

Java Singh

Feminist Literary and Cultural Criticism

An Analytical Approach to Space

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ISBN 978-981-19-1425-6 ISBN 978-981-19-1426-3 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-1426-3>

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For
Ravi,
My mother, Neelam
and
My grandmothers, Lakshmi and Lalmani

Foreword

The book's theoretical imperative, vast scope, and transnational orientation ensure its relevance to a wide audience. It is to the author's great credit that she manages an ambitious interdisciplinary project with great command and fluidity. The author reviews the works of an excellent selection of theorists from the fields of anthropology, geography, psychology, and literary criticism to inform her argument. It works to the book's great advantage that the selection is not confined to Anglophone theorists. Many of the ideas discussed are drawn from books and articles in Spanish that have not yet been translated into English. The book greatly benefits from the author's ability to reference complex works available only in Spanish. The historical depth of the literature reviewed is a great strength of the book. The bibliography goes as far back as the seventeenth century and saves the book from falling prey to *hyper-presentism*. Multiple strands of theories, texts, concepts, regions, time-horizons, genres, and forms are held together in an easy grip of feminism. The steady feminist tone of the book also takes many minoritarian concerns into consideration, especially accentuating the unfair treatment of persons suffering from mental disorders, earth others, native Americans, transgender persons, and slum-dwellers.

Dr. Singh sustains methodological control through systematic delivery, deepening discussion, bringing together threads of analysis, and applying them carefully and insistently in the close reading of the texts. While closely detailing the theoretical trajectory of the analysis, the author always has the texts in sight, and the theoretical framework is consistently informed by a core understanding of the texts. Theoretical deliberations are deftly interwoven with discussions of real-life instances, bridging the gaps that separate theory, text, and the world.

The book is neatly structured into two parts—the first is primarily concerned with theory and the second with the selected texts. The conceptual framework developed in the book focusses on 'space' instead of 'place,' thus breaking through geographic limitations. Although the original location of the writer, director, scriptwriter, or cartoonist is seen as a crucial influence on their creative output, the work acquires transnational relevance when readers recognize its capacity to raise issues that resonate beyond their own originating locations. Additionally, the analytical

approach of the book frees itself from local referentiality to highlight space as a cross-cultural construct and extends its applicability beyond any national frontiers.

The selected writers come from five different countries, India, Argentina, the USA, Uruguay, and Spain. Their work has a transnational reach because it provides referential frameworks that are accessible the world over. Sumukhi Suresh's OTT series raises concerns about body shaming and mental health. Ecological concerns and gender inequality are key themes in Manjula Padmanabhan's science fiction. Lucrecia Martel, the Argentine filmmaker, uses a provincial setting for her films to expose the decadence of inherited privilege, successfully de-provincializing her cinematic narrative. Carol Lay's work delves into the devastating impact of the relentless exploitation of natural resources to meet the needs of increasingly consumerist societies. Cristina Peri Rossi is an iconic figure in exile literature. Persecuted by the military dictatorship in her native Uruguay, she escaped to Spain in the 1970s. Her experiences as a gay woman who came out in the 1960s, an anti-establishment activist, and an immigrant filter into her writing. The selected creative artists speak to a global audience.

The approach to analyzing space developed in the book is unique. "The Spatial Gynocritics Model" is effective in creating a critical approach that opens up meanings rather than imposing meanings from theory. The text always has primacy over theory in this book. In each chapter of Part II, the author discusses various aspects of the narratives before centring her attention on the spatial analysis. The critical strategy of the model works on the idea of taking a binocular view of the Oedipal triangle, denying legitimacy to any single perspective. The author displays great confidence in her model by testing it repeatedly and effectively on different genres and narrative forms. The model generates cross-over vocabulary and grammar that may be utilized to frame coherent readings even of texts not included in the book. The spatial gynocritic model and close-readings advanced in Part II introduce a way of thinking about texts that does not essentialize and prescribe, enabling and encouraging the reader to be intellectually nomadic. The use of diagrams, rarely found in critical analyses of texts, is ideally suited to spatial analysis. These pictorial depictions create a modular arrangement that relieves the model of any rigidity, inviting a bricolage rearrangement of its tools and devices. The diagrams also serve as mind maps that aid quick recall of the intricacies of the model developed in the book.

Feminist Literary and Cultural Criticism: An Analytic Approach to Space makes an important and original contribution to diffusing the boundaries among ways of reading different forms of creative representations. The book straddles several disciplines of comparative literature, comparative theory, film criticism, cartoon criticism, comedy criticism, feminist literary criticism, science fiction criticism, and spatial criticism, making it useful for scholars in all these fields. The author's meticulous close reading—of Lucrecia Martel's films, Sumukhi Suresh's OTT series, Cristina Peri Rossi's stories, Manjula Padmanabhan's novels, and Carol Lay's cartoon

comics makes the book stimulating for anyone interested in developing a careful understanding of the works of these extraordinarily gifted women.

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Preface

The preface to a book is both an introduction to what the reader may expect to find in it and the author's reflection on all the strands she has braided into a discernible design. It is an instantiation of "proleptic analepsis," a flashback that contains fractals that will actualize their possibilities in the future.¹

The title of the book, *Feminist Literary and Cultural Criticism: An Analytic Approach to Space*, identifies it as an attempt at spatial criticism of literary and cultural narratives that is informed by a feminist consciousness. In addition to its commitment to feminism, the endeavour is also persuaded by the analytic lines pursued in structuralist poetics. In the preface to the 2002 edition of *Structuralist Poetics*, Jonathan Culler defends structuralist approaches, which focus on the "how works produce the effects [such as meanings] they have for readers" against advocates of hermeneutics, who concentrate on explicating *what* those 'effects' or 'meanings' may be. By bringing up the dialectics between poetics and hermeneutics, Culler revives the age-old discussion on the relative primacy of the realms of *logos* and *lexis*, *res* and *verba*, ideas and expression, meaning and rhetoric or, simply put, between the 'what' and the 'how' that is crucial in assembling any critical view of literary and cultural representations.

