

Research Article

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Mobility and Insurgent Celebrityhood: The Case of Arundhati Roy

DOI 10.1515/culture-2017-0005

Received December 16, 2016; accepted April 24, 2017

Abstract: Indian novelist and Booker winner Arundhati Roy is a celebrity author, but her celebrityhood is a cross-genre and cross-domain one. This essay argues that a certain insurgent celebrityhood emerges in the case of Roy through her mobility into and across many public domains. In this process of mobility, Roy also mobilises in her rhetoric and her polemics, the precariat public sphere by her participation in it. There is, first her generic mobility (across genres). Then, Roy moves from the cosmopolitan domain to the vernacular when she employs her cosmopolitan cultural capital of the English language, but also political ideas of citizenship, in order to alter her vernacularisation. Third, Roy's activism enables her mobilisation of "insurgents," those with political views opposed to the state's and involved with social justice struggles.

Keywords: Arundhati Roy, mobility, insurgent celebrityhood, cosmopolitanism, vernacularization

Che adorns tee-shirts, coffee-mugs, stationery, caps and any number of material objects, most of which have little to do with the avowedly left-oriented social reformer and revolutionary. "Regimes of value," as John Frow reminds us (2002), organise the aesthetic space in which an icon is circulated: so Che's visage circulates simultaneously among dissident teenagers, grunge dressing and high-end fashion products just as his *Motorcycle Diaries* does. "Insurgent celebrityhood" is my term for the inextricable link of mobility with dissidence, a mobility that then, within the regimes of value of contemporary popular and public culture enables the mobilisation of protest, sentiments and political activism. The sense of mobility is of course embedded in the very word "insurgence," from "insurgere," meaning "to rise up in revolt."

Starting off her career as a script writer for films, receiving critical acclaim and literary celebritydom for *The God of Small Things* (1997), and finally a substantial mass popularity among activists stemming from her association with the Narmada Bachao Andolan, Roy has demonstrated a kind of celebrity that is rare in India. For a literary figure to metamorphose into a cultural commentator is fairly easy—in recent times we have seen the best-selling author Chetan Bhagat do this. For an academic to be involved in public debates is also common enough (Amartya Sen, Ramachandra Guha, Ashis Nandy, Romila Thapar, Shiv Vishvanathan, Kancha Ilaiah).¹ Her early activist writing included a clinical-yet-poetic dissection of Shekar Kapur's biopic, *Bandit Queen*, on the Indian woman bandit, Phoolan Devi (Roy's review essay, "The Great Indian Rape Trick" appeared in two parts in 1994 in the now-defunct periodical *Sunday*, well before the release of her novel). In this early piece, Roy made an explicitly feminist reading of the film, arguing that it rendered the protagonist only as a rape-victim but, most importantly, ignored the caste and land-ownership angle which Mala Sen's biography (which Shekar Kapur adapted) highlighted, and neutralised the rebel-woman. The

1 I have elsewhere argued that Indian Writing in English, as a genre, has become a celebrity partly because of the public engagements of the authors, and for various other reasons (Nayar 2014).

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debate provoked by Roy's defence of the woman bandit (see, notably, Sen 1995) gave the world the first glimpse of what Roy clearly does: it discerns, and it divides readers.

What Roy has however achieved is cross-genre celebrityhood with economics, politics, socio-cultural processes and practices and literature, all being domains in which she has made her presence and contributions. In this essay, I propose that Arundhati Roy, Indian novelist, polemicist and activist, demonstrates an insurgent celebrityhood whose primary process I take to be mobility.

Central to Roy's celebrityhood is an unparalleled and admirable series of mobilities. By "mobility" I intend the facility, fluency, felicity and frequency of entering into multiple domains of public life, from the political to the cultural. Roy's mobility is across genres, geopolitical and cultural borders and political concerns. While this mobility generates her insurgent celebritydom globally, it also enables a mobilisation, founded on her participation in the precariat public sphere writ globally.

