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Bodies in Transit: Women, War, and Violence in Select Fiction from Nepal

By Lakhipriya Gogoi¹

Abstract

The figures of women in conflict zones have been presented in South Asian literature chiefly as torn and battered bodies/souls, usually carrying an irremediable suffering and sense of loss that they bear as wives, mothers, and daughters while their male compatriots participate in the zone of war. The twentieth century surge in identity movements and political conflicts in South Asia, however, offers us new figures of women as “warriors” or direct participants in the zones of violence. The usurpation of such new bodies, on the one hand, defies the hegemonic feminization of women’s bodies as caregivers, and on the other hand, initiates the possibility of re-examining the process of feminization where the female body is viewed against the masculine body. The article attempts to study a significant aspect of this shift in identity in the context of the late-twentieth-century Maoist Movement in Nepal. The novels selected for study, *Seasons of Flight* (2010) and *Palpasa Café* (2008) by two prominent Nepali writers, Manjushree Thapa and Narayan Wagle respectively, offer an interesting reading of the diverse manifestations of violence and female embodiment at the backdrop of the movement that established a people’s government and claimed to have challenged the existing gender discrimination in Nepalese society. The novels present female characters as both active warriors and those internally stuck owing to the ramifications of war, which leads to an observation of how violence and resistance proliferate at times of crisis. Moreover, Prema and Palpasa, the major characters from the novels, undertake two different journeys to understand and negotiate with the question of identity in times of violence. Prema leaves Nepal to look for a better life in the USA, whereas Palpasa leaves the USA to discover her native land, Nepal. On their journeys to find out more about themselves, these bodies in motion show how women deal with violence.

Keywords: Women, War, Violence, Performativity, Mobility, Nepal, Fiction

Introduction

The discourse of the “body” has been given a lot of attention in feminist theories about the sex/gender binary since the propositions made by Simone de Beauvoir and others have necessitated an understanding of the body and its diverse significations. The biological or corporeal body of women within and outside its cultural signification has been understood by notable feminist scholars such as Judith Butler, Susan Bordo, Elizabeth Grosz, and others. The social and historical significance of “performative” (Butler, 1993), “mediated” (Bordo, 1993), and “volatile” (Grosz, 1995) bodies can be connected to the contextualization of female bodies in terms of racial, ethnic, and geographic diversity. Such an understanding of the body as a dynamic “culturally mediated form” accentuates the reading of women’s experiences in conflict zones, where the body becomes a significant site of violence and resistance. The literature available on violence against women in conflict zones has explored the politics of rape, sexual abuse, and intimate violence vis-à-vis the questions of race, gender, and ethnicity. The collective experiences of women as victims of war and violence in different political situations reveal the intricate connection between bodies and their cultural performances. South

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Asian women's experiences in this context may be similar but culturally coded in a different framework than Black or Mexican women's experiences. The article attempts to understand such specific significations of the female body in Nepal against the backdrop of the Maoist Movement from 1996 to 2006. The interesting assumption of a new political and revolutionary body by some women in Nepal during this movement has been explored with the parallel growth of a sense of ennui among another section of women who despaired of the gendered ramifications of war and chose alternate identities through the assumption of mobility. All these women, in this process of assuming newer meanings in war-torn Nepal, transcend the boundaries of their lived bodies through agencies ironically offered by the war.

The Maoist Movement in Nepal has drawn the attention of scholars who discuss the significant participation of women in an otherwise male-dominated zone of war and public resistance. The significant absence and silence of women during the long rule of the monarchy in Nepal, and during the party-less *panchayat* system (1962-1990), demonstrates the male-oriented political structures of the country. The strong growth of a pro-democracy movement in the latter decades of the twentieth century could promise a change in the scenario as women, especially from the lower caste, were mobilized to join the movement. Parallel to this growth, the establishment of a constitutional monarchy and a parliament based on a multi-party system in Nepal further led to the complete abolition of the old system of monarchy in 1997. The new democratic system and the establishment of several political parties, namely, Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist Leninist (NCP-UML), Nepali Congress (NC), Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), Nepal Sadhavana Party (NSP), Rastriya Jana Morcha, Nepal Workers and Peasants Party (NWPP), and Samyukta Janmorcha Nepal (Ashraf, 2002), could be seen offering a space for women. However, the new party-based electoral politics too failed to bring stability and unanimous peace, and such a poor state of affairs led to the Maoist uprising in the country in 1996, and a subsequent decade of violence, death and displacement affected its people. The Maoist movement, under the patronage of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)—a new faction of the earlier NCP-UML—sought a complete replacement of the political system with the aim of establishing a people's government. The Marxist ideology of the party sought to bring about a change through the waging of a violent People's War, as armed struggle against the atrocities of the state opened space for civilians, including women, to be a part of the protest.