This book does not view the categories of poetics and hermeneutics as separate critical methods; instead, they are viewed as distinct tones that should constitute any in-depth commentary on texts. As both modes of reading merit attention, the book strives to understand the feminist 'meanings' and 'effects' that are evoked by the selected texts; on the other, it explicates the *spatial* tools, tactics, and devices that are used to convey those meanings to the reader. Without structuralist tools, such as those associated with space, the text cannot be adequately pried open for analysis, and without a hermeneutic objective, the analytic project risks becoming futile. A profound engagement with structuralist analysis is not opposed to developing an ideological commitment; in fact, structuralist approaches may equip the critic to

¹ Bruce Robbins used the term in his keynote address at the XXIst conference of the Forum on Contemporary Theory, in 2018 in Puri, Odisha. The speech was titled "Diasporas and Atrocities: Cosmopolitanism Now." Unfortunately, it has not been published, hence a citation is not possible.

reveal hitherto obscure ideological aspects of texts. Walter Mignolo, a leading voice in postcolonial theory, started out as a structuralist. In *Elements for a Theory of the Literary Text* (1978), Mignolo's articulation of various productive concepts such as axiality, figuration, and connectedness is directly derived from the fundamentals of structuralism.

According to Culler, poetics "could be thought of [...] as the attempt to understand what a poet or novelist must know implicitly to be able to construct the literary work." Culler's expectation of 'implicit' knowledge on the part of the novelist is key to this book. Many of the theorists, writers, and artists studied in the book demonstrate explicitly feminist stances in their works, but they also make implicit discursive connections with a diverse range of concerns such as mental health, nation formation, state-induced precarity, linguistic prejudice, and consumerism. The critic's task is to make explicit the implicit awareness that resides in the text. In order to read the implicit discursivities, the book posits space as an essential element of 'literary competence.' A deep understanding of the spatial logic of literary and cultural narratives provides new ways of reading these texts, enabling 'performativities' that would otherwise remain unactualized.

The book approaches its objectives through two distinct trajectories—building a model and applying the model—each becoming a guiding thread for the two parts of the book. Part I, comprised of five chapters, outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the book, and relying on them, proposes a model for spatial criticism. Part II, also comprised of five chapters, applies the spatial gynocritics model proposed in Part I to carry out innovative readings of selected literary and cultural narratives created by five women—Cristina Peri Rossi, Manjula Padmanabhan, Lucrecia Martel, Sumukhi Suresh, and Carol Lay.

Serendipity was certainly at play in assembling this cast of creators. Cristina Peri Rossi was the first woman who made her way through the analytical sieve used in this book. She is featured on the syllabi of literature courses in various universities as a leading voice of postmodernist, post-boom Latin American, and gay literature. Peri Rossi writes in many genres, including science fiction. Research on her science fiction led this study into the field of women's science fiction, where Manjula Padmanabhan emerged as an iconic figure from India. A talk by the cultural attaché at the Argentinian embassy in New Delhi, titled 'Discover Argentina through its Cinema,' occasioned an introduction to the work of Lucrecia Martel. She stood out as the only woman director in the list of ten emblematic films that was passed around during the talk. A keynote address at a conference on the fantastic in Barcelona mentioned Carol Lay's unique blend of reality and fantasy as a forceful tool for social critique, provoking a deeper exploration of her work. The study of Lay's cartoons involved developing an understanding of the functioning of humour. The early days of the research on humour for the present project coincided with the visible success of young female comics on OTT platforms in India. Among them, Sumukhi Suresh stood out as a path-breaking artist.

The serendipitous selection may be seen as 'el azar electivo,' or a series of objective chance encounters that take place in the zone lying between deterministic impositions and complete free will. The five creative women studied in Part II of the book were not

selected to comply with a pre-determined theoretical design, nor was their selection an outcome of pure chance. Their work came through on three broadly conceived criteria for text selection. Firstly, the selected group should have crafted diverse literary and cultural genres so that the model developed in Part I could be tested cross-generically; secondly, they should be representative of the Indo-American–Latin and North–contact zone that shapes the work of Indian Hispanists; and thirdly, that their work runs against the grain of the popular market sentiment of their times. Peri Rossi rejected magic realism as a literary register, refusing to ride the wave of commercial success that had been set in motion by the huge popularity of writers like Gabriel García Márquez and Isabelle Allende. Padmanabhan grounded her stories on Earth, avoiding inter-planetary explorations that were the staple of best-selling science fiction literature and high-grossing films. Martel avoided exoticizing her local settings to attract international attention. She also did not rely heavily on the recent history of national trauma inflicted on her country by the military junta that held power during the 1970s and 80s—a subject matter that ensured ready recognition for Argentinian films by the market and film festivals alike. Sumukhi Suresh created an unapologetically desirous woman without offering any excuses for her obsessions. She portrayed the large-bodied female lead of her series with a level empathy and confidence unprecedented in Indian cinema. Carol Lay created female characters that flouted the graphic conventions instituted by best-selling superhero comics on the 1970s and 80s.

The women featured in Part II span three generations. Peri Rossi was born in 1942, Lay and Padmanabhan in 1952 and 1953, respectively. Lucrecia Martel in 1966 and Sumukhi Suresh in 1987. Each one brings their experiences of masculine mechanisms of control to their work—politically sanctioned human rights abuses of a military dictatorship (Peri Rossi), socially endorsed female foeticide and infanticide (Padmanabhan), culturally accepted invisibility of middle-aged and old women (Martel), market induced body regimes that foment self-hate (Suresh), and masculine appropriation of natural resources and traditional ecological knowledge systems (Lay). The use of a gendered lens by women of different generations reveals the continuity of a misogynistic element that sustains a political-social-cultural-economic sensibility that mitigates against the emancipation of women from patriarchal control. Moreover, the group of women featured in Part II displays a spatial consciousness that resonates powerfully with the theoretical foci of the book.

In Part I, the theoretical levers of the book are organized into four ‘vectors’ based on their provenance from the fields of anthropology, geography, psychology, and feminist literary criticism. Real-life instances and examples from literature and cinema are used to elucidate key concepts that form part of the analytic lexicon of the book. The inter-disciplinary approach is fundamental in deriving the conceptual tools that constitute the spatial gynocritics model delineated in Part I.