By "precariat public sphere" I mean (i) that public sphere made up of the "precarious lives" (Judith Butler's now-renowned construction, 2004) Roy spoke for, (ii) a public sphere made of the bourgeois but whose concerns and politics lay with these classes and (iii) a public sphere constituted by a sense of precarity that haunts the vast majority of Indians. This precariat public sphere might be seen in the visual and verbal representations of protests against Kundamkulam nuclear projects, the Narmada dam, tribal rights campaigns in Kerala, among others, all sharing, as has been argued (Nayar 2013), a common grammar.

This essay instantiates the belief that new forms of political protests demand and generate new rhetorical, generic and discursive modes, and that Arundhati Roy's success and effect as a polemicist drawing upon literary tropes and political communications strategies ensures her celebritydom across domains. The essay demonstrates, further, that in Roy's case the literary and political are not separate domains: her brilliance has been to harness the two in terms of discursive shifts and rhetorical devices. In 2002 a commentator in *The Hindu* summarised Roy's public persona when he wrote: "instinctively she understands how all politics is a form of theatre and her very stature speaks eloquently of a David and Goliath battle" (Reddy 2002). An academic essay puts it this way: "there is no ideological break between the novel [*The God of Small Things*] and Roy's subsequent writings" (Baneth-Nouailhetas 95). The comments presciently point to the theatrical spectacle, the rhetorical flourishes and the drama she brings through her prose to the public appeals, and the public appearance with which she vivifies her prose.

Generic Mobility

When in 1997 Roy's *The God of Small Things* won the Booker Prize, it immediately acquired a visibility and inserted itself into an unverifiable but palpable regime of value: Indian cultural and national identity writ globally. Nineteen ninety-seven was also the 50th year of India's independence. Besides Roy, two of India's beauty queens, Aishwarya Rai and Sushmita Sen, won international beauty contests and would go on to become Bollywood stars. Roy became integral to a celebratory "50 years of Independent India."

The novel itself with its linguistic and formal experimentation acquired opprobrium and fan-following among the small percentile of readers of English-language fiction. Roy has not published a novel since this one to date (she releases her second in June 2017, two decades after *The God of Small Things*). The novel's success was, indisputably, within the elite English-speaking classes. But it also acquired academic respectability with M.Phil and PhD dissertations, critical anthologies, essays and conference papers appearing across English and Comparative Literature Departments in India. One of the first indications of the times to come may have appeared early—the discussions around Roy's portrayal of caste and gender oppression in the work of fiction. The academic and intellectual discussion was, expectedly, divided on her allegiance to conservative (or worse, neo-con) ideologies and her radicalism. This effectively laid, I propose, the grounds for Roy's generic mobility.

Roy's ability to *move* across genres, and experiment with them, is an instance of "generic engineering" (I borrow Joseph Slaughter's term, 2007, suggesting the alteration, hybridization and adaption of genres for one's own political purpose—for instance the use of comic books to speak of serious topics such as the

Holocaust or Human Rights). Appropriating the languages of political polemics but casting it within the rhetoric of sentiment—she *feels* for her nation, the rivers, the oppressed—that marks the personal essay, Roy engineers the very genre of the political essay. Personalising her approach to political issues as she transforms the engagement with ideas of constitutionality, democracy or nationalism, as I shall demonstrate, renders her work an excellent instance of the postcolonial appropriation—and abrogation—of the English language itself.

