contrary, composes a narrative that is infused with meaning because it does not derive reality from the bourgeois individual, but develops it from the social relations and relations of production, which are simultaneously concretely experienced by human beings and shape the conditions of their existence in the abstract. Key here, as he explains, is precisely that any "subjective factor, which is sidelined in the composition of the work, appears as unorganized subjectivity of the author, as moralizing commentary and as superfluous, accidental aspect of characters that is not organically tied to the action" (39). But as I have suggested throughout this chapter, contemporary nonfiction texts do not fall into this trap of subjectivism. Instead, these texts in fact emphasize the fundamental connection between abstract global relations of production, and the concretely lived experience that makes up the fabric of the social totality of neoliberal India.

Conclusion: Neoliberal Narratives and the Representation of Space

It is no coincidence that Bakhtin identifies the chronotope as the crucial link between the subjective experience of individuals and the objective representation of a social totality. If we complement Lukács wariness of the *purely* subjective with Bakhtin's concern for subjectivity as the only way in which human beings can relate to reality we arrive at a theorization of realism in which the very relationship between world and text becomes the constitutive moment of narrative itself. In their interdependent movement, where time is materialized in narrative space and space becomes a mapping function of historical process and narrative time, they lay out not just plot and setting, but place these aspects in a relationship to the social totality of their historic moment. It is this process that ultimately creates an entire social universe and adds to our understanding of societal processes at work both in the fictional and real world. While Bakhtin

acknowledges that this dynamic is to some degree shared by all texts, he is also committed to a historical-materialist conception of story-telling that views these dynamics, what he calls the "organizing principle," as dominant at specific periods in time ("Forms" 104). As we have seen, this idea of the organizing function of narrative has been theorized at various points in time in different, yet similar ways. The difference of these theoretical approaches is dictated by the question of whether this organizing function was dominant or not.

The similarities, on the other hand, point to a shared realist aesthetic that never really went out of fashion, so to speak, in the period of capitalist modernity. Since it responds to the mystification of the relations of production, for this reason, we can identify its re-emergence across periods from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century in uneven ways and at different times across the globe. The critical realism of contemporary anglophone literature is in this sense only the latest instantiation of a general representational paradigm that is unique to the capitalist mode of production. What Bakhtin calls "organizing principle," we thus also see in Lukács's idea of narration or simply "composition," and encounter again in Jameson's concept of "cognitive mapping" (Bakhtin, "Forms" 104; Lukács, "Reportage" 39; Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping" 356). For Jameson in particular, this means that realism refers to a literary aesthetic that is defined by its relationship to how we see the world. That he can speak therefore of contemporary realism as "the ultimate renewal of modernism" in his afterword to *Aesthetics and Politics*—the edited volume that collects essays by Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch, Brecht, and Lukács on the subject of the realism-modernism debate[94]—reflects the way he associates realism with a response to our inability to recognize our real conditions ("Reflections" 211). Framed in

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[94] This Marxist debate had its beginnings in the 1920s. It essentially centered on realism and modernism and the politics of representation. See Adorno et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, especially Jameson's summary and analysis in his "Reflections in Conclusion."

this way, contemporary realism is neither an anomaly nor a mere return of an outdated aesthetic. Instead, we encounter it as the re-emergence of something that may look distinct and unexpected in its new shape but at the same time appears as something we are deeply familiar with.

CONCLUSION

Hegemonic Reflections: Realism, Mimesis, and Postcolonial Aesthetics

In the preceding chapters, I have outlined a theoretical framework for the study of a *resurgent*

realism in the context of contemporary global anglophone literature. My dissertation in this way

speaks to the renewed interest in realism, which has been taking on momentum recently, as well

as to the political stakes of theorizing "a global realist tradition that emerges from within

consonant—but by no means identical—historical transitions under capitalism in different parts

of the world" (Beckman 71).[95] In conclusion, I now want to discuss this resurgence in slightly

different terms in order to push beyond the normative definitions of realism that still shape the

debates in literary theory and to theorize literature once again as a crucial site of conflict. In other

words, I argue that the emergence of a *global realism* registers a return to the struggle *against* the

cultural hegemony of postmodern consumer culture and *for* freeing our collective imagination

from the excesses of what Mark Fisher calls *capitalist realism*. In order to re-frame the issue in

this way, I suggest that perhaps talking about *realism* is precisely what prevents us from properly

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I want to thank the Berlin Institute of Critical Theory (InkriT) and especially Wolfgang Fritz
Haug for inviting me to present my research on mimesis during their annual workshop in 2018.
The feedback I received as a fellow has greatly helped me develop the points about mimesis I put
forward in this conclusion.

