

**MISFIT COMMODITIES: THE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN MAGICAL
REALISM AND NEOLIBERAL PRODUCTIVITY**

by

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ABSTRACT

My thesis analyzes two magical realist novels, Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, to explore how they rebel against cultural expectations set by global neoliberal capitalism.

Neoliberalism has impacted our world as David Harvey calls "a guide to all human action," signifying that it is not only an economic force but a cultural one that seeks to replace old systems and institutions (Harvey 3). From this, neoliberalism enforces a set of expectations geared towards economic productivity, like colonialism years and centuries before. The neoliberal reality, while offering a more diverse set of players and beneficiaries often implements these expectations in ways to exploit human labor. Often, these expectations are to be compliant workers, to be model immigrants by making economic contributions to the new country, to be excessively controlling when in a position of power, and to maintain archaic gender roles.

Magical realism as an art form, seeks to have its characters let go of these expectations and proposes other ways for humans to live. *Tropic of Orange* and *The God of Small Things* have many characters who fail to be productive workers and, more importantly, stray from the model narratives expected of them as immigrants from Third World to First World countries. These novels also provide examples, and rebellion, of these expectations infiltrated into family life and gender relations, usually to do with maintaining patriarchy and sexual passivity in women.

Magical realism uses fantastic events to literalize the invisible pain of its characters and provides solutions for their plights. The larger work of this genre goes parallel with decolonization, what Walter Mingolo describes as an "undoing" of exploitative capitalist norms and "redoing" with more humane values (Mingolo 83).

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to explore a dichotomy between productivity and antithetical uselessness present in the literary genre of magical realism, with primary examples being Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*. This thesis argues that global neoliberal capitalism is an extension of colonialism, with the goal to economize everything involving the human condition. The texts I discuss take place within postcolonial nations, in the sense that the areas had once been colonized by Europeans and still experience exploitative economic measures from which they are technically supposed to be freed. Combatting neoliberalism thus requires decolonization, which Walter Mignolo describes as a "double critique" against the colonizing forces of modernization. Modernization was not only "linked to the civilizing mission" in the nineteenth century, but also "in the nineties...linked to globalization and market ideology" (Mignolo 83).

Neoliberalism has taken complete hold of the global economy and is characterized by David Harvey as "political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (Harvey 2)." This institutional framework is kept as unregulated as possible, giving similar freedoms to entrepreneurship that colonization once had with the installation of neoliberal governments in places such as Chile and Iraq (Harvey 7). Neoliberalism also feeds global systemic inequality

through black markets such as the global organ trade. In the late 1970s—around the same time as the growth of neoliberalism—and continuing today, postcolonial theory has developed to respond culturally to the wake of colonialism and the colonizing effects of neoliberalism today.

When people analyze cultural objects that critique colonialism and its effects, “postcolonial” is the most frequent term they use. Postcolonialism is treated by many, including Arif Dirlik, as a branch of postmodernism that describes how neoliberalism decentralizes economic hierarchy. The globality of neoliberal economics and the focus on entrepreneurship has created a wide variety of players in the global market, players that would not be as powerful under colonialism. The totalizing nature of neoliberalism creates exploitative, or as I will say, **commodifying** practices in human life, from the monetary exchange of human organs, as researched by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and *Organs Watch*, to the cost benefits of cheap, immigrant labor (Caufield 65). David Harvey argues that postmodernism is the development of the ‘temporary contract’ provided by decentralized neoliberalism over previous institutions, headed by Europe and the United States.

The process of neoliberalization has, however, entailed much ‘creative destruction’, not only of prior institutional frameworks and powers (even challenging traditional forms of state sovereignty) but also of divisions of labor, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and habits of the heart. In so far as neoliberalism values market exchange as ‘an ethic in itself,

capable of acting as a guide to all human action, and substituting it for all previously held ethical beliefs’, it emphasizes the significance of contractual relations in the marketplace (Harvey 3).

Dirlik argues that while shaped by Eurocentrism, neoliberalism will provide “cultural fragmentation” that offers alternative institutions outside of western thought (Dirlik 350). Today, this is truer than ever, with the increasing economic significance of BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—all countries previously in the old categories of the Second and the Third World. So, this is how postmodernism—or postcolonialism—is reacting to and destabilizing old global power structures, but does simply having more players change the destructive principles of the structures? Harvey argues that postmodernism provides a “temporary contract” (Harvey 4) that replaces old systems, but does that erase the characteristically exploitative nature of colonialism? Mignolo argues that the colonial side of neoliberalism acts as a “double bind” between “assimilation” and “marginalization” (Mignolo 83). Capitalism may need a diverse market for competition, but diverse players eventually need to assimilate to capitalism’s core principles to survive in its world.

Magical realism does not simply challenge Eurocentrism, but the systems of inequality that persist from these old systems, no matter who adopts them. Dirlik himself agrees that no matter how global and postcolonial capitalism can be, Eurocentrism has always been a product of capitalism and will remain one (Dirlik 350). I argue that this sense of European superiority through association with previous

colonizers, whether through history or practice, is what remains and keeps exploiting the most vulnerable. Magical realism recognizes this complexity, as there are many Third World villains of the novels I have mentioned here, from Mexican organ traders in *Tropic of Orange* to the Ipes themselves in *The God of Small Things*. Magical realism reacts against the commodification of humans and their institutions by destabilizing productivity, deconstructing what Harvey's refers to as "acting as a guide to all human action." When this guide is deconstructed, you then destabilize the commodification of people's identity and history in the "cultural fragmentation" that happens in the need for global capitalist competition. In *The God of Small Things*, the Ipe family's status as "Anglophiles" is destroyed, and now they cannot return to old institutions after the implementation of cultural commodification and the "temporary contract" that they helped implement. In *Tropic of Orange*, real indigenous institutions invade the "multicultural" Los Angeles. Magical realism provides a framework for demonstrating that the Third World should not have to participate in the race to the bottom in order to be free of subordination. In so doing, magical realist texts complete the work of decolonization, what Mignolo and Abdelkebir Khatibi define as "an undoing and redoing: an undoing (double critique) of colonial difference and a redoing...as the ground of future epistemologies and political projects" (Mignolo 83). What magical realism seeks to undo and redo manifests in multiple ways, from exploitation of cheap labor, to maintaining gender roles in order to produce as many future laborers as possible, to maintaining certain narratives of history that show capitalism in a beneficial light, allowing it to continue.

The upending and the failure of these practices is frequent in magical realism. The genre's most famous example, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, is a story of people trying to escape commodification and imperialism, only to have it creep into their world nonetheless. Yuri Herrera's *Signs Preceding the End of the World* imagines the dehumanizing process of migrating from Mexico into the United States as a journey to the underworld, from the perspective of one young woman trying to retrieve her brother. In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the differing perspectives surrounding Indian history by colonizers and natives seek to memorialize it for either political or commodifiable purposes. In Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*, the identity of immigrants or Latin American natives is often commercialized with American capitalist ideals to serve as either positive examples or cautionary tales.

