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ABOUT US

WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal provided dedicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you

RECIPROCAL RESISTANCE: ARUNDHATI ROY'S FEMINIST DIALECTICS OF CONFLICT

AUTHORED BY - S M SAKHAWAT HOSSAIN

*This study interrogates dominant conflict resolution paradigms through Arundhati Roy's literary and political oeuvre, proposing a feminist theory of reciprocal resistance that challenges liberal peacebuilding's limitations. While conventional models prioritize institutional compromise and normative reconciliation, Roy's work spanning *The God of Small Things* to *My Seditious Heart* articulates an alternative epistemology of conflict that centers subaltern agency through unfinished justice. Employing close textual analysis and feminist decolonial frameworks, the study examines how Roy's narrative strategies (nonlinear temporality, polyphonic testimony) and activist interventions (Kashmir solidarity, anti-dam movements) construct a dialectical model of conflict resolution. The study findings reveal three radical principles: (1) conflict as sustained ethical engagement rather than technical solution; (2) resolution requiring oppressors' embodied accountability; and (3) justice as permanently contested terrain. Roy's contribution within critical peace studies, demonstrates how her reciprocal resistance framework: (a) disrupts neoliberal reconciliation's violence of closure; (b) reorients feminist conflict theory toward materialist praxis; and (c) offers decolonial methodologies for contemporary liberation struggles. This analysis ultimately redefines conflict resolution as an ongoing process of mutual vulnerability and structural dismantling.*

Keywords: *Arundhati Roy, feminist conflict theory, reciprocal resistance, unfinished justice, decolonial praxis*

1. Introduction:

1.1 Research Context: The Crisis in Conflict Resolution Theory

Contemporary paradigms for conflict resolution remain stuck in what Galtung (1996) referred to as "positive peace" orientations, institutional approaches that prioritize stability over justice, and procedural reconciliation over transformational change. Liberal peacebuilding blueprints (Lederach, 1997) remain dominant in policy arenas in spite of their demonstrated failures in postcolonial societies, where they are employed as what Richmond (2011) refers to as "peace as governance" technocratic solutions that repress historic violence in the guise of impartial mediation. These approaches have three fundamental weaknesses in common: Firstly, they operate within what Spivak (1988) referred to as the "epistemic violence" of Western rationality, imposing universalist schemas on repressed subaltern knowledges. The 2015 Colombian peace process is one such example, FARC combatants being requested to frame grievances in terms which were legalistic and foreign to their actual-world experiences of dispossession (Tate, 2017). Second, neoliberal reconciliation models (Tutu, 1999) objectify justice as transactional forgiveness, what Roy (2004) aptly calls "the algebra of infinite justice" numerical equations of reparations that never equate colonial continuities. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission shows us how such a "forgiveness industry" (Mamdani, 2000) can be what feminist critics call "reconciliation as erasure" (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2015), leaving structural patriarchy and economic violence intact. Third, these models tap into what Mohanty (2003) has denounced as "feminism without borders" – militarized depoliticized gender mainstreaming that appropriates women into peace processes but not into the exercises of militarized power. UN Security Council Resolution 1325's implementation in Kashmir illustrates this paradox, where "women's participation" gets appropriated to legitimate occupation (Manchanda, 2017).

1.2 Arundhati Roy as Conflict Theorist: Bridging the Literary-Political Divide

Roy's unique contribution emerges precisely at these theoretical fault lines. While scholars have split her work, literary criticism appropriating her novels (Tickell, 2007; Dixit, 2013), political science claiming her activism (Nayar, 2010) this artificial division entombs her most innovative contribution: the dialectical synthesis of narrative form and political practice into a novel conflict theory.

Previous studies have neglected three crucial dimensions:

- 1) **Embodied Epistemology:** Roy's novel (*The God of Small Things*, 1997) delineates what we might call a "corporeal theory of conflict" violence not as disembodied political terms but experienced in what Merleau-Ponty (1945) called the "flesh of the world." The novel's emphasis on Ammu's body as a space of caste-patriarchy prefigures her later essays on Kashmir, where she writes, "The stomach is the site of war" (Roy, 2011).
- 2) **Temporal Resistance:** As transitional justice operates in linear temporality (past violence → present truth → future reconciliation), Roy's non-linear fictions (*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, 2017) enact what queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman (2010) has called "temporal drag" the disruptive presence of unresolved pasts. This formal strategy is an explicit challenge to what she calls "the cult of the Supreme Leader" (Roy, 2020) in peace processes.
- 3) **Mutual Witnessing:** Roy's journalism (*Walking with the Comrades*, 2010) is an example of a counterpoint to extractive human rights journalism. Her embedded journalism performs what Das (2007) theorizes as "critical event ethnography," wherein the vulnerability of the witness becomes condition of possibility for ethical responsiveness a gesture that departs radically from liberal fictions of objectivity.