[95] See, for example, *Peripheral Realisms*, a 2012 special issue of the *Modern Language
Quarterly*, edited by Jed Esty, Colleen Lye, and Joe Cleary; as well as *Realism Reevaluated*, a
recent issue of *Mediations* edited by Davis Smith-Brecheisen, which focuses on contemporary
debates about realism and includes a section dedicated to Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism*.

understanding and categorizing contemporary anglophone literature in terms of world-literature. As I have outlined in my introduction, understanding contemporary realism in terms of its similarities and differences to previous instantiations of realism allows us to view it as a more fluid aesthetic response to capitalist modernity. Since it may make sense to let go of loaded generic categories like *realism* or *modernism*, I want to complicate our understanding of aesthetics and narrative in the very fundamental terms of *mimesis*, and suggest it as the more useful term for the analysis of the shifting landscapes of world-literature where the social, historical, and political intersect.[96]

Crucially, *mimetic reproduction*, in this context, should not be understood narrowly as plain *imitation*, but as *mediation.* That is, mimesis is imitation *plus* observation: a *productive* act, not mere reflection. In other words, what I have referred to as realist representation throughout this dissertation essentially describes the mimetic process of making history and social relations aesthetically legible by giving them narrative form. Realism, understood in those terms, in turn reveals the hegemonic nature of mimetic representation, which Nicholas Brown, in fact, refers to as "the ideological problem with mimesis as such" (124). Mimesis can serve either *domination* (the aesthetic reproduction of reality as static and unchanging; in other words, the kind of *capitalist realism* that simultaneously sees and describes neoliberal globalization as benign and without alternative) or *liberation* (in other words, a *critical realism* that narrates the real conditions of life under capitalism in order to make them legible; it is this kind of narration that fulfills what Jameson refers to as the *cognitive mapping function* that counters the effects of alienation and reification).

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[96] I think it is noticeable that many of the essays in the 2019 issue of *Mediations* titled *Realism Reevaluated*, in one way or another, engage with realism in terms of what Thomas Laughlin calls "a mimetic theory of capitalism's representation" (2).

Real Tendencies: The Contested Territory of Representation

The first systematic literary study of mimesis as a concept of literary analysis was Erich

Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. A seminal text in the

study of representation, it is an early example of what Timothy Brennan refers to as a modern

philological tradition that is in profound ways oriented towards the world.[97] While the title

betrays its exclusive focus on Europe, the text itself is a sprawling account of literary tradition

whose macroscopic view extends across time and space. In fact, as Auerbach himself points out,

tradition might not be the right term because a strict categorization of the vast array of texts

across several thousand years of literary history is better captured by terms that avoid any sense

of linear progress. His preferred terms are thus "Tendenz" and "Strömung" (511), *tendency* and

current, implying an ever changing, fluid conception of literary form.

And while the canon of the works Auerbach examines is ultimately limited, his *method* is

broad in its socio-historical scope. Not only does he identify mimesis as a general tendency of

literary production and as the result of a global process of enriched experience, he also puts a

profoundly social conception of literary form at its center (511). His analysis of literary form

specifically foregrounds the representation of everyday life as crucial to determining a text's

historical relevance and social function. To Auerbach, it matters for example if we can represent

the everyday solely as *comical* and *sinful* (from the point of view of the rulers of society who

control the moral regimes of daily life) or if we can represent it with a genuine appreciation for

the popular in the proper sense of the word. We see here the kernel of what Lukács argued

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[97] Brennan has dedicated a book length study of the humanist tradition and the enlightenment, titled *Borrowed Light: Vico, Hegel, and the Colonies*, to this question. In this text, he offers a broad defense of this reading of not just Auerbach but of an entire tradition of "philology—or, at least, a philological sensibility—[which] was positively involved in, and helped enable, the emerging interest in non-Western cultures and the legacies of imperialism" (7). See also Brennan, "Places of Mind, Occupied Lands: Edward Said and Philology," which represents an early instance of his argument.

throughout his career: that art and the representation of reality more broadly speaking are in both ideological and social terms key sites of mystification. Compared to most other dominant theorizations of realism and the novel in literary studies—which focus on generic markers and style even when they discuss the socio-cultural context of literary production—Auerbach, in other words, marks an important intervention precisely because he foregrounds literature *as a form of social reproduction* and consequently lays the foundation for a conception of *aesthetics as a site of hegemonic struggle*.

