

UNTOUCHABLE BODIES: ARUNDHATI ROY'S
CORPOREAL TRANSGRESSIONS

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Touch me and let me touch you, for the private is political.
Trinh T. Minh-ha

Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks
and limits have appeared like a
team of trolls on their separate
horizons.
Arundhati Roy

Abstract

The article discusses the novel *The God of Small Things* (1997), by the Indian writer Arundhati Roy, showing how the author transgresses several social and historical rules in terms of both gender and race issues in the context of the postcolonial and caste based society in which it takes place.

Keywords: postcolonialism – transgression – the body politic

Resumo

O artigo discute o romance *The God of Small Things* (1997), da escritora indiana Arundhati Roy, mostrando como a autora transgride várias regras sociais e históricas em termos de questões de gênero e raça no contexto de uma

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sociedade pós-colonial e baseada em castas, na qual a estória acontece.

Palavras-chave: pós-colonialismo – transgressão – corpo político

When Arundhati Roy's first novel, *The God of Small Things*, came out in 1997 it was surrounded by an enormous controversy regarding the substantial amount of money the writer had received for the copyright of the book before it was even completed. Winning the Booker Prize in the same year put Roy even more in the spotlight and contributed to the emergence of an array of criticism of her work. On the one hand, some critics attributed the considerable popularity of the novel to the marketing ability and manipulation of the media by the editors and publishers. On the other, there were those who hailed Roy as a female "Rushdie," whose work would substantially add to the deeply commodified market of third-world literatures in English. Meanwhile, others focused on the deemed subversive sexual content of the book, which resulted in Roy's being faced with a lawsuit for portraying immorality – an astounding occurrence for contemporary Western standards (implausible even for Indian patterns; after all, as critics point out, India is the country of the Kama Sutra). Still others delved into the unfavorable portrayal of the Kerala Marxists in the novel, which enraged leftist thinkers, including the renowned critic Aijaz Ahmad.

No matter how one looks at it, Roy's *The God of Small Things* stirred diverse forms of reactions that reflect not only the nature of the narrative produced but also the social-historical issues related to the author's locus of enunciation, the mode of production that was responsible for the abiding success of the book, the politics the novel sponsored, and the gender of the author. Undeniable, however, is the strength, uniqueness and beauty of Roy's style and the response the novel drew from readers all over the world. Even a harsh critic such as Ahmad is forced to acknowledge that *The God of Small Things* is "possibly the most polished novel we have had in the language so far" and that Roy "may well have written the most accomplished, the most moving novel by an Indian author in English" (103). Apart from all the controversy it generated, Roy's novel approaches issues that are inherent

to an understanding of the mechanisms of exclusion and abuse in repressive systems. These can be observed in terms of both gender and race issues in the context of the postcolonial and caste based Indian society.

In *The God of Small Things* Roy ingeniously exposes and denounces the politics of the subaltern through questions of corporeality, gender and race positioning. She does so, however, in a way that escapes facile dichotomous divisions and obvious essentialist oppositions. At the core of her critique is a social and cultural system that not only stifles individual freedom and social mobility but also, and above all, represses the expressions of the body and the discourses of desire. This work discusses how Arundhati Roy builds a narrative that focuses on bodily encounters that defy authoritative discourses and function as frontiers of cultural and social contacts. "Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits" (5) are depicted as loci devised by a web of socio-historical relations that the narrative undermines and revises. Through the discursive construction of characters that remain outside the social structure for different reasons, Roy creates a context of intercultural dialogue in which the body as such becomes not only the mediator of this interaction but also the means through which a transgression of social and cultural codes are enacted. Roy's characters, both male and female, and their various forms of displacement, question the cultural inscriptions of the "disembodied" body, thus giving evidence to the permeability of the corporeal entities that are inevitably socially regulated. In this context, the issues of corporeality acquire a meaning that is determined by social restrictions and limitations which in Roy's narrative become invested with other and distinctive meanings. By questioning traditional concepts of the body politic, Roy produces a narrative that moves beyond the visible politics of exclusion in a postcolonial context and open venues to possible destabilizing readings of issues of gender and race, and questions of corporeality.