Magical realism has the extra quality of being a genre in literature and art that has begun and flourished within repressed societies. The term was first used by Franz Roh in the Weimar Republic as a parallel to surrealism. Alejo Carpentier, while studying in Europe, applied this term to his poetry, wanting to encapsulate the imperialized and revolutionized Cuban society; he later became an influence for Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Bowers 9). Magical realism allows for many subversions of oppressive societies, from creating fantastic events to help people escape oppressive realities to upending more subconscious views of the world which colonization has instilled. In a review of *Nazif-al-Hajar*, a magical realist work from Libya, Miriam Cooke notes how the protagonist, Asuf, is able to turn into a mythical sheep to outrun soldiers during the country's occupation by Italy (Cooke 15). Similarly, *Tropic of*

Orange leaves an entire freeway unusable and the abandoned cars soon become shelter for the city's homeless. At the same time, magical realism leaves us with an odd taste in our mouths because of how disorderly it is, and in this case, how unproductive it is. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, through its magical realism, offers many examples that counter productivity ideals on both small and large scales, from an entire orange supply being poisoned to a janitorial worker's struggle to achieve his version of the American dream. Likewise, familial and sexual relationships structured towards productivity are rendered useless through a lack of patriarchal leadership, infertility, and female assertiveness. Both *Tropic of Orange* and *The God of Small Things* reflect these outcomes through their own takes on magical realism.

Chapter 1

USELESS WORKERS, BROKEN COMMODITIES

Many of the characters in *Tropic of Orange* and *The God of Small Things* fail at postmodern expectations to let neoliberal productivity guide their actions and compartmentalize their identities. Both these works have specific writing techniques that penetrate these deeper-rooted variables and portray quite literally more imperceptible realities of the postcolonial world. When people's lives and entire societies are being controlled and validated according to how they can produce goods and labor, the characters' failure, or their uselessness, provides a subversion of neoliberalism.

Tropic of Orange has a direct way of using magical realism to revise power structures in order to empower the subaltern. The novel, written in 1997, centers its events in the context of The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the foundational neoliberal trade agreement implemented just three years earlier, and critiques directly what Harvey describes as the replacement of all old institutions with neoliberalism. It tells this story in a number of different ways, from personifying NAFTA, to providing fantastical solutions to the most disadvantaged people, to focusing more on the personal situations of the main characters.

The biggest plot arc in the novel occurs when a Los Angeles freeway shuts down indefinitely. The freeway is the center of most of the action in the novel since it carries utmost significance in the transportation of commodities. One of the characters is Manzanar, a homeless man who gives himself the profession of conducting what he

terms as the music of the freeway. He calls it “a great root system, an organic living entity. It was nothing more than a great writhing concrete dinosaur and nothing less than the greatest orchestra on Earth” (Yamashita 37). In another passage with him, he “understood the nature of the truck-beast, whose purpose was to transport the great products of civilization: home and office appliances, steel beams and turbines, fruits, vegetables, meats, and grain, Coca-Cola and Sparkletts, Hollywood sets, this fall’s fashions, military hardware, gasoline, concrete, and garbage.” (Yamashita 120). In her chapter “Karen Tei Yamashita’s Los Angeles, Tropic of Orange,” Melanie U Pooch highlights how cars and roads are a large hallmark of American culture and freedom, symbolizing mobility and a network of governance in a decentralized, “global city” (Pooch 170). The freeway is also a network that carries commodities maintaining global wealth, happiness, and freedom—that is, at least in Los Angeles.

Oranges can be seen as a stand in for commodities in the United States, particularly commodities that are created in a subaltern world, like Latin America. Products like orange juice have a uniquely American connotation to them, and the oranges that Yamashita mentions in her novel are, ironically, grown in Latin America or in places influenced by Latin America, such as Florida and California. The oranges immediately get corrupted by what can also be considered a symbol of American consumerism: cocaine. Ironically, the same drug associated with business elites and a luxurious lifestyle that the world is supposed to be striving for ends up spiraling it out of control. Because the cocaine infusion was done by Brazilian narcotraffickers, the fears of white America of the black market start this destruction of above-ground

capitalism. The backing up of the Los Angeles Freeway occurs once two men eat them and die while driving on the Los Angeles freeway, it gets closed up. We get to see the true nature of Yamashita's work when both these trophies of the American Dream—the freeway and the oranges—are rendered useless and are replaced by less commodifiable alternatives. After the destruction of the orange industry, the passionfruit is taken in as the new commodity fruit, despite being very complicated and inaccessible to eat. The events that cause the most upheaval in the novel, though, are brought about by the last corrupted orange on the planet, a small unripe one that is connected to the Tropic of Cancer. This orange is then picked up by a mysterious performance artist named Arcangel, who recognizes its specific destiny as the last commodity on earth. He marches with the orange while the orange carries the Tropic of Cancer itself, manifested as a gossamer line, to a battle in Los Angeles.

These commodities hold a great sway over the world of *Tropic of Orange* at the beginning of the novel, but that changes once the Los Angeles Freeway loses its crucial momentum. Seeing no solution to the issue, the people in their cars eventually leave and they are replaced by the city's homeless looking for shelter. From the cars that they live in and the transported goods still in these trucks, the homeless are able to create an alternate society. The commodities of food and clothes and car radios get turned back into resources, things people survive off of. If, according to Marx, a commodity is “an object outside of us” (Marx 199) then by the interaction with the needy on the freeway, the resources on the trucks stop being commodities. When the relationship between the humans and the objects become re-contextualized into the

most basic necessity, the lack of plenty strips objects of their commodity identity, but also people's labor.

Once the story of the freeway makes the news, the homeless are given visibility. Buzzworm, a social worker, goes further and creates his own talk show in order to give light to various people and artists (Yamashita 190). Suddenly, a new, more empathetic society is emerging, but damage has been done to the old one, and that is not forgotten. The position of the homeless on the freeway becomes increasingly dangerous as fires from under the freeway surround them and police start to advance on them. Manzanar goes back to comparing the new society and his old home under the freeway: "When the tanks blew and the great walls of flames flew up the brush and ivy along the freeway canyon, Manzanar knew instinctively the consequences, knew that his humble encampment wedged against a retaining wall and a hidden in oleander would soon be a pile of ash" (Yamashita 120). Despite the promising momentum of the new highway society and his work, he knows that the opposition is very strong and the costs of transgressing against the old ways could be extreme.

The stakes keep getting raised in the novel, cumulating in a great wrestling match with the? Pacific Rim seeking the destruction of SUPERNAFTA, a personification of neoliberal economic trends, clad in a "titanium suit with a head of raging fire" (Yamashita 256). His challenger is Arcangel, whose date of birth is supposedly the day that Columbus invaded America and is a performance artist that keeps getting reborn to assist in various catastrophes. He is a champion for the

colonized subaltern of Latin America, and he is that champion in blatant uselessness. His story is told throughout the novel, starting in Mazatlán where Rafaela is; he takes the last uncorrupted orange that Rafaela discovers and carries it along with the Tropic of Cancer with him to Los Angeles, warping spacetime as he does so. While Arcangel does not explicitly know that the freeway crash in Los Angeles has occurred, he senses that he is being called to perform. He seizes his opportunity when he finds the orange at Gabriel's house in Mazatlán as it carries with it the Tropic of Cancer. The Tropic of Cancer symbolically relates to borders and the warping of them. When Arcangel takes the orange with him north, he pulls the Tropic of Cancer upwards and literally brings the south to the north as an act of reclamation and the destruction of superfluous divisions. Being connected by the sickly orange, a final and useless commodity, his actions also represents the destruction of unequal global economic divisions, liberating vulnerable people from commodifying themselves.

