

Globalization and Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

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In this essay I discuss pedagogical strategies in world literature classes through a basic theoretical framework about the nature of radical pedagogy within the context of American universities. Although I focus on Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995) as case study, I understand that my discussion of this one novel can be applied readily to other works of fiction and non-fiction. Only informed, radical, and critical pedagogy can enable us to create more informed, empathetic, and cosmopolitan human subjects. Because the texts are produced in the present, it is also helpful to teach with an eye toward the material conditions in which the texts are produced, published, taught, and received.

As a theoretical scaffolding of my inquiry, I draw on Mark Bracher's discussion of the role of radical pedagogy, applying his model, albeit with a few modifications, to the importance of using Mistry's novel as a didactic tool in creating a more cosmopolitan and compassionate view of the world.

Globalization has emerged as a major theoretical term in the field of postcolonial studies and it is also obvious that we now live in an increasingly monetized and financialized world.¹ It is therefore necessary to teach contemporary postcolonial texts within the context of the all-pervasive economic system of our times, especially as they relate to the particular settings of the postcolonial novel in general but this novel in particular. One must also mobilize the text not only to emphasize a critique of the unequal global economic order, but also to forge a method of pedagogy that can, in Mark Bracher's words, "promote the compassion for real strangers" ("Educating" 2013: 30). This emphasis on feelings, empathy, and compassion is important within a climate of rising protectionism, nativism, and belligerent nationalisms all over the world.

In what follows, I first set forth my theoretical framework, and provide an overview of the varied discussions of the novel by other scholars. The article then focuses on offering my own interpretive insights related to the mobilization of the novel in the service of a compassionate and just understanding of the world, and of our existence in it. The discussion therefore extends beyond the novel as a distinct genre, and delves into the way the novel can be employed as a pedagogical medium in order to enable our students to construct more compassionate and cosmopolitan identities. My reading and analysis of the literature to create compassionate identities focuses on the circumstances related to metropolitan students, as this is where I am

situated as a practicing scholar and teacher. My discussion should be understood within the paradigm of identity formation suggested by Mark Bracher, who is one of the leading theorists on radical pedagogy and significance of questions of identity to a transformative pedagogical practice.

Published in 1995, Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* is a realistic novel set in India and offers the day-to-day struggles of a few major characters trying to seek autonomy through their labor within neoliberal capital. The novel, I suggest, can be a wonderful tool in teaching precarity and need for empathy in this neoliberal, precarious world. The novel has garnered quite a lot of scholarly attention and it will therefore be helpful to provide below a brief overview of the work of my predecessors whose views have informed my own engagement with the novel. Doreen D'Cruz acknowledges that the "postcolonial subject exists in at least two dimensions, one that emanates from colonial and postcolonial cultural politics, and the other from indigenous forms of social stratification" (57) and taking this as a point of departure, discusses the novel with an eye toward the operative "role of gender" (57). This incisive essay thus takes the focus away from the traditional emphasis in postcolonial studies on the oppressive role of the colonizers in maintain the cultural hierarchies present within postcolonial spaces. The problem, however, is that if we teach this aspect of the novel uncritically, then our students can very easily assign these inequities and cruelties to the inherent nature of the colonized and neocolonial spaces, thus absolving the global economic and political system that underwrites and sanctifies these ossified systems. Building on D'Cruz's work, I argue for the importance of radical pedagogy.

Caroline Herbert focuses on the cosmopolitan aesthetics and politics of Rohinton Mistry's works, in general, and on the novel, in particular. Herbert suggests "that Mistry's representations reveal an anxiety over his position as a migrant writer" and she further asserts that Mistry's "work seems to mobilize writing as a means of avoiding a problematically apolitical detachment from India," thus, establishing "a tension between his representation of the migrant within his fiction and his negotiation of his own migrant position through his fiction." (11). In such a scenario, the text, besides representing the "state of migrancy" and "cosmopolitanism" also becomes a clue into the very psyche of the author and his lived experience. There is, of course, nothing wrong with such an approach: after all, the authors are constituted not only by the places of their origin, but also by the experiential terrain of their migrant experiences. Herbert also reads the novel as an example of the post-emergency novels and discusses it "as a text concerned not only with national politics but also with the politics of migrancy" (13). With this view in mind, Herbert offers the novel as a "migrant representation of India and, at the same time, a

critical representation of the migrant” (13). Taking this view of the novel as a point of departure, I contemplate aspects of the novel that not only focus on migrancy or the nation, but also on the kind of human subjectivities created by the current political and economic order.

