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Constructing (un)Situated Women: Situated Knowledges in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Balli K. Jaswal's *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows* (2017)

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CONSTRUCTING (UN)SITUATED WOMEN: SITUATED KNOWLEDGES IN ARUNDHATI
ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS* (1997) AND BALLI K. JASWAL'S *EROTIC
STORIES FOR PUNJABI WIDOWS* (2017)

by

NECOLE T. DELOACH

(Under the Direction of Hapsatou Wane)

ABSTRACT

This thesis applies Donna Haraway's concept of "situated knowledges" to postcolonial feminist novels such as Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Balli K. Jaswal's *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows* in order to illustrate why there needs to be a new framework for analyzing literary postcolonial women. Despite the applicability of Donna Haraway's "situated knowledges" to postcolonial feminist literary studies, there has been little research published that analyzes not just the intersection of "situated knowledges" and postcolonial feminist literature, but also the problems that occur when Western scholars approach postcolonial texts without completely acknowledging their own worldview. I argue that because women within postcolonial feminist texts are at risk of what Chandra T. Mohanty calls "discursive colonization", that there needs to be a new theoretical framework that embraces specificity. I call this new framework (un)Situated Knowledge and the female characters I focus on in my thesis analysis, (un)Situated Women. Through analyzing Ammu from Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Nikki from *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows*, women who are alienated within their respective cultures, I demonstrate why (un)Situated Knowledge is an useful framework for postcolonial feminist literary analysis.

INDEX WORDS: Situated knowledges, Postcolonial womanhood, Donna Haraway, *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows*, *The God of Small Things*, Postcolonial feminist literature

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DEDICATION

To the ones who stood before me, I thank you.

To the ones who come after me, I hear you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Creating New Women

What does it mean to *be* a woman within Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), a postcolonial classic dealing with themes of disconnection, love and death within an Syrian-Christian family in Kerala, India, or Balli K. Jaswal's *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows* (2017), a relatively new work that explores hybridity through the complex social and cultural connections within the Sikh-Indian community in London? What is at stake in addressing this question? What knowledge can be gleaned in engaging with both novels regarding postcolonial feminist studies? Or better yet, would these questions reproduce the totalizing allure in which the significance of these women's experiences in feminist studies is based on their positioning as Third World women or Third World diasporas?

Renowned feminist scholars such as Chandra T. Mohanty assert that feminist scholarship is not a pure or innocent category. In "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", Mohanty states that feminist scholarship is more than "a mere production of knowledge about a certain subject...a directly political and discursive practice in that it is purposeful and ideological" (19). Mohanty sees a relationship between "Woman" as a constructed category formed by various representations and "women" as material subjects situated within particular historical processes, linking what is represented or the "product" with what is real, the "material" where contemporary feminist scholarship (whether it be literary, scientific, sociological, etc.) reduce the complexities as women within the Third World as a universalized Woman. Although some scholars may argue that since publishing this essay in the 1980s, the discourses surrounding Third World women have changed tremendously (I would

agree), this does not indicate that the issues surrounding representations of Third World women (and their diasporas) within literature have completely disappeared. For this reason, it is necessary to look at feminist scholarship on both novels.

Feminist scholarship on *The God of Small Things* and *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows*

Regarding the current scholarship of Roy's *God of Small Things*, scholars have focused on Roy's treatment of women *as a group* (the Woman/women issue) rather than on specificity within subgroups. For instance, Rajneesh Kumar (2020) applies a psychological comparative literary analysis to *The God of Small Things*, *Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) and Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) and *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), seeing Roy's and Desai's treatment of women in their works as an indictment of a generalized Indian society's maltreatment towards women. The differences between characters like Ammu, Mammachi and Rahel are treated as parts of the ongoing issue of women suffering where Roy, like Desai, shows a "[deliberation] of multiple options" (5). India becomes the backdrop of this identity construction, with issues relating to *Indianness* implicitly being referred to with Kumar's statements of the ways in which the traditional gender roles are enforced in the "social setup of India" (3).

Kumar claims that "both Roy and Desai have dealt with the theme of identity in keeping the Indian environment in mind. They valiantly elaborate on the multiple issues related to the identity crisis suffered by *women* [emphasis mine]" (2). One must be critically aware of the situatedness of claims, which Kumar aptly demonstrates; however, even if "women" are connected with nation and cultural identity, the looming facade of hegemonic ideals remains. If Roy and Desai's women characters are reflections on women's roles within a rigid Indian social structure that reveal "different dimensions of womanhood" (5), then what kind of womanhood

are they exhibiting? I mean not to engage in a poststructural nitpicking with this question, but to illustrate how Haraway's situated knowledge question helps lead to a deeper understanding of the problems of "womanhood", "women" and "Woman" as categorical identifiers. The womanhood that Ammu exhibits ("quite rebellious" (5) of Indian social mores) is not the same as Mammachi's; and, I do not mean to assert that Kumar equivocates in such a way. I only seek to highlight that, because Mammachi and Ammu exhibit different forms of rebellion of Indian social roles for women, they should not be placed in the same comparative representational category as women on a "quest for identity" (6).

Kumar's explanation portrays that the revelatory knowledge gained from reading *The God of Small Things* in this manner is one about the struggles of Indian women and their modes of patriarchal resistance; however, it is a knowledge that falls into the same "god-trick" of universalizing an experience into a solid representation of *how things are*—of "seeing everything from nowhere" (Haraway 581) which leads to "identity" being made into a neutral subject just like the body and "woman". Although interpreting *The God of Small Things*'s female characters as undergoing multiple "identity crises" is fascinating and worth exploring in my own thesis, Kumar's understanding of women like Ammu, Mammachi, and Rahel as signifiers of rebellion against patriarchal Indian culture (*the* culture rather than *a* culture) rather than as rebels within a specific brand of Indianness such as Syrian Christianity in Kerala or Keralan gender politics can result in yet another critical reading of *The God of Small Things* as a *tour de force* against international patriarchy rather than a patriarchy formed within specific sociocultural elements. If there is a Third World woman— a woman who cannot speak but speaks for others as Mohanty adequately describes— then there is a "Third World Patriarchy" which lends itself easily to Western constructions of how patriarchy around the world manifests, often blending into colonial

historico-social elements that pits Eastern male-centered societies as savage when compared to Western counterparts.

Similarly, Mustabshira Siddiqui's analysis, although more situated in the religious context (emphasizing both Syrian Christian and Hindu characteristics within Keralan cultures), falls into the previously-mentioned totalizing allure by relying on Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent* (2020), a book which analyzes the cross-cultural links between treatment of American-born blacks, Jewish people and India's caste system. Siddiqui contextualizes the caste system in India through the religious and philosophical components that justify caste in holy scriptural texts such as the Rigveda and investigates how Roy captures the anxiety of intercaste relationships within *The God of Small Things*, ending "The Caste System in India and its Representation in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy" with a call for "[raising] our voice[s] against all forms of injustices as 'evil asks little of the dominant...other than to sit back and do nothing' [Wilkerson, 141]" (153).

Siddiqui's view on the relationship between Ammu and Velutha is remarkable as without her contextualization of the Hindu scriptures the social stigmas between Ammu and Velutha, their mutual "sin", would be without apprehension by a reader unfamiliar with Indian holy texts. Nonetheless, Siddiqui's work here falls into the "god trick" that persuades Kumar in that the caste system within India becomes a monolithic model without differentiation. Casteism is horrible, yes, but it is also a phenomenon whose tainting structures grow into different subcultural strains. The casteism in *The God of Small Things* which begins in the 1960s in Kerala would not be the same breed of casteism espoused in a literary critique of casteism in *A Fine Balance* (1996) by Rohinton Mistry which is set in Bombay in the 1970s.

Furthermore, although Wilkerson's work is indeed groundbreaking in its attempt to show similarities between treatments of the marginalized within their respective communities through the lens of caste creation and maintenance, it is an analysis that falls into the "race analogy" Malini Johar Schueller critiques in "Analogy and (White) Feminist Theory: Thinking Race and the Color of the Cyborg Body" (2005). Schueller's contribution to feminist discourse by investigating the ways in which Gayle Rubin's "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" (1984), Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1991) and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) writings treat "race analogically" (65), a phrase inspired by Elizabeth Spelman's concept of the "additive analysis" when it comes to analyzing gender by treating race and other socio-cultural signifiers as additions to the *main* concern of gender.

Gender is still the universalizing component, a condition which unifies women under the umbrella of Woman despite the particular concerns of those women whose bodies are marked with more than sex. Schueller invokes the "spirit of Haraway's situated knowledge" (77) to state the basis of her own argument for a deeper "context-specific theory" (77) which does not treat race as an analogy for gender (e.g.: treating women like *x* is just like treating black people like it is the 1860s). The reliance of Wilkerson's *Caste* to illustrate the marginalization of those on the lowest end of caste along with statements such as "The sad truth is that the majority of the religious and political leaders remained indifferent to an issue as serious as casteism. This is what makes horrifying and abominable like racism, anti-Semitism, and casteism seem like a normal part of society" (52), Siddiqui treats race and anti-semitism as analogies, concepts that may have the same rootedness in social evils but are ideas that cannot and *should not* be taken to be the same. The racism experienced by a Mexican-American because of the viciousness of American anti-immigrant discourse and American-born blacks because of white supremacist

ideologies is racism, but it is racism born from different social-cultural-historical currents. Likewise, the long history that pivots Velutha's characterization between a man worthy of Ammu's love and a man unworthy of societal embrace (because of his untouchability) is not the same social tragedy as, say, Othello and Desdemona in Shakespeare's *Othello*. The power of the "god trick" is to make things that are particular, general, to make experiences born from a lifetime of aggregated circumstances reachable through distant deduction. Although, it can be argued that both Kumar and Siddiqui could be engaging with what Gayatri Spivak calls "strategic essentialism"¹ in their analyses, they do not explicitly state it. Therefore, my criticisms of both of their works is to illustrate the present issue of women's identity construction, situated within their particular sociocultural and historical context, and complicates the knowledge question within literary postcolonial texts.

There has been a dearth of scholarship on *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows* and specifically its protagonist, Nikki, which is unfortunate as K. Jaswal's 2017 novel explores hybridity-within-hybrid cultures just as much as her previous and newer novels. Although not Syrian Christian or Keralan like Ammu, Nikki's hybridized identity further nuances her relationship with the women at the gurdwara where she teaches English writing. Taking on an authority role even though others within the community sees her as "inappropriate" due to her age and her disregard for traditional customs, Nikki presents a way of (un)Situatdness that does not entail the death of the physical body for the sake of cultural change. Instead, Nikki's (un)Situatdness is optimistic, not lingeringly tragic like Ammu's in *The God of Small Things*. The *beingness* that she possesses embraces the past, but not to the extent that Ammu does, which is another reason why Nikki grants a different perspective on (un)Situatdness. This lack of

¹Spivak explains why strategic essentialism is a useful tool for political action in *Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (1999).

scholarship, when compared to the scholarship on Roy's novel, does not mean that *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows* is completely without critical attention.

Kareem Khubchandani (2020) studies the relationship between “aunty sexualities” in relation to younger generations where he brings *Erotic Stories of Punjabi Widows* into the conversation with queer sexuality representation through various literary works. Khubchandani defines “aunty porn” as a body of pornography that includes older, South Asian women as protagonists, claiming that “aging South Asian women rehearse queer sexual futures for and between themselves”. Given the obviousness of the sexual nature of the title of K. Jaswal's novel, Khubchandani's exploration of “aunty porn” as an agential category that subverts expectations of proper behavior from older women is very useful in understanding Nikki's role as an (un)Situating woman and subversive authority figure.

Angela Poon (2021) has also given K. Jaswal's novel critical examination. Poon compares the novel with K. Jaswal's previous novel, *Sugarbread* (2016), as an example of international and national “spatial politics” (3). She states that *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows*, like *Sugarbread*, “dramatize[s] the education of their respective young female protagonists, especially in relation to their own mothers or to women from an older generation” (3). Poon also compliments Khubchandani's critique of the novel through the lens of porn studies. With the combination of both scholars' perspectives, Nikki's representation of (un)Situatingness is apparent. Like Ammu, Nikki's nebulous connections with multiple generations and cultures casts her within a multiplicity of *beingness*.

My contribution to recent feminist studies scholarship is an arduous undertaking: I seek to explore how knowledge production and ontology produces a new way of reading postcolonial feminist works like Roy's *The God of Small Things* and K. Jaswal's *Erotic Stories for Punjabi*

Widows. I focus on identity construction through Haraway's "situated knowledge" to illustrate the need for a more comprehensive understanding of how the aforementioned texts use the unique positioning of characters like Ammu in *The God of Small Things* and Nikki in *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows*. This is to create new literary ontologies regarding the multiplicity of identities that were previously labeled as Third World women. Haraway's concept of "situated knowledges" requires a recentering of the self and the other in order to produce meaningful knowledges that do not become tinged by the effervescent promises of what she calls "the god-trick." This echoes the totalizing allure mentioned earlier in my thesis.

As a Western woman who studies postcolonial literature, "situated knowledges" enables me as an outsider to comprehend the ways in which I interpret both novels. However, this does not mean that my vision is infallible or without its own unique fragmented pieces. As Haraway writes, "the eyes have been used to signify a perverse capacity—honed to perfection in the history of science tied to militarism, capitalism, colonialism and male supremacy—to distance the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interested of unfettered power" (581). As an American, I am acutely aware of how vision can isolate difference in order to compete for unrestricted privileges as well as manipulate difference for an easy, trembling "solidarity." #Girlboss and the tragedy of the too-late media coverage of Tarana Burke's involvement as the starter #MeToo phrase has made me incredibly aware of how vision can isolate or "neutral-ize" the subaltern body.

However, as a woman of color—an other among Others—the vision I possess can be used in solidarity. This is not to say that identities other than women of color cannot also use their vision for solidarity once their positionings are interrogated. It is more so to outline my intention for vision in this project, an intention that aligns with Haraway's description of a vision

that is partial, limited locationally and situated, a vision that “become[s] answerable for what we learn how to see” (583). Therefore, in the spirit of Haraway’s “situated knowledge”, I propose a new postcolonial feminist framework of study: (un)Situating knowledge. In doing so, I highlight the need for a new category to label what Trinh Minh-ha calls “inappropriate/d others”², the other of others who can speak. These are the women that I call (un)Situating women based on an analysis of *The God of Small Things* and *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows*. In order to explore the identities and characteristics of (un)Situating women, I locate (un)Situating knowledge at the intersection between materialist feminism and postcolonial feminism.

The Intersection between Materialist Feminism and postcolonial feminist Literature: A Review

Materialist feminism and postcolonial feminism may seem to have an uneasy relationship due to, borrowing Latour’s phrasing in reference to scholars’ relationship to the objects of their studies, “matters of concern”³. Materialist feminism centers on the external conditions that create gender, the ways in which privilege, race, sex, nation, and other markers dictate roles within a given society. Rosemary Hennesy and Chrys Ingraham (1997) that materialist feminism emerged from the “contradictory situation of first-world women under monopoly capitalism and played out in the insights and oversights of nineteenth-century socialists” (3). Gillian Howie (2010) emphasizes materialist feminism’s connection to Marxism, elaborating that materialism has three predominant meanings based on physicalism, realism, and dialectical materialism. The latter was

² For Minh-ha, the inappropriate/d other can move between spaces, acting out so that her identity is both affirmed but also marked by difference. Minh-ha states that this other is “... like you’ while pointing insistently to the difference” (“She, the Inappropriate/d Other”, 9).

