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The Paradox of Speaking for Narrative Authority, Hierarchical Representation, and Self-Reflexivity in Arundhati Roy's Walking with the Comrades

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Abstract: Arundhati Roy's *Walking with the Comrades* (2010) constitutes a pivotal intervention in postcolonial literary journalism, seeking to amplify the voices of India's marginalized Maoist insurgents. By innovatively blending journalism, political commentary, and travel writing, Roy challenges dominant state and media narratives. Yet, this study argues that the very hybridity of her form produces representational paradoxes that inadvertently reproduce the hierarchical structures of colonial discourse she aims to subvert. Drawing on postcolonial theory and critical discourse analysis, with reference to Spivak, Huggan, and Rancière, this research identifies three interrelated dilemmas in Roy's text: first, the construction of a privileged journalistic gaze that positions the author as an authoritative mediator of truth; second, the hierarchical selection of voices within the Maoist movement, which foregrounds educated leaders while marginalizing the agency of ordinary, often female, cadres; and third, the aestheticization of revolutionary struggle through literary travel writing, which risks commodifying resistance for a cosmopolitan readership. While Roy's self-reflexive moments acknowledge the ethical challenges of representing the subaltern, this metacommentary paradoxically reinforces her narrative authority. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that *Walking with the Comrades* exemplifies the enduring ethical bind of postcolonial representation: the political imperative to speak for the marginalized is continually undercut by the epistemological impossibility of doing so without appropriation. The text thus provides a rich site for theorizing both the limits and possibilities of solidarity literature in a postcolonial context.

Keywords: Arundhati Roy; postcolonial representation; subaltern voice; narrative authority; exoticism; walking with the comrades; genre hybridity

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1. Introduction

1.1. Ethical Imperatives and the Postcolonial Dilemma

The ethical imperative to represent marginalized communities, making their struggles visible and their voices heard, constitutes a central yet fraught project in postcolonial writing. This endeavor is perennially shadowed by the specter of epistemological violence, whereby the act of representation itself risks reinscribing the very power hierarchies it seeks to dismantle. Intellectuals who venture into subaltern spaces to bear witness thus operate within a contested field, negotiating what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak famously theorized as the impossibility of transparently representing the subaltern without engaging in epistemic appropriation [1]. Within this critical context, Arundhati Roy's *Walking with the Comrades* (2010) emerges as a seminal yet deeply paradoxical text, undertaking a bold exploration of India's Maoist insurgency while interrogating the limits of ethical representation.

1.2. Roy's Hybrid Narrative

From the outset, Roy's project is propelled by a potent political commitment. By physically "walking with the comrades," she seeks to transcend the distant, objectifying gaze characteristic of traditional reportage, offering instead an immersive and empathetic account from the guerrillas' perspective. Her hybrid narrative-blending investigative journalism, political critique, and literary travelogue-is a deliberate formal strategy designed to capture the multifaceted reality of the Maoist struggle: its political logic, cultural practices, and human costs. This genre-bending approach aims to produce a counter-narrative capable of challenging the hegemony of state discourse. The work has been widely recognized for its courage and incisive critique of the Indian government's counter-insurgency operations, most notably Operation Green Hunt.

1.3. Representational Paradoxes and Analytical Framework

Despite its radical intentions, *Walking with the Comrades* offers a fertile site for examining the persistent dilemmas of postcolonial representation. This study argues that Roy's sophisticated textual practice, while striving to amplify the voices of the Maoists, inadvertently enacts a series of representational paradoxes: it consolidates her authority as a privileged interpreter, produces hierarchies within the subaltern community, and aestheticizes resistance in ways that commodify it for a global readership. These paradoxes manifest on three interrelated levels: first, in the journalistic modality, which establishes cognitive privilege and authoritative witnessing; second, in the hierarchical selection of voices, privileging educated leaders over ordinary, often female, cadres; and third, in the literary aestheticization of the struggle, rendering the conflict exotically consumable-a phenomenon Graham Huggan terms the "postcolonial exotic" [2].