In another essay, while focusing on the economy, especially in the field of Economics, Tyler Tokaryk suggests that the novel succeeds in telling a compelling, persuasive story of economic development because it embraces an epistemology, language, and set of storytelling practices roughly homologous to those theorized by Keynes as the necessary conditions for a functional representation of the material world. (3). For Tokaryk, then, the novel serves as a literary analog to Keynes’ approach. By reading the novel in a similar vein, one can posit the real-life impact of economic policies on human characters. This is an especially instructive aspect of the novel in explaining the theoretical concepts developed by one of the leading world economists whose theories have now been replaced by a neoliberal economic model. I take my inquiry a few steps further by suggesting that the novel provides a realistic narrative of people’s lives on the margins of the global economic order. Going further, I develop a framework for teaching the novel with the aim of making our students and readers aware of the consequences of current global economic policies on the lives of average citizens of India and the world.

James Johnson deals with the fictional representations of the body and its connection to body politic of India (148). Focused on the inscriptions of the state narratives on the bodies of the urban underclasses, Johnson also centers the Indian emergency [declared by Indira Gandhi in 1975] as its main underlying feature for the creation of “docile bodies.” Furthermore, the essay focuses on the character of Beggarmaster who, in Johnson’s view, transforms “already disfigured bodies into docile bodies by maximizing their potential to evoke pity, but also he creates disfigurements by manipulating the bodies of the healthy.” (154). Ultimately, the mastering and shaping of native bodies is either affected by their caste or class or through the regulatory and body-altering politics of statist imperatives. If read uncritically, however, this article can be misunderstood as legitimizing the myth that somehow the native Indians are themselves solely responsible for the degradation of other Indian bodies. A more persuasive approach would have been to attend to the role that the Beggarmaster plays in the novel: that of a powerful, unrestrained, and unregulated capitalist for whom all bodies are, somehow, bodies that can be shaped, alerted, and instrumentalized for profit. This way of perceiving the Beggarmaster will accomplish two things: it would inform the readers about the specificity of local class-based and caste-based violence, but then also connect these acts to the imperatives of

global capitalism. The Beggermaster does not exist in a vacuum but rather in a space and time where the state has abdicated its responsibility to the masses, leaving the privatized public sphere open to the power and influence of such characters.

Theoretical Framework

Having reviewed prior readings of this novel, I turn to elaborating the theoretical framework that supports my inquiry. In his book, *Radical Pedagogy*, Bracher acknowledges the need to shift to a teaching model that focuses on identity development as opposed to a model that sees identity development as a supplementary outcome of education. In Bracher's view, "One reason educators fail to recognize the importance of identity in learning and social problems is our lack of awareness and understanding of how identity needs motivate and direct our own actions, including our teaching practices" (Bracher, *Radical* xiii). Furthermore, Bracher argues, "students will be motivated to pursue knowledge and academic success only to the degree that they experience such pursuit as more identity-enhancing than identity-threatening" (xii). Bracher's argument serves as an uncomfortable reminder that much of what is done with good intentions in specific educational contexts, may be experienced as detrimental by students situated at the intersection of multiple systems of oppression and privilege. This happens because we as teachers work without a deeper knowledge of how identity works and how best to use this knowledge in our pedagogy.

Bracher explores the construction of identity under three overlapping registers: The affective, the imagist, and the linguistic (14-15). Out of these three registers, the linguistic is the most relevant for present purposes, because the literary texts that we use in our classes are usually the most elevated form of written expression.. At the core of Bracher's analysis is the question of identity and what it needs to sustain itself. According to Bracher, "the most fundamental identity need is the need for recognition, the need for one's being appreciated and validated, or at least acknowledged, taken into account, by others" (7). This implies not only that students feel defensive about their core identities as they enter our classrooms, but also that they need their identity be acknowledged and recognized by the teachers, the authority figures.