Chapter 1, titled ‘The Anthropology Vector,’ focusses on Victor Turner’s extrapolation of anthropological concepts to the realm of literary and cultural criticism. This chapter considers the exploration of spatial liminality by Victor Turner as foundational to developing a deeper understanding of the processes of social change. Turner’s articulations of the Social Drama, rituals, and pilgrimage, especially, are

extrapolated to analyze the importance of spatial locations in public manifestations of a shared sense of injustice. Some such instances that are read through a *Turnerian* lens are the Indian Anti-dowry Movement, protests against the ban on Jallikattu, Argentina's *Madres de la Plaza* movement, and the Chilean *Social Outbreak*. By using different public spaces—the college campus, main streets of prominent cities, the premises around the presidential residence, and metro stations, respectively—the dissenting groups were able to gather sufficient momentum to get the authorities to redress their grievances to some extent. The locations for these expressions of dissent show that even everyday places are imbued with liminal, transformative energies. The sites of dissent function as liminal zones in which all participants, devoid of markers of status, are able to enjoy greater degrees of autonomy than in the pre-liminal and post-liminal stages. The chapter also examines the role of cultural performances and literary representations in supporting and instigating such social changes. The applicability of Turner's conceptualization of ritual, liminality, and pilgrimage as tools for literary and cultural criticism has been demonstrated through brief commentaries on selected short stories, films, and T.V. shows. The chapter attempts to establish connections between the literary, cultural, and physical liminal spaces through the anthropological vector.

Chapter 2 titled 'The Geography Vector,' examines the assertions of feminist geographers who have argued that modes of spatial control of women serve as mechanisms of patriarchal control. A poetics of spatial patriarchy emerges from the schema outlined by Doreen Massey and Linda McDowell, and Daphne Spain's historic sociological study of segregated spaces for women. The elements of these poetics are utilized to articulate the topographical view of space adopted in the study. In this view, the cultural valence of a space depends on the full inventory of the compositional elements of the place where it is located. For example, an uninhabited strip of sand may appear abandoned in a superficial view, but when examined closely, it may be replete with many forms of animal life and reminders of life forms that once thrived there. This chapter explicates the topographical view as a 'liminal' view that stretches the studied space to reveal the significance of the interstices contained in any spatiality. Thus, space, as a building block of the narrative structure, is construed as pronominal and deictic, its significance being determined by the perspective from which it is viewed. The topographical approach is used to read Teresa de la Parra's iconic work of feminist literature, *Ifigenia*, and Cristina Peri Rossi's short story 'The Annunciation.' Informed by the geography vector, the spatial analysis of these narratives reveals links between territorial dispossession and emotional exploitation and the actant potency of space as an autonomous literary device.

Chapter 3 forges the eponymous psychology vector from three flagstone texts of twentieth-century feminist scholarship in the field of psychology, namely, Karen Horney's *New Ways in Psychoanalysis* (1939), Juliet Mitchell's 'Women the Longest Revolution' (1966), and Kate Millett's *The Loony Bin Trip* (1990). The mirroring of women's familial and social positions in these works is highlighted in this chapter. Some of the critical concepts articulated by these theorists are used to study real-life instances of oppression of even exceptionally gifted women to demonstrate the

power of patriarchal tendencies. The notions of undertow, recoil, and afterwardness are explicated to understand the slow change in women's position in society vis-à-vis men. The neurosis-inducing effect of insalubrious dependencies is examined to demonstrate that individual masochistic and narcissistic dependencies have generated a pathological social condition that is detrimental to changing patriarchal attitudes towards women. The psychological vector developed in this chapter is used to analyze the portrayal of the domestic space in selected short stories. The notion of the 'Jocasta complex' is developed as contrapuntal to the Oedipal complex to describe the psychological response of women to their confinement in domestic spaces. The adopted approaches generate a binocular view of the domestic space as depicted in the stories, whereby it emerges as a masochistic space. The psychological vector exposes the oppressive underbelly of superficial stances of protectiveness towards the woman and reverence towards the mother-figure.

Chapter 4, 'The Literary Vector,' presents a brief survey of the field of feminist literary criticism before proceeding to tease out the spatial implications suggested by the conceptual schemes of selected critics. The conceptual schema of Jean Franco, Josefina Ludmer, Sara Castro-Klaren, Nattie Golubov, Rachel Falconer, and Joy Ladin are examined in detail to extricate the spatial premises that emerge from their critical articulations. The literary vector thus crafted is used to explore Antigone's unique location in kinship structures, de-differentiated and de-sedimented views of unified solidities, visualization of localized speaking spaces, the notion of the female nomadic reader, and chrontopic extensions discernible in centrifugal narratives. The chapter explains the derivation process for the analytic devices of 'Antigonal spatial archetypes,' 'liminal chronotopy,' 'spatial de-differentiations,' 'localizing the limen,' 'spatial de-sedimenting,' and 'speculative materiality of the limen.'

Chapter 5 brings together the exploratory probes and analytic formulations of the first four chapters to suggest an arrangement for the conceptual tools derived in Chap. 4 of the book. The mode of combining the tools is informed by a consciousness of Debra Castillo's six-pronged strategy for feminist literary criticism. Castillo urges a critical reading of women's texts that scrutinizes the play of six literary, tactical elements, namely: silencing, appropriation, surfacing, marginality, negation, and the subjunctive mood. The spatial gynocritics model that emerges from the interplay between these tactical elements and the conceptual tools for spatial analysis is a trifurcated entity whose tines are named 'de-canonizing derivatives,' 'de-bordering derivatives,' and 'de-settling derivatives.' The suggested arrangement of these perspectival tools for understanding portrayals of spaces in literary and cultural narratives is by no means meant to be prescriptive; instead, the intent in proposing a modular formation is to demonstrate possible inter-relationships among the various conceptual schemes from which the tools are derived.

While taking up different genres and forms of literary and cultural narratives for discussion in Part II, it is assumed that no reader will have in-depth knowledge of the relevant critical tools and the background information for each one. Therefore, apart from undertaking the spatial analysis of the selected narrative, each chapter presents a critical overview of the selected writer or artist and, where required, explains the terminology that is specific to that form.