The origin of the notion of the "body politic" as a metaphor for the visualization of society as a coherent and whole organism goes back to philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Seneca (Bordo, "Power"

251). Implicit in this concept is the belief in this body as an essentially masculine, white and heterosexual entity, and, therefore, idealized, normalized,¹ and pre-determined. Along these lines, Moira Gatens concludes that the political body “conceived historically as the organization of many bodies into one body . . . would itself enhance and intensify the powers and capacities of specifically male bodies” (“Power” 230). This ingrained concept leads eventually to an emphasis on the masculinization of the public space in bodily terms (Rose 364). However, rather than being a neutral object, as several critics have since pointed out, the human body is a signified and material body, one upon which social and historical elements are inscribed. It is, above all, as Foucault claims, a discursive construction.² Or as many feminist critics have pointed out, following Foucault’s lead, “it is the female body above all that is constructed and marked in such a way” (Price and Shildrick 8). This gendered concept of the “politics of the body” as a new version of the old “body politic” acknowledges the power of the body as a politically inscribed entity and visualizes the female body no longer as a colonized territory but rather as a locus of individual self-determination (Bordo, “Feminism” 250-51).

Dismantled by this critique of the body politic is also the age-old Cartesian logic that fosters the opposition between the mind and body and its more famous correlate – culture and nature, respectively. As historically highlighted, the former traditionally embodies the positive values of rationality and progress while the latter is negatively associated with emotion and feelings. This dichotomy becomes especially conceived in gendered terms in the sense that the devalued terms – that is, the body and nature – become essentially associated with the feminine. Such correlative does not hold in the present critique of the body politic because under examination is the concept that the body/nature is itself a product of culture, not a mere basis for opposition. The body is not a given “natural” against which culture can be measured, but rather, it is itself a cultural construct (Waugh 175).

As seen in these two historical readings of the notion of the body as a metaphor, no matter how one looks at it, either as a socially regulated

entity ("the body politic") or as the devalued term in a binary system ("the split mind/body"), the excluded term is always the one that does not conform to a norm or pattern to be followed. This normative embodiment results in a configuration in which those who do not conform with a set of norms are excluded not only on grounds of gender, but also on grounds of race, sexuality, and class. In other words, whatever is "different," "other" from a pattern of normalization becomes a site of repression and exclusion, but, as other critics claim, it also ultimately a potential for transgression. To this extent, the Foucautian notion of power on the body recognizes that resistance is a central counterpoint of power as there is the possibility for bodies to creatively resist power (Bordo, "Feminism" 254-55). Seen in a new light, the body as a discursive entity that is marked by issue of gender, race and class, has the potential of evoking resistance in the very locus of its oppression. Indeed, resistance begins when we dismantle the notion of the body as a unifying entity. As Spivak reminds us, "there is no possible outline of the body as such" because the body is imbued with a variety of value codings (149). The body as such cannot be thought in the sense that there is an endless array of sliding categories, besides that of sex/gender, that mark its configurations in terms of race, class, age, etc., thus rendering it unstable and subversively ambiguous as an analytical category.

The God of Small Things is particularly a novel about resistance in and through the body. It is how, despite the exclusions from normalizing effects of the body politic, transgression comes precisely from that which has been repressed, as something that, in Freudian terms, always comes back. In fact, Roy herself states in one of her interviews that her work is not about history, but rather about biology and transgression ("For me" 46). Her text foregrounds two major corporeal transgressions that lie, on the one hand, at the core of the cultural contract and, on the other, at a specific prohibition that involves the social relations of Hindu customs and Indian society. Significantly, Roy's narrative unfolds "a time when the unthinkable became thinkable and the impossible really happened" (31).

Rahel, the consciousness through which most of the narrative is filtered, tells us that it all began because Ammu (her mother), Estha (her twin brother), and herself broke the "Love Laws." In fact, she points out that to say that it all began when Solphie Mol, her uncle Chacko's English daughter, arrived is just one side of the story because:

Equally, it could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. Long before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar, before the Dutch Ascendency, before Vasco da Gama arrived, before the Zamorin's conquest of Calicut. Before three purpled robed Syrian bishops murdered by the Portuguese were found floating in the sea. . . . It could be argued that it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag. That it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much. (33)

The narrative may not be specifically about "history" because, as the above quote shows, the laws that regulate the narrative predate the historical events related to India as a nation. The issues addressed in the novel are at the basis of human relations in terms of rules based on biology and customs that are not supposed to be transgressed. At the same time that Roy negates the force of history in shaping her narrative, she cannot avoid enumerating the series of historical events that have marked the construction of the nation, and that of her very narrative as well. After all, we learn from the narrator that "history negotiates in terms and collects its dues from those who break its laws" (54). History, transgressions, biology, laws are some of the issues that continually interact in the construction of this family saga.