The linguistic register, according to Bracher, is crucial in identity formation, for it provides the crucial "Identity-bearing master signifiers" [IBMS] (17). Terms such as "man," "women," "American" etc., according to Bracher, are some such signifiers. And these master signifiers "embody socially valued ideals and attributes that we strive

either to enact or to avoid embodying in our behavior” (17). Obviously, if the linguistic register is the most crucial in our identity formation and if we stabilize or even define our identities with certain affiliations and attributes and by rejecting certain negative attributes, then to our students only those things that strengthen their IBMs will be acceptable. Conversely, anything that threatens their IBMs will be perceived as a threat and hence unwelcome. Bracher argues that, to make any attempt at helping our students view the world differently and more compassionately, we must present them new knowledge in a way that they are at least receptive to it and do not see it as a threat to their assumed selves. For when they “encounter information that supports or enhances their identity, they welcome it,” however, they “often vigorously resist” any knowledge that threatens their “identity-bearing beliefs” (24).

This enables us to raise an important question for our pedagogical practices, grounded in world literature: how should we teach world literature in a way that transforms the imagination of our students without threatening their identities so that they do not close their minds to the liberating influences of the text? Finding this balance is a question that we must answer if we want to be effective teachers of world literature.

In her book *Other Asias*, Spivak asserts that the purpose of humanistic education is “the empowerment of an informed imagination” (2), and suggests that “the ethico-political task of the humanities has always been rearrangement of desires” (3). This rearrangement of desires needs to be performed at both ends of the global division of labor. For the metropolitan students, such pedagogy needs to encourage students to acknowledge global differences, and their own complicity in the global system of oppression. On the other hand, as Spivak points out, the need to learn from below and teach the rural children of the global periphery about the habits, desires, and expectations of living in a democracy is another important aspect of a humanistic education. Bracher’s approach is a focused attempt at understanding the learning aspects of human psyche, thereby offering us the tools needed to perform this rearrangement of desires, while also becoming cognizant of the destructive aspects of, for example, mere historicism.

As stated earlier, I believe that *A Fine Balance* can help us teach two important aspects of life in the periphery within the regime of neoliberal capital: The novel teaches us the lived realities of global distributive order and within that logic, it also enables us to create empathy for our global others. For the purpose of this essay, I imagine myself in an American classroom, but my analysis can be adapted to any specific teaching situation. What is it that I attempt to do in my classes? Unless the intent of my pedagogy is clear, the practices cannot

really be fully explained. Here are some of the things that I strive to accomplish in the learning environment:

- To inform my students about the nature of global inequalities.
- To enable my students to read the texts of the global periphery with a deeper understanding of the specific histories and cultures of the novel's settings.
- And to encourage my students to be more empathetic and compassionate about their global others.

At a certain level all of these are pedagogical priorities that would not matter to those who strongly believe only in what Bracher calls the “discourse of the master or the discourse of the discipline.” But to anyone interested in radical and critical pedagogy, the role of humanities in shaping our students' desires, imagination, and politics into a more accepting and reflective politics is something that can and should be incorporated into our classroom interactions.

The starting point of such a pedagogical approach is to acknowledge that the most important needs of our students are their identity needs and that they will protect these identities if they feel threatened. Thus, unless we find out a way of strengthening their identities, there can be no strong basis in effecting any changes in our students' behavior and feelings to their global others. That is why, despite our best efforts, we may fail to reach the students who perceive the curriculum and its subject matter as a threat to their very identities. In a literature classroom, therefore, we already have a written text with which to work. What we say about this text, and how we think about it, can often come in conflict with the self-narratives and cultural scripts which shape our students' identities. If the text challenges those scripts, then the students would automatically shut us out.