Chapter 6, the opening chapter of Part II, is concerned with Cristina Peri Rossi's postmodernist short stories. Peri Rossi is considered part of the 'Generation of 1972,' which includes other writers who were forced to flee out of fear of persecution at the hands of the military juntas in their native countries. Over the course of almost sixty years, she has received several awards, including the highest literary award in the Spanish language, the 2021 Miguel de Cervantes Prize, for her impressive oeuvre consisting of novels, short stories, newspaper columns, and poems. This chapter provides a background of the political scenario that pushed Peri Rossi into voluntary exile and locates her writing within the postmodernist literary turn in Latin American literature. The chapter explains why the theme of exile—literal and metaphoric—in her work has attracted extensive critical attention. In order to open up her short narratives to new readings, the portrayal of three spaces, each of which comes up in multiple stories by Peri Rossi, is examined through the spatial gynecritic model. The de-settling, de-bordering, and de-settling derivatives are used to examine the topographies of the psychiatrist's clinic, road, and racetrack. When viewed through the model, these spaces become subversive representations, challenging normative notions of 'madness/sanity,' the 'saviour/victim complex,' and 'sportsmanship/avariciousness,' respectively.

Chapter 7 discusses the works of Manjula Padmanabhan, a pioneer in English-language science fiction (sf) written by Indian women. Perhaps because she had no female predecessors, Padmanabhan's work has more in common with American sf writers than with those from her own country. Delineating the common themes that have been featured in women's sf, the chapter provides a recent history of women's sf in the U.S. and sf writing by women in India. The chapter discusses the basics of myth criticism as the genre of sf relies extensively on traditional mythologies, reinterpreting and renovating them to create new myths. Having set the background for discussing Padmanabhan's sf, the chapter provides a critical overview of the 'Meiji Saga,' comprised of *Escape* (2008) and *The Island of Lost Girls* (2015). Subsequently, these novels are taken up for detailed spatial analysis. The spatial gynecritic model reveals that the novels de-canonize 'junctions' as neutral places meant for transitions, reinterpreting them as sites for resistance. They also de-border the modern battlefield and the ancient Roman gladiatorial arena, demonstrating the continuance of commercial interests that turn war into a type of reality entertainment. Additionally, the literary analysis in Chap. 7 focuses on the futuristic vehicles and portable habitats depicted in the novels, probing the de-settling of any notions of the permanent home as a safe space.

Chapter 8 examines the evolution of Argentinian cinema in the second half of the twentieth century and locates Lucrecia Martel among the filmmakers who gave it a new direction at the turn of the twenty-first. The characteristics of 'New Argentine Cinema,' which includes Martel's cinema, are delineated to show the changes in the cinematic themes and stylistic approaches since the years of the Dirty War—a traumatic period in the country's recent history. Martel's oeuvre is sparse, but she has received national and international accolades for every film that she has made. The chapter concentrates on her Salta trilogy, providing justifications for viewing it as a transnational, collective bildungsroman. In addition, the chapter selects the pool

for spatial analysis as it is featured prominently in all three films of the trilogy. When the pool is viewed through the spatial gynocritic models, it emerges as a de-settling element that unravels racial and familial hierarchies in *The Swamp*; in *The Holy Girl*, Martel uses the pool to present a de-canonized view of the home-nation; and in *The Headless Woman*, the liquid space becomes a site for de-bordering the perceived safety of the city and the threat of violence presented by neighbouring slums.

Chapter 9 examines the coming-of-age of women comedians in India in the twenty-first century, concluding that they have successfully overcome the marginalization of women in comedy. The focus of the chapter is on the work of Sumukhi Suresh, who is the first stand-up comedian to secure a two-season deal with a major OTT platform, without succumbing to stereotypical representations of women, especially the large-bodied woman. The chapter carries out an in-depth study of the innovative re-interpretation of the feminist trope of ‘madwoman’ in her series *Pushpavalli*. Another mythological archetype that has been used as an analytic tool for the series is that of the trickster. Based on the analysis, the chapter posits that the series portrays a strong link between body image concerns and mental health that is especially prevalent among women. The series is viewed as a Juvenalian satire that uses dark humour to represent grave social problems such as misogyny, language-based discrimination, and marginalization of experiential knowledge systems. The spatial analysis looks at six different settings featured prominently in the series—the PG accommodation, tea stall, library, conference centre, packhouse, and the godman’s ashram—through the de-bordering, de-settling, and de-canonizing derivatives of the spatial gynocritics model.

Chapter 10 discusses the fundamental tools used in the analysis of the genre of comics. It explores the outlook of four key theorists of the genre, namely Román Gubern, Will Eisner, Thierry Groensteen, and Scott McCloud, to develop an understanding of the comic as a distinctive art form. The chapter also examines the history of twentieth-century women comic artists, from North and South America, placing Carol Lay’s work among the ‘daughters of the underground.’ Over the course of forty years, Carol Lay’s depiction of female characters has undergone significant shifts. Based on the changes in the visual language and character traits as the primary criteria, the chapter classifies her extensive oeuvre into three phases—agential, capacitated, and emancipated. In the last section, the chapter carries out a spatial analysis of places of work and play, the jungle and city, and the garbage heap to unveil the hidden layers of significance in Lay’s graphic narratives.

Parts I and II complement each other as theory and practice, but they can also be read separately. Every chapter, except the fifth one, attempts a substantive argument that can be accessed independently of the other chapters. Chapter 5, in which the spatial gynocritics model is assembled, makes for a coherent reading if it is read after the preceding ones. The reader is invited to read all the other chapters in any order.

Acknowledgments

This book is based on my doctoral research at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. It would not have reached the present stage without the guidance of Prof. Indrani Mukherjee, who was my Ph.D. supervisor and continues to be my intellectual sounding board. I am grateful to her not only for sharing her formidable erudition with me but also her exceptional commitment to egalitarian values. She is a demanding, rigorous instructor who excised my errors and generously commended any insights I happened to chance upon. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with her.

I am also grateful to the entire faculty at the Centre for Spanish for teaching me the Spanish language and introducing me to the cultural wealth that it carries. Dr. Meenakshi Sundriyal, with whom I did my graduate dissertation and Dr. Lipi Biswas Sen who salvaged many of my submissions from being rejected by conferences and journals, have been pillars of support. Dr. Gaurav Kumar taught me the first Spanish class that I attended, starting me off on a rewarding journey.

The Forum on Cotemporary Theory, Baroda and its 'patron saint' Prof. Prafulla Kar share the credit for providing me a community where I presented my initial research papers and got the opportunity to interact with intellectual giants from all over the world.

