

Teaching Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* with Sidhwa's *Cracking India* as Introduction to Transnational Feminisms

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Abstract

The *Handmaid's Tale* and *Cracking India* provide a context for introducing second-year students to transnational feminisms. Students with wide-ranging preparation engaged the critiques and "horizons of possibility" that transnational feminisms propose, grounding their work in the perspectives each novel illuminates, considered in tandem.

Résumé

The *Handmaid's Tale* (trad. La Servante Écarlate) et *Cracking India* offrent un contexte pour introduire les étudiantes de deuxième année aux féminismes transnationaux. Les étudiantes ayant fait une préparation de grande envergure engagèrent les critiques et les "horizons de possibilités" que les féminismes transnationaux proposent en basant leur travail sur les perspectives sur lesquelles chaque roman illumine quand elles sont considérées en tandem.

In working to construct...a terrain of coalition and cooperation...we have to rearticulate the histories of how people in different locations and circumstances are linked by the spread of and resistance to modern capitalist social formations even as their experiences of these phenomena are not at all the same or equal. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994, 5)

It is the way we position historical narratives of experience in relation to each other, the way we theorize relationality as both historical and simultaneously singular and collective that determines how and what we learn when we cross cultural and experiential borders.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003, 238)

In Canada and beyond, shifting economic conditions and xenophobia provide contested but often prevailing justification for everything from public service reductions with gendered effects to shared investments in imperialist wars and development policies. Under these conditions, introducing students to the possibilities and debates emerging through transnational feminisms remains crucial to their preparation for informed social participation. Transnational feminist frameworks help students articulate their co-implication in the "glocalized" conditions out of which their subjectivities are constructed, while providing models for negotiating responsive agency, given the individual's condition as "an active but not sovereign protagonist" (Weedon 1987, 41) at the numerous "sites of indetermination" (Didur 1998, 62) where change remains possible.

In order to make sense of the ways political discourses transect private lives and public space, my students have found it helpful to develop tools with which to examine the links between the rise of the nation-state and gendered, classed, racialized, and other constructed identities as "currency" (Mani 1989, 118) for nationalist struggles and "development" schemes. Because transnational feminisms seek to account for the ways capitalist processes produce and exploit discrepancies in social access and affluence, their critiques help students appreciate how new and constraining femininities and masculinities continue to form across social locations. Their critiques of capitalist ways of co-opting progressive movements help students consider how to enact their own political commitments, with a deeper appreciation for the intersubjectivities that structure social space. Meanwhile, students learn how access to citizenship is shaped by privilege, including through educational processes that condition personal and professional identities.

Following Haunani Kay Trask, Linda Tuhiwai Smith calls imperial and consumerist practices of identity formation "predatory individualism" (2002, 20), a way of being that sacrifices the well-being of the many for the profit of the few. In step with this view, Susan Heald remarks that students in Canadian classrooms: "...need to see themselves not as the 'unique individual' that liberal theory and its manifestations in Western culture encourage them to be, but as social actors both constituted and constrained by broader social forces which they need to analyze and try to understand" (2004, 46). Part of developing this understanding involves recognizing how the forces of globalization and resistance transect "Canadian" space, and are not confined to any imaginary "elsewhere" that serves to define it.

In a second year Women's and Gender Studies course I taught recently at the University of Saskatchewan, I wanted to illustrate the concepts Pamela Hewitt identifies as central to capitalism's gendered effects: "sexual objectification, patriarchy, gender stratification, sexualization" (1996, 110 - 11). To augment class readings and selected films, I chose two novels as a way to contextualize the relational issues raised by the course: Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (which most students had heard of and some had read in high school

or previous university courses) and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, which none had previously encountered.² Prior to introducing the novels, I engaged students in analyses of the partial and malleable perceptual fields that shape embodied experience, in efforts to sensitize them to Atwood and Sidhwa's treatments of subordinated lives under fundamentalist nationalisms. My strategy was to use novels that would unpack what Dorothy Smith has termed "relations of ruling"³ around characters who learn to see through the fictions responsible for the material consequences each witnesses and endures.