³ Referring to what Heather Love deems as the “critique debates” regarding Latour’s (2004) essay criticizing the “culture of skepticism in the contemporary humanities and social sciences” (50) in which Love summarizes Latour’s call for a less militarized form of critique that installs “ ‘matters of concern’ at the heart of their inquiry rather than ‘matters of fact’ ” (56). As an essay that emphasizes Donna Haraway’s role as a feminist science historian to dynamize the “critique debates” due to her interdisciplinary approach to her subjects of study.

developed as response to Hegelian idealism in order to recenter “the commonsense realist view that there is something ‘out there’ independent from the individual perceiver”⁴ (5).

Dialectical materialism (also known as historical materialism) is predicated on the relationship between subject and object, the self and other, in order to understand reality. Howie addresses the “paradox” (11) of feminism’s discomfort with Enlightenment’s principal tenets given that feminism itself originates from Enlightenment-era thinking. Howie writes that, “If the problem before us is the relationship between ‘the subject’, however construed, and ‘the object’, however construed, then I suggest we should regroup around the idea of dialectical materialism,” Howie asserts, “[...] But for a number of reasons, not unrelated to the hegemonic influence of postmodernism and post-structuralism on the intellectual landscape, during the last few decades the dialectical synthesis of subjective and objective fell apart leaving two terminals: the purely internal and the reductively empirical” (3). Materialist feminism then seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice in a way that brings the body—its materiality—and its relationship to class (as both a marker and product of it) into focus. Citing Victoria Pitts-Taylor (2016), bringing “attention to matter and *mattering*”⁵ demonstrates how materialist feminism often finds itself bridging the gap between theory and practice. Scholars like Donna Haraway use feminist science studies (FSS) as an interdisciplinary approach to contextualize the ways in which the body (matter) influences the perception and methodology of fields often celebrated as unbiased. These fields are treated as spaces of epistemological and ontological purity because they are often conceived as inerrant and apolitical.

⁴ Howie continues in the introductory chapter of *Between Feminism and Materialism: A Question of Method* that Marx’s distinguishing between human influence on the world and the idea of the world being influenced by the human mind, which would lead to “much worry within the Marxist tradition” (5), particularly in reference to the construction of objectivity or the “ideology of objectivity”, a topic that I explore in further detail later in my thesis.

⁵ Pitts-Taylor fully explains that materialist feminism forms a baseline theoretical framework in FSS in *Mattering: Feminism, Science, and Materialism*.

In FSS, knowledge is something that is constructed by other processes rather than what can be found under a microscope, through a complex algorithmic process, or other means. The classic journalistic questions (Who? When? Where? Why? How?) factor into the production of knowledge just as much as the results of an inquiry. However, for FSS scholars, it is not enough to simply contextualize findings. They must also address power's relationship to the socio-political underpinnings of scientific studies.

For example, Pitts-Taylor asserts that feminism's "sustained focus...is power."⁶ As such, feminism is a movement that sees the world as processes "in the making"⁷ rather than already made. Pitts-Taylor's questions regarding feminist forays into the various disciplines are particularly useful in introducing the complexities of various power stratifications within postcolonial theory (2): "In what ways is matter involved in...sex/gender, class, race, nation, citizenship, and other stratifications? How are these power relations involved in the understanding and management of biology or 'life itself'...? What sorts of theoretical and methodological innovations are required to address matter as thusly *situating* and *situated* [emphasis mine]?" Pitts-Taylor describes a "symbolic culture" (2) surrounding the subjects of mind and body that informs the creation of knowledge. In turn, this "symbolic culture" contradicts the idea of the world, especially the physical world, as being in a "fixed" state. Whether materialist feminism or feminist new materialism, the "matters of concern" where the representations of the body and the socio-cultural prescriptions upon its materiality connect with

⁶ Pitts-Taylor's questions regarding feminist forays into the various disciplines are particularly useful in introducing the complexities of various power stratifications within postcolonial theory (2): "In what ways is matter involved in, or shot through with, sex/gender, class, race, nation, citizenship, and other stratifications? How are these power relations involved in the understanding and management of biology or 'life itself', and how do they materialize in bodies, corporeal processes, and environments? What sorts of theoretical and methodological innovations are required to address matter as thusly *situating* and *situated* [emphasis mine]?"

⁷ Haraway

postcolonial feminism's deconstruction of the gendered aspects of colonial and neocolonial projects.

The body, both as a physical manifestation of being and as an object enacted upon by external forces, becomes the bridge between what is known and unknown as phrases such as "body of work" or "body of knowledge" demonstrate. "Body of work" or "body of knowledge" corporealize abstract concepts like "work" and "knowledge", bringing into focus ideas relating to production; and, given the history of materialist feminism and feminist new materialism's embeddedness in dialectical materialism as a model for disentangling capitalist manipulations from the oppression of women and situating said manipulations into the ways in which these manipulations manifest gendered social, economic and cultural power in pursuit of gain, the body then becomes an "interface", a place where the social, cultural, political, historical and biological meet and entangle like the inescapable knots in a clump of embroidery floss, unable to be completely separated without some form of intentional cutting.

Although it is by no means a comprehensive analogy on materialist feminism and the more science-oriented feminist new materialism, the analogy serves to illustrate the goal of both disciplines in the work of bringing matter back into the mind and mind back into matter, to blur the demarcations created between the two for the sake of class, gendered, sexual, and national exploitation. Howie's claim that "bodies are not neutral" provides a succinct phrasing for describing the goal of materialist feminism and feminist new materialism. It is a phrase that is immediately associated with the goals of postcolonial feminism. In fact, the claim that "bodies are not neutral" refers to bodies as physical matter, social constructs and containers of text.

The cross-pollination of materialist feminism and feminist new materialism with not just postcolonial theory but also postcolonial feminism is one that has been occurring in works such

as the *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) and “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1994). Thus, Haraway often uses concepts and methodologies from different disciplines such as biology, psychology, philosophy, postcolonial theory and even science fiction in order to create new ways of thinking about issues of gender and sex.

For instance, Haraway conceptualizes the cyborg as an entity “without innocence” (9), an entity that is troubled because it is birthed from “militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism” (10). Here, Haraway’s writing raises questions related to how epistemology and ontology are conscripted into masculinist narratives. These narratives leave the “-ing” out of *knowing* and *being*, suggesting that both are static rather than dynamic. In turn, Haraway transforms the cyborg into an ideological interface where the commitment to “partiality, irony, intimacy and perversity” (9) is woven into its being.

Haraway proclaims, “In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense...” (9). Haraway brings up postcoloniality in relation to the production of Western technology in what is referred to as the Third World (25)⁸ along with the power of women of color’s writing⁹ in providing a way of addressing the issues tackled by materialist feminists and FSS scholars, thus creating a dialogue where multiple disciplines can converse while maintaining their respective

⁸ Haraway elaborates that the “new industrial revolution” where production for technology is outsourced to different nation states occurs not because of a preferential desire for Third World women labor but because of “systematic” ideologies that restructure traditionally-female-described jobs into new settings. Relying on Gordon’s “homework economy” theory, Haraway states that “the homework economy is made possible by (not caused by) the new technologies. The success of the attack on relatively privileged, mostly white, men’s unionized jobs is tied to the power of the new technologies to integrate and control labor despite extensive dispersion and decentralization. The consequences of the new technologies are felt by women both in the loss of the family (male) wage (if they ever had access to this white privilege) and in the character of their own jobs, which are becoming capital-intensive, e.g., office work and nursing” (26).

⁹ Haraway sees women of color as a type of “cyborg identity” due to the category’s “fusions of outsider identities” (32). This description of women of color becomes an issue for scholars like Malini Johar Schueller (2005) who claim that Haraway treats “race analogically”, a term inspired by Elizabeth V. Spelman’s concept of “additive analysis”.

uniquenesses. Writing has a “special significance for all colonized groups” (32). Since writing is “crucial to the Western myth of the distinction of oral and written cultures, primitive and civilized mentalities...” (32), it holds significant political power for women of various backgrounds.

Therefore, by affirming writing as a tool for empowerment (33), Haraway connects the value of postcolonial thought (whether feminist or otherwise) into redefining previously inaccessible spaces due to the white-capitalist-masculinist project. If women of color are a type of cyborg entity because of the ways in which the matrices of domination intersect on their bodies physically, historically and psychosocially, then embracing their writings as “cyborg writing” provides a textual surface to reimagine the borders between literature and other disciplines. What is particularly interesting in the theories of FSS scholars like Haraway, material feminists and feminist new materialists is their refusal to treat the sciences, philosophy, literature and critical theory as distinct entities that never intersect.

As previously mentioned, Haraway borrows from science fiction to construct an analysis of the ways in which technology, capitalism, and colonialism interweave and uphold gendered hegemonic roles. This creates new oppressive processes and therefore requires new ways of feminist intervention. However, the interventions Haraway recommends mandate a moving *beyond* “women” as a solidified class by not misappropriating the “parts” for the sake of unity, a sentiment that is repeated again in “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” (1988, 1991). In that essay, Haraway proposes rethinking objectivity, which is determined to not be neutral (just as the body is not neutral) and *situating* it not just within the context of the objects of study, but also requiring researchers to consider their own socio-cultural-political positions as they *perform* research.

In line with the unifying notion of there being no intrinsic separation or duality when it comes to the body and mind, Haraway requests that researchers be aware of both their own unique positions while researching the value of an a-politicized, non-locatable knowledge. This is a form of knowledge that Haraway characterizes as a “gaze from nowhere” (581). In other words, this “gaze from nowhere” consists of Knowledges¹⁰ stained by historically colonial, gendered and capitalist processes treating it as a distinct entity. Instead of considering knowledge as the interaction between researcher and subject, the “gaze from nowhere” assumes a rarified Knowledge that exists in complete innocence. If dialectical materialism is the theory of the Marxist project then communism is the practice¹¹. Likewise, if materialist feminism (or feminist new materialism) is the theory then situated knowledge is the practice. In this way, situated knowledge reestablishes the connection between the subject and the object.

Still, one question that may be lingering is how these theories regarding knowledge can be useful in postcolonial literary criticism. How does the work of these FSS scholars, feminist new materialists, human/animal studies theorists and others contribute to the analysis of postcolonial feminist works such as *The God of Small Things* and *Erotic Stories of Punjabi Widows*? Why should postcolonial literary scholars be at least partially interested in these? Well, to answer these questions, I must again refer to Haraway.

In “Situated Knowledges”, Haraway declares Katie King’s “scheme” in “Canons without Innocence” (1987) to be critically useful in the formation of “a feminist theory of situated knowledges”. She adds that King’s “...analysis of the production of the poem as an object of

¹⁰ I capitalize “knowledge” here to differentiate it as a power-ridden product rather than the result of open inquiry.

¹¹ From The Marxist Internet Archive’s Encyclopedia of Marxism (www.marxists.org)’s entry on “dialectical materialism”. This resource gives integral information relating to the definition and practice of dialectical materialism as a rebuttal to Hegelian idealism. The entries on “objectivity”, “objectivism”, and “object and subject” are particularly revelatory as it becomes clearer that when Haraway and materialist feminists, feminist new materialists, and FSS scholars mention these three topics, the strength of Marxist influence on these disciplines is still maintained.

literary value...offers tools that clarify matters in the objectivity debates among feminists” (595). These tools relate to how King suggests that the “apparatus of literary production”, to which the poem belongs, births literature within its literary production. Haraway takes inspiration from King’s ideas which “translate[s] the ideological ‘facticity’ and ‘the organic’ into a cumbersome entity called a ‘material-semiotic actor’ ” (595). This is a term created to describe an object of knowledge as an active, meaningful part of the “apparatus of bodily production, without *ever* implying the immediate presence of such objects or, what is the same thing, their final or unique determination of what can count as objective knowledge” (595). The body, like a poem, becomes an entity where language works as an actor, transforming the body into objects of knowledge. Once this body is remembered as not being neutral, something interesting occurs within postcolonial feminist literary theory. This is why universalizing women’s bodies à la Mohanty’s “Third World woman” within postcolonial feminist literature is impossible based on complex markings (physical, social, and cultural difference) “producing” or “generating” them. Haraway’s question of whether bodies are “produced” or “generated” like a poem is interesting because it is a question rooted not only in epistemology but also in ontology.

My thesis mostly focuses on the ontological intersection between materialist feminism, FSS and postcolonial feminist studies. (un)Situated women live within the margins of an already marginalized group. They cannot be understood fully as to understand them would ruin them. These are women who may have an “unmixable mix”¹² or “unsafe edge”¹³ like Ammu in *The God of Small Things* or capable of starting a “quiet rebellion”¹⁴ in others like Nikki in *Erotic*

¹² This phrase is repeated in *The God of Small Things*, appearing first in the chapter, “Pappachi’s Moth” (44).

¹³ This is another phrase repeated from the novel and is used in different contexts. For example in the chapter, “Saving Ammu”, the narrator states that Baby Kochamma “hadn’t taken into account the Unsafe Edge in Ammu” (304).

¹⁴ Originates from the narrator’s assessment of the events in *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows*. The full quote is, “Compel [Kulwinder Kaur] to see that these women [the widows] who had started one quiet rebellion could come together to fight a bigger injustice” (227).

Stories of Punjabi Widows. Modernity and tradition merge in these women's bodies like estuaries. They belong but also not belong, the "not quiteness"¹⁵ "not quiteness" separating them within their respective groups. Yet, their "not quiteness" is not solely rooted into the matrices of domination as Patricia Hill Collins puts it¹⁶. They make a choice within their worlds. This ability to make a choice means that (un)Situated women live within a privileged position. They can afford to leave their heads uncovered while at a gurdwara like Nikki does. They smoke cigarettes while listening to music, forgetting traditional ideals of motherhood as Ammu demonstrates. As women who live fluidly through the dichotomy of belonging and unbelonging, able to make attempts at appeasing traditional and patriarchal authorities, these women are hybrids among the hybridized. They are other Others.

(un)Situatedness comes from a multiplicity of positions that blend just enough to allow their individual strands to remain intact. A tapestry of identities where one can see from a distance a complete picture unless they move multi-directionally to notice the individual threads. As a literary scholar, what I am offering by analyzing these texts where (un)Situated Women dwell is not a knowledge of generalized comprehension. After all, (un)Situated women cannot be fully comprehended else they will become "safe"¹⁷. These women dispel myths of safe identity. To be "safe" is to be "neutral", and the body of the Other is never neutral.

¹⁵This phrase refers to Homi Bhabha's essay, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", from *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha's full quote regarding "not quiteness" goes as follows: "What they [the colonial state and its colonies] share is a discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely 'rupture' the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence." (86).

¹⁶ Collins coined the term "matrix of domination" in order to describe how different oppressions are organized. She explains the concept in further detail in "The Politics of Black Feminist Thought", which can be found in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2002).

¹⁷ I reference Minh-ha's proclamation that "The formula 'Know Yourself' has become obsolete. We don't want to observe our organism [writing] from a safe distance" (65). Minh-ha's statement can be found in the chapter "Writing Woman" from *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (1989).