Prof. Catherine Boyle (King's College, London) and Prof. Nishat Haider (Jamia Milia, New Delhi) provided constructive criticism for my doctoral research. Their observations encouraged me to cultivate and grow many ideas that were at a nascent stage in my Ph.D. dissertation. Professors Walter Mignolo (Duke University), Debra Castillo (Cornell University), Olga Bezhanova (Southern Illinois University), Elena Losada (University of Barcelona), and Claudio Paulini (Artigas Institute, Montevideo) have generously shared their feedback on my research papers, sharpening my approach and expanding my horizons.

Nalini Hariharan and Alicia Semiglia have been exceptional professional associates, becoming my dear friends, in the process. Bratati Ghosh was the source of the vital input that ensured that this book did not become an endless project. On the purely personal front, I have made the most demands on Nikhil and Jay to write this book. Thank you, bears.

Finally, I would like to thank Satvinder Kaur at Springer for seeing the merit in my book proposal and for sending it to reviewers—names unknown to me—who offered invaluable insights for shaping the book.

Contents

Part I Interdisciplinary Vectors

1	The Anthropological Vector	3
1.1	Social Drama	4
1.2	Liminality	9
1.3	Rites and Ritual	12
1.4	Communitas and Anti-structure	16
1.5	Pilgrimage	19
1.6	Conclusion	22
	References	23
2	The Geographic Vector	25
2.1	The Poetics of Spatial Patriarchy	27
2.2	Space and Place: Is There a Material Difference?	30
2.3	A Topographical View of Literary Spatiality	32
2.4	Viewing Interstices by Stretching Space in Teresa de la Parra's <i>Ifigenia</i>	36
2.5	A View from the Interstices in Cristina Peri Rossi's "The Annunciation"	41
2.6	Conclusion	46
	References	46
3	The Psychological Vector	49
3.1	Metonymic Disordered Space	53
3.2	The Neurotic Anxiety of Patriarchy	55
3.3	Real-Life Instances of Pathologically Masochistic Patriarchy	57
3.4	A Binocular View of Masochistic Space	61
3.5	Matrilineal Horror	68
3.6	Conclusion	69
	References	69

