

Keyifli Okumalar Dileriz

Binlerce kategoride milyonlarca PDF e-kitap, ders kitapları, dergiler ve romanlara platformumuz üzerinden ücretsiz ulaşabilirsiniz.

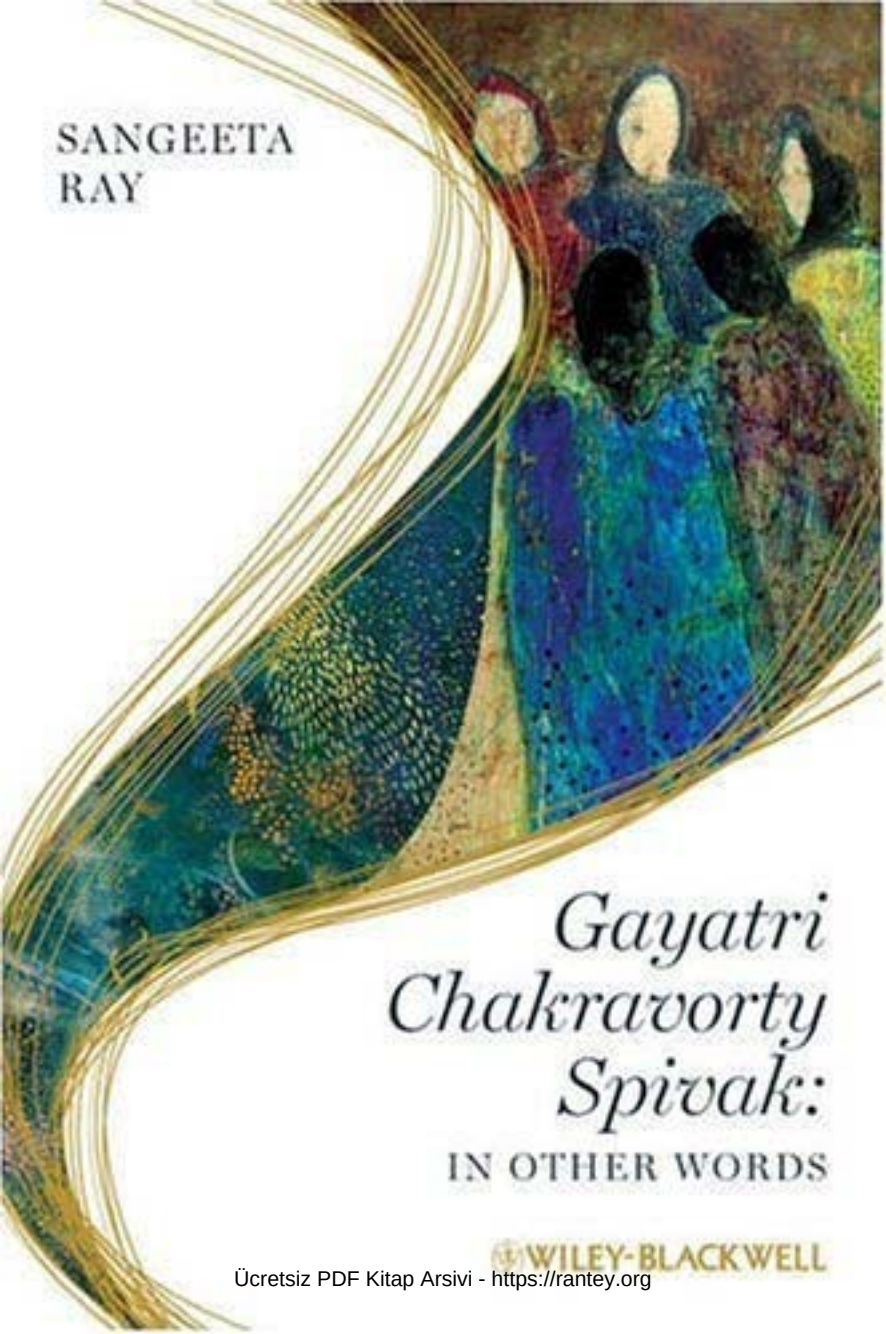
RESMİ WEB SİTEMİZ

<https://rantey.org>

Yedek ve Duyuru Kanallarımız

Sitemize erişim engeli gelmesi veya adres değişikliği durumunda aşağıdaki kanallardan güncel giriş adresine erişebilirsiniz:

- Telegram: <https://t.me/birkitapbir>
- WhatsApp Kanalımız : <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029VbDHv8uE50Us4lvMoc0Y>

An abstract painting featuring several figures in a boat, rendered in a style reminiscent of the Bengal School. The figures are depicted with dark, elongated forms and are surrounded by vibrant, swirling colors of blue, green, and yellow. The background is a mix of warm, earthy tones. The overall composition is dynamic and expressive, with a strong sense of movement and emotion.

SANGEETA
RAY

*Gayatri
Chakravorty
Spivak:*
IN OTHER WORDS

WILEY-BLACKWELL

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

In Other Words

Sangeeta Ray



A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2009

© 2009 Sangeeta Ray

Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

Editorial Offices

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer services, and for information about how to apply for permission to reuse the copyright material in this book please see our website at www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell.

The right of Sangeeta Ray to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book are trade names, service marks, trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publisher is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book. This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold on the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ray, Sangeeta.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak : in other words / Sangeeta Ray.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4051-0317-6 (hardcover : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-1-4051-0318-3 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Culture. 2. Feminist criticism. 3. Feminist literature. I. Title.

HM623.R39 2009

301.092–dc22

2008043811

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Set in 10/13pt Palatino

by SPi Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India

Printed in Singapore

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
1 Writing Autobiography, Writing Spivak: In Lieu of an Introduction	1
2 Reading Literature, Teaching Literature: Whither Soul Making?	27
3 Reading Singularity, Reading Difference: An Ethics of the Impossible	67
4 Reading Woman, Reading Essence: Whither Gender?	107
<i>Bibliography</i>	139
<i>Index</i>	147

Acknowledgments

The author and publisher gratefully acknowledge the permission granted to reproduce the following copyright material in this book:

Ray, S., "Ethical Encounters: Spivak, Alexander and Kincaid," from *Cultural Studies*, 17 (2003): 42–55. Reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis Ltd., www.informaworld.com.

Ray, S., "The Postcolonial Critic: Shifting Subjects, Changing Paradigms" (sections). Reprinted by permission from *Language and Liberation: Feminism, Philosophy, and Language*, edited by Christina Hendricks and Kelly Oliver, the State University of New York Press. © 1999 State University of New York. All Rights Reserved.

Spivak, G. C., *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. © 1999 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Sections reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material. The publisher apologizes for any errors or omissions in the above list and would be grateful if notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or editions of this book.

Writing Autobiography, Writing Spivak: In Lieu of an Introduction

Partial Beginnings

This book has taken a while to take the shape it has. When Andrew McNeillie asked me if I would consider writing a book on Spivak, my immediate answer was a categorical no. I felt the task to be impossible. How would I tackle the vast subject that is Spivak, the collection of works that arrive in every page in a dense prose that seems often impossible to parse? And then how would I write her without diminishing her presence – always excessively present – in that prose. If, as Landry and Maclean say in their introduction to *The Spivak Reader*, echoing Spivak writing about Derrida, that “Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is also this collection of texts” (2), wouldn’t the reader of my text feel frustrated at not finding a Spivak, or the Spivak they were looking for? Perhaps the fear was even more personal. Would I vanish in trying to write Spivak, reduced to an emulating disciple, whose role would be to enable an “accurate” reading of Spivak? In the end, of course, I did write the book, this book, a version of the many possible books that were discarded and rewritten. Andrew did give me a lot of leeway. Looking back at my correspondence with him, I realize how we negotiated the terrain in which Spivak could be discovered. Should we think of the various terms that one associates with Spivak and examine her development of said terms in a principled manner? I suggested that we think of Spivak in terms of questions posed: a “what is?” model that then would produce, hopefully, complicated answers. Or we could think of the various contributions that Spivak has made to different fields. I could imagine a book (which I did for a while) where I read Spivak’s engagements with Derrida and Marx on the one hand, and postcoloniality, ethics, and feminism on the other. Perhaps this book is closest to that book.

2 Writing Autobiography, Writing Spivak: In Lieu of an Introduction

My own encounter with Spivak is, in a way, exemplary.¹ As a graduate student, I discovered Spivak in the covers of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. It was the requisite graduate introduction to theory; it was the mid-eighties and I had just arrived via a Pan Am flight to the Midwest. I did not know much theory, but I did know, like most good postcolonial subjects, a lot of British literature. In college in Calcutta, I thoroughly traversed the discipline from Beowulf to Virginia Woolf. Repeating a Master's degree in the US seemed trivial at best. So to theory I gravitated, attempting to master dense literary criticism as philosophy and vice versa. In that class, taught by a medievalist, who mainly talked with his back to the students while scribbling intensely on the blackboard, I discovered, unlike most in the class, that I liked theory. We read books or a set of articles under several rubrics: terms and definitions came flying at us without much preparation; I spent days and nights in the library trying to marshal my thoughts and keep at least half a step ahead. As a foreign student living on a pittance, I tried to check books out of the library rather than buying them at the bookstore. Looking at the syllabus, I saw that we were supposed to read a major chunk of *Of Grammatology* in a couple of weeks. I raced to check out the book. I remember sitting down and opening the book and coming across this name that seemed Indian; not just Indian but Bengali. I was hooked and I did then what I ask my students not to do – that is, do not read an introduction or an essay by someone else on a theorist.² Read the “original” text. Reading Spivak's “Translator's Preface” to *Of Grammatology* remains for me, even today, one of the greatest reading experiences, and not least because it is anything but an introduction, complicating profoundly the distinction between original and originary texts. Now, writing this book 22 years after reading that preface, I remind myself that at the beginning, almost, Spivak had underlined the significance of responsibility for one's writing and reading:

[If] the assumption of responsibility for one's discourse leads to the conclusion that all conclusions are genuinely provisional and therefore inconclusive, that all origins are similarly unoriginal, that responsibility itself must cohabit with frivolity, this need not be cause for gloom. (xiii)

Perhaps it is this cautionary promise of promise that allowed me to write this book, and, while the book that follows is not a preface, maybe I can still use Spivak's description of the preface as an opening into my

book on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: “[T]here, is then, always already a preface between two hands holding open a book. And the ‘prefacer,’ of the same or another proper name as the ‘author,’ need not apologize for ‘repeating’ the text” (xiii).

I could now move to the required biography of Spivak and list her various accomplishments, publications, and contributions to the making of a field such as postcolonial studies, and/or postcolonial transnational feminist studies. I could use another critic’s quite gauche sculpting of Spivak as “the model product of an Indian undergraduate and an American graduate education – probably the most scholarly combination in the planet” (*IOW*, ix), as a way to underline her movement from a middle-class family in Calcutta to the upper echelons of academia in the United States via an initial stay in Iowa and a few visits elsewhere. But trying to capture the life and times of Spivak, and reducing her contributions to a pithy defining sentence, is impossible. Spivak is a literary theorist, a postcolonial critic, translator, feminist, Marxist, and deconstructionist. She has published on every significant social, political, and cultural topic that has engaged our times, while never losing sight of the role of the teacher in the university and beyond, to rural enclaves in Bangladesh and China. She remains an exemplary literary critic of English texts, demanding, at the same time, an investment in the languages of the South for a productive comparative literature in the twenty-first century.³ Her subtle criticism of the long reach of the native informant has allowed her to think through the role and function of the informant, not just in colonial discourse, but in transnational feminism that repeatedly bypasses women who remain on the fringes of a present condition marked by nationalism, postcoloniality, and migration. Her commitment to a planetary ethics has produced trenchant criticisms of the racialization of capital in the hands of a “managerial class all across the globe today in globalization who are many colors, again racialized” (“What is Enlightenment?” 199) and the manner in which the “transformation of indigenous knowledges into intellectual property deliberately bypasses the question of the subject” (“Claiming Transformations,” 123).

But above all, and in everything she writes, Spivak continues to take to task modes of critical self-representation, whether it be as an embattled Third World scholar in the First, a feminist who is both a Marxist and a deconstructionist, or a teacher who remains ethically responsible to pedagogy. My own engagements with Spivak’s work have

4 Writing Autobiography, Writing Spivak: In Lieu of an Introduction

changed and developed over time, especially in relation to her own self-representation in her work and her encounters with those who seek to represent her through her work. Such moments are particularly marked in Spivak's numerous interviews, beginning with her first in 1963, at the age of 18, in *Newsweek*, in an article entitled "Foreign Students: Diplomas and Diplomacy." The interview was intended to capture the flow of foreign students to the US as a way of registering intercultural exchange between the US and the rest of the world. It seeks to register the culture shock that many students must have felt, or so the thinking goes, appropriately captured by a photo of Gayatri Spivak appearing on the cover in a sari. She refers to this interview in another one recorded by Angela Ingram in 1987 and notes:

[When I was being interviewed] by these blokes, I absolutely had no compunction in producing this deathless line. I only know because I got hate mail you would not believe. I said – and I was being honest because I felt that I should say what I thought – "I don't understand why Americans who don't know you smile at you on the street. I've been traumatized." Can you imagine? Really. This was a very genuine kind of a thing. I was a luscious nineteen-year-old, and they smiled at me because, to an extent, they didn't really think. It's like women in *National Geographic*, where they are allowed to have bare breasts. I was not someone with whom they had the same rules, the same sexual code of behavior. So it was okay. But you know, that comes from two things. One is the fact that I was a "communist" so early, right? So I kind of felt politics in other people. But also a communist out of moral outrage. But it also comes from a very bad thing, which is my caste-fix. Brahmin women have always been unspoken. (PC, 84-5)

Reading this passage always makes me giddy. There is so much to unpack here. Spivak's recollection of a traumatic event; her dismissal of the, obviously, more empowered interviewers as "blokes," who had no idea what they were up against; her conviction that she could and must speak her mind and politicize an everyday, seemingly benign, practice as a trauma for the other. Trauma in benevolence. Benevolence as trauma. One can already see in the re-presented 18-year old the Spivak to come. But then she also represents herself, from the present vantage point, as a luscious 19-year old whose clothed image in a sari conjures up images of bare breasted "other women" in *National Geographic*. A representation that is further compounded by her investment in

being a communist and an outspoken Brahmin woman. Race, class, caste, gender, and politics are evoked to challenge the notion of an essential foreigner captured in a seemingly unproblematic rendition of the Indian female student. But the slippages between women ranging from middle-class Indian Brahmin, to impoverished foreign student in Cornell, to subaltern bare-breasted women leaves me gasping for air. Does being a communist somehow help suture, however sloppily, these categories? Does Spivak rest uneasily on the Brahmin note? When she remarks that it is a bad thing to be an outspoken Brahmin woman, is she actually being good because it gives her strength to confront being othered? Does being Brahmin also allow her to be luscious?

A page earlier in the Ingram interview, entitled, "Postmarked Calcutta, India," Spivak challenges the interviewer's assumption that she can pass without being noticed in an airport in India. The idea of being different and thus marked carries over everywhere, including home. In India, given Spivak's height, spiky hair, and "hopeless sense of dress," she is considered as "some kind of foreign person who is *so* eccentric that she can dress [and look] like this" (PC, 82). However, the spiky hair produces another possible identity, that of the widow. Hair is an important signifier of femininity. Spivak's spiky hair was not seen in India, especially in Bengal, as a westernized stylish cut. Being 45, childless, and not married in the traditional sense of staying with one husband for the duration, people read her cut as a signifier of asexuality, a widow's cut. I wonder if the widow's cut was perceived as a Brahmin's widow cut. Spivak does not say so, but given all her work on the regulative psychobiography of women as sati, or rather sati as good wife and good woman,⁴ one could be forced to read this image as such. In the interview, Spivak leaves both accounts intact, begging the reader to make the connections between a hyper-sexualized figure as imagined by a 45-year-old looking back at a possible casting of a 19-year-old by the dominant western gaze, and a 45-year-old imagining her production as an hypo-asexualized widow by the dominant Indian. Both are moments of acute discomfort, but only one produces trauma. Why? The question is never answered except through Spivak's attempt to substitute her being read as a widow by her own reading of her self as an eccentric, a role further accentuated by her recourse to the accents of a British English. Interestingly, it is accent, an English accent, which is used to displace anxiety and lack of control over being read by others. In India, despite her tremendous fluency in Bengali, she can use her

accent to help produce herself as an eccentric if she so desires. In the US, enraged by a screaming white guy who did not realize that she lived and owned a home in the same street, she can roll down her car window and scold him in a very English accent, “*Stop muttering.*” “And he was so amazed, that someone dressed like me had said [that] to him” (PC, 90).

This interview is particularly significant because it is conducted upon her return from having taught, as an academic, for the first time in India. Perhaps this garnering of an academic status at “home” allows her to open up to the many ways one can be and choose to be represented. It is also an interview where Spivak admits to having not just privilege, but also power: “You see, [she says to Ingram] I use positions of power” (PC, 89). She admits this parenthetically, and it is this recognition of the power move that mitigates, for me, some of her more drastic deployments of shifting categories to describe herself. I used this interview to open up the space for my engagement with the collection of interviews gathered together in *The Post-Colonial Critic*. I revisit them here, and have thoroughly revised and self-consciously reworked my earlier review of the collection as a way to mark my own transformative experience in reading Spivak. My essay was written for a special issue of *Hypatia* in 1992, and then it was republished in a collection entitled *Language and Liberation: Feminism, Philosophy, and Language* in 1999. In its second incarnation, I added an autobiographical anecdote and a postscript to situate my own reading of Spivak, underlining my critical stance on the “original” essay. In a fashion, I practice here self-citationality as a mode of reading and writing Spivak. I use the essay as a point of departure for my introduction to this book on Spivak to mark the (im)possibility of ever resting easily with the collection of texts that is Spivak.

The Postcolonial Critic: Shifting Subjects

Many feminist and postcolonial critics continue to use a self-defining, clarifying sentence to produce a subject position vis-à-vis a text that they are attempting to read and critique. Here is one that I could use: I am a postcolonial feminist critic educated in a former British colony who now teaches in an American academic institution, and I am therefore intimately implicated in my reading of this text. One could imagine

all sorts of variations through substitution of different marginalized minorities attempting to articulate their racialized, gendered, ethnic, and sexual subject positions. On the one hand, the insistence on the heterogeneity of one's subject position prevents indulging in any utopic desire that one can exist outside relations of power; it is a methodological trope, evoking an involvement in the dynamics of the very discourses of power we seek to alter. On the other hand, an uncritical appropriation of this methodological trope has become an alibi for doing business as usual. The autobiographical preamble that foregrounds the critic's subject position is easily transformed into a series of nouns and adjectives that produces a renewable symbolic economy in which one can continue to add denominations endlessly and seamlessly. In one's desire to argue for multiple mediations, one can seemingly dip into a well of terminologies, unproblematically contextualize oneself, and come up barely wet.

In many ways, this contradicts the spirit of the Spivakian injunction of unlearning one's privilege as loss. Rather, it points to the way in which the lesson in humility that Spivak wants us to learn becomes a narcissistic enterprise allowing for the passing off of "situated knowledge"⁵ as "sanctioned ignorance." That is why, as Spivak has pointed out, she rewrote unlearning one's privilege as loss as learning to learn from below, an injunction that she says has gone relatively unnoticed ("Claiming Transformations", 121). Sanctioned ignorance needs to be replaced by "a strongly worded error message" (ibid.), so that we are aware today that while "in earlier days, all we needed to ask was the question of the subject of representation: can the desire of the person behind the work be represented so transparently or be so unproblematically assigned? But in a contemporary context, we must learn to acknowledge that the subject-object relationship is itself woven in the textile of the history of the present" (123). History is on the move and "if the colonial subject was largely a class subject, and if the subject of postcoloniality was variously racialised, then the subject of globalisation is gendered" (ibid.). While one may be sympathetic to the critical use of the autobiographical trope, one could end up claiming an unmediated privileged status for the voices of the oppressed. "Identity politics" at its best challenges the neutrality of the critical narrative voice pronouncing judgments on the state of the world as such; but the insistence on the local, the contingent, the contextual, and the personal raises certain problems for its practitioners.