Importantly, Roy's self-reflexive moments acknowledge these tensions, as when she questions: "But what should I suggest they do?" [3]. Yet, this metacommentary, while demonstrating ethical awareness, paradoxically reinforces her narrative authority. To unpack these dynamics, this paper employs a critical discourse analysis grounded in postcolonial theory, drawing on Spivak's caution against intellectual representation [1], Huggan's analysis of cultural commodification [2], and Rancière's concept of the "partition of the sensible" [4], which delineates who is heard as a political subject. The analysis proceeds by examining: (1) the construction of Roy's journalistic authority, (2) the hierarchical distribution of voice within her account, and (3) the exoticizing effects of her literary aesthetics. Throughout, it maintains dialogue with Roy's self-reflexivity, arguing that her work exemplifies the intractable ethical bind of postcolonial representation: the political necessity of testimony is perpetually complicated by epistemological constraints. By mapping these paradoxes, this study seeks to illuminate the ethics and politics of solidarity literature in an increasingly mediated world.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The critical challenges inherent in Arundhati Roy's *Walking with the Comrades* are not isolated phenomena but are embedded within a rich and contested body of scholarship in postcolonial and media studies. This literature review establishes the theoretical framework for analyzing the representational paradoxes in Roy's text by engaging with three interconnected domains: the ethics of subaltern representation, the politics of narrative form, and the commodification of alterity.

2.1. The Subaltern Dilemma

The foundational theoretical problem this study engages with is most famously articulated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her seminal essay, *"Can the Subaltern Speak?"* [1]. Spivak contends that the subaltern-marginalized subjects positioned outside the circuits of hegemonic power-cannot speak in a manner that is transparently heard or understood by the institutionalized discourses of either the West or the native elite. Any attempt

by intellectuals to represent or "give voice" to the subaltern necessarily entails processes of translation and mediation that risk distorting or appropriating the subaltern's consciousness, ultimately re-inscribing the very power structures such representation seeks to challenge. Spivak's critique instills profound skepticism toward the intellectual's project of representation, framing such acts as potentially complicit in epistemic violence. Roy's *Walking with the Comrades* is situated squarely within this dilemma: her deliberate effort to foreground the voices of Maoist insurgents is continually shadowed by the risk that her own privileged positionality filters and shapes their message.

Building on this, the work of scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith on decolonizing methodologies reinforces the claim that research and representation are never neutral acts but are deeply embedded in power relations and historical processes of colonization [5]. Despite Roy's counter-hegemonic intentions, her project must be critically examined for how it might inadvertently perpetuate a form of intellectual colonialism by interpreting the Maoist struggle through frameworks intelligible to a global, liberal readership.

2.2. Narrative Authority and the Politics of Genre

The second body of relevant literature focuses on the power that is produced by the narrative modes of telling story. Roy's foray into genre-bending is a tactical move in Rancière's "partition of the sensible" (le partage du sensible) [4]. The political order, for Rancière, is ultimately an aesthetic one, defining the visible and the audible and the sayable. By taking up a hybrid form, Roy intends to contest the dominant partition which either invisibilizes the Maoists or renders them visible simply as "India's gravest internal security threat" [3].

But every genre she summons up has its own ideological histories. The convention of literary journalism and travel writing which Mary Louise Pratt has analyzed in Imperial Eyes historically has produced the "seeing-man": a European male subject who confidently speaks for non-European lands and peoples to a home audience which is racially-ized as white [6]. Although Roy is an Indian author writing about a domestic conflict, her deployment of immersive first-person narration and vivid description can be understood as participating, if not inheriting, this tradition of authoritative witnessing. Rewrites in English:

Lilie Chouliaraki's analysis of the "spectatorship of suffering" has, for example, shown how media narratives establish hierarchies of humanity and define moral responsibility in manners that can alienate and distance the viewers from their depicted victims [7]. Roy's journalistic view, - though dissenting - is still a mediated one, which presents the suffering and resistance of the Maoists to a far off audience, and raises important questions around the morality of witnessing.