His mission is to rebel against the injustices of neoliberalism, from remarking on Mexican workers drinking American beers, to reclaiming Los Angeles as a Mexican territory, to literally destroying NAFTA by fighting SUPERNAFTA. He presents himself as a luchador emascarado called "El Gran Mojado" or "The Great Wetback," with a clashing outfit composed of his "Ski mask in camouflage nylon, blue cape with the magic image of Guadalupe in an aura of gold feathers and blood roses, leopard bicycle tights, and blue boots" (Yamashita 132). Despite himself dying in the process, Arcangel defeats SUPERNAFTA and the uncorrupted orange, the last commodity on earth, gets fed to him by Rafaela.

One of the most profound ways that Yamashita critiques commodification is through the commodifying of the workers in her novel. The identity of a worker, particularly a subaltern worker, is defined only in their work. Productivity is an ideal for success in a capitalist world. In our visions of the American Dream, work leads to complete fulfilment, not just materially, but emotionally as well. In a section titled: “Debates on Immigration,” from *The Americans*, a widely used American history textbook for high school students, the section opens:

For hundreds of years, immigrants working for their dreams have shaped the United States. Latino ranchers developed many of the tools and skills of the American cowboy. Chinese laborers laid the tracks of the transcontinental railroad. African Americans, though not voluntary immigrants, labored to develop the agriculture of the South and the industry of the North. Farmers and workers of every origin build the nation we know today (McDougal Littell, 1106).

Without getting into the problematic decision to discuss African American slaves and immigrants in the same sentence, the passage highlights a pattern of validating the success of immigrants according to the manual labor they produce. The implementation of NAFTA brought unsatisfactory labor conditions in Mexico and a tanking agricultural industry, leading many workers to migrate to the United States to be exploited for their work and treated like scapegoats (Caufield). The critique of this history is significant in Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*. Each of the characters also in some way interacts negatively with the exploitative nature of neoliberal capitalism,

whether blatantly exploited for labor, or pressured to follow a model immigrant narrative, or rejecting of the system altogether. Each of the characters provide the political work of suspending hegemonic expectations of capitalism while trying to manage the events that are rocking their world.

The story is told from the perspective of seven different characters, all people of color and most of them are either immigrants themselves or descended from immigrants. In *Tropic of Orange*'s many subplots, the implosion of commodities happens on large and smaller scales. Magical realism often plays with large and small scales when it comes to the consequences of characters actions. For example, Yuri Herrera's *Signs Preceding the End of the World* tells the story of a young Mexican woman, Makina, who travels across the border to the United States and to retrieve her brother, but the journey quickly turns into a descent into a sort of underworld. Sometimes, one character's journey becomes contribution to a larger phenomenon or critique. As I said before, one of the ways it discusses commodified labor on the individual level is through the model immigrant story. In one of the most blatant examples of this trajectory, Bobby is an Asian immigrant who runs his own janitorial service and immediately becomes an example of someone who buys into his own version of the American dream. In many ways he tries to create his own model immigrant story. As his janitorial business is flourishing, he invests in all the material markers of success that he can afford, like a large television and mobile phones. His wife, Rafaela, whose happiness is motivation for his behavior, is not as satisfied as he believed. A large of the novel is spent after she has left him, because he would not

listen to her desires for their business to join a union, or to take some sort of community action against the exploitation of their labor. Bobby is definitely aware of the power structures in the American economic system and sees his vulnerable position in it. He has a profound moment of this awareness when cleaning a screening room at a Hollywood studio:

Somebody says, "What'd we do without you, Bobby? You saving our lives.

Without you nothing gets done around here." It's an exaggeration. Bobby don't hold nothing by it. Way of saying, who's gonna clean if it isn't you? Gonna be some other refugee who needs the work (Yamashita 159).

Yet, he still sticks to his individualist outlook. As long as he is making money, he has nothing to worry about. It is not until Rafaela leaves with Sol that he begins to question the way he lives his life. The last chapter is told from his perspective as the final events are unfolding and he ends up holding the final, uncorrupted orange. When he decides to hold onto his son instead, he chooses to give up the commodity and chooses to stop commodifying himself. Forces throughout the novel have halted the commodity driven economic system, but it is the decision of the individual worker to choose his livelihood over his labor that finalizes the shift.

Tropic of Orange not only upends the dreams of a productive capitalist society but upends productivity altogether. There are several characters whose goals are either vague or completely useless in a neoliberal economic framework. Manzanar from the highway, for example, is discovered to have been a third-generation Japanese American born in a Japanese internment camp during World War Two. He becomes a

neurosurgeon, but one day he decides to give it all up; disappearing from his job and his family and becomes the homeless conductor that we see in the novel. For many readers, this is supposed to be a perplexing moment, as we see Manzanar complete a success story and then suddenly divorce himself from it. Only to perplex us further, Manzanar quits his job for the vague mission to conduct the imperceptible choirs of Los Angeles. Not only does he infuriate our perceptions of purpose by giving up a great job for art, but art performed by untrained singers no less. It is more than a coincidence as well that these homeless singers happen to be singing the same song as the Latin American spectators following Arcangel.

Like in *Tropic of Orange*, the Ipe family in *The God of Small Things* also has their share of unproductive characters. However, where the workers in *Tropic of Orange* end their productivity to rebelliously find a more fitting sense of self-worth, the unproductivity of the characters in Roy's novel is a sign of their inability to exist in their world. *The God of Small Things* is a novel told from the perspective of Rahel, a woman who returns to her family home in Kerala, India to her great aunt and her twin brother as she in her mind retells the breaking point of her affluent but dysfunctional family as she was growing up. The story is not told linearly, but rather told as a series of events that get closer and closer to a traumatic event that she cannot escape and has shaped the rest of her life. At the end of the novel, we find out that this event was the drowning of her English cousin, Sophie Mol, which she and her twin brother had an accidental hand in because they did not stop her from crossing a river with them while not being able to swim. Furthermore, this death was framed as a

murder by Velutha, an untouchable who worked for the family but broke their relationship by having an affair with Rahel's mother, Ammu.

The first perception that we get of Rahel as an adult is a failure. In one interpretation, she could be seen faking her way into capitalist narratives about career, success, and model immigrant stories, but she is characteristically unmotivated. "When she finished school, she won admission into a mediocre college of architecture in Delhi. It wasn't the outcome of any serious interest in architecture. Nor even, in fact, of a superficial one." (Roy 18). When she eventually gets married to an architect and moves to Boston, she quickly gets divorced due to an "emptiness" and works as a waitress and at a toll booth for a couple of years before she moves back home (Roy 20-21). As the novel unfolds, much of Rahel's behavior is motivated by her trauma from growing up and from the ostracization of being associated with her family, and more specifically her mother: "Rahel grew up without a brief. Without anybody to arrange a marriage for her. Without anybody who would pay her a dowry and therefore without an obligatory husband looming on her horizon. So as long as she wasn't noisy about it, she remained free to make her own enquiries...Into life and how it ought to be lived" (Roy 18). Rahel cannot become a successful citizen and white-collar worker because she cannot move on from this trauma that was shaped by her culture and her region's history. This is partly due to the history of colonialism in Kerala and the prevalence of neoliberal capitalism, which commodifies her history and asks her to hide her story in order to promote a different narrative.