The underlining of the axioms of self-presentation generates what Laura Kipnis has called the “hypervisibility [of the] ideological category of the subject” (Kipnis, 158). This hypervisibility has its flip side where the fractured voices seeking simultaneously to speak *for* and *as* cannot double back to address the gaps occasioned by the omissions produced because of such self-conscious practices of representation. The conundrum for such a critic then is not only how to interpret the “fictionality [of] unmarked subjectivities” in relation to the “epistemologies of marked subjectivities” (Hartstock, 24), but how to address the internal imbalance produced in the narrative voice that seeks to present itself even as it challenges the impossibility of the representation of identity in and as presence. A category repeatedly used by writers and critics seeking to problematize the history of difference is “experience,” especially the use of experience as/in autobiography. The subject’s account of lived experience becomes an irrefutable point of departure for an analysis of the epistemology of the other. However, this deployment of experience must be advanced with a change in the structure of address that defines and manipulates the power of experience. Otherwise, despite the seeming move from the universal to the personal, what happens is merely the substitution of the personal as the universal. As Joan Scott puts it:

When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject ... becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built ... [T]he evidence of experience ... reproduces rather than contests given ideological systems ... [it] precludes analysis of the workings of [the] system and of its historicity: instead it reproduces its terms. (Scott, 25)⁶

Interestingly my own awareness of the impossibility of capturing one’s identity in experience became quite clear on my first visit back to Calcutta, India, after an absence of five years. Location, I realized, was crucial when using certain categories to define oneself. My experiences at “home” revealed not only the inadequacy of certain subject positions, but also the problems involved in the availability of hitherto inadmissible discursive spaces that are at present overloaded with politically charged epistemological markers. I learned a lesson from Abena Busia, who notes that those of us who struggle to negotiate between cultures, languages, and complex configurations of meaning

and power must simultaneously and constantly be aware that every time we speak or write we participate in “a social encounter [that] generates and is generated by complex sets of negotiations between externally produced meanings and internally created subjectivities, between the ways we see and hear and the ways in which we are seen and heard” (Busia, 82).

It is in an attempt to understand my own social encounter in the street theater of Calcutta, India that I later turn to an autobiographical anecdote. I may remind the reader here that the use of the personalized anecdote is a key feature of many of Spivak’s essays and interviews. Remember “Postmarked Calcutta, India,” the interview with Angel Ingram mentioned above. In the chapters that follow, I use many other autobiographical moments to highlight Spivak’s articulations of ethics, pedagogy, and feminism: the story of her encounter with the washerwomen, the young girl in rural Bengal, the young teacher in rural China, the Sudanese colleague, or the narratives of various other people she notes in her many, many interviews. While one could suggest that the personal is not particularly useful as a mode of political engagement with the very disenfranchised subjects that so concern Spivak, I tend to concur with Stephen Morton that “such an argument overlooks the significance of Spivak’s intellectual biography to an understanding of her own writing and theoretical affiliations” (Morton, 3). Thus, using my personal experience critically as a way to read the collection of interviews that in so many ways helped open up Spivak to a larger audience seems appropriate. It is equally important to note what Spivak herself has asserted, both about the genre of the interview as well as about the kind of self-situating(s) that interviews can evoke:

What I like about interviews is that they teach me things, not only about myself, but about things I’ve thought, which doesn’t quite happen if I take good stock of what I’m going to say. It’s always interesting to see one’s own slips, or, where one falls back. ... It’s a wonderful way of “othering” oneself. I like to surrender myself to the interviews, is what I’m saying. (PC, 36)

My interest in the collection then and now lies both in the interviews themselves as some of the most cogent and intelligent theoretical postulations by a leading critic of our times, and also in the commodification and marketing of Spivak as the postcolonial intellectual. In 1991 and

1999 I felt a need to emphasize that which today we seem to take for granted. As Third World women moving up in the First World, we must be committed to cross-cultural exchanges. Spivak has asked us to "consider the historical (rather than romantic or nostalgic) constitution of geography – how the world (geo) was written (graphy) in the last few centuries. Such considerations would not rule out the desire to cross cultures, but would reveal the difficulty of the task" ("Political Economy of Women," 115). In my engagement with the collection of interviews, I want to consider Spivak's success in interrogating her own position as a leading postcolonial critic as she engages in dialogues with various people. I am primarily interested in those moments in the interview where Spivak's undeniable commitment to cross-cultural exchanges is undermined by the resurgence of her authoritative subject position, instances where she fails to take stock. This dominant voice then deflects productive tensions generated by critical scrutiny of the category "postcolonial" as one that is, to use Teresa de Lauretis's words in a different context, "multiply organized across positionalities along several axes and across mutually contradictory discourses" (de Lauretis, 136).

In "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman's Text From the Third World," Spivak is extremely successful in analyzing the multiple positionalities of the postcolonial subaltern woman, Jasodha, the main character of Mahashweta Devi's story, "The Breast Giver." Spivak provides shifting readings of the condition of Jasodha by interweaving the materials present in the primary texts with various western "elite" theories to prevent the separation of Third World texts and First World theories as well as to suggest the "limit and limitations" of the various theories she uses. Her aim is to produce scenarios in which the "teacher clandestinely carves out a piece of action by using the text as a tool ... in celebration of the text's apartness (*être-à-l'écart*). Paradoxically, this apartness makes the text susceptible to a history larger than that of the writer, reader, teacher" (*IOW*, 268). Spivak's maneuver here allows her to rupture the totalizing gesture that would insulate Third World texts as too culturally different to be accommodated by First World theories that further the "current and continued subalternization of so-called third-world literatures" (*IOW*, 241).⁷

The complex juxtaposed readings Spivak provides implicates her own position as a Third World informant whose accession to the ranks of the intellectual elite in the First World is guaranteed by her expertise

in the esoteric theories of Derridean deconstruction, French feminism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis. In the concluding section of the essay, Spivak, in a by now characteristic move, evokes David Hardiman's criticism of her reading of Devi's story. Hardiman had indicted Spivak for wrenching Devi's story out of its immediate historical and social context, repudiating the "authentic" reading offered by the author, and imposing eclectic and Olympian analyses on an apparently obviously realist text. Hardiman's criticism indicates the precarious position of anyone endeavoring to participate critically in cross-cultural exchanges. Not only is Hardiman guilty of "an ontological/epistemological confusion that pits subaltern being against elite knowing" (*IOW*, 268), but he also refuses to recognize Spivak's position as anything other than absolutely contaminated. Hardiman dismisses Spivak's articulation of her position as a Marxist-deconstructivist-feminist-postcolonial critic who borrows eclectically and diligently various critical methodologies afforded by such a multiple plotting.

Feminist postcolonial practice was and is a subdivision of postcolonial studies in general, and a number of so-called postcolonial critics continue to be oblivious to the manner in which gender is deeply imbricated in their own production of oppositional discourses. It is their very oppositionality, and I would argue their persistent marginalization of gender, that gives them their position of academic privilege. In fact, in the most recent Modern Languages Association (MLA) session sponsored by the Postcolonial Division Group, in a panel devoted to taking stock of postcolonial studies, gender was visibly absent. And when challenged in the Q&A session, the answer given was that postcolonial feminism was just one kind of postcolonial study. The idea that gender should undergird all of one's critical assumptions was assumed to be passé, even retrograde. In such a scene, paying attention to the work of Gayatri Spivak seems prescient for its unflagging and continuing attention to a feminist politics and a politics of gender. Her commitment to feminist inquiry has not only produced brilliant critiques of the erasure of the body and subjectivity of the colonial woman from the history of both imperial domination and colonial resistance; she has also analyzed crucial and often violent epistemic shifts within the territorial imperialism of nineteenth-century India, postcolonial *Other Asias* (the title of one of her recent collections of essays), and a globalization from above. She articulates the crucial necessity of differentiating between the production of various colonial subjectivities under

territorial imperialism and neo-colonial and transnational subjects – primarily women – in the era of postmodern, electronic capitalism.

The identification and reification that *The Post-Colonial Critic* lends itself to gave me pause then, because I saw the collection as producing, perhaps unwittingly, an unmediated postcolonial subject in the figure of Spivak as the postcolonial intellectual of the times. Today, there exist already at least two books about Gayatri. Mine is a third.⁸ I hope that I have been careful to engage with the body of Spivak's work in such a way that helps mitigate what I saw done in *The Post-Colonial Critic*. The interviews reproduced in that volume cover a wide range of subjects, even though each interview does return, however tangentially or sporadically, to the situation of the postcolonial critic. The interviews are arranged chronologically, and they were all published separately prior to their compilation under the rubric of the postcolonial critic. They range from a discussion about the postmodern condition, its indifference or relevance to practical politics, to the importance of engaging in a persistent critique of multicultural endeavors. Spivak discusses important aspects of her work such as her belief in the possibility of using deconstruction to effect a political directed "transformation of consciousness" similar to feminism, the crucial need to constantly problematize one's authority as an investigating subject, the obligation on the part of teachers to examine their pedagogical responsibility as they disseminate various "-isms" in their classrooms, and the importance of scrutinizing self-representation carefully as one appropriates terms and categories from various disciplinary areas and, more importantly, from different cultures. In sum, the interviews capture most of Spivak's lessons.

The volume, *The Post-Colonial Critic*, is offered to us as a package with the subtitle *Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. The cover, which is black and white, depicts an illuminated picture of an Indian woman with her long hair plaited, the traditional bindi on her forehead, and big round earrings hanging from pierced ears. What we are offered is a detail from a larger whole entitled "Starry Night in Iowa" – perhaps because Spivak started her academic career in Iowa?⁹ The picture looks like anything but the iconic image of Spivak, and I have continued to wonder at the choice of such a domesticated image placed beside the title of the book. Is this image intended as ironic, a sardonic comment on what an uninitiated reader tends to expect when she opens the collection? Or is this image somehow supposed to contain the excess that is, in many ways,

the hallmark of a Spivakian interview? Whatever the reason, it is not one that a reader can find in the introduction to the collection. In fact, there is no introduction, just a preface, a short editor's note, unlike Spivak's preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. All it does is quickly catalog Spivak's contribution to the field. No doubt the interviews themselves function as "active critical commentary" (viii) and need few explanatory notes; however, the presence of the editor, Sarah Harasym (other than in her own interview of Spivak), is missing. Also missing is a theoretical framework that situates the book historically or an explanation as to why these interviews were chosen; or an examination of some of the controversies bound to be generated by interviewers ranging from the Australian critic Sneja Gunew to the New Historicist Harold Veaser, across a time span of seven years in settings spread over three continents. The book hangs together only in its name.

That is not enough, given that the collection seeks to establish Spivak's position as a leading postcolonial feminist critic. Even as Spivak's name and essays continue to be cited, and certain of her essays repeatedly anthologized, there remains a curious absence of a deep engagement with her work. To be sure, her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* garnered some reviews, but there were very few really expanded, systemic engagements with the book.¹⁰ It is in this context that I had faulted the absence of an introduction that would situate the interviews collected in *The Post-Colonial Critic*. Spivak's position as a leading cultural and literary theorist requires us to engage critically with her various intellectual formulations that address in manifold ways the interconnectedness of the micro-politics of the academy and the macro-politics of imperialist and neo-imperialist narratives. In the absence of such an engagement, there is a real possibility that a text circulating as *The Post-Colonial Critic*, containing the marvelous voice of Spivak, ends up essentializing a critic who has above all taught us about the limits of essentialism. For one example, there is an interesting relationship between two interviews – "Strategy, Identity, Writing," conducted in Canberra, Australia in 1986, and "The Post-Colonial Critic," which took place in New Delhi, India in 1987. Although both discussions center on the problems and politics of cultural self-representation, the interview conducted by the Indian female academics is quite awkward given Spivak's refusal to respond directly to some of the more crucial questions concerning her privileged position as a renowned critic in the West. She is much more comfortable about her subject position in the other

interview, willing to put herself on the block, as it were. She underlines the importance of acknowledging her place of privilege in the “conscious struggle to win back the position of the questioning subject.” if one fails to do this, then one cannot unlearn one’s privilege as a necessary step to be able to speak and be heard by “that other constituency” (PC, 42).

While the New Delhi interview begins, predictably, with the well-rehearsed us and them divide, Spivak fails to recognize that very privilege she so squarely faces in the Australian interview (I address both interviews at some length in chapter 4). Let me just note here that Spivak continues to shift the burden of investigation onto the interviewers. While her injunction to them to “meditate” on their own desires that seek to define her as a diasporic intellectual with the weight of “rarefaction and super subtlety” on her side so that they can define themselves as indigenous whose realities “surely need connotations of a stronger and more formal intervention” (PC, 71–2) is on the mark, the reader is denied the experience of a dynamic and engaging discussion. She must look at other interviews for that. The interviewers here are forced to move, quickly and rather abruptly, from one topic of conversation to another. One would have hoped, for example, for a more sustained discussion about the inherent danger of “the regulative psychobiography for the Indian woman” as sanctioned suicide ending up as a master trope for the condition of the subaltern woman. Instead, Spivak merely says that for her it is but a “diagnostic point” of departure in her attempt to find an “alternative regulative psychobiography” that could operate outside both “psychoanalysis and counter-psychoanalysis” (PC, 71). For a critic who resorts often to psychoanalysis, to understand gendered subjectivity this answer needs some explanation. But the reader must go elsewhere for an explanation, maybe to Spivak’s essays on French feminism and feminism and deconstruction.

Reflecting back on an autobiographical moment in her “Lives,” in *Confessions of the Critics*, Spivak notes that:

Asked to talk about myself in 1992, by a Greek-Australian member of a British multicultural collective, who had heard bits of an autobiographical talk I had permitted myself to utter at the University of Cambridge, I first offered a few pages of musings on the thesis that “experience is a staging of experience.” Those musings are of course “too theoretical,” “not autobiographical enough” to be included here; although an undoing of that opposition has been at stake in my temporizing of a life. (“Lives,” 205)

Perhaps it's the failure of undoing that very opposition, a recognition of the staging of experience as a staging that I mark as absent in the interview "The Post-Colonial Critic." Of all the interviews, this one is, to me, the least satisfying. In the interviews entitled "Questions of Multiculturalism," "Postmarked Calcutta, India," and "Practical Politics of the Open End," the authority of Spivak's experiences grounded in a material reality provide a boundary-breaking space, a borderland that allows the participants, who do not always agree on all the issues, to "develop democratic processes for formulating collective postepistemological and postontological judgments" (Brown, 80). This then allows one to "learn how to have public conversations with each other, arguing from a vision about the common ('what I want for us') rather than from identity ('who I am') and from explicitly postulated norms and potential common values rather than from false essentialisms or unreconstructed private interest" (ibid.). In the failed interview, the desire to argue from a position of "what I want for us" is troubled by what seems to be a denial of the significant differences in terms of location between the I and the you that constitutes the us. Unexamined benevolence is the danger.

If in "The Post-Colonial Critic" Spivak seeks to discount the differences between her position and that of her Indian feminist interlocutors, in "Questions of Multiculturalism," she registers her angry disbelief at being literally denied the privilege of mobility that she has come to take for granted. Spivak recounts as an anecdote her encounter with an Air Canada employee at Heathrow airport who refuses to allow her to travel to Canada because she does not have a valid visa. Spivak's nationality makes her an (im)possible traveler. An Indian passport holder with a US green card does not need a visa to travel from the US to Canada, "because of course an Indian resident in the United States would not, the thinking goes, want to become an illegal immigrant in Canada" (PC, 65). She does not require additional papers when she travels from Canada to London. However, the same individual cannot enter Canada from London unless she has a proper entry visa – "look here, I am the same person, the same passport ... Indian cultural identity, right? But you become different. When it is from London, Indians can very well want to jump ship to Canada" (ibid.), given the intense racialization of South Asians in general in Britain. The personal injury caused by such an insult – and the fact that Spivak could not attend her invitation to speak in Canada – makes the reader aware of who gets to

cross borders where and how and when. One's credentials as a professional academic with a history of residence and teaching in the US provide no guarantees when it comes to the politics of travel.

But the problem for me lies elsewhere. It lies in Spivak's rage at the employee. Even if we grant that the employee may have been a racist, is it not apparent that she is but a minor figure in an increasingly dictatorial bureaucracy and that she wields considerably less power in the global economy than does Spivak. Spivak chastises the woman, giving her a lesson in the use of appropriate, inoffensive language. The order to change the words from "We can't accept you" to "The regulations are against it" might make Spivak feel better, but does it in any way change the status of the woman in question as Spivak says it does? The woman, who probably relies on the income generated by her job, will have to continue to maintain her status (if one can call it that) as a mere cog in a rather large and complex wheel. Are they then equal victims of a prejudicial government? Spivak's insistence on using signification appropriate to the moment allows her to vent her bitterness on a white woman, who, yes, would probably be shocked at the imperial bearing of a sari-clad woman telling her how to use the English language. But one wonders if the employee at an airport is allowed the luxury to think through such careful semantic distinctions. This anecdote, while it illustrates the lack of privilege based on national identity on the one hand, denies the lack of privilege based on class on the other. In this particular confrontation, nationality, ethnicity, perhaps even race, trump class and thereby elide the imbrications of race and class.

Autobiographical Interlude

It is in order to understand one's investment in discourses of self-representation that I insert this story. It is to critique the use of experience to underline one's sense of dismay at the use of identity, national, racial, sexual, gendered, to define and keep the other in place, that I evoke an experience of my own. If, according to Spivak, it ought to be possible for cultural critics to "make visible the assignment of subject positions" (*IOW*, 241), I would hope that a critique of my own failure to negotiate the structural complexities of identity formations is an illustration of the difficulty involved in letting go of one's own privilege – a lesson that I have learnt from reading Spivak.

I returned to India after an initial absence of five years – a grueling five years during which I received a Master's degree from one University, a PhD from another, and finally a position as an assistant professor at the University of Maryland. My time in India was spent with my immediate and extended family. The space that I inhabited during my month's stay was therefore largely homogeneous. Most of my relatives and close friends belong to the upper-middle class, are westernized, and have either visited various parts of the US and Europe or have close ties with at least one person who lives abroad. I, of course, inhabited this same space before I left in 1985; however, my presumption that I would be able to resume where I had left off was naïve, to say the least. Throughout my stay, I struggled repeatedly to be perceived as everyone else. Today, the scene in India is quite different. The dollar has lost its prestige and India's entry as a significant player in a global economy has fundamentally altered cityscapes across the nation. But in 1990 things were different, especially in Calcutta (which is still not Bangalore, Delhi, or Mumbai). The divide between resident and non-resident Indian was quite sharp and often divisive. There was a persistent desire to cast me as other because of my dislocation, leaving me with a choice: either accept their vision of me as someone who must have changed because of her alliances abroad or insistently question their desire in wanting to perceive me as different. I attempted to fracture the totalizing logic of their representational practices by othering myself from the stereotypical consolidation of the rich, non-resident Indian subject. I did not, then, own a home; I drove a car that cost me five hundred dollars; I had not been able to return home in five years, etc. etc. I was constantly engaged in asking them to deconstruct the horizon of their "social lifeworld" (Benhabib, 226). I was, obviously, very complacent about my ability to discursively reproduce myself through my experiences outside the boundaries of a geographically defined Indian space as both the subject and object of a rationale for the transformation of representational practices. In trying to rupture the dialectic of a symbolic construction of identity based on the opposition of us and them, I failed to acknowledge that my contestatory theory of agency was guided by a desire to be included in the community I had left behind as still untainted and yet contingent upon my difference from the non-resident community that had but a marginal impact on my notion of myself.

What brought into vivid relief my investment in an originary identity was not just my dismay at being called a non-resident Indian, but that

of being perceived by strangers as a non-Indian, a *bideshi*, a foreigner. One strikingly humbling and humiliating experience was my futile attempt at refusing to be cast as a “shada chamra,” a “white foreigner” (this really brings home the construction of race and whiteness!), by speaking in fluent Bengali to my mother.¹¹ I overheard a heated conversation between two men about my racial (national, ethnic?) identity. One was absolutely convinced about my absolute difference, while the other was trying to suggest that perhaps I was part Indian, maybe even a North Indian. The former, in order to assert the infallibility of his judgment, forcefully asserted in Bengali: “But look at her. Just look at her.” It was then that I started to speak quite loudly in Bengali to my mother, expecting a shock of recognition on their part, a sense of shame at so miscasting me in their play about identity. But no. They registered their amazement at a foreigner who could speak their mother tongue so fluently and their only sense of shame was at having been overheard and understood by a foreigner. One can see an echo of what Spivak recounts in “Postmarked Calcutta, India” in my own desire to have a “kind of cultural fix as a resident alien” (PC, 82). Spivak recounts in the interview how she would spit back at men in Delhi who would spit at her when she went running; or in Calcutta, where she would verbally and publicly flagellate them by saying “horrible things in extremely elegant obscene Bengali” (PC, 88). For Spivak, being absolutely fluent in her mother tongue gave her the power “to decimate them and tell them to blast off” (ibid.). My own experience registers differently.