In the author's note to *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood remarks that she has "long been interested in the histories of totalitarian regimes and the different forms they have taken in various societies." She says:

The roots of the book go back to my study of the American Puritans. The society they founded in America was not a democracy as we know it, but a theocracy. In addition, I found myself increasingly alarmed by statements made frequently by religious leaders in the United States; and then a variety of events from around the world could not be ignored....there is nothing new about the society depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale*....All of the things I have written about have - as noted in the "Historical Notes" at the end - been done before, more than once. (Atwood 1986a, 392)

Atwood thus invites readers of her speculative fiction to treat its gendered dystopia as an extended commentary on the mechanisms that shape subordinated lives through regime changes, past and present. This invitation references the novel's skeptical treatment of the "Historical Notes" of Professor James Darcy Piexoto which, David S. Hogsette suggests, "provides readers with an example of how not to read Atwood's novel" (1997, 263). Playing on the regime-generated name of the novel's protagonist, Offred - chattel of the patriarchal Commander in whose home she serves as reproductive handmaid ("of Fred") - Hogsette argues that in order to avoid misappropriations like Piexoto's (reducing "Offred" to "Ofjames"; Hogsette 1997, 272),

emergent voices require an audience that "must be careful not to off-read, so to speak, that speaker's voice" (276). In resistance both to "those who would devise Gileadean empires" and "those who would merely study them" (Brydon 1996, 53), Hogsette imagines compassionate audiences that practice mindful solidarity with emergent and recovered voices, attentive to the contradictions (1997, 274) that characterize subalterned⁴ positions.

Like Atwood's *Tale*, Sidhwa's novel visits the production and exploitation of gendered social positions, but in the context of the 1947 partition of Pakistan and India. The novel witnesses the events of Partition through the eyes of Lenny, an 8-year-old Parsee girl recovering from polio and sorting through the effects of "regime change" in the lives of her family and friends in Lahore and environs. Lenny's story is situated in the context of several others: her lovely and much sought after Hindu child-care provider, Ayah; Ayah's entourage of suitors - including Ice-Candy-Man - for whom the novel was originally named; Lenny's slightly older and therefore potentially marriageable male Cousin; her parents and Electric Aunt; her beloved Godmother and attendant "Slavesister;" as well as Ranna - a young Muslim boy who survives the rape and slaughter of his entire village in the disorderly wake of British imperialism.

My selection of this pair of novels was based on several criteria. First, both were published in the 1980s, Atwood's the year before and Sidhwa's two years after the 1988 appearance of Mohanty's influential essay, "Under Western Eyes." The 1980s provide critical background to the stories Atwood and Sidhwa tell. The backlash against various feminisms at the time was symptomatic, in part, of a new configuration of fiscal imperialism, consolidated as international debt that targeted poor women and children in money-making gendered development schemes, from which privileged women and men continue to benefit. Just as multiple forces in the Two-Thirds World were struggling to foster innovative social possibilities and programs, Gilead continually arrived in the form of structural adjustment, a process my students recognized clearly as undermining connection and community while creating fertile ground for fascist fundamentalisms. Despite their deleterious effects, structural adjustment

programs have been couched in performances of benevolence that demonstrate, as Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor argues, the characteristic "inseparability of ideology and theatricality" (2002, 130).

For Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale*, such a performance is personalized by the Commander, who appears "positively Daddyish" in the household gathering in Serena Joy's living room, just before the monthly rape Ceremony, which masquerades as sacred insemination: "The Commander sighs, takes out a pair of reading glasses from his inside jacket pocket, gold rims, slips them on. Now he looks like a shoemaker in an old fairy-tale book. Is there no end to his disguises of benevolence?" (Atwood, 1986a 108).