2.3. The Postcolonial Exotic and the Commodification of Resistance

The third pivotal aspect relates to the marketable consumption of cultural difference. Graham Huggan's notion of the "postcolonial exotic" is particularly significant here. Huggan argues that postcolonial texts and products are often packaged for a global market which desires, and commodifies, alterity [2]. Within this model of analysis, 'exoticism' is not simply a mode of seeing difference but a form of aesthetic seeing that simultaneously makes people, places, and things strange and familiar [2]. This process a lot of times involves a sort of "sympathetic identification" that replaces more profound political knowledge or real solidarity.

Roy's extremely literary and aestheticized description of the Dandakaranya forest and the Bhumkal ritual is a case in point. In this context, Huggan's concept might lead to the conclusion that these excerpts, even if they are meant to cultivate compassion, invite empathy for the Maoist struggle by making it appear "strangely familiar" and consumable

for a metropolitan audience, thereby blunting its radical political charge. This critique resonates with other writers that argue that revolutionary struggle is made aesthetic and safe when packaged as cultural goods for liberal consumers.

2.4. Synthesizing the Framework and Research Gap

While already published scholarship has praised Roy's political bravery and focused their analysis of her non-fiction output on thematic content, very few sustained critical engagement of Walking with the Comrades in particular viewing the novel through the aforementioned theoretical lenses-Spivakian questions of subaltern representation, Rancièrian aesthetic politics and Huggan's idea of the postcolonial exotic-to the level of formal and narrative strategies exist [8-11]. As well, a lot of the existing criticism seems to either praise her for voicing solidarity, or accuse her for championing, and both can sometimes result in the erasure of subtle self reflexivity that complicates those readings [12].

This article attempts to fill that gap by reading Roy's text as a complex, self-reflexive performance of the very representational challenges framed by Spivak, Rancière and Huggan. Rather than smoothing them over, the work stages tensions that are aged and deliberate. The theoretical apparatus employed here allows for an interpretation that comfortably accounts for Roy's political intentions and her occasional moments of metacommentary while interrogating with suspicion the power relations implicated in her narrative choices. It gives us theoretical meat to chew on to interrogate how authority is constructed by genre, how voices are stratified within the text, and how resistance may be aestheticized, as it ultimately contends that self-reflexivity in this circumstance operates paradoxically by both drawing attention to and solidifying the text's narrative authority rather than serving as a means to resolve the ethical quandaries it faces.

3. Privileged Witnessing and Journalistic Authority

3.1. Narrative Initiation and Access

Arundhati Roy's *Walking with the Comrades* commences with an act of journeying-moving from the center of public intellectual life into the peripheries of banned conflict zones. While framed as an act of solidarity and immersion, her narrative simultaneously establishes a position of privileged witnessing. This privilege is not merely logistical but epistemological, positioning Roy as the primary interpreter of reality for her readers. Through the conventions of investigative journalism, she assumes an authoritative stance that, despite being adversarial to the state, structures a cognitive hierarchy between the intellectual-witness and the subaltern-subject, potentially displacing the latter's own epistemologies.

The very opening of the text authorizes Roy's position. In recounting "waiting for months" for a letter granting her access to the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA)-whom she simultaneously calls "India's Gravest Internal Security Threat" [3]. Roy orchestrates a subtle rhetorical maneuver. This juxtaposition not only heightens narrative suspense but presupposes her legitimacy and safety to enter spaces deemed dangerous by the state, casting her as a unique boundary-crosser with access unavailable to ordinary citizens or mainstream journalists. This foundational moment resonates with Lilie Chouliaraki's notion of the witness's power to "orchestrate suffering" for a distant audience, determining which events merit attention and how they should be framed [7]. Roy's access immediately confers credibility and exclusivity, situating her at a pinnacle of cognitive privilege.