Under the leadership of these new rebellious forces, women found a new space as part of the "structural social change" (Manchanda, 2004) that the movement sought to establish. The party announced an egalitarian space for women and other minority communities to resist social discrimination based on class, caste, and gender in conventional Nepalese society. Such initiatives, on the one hand, offered women newer roles, particularly as war guerrillas, ostensibly overthrowing the gendered roles of wives, mothers, and daughters, and on the other, opened up spaces for discussion of complex social issues, which cannot be reformed simply by assuming new and temporary roles.

Significant numbers of critical discussions on the participation of women in the Maoist uprising (Manchanda, 2004; Ariño, 2008; Gogoi, 2017; Sthapit & Doneys, 2017; Singh, 2017) have addressed the massive participation of women in the armed resistance and explored the political-cultural changes that it did bring or at times failed to bring. This mobilization of women to join the war is significant as "according to some accounts, 20 percent of the Maoist forces were women (3,846 out of a total verified People's Liberation Army of 19,602)" (Ariño, 2008). These newer performances of the otherwise gendered body can be seen through the diverse characters from the novels *Seasons of Flight* and *Palpasa Café*. The movement, in their case, offered a possibility to overthrow the barriers of household female roles and initiate a new life. As one female rebel in *Palpasa Café* states, "How long do we have to keep carrying these *dokos*? [...] Our mothers did the same thing. Our sisters-in-law do it. [...] If we take part in this struggle, at least our younger sisters and brothers might be able to get a proper education"

(Wagle, 2008, p. 96). Marriage, poverty, and a lack of education for rural women in Nepal are identified as the forces driving gendered performances of their female bodies and their dreams of overthrowing this power structure through the assumption of revolutionary bodies, which is significant because the novels make us realize that such assumptions do not ultimately free women from other forms of violence.

Whereas the reasons for women joining the war ranged from personal to economic, the challenge to the societal role assigned to women through the Communist Party's organizational structure, which was usurped by active female participants in the war, calls for a critical examination. The fading away of the traditional patriarchal roles meant for women to assume the so-called empowering act of contributing to political change refers to a shallow understanding of the entire power structure. The limited scope offered to women in the movement mostly dictated by men can be realised in the significant exclusion of the women's question as the party initiated the peace process in 2006. Given this interesting narrative of the "participation" and "exclusion" of women in the discourse of war and social resistance, the exploration of the female body in times of violence leads us to understand the nuanced dimensions and performances of women's corporeal and political bodies as sites of violence.

The universal victimization of female bodies as sites of sexual and structural violence is no exception in the case of Nepalese society, and during the Maoist Movement, women bore a significant brunt of the violence unfolding during the war.

Records show that out of the total (verified) number of people killed during the period of the Maoist insurgency, 10,297 were men and 1,013 were women, while 2,034 people were unverified. Similarly, 84,969 people were abducted, out of which 2,087 were identified as women while the identity of 69,403 people abducted during the period remains unknown. There are few records of the countless crimes, sexual violence and human rights abuses committed during the insurgency. (Sthapit & Doneys, 2017, p. 36)

Manchanda mentions that "Since the People's War began in February 1996 through to December 2003, out of an estimated total of 8265 killed, 561 have been women" (2004, p. 242). However, at the same time, the two-fold nature of the violence also needs attention as both the Maoists and the security forces "espoused and employed violence to kill opponents [...]. From February 13, 1996, to the end of 2006, the state was responsible for 63 percent of those killed in the insurgency, while the Maoists killed nearly 5,000 people or 37 percent" (Lawoti & Pahari, 2009, p. 309).