The tag of elitism, given that she wrote her novel in *English*, might have become the proverbial millstone and immovable anchor for Roy, tethering her to the identity of being just another bright English novelist from India, taken up by the West. Roy's first essays, also in English, were signs that she would not stay elitist, even if the language of writing was at once poetic (elite again), polemical and highly reflective, all at once. "The Great Indian Rape Trick" (1994, *before* her novel) "The End of Imagination" (1998), "The Greater Common Good" (1999), "The Algebra of Infinite Justice" (2001) and other essays from her early phase, against India's nuclearization program, Big Dams and development policies enabled Roy to undertake a migration: from being the creator of perhaps-radical literary figures and fictions to a commentator with anti-establishment (i.e., anti-state and anti-corporate) views. Retaining the register of English polemics—one can sense George Orwell, Salman Rushdie but also Alan Badiou in her early work—Roy proceeded to align herself firmly with concerns of the underdog.

I propose that generic mobility in Roy *denaturalized* her as a writer of English fiction. In the midst of debates about the "authenticity" of Indian writing in English (Chandra 2000; Sunder Rajan 2001), Roy quietly slipped into the role of "voice of the oppressed," that oft-used and well-recognized academic phrase. Roy's work did not at any point lapse into colloquialisms or take recourse to idiomatic expressions from rural India and folklore, even as she borrows yuppie slang, political languages of citizenship and rights freely and scatters her prose with interesting turns of highly visual phrase ("I could see little children with littler goats scuttling across the landscape like motorized peanuts," "The Greater Common Good"). She stayed with English, but what she achieved in the course of her generic mobility was shift the regime of value in which her high-English prose would be read and evaluated: a regime of value that locates her within the tradition of dissident writing, political commentary and social polemics.

What shall we do then, those of us who are still alive? Burned and blind and bald and ill, carrying the cancerous carcasses of our children in our arms, where shall we go? What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we breathe? (Roy, "The End of Imagination,")

The alliterative prose of Roy is an unusual choice of language, surely, but one that readily fits into the affective public sphere.

Big Dams are obsolete. They're uncool. They're undemocratic . . . They're a guaranteed way of taking a farmer's wisdom away from him. They're a brazen means of taking water, land, and irrigation away from the poor and gifting it to the rich . . . Ecologically, they're in the doghouse. They lay the earth to waste. (Roy, "The Greater Common Good")

Merging the language of economics, politics, rights with yuppie/youth slang and idiomatic expressions Roy here makes the larger point about the ineffectual nature of Big Dams.

I would go so far as to propose that Roy's prose and generic innovations—polemics in precise, poetic prose—that would have otherwise rung hollow and inauthentic in terms of its connections with the oppressed and disenfranchised social classes the prose was supposed to represent, implicitly suggests that the real conditions on the ground were essentially untranslatable into a "proper" idiom. In other words, Roy performed an act of "generic engineering" by making it possible to situate, or embed, the local voices of resistance—the Narmada displaced—within a global grammar of rights, responsibilities and accountability.

The search for a wide-ranging idiom of Human Rights has been on for some time. Upendar Baxi asks:

How far do these [the narrative voices of the oppressed] translate the variegated adopted/imposed/borrowed grammars of international human rights as expressive of the pain, sorrow, and suffering of constantly disenfranchised humans? How may one translate the vernacular languages of human violation, abuse, and suffering into the inclusive/commodious normative languages of contemporary human rights? To what extent may contemporary human rights languages advance

the task of constructing languages of our shared political and social responsiveness and responsibility to redress human abuse, violation and violence? (xxv-xxvi)

Roy, situating herself on the side of the precariat public sphere, finds the answers to Baxi's questions in her choice of language and rhetoric. Conscious of the metropolitan and elite readers of her English prose, Roy constructed cultural texts that were equal parts emotion, political logic, interrogatives and subjective expressions. Roy altered the language of protest the English-reading public of India had become familiar with, thanks to the writings of P. Sainath, Harsh Mander and Kancha Ilaiah by demonstrating how multiple *rhetorics* could serve the purpose of raising consciousness. Where Kancha Ilaiah relies heavily on Ambedkarite political thought, Sainath on economics and Harsh Mander on civil action, Roy merges all of them in her intergeneric prose. Retaining the elitism of English, Roy managed to reposition herself within the precariat public sphere.