Her authority is further reinforced through critique. She deconstructs official state discourse, exposing contradictions to bolster the authenticity of her narrative. For example, she quotes then-Home Minister P. Chidambaram's denial of "Operation Green Hunt," only to counter it with evidence of troop deployments and allocated funds [3]. This positions her as more than a reporter; she becomes a truth-teller capable of discerning state

dissimulation. Yet this strategy establishes a hierarchy: the state's narrative is false, mainstream media's coverage superficial, and Roy's account-by virtue of her access and analytical skill-the most authoritative. Within this triad, the Maoists' understanding of their situation is mediated and validated through Roy's interpretive authority, exemplifying the epistemic displacement Spivak warns against [1].

3.2. Cognitive Mediation and Juxtaposition

Roy's deployment of international legal discourse further exemplifies her cognitive mediation. To condemn state violence, she extensively invokes the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide [3]. While this amplifies the severity of the state's actions for a global audience, it constitutes a form of discursive translation, filtering the local, context-specific conflict through a universalized Western legal framework. This move, however well-intentioned, illustrates the intellectual's role in integrating subaltern struggles into hegemonic discursive systems. It raises the critical question: must a tribal community's suffering be validated by a UN convention to be recognized as catastrophic? Roy's strategy amplifies visibility but may simultaneously systematize and narrow the struggle into cosmopolitan terms, potentially obscuring indigenous logics and forms of justice.

Juxtaposition and montage are central to Roy's narrative authority. Her account of the Lalgarh attack, for instance, first cites the BBC's detached report of "14 policemen killed" and then moves to the internal reaction of the guerrillas: a "murmur of pleasure" [3]. This editorial choice does more than present multiple perspectives; it constructs a third, superior vantage point-that of Roy herself-allowing her to synthesize the external media narrative with the internal emotional logic of the Maoists. She becomes the sole narrator capable of rendering these disparate realities coherent, naturalizing her role as the essential translator and arbiter of meaning.

This cognitive framing extends to the portrayal of Maoist media practices. In a conversation with Kamla about watching films, the response "Only ambush videos" anticipates Roy's narration of one such video, which begins with serene images of nature before abruptly cutting to a violent IED explosion [3]. By translating this media violence into a cinematic grammar comprehensible to her audience, Roy imposes an interpretive framework. The complexity and cultural specificity of the Maoists' engagement with violence and media is thereby mediated, elevating Roy's-and by extension the reader's-media literacy as the standard for understanding the insurgents' practices.

3.3. Self-Reflexivity and Ethical Authority

Roy's narrative is punctuated with moments of self-awareness regarding her privileged position. She articulates discomfort and reflects on the limitations of applying liberal humanist norms of non-violence to the Maoists' context [3]. Yet, as Rancière suggests, such self-reflexivity itself becomes part of the "distribution of the sensible" [4]. By publicly displaying her ethical dilemmas, Roy performs the role of the conscientious intellectual-a performance that paradoxically reinforces her authority. Her capacity for critical self-examination, a luxury unavailable to the subjects of her narrative, legitimizes her voice by demonstrating moral and intellectual sophistication.

In conclusion, Roy's journalistic deployment, while effective in critiquing state power, constructs an authoritative voice that operates from a position of cognitive privilege. Through strategies of access, discursive translation, juxtaposition, and self-reflexivity, she establishes herself as the principal mediator and interpreter of the Maoist struggle. This process, essential for bringing the conflict to wider attention, inevitably filters subaltern experience through the intellectual lens, exemplifying the persistent paradox of privileged witnessing: the act of making the marginalized visible simultaneously frames and shapes that visibility, and every act of solidarity risks epistemological displacement.

4. Interpretative Preference

Building upon Roy's overarching narrative authority, a closer reading reveals a critical paradox: the project of democratizing voice often results in a hierarchical filtering of whose perspectives are amplified and how. While Roy seeks to represent the Maoist community as a unified political subject, her textual practice inadvertently institutes what Jacques Rancière terms a "partition of the sensible", an aesthetico-political ordering that determines who within the community is granted the capacity to be heard as an articulate, reasoning agent and who is relegated to the realm of the visible, the emotional, or the silent [4].