4 The Literary Vector 71

4.1 An-Other Literary Cartography 71

4.2 Jean Franco: *Antigonal* Archetypes 79

4.3 Josefina Ludmer: De-Differentiated Oscillations 85

4.4 Sara Castro-Klarén: Localized Speaking Spaces 90

4.5 Nattie Golubov: La Lectora Nómada (The Female
Nomadic Reader) 96

4.6 Rachel Falconer and Joy Ladin: Chronotopic Extensions 100

4.7 Conclusion 104

References 104

5 The Resultant Vector: A Model for Spatial Gynocritics 107

5.1 The Machine Gun of Silence and Appropriating Gratitude 109

5.2 Surface Tension and Marginal Autonomy 112

5.3 Negative, Subjunctive Imperatives 116

5.4 Conclusion 120

References 121

Part II Interstitial Spatial Views

6 Cristina Peri Rossi’s Postmodernist Short Story 125

6.1 Political, Social, and Sexual Exile 126

6.2 Delimiting Women’s Postmodernist Writing 128

6.3 Stories of the Psychiatrist’s Clinic, the Road,
and the Racetrack 130

6.3.1 The Psychiatrist’s Clinic Stories 130

6.3.2 The Road Stories 135

6.3.3 The Racetrack Stories 140

6.4 A View Through the Spatial Gynocritics Model 145

6.4.1 De-settling Clinics 146

6.4.2 De-bordering Roads 149

6.4.3 De-canonizing the Racetrack 152

6.5 Conclusion 154

References 154

7 Manjula Padmanabhan’s Science Fiction Novel 157

7.1 Women Science Fiction Writers in India 160

7.2 Myth and Science Fiction 161

7.3 Manjula Padmanabhan’s Science Fiction 164

7.4 Precaricide, Reproduction, and Myth in Manjula
Padmanabhan’s Novels 168

7.5 A View Through the Spatial Gynocritics Model 176

7.5.1 De-canonizing Junctions 176

7.5.2 De-bordering the Arena, Battlefield, and Playfield 180

7.5.3 De-settling Vehicular Transport 183

7.6 Conclusion 186

References 186

8 Lucrecia Martel’s Transnational Cinema 189

8.1 Lucrecia Martel’s *Salta* Trilogy: A Transnational Bildungsroman 191

8.2 A View Through the Spatial Gynocritics Model 204

8.2.1 De-settling Class and Family by the Pool 204

8.2.2 De-canonizing the Home-Nation 206

8.2.3 De-bordering the City and the Slum Through Liquid Spaces 208

8.3 Conclusion 209

References 210

9 Sumukhi Suresh’s Satirical Comedy 213

9.1 The “Madwoman” as a Feminist Trope 215

9.2 Pushpavalli as a Comic Embodiment of Madness and Trickery 218

9.3 Placing *Pushpavalli* Generically 227

9.4 A View Through the Gynocritic Spatial Model 229

9.4.1 De-bordering at the Paying Guest (PG) Accommodation and the Tea Stall 229

9.4.2 De-settling the Library and Conference Centre 233

9.4.3 De-canonizing the Temple and the Export House 236

9.5 Conclusion 239

References 239

10 Carol Lay’s Comics 241

10.1 Women Artists and the Twentieth-Century American Comic 242

10.2 Carol Lay and the Post-underground Phase in Women’s Comics 245

10.3 The Poetics of Comics 246

10.4 Carol Lay’s Artistic Journey 251

10.4.1 Phase I—Agential 251

10.4.2 Phase II—Capacitated 258

10.4.3 Phase III—Emancipatory 269

10.5 A View Through the Gynocritic Spatial Model 273

10.5.1 De-canonizing Derivatives for Places of Work and Play 273

10.5.2 De-bordering the Jungle and the City 277

10.5.3 De-settling the Garbage Heap 280

10.6 Conclusion 282

References 282

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List of Figures

Fig. 2.1	Differentiated reactions to territorial dispossession	40
Fig. 4.1	The Flatlanders' view	75
Fig. 5.1	De-canonizing derivatives	120
Fig. 5.2	De-bordering derivatives	121
Fig. 5.3	De-settling derivatives	121
Fig. 6.1	De-settling the clinic	149
Fig. 6.2	De-bordering the brothel	152
Fig. 6.3	De-canonizing the racetrack	154
Fig. 7.1	De-canonizing the junction	180
Fig. 7.2	De-bordering the battlefield	183
Fig. 7.3	De-settling the permanent home	185
Fig. 8.1	The de-settled pool	205
Fig. 8.2	The de-canonized nation	208
Fig. 8.3	The de-bordered slum	209
Fig. 9.1	Different body shapes of the heroine and the comediennes	214
Fig. 9.2	Pushpavalli schemes to get out of a tough spot	219
Fig. 9.3	Vasu threatens to throw out Pushpavalli	222
Fig. 9.4	De-bordering the sites of hospitality	232
Fig. 9.5	De-settling the lettered city	236
Fig. 9.6	The grimy interiors of the packhouse at O.K. Rao Exports	237
Fig. 9.7	Pushpavalli at Guruji's camp ashram	238
Fig. 9.8	De-canonizing the sites of tradition and modernity	239
Fig. 10.1	Panel, gutter, and frame	247
Fig. 10.2	Braiding across sequences	250
Fig. 10.3	Extract from <i>Good Girls</i> Issue #4	253
Fig. 10.4	Extract from <i>Good Girls</i> Issue #1	254
Fig. 10.5	a Close-up of Fig. 10.4. b Close-up of a	255
Fig. 10.6	Extract from "The Visitation"	256
Fig. 10.7	Comparative poses	257
Fig. 10.8	Iconic representation of a fragile relationship	260
Fig. 10.9	Iconic evocation of easy togetherness	261

Fig. 10.10 Representation of the Limbo as an in-between liminal space 262

Fig. 10.11 Contrasting reactions from phases one and two 263

Fig. 10.12 “Women who Run with the Skunks” 265

Fig. 10.13 Use of incrustated frames 268

Fig. 10.14 Autonomy of the jungle 268

Fig. 10.15 Visual language emphasizes eyes 269

Fig. 10.16 Cartographic documentation of the location 270

Fig. 10.17 Synaesthetic combinations 272

Fig. 10.18 The office and home in phase one 274

Fig. 10.19 The playground in phase two 275

Fig. 10.20 De-canonizing the office and playground 277

Fig. 10.21 Extract from “Women who Run with Skunks” 279

Fig. 10.22 De-bordering the jungle and city 279

Fig. 10.23 Iconic representation of the sense of smell 280

Fig. 10.24 De-settling the garbage heap 281

Part I
Interdisciplinary Vectors

Chapter 1

The Anthropological Vector



Abstract The notion of the liminal space is key in transforming both individual and social attitudes. This chapter considers the exploration of spatial liminality by Victor Turner as foundational to developing a deeper understanding of the processes of social change. Turner's articulations of the Social Drama, rituals, and pilgrimage, especially, are extrapolated to analyze the importance of spatial location in some instances that brought about significant changes in social attitudes such as the Indian Anti-dowry Movement, Bhanwari Devi's case against her rapists, demonstrations against the proposed ban on Jallikattu, and Argentina's Madres de la Plaza movement. By using different public spaces—the college campus, court of law, main streets of prominent cities, and the premises around the presidential residence, respectively—the dissenting groups were able to gather sufficient momentum to get the authorities to redress the grievances of minoritarian groups. The chapter also examines the role of cultural performances and literary representations in supporting and instigating such social changes. Thus, establishing connections between the literary, cultural, and physical liminal spaces through the anthropological vector that are relevant to developing the gynocritic model for spatial analysis attempted in this book.

Keywords Liminality · Communitas · Pilgrimage · Dowry · Sexual assault

The anthropological vector of the present approach to space mainly originates in Victor Turner's extrapolation of anthropological concepts to the realm of literary and cultural criticism. Turner's framework, which is gridded with the conceptual tools of liminality, ritual, anti-structure, communitas, Social Drama, and pilgrimage, has proven to be a perceptive and potent sensor for opening up literary and cultural texts to new readings. Literary critics have used Turner's foundational concepts to read biblical texts, modernist fiction, post-modernist representations, and romantic North American novels.¹ Cultural critics have applied his concepts to study the dynamics of sports events, theatre, film, television, and even political scandals like the Watergate affair.²

¹ Kathleen M. Ashley, ed., *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990).

² *Ibid.*

Turner's conceptual schematization of the ritual was greatly influenced by Arnold van Gennep's 1909 book, *Rites of Passage*.³ Van Gennep coined the eponymous term "rites of passage" to describe ceremonies that accompany life course transitions, including "birth, childhood, social puberty, betrothal, marriage, pregnancy, fatherhood, initiation into religious societies, and funerals" in pre-industrial tribal societies.⁴ By choosing to term rites that mark important life stage "rites of passage"—instead of opting for some other alternatives such as, perhaps, rites of being, rites of becoming, or rites of aging—van Gennep emphasizes the transitional processes rather than the outcomes of those processes. The spatial metaphor lies at the core of these transitional rites. The second chapter of his landmark book opens with the remark: "Territorial passages can provide a framework for the discussion of rites of passage."⁵ Van Gennep chose to foreground a spatial element—the limen while categorizing rites. He identified three types of rites—separation, transition, and incorporation, referring to them also as pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal, respectively.

It is logical that space is as central to Turner's conceptual scheme as it was to that of van Gennep. Turner highlights that "often the indigenous word for the liminal period is [...] the locative form of a noun meaning 'seclusion site.'"⁶ After sustained conceptual chiselling, he establishes that an understanding of the liminal *space* is indispensable for unpacking the relationship between social processes and performative genres. He explains that performers in meta-social rites like carnivals and other secular festivals use quotidian spaces as their stage; their mode of occupying them or passing through them makes them noteworthy. Though a daunting body of scholarship emanates from Turner's fecund intellectual corpus, there is still room for a closer examination of the spatial facet of each of his key constructs.