Not a Marxist or historical-materialist by any means, Auerbach's radical conception of representation can make these claims because his philological method shares a common heritage with Marxist approaches to literary and cultural studies that pick up similar strands in their discussions of mimesis. In fact, as Timothy Brennan argues in *Borrowed Light: Vico, Hegel, and the Colonies*, his study of the liberationist tendencies of humanist thought, both philology and Marxism are examples of *a humanist tradition*—which has its progenitor in the Enlightenment philosopher Giambattista Vico—that centers on the social tendencies of cultural development.[98] This tradition is defined by being profoundly "interdisciplinary and based on a logic of intellectual generalism that was developed in Left Hegelian thought as the only approach possible for the study of the social totality" (Brennan, *Borrowed Light* 9). In this sense, Vico can even be understood as a point of origin for the systematic study of literature and culture in historical and materialist terms. As Brennan puts it, philology today is essentially still defined by

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[98] The urgency of Brennan's argument becomes clear when his defense of Marxism as a strand of humanism is read in the broader context of academic debates about posthumanism and surface reading. Brennan ultimately concludes: "To enshrine the posthuman … is to take humanity away from the slave, the domestic servant, the illegal immigrant, the Chavista, the Tibetan Maoist. To condemn the arrogance of humanism is to exempt from inclusion all men and women so long as their struggles against injustice can be shunted onto machines or other species, leaving unchecked and unaddressed the injustice to the invisible within our own species who just now, in the last century, have started to come into focus" (*Borrowed Light* 234).

"Vico's recognition that the principles underlying any claim on the real rely on attention to the modes of language, to sorting of documents, internal consistency, and systematic comprehension" (9). Citing Auerbach, Brennan elaborates that in Vico's conception philology referred to the expansive scope of study that marks the humanities in general in their resistance to an intellectual division of labor. Philology, as the systematic convergence of "sociology, national economy, the history of religion, language, law and art," in other words, marks the intersection of all things social in historically specific terms (Auerbach, "Einleitung" 23 qtd. in Brennan 9).

Identifying Auerbach's contribution to the study of literary representation in this way, allows us to grasp why the debates surrounding contemporary forms of realism have acquired such urgency: "What is at stake, in other words, in the claim that works of art do not mimic reality, but rather constitute claims about it, is a conception of consciousness as an active principle" (Brown 128). A Marxist literary criticism that places itself in a liberationist humanist tradition that foregrounds human agency can make a clear link between the social and political functions of art and the study of aesthetics without dropping one in favor of the other. It also demonstrates why the very terms of the debates about realism—including and especially the term *realism* itself—may be a conceptual *cul-de-sac*. If we focus on a conceptualization of representation in terms that have established and historically specific meanings, we risk falling into the trap of either running into common sense definitions (for example, classic literary theorizations of realism as mere imitation of reality) or extrapolating normative categories into universal ones. This is not to say that we cannot think about, say, contemporary realism in anglophone texts from and about South Asia *as realism*, but that to talk about strict categorizations of contemporary texts as either realist or modernist risks obfuscating the real

issues at stake by foregrounding dominant definitions—that are themselves based on reified categories of bourgeois science—and derivations from these norms in our analysis. In other words, it risks fetishizing difference in a way that misses the crucial similarities and the shared experience of how art responds with local specificity to global, world-historic processes like capitalist modernity. Shifting the discussion away from *realism* towards a re-evaluation of *mimesis* as the more fundamental category of representation thus allows us to think about the stakes inherent in how the world itself is processed *through* its re-*production*.

Producing Images: Walter Benjamin's Conception of Mimetic Ability

In essence, Marxist theories of mimesis take as their point of departure an understanding of mimetic reproduction as a process of productive human labor. In this they draw on an Aristotelian conception of mimesis which, in the first instance is less interested in artistic imitation or any social function it fulfills, and more in a general question of what surplus value human labor power generates in its interaction with nature. In this sense, mimetic reproduction can be understood as a *labor process* that represents both an "ars imitatoria" and an "ars perfectoria," an art that both *imitates* and *completes* (Lima and Fontius 88). For example, in relation to "the sphere of agriculture and the most important activities of the urban craft," imitation can be understood as an act in which "on the one hand, the work of nature is completed by cultivation, [and in which,] on the other hand it produces for man what naturally becomes available to animals" (88). As Thomas Metscher points out in his contribution to the *Bibliothek dialektischer Grundbegriffe* [*Library of Dialectic Key Terms*], "[m]imetic ability," in this sense, can be understood as a "productive force" since it "has its genetic location in nature as the site of the generation of similarities" (9). Consequently, mimesis represents an organic and productive process that creates *surplus value* because it *actively adds to the image it reproduces*. Marxist