Although *The God of Small Things* has as the central argument the transgression of ancient laws, the colonial and postcolonial history of India intermingles with individual stories, emphasizing what feminist critics have observed for a while, that is, that the private can

also be political. As the narrative voice states: "That something [the transgression] happened when personal turmoil dropped by at the wayside shrine of the vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible, public turmoil of a nation" (20). Furthermore, the central personal episodes around which the narrative moves, that is, Solphie Mol's death and Ammu's unthinkable love affair, happen in or around what the twins call "The History House." History here has an alternative meaning described to the twins by their uncle Chacko as an "old house at night with all the lamps lit. And the ancestors whispering inside" (51). The twins instantly connect this metaphoric version of history to the abandoned house on the other side of the river that belonged to Kari Saipu ("Ayemenem's Kurtz") around which most of the tragic events take place. History in this case comes to comprise a series of individualized stories of transgression that underlie the likely "Official Version" of history that will eventually prevail in the narrative (287).

The first "Love Law" to be transgressed is a cultural, social, and historical one that lies deeply ingrained in Indian customs. Not only does this transgression eliminate the barriers between the rigid caste system in Indian society but it also explores the "unthinkable" in their societal norms, that is, it tampers with the rules about who can be touched and who cannot. It crosses "into forbidden territory" (31). This episode, around which most of the story revolves, describes a relationship between Ammu, the mother of the two-egg twins with "the single Siamese soul," who belongs to the affluent class of Syrian Christians, and Velutha (ironically, a word that means White in Malayalam), the Untouchable black carpenter, the God of Small Things (and also the "God of Loss"), who works for her family. According to a Hindu tradition that goes back to 1200 BC, Untouchables remain outside the caste system and are considered to be polluted, in a permanent state of impurity, and are therefore not to be touched by members of the caste system. Seen in this light, Ammu commits the ultimate transgression in cultural terms by daring to touch an Untouchable. Viewed in gendered terms, the situation has stronger resonance because in Indian society it is considered a more serious offence for an upper caste woman to be

polluted by interacting sexually with an Untouchable than it would be for a man. After all, as Leela Dube reminds us, according to customs, “[s]uperior seed can fall on an inferior field but an inferior seed cannot fall on a superior field” (qtd. in Khushu-Lahiri 116). This tradition explains the gender biased standard exposed in the novel when Mammachi, Ammu’s mother, accepts the fact that Chacko, her son, has “Men’s Needs” that are fulfilled by the female factory workers. Ammu’s rejection of the laws, however, is not tolerated by her family and she pays the price for the defiance with her own life.

Throughout the narrative Ammu is portrayed as a transgressor at heart, as somebody who has an “Unsafe Edge,” an “air of unpredictability,” “the unmixable mix” (306), “the infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber,” somebody who lives “in the penumbral shadows between two worlds, just beyond the grasp of their power” (44). She chooses her own husband outside their social circle and against her family wishes, and later when he becomes abusive she divorces him, being, thereafter, forced to go back unwelcomed to live with her family, taking along her twin children. Ammu chooses to defy a patriarchal social code through which women are mere tokens of exchange and by doing so she rewrites the narrative of the traffic in women, even if it is at a high cost for herself and her children.³ For her utmost subversion, however, she is punished in the same way that so many other transgressive heroines in the past were: through the hysterization of the body⁴:

Little Ammu.

Who never completed *her* corrections.

Who had to pack her bags and leave. Because she had no
Locusts Stand I. . . . Who came back to Ayemenem with
asthma and a rattle in her chest that sounded like a faraway
man shouting. . . .

Wild. Sick. Sad. . . . She said she felt like a road sign with birds
sitting on her. She had an odd, feverish glitter in her eyes. (151-53)

After the affair is disclosed and Velutha dies, Ammu has to face the utter rejection of her family and society. She does not have any plans, any *locus standi* – or “Locusts Stand I,” as Rahel refers to it – in her present environment. Forced to give up one child – Estha, who is “Returned” to his father – and to leave town, Ammu enacts the suffering of segregation and rejection precisely through the repression of the body. The body as a surface, this case as a text of femininity and as such a site of regulatory practices, makes the predictable shift: the body in pleasure becomes, by repression and frustration, the body in pain.⁵ Ammu eventually dies alone in a hotel room when the “faraway man inside her began to shout” but this time “the steely fist never loosened its grip” (154). A question lingers in the air: did Ammu commit suicide? Nevertheless, in my reading, the embodiment of her pain becomes for Ammu a potential site of struggle through a form of resistance in sickness. Such attitude can be viewed, as Bordo observes, as a form of protest, one that, however, surfaces often as “counterproductive, tragically self-defeating (indeed, self-deconstructing)” (“The Body” 99). The ambiguity of a representation of the body in pain as a form of resistance has plagued women for many centuries but my interest here lies in the ways this narrative builds an entire system of ambiguous symbolic structures around the image of the body – in this case, a culturally and socially inscribed female body. Ammu’s body in pain is in due course her escape and destruction – her escape from a life of repression and her destruction through her death as “other.”