The novel is set in India and tells the story of a few main characters caught within the destructive logic of the neoliberal market system. The novel, though realistic, is not necessarily a novel of India but the novel of a certain segment of India caught within the logic and destructive power of neoliberal capital and its power to produce and normalize precarity. This precarity, however, is not really an accident but rather a necessary precondition for the success of neoliberal capital. In fact, the precariat, according to Guy Standing, has now become a new class and shares the following global conditions and attributes:

Those in it [in the precariat] have lives dominated by insecurity, uncertainty, debt and humiliation. They are becoming denizens rather than citizens, losing cultural, civil, social, political and economic rights built up

over generations. The precariat is also the first class in history expected to endure labour and work at a lower level than the schooling it typically requires. In an ever unequal society, its relative deprivation is severe. (VII)

For this reason, the novel is helpful in teaching precarity and its consequences for the people of India and of the Global South more broadly. While no amount of political sermonizing will change the perceptions of our metropolitan students toward the global periphery, the novel, if taught radically, could enable us not just to highlight the precarious nature of global labor but also to create a sort of global empathy and sense of responsibility for the actions of the North Atlantic governments and corporations abroad, for it is they who are structuring and forcing the current regime of capital on the rest of the world.

The main characters in the novel can be summarized as follows: Dina Dalal is a widow who has decided to take on the manufacturing job at the other end of the global divide. Ms. Dalal, in the beginning of the novel, is attempting to live independently and hence wants to run her own business from her house: The kind of ideal individualistic subjectivity that is often foregrounded in the narratives of capital and its liberating power. The business involves getting piece work from the wholesalers, converting the pieces to tailored materials and then returning the commodities to the wholesalers. She has, therefore, hired two tailors from a village—Ishvar and Omprakash—who are like the modern-day versions of assembly line workers. Thus, when the tailors, while being interviewed, inform her that they can custom make any fashion or design (9) she informs them that their work would not involve any such skills. “The sewing,” she informs them “will be straight from paper patterns. Each week you have to make two dozen, three dozen, whatever the company wants” (9).

After having explained the nature of their work, Dina also explains to them the terms of employment that require that “they would have to bring their own sewing-machines; all sewing would be piece work” and the more they make the more money they will make and the work hours would be “from eight a.m. to six p.m.” Any hours less than that “would not do” (9).

There are many instructive elements in this first encounter between Ms. Dina Dalal, the boss, and her future employees. The work does not require a high expertise, just basic sewing skills. The employer is not responsible to provide the tools or machinery of production—the workers must bring their own tools—and the employer will then provide the materials to be converted into marketable commodities. The workers are also required to work long monotonous hours of producing the same commodity without the least amount of imagination involved. The work of labor here is reduced to an automated soulless task of transforming pre-designed raw materials into a finished product through unimaginative, repetitive labor, kind of

a post-Fordist model in the form of a cottage or home industry. This mode of production also produces what one could call, for lack of a better term, a chain of dependencies.

Within the context of the novel, these dependencies have both national and transnational connotations: the piece work is commissioned by the global corporation through the local businesses who then assign it to petty mid-level operators (such as Ms. Dalal) who contract the workers to transform the pieces into the prescribed garments for return. The novel teaches us the very shaping of their lives through this precarious and exploitative system of production and labor. It is important to note that this system of labor is not far from the “putting out system” of the “16th through 18th centuries” (Caffentzis 44) but does have certain marked differences in its functioning. While in the former system the workers did have some autonomy, for the work was brought to them, under the current system the workers, especially in the novel, are captive labor being constantly supervised and thus even lack the limited autonomy of their counterparts from history. There is also a temporal dictate working constantly against the workers but also against Ms. Dalal, their manager, as all of them are responsible to finish the pieces and return the finished product to the senders or there are no payments. At both ends, thus, the reception of work and the acceptance of the finished product, for the middle businesses can refuse to pay if they deem the quality not good enough, Ms. Dalal and her small venture into personal freedom through market is under extreme precarity. Thus, the precarity is produced at the very instance of production and becomes an increasingly important part of global capitalism. At the heart of this novel are the main characters, all attempting to escape the very givens of their lives, the given that has been ascribed to them through their lived experience and they all attempt to do it through a deep negotiation with the rising capitalistic system. The novel then is an account of their aspirations in a system beyond their control.