1.1 Social Drama

As delineated by Turner, Social Drama is the inevitable processual form of all social transformations. It is a four-act drama in which the first three acts are termed breach, crisis, and redress, respectively. The fourth act has two mutually exclusive variants, reintegration or schism. The climax involves a dramatic culmination of various slow transformative processes that a society may have been undergoing for decades or even centuries. Turner sees a classic unfolding of the four stages in Miguel Hidalgo's "Cry of Dolores"—a sermon pronounced in 1810 that led to Mexican independence. The breach took place behind closed doors in the Literary and Social Club of Queretaro, where Hidalgo conspired with leaders of the local militia to incite a popular rebellion;

³ Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of passage* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1960).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶ Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage," in *Reader in Comparative Religion*, eds. William Armand Lessa, Evon Zartman Vogt, and John Mamoru Watanabe (Bloomington: Indian UP, 1979).

events reached a crisis point in a public space where Hidalgo's parishioners had gathered for Sunday mass. Subsequently, no redressive mechanisms were offered by the Mexican state or the local elites of the time. Hidalgo was defrocked, captured, and eventually executed within a year of the declaration of rebellion. Hidalgo's execution site may be seen as the site of the schism—the separation of the protesting group from the existing socio-political structure. After Hidalgo's death, another priest, a mestizo of mixed indigenous and Hispanic descent, assumed command of the insurgent movement. The sustained revolutionary spirit forced the local elites to part ways with the colonial administration and collaborate with indigenous militia soldiers to secure full independence for the country. Thus, Hidalgo's declaration brought on a social change as well as a political change. As a result of the schism, the indigenous soldiers played a prominent role in the overthrow of the imperial government, freeing Mexico from centuries of colonial rule. Discontent against the colonial rulers had been slowly building up over the past century. The expressions of discontent gathered momentum in the last few months leading up to independence, playing out as a *Turnerian* social drama.

Turner's stages of the social drama may also be seen in the anti-dowry protests of 1979. These protests were held at numerous sites in Delhi against the murder of a local woman who was burnt to death by her husband's family because she did not bring enough dowry. The practice of dowry has been a chronic problem in Indian society. The proclamation of the Dowry Abolition Act, 1961 did not have sufficient impact on the extractive practice. Though the act declared the giving and taking of dowry at the time of the wedding as punishable offences, it did not take cognisance of the violence and harassment related to dowry demands after the wedding had taken place. Sporadic protests against dowry-related deaths, violence, and harassment had been erupting during the 1960s and 70s, but the protests of 1979 attracted unprecedented media attention. The breach in the social acceptance of dowry may be attributed to the discussions among various small feminist groups behind closed doors. In the 1979 case, the breach happened when a neighbour of the victim, who had seen her body go up in flames, founded a feminist organization that decided to raise public support for the issue.⁷ As a first step towards voicing their outrage, the group enacted a play based on the burning of the young woman in the campus premises of a prominent girls' college in Delhi. Soon, the fervour spread through the entire city, provoking well-attended protest marches. The anti-dowry protests may be seen to represent the crisis stage of the *Turnerian* social drama, in which the social discontent of a significant minority is publicly demonstrated. A crisis brings forth the third stage, that of redressal, in which "certain adjustive and redressive mechanisms [...] informal or formal, institutionalized or ad hoc, are swiftly brought into operation by leading or structurally representative members of the disturbed social system."⁸ Aspects of this stage of social drama were visible in the supportive

⁷ Himanshi Nagpal, "The Historical Journey of Anti-Dowry Laws," *feminismsindia*, June 21, 2017, <https://feminismindia.com/2017/06/21/historical-journey-anti-dowry-laws/>.

⁸ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Cornell UP, 1974), 39.

response from the mainstream media publications calling for severe sentences for “bride burning” and dowry-related harassment.⁹ Such redressal mechanisms ensured that the demands of the protesting group are brought to the notice of a larger section of society. Cultural performances also served as a redressal tool. At the height of the protests in 1979, the victims’ stories inspired plays like *Om Swaha*, *Aurat*, *Mulgi Zhali Ho*, and *Aurat aur Dharam* that brought out the horror of dowry killings.¹⁰ These plays would be staged repeatedly in quotidian spaces such as street corners and dormitory houses. The performances succeeded in evoking emotional responses from audience members, especially young women who joined the protest marches in large numbers. The subsequent amendment of the anti-dowry law by the government in 1983 that made it more effective represented the final stage of reintegration, wherein the concerns of the break-away group were sufficiently accommodated within the official structures, making continued enactment of protest unnecessary. Though the practice of dowry continues in large parts of the country, the severity of the laws has acted as a deterrent.¹¹

Cultural performances like theatre and cinema and literature serve as powerful redressal procedures. By creating powerful representations of crisis moments, literary and cultural narratives play a dynamic role in social dramas. Like the Deleuzian mime, literature, film, and theatre perform protest by giving voice to silenced topics such as eroticism, multiple sexualities, and failure of the family. A representation of the futility of the ‘female’ virtues of patience, trust, and submissiveness, may reveal that these qualities invite and sustain domination in an unjust social order. Connecting sexual repression to sexual violence may cast serious doubt on the traditional ‘virtues’ of abstinence and chastity. Showing the family imploding under the stresses of ghettoization may speak to the need for relationships beyond oedipally marked spaces.

It would be difficult to imagine the women’s liberation movement without the literary contributions of Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison. In Latin America, the struggles of being a woman in patriarchal societies are writ powerful in the works of writers like Diamela Eltit, Rosario Ferré, Gioconda Belli, Marta Traba, and Cristina Peri Rossi. In India, the stories of Ismat Chughtai and Amrita Pritam have shucked off the curtain of age-old social structures to reveal the exploitative mechanisms in traditional social structures purportedly instituted for the protection of women. The cinema of filmmakers like Deepa Mehta, Nandita

⁹ Sunil Sethi, “Bride Burning Becomes a Congizable Blood Sport,” *indiatoday*, July 15, 1979, https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/special-report/story/19790715-bride-burning-becomes-a-cognizable-blood-sport-in-cities-like-new-delhi-822730-2014-03-03_

“Burning of the Bride,” *newint*, November 2, 1979, <https://newint.org/features/1979/11/01/brining-brides>.

¹⁰ Malini Nair, “How a Dowry Death in Delhi gave Birth to Feminist Street Theatre in India,” *Scroll*, July 13, 2017, <https://scroll.in/magazine/842756/how-a-dowry-death-in-delhi-gave-birth-to-feminist-street-theatre-in-india>.

