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Arundhati Roy as a Transmodern Intellectual. Gender Troubles, Ethnic Conflicts and Vulnerable Ecology

Abstract: This article adopts a transmodern approach to Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and it contends that Roy's fusion of anti-global activism, typical of her non-fiction writings, and literary imagination, reminiscent of Indian epic texts, can provide an interesting instance of a transmodern intellectual perspective. In particular, by examining gender troubles, ethnic conflicts and vulnerable ecology, my article argues that Roy's second novel refracts the decolonial/postcolonial debate by means of a hybrid narrative form. This interplay between creative writing and intellectual activism can be said to chime with transmodern ethics in that it promotes attentiveness to the perspective of the most marginalised.

Keywords: *transmodernity*, *Arundhati Roy*, *gender*, *history*, *ecology*

The text is a limited field of possible constructions.
Paul Ricœur, *From Text to Action*

1. Arundhati Roy between Intellectualism and Imagination

With the publication of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), Indian novelist and essayist Arundhati Roy eventually returned to fiction writing after an interval of twenty years since the success of her debut novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997). And yet, between her Booker Prize-winning *opera prima* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Roy has engaged with some crucial questions related to the Indian subcontinent in a large number of essays, such as *The Cost of Living* (1999), *Power Politics* (2001), and *Kashmir: The Case for Freedom* (2011). The rise of nationalist propaganda, the persistence of ethnic conflicts, the climate of religious intolerance, the constant violation of human and civil rights, and the exploitation of the environment are among the issues that, according to the Indian author, require strong intellectual commitment. As in *The God of Small Things*, so in her second novel Roy addresses a plethora of socio-political matters which provide fodder for her fiction, thus linking her anti-global intellectualism to specific colonial legacies in the subcontinent. As Emilienne Baneth-Nouailhetas argues, the dialogism between creativity and ideology in Roy's macrotext can be read as "a fictionalization of the world and an active hermeneutical construction of history, with the aim of countering the narratives of power".[1] In other words, the juxtaposition of intellectual activism and literary imagination is a basic stylistic feature Roy resorts to in order to investigate how globalisation permeates our world, manifesting itself as haunting continuation of colonial power.

Along this premise, what I intend to show in my article is how Roy's fusion of intellectual and creative writing might be approached by interrogating the category of Transmodernity. With regard to the 'theory wars' dealing with the prefixes expressive of colonialism and its aftermath, this article argues that, by shifting from the rigid 'post' and 'de' to the fluid 'trans', a more liquid perspective can emerge. Coined by the Spanish philosopher Rosa María Rodriguez Magda in *La Sonrisa de Saturno*

[1] Emilienne Baneth-Nouailhetas, "Committed Writing, Committed Writer?", in Ranjan Ghosh and Antonia Navarro-Tejero, eds., *Globalizing Dissent: Essays on Arundhati Roy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 98.

(1989),[2] Transmodernity, in her own words, illustrates a mode of thinking that might reflect "our social reality, transborder, fluid, interconnected and unstable".[3] Accordingly, Rodriguez Magda's claims, which have further been investigated by the Argentinian philosopher Enrique Dussel and by the Belgian theologian Marc Luyckx Ghisi, among others, can be re-conceptualised, from a literary perspective, as illustrative of the tensions that characterise our contemporary moment, insomuch that the transmodern paradigm can entail a decolonising epistemological approach that "allows us to imagine that which has been made absent and invisible".[4] In this respect, I would like to read *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* as exemplificative of the transmodern aesthetics since Roy's latest novel features a socially and ethnically varied cast of characters and a wide range of socio-cultural issues that connect the subcontinent to the rest of the world, making the narrative edge towards the transmodern paradigm where both mankind and environment are conceptualised as an "independent whole".[5]

Because of how it exhibits that our world dwells "no longer in the *post* but in the *trans*",[6] Roy's writing can be said to inhabit then a hybrid unstable condition that encompasses a wide range of situations from anti-global protests to global terrorism, from human rights to ecological degradation. Owing to its generic instability and its intellectual exploration of interconnected themes that tie in with Transmodernity, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is presented as a rewriting of hegemonic discourse and is concerned with the effort of retrieving the voices of the most marginal, silenced under our ever-globalised society. Through the examination of gender troubles, ethnic conflicts and vulnerable ecology, this paper seeks to demonstrate how Roy's writing can promote a transmodern respect for the 'other', attentive to both postcolonial localism and global coloniality. In what follows, I will first outline a definition of Transmodernity: by investigating its philosophical tenets, which strike their roots in Levinas' philosophy of alterity, I will try to set up a dialogue with postcolonial theory, specifically with Gayatri Spivak's concern with the subaltern condition. In addition, I will seek to envisage how the transmodern approach can be accommodated into literary representations. Then, I will look at the ways through which the themes chosen as subjects for my analysis chime, in some respects, with Transmodernity, as they tackle both the reality of the present and the legacy of the colonial past, while opening up to imagining a better future.

2. The Ethics of Transmodernity between Decolonial and Postcolonial

In *Understanding Postcolonialism*, Jane Hiddleton discusses the role of Emmanuel Levinas within postcolonial theory. Specifically, with regard to a cluster of issues such as identity formation and subalternity, Hiddleton claims that Levinas brings about an ethical dimension since "he writes against any conception of subjectivity as totalized, masterful and dominant over the other".[7] While scrutinising such terms as 'Totality', 'Being', and 'the Same', Levinas criticises Western philosophy, eliciting an ethical awakening that he describes as "the call of the other", which foregrounds a sense of responsibility for the oppressed and the discriminated. According to the French philosopher of Lithuanian origin, the relationship between self and other is an ethical one and, as he suggests:

[2] See Rosa María Rodriguez Magda, *La sonrisa de Saturno. Hacia una teoría transmoderna* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1989).
[3] Rosa María Rodriguez Magda, "Globalization as Transmodern Totality", http://transmodern-theory.blogspot.it/2008/12/globalization-as-transmodern-totality.html/, accessed 10 November 2020.
[4] Susana Onega and Jean Michel Ganteau, "Introduction: Transcending the Postmodern", in Susana Onega and Jean Michel Ganteau, eds., *Transcending the Postmodern: The Singular Response of Literature to the Transmodern Paradigm* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 13.
[5] Rosa María Rodriguez Magda, "Transmodernity: A New Paradigm", http://transmodern-theory.blogspot.com/, accessed 10 November 2020.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Jane Hiddleton, *Understanding Postcolonialism* [2009] (New York: Routledge, 2014), 16.