The failure of recognition resulted in a sense of loss, a displacement, that no autobiographical narrative can adequately explain or account for. What it did do was help me think through my own investments in certain definitions of the self that I assumed to be stable and a given. It made me realize that our disquisitions on multiplicity and heterogeneity always beg the question of a ground from which such articulations are made. It made me realize the significance of Meese’s idea of “excess, the more than the personal which constitutes The Political (not as reduction) or the political-taken-personally” (Meese, 254). Radhakrishnan has enunciated the precarious predicament of each one of us trying to inhabit the tenuous space opened up by possible subject positions even as he explores the progressive potential in such tensions.¹² The refusal to naturalize the I, the deliberate undercutting of a single identity realized in the constituted nature of one’s subjectivity,

epitomizes the crisis of living in and living as tension. It is not enough merely to implicate oneself in one's readings; the awareness of the critical interpreter's role in the continuous production of meaning as she chooses to position herself should affirm the cultural, racial, sexual, and political inter/intra-reality of her identity and those around her.

Despite my criticism of a couple of encounters with the other in Spivak's interviews, it is from Spivak that I have also learnt to question the security provided by the symbolic economy of the autobiographical sentence. I have learned to interrogate the inherent essentialism rendered invisible in the authorizing account of one's experience. This book urges readers to read Spivak's interviews alongside her many essays. The immediacy of the setting of an interview may allow us to comprehend Spivak with a greater ease than in her writing, but it is precisely this ease and rush of words that needs some introduction and critical intervention, an intervention that *The Post-Colonial Critic* mistakenly refuses to provide. The collection tends to shore up postcoloniality in the figure of Spivak. But postcoloniality is itself an artificial and ultimately misleading conglomerate of radically disparate cultures and texts, and its heterogeneity must be arduously kept alive. Spivak herself has remarked on her critical relationship to metropolitan postcolonialism even as she notes that she is "less locationist, more nuanced with a productive acknowledgement of complicity" than other more locationist dismissive critics (*CPR*, xii). In her foreword to the *Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, she begins with a beautifully short and expressive sentence: "The best of postcolonialism is autocritical" ("Foreword," xv).

Postscript: An Introduction?

The revisions undertaken of an earlier essay for a book being written 16 years later, with the title *Gayatri Spivak: In Other Words*, begs the question of beginnings. In the preface to his book *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, Edward Said succinctly captures the dilemma of attempting to define beginnings. What makes a definition of beginnings difficult is its ideational connection to a "whole complex of relations" (Said, *Beginnings*, 5–6) and its paradoxical, theoretical, and philosophical status as both a kind of action and an originary moment for future action. "[T]he beginning, then, is the first step in the intentional

production of meaning" (5) as well as an "activity which ultimately implies return and repetition rather than simple linear accomplishment, that beginning and beginning-again are historical ... that a beginning not only creates but is its own method because it has intention" (xvii). I use Said's meditations on beginnings to open up a space wherein I can speculate not only on the makings of my continuing engagements with Spivak but also on the status of the book on Spivak.

My original review essay was commissioned for a special issue on Philosophy and Language. As a feminist postcolonial critic, the connections between a feminist theoretical and pedagogical practice and language are always at the center of any critical enterprise I undertake. Thus an engagement with a collection of interviews titled *The Post-Colonial Critic* seemed apposite precisely when postcolonial studies was being consolidated as a discipline. The disciplinary status of a field of study can often be measured, as we all know, by a proliferation of various stances and its concomitant distillation in the voices of its central figures. I understood the publication of the scattered interviews in one venue as a textual production of one such seminal moment in US academic history, and thus wished to interrogate and contextualize its location through a postcolonial feminist praxis. But, as I noted earlier, one can identify today a certain trend in postcolonial critical studies that is characterized by a failure to engage cogently with many of the key tenets articulated by Spivak, as significant for a politically charged postcolonial epistemology. At her best, Spivak's methodology skillfully combines scrupulous readings of Marx and Derrida with a politically nuanced international and transnational feminism that constantly negotiates the material grounds of theoretical productions, without providing an easy and coherent narrative. It is perhaps the absence of portable definitions in Spivak's work that makes it impossible to package her neatly and transport her easily to other sites of critical examination. Often framing her investigations as questions – "Can the Subaltern Speak?" – or as negative assertions – "Not Virgin Enough to Say that [S]he Occupies the Place of the Other" – or as "negotiations" and "scattered speculations," Spivak's theoretical exegeses cannot be easily recuperated in one's own examination of a cultural performance or fictional text.

This is not to say that other postcolonial critics are working with simpler concepts and that Spivak is more difficult than, say, Homi Bhabha. Bhabha has himself been apostrophized, by Arif Dirlik, as the "master

of political mystification and theoretical obfuscation" ("The Postcolonial Aura," 334–5, n. 6).¹³ However, it is also true that certain theoretical and epistemic categories produced by Bhabha have been easily accommodated into the conceptual vocabulary of postcolonial theory and analysis. A number of critics in postcolonial and cultural studies are perfectly comfortable working with notions of mimicry, hybridity, migrancy, and the pedagogical and performative narratives of nations, citing the requisite essay in which the ideas had initially been unfolded by Bhabha. In fact, it is the free-floating signification of these unanchored categories that increasingly seem to mark a critical essay as postcolonial, or even better as transnational, rather than an informed material-based theoretical examination of an epistemic formation particular to a location. The publication of Bhabha's collection of essays under the title *The Location of Culture* captures the singularity of thought that characterizes much postcolonial examination. Bhabha locates culture "in the realm of the *beyond*," in the theoretically innovative narrative of the space of in-betweenness that, according to him, provides the "terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood (1). In as much as he locates his desire to interrogate the culture of western modernity from the postcolonial perspective, that postcolonial perspective appears to be cathected to the necessary injunction that seems to demand both the presence and the erasure of the in-betweenness of the post-Cartesian subject. A particular moment in Bhabha's Introduction captures this paradox: "As literary creatures and political animals we ought to concern ourselves with the understanding of human action, and the social world as a moment when *something is beyond control, but is not beyond accommodation*" (*Location of Culture*, 12). Bhabha privileges the momentary possibilities of accommodation in the "[t]hird space of enunciation ... that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (38) in the various literary texts that he reads, from Conrad to Morrison, from Harris to Gordimer, in order to assert that it is in this third space that one can begin to envisage "national, antinationalist histories of the 'people,' ... [that] elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (38–9). I believe it is this ultimately benign and celebratory aspect of Bhabha's postcolonial praxis that allows him to be so easily and sometimes incorrectly mobilized.

It is not my purpose here to pit one postcolonial critic against another to see who comes out on top. Rather, it is my attempt to understand the privileging of *The Location of Culture* as the pre-eminent postcolonial

theoretical text. In contrast, it is in particular feminist circles that Spivak's critical vocabulary resonates most strongly, primarily non Anglo-American.¹⁴ Spivak's theorization of the relationship between cultural, economic, and political systems of value, her attention to the gendered and racialized face of global capitalism, her interrogation of the responsibility of the "academic/intellectual/artistic hybrid" (*OTM*, x) make her the outside, dissident voice, not only in Marxist and deconstruction circles, but also among a number of Marxist and deconstruction influenced/oriented postcolonial critics. Her emphasis on the power of the structures of violence that constantly seek to undo the third space that Bhabha so valorizes is clearly articulated in her engagements with the necessary crisis confronted by intellectuals desiring to produce an ethical praxis of knowing the other. She insists on recognizing that, despite careful readings of the manner in which material and epistemic differences structure our responses to a text designated as "other," even the most responsible and accountable of critics has to learn to acknowledge the impossibility of a fully revealed and therefore a fully graspable episteme of alterity.

I feel like the woman with a cigarette in the Old Virginia Slims ad who delightedly confesses that she has come a long way. Looking back at my own relationship with Spivak, I must say that I have moved from a place of some trepidation and resistance to one of deep, critical immersion. Spivak's increasing emphasis on ethics and intimacy has shaped my own work on an ethics of reading. Her continuing interest in literary texts, especially novels, resonates with my own interest in the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. And her deep and abiding commitment to feminist politics and women in the South has always suggested the possibilities of practical politics in an academic setting. This is not a book about Spivak. Spivak paradigmatically refuses paradigms. To write a book about Spivak's work would be to do exactly what her work demands we not do. Her work is not about reading; her work is a reading practice. Spivak does not just talk about ethics in the abstract; her work performs an ethics of the impossible; it executes "the subjectship of ethics and the subjectship of culture, past the threshold of naming, in and out of claims to alterity," by complicating the relationship of the global to the local, the global in the local, the local in the global, and by "tracking the exorbitant as it institutes its culture" ("Acting Bits," 775). Spivak's work continually marks the "confidence in accessibility" in the house of "official feminism" (792) insisting on

the lesson of the impossibility of translation in the general sense but a need for translation as literacy through an intense labor that demands a recognition not just of the “complexity of postcolonial space [but] especially womanspace” (“Who Claims Alterity,” 277).

This then cannot be a book that simply explains Spivak, or a book that delineates Spivak’s various engagements with this or that theorist. It may be read as that. But I hope, instead, that the reader sees it is a book that offers a thinking through with Spivak the important questions about reading, pedagogy, ethics, and feminism. I remain thoroughly indebted to Kandice Chuh, the book’s ideal reader, for articulating the project in such a manner. This book owes much to her critical scrutiny as it does to my many conversations with her. This book is for my students who have studied Spivak with me all these years.

Notes

- 1 There were two other encounters as well, one which I write of as a failed one because I doubt whether Spivak remembers it. And the other at George Washington University in 1991 or so, when Spivak saw me across a very crowded large hall and which generated her first recognition of me as another tall, Bengali woman. I have met her many times since. I held an MLA session, under the Postcolonial Discussion Group, the first I believe on her work, to which I invited Bruce Robbins, Lauren Berlant, and Brett Edwards to participate. Just two MLAs ago, there was a special session organized by Rashmi Bhatnagar, one of the (in)famous interviewers of “The Post Colonial Critic,” in which I participated alongside six other women, including Spivak. That session has since been published in the Forum section of PMLA.

I might as well also admit that I did meet Spivak over drinks – actually, she drank tea, I drank a martini – where I discussed the contours of this project. I bring this up because at this meeting Spivak had left her wallet in the hotel room. I paid for the tea and the drink and she said humorously, “Is this going to end up in the book?” And I said, of course and it may become one of those legendary Spivak stories depending on how I tell it. I tell it here simply without hyperbole.

- 2 My encounter with Spivak in the pages of *Of Grammatology* is an uncanny repetition of Spivak’s encounter with Derrida. She came across an entry in the Minuit catalog for *De la Grammatologie*, and ordered it “because it looked interesting” (Foreword,” xix). Spivak had never heard about Derrida or about the Structuralist Controversy at Johns Hopkins University in 1966.

J. Hillis Miller took it to Johns Hopkins University Press because “he had already started organizing Derrida’s US career” (“Thinking about Edward Said,” 519). The translation appeared in 1976. The rest is history. Out of such accidents are careers made.

- 3 I don’t quite address Spivak’s *Death of a Discipline*, but her articulation of the resurrections of a discipline resonates with her general emphasis on a pedagogy of reading the other through “responsible effort” (*DD*, 13). She eschews the idea of “cultural informants,” and demands a “language-based literary investigation.” She argues that “if a responsible comparativism can be of the remotest possible use in the training of the imagination, it must approach culturally diversified ethical systems diachronically, through the history of multicultural empires, without foregone conclusions ... In order to reclaim the role of teaching literature as training the imagination – the great inbuilt instrument of othering – we may, if we work hard, as old-fashioned Comp. Lit is known to be capable of doing, come close to the irreducible work of translation, not from language to language but from body to ethical semiosis, that incessant shuttle that is a “life” (12–13). Such a Comparative Literature would be an integral and necessary theoretical supplement to today’s more empirically driven gender training and practical and narrowly conceived human rights intervention. Spivak’s version of Comparative Literature would undermine the emphasis on what is reduced to practical considerations by showing how the “proper study of literature may give us entry into the performativity of cultures as substantiated in narrative” (13). Humanism with a difference seems to be the name of the new game that could be Comparative Literature.
- 4 The distinction is briefly evoked in the essay “The Rani of Sirmur,” which was first read at a conference titled “Europe and its Others,” and then at great length in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” When the two essays reappear in sequence as the chapter titled “History” in *a Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, the “mobilizing of woman into *Sati*,” is used to think through the various incarnations of woman outside a simplistic “cultural difference,” in not just discourses of colonialism, imperialism, and Indian nationalism, but also through repetition as a trope in the idea of sanctioned suicides by women in discourses that seek to articulate gender and development. I provide a brief summary of the role of sati as good woman, good wife and its implications today, by marking the use of sati by Allan Bloom in my book *Engendering India*.
- 5 A term made famous by Donna Haraway.
- 6 As Lata Mani has pointed out in “Multiple Meditations,” “the relation between experience and knowledge [is] fraught with history, contingency, and struggle” (26). I am deeply indebted to this article for its exploration of

- "the questions of positionality and location and their relation to the production of knowledge as well as its reception" (25).
- 7 In his essay, "The Commitment to Theory," Homi Bhabha presents a convincing case against the "binarism of theory vs politics," the belief that "the Olympian realms of what is mistakenly labeled pure theory" is assumed to be "eternally insulated from the historical exigencies and tragedies of the wretched of the earth" (5).
 - 8 Stephen Morton's *Gayatri Spivak* is a wonderful introduction to Spivak's work. Mark Sanders's *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Live Theory* is quite lovely because it reads Spivak through the lens of translation. Spivak as translator, loosely put, par excellence.
 - 9 A version of what seems to be the entire picture that appeared in an early Routledge catalog raises even more questions. I don't want to analyze the picture at length, but suffice it to say that the woman in the picture is cradling a bespectacled white man and in the background there looms a bear. Knowledge among the "Primitive," perhaps.
 - 10 See, for example, "Three-Way Misreading," by Mieke Bal, in *Diacritics*, a journal that has been a significant venue of some of Spivak's key essays.
 - 11 I am a tall Bengali woman, standing six feet one. I have lighter skin tone than most Bengalis but can in no way pass for white
 - 12 Radhakrishnan writes: "I wish to argue that the structuralist rhetoric of 'positionality' does not have to result in empty allegorical readings of history, but instead can be used to sensitize our awareness of historical process as *chrono-topic*. ... If one's sense of identity in 'one's own time' endows the 'self' with a sense of personal authenticity, a spatialized perception of one's own personalized identity leads to the realm of the 'political' which necessarily relativizes and/or sublates the *personal* as such" (281).
 - 13 For a critical response to Dirlik's essay, especially his dismissal of post-structuralist-oriented postcolonial critics, see the essay by Ray and Schwarz titled, "Postcolonial Discourse: The Raw and the Cooked."
 - 14 Spivak describes *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* as a "feminist book. Feminist issues are pre-emergent in the first chapter. They are the substance of the rest. In the fourth, a critique of contemporary culturalist universalist feminism is offered" (CPR, xi).

Reading Literature, Teaching Literature: Whither Soul Making?

A Critique of Anglo-American Feminist Pedagogy

Any examination of Spivak as the arch literary critic, as a postcolonial literary reader par excellence, must begin with the essay, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," first published in 1985. In situating my opening into Spivak's literary readings with this essay, I, of course, bracket Spivak's earlier work, especially her book on Yeats, *Myself I Must Remake: The Life and Poetry of W.B. Yeats*.¹ While the book on Yeats may open up the idea of a writer writing under colonialism, it is the essay that for me best captures the emphasis of a reading for the times, an insistently postcolonial time. In another essay, published in 1995, entitled, "Teaching for the Times," Spivak addresses the migrant academic who too easily falls prey to a postcolonial temporality that elides differences between varieties of decolonization. She advocates a transnational literacy that would interrupt a homogenous postcolonial time and produce a "disarticulating rather than a comparative point of view" (194). However, in 1985, what was necessary was the interruption of a dominant western chronotope from within, a postcolonial critique of the march of the same. Thus, despite Spivak's later uneasiness with the term postcolonialism for its failure adequately to address the inequalities under global capitalism, "Three Women's Texts" does provide, and continues to provide, an exemplary lens for a postcolonial reading of canonical nineteenth-century British novels.

Almost 20 years later, this essay reappears in the pages of the journal *Victorian Studies* in the guise of a missile that has struck down all that could be noble and great in the field of Victorian literary studies. In an essay entitled, "Preface for a Post-Postcolonial Criticism," Erin O'Connor stages a counter strike, determined to liberate Victorian

literary studies from the dictatorship of a simplistic, overtly ideological argument fueled for the most part by the central thesis of Spivak's essay. O'Connor's argument develops by reducing Spivak, or rather the "author function" of Spivak, to this one essay. It then zeroes in on the section on *Jane Eyre*, positioning it as the definitive word on postcolonial criticism. Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Jan Mohammed are also mentioned, but they seem to lack the devastating nuclear potential of "Spivak." According to O'Connor, the aim of Spivak's essay is to annihilate all but the imperialistic resonances of the Victorian novel. Let my metaphors seem overdone or overarmed, one only needs to read O'Connor's essay to understand my use of the language of combat. In a particularly aggressive move, O'Connor allegorizes the narrative of the critical decimation of the Victorian novel at the words of postcolonial criticism in the mode of the other famous novel so dear to postcolonial critics, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. By comparing the march of postcolonial criticism on the terrain of Victorian novel studies to the embattled journey of Conrad's Marlow, O'Connor wants to defeat postcolonial criticism on its own turf – ye who speak of imperialism as inhering in the best and worst of Victorian novels are guilty of disciplinary imperialism and colonialism!

I am not interested in rescuing postcolonial criticism from the clutches of an idealized, non-ideological Victorian literary criticism as supposedly desired by O'Connor.² I introduce O'Connor's essay in this chapter to remind us of the significance, however debated, of Spivak's early essay. Even more importantly, I want to alert the reader to the reappearance of the essay in her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, in the chapter called "Literature." How is this essay transformed, if at all, as a result of being revised and inserted in a larger context? And even more significantly, what is gained when this essay – an essay that appeared in the journal *Diacritics* in 2002, entitled "Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching" – is read together with the chapter titled "Literature" in her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.

"Three Women's Texts" marks a central concern guiding much of Spivak's work in the spirit of what I will call "A Critique of Pedagogy." If one polled academics to gauge the significance of Spivak's contributions, they would probably list a combination of two essays ("Three Women's Texts" and "Can the Subaltern Speak?"), a term ("strategic essentialism") and her translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. Some, more familiar with her oeuvre would also point to her translations of

the stories of Mahashweta Devi, her intellectual forays into the arena of transnational feminism, her more recent engagements with ethics in general, and the ethico-political ramifications of the discourses of alterity in particular. I could argue that what undergirds so much of Spivak's provocative interventions is an engagement with pedagogy. Pedagogy drives much of Spivak's work – the art of teaching; the implications of teaching; the negotiations between subjects during teaching. Teaching as a form of learning is one of her overriding concerns and one that emerges as a central premise in the essay that first appears in 1985 in the seminal journal *Critical Inquiry* and then is widely anthologized and referenced. When one teaches "Three Women's Texts" today in a classroom, its premise may seem both obvious and not quite provocative. The idea that colonialism and imperialism saturate many canonical nineteenth-century novels and that the writing and circulation of said novels was deeply imbricated in the power/knowledge language games that were constitutive of colonial discourse – what the essay terms "the worlding of the third world" – now seems unexceptional. In 1985 it wasn't. In fact it was deemed radical, controversial even, and it grew out of a particular critique of colonial discourse that has its roots in Edward Said's *Orientalism*.³

What was unique about this essay was the critique of an Anglo-American feminism that, Spivak argued, reproduced the "axioms of imperialism" ("Three Women's Texts," 114) in its exemplification of the female subject of European and Anglo-American literature as the normative feminist subject.⁴ In other words, while a US-based academic audience, with different ideological leanings than, say, a certain Erin O'Connor, may have been radically excited by a discussion about the imperialistic ideological underpinnings of the English nineteenth-century novel, they may have been less satisfied with the critique of the imperialistic overtones of a benevolent Anglo-American feminism that, in its haste to produce the normative feminist literary subject, reproduced the very patriarchal structure it was seeking to critique. The white man's burden was replaced by the white woman's burden, and female characters of color (those who actually bore the brunt of empire building) remained locked in the attic while white female characters were liberated to be read in diverse fashion in order to enable a critique of western patriarchy. However, while critics may find fault with some of Spivak's claims in this essay, her larger argument still resonates some 20-plus years later.