Chacko, Rahel's uncle and Ammu's brother, has a similar struggle to choose between his identity as a worker and a capitalist. He tries to take over Mammachi's pickle business and drives it into the ground. When it becomes obvious that Mammachi was the better business owner, he very childishly tries to assert dominance. Despite his support of Communism and the local party despite not being very engaged with the plight of the masses in action. He ironically contracts a Comrade Pillai, a Marxist party leader who works as a printer, to make advertisements for the pickle business: "Chacko-the-client and Chacko-the-management were two different people. Quite separate of course from Chacko-the-Comrade" (Roy 115). We learn that this is also due to Chacko not being able to move on from the traumatic relationship he had with his father. Growing up, he was someone who was always defined by his rebellion against his father, which inspired his love for the communist party in Kerala. However, once Pappachi dies and he becomes the patriarch of the house, he realizes his aristocratic ties not only in his family history, but in his egotistical nature. This indecision and cowardice leads to him being completely useless in either category: "Chacko on the other hand, though he was the Man of the House, though he said "My pickles, my jam, my curry powders," was so busy trying on different costumes that he blurred the battle lines" (Roy 116).

Chacko's traumatic relationship with his father extends into another traumatic relationship with his history. He is aware of his family's lucrative but still subordinate position in colonial history, calling them "Anglophiles" and remarks on their blindness

to the cruelty of that system through the metaphor of the History House, a house that once belonged to a British man across the river:

And when we look in through the windows, all we see are shadows. And when we try and listen, all we hear is a whispering. And we cannot understand the whispering, because our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost. The very worst sort of war. A war that captures dreams and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves (Roy 52).

While he is able to sometimes make insights, like in this case, they are not followed by his actions. In these specific passages, Roy often refers to him saying them in his “Reading aloud voice” (Roy 53), meaning that he makes his speeches for the projection of moral superiority. While Chacko does want to believe that he is morally superior to the rest of his family—as a way of projecting his victimhood—he does not truly believe in the things that he says. First, it is revealed he attended Oxford and married an English woman, Margaret Kochamma, fathering Sophie Mol with her. Ammu many times refers to his engagement with the Communist party as “playing Comrade! Comrade!” (Roy 63), which in many ways proves evident. It is mentioned that when he was younger he took many mistresses, and they were often snuck through the back of his house and are paid off by Mammachi to maintain some discretion, leading to what Ammu calls “a Marxist mind and a feudal libido” (Roy 160). All of this is to show that despite Chacko’s alignment with the Communist party,

he still sees himself as a superior. This also affects his treatment of the vulnerable people that he claims to side with.

This irony runs parallel with the historical struggles for power in Kerala. The 1950s and 60s in Kerala were characterized by the rise of communism in its parliaments, with the most famous example being the instillation of a communist government in 1957 led by E.M.S. Namboodiripad (Chakranbarty 32). However, as leftism rose more in the region, critique of communist leaders led to many divisions within the communist party. The Communist Party of India was adamant in being able to provide “peaceful transition” (Chakranbarty 32) but compromising with non-communist parties for more centrist policies led to dissatisfaction outside of parliament. To many, the CPI’s actions were running contradictory to their ideals and the rights of the people they defended were at stake.

When being faced with someone else’s individual plight, Chacko is not empathetic. Chacko does nothing to help Velutha when he knows that Velutha will be harmed for sleeping with Ammu, and the Communist party leader does not even let Velutha into his home when the police come after him. It highlights a key problem in both the Christian community and the Communists in the setting of *The God of Small Things*, they both ideologically serve as equalizing forces, but they operate under the very strict Indian caste system. Therefore, even the most superficially moral people make decisions that maintain their superiority.

In the 1960s, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) was gaining traction and the Naxalite movement was started by agricultural workers who wanted to overthrow

the systems that kept them unheard (Chakranbarty 128-129). In response to these threats to their power, the CPI formed alliances with non-communist parties like Congress and RSP. The increasing disorganization and social anxiety led many young, social leftists in the 1970s to critique communism's role in Kerala, addressing that it was not equipped to navigate India's importance on religion and the caste system. Velutha represents the genuine struggle of India's most vulnerable, that end up getting squashed by those in power who were threatened, not understanding the full implications of what Communism means. Velutha, as an untouchable, struggles to get attain more rights in an India that promises its own modernization by granting equal rights. Many characters show him leniency throughout the novel either for the sake of Communism or Christianity, but when he actually asserts himself as an equal with the rest of society by beginning an affair with Ammu, he is punished greatly for it. Although Communism is typically not put into such a category, it can be seen as a western idea imposed on a society where its design is not complimentary. Roy makes note of the irony between Communism and the caste system on a large scale "The real secret was that communism crept into Kerala insidiously. As a reformist movement that never overtly questioned the traditional values of the caste-ridden, extremely traditional community" (Roy 64). The role of communism in Kerala during the sixties plays heavily into Roy's writing as an example of how it transcends a family tragedy into a larger critique of her society.

Roy comments on the presence and warping of what she calls "History." The capitalization is important because it alludes to something official, something

authoritative. Magical realism understands the authoritative nature of History, in the form of certain historical narratives that overpower others. In his review of *The Invention of the World* among other works, Steven Slemon highlights how magical realism is used to subvert binaries in language and codes provided by colonialism. He elaborates that in magical realism, the real and the fantasy also live in a strict binary and compete, between imperialist and native perspectives, to revise history:

This focus on the problem of history is shared by that body of criticism in postcolonial studies which argues that people in postcolonial cultures engage in a special “dialogue with history.” In this account, “double vision” or “metaphysical clash” emerges in the space of incommensurability between inherited notions of imperial history as “the views that tend to see history more as a kind of alchemical process, somewhat analogous to a way of seeing, in which the silenced, marginalized, or dispossessed voices within the colonial encounter themselves form the record of “true” history. The “re-visioning” of history, then, takes place when the voices or visions—what J. Michael Dash calls “the counterculture of the imagination”—come into dialectical play with the inherited, dominant modes of discourse and cognition in colonialism’s “phenomenal legacy” and work toward transmuting perception into new “codes of recognition” (Slemon 414).

Slemon not only discusses the revisioning of history, but how time is changed by colonial power and how magical realism allows marginalized forces to change it based on their own experiences. History becomes a commodity itself, increasing the value of

the colonialism as something that while cruel, ultimately enlightened the affected societies to produce better workers and better creators of commodities. This is a real phenomenon in the British occupation in India and it perseveres in modern perceptions of India and in the events of Roy's novel. In his book, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, Bernard S. Cohn remarks how India's large wealth of cultural objects gave the British wonder but also allowed them to commodify India's history and control its narrative. The process of "discovering" the Indian past meant a slew of dating and classifications all with little affirmation from the natives. "Here [India] could be found a kind of living fossil bed of the European past... a vast field on which to impose [the European's] own visions of history" (Cohn 80). The British fascination with Indian artifacts was not only driven by pure curiosity but as a means of control and a way to establish the British empire's economic and cultural superiority. "The power to define the nature of the past and establish priorities in the creation of a monumental record of a civilization, and to propound canons of taste, are among the most significant instruments of rulership" (Cohn 10).

Part of uselessness involves the failure to adapt to this happy ending, and sometimes invoking precolonial phenomena. This is largely what Arcangel sets out to do in *Tropic of Orange*, to rewrite these narratives and literally undo History by taking back Los Angeles. *Tropic of Orange* is an example where uselessness serves people well, but *The God of Small Things* is a form of rebellion that shows as a symptom, like an allergic reaction. The characters of *The God of Small Things* are useless because

that version of history is not true, at least for them, and destroys them in the process of commodifying them.