aesthetics thus provides an important historical-materialist corrective to trans-historical theorizations of mimesis because it inscribes mimesis with a capacity for reproduction that—while natural—can be traced in terms of its historical development precisely because it is grounded in productive labor.

This basic conception of mimesis as both an act of human labor and a natural force, informs one of the key early theorizations of mimesis in Marxist aesthetics. Walter Benjamin traces mimetic reproduction, and artistic imitation more broadly speaking, back to *mimicry*—imitation as an act of assimilation to existing conditions for the purpose of survival. Taking it as his point of departure, Benjamin sees nature itself as a system that produces very basic similarities through the natural reproduction of reality. This type of *appropriation* (*zu eigen machen*, or making one's own) of the world has allowed human beings to develop "the highest capacity for producing similarities" (Benjamin, "Mimetic Faculty" 2.2: 720). In addition to mere adaptation, however, humans also have the "gift for *seeing* similarities" (720; emphasis added), which is derived from mimicry but stands somewhat separate. In this sense, Benjamin elaborates on the concept of "mimetic faculty," in which *production* and *reproduction*, *Darstellung* (portrayal) and *Abbildung* (depiction), *interpretation* and *representation,* not only mutually refer to each other, but in principle can be traced back to the same human ability (721). This is not coincidentally also the logic that informs Lukács's distinction between realism and modernism/naturalism—*narration* (making history legible as process) versus *description* (presenting it as static, natural, and unchanging)—whose focus I have attempted to sharpen throughout this project.

This does not mean, however, that Benjamin is interested in developing mimesis as a concept that exists outside of historical change. Rather, he theorizes the fundamental historicity

of mimetic ability, which on the one hand still finds itself in the "[c]hildren's play," which is "everywhere permeated by mimetic modes of behavior," but on the other hand, thanks to the worldly nature of mimetic reproduction, is inextricably linked to historical change (Benjamin, "Mimetic Faculty" 2.2: 720). For "neither mimetic powers nor mimetic objects remain the same in the course of thousands of years. Rather, we must suppose that the gift for producing similarities . . . and therefore also the gift of recognizing them, have changed in the course of history" (720). In other words, since mimetic reproduction represents a fundamental relationship between subject and object, between world and ego, it is not to be historically understood despite but *because* of the central role it plays in cultural production. Moreover, mimesis for Benjamin— to a degree we can find to similar measure only in Lukács—is so central in the history of human culture that it can itself be read as a "history of mimetic wealth" (Metscher 10).

Benjamin's theorization of mimesis is, however, not limited to philosophical speculations about the origins of art alone. Since Benjamin refers from the outset to the dialectics of representation *and* interpretation, he is also confronted with the question of the origin of language. For if the mimetic faculty is a central moment of human productive power and human learning, it raises the question of how language—as the crucial arbiter of our reality—is related to reality itself. In this context, Benjamin, on the one hand, engages with the "onomatopoetic mode of explanation" of linguistic sociology, but also formulates his own concept of the so-called "nonsensous similarity" (*unsinnliche Ähnlichkeit*), which describes the "ties not only between what is said and what is meant but also between what is written and what is meant, and equally between the spoken and the written" (Benjamin, "Mimetic Faculty" 2.2: 722). The "nonsensous similarity" of language, in other words, *imitation that is not necessarily identical with what it portrays and therefore requires an act of deciphering*, describes how mimetic ability

itself has shaped not just language but its increasingly independent function as a sign system. Thus, if language is understood as "an archive of nonsensous similarities" and as an active creation, then its origin can be localized in man's ability to recognize structures (722). The mimetic ability therefore plays a central role not only as *representation* and *mediation*, but also has a decisive part in the *interpretation* of reality, which becomes readable and understandable precisely because *recognition* represents the dialectical other of mimesis.