The original essay revolved around interpretations of three novels – Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* – the first as a novel that locates what Spivak calls the “structural motors” (“Three Women's Texts,” 244) of the worlding of the third world; the second as that which reinscripts by including what *Jane Eyre* brackets in such a worlding; and *Frankenstein* as that which provides an analysis through deconstruction of such worldings. It is a tripartite analysis that is concerned with exploring the discursive reaches of the axiom “imperialism as a social mission” in nineteenth-century literary texts, and clarifying its connection to a particular consolidation of feminist individualism and its refraction of the very axiom “imperialism as a social mission.” The various feminist approbations of *Jane Eyre* – the novel and the character – by failing to read Bertha Mason as a white Creole Jamaican female character with all that it could and should suggest, endorse Brontë's depiction of Bertha as an indeterminate figure that straddles the boundary between human and animal.⁵ Spivak's analysis of the encounter between Jane and Bertha, provided, of course, solely from the point of view of Jane, as that which inevitably places the “other” outside of and necessary for the imperialistic project of soul making, allows her to plot a fascinating critical thread that takes us from Roberto Retamar's “Caliban: Notes Towards a Discussion of Culture in our America,” through a brief discussion of the utilization of Kant's categorical imperative for a justification of the imperialist project,⁶ to a cryptic suggestion that “*Jane Eyre* can be read as the orchestration and staging of the self immolation of Bertha Mason as ‘good wife’” (“Three Women's Texts,” 259) if First World readers allow themselves to “expand the frontiers of the politics of reading” (ibid.) by engaging with a reading of the archives of imperialism.⁷

What is most significant in this early essay, apart from the readings of the three novels, and what I believe becomes of crucial importance when the essay reappears as a chapter, “Literature,” in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, is Spivak's cautionary injunction to postcolonial readers of our own narcissistic desires. Thus, while Retamar's desire to identify in the figure of the resisting and revolutionary Caliban the foundation (however slippery) of a Latin American culture is to be commended, we need to be constantly aware of the erasures produced in every “narrativization of history.” Thus, the postcolonial Latin American intellectual, who privileges Caliban as the repository of an indigenous, rebellious discourse, does so at the expense of other

voices – those of Native Americans, for example. In our inability to acknowledge our nostalgia for origins and in our desire to posit and occupy the place and being of such origins, we end up endorsing the “very individualism that we must persistently attempt to undermine from within” (CPR, 118). Looking back, such a cautionary admonishment to postcolonial intellectuals seems astonishingly prescient. A refusal to celebrate romanticized resistance, something that we encounter in Aime Césaire’s depiction of Caliban in *Une Tempête*, allows Spivak to juxtapose a postcolonial celebration of Caliban to Anglo-American feminist celebrations of *Jane Eyre* and demonstrate how both discourses are entangled in a less than critical legitimization of individualism.

In the essay’s revised and contextualized reinscription in the larger chapter, “Literature,” in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, the readings of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* do not undergo any significant change. Spivak does incorporate, primarily by way of footnotes, some of the concerns raised by critics of certain assumptions (perhaps presumptions) in her original analysis, particularly the departure of the character of Christophine (*Wide Sargasso Sea*) and the death by fire of Bertha Mason (*Jane Eyre*). I will return to these two concerns in a moment. For now, let me suggest that the main analytical thread that runs through all three novels is a charting and critique of the idea of “soul making” central to the imperialist mission. Soul making in its very articulation carries with it both the possibility and the impossibility of what it offers to the colonized. The civilizing mission seeks to make a subject of the colonized through the process of soul making by drawing attention to the very alterity of the colonized. The project of soul making, as conceived by Spivak, hinges on the deployment of her reading of Kant’s notion of the categorical imperative, “conceived as the moral law given in pure reason,” which ratifies man as an end in itself and thereby refuses to see man and every rational creature as a means to an end. This notion then becomes for Spivak a “metonym for (the) most ethical moment in the European eighteenth century” (CPR, 123) that is then travestied both in the imperialist project and in the discourses of present-day “Development.” In other words, the savage, the heathen, or the “raw man” (in Kant) acts as a limit case for the civilizing mission that seeks to make the other into a human. The limits of this make-over, as it were, is suggested in the wild figure of Bertha Mason, whose self-immolation is necessary for the preservation of the categorical imperative. In *Jane Eyre*, soul making is relegated to the domestic in the figure of

Jane, who moves from being ex-centric to the family to becoming the central figure in her own household. The novel can only accommodate sexual reproduction and soul making within the domestic by casting out those who breach the norms of sexual reproduction. However, there is a vast difference in the manner in which the narrative treats such outcasts. In the case of the wild other (the raw woman as/in Bertha Mason) the narrative accommodates through expulsion, while in the case of St John, who chooses soul making at the expense of and negation of sexual reproduction, the narrative reaches beyond the domestic to incorporate the death of St John, the missionary in Calcutta, India. As Spivak argues, St John's burning desire is to fulfill the mission of soul making, literalizing the philosophical mandate inherent in the Kantian categorical imperative to the detriment of "natives" in the burgeoning British Empire. Such burning desire is beyond the reach of the domestic desire that constitutes *Jane Eyre* and thus the imperial mission can only be narrated as a conclusion to the novel and only after the domestic narrative of soul making has been resolved. But, as Spivak points out, this supplemental narrative has all the characteristics of the Derridean supplement and gestures to the violence of the subject constituting project of imperialism.⁸

The violence of subject constitution is in many ways a key ingredient to the understanding of much of Spivak's work. More often than not, it gets cast as epistemic violence, which echoes Foucault's notion of epistemic rupture and discursive violence, and draws attention to the manner in which epistemology is inevitably used to justify forms of political domination. Spivak's reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea* illustrates this most clearly. In fact, by now, we all know that Jean Rhys wrote this short novel as a reflection on the modalities of epistemic violence. Thus, her attempt to understand the production of subjects like Rochester and Antoinette within a plantation economy – a microcosm of imperialist economics and politics. What Spivak seeks to underscore in her reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the developmental narrative that creates Antoinette in and through violence. Spivak focuses on the triangular nature of subject formation in the colonies for white men and Creole women by drawing on the Oedipal and Narcissus myth respectively. However, in both cases the myths fail to deliver the adequate narrative of self-development. While the failure to garner the Name of the Father leaves Rochester lost without a patronymic, the fatal recognition by Antoinette (renamed Bertha) of herself as the madwoman in the attic

leads her to set fire to the Rochester mansion and to herself. The impossibility of an appropriate reflection either in Tia (the black servant as imagined friend) or in Bertha registers the cognitive fractures of subject constitution. In a brilliant move, Spivak shows how such failures of cognition are underscored in canonical English literature on the one hand and, on the other, the manner in which Rhys's rewriting of the story of Antoinette can only fulfill the already determined end as written in *Jane Eyre*. What the narrative offers us is the woman of reason that is written out in the casting of Bertha Mason as a bestial figure in *Jane Eyre*. *Wide Sargasso Sea* fills in the gaps in the inherited narrative, offering the reader intention and determination in the character of Antoinette. But, as Spivak shows in her reading, Antoinette lives up to the Kantian categorical imperative while drawing attention to the impossibility of its survival for the tainted other in an imperial economy.

Spivak's reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea* does not conclude with a reading of Antoinette and Rochester. She extends her analysis to the character of Christophine, Antoinette's black nurse from Martinique, who is offered as a wedding gift to Antoinette's mother, Annette. Within the plantation economy, Christophine can be read as the furthest sign of alterity – a voodoo practitioner from Martinique whose mother was never approved of by the Jamaican ladies. Spivak's argument about radical alterity hinges on the figure of Christophine, who does not occupy the savage space assigned to Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and who functions as the voice of reason and reprimand to both Antoinette and Rochester. It is precisely because she breaches the representational mode assigned to the other in European novelistic traditions that Christophine must step out of the narrative. The fact that she does so fully cognizant of her place as a free woman who realizes that she cannot fight the "forces of Law and Order" (CPR, 130) underlines the limits of possible subjectivity assigned to the other in the worlding of the Third World. Spivak's analysis credits Rhys's text for refusing to "turn the other into a self," because such turns are necessarily narcissistic and can only remake the other into an image of the self, a reflection that is a refraction that shores up the incommensurability between the imperial self and its colonized other.

In a footnote (n. 30) and the final paragraph that concludes Spivak's reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, she gestures to Mary Lou Emery's book on Rhys, and acknowledges that Emery's suggestion that "the textual practices of *Wide Sargasso Sea* borrow from and enact the technique of

the obeah complicates [her] conviction that the other cannot be fully selfed" (CPR, 132). Emery's reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, with its emphasis on the quest for community and its fleshing out of the Caribbean cultural context, allows her to posit the possibility of a different unfolding of the self, one defined not through a "successful overcoming of obstacles and an increasingly consolidated ego" but, rather, a self that undergoes "the brutal loss of identity that necessitates new spiritual and political alliances in a dreamed of, magically realized, and chosen community" (Emery, 175). This emphasis on community allows Emery to produce an Antoinette who is different from the Antoinette reproduced in Spivak's readings. However, in the case of Christophine, Spivak still maintains that the "staging of the departure of Christophine" is necessary as a move to guard the margin, a margin that eludes the reader's tendency to recuperate the other in a particular cultural, historical, philosophical discourse. In other words, even when one critiques the disciplinary efforts of "soul making," and introduces "other" narratives to encompass alternative notions of subject formation, the critical reader must be attuned to the margins of all such narratives. Thus, while Spivak in a strange move writes in the same footnote that "she cannot, of course be responsible within Christophine's text (in terms of available psychobiographies)," as she has tried to be with the figure of the female subaltern in "Can the Subaltern Speak?," I must ask "Why?" Why cannot she be responsible? In fact, I would argue that Spivak actually is being a bit disingenuous here and that she actually offers a different register of responsibility, one that is situated, as she herself goes on to say, in a "non-locationist cultural studies, one that does not keep oneself confined to national origin" (CPR, 131).⁹

The Limits of Female Soul Making

This theme about specialization and location vis-à-vis a scholar's/critic's obligation will reappear again and again in Spivak's work. In the chapter "Literature" in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, I read Spivak's inclusion of Mahashweta Devi's novella *Pterodactyl, Pirtha and Puran Sahay* as an interesting intervention in this debate about locationist and non-locationist cultural studies. A story written in Bengali ostensibly about the Nagesia tribe, but in fiction "an abstract of [Devi's] entire tribal experience (IM, xx-xxi), it is translated into English by Spivak

and included in her *Imaginary Maps*, published simultaneously in India and the US. Spivak's critical reading of this novella, situated right after her reading of *Frankenstein* and before her reading of three masculinist texts, suggests that non-locationist cultural studies is not just about a First World/Third World, West/East, North/South or developed/developing (world) divide. It must be also about the binary within – the appearance of the Third in the First, the East in the West, the South in the North, and so on. The inclusion of a novella about tribals in India is a jarring intervention in a chapter that is about the worlding of the Third World, soul making, and the (im)possible representation and function of the native informant. Jarring, because it draws attention to the various modalities of being located. Is Spivak's reading of this novella a locationist cultural studies tied to national origins? Does her citizenship and her expertise in Bengali make it locationist even as her status, as an academic expatriate, privileged elite subject, make her non-locationist? Is it equally impossible for Spivak to be responsible within the text of a tribal character because of the lack of an adequate psychobiography? The answer would have to be yes not in an absolute sense, but in terms of differential registers of both location and responsibility. It is in the awareness of the dangers of the role of native informant, in this case as translator and reader of tribal stories for a divided audience, that we get another staging of the desire to guard the margins.¹⁰

The move from *Jane Eyre* to *Wide Sargasso Sea* to *Frankenstein*, and finally to Devi's novella, allows for not just provocative critical readings of the various worldings of the Third World, but also allows Spivak to reimagine the project of soul making. In *Frankenstein*, we get, literally, the aborted remains of the project of soul making – where man as god cannot complete his creation when faced with the image of reason in/as monster. The male monster is a version of the native informant as Caliban. In other words, if in other places the native informant is always cast in the mode of a palatable Ariel (the colonized bourgeois subject, the nationalist intellectual), the birth of the monster as Caliban, as "a putative human" (CPR, 136) in England, marks the impossibility of the narrative of the making of an Ariel out of a Caliban. Shelley, as Spivak puts it, "differentiates the Other, works at the Caliban/Ariel distinction, and cannot make the monster identical with the recipient of [the lessons of universal secular humanity]" (CPR, 138). And when it comes to providing a mate for such a differentiated Other, the project of soul

making must be abandoned altogether. The only psychobiography that man has for woman is that of female-womb-birth-mother, “the authoritative scenario of Christian psychobiography” (*CPR*, 139), a narrative that is grotesquely distorted when said psychobiography ends with monsters after mother [female-womb-birth-mother-monster] producing a “condition precarious and full of terror” (quoted in *CPR*, 135) and marking the absolute collapse of the narrative of soul making. “Here the language of racism – the dark side of imperialism understood as social mission – combines with the hysteria of masculism into the idiom of (and withdrawal of) sexual reproduction rather than subject constitution” (*CPR*, 134).¹¹ Perhaps it is the recognition of the failure of soul making that guards the margins of Shelley’s “great flawed text” (*CPR*, 140). The monster refuses to be held within the gaze of the master, what Spivak calls “an apartheid of speculation” (*ibid.*; perhaps “specularity” would be a better word?). It is precisely such return and recognition that causes Antoinette turned Bertha to self-immolate as she tries to bring down the house of Rochester in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In Spivak’s reading of Shelley’s novel, the intention of the monster to immolate himself must happen off-stage. Spivak seems to suggest that in rewritings of nineteenth-century canonical novels like *Jane Eyre*, and in novels like *Frankenstein* that provide a critique of the very cultural identity shored up in *Jane Eyre*, the postcolonial reader finds a certain satisfaction in the unresolved moments in texts, the refusal of/by certain characters to be contained by the text. And it is in the staging of such non-containments that we postcolonial readers recognize simultaneously the relationship between sexual reproduction and subject production and its very failure.

Earlier on in the chapter “Literature,” Spivak makes the point that the object of her investigation is “the printed book, not its ‘author,’” even as she argues that such a binary opposition undermines one of the most fundamental tenets of a deconstructive critical approach which would demand a loosening of the boundaries between author and text, undoing “the opposition between verbal text and bio-graphy of the named subject” as author.¹² However, “to touch [an author’s] life in such a way may be too risky,” because the life of the author being evoked under “my life” is as much a “production in psychosocial space as the book” (*CPR*, 115). As such, then, a deconstructive critical approach must be tempered with a historicism gleaned from feminism. But in a typical Spivakian fashion, she does not stop there – what also must be unlearned is the script of a US feminism that fails to grasp the manner

in which the subject constitution of female individual is interpellated as an individualist precisely by refusing to account for that other history – the history of imperialism. Thus the psychobiography of a uniformly coded militant female subject can only emerge by refusing to register the “other” female subject (native, subaltern) made absent from the script of child-rearing and soul making.

Reading a Subaltern Text

The insertion of a reading of Mahasweta Devi’s novella then must be read in this context though it too marks the impossibility of registering “the native subaltern female (within discourse, as a signifier)” (CPR, 117) within any emerging norm, be it metropolitan and/or nationalist. In other words, what stands in for the excluded native subaltern female (we have to look at other stories by Devi for that) in the chapter “Literature” is the named author – Mahashweta Devi – who circulates outside metropolitan, nationalist, and even regional discourses of South Asian, Indian, and even Bengali fiction and thus, as Spivak footnotes, cannot be served up as an example of a Jamesonian “Third World literature.” The biography of the named subject Mahashweta Devi as author (provided in footnotes and in the interview that opens the collection *Imaginary Maps*), I would argue, is another staging, by Spivak herself this time, of the desire to guard the margins. This in turn is exactly the opposite of what she has been accused of being – functioning as the gatekeeper of Devi for the West. And as always, it points the reader to the need to read Spivak’s works in dialogue – the incessant repetition, self citations provide the route for such reading and re-readings.

Why does Spivak include this particular story by Devi instead of the others like the “Breast Giver,” “Douluti the Bountiful,” or “The Hunt,” which feature central female subaltern and/or tribal characters. Female tribals are not developed characters in *Pterodactyl*; they people Pritha to epitomize the poverty and depredation of the hill region of Madhya Pradesh. The only substantial female character is Saraswati, the sister-in-law who is tired of waiting to marry Puran, whose “glance says: it’s your failure that there was no room for a fleshly, hungry, thirsty, human relationship to grow” (IM, 97), and who is astute enough to realize that the reason Puran has not been able to know her after “so many years

spent close together, [is] because there is no book about [her]" (IM, 158). Saraswati, Puran's mother who is raising his son, and Puran's dead wife provide "the conception of Puran's private life, delicately inscribed within the gender-emancipation of domestic society among the committed section of the metropolitan and urban lower-middle-class" (CPR, 143). An obvious follow-up to critical readings that flesh out the failures of subaltern or monstrous female subject constitution in novels that "world the Third World" should be a reading of a novel that provides an antidote, a correction to such failures. Such a reading might occupy itself with precisely a narrative of gender emancipation that provides the frame scenario of Devi's *Pterodactyl*. In fact, just as Puran, the interventionist journalist, leaves this frame scenario to climb the Pirtha hills, so does Spivak leave behind the narrative of celebrations of feminist truth-tellings. Her cautionary remark that even as feminism participates in the discovery that "woman or the racial other is merely a kind of troping of the truth of man – in the sense that they must be understood as unlike (non-identical with) and yet with reference to it" (CPR, 147), they must be aware of their own complicity in their own epistemological productions. Thus "feminism within the social relations and institutions of the metropolis has something like a relationship with the fight for individualism in the upwardly class mobile bourgeois cultural politics of the European nineteenth century" (CPR, 148). A reading of gender-emancipated narratives, however fraught, of women like Saraswati or the Sarpanch's wife in the story, who is a member of parliament in the city of Indore, may prevent us from deliberating precisely on the issue that "truths can only be shored up by strategic exclusions, by declaring opposition where there is complicity, by denying the possibility of randomness, by proclaiming a provisional origin or point of departure as ground" (CPR, 147). It is as one such example of randomness, of provisionality, that I read the inclusion of Devi's story in a chapter otherwise devoted to metropolitan texts.

I am not suggesting that Spivak includes Devi's novella as a sign of inaccessibility, as marking the outer edges of what constitutes a metropolitan text. While one may definitely read the inclusion in such a fashion, I want to point to this comparison that Spivak makes: "At the end of *Remembrance of Things Past*, Proust writes lengthily of the task before him, the writing presumably of the many volumed book that we have just finished. Devi's gesture belongs to this topos. After the experience of the entire novella the author tells us that the only authority of the

story is rhetorical" (CPR, 142). Spivak is referring to the author's note in brackets that follows the end of the novella and which states that the story, despite its use of geographical particularities, does not literally refer to a tribe or state in India. It is, the author writes, an "estimation" born of her "experience of Indian tribal society" that she has tried to express "through the myth of the pterodactyl" (IM, 196). Just as Devi refuses to museumize the aboriginals in her stories, so does Spivak refuse to museumize Mahasweta Devi as the authentic witness of tribal living and being. The author's signatorial note that exists simultaneously beyond and within the frame of the novella must remind the reader of the dangers of being a native informant; must remind the reader that a literary text about the margins should not be read as an anthropological or even a socio-historical document. It's only by recognizing that truth-telling in fiction is not exactitude (CPR, 142) that one can read postcolonial fiction from the margins within the margins like all literature (such as *Remembrance of Things Past*) and begin to understand that "reading literature, we learn to learn from the singular and the unverifiable (CPR, 145, n. 49).