Aligned more with the subaltern public sphere with a distinct emphasis on the precarity of lives lived in the shadow of displacement, starvation, unemployment and even massacres, the precariat public sphere that Roy hopes to stand for partakes of the languages of protest adapted from the bourgeois public sphere but fitted into the affective language of the subalterns.² This style of Roy's generic engineering is the response to Baxi's questions: the language of political rights, of citizenship and universal human rights might need to be infused with the language of affect and silences of the precariat public sphere. There is no one language of human rights: testimonies, Truth Commissions, Amnesty Reports, newspaper coverage and exposés such as from Abu Ghraib are mixed and matched in the kind of generic engineering that Roy indulges in.

The grammar of human rights and the grammar of protests were appropriated by Roy and recast within languages of fervent appeal, subjective responses and cultural questions about citizenship and rights. I propose that the shift toward the precariat public sphere attained through her slippery, complex and poetic registers, gave Roy a *cultural* legibility and legitimacy that was far more than just an extension of her literary legibility. Starting with fictional characters like Velutha and Ammu of *The God of Small Things*, Roy went on to assimilate such numerous nameless but real lower castes and women, direct and indirect victims of globalisation, development and state indifference, into her grammar. With the use of such nameless, faceless figures disenfranchised by historical processes (for instance, the Narmada dam), Roy gives them a space of representation, a certain cultural legibility. Indeed, it could be said that the defacement achieved by the project is precisely what constitutes its "face," exemplified by the saddened or withered visages often seen in photographs of the displaced.

Roy manages to yoke together the more innovative and high-cultural dimensions of the English polemical tradition with a subjective and, shall we say folkloric, grassroots embeddedness. Her English makes her mobility into global visibility easier. Her frequently subjective tone situates her in sharp dissonance with the so-called "rational public sphere" (if we accept the Habermasian construction, that is) but within the folkloric schema of local protests. Finally, her language of political citizenship and rights appropriates globally recognised languages of, say, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Cosmopolitan-Vernacular Mobility

Roy's career moves from her cosmopolitan domain to the vernacular—by which I really mean her association with the precariat—where she deploys her cosmopolitan cultural capital (English, political idea(s) of citizenship) in order to furnish her vernacularisation. Then, of course, she takes the vernacular to the cosmopolitan stage again, when she speaks in the U.S.A., gives interviews to the UK's *Guardian* (2014) and other such global cultural spaces. But what makes Roy's work exceptional is the harnessing of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism to the vernacular and the local.

² Commentators like Nancy Fraser have pointed to the inadequacy of Habermasian theory of rational dialogue as the cornerstone of the public sphere. Sentiment and affect have increasingly come in for attention from those who see "public feelings" as central to the way societies and cultures, and even nations, see and talk about themselves (Berlant 2004, 2011; Cvetkovich 2012).

In “Listening to the Grasshoppers” (2008) she aligns the genocide of Armenians (1915), Rwanda (1999) and others with the massacre of 2000-plus Muslims in post-Godhra Gujarat (2002). Roy uses the word *lebensraum* (“living space”), Nazi Germany’s key concept which argued that vast European lands need to be annexed to create adequate living space for Germans, in this essay. Later, she notes how survivors of genocides, whether Armenians or Muslims, live in ghettos and camps built on garbage heaps. Roy takes an extraordinarily discriminatory, even violent, concept that eventually climaxed in Nazi Germany’s pursuit of empire and extermination, to point out on-the-ground condition in, say Gujarat, India, of refugees and survivors. It is almost as though the Nazi concept offers Roy the exact register and idiom in which to speak of the conditions in post-riots Gujarat and the anti-minoritarianism of Indian democracy itself. But she also uses the term to caution us: an idea of living space that concretized first as “mere” discrimination culminated in genocide.