The literature from Nepal has delineated the predicaments of women, especially as recipients of sexual violence, and offered occasions to discuss the socio-cultural ramifications of violence as part of the structural resistance against political forces by civilians. Acknowledging the brutal rape and sexual assaults against women has been a major way of understanding the effects of the political crisis on the community, cutting across binaries of caste, class, and ethnicity. In understanding the dictates of violence on women through the two novels, *Seasons of Flight* (2010) by Manjushree Thapa and *Palpasa Café* (2008) by Narayan Wagle, I will be focusing on the female body as a site of both violence and resistance. Through a reading of the diverse acts of "negotiation" that women perform in the novels, the article argues that bodies in motion or transit offer crucial understandings of violence both in and outside the zones of war. While analyzing the access to a newer identity of Nepalese women as warriors and survivors, an attempt has been made in this study to underscore the "transitions" that occur around the cultural/institutional performances of the bodies. In doing so, I argue that besides the corporeal bodies that actively participated in the People's war of Nepal, the women's bodies during the time of crisis underwent several other forms of displacement and hence adopted diverse ways of negotiation. The central characters of the novels, namely Prema

from *Seasons of Flight* and Palpasa from *Palpasa Café*, in their attempts to interrogate the question of identity in times of conflict, undertake “mobility” as a significant discursive practice. The larger ennui of the war affecting the everyday lives of the non-active participants and a constant sense of dilemma around the necessity of the war can be realized through a closer understanding of such acts of mobility. These young women refer to their cultural displacements induced by the war, yet at the same time mobility seemed to have offered them a means of resistance.

In its course, the article investigates the intersections of two parallel lines of resistance: the people’s rising against the state (where women could temporarily assume a new identity), and the cultural resistance of “internally stuck” (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2001; Manchanda, 2004) women in response to the stagnancy and unrest brought about by the people’s war. In both these types of resistance, the corporeal as well as the political body of a woman receives as well as executes multiple accounts of violence. Echoing Ann J. Cahill’s critique of the Foucauldian reading of rape, the article locates sexual violence against women as integrally connected to the masculine discourse of war. It establishes the cultural signification of the female body through a reading of the female characters from the novel within the framework of the two types of resistance mentioned earlier. Whereas the characters like Prema’s sister Bijaya from *Seasons of Flight* and Yam Kumari and some other unnamed Maoist combatants from *Palpasa Café* join the war to become active insiders resisting the oppression of the state, the other group of characters like Prema and Palpasa resist the intervention of war by the attainment of mobility. In their cases, the act of leaving leads to further explorations of the body, as Prema explores her sexuality in the USA, and Palpasa, as a photographer, intends to record the war and its effects through her camera. In the case of the first group of women, the gendered discourse of the armed struggle fails to liberate them from the structural violence against women as they remain trapped in the institutions of marriage and motherhood both within and outside sites of war. The second group of women, in their attempts to defy such gendered operations of the patriarchal discourse of war, explore bodily transgression as a powerful means of negotiation.

The performance of “the body—dictated by the norms and conventions that belong not to the nature of the body itself, but to the context in which it finds itself” (Jeffries, 2007, p. xii)—has been one of the significant ways of understanding the corporeal and cultural ramifications of the female body in a patriarchal structure like Nepal. Such cultural iterations of the body and the performative body understood by Butler are the premises that enable a reading of the resisting bodies of Nepalese women in both the novels.

Bodily Resistance inside the War Zone

The historical othering of women’s bodies in comparison to men’s bodies leads to the realization, “that women’s bodies become women’s bodies only as they are caught up in the tyrannies, the overwhelming incursions of both nature and man - or, more optimistically, that there are also vehement pleasures and delights to offset a history of unbridled and violent subjection” (Riley, 1988, p.105). Reading the forms of violence against women’s bodies also involves recognizing men’s bodies as perpetrators. It is especially so in the case of war zones that present masculine bodies as repositories of power and women’s bodies as “docile.” In the context of Nepal, this docility of the female bodies could ironically be seen as the Maoist combatants assumed a powerful position with the acquisition of arms. However, women’s assumption of masculine power becomes limited only to their participation in mass killings executed by men in the rebellion against the state. At home in such performances of the body, the female combatants, at least in the novels, fail to liberate themselves from the trappings of the gendered body.