Keeping in view Bracher’s proposed method of pedagogy, it is important to consider the possible teaching strategies that, instead of flattening the text, create possibilities for encouraging more empathetic and compassionate responses from North American students. The idea is to teach them the complicity of their own powerful nation and the corporations in this very act of appropriating and exploiting human labor in India. The novel’s characters are therefore, emblematic of this new world order. A straightforward lecture on the evils of capitalism is not likely to change anybody’s minds. Instead it may have the opposite effect, forcing our more conservative students to close off to any such appeals.

The novel’s characters are all caught within the destructive logic of neoliberal capital. Ms. Dalal is the overseer, the one who

would traditionally get the contract within the old “put out system” (Caffentzis 44). Capitalism is her way of breaking the primordial familial bond and to create a free idealized subjectivity. Our students often internalize the meritocratic discourse that those who are innovative and hardworking succeed within a capitalist system. It is obvious that Ms. Dalal’s life faces precarity at both ends of the productive process: she is dependent upon the good will of the distributors who may or may not give her the piece work. On the other end she is at the mercy of the two tailors, who, when they learn of her weak position, might extract more and more wages from her. As a middle woman, she neither has the control on the supply side nor on the production side. The two tailors, on the other hand, have themselves escaped the vagaries of a rural life and are therefore completely dependent on their current job not just to sustain life but to also plan for a future.

A young student, Maneck Kohla, sent to Ms. Dalal as a house guest who is preparing to one day leave for the green pastures of Canada for higher education. In a way then, the novel stages for us three people deeply enmeshed in the current economic system at the micro level and one detached subjectivity that can afford to look at the situation from an outsiders’ perspective. The experiences they have together are made possible by their individual and collective negotiation of the microeconomic actions that they perform in order to sustain life. These characters stage a sort of microcosm of precarious life in the neoliberal capital on the other end of the global divide, in the so-called developing world. And despite their best efforts, in the absence of any statist or privatized system of insurance against change, they fail and that is the ultimate lesson about this new phase of capital: that much of what happens in our lives is beyond our control and decided by the impersonal and implacable forces of capital. It is this didactic aspect of the novel that one needs to mobilize in a kind of enlightened radical pedagogy. If this is offered to our students as a narrative of hardworking people who fail because of an unjust system, chances are that our students, who themselves exist in the same kind of system, will be able to relate to the story and find some common ground with the characters. If our identities, in the linguistic register, are structured through self-serving narratives of individual responsibility and upward mobility, then a clear discussion of the market-induced imperatives to the contrary and the overdeterminism that comes with it, can be a good didactic tool even for the most ardent market fundamentalists. This is where Mark Bracher’s work can be of exceptional importance in enabling our students to be more empathetic global citizens. Lecturing, especially sanctimonious sermonizing does not really work; it in fact comes across as irrelevant and threatening to our students. Bracher points out elsewhere that our other techniques of pedagogy also do more harm than good and he poses some serious

questions in one of his other works. In responding to various theorists of cosmopolitanism, Bracher discusses some important assertions by Martha Nussbaum. In *Cultivating Humanity*, Nussbaum claims that “to become world citizens we must not simply amass knowledge; we must also cultivate in ourselves a capacity for sympathetic imagination that will enable us to comprehend the motives and choices of people different from ourselves, seeing them not as forbiddingly alien and other, but as sharing many problems and possibilities with us” (Bracher 28), Nussbaum offers literary imagination as one of the tools to teach us this kind of compassionate living, but to that recipe, Bracher poses difficult questions, especially about the possibility of creating compassion for others through literature or literary imagination. Bracher asks:

Nussbaum appears to assume that by arousing sympathy for characters, literature also automatically heightens and broadens readers’ sympathy for real people. But while it is obvious that literature often develops compassion for characters in the text and also broadens readers’ sympathy by extending it to characters who are strange and different from readers, it is not at all evident that readers [such] readers . . . go on to experience greater compassion for real strangers outside the text. (29)