When writing about Seattle’s anti-WTO protests and American imperialism (“People vs. Empire,” 2004), Roy once again uses global events to address Indian concerns. She starts with American imperialism and its use of the “public” (Roy notes that “government” and “the people” are merged in the actions of the United States) and then shoehorns in the point that, in India, there is no ideological difference between the Congress Party and the right-wing, pro-Hindutva Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In her analysis, therefore, Roy develops a cosmopolitanism that addresses the vernacular condition in the idiom of an international problem (Empire) and solution (civil-civic resistance). By vernacularizing social protests such as Seattle and by appropriating the languages of global protests, Roy swiftly aligns herself simultaneously with both. Critiquing the 27-floor home, “Antilla,” of the billionaire Mukesh Ambani, Roy links capitalism, civil liberties campaigns and wars in the First World. She also notes with distress the sources of funding of activist campaigns and NGOs, whether in India, South Africa or in the First World, often lie in Ford, Coca-Cola and Lehman brothers. Roy acknowledges, however, that “another language has appeared on US streets and campuses” thanks to “Occupy” (“Capitalism: A Ghost Story,” 2012). When commenting on the horrific Khairlanji killings of Dalits (2006), Roy aligns the dead and unrepresented victims with the survivor-heroine Malala Yousufzai (“Indiass Shame,” 2014). In her controversial Introduction to a new edition of BR Ambedkar’s *Annihilation of Caste* (2014), Roy incessantly draws connections between American racism, India’s caste-based discrimination and the transnationalisation of the latter (Roy notes that caste exists among upwardly mobile Indian immigrants in the First World as well. Here, in particular, Roy effectively brings together her literary portraits of caste-based discrimination, globalisation and the changing social order in Kerala state, south India, in *The God of Small Things* with the national and global issues around discrimination in general.

I return here briefly to my earlier argument (Nayar 2013) about Roy’s finessing of local concerns with larger, global protest projects. Akin to what a critic has described as “Roy’s aesthetics of the small and minute in her novel and contemporary events [that are] therefore political” (Baneth-Nouailhetas 97), Roy’s emphasis in “The Greater Common Good,” on local farming techniques, local farmers’ expertise and local knowledge is central to the way she globalizes Narmada and herself. I argued then that Roy constructs a dichotomy between local, practical and collective knowledge and the globalising, capitalist “modern” knowledge. Roy, I now propose, demonstrates a remarkable rhetorical and political cosmopolitanisation of the vernacular and vice versa.

If cosmopolitanism is at once a response born of “shared judgments about particular cases” (Appiah 223) it is also a “reflective distance from one’s original or primary cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures and contexts, and a belief in universal Humanity” (Anderson 63). But, Lauren Goodlad points out, cosmopolitanism grows out of new transnational *movements* of goods and people, industrialisation and geopolitics (400-01). Note how Roy’s work demonstrates these aspects of cosmopolitanism, even as she clings tenaciously to root causes and local mobilisations. The focus, clearly, is a global precariat public sphere.

When asked to speak about “how to confront Empire” at the World Social Forum in 2003, Roy says: “[i]n many countries, Empire has sprouted other subsidiary heads, some dangerous byproducts—nationalism, religious bigotry, fascism and, of course, terrorism. All these march arm in arm with the project of corporate globalisation” (“Confronting Empire”). Her immediate example of such a corporate globalisation

is, interestingly, *India*, and how it sells its “water, electricity, oil, coal, steel, health, education, and telecommunication” (“Confronting Empire,” 2003). In another essay, she does the reverse, fitting herself into an entirely different context of oppression and thus embedding herself in a cosmopolitan history of the precariat public sphere. While apologising for criticising the US despite not being an American, Roy concludes the apologia with: “[m]ay I clarify that I speak as a subject of the U.S. empire? I speak as a slave who presumes to criticise her king” (“The Loneliness of Noam Chomsky,” 2003)