4.1. Male Leadership and Ideological Authority

The most pronounced elevation within this hierarchy is reserved for figures such as Comrade Venu. Roy's encounter with him is framed as a pedagogical event: "Comrade Venu is waiting for me,...I'm going to get a history lesson...a lecture on the history of the last thirty years in the Dandakaranya forest" [3]. Venu is constructed not merely as a fighter, but as a historian and theorist-an "intellectual interpreter" whose discourse aligns seamlessly with Roy's academic and narrative sensibilities. He provides ideological scaffolding, historical context, and political analysis that allow both Roy and her readers to cognitively map and rationalize the rebellion. By translating the Maoist struggle into the familiar language of a "lesson" or "lecture," Roy grants Venu a full and legitimate space for expression, effectively sanctioning him as the subaltern who can speak intelligibly and respectfully to the intellectual elite. While this validates the movement's intellectual depth, it simultaneously risks reducing its complexity to a single, authoritative voice mirroring the author's own discursive world.

4.2. Ordinary Cadres and Gendered Marginalization

In contrast, ordinary members of the PLGA are predominantly represented through their physicality and suffering, with their political subjectivity often secondary to symbolic value. For example, Mangtu is introduced through meticulous description of his marching gear: "The three-finger rule for the strap of the backpack... the stun pants... the safety pins" [3]. This almost ethnographic focus evokes empathy but objectifies him as an observed figure; his political consciousness, motivations, and understanding of the conflict remain largely unexplored. He becomes primarily a catalyst for the reader's "sentimental reaction," a symbol of a "shattered childhood" rather than a thinking, speaking political agent-a direct reflection of Spivak's caution against constructing the subaltern as an object of sympathy rather than a subject of history [1,3].

This asymmetry is further intensified along gender lines. Female cadres such as Kamla Maase and Rinki are frequently depicted in functional, supportive roles: "cooking, carrying guns, arranging meetings" [3]. Their agency, when visible, is often expressed through militarized versions of traditionally feminine or domestic duties. Roy notes the Maoists' professed commitment to gender equality, yet her narrative rarely interrogates the potential "dual positional tension" between revolutionary ideals and patriarchal practices. Female voices are seldom granted ideological or analytical space comparable to Comrade Venu's; they remain spoken-about rather than speaking subjects, serving to illustrate operational logistics or evoke emotional resonance rather than contributing to political theory.

4.3. Self-Reflexivity and Interpretive Privilege

Roy's occasional self-reflexivity appears within this hierarchical framework, yet it follows a familiar pattern of reinforcing her interpretive privilege. After witnessing a people's court execution, she reflects: "I feel my responsibility to say something about the futility of violence, the unacceptability of summary executions", followed by the rhetorical

question, "But what should I suggest they do?" [3]. While signaling humility, this performance of self-doubt recenters the narrative on her moral and intellectual dilemma. The lived realities, justifications, and political calculations of the Maoists themselves recede into the background, forming a stage for Roy's ethical drama. This exemplifies Astrida Neimanis's observation that even well-intentioned representation carries the "risk of capture and appropriation that runs alongside the impetus to 'speak for others'" [13]. In this context, self-reflexivity functions less as a corrective than as an instrument of discursive authority.

In sum, Roy's text enacts a selective amplification of voice that produces an internal hierarchy within the subaltern community. Male leaders are granted the space for reasoned, ideological expression; ordinary cadres, particularly women, are allocated the realm of visible, suffering existence. Consequently, Roy's project-though committed to championing marginalized agency-demonstrates the persistent difficulty of escaping epistemological frameworks that shape whose voice can be fully humanized, that is, recognized as a thinking, speaking subject rather than a seen and felt object.