Bracher also discusses three kinds of “judgments,” as elaborated by Nussbaum, that are necessary to produce compassion: acknowledging another person’s needs or suffering; knowing that the other is not responsible for this suffering and need; and understanding that the other’s “well-being overlaps significantly with one’s own” (Bracher, “Educating” 30). According to Bracher, while Nussbaum understands these three kinds of judgments to be crucial to developing more compassionate and empathetic subjectivities and while she offers literary studies as a tool in developing such judgments, no viable method is offered to accomplish that. So, the ultimate question for Bracher remains a pertinent one: granted that literature can create empathy and compassion, but how must it be taught to accomplish that? What kind of pedagogy would be absolutely necessary for literature to have this transformative effect? In most of the cases this transformative impact is automatically assumed. In order to offer a more workable and plausible solution to explaining the alleviative function of literary studies, Bracher relies on the recent research in cognitive sciences. Using the recent research in cognitive sciences, Bracher proposes the following strategy for a specific kind of pedagogy:

What we need to identify are the cognitive structures that prevent people from arriving at three compassion-producing judgments about others when these judgments are warranted by the facts. (“Educating” 32).

If our pedagogy does not produce some kind of empathy or compassion in our students—if that matters to you—then obviously there is something wrong with our teaching practices. In his earlier work, Bracher had help explained the harm that we all can do in our classrooms and I have touched upon it above. But in this particular work, Bracher expands on his earlier work by explaining the nature of cognition itself. So, lack of “compassion-producing” judgments, even when a text points to it, is caused, according to Bracher, by the faulty basic “cognitive schemas” (32) of our students. Bracher explains the general knowledge cognitive schemas as follows:

The basic types of knowledge include proportional knowledge (based in semantic memory), knowledge of particular instances and events (based in episodic memory), prototypes (generalizations or averages of these particular instances and events), information-processing scripts (based in procedural memory). Any or all of these four types of can play a significant role in our perception, judgment, emotion, and action regarding other people. (“Educating 32)

Any change in the political and social behavior of our students will involve expanding and altering the faulty schemas with the compassion-enhancing schemas. According to Bracher, to create more compassionate human subjectivities—and this, I believe, needs to be done at both ends of the global divide, the “key” to “helping distant others who are in need” is to “increase people’s recognition of their sameness and overlap with others.” (36). According to Bracher “literature engages readers in . . . [these] schema altering processes” (41) and an informed pedagogy can harness this into instilling in our students the kind of compassionate cosmopolitanism that is absolutely necessary for our world. But Bracher also asserts that literature cannot be do this by itself: *For literature to be transformative, it must be taught differently*. By far the most important techniques to engage our students at a deeper level, according to Bracher, is when teachers provide “multiple examples corrective exemplars for each of the prototype category” (41). If, for example, a certain individual or cultural bias exists against a particular group, religion, or ethnicity, then the texts should provide exemplars as to how so many of those people share some degree of sameness and overlap with the students, which would, in the end, humanize the stereotyped beings and thus transform the basic schemas of the students about such a group. This recognition of others “humanity” will have, according to Bracher, a transformative effect:

When students have acquired a critical mass of corrective exemplars of the Other and have developed a certain degree of metacognition regarding their own information processing, their humanity-and sameness-recognizing information processing of the Other can be developed further having them read texts that represent the other in ways that obscure or even deny the Other’s humanity and sameness with the reader. (“Educating” 42)

Instead of lecturing on the inherent injustices of the global market system and neoliberal economy, one could make the plight of these characters as a didactic tool. The questions could be related to their efforts and work ethics. One could ask the students as to what do they think of their work ethic and the proceed to discuss the causes of their failure. Naturally, if the causes cannot be privatized and posited in terms of individual failure, then it would be easier to convince our students about the unjust nature of the neoliberal global order. This would in turn reshape their own self-serving narratives and unless those self-serving narratives are altered, we cannot produce empathetic subjectivities.