Imitation, Domination, Liberation: The Stakes of Postcolonial Aesthetics

In his remarks on the problems of linguistic sociology, as Anja Lemke points out, Benjamin pursues this idea further by essentially adding to the historicity of mimetic reproduction what he describes as an inherent function of power by way of the work of Alfredo Niceforos (Lemke 647). Benjamin, citing Niceforos's *Genie del'argot*, discusses language—much like Bakhtin—as a historical sociolect (*argot*) and thus as discursive act defined by its inherent class characteristics: "The vernacular as used by the common people is, in a sense, a class characteristic that is a source of pride for its group. At the same time, it is one of the weapons with which the suppressed people attacks the ruling class it sets out to displace" (Niceforos 79 in Benjamin, "Problems" 3: 75). Benjamin essentially realizes that language—due to the mimetic impulse inherent in its function as a sociolect—is, as Lemke puts it, "an instrument of class struggle" (647). In other words, language itself, because it is a fundamental medium of mimetic reproduction, becomes a site of a Gramscian struggle for cultural hegemony.

Related to this analysis of language as a site of class struggle is what Metscher describes as the "anticipatory power emanating from mimetic practice," which Theodor W. Adorno theorized in continuation of Benjamin's idea (Metscher 10). This understanding of mimesis as an imaginative force is also related to the materialist conception of utopia developed by Ernst

Bloch. In fact, Bloch's interest in the inherent tendencies of a historical moment, his desire to

make use of "existing tendencies of development so that instead of a mere automatic crash a

truly dialectical, subject-centered shift towards socialism may take place" (Bloch, "Aktualität"

613),[99] can itself be described as what Metscher calls a "utopian rationality based on mimetic

ability" (10). But unlike in Bloch, where the utopian tendencies remain a potential, they play a

concrete and decisive role in Theodor Adorno's conception of artistic imitation. In contrast to

mere composition, Adorno sees creative art as a constructive process in which "the

encompassing sense of pictorial composition, is the ruthless subordination not only of everything

that originated from outside the artwork, but also of all partial elements immanent to the work"

(*Aesthetic Theory* 57). In other words, for him it is precisely the "affinity of construction with

cognitive processes" that becomes clear in mimetic practice (57). We can begin to see take shape

here a *mimetic function of rule* (*Herrschaftsfunktion*), or what Adorno calls the "subjective

domination" of nature (57). But Adorno recognizes that the act of imitation is also one of

realization. In the act of making-legible that which is only potential in objective reality, he thus

glimpses a utopian possibility of rewriting reality itself: "Construction tears the elements of

reality out of their primary context and transforms them to the point where they are once again

capable of forming unity" (57).

  Adorno continues this line of reasoning in collaboration with Max Horkheimer in their

Dialectic of Enlightenment. Here, imitation is plainly presented as an act of *mastering nature*,

which consequently means that the enlightenment is viewed not as a disenchantment *of* nature

but as the reification of reason. As a result, reason cannot in actuality explain the state of nature,

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[99] This quote is from Bloch's 1923 review of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, titled
"Actuality and Utopia." The translation is mine, but there is also a complete recent translation
available by Cat Moir, which includes a helpful introduction. See Moir, "The Archimedean
Point: Consciousness, Praxis, and the Present in Lukács and Bloch."

but instead merely forces it into bourgeois-rational forms of thought: "All that remains of the adaptation to nature is the hardening against it" (Horkheimer and Adorno 149). The result is not just an ossification of the creative impulse of mimesis, but its reversal into the opposite.

However, as Horkheimer emphasizes in his *Critique of Instrumental Reason*,[100] it is not the unavoidable fate of mimetic ability to realize itself as a rule of function and slide into political domination. Rather, it is the "malicious application of the mimetic impulse" in which the function of domination expresses itself (Horkheimer 127). It is thus the *instrumentalization of mimetic reproduction* that alienates it from nature, not some quality inherent to the act of imitation. Language itself, for example, reaches back to its natural foundations in an attempt to represent reality: "[It] reflects the longings of the oppressed and the necessity of nature; it liberates the mimetic impulse" (Horkheimer 179). The dialectic of domination and liberation, of bondage and freedom, can be explained only through the concrete applications of mimetic ability. Representation, in other words, is not by default a function of rule, because it actually has a potential connection to the *real conditions of life*. It is the connection of mimetic reproduction to *lived experience* that allows it to counter the instrumentalization of the mimetic impulse.