> Its responsibility for the other, the proximity of the neighbor, does not signify a submission to the non-ego; it means an openness in which being's essence is surpassed in inspiration. It is an openness of which respiration is a modality or a foretaste, or, more exactly, of which it retains the aftertaste.[8]

This excerpt encapsulates the tenets of Levinas' thought: the openness to the other implies an 'aftertaste', a continuation that carries the taste of cultural and historical contamination. Levinas' claims call for a certain intellectual openness towards the 'other', becoming the precondition of a relationality that rejects violent confrontation, in conformity with Irena Ateljevic's understanding of Transmodernity as "*global reconciliation* around a sustainable future"[9] where mutuality and global consciousness prevail. Drawing on Levinas' ideas, Dussel has proposed a theory based on an ethics of liberation that favours the construction of planetary humanism. Levinas' call of the other has had a significant impact on the Latin American philosopher who challenges the traditional vision of modernity insomuch that it is imbued with Eurocentric and colonial thinking. In his words, "modernity justifies an irrational praxis of violence … Modern civilization understands itself as most developed and superior, since it lacks awareness of its own ideological Eurocentrism".[10] Conversely, Dussel sets forth the category of Transmodernity, conveying a radical critique of modernity in light of the decolonial/postcolonial debate. For Dussel, the transmodern indicates a new essence which emerges from the transcendence of modernity, while affirming "the emancipative tendencies of the enlightenment and modernity within a new transmodernity".[11]

As already alluded to before, in a similar vein to Dussel's stance, Rodriguez Magda has used the term 'Transmodernidad' to describe the vacillation of our present age between the end of postmodernity and a prolongation of modernity. In her view, Transmodernity is a synthesis of the modern thesis and postmodern antithesis, since it "tends to preserve the defining impetus of the first yet is devoid of its underlying base: by integrating its negation the third moment reaches a type of specular closure",[12] thus bridging the gap between the search for unity of the former and the celebration of fragmentation of the latter. The prefix 'trans', Rodríguez Magda explains, "denotes dynamism, but also confusion, because it mixes planes, accumulates them, hybridizes them".[13] Transmodernity, in other words, prolongs modernity and presents itself as a synthesis of Hegel's dialectic understanding of history.

In Dussel's understanding of the term, Transmodernity, however, retains a stronger focus on colonial questions, as it subverts the timeline of Western history by incorporating it with other perspectives to put forward a more coherent account of world history. As he states:

> The transmodern project achieves with modernity what it could not achieve by itself—a corealization of solidarity, which is analectic, analogic, syncretic, hybrid and mestizo, and which bonds center to periphery, woman to man, race to race, ethnic group to ethnic group, class to class, humanity to earth, and occidental to Third World cultures. This bonding occurs not via negation, but via a subsumption from the viewpoint of alterity.[14]

[8] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* [1974], trans. by Alphonoso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne U.P., 2006), 115.
[9] Irena, Ateljevic, "Visions of Transmodernity: A New Renaissance of our Human History?", *Integral Review*, 9.2 (June 2013), 204.
[10] Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity* [1992], trans. by Michael D. Barber (New York: Continuum, 1995), 115.
[11] Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. by Eduardo Mendieta (Atlantic Highland, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996), 3.
[12] Rosa María Rodriguez Magda, "Globalization as Transmodern Totality".
[13] Ibid.
[14] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 138.

What Dussel might be invoking here is a pluralisation of the project of modernity, a contamination that includes and expands its scope rather than merely denouncing its limits. To do this, Dussel's project operates by illuminating certain local histories to create a larger puzzle that allows for a better understanding of the manifold dimensions of coloniality. For Dussel, Transmodernity is a transcending analectic moment emerging from modernity and postmodernity and it moves away from postcolonial theory, redolent of Eurocentric knowledge, since it tends to disclose new horizons of dialogues between cultures, without seeking to impose a dominant perspective. In certain respects, Roy' writings, and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* in particular, display a large, inclusive portrait of human history, establishing solidarity and empathic connections among different layers of humanity, beyond the differences concerning gender, ethnicity and religion. By paying attention to the 'unconsoled', as Roy herself writes in the dedication of her second novel, the Indian author "seeks to bring that which remains outside the dialectic into visibility".[15] As Linda Alcoff argues, Dusell's analectic method allows us to see what is hidden beyond the risks of dialectical generalisations, while addressing "the specificity of group identities such as the indigenous, the poor, racialized peoples, women, religious minorities, and sexual minorities".[16]

The fact that Roy's novel contains the word 'ministry' already evokes an intellectual unravelling that combines religion with politics. Also, the narrative's engagement with a 'viewpoint of alterity', as Dussel calls it, echoes with Spivak's claims on the destructive effects of global capitalism. Indeed, for Spivak, knowledge and discourse are framed by an imperialist perspective that forecloses any possibility of authenticity: in her words, a form of "epistemic violence"[17] emerges in postcolonial subjects that yearn for a language of their own. In this perspective, violence can be said to permeate the construction of the postcolonial subjects, allowing for the emergence of the other's alterity as a form of resistance to the global discourse. As suggested before, Dussel's decolonising project of the Enlightenment can be juxtaposed with Spivak deconstructionist reading of Immanuel Kant's philosophy as "affirmative sabotage or resistant appropriation".[18] Thus, Dussel's decolonial project and Spivak's postcolonial critique somehow tend to converge on one point: a commitment to absolute liberation requires an endeavour grounded in reframing the global and imperialist perspectives, in an echo of Levinas's ethics of alterity.