While *Frankenstein* may partake of the genre of science fiction, we do not just read it as such. The pterodactyl is not just a symbol of a dying way of life. Devi's novella is not science fiction. What it offers us are alternative and discrete registers of knowledge production and hermeneutics – "for the modern Indian the pterodactyl is an empirical impossibility. For the modern aboriginal Indian the pterodactyl may be the soul of the ancestors" (CPR, 145). But the "may be" is crucial here because it is not only imagined as such by the text, but confirmed by the author in her note. The tribals, including the young boy Bikhia, have seen the pterodactyl. Bikhia watches it die and buries it in a cave covered with paintings that Puran the journalist, along with the reader, discovers. The burial of the pterodactyl enacts the possible burial rituals of a tribe before the spread of Hinduism and its burning of the dead. But there is no room in this novella for authenticating such lost practices; no nostalgia for lost origins. In concentrating on the author figure, what Spivak seeks to provide is the refusal of this author figure (Devi) to be appropriated as a native informant who feeds anthropology. Or, to think in terms of the logic of the Spivakian reading that governs this chapter: just as Shelley works at the Ariel/Caliban distinction in *Frankenstein*, so does Devi work at the native informant/author-function distinction by loosening the boundaries between Shankar, the tribal

character who refuses to be the native informant and instead functions as aboriginal resistant subject of Development; Devi the author figure who, while staging the “works of the postcolonial state with minute knowledge, anger and loving despair” (CPR, 143), refuses to romanticize said resistant subaltern subject; and Puran the journalist, non-aboriginal character who must, however tenuously, attempt to be ethico-political as an interventionist journalist who wants to advocate responsibility toward the subaltern outside the usually available discourse of the fight for rights. In other words, what Spivak wants to draw our attention to is a worlding that cannot be understood in the mode of the usually available master/slave specular relationships or their postcolonial rewritings, however radical. Despite Puran’s melancholic lament that underscores the ethico-political lesson that he has learnt in Pirtha, despite his realization that he can “no longer remain a distant spectator anywhere in life” (IM, 196), he must leave Pirtha and walk off stage – repeating with a difference the earlier departures of Christophine and Frankenstein. Puran however does not disappear completely – “a truck comes by, Puran raises his hand, steps up” (IM, 196) – to reappear in the narrative, the novella, as desiring to reproduce the inhabitants of Pirtha as “the subject of the elegy” of an increasingly diminishing way of life which refuses the logic of citizenship undergirding the postcolonial performance of the national subject and demanding instead that which can only be gesturally invoked, “aboriginal narrativity” (CPR, 146), one that may be poised to narrate postcoloniality in subalternity. Elizabeth Deloughrey has pointed out to me in an email conversation the following:

What needs to be emphasized is the narrative of the state that frames Devi’s novella as opposed to the narratives of empire that undergird *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*. Thus the shift with Devi is the failure of narratives of the state, via journalism, mapping, the census etc. I think Puran is a failed reader (and self consciously so) because of that moment when he looks into the pterodactyl’s eyes and recognizes both the creature’s alterity and narrative’s failure. Does Devi’s novella then lie outside the trajectory of soul making absolutely? It is the best representation of planetarity, literally prehistoric in the sense of prior to and exceeding both human knowledge and narrative. The problem of state narratives and their constant drive to incorporate and assimilate (land, people, and resources) answers your question about how we interpret the indigenous refusal to relocate and thus survive. In other words, I think it’s Devi’s genius in

implicating her own writing and project within the recuperative/redemption drive of the state. If she gave us the redemption of the community it would be the same assimilating state narrative (more subjects for the census), more Indian citizens, more world citizens to account for as part of the reader's knowledge. The lack of resolution, the anxiety that it produces, and her refusal to provide a 'logical' and accessible narrative of survival in some ways is the only answer if she's going to uphold her own critique about the limits of knowledge and representation (hers and ours).

Spivak reads both Puran and Devi as writers/narrators who understand the precarious predicament underlining the translation of the processes of aboriginal storytelling and interpretation. Puran's understanding of the refusal of the tribals to participate in the agenda of development is not the same as the narrative of refusal by the tribals to the agenda of development – they are “each aporetic to the other, an insoluble contradiction that is held in rhetorical suspension both within the frame and the central narrative” (*CPR*, 146). Devi is not Puran and Puran is not Devi – the two author figures however draw attention to the structure of translation as violation. While Spivak underscores linguistic translation on the part of Devi, who “constructs a unique underclass hybrid language of Eastern India and uses it skillfully to contrast passages in Sanskritized Bengali” (*CPR*, 163), it goes without saying that the larger issue of translating marginal world views for consumption by metropolitan audience demands a thorough and constant vigilance against what Spivak calls “sanctioned ignorance.” The metropolitan reader, even one participating in a celebrated feminist “third-worldist literary pedagogy,” (*CPR*, 164) shores up her lack of knowledge of particular historical frames and original languages, by reproducing literary pedagogy in the name of globality and/or hybridity and thereby refusing to acknowledge the limitations of understanding other modes of “subject constitution of the social and gendered agents in question.” It is in the acknowledgment of what is gained as a loss in such profound admissions that we can begin to move from translation as violation to “the ideal of translation as freedom in troping” (*ibid.*). Spivak's own translation of the hybrid language of Devi into English is one example of translation as freedom in troping.¹³ Another is her suggestion that we read Devi's novellas as bounded by the reaches of the European novel form as much as *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and finally her suggestion that *Pterodactyl* belongs to the same topos as Proust's novel about the act of writing fiction. It is by marking the turns taken

by/in translation that we can try to understand the mechanisms of *pouvoir/savoir* and the inevitable distance between the two when we are confronted by aboriginal narrativity.

A pedagogy that is attuned to the “structural effect of a limited access to the norm” (*CPR*, 167) can begin to articulate a cross-cultural disciplinary practice as a “specifically feminist revolution in habits of thought and intervention through a persistent critical [pedagogical] presence” (*CPR*, 168). Such a critical practice would demand of feminists, Third World and otherwise, but especially those of us who may be appropriated to function as an alibi for the developing world in the developed, to speak for the margins as a representative of the margins, a recognition in complicity of “the thoroughly stratified larger theater of the South, the stage of so-called de-colonization, equal rights of historical, geographical, linguistic specificity and theoretical agency” (*ibid.*). Feminism and feminism alone (and vehemently not mainstream feminism) for Spivak can deconstruct masculinist universalism as well as correct the errant performances of feminist practices that reinscribe literary “heroines of the North Atlantic traditions in a singular and individualist way and the collective presence of women elsewhere in a pluralized and inchoate fashion” (*ibid.*). If feminism continues to participate in a postcolonialism always cast as migrant hybridism, “the South is once again in shadow; the diasporic stands in for the native informant” (*CPR*, 169). The inclusion of Devi’s novella *Pterodactyl* in a chapter on literature that begins with a deconstruction of the tropes of a masculinist individualism recast in female robes is a challenge to critical practices that continue to domesticate the South for a palatable consumption in/by the North.

Spivak cautions us against consigning postcoloniality as an illegible subalternity on the one hand and enshrining postcolonialism as overtly legible migrant hybridity on the other. Not afraid of the word “methodology,” Spivak offers a few substantive suggestions that could allow us to find our way out of the “double bind of Eurocentric arrogance or unexamined nativism” (*CPR*, 173). Trying to methodologically and critically read one’s way out of a double bind is more productive than assuming a unilateral formula for all decodings of diversity. First, one must distinguish between internal colonization in metropolitan spaces and colonialism. Second, one must discriminate between colonialism, neocolonialism, and postcoloniality. Third, one must be aware of the ease with which we gravitate towards dominant and normative systems of representation to secure cultural explanations for other spaces.

The starting point for any engagement with the other in a literary context – in the teaching of literature from the margins and in the teaching of the representation of the margins in the literatures from the metropolitan centers – must be in the acknowledgment of a double gesture. In Spivak's words the charge goes like this: "begin where you are; but, when in search of absolute justification, remember that the margin as such is the impossible boundary marking off the wholly other, and the encounter with the wholly other, as it may be figured, has an unpredictable relationship to our ethical rules" (ibid.). I would argue that in Devi's novella there can be no representation of the named marginal since it defies the narrative representational economy of both the empire and the postcolonial nation-state. However, in order to complete the narrative of soul making and subject formation in the worlding of the Third World that initiates Spivak's reading of nineteenth-century canonical texts, she returns in the end to a rewriting of a "pure" example of the literary representation of the colonization of other spaces – *Robinson Crusoe*. Spivak turns to J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, "which reopens two English texts in which the early eighteenth century tries to constitute marginality" (CPR, 172), *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana*.

Reading in the Margins of Postcoloniality

Spivak's introduction of Devi's novella in this chapter on "Literature" that is devoted to canonical writers may be read as an example of a marking of the "margins as such," a cautionary inclusion dictated by our pedagogical desire always to want to encompass the other in the name of multiculturalism, even of the most critical stripe. If *Pterodactyl* marks one end of the impossibility of the narrative of soul making, then Coetzee's *Foe* marks another. The reading of *Foe* is the most pedagogical in tone perhaps because the novel itself is an illustration of pedagogical metafiction of the best kind. In fact, Spivak ends her chapter with an anecdote about a colleague who tentatively gestures to the impossibility of politics in a metafictional novel: "I quite like metafiction, but ..." (CPR, 197). It is this ellipsis that Spivak fills in with her reading of the novel to show that it is precisely metafictionality that allows the novel to represent "the staging of the emergence of the experience of the impossible" in the figuration of the voiceless Friday.¹⁴ Spivak urges us to read the novel in a truly deconstructive mode, one that demands of

the postcolonial critic to say “no to a structure (one determined by the imperatives of nineteenth-century British imperialism) that one critiques yet inhabits intimately ... of which postcoloniality is a historical case” (CPR, 191).¹⁵ The recognition of this impossible inhabiting is what could allow postcolonial critics to pay attention to the repositioned figure of Friday in *Foe* as “the curious guardian at the margin who will not inform” (CPR, 190). As such, Friday is differently imagined from Christophine in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Christophine is envisaged by Rhys as the guardian of the margin and is therefore allowed voice within the main text. She speaks from the margins to the center in the language of the center but then must withdraw, since such penetration of the center by the margins necessarily entails consequences of which Christophine is well aware. Such margin-center interactions are rendered impossible in *Foe* because Friday is not a guardian of the margins but a guardian *at* the margins. In other words, the marginal text is literalized in the loss of Friday’s tongue and this loss produces an itinerary of silencing that cannot be traced within the novel. The silencing that can be made audible is, paradoxically, the spectral narrative of mothering that haunts both Susan Barton and the novel. Foe’s refusal (as both the title of the postcolonial novel and as a shorthand for the writer Daniel Defoe) to father the novel that Barton brings him, and his insistence on writing Barton’s story in five parts where, in the island story, it merely functions as an interlude (and not a story in itself), is a violent example of a postcolonial literary patricide. *Foe* demands a literary existence outside its relationship to *Robinson Crusoe*, and therefore it marks the (im)possible existence of that text. With the island not being a story in itself, *Foe*, Spivak argues, wishes to bracket the history of the empire and instead concentrate on the other story – about female individualism and entrepreneurship that that history has suppressed. The character Foe, as author, wants to write the story of Susan Barton as *The Female Castaway*. Susan Barton wants him to write the story as *Robinson Crusoe*. What we get is *Foe* by way of a “reopening [of] two English texts in which the early eighteenth century tried to constitute marginality: Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxanna*” (CPR, 174). *Foe* renders Roxanna as Susan Barton venturing beyond the bourgeois stronghold – into the “new cartography of the space of conquest” in search of her daughter. She ends up on the island as a representation of a “historically implausible but politically provocative revision ... [that] of the bourgeois individualist woman in early capitalism as the agent of an other directed ethics rather

than as a combatant in the preferential ethics of self interest" (CPR, 182). In other words, while Susan Barton may have ventured out into the new space of conquest in order to world that world via the enterprise of soul making as articulated in the search of mother for lost daughter, her relationship with Crusoe on the island codes her as a "woman giving pleasure, without the usual affective charge, *as use-value, in need*" (PR, 182). The refusal to claim the daughter who haunts her doorstep upon her return to London invalidates the mother-daughter sub-plot that Foe wants to validate. Spivak's brilliant analysis of the rewriting of the canonical texts of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana* – which are overdetermined by the marking of time as *Foe* that "seems interested in space rather than time, as it stages the difficulties of a time keeping investigation before a space that will not yield its inscription" (CPR, 178) – notes the dismissal by the yet nascent subject of capitalist agency of woman as woman outside of the marriage plot by woman herself. Susan Barton does not want her story as mother to be told, but she also does not understand the value of the inscription of her story as female agent authoring her own story which encompasses both the affective value of mothering and the ambitions of possessive female individualism. While *Foe* refuses to narrate the colonial text of *Robinson Crusoe*, it attempts to rescue the narrative of mothering from the European patriarchal coding. But the overdetermined nature of both narratives makes it impossible for either a dislocation of the two or a seamless traversing of both. An easy political reading would produce a politics founded "on a continuous overdetermined multiplicity of agencies" (CPR, 183). In Spivak's reading, however, *Foe* marks an aporia in the center, an aporia that is oxymoronically represented in terms of the making of narrative itself. As such, in the textual space of *Foe*, neither *Robinson Crusoe*, where the frame narrative is capitalism and colony, nor *The Female Castaway*, where the frame narrative is the mother-daughter story, can occupy a continuous space. Susan Barton as an "other" directed ethico-political character seeks to break this binary opposition by broaching the real margin that has been haunting the text since its first page.¹⁶

And it is in the real margin that this postcolonial novel grapples with the legacy of soul making that undergirds so much of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imperial fiction. At this point, one must pause and look at the genealogy of this particular essay on *Foe* by Spivak. It appeared in a collection of essays edited by Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson – *Consequences of Theory*, published in 1991. The blurb at the

back of this book situates the essays in the wake of the theory boom of the 1970s that provoked a hostile reaction in the '80s'. The contributors to this collection argue for the necessity for theory not as a method or a system that provides answers, but as the "interrogative process of critical thinking." Spivak's essay is described as that which focuses on marginality and as mediation on the forms and styles necessary to rethink the category of marginality in the world of the 1990s. The thrust of the essay, according to Johnson, lies in its cautionary philosophical remarks on the use value of the margins as resistance when they become too easily mainstreamed and commodified. The last word of the introduction is given to Spivak who, according to Johnson, asserts: "[T]heory is always off the mark, but without it we would have nothing to (un)do" (xiii). So the reading of *Foe* is a theoretical exercise that shows how a South African white author writing under apartheid attempts an imaginative rendition of the guardians of the margins. When this essay is incorporated as the last section of the chapter "Literature," which begins with the idea of the fictional worlding of the Third World through the civilizing imperatives of soul making, we are made to realize that just as theory is always off the mark, so is the representation of the guardian of the margins as a black man whose tongue has supposedly been cut off and who can only voice the sound of H which is the "failed echolia of the mute" (CPR, 189). Friday's narrative is in many ways already written in *Robinson Crusoe* much as Bertha Mason's narrative is in *Jane Eyre*. However, what theory in the margins (the title of Spivak's essay on *Foe* in *Consequences of Theory*) makes us undo in Coetzee's *Foe*, or perhaps what theory has allowed Coetzee to undo in *Foe*, is precisely the narrative of Friday in *Robinson Crusoe*. In other words, while Rhys's rewriting of *Jane Eyre* as *Wide Sargasso Sea* seeks to write Bertha's story from where she stands in the margins, a story that must inevitably lead to her self-immolation in the house of Rochester, Coetzee refuses to write the story of Friday.¹⁷

Friday, as he appears in *Robinson Crusoe*, is on his way out of the margins by playing the native turned proper colonial subject. Friday is written as savage turned prototype of the successful colonial subject who replaces his arrow with a gun and is available to amuse his masters by playing the savage turned domesticated subject. Bertha Mason as Creole woman can only occupy a liminal space between human and animal even as Rhys writes her as fully human. *Foe* refuses both narratives. *Foe* crosses that liminal space occupied by Bertha in *Wide Sargasso Sea*,

but in crossing that space, Foe refuses to yield up a “native” voice, even a “native” voice of/in subalternity. As Spivak notes, Friday is “the unemphatic agent of withholding in the text” (*CPR*, 190). I must insist that withholding is not the same as a refusal to disclose or even a marked silence that cannot or even perhaps must not be read along the lines of the argument about silences in minority texts as delineated by Dorris Sommer.¹⁸ This is not an argument about the privileges of silences or the privileging of silence as speech. Spivak is absolutely clear about this when she says:

[F]or every territorial space that is value coded by colonialism *and* every command of metropolitan anti-colonialism for the native to yield his “voice,” there is a space of withholding, marked by a secret that may not be a secret but cannot be unlocked. “The native” whatever that might mean, is not only a victim, but also an agent. The curious guardian at the margin who will not inform. (*CPR*, 190)¹⁹

The emphasis is on the phrase “will not inform.” This phrase is inserted again in the slight rewriting of this section on *Foe* in *CPR*.

In “Three Women’s Texts,” Spivak sets herself up in an adversarial relationship with Anglo-American feminists who bracket the existence of non-normative women of color in order to chart the narrative of female individualism. In her reading of *Foe*, Spivak mounts a critique against metropolitan postcolonial critics who too easily (a) privilege migrancy and hybridity or (b) seek to give subalterns agency and a script with which to fill in the historical absence of “native” voices. While a critic like Benita Parry may situate Spivak alongside Bhabha in their mutual admiration for deconstruction, I would assert that their use of deconstruction is markedly different. For Bhabha, deconstruction among other critical/philosophical discourses is indeed used to privilege hybridity, as in his deployments of mimicry as well as in his influential theoretical trope of the third space. For Spivak, however, a celebration of the affirmative power of hybridity or the third space is always muted by a simultaneous attention to the mode of production of such celebratory marginalized articulations, spaces, and/or characters. It is not that Spivak does not recognize the moments in which the “native” speaks, a reprimand aimed at her by Parry, (*CPR*, 190). Rather, she draws attention to the process by which such voices are given voice by critics of different stripes and the political and critical investments

that accompany such voicings. Thus US feminism in its “increasing interest in multicultural or postcolonial marginality, in marginality in the narrow sense” glosses over a significant problem: “that a concern with women *and* men who have not been written in the *same* cultural inscription ... cannot be mobilized in the same way as the investigation of gendering in one’s own” (CPR, 170). The neo-colonial anti-colonialist’s or the metropolitan postcolonialist’s desire to mobilize lost or denied “native” (primarily female) voices via conscientious ethnography may, on the one hand, fail to underscore the differential production of said female subaltern voices in the guise of healers, ascetics, singers, and artisans, and, on the other, elide the production of the sociality of a class of postcolonial persons who are able to communicate with each other because “we have had access to the so-called culture of imperialism” (CPR, 191). Once again, Spivak’s cautionary remarks about the impossibility of saying no to a structure that one critiques while being intimately housed in it reveals her attention to the imperatives of deconstruction in a way markedly different from Bhabha’s.²⁰ Spivak’s readings of both Devi’s *Pterodactyl* and Coetzee’s *Foe* are valuable illustrations of the desire to give both voice to the native as well as a warning of the attendant problems. Thus, reading fiction as fictive and not as history or ethnography (however conscientious) marks Spivak’s analysis of *Foe*. It pays close attention “to the rhetorical conduct of the text as the latter stages writing and reading” (CPR, 174). If, as Spivak says, Coetzee “plays the register of legible banality with panache” (CPR, 191), it is up to the rhetorically and deconstructively savvy critic to underscore the impossibility of recuperating the absolute margin in/of this text. That is what the last section of the novel narrated by a reader of unspecified gender and date suggests (CPR, 191). While a new historicist reading (like the one offered by Attwell) or an ethnographically driven reading (as one that could be offered by Parry) could produce satisfactory readings by recuperating the margins in the name of history or subaltern agency/voice, Spivak’s reading begins with the harsh acknowledgment that our starting point is “*all efforts taken, shaky ... and that all provisions made, the end will be inconclusive*” (CPR, 175; emphasis in the original). One needs to be constantly vigilant about the manner in which the “actively marginalized margins haunt what we start and get done, as curious guardians” (CPR, 175).