The Ipe family is allowed to be affluent through the imperial system during the British occupation and its aftermath in exchange for upholding the system and subordinating themselves, in the case of how Sophie Mol is deified in death, and others, in the case of Velutha. The Ipe family in acts in many ways like the British, giving them Chacko's nickname, "Anglophiles," but when the inherent subordinate role they share with all Indians is brought up, they are easily threatened. Like the individual members have trauma from each other, the Ipe family as a whole, shares a larger trauma of upholding the colonial system. Their control over and cruelty towards Velutha and others justifies the control that the British have on them; to show that this is the best possible way of living and that everyone has a justified part in it. Like in the case of many subordinates in the Indian caste system during colonialism (Cohn), Velutha is rewarded for his carpentry and his contribution to the pickle factory despite being an untouchable because of his exchange value as a carpenter. The Ipes as upholders of colonialism adapt to this and they have a sense of power when they patronize him, they keep control while also feeling morally grounded. However, the differing ways they treat Velutha compared to most Indians puts him in a socially ambiguous relationship with the Ipes. The confusion reaches its peak with his affair with Ammu. The Ipes realize at that point that they can no longer control him and Velutha is forced to pay the price out of "Man's subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify" (Roy 292).

History's epicenter in *The God of Small Things* is the History House, situated across the river just outside the Ipe family house. It has its own story rooted in the popular colonial narrative of *The Heart of Darkness*. It once belonged to a colonizer who "went native" by living in isolation and taking a male lover. This origin is given to readers in various ways. He becomes personified as a ghost when one character passes him in the woods near the History House. He is soon grouped in with History:

The History House...Where waxy ancestors with tough toe-nails and breath that smelled of yellow maps whispered papery whispers...Where dreams were captured and re-dreamed...where an old Englishman ghost, sickled to a tree, was abrogated by a pair of two-egg twins...As the platoon of policemen minced past they didn't hear him beg. In his kind-missionary voice. *Excuse me, would you, umm...you wouldn't happen to umm...I suppose you'd have a cigar on you? No?...No, I didn't think so*" (Roy 290).

This more innocent, hapless version seems to spell out Colonialism's way of consuming even the powerful, as the man is punished for living outside the expectations placed on him as a colonizer. He ruins his symbolism as a productive leader and thus pays the price of how History remembers him.

At the same time, this house is also where History breaks down on Velutha, who is beaten for sleeping with Ammu. It is here that History is not only a gatekeeper but an industrious disposer of savage or underdeveloped moments that counter the narrative of history as constant progression. It is worth mentioning that Velutha, while severely beaten, does not die at the History House, only later at the police station,

unseen. He is both prevented from creating more upheavals in the community and from exposing the bigotry of his community by being murdered at the History House, thus not leaving a grisly mark on History. Yet, History nonetheless does its dirty work by keeping the same people subjugated.

Here one can actually get a sense of the destructiveness of the History and the History house have for native Indians, even powerful ones like the Ipe family. The Ipe family tries to play along with colonial history to their advantage, but it ends up consuming them. It is not a coincidence when Rahel returns to her home as an adult, the History House has turned into a “Heritage” resort, commodifying Indian history for tourists. She goes to see a Kathakali dancer, a traditional performer of religious epics. At this point, the dancers are only able to find work in resorts like the History House where five or six-hour performances are greatly reduced to twenty-minute shows; palatable for western tourists:

But these days become unviable. Unfeasible. Condemned goods. His children deride him. They long to be everything that he is not. He has watched them grow up to become clerks and bus conductors. Class IV nongazetted officers. With unions of their own. But he himself, left dangling somewhere between heaven and earth, cannot do what they do...In despair he turns to tourism. He enters the market. He hawks the only thing he owns. The stories that his body can tell. He becomes regional flavor.” (Roy 219).

Suddenly, the entire complexity of the stories that they tell, and consequently the story of the Ipe family's relationship to History and the History House, is reduced to an exchangeable package of culture, without nuance.

The characters act out against their "roles" in History because History provides unrealistic and damaging narratives. Colonialism forces the Ipes to live as contradictions. The Ipes cannot be truly productive as subordinates and masters. Rahel and Estha cannot be truly productive as successful and independent minds if they are defined by their unworthiness to their white cousin. India cannot be truly productive unless it has its own agency over its history, its perception, and its economics.

Chapter 2

AN END TO PATRIARCHS AND COMMODITY WOMEN

In addition to disrupting the role of the worker in a capitalist system, magical realism also disrupts the symbol of the nuclear family. Andrew Merrifield remarks that Garcia Marquez wanted to write “beyond a quaint family romance” to instead represent a lineage of madness from “damaged characters” who “rarely let facts get in the way of their own stories” (Merrifield 29). In many ways this is a critique against capitalism in the sense of how family plays into the production of capital and of future laborers and how women are seen as objects and commodities. Gayle Rubin’s famous essay, *The Traffic in Women*, explains how capitalism is just one of many social, political, and economic systems based on “the exchange of women.” She does not give “the exchange of women” as a distinction, but rather, as a trait of all male-dominant sexual systems that impact political and economic arrangements and vice versa. While Rubin mentions that in a capitalist society where women normally complete unpaid housework that generates food and living that “through the reproduction of labor power that women are articulated into the surplus-value nexus” (Rubin 37). She does not go further into making direct connections to the family structure and capitalism but makes a connection nonetheless.

One Hundred Years of Solitude being the ultimate example of magical realism, also has the most blatant example of a dysfunctional family. The nuclear family is an idea that is revered by capitalist productive culture and one that is equally warped by both *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The God of Small Things*. Both stories

involve a family that starts nuclear but eventually deteriorates through intergenerational trauma implemented from outside and within.

Both *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The God of Small Things* degenerate the symbol of the patriarch. It is important to note here that Rubin does not define any male-dominant sexual system as a patriarchy, but in fact, that a patriarchy is one where a *leading* male has control over his wife, children, and property:

Finally, there are gender-stratified systems that are not adequately described as patriarchal. Many New Guinea societies are viciously oppressive to women. But the power of males in these groups is founded not on their roles as fathers or patriarchs, but on their collective adult maleness...Patriarchy is a specific form of male dominance, and the use of the term ought to be confined to the ecclesiastical offices and authorities to which the term initially referred, or to the Old Testament-type pastoral nomads and similar groups whose political structures the word usefully describes. Abraham was a Patriarch—one old man whose absolute power over wives, children, herds, and dependents was an aspect of the institution of fatherhood, as defined in the social group in which he lived (Rubin 40-41).

Similarly, this is very similar to the structure of capitalism, where subordinate workers are controlled by a capitalist who in turn provides stimulation in the economy as a whole.

The patriarch of the Buendía family, José Arcadio Buendía, is the heroic founder of Macondo who was solely responsible for creating an almost perfect society, but once

he is influenced by a band of traveling “gypsies,” his forward-thinking genius becomes a source of his insanity. Patriarchs like José Arcadio Buendía quickly crumble in magical realist narratives in order to disprove their necessity, and therefore the necessity of capitalism.