For the purpose of this article, the question I want to posit is how such philosophical matters can be allocated in literary representations. According to Susana Onega, for instance, contemporary literature can be said to witness a paradigm shift towards Transmodernity by favouring a "transversal dialogue"[19] between centre and periphery which might "deconstruct the West/non-West binary and acquire the pluriversal and multiperspectival understanding of self and world".[20] Likewise, in *Transmodern Perspectives on Contemporary Literatures in English*, Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen and José María Yebra-Pertusa argue that Transmodernity can be employed as an 'umbrella term' to connote our present age since it can include "all that is virtual, transnational, transethnically cosmopolitan, glocal,

[15] Linda Martín Alcoff, "An Epistemology for the New Revolution", *Transmodernity. Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1.2 (2011), 72.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 289. Here, Spivak discusses the concept of "epistemic violence" by connecting Michel Foucault's notion of the 'episteme' with Antonio Gramsci's exploration of 'contradictory consciousness' and the 'subaltern'. On this, see Anke Bartels, Lars Eckstein, Nicole Waller and Dirk Wiemann, *Postcolonial Literatures in English: An Introduction* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2019), 153-154.
[18] Gayatri Spivak, *Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 2012), 4. Spivak proposes a reading strategy that she calls "ab-use" since it uses the European Enlightenment "from below" (3).
[19] Susana Onega, "Thinking English Literature and Criticism under the Transmodern Paradigm", *CounterText*, 3.3 (2017), 362.
[20] Ibid.

strategic, and transubiquitous".[21] As evinced in these comments, Transmodernity offers a "move towards a new era of humanity"[22] where terrorism, climate change, social inequalities and economic gaps are intertwined. By giving voice to victimised and wounded subjects, Transmodernity recalls "a Levinasian ethics of alterity and of consolidating pluriversal knowledge as an alternative to the univocal and teleologically oriented knowledge provided by grand universal narratives".[23] What these critical views share is the idea that contemporary literature transgresses social, gender, cultural, and religious borders, thus accommodating the main tenets of Transmodernity. The connections that Transmodernity establishes, therefore, can be said to trigger the resurrection of those 'grand narratives' whose disappearance has been notoriously associated, by scholars like Jean-François Lyotard, to postmodernism. However, the transmodern also transcends modernity, since it highlights the complexity of human experiences, by moving beyond boundaries and casting light on the perspectives of marginalised and vulnerable subjectivities. Thus, Dussel's and the other afore-mentioned approaches inspired by the transmodern philosophic investigation and the sibling postcolonial critique of Western knowledge may provide conceptual tools for the analysis of contemporary narratives that allows for a dialogue among cultures, thereby placing individuals in their singularities.

With such issues in mind, in the following pages I would like to explore the characters, the themes and the narrative form of Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* from a transmodern perspective. In particular, I wish to demonstrate how the Indian author's fusion of literary imagination, which evokes the mythology-inspired style of *Bharati* fantasy,[24] and realist chronicle, a documentary form that recalls her non-fiction works, ties in with the idea of a transmodern literary work in that it addresses diversity, interconnection, and ethical attentiveness to otherness and difference. To some extent, Roy's generic experimentation can be said to reflect "similar visions of the fluid, interconnected, unstable reality of selves and worlds in the transmodern era"[25] insomuch that it attempts to unravel gender issues, historical frictions and environmental concerns. I will specifically analyse three aspects of Roy's latest novel which can exemplify the transmodern orientation of the narrative as it seeks to address the fragilities of our contemporary globalised world. Firstly, I will examine how gender borders are blurred in Anjum, one of the central characters of the story. Anjum's transgender identity reflects the fluid and hybrid narrative form as it interweaves fantasy, mythology and history. This will then lead to an exploration of ethnic frictions, mainly the Kashmir conflict and the Iraqi war in 2004, which tend to privilege Roy's intellectual language, thus reconstructing history from the perspective of the 'other'. Finally, I will focus on the environmental crisis the novel hints at, arguing that a transmodern approach to literature also promotes attentiveness to the non-human.

3. Gender Troubles and Hybrid Narrative Form

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is structured in twelve chapters, introduced by a prologue, and it features two main narrative strands with two protagonists, Anjum and Tilo, and a wide range of secondary characters that contribute to make the narrative kaleidoscopic. The omniscient narrative viewpoint is often replaced by a multifocal perspective through which the other characters recount their stories, using letters, diaries, text-messages, songs, and poems to make the events more genuine

[21] Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen and José María Yebra-Pertusa, "Introduction", in Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen and José María Yebra-Pertusa, eds., *Transmodern Perspectives on Contemporary Literatures in English* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 9.
[22] Ateljevic, "Visions of Transmodernity", 201.
[23] Onega and Ganteau, "Introduction: Transcending the Postmodern", 12.
[24] See Dawson E. Varughese, *Genre Fiction of New India: Post-millennial Receptions of "Weird" Narratives* (New York: Routledge, 2017). Here, Varughese employs the formula '*Bharati* Fantasy' to describe a corpus of postmillennial Indian fiction that draws from various Hindu scriptures and epic texts "through retellings, interpretation and inspired versions of the ideas and characters present in the 'original' material" (32).
[25] Onega and Ganteau, "Introduction: Transcending the Postmodern", 15.

and authentic. The narrative thematises the contradictions of the subcontinent, specifically the matter of the *hijra* communities (male-to-female transgender people), the rise of Hindu nationalism, the struggle for Kashmiri independence, the plight of caste discrimination, the impact of rapid industrialisation on the environment, and the disastrous effects of globalisation on society.

The first plotline revolves around Aftab, a baby boy born to a Muslim family in Delhi, in the wake of Partition. The infant, however, is a hermaphrodite because, as his mother Jahanara soon finds out, a "small unformed girl-part"[26] is nestled near the genitals. As Jahanara herself comments, her baby's situation is a singular manifestation of fluidity which also transgresses linguistic barriers:

> In Urdu, the only language she knew, *all* things, not just living things but all things – carpets, clothes, books, pens, musical instruments – had a gender. Everything was either masculine or feminine, man or woman. Everything except her baby. Yes of course she knew there was a word for those like him – *Hijra*. Two words actually, *Hijra* and *Kinnar*. But two words do not make a language. Was it possible to live outside language? Naturally this question did not address itself to her in words, or as a single lucid sentence. It addressed itself to her as a soundless, embryonic howl. (8; emphasis in the original)