Sidhwa too, criticizes public performances of benevolence by the leaders of nationalist movements. Because of her family's relatively privileged position in Lahore, young Lenny has the opportunity to meet Gandhi, whose image has been lauded in many circles. Sidhwa writes Lenny's childish responses to Gandhi's digestive concerns with characteristic humor, before delivering the final verdict of a seasoned post-Partition perspective:

I consider all this talk about enemas and clogged intestines in shocking taste, and I take a dim and bitter view of his concern for my health and welfare....I am puzzled why he's so famous - and suddenly his eyes turn to me. The pure shaft of humor, compassion, tolerance and understanding...fuses me to everything that is feminine, funny, gentle, loving....He touches my face, and in a burst of shyness I lower my eyes...the first time I have lowered my eyes before man....some years later - when I realized the full scope and dimension of the massacres...I comprehended the concealed nature of the ice lurking deep inside the hypnotic and dynamic femininity of Gandhi's non-violent exterior....And then, when I raised my head again, the men lowered their eyes. (Sidhwa 1996, 96)

This is one of the few occasions where Sidhwa invokes an

adult outlook in Lenny's discourse, to comment on how a nationalist focus on one set of possibilities diminishes and endangers others. The reduction of people to symbols within changing regimes happens differently in *Cracking India* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. In *Cracking India* Lenny observes, over a family dinner that nearly erupts into violence, how the British colonialists will leave behind their divide-and-conquer method of administering social differences and aspirations. Notably, this geo-political separatism characterizes Canadian as well as Indo-Pakistani politics, and calls to mind similar vestiges of colonialism around the globe. The effects reach even to the children:

Cousin erupts with a fresh crop of Sikh jokes.
And there are Hindu, Muslim, Parsee and Christian jokes.

(Sidhwa 1988,104)

As my students observed, such jokes are precursors to escalating acts of discrimination and hatred. Lenny becomes aware of the change in the air: "It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves - and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols" (Sidhwa 1988, 104).

This public encroachment on interpersonal relationships penetrates to the level of embodied identity in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Offred observes an estrangement from her body:

Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I'm a cloud congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear which is hard and more real than I am and glows red within its translucent wrapping. Inside it is a space...round, heavy, an omen...and I see despair coming towards me like famine....I listen to my heart, wave upon wave, salty and red, continuing on and on, marking time. (Atwood 1986a, 91)

Of course, if Offred does not get pregnant in relatively short order, she will be killed. Similarly, in *Cracking India*, the rapes

that characterize paramilitary civil conflict render affected women undesirable to their families, and thereby further imperil their survival.

Both texts observe the recent or pending formation of nation states through the limited perspective of female protagonists from the middle classes, one circumscribed in her movements by her designation as "handmaid" in the republic of Gilead, the other by polio, her youth, and her social location as member of a regional "model minority." In Atwood's Gothic fantasy, Offred is brutally separated from a daughter whose life remains a mystery to her in her re-designation as Gilead's handmaid, while in Sidhwa's semi-autobiographical historical novel, Lenny is brutally separated from her beloved Ayah, who is raped, prostituted, and finally married to Ice-Candy-Man, a young entrepreneur from the lower Muslim classes who has little chance of otherwise securing her hand.

These novels are both sensitive to the enduring effects of Cold War politics, presenting what Rachel Salazar Parrenas would term "stalled revolutions" (Parrenas 2002, 39-40) whose idealized rhetorics unleash as many destructive forces as they claim to bind. Amidst only partially realized efforts to form women's alliances, both texts posit what Sumit Sarkar describes as "a vast and complex continuum of intermediate attitudes of which total subordination and open revolt are only the extreme poles" (Sarkar 1985, 273). This range of attitudes manifests within the behavior of individuals and across groups. In *Cracking India*, Godmother, whose truth-telling vanquishes Ice-Candy-Man's defenses for his crimes against Ayah, is nevertheless cruel to her enslaved step-sister. In order to preserve their social positions in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Serena Joy and the Aunts are more or less willingly complicit with Gilead's regime, even as they suffer gender-based indignities within it. Tara J. Johnson points out that the Aunts are actually quite powerful in Gilead, permitted access to literacy with the Commanders (Johnson 2004, 74). Indeed, Atwood argues in an interview about the novel: "No power structure can institute total serfdom (unless they kill off most of the people) without giving a few 'perks'...Any imperial power does the same thing; the British in India developed terrific regiments made up of Indians. And so, in Gilead, we

have troops of women" (1986b, 397).