The Ipe family in *The God of Small Things* has an especially degenerative family structure that not only upends the colonial ideal of productivity but shows it as part of the culprit. The family member who gives the Ipe family their regard is Reverend Ipe, who was brought up as a Syrian Christian and kisses the Patriarch of Antioch’s ring, making him renowned (Roy 23). That is the majority we hear about Reverend Ipe, who is thought to be the ultimate patriarch. Most of the trauma is instead centered around Reverend Ipe’s son, Pappachi, who is a much crueler patriarch. His wife, Mammachi, is repeatedly beaten by him and is further cruel to his children. Pappachi has a sister, Baby Kochamma, and two children: Chacko and Ammu. Chacko, as is already mentioned, rebels against his father’s abusive behavior. A key point in their relationship occurs when Chacko comes home from university and catches Pappachi beating Mammachi: “Chacko strode into the room, caught Pappachi’s vase hand and twisted it around his back...[Pappachi] never touched Mammachi again” (Roy 47). We then see Chacko rail against the idea of a patriarchy, becoming a supporter of the Communist party and making speeches about history in his “reading aloud voice.” However, we see that this behavior is superficial and is a way of getting back at his family.

The destruction of the patriarch can also be applied to Bobby's example in *Tropic of Orange*. Starting with his little brother, Bobby becomes the sole provider for his family when he immigrates to the United States. With Rafaela and Sol, he tries to provide the American Dream for them and emulate a western breadwinner, but by the beginning of the novel, Rafaela has already shattered that dream by taking Sol and leaving him—to return to Mexico no less. She leaves out of a disagreement that they have: Rafaela wants to join a janitor's union while Bobby is focused on keeping his business and its profits independent, still somewhat believing that if you work hard enough, you can live just as well as someone with more privileges (Yamashita 17). Yamashita gives her exact reasoning: "She respected his work. But she wanted more. She left the cherry-red Camaro z28 with the car seat and The Club. She left the house and the 32" Sony KV32V25 stereo TV with picture-in-picture and and the Panasonic PUS4670 Super-VHS VCR...She just took some books, Sol's clothing, and some toys. She didn't want any of this. She wanted more" (Yamashita 20). When he drops the orange to catch Sol at the end of the novel, he chooses his son over his work, and therefore, his role as the breadwinner and breaking the separate spheres between him and Rafaela. Arcangel encourages Bobby's choice: instead of going for Rafaela, the mother, he turns to Bobby and says, "Where have you been? What do you think I am? A baby-sitter?" (Yamashita 261). Bobby and Rafaela's relationship succeeds when Bobby lets go of his warped patriarchal thinking that holds him to an impossible standard, to break the separate spheres between him and his wife, and to actively listen to the needs of his family, something real that he can cultivate.

Tropic of Orange's Arcangel steadfastly resists the role of the patriarch. When he assumes the position of a champion for uselessness and agency among the global south, he is also a champion of reproductive uselessness. Arcangel for example, rebels against American puritan sexuality by having an equally abrasive and pointless sex life. His preference for masturbation to using his sperm for a much more productive goal of conceiving children ends up being so pervasive that when he faces the great emascarado battle with SUPERNAFTA, condoms are being sold at the entrance in the name of “liberation sex” (Yamashita 266). Despite all this, Arcangel has the strongest and most spirited following of the two fighters, and while killing himself, is able to defeat SUPERNAFTA, bringing in a new world of uncertainty, but perhaps a better one for his followers.

As I have explained with the succession of patriarchs in the Ipe family, from Reverend Ipe to Pappachi to Chacko, patterns of destructive behavior play out through descendants. This is represented through the trope of generational madness, which is important. Madness is a common destroyer of patriarchs and patriarchal families in magical realism. The moment Úrsula tries to prevent José Arcadio Buendía, the patriarch of the Buendía family from having kids with her out of concern about complications from inbreeding—the two are first cousins—the topic of madness is introduced. The Buendía society that forms after is tainted by this taboo, which pervades into the homogeny and isolation of the group that is doomed to fail. Characters who try not to play into this repetition, although they are seen as reasonable, often meet tragic ends. José Arcadio, the oldest son of José Arcadio

Buendía, leaves Macondo for years and when he eventually comes back, is rejected by his family. Similarly, Ammu is rejected by their family for marrying a Hindu—she is from a Syrian Christian family—and for then divorcing him after having the twins Rahel and Estha. She is not only unwelcomed at her old family home but cannot complete a nuclear family as a divorcee. She does not have the advantage that her divorcee brother does because she is not a man and cannot be patriarch of the family.

The degradation of the nuclear family is also played out through trauma, and not just in the form of getting back at former patriarchs. As Elizabeth Outka notes, Roy's storytelling reflects that of people's reaction to traumatic events (Outka 22). The story is not told linearly and is usually recounted in flashback, only progressing as the events get closer and closer to two events seen as the crumbling points of the Ipe family: first, the day that Rahel and Estha's white cousin, Sophie Mol, Chacko's daughter, is drowned, and the moment that Ammu sleeps with Velutha and the violent aftermath. As the telling of the story progresses, we get closer and closer to the fact that Ammu's one escape from a tortured existence kills her lover and then, slowly, her. We also see that Rahel and Estha are never as valued as their cousin Sophie Mol despite all of them being children of divorce, and that all of them never experience functional families. Furthermore, the trauma proves the lack of development of the family, especially after colonialism. Both the Buendía and Ipe families are proof that history is not in a constant upward progression, and that families do not get increasingly more successful with each generation.

This argument about the uselessness of family of course, cannot be divorced from how gender roles play into capitalist narratives. As I have said before, capitalism can be seen as an extension of patriarchy and according to Gale Rubin, women are seen as a source of surplus value when it comes to generating and fueling labor. She continues by saying that capitalism is but one of many sexually stratified societies based on the exchange of women as objects. Women therefore, are more sensitive to their commodity status in capitalism due to their commodity status as women. She concludes that the erasure of this stratification must start with more aggression in women in the entirety of their lives. Many women in these novels are aware of their commodity status and some try to change it, sometimes succeeding and sometimes failing.

A lack of sexual passivity in women is *As One Hundred Years of Solitude* continues, their two sons, Aureliano and José Arcadio both have children with Pilar Ternera, a woman who arrived at Macondo with the founders after she was taken away from her relationship as a mistress to an older man. Both of the brothers get married, but they never have children with any of their wives. The intended women of the nuclear family never serve their role to provide surplus value in the form of more laborers. That instead, is left to a woman who was never officially exchanged and does not assume passivity.

Heterosexual love stories also have their own specific sense of female passivity that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* reveals as a perversion. As an example, there is Remedios, the youngest daughter of the magistrate, is seen as a pinnacle of youth and

beauty and is prepped to become an obvious love interest. However, Aureliano, Jose Arcadio Buendía's son, starts his romantic attraction to her when she is only nine years old. The two get married once she is thirteen, but when the decision is initially made, the women in the town worry about how quickly she'll acclimate to married life. When we first get to know Remedios, she describes more of what Rubin defines as a "bisexual infant" according to Freudian terms, meaning that she has no sexual passivity from developing gender roles. In the month setting up for the wedding though, Remedios somehow miraculously shows the maturity and wherewithal needed to marry Aureliano. Therefore, she is now old enough to bear children and emulate this sexual passivity, but also young enough to not have the personal development to assert herself in other situations, like Ursula and Rebecca. This is not only a perversion from Aurelio to desire her, but Remedios herself is a perversion of the trope of the young bride. Remedios never gets the emotional maturity to challenge Aureliano, but she never gets to bear him children either, as she soon dies from a miscarriage after marrying him.

In Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*, many of the women give into strenuous attention to their beauty, only to have them be mistreated as human beings. The actresses of Manila lead glamorous lives from the outside that are just fueled by substance abuse, abuse of their bodies, and misery. Isobel Alacran, the wife of the dangerous, lecherous business mogul Severo Alacran spends the majority of her energy maintaining beauty and youth only to have her husband's attention divided to other women and berates her daughter, Rosario, for not having the same conventional

attractiveness. Daisy Avila, daughter of the leftist senator, Domingo Avila, enters a beauty contest against the protests of her mother and when she wins, understands her mother's warning and becomes extremely withdrawn. Beauty is a commodity in Hagedorn's Manila and when Daisy realizes that she is now a piece of culture that is consumed, she is overwhelmed by the people who claim ownership of her, from the television hosts, to the press, to other young men making marriage proposals. She is suddenly a pawn for the society that her parents want to reorganize. Rio, one of the main characters, and her cousin Pucha are foils for how they view each other's sexuality. Rio does not pay it much mind, as she is only ten at the beginning of the novel, and only pertains it to her romantic fantasies. Pucha at fourteen, however, plays into the commodification of her "overripe" body (Hagedorn 5). She flirts with lecherous, older boys, and even the dangerous Severo Alcaran, unaware of the consequences she could have.

In some novels more related to Latin America, authors incorporate a female perspective into immigrant narratives as a way to represent the specific commodity and surplus values in women. Yuri Herrera highlights the specific trials of immigrant women in *Signs Preceding the End of the World*. There are many characters in the novel who see Makina as someone who can be easily exploited, but they often underestimate her, from turning down Mr. P's proposal to work for him (Herrera 62) to twisting the finger of a boy (Herrera 31). Her understanding of the brutal and sexist world she lives in gives her a sort of protection, and therefore makes her extremely competent. At the beginning of the novel, her mother says: "I don't like to send you,

child, but who else can I trust it to, a man?" (Herrera 12). As many of the men in the novel are wrapped up in making fortunes and their egos, Makina sees her world for what it is and can navigate it better. Makina's gender and the relationships she has with the men also contribute to her prowess as a communicator between many nefarious organizations. She uses her history with the men to her advantage, mentioning that she had "shucked" Mr. Double-U and Mr. Aitch. She keeps herself safe but uses her commodity value as a tool to get her across.

Tropic of Orange explores female commodification in immigrant narratives with the characters Emi and Rafaela, who are strong contrasts to each other. Emi, Gabriel's girlfriend, is far more concerned with modernizing herself and adapting to global neoliberal culture. In the chapter that we are introduced to her, she is arguing with Gabriel over the importance of Film Noir and film-buff culture in general in a restaurant full of people from the Hollywood film industry, "watching the entire clientele in the restaurant, taking hold of the situation as if she had produced it herself" (Yamashita 18). In many ways she wakes Gabriel from his antiquated dream-state: "if you are making a product you can actually touch *and*...making a comfortable living at it, you are either an Asian or a machine" (Yamashita 23) but in many ways is reacting against hurt. Emi is aware of her standing in Los Angeles and in television producing society as a Japanese-American woman, and she recognizes its nuances, from her sense of belonging in her job to the superficial attempts by white people to be "multicultural." However, she does not question the systems in place that could put her at a disadvantage, because she is not at one at least from her perspective. The idea

of multiculturalism though does get into her, knowing that most people engage with it out of superficial politeness. “Oh you’re so Chicano!” is what she says to Gabriel in public to get reactions out of people (Yamashita 23). In a sushi bar, she confronts a white woman about patronizing cultures that don’t belong to her when the woman scoffs at Emi for her cynicism (Yamashita 128). Later it is discovered that Manzanar was her grandfather who ended up leaving their family along with his job. What is left is a lot of confusion for Emi. Sometimes she jokes that she is not really Japanese American (Yamashita 21). Without Manzanar’s presence, she lacks the full nuance of what it means to be Japanese American, as Manzanar was someone born in an internment camp and has seen the benefits and negatives of his position. However, she does not get the explanation as to why he left and gave up his “model minority” status, leaving her with these expectations but with no one to give her a wise perspective on them.

Rafaela is probably one of the most dynamic and powerful characters in *Tropic of Orange* because she negotiates so many elements and themes of the novel. Unlike Emi, she keeps idealist goals and maintains them as simply as she can, mainly in her personal life. She begins as Gabriel’s housekeeper for his house in Mexico. She is originally from Mexico, but later marries Bobby for a green card to get into the United States. At first in Bobby’s perspective, he does not see much in her—all he really knows about her is that “she was gonna be the pretty one” (Yamashita 77)—but as their relationship develops, they become a stronger couple. Even though she leaves him to go work as Gabriel’s housekeeper, she still thinks about him, especially with

Sol as a reminder, and then eventually gets back together with Bobby. Like Makina, she understands that as an immigrant—especially a female immigrant—that she has to commodify herself.

Rafaela also has a supernatural quality to her character. First, she has an unusual connection with nature. Part of this is due to her refusing to perform modern, neoliberal femininity. We are introduced to her as she is working at Gabriel's house and interacts every morning with "dead and living things from over and under beds, from behind doors and shutters, through archways, along the veranda—sweeping them all across all across the deep shadows and luminous sunlight carpeting the cool tile floors" (Yamashita 3). Although she is still working as a housekeeper, she knows Gabriel to be a helpful and respectful boss and often provides her own insights. She prefers simpler technologies, rejecting the Electrolux vacuum over a broom to clean up the critters, knowing that the vacuum is not as effective and that "Recycling these bags was nearly impossible, and she did not have the heart to dump them without releasing the trapped animals inside" (Yamashita 4). This connection to the earth gives her a supernatural comparison as well that is founded in her heritage and her role as a single mother. Rafaela is one of the several characters who is referred to as an angel, especially after her battle with Doña María's son. However, she is not angelic in the soft, virginal, Christian sense. In her complex interaction with the son Rafaela has her sexuality exploited, with the text alluding to her rape in his car but at the same time takes an inverse role of a mother, not just a nurturer, but a protector (Yamashita 220). In the mix of those two actions she faces the violence and uses it to her advantage:

“copulating in rage, destroying and creating at once—the apocalyptic fulfillment of a prophecy—blood and semen commingling among shredded serpent and feline remains. She turns into a heroic beast that slays the son-turned-wolf: “Her writhing twisted her body into a muscular serpent—sinuous and suddenly powerful” (Yamashita 220). It is at that moment that her struggle also becomes the struggle of all women like her:

And there was the passage of 5,000 women of Cochibamba resisting with tin guns an entire army of Spaniards, the passage of a virgin consecrated to the sun-god buried alive with her lover, of La Malinche abandoning her children and La Llorona howling after, of cangaceira Maria Bonita riddled with lead by machine guns at the side of her Lampião, of one hundred mothers pacing day after day the Plaza de Mayo with the photos of their disappeared children, and Coatloapeuh blessing it all” (Yamashita 220-221).

Yamashita adds another layer of snake imagery with the reference to Coatloapeuh. This reference, points to a deeper connection between the snake and Rafaela’s femininity, suggesting a sexuality and danger to her otherwise angelic condition. Other artists have made connections to this specific kind of animalistic femininity. Gloria Anzaldúa gives a powerful history into the origins of the deity and how it has evolved into La Virgen Guadalupe and yet still grounds indigenous populations.