Therefore, I elaborate how these novels are gateway texts for studying (un)Situating women. Chapter One discusses how (un)Situating bodies work as physical interfaces for cultural and social mandates and how the reader can participate in the meaningfulness of such mandates. I also explore how complicity and agency work for (un)Situating women like Ammu who is the character I will be solely focusing on in the chapter. Chapter Two shifts focus from the body to storytelling, specifically why storytelling matters in the (un)Situating contexts. Nikki's role as an (un)Situating woman will be the sole focus of this particular chapter. In my final chapter, Chapter Three, I explore the possibilities of (un)Situating knowledge while analyzing the role death plays for (un)Situating women like Ammu and Nikki. My hope is that with this submission, my contribution to postcolonial feminist literary scholarship is the construction of a well-needed category of new literary women.

CHAPTER 2

BODIES THAT MATTER

THE BODY POLITICS OF (UN)SITUATEDNESS

“...Under capitalism, the term *everybody* is a political euphemism used by capitalists (and those who believe them) to deflect responsibility for systemic processes onto consumers who cannot control them. But beneath the gloss, there is a deep hatred of ‘the everybody’ (the faceless masses [...]) combined with a sense of collective ownership of other people’s achievements (multiculturalism). Everybody exists to sacrifice for the few”- Holly Lewis¹⁸

“Baby Kochamma loved the Ayemenem house and cherished the furniture that she had inherited by outliving everybody else...She viewed ethnic cleansing, famine, and genocide as direct threats to her furniture” -Roy, p.29

In this chapter, I will be focusing on Ammu’s body as an example of the “body politic” of (un)Situating women; however, it is important that I begin this chapter with the above quotes to

¹⁸ Lewis, Holly. “The politics of everybody.” *The Politics of Everybody: Feminism, Queer Theory, and Marxism at the Intersection*, Zed Books London, 2016, pp. 3-4.

illustrate a grave (pun intended) irony when it comes to discussing the physical manifestations of class marginalization within the public consciousness. The reason why this illustration of irony is necessary in this chapter is to highlight the political ramifications intrinsic to the (un)Situating woman's physical body.

In Holly Lewis's chapter, "The Politics of Everybody", from her book *The Politics of Everybody: Feminism, Queer Theory and Marxism at the Intersection* (2016), Lewis outlines the connotational intent of the word *everybody* for different political groups. Since the word "evokes harmony and erasure, connectedness and enchainment" and "is everywhere but nowhere in particular" (1), *everybody* can include both totality and particularity. Lewis explains the subtlety of the word's ability to include and/or exclude, writing, "Everybody is both the *us* [emphasis mine] and the *them* [emphasis again mine]. Phrases such as 'we're all in this together', 'one big happy family' and 'be a team player' reflect this. But the idea can also inspire us to demand 'our' inclusion in 'their' world; it reminds us that 'we' are the ones who make 'their' world possible—which of course means the world was always 'all of ours' all along" (1). *Everybody* then becomes a call to arms depending on who uses it. For capitalists, the term is useful for making the neo-feudal implications of their worldview plausible since it grants them an unfettered grasp of large swathes of resources while also soothing interclass uneasiness. After all, why revolt if one can too be *one of them* one day? It makes little sense to dismantle a system if it can benefit oneself eventually. Then there are the fascists who see *everybody* as a respect for unity, the "body act[ing] as one body" (4), the transcendental beauty of oneness overpowering the visibility of the individual's physical, social and psychological degradation. Homogeneity exists to protect what is pure from the taint of the heterogeneous, thus inauthentic, contagion. What cannot conform must be excised from the multitudinous one. Capitalists see *us*

and *them* as a plan for acquisition; whereas, fascists see *us* and *them* as distinctions of purity. But what of those who have already been sanctioned by both, those who live within the margins, unable to belong to either camp because of skepticism or nonconformity? What about those people who are borderless and border-transgressive?

For those people, the implied *us* and *them* in *everybody* is a “final hollowing out of what has not already been erased by imperial conquest” (Lewis 5). They do not want to be included in *everybody* because of their memories of History¹⁹. *Everybody* is always suspect to *somebody*. For decolonial and anticolonial mindsets, the term embodies “the *material* legacy of colonialism and imperialism is conceptually obscured within the academy” (5). For Marxists, *everybody* can represent positions for and against capitalists; and, for the antifascist, the term holds as much significance for them as it does fascists. Since *everybody* is a word imbued with sociopolitical might, it brings into mind the connections between the physical and intangible.

For example, splitting *everybody* into *every body* creates an individual emphasis on both words which at once connotes multiplicity and singularity. Yet, separating the words will not do away with the political implications associated within their union. Just as *everybody* contains the implication of *which* body matters, *every body* has an equally weighty question: *whose body matters?* Therefore, perhaps it is better to focus further on the categories of the questions being asked. The question of “whose”/ “which” is associated with questions of belonging. To whom does this body belong to? Does this body matter? Why does this body matter? And does this body mean anything to *us*—the ones observing and seeking to consign it in one place or another?

¹⁹ I allude here to the History House, the place in *The God of Small Things* where “...crumbling ancestors with tough toe-nails and breath that smelled of yellow maps gossiped in sibilant, papery whispers” (51). In the novel, the History House serves as a visible marker of the legacy of British colonialism in Kerala to Rahel and Estahappen, the novel’s child protagonists.

The questions involved then would take on a new dimension, moving beyond over-simplistic needs to place an object within a place but also to understand how it is represented.

Through the process of figuring out what it represents, bodies become the source from which knowledge can be gained whether its knowledge relating to the composition of the subject (the what it is) or the means of strategic action (the how). Hence, just as *everybody* needs to be situated and critiqued based on context, so does the “body” in *everybody*. The reason for this is straightforward: because bodies are the first noticeable marker of Otherness, it becomes a representative of what the Other is. For (un)Situating women, their physical bodies are tied to acts that cause them to be marginalized within their communities.

The Married Body: Culture, Gender and Biology

The act that pushes the tragic events in *The God of Small Things* (known as *GOST* for brevity's sake) is Ammu's physical relationship with Velutha, a Paravan or untouchable worker at the family's pickle factory. The narrator describes Ammu's physical traits in the chapter, “Pappachi's Moth”, as her having “a delicate, chiseled face, black eyebrows angled like soaring seagull's wings, a small straight nose and luminous nut-brown skin” (44) and being “sometimes...the most beautiful woman that Estha and Rahel [Ammu's twin son and daughter] had ever seen.” (44). Through this description alone, there is a sense of dissimilarity. Ammu's eyebrows are compared to a sea bird known for engaging in scavenging (and gluttonous) behavior. Her face has an androgynous quality, the juxtaposition of words like “delicate” and “chiseled” appealing to Western notions of femininity and masculinity. It would seem that the narrator's question regarding the origin of Ammu's “Unsafe Edge” (44) where it is described as an “unmixable mix” (44) correlates to the blend of her physical features where the description of her physical characteristics set her apart, but apart from what? Her mother, Mammachi and aunt,

Baby Kochamma? To suggest Mammachi and Baby Kochamma are the factors that create Ammu's "unmixable mix" or "Unsafe Edge" would simplify not just her relationship to her family but also their relationship to her. Not to mention, the narrator asks this question rhetorically. The origin of what distinguishes her from others is never explored in the novel. Ammu's history is not disconnected from the greater history of the Ipe family—is not extractable as an individual component from the whole. Instead, Ammu is a paradox on a continuum of behaviors that prescribe conditions for women who share her background, conditions which creates "a liquid ache [which spreads] under her skin [as] she walk[s] out of the world like a witch to a better, happier place" (43). Beloved songs on her radio signals Ammu's rectification of her internal restlessness (43). Her gait changes "from a safe mother walk to another wilder sort of walk" (43) like a person removing an ill-fitting costume. Perhaps it is not the origin story behind Ammu's actions that matters. More so, like all rhetorical questions, the narrator expects the reader to not search for a reason behind Ammu's actions, but to call attention to the historical processes that make Ammu appear out of place.

An example of such an historical process would be marriage since, as a young woman forbidden from going to university or pursuing a career because of her gender, Ammu chooses marriage in order to escape a life of mediocrity.

Married to "the wrong man" (38) and aware that "for her, life had been lived" (38), Ammu is restless and deeply unhappy. She met and married her husband where the couple lived at a tea estate in Assam after five days of knowing one another. As one of her "several wretched little plans" (38) to escape Ayemenem, Ammu's marriage was a marriage of convenience by Western moral standards. She may not have loved her children's father ("Ammu didn't pretend to be in love with him. She just weighed the odds and accepted" 39), but the convenience of

cultural marital standards allowed her to circumvent the dull existence she would have lived had she continued to stay under her parents' scrutiny. Still, to leave Ammu's marriage to "the wrong man" as nothing more than a marriage of convenience would be to misunderstand the value of freedom to Ammu, freedom that is to be defined by her own terms and persistently pursued. In a sense, Ammu's marriage is her first stepping stone on her rebellious path. Her ex-husband proposed to her within the first week of their meeting. She accepted because, although she knew not if he was truly in love or had "excitement at the prospect of carnal bliss" (39), what he offered her was salvation through tradition. However, this salvation will come at a price. Ammu soon realized that between the rock of her disaffection at Ayemenem, she will be pinned against the hard place of male-centered marital expectations. As a transcultural category, heterosexual marriage shares the "institutionalization" of gendered power relations as highlighted by Heather Brooks in *Stalemate: Rethinking the Politics of Marriage* (2002). Brooks clarifies that "when marriage is referred to as an 'institution', the import usually conveyed is that marriage has been around for a very long time, and that as an element of societal organization it is widely accepted and practiced: marriage is 'the done thing' an 'institution'" (47). As an act that "is done", regardless if it is "done" through cultural mandates or a need for state-verified "kinship"²⁰ Ammu's approach to marriage adds nuance into the feminist critiques regarding the marital structure as it further cements her agency as both a woman and as a "third world" entity as, immediately, heterosexual marriage links to the body, specifically the expectations of the body as a vessel for familial and national reproduction.

²⁰ Brooks proposes that marriage has been overlooked as a category of analysis since the Western feminist interrogation of heterosexual marriage resulted in a general feminist boredom. Brooks hopes to reinvigorate marriage analysis through her examination of feminist theories regarding the subject. One such idea Brooks introduces in her analysis is the idea of marriage as an "institution of kinship" (47), one that is situated within the private sphere between the Western public/private dichotomy.

Roy appears to specify this corporeal link in regards to the Ammu's realization of her ex-husband's "feverish glitter" (39) on the day of her wedding: "Later, looking back on the day [of her wedding], Ammu realized that the slightly feverish glitter in her bridegroom's eyes had not been love, or even the excitement at the prospect of carnal bliss, but approximately eight large pegs of whiskey. Straight. Neat" (39). Within this sentence, Roy pivots between three major discourses within the marriage construct: marriage as an "institution of kinship" via the enchantment of love, marriage as a culturally-validated route for sexual fulfillment and marriage as a tool for social (dis)engagement—all discourses which still tie into the body's material and sociocultural positions as a tool for cultural and familial reproduction and as a site of gendered oppression. As an "institution of kinship", marriage uses the body as a supportive framework in the fulfillment of mutual needs which becomes highlighted due to Ammu and her husband's shared exploitation of the other. Ammu marries because "*anything, anyone* [emphasis mine] at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem" (39). Her husband presents an opportunity too psychologically profitable for Ammu to refuse. Yet, her ex-husband's reason for marrying her is not as forthcoming (honest) as Ammu's is. "When Ammu and her husband moved to Assam, Ammu, beautiful, young and cheeky, became the toast of the Planter's Club. She wore backless blouses with her saris and carried a silver lamé purse on a chain," (39) a description of recently-married Ammu's cosmopolitanized body, "She smoked long cigarettes in a silver cigarette holder, and learned to blow perfect smoke rings. Her husband turned out to be not just a heavy drinker but a full-blown alcoholic with all an alcoholic's deviousness and tragic charm" (39-40). The emphasis on Ammu's dress and smoking style insinuates that her ex-husband may have viewed Ammu as a social accomplishment, a *trophy wife* as Western parlance will state; and, given that her ex-husband's English manager, Mr. Hollick, desires Ammu because of her

beauty (“ ‘You’re a very lucky man [Ammu’s ex-husband], you know, wonderful family, beautiful children, such an attractive wife...An *extremely* attractive wife...” (41) . Yet, to keep his position at the estate, Ammu’s husband sees his wife’s body as an effective bargaining chip for power (42). In this sense, Ammu’s body represents a neural, depersonalized territory where male desire and control intersect.

Yet, these male desires are segmented by national, racial and cultural lines. As a white Englishman managing presumably brown “tea-pickers” (41), many of whom bore him numerous children (41), Mr. Hollick brazenly revels in the disproportionate power dynamics between his lower-ranked affiliates and himself. These are power dynamics that require multiple *visions*: the first of which to see Ammu’s marriage as a subversion of *the* marriage institution via her co-opting the “love marriage” ideal (e.g.: marriage as a willing “institution of kinship”) into a route for self-emancipation from familial demands; the second which places her marriage as a commentary on the social (dis)engagement via parental roles once children are produced (“Ammu checked them [Esta and Rahel] for deformities before she closed her eyes and slept...Their father, stretched out on a hard bench in the hospital corridor, was drunk” (40); and, finally, Ammu’s marriage as a representation of intercultural exploitation by those who in power who view bodies like her as products for sexual consumption. Within the purview of these three *visions*, Ammu’s body still remains contested grounds, her flesh never *quite* her own, and, not in the sense of patriarchal and cultural directives regarding the gendered body.

Cluster Cues and Embodied Anchors: Reading into Ammu’s Body

In “Goosebumps, Shivers, Visualization, and Embodied Resonance in Reading Experience: *The God of Small Things*” (2017) Naomi Rokotnitz²¹ connects how the gaze of the

²¹ Rokotnitz relies on neuropsychologists Maria Vanderkerchove and Jaak Pankseep’s concept of “affective consciousness” to construct a her idea of the “embodied anchor” which is a narrative technique

reader and “embodied anchors” within the text provides alternative and parallel meanings. Consequently, because of this connection, meanings gained from reading the text “integrates” (276) into the reader’s experiences, thus imbibing the reader with new knowledge.

Rokotnitz sees the novel as a work rich with “a series of images that form clusters of meaning through which the author condenses various levels of significance [with each of] Roy’s image clusters [combining] abstract metaphoric concepts with a direct appeal to reader’s bodies” (275). Rokotnitz’s concept is particularly useful in understanding the bodies of (un)Situated women like Ammu because it invites readers to participate in the narrative’s unfolding or *becoming*. The reader is not viewed as a passive object in which a text simply “talks to”. Instead, “embodied anchors” enable the reader to become just as involved with the material of their own bodies as well as the object itself. As Rokotnitz reminds us, specificities such as “historical context, gender, ethnicity, education, economic status, and physical (dis)abilities” (276) may influence our individual identities but we still share “the neuronal and affective schemata with the rest of the species” (276). Our bodies (*everyone* has a body, no matter how different it looks from others) connect us to the things we read just as the bodies of the things we read connect to us—*everybody has a body*.

Therefore, when reading *GOST* and noticing certain “cluster cues”—a term Rokotnitz uses to describe the “vivid metaphors that function as ‘embodied anchors’ [or] prompts that condense multiple levels of significance through being anchored in sensorimotor stimuli” (281)—readers relate to the novel through “constellations of meanings” (283). Rokotnitz uses the example of the chapter “Pappachi’s Moth”, the same chapter where Ammu’s body comes into

where Roy conveys a character’s external and internal experiences through “image clusters” that work as both metaphors and physical “cues.”

greater focus as a material matrix of different cultural, racial and sexual discourses, to demonstrate the power of “cluster cues” as “embodied anchors.”