Both writers are critical of gendered educational practices in the context each creates and examines. Atwood's novel begins in a school gymnasium, where handmaids in training are punished by Aunts with electric cattle prods if they give the "wrong" answer, or engage in other forbidden behaviors. Lois Feuer points out that "Harvard itself, bastion of reasoned discourse, has become the site of torture and mutilation of the regime's enemies" (Feuer 1997, 84), and Piexoto's oblivious university lecture is delivered at Denay, Nunavit - formerly, a northern region of Canada. In Sidhwa's text, the family doctor's prescriptions for polio include the dictum that there is no need to educate a girl whose destiny is marriage (1988, 25), so Lenny acquires her education through observation and conversations with her Cousin and Ayah.

On the other hand, while both texts were written in English, a reminder of British imperialism in Canada and Pakistan, the post-colonial politics specific to their respective geographic settings are very particular to the story each tells. As a gothic parable, Atwood's text delineates a very spare number of characters and social groupings. Conversely, students were quick to recognize that Sidhwa's novel is richly peopled with characters from a spectrum of social classes, religions and political affiliations. In choosing these works I was conscious of the ways that, owing to their narrative forms, Atwood's speculative fiction and Sidhwa's semi-autobiographical historical novel would invite discussion of the universalizing tendencies of Western knowledge models that particularize⁵ "othered" experiences. At the same time, I hoped the class could work together to form an engaged audience for both novels, imagining possibilities for solidarity across the many subordinated positions each presents.

Since the effects of British colonialism have played out very differently in Pakistan, India, Canada and the United States, with particular consequences for diversely lived experiences of gender within each nation, these novels provide a matrix of perspectives through which to consider the issues raised by transnational feminist critiques and activisms. Certainly, the increasingly volatile and dubious "war on terrorism," which targets Pakistan among many other nations

and serves as a platform for global militarization, made pairing these texts provocative in a contemporary North American classroom. As students engaged with current events in the class, Atwood's gothic parable appeared to them to be chillingly prescient. To quote Offred's analysis of the xenophobic propaganda that supported the rise of Gilead: "It was after the catastrophe, when they shot the president and machine-gunned the Congress and the army declared a state of emergency. They blamed it on the Islamic fanatics at the time" (Atwood 1986a, 217).

Of course, it was "home-grown" Christian fanatics - like the two candidates for the figure of Offred's Commander in Piexoto's lecture - who orchestrated these events, invoking a prevalent local bias to construct imagined "terrorist" enemies as a cover to their own political abuses. A sociologist and market researcher, Frederick R. Waterford, designed the handmaid's habits and coined the term "Participation" for the spectacular ritual dismemberment of political dissidents by enraged handmaids. B. Frederick Judd instituted Gilead's apartheid "National Homelands," evocative of First Nations reservations and South African apartheid policies. Together, with others like themselves, these men formulated Gilead's gendered fundamentalist, fascist regime, under the guise of a "terrorist" crisis.

Karen Stein ascribes the sustained timeliness of *The Handmaid's Tale* to the urgency with which Atwood's heroines tell "their stories in order to understand their situations and survive" (Stein 2000, 64). However, not all women are in a position to tell their stories to receptive audiences. Pressing circumstances and denial of access to public voice militate against that possibility for many women living in perpetual manufactured crises. Indeed, Saskia Sassen would argue that "survival circuits" are relentlessly being built "on the backs of women" (2002, 255) in a globalizing world that continues to profit from their reproductive labour, with little or no shared interest in the condition of their lives, unless these become an excuse for military invasion.

In an interview with David Montenegro, Sidhwa remarks the reductive ways Pakistan, like many nations suffering under capitalist empire, has been portrayed in the western press:

It's been fashionable to kick Pakistan, and it's been done again and again by various writers living in the West....And I feel, if there's one little thing I could do, it's to make people realize: We are not worthless because we inhabit a poor country that is seen by Western eyes as a primitive, fundamentalist country only.