The most difficult lesson for those of us working in fields that lend themselves to an examination of the margins is that it is precisely our

centered examination of the margins that ends up reproducing them as fixed verifiabiles. Spivak's choice of Coetzee's novel *Foe* is apt, since both the novel and Spivak's reading of the novel illustrate that "literature remains singular and unverifiable" (CPR, 175). Thus, for Spivak, *Foe* stages the impossible experience of the representation of the marginal as such, not out of diffidence or respect for silences that should not be read, but because the marginal cannot be named in a text that writes its textual continuity within the text of empire. Friday is but an arbitrary name for such a margin, and in our recognition of the arbitrariness of such namings lies also our recognition, along with Coetzee and Spivak, of the precise withholding of such limits in the pursuit of knowledge. In a pure Spivakian moment of self-referentiality, she draws attention to a desired concluding sentence that would have been a rhetorical play with the name and meaning of Foe as everyone's enemy and thus function as "the enabling violator, for without him there is nothing to cite" (CPR, 193). Such a sentence, I believe, would have incorrectly read the novel as reconstituting the project of soul making that begins with *Robinson Crusoe*, extends in terms of gender to *Roxanna*, and is then revisited critically in a postcolonial novel par excellence, *Foe*. However, luckily for us, Spivak encounters another text – Derrida's paper on friendship. Since *Foe* is in many ways about the possibility and impossibilities of friendship which is the subject of the essay by Derrida, it alerts Spivak to something other than Foe the writer as enabling violator. Rather, the place of *Foe* in literary history is the site where the line between "friend and foe is undone. When one wants to be friend to the other, it withdraws its graphematic space. Foe allows that story to be told" (CPR, 194). Thus Coetzee's novel reduces the patronymic of its literary forefather to a character Foe, reintroducing the original name of the author as Daniel Foe even as it reminds us that there is no room for an evocation of the proper name for Friday. Friday can only function as the arbitrary name of he who guards the margins. A rewriting of the script of soul making and the worlding of the Third World by a writer who acknowledges his complicity with Foe and with Susan Barton is perhaps the only way that a national elite (an Ariel?) can encounter and critique, however provisionally, such worldings. The figuration of Friday as a character without an "intelligible" voice may not produce the sense of self-satisfaction that one might get from a voiced Friday who speaks back to both Foe and Barton (much like Césaire's Caliban?) and thus satisfy a reader who wishes for a radical and critical closure to

the history of subject formation through soul making. But as Spivak's concluding sentence to the chapter "Literature" declares: "The conventional highway to a politically correct single issue is merely the shortest way between two signposted exits" (CPR, 197). What her reading of *Foe* reveals, on the other hand, is the impossibility of such clean getaways.

In her various readings of literary texts, including the ones intimately involved in worlding or undermining the worlding of the Third World, Spivak seeks to underscore the discontinuity between the ethical and the political and the ethical and the epistemological, a lesson she says she learns from Kant and Levinas respectively. I would like now to turn to Spivak's analysis of literary texts with a look at an essay that appeared in *Diacritics* titled "Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching," an essay that, both rhetorically and substantively, wishes to critically practice in writing and thinking such discontinuities even as it endorses pedagogy as the central commitment for all of us in the humanities. To put this generously, the essay is perhaps deliberately discontinuous, constantly interrupting itself to push against the claims of the ethical and the epistemological, the ethical and the political made by a metropolitan literary critic extremely familiar with the canon, and thus intertextuality on the one hand, and the same metropolitan academic as teacher of fourth-graders in rural Bengal, on the other.²¹ The seemingly impossible task of incorporating both moments and movements in an essay that encompasses Tagore, Kant, Levinas, Coetzee, Shakespeare, Kafka, Hercule Barbin, and the Pratchi Education Report, used as a manifesto of sorts for the education of the disenfranchised in Bengal, may be deliberate to underline the impossibility of bridging the gap between the epistemological and the political via the ethical. In this extremely elliptical essay, Spivak seems to return to the idea of soul making in order to mark its (im)possibility in a world dominated by discourses of nationalism, globalization, development, and equality. Rather than provide an analysis of novels that are deliberate rewritings of earlier canonical novels (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Foe*), Spivak, in this essay, provides an exemplification of a complex and often fraught intertextual reading of the kind she says is the responsibility of the literary academic participating in a postcolonial scene of reading. Spivak produces a reading of Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* by weaving together a poem by Tagore, *King Lear*, and *The Trial*, and even Foucault's *Hercule Barbin*, to enable an understanding of the idea of fiction as event and task undergirded by the various deployments of the word "nothing" as

it appears, either literally or figuratively, in these various texts. Thus, even though the particular intertextual resonance with Kafka's *The Trial* lies in the lines "Like a dog?," dying like a dog and the death of the dog at the end of *Disgrace* is an enactment of the nothing that Lear confronts at the death of Cordelia (an interesting recasting of the nothing with which Cordelia refuses to measure her love for her father) when he says:

... no, no, no life?
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never.
(V.iii.306-9)

Spivak quotes the lines below from *King Lear* and I offer the above as my illustration of restoring "reference in order that intertextuality may function" ("Ethics and Politics," 19):

Indeed, in the first impact of the word "nothing" in the play, this protest is mimed in the clustering of silences in the short lines among the regular iambic pentameter lines. "Cor. Nothing, my lord. [six syllables of silence] / Lear. Nothing? [eight syllables of silence] / Cor. Nothing, [eight again] / Lear. Nothing will come of nothing; speak again" ([I.1.87-90], 20).

Later on in the essay, Spivak evokes Foucault's account of Hercule Barbin as another intertextual weave that seeks to articulate a gendered identity outside the rigors of heteronormative sexual reproduction – in the case of Barbin, this possibility is denied in the production of the castrato as "nothing" – as s/he who is incapable of participating in the normative discourse of heterosexual reproduction. In the case of Lucy in *Disgrace*, a possible "lesbian," raped by more than one man, her nothingness is not non-reproductive – rather, it is the possibility of life outside of normative and prescriptive scripts that makes the reader pause uncomfortably at the beginning of what appears to be an anomalous narrative for both family and nation in post-apartheid South Africa. The narrative seeks to move beyond the question of guilt and responsibility, beyond a sense of futility and or (im)possible shame without actually providing a formula for such a narrative, since the counter-focalization demanded by the reader of Lucy is never provided. Such

counterfocalization is what Spivak seems to want to provide through her intertextual readings of the many meanings of nothing in the various texts she manipulates in the service of her reading of *Disgrace*.²²

Thus the nothing that echoes in Tagore's poem "Apoman" is a call to the incipient nation for an active evacuation of its national identity, an identity that it wants to forge at the expense of those that it has disgraced for millennia. The disgrace of the other is a disgrace of the self and a disgrace of the country that must be mutually acknowledged, "my unfortunate country, you will have to be equal in disgrace to each and every one of those you have disgraced millennially" ("Ethics and Politics," 19), to even begin to think of the enabling discourse of human rights. For Tagore, the death of a nation born in disgrace – "the one you fling down will bind you down there" and "*apomane hote hobe tahader shobar shoman* – you will have to be equal in disgrace to all of them" (18–19) – may hold out some hope for the new nation that may rise from "nothing" – the hope is measurably tempered. In *Disgrace*, for a nation still coping with the effect and affect of apartheid, Lucy's nothing is not an impossibility but a possibility that refuses the affective-value coded in the body and heteronormativity of the white woman, a repetition with a difference of the affective value denied by Cordelia in her refusal to participate in the narrative of filial love. The kind of soul making, if one can even call it that, that Lucy's nothing eschews is one which has little to do with the discourse of human rights (everyone has a soul and must be saved). Lucy refuses to provide a narrative that delineates the tendencies latent in her words – "To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity" (*Disgrace*, 204–5; "Ethics and Politics," 20) – which may result in a new form for the object man à la Levinas, not one that must figure at the beginning of all knowing, but an object woman who can only claim generality by making visible the difficulty of the ethico-episteme and the ethico-political as/in the formation of the postcolonial nation after apartheid. Spivak correctly notes that, like *King Lear*, "*Disgrace* is [not] a blueprint for unmediated social policy. These are figures, asking for dis-figuration, as figures must. And it is the representation of the 'I' as figured object – as woman relinquishing the child as property, as always, and as former colonizer in the ex-colony. This is how critique is operated through fictions" (21).

The question remains whether such critique operates on fiction as event or fiction as task, a delineation Spivak makes early on in the essay in an attempt at thinking the representation of the "I" as object in fiction:

My general suggestion, that the protocol of fiction gives us a practical simulacrum of the graver discontinuities inhabiting (and operating?) the ethico-epistemic and the ethico-political, can, however, take such a figure on board. I will continue to want to say that fiction offers us an experience of the discontinuities that remain in place "in real life." That would be a description of fiction as an event – an indeterminate "sharing" between writer and reader, where the effort of reading is to taste the impossible status of being figured as object in the web of the other. Reading, in this special sense, is sacred. (18)

She goes on to say that in this particular essay she is interested not only in fiction as event but also in fiction as task. She then initiates her intertextual reading: "I locate in Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) and J. M. Coetzee (1940–) representations of what may be read as versions of the 'I' figured as object and weave the representations together as a warning text for postcolonial political ambitions" (18). So, is this intense and wide-ranging intertextual reading an exemplification of the idea of fiction as task? Is a particular kind of postcolonial intertextual reading – one that can bring in Tagore in the same breath as Shakespeare, Kafka, and Foucault – being provided to undo readings of Coetzee's novel that see in Lucy's "nothing" and in the text's refusal to provide a counterfocalization through Lucy a failure to indict the rape of women, the use of women to shore up not just nationalism but even nationalitarianism, the failure in the end to indict men, white and black, a scripting yet again of the manner in which women are forced to work within a defined script written by patriarchs? Are such readings being indicted as "warning texts for postcolonial political ambitions" that may in the end be mobilized for just another version of soul making that is initiated in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels? Is Spivak arguing for the necessity of counterfocalization through critical exercise provided through intertextuality that reaches beyond the usual canonical texts, so as to enable a reading of a novel that seeks to intensify the discontinuities between the ethico-political and the ethico-episteme by refusing the narrative of soul making as predicated in the story of Jane Eyre? Doesn't Lucy in her articulation of "nothing" disrupt, even

suspend, the inevitable passage from sexual reproduction to soul making that constitutes the imperialist mission represented in *Jane Eyre*? If St John Rivers dies in Calcutta precisely to make possible the soul making not just of Jane Eyre but also of the heathens, by sanctioning imperialism and its territorial and subject-constituting project, what form of sociality does Lurie's abdication of humans in the service of dogs underwrite? Perhaps his is a refusal of the civil society he is faced with, unlike (his estranged daughter) Lucy's, who perhaps wishes to bring forth a "scary beginning" out of the "nothing," a civil society where the passage from "counter-family to the family-in law" refutes the "active pouvoir-savoir or making sense-ability of imperialism" and an easy, celebratory postcolonialism (CPR, 120). The question that haunts *Disgrace* is the notion of what counts as family in rural South Africa and what kind of education is necessary for such families to reconstitute civil society. It is definitely not one that Lurie's colleagues imagine within the confines of academic protocols that dictate sexual behavior. Neither is it Lurie's (one patriarch's) almost comical abjection before Melanie's father (another patriarch).

Teaching in the Rural South

My reading of Spivak's reading of *Disgrace*, highlighting the role of fiction as task, is offered in order to make sense of the last section of the essay where Spivak moves to a "real" scene of teaching – a pedagogically instructive moment of the operation of the gap between the ethico-episteme and the ethico-political that is held in place in "real life." What is privileged in this essay is the practice of literary reading for fiction both as event and as task, for both novels and "real life." This privileging of a certain kind of reading is evident in the rewriting of an earlier statement from Spivak's essay on Coetzee's *Foe*, this time as "Literary reading teaches us to learn from the singular and the unverifiable" ("Ethics and Politics," 23). The original, "literature is singular and unverifiable," does appear in this essay a couple of times, but it is the revision that interests me here. The segue from literature to literary reading obviously situates the literary critic as the apt reader for ethical discontinuities as they emerge in "real life." While Spivak commends the Pratichi Report for its dedication to the education of the disenfranchised in free primary schools in rural Bengal, she reminds us that the

poem by Tagore, which functions as an epigraph to the report, is much more upbeat than the poem "Apoman." Here is Spivak's translation of the last lines of the poem and her reading of it:

*Nikhiler alo purba akashe jolilo punyodine/Ekshathe jara cholibe tahara shokolere
nik chine.* The universe's light burns in the eastern sky on this blessed
day / Let those who'll walk together recognize each other. These lines reso-
nate with what might be the mission statement of the moral entrepreneur-
ship of the international civil society today. ("Ethics and Politics," 18)

By the end of "Ethics and Politics," what Spivak indicts is the instrumentalized nature of ethical interventions that seek to improve the conditions of the disenfranchised in the name of public education. The sentiment is highly noble, but Spivak's question to the architects of reports, like the Pratchi Report, is whether such public education with its emphasis on rote learning, untrained teachers, and not very useful textbooks, can be achieved without an accompanying emphasis on private tuition. In this context, though Spivak herself does not comment on it, private tuition is in many ways the singular mode of education reserved for the upper class and the enfranchised. In fact, private tuition in the form of expensive pedagogical labor garnered by the middle and upper classes is what grants access to higher education for even those most privileged. Private tuition with the right teachers is the name of the game today in India. While Spivak's attempts at private tuition stems from the opposite impulse – providing one-on-one education through non-profit labor in the service of a different kind of pedagogy – and may lend itself to a different articulation of private tuition, she realizes that her efforts cannot be replicated at the structural level where, in the service of a democratic nation, all that one looks for is mere reading expertise rather than comprehension. What Spivak is able to achieve through her intervention, as recounted in "Ethics and Politics," is a moment of contact over caste and class lines depicted in a fleeting yet acknowledged glance and smile between a girl in rural Mednipur district and herself (upper caste, metropolitan academic). This contact is generated presumably by her desire to teach equality through a lesson in color chromatism – she places her brown hand next to the fourth-grader's dark purple hand and says "Ami ja, Tumi Ta" ("What I, that you"), in an attempt to explain the fight for rights undertaken in South Africa by Nelson Mandela. The next day, when she asks

the girl what she had been taught or what she had learnt from the previous lesson, the girl repeats with a difference: "Ami ja, tumi ta, raja here gaache" ("What I, that you, the king was defeated") (28). The king here can stand for the nation that perpetuates discrimination that the state through its laws and pedagogical drive can help overcome. When Spivak encounters this girl again four years later in another, upper-level classroom, she reminds her of the lesson on Mandela. It is then that the fleeting smile flashes across the girl's face. There is no eye contact. But the smile can be read as an acknowledgement of an epistemic moment understood as such in a structure where intimate glances between an adivasi and an upper-caste Brahmin is neither *de rigueur* nor *de jure*. In this glance, which is not a glance but a fleeting smile, unverifiable perhaps for Spivak as for us, lingers the possible "interruptive emergence of the ethical" (29).

But what kind of conclusion are we left with as we read the end of the essay and I come close to the end of my chapter? As Spivak herself acknowledges, the systemic change necessary for the transformation of this fleeting smile to effect a change in the free education system granted to the disenfranchised by the state is immense. So what can we retain from this illustration of fiction as event and fiction as task that is different from the intertextual reading of the novel *Disgrace*? In other words, what binds these two texts together? Is there an intertextual weave between fiction as fiction (the novel) and fiction as the story of an earnest encounter of the I and the other in the spaces of rural West Bengal? I believe Spivak recognizes that what fiction as event in *Disgrace* offers, through a refusal of Lucy's counterfocalization filtered (perhaps) only once through Petrus's observation that she is a forward-looking lady, and in Lucy's articulation of "nothing" as an emptying of the usual significations necessary for a recognition of the other, is an ethical emergence of a different (mis)recognition which could lead to a bridging of the ethico-episteme and the ethico-politic. Of course, the novel only rehearses this event as good event without producing a script for the execution of such an ethical chapter in the narratives of civil society. While it is true that literary reading has to be learned, as Spivak demonstrates so complexly, wherein "metaphor leans on concept and concept on metaphor; logic nestles in rhetoric," she also reminds us in the next sentence that "they are not the same and one cannot be effaced in the other" (22). In the other ethical moment, equally unverifiable outside Spivak's recounting of it, and thus a fiction in another sense, is

present the existence of rural children trying to stay afloat in the new and shining India where the gap between the upper and middle classes and the disenfranchised gets wider and wider. In this case, the narrative that could get written after the staging of fiction as event is but "the daunting labor of the political calculus, ... [where] we must begin with the end, which must remain the possibility of the ethical. That inconvenient effort is the uncertain ground of every just society. If the political calculus becomes the means *and* the end, justice is ill served and no change sticks" (29). Thus, as fiction says, or as fiction would have us recognize, the "suggestive smile, directed by indirection and a shared experience, is a good event, it has no significance in terms of the public sphere, to which education should give access" (29). In other words, while an intertextual reading of the novel *Disgrace* can produce, through the task of counterfocalization as provided by a literary reading, a possible opening up of the ethical encounter with the other in a yet to be imagined public sphere, the existing reality of the public sphere in India (or specifically West Bengal) lets us only perceive the "smile of complicity that passes between adivasi and caste-Indian, unprovoked" as an "immense advance [which is] neither a beginning nor an end, only an irreducible grounding condition" (29). The paradox of an irreducible grounding condition may belie the mongrel efforts of Spivak trying to generate a reading beyond rote that passes for education in rural Bengal but that is all one yet must offer.²³ What one can achieve by focusing on the paradox of an irreducible grounding in literature seems to me the opposite, in that it makes possible an opening of the vast vistas of a literary apparatus available to us postcolonial critics to foster multiple displacements in a work "for the remote possibility of the precarious production of an infrastructure that can in turn produce a Lucy or her focalizer, figuring forth an equality that takes disgrace in its stride" (30). If we learn this lesson, we would seem to have come full circle and finally refused the figuring and representation of worlding the Third World and the demands of the narrative of soul making that we have inherited from imperialism.

This chapter has concerned itself with Spivak's critique of project of soul making writ largely in fiction. The essay on Coetzee provides a transition to the "real," to the field of primary education in rural Bengal, a thinking through of the project of literacy outside of soul making. For the most part, I remain troubled by what I see as Spivak's insistence on taking the charge handed down by Levinas a bit too literally. Spivak

seems to appreciate Levinas's positing "the ethical with astonishing humility [when he says]: 'but we do not need this knowledge in the relationship in which the other is the one next to me [*le prochain*]' " ("Ethics and Politics," 17). But maybe I am guilty of a misreading here. Most recently, in a discussion of my chapter along with Spivak's essay "Ethics and Politics," in a session of the Theory Colloquium at the University of Maryland, a couple of students raised the possibility of the illustration by Spivak of this anecdote as a deliberate act of misreading. I produce here my edited reading of the thoughts of one of them, Jennifer Wellman, on the subject, which may provide another, entirely more satisfactory reading. According to Wellman:

Spivak leaves open the possibility that she has "misread" the smile of the young girl. Such an interpretation shifts the focus from one centered on the postcolonial critic as a different kind of reader to one of a different kind of misreader. Given the discussion of misreadings in Coetzee's fiction – *Disgrace* and *Foe* – could one make the argument that Spivak is aware of the possibility of her own misreading? Spivak reads the "signal" of the smile as a "symbol" but does not designate its meaning. When she does attempt an interpretation, she repeatedly uses the term "possibility" to describe its existence and meaning as a sign. It is also important to note that what Spivak ultimately concludes about the smile/signal is that it "is a good *event*: it has no significance in terms of the public sphere ..." [29; emphasis Wellman's]. Such a conclusion identifies this situation as a moment of good fiction. To see her own interpretation as an act of fiction could be a recognition of her own position as reader/potential misreader while simultaneously holding on to the meaning of her own reading.