Pappachi or Shri Benaan John Ipe is Ammu’s father and the grandfather of her children. An “Imperial Entomologist” (Roy 47), Pappachi was slighted when a new species of moth he discovered while sitting at a rest house was credited to have been discovered by a lower-ranked man whom he disliked (48). Rokotnitz writes that the moth is “one of the most evocative multisensory embodied anchor cues” (283) due to its being embedded in multiple contexts within the narrative. The presence of the moth “conditions readers to find it repulsive” (285) because of its association with Pappachi’s resentment and violence towards his wife and children. In turn, the moth’s presence, either imagined by the characters (like Rahel after the OrangedrinkLemondrink man sexually violates Estha at the cinema) or real within the text, links to the Ipe family’s legacy of disappointment, shame and violence. Rokotnitz explains that Roy accomplishes this by creating an “analogy emplotment of the characters in the storyworld space [and] the symbolic connotation of its effects” (285). This interweaving of plot and symbolism conditions the reader to associate the moth-cue with the characters' dread whenever it appears; and, like the moth-cue, Ammu’s body works as a similar cluster cue.

As previously mentioned, Ammu’s body exists within a matrix of different ideals relating to patriarchal sexual demands, gendered socio-cultural hierarchies and rigid constructions of motherhood. One strand forming this matrix is the sexualization of her body both within and outside intra-national lines. In “Paradise Pickles & Preserves”, the introductory chapter which focuses on Rahel’s return to Ayememen, Ammu is sexually harassed by Inspector Thomas Mathew who “tapped her breasts with his baton. Gently. Tap tap. As though he was

choosing mangoes from a basket... (10). However, it is not specifically her body that works as a sexualization cluster-cue.

Instead, Ammu's body seems to be an embodied anchor composed of multiple sexualization cluster cues such as the reference her breasts being compared to mangoes. Baby Kochamma's breasts are frequently described within the text (e.g.: in "Abhilash Talkies") as "melons": "Baby Kochamma waited for half of half a moment. Head thrust forward. Silly Smile. Bosom swinging low. Melons in a blouse" (91); "Baby Kochamma, weighed down by her melons..." (93); "The camera [regarding *The Sound of Music* playing at the cinema] soared up high...Nuns walked across [the courtyard]...No melons in their blouses [signalling Baby Kochamma since she is an ex-nun]" (95). And, "mangoes", like Baby Kochamma's "melons" immediately link to the overt sexualization of Ammu's body by an authoritative (male) figure as illustrated by the phrase "...the Inspector chose his mangoes (*tap,tap*)..." (304). Yet, within the "mango"/ "melon" comparison lies a dichotomy of intention. Baby Kochamma's breasts as "melons" are not sexualized; her breasts are compared to melons in order to demonstrate a weightiness to her physique such as what a small child like Rahel would notice. It is not the same sexualizing intent as the inspector's, but more so the "child protagonists' unalloyed experiential awareness and acute body consciousness, free as yet of prescriptive taboos..." (Rokotnitz 279-280). Baby Kochamma's breasts interest the children because of their similarity to something they know (melons). It is part of the children's meaning-making within the specificity of their experiences. The inspector's mango-choosing may appear to be the same kind of meaning-making, but his actions are rooted in his macrocosmic *worldmaking*—the hegemonic structures composed and maintained by the interplay of various power relations. Ammu's breasts connect with "mangoes" because of how Inspector Mathew regards them during her plea for

Velutha's release. The sound cue, "tap, tap", is not dissimilar from Rokotnitz's "smell-cue"²² ("like old roses on a breeze") which surfaces frequently as an embodied anchor within *GOST*.

Both Baby Kochamma's "melons" and Ammu's "mangoes" work as a multi-functional cue that places the reader into the text through imagery—the shape of melons and mangoes, the texture, the weight of it—as well as the senses associated with said imagery (such as the taste of the fruits, the scent of it, the process of consuming it, etc.). As the reader reads, their body entangles with the bodies within the page through the conditioning of their senses; therefore, by *reading* into Ammu's body—its experiences and how others within the text experience it—the reader is positioned within a sensorial interconnection within the text.

The Complicit Body: Borders, Borderlands and Somewhere In-Between

Ammu's body is viewed with sexualized yearning as well as condemnation ("[The inspector] said the police knew all they needed to know and that the Kottayam Police didn't take statements from *veshyas* or their illegitimate children" (9)). Her body is wanted *and* unwanted because of the interplay of different desires that state what it *ought* to be based on whose "vision" beholds it. Such a statement has been well-known within Western feminist literary scholarship (e.g.: The Madonna/Whore Complex in which Woman is either chaste/ "pure" or licentious/sexually-available); yet, this is where (un)Sitedness enters into the general feminist framework of literary analysis. Ammu's body is inscribed with multiple dimensions of meaning, all of which share commonalities with the discursive overview of Woman's body (the material of

²² Rokotnitz recognizes how the "smell leitmotif" in *GOST* "stimul[ates] readers' olfactory sensibilities" (281) before readers understand the connection between different smells (e.g.: roses and metal equalling caste-based violence). Once readers understand how smells signal to impactful or traumatic events within the novel, these smells are imbued with deeper meanings that constitute knowledge-making: "Thus, the narrative plotline that traces 'ways of breaking men' (Roy: 6), traversing social, political and quite literal dimensions is encapsulated in the children's experience as a specific smell, anchoring a complex network of ideas in a physical referent. For readers, this smell-cue or embodied anchor may subliminally prompt disgust mechanisms, which alert them to physical violation and/or injustice, thus involving readers' own preconscious bodily reflexes in the reading experiences" (282).

it) as a meaning-making point; yet, commonalities *do not* make universalisms. Within transnational feminism (to which it can be argued that *GOST* is a *transnational*²³ text), agency comes up time and time again in relation to how the state and/or nation inscribes controlling mechanisms onto the women within and outside of its borders. Nevertheless, as Joe Parker (2012)²⁴ notes, agency comes with its own power relations. Parker builds a theoretical framework, based in Foucauldian interpretations of power relations and intersectionality, and creates a framework, inspired by Spivak, Mohanty, Chow and others, which positions “explicitly acknowledging complicities when performing the practices of agency that lead to resistance” within transnational location politics. Parker’s vision entails a naming of privilege within the liberal European project, seeing it as an “intervention” against totalization, a making of a body marked both within the historical continuum of power relations and, thus, “subject to historical critique” (12). The agency Parker sees as useful is different from the agency that is often touted by neoliberal and neoconservatives as being a sign of empowerment (e.g.: the association of “freedom” with consumerism or the association of “freedom” within the isolationist paradigms of “self-responsibility”. Of course, both ideas often intersect). Parker’s agency is more of “disruption” of historicized power relations that, with an explicit acknowledgment of the ways one is complicit in both benefiting and being marginalized within a given power structure, can result in destabilizing the power within hegemonic structures through enlivening agency not

²³ On deciding whether to classify *GOST* as an “transnational” text rather than an “international” or “multinational” text was a difficult one given that the novel was originally published in English, in New Delhi, India, with the characters within the novel speaking Malayalam the majority of the time. Ultimately, the sub-themes of transnationalism via Chacko and Margaret Kochamma’s daughter, Sophie-Mol (being British and Indian) along with the Kochammas admitted anglophilia even when they speak Malayalam within the text factors into why I use the term “transnational” rather than “international” (implying a rootedness in a nation-state and, by luck, becoming an international work) or “multi-national” (implying multi-rootedness in various national identities).

²⁴ Parker, Joe. “Questioning Appropriation: Agency and Complicity in Transnational Feminist Location Politics.” *Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2018, pp. 1-18. Parker urges activists and academics alike to work with the “persistent complicities in the constitution of the subject” (14) in order to render the foundational violences of social orders more visible, thus, making resistance more potently available.

through the master's tools of domination, but through, as quoted from Meyda Yeğenoğlu (1998, 9), "receptivity and openness to other and otherness" (16).

I agree with Parker's definition of agency; and I envision it as a key characteristic of (un)Situatenedness as well as ethical academic work. As someone trained in Western humanist interpretations of literature, I am participating in the liberal European project; therefore, it is important that I am aware of the ways in which I am complicit in maintaining historical power structures, especially as an United Statesian studying the literature of brown women from India and Singapore²⁵. I am privileged in that I attended a university, am able-bodied, born and raised within the Global North; and, although I come from an impoverished background, the physical site of my impoverishment still allowed me access to a means of bettering my physical and social conditions. I also benefit from colorist hierarchies due to the *type* of blackness I possess as well as texturism (the subliminal linkage of "good hair" equaling white aesthetic sensibilities). Within this matrix, the sites of complicity and marginalization within me as a "red-bone", black, Anglophonic, Global North woman can either converse or "disrupt" the everyday power hierarchies. In this sense, locating myself racially, culturally, economically as I interact as an "other among Others" as Minh-ha²⁶ states enables me to take ownership of my complicity within hegemonic power structures while simultaneously questioning said power structures's validity. Thus, by situating myself within the context of the works I study, I unsituate the fixedness of said power's hold on the "natural" and the "essential", its power as a "gaze from nowhere".

²⁵ Arundhati Roy is a novelist from India; Balli K. Jaswal is a novelist from Singapore.

²⁶ Minh-ha writes in the introduction to *Discourse's* (1986-1987) issue "She, the Inappropriate/d Other": "The master is made to recognize that His Culture is not as homogenous, not as monolithic as He once believed it to be; He discovers, often with much reluctance, that He is just an other among others. In this 'horizontal vertigo' (Ortiz), identity is this multiple layer whose process never leads to a True Self, or to Woman, but only to other layers, other selves, other women" (7). The notion of the "True Self" is a concept rooted in an ontology that regards being as a single, "pure" essence that contrasts among other essences, a thread of the self that is higher among other threads and therefore self-contained and undiluted by other processes.

(un)Situatdness comes from the interplay between situating one's socio-cultural, political, geographical, (dis)ability, sexual, gender, race, ethnicity, and national identities that comprise the uniqueness of one's location and also historicizing these identities. The word 'and' points to an interrogation of these categorie's borders. One can situate themselves and become (un)situated at the same time because borders are never fixed. There are histories of the borders in which we enter, histories which are informed by epistemologies and ontologies and moral dicta which clarify what one is and/or *should* be. The threads that compose this are never pure. Like a tapestry, each thread intersects, pierces through, blends in, elongates, and shortens in order to make the entirety of the subject more intelligible. Isolating one thread by removing it may lead to needing to redo an entire section. Given that our eyes are perniciously meticulous devices that can spot differences sometimes without our brains registering what it is that makes something different (especially in regards to the "uncanny valley" phenomenon), leaving a thread ratted or loose while the rest of the tapestry chunks are smooth and taut will draw our attention. Even though we are nothing like tapestries, we do share some characteristics with them. A tapestry's projected image, what the observer sees once they stand back and interpret it, is like our material bodies. We cannot see our body unless it is reflected at us or captured in a photograph. Others can describe it to us through words, imbuing our material bodies with meaning. We can imagine ourselves unless one has aphantasia or any other neurological condition which impacts the ability to create a mental image to which Others will recategorize as an outlier.

In all three possibilities, however, observation (a reflection, photograph, second-hand evaluation) plays a critical role in interpreting what is supposed to be seen whether it is a tapestry or a material body; however, it is through closer inspection of what is observed can these

individual threads, these creative entanglements, be noticed. An observer may ask, “What will this embroidered section look like if teal was used for the grass instead of lime-green?” and the answer may be seen as an artistic choice, the question, depending on the tone, viewed as innocently curious. The observer may be questioning structure but it is the structure of a created object, inanimate and unfeeling and non-agential. Still, if this same type of question, reconfigured of course to focus on categories of more substantial meaning such as race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, etc., the observer’s innocence is understandably questioned by both the observed and the powers that construct both observer/ observed. History and experience entangle in ongoing discourses.

The material body then becomes a vector where these discursive entanglements are expressed; and, when one considers not just where an observed body is situated but also the powers that construct the observer’s ability to situated them (particularly in the act of reading the body in literature) an interesting issue arises regarding the manifestation of power.

Yvonne Yarbo-Bejarano (1994), writing on the political implications of *mestiza* consciousness in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, states that how we read, understand and *locate* texts opens up “two potentially problematic areas” (7). These areas are the isolating of a text from the community it focuses on, its “conceptual community” (7), and the universalizing of the theoretical underpinnings of a text which a text may “painstakingly [ground] in specific historical and cultural experiences” (7). Yarbo-Bejarano refers explicitly to *Borderlands*; however, her comments on the methods of reacting to texts by women of color where ideas like Anzaldúa's “borderland” and “*mestiza*” consciousness are appropriated by readers who may identify with the general experience described by both terms serve as an important reminder for the need for specificity and grounding of one’s location. Some

terms carry political might that seek to problematize the way certain hierarchies and theories are constructed. Yarbo-Bejarano explains that Anzaldúa's "choice of the terms 'border' and particularly '*mestiza*' problematizes the way [Sandoval's theory of consciousness] travels. Clearly, non-Chicana readers and critics may relate to the 'miscegenation' and 'border crossing' in their own lives and critical practices [however] If every reader who identifies with the border-crossing experience described by Anzaldúa's text sees her/himself as a 'New *mestiza*', what is lost in terms of the erasure of difference and specificity?" (8).

I would answer this question in an admittedly blunt (perhaps even cynical) way: everything. In naming the experiences associated with a particular socio-cultural location, those experiences become inscribed with expressive politics meant to articulate the features that come with owning said experiences. This is not to say that these experiences acquire an "essential" characteristic(s) that make them stand outside of the reach of history and history's handler, power. It is more so to state that through the process of uncovering the ideologies penetrating the roots of one's position—an excavation that naming can help—an empowering transformation unique to those in those similar location(s) ensues. *Everybody* may be ruled by borders but not all borders share the same permeability, shape or history. To claim that one's borders are the same as another's is not just to egregiously overgeneralize, but to appropriate the pain, triumph, and *belongingness* once a space is named. It is creating, to borrow Yarbo-Bejarano's phrasing regarding Anzaldúa's naming of her experiences in *Borderlands*, a "home" (13). *Your* home is not *my* home; or, to return to the tapestry metaphor, lime-green is *not* the same as moss-green.

Therefore, when analyzing characters like Ammu in *GOST*, who can be seen as a Third World woman, one must be cautious of the ideological mishmashing that arises when using ideas from Western vision such as the Madonna/Whore complex. This complex may explain

socio-cultural male behavior (such as Mr. Hollick and Inspector Mathew) towards Ammu body; however, it is *not quite* accurate to the Ammu's positioning as an upper-caste Keralan Syrian-Christian woman complicit in other forms of oppression. Mohanty warns Western feminist scholars of the power of "discursive colonization" in "Under Western Eyes." Instead, perhaps it is best to refer to *GOST's* own language regarding the ironies of male desire on the female body, language that is couched in a specific cultural context.