(quoted in Dhawan and Kapadia 1996, 14)

Thus, where Atwood exposes the gendered fundamentalisms that characterize North American right-wing politics and religion, *Sidhwa*, while acknowledging the fundamentalisms that inform Pakistan's formation as a nation, defies non-self-reflexive western projections of the charge. Both texts resist the violence of constructing rival or othered states as primary purveyors of such abuses.

Throughout the course, students remained attentive to the ways pairing these novels serves to interrogate historical and contemporary social conditions, such as enduring tensions between Pakistan and India or the implications of nationalist domestic and foreign policy. One class member noted how Loyalists to the British crown were resistant to the American Revolution, and drew comparisons between Canada's economically dependent relation to the United States, today, and the challenges Pakistan faces, beside the larger economy of India. While the histories of these pairs of geographically proximal nations are very different, students were able to make comparative links between forced migrations of First Nations communities, Acadians, Loyalists, migrant workers, and slaves, and the social upheavals that unfolded under Partition. Several students commented on how easy it is for Canadians to perceive themselves as less involved in power-mongering than Americans, but drew on course materials to emphasize how Canada's recent refusal to send troops to Iraq, for example, obscured a less obvious but nevertheless lethal investment of Canadian Pension Plan funds in American defense contractors (Sanders 2004). In group projects, students began to examine the complex roles of international treaties and organizations such as the North American Free-Trade Act, the United Nations, and policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, in national and global contexts.

Others sought to evaluate the role of World Women's Conferences, UNIFEM, and feminist NGOs in creating possibilities for change.

Nevertheless, class members worked to maintain focus on the links between intimate and international politics. As an antidote to any exclusive focus only on nationalist or global arenas, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak demands careful attention to the local terms that condition emancipatory struggles, and the multiple social stages upon which they are played out. She remarks:

...if nationalism is the only discourse credited with emancipatory possibilities in the imperialist theater, then one must ignore the innumerable subaltern examples of resistance throughout the imperialist and pre-imperialist societies, often suppressed by those very forces of nationalism which would be instrumental in changing the geo-political conjuncture from territorial imperialism to neo-colonialism, and which seem particularly useless in current situations of struggle. (Spivak 1987, 245)

Certainly, the efforts of Lenny's mother and Electric Aunt to establish a refuge for the "fallen" women created by the brutalities of what would today be called "low-level" war, would fall into this category, as would the underground Mayday network in Atwood's novel. In both novels, women are key players in such resistance efforts, while a few men also choose to risk their lives in solidarity. Too often, such localized efforts are undervalued in the propagandized sweep of nationalisms and imperialisms.

Global empire is characterized by grave tensions between extreme capitalist abstractions and the lived realities of those who suffer most in sustaining the benefits to those at the top. As Jacqui Alexander points out in *Pedagogies of Crossing*, "empire requires...the sacrifice of consent" (2005, 3). My students, then, read the pun on the Inuit conference site of Atwood's "Historical Notes," Denay Nunavit, not only as an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of North American First Nation's claims to sovereignty and reparations, or to the need for accountability: "deny none of it." In efforts to "deny none

of it," students also heard in the phrase, "they knew none of it," a critique of any imposed or studied ignorance of how polarized social positions are mutually constituted. Students began to question some of the nationalist zeal of their public school educations and, through analyses of international relations in other parts of the course, became more critical of lauded constructions of "development." As Offred's Commander rationalizes: "Better never means better for everyone...It always means worse for some" (Atwood 1986a, 264).

Worse - in Offred's case - means, among other things, monthly rapes and exposure to regular executions as part of the insidious circulating traumatic discipline that enforces compliance with the new regime. For Ayah, too, rape becomes a condition of existence. Worse also means denial of access to literacy and education for targeted groups in both texts. Commander Judd is credited with a misogynist abandonment of public education, in favor of brutally regimented indoctrination into the new social order in Atwood's novel: "Our big mistake was teaching them to read. We won't do that again" (Atwood 1986a, 383). Imposed or unevenly distributed access to literacy and the means of cultural production are classic mechanisms of domination.