Wellman provides a much more enabling interpretation of the open-ended intertextuality of Spivak's essay and one could rest here.

However, this is not the only place that Spivak has argued for the need for education for the very poor. Spivak has, in the past few years, really opened up about her personal commitment to literacy. In an interview with Tani Barlow in 2004, she says that she is "engaged in an altogether labor-intensive work, which has not been able to create even a tiny "social movement" ("Not Really," 141). This work has taken her from rural Bengal and Bangladesh to Algeria, South Africa, and China. She is "interested in the nature and quality of teaching, especially on the ground level because that is the largest sector" (144). She describes

her visit to a one-teacher school in north-eastern Yunnan province with a “native informant,” who, according to her, knew nothing. But she refuses to let the language barrier or “sanctioned ignorance” be a hindrance, and pushes and pushes back against resistant subjects. She “sat in the classroom and said whatever [she] could” and there again, we are privy to the recognition that Spivak desires:

[T]here was recognition that I had teaching experience, that I had taught in poor schools. . . . Nothing was hidden, but since I was talking about the fact that I ran schools, and then we were talking about teaching, and I was asking them to point this out and point that out, they had a sense that I knew about very poor circumstances, how one teaches, and so on. (144–5)

In this rush of words, one identifies with, and even celebrates Spivak’s enthusiasm. How can one not? But there is the problem of the role model again. She knows how to teach and “they” recognize that she is a different kind of teacher from those present. There is no hesitation or a registering of the misreading or even a gesture to the possibility of fictionality in the event. Since this interview approaches the subject of semi-state modes of “social work,” it is more difficult to encompass Spivak’s “work” in the discontinuities between the ethical and the political and the ethical and the epistemological. It is difficult to register in “work” the manner in which “discontinuities between the ethical and the epistemological and political fields are tamed in the nestling of logic and rhetoric [as] in fiction” (“Ethics and Politics,” 18). The distance between the taming and the letting go of the awareness of the discontinuities is never so sharp as when Spivak recounts, without apology, her chastising of the English teacher in China:

Then I gave such a huge tongue lashing to the English teacher in the Wumang school because he was blaming the students from the countryside for not being motivated. Yet a new person will go to that school and think, “Oh, I have touched the subaltern,” and yet I had just visited a much less fortunate layer. You must go and go and go where the lines of social mobility stop. (“Not Really” 146)

The English teacher at the Wumang school may have thought that he had really “touched” the subaltern, but Spivak, having visited even poorer schools in China, could give him a lesson or two about the

subaltern as the limit case for social mobility; the subaltern does not occupy a liminal position and one should never assume that one has “truly” touched one. Spivak’s work is not like the AT&T ad that tells people to feel good about themselves for having reached out and touched an-other. But one certainly cannot deny the self congratulatory tone in Spivak’s admonishment: “‘You will never be a good teacher if you think this is what your students are. You must change their minds.’ Uncoercive rearrangement of desires” (146). The sentiment is to be applauded; the tactic less so.

In the next chapter, I discuss at length Spivak’s engagement with ethics and outline what I see as the contours of a Spivakian ethics. I end the chapter with a reading of a memoir, a novel, and a short film to illustrate a Spivakian ethics of reading. I would like to conclude the current chapter, which has been an excavation of Spivak’s intricate readings of fiction, by mentioning an essay about the value of teaching as a segue into the next chapter. I shift to an essay titled, “Righting Wrongs,” delivered by Spivak in 2001 as part of the Oxford Amnesty Lectures. Taking as her point of departure the need for a new water pipe to deliver clean water to a community of tribals in India, Spivak shifts a discussion of human rights from the shared burden of providing material resources to the underprivileged to the right to education for all. As Robert Young summarizes: “Spivak argues for a pedagogy of the oppressed designed to enable empowerment, the righting of wrongs, through a dynamic dialogic model of education as the means to cultural and political action” (Young, “Introduction,” 167). I offer my reading of this essay as a way to, perhaps, answer my own reservations of the encounter read by Spivak in the essay on Coetzee and Tagore. In a fashion, “Righting Wrongs” may be read as an answer to a question that she poses at the beginning of another essay, “A Moral Dilemma.” In that essay she asks: “How is it possible to reconcile what I learn in the field with what I teach for a living?” (215).

Spivak understands human rights as being not just about having or claiming rights, but also about “righting wrongs, about being the dispenser of these rights” (“Righting Wrongs,” 169). The agenda of dispensing human rights echoes in many ways the charge placed on the white man under imperialism to civilize and develop. Spivak’s intention is not to “complain about the eurocentrism of human rights” or to “write off the righting of wrongs. The enablement must be used even as the violation is renegotiated” (ibid.). Under postcolonialism and an

increased globalism, the burden to redress wrongs has reshaped the face of the white man's burden. Today, members of a postcolonial elite, representing themselves as the best of a class of Native Informants, are among the human rights advocates in the countries of the South. However, they are profoundly disconnected from the local underclasses and there is a "real epistemic discontinuity between the Southern human rights advocates and those whom they protect" (257).

How does one make productive such discontinuities? Spivak's intervention as a teacher among the rural poor is one such answer. But she is also a distinguished, named professor at Columbia University and, as such, her position is precisely one of such discontinuity. A discontinuity that is not covered over but actually explored to make possible an education for the children of the rural poor "that would go beyond literacy and numeracy and find a home in an expanded definition of a 'humanities to come'" ("Righting Wrongs," 173). Spivak repeats a phrase we find in the interview with Barlow when she says, "education in the humanities attempts to be an *uncoercive* rearrangement of desires" (ibid.), a rearrangement not just among the rural poor of the South but also among the elite inhabiting great universities everywhere. A rearrangement of desire can occur in metropolitan students through the teaching of the humanities that could challenge the current emphasis on corporatist benevolence (180). Spivak asserts that she "would not remain a teacher of the humanities if [she] did not believe that at the New York end ... the teacher can ... attempt to develop in the student a habit of literary reading, even just 'reading,' suspending oneself in the text of the other" (181). One sees again the circulation of one of Spivak's favorite lines, when she says that the best and patient kind of literary reading is to "learn from the singular and the unverifiable," a training "not only in poesis, accessing the other so well that probable action can be prefigured, but teleo-poesis, striving for a response from the distant other, without guarantees" (ibid.).²⁴ Such training in reading would learn that on the other side of wrong is not just right but "responsibility," a responsibility that does not necessarily follow from an advocacy of rights giving. It is this discontinuity between rights and responsibility that undergirds much of Spivak's work on ethics and one that I seek to comprehend in the next chapter.²⁵

On the other end, among teachers in the rural South, she advocates "a pedagogy of the subaltern" (180) that challenges the routine of rote learning. For the metropolitan academic who wishes to think of the

humanities outside the context of the university, she must work hands-on with teachers and students in the rural South over long periods of time on their own terms without thinking of producing information for their academic peers (204); not information retrieval for anthropological work on the other; and not reducing learning to memorizing alphabets and numbers in subaltern schools. In order to suture rights to responsibility in an ethical fashion, one must emphasize explanation and meaning as significant for learning everywhere, not just in urban middle-class enclaves in the South. This is what literature teaches us. In case we think of this kind of learning as a western import, Spivak points to a primer written by Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, a nineteenth-century public intellectual from rural Bengal, which seeks to activate “the structural neatness of the Sanskrit and Bengali alphabet for the teacher and the child, and undermines rote learning by encouraging the teacher to jumble the structure of teaching at the same time. [Unfortunately] the “wherewithal is all there, but no one knows (how) to use it any more” (210). Learning through comprehension has now been reduced to learning through memorization. Rather than dismissing, as the Chinese teacher did his “country” students as incapable of learning, Spivak wants teachers trained to teach the poor in the rural South, to learn from “children’s response to teaching as our teaching texts that [then] we can hope to put ourselves in the way of ‘activating’ responsible pedagogical structures” (217). Learning to learn from below then becomes the mode in which to supplement human rights at opposite ends of the globe and, perhaps, the only mode that prevents us from falling into the trap of a “benevolent” dispensation of human rights from above practiced in the art of soul making.

Notes

- 1 I also bracket almost the first half of the essays collected under the section on “Literature” in *In Other Worlds*, the essays on Woolf, Wordsworth and Dante.
- 2 The journal *Victorian Studies* invited responses to the essay. Both Dierdre David and Patrick Brantlinger provide sophisticated, nuanced responses. The conversation stops at that point, since O’Connor declined to respond to the responses.
- 3 Spivak is very clear about her difference from Edward Said. Even though she readily admits that “Said is a groundbreaker in our [postcolonial?]

- discipline" ("Race before Racism"), she is also quite adamant in insisting that he is not her mentor. He is a senior colleague, a friend, an ally, but she "was a full professor three years before *Orientalism* came out. I certainly meant it when I described *Orientalism* as 'the source book in our discipline' ... but I meant it for the sake of the entire discipline" ("Foreword," xxi).
- 4 Susan Stanford Freidman has attempted to answer the question "[i]s there an Anglo-American feminist criticism? ... does it imply a 'school,' with a coherent system of ideas, common project, and related methodologies? Or does it more loosely suggest a confederation of 'family resemblances' based in two cultures whose dominant language is English?" (247). Freidman goes on to suggest that the term Anglo-American does not only elide differences between Anglo (British) and American feminism but also radical differences within the two groups.
 - 5 Of course this distinction between human and animal, or what Derrida calls animality in "The Animal That Therefore I am (More to Follow)," undergirds much of western metaphysics. Agamben picks up on this quite eloquently in his *The Open: Man and Animal*.
 - 6 For a particular elaboration of Kant, see Spivak's chapter, "Philosophy," in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.
 - 7 Spivak's attempt to read the "suicide" of Bertha in Rhys's *Wide Saragasso Sea* as a displaced illustration of sati or sanctioned suicide has raised some eyebrows. See Laura Chrissman's "The Imperial Unconscious," where Chrissman faults Spivak for unintentionally exalting one colony, India, which results in an erasure of significant and crucial differences between colonial worlds. Spivak tends to use India as a privileged site of representation and conceptual paradigm. This leads to the "indirect elision of 'black' presence displacing blackness on to a 'generalized otherness'" (40).
 - 8 In Derrida, the function of the supplement is ambiguous, or more accurately "undecidable." The supplement could be seen as "a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest measure of presence," or "the supplement supplements ... adds only to replace ... represents and makes an image ... its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness" (Derrida, 144) Ultimately, Derrida suggests that the supplement is both of these things, accretion and substitution (200), which means that the supplement is "not a signified more than a signifier, a representer than a presence, a writing than a speech" (315). It comes before all such modalities.
 - 9 I have always found this turn problematic from a critic who so insists on transnational literacy.
 - 10 In his book on Spivak, Mark Sanders provides an engaging discussion of the tracking of the role of the "Native Informant's perspective as narrative perspective," in Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (CPR, 9; Sanders, 13).

- 11 Bruce Robbins, in an essay entitled "Soul Making; Gayatri Spivak On Upward Mobility," marks upward mobility as "the erotic detour momentarily abstracted from its imperialist content" as the hallmark of the genre of upward mobility stories in general. He notes that "upward mobility can only happen as a betrayal of those left behind" (17).
- 12 This is different from the definitive celebration of the death of the author in a Barthesian mode
- 13 Spivak is even more daring in her translation (mis-translation) of Devi's *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*.
- 14 I address Spivkian ethics at length in the next chapter.
- 15 One can note here the value of postcoloniality for Spivak. In her essay, "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality, and Value," Spivak notes the significance of the term "postcoloniality," however awkwardly, to mark simultaneously the continuity and difference between then and now, old and new, inside and outside, which the prefix "post" makes possible. As she notes in a repetition of what appears in *CPR*: "the impossible 'no' to a structure [postcolonial], which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately, is the deconstructive philosophical position, and the everyday here and now named 'postcoloniality' is a case of it" (225).
- 16 Fiona Probyn suggests that "[f]eminist discourse, and 'the feminine,' are crucial to Coetzee's elucidation of this nature of discourse. While numerous Coetzee critics have observed that he alludes to feminist texts in his fiction, it is most often in the context of elaborating on the ways in which Coetzee is 'undermining' (see Mascaskill and Colleran) feminist discourse in order to critique a 'western feminism' (Anglo-American feminism in particular) that is inattentive to the ramifications of its universalising claims. Much as Coetzee provides a critique of Anglo-American feminist discourse, he is also inescapably reliant on these 'feminisms' and feminist writers for articulating a position of necessarily complicit marginalisation that he 'develops' in his own critical oeuvre. Not only does Coetzee utilise feminist discourse as a necessarily marginalised and complicit strategy, but he also adopts feminine symbols (fluidity, maternity, writing the body, silences, weaving metaphors), all of which are emphasised in the writings of difference in feminists such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, in order to suggest a space *beyond* the limitations posed by (phal)logocentric thinking" (Probyn, 1).
- 17 In this context, David Attwell's remark that the "basic narrative of Coetzee's oeuvre is indeed that of colonialism and decolonization" rings true. Attwell notes that *Foe* interrupts the sequence from imperialist violence, to anticipated revolution, to aggressive civil warfare that a sequential reading such as the following suggests: *Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country*, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, and *The Life and Times of Michael*. But otherwise *Foe*

"is no less concerned with questions of power and authority under colonialism, specifically the power and authority of a mode of authorship straddling the metropolis and the colony, awaiting transformations, that are a yet undetermined, perhaps indeterminable" (Attwell, 14).

- 18 See Sommer's *Foundational Fictions* and *Proceed with Caution*.
- 19 For an entirely different and intriguing reading of narrative possibility of/ in Friday's voice, see Lewis McLeod's "Do We of Necessity Become Puppets in a Story."
- 20 This is not about a good Spivak and a bad Bhabha. Rather it is about Parry's tendency to elide differences between poststructuralist postcolonial critics.
- 21 The journal *Diacritics* is devoted to large review essays on a subject, a field, a series of texts. In this context, it is interesting to find Spivak's essay, which enacts a series of intertextual readings in the journal. This may be because it was a special issue on *Ethics*.
- 22 For an extended reading of Coetzee's novels and their exploration of a number of issues such as interpretation, responsibility to the other, trust and betrayal, confession, and the problematic idea of truth to the self, see Derek Attridge's, J.M. Coetzee and the *Ethics of Reading*.
- 23 Perhaps Spivak's translations of Mahasheta Devi's stories offer an alternative vocabulary for an understanding of the epistemology of the other.
- 24 In "A Note on the New International," Spivak, reading Derrida's *Politics of Friendship*, argues that his use of telepoesis "is one of the shocks to the idea of belonging in a collectivity, for it makes a constant and risk-taking effort to affect the distance in a poesis or imaginative remaking, without guarantees" (12). For Derrida, telepoesis remains a messianic structure.
- 25 Spivak is harshly critical of "the training of children [that] builds itself on the loss of the cultural habit of assuming the agency of responsibility in radical alterity. It is followed through by the relentless education into business culture in academic and on-the job-training ... prepared for by the thousands and thousands of business schools all over the global South as well as the North, training undergraduates into business culture, making the supplementation of the responsibility-based subaltern layer by the ethics of class-culture difference altogether impossible, consolidating class apartheid ("Righting Wrongs," 193).

Reading Singularity, Reading Difference: An Ethics of the Impossible

Knowledge in Crisis

In the conclusion to the last chapter, I highlighted Spivak's emphasis on the opening up of the ethical through the praxis of literary reading. She does not quite advocate a training in the humanities for students in the metropolitan wishing to participate in the agenda of human rights, but she does come close to it. In *Death of a Discipline*, Spivak asserts the need for a new comparative literature with a renewed care for language and idiom that could influence and impact the politics of the production of knowledge not only in area studies, but in other "human sciences" too (5). Such an activation of the care for language would not approach the language of the other as a "field language" but as "active cultural media rather than as objects of cultural study" (9).¹ Literary and language training is, of course,

[not a] blueprint to be followed in unmediated social action. But as teachers of literature we teach reading, literature can be our teacher as well as our object of investigation ... Our own undecidable meaning is in the irreducible figure that stands in for the eyes of the other. This is an effortful task: to displace the fear of our faceless students, behind whom are the eyes of the global others. (*DD*, 23)

It is to imagine the human as always angled toward the other, to supplement the gap between history and politics via the ethical relationship to the other. It is to the imagining of a productive ethical situation where one can at least begin to begin comprehending the other that I now turn to Spivak's various disquisitions on the ethics of the impossible. In the last section of the chapter, I offer three literary readings as illustration.

The second interview collected in *the Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* dates back to 1984 and is a transcription of an interview for a television series (UK, Channel 4) entitled *Knowledge in Crisis*. I begin with this interview, which is called “The Postmodern Condition,” for a discussion of Spivak’s various contributions on the subject of ethics to demonstrate how consideration of ethics and the ethical has been central to her thinking. As the title makes clear, this interview is concerned with a particular crisis that marks the humanities in the 1980s – a crisis signaled by a resounding call to denounce the credibility of the grand recits of the Enlightenment. In certain quarters such a call resonated with another call announcing the death of politics, or, to qualify it, politics as usual. In the interview, Spivak sought to “argue about whether post-structuralism offers an intelligible position, and if intelligible acceptable, and if acceptable, liveable” (PC, 18). The liveable is what Spivak has always offered us in her various deployments of so-called poststructuralist philosophies, especially deconstruction. In being posed the question about the validity of the deconstructive movement for politics, her answer is succinct: “I think of it myself [she says] as a radical acceptance of vulnerability” (PC, 18). The emphasis on *vulnerability* is one that will appear repeatedly in her future engagements with ethics and the call to the ethical.²

In this interview Spivak engages with the production of a facile post-structuralist truism: everything is a text. This mantra is taken up cogently as she introduces into the discussion the term “paleonymy” (writing), a term used by Derrida to point to the utilization of an old name strategically retrieved to launch a new inquiry.³ Spivak uses paleonymy to suggest “the charge which words carry on their shoulders” as a means of thinking through the relationship between a verbal text and a network, a web of discourses that allows us to think about our subject positions as “effects within a much larger text/tissue/weave of which the ends are not accessible to us ...” (PC, 25). The relationship between paleonymy and subject-effect⁴ becomes quite clear in Spivak’s use of subject-effect to get at subalternity. Subject-effect for Spivak cannot be contained in/by a definition. Rather, it needs to be elaborated through an operational plotting in a heterogeneous and inter-linked epistemic system. Here is Spivak’s attempt at such a plotting:

that which seems to operate as a subject may be part of an immense discontinuous network (“text” in the general sense) of strands that may be

termed politics, ideology, economics, history, sexuality, language and so on ... Different knottings and configurations of these strands, determined by heterogeneous determinations which are themselves dependent upon myriad circumstances, produce the effect of an operating subject. Yet the continuist and homegenist deliberative consciousness symptomatically requires a continuous and homegeneous cause for this effect and thus posits a sovereign and determining subject. The latter is, then, the effect of an effect and its positing a metalepsis, or the substitution of an effect for a cause. (*IOW*, 204)

The sovereign, determining subject, shorn of its production as subject-effect, is the protagonist of the grand narratives underlying the programs of social justice. The great narratives of social justice have an end in view and they end with the freedom garnered by this sovereign subject. Spivak, on the other hand, along with other poststructuralists, especially Derrida, wants to "examine the impulse to narrate [as] a solution to problems in the world (*PC*, 10). It is not that we should not narrate or wage a war on narratives. Rather, we should see our impulse to narrate as "symptomatic of the solution ... [the realization that] in a narrative, as [we] proceed along the narrative, the narrative takes on its own impetus as it were, so that one begins to see reality as non-narrated" (*PC*, 19). The non-narrated, in this case, as Spivak makes amply clear, is not that which cannot be narrated. Rather, it's the very opposite. The incessant repetition of a particular kind of narrative, a narrative that equates ethics with benevolence toward an other that must be incorporated into the "rationalist narrative of the knowing subject," produces a reality effect that precludes the possibility of other understandings of the relationship between self and other. This reality effect then takes on the appearance of the non-narrated, making it always such and therefore outside of the very narrative that has repeatedly and emphatically brought such a relationship between the investigating subject and its other into existence.