1.3 Thesis and Methodology: Toward a Theory of Reciprocal Resistance

This argument is that Roy's work is a feminist-decolonial theory of shared resistance conflict resolution redefined as:

- 1) Common vulnerability (oppressors must risk equal exposure)
- 2) Ongoing dialectic (justice as ongoing negotiation, not endpoint)
- 3) Material reckoning (bodily consequences rather than symbolic show)

The study approach combines:

Textual Analysis: Close reading of Roy's novels through feminist narratology (Warhol, 2005) and trauma theory (Caruth, 1996) with a view to how narrative structure enacts political theory. The fragmented timeline of *The God of Small Things*, for instance, does what Hartman (1997) calls "critical fabulation" re-writing official histories.

Theoretical Synthesis: The study place Roy in dialogue with:

- Feminist political ecology (Shiva, 1988) conflict as wars over resources;
- Subaltern studies (Guha, 1983) reversing master historiography;
- Critical race theory (Crenshaw, 1991) violence in intersection Praxis Evaluation;

This approach reveals how Roy's work provides what postcolonial theory has for a long time yearned for: a framework of conflict resolution that forgoes the misleading choice between armed struggle and liberal peace what we refer to as the "third way of reciprocal resistance."

2. Theoretical Framework: Feminist Dialectics

2.1 Defining Reciprocal Resistance

Arundhati Roy's theory of reciprocal resistance challenges dominant conflict resolution models of consensus or passivity. Unlike Jürgen Habermas's (1984) communicative action theory, which imagines dialogue as a rational process of mutual understanding, Roy uncovers the tendency in such models to achieve forced consensus at the expense of silencing the voices of the marginalized in the name of neutrality. Where Habermas sees an "ideal speech situation," Roy's writing discusses how asymmetries of power stain conversation so that actual reciprocity is not possible where one has institutional power. Similarly, Roy's approach contrasts strongly with Gandhian ahimsa (nonviolence), which she argues is active compliance that maintains oppressive structures.

Whereas Gandhi drew upon moral persuasion (Gandhi, 1927/1993), Roy, like Audre Lorde (1984), contends that anger and disruption are justifiable means to justice. Lorde's *The Uses of Anger* notes that the anger of the oppressed is not only inevitable but a vital force for change, a position taken by Roy in her disruptive essays and activism. This aligns with Sara Ahmed's (2017) feminist killjoy the individual who will not be party to superficial harmony. Ahmed points out how women interrupting exploitative norms are labeled as troublemaking, just like Roy is, whose unflinching denunciation against state brutality has pigeonholed her as a "dissident." Reciprocal resistance thus has nothing to do with polite negotiation but mutual confrontation, where oppressors must face the discomfort they instill.

2.2 Unfinished Justice

Roy's writing basically refuses the possibility of "closure" in conflict resolution, exactly contrary to transitional justice models (Teitel, 2000) that strive to create definitive endings through trials or truth commissions. Where institutions demand reconciliation, Roy insists on sustained reckoning a notion evoking Walter Benjamin's (1940/1968) messianic time, where past injustices remain urgently present rather than neatly resolved.

This resonates with Jacques Derrida's (1993) hauntology, the argument that unfinished traumas "haunt" the present and will not be interred. Roy's fiction particularly *The Ministry of Utmost*

Happiness (2017) is an incarnation of this, with characters like Anjum, a trans woman who lives with the unfinished wounds of Partition and Kashmir. In contrast to legalistic justice, which assumes final judgments, Roy's framework demands ongoing engagement with historical violence.

2.3 Embodied Epistemologies

For Roy, knowledge of conflict is not abstract but embodied and lived. This follows Chandra Mohanty's (2003) feminist standpoint theory, where subaltern consciousness is accepted as authentic ways of knowing. When Roy explains anti-dam movement protests (*Walking with the Comrades*, 2010) or occupation in Kashmir, she does so in the genre of embodied testimony a practice akin to John Beverley's (2004) *testimonio*, where the testimonies of marginal individuals narrate their own struggles without intermediacy.