The massive participation of women in the armed resistance of the Maoist movement happened mainly in two ways: voluntary and coercive (Manchanda, 2004). Some female combatants of the movement, like Bijaya and Yam Kumari, joined the force under a strategic reimagining of the women question framed by party politics. Bijaya, as reported by Prema's father, "went just like that" (Thapa, 2010, p. 21), influenced by the ideals of equality proclaimed by the Maoist rebels. Yam Kumari, too, as reported by her father, "was going to school, preparing for the School Leaving Certificate. Then one day, out of the blue, she came home wearing their uniform" (Wagle, 2008, p. 120). These young girls' decisions to join the war as combatants evoke two separate responses. Whereas both Prema and her father think of Bijaya as being "that idiot girl" who might not have seriously thought about "a future in warfare" (Thapa, 2010, p. 21), Yam Kumari's father offers a different perspective on the same, as he says, "She showed me a gun and I taught her how to use it. What was I to do? I thought she'd be safer that way" (Wagle, 2008, p. 120). Such a dual vision of women in war refers to the precariousness of female bodies, especially when located inside the predominantly masculine domain of war and politics. The angst of Prema over the unrest caused by the war frames Bijaya as an idiot girl not concerned about her future, and the illusive notion of "security" of the female body within the structure of armed resistance speculated by Yam's father suggests the complexity of reading violence in connection with the female body.

The dimension of gender and the female body achieves a new understanding as we learn that "in the rural areas, when the Maoists come calling for one child per family to join the movement, families are increasingly sending daughters, who are more expendable than sons" (Manchanda, 2004, p. 244). These everyday choices made on the basis of a gender hierarchy also present the female body as a site of structural cultural violence. This sense of a cultural alienation of the female body within the family structure at the time of crisis is contradictory to the projected centrality of women in the domain of organized militarization under the aegis of political parties. On the one hand, the female bodies are being expended by the families for the sake of keeping their brothers alive; on the other hand, those women cadres are being raped, murdered, and subjected to other violence at the hands of the military forces. Scholars addressing the question of female combatants during and after the war point towards a peculiar framing of the expected structural social change through the inclusion of women in the armed struggle. CPN and its male leaders claim that the inclusion of women guerillas alongside the recruits from the so-called lower caste communities was an act of redrawing the social imaginings around caste and gender, yet this claim was not borne out either within or outside the ambit of the revolution. The allegations and frustrations of the ex-female cadres of the revolution, especially those who feel betrayed by the political turn of the war, suggest that the temporary inclusion of women as combatants did not bring any change to the social structure (Manchanda, 2004; Sthapit and Doneys, 2017; Gogoi, 2017). As the readings of *Seasons of Flight* and *Palpasa Café* unfold, the primary institutions through which the discriminatory practices were retained were those of marriage and motherhood.

The gendered nature of these two institutions accentuated the violence against women within the armed struggle, as can be seen in the case of Bijaya. She married a fellow combatant and, after attaining motherhood, had to leave her active life as a cadre. The disfigurement of her rebellious political body reveals the failure of revolutionary projects in overthrowing gender biases. Moreover, the life of penury that she had to live with her father while raising her son also suggests the pressing issues of livelihood that the ex-Maoist cadres face once they leave the structure of war. Prema's father hesitantly expresses, "Your sister— She talks about big big things, about revolution, but with the baby it's—It's become quite hard here" (Thapa, 2010, p. 207). It also indicates the patriarchal framing of a mother's corporeal body as incompatible with the larger projects of achieving "big big things"—or the social structural change she collectively anticipated as part of the revolution. The violence that occurs here is

of removing the sexed body of a mother from the revolutionary projects of reform in which she imagined herself as an active agent until motherhood or marriage. The overshadowing of her identity as a revolutionary through her newly attained identity as a wife and mother allows one to see how the performative body and the politics around it shape the life course of a woman. Drishya, the narrator and protagonist of *Palpasa Café*, meets one such female combatant who shares the ideology of Bijaya and Yam Kumari, one who dreams of bringing an end to gender discrimination through the assumption of masculine power, significantly symbolised by a gun. She becomes irritated when Drishya asks her about her marital status and what she intends to achieve by using a gun. Her ideology of living a purposeful life instead of “wearing bangles just to show I’m a slave to some man” (Wagle, 2008, p. 168) and the so-called “protection” that she claims to have attained inside the war zone, suggests an ambiguous and convoluted picture of the war. The assumed achievement of power in their cases gets further manipulated as the state’s military force uses sexual violence as a significant way of disfiguring the political bodies of these female Maoists.