5. Literary Exoticism and Political Consumerism

The representational dilemmas in *Walking with the Comrades* culminate in a third, deeply intertwined paradox: the tension between Roy's political objective to document a revolutionary struggle and her literary impulse to render it in intensely aestheticized prose. Roy's deployment of travel writing and her lyrical, descriptive style, while designed to generate empathy and immersive engagement, operates within the logic of what Graham Huggan terms the "postcolonial exotic" [2]. This framework illuminates how cultural difference is strategically packaged for consumption by a cosmopolitan audience, potentially transforming radical political resistance into a form of aesthetic spectacle, thereby diluting its material and confrontational realities.

5.1. Exoticizing Cultural Performance

The description of the Bhumkal celebration exemplifies this exoticizing mechanism. Roy presents the event with rich sensory detail:

"There's a sea of people, the most wild, beautiful people, dressed in the most wild, beautiful ways. [Men] have feathered headgear and painted tattoos on their faces [and] have eye make-up and a white, powdered face" [3].

While evocative, this language foregrounds visual aesthetics over political significance. The commemoration of Bhumkal-a historical rebellion against colonial rule-is rendered as a vibrant spectacle, and the participants' political commitment is subordinated to their exotic appearance. In Huggan's terms, the Maoists become simultaneously "strange" in their captivating otherness and "familiar" through recognizable tropes of tribal exoticism [2]. This sympathetic portrayal encourages reader identification but risks reducing the struggle to consumable cultural imagery, potentially at the expense of substantive engagement with its political grievances [2].

5.2. Romanticized Landscapes and the Contact Zone

Roy's aestheticization extends to the revolutionary landscape itself. The Dandakaranya forest is romanticized as a "thousand-star hotel" and a site of sublime nocturnal beauty [3]. While compelling, this transformation recasts a dangerous, deprivation-laden zone into an immersive, almost touristic experience. Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the "contact zone" is instructive here: she defines it as a social space where disparate cultures interact under asymmetrical power relations [6]. Roy's literary rendering softens the violent edges of this zone, insulating readers from the constant threat, hunger, and fatigue that define the guerrillas' daily life. The political struggle over land and resources is thereby aestheticized, subtly converting radical resistance into a consumable form of literary ecotourism.

5.3. Cinematic Montage and Consumable Violence

Roy further intensifies this aestheticization through cinematic montage, juxtaposing beauty and violence. In the description of an ambush video, serene images of rivers, waterfalls, and birds are abruptly interrupted by a comrade wiring an IED and a motorcycle cavalcade exploding [3]. This narrative strategy mirrors the book's broader literary method, framing violence within an aesthetic package. While impactful, the technique risks transforming ethical and political realities into a dramatic spectacle, allowing distant readers to engage with the thrill of the scene without confronting its moral and material gravity.

It is important to note that this aestheticization arises from Roy's genuine literary skill and her desire to make the Maoist world compelling and real. Yet, in the context of a global literary marketplace, the effect aligns with Huggan's critique: the book becomes a cultural commodity offering safe, pleasurable access to danger and difference [2]. The exoticized people, landscapes, and violent episodes are rendered consumable, potentially diluting the radical and confrontational dimensions of the struggle.

In conclusion, Roy's literary talent, which underpins the text's power and appeal, is also the source of its most profound representational paradox. Poetic description, romantic metaphor, and cinematic montage humanize the guerrillas and captivate readers, but simultaneously commodify resistance, allowing political struggle to be aesthetically consumed. The text thus exemplifies the intricate bind of representing insurgency within an economy of cultural consumption: efforts to render the struggle legible for a global audience risk making it consumable rather than fully comprehensible.

6. Roy's Self-Reflexivity and the Ethics of Representation

Arundhati Roy's *Walking with the Comrades* is marked by a persistent metacritical voice that engages directly with the ethical dilemmas of representation. While her self-reflexivity demonstrates genuine awareness of her privileged positionality, it simultaneously functions to reinforce her narrative authority. This chapter explores how Roy's introspection both complicates and paradoxically consolidates her interpretive power, dividing the analysis into three dimensions: (1) Ethical Awareness and Intellectual Dilemma; (2) Rancièrian Politics of Self-Reflexivity; (3) Paradoxical Reinforcement of Authority.