It is here that we can return to the discussion of representation and to normative conceptions of realism in the context of postcolonial studies, and to the important corrective that Marxist theorizations of mimesis provide. Homi Bhabha, for example, rejects realism *tout court* as the framework of colonial discourse in which realities are rewritten and imposed on the colonial subject: "It resembles a form of narrative whereby the productivity and circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a reformed and recognizable totality. It employs a system of representation, a regime of truth, that is structurally similar to realism" (Bhabha 101). It is thus either a function of rule or merely a nationalist activation of the ruling function of mimesis which

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[100] Both of the following quotations are my translation.

drafts a broad popular coalition into overthrowing colonial rule for the sake of an indigenous ruling class: "The present of the people's history, then, is a practice that attempts to hark back to a 'true' national past, which is often represented in the reified forms of realism and stereotype" (Bhabha 218). As David Huddart points out, the problem for Bhabha is ultimately this: "If realism is not always colonial discourse, then colonial discourse is always a form of realism. In other words, not all realistic narratives . . . have connections with colonialism, but colonial discourse is always claiming to directly represent colonial reality" (39). In Bhabha, thus

> [d]espite slight qualifications and hesitations, . . . colonial discourse is clearly associated with both realism and totality, meaning explanations of reality that aim to define its entirety. . . . [A]ny further analysis of colonial discourse that operates in terms of unqualified realism or totality is to that extent far too similar to its object: when we analyse colonial discourse, we need narrative strategies that can capture its bizarre or unrealistic qualities. (Huddart 39)

As Huddart's analysis shows, we can see in Bhabha what Neil Lazarus calls a disdain for "totality and systemic analysis" and a profoundly anti-Marxist rejection of a "struggle-based model of politics" and dialectics which is constitutive of normative conceptions of realism and mimesis in the field (Lazarus 21). Because Bhabha's theorization of realism rejects any dialectical relationship between rule and liberation, he is not able to think beyond the function of rule, and thus beyond reified, bourgeois forms of the mimetic impulse. But it is only in insisting on this other side of mimetic ability, that we can move beyond the postcolonial as a static reality and develop a conception of postcolonial literature which conceives of history as a dynamic process. For Bhabha, history is rupture, any search for continuities is an imposition of grand

narratives. But it is only in returning to history, rather than in a separation from it, that we can move beyond this impasse. For in history there is no true break *without continuity*.

This brings us to the final aspect of the realism-mimesis complex which underlines the urgent need for the study of aesthetics in the context of postcolonial literature and world-literature more broadly speaking: *criticism*. As I have shown in the previous chapters, Bakhtin and Lukács work with a conception of realism that foregrounds its dynamic ability to map capitalist modernity. Ultimately, their most crucial contribution, however, is that they—like Auerbach—ground realism in concrete human experience and in the dialectical connection between individual and society. Unsurprisingly, Bakhtin, Auerbach, and Lukács (in this order) appear in Jameson's *Antinomies of Realism* as the central "three apologists for the realist novel" (4). Realism, or rather, *critical realism*, represents an act of *recognition* that enables us to understand the social totality because it gives expression to lived reality. As Jameson puts it, "as a form (or mode) [realism] is historically associated … with the function of demystification," a function it continues to fulfill and which explains its recent resurgence (*Antinomies* 4).

Ultimately, dismissing all forms of realism because of its potential ruling function risks throwing out its critical tendencies as well. It is essentially an anti-critical move that wants to shut the door on a Marxist aesthetics that insists on class analysis and struggle, and as a result it also shuts out the utopian potential of literature. Fortunately, the recent re-emergence of realism in new shapes and forms in global anglophone literature, helps us dispel any notions about realism as a genre of the past. As Mathias Nilges puts it, "[r]ather, we see the emergence of a new kind of realism that confronts the socio-political and imaginative impasses and limitations of our moment precisely through the exploration of the formal limits of realism itself" (90). To Marxist literary theory, this is of course not news. Already for Lukács, realism represented the

only genuinely critical mode of representation because it points beyond the present moment and into the future, "as an expression of a diverse and rich understanding of reality, as a reflection of its hidden tendencies" (Lukács, "Realismus" 129). *Critical realism*, in other words, allows us to experience the utopian tendencies that lie dormant in reality as tangible possibilities. It is thus realism itself that provides us with the tools and the drive we need to overcome the aporia that *capitalist realism* represents: "Great realism consequently shapes a tendency within reality, which is not immediately evident, but much more importantly permanently present" (Lukács, "Realismus" 129).

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