What this quote paradoxically illustrates is the construction of gender in both life and language, stretching the linguistic power of designating identity to its limits. Aftab dwells on the threshold of language and the two words Jahanara evokes, *Hijra* and *Kinnar*, cannot contain the baby's fluid identity: while the first term describes eunuchs and hermaphrodites, the second strikes its etymological roots into Hindu mythology. According to Hindu legends, *Kinnars* were singers belonging to the realm of the Gods, "horse-headed and half-human figures"[27] that used to live in the Himalayan region. These celestial creatures are symbolically embodied in the very etymology of the name Aftab, 'sunlight', while their trans-human nature seems to be refracted in Aftab's fluid sexuality. As the narrative progresses, Aftab has surgery, becomes Anjum and joins a group of *hijras* living in a household, called the *Khwabgah* ('House of Dreams'), located in the old part of Delhi. Aftab's transitional status can be read as an emblem of the porous borders among languages and gender differences. As Anjum underlines in the Prologue, while musing on the name chosen, "I'm *mehfil*. I'm a gathering. Of everybody and nobody, of everything and nothing" (4; emphasis in the original). Interestingly, the word *mehfil*, that describes a 'gathering' mainly for praising someone with music and poetry, is semantically related to *anjuman*, 'meeting'. Thus, the name Anjum reveals an overlap of traces, entailing a palimpsestic accumulation evocative of what Glen D. Kuecker sees as a "transmodern ontology" where "a way of being human that transcends the modern world-system and generates its own ways of seeing and thinking"[28] eventually emerges.

This dichotomy between male and female, human and god-like, reframes Roy's interest in the exploration of the subaltern voices of the Indian subcontinent. Like in *The God of Small Things* where, through the tragic character of Velutha, the Indian author had represented the *dalits*, the lower Indian caste, so in her latest novel she provides *hijras* with voice and agency. Indeed, Roy's preoccupation with marginal subjectivities finds a fertile environment also in her non-fiction writings. In *Power Politics*, for instance, Roy conveys a searing critique of those modern globalising forces that have turned Indian citizens into vulnerable individuals. The word 'subaltern' inevitably leads to Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial conceptualisation, in her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1983), of the painful condition of the most marginalised subjects or "the silenced center"[29] as she calls them.

[26] Arundhati Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (London: Penguin, 2017), 7. All further references to this edition, with page numbers, are to be found in the body of the text.
[27] Dinesh Prasad Saklani, *Ancient Communities of the Himalaya* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1998), 76.
[28] Glen D. Kuecker, "From the Alienation of Neoliberal Globalization to the Transmodern Ways of Being: Epistemic Change and the Collapse of the Modern World-System", *Journal of Globalization Studies*, 5.1 (2014), 163.
[29] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 283.

While expressing her doubts concerning the possibility of retrieving a "subaltern consciousness",[30] Spivak acknowledges that, as subaltern, women are "even more deeply in shadow",[31] thereby questioning the representative power of language.[32] By extension, Roy attempts to portray the marginalised, giving them agency and, then, going beyond the domain of the possibility. What Anjum's character presents is a problematisation of India's 'true' subaltern.[33] Her voice crosses the frontiers of gender, caste, religion and history, thus challenging the idea that only 'experts' can speak and allowing citizens the "rights to express dissent".[34] With a name transcending human finitude and a transgender identity, Anjum challenges the representative limits of language, thus deviating from Western representations of Indian marginalised groups. In this regard, Roy's ethical attention attracts all the social forms of exclusion, recalling Dussel's stance of Transmodernity as being coterminous with "an *incorporative* solidarity"[35] which results from the inclusion of all the neglected and victimized voices. With its Levinasian emphasis on the recognition of otherness, Dussel's transmodern project seeks to illuminate forms of alterity that emerge from the encounter between modernity and coloniality. As already argued before, one of the key aspects of Dussel's philosophy is the so-called analectic method which, in the Argentinian philosopher's own words, "refers to the real human fact by which every person, every group or people, is always situated 'beyond' (*ano*-) the horizon of totality".[36] This analectic perspective is then beyond a totalitarian vision, allowing for a reconceptualization of the 'other'.

Grappling with a transcultural perspective that moves beyond totalitarian dynamics is at the core of the novel, as Aftab's parable illustrates. Interestingly, the feeling of spiritual transcendence that permeates Roy's novel, also recalls Varughese's category of '*Bharati* Fantasy'. As I have discussed elsewhere,[37] the narrative form of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* blends some historical major watersheds with elements taken from the rich tradition of legends, myths and tales associated to the *topos* of *Bharat Mata* ('Mother India'). The parable of Aftab/Anjum metaphorically blurs the borders between fantasy and history, indulging in nostalgic recollections of a lost world when *hijras* used to enjoy an important social and cultural status in India. Their songs were believed to bring luck and fertility, a relevant presence also manifested in two major Hindu epic texts, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*,[38] where mythological accounts record the god-like nature of these androgynous creatures. In Roy's novel, the *hijra* community in the 'House of the Dreams' is then, in Varughese's words, a 'weird' representation of otherness for the Western audience or, as I wish to demonstrate here, an instance of a transmodern perspective in that their presence installs a form of otherness marked by agency and potentiality. As the old guru of the 'House of the Dreams' explains, "[t]o be

[30] Ibid., 284.
[31] Ibid., 287.
[32] In her essay, Spivak discusses Karl Max's notion of representation, distinguishing between the two German words, *veretren* ('fill in') and *darstellan* ('depict'). On this point, see Stephen Morton, *Gayatri Spivak: Ethics, Subalternity and the Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2007).
[33] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 285.
[34] Arundhati Roy, *Power Politics* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2001), 76.
[35] Enrique Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity", *boundary 2*, 20.3 (Autumn 1993), 76.
[36] Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* [1985], trans. by Aquilina Martinez and Christine Markovsky (New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 158.
[37] Angelo Monaco, "Fantasy and History in Postcolonial India: the Case of Arundhati Roy's Anti-Global Novel", *From the European South: A Transdisciplinary Journal of Postcolonial Humanities*, 3 (2018): 55-70, http://europeansouth.postcolonialitalia.it/journal/2018-3/5.Monaco.pdf, accessed 10 November 2020.
[38] The *Ramayana*, as the title suggests, narrates the life of Rama, a divine prince who fights against the demon king Ravana in order to rescue his wife. The poem, which contains about 24,000 lines, is considered the oldest Hindu epic text, dating back to the 6th century B.C. Together with the *Mahabharata*, 4th century B.C., it forms the core of the so-called *Itihasa*, the two major epic works of Hinduism written in Sanskrit. The *Mahabharata*, made of nearly 200,000 verses, has a very complex plot that joins wars, adventures and philosophical meditations.