The *Veshya* Body

The word *veshya*, through an interaction of ironic italicization rules that require "foreign" words to be italicized in English-language novels, stands out like an island within the text. It is a word that authenticates Ammu's dehumanization and complicity within Kerala's matrices of domination. In the chapter "Wisdom Exercise Notebooks", *veshya*, the word Rahel longed to ask her mother the definition of during their visit to the police station, is defined through Ammu's nightmares—nightmares which are revealed just as the intimate conditions of her often-referred death are. "[Ammu] had woken up at night to escape from a familiar, recurrent dream in which policemen approached her with snicking scissors, wanting to hack off her hair. They did that in Kottayam to prostitutes whom they'd caught in the bazaar—branded them so that everybody would know them for what they were. *Veshyas*. So that new policemen on the beat would have no trouble identifying whom to harass. Ammu always noticed them in the market, the women with vacant eyes and forcibly shaved heads in the land where long, oiled hair was only for the morally upright..." (153). By referring to the Malayalam word instead of an English equivalent, Roy reaffirms the geographic and socio-cultural connection of Ammu's condition, but also questions the borders used to distinguish those who are "morally upright" from the unrighteous, those who benefit from this distinguishing (such as Ammu) and those who do not (the punished

sex workers), and lays a path into mutual understanding. If Ammu, as an upper-caste woman, is a *veshya* for loving someone, then she is no different from lower-caste women who too love someone. If there is no difference between Ammu and the other women, punished for their love and/or the use of their own bodies in the fulfillment of that love (even if it is the love of a dream), then what is the use of the caste system in creating and maintaining identities? Ammu's dream seems to suggest that the mutual cultural displacement of being "branded" as a *veshya*, regardless of the context of how that word is bestowed to the woman met with its accusation, is a cross-caste, cross-religious phenomenon, a form of solidarity *within* the Keralan space rather than a general, transnational conglomerate of feminisms from various parts of the world. After all, Ammu does not fear the women but the way their crimes are presented to society. To be a *veshya* is to be a marked woman. Fortunately, Ammu's position as an upper-caste woman allowed her to avoid the ostentatious markings of being *veshya*-dom. Unfortunately, however, her ability to implicitly draw the connections in state and cultural attitudes where her circumstances and that of the bazaar women are regarded as essentially the same does not allow her to fully escape unmarked. There is too much power in a word like *veshya* as those called it, like Ammu, cannot seem to shake away its entanglements while those who use it do so with the full knowledge of its strength as an accusation. *Veshya* is a word that links to the alleged corruption of not just the material body, but also the spiritual and cultural body. It is not a "cluster-cue" or an "embodied anchor." Instead, *veshya* is a pithy metaphor for the women within Kerala that broke the Love Laws, the laws that state who can be loved, how they should be loved, and how much.

The treatment of Ammu's body within the text then demonstrates the body politics of (un)Situatdness by illustrating the ways in which complicity, agency and the reader's response

to the characterization of the material body mirrors discourses within said body's socio-cultural location. Because the (un)Situated woman lives within a spatial flux which privileges their ability to act against the constraints of social and cultural dicta, their ability to choose implicates the histories that enable them to do so. Given body politics being a phrase indicating the "soul" or "essentialness" of a nation, it is important to question just how the material body of these women are imagined in texts.

Ammu, as an upper-caste, Syrian Christian woman in an Indian state that enables her to benefit from her class through not being publicly humiliated like the bazaar women, interrogates the borders between respectability and moral normatives. But, as a Keralan woman whose autonomy is limited due to her gender, Ammu subverts the systems (e.g.: marriage) that seek to oppress her in order to create a "home" for herself. Therefore, through Ammu's example, the body politics of (un)Situatdness comes from a willingness to comply with socio-cultural mores in order to subvert them for one's own liberation, no matter how short-lived said liberation is.

Yet, it also comes from the reader's understanding of their own location as she interacts with the texts where these characters live; and, no more is this important than in an age of globalization and neocolonial interests. The reaction to the texts of subaltern groups from historically-marginalized geographies must be centered within the understanding of an ongoing interplay between different powers. Thus, the theoretical framework of (un)Situatdness I propose in my thesis, a framework which allows the characters in the work to be *situated* within their particular socio-cultural contexts while also demanding that the reader do not appropriate their experiences for a universalization or a "god trick", is an interrogation of this ongoing interplay. We began with the most visible sign of otherness which is the material body. In the

next chapter, will we move on to the less-visible: the stories cultures tell of themselves and those who live within it.

CHAPTER 3

STORYTELLING MATTERS

“One cannot really ‘give voice’ to the others without unlearning one’s privilege as speaking/making subject, or as [Spivak] puts it, without ‘learning how to speak...’. To raise the issue of the Other is also to raise the issue of not representing the Other, involving therefore questions of enunciation, of translation, and of interpretation”-Minh-ha, “She, The Inappropriate/d Other”, 8

“‘I’m doing something to help empower women’... ‘I moved across London. It’s hardly as if I abandoned my family. This is what young women do in Britain! We move out. We become independent. This is our culture’ - K. Jaswal, 27-31.

In a 2017 interview with *Brooklyn Magazine*’s Pooja Makhijani²⁷, Balli K. Jaswal describes her inspiration for *Erotic Stories For Punjabi Widows* (henceforth known as *Erotic Stories* for brevity’s sake) central scenario, stating:

When I lived in England, I visited some family friends in Southall pretty often. It was an intriguing place—on the western fringe of London. There was something very welcoming about this enclave of Punjabi immigrants, so I could see why it would appeal to new arrivals in a country that was hostile towards them, especially in the 1940s and 1950s. But I was definitely an outsider because I don’t speak Punjabi and I’m not into Bollywood music and movies, and it was an alienating experience to be in a place where there seemed to be only one way to be an Indian woman. I wanted to write about this place, and to explore the idea of women defying expectations and rewriting their own narratives (“P.S.”, 8).

²⁷ This interview is available in the 2017 Harper Collins print edition of Kaur Jaswal’s *Erotic Stories*, which is the edition I use for this project.

Although, it is not my intent to force a biographical perspective on *Erotic Stories*, K. Jaswal's insight foregrounds the distance felt once one realizes she is an *other* even among *others* like herself. Otherness is a concept that can be described as a "big nasty" in the parlance of non-academics. Through its membranes, questions of who belongs, how they belong and why permeate through its textures; and, with there being borders at all in its construction, there are also limitations. Minh-ha captures the tension within Otherness's limitations when she succinctly declares that "Otherness has its own laws and interdictions", a phrase which can serve as a reminder to remember both the historical processes that create Others as well and that there is no single Other that speaks for all Others.

Yet, Otherness, like the category of "Woman", has a texture composed of images, sounds, emotions and ideologies that suggests quintessential characteristics that, without these characteristics being factored into its construction, makes describing what Otherness *is* nigh impossible. *Erotic Stories* tackles Otherness in a way that differs from conventional descriptions of the Other within some strands of postcolonial thought (e.g.: the Other as a peripheralized entity that contrasts the centralized Included). Rather than portray Otherness as "a form of governmentality" that colonial discourses create through appropriation, direction and/or domination of affected spheres as Bhabha states²⁸, the novel focuses on the internalization of Otherness within Others themselves. The ghost of colonization remains—the novel takes place in Britain—both Nikki and deuteragonist Kulwinder Kaur being representatives of different types

²⁸ Bhabha takes a theoretical approach, informed by Foucault and Freud, to defining Otherness in "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism", elaborating that the minimum requirements of the colonial discourse as a tool for power are: 1) recognizing while disowning racial/cultural/historical differences, 2) creating "subject peoples" by producing knowledge from what it interprets to be (not) pleasurable; 3) seeks validation for its existence by the knowledges gained from both the colonizer and colonized; 4) has an objective based on representing the colonized populations in such a way that justifies its existence as a conqueror (*The Location of Culture*, 100-101).

of hybridity that interrogates Otherness through the lens of the intra-communal Other or what Minh-ha calls “the authentic Other” in her essay on inappropriate/d others.

Otherness as a condition created by the historic processes of colonization matters in the novel, yes, but this mattering (both as significance and a physical example of as a kinship enclave like Southall) is circumscribed by the greater socio-cultural reaction to said historic process—the salient admission that in order to survive “out there” (white, Anglocentric Britain) one must conform to the rules “in here” (Indian, Punjabi, Sikh). For the purposes of this chapter, the novel’s “authentic Other” is feminized: *she* accepts the gendered paradigm of dutiful daughter and wife, *she* heeds to the call of filial piety and cultural mandate, *she* embraces acceptance of her prescribed role within her borders of community unquestionably but *she* is not the same as the She outside the watchful eyes of culture. If Woman is not a neutral category because it defaults to whiteness and Westernness, then the “authentic Other” is too riddled with its own default signifiers that often legitimate oppressive practices within the socio-cultural context of the Other.

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that when discussing The Authentic Other that she is not Westernized via analogy. It is equally important to remember her borders, the histories of her contours and the tug of war over her identity between different dominating factions. There is *no* singularity with “the authentic Other” but multitudes, all distinct, omniscient, and alluring yet completely situational. In other words, *she* may “come from somewhere”, but can exist in multiple states alongside othernesses that may be deemed as less “real” or “inappropriate”. In *Erotic Stories*, “the authentic Other” is characterized by what is said and *not* said by the characters as they pivot between engaging in “proper” behavior as prescribed by their community and behavior that will result in negative consequences. *She* remains just out of sight,

yet in descriptions of *her* through the statements and reflections of characters like Nikki one can at least acknowledge *her* presence.

Situating “the authentic Other”

For example, after being accused by Mindi, her sister, of being selfish for not “consider[ing] the consequences for other people” (29), Nikki laments, reflecting that it is “easier to be a criminal fairly prosecuted by the law than an Indian daughter who wronged her family. A crime would be punishable by a jail sentence of definite duration rather than this uncertain length of family guilt trips” (29). Even within this familial argument, *she* announces herself through the moral implications of Nikki’s thinking, raising questions of the respectable Indian woman behavior and how said behavior reflects state interests. Yet, to give more context to the condition leading up to Nikki and Mindi’s argument, the “wrong” that Nikki refers to here is her dropping out of university, an act that has put strain on the family given the “duty” Nikki is obliged to fulfill due to cultural and familial command. Mindi elaborates on Nikki’s duty to her family, retorting that “[Nikki] had a duty to Dad. He had been so devoted to championing you—all those school debates, all those speech contests. He included you in political conversations with his friends and he didn’t stop you from arguing with Mum if he thought you had a point. He put such *faith* [emphasis mine] in you” (30). Mindi’s comments illustrate the power duty has (as a manifestation of parental faith in a child) in maintaining control *within* the dutiful daughter rather than through more overtly disciplinarian means.

Throughout the novel, Nikki struggles with authenticity from multiple positions. The first position, as exemplified by the symbol of the “dutiful” Indian daughter, is just one—a position which Nikki pivots to whenever she is uncertain of the righteousness of her path in life (e.g.: “...Dad died in India...In traditional Indian morality tales, wayward children were the primary

cause of heart conditions, cancerous lumps, hair loss and other ailments in their aggrieved parents...The guilt gnawed at her insides and made it impossible for Nikki to grieve...Two years on, Nikki still wondered if she had made the right decision” (8). Nikki’s temporary pivot towards morality tales where the implied reason for the death of loved ones is a child’s failure to fulfill their parents faith in them (duty) demonstrates the power of “the authentic other”. Nikki may have not been drawn to the traditionalism desired by her parents, but she feels as if she should be. As a cultural symbol of success, “the authentic other” leaves Nikki isolated because of her own desires. Nevertheless, cultural traditionalism is just one manifestation of “the authentic other”. Given her “lifestyle” (2), Nikki has an admittedly feminist mindset which seems to have been cultivated by her need for a higher purpose:

Quitting university provided some relief but Nikki became plagued with anxieties about what she *should* [emphasis mine] instead. After a week...Nikki began filling her afternoons by attending protests with her best friend Olive, who volunteered for an organization called UK Fem Fighters. There was much to be indignant about. Topless models were still appearing on Page Three of the *Sun*. Government funding to women’s crisis centres was being halved as part of new austerity measures. Female journalists were in danger of being harassed and assaulted while reporting in war zones overseas... (6-7).

The other manifestation of “the authentic other”, given this context, is the Western feminist ideal, an ideal which can be found within the prevailing white Western feminist discourse. Jawad Syed and Faiza Ali (2011) contextualize this discourse in “The White Woman’s Burden: from colonial *civilisation* to Third World *development*” where the authors seek to make visible the possible reasons for mistrust of white feminism in national, international and Global South movements. From a historical perspective, the fact that the “extended history of what may

be described as a tortured relationship between powerful white women and subjugated women of color” (352) highlights the chronic “overstep[ping]” of the boundaries of the indigenous woman subject whom these white women saviors viewed as unenlightened and puerile, contributes to the predominant narrative of whiteness being the manifestation of the righteous colonizing state. “It is a historical fact that British feminism developed during an age of colonization, and that British feminists participated in assumptions and projections of white racial superiority,” Syed and Ali write, “... British feminists constructed the image of a powerless Indian womanhood on whom their own emancipation in the imperial nation-state ultimately relied. Thus, the Indian woman served as a foil against which British feminists *could gauge their own progress* [emphasis mine]. In their pursuit of emancipation and empowerment, different sub-groups of British feminists collaborated in the service of empire, reproducing the moral discourse of imperialism and embedding white feminist ideology within it.” Syed and Ali refer to Antoinette M. Burton’s (1990)²⁹ review of the historic British colonial campaigns for the Indian woman, tracing the ways in which the colonial ideologies underpinning these campaigns merged into modern British feminism. Burton’s contributing insight to Syed and Ali’s analysis is fascinating as it illustrates a manifestation of “the authentic Other” as being part of Mohanty’s spoken-for-yet-speaking “Third World Woman”. Equally as fascinating is Syed and Ali’s understanding of Marilyn Frye’s concept of “whiteness”, which they see as a “contingent connection” (351), one that insists upon a normative view of empowerment from groups that benefit the most due to race, nation and class (350). The authors’s comparison of whiteness with masculinity to illustrate how both concepts need not be limited to the white or male body to be effective illuminates just one way

²⁹ Burton, Antoinette, M. “The white woman’s burden: British feminists and the Indian woman, 1865-1915.” *Women’s Studies International Forum*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 295-308.

how the dehumanization of the historic past can be reborn in movements which seek to unify against oppression.

In other words, Audre Lorde's oft-repeated metaphor rings true³⁰; and, as we turn to *Erotic Stories*, Nikki's attempts to dismantle patriarchal control within a community she does not see herself as truly ("authentically") belonging to, but wishing to speak for, is especially evocative. Here is another example:

Just as Nikki was about to leave the building, she finally received a reply to her earlier message to Olive. 'Where's Southall?' The question surprised Nikki. Surely in their years of friendship, Nikki had mentioned Southall to Olive? Then again, she and Olive had met in secondary school...Nikki stopped and looked around. She was surrounded by women with their heads covered—women hurrying after their toddlers, women given each other sideways glances...Each had a story. She could see herself addressing a room full of these *Punjabi* [emphasis mine] women. Her senses overwhelmed with the color of their kameezes, the sound of fabric rustling and pencils tapping, the smell of perfume and turmeric. Her purpose came into sharp focus. 'Some people don't even know about this place,' she would say. 'Let's change that.' Fiery-eyed and indignant, they would pen their stories for the whole world to read (14-15).