Her essays appear as radical ethnography, plunging into others' suffering rather than maintaining distance. This contradicts traditional conflict studies, which prefer to stay aloof. Roy's approach requires: "*to know violence, one must feel its gravity.*"

3. Literary Analysis: Conflict in Roy's Fiction

3.1 The God of Small Things: Caste/Gender as Dialectical Wound

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) shows how caste and gender violence become entwined systems of oppression, where love is politicized. Illegal love affair between Ammu, a woman of the upper-caste class, and Velutha, a man of Dalit origins, is an expression of mutual resistance one fleeting moment of mutuality lost due to the "Love Laws" that regulate "who should be loved, and how" (Roy, 1997, p. 33). Their relationship, as theirs is fated to be, breaks Kerala's postcolonial society's strict hierarchies, showing how intimacy is full of structural violence. Roy's non-linear storytelling replicates this instability, avoiding chronological resolution. Like Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), the novel's disjointed chronology conveys trauma's enduring grip (Caruth, 1996). The disconnected revelation of Velutha's murder first intimated in the novel's early pages forces readers to conform to incompleteness as truth, violating Western literary conventions demanding closure.

3.2 The Ministry of Utmost Happiness: Permanent Conflict

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), Roy introduces Kashmir neither as "a problem to be solved" nor simply as a space of ongoing resistance to the state discourses of

"normalization." Musa, a Kashmiri militant, does not allow the government to take the corpse of his recently deceased fiancée, using her grave as a memorial to unlamented loss (Roy, 2017, p. 212). This is also how real Kashmiri protests are conducted where funerals of martyrs are acts of defiance (Kak, 2021).

Anjum, a hijra (a transgendered woman), also represents embodied dissent. Although India's 2014 bill on transgender rights sought to "include" hijras by legalizing them (Narain, 2016), Roy depicts Anjum's community as one existing outside of state classification. Their decrepit guesthouse is a microcosm of alternative kinship, where disagreement is experienced instead of resolved.

3.3 Narrative Form as Theory

Roy's fractured account combining newspaper clippings, verse, and shifting narrative—executes Spivak's (1988) "the subaltern speaking" through style. Failure of the novel to offer catharsis (e.g., the fate of Tilo) abstains from the "redemptive arc" of trauma fiction (Luckhurst, 2008), demanding instead continued unease.

Polyphony is political praxis, too. Ministry contrasts Anjum's story against Kashmir's violence in a manner that compels readers to conduct themselves with opposing truths, as in the "both/and" dictum of feminist dialectics (Mohanty, 2003).

4. Political Essays: Praxis of Resistance

4.1 Against Neoliberal Peace

Roy's *Walking with the Comrades* (2010) dismantles the Indian government's branding of Maoist revolutionaries as "terrorists," recasting their rebellion as resistance to developmental violence. Roy, in exile with guerrillas in the jungle of Bastar, unpacks how corporate mining projects glossed as "progress"—displace Adivasi people (Roy, 2010, p. 47).

Her critique is confirmed by David Harvey's (2005) "accumulation by dispossession," bare facing neoliberal peace as violence rebranded.

Similarly, *The End of Imagination* (1998) deconstructs India's nuclear tests in 1998 as nationalist successes. Roy describes this "mass psychosis" (Roy, 1998, p. 12), and illustrates how militarism manufactures consent through the blurring of opposition with treason a process Giroux (2014) has theorized as "dissemination machines."

4.2 Listening as Labor

Roy's writings on Kashmir (*The Algebra of Infinite Justice*, 2001) are paradigmatic testimonial journalism. Placing Kashmiri voices like the mother who "counts [bullets] like beads on a rosary" (Roy, 2001, p. 89) she performs what Joan Tronto (1993) would characterize as "attentive care", in which listening is political labor.

This is in accordance with Veena Das's (2007) "dangerous listening" the ethical risk of internalizing others' trauma. When Roy is writing about Narmada dam protests, she doesn't just report but lives solidarity, braving floodwaters with ousted farmers (Roy, 1999).

4.3 The Limits of Solidarity

Roy self-consciously invokes her own privilege in *My Seditious Heart* (2019): "I speak about, not" (Roy, 2019, p. xxiii). This is echoed by Spivak's (1988) warning that intellectuals co-opt subaltern struggles. But Roy's self-implication as "the court jester" of elites (Roy, 2009) is a model for accountable allyship, as is hooks' (1990) "engaged pedagogy."

5. Toward a Royian Model of Conflict

Arundhati Roy, the celebrated writer and activist, offers a revolutionary model of conflict which defies conventional legalistic and state-normative constructs. She writes on lived resistance, the necessity of opposition, and resistance to the sanitizing of oppression by institutional or bureaucratic process. This study suggests a Royian model of conflict resolution from her political writings and speeches, analyzing its applications and limitations.