6.1. Ethical Awareness and Intellectual Dilemma

Roy consistently signals her awareness of the ethical minefield inherent in representing the Maoists. She acknowledges her privileged identity as an elite, metropolitan intellectual entering a subaltern space, and frames her narrative around this awareness. For example, after witnessing a people's court execution, she reflects:

"I feel my responsibility to say something about the futility of violence, the unacceptability of summary executions" [3].

This is accompanied by her rhetorical question, "But what should I suggest they do?" , which foregrounds the limitations of her external perspective [3]. These passages illustrate an epistemological crisis: Roy is acutely conscious that her ethical and political frameworks may be inadequate or even irrelevant to the lived realities of the Maoists. In this sense, her self-reflexivity aligns with the decolonial ethos described by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, which cautions against the imperialist tendency of "bringing enlightenment" to the subaltern [5]. Her hesitation resists facile solutions and compels readers to engage with the same ethical uncertainty she experiences, foregrounding the moral complexity of the representational task.

6.2. Rancièrian Politics of Self-Reflexivity

Using a Rancièrian lens, Roy's self-reflexivity can be seen as a deliberate performance within the "distribution of the sensible" [4]. By publicly displaying her ethical dilemmas, she enacts the role of the conscientious, self-critical intellectual-a performance that carries

significant cultural capital. While the Maoist guerrillas' subjectivity is constrained by the necessities of survival and ideological practice, Roy's narrative includes the luxury of moral reflection, rhetorical questioning, and ethical anguish. This asymmetry highlights a crucial dynamic: self-reflection, rather than leveling power relations, becomes an index of interpretive authority. Her ethical deliberation is a form of discourse that distinguishes her as both morally sophisticated and capable of negotiating complex truths, reinforcing the hierarchy between observer and observed.

6.3. Paradoxical Reinforcement of Authority

Roy's self-reflexivity, while sincere, paradoxically consolidates her narrative authority. Astrida Neimanis warns that the act of speaking for others carries a persistent "risk of capture and appropriation"; in Roy's case, this capture is subtle [13]. The very articulation of her ethical consciousness and hesitation becomes part of her representative power. By exposing her limitations and questioning her right to judge, she preempts critique and cultivates credibility. As a result, the reader is invited to trust her judgment precisely because she demonstrates awareness of representational pitfalls. This dynamic resonates with Lilie Chouliaraki's concept of the "agency of the spectator", wherein both Roy and the reader are positioned to morally evaluate suffering, yet the underlying structures that enable such evaluation remain intact [7]. Her self-reflexivity stages, rather than resolves, the Spivakian paradox: attempts to mitigate her privilege become performative acts that authenticate it, documenting the inescapable tension between ethical self-awareness and epistemic authority.

7. Conclusion

Arundhati Roy's *Walking with the Comrades* exemplifies the enduring paradox of postcolonial representation: efforts to amplify subaltern voices inevitably risk re-inscribing structures of epistemic authority. By employing a hybrid narrative that intertwines journalism, political critique, and travel writing, Roy aims to challenge state-sanctioned accounts of India's Maoist conflict. Yet this very formal strategy generates a triad of representational tensions. Her journalistic gaze positions her as a privileged witness, translating local struggles into globally legible, yet externally mediated, discursive frameworks. Simultaneously, her narrative establishes an internal hierarchy of voice, elevating the ideological discourse of educated male leaders while rendering ordinary cadres-particularly women-as primarily emotional or functional figures. Moreover, her literary aestheticization of resistance, through exoticized portrayals of landscape and cultural practice, risks commodifying the movement for cosmopolitan consumption. Crucially, Roy's persistent self-reflexivity, though ostensibly addressing these dilemmas, ultimately functions to reinforce her authority as mediator. In staging these tensions, the work vividly embodies the central Spivakian paradox: the political imperative to represent the subaltern remains inextricably entwined with the epistemological impossibility of fully doing so, highlighting the profound ethical complexities inherent in intellectual solidarity across epistemic and cultural divides.

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