present in history, even as nothing more than a chuckle, was a universe away from being absent from it, from being written out of it altogether" (51). This comment showcases Roy's infusion of a subaltern subjectivity endowed with voice and agency, thus echoing Dussel's words on the emancipation of the oppressed that "can only be finally achieved by reaching, on equal terms, to those beyond that system".[39]

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, the *hijra* community acts as a symbol of vulnerability and otherness, a metonymic signifier for contemporary India itself, as the country seeks to confront the present disrupted by violence, intolerance and poverty. Beyond this metaphorical orientation of liberation, the fluid identities of the *hijras* also mirror the very complex and liquid narrative form of the novel. As I have pointed out before, the novel mixes history and mythology, thus displaying a narrative style that alternates historical realism with magic realism. The incorporation of letters, poems, diary pages, articles from newspapers and official documents is a metanarrative solution that alerts the reader to the generic hybridity of the story where authentic realities and imaginary situations coexist, a liminal form that resonates with Rodriguez Magda's categorisation of Transmodern texts as "narratives of the limits"[40] since they address questions of rupture by exploring new territories. In addition, the novel privileges a multifocal perspective that continuously shifts the narrative perspective from third-person omniscient narrator to the first person. In this respect, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* works as a palimpsestic text, its overarching organisation showing interconnections and links, specifically related to manifestations of otherness and oppression, as in the cases of the ethnic conflicts staged in the novel.

4. Ethnic Conflicts and Intellectual Activism: The Kashmir Conflict

The second narrative strand Roy's second novel pivots around features a young woman, Tilo, and her three lovers: a Kashmiri freedom fighter and revolutionary hero, named Musa, with whom Tilo lives a romance; Naga, a left-wing corrupt journalist, whom Tilo eventually marries; and Biplab, a senior officer in the Indian Intelligence Bureau, who discloses most of the mysteries about Tilo's story. This intricate storyline shifts the novel's focus from allegory to historical document, zooming in on the tragic, bloody conflict between India and Kashmir. The region has been a disputed territory between India and Pakistan since the end of the British colonial rule in 1947, though the frictions in this contested territory pre-date Partition.[41] In the aftermath of the ceasefire established in July 1949, Pakistan retained control of the north-western area inhabited by a large Muslim community, while India controlled the south and east regions, thereby rejecting the local people's demand for independence. According to the United Nations, the Indian government is still perpetrating human rights violations, excessive use of military force and sexual discrimination,[42] a concern that Roy herself has addressed in her writings.

[39] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 138.

[40] Rosa María Rodriguez Magda, "The Crossroads of Transmodernity", https://www.academia.edu/33683289/_The_Crossroads_of_Transmodernity/, accessed 10 November 2020.

[41] The princely state of Jammur and Kashmir was established with the treaty of Amritsar (1846). The rise of a nationalist movement in the region started in the early 1930s when the religious fractures among Muslims, Sinks and Hindus became stronger. In the wake of Partition, however, the Chinese government gradually took control of the eastern area of the region, following the 1962 Sino-Indian War. See Chitralekha Zutshi, ed., *Kashmir: History, Politics, Representation* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge U.P., 2017).

[42] See "Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kashmir: Developments in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir from June 2016 to April 2018, and General Human Rights Concerns in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan", https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IN/DevelopmentsInKashmirJune2016ToApril2018.pdf, accessed 10 November 2020.

What I intend to show here, however, is how the ethnic frictions that animate Roy's second novel delineate a universalising project that juxtaposes different manifestations of vulnerability around the world. Already in Anjum's plotline, the collisions between Muslims and Hindus materialise in many forms. Against the backdrop of 'shining India', where "[s]kyscrapers and steel factories sprang up where forests used to be, rivers were sold and bottled in supermarkets, fish were tinned, mountains mined and turned into shining missiles" (98), religious tensions erupt in the country. This is suggested, for instance, in the story of Saddam Hussain, an outcast Anjum meets when she moves from the 'House of Dreams' to a graveyard, on the outskirts of Delhi, where she offers shelter to marginalised and wounded people. The man, whose real name is Dayachand, was born to a Hindu family belonging to the caste of the skinners and, in his youth, had witnessed his father's brutal assassination by some policemen and an exacerbated mob. This hideous fact leads Dayachand to take the name of Saddam Hussain when he sees the video of the former Iraqi president's execution and is impressed by "the courage and dignity of that man in the face of death" (90). As Dayachand claims, the decision of taking that name and becoming a Muslim is driven by his thirst for revenge, by his ambition of dying like a martyr and "pay a price" (91).

This emphasis on ethnic and religious differences, therefore, shows the mosaic-like articulation of the novel, which establishes connections among various stories of grief and trauma, from Iraq to India. Moreover, this episode also transcends the frontier between fact and storytelling. Dayachand, who has a little knowledge about the former Iraqi president, shows a fascination with the real Saddam Hussein because of the videos circulating on the Web where he is depicted as a stoic hero, while Anjum points out the huge mischief caused by his regime, concluding that "we Muslims are motherfuckers too, just like everyone else" (91). This quote reflects Roy's intellectual effort: by expressing her disagreement with feelings of religious intolerance, what the Indian author might be trying to convey here is the relevance of religious and ethnic conflicts if one wants to go beyond the rigid limits of a unilateral perspective. This pluriversal approach moves beyond the level of the local, creating connections among wounds: the allusion to Iraq indirectly evokes the American invasion of the Middle Eastern country, thus creating links with various forms of oppression. As Dussel puts it, the transmodern intellectual ought to promote a "*trans*-modern pluriverse"[43] which includes peripheral and oppressed identities, instead of an empty, undifferentiated unity. This stance percolates through *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, specifically in relation to the troublesome Kashmiri question, finding in the word *azadi* a linguistic vehicle of connection.