Roy’s rhetoric finesses America’s most shameful history—slavery—with neo-colonialism (Empire) and globalisation. Separating herself from the United States and yet inserting herself into a global precariat public sphere, Roy performs a mobility across geopolitical borders but also histories, forms of oppression and social groups. An emerging (emergent?) global subaltern class consisting of migrants, low-wage workers, refugees and dispossessed whose lives are subject to the neo-colonial norms and operations of work, labour and capital makes up this global precariat public sphere Roy draws attention to—and this is the tragic result of Empire.³

Roy’s technique has been, right from the early essays, to never abandon the local for the global and thus embodies what has been variously termed “vernacular cosmopolitanism” (Werbner 2006) and “territorialized cosmopolitanism” (Johannsen 2008). Roy’s celebrityhood, I argue, stems from this constant mobility across geopolitical borders and various subaltern groups in different parts of the world. The only constant in this process of mobility is her attention to the precarious lives—an attention instantiated in her rhetoric of empathy, civil society engagements and protests while adopting symbols, actions and processes from the larger world of “resistance.” Inventorying, as Roy is prone to do in her writings, merely serves to provide a *multisite* location for her mobility and consequent rhetoric of protest and resistance.

Mobility and Mobilisation

A significant, and perhaps expected, consequence of the above two mobilities for Roy has been the kind of mobilisation around her. Her participation in the precariat public sphere through activism and the rhetoric she deploys has generated an interest, fan base and followers among university students, journalists, international and national activists, polemicists and the disempowered. Roy’s “insurgent celebrityhood,” in other words, is not only about her own mobilities, but also about mobilization of insurgents (I use the term, not as a pejorative but to signify those whose views, antagonistic to that of the state, causes them to launch campaigns and activist programs, not all of which are armed struggles.)⁴

In the first key essay, “The End of Imagination,” she threatened to secede from the state of India. She underwent a much-publicised one-day imprisonment for contempt of court. Such generic innovations with emotion, rhetoric and opinion in Roy’s speeches and writings have combined with definitive symbolic gestures such as the above might suggest style over substance.⁵ I propose that Roy’s initial stardom as a literary figure folds, or shades, into a star-activist for the Narmada and against globalisation. This fits in with the late twentieth century’s use of fame in political culture (Street 2003, 2004). I see Roy’s mobility across genres and geopolitical/cultural borders as a *performance* that furthers a political project. In this reading, I adapt John Street’s idea of “celebrity performance.” Street outlines it as follows:

[I]n focusing on the style in which politics is presented, we need to go beyond mere description of the gestures and images. We need to assess them, to think about them as performances and to apply critical language appropriate to this . . . To see politics as coterminous with popular culture is not to assume that it is diminished . . . The point is to use this approach to discover the appropriate critical language with which to analyse it. (Street “The Celebrity Politician” 97)

³ Empire here is used in the Hardt-Negri (2000) sense. This Empire is decentered, rhizomatic and near-ghostly and embodies the present stage of capitalism

⁴ Roy’s outspoken sympathies for the Maoist (communism-inspired insurgents advocating armed struggle against the state) has often resulted in awkward situations. For instance, in one talk she unambiguously vouchsafed support for the armed resistance of the Maoists – just after they had gunned down women and children in a village (see <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/I-didnt-term-Maoists-as-Gandhians-with-guns-Arundhati-Roy/articleshow/6005215.cms>).

⁵ Douglas Kellner had argued that this dominance of style over substance is the key problem with celebrity diplomacy (2010)

Street's arguments about performance gesture clearly at a different order and style of political performance and diplomacy. Roy, I suggest, makes use of her stardom in one domain and performs in another—it is notable that 18 years have passed, at the time of writing, and she has not published another literary piece, which seems to gesture at this shift of domains. This is not to take away from the efficacy of the style in the ways in which it contributes to her political work.