Foucault reads rape as any other bodily assault and hence declares it subject to punishment as per the legal understanding of physical assault as a crime. Ann J. Cahill, while critiquing this desexualisation of rape, points towards the centrality of the female experience in rape and the social construction of the feminine body (Cahill, 2000). Such a crucial understanding of the social construction of the feminine body defined by its power dynamics allows us to inspect the questions of desire and the female body. The death of Prema’s mother in post-childbirth complications, which leaves a traumatic experience in her mind that eventually induces her disillusionment about her female body, can be seen as another episode of violence that connects the female bodies within and outside the structure of militarised war. Prema’s mother wished to give birth to a boy as she believed that “Only a son can open the gates of heaven” (Wagle, 2008, p. 281). Her subsequent death after giving birth to a girl whom “Her parents had named [...] Bijaya: Victory” (2008, p. 15) shapes Prema’s later understanding of the body. The trauma of childbirth that affects Prema’s intimate relationships both in Nepal and the USA is replaced by her exploration of sexual desire without being bound by the institutions of marriage and motherhood.

Transition and Migration in the Negotiation of Crisis

The displacement of bodies during the violent unfurling of war has been a significant way of addressing the effects of political crisis, not just in the case of the Maoist movement of Nepal. Identity movements and political conflicts in South Asia in the twentieth century were major reasons for people’s displacements, as conflict-affected zones could not provide better hopes and opportunities for the younger generation, and even the older generation was prone to feeling hopeless after witnessing hatred and violence that failed to bring about any change in everyday realities. As Prema thinks, “The Maoists would not give up, and neither would the king and the army; and people who had nothing to do on either side would get drawn in. Should she not leave? This shabby, Third world country” (Thapa, 2010, p. 66).

Special attention should be paid to the interconnected nature of some of the major reasons that lead to large scale population displacements and even statelessness across the globe, such as “[...] actual practices or threat of violence, discrimination, natural disasters, man-made famines and foods, climate change, resource crises, environmental catastrophes, complex emergencies and civil wars alike” (Canefe et.al., 2022, p. 3). To read the unique experiences of female bodies through a state-induced crisis vis-à-vis the issue of displacement is to uncover the personal and collective strategies of negotiation and recuperation that women from the conflict zones adopt. The coming back of Palpasa from the USA to make a documentary on the Maoist insurgency in her homeland, which she felt would add meaning to her life, led to her death in an ambush laid by the Maoists targeting the police personnel. The

precarity of love and desire in conflict zones can be seen in both the novels as Drishya sees a couple in Kathmandu and wonders if they would get to passionately love each other, given the real possibility of “a bomb explod[ing] in the city, claiming one of their lives. Or the man might get caught in crossfire while travelling outside the capital. His car might be ambushed” (Wagle, 2008, p. 36). This premonition becomes a reality when he meets Palpasa for the last time before witnessing the bus that she boarded “still burning. In no time, all that was left was a charred skeleton. No one inside was screaming any more” (2008, p. 191). Palpasa’s travel to Nepal from the USA to live a meaningful life while defying her parents’ patriarchal framing of women makes her a victim of violence and yet provides her a sense of agency. She mentions in her letter to Drishya that her camera could heal her pain. Coming back home to share collective suffering refers to her choice independent of the performances of gendered bodies. It can also be juxtaposed with the additive power of the gun, assumed by the female combatants. Similar to that of their resistance through the gun and its supposed power to bring structural change, Palpasa frames her camera as a means of transition into a resistant expression of the body. Both Palpasa and Prema could be seen adopting mobility as individual choices outside the compulsive forces of politics and the economy. Prema, unlike the global female migrants, cannot be framed as “sacrificing heroines” or “beautiful victims” (Schewenken, 2008); rather, her metaphorical flight allows her to live outside the gendered expectations of a female body in both Nepal and the United States.