Sidhwa takes up this point personally in an essay entitled "Why Do I Write?" She remarks that, as a relatively privileged member of Lahore society, whose early experiences of polio enforced a certain isolation and self-reliance, she developed a love of reading that eventually led to her career as a writer. She points out, however, that imperialisms created intellectual privations in her early life. She observes that, as a child, after reading Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*:

...I read voraciously anything that came my way: European, Russian and American classics, *Filmfare*, *Femina*, comics, P.G. Wodehouse, Enid Blyton, British and American magazines and Pakistani newspapers. As for Indian novels, I could have been on the other side of the world for all the access I had to them. The only book available to me was Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, and much later, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. I wish I could have read Narayan, Desai and Desani earlier.

(Sidhwa 1996, 27)

Clearly, European, Russian and American classics came Sidhwa's way early because privileged access to literary production and distribution is a hallmark of cultural imperialism. The availability of European authors reflected the enduring pre-1947 effects of colonialism, while the presence of Russian and American classics reflected regional interests of the twin Cold War super-powers. The absence of Indian works in her early reading catalogue clearly reflects consequences of the events her novel chronicles.

Both authors, then, are critical of cultural imperialism, while writing for more livable lives. Students recognized, however, that the production of a Canadian national literature in English has received long-standing support from the empire. Sidhwa's place in Pakistan's emergent literature, on the other hand, has been both revered and critiqued because of her use of English. In an academic environment where graduating students are actively recruited to teach English as a second language as a way to pay off rising student loans, the international politics of literary production provided a rich source of discussion.

Atwood's references to India, Iran, Japan, Canada, and the United States, among other nations, were not lost on students. Together we considered how the fantasy nation of Gilead exposes some matrices of intimate and international relations, while potentially obscuring others. Ruth McElroy makes this point in her study of surrogate motherhood and its relation to the social politics of race in Atwood's novel. She notes the many associations with African American slave narratives in *The Handmaid's Tale* structured around "women's experience of sexual abuse and their role as self-reproducing labour" (McElroy 2002, 328). Telling details are there, right down to the underground railroad to Canada. As handmaid, Offred is like a slave, like a peasant, living a restricted life, like every other abused woman in the world. But, McElroy asserts, such associative surrogacies are insufficiently respectful of necessary place-based responses to scattered hegemonic forces. Citing the incident where stereotyped Japanese tourists with cameras place white subjects in the role of "local color" (2002, 339), she argues that such efforts to enable readers to "see what it is like" to be captured by the lens of a tourist

who cannot begin to understand, stretch the notion of empathy too far in the direction of self-congratulation. "Concealed within such surrogacy moves," she argues "is the privilege that underscores the lie that we can just stand in others' places and thereby gain enlightened truth." McElroy goes on to suggest that: "Empathy, when framed as standing in another's place, is an ambiguous basis for a feminist politics attuned to the power-laden dynamics of racial, national and religious 'difference'" (2002, 339).

Ambreen Hai makes a similar point about Sidhwa's treatment of Ayah's story in *Cracking India*. She notes that Ayah is referenced only once by name in Lenny's account of her tragic story, (a fact curiously reminiscent of the suppression of both Offred's and her daughter's birth names in Atwood's text) and that readers are left without any sense of her history or prospects by the novel's end. Rather, Hai suggests that:

As the multiply othered victim, Ayah serves finally as a tool to emphasize the goodness of the ethnically neutral and upper-class Parsee (border) women who volunteer to save her and others like her. But as they try to find her a "home" they can only send her beyond the borders of Pakistan to an India that has no assurance of welcome - just as the narrative can only place such a figure of marginality finally beyond its own boundaries, within which she cannot find a home.

(2000, 390)

In fact, Ayah and Offred both face indeterminate futures at the close of each of these novels. The critiques offered by McElroy and Hai suggest that middle class, educated feminisms, while important and necessary, are not sufficient to the compelling needs generated by global capitalism's excesses. Read together, these novels were useful in helping students to question what remains to be understood and addressed in the project of equalizing relations among women across diverse social locations.