In *Kashmir: The Case for Freedom*, Roy had already engaged with the struggles in the contested Himalayan region. In the collection, Roy's essays side with the local population's demands for freedom. In "*Azadi*: The Only Thing Kashmiris Want", for instance, Roy employs the local word *azadi* ('freedom', from the Persian *Āzādī*) and denounces the Indian government's suppression of human rights. As Roy wonders, "[d]oes any government have the right to take away people's liberty with military force?".[44] This central question marks Roy's intellectual commitment to the Kashmiri cause, a struggle for which she has also risked imprisonment. The word '*azadi*' is, however, also conjured up in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, specifically in Chapter seven where Biplab reconstructs his friendship with Tilo in the throes of the chaos and protests involving the Himalayan valley.

In this chapter, Roy's experimentation with the narrative format reaches its most evident materialisation. Biplab's reconstruction of Tilo's story is interspersed with pages of the woman's diary in which, as the following quote shows, Tilo reports opinions and ideas of the Kashmiri population: "In Kashmir", a man explains, "when we wake up and say 'Good Morning' what we mean is 'Good

[43] Enrique Dussel, "A New Age in the History of Philosophy: The World Dialogue between Philosophical Traditions", *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 35.5 (2009), 512.
[44] Arundhati Roy, "*Azadi*: The Only Thing Kashmiris Want", in Tariq Ali et al., eds., *Kashmir: The Case for Freedom* (London and New York: Verso, 2011), 71.

Mourning'" (279). Tilo, who is an activist, a possible alter-ego of Roy herself, does highlight here how modernity, in Kashmir, emerges as a historical moment where the end of British colonialism leads to genocide and military occupation by new neocolonial forces. This is best illustrated, however, not in the depiction of conflicts and clashes but in a scene that portrays a funeral procession:

> Seventeen-plus-one tin coffins wove through the streets, winking back at the winter sun. To someone looking down at the city from the ring of high mountains that surrounded it, the procession would have looked like a column of brown ants carrying seventeen-plus-one sugar crystals to their anthill to feed their queen. Perhaps to a student of history and human conflict, in relative terms that's all the little procession really amounted to: a column of ants making off with some crumbs that had fallen from the high table. (325)

In line with the novel's dedication, Roy chronicles the excesses of a long conflictual dispute, lending her chronicle of skirmishes and riots a lyrical tone. By comparing the local people mourning procession to insects swarming across the mountains, Roy's figurative language creates the impression that nothing 'new' seems to happen in the valley. Also, Tilo's reflections are ironically expressed in a style marked by unconventional narrative techniques, such as vocabulary entries or questionnaires. The tragic death of a man, named Mattoo, for instance, is conveyed with multiple-choice questions which possibly attempt to shock and displace the reader, like the following quote well illustrates:

> Q1: Why was Mattoo shot?
> (a) Because he was a Hindu
> (b) Because he wanted Azadi
> (c) Because he won the Nobel Prize
> (d) None of the above
> (e) All of the above (279)

While reviewers have expressed harsh criticism with what they view as a disruption of the narrative form in favour of a high political activism infused in the story,[45] what I wish to underline here is that Roy's intellectual force emerges as one characterised by black humour. Tilo's revelations disclose a world where "[d]eath was everywhere. Death was everything" (314). The woman's activism is a clear materialisation of the intellectual energy Roy's novel is imbued with and this continual adherence to the issues of excluded, oppressed and marginalised people clearly recalls Dussel's ethics of liberation and Spivak's concern with the subaltern.

As the Argentinian philosopher claims, a transmodern ethics seeks to include the 'other', calling for a liberation project "based on the reason of the *Other*".[46] Following Levinas, who does not reduce the 'other' to the 'I', because of the "strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I",[47] Dussel proposes an ethical mission opposed to the epistemic and military hegemony of the West, which aims, instead, at dispossessing the self of any concept of superiority, trying "to realize the new, what has not been foreseen by the totality, that which arises from freedom that is unconditioned, revolutionary,

[45] See, for instance, Parul Sehgal, "Arundhati Roy's Fascinating Mess: Being an Activist and an Artist is Trickier than it Sounds", *The Atlantic*, July/August 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/07/arundhati-roys-fascinating-mess/528684/ accessed 10 November 2020 or Eileen Battersby, "*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy Review: All too Obvious", *The Irish Times*, 3 June 2017, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/the-ministry-of-utmost-happiness-by-arundhati-roy-review-all-too-obvious-1.3096344 accessed 10 November 2020. Battersby, in particular, claims that Roy's "polemical instinct is far more developed than her art".

[46] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 137.

[47] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* [1961], trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Kluwer: Academic Publishers, 1991), 43.

innovative".[48] This position, then, goes beyond totality, transcending it. In addition, Dussel's ethics entails the principle of liberation, seen as "the act of the oppressed by which they express or realize themselves".[49] If the Levinasian 'aftertaste' implies a liberation path that establishes continuities between self and other, the word *azadi*, through which Roy ventriloquises the Kashmiri cause, is a significant manifestation of this project. While in the Kashmiri context, the Persian word *Azadi*, as Rakhshan Rizwan argues, evokes the local people's activism against violence, eliciting "a desire for the restoration of the '*haq-e-khud-iradiat*'"[50] that corresponds to "the right to self-determination"[51], in India it has also become the symbol of the fight for women's emancipation. As a slogan, *azadi* becomes a vehicle allowing for the crossing of spatio-temporal borders, but also a performative act directed outside oneself, to the rest of the country and to the rest of the world. Roy then gives voice to the other, to the discriminated and the most vulnerable, thus transcending, in a transmodern sense, the boundary between victims and perpetrators in line with Dussel's liberation project.