Aside from the common experiences of violence that the female body witnesses both inside and outside of a war zone, as shown in previous sections, we can point to specific other executions of violence that have disproportionately affected the cultural body of women. Speaking of the fear and collective angst that the common people felt when trapped between the military forces of the state and the rebels, Wagle delineates the false and prejudiced sense of justice by the Maoists as part of their reformist agenda. Drishya, as an artist pursuing his dream project of opening an art gallery and café in memory of his beloved Palpasa, continues to draw paintings, and yet the story of a seventy-year old woman named Manmaya affects him so much that he finds it difficult to draw a painting based on her story. Manmaya was ordered by the Maoist’s “People’s Court” to leave her village within seven days as a punishment for having a bad relationship with her daughter-in-law, and her journey caught the attention of a news reporter. As the reporter describes her, “carrying only a small bag. The wrinkles on her face were filled with rivulets of years. Old and stooped, she was making her way towards an uncertain future” (Wagle, 2008, p. 232). The presumed sense of justice offered by the people’s court and its effect on women’s cultural bodies as mothers-in-law presents the gendered nature of such justice and confirms a shared realization of fear among women across class. Both Palpasa and Manmaya confirm a dictatorial rule on the part of the so-called reformists. Palpasa says, “They have made the villagers their prisoners. No one can go anywhere without their permission. It’s simply a dictatorship” (2008, p. 189). Manmaya’s version confirms the same, as she states, “My daughter-in-law realised she had been wrong and asked them to change the verdict. But, finally, I left on my own volition. I was too scared to stay. Who isn’t scared of them?” (2008, p. 233). Such collective expressions of fear and anxiety over the violent side of the reformist agenda complicate the larger picture of war and also lead to diverse ways of negotiation with such violence.

One of the significant expressions of female bodies explored in both the novels is around the site of their sexuality, and the novels present these explorations as forms of resistance adopted by women. This can particularly be seen in the character of Prema. Her reawakening in Los Angeles to unrestrained sexual pleasure can be seen as providing her with a sense of meaning for the absence of which she left her home. Her choice of a life not dictated by the institutions of marriage and motherhood presents a resilient body, and her later decision to work for the conservation of endangered butterflies in Los Angeles confirms her

determination to leave behind the institutional obligations of being a woman. She realizes that “She had found her place. Not in America, and not in Nepal, but in the wilderness at the heart of human habitation” (Thapa, 2010, p. 224). Prema’s usurpation of a new body is significant. Even in Nepal, her relationship with Rajan and their secret monthly meetings didn’t prove sufficient to hold her back in Nepal as she felt “There was no end in sight to the war. It felt like she was abandoning everyone, to secure her own future. Yet that was what she did” (2010, p. 71). Moreover, the absence of an open expression of pleasure restricted those earlier explorations of her sexuality, as “The walls of the lodge were made of plywood, so the only sounds they made as they joined were their breathing, their grasping” (2010, p. 35). Such experiences of bodily desires were replaced by her awakening to pleasure in Los Angeles. She felt Luis, her partner, was “a reward for having left her past and reinvented herself [...]. It was as if something so obvious, so self-evident, had been revealed to her so late. Sex. Had this not been the point of life all along? Her spirit effervesced, she felt speedy, propelled by joy” (2010, p. 98). These performances of the body offer her a different cultural expression of sexuality and thus lead her towards a new self-realization. What finally comes out as the actual resistance is when she decides to move out of the live-in relationship with Luis once the torments of the soul take over the bodily pleasures. The constant dilemma that she faced over her decision to leave her homeland and her effort to “remember the war in her life by learning about the war in the lives of others” (2010, p. 168) eventually gets in her way of living life outside the war. While embracing the “nagging uncertainty—never knowing, never knowing for sure, or at all” (2010, p. 234), she also learned to negotiate with such crises in her own ways. She firmly believed that “if the biological purpose of sex was to foster love, and marriage, so as to aid with child-rearing, she did not need a relationship, because she did not want to be married or to have children” (2010, p. 235). Palpasa’s mobility to encounter life inside the zone of war makes her a victim of its violence, and Prema transitions from an anxious woman desperate to have a life outside the zone of war to one who finally finds meaning in her place in the wilderness. Such liberations are attained by both of them through their resistance to the gendered performance of the body.

Conclusion

The masculine discourse of war and revolution points towards the precarious state of the female body in the context of Nepal. The predicaments of the revolutionary and cultural bodies of Bijaya, Yam Kumari, and Manmaya uncover the masculine narrative of violence. Their bodies as sites of violence underscore the boundaries set for women in the apparently egalitarian space of the Maoist Movement. If these ways of resistance are shut down for women, then how do the women of Nepal find a way out of violence? Narayan Wagle and Manjushree Thapa’s critique of the war delineate mobility as a crucial agency for women like Prema and Palpasa. These bodies in transit unfurl the possibilities of diverse forms of negotiation and thereby hint at the resisting forces that women’s bodies possess. This layered story of violence and the female body in Nepal in the late 20th century shows how important it is to look at the South Asian context when analysing gendered experience.

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