In a similar vein, Velutha suffers the consequences of their transgression of the “Love Laws” through the repression of the body. Like Ammu, he perceives their experience in terms of bodily sensations: the Untouchable body that has subversively been touched experiences pleasure and, as a consequence, unbearable pain. The body in pain for Velutha, however, partakes of a different economy from that undergone by Ammu’s body. If Ammu’s experience of the hysterization of the body is informed by gender patterns, Velutha’s is conditioned by racial and class issues. His body is excluded from the caste system for his cultural heritage and corporeal specificities becoming thus a

“delegitimated” body that fails to count as a body *per se* (Butler 243). To some extent, “the mortgaged body parts” of Vellya Paapen, Velutha’s father – the glass eye Mammachi gives him which he feels he has to pay off with his life – becomes a recurrent reference in the novel that highlights the delegitimated body of untouchability. Gatens reminds us that throughout history different peoples, such as slaves, foreigners, women, the conquered, have been excluded from the social pact “by virtue of their corporeal specificity” (“Corporeal Representation” 83). This accounts for the ancient custom, constantly referred to in the novel, for the Untouchables to be expected “to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints” (71), that is, erasing their bodily marks. Likewise, this Untouchable body of the subaltern is completely swept away, erased from hegemonic historical accounts, and from the “Official Version.” Velutha’s body leaves “no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors” (250). Interestingly, the metaphor of the erased footprints returns in the novel in a different context. Ammu’s family is defined as Anglophiles who are “[p]ointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away” (51). We can conclude that the erasure of bodily marks excludes one from history and that in a hierarchical scheme of social relations the Untouchables are for the upper caste Indians what these in turn are for the colonizer – bodily absences in official historical accounts. Roy exposes here the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in the complex structure of colonial and postcolonial relations in the sense that there is a constant sliding of categories of power and dominance.

Velutha becomes the scapegoat for a series of incidents that occurs in the novel fabricated to incriminate him: the drowning of Solphie Mol, the disappearance of the twins, and the attempted rape of Ammu. The scene in which he is physically tortured by the police is graphically described in repulsive details intended to shock. It shows the infliction of bodily pain by emblematically opposing the silence of the corporeal subject being tortured and the voice of the speaking subject, the torturer:

If they hurt Velutha more than they intended to, it was only because any kinship, any connection between themselves and him, any implication that if nothing else, at least biologically he was a fellow creature – had been severed long ago. They were not arresting a man, they were exorcising fear. They had no instrument to calibrate how much punishment he could take. No means of gauging how much or how permanently they had damaged him. . . . They were merely inoculating a community against an outbreak. (293)

In this scene the narrative voice intentionally focuses on the thoughts, deeds and conversation of the Touchable police and entirely suppresses Velutha's consciousness and voice. Since torture has the power to destroy language, throughout the violent scene until his death in the next episode, Velutha himself remains mute and vacant, completely absent from the narrative and the official version of history that is released afterwards. Only his maimed, shattered, delegitimated body is exposed in its destruction in graphic details. The dynamics of this opposition between the torturer and the tortured in terms of voice and body is an enactment of the power relations portrayed in the novel. As Bakare-Yusuf observes, "For the torturer, the awareness of voice confirms his power, his existence, the presence of a world; for the sufferer, the absence of a world, the awareness of his/her corporeality, the limit of his/her extension in the world" (316).⁶ Likewise, Ammu's encounter with the policemen responsible for Velutha's death also recreates the image of the abused body of the silenced subaltern in confrontation with the voice as a sign of power. She goes to the police station to tell them that Velutha had not tried to rape her as her aunt had claimed and receives the following response: "'If I were you,' he said, 'I'd go home quietly.' Then he tapped her breasts with his baton. Gently. Tap tap. As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket. Pointing out the ones that he wanted packed and delivered. Inspector Thomas Mathew seemed to know whom he would pick on and whom he wouldn't. Policemen had that instinct" (10). The objectification of

Ammu's body, her being called a *veshya* (the Malayalam word for prostitute), and her inability to argue verbally with the policeman add to a web of power relations in which the transgressive subaltern is devoid of individuality, corporeality and voice in political terms. Both Ammu and Velutha bear in corporeal terms the brunt of the silenced subaltern historically victimized for gender and racial reasons.