The destiny of the Kashmiri people is still highly debated, while the killing fields of the region are so huge that they can "dwarf those of Palestine and Tibet".[52] In the light of this, a critical revision of the present situation requires the active involvement of the local population, a stance that Roy has attempted to unfold in both her non-fiction and narrative works. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, the Kashmir conflict is not merely described with a strong polemical edge; rather, the novel's delving into the brutality of the tensions portrays the psychological impact they have on both sides. Take, for instance, the human parable of Biplab, the officer of the Indian Intelligence service who is responsible for the massacre of the Kashmiris. By the end of the novel, readers gradually find out that the character's mental health begins to deteriorate, edging towards a serious form of depression. The man, who is the only character to be endowed with a first-person narrative perspective, is both a witness to and a perpetrator of evil, exhibiting an exposure to violence which ultimately seems to blur his mental sanity. As he declares, "[i]t worries me that I use the simple past" (189), a statement that discloses the traumatic effects of reporting death and havoc. Biplab's final reflections address all the mistakes made, revealing a man who feels compassion and sorrow for Musa, the Kashmiri freedom-fighter he almost accidentally encounters by the end of the novel. Like a "nostalgic old fool", living in a "kind of epochal sadness" (434), Biplab sees the future of the world as a place swelling with death and destruction, "inured to the sight of piled-up corpses" (430).

Biplab's fractured self transcends the monolithic voice of modernity perceived as a violent eruption of war and destruction, highlighting the mental deterioration that such an engagement with violence can generate. From Iraq to Kashmir, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* establishes metaphorical connections of shared grief and oppression. Moreover, Roy's critical vision of the geopolitical situation juxtaposes violence and hope, decay and compassion, trying to follow an ethics of liberation that, in Dussel's words, "subverts the phenomenological order and pierces it to let in a metaphysical transcendence".[53] Roy's denunciation is also an attempt to cleave the psychological certainty of the mechanisms that govern capitalism, neocolonialism and globalisation, not only with regard to marginalised and oppressed subjects, but also in relation to the threat of present-day environmental apocalypse, thus embracing a planetary ethical perspective. Planetarity, as Spivak argues, is a future-

[48] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 160.
[49] Ibid., 62.
[50] Rakhshan Rizwan, *Kashmiri Life Narratives: Human Rights, Pleasure and the Local Cosmopolitan* (New York and London: Routledge, 2020), 101.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Pankaj Mishra, "Introduction", in Ali et al., eds., *Kashmir: The Case for Freedom*, 1.
[53] Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 58.

oriented experience, an endeavour to go past superficial binary oppositions, "an experience of the impossible"[54] that invites us "to imagine ourselves as planetary creatures rather than global entities".[55]

5. The Environmental Crisis between Apocalypse and Ethics

We now live in a historical moment of considerably growing awareness about the ecological crisis that is affecting our planet. In this respect, among the various domains the transmodern project deals with, the ecological question is a prominent one. The ethics of liberation promoted by transmodern intellectuals sees the human and the non-human as embedded within the same natural world, suggesting the idea of a harmonization between man and nature. Against this background, Marc Luyckx Ghisi has proposed a project of 'genuine sustainability' in which "we put up a stop to the current practices that do irremediable harm to Nature and we begin to heal and to clean our environment".[56] Likewise, Dussel's liberation project provides ample evidence of a certain ecological emphasis:

> The overcoming of cynical management reason (planetary administration), of capitalism (as economic system), of liberalism (as political system), of Eurocentrism (as ideology), of machismo (in erotics), of the reign of the white race (in racism), of the destruction of nature (in ecology), and so on presumes the liberation of diverse types of the oppressed and/or excluded. It is in this sense that the ethics of liberation defines itself as transmodern (because the postmoderns are still Eurocentric).[57]

Dussel's invocation of ecological concerns includes also the question of the environment, allowing for a transmodern liberation project that moves beyond a mere critique of the capitalist and ideological system of modernity. Ecological preoccupations recur also in Roy's writings. Already in *The God of Small Things*, Roy adopts an ecocritical focus on the natural scenario of Kerala, south-west India, where the novel is set. This is how, for instance, Roy comments on climate changes and on human responsibilities:

> Though it was December, it rained as though it was June. "Cyclonic disturbance", the newspapers called it the next day. But by then nobody was in any condition to read the papers. Perhaps it was the rain that drove Vellya Paapen to the kitchen door. To a superstitious man, the relentlessness of that unseasonal downpour could have seemed like an omen from an angry god. To a drunk superstitious man, it could have seemed like the beginning of the end of the world. Which, in a way, it was.[58]

By resorting to the rhetoric of the apocalypse, Roy depicts the "cyclonic disturbance" causing harm and destruction. The Meenachal River, for example, along which the story unfolds, continuously floods, taking the life of human beings. If the basic motto of ecocriticism is "no social justice without environmental justice",[59] Roy's quest for environmental and social harmony is a crucial theme which the Indian author also addresses in her non-fictional works.

In *The Cost of Living*, Roy tackles the construction of a dam on the Narmada River, suggesting that the dam does not entail development, but dispossession, thus implying an experience "of suffering for

[54] Gayatri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2003), 102.
[55] Ibid., 72.
[56] Marc Luyckx Ghisi, *Knowledge Society: A Breakthrough Toward Genuine Sustainability* (Cochin: Arunchala Press, 2009), 5.
[57] Enrique Dussel, "Beyond Eurocentrism: The World System and the Limits of Modernity", in Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham: Duke U.P., 1998), 19.
[58] Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (New York: Random House, 1997), 241.
[59] Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, "Green Postcolonialism", *Interventions*, 9.1 (2007), 10.

those displaced".[60] For Roy, the capitalist logic does not bring even development; rather, it implies forms of domination that produce disastrous consequences. "The story of the Narmada valley", Roy writes, "is nothing less than the story of modern India. Like the tiger in the Belgrade Zoo during the NATO bombing, we're beginning to eat our own limbs".[61] These are the words that Roy uses in her condemnation of this project. As she explains, over 3,000 dams have been built in India in the aftermath of independence, a large investment that has been equated to the process of nation-building. And yet, this conspicuous and immensely expensive strategy has also displaced millions of people, above all those belonging to the lower castes of Indian society. Thus, when it is not war and violence to generate death, the "inflated rhetoric" of progress, as Roy calls Indian environmental policy, exposes the most vulnerable segments of the population to dispossession and poverty. Growing concerns over the delicate condition of modern India have also been expressed by Roy on the present covid-19 emergency that has revealed the country's "brutal, structural, social and economic inequality".[62]

Interestingly, Roy's critique also deals with the ecological effects that unbridled capitalism has on the natural world. Specifically, in the essay titled "The End of Imagination", Roy resorts to the convention of the "environmental apocalypse" that, as Greg Garrard explains, "is not about anticipating the end of the world, but about attempting to avert it by persuasive means".[63] In her essay, Roy discusses the theme of nuclear testing, pointing out the possible risks of such a cataclysmic act: "[i]f there is a nuclear war, our foes will not be China or America or even each other. Our foe will be – the sky, the air, the land, the wind and water – will all turn against us. Their wrath will be terrible".[64] Here, Roy is possibly issuing a warning against the threat of nuclear wars not only as a means for generating loss but also as a way for spoiling our natural world. Along this premise, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* perfectly incarnates Roy's apocalyptic rhetoric, showing a fascination with wounded and precarious ecology.