¹¹ For data on dowry related deaths, legal cases, and judgements see S. Rukmini, “Dowry: What the Data Says and What it Doesn’t,” *The Hindu*, July 7, 2014, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/blogs/blog-datadelve/article6186330.ece>.

Das, Aparna Sen, Meghna Gulzar, Icíar Bollain, Isabel Coixet, and Lucrecia Martel offers an endorsement of anti-structural choices and a denunciation of submissive compliance to exploitative and restrictive norms, becoming a part of the redressal processes.

After redressal comes to the final stage of the social drama, Turner discerns two alternatives at this stage—reintegration or schism. In case of reintegration, the disturbed group may find a place in an altered socio-political structure. The resolution of Argentina’s Madres de la Plaza de Mayo movement serves as an illustrative instance of reintegration. Women who had been protesting peacefully for thirty years against the disappearance of their children by the Argentinian dictatorship of the 1970s decided to end their marches when the government of the day restarted trials of the key perpetrators of The Dirty War.¹² During the thirty-year protest, the women had transformed the main plaza of Buenos Aires into a site of unarmed rebellion against the authority of a military junta. The Plaza de Mayo, like Hyde Park in London, the National Mall in Washington D.C., and Rajpath in New Delhi, is located close to the heavily guarded nerve centre of power networks but is also open to the public. Instead of intimidating the crisis group, a location’s proximity to structures of power makes it the ideal protest space. The 1968 Paris protests that united students and striking workers saw attacks on police stations, the stock exchange, and other government buildings. Kirstin Ross observes that “[b]ehind their activities lay the recognition that the division between intellectual and manual labour was inseparable from the spatial projection or format of that division: the gap separating city from countryside and even the Latin Quarter from the workers’ foyers [...]”¹³ The Latin Quarter, which houses five major universities, and several other educational institutions, was transformed from a Lyceum to a battlefield, not by invading marauders but by the residents who decided to inhabit it differently, building “more than 600 barricades by uprooting trees, street signs, and sidewalk grates.”¹⁴ The Social Drama barely lasted a month because the government agreed to wage increases for workers, and the students, who did not articulate a specific set of economic or political demands, went back to being students in what they believed was a more liberal society.

When we see the peaceful Argentinian protests movement, the violent French social outburst, and other recent spontaneous and leaderless social uprisings—Occupy Wall Street in New York (2011), Nirbhaya vigils in New Delhi (2012),

¹² The eight-year period of military rule in Argentina from 1976 to 1983 is referred to as *La Guerra Sucia* or The Dirty War. During this time, state supported death squads carried out extra-judicial arrests, torture, and murder in an arbitrary manner. It is estimated that at least 9,000 people, and possibly as many as 30,000, were “disappeared” during this period. Children of women who were pregnant at the time of their arrest were born in captivity and given away to unknown persons. An NGO called Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo launched a program for return of their grandchildren who had been kidnapped unborn by the state. As of 2018, they had traced 128 of the disappeared children. The website of the organization provides names of all identified as missing and resolved cases (<https://abuelas.org.ar/idiomas/english/history.htm>).

¹³ Kristin Ross, *May’68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: UP Chicago, 2002), 93.

¹⁴ Eleanor Beardsley, “The Protests Of May 1968 Reverberate Today—And Still Divide The French,” *Npr*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/05/29/613671633/in-france-the-protests-of-may-1968-reverberate-today-and-still-divide-the-french>.

pro-Jallikattu mass gatherings in Chennai (2017), street protests against the Indian Supreme Court's Sabarimala decision (2018), the Social Outbreak in Santiago (2019), and the George Floyd marches in Minneapolis (2020)—through the lens of social drama, we can see that the crisis stage is performed close to power centres and the redressal happens inside state institutions.¹⁵ A detailed discussion on the spatial strategy of the artists, writers, and cineastes in the second part of the book explores the sites of breach, crisis, and redressal. Social Dramas are, of course, political processes involving competition for “scarce ends” such as power, prestige, dignity, and purity by using scarce resources, including territory. The Nirbhaya vigils and George Floyd marches mounted pressure on the state to ensure justice, culminating in the pronouncement of death sentences for Nirbhaya's rapists and a twenty-two-and-a-half-year sentence for George Floyd's murderer; pro-Jallikattu mass gatherings vindicated the prestige of an ancient sport, Occupy Wall Street, and the Social Outbreak demanded a dignified life for the urban low-income working class. The outpouring against the Indian Supreme Court's decision to allow women between the ages of ten and fifty to enter the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple was a response to what the dissenting group saw as defilement of the shrine's purity. It is important for a literary and cultural critic to be mindful of such attempts at social transformation because literary and cultural narratives originate in social fractures. They are amorphous, aestheticized, and agonistic responses to dominant socio-political narratives.

The alternative outcome in the last stage of the Social Drama could be a recognition of the schism by the disturbed group, which then locates itself outside the structure. This could be geographical—as was the predicament of the Latin American writers who spent years in exile in Europe in the aftermath of the dictatorships of the 1970s and 80s. In another form of schism, the dislocation may not go as far as a trans-border exile. Instead, the disturbed groups remain within national frontiers taking the form of conspicuous militant organizations like FARC in Colombia, the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Maoist militia of Dantewada, and the Chambal dacoits in India. There appears to be a strong positive correlation between the possibility of reintegration and what we may term the ‘distance of dissent.’ As the militia in crisis are distant from power

¹⁵ For the main events of the protests see:

Michael Levitin, “The Triumph of Occupy Wall Street,” *The Atlantic*, June 10, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/06/the-triumph-of-occupy-wall-street/395408/>.

“Chronology of Events in the Nirbhaya Case,” *thehindu*, January 14, 2021, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/chronology-of-events-in-nirbhaya-case/article30566298.ece>.

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“Sabarimala Protests: What is Happening in Kerala,” *indianexpress*, October 19, 2018, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/sabarimala-temple-protest-kerala-women-entry-5408635/>.

Rachel Bunyan, “18 Killed as Hundreds of Thousands of Protestors Take to the Streets in Chile. Here's What to Know,” *time*, October 25, 2019.

Hannah Hageman and Scott Neuman, “‘I Can't Breathe’: Peaceful Demonstrators Continue To Rally Over George Floyd's Death,” *Npr*, June 3, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/03/869186653/demonstrations-over-george-floyds-death-and-police-brutality-carry-on>.