The bodily transgression carried out by Ammu and Velutha and punished by the specific experiences of their body in pain and their deaths foreshadows yet another major transgression. This time, however, the subversive act goes beyond the confines of a society based on the caste system and exposes deeper ingrained myths of human behavior. It refers to how the twins ultimately also break the "Love Laws." After being separated for twenty-three years, Rahel and Estha finally meet and wind up sharing their angst, anger, and despair. While their great aunt, Baby Kochama, watches the Western show *Prime Bodies* on TV, the twins try to overcome their sorrow, emptiness, and isolation through bodily contacts. Here is the scene that describes their violation of the Law:

But what was there to say?

Only that there were tears. Only that Quietness and Emptiness fitted together like stacked spoons. . . . Only that they held each other close, long after it was over. Only that what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief.

Only that once again they broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much. (311)

The law that the twins break is none other than the age-old taboo of incest prohibition. As Lèvi-Strauss has argued extensively, the incest prohibition has a regulatory status in that it is a cultural intervention in a natural system devised to ensure the social organization of a group.⁷ In a state of nature before the interdiction of the law, inbreeding is a common practice that regulates the self-sufficiency of the family. By

breaking the law at its most culturally sacred norm (and undermining the culture/nature split), the twins not only re-enact their mother's transgression but also shatter social customs and societal laws to the core by committing the ultimate act of cultural negation. While Baby Kochama watches a Western version of idealized bodily encounters in the TV show *Prime Bodies*, Estha and Rahel build their own version of interaction and healing, through the sharing and the contact of their bodies, fitting perfectly like spoons, like their Siamese souls. In fact, this act can only be described towards the end when it becomes apparent that they have very little to lose in societal terms. After being emotionally destroyed, separated, and rejected by their social milieu, Estha, "Quietness," becomes entirely mute and alien to the world around him, while Rahel, "Emptiness," drifts aimlessly around the world. In the end, "the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other" (21). Emblematically, when their re-encounter happens they are both thirty-one, "a viable die-able age" (310), precisely Ammu's age when she died. Are we to expect that they will have the same fate as their mother and her lover? It is also relevant that after the twins' transgression the narrative turns, for the first time, to the highly erotic depiction of the sexual encounter between Ammu and Velutha. Although their law-breaking is referred to throughout the novel and serves as the vortex around which the narrative turns, only now in the end, under a chapter symbolically entitled "The Cost of Living," do we have a glimpse of what really goes on between them – the passion and beauty they share. At this point Roy focuses on the discourse of desire and the pleasures of the body in terms of metaphors of touch and bodily contact.

Ahmad criticizes Roy for employing standard conventions of European fiction to portray bodily love and sexual relations and for placing emphasis on the erotic as a private transgression to account for political injustices (104-05). However, Ahmad fails to note that Roy does not create a dichotomy around such terms as public and private. Nor does she expose eroticism and bodily love as mere private matters. In breaking with such dichotomous thinking as it has prevailed in Western criticism, Roy produces a narrative that unsettles preconceived

notions of the love, sexuality, and bodily encounters. As Audre Lorde reminds us, the erotic is a form of power for women in that it contests male models of power precisely by bringing the private into the public area (1-10). To some extent, Ahmad's criticism of Roy's use of the erotic may be perceived as a male biased view of the erotic as a sign of female inferiority and unacceptable social behavior. On the contrary, by concluding with this highly erotic and poetic account of a sexual encounter, the narrative ending provides a redemptive tone that is reinforced by the evocation of the word "*Naaley*" (which means "tomorrow" in Malayalam), spoken by the two lovers, Ammu and Velutha. In a movement that mirrors the previous scene, it might also refer to the twins. However, the narrative leaves the reader to ponder upon the outcome of the twins' lives. There is no closure in this re-enactment of the transgression of the Love Laws.