From the very initial pages, the reader of Roy's second novel is confronted with a fragile natural environment. The *incipit* is a lyrical vignette where a scene of pastoral decay is portrayed. Set at the "*magic hour*", hovering between day and night, this poetic prologue presents an old graveyard where "*vultures died of diclofenac poisoning*" (1; emphasis in the original) among Banyan trees. As the narrator explains, diclofenac is an aspirin[65] given to cows in order to increase the production of milk, a necessity associated with the demands of the constantly growing Indian population. By mixing irony and a highly poetic language, Roy warns the reader of what might happen if we do not try to change our anthropocentric behaviour, a tendency which Roy connects to unbridled capitalism.

Notably, the novel is centred on a range of environmental disasters that reveal Roy's ecocritical concerns. As discussed at the beginning of this section, transmodern ethics shares a fascination with ecology which is seen as a necessary way for promoting inclusiveness and for contrasting economic imbalances. This ecological stance is clearly evident, for instance, when the narrator indulges in the paradoxical nature of India's economic boom. As already alluded before, the policies that the Indian government proposes favour multinational companies, such as in the case of local farmers who become dispossessed of their lands which are instead given to petrochemical corporations (105) or when *adivasi* people are evicted from the forests in order to favour mining companies (421). As Spivak

[60] Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), ix.
[61] Arundhati Roy, *The Cost of Living: The Greater Common Good and the End of the Imagination* (London: Flamingo, 1999), x.
[62] Arundhati Roy, "The Pandemic Is a Portal", *The Financial Times*, 3 April 2020, https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca, accessed 10 November 2020.
[63] Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 107-108.
[64] Roy, *The Cost of Living*, 46.
[65] I am using the word 'aspirin' as it appears in Roy's novel though dioclofenac is a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug and it does not share the same molecular formula as in aspirins.

notes, in a world dominated by the West imperial agenda, economic profit can only produce "the common thread of profound ecological loss, the loss of forest and river as foundation of life".[66] In other words, a planetary ethics, in line with Dussel's liberation project is a way to deconstruct the model of global exploitation. In this respect, a similar type of impingement is at work in Roy's novel as it shows how anthropocentric behaviour generates loss and deterioration, as in the case of the 1984 Union Carbide Bhopal disaster. This gas leak, which caused the death of about one thousand people in Bhopal, central India, has produced "generations of deformed babies" and thousands of people "killed, maimed and blinded" (111).

Despite such an apocalyptic portrait, Roy eventually opens up to glimmers of hope: by the end of the novel, the garden yielding "beans, chillies, tomatoes and several kinds of gourds" (399), near the graveyard where Anjum and Tilo create their own community, provides a "temporary solace" (400) for the sense of grief the novel entails. Anjum and Tilo's final choice of moving to a graveyard is the sign of a spiritual reunion with the natural world, Roy's protagonists display an ethics of care and affect. Significantly, Anjum, who "lives like a tree" (3) in the graveyard, embodies Roy's intellectual energy, entailing a transmodern sensibility that subverts capitalist and neo-colonialist modernity with an ecomorphic encounter with the natural world, attuned to the 'unconsoled', to whom the Indian writer has dedicated her novel.

6. Coda: Refracting the Transmodern

Postcolonial intellectuals, as Engin Isin contends, should be seen as "neither universal nor specific but transversal political subjects, always crossing borders and orders, constituting solidarities, networks, and connections".[67] By choosing a *hijra*, those tormented by conflicts, and wounded ecology as her main narrative focuses, Roy expands and complicates the mainstream narrative of postcolonial India, privileging marginal voices which together patch up the fragments of a multifaceted and complex country. Through them, Roy articulates a feeling of transformative solidarity, an emotional contagion that is well expressed in the poem that appears by the end of the novel: "*How to tell a shattered story? By slowly becoming everybody. No. By slowly becoming everything*" (436; emphasis in the original). The shattered stories contained in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* resonate with the Indian author's intellectual activism that readers may find in her non-fictional accounts. And yet, albeit the negative atmosphere that looms large in Roy's macrotext, these lyrical lines are a kind of coda that orient readers across the fluid transmodern format of the novel. Whilst characters and nature seem to be engulfed by events and incidents and *dramatis personae* multiply, Roy's style invites readers to reflect on the inequalities of our world, showing a transformative active function. The figural language of the novel is evocative of Dussel's transmodern stance since it tries to maintain a dialogue between self and other, man and nature, coloniser and colonised, history and mythology, revealing a "rich thematic of the refraction of the center in or by the periphery".[68] By promoting attention to individual singularities and global questions, Roy's novel can be said to allow for "an increased demand for solidarity"[69] that Onega sees as a central concern in trasnmodern literary texts. The novel, to conclude, contributes to an epistemological thinking from the borders insomuch that it elicits attentiveness to local singularities

[66] Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 1999), 380.
[67] Engin Isin, "Preface: Postcolonial Intellectuals *Universal, Specific or Transversal?*", in Sandra Ponzanesi and Adriano José Habed, eds., *Postcolonial Intellectuals in Europe: Critics, Artists, Movements, and Their Publics* (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), xiv.
[68] Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity*, 137.
[69] Onega, "Thinking English Literature and Criticism under the Transmodern Paradigm", 373.

and global issues, edging towards a Transmodern paradigm shift through which the decolonial/postcolonial debate is eventually refracted.