It must be noted that Nikki's purpose is sparked by a white woman's ignorance of a place culturally significant to her—a white woman whom, for all intents and purposes, would be seen as the "authentic" British citizen by outsiders. "As the tourists walked away [after asking her where to find Hyde Park], Nikki overheard the woman asking her husband, 'We should ask a person who's from here'...Having her claim to Britain [Nikki's] taken away from her by an

³⁰In Lorde's essay "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (1984), Lorde describes the disconnection she feels as a black, lesbian feminist participating in feminist discourse that decenters the realities of poor, "Third World" (1), non-heterosexual women of color.

ignorant tourist warranted a satisfying smoke' (286-287). Nikki's desire to uplift Southall as the Punjabi-Sikh enclave as a cultural center visible ("worthy") of the typical white Western gaze is reminiscent of Bhabha's mimicry; especially, as Nikki focuses on the overrepresented image of the unspeaking Indian woman (e.g.: the women with covered heads, hurrying after children) although prior to her finding her purpose, she is confronted with symbols of modernity: "At one stop [in Southall], a group of secondary school girls boarded. They giggled and spoke over each other and when the bus lurched suddenly, they flew forwards with a collective shriek. 'Fuckin' hell!' one girl yelped. The other girls laughed..." (10). Nikki sees herself liberating the women who would be representatives of the "authentic Other" within Mohanty's "Third World Woman" concept. Nikki does not see herself liberating the "modern girls" whose abrupt swearing is symbolic of British modernity. Therefore, when Nikki imagines the women in the gurdwara classroom as "fiery-eyed and indignant", she imagines them as acolytes in feminist whiteness "pen[ning]" their stories as an indictment against cultural patriarchal mores. But there is a question looming within Nikki's imaginings, a question that returns to *her's* broader construction as the representation of the "authentic Other": for whose gaze do "We/we"³¹ write?

The thing about mimicry is that its existence rests on the power of stereotypes to create and maintain power relations. As clarified in "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism", Bhabha sees the stereotype as the "primary point of subjectification in colonial discourse" (107) for both the colonizer and colonized. Rather than a misrepresentation of the Other, the stereotype is a "simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the other permits), constitutes a problem for the *representation* of the subject in significations of

³¹ I borrow from Minh-ha's distinguishing of the collective "We" and the individual "we" in order to illustrate the complexity of identities within the historical and historicizing process.

psychic and social relations” (107). This denial then leads both the colonizer and colonized unable to access a way of negating while recognizing difference (108). Mimicry, empowered by the stereotype, then causes the imitating subject to denounce or downplay the significance of difference in their creation of self-identity. And, although the imitating subject may see their own identity as distinct, this distinction is rooted in the complex relationship between what the dominant force exhibits and what the subject imagines as power. In turn, the empowerment the imitating subject finds is one removed from context. It becomes a “view from nowhere”, isolated, all-seeing and universalized. Since Nikki is created by whiteness, seeing its feminism as something the women at the gurdwara writing class truly want but cannot ask for due to patriarchy, she takes on a Bhabha-esque mimicry. Mimicry and the “authentic Other” differ by intent and degrees. While mimicry is the result of desire for the external power which subjugates, the “authentic Other” is desire to maintain the unique power relations within Otherness. If mimicry is assimilation, then the “authentic Other” is reactionarism; and, *she* dwells in both, being at once the “authentic Other” while also being the *mimic-woman*.

Such is the state of the hybridized subject. She can never be either/or, only degrees on a spectrum. Nikki fits the mold of the modern hybrid being that she is of Punjabi-Sikh descent, born and raised in London, to Punjabi-Indian immigrant parents. She is split in two: “Through the windows of the connecting bus to the temple, the sight of more bilingual signs on the shop fronts gave Nikki a slight headache and the sensation of being split in two parts. British, Indian” (10). The Gurmukhi lessons she took as a child, an initiative by her parents perhaps to install cultural knowledge, became “party tricks” (10) for her friends. Britishness dominates Indianness given that Gurmukhi, the script her pupils use while writing and that Nikki herself cannot fully understand, becomes entertainment for English children. It also illustrates Nikki’s drifting away

from the culture that forms a part of Nikki's identity inheritance. Nikki recalls the "confused conversations of these trips [to Southall] as Mum and Dad seemed to both love and loathe being amongst their country folk: wouldn't it be nice to have Punjabi neighbors? But what was the point of moving to England then?" (10). Migration, no matter the reason behind it, links to a need for escape: escape from the nation, escape from the cultures within a nation, escape from *the past*. But, there is no escaping *her*, Nikki soon realizes. There is only amelioration of conditions, but *she* lingers, ever watching and ever waiting.

The third position is one that is more complex and exists within a "third space" that is quite similar to Bhabha's conception of the idea. Although offering a creative way to exist within the predominant (whitely) feminist and traditional discourses, this position is cemented in an acute resistance to any form of assimilation, rather "progressive" or "conservative". It is also the space where (un)Situatdness blooms freely. However, within the commitment of resisting assimilation no matter where it comes from, it becomes a facet of the "authentic Other", the *she* who "is like you but not quite" because she exists for community. Without community, *she* does not exist for it is within the hierarchies and oppressive apparatuses of a community that *she* realizes that she must stand against and urge *others* to do the same. In other words, *she* is "in the making", not entirely rooted in the historical past or believing in the glittering fool's gold of the present liberationist posturings. This *she* becomes the mantle in which Nikki eventually comes to rest her head in the novel; yet, to understand *her*, I must now point to a major theme present in *Erotic Stories*: the transformative power of storytelling.

Storytelling for the "You" in "Me"

Erotic Stories offers an unique perspective on storytelling as an act of resistance. Instead of the story product being removed from the act that produces it, both the story and the act of

storytelling join together to create a layered interrogation of stale, oppressive values within a culture. For instance, *Erotic Stories* is interspersed with the personal erotic tales created by Nikki's students, giving the entirety of the text a reality that extends beyond the novel's main plot. However, these stories which the reader can engage with are not just mere textual fluff; K. Jaswal names the stories, provides plots to each one provided (making it into its own meta-commentary on the nature of desire) and links most to a particular character within the text.

“The Viewing”, the first full story, written by the “widow” (her husband is not dead), Manjeet Kaur, is the first example of these individual “links”. “The Viewing” is about a young woman named Sunita who cannot procure a suitable marriage due to a large facial mole—an attribute that Manjeet has. The story's theme focuses on imagination as a liberating force; Sunita retreats into lush imaginative scenes where she ponders the sexual prowess of potential suitors which include her older, single, male neighbor—the latter of which inspires a self-sexually fulfilling act that culminates in Sunita realizing that her mole is not entirely “unlucky” (75). When questioned about her inspiration for the story, Manjeet states that, “It all comes from Sunita's imagination, not mine” (75), illustrating the creative “other space”, the “here-but-not-here” position of the engaged creative act. Preetam, a fellow widow and daughter of Arvinder, who is also widowed and attending the writing class, is unable to separate Manjeet from Sunita: “Sunita is not you?... You've got a mole as well” (75). However, Manjeet's comments sheds light on the differences of the storyteller's creation and themselves by distinguishing the allure of difference in fiction versus the view of it in reality. “ ‘Ah, Sunita's mole is a mark of beauty,’ Manjeet said. ‘Mine is just...’ She shrugged. Nikki noticed that she kept her hand cupped around her chin to cover her mole”. When Nikki tries to boost Manjeet's confidence in her appearance, Manjeet stops her, elaborating that her mother “was very

concerned about [her] mole [like Sunita's]. She said it was bad luck and I'd never find anyone" (78) and confirmed that, in a sense, her mother's observation, like Sunita's in her story, is correct: "I didn't keep [my husband], did I?...He's not dead. He's still very much alive. He ran away with the nurse who took care of him after his heart attack" (78). The space between creation and creator, oftentimes desired to be treated as separate entities (e.g.: the old "separate the art from the artist" quip), cannot exist for these groups of women who are already maligned within their culture as well as the culture they are integrating into ("We'd be invisible in India," Arvinder said. 'I suppose it makes no difference that we're in England...' (62). For Manjeet, the idea of separating the art from the artist then becomes yet another cloak of privilege that only those who can afford to "separate" their creations permanently from themselves can do. Manjeet, like the other widows, cannot do this. Her writing is her route to sense-making; and that is because she exists within a "third space"---perhaps even a "*fourth* space" depending on the arbitrariness of categorical numbering. In this sense, "The Viewing" provides the foundation for how *Erotic Stories* uses the widows stories to contextualize their past experiences, thus elucidating the reason why storytelling is something worth fighting for within the work.

Yet, Nikki is initially shocked when she realizes the widows are not women in need of a savior. She tells the widows after realizing that they prefer writing erotic stories that, "This is not the type of story I had in mind" (61), and assumes that their "smirking" (61) is their trying to wrestle away her authority as a teacher. Once Sheena, the youngest of the widows, challenges Nikki's assumption regarding proper storytelling for adults, Nikki realizes her error: "[Just] because our husbands are gone...we [still] have plenty of experience with desire" (62). As a twenty-something-year-old "modern girl", Nikki's view of widowhood and older Punjabi women in general is founded in the South Asian intra-cultural image of the "aunty." Kareem

Khubchandani (2022) investigates the queer potential of aunties in “Between Aunties: Sexual Futures and Queer South Asian Aunty Porn” that “the aunty appears as a common vernacular figure in South Asian film, television, memes, novels and porn... While generally refer[ring] to older women, it is also a ‘role’ that is done, not necessarily something that one is [Cobham-Sandler 2021]; one can thus have an aunty aesthetic or be read as an aunty without necessarily identifying as one” (346). Khubchandani identifies “aunties” as a “disruptor” (347), one that can subvert the popular image of them within South Asian media as investors in heteronormativity. Although “aunties” are pinned as a menace against the sexual and gender freedoms of younger generations, they can also exist within “liminal location[s] which allows them to sneak sex, gossip, and scandal into the home” (347). Replace “the home” with the religious-social space of the gurdwara and Khubchandani’s “aunties” as disruptor concept remains feasible. In fact, Khubchandani sees *Erotic Stories* as a subversion of the “aunty gossip” trope where “aunty” speech conveys not just information but “excess[es] of meaning” (355) which uplifts not just this kind of speech being the sole purview of women but also men.

For example, *The Brothers* in *Erotic Stories*, a group of disenchanted young men, cut off from economic opportunities and finding meaning in policing the speech, dress and movement of women within the community, also rely on gossip in order to target women whom they deem to be inappropriate to the community as Sheena informs Nikki: “No, *the Brothers*. A group of young, unemployed men who consider themselves Southall’s morality police. A lot of them were working at the scrap metal factory before it closed down. Now they patrol the temple grounds and remind people to cover their heads... There’s nothing religious in their thinking. They’re bored and frustrated... I’ve heard they offer services to families as well... Bounty hunting, mostly...” (108-109). Khubchandani sees the rather egalitarian portrayal of gossip in the text, an

act often bestowed to “aunties”, as “diffuse[d] pathways” illustrating gossip’s potential to be “a matter of life and death” (356). When reflecting on the nature of “the stories”, made magnanimous and singular in their collectivity, one can see the danger inherent in both their production and in it as a product. As a peripheralized entity, the widows rely on the safety of their invisibility within their culture in order to flourish. Gossip, as “a site of contestations over power and knowledge” (Khubchandani 356), helps to draw others like them into an in-between space, but also leaves them at risk of being discovered by those invested in hegemonic power. And, as a physical manifestation of the secret longings of the widow marginalized community, “the stories”, by being a subversion of the “written document as a respectable form of information” (356), becomes the gateway to both liberation as well as discovery. If the storytelling activities within the gurdwara enable the widows to revel in the freedoms within the “third space”, then “the stories” represent the end result of said freedom pursuit, enabling others to tune into the third space and choose whether to become part of it or denounce it.

The novel’s take on the “aunty trope” then enables the us as readers and critics to pinpoint different hegemonic ideals through the interstitial stories juxtaposed with the main narrative. The “aunties” or widows write for themselves, but as they write, as Manjeet’s “The Viewing” story illustrates, they are also calling into question hegemonic ideas that push them into marginalization—the things that women in their position know but are too intimidated by internal and external pressures to say aloud. When Manjeet says that “If I could live my life again, I’d be more like Sunita. . . . She knows what she wants” (*Erotic Stories* 76), she voices the implied dictate that women like her are to *not* be forthcoming in their desires, a characteristic of *her* as the traditional “authentic Other”. But, in communicating this desire to be someone else, someone who is more outspoken and revelatory in their difference, Manjeet is not thinking of *her*

in terms of the whitely Western feminist sense either: “That nurse, too. She knew what she wanted and she took it . . . This nurse came to England from a village in India as well but she’s from a different generation, Nikki. Those girls know how to do everything men want before they’re married” (76-77). The sexual a-morality that Manjeet sees permissible in “newer generations” is not something she would want if she had a second chance, which Nikki understands to be a demonstrable difference between “courage” and “malice” (“I think what Bibi Maneet’s story has highlighted is that there’s a difference between being courageous and being *malicious* . . . I think Sunita’s courage is admirable but to take somebody’s husband is greedy and hurtful” (77)). Therefore, by thinking about how Manjeet connects her past experiences with the imaginative acts in her story, Nikki understands that the thing she admires about the nurse who “took” her husband is sarcasm. Manjeet is not wishing to be outspoken in order to keep her husband (a form of patriarchal complicity in its own) but in order to be more true to herself. In sharing her story and exchanging sexual history with others, Manjeet expunges some of the pain of losing her husband which makes her internalize widowhood: “. . . but a glimpse at Manjeet’s face stopped [Nikki]: the traces of sadness around her eyes were replaced by deep laugh lines. She looked gratefully at the widows, her stark dupatta slipping off onto her shoulders where she let it rest” (79). Manjeet, emboldened by the community of those who understand her, is finally able to put to rest the cultural and internalized mandate that sees women whose husbands leave them as less “respectable” than widowed women. Storytelling, both through the erotic story she produced and sharing the emotions infusing its production, enables her to finally heal. The “third space” she is in allows her to do just that.