It becomes manifest in both cases that transgression is triggered by the intervention and volition of the female characters – Ammu and Rahel – while the male characters play the culturally reversed role of the seduced ones. This reversal is carried out even further by the obvious femininization of these male characters: Velutha dies wearing Rahel's nail varnish and Estha, after his "Return," does household chores for his father and stepmother. While the narrative apparently moves away from the gender issues by including the male characters in the frame of bodily transgression, the fact that they become invested with "feminine" traits redirects the focus towards the gender issue. This emasculation of males becomes a pre-requisite for them to join a mode of transgression, which in this case belongs to the female realm as a potential site of power struggles. Their femininization also functions as a mocking enactment of gender stereotypes showing how the notions of gender are constructed or performed. The policemen who tortured Velutha make fun of him for being a homosexual or transvestite because of his painted nails, while Estha's father and stepmother are embarrassed by the fact that he assumes a typically feminine role. This evident inversion of roles simultaneously lessens the power of the male characters and rescues the female characters from victimization by

associating transgression to a symbolically feminine sphere. Accordingly, the issue of power relations in the novel remains focused around gender aspects. The attribute of femininity relates to powerless and oppression in a long-established colonial and postcolonial context; yet, in Roy's narrative it also figures as the locus of transgression and resistance.

The construction of the narrative extends this notion of the feminine as a central expression of alterity, but also of strength and desire, to the depiction of the body. While in a way glorifying the female body in all its possibilities and potential, Roy mocks the male body in its attempt to convey power that it does not really possess. If the political body is inevitably masculine, as critics have argued, then Roy, by mocking the masculine body, is also undermining its power and norm as the pattern to be followed in a patriarchal society. This becomes obvious in the scenes when Ammu's and Rahel's bodies are poetically and sensually described, as opposed to the caricature of Comrade Pillai who shows "his balls silhouetted against his soft white mundu" (15).⁸ The description of Estha's and Velutha's bodies, however, are equally treated with the reverence devoted to Rahel's and Ammu's bodies.

In the case of Ammu and Velutha the private experience of bodies in contact acquires a political connotation for Kerala society. Their transgression unsettles the fragile balance in which their social and cultural bases stand. Rahel and Estha's rejection of the sacred laws while still intimate and private represents a transgression in cultural terms and a return to natural states before the establishment of the laws of culture. Faced with issues of power, the characters express the potential for resistance in and through the body. It is their attempt to reject that which has been responsible for their demise and destruction as human beings. The split body/culture as well as the notion of the masculinized body politic is undermined in the narrative. Rather, what remains is the body's potential for transgression in the very locus of its oppression: after all the transgression was only possible because there was first a prohibition based on cultural terms, either caste mixture or incest prohibition. In the end, the most oppressed version of the body in culture – the female body – defies culture and rejects victimization.

Yet, Roy's narrative of cultural appropriation and mimicry leaves an uncertain hope for the future: *Naaley*.

Notes

- 1 use the notion of "normalization" in the sense that Bordo does, that is, as "those modes of acculturation which work by setting up standards or 'norms' against which individuals continually measure, judge, 'discipline' and 'correct' their behaviour and presentation of self" ("Feminism" 255).
- 2 Bordo contends that, rather than originating with Foucault or the post-structuralist thinkers, the notion of the body as a site of power struggles is a feminist argument that dates as far back as Mary Wollstonecraft's influential essay of 1792 ("Feminism" 248).
- 3 For a analysis of "the traffic in women" see Rubin (1975) and also Waugh (1989).
- 4 The term refers back to the old-age relation between hysteria (the Greek word for womb) and women.
- 5 Bakakre-Yusuf in her analysis of the slave experience as an embodied phenomenon observes that the body as surface comprises a double-edged experience "a surface that can experience and be inflicted with pain, tortured and terrorized, but also a surface that can be pleased and is pleasuring" (314).
- 6 For an account of the body in pain, see Scarry (1985).
- 7 See Lèvi-Strauss (1969) for a discussion of the cultural nature of the incest taboo and Khushu-Lahiri (1999) for a treatment of incest taboo in *The God of Small Things*. Derrida (1978) rereads Rousseau's discussion of the incest prohibition pointing out a lacuna in Rousseau's texts because he does not acknowledge the existence of incest before the law was conceived: "Before the festival, there was no incest because there was no prohibition of incest and no society. After festival there is no more incest because it is forbidden" (260). Satpathy reads Roy's novel as an appropriation and subversion of Rousseau and as an enactment of Derrida's critique (138-41).
- 8 George (1999) draws attention to Roy's mockery of male anatomy, observing that she "mocks the norm: the belief that viewing the genitals of the opposite sex is an instant turn-on for the woman as it is for the man" (75).

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