“Coatloapeuh,” she writes:

is descended from, or is an aspect of, earlier Mesoamerican fertility and Earth goddesses. The earliest is Cotlicue, or “Serpent Skirt.” “She had a human skull

or serpent for a head, a necklace of human hearts, a skirt of twisted serpents, and taloned feet. As creator goddess, she was mother of the celestial deities” (Anzaldúa). The transformation of Coatloapeuh turns into a direction of increased sanitation.

The male-dominated Azteca-Mexica culture drove the powerful female deities underground by giving them monstrous attributes and by substituting male deities in their place, thus splitting the female Self and the female deities. They divided her who had been complete, who possessed both upper (light) and underworld (dark) aspects. *Coatlicue*, the Serpent goddess, and her more sinister aspects, *Tlazolteotl* and *Cihuacoatl*, were "darkened" and disempowered much in the same manner as the Indian *Kali*. *Tonantsi* --split from her dark guises, *Coatlicue*, *Tlazolteotl*, and *Cihuacoatl*-- became the good mother... After the Conquest, the Spaniards and their Church continues to split *Tonantsi* / *Guadalupe*. They desexed *Guadalupe*, taking *Coatloapeuh*, the serpent / sexuality, out of her. They completed the split begun by the Nahuas by making *la Virgen de Guadalupe* / *Virgen María* into chaste virgins and *Tlazolteotl* / *Coatlicue* / *la Chingada* into *putas*; into the Beauties and the Beasts. They went even further; they made all Indian deities and religious practices the work of the devil...(Anzaldúa 27-29).

At the end, Rafaela lays dispensed at the side of the road, returning to her holy mother form, but leaving the reader an unforgettable impression of what lies underneath. This is when Gabriel finds her Gabriel's secret attraction to Rafaela is something that is

hinted since the beginning of the novel, which is something also tied to the house and his desire to perfectly capture his Latinx heritage. Rafaela, like many female characters do for men, represents a larger concept to him. Unfortunately, Gabriel never gets the satisfaction of attaining her, as she asks for Bobby, her husband, as soon as she regains consciousness.

Rafaela has the most mythic femininity to her. Unlike Emi, who is mostly lives her life despite her femininity, Rafaela's uses hers to her advantage. Emi tries to assimilate as best she can both with the neoliberal capitalist society around her, but with the capitalist, and subsequently patriarchal concept that masculinity is more powerful and will lead to higher success. Emi has been able to fake her way to making it so far as a television producer, so she continues to do so. Rafaela, on the other hand, being an immigrant and without the proper anonymity in her job, cannot fake her status and cannot fake her femininity. She instead has to make the best of her situation. As it turns out, the new world only has room for one of the women as Emi gets shot on top of a news van while trying to cover the freeway situation, perhaps not fully understanding what is happening.

Like in other aspects of *The God of Small Things*, failure to free oneself also applies to gender in the case of Ammu. She offends her family two-fold by marrying a Hindu and then later divorcing him. Ammu is disrupting an essential practice for the Freudian sex-stratified nuclear family, she refuses to be passive in her sexuality. It is revealed that she divorced her husband not only because he was an alcoholic, but that he risked losing his job working for an Englishman and that the only way for him to

keep it was to take some time off and have Ammu stay at his manager's house to be "looked after" (Roy 41). Ammu's sexuality is seen as her commodification, not only in producing children but in being able to secure her husband's job. When Ammu divorces her husband, she rejects her productivity and her role in the postcolonial system. The system in turn rejects her, starting with her father: "Pappachi would not believe her story—not because he thought well of her husband, but simply because he didn't believe that an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man's wife" Roy (42). Ammu then tries to use her sexuality and capability for romance beyond its exchange value with her affair with Velutha, but that ultimately gets Velutha killed immediately, and ends with her dying a much slower death of cultural and family banishment.

Velutha is an equally interesting transgressor of gender roles. In one passage, Rahel, Estha, and Sophie Mol visit him and paint his nails (Roy 181). It is also one of the first things that the police notice when they find him at the History House. This ends up being one of the many social rules that Velutha ends up flouting, while trying to create his own comfortable and independent position in his world, away from oppression and violence. Estha is also unusually feminine in this scene: "all three of them, wearing saris (old ones, torn in half) that day. Estha was the draping expert. He pleated Sophie Mol's pleats. Organized Rahel's pallu and settled his own" (Roy 180). Estha makes an unusual transition, from the genderless, bisexual infant that Rubin describes, to someone who can never relate to men. He can only relate to Rahel as they both are stuck in the trauma of these events.

The novel ends with an intimate scene with Ammu and Velutha, which takes a different tone from the upsetting and gloomy nature of the rest of the chapters. We see a connection of genuine love and happiness, and it is worth noting that we leave Ammu and Velutha in this state. Despite what inevitably happened, we do get to see a chance where Ammu can—if only temporarily—escape the constraints and abuse of her society and the “Love Laws.” “She danced for him. On that boat-shaped piece of earth. She lived...And on Ammu’s Road (to Age and Death) a small, sunny meadow appeared. Copper grass sprangled with blue butterflies. Beyond it, an abyss” (Roy 319). Ammu’s happiness, although short lived and followed by abject horror, is what we are reminded of in the last moments, and we are meant to find it worthwhile.

In these examples, we see both men and women stripped of their humanity in different ways in order to serve an organizational and productive function. In order to be patriachs, men must retain strict control over everyone in their domain and cannot be weak, lest that be a signal of their lack of leadership. Likewise, women’s sphere is procreating, but this procreation must be completely devoid of sexuality, or else they cannot be controlled by patriachs and are less efficient producers of surplus value.

CONCLUSION

Through fantastic events, these magical realist works force us to suspend our disbelief as a way to reimagine the nature of heavily established systems and concepts. This reimagination is hard to measure, since in literary analysis authorial intent is not given any more weight than a reader's well-supported interpretation, and the beliefs suspended and interpretations made vary by reader. However, as global neoliberal capitalism has spread, the expectations and systems it carries expand too. It is also clear that all of these novels reflect a perspective of people who have been exploited by these expectations; they not only provide insight into living from this perspective, but they also foreground these people's ideas for the future.

This transformative thinking may occur through the introduction of albeit fantastic solutions to large and unruly problems of exploitative capitalism and consumerism, like the highway crash. In this case, we get to see how the world could be and that is a form of political work. Perhaps you can find something without buying it. Obviously, we will never see NAFTA represented as a transformer physically defeated by an *emascarado*, but with all its titanium and flaming hair, it nevertheless becomes superficial and less powerful than we once imagined.

A heightened sense of empathy may also occur through a dramatization of individual characters' plights. In the more literal case of watching someone cross the U.S. Mexico border as a journey into the underworld, we get a glimpse of the fear and the danger that someone in Makina's position is put through. With the structuring of a narrative, we can delve into the psyche and pain of a narrator like Rahel and

eventually conclude at the act of love that betrayed society but should not have been destroyed. Horrific and fantastic failures also serve as warning signs about the expectations that various characters face. Having someone like Pilar Ternera giving birth to the children of patriarchs instead of their wives shows the problems with divorcing a woman's ability to give birth from the sexuality where it originates. Having patriarchs fail also symbolizes the unrealistic expectations for men to control everything related to them and the damaging consequences these traditional gender roles create for them and the people in their spheres.

Magical realism's effectiveness is putting the impossible into a world we recognize, forcing us to look inward and analyze ourselves and the world around us. We not only question how easily our world can be changed, but we also ask why the worlds in these novels are changed the way they are and how we would change our worlds if given the chance.

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