Manjeet’s “The Viewing” is just one example of the power of “third spaces” in action. Once “the stories” began to circulate through an underground network of “aunties” and more

women, not all widows, show up at Nikki's class to share their own erotic stories and experiences, Kulwinder realizes the power of storytelling as an act of resistance. However, Kulwinder is initially more resistant to the idea, fretting that the classes that she has worked so hard on to get started as a legitimate space for women would be dismantled due to "inappropriate" classroom behavior. Kulwinder has always been suspicious of Nikki due to her being a "modern girl", someone who had "stumbled into her territory and now must play by [Kulwinder's] rules" (37) but refusing to do so. Nikki's refusal "gamble[s]" with Kulwinder's reputation which she worked hard to establish within a place that privileges male authority; however, even after canceling the writing classes, Kulwinder is not entirely immune to the allure of "the stories". Explaining that her curiosity will enable her to figure out the reason why she dismissed them, Kulwinder reads the unattributed, "The Tailor" as a test (221). Instead of remaining trapped within the "facade" (225) of indignation, Kulwinder begins to remember: "She could feel the pulsing of her heart and another pulsing in [a] very private place. There was a faint recollection of this feeling, from many years ago when she first discovered what it was that men and women did, and why they did it...She even *dared to think* [emphasis mine] that it was worth living the rest of her life for, this closeness with another human being" (225). Although the name of the author of "The Tailor" is unknown, it still links to a character in the same manner that "The Viewing" links to Manjeet; however, instead of giving some information about its creator, it gives information about the reader. Kulwinder aligns herself with male authority because of a lack of choice and not because she agrees with them; and, by reacting to a story that would had been deemed inappropriate by the male authority in a positive way, Kulwinder understands the power of "the stories" as a meaningful and liberating force for women like her. "*Oh what have we done? . . . Behaving like *goreh*, getting carried away in their excitement . . .*

The stories had provided no instructions, but they had known anyway how to bring each other [Kulwinder and her husband, Sarab] to such heat. The thought of it sent shocks through Kulwinder's body and then she was overcome by a wave of shame. *But why?*" (230). The 'we' of Kulwinder's thinking refers to her sleeping with her husband, an act that would not seem worth worrying over given the seemingly ubiquitous permissibility of sex within marriage; however, Kulwinder's worries are attached to broader questions of culture, particularly the stories told within the intra-cultural setting. There are two points of entry here: the (non)permissibility of outsider/insider behavior and the pollution of the sanctioned sexual act. Kulwinder invokes the term "*goreh*", a word that roughly means "foreigner" in Punjabi given the context, and implicitly positions herself between two poles of (non)permissible behavior. To "behave like *goreh*" is to act in a way that runs contrary to the cultural expectations of Southall's Punjabi Sikh community; therefore, by referring to her and Sarab's sexual acts as something foreigners—specifically, "white people" (249)³²—do, Kulwinder questions her relationship with the idealized images of the proper Punjabi Sikh wife and the "modern girl". Secondly, given the role "the stories", the reader can infer that Kulwinder sees the aftermath of her act with her husband as a form of pollution that can only be rectified once she begins to deconstruct the ideology enforced through culture: "Why was she ashamed? Because she was supposed to be; because women, especially at her age, did not ask for these sorts of pleasures . . . What if the neighbors had heard? . . . [Sarab] would think that something was wrong with her, he would think she *liked* it, couldn't get enough of it. That would be humiliating. Disgraceful. *Why?*" (230-231). By interrogating the cultural baggage that keeps "the stories" from being appropriate, Kulwinder's mind opens up to other possibilities as she explores the gendered complexities of social stigma and rebellion. After all, Sarab rejoices in the power of "the stories" to move his wife. He does not denounce them; and,

³² Hindi गौरा (*gorā*) refers to white skin/people.

seeing that he does not think of her as a monstrous being who “likes it” (as if it were a bad thing), Kulwinder too can accept them by *permitting* herself to question the very forces that damn their existence. She is not quite a “modern girl”, still seeing herself as part of the traditional zeitgeist of her generation, but she is definitely no longer a complicit accessory to the patriarchal forces that insist that she behaves as an “appropriate” woman. Like Manjeet, Kulwinder exists in a “third space”, but instead of being allowed to create, she is allowed to *reflect*.

Both Manjeet and Kulwinder’s reaction to the *process* of storytelling and the *product* of storytelling illustrate the value storytelling has in intra-community resistance. Manjeet is allowed to heal after an affair and Kulwinder is allowed to do the same by retreating to the person who would have understood her grief over her daughter’s death as much as she does: Sarab. “The stories”, created by community outcasts and passed along through gossip, provides the alienated, hopeless, and downtrodden an outlet to express themselves in a meaningful way, allowing them to share their experiences and impart knowledge from *within* the “third space” to the new generation.

Being (un)Situated: Nikki’s Revolution

Now that the novel’s treatment of storytelling has been explained, the third and final position Nikki pivots towards can be understood. Since the widows exist within a “third space”, using their invisibility to exercise freedoms barred to them, Nikki does not “permit” them to be free in the sense that teachers permit their students to talk about their experiences in the classroom. Permission implies an authority figure, through *their* discretion, allowing things to occur for whatever reason. Permission connotes begging (which the widows do) and the paternalistic hand-waving of an authority figure. Nikki does not do this in *Erotic Stories*,

although she initially tries and fails (e.g.: calling Preetam by her first name when she meets her to which Preetam quickly corrects her, “ ‘That’s Bibi Preetam to you, young lady...Or Aunty. Or Preetam-ji’...[Nikki realizes] these were her students but they were also Punjabi elders and she would have to address them appropriately” (34). As a teacher, Nikki is in the position to enact authority; however, because of her age and inability to comply with certain cultural norms (e.g.: addressing her elders in a respectful manner), she cannot do so. Speaking with the widows and learning about their experiences softens her view of them from women in need of a leader to women in need of a listener; and, as a “modern girl”, the widows trust Nikki because they associate modernity with “open-mindedness” (62). However, it takes Nikki time to become truly open-minded and understand that the world is not black or white.

Like Kulwinder questioning the reasons why she felt guilty after reading “the stories”, Nikki questions her assumptions on widowhood and proper “aunty” behavior, eventually defending the widows need to “express themselves” (215). Because of her friendship with the widows, Southall takes on a new texture, becoming less like “chaos [and] now [feels] very much like home...” (192). Through embracing Southall, Nikki finds community, albeit one that is interstitial. This is why when she insists that Sheena tell her about the community’s problems because “It’s [her] community too” (193), Nikki is insisting that although her otherness is different from their otherness as older widows, she still sees herself as connected to them. She and the widows’s marginalization within their respective culture blocs (Nikki being too Indian to be considered “authentically British” and the widows too outspoken to be “authentic Punjabi widows”) form a solidarity within their mutual alienation. Thus when Nikki states to her worried mother that, “Those meetings gave those women a strong sense of acceptance and support . . . Those women were used to turning the other cheek when injustices were committed because it’s

inappropriate to get involved, or to go to the police and betray your own [addressing the unsolved murders of Punjabi girls in Southall]. But they didn't hesitate to help me and put themselves at risk when I was in danger [because now] they know they're capable of fighting" (267), she demonstrates the power storytelling has in starting revolutions. "The stories" as a written document, evidence of societal transgression, did not need to physically exist to matter to the cause of transformative action as these things can be remembered, recited and recorded; it is the "quiet rebellion [which] could come together to fight a bigger injustice" (227), the act of storytelling itself, which does.

Thus, alienation, a chief cause of (un)Situatdness, can become a positive force for greater social action. Nikki felt split in two, British and Indian, "modern girl" yet Punjabi, but she realizes she does not need to choose. She can be both authentically British, Indian, Punjabi, Sikh and modern. Making a choice to "be" either or is a trap, a "god-trick". Yet, to know that this is one, one must be aware of the polyvocality of the representations of "the authentic Other"—a form of privilege that widows like the marriage "survivor" Arvinder could only wish to have the choice to deny. For example, Arvinder says to Preetam after she discovers that Arvinder cheated on her father, "You should be grateful...This country is spoiling you. I gave you all the happiness I couldn't have. You loved your husband, your marriage...I *survived* mine" (145). Alienation is a cause of (un)Situatdness, the being unrooted from where one belongs or *should* belong; however, having choice is a symptom of it. Nikki can choose if she wishes to. She can relish in being a part of a "quiet rebellion" that leads to big cultural changes. But that is because Nikki, by wilfully existing in a "third space" and forming an identity within it, is (un)Situatd. She has a choice. The widows, by being widowed, do not. They are not (un)Situatd. Their space was

created for them because the Powers That Be knew not what to do with manless women, so they turned what would have been a prison into a place of refuge.

Nonetheless, alienation as one cause of (un)Situatdness warrants more in-depth analyses. In the next and final chapter, I will be discussing the traits of (un)Situatdness in postcolonial feminist literature using Ammu and Nikki as examples. I will also complicate Haraway's idea of "situated knowledges" where I will conclude that despite the concept's liberatory capabilities, it can still lead to additional forms of marginalization for the postcolonial body.

CHAPTER 4

(UN)SITUATED KNOWLEDGES MATTER

“But, of course, [the] view of infinite vision is an illusion, a god trick. I would like to suggest how our insisting metaphorically on the particularity and embodiment of all vision...and not give in to the tempting myths of vision as a route to disembodiment and second-birthing allows us to construct a usable, but not an *innocent* [emphasis mine], doctrine of objectivity... We need to learn our bodies, endowed with primate color and stereoscopic vision, how to attach the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and are not, in dimensions of mental and physical space we hardly know how to name”- Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges”, 582.

Vision is a tricky device. It can obfuscate as well as illuminate. It can separate as well as assimilate; however, despite the particularities of intention, vision, as Haraway asserts, is the best method in (re)embodying knowledge so that knowledge becomes tangible, useful, and best of all, equitable. In the introduction of my thesis, I claimed a distinction between Knowledge as a hegemonic structure, underpinned by oppressive structures while claiming a removed and distant “objectivity”, and knowledge as the concomitant result of a society admitting to what it knows or experiences. The Knowledge/knowledge distinction mirrors the Woman/woman dichotomy. Both Knowledge and Woman, as categories created to dampen all distinctions it represents, can be counterproductive to any meaningful answers to the identity question.

Yet, reflecting on Haraway’s ideas in “Situated Knowledge”, I must reiterate that Haraway is not calling for a new era of epistemological and ontological relativism. Relativism, according to Haraway and which I agree, is a “god trick” that promises an easy solution to the issue of knowledge production via its own claim to innocence. Relativism too has a “view from nowhere”, after all; as the “perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity” (584), relativism, “den[ies] the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective . . . mak[ing] it impossible to see well” (584). Therefore, what Haraway proposes and what I,

inspired by Haraway's concept, wish to suggest, is a way to make sense of the world without relying on the party tricks of omniscient, disembodied visions of unlimited knowing (Knowledge) without falling into the embrace of academic nihilism (e.g.: relativism). Haraway's conception of situated knowledge suggests that in order for knowledge to matter *and* be equitable, one's "vision" must be taken into account as a limited position even as it folds into other limited viewpoints. In order for situated knowledges to work, responsibility has to be taken into account; however, to take responsibility for one's socio-cultural location comes with its own complications. For example, there must be awareness of the ways in which complicity and subjugation manifest in one's life. If awareness of one's complicity and subjugation within an oppressive structure plays a role in one's location, then how can awareness be illustrated? Is there a litmus test for awareness, some kind of pronouncement that confirms that responsibility has been taken? Better yet, *how* would the results of such responsibility be beneficial in making knowledge more equitable across various social strata? Haraway writes that "irresponsible" (583) knowledges are knowledges that are unable to be "called into account" (583); yet, when constructing explicitly multivocal knowledges, which of these knowledges should be held accountable and to what degree?

For instance, when reading *Erotic Stories*, knowledges are comprised through a dichotomy between the British standard (e.g.: represented through British academe which Nikki refuses to engage with at first due to its uselessness to her need of greater social need) and gendered, cultural knowledges present within Southall's British-Sikh community. As discussed in the previous chapter, the feminine hegemonic structures informed by both British and Punjabi-Sikh ideals of womanhood result in the creation of a "third space" where parties who revolt against the Punjabi-Sikh (e.g.: Nikki) or the British (e.g.: the widows) thrive, resulting in a

new way of being and understanding—a new *knowledge*. Hence when Haraway states “responsibility” of one’s place as being a key aspect of constructing situated knowledges, her call for “responsibility” can enter into a murky trap where those who are already empowered by the prestige of Knowledge (rooted within the misappropriation, exploitation and denigration of the Other) can find a way out of accountability through admitting some form of “responsibility” as the boundaries of the word are not well-defined. “Responsibility” can ring as hollow as a corporate apology regarding decades’ worth of worker exploitation. “Responsibility” can be used to manipulate the voices of the marginalized so that their criticisms of Power become meaningless for systematic change. And, in the case of Nikki in *Erotic Stories*, “responsibility” can take into relying on traditional structures of control (the academy) in order to create a community-wide change in the ways in which some stories, some *knowledges*, are gained.

After all, Nikki returns to the academy (e.g.: law school) in order to make a difference in the lives of those affected by the gendered violence in Southall’s Punjabi-Sikh community. Maya, Kulwinder’s murdered daughter, a young woman whose “story was over” (40), becomes the referent for intra-communal knowledge about what young women *should* not do (e.g. “Death is better than life if a girl doesn’t have her honour. Sometimes the younger generation needs this reminder...If Maya had just considered what she was doing to her family, none of this would have happened...” (49).) To make Maya more than just a symbol for young modern girls gone bad, Nikki *had* to rely on the academy to legitimize Maya as a figure for necessary social change. In other words, Nikki has to incorporate Maya into a new form of knowledge in order for social change to occur. The “responsibility” Nikki takes is the awakening that she is part of the community, that she, by being “modern” can enact change through her privileged position. Yet, by relying on traditional structures of power such as the education and law systems, Nikki

has to be complicit in some level with these institutions (e.g. studying British law) in order to make a worthwhile difference. Although the complicity Nikki must have is different from Parker's complicity by intention, it is still complicity. It also raises the issue of power as Nikki, being seen as "modern", having the privilege as someone whose hybridity does not set her completely *apart* from Britishness as opposed to the widows who see Britishness as something they cannot grasp, can choose the ways in which she complies. She can afford to be inappropriate. She can, through having access to the Knowledge via traditional means, learn of her subjugated perspective, her doubled oppression. She can *speak* for others, be *heard* and "take responsibility", no matter the narrowness of her vision. In sum, to "take responsibility" one has to be in the position to do so. There has to be at least a little bit of a "view-from-nowhere" in order to understand one's "view-from-somewhere".

What this means is that for the postcolonial subject *now*, complicity, agency, and rebellion are still intertwined. The colonized/colonizer dichotomy as it has been discussed in past discourses during decolonization is no longer as applicable due to globalization. One has to be aware of the ways in which they are complicit in a system that both marginalizes and enables them to "take responsibility." Participation in these systems is a given. (un)Situated women *must* participate in order to uncover the strands that allow loyalty and rebellion to said systems. Such imperatives immediately point to Crenshaw's intersectionality; however, (un)Situatedness is founded within the interstitial spaces between social categories such as race, gender and class. Liminality is part of the (un)Situated woman's appeal; and, although Crenshaw writes that intersectionality is not meant to be a totalizing theory³³excavating the ways in which people are

³³ Crenshaw writes in "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" (1993) that because identity politics have been held "in tension" (1242) with traditional dominant structures of social justice because of the idea that identities should be transcended rather than embraced, it has left those who rely on their identities as a source of empowerment lost. Meanwhile, Crenshaw rightly asserts that the "problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference [but] that frequently conflates or ignores *intragroup* [emphasis mine] difference" (1242). The example of

pinpointed within matrices of domination; unfortunately, the concept has been used by academics and feminist and anti-racist activists as such. T-shirts, posters, purses, backpacks, car decals—anything that can be printed and sold to liberals, progressives and internet pundits as visible symbols of their political alliances—can be found with slogans such as “If it ain’t intersectional, it ain’t feminist”³⁴.

Although a part of me is skeptical of the quasi-capitalistic qualities of the ways intersectionality has been seized by some members of the non-academic community, I am also in awe of the creativity, introspection and coalitional aspirations inspired by centering intersectionality within online spaces. The internet allows these conversations and coalitional opportunities to take place in real time, all over the world, where participation is not limited to state-sanctioned venues of “real” knowledge making such as the academe. Nonetheless, this does not mean that this internet-enabled access accelerates the downfall of traditional power structures. If anything, the internet has made things more complicated via post-truth politics, ideological globalization, and state-sanctioned internet blackout and censorship campaigns. As someone who has both experienced life prior to the home internet explosion in the 1990s and its aftermath, the transformation is both amazing as well as frightening. Political and social mobilization can occur for whatever reason within days of a single post. An order from Gujarat, India can be at my doorstep in America with the press of a button. Attending a conference in the

violence between women such as in domestic violence cases between lesbian couples being “shrouded in secrecy for similar reasons that have suppressed the exposure of heterosexual violence in communities of color” [5] illustrates these intragroup differences where homophobia distances lesbian domestic violence from patriarchal underpinnings of heterosexual male violence against women.