The affective prose, the subjective tone, the polemical outbursts, the citation of world events are performances, adapted from the field she specialised in—film script writing, literary fictions—that Roy choreographs and *stylizes* her appearances in order to express her solidarity with and mobilisation of the precariat public sphere of the world. As theatre, it works effectively, and if Street is correct in his argument, a new form of public and political diplomacy/activism is now emerging with the likes of Roy. Cutting across popular culture and elite political commentaries, embeddedness in grassroots lives and futures, this performance by Roy is the centrepiece of a new political idiom.

“Mobilization” here is a mix of fan-following and political grouping, and Roy's audiences and fellow-activists ranging from Noam Chomsky to NYU students to Adivasis in the Narmada basin, seems to suggest that her generic engineering and performance of mobilities does generate a political effect. Given the fact that Roy's focus seems to be the world's subalterns, it is logical that no one style can fit the requirements of mobilisation. To be an insurgent celebrity then, in Roy's case, is to be able to fit into multiple forms of insurgent prose (I call it “dissident writing,” for two reasons: the generic engineering Roy undertakes that refuses to be categorized easily and is thus dissident within writing conventions, and the writing itself as dissident within public culture resisting the state and the corporate worlds) and insurgent populations. Without her mobilities that effect this “fit” her mobilisations are unthinkable.

I align Roy's mobility-driven mobilisations as a mode of political resistance that Bernard Harcourt has termed “political disobedience” (2012). Harcourt defines this form of political disobedience as:

political disobedience . . . resists the very way in which we are governed. It rejects the idea of honoring or expressing the “highest respect for law.” It refuses to willingly accept the sanctions meted out by the legal and political system. It challenges the conventional way that political governance takes place, that laws are enforced. It turns its back on the political institutions and actors who govern us all. It resists the structure of partisan politics, the traditional demand for policy reforms, the call for party identification, and, beyond that, the very ideologies that have dominated the postwar period. (34)

I propose that by possessing and “occupying” multisite political spaces, as Roy does with her mobilities, she is able to ensure that the state in *all* cases, whether the USA's crony capitalism or India's corporatized democracy, with adequate support from the judiciary and the political parties, is to blame for the injustice to the precariat. That is, Roy generates a political disobedience whose primary target remains the state and its apparatuses, *across the world*. Just as the “Occupy” campaign, located in one city, one street, focused on how Wall Street as the “enemy” of “*all* people” and “*the* environment” (visuals of the campaign in Taussig 60), Roy's rhetoric encompasses the world. Rather than focus on, say, India's state-organized development plans (of which the Narmada is the best known), Roy builds common cause with victims of the older institution of American slavery, of contemporary global neo-cons, and numerous such cross-border, transnational issues and peoples. Political disobedience of the sort Roy participates in is possible, I argue, only because of the mobility regime she inhabits. The state, in Roy's mobilisation of political disobedience and insurgency, is always to blame.

That since Roy's first essays the multiplication of platforms for the dissemination of opinions and commentaries have emerged in the form of online forums, blogging and transmedia journals and columns ensures that polemical essays and opinions generate online activism. Roy's work, which now appears in numerous caches of online content and archives, is a part of the global shift to online dissident writings and polemics, where, as Gillian Whitlock (2007) has argued, dissident bloggers become stars and the online circulation of their texts serve as “soft weapons” in the cause of radical movements.

Roy's own rhetorical, geopolitical and cultural mobilities ensure audiences across the world and different social layers. Refusing to be reified into a mere polemicist *or* novelist, Roy ensures that her mobility is grounded in the new style of contemporary politics and the discourses that make up the

precariat public sphere, anywhere in the world. Her insurgent celebrityhood is founded on mobilities, whether in rhetoric or political concerns. As an icon or brand, Arundhati Roy can now circulate in the world's insurgent conglomerations independent of her celebrated novel and even her Indianness. The mobilities documented above make her a participant in multiple sites of protest so that her concerns lie beyond territorial borders, in a global precariat public sphere, well in keeping with the politics demanded of us in the age of globalisation.

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