Students also noted how each text fills in important gaps in the other's partial perspective. Whereas Ayah's story

as prostituted "handmaid" is partially shielded from the eyes of the reader through Lenny, so the fate of Offred's daughter - herself likely to be subjected to the "Ceremony" in due course - is also suppressed in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Asha Sen suggests that child narrators offer "uncanny remembrance and re-presentation [that]...deconstructs the adult narrator's impulse to seek refuge under the normative discourse of national unification and integrity" (Sen 1998,190). Adult narrators, meanwhile, can contextualize childhood recollections. As J. Brooks Bouson suggests of Atwood's text: "Because the Handmaid takes on the role of the dutiful child-daughter in the Commander-father's household, the Ceremony, with its degrading oedipal flesh triangle, is presented as a thinly disguised incest trauma" (Bouson 1996, 124). Thus, Offred's story helped students appreciate Ayah's situation, while Lenny's perspective on her friend Papoo's experience as a child bride helped them to reconsider the fate of Offred's daughter. Consequently, in a city with the highest per capita child prostitution rate in Canada, and where First Nations and Métis women continue to disappear regularly, students were able to place their own environs in the context of the sexualized violence these novels invoke.

Ultimately, both texts demand accountability, trading accumulated abstractions for readings that attend to the ways that none is exempt from complicity, and everyone counts. In Sidhwa's novel, Lenny's story offers a belated effort to redress her uninformed betrayal of Ayah, and even though Sikh rebels conspire to drive out and slaughter Ranna's entire village, it is a Sikh guard who defends, as "my sisters and mothers!" (Sidhwa 1988, 284), the defiled Muslim women in the compound Lenny's mother and female relatives establish next door. Meanwhile, in a libidinal economy where Offred functions as reproductive currency, exchangeable for the next set of functional ovaries, she decides that each perspective is necessary to collective understanding: "Each one remains unique, there is no way of joining them together. They cannot be exchanged one for the other" (Atwood 1986a, 240).

Students in this class found ways to insist that resistance is grounded in the principle that everyone counts, and a belief that better informed and more respectful alliances can be built across the structured spaces of difference that

characterize globalization. Reading these novels together, among shorter theoretical and topical pieces, helped them to consider the links and disjunctions between national and international fundamentalisms, militarisms, patterns of gender domination, the globalization of capitalism, racialization, environmental degradation, and lesbo and homophobia, while becoming more familiar with the simultaneous possibilities of being both dominated and dominating, all at the same time. They actively sought ways to resist their own oppressions, as well as participating in the oppressions of others, and to become more involved in local activisms. As Cynthia Enloe maintains, students are often invited to learn about globalization because it will affect them, without regard for their capacities to function as collaborative actors in the scenes they study. While, as Cynthia Burack argues, "judging the efficacy of pedagogical acts is a difficult enterprise" (1988-89, 281), pairing Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* with Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* provides one among many possible strategies for engaging Canadian undergraduates in the debates and choices that are shaping the possibilities of transnational feminisms.

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Endnotes

1. Weiss interprets Husserl's phrase to denote multiple "grounds" for the relational and multidirectional meanings of situated experiences.
2. Of twenty nine students in the class, most were regional

Euro-Canadians, two of them men; two were First Nations Cree; and two had immigrated from Africa and South Asia, respectively.

3. "'Relations of ruling' is a concept that grasps power, organization, direction and regulation as more pervasively structured than can be expressed in traditional concepts provided by the discourses of power....When I write of 'ruling' in this context I am identifying a complex of organized practices, including government, law, business and financial management, professional organizations, and educational institutions as well as discourses in texts..."(Smith 1987, 3).

4. Spivak's question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" resonates in the vacuum of empire's capacity to attend and respond to the voices and needs of the majority of the world's people, many of them women, upon the misreading of whose lives scattered hegemonies depend.

5. Barbara Burton et al. argue that "In addition to the guiding and political rhetoric of the post-World War II era and the processes of development essential to modernization theory, these constructions depended upon a particular intellectual division of labor. The more...universalizing studies were applied to the First World...the more ideographic or particular studies to the Third World....such divisions only reinforced and sustained previous colonial era binaries" (2002, 28).

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