There are quite a few instances in the novel that can be mobilized to encourage critical reflection and to encourage metropolitan students to find their empathetic bond with their so-called global others. For example, when Ishvar and Om talk about the latter's marriage options, their conversation is a good indicator of the impact of local customs and the insecurities created by the local and global economy. In opposing Om's hasty marriage, Dina poses the following question: "What if our tailoring goes phuss because of a strike or something." (461). One could point to the local precarities that impact the lives of our students while living in the United States. Might not our students worry about a stable job before they start thinking of a serious relationship or marriage. In a way, then, this particular conversation from the book can enable our students to learn that these insecurities are global in nature. Since the text refers back to their own anxieties and fears, the students would probably not be reluctant to feel some empathy for Om or for anyone else in the world who shares the same anxieties caused by the uncertain economic conditions. A similar approach can help create empathetic webs, as the characters talk about the post-marriage living situation for Om and his fiancée: a concern that is also likely to be a part of any American student's consciousness or experience when thinking about starting a family. And the fact that Om points to the terrible living conditions for most of the poor working-class people in the city, would enable our students to see the economic inequalities created by the global economic systems, especially as by this point in the novel, they are already aware that each one of these characters is trying exceptionally hard to succeed within the given economic system.

Another instance of solidarity, that can be invoked, as an compassion-generating frame for our students, is the exchange between Ashraf, a Muslim, and Ishvar and Om, both Hindus. As they are leaving for the city, Ashraf writes to his friends in the city "to put up Ishvar and Omprakashan when they arrived, help them settle in the city" (151). This is a simple act of kindness extended from one person to two others, and one could mobilize it to discuss, in a classroom setting, the nature of kindness to strangers and things that people often

do here for their friends, for charities, and for the care of others. Such small instances would also help in reinforcing the collective nature of our human experiences and will also provide a common frame to think about our actions towards others from a point of view of 'sameness' of our human plight and the actions that we perform and can call compassionate and humane. I could go on, but the point is that there are various small and large instances of human kindness and generosity that would resonate with metropolitan students and, using Mark Bracher's strategies, could be mobilized to enable our metropolitan students to think and feel empathetically about their global and local others. Let us recapture the nature of precarious work in which the novel's main characters are engaged, and eradicate any that their tribulations are the result of personal failings as subjects of neoliberal capital. I understand that teaching literature should never always be about instrumentalizing the texts to a purpose outside the texts, but teaching texts as self-contained nuggets of perpetual wisdom and aesthetic wonder is also not a very interesting thing. By and large, it is only in a humanities classroom that a student would be either required or encouraged to think critically about the system within which he or she exists. This is what makes critical pedagogy extremely crucial for our time. If we only teach the system and how it works, without attempting to invoke the Why question, then there is no chance for us to enable the kind of human subjectivities that can or would want to effect positive change in the world. The idea that people somehow would become aware of the global and local inequalities simply through a kind of lived osmosis is absurd.²

Ms. Dalal is dependent upon the piece work she receives from the company. She can only turn a profit if she can employ workers who would work for less. The two tailors work for less because they can no longer go back to their village. Thus, at all levels of this exchange, their lives are determined by forces larger than them and forces upon which they have no control and since the entire system is privatized and outside the influence of any government, when they fail, the remedies are also private and individual as there is no safety net on which to rely. If taught and learned within a critical, emancipatory pedagogical framework, the novel can bring about a deeper understanding of the nature of global precarity, encouraging our metropolitan students to engage critically with the current global system of economics, and to find themselves in solidarity and sympathy with their global and local others.

Notes

1. An important discussion of the financialization of much of the world's economy, and its costs to the global periphery can be found in

Gayatri Spivak's discussion of the subaltern in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" a revised version of which can be consulted in the final chapter of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*).

2. Even for Marxists, the biggest problem was that of coming to awareness. That is why even Marxism had to become vanguardist and had to rely on pedagogy and study circles and teach-ins. This is true of classical Marxism, Leninism and of course in the work of Paulo Freire.

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