5.1 Feminist Principles of Conflict Resolution

Roy's conflict philosophy is deeply feminist and anti-colonial and resists abstract legalism on behalf of lived experience. Three principles are discernible from her work:

1. Prioritizing the Body (over Abstract Legalism)

Roy critiques state apparatuses that depoliticize oppression by rendering it a mere matter of legal procedures. Embodied resistance where the body of the oppressed steps in to shatter power relations is her preference (Roy, 2001). For example, writing on Kashmir, she identifies how militarization is experienced at the body level through disappearance, torture, and curfews which necessitates resistance that will not be abstracted into courtroom arguments (Roy, 2011).

2. Reciprocal Vulnerability (Oppressors Must Bear Witness)

Contrary to liberal theories of peacemaking, which demand "neutral" mediation, Roy demands that oppressors be compelled to witness the consequences of their deeds. In *Walking with the Comrades* (2010), she documents Indigenous resistance in Indian forests, arguing that state violence must be witnessed rather than bureaucratically mediated. This decree demands that power be accountable by way of face-to-face encounter with suffering.

3. Persistent Dissent as Justice

Justice is always an elusive concept but an ongoing struggle for Roy. She avoids the premise that conflicts have to be "resolved" in order to institutionally preserve harmony and promotes endless dissension (Roy, 2004). This aligns with feminist criticisms of reconciliation models prioritizing closure over truth (Crenshaw, 1991).

5.2 Comparative Applications

Roy's theory resonates within global resistance movements:

i. Palestinian Resistance

Roy's work on Israel-Palestine (2011, 2014) condemns the language of occupation as a "conflict" rather than settler-colonialism. She rejoices in Palestinian refusal acts such as the Great March of Return as being about resistance that cannot be legislated out of existence. Her work chimes with Said's (1978) condemnation of Orientalist accounts that depoliticize oppression.

ii. Indigenous Movements (Standing Rock, Anti-Caste Struggles)

At Standing Rock, material bodily resistance of water protectors against pipelines realized Roy's body centering concept (Estes, 2019). Similarly, Dalit struggles in India such as the Bhima Koregaon protests resist violence of caste through sustained protest rather than legal action (Roy, 2017).

5.3 Challenges

There is strong critique but material and theoretical challenges to Roy's model:

i. Utopianism? Material Constraints of Roy's Mode

Roy's reliance on relentless struggle risks disregarding pragmatic survival strategies of oppressed peoples (Spivak, 1988). Constant conflict cannot be maintained by all groups in the absence of defensive institutions.

ii. Romanticizing Endless Struggle

Idolizing endless struggle risks unwittingly sanctioning suffering in the lack of any mechanism of material transformation (Mbembe, 2003). Agons such as South Africa's post-apartheid truth commissions, as they are, show that some form of organized resolution must take place.

Roy's model resists liberal peacebuilding in placing the oppressed body at the center and rejecting pacification in institutions. However, its viability depends on how it balances resistance with strategic dividends. Future research must analyze how Royian resistance aligns with transitional justice and bottom-up mobilization.

6. Conclusion

Arundhati Roy's model of conflict dispenses with depoliticized, state-managed closure of oppression in favor of what one can term as reciprocal resistance a feminist and decolonial disruption that centers the body, advocates exposure of oppressors, and views dissent as a long-term ethical practice. Her work turns liberal peacebuilding discourses prioritizing institutional balance over justice on their heads, instead insisting on visibility to violence and the incompressibility of resistance. Where conventional conflict studies yearn for closure, Roy's approach enacts irresolution as political necessity, in so far as certain examples of oppression can't and shouldn't be "resolved" in terms of existing relations of power. This has profoundly practical consequences for the way we think about justice. If conflict is not aberration to be mediated but symptom of enduring hierarchies, then the objective is no longer resolution but amplification making sure the oppressed are heard in their own voice. Roy's identification with Indigenous, Palestinian, and anti-caste struggles is a model of the ways embodied resistance rejects the abstractions of diplomacy or law and insists on confronting material suffering. But that makes it difficult: Can freedom be maintained through opposition only? How do we reconcile the need for ongoing struggle with the need for present material relief? Scholars to arrive at some point needs to place Roy in dialogue with Black radical movements that also refuse liberal pacification. Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019), for instance, theorizes how dominated populations perform freedom beyond official regimes a prophetic echo of Roy's lived resistance. Dialogue through such affinities might be able to take our thinking on conflict out of a problem to be solved, but as a condition to be remade ethically, unapologetically, and without promise.

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