³⁴I added my own linguistic difference in the phrase in hopes of illustrating how dialects, such as the Southern United Statesian dialect I grew up speaking as a native of southeast Georgia, can have deconstructive appeal within an intersectional framework. Nevertheless, a quick web search of “if it’s not intersectional, it’s not feminist” or “it’s not feminist if it’s not intersectional” will lead to numerous Etsy shops, Instagram posts and tweets demonstrating the unfortunate *sloganization* of intersectionality’s complexity.

Netherlands need not involve international security and travel expenses as I can attend it within the familiarity of my own home. In other words, like Baby Kochamma in *GOST*, I can imbibe the pleasures and the pain of the world with just a lift of my finger, my couch my throne and my wifi-enabled television the portal for me to accept or deny whatever is being offered to me at the moment. In this new age, knowledge need not be a purely passive subject, something inert and summoned whenever a reference is needed. In this new age, I can at least feign active interest through a tweet, message board emoji, or a movie gif expressing whatever emotion that is socially acceptable to express. Vicariousness has never been easier to perform as it is now which is what makes (un)Situatdness so appealing in an age where vicariousness is an easy state to fall into.

Within (un)Situatdness, vicarious living is impossible. The (un)Situatd woman knows too much, is too impacted, by the circumstances that pushed her into the interstitial space between Before and After. There is an exigency within (un)Situatdness that pushes both the (un)Situatd subject and the reader into union. For example, Ammu negotiates with elements of hegemonic authority after Velutha's murder. She has renounced patriarchal authority via her divorcing her alcoholic husband. She has loved a Paravan, knowing of the consequences of her trampling over "the Love Laws." But, she remains ambivalent, agreeing that perhaps Estha does "need a Baba" (31, 286), a "redly dead" (31) expression on her face as the negotiation made between herself and the traditional hegemonic force in which she responds to reveals to be a negotiation in the force's favor. Yet, it is a decision she has no other choice but to make because of her "double" love for Estha and Rahel—a doubled love that points to her double consciousness as both a woman within a postcolonial society as well as a woman who wanted her life to be more than just motherhood ("Ammu grew tired of their [the twins] proprietary

handling of her. She wanted her body back. It was hers” (211). Chacko’s and Baby Kochamma’s interference in her decision to Return Estha may have factored into her decision, but these factors just show the complexity of the third space Ammu inhabits as a woman without community. After all, Ammu pivots, just as Nikki pivoted whenever she doubted herself in *Erotic Stories*, towards the traditional structure she was familiar with as a Keralan Syrian Christian woman. The alienation of her condition, a woman alone with her children in the face of oppressive systems, Ammu has no choice but to negotiate in a way that gives said oppressive systems what they want the most from her without limiting the potential of the beings she loved the most. Therefore, Ammu’s brief subservience to this authority is a survival tactic. She complies because her hand was forced, just as the “unmixable mix” within her compels her to begin her romantic relationship with Velutha. The interconnection between complicity and agency, rebellion and subservience tangle deeply within Ammu so that working out these entanglements are difficult, perhaps even impossible. And, if Ammu’s identities—being as multitudinous and self-referencing as they are—represents the anxieties of, say, the postcolony (e.g.: a renewed woman-as-nation symbol), then the knowledge she has due to her experience within multiple locations is hybridized because Ammu herself is hybridized.

In turn, Rahel, who in *GOST* is treated as Ammu’s twin given their similar stances as women divorced from male outsiders, inherits her mother’s hybridity. Like Ammu, something within Rahel compels to break “the Love Laws”, but the thing that compels her is not an “unmixable mix”, but a need to communicate a grief so immense that the only other person who could possibly understand it would be Estha. Sleeping with Estha breaks a rule dictated by “the Love Laws”, yet “there is very little that anyone could say to clarify what [had happened]. Nothing that (in Mammachi’s book) would separate Sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings”

(310). To be heard, Rahel had to grieve (310) just as to be happy (“Then suddenly, [Ammu] rose from her chair and walked out of her world like a witch. To a better, happier place” (314), Ammu had to give into her desire for Velutha. Both Ammu and Rahel break “the Love Laws”, but for different reasons which align to generational differences between the two. Ammu desires to make a trajectory in her life less known as it was not what laid in the future that bothered Ammu, but the “nature of the road itself” (213)—a road “without milestones mark[ing] its progress” (213). Loving Velutha enables her to pursue that dream as once their affair begins, “the small things” (319) are what matter the most to her now. Where before Ammu’s road “(to Age and Death)” (319) presents nothing worthwhile, now “a small, sunny meadow appear[s]” (319)—a symbol of hope, although short-lived, but hope nonetheless. Meanwhile, Rahel breaks “the Love Laws” again because to make sense of her past, she has to reenact the act that frames *GOST*’s centermost tragedy. Hers is recovery work where she finds a route to breaking free of the grief that encapsulated her—transmuting experience into a reservoir of knowledge. In looking at how the parallels between Ammu and Rahel develop within the text, the most important trait of (un)Situatdness becomes clearer: the need for community.

Ammu is alienated from the Keralan Syrian Christian and Communist ideologies given her skepticism of both outlets. Her only community which embraces her consists of her children and Velutha. Similarly, Rahel, who often worries as a child how much Ammu loves her (“Ammu loving her less” a repeating phrase within the text), seeks community through Estha given that he is the only person who would understand her pain. Ammu passes hybridity to her children, but it is not a positive portrayal of the topic’s liberating aspects. Instead, Ammu’s hybrid heirloom damns her and her children. Rahel and Estha are alive at the end of the text. They are reunited and grieving; however, it is the past, specifically the dead, who indicate a better future.

“Tomorrow” (320) appears to be both a reminder of the joy “the small things” can bring in one’s life as well as a symbol of generational progress. After all, Ammu is concerned with how her memory will be received by future generations: “Ammu worried about madness. Mammachi said it ran in their family... Would future generations say, ‘There was Ammu—Ammu Ipe. Married a Bengali. Went quite mad. Died young. In a cheap lodge somewhere’ ...Ammu gathered up her heavy hair, wrapped it around her face, and peered down the road to Age and Death through its parted strands...” (212). Not to mention, *Chappu Thamburan*, the spider who Ammu and Velutha “[link] their fates, their futures (their Love, their Madness, their Hope, their Infinite Joy)” (320) to, reasserts the text’s optimism towards future generations since the spider, as the living symbol of frailty (320), outlives Velutha. Yet, *GOST* complicates this optimism by showing how the ghosts of the past (e.g.: the History House) makes social betterment difficult for present generations. For example, it is not so much that Rahel is given an opportunity Ammu would have embraced (e.g.: going to university) that illustrates social progress. It is the fact that said example of social progress such as going to university is contextualized within a series of traumatic events: Rahel can go to university because she “grew up without a brief” (17), which the reader can presume originates from her being neglected (“Oddly, neglect seemed to have resulted in an accidental release of the spirit” (17) due to Ammu’s work habits and early death. Yet, Rahel is not an (un)Situated woman. She cannot make a choice between traditional hegemonic authority or liberated spaces. She is born hybridized (“Baby Kochamma disliked [the twins]...Worse still, they were Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry” (44). The third space is all she knows. Unlike Ammu who can choose (and does choose) to inhabit the third space as it presents itself to her.

Therefore, it is best to consider *GOST*'s optimism in its conclusion as a cautious one that both acknowledges the power of generational challenges to traditional power structures while also examining how said power structures imprint trauma onto the lives of the present generation. Ammu's hybrid heirloom, the fruit of knowledge and beingness that she bestows upon her children, is both a blessing and a curse. Had Ammu had the community Nikki and the Southhall widows have in *Erotic Stories*, one that is mutually co-created by those marginalized within a culture, perhaps Ammu's narrative would be different. Then again, the main reason why I am drawn to Ammu as an example of an (un)Situating woman is because of her traits. (un)Situating women are alienated socially, disconnected culturally (due to disempowering interpretations of culture), mobile (being able to "pivot" between one social ideal and another), unlocatable (preferring interstitial or third spaces), and death-embracing (nearly or completely dying). In the previous chapters, I discussed all traits except death which I will now turn my attention.

Death works for (un)Situatingness as a mobilizing force. Ammu dies in *GOST* ultimately because in order for Rahel to make sense of what History causes (via Velutha's death) her guidance as mother must be physically removed. The themes of loss and traumatic cycles due to the lack of interrogation of hegemonic structures like caste resonates because her death circumvents the cautionary imperatives of inter-caste relationships within the novel by providing a warning of what is at stake if casteism is not acknowledged as an omnipresent force within general Indian cultures. As a Syrian Christian, the infiltration of caste is surprising given the narrator's explanation that many Paravans saw Christianity as a way out of their oppression (70). Communism too suffers the same infiltration: "As a reformist movement that never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community. The

Marxists worked *within* the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to. They offered a cocktail revolution” (63). By not overtly and aggressively interrogating caste, these movements fail to distance themselves from oppressive historic practices; therefore, it is ludicrous to assume that casteism is *just* a Hindu idea, something that can be ignored once one converts to another faith or political ideology.

The juxtaposition of Syrian Christianity and Communism as background ideologies capable of supporting casteism shows that the practice is not intrinsically religious or political, although religious and political interests can intersect within it. What it does show is that caste, like gender and race, is an equally weighty social category that is *distinct* from class despite opportunists like Comrade Pillai equating both in his political speeches (“Caste is Class, comrades” (266).) As a woman alienated by both traditional Syrian Christian morals and communist revolutionary promises, Ammu death is not preventable; and, because it is not preventable, her death, like Velutha’s, condemns the historical processes that promise alleviation of caste burdens but fails to do so because of interests in maintaining hegemonic power. Velutha’s murder is violent and cruel. He dies within a day of his injuries. Meanwhile, Ammu’s death was slow and quiet. It takes years for “faraway man shouting” to finally catch up with her; and, once he does, the reader can appreciate just how vulnerable those within third spaces are. Although Aijaz Ahmad of *Frontline* (1997, 2022) sees Ammu’s death as an “unnecessary death [that] is utterly contrived by the author”, I see Ammu’s death as the expected end result of a cautionary tale. As an (un)Situating woman, Ammu’s story imparts knowledge in the past-tense, cautioning of optimistic oversimplifications of just how deep historical power can go.

Meanwhile, in *Erotic Stories*, death works in a similar cautionary manner with the exception of adding a revolutionary intra-community incentive that ensures that similar deaths do

not recur. Nikki survives her assault at the hands of Maya's husband, Jaggi, and his mistress, Tarampal—a character whose near ingratiating complicity with hegemonic power parallels Baby Kochamma in *GOST*. Just as Baby Kochamma frames her manipulations of the twins, Chacko and Mammachi as “saving” the family's lineage, Tarampal complies with Maya's murder because of interest in preserving her status as the devoted wife of a late religious pundit. However, as with Baby Kochamma who, although villainous due to her enthusiastic complicity with oppressive power, is still humanized via the weight of history on women of her generation, Tarampal is given the same treatment. Married to the pundit at ten years old (143), Tarampal does not know how to deconstruct power in the same way as Nikki does. She only agrees with what has been taught to her (e.g. “*Death over dishonour*” (256).) Although Tarampal is never charged for her compliance in Maya's murder (she flees before charges are brought against her (272), the blame of the death of women like Maya and Sheena's friends Karina and Gulshan are on the systems which permit their deaths to become admonitory examples to women within the community of what happens to “rebellious” women. Nikki is saved by women who, like her, live within a third space—her community risking their safety for one of their own.

Although Nikki does not physically die, she is reborn through her renewed interests in ensuring women like Maya, Karina and Gulshan are not forgotten. Nikki's old self, the one who desires to do more for greater society, dies. In turn, Nikki is born anew having seen the depths of just how far uncriticized intra-cultural ideals regarding age and gender roles can result in irreparable changes in the lives of everyone within a community. The murdered women then become a symbol for necessary change within a community—Nikki's determination to speak for those victimized by patriarchal intra-communal violence provides a step in meaningful change. Without Maya, Karina and Gulshan's murders, the true cost of harmful discourses rooted in

traditional hegemonic power will not be fully understood. Thus, by nearly experiencing physical death, Nikki is pushed into purposeful action.

The generational and cultural differences between Ammu and Nikki raise profound questions about the social aspects of death for (un)Situated women. Even though Orlando Patterson uses the phrase “social death” (38) to refer to how cultures justified slave master authority in *Slavery and Social Death* (1982), his insights into how social death takes its shape are particularly useful in understanding death’s role in shaping the lives (un)Situated women. Patterson discusses two “modes” of social death: the intrusive mode and the extrusive mode. Both modes work within a symbolic framework that places the enslaved individual as a representation of malignant otherness (39-42). Patterson explains that “in the intrusive mode of representing social death the slave was ritually incorporated as *the permanent enemy on the inside* [emphasis mine]...He did not and could not belong because he was the product of a hostile, alien culture” (39). Meanwhile, in the extrusive mode, the enslaved person represents the image of a “fallen insider” (41), someone who is forced out of communal belonging because of failing to “meet certain minimal legal or socioeconomic norms of behavior” (41). The goal of both modes of social death is to justify authority through effectively defining the enslaved person as “socially dead” (38), therefore “a nonbeing” (38). What Patterson’s analysis illustrates is how sociocultural factors that create *non-beingness* constructs and reifies the qualities of communal belonging. Without an outsider, there is no insider and vice versa. Just who qualifies for the nonbeing state depends on the specific differences and tolerance for said differences within a community.

Thus, as (un)Situated Women, as others among others, Ammu and Nikki must face the climaxes of their physical and/or social deaths in order to create new spaces for belonging. Both

Ammu and Nikki are the “permanent enem[ies] on the inside” since as cultural outsiders, they do not “fall” from anywhere. Ammu’s “unmixable mix” and “Unsafe Edge” marks her as an outsider incapable or unwilling to understand the sociopolitical stakes of her actions. Likewise, Nikki’s inability to fully embrace the Punjabi-Sikh traditionalism of Southall is a symptom of a similar incapability.

Nevertheless, to ask if Ammu and Nikki are somehow *destined* to be nonbeings within their communities would be to miss the importance of their physical and/or social deaths. As (un)Situated women, they must experience death in order to challenge existing power paradigms. This is because without death, without knowing what makes *being* and *nonbeing* possible within a culture, (un)Situated knowledge is not possible.

As a consequence, by looking at the traits Ammu and Nikki have as (un)Situated women, one can infer that (un)Situated knowledge is obtained through the experiences of those able to exist within multiple spaces as both insiders and outsiders. (un)Situated knowledge then is the full participation of hybridized, mobile subjects within the knowledge-making process in order to usher in radical change “in the real world”, that is the world beyond the page or screen. Although not at all hoping to propose a totalizing, one-size-fits-all approach to analyzing postcolonial feminist novels, my hope is that this analytical framework will be useful in deconstructing, illuminating and, most importantly, opening a conversation, regarding the intersections between situated knowledge and postcolonial feminist theory.

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