Spivak's critical emphasis on benevolence as the guiding principle for the relationship between the investigating subject and his other, in this early interview, should remind us of her persistent critique of the anthropological paradigm of field work that undergirds diverse attempts to understand the other. Field work becomes a substitute for the painstaking labor necessary for establishing a dialogue with the other. It is not that field work cannot be done with a self-consciousness of its very limitations; but field work is bound to the script of

anthropology, a discipline that is necessarily tied to the history of European colonialism. As Stephen Morton has argued, Spivak's discomfort with the anthropological paradigm "recalls Derrida's criticism of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*, and his recognition that ethics, or the responsibility of the self to the other, cannot exist apart from the violence of writing. ... Derrida's critique ... is concerned with the way in which western anthropology often represents its object of knowledge – so-called primitive societies – as societies without culture or writing." (Morton, 61). The (im)possibility of recognizing complex systems of writing that already exists in non-western societies can be read as the mark of vulnerability. In the case of the colonial encounter with the other, the failure to be vulnerable, as it were, leaves one open to the structure of violence that is intimately tied to the structure of ethics and responsibility. The question that occupies Spivak's various engagements with ethics and responsibility is precisely this: how do we engage with the other in a responsible fashion, given that the framing structure of violence, under the conditions of modernity, determines the conceptualization of one's relationship with the other?

I move now to an essay entitled "Responsibility," which appeared in *Boundary 2* in 1994, 10 years after the interview cited above, and which has been republished in the most recent collection *Other Asias*⁵ with very slight modifications as "Responsibility-1992: Testing Theory in the Plains." I read this essay as an attempt by Spivak to answer the fraught question of an ethical responsibility to an other. I have a difficult task ahead of me, since this essay is one of Spivak's most difficult in its seeming incongruity. It has taken me many years to come to grips with this essay, one that I have set aside many times and one that I have never taught. However, when I saw its reappearance in *Other Asias*, and given its title – how can one take on ethics in Spivak and refuse engagement with an essay called (whether ironically or not) "Responsibility"? – I felt a responsibility to myself, to my reader, and to Spivak, and therefore you have what follows.

What is intriguing in this republication is the new frame that Spivak provides for her original essay. First, we get a very short paragraph outlining the purpose of Section 1, followed by a paragraph that describes, again very succinctly, her argument for the juxtaposition of the two seemingly different sections that make up her essay. Section 1 is Spivak's reading of Derrida's *Of Spirit*, the longest of all of Derrida's readings of Heidegger and which Spivak posits cleanly, almost

non-philosophically, as “Derrida’s consideration of Heidegger’s involvement with Nazism” (OA, 58). I am intrigued by Spivak’s contradictory address to the reader which of course I read as counter to Spivak’s stated intention.⁶ Spivak’s reason for including her reading of Derrida’s *Of Spirit* is to emphasize that the continuing structures of benevolence that undergird contemporary Europe’s benevolence toward the other could be a displacement of some of yesterday’s most vicious form of ethnocentrism. She is not drawing a parallel between Nazism as a form of ethnocentric fascism and contemporary forms of benevolent political activism in the name of the other. Rather, as she outlines in the argument, Derrida’s reading of the trajectory of “Spirit” in Heidegger’s work may give us a clue not only to Heidegger’s involvement with Nazism, but may allow us to understand that “European thought is marked as such by the ethnocentrism that took an extreme form in Nazism ... [and that] European benevolence is still burdened by this heritage, even when far from the extreme” (ibid.). The two paragraphs that introduce the original essay repeat the same idea, but in the first she tells the reader that if Derrida is not to their taste they can skip ahead to Section 2. But then of course the second paragraph tells the reader that if she does this she will not understand the historical nature of the benevolent attitudes undergirding European political charity in the name of development. Obviously the reader must read Heidegger, Derrida’s reading of Heidegger, and Spivak’s reading of Derrida reading Heidegger – this is an illustration of the painstaking intellectual labor necessary for any responsible engagement with the other.

In “Responsibility,” Spivak pushes against the Derridian impulse to necessarily, perhaps even inevitably, postpone the impulse to chart a narrative that would establish a causal link from a discourse about the other to the events that constitute history and politics. As she remarks about her philosophical bent – she rushes in “to supplement where Derrida wisely postpones” (OA, 78). I would like to suggest that given the significance of *place* in Spivak’s work and her translation of Derrida’s thought to sites not necessarily invoked in Derrida, she must wisely rush in. If she doesn’t, then she may be guilty of not just postponement but of trying to essentialize the “otherness” of the other and its irreducible difference. Because Spivak insists on revealing that the “(thinking of) responsibility is also the (thinking of) contamination” (OA, 61), one can no longer imagine a formal script of ethical responsibility based on knowing the other without noting one’s sense of complicity precisely in

the very script that produces the other. I read contamination as a formal principle that is necessary to hold us in that intermediary stage where responsibility *to* the other is necessarily caught up with responsibility *for* the other. Spivak refuses the neat suturing of the line that could take us from being responsible *to* to being responsible *for*; she literally mobilizes Derrida's use of the play in French between *répondre à* and *répondre de* to argue against the possibility of producing a purely theoretical formalization of the thinking of responsibility. Instead, Spivak wishes to argue the contrary, that "formalizing steps must be formally taken" only to show us the limits of such formalizations so that we could then begin the setting to work of responsibility. So what is being formalized is not responsibility as a discourse that moves from knowing the other to helping/enabling the other, but a formalization of the problematic of responsibility seen as an intermediary stage between an ungraspable call to action in the name of the other and a "staging, or production" of an event that follows from such an ungraspable call (OA, 61).

In order to understand Spivak's difference from Derrida, one should turn to the appendix of the book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. The appendix, entitled "The Setting to Work of Deconstruction," is one way to read and understand Spivak's mobilization and (dis)placement of Derrida's thought. In attempting to "interpret deconstruction specifically in Jacques Derrida's work" (CPR, 423), Spivak returns us to her deployment of "Derrida" – a name that binds together the numerous references to a Derridean corpus in Spivak's body of work as an illustration of "critical intimacy rather than critical distance [which] is a mark of affirmative deconstruction" (CPR, 425). I am here mobilizing Spivak's articulation of Derrida's relationship to Heidegger to capture Spivak's relationship to Derrida. Derrida's kinship and interrogative conversations with various philosophers from Kant to Nietzsche, Hegel to Benjamin, Husserl to Levinas is the subject of some of his more well-known essays. But as Spivak asserts, and rightly so, "the Heideggerian theme of the priority of the question (of Being, to all ontological investigation ...) is never absent" (CPR, 425).⁷

But what Derrida notes of Heidegger that is significant for our understanding of Spivak's relationship to Derrida is this: Derrida argues, from "The Ends of Man" (1968, translated in 1972, in *Margins of Philosophy*) through *Of Spirit* (1987) and beyond, that "Heidegger betrayed his insistence that, at the start of all investigative questioning

was a prior question that could not be adequately answered" (CPR, 425). Derrida's "The Ends of Man," on the other hand, points in a different direction – not to the (im)possibility of betraying a prior question but "signaling to an indefinite future" (ibid.), a future based on an acknowledgement not of the "guarding of the question," but of an "unanswerable question." Derrida writes this as *différance* – "a radical alterity conceived as a methodological necessary presupposition that is effaced in being named" (CPR, 426), a call to the wholly other that must be differed-deferred so we can at least put forward ourselves. Spivak makes a significant conclusion based on Derrida's own ad hoc periodization of his own work: she charts a trajectory from a Derrida who "insisted that all institutions of origin concealed the splitting off from something other than the origin, in order for the origin to be instituted" (ibid.) to an affirmative (a word Derrida himself used) call or appeal to the wholly other, a call that, rather than emphasizing the necessary inauguration of a putative origin dependent on the bracketing of the other, addressed whatever may be prior to the trace of the other "through the new concept-metaphor of the 'experience of the impossible'" (CPR, 426). In this movement from the presupposition of a radical alterity that is canceled in its very naming to a mobilization of a concept-metaphor in a prepositional form – *an experience of the impossible* – Derrida highlights through a "deconstructive embrace" undeconstructible imponderables such as justice and ethics.

If radical alterity is rendered legible only as a crossing out of the name of the other, naming the other as an experience of the impossible involves aporia, not a paradox to be solved logically, but an aporia that marks the impossibility of passage. In other words, how do we get to the experience of the impossible? The obvious answer is that we cannot, but we know the experience of the impossible as other in aporia, in "the experience of being passed through, although they are non passages; they are thus disclosed in effacement, thus experience of the impossible" (CPR, 427). This is the setting to work of deconstruction; Spivak writes this setting to work by rewriting Derrida's deconstructive embracing of the conjunction of law and justice: "Law is not justice [although] it is just that there be law" (from Derrida's "Force of Law"). Spivak goes on to say that the connective – *although* – has to be supplied by the reader "who provides connections in order to make the text work," a text that Derrida "philosophizes interactively" (ibid.; I have re-arranged Spivak's words here). The line from law to justice is not

gained through direct action. It's not a straight line, but one that is marked as aporia; and yet "justice is disclosed in law, even as its own effacement. This is the peculiar nature of deconstructive embrace. Ethics as 'the experience of the impossible' and politics as the calculus of action are also in a deconstructive embrace" (ibid.). I will return below to a fuller account of Spivak's notion of an ethics of the impossible.

The Heideggerian Non-Embrace

For now, I want to hone in on the failure of the deconstructive embrace of ethics and politics that Spivak uncovers in Derrida's reading of Heidegger's *Of Spirit*, charting Heidegger's "seeming failure of responsibility to his own thinking" (OA, 62). According to Spivak, Derrida asserts that in choosing to define Spirit (*Geist*) in his *Rectorship Address*, Heidegger removes the quotation marks around the term, a practice he had followed earlier, a prudent measure designed to keep the question of the Spirit open.⁸ However, rather than reading Heidegger's decision to define Spirit as a departure or a rupture, Derrida points out that Heidegger's philosophy has always been dependent on the question of the Spirit that was merely avoided or foreclosed (OA, 62). The definition of Spirit does open it up for appropriation by the very opposition that is set up in the definition. In other words, by defining Spirit in a purely metaphysical sense, as a spiritual force, it loses its place as that which remains "prior to – or outside of – all differences between subject and whatever is not subject" (OA, 62). Spirit now becomes part of the opposition it earlier attempted to at least foreclose, and in this move it allows for its opposite – a thinking of Spirit in terms of appeal to "obscure forces – forces which would not be spiritual, but natural, biological, racial ..." (Derrida, *Of Spirit*, 39), making it "a unilaterality of subjectivity" (ibid., 39). Thus, now, with the defining move to define Spirit, "the only choice is the choice between the terrifying contaminations it assigns. *Even if all forms of complicity are not equivalent, they are irreducible.* The question of knowing which is the least grave of all these forms of complicity is always there... it will never dissolve the irreducibility of this fact ... calls more than ever ... for absolutely unprecedented responsibilities of 'thought' and 'action'" (Derrida, *Of Spirit*, 30–40). I have borrowed this quote from Spivak's citing of Derrida and then edited it to highlight what I see as crucial for an understanding of

Spivak's own negotiation of the divide, an inseparable divide, between thought and action.

David Wood has argued in his introduction to *Of Derrida, Heidegger, and Spirit* that Derrida is "answering the charge of being apolitical, or worse fascistic, by attempting to locate the site of the political in and through Heidegger's texts" by "offering us an exemplary demonstration of how to read Heidegger, of why we do not need to resort to book burning" (2). Later on, in his own essay on the subject, Wood explains that Heidegger's *Rectoral Address* represents "a betrayal of an original project; Heidegger has forgotten his earlier careful avoidance of *Geist*" (73). However, inasmuch as we try to dismiss this lapse as a problem of memory or fidelity to the original, it cannot be disputed that when Heidegger charts the movement from specific avoidance or containment of *Geist* in *Being and Time* to "its active liberation in the *Rectoral Address*," we have to remember, à la Derrida, that complicity is inescapable and it is this, perhaps, denial of complicity, that readers find as problematic in the deployment of *Geist* in the *Address*. But what Derrida's elaborates in his most carefully literal reading of Heidegger's texts is, in the words of Wood, "the vulnerability of Heidegger's discourse to a military transposition." Wood goes on to assert that "[w]e can understand the resurrection of *Geist* specifically in the *Rectoral Address* in terms of the structure of vertical integration – between students, the sciences, the university, Germany and destiny – that it seems to facilitate" (77).⁹

This is in keeping with Spivak's reading of Derrida's reading of Heidegger. As she notes, neither deconstruction nor *Destruktion*¹⁰ becomes a matter of obeying and applying an obsessive typography of the kind that can lead to "unilaterality of subjectivity when spirit is bound by a stand taken in its name." The spirit cannot be bound by politicizing in its name and in Heideggerian philosophy the deployment of *Geist*, as that which marks an absolute separation of human from animal "cannot give itself over to its own animality" an animality that could be recalled as a limit to the active liberation of spirit (OA, 69–70). This is, as Spivak asserts, an indictment of Heidegger's irresponsibility to philosophy, and Derrida simply asserting that Heidegger was a Nazi, as some have said he should have done, would be a similarly irresponsible philosophical act, one that would have to assume the denial of complicity in deconstruction. Derrida thus takes on the heavy mantle of philosophical responsibility "with all stops pulled out,

without denegating his complicity, to present Heideggerian philosophy as *pharmakon*, what could have been medicine turned into poison" (OA, 71).

In her essay, after her reading of Derrida reading Heidegger, Spivak introduces her reading of another text, not a text of philosophy, but a textual scene, which functions as a *mise-en-scène*, of a dialogue on the Flood Action Plain in Bangladesh (FAP) set in place at the Paris Summit in 1993. (This is what I meant earlier when I hinted about the specifics of place in Spivak's work and her ability to take up Derrida elsewhere.) Third World aid to prevent disastrous floods, a staple problem in Bangladesh, writes Spivak, functions as an "allegory of right reason" (OA, 83). Europe, with the aid of the IMF and World Bank as donors, decides to redesign a "changeable riverscape" with the imposition of massive embankments (ibid.). A conference is then arranged by the European Green Party in the name of saving nature in collaboration with local (Bangladeshi) opposition in the name of saving the livelihood of local fishermen. The conference is set up as a dialogue, presupposing equivalence among the various groups gathered together to dialogue, between the forces of development and the voices of a developing nation, the latter given voice to by the intervention of the Green Party which supposedly enables its representation. Spivak chooses this particular conference because it allows her to enact the act of "knowing that responsibility in its setting to work can never reduce out the unilaterality of subjectivity" (OA, 85) even as she herself takes accountability of the difference in equivalence between the form of the complicity of the Green Party, on the one hand, and the World Bank, on the other. It is pretty clear to us now (it was pretty clear to some of us even then – 1992) that while "development is the dominant global denomination of Responsibility" (ibid.), it is a responsibility only ever translated in the rhetoric of economic giving, a giving that is actually "coercive lending, solicited by comprador capital and a compromised State, used as staging props for a nation seeking 'alms'" (OA, 83).¹¹

What Spivak unpackages are the two modes of responsibility in the name of helping the people of Bangladesh. While for the World Bank the "people" is a mere signifier for economic development in the name of capital growth, a "promised possible beneficiary of the trickledown from capital intensive 'social productivity,' even as it concentrates its wealth giving in the name of global capital to the consultant and the contractor" (85–6), the signification of the people in the discourse of the

Green Party is more complex. While the Green Party's emphasis on Nature must necessarily include the human as Nature and even Nature for the human, who/what the Green Party is responsible to and for, in the last instance, is "Nature." Thus, the "structure of responsibility/representation keeps the Party on the other side of the subaltern as well" (OA, 86). While we can and must make the political distinction between the two modes of responsibility and structures of representation of the people, we cannot just acknowledge the rupture between the Party and the Bank. We cannot ignore the repetition of the structure of representation and responsibility adumbrated in the discourse of development of the Bank in the discourse of saving Nature in the Party. This, as Spivak almost reluctantly asserts, is "the harsh lesson of deconstruction, always asymmetrical in interest. An abyssal double bind; to close it off is of course convenient" (ibid.).

Spivak could have concluded her essay at this point, marking her reading of the conference as an illustration of the abyssal double bind on the political plane, an illustration of the intervention of the Green Party as *pharmakon*.¹² But she does not. The essay takes off in another direction, in a refusal of the abyssal double bind. First, she makes clear that while the two faces of Europe's benevolence toward the other must be read as two sides of the same coin – "global and bloated on the one hand and earthy and ascetic on the other" (ibid.) – we must recognize that the World Bank cannot even think of "exchange" as the first formal principle of responsibility. Second, the World Bank in fact thrives on a formal refusal of responsibility as documented in the listing of the names of various Bank officials who belatedly declined the invitation to attend the conference. The absence of their presence at the conference is of course supplanted by the systematic and systemic retrieval of information about land and flood management in the name of helping the country and its people. Spivak draws our attention to the similarities between imperialist practices and development programs sponsored by the World Bank as

[the] implacable logic [that] began with the systematizing of land into survey in early modern Britain, the condition and effect of conquest and imperialism. The worlding of infinite geometries for control of the country [in this case Bangladesh] as information is its working out ... [an] exploitation fully transforming land into information for manipulation that will obey myriad minute rules of programming. (OA, 87–8)

This is the collaboration of Reason and capitalism, a “public use of reason – ‘white’ mythology” (OA, 88).¹³

Spivak goes on to provide asymmetrical examples of the interruption of the full telos of Reason and capitalism. The intervention of the Green Party is one such failed interruption from within the logic of Reason and capitalism. The other two examples Spivak provides – (1) the testimony of Mr Sattar Khan, who was produced by the Green Party, and staged at the conference as “a slice of the authentic, a piece of the real Bangladesh” (OA, 92); and (2) the (mis)appropriation of Bengali by a European, authoritative witness against irresponsible development in an essay entitled “The Birth of a Megaproject,” to make a distinction between beneficial floods and harmful floods, a distinction he claims is not present in the English word “flood,” – are examples that deploy the subaltern as authentic local voice, and as linguistic difference. Such representations of the subaltern, however, function merely as an alibi for European moral outrage speaking in the name of subaltern self-interest. On the one hand, the testimony of Sattar Khan fails to be heard literally because there is no professional translator present; on the other hand, a linguistic opposition between good and bad floods – *borsha* (rain) and *bonna* (flood) – is now part of the benevolent discourse against the development of embankments for the protection against floods, even as it fails to acknowledge that, for the local population in this water-borne land, the distinction between rain and flood is “persistently deconstructed, the one implying the other” (OA, 95). Thus no matter “how sympathetic the attention, to rob the mother-tongue of the subaltern by way of an ignorant authoritative definition that is already becoming part of the accepted benevolent lexicography is a most profound silencing” (OA, 96).

Spivak’s emphasis on the silencing of the subaltern returns us to the notion of subject-effect, where the retrieval of subaltern consciousness cannot be accommodated precisely because it is undergirded by the structure of benevolent responsibility. Subaltern consciousness can be grasped only “in the place of difference rather than as identity” (IOW, 204) and since identity is always being bestowed on the subaltern by those with a sense of (mis)-placed responsibility, Spivak’s essay seeks to restore a different structure of ethico-political responsibility. She introduces, without privileging it, a subaltern practice of sowing two types of rice paddy seeds, a practice perfected by the Bangladeshi peasant “living in the rhythm of water” (OA, 88). This practice was interrupted

by agricultural reformers who introduced a different variety of rice for a single high-yield crop. The farmers adjusted to this by shifting the time of the sowing of this modern rice crop to February–March. “As was their established customs, accommodating the play of land and water, they now sow pulses and vegetables before this. And now, at the reaping time of the new crop, the old flood seed is sown, so that in the rain and flood time, the fields are once again full of that submersible paddy” (ibid.) This is not an example of romanticized deep ecology and Spivak’s inclusion of such a local practice must not be read merely as an interruption of either the earlier philosophical discourse and the later discourse of development in the name of natural “flood management.”¹⁴ Rather, she wants the interruption to also be read in the nature of a permanent parabasis, “the peasant’s rather than the philosopher’s disarticulated rhetoric, a setting to work, not an explication of a philosopher’s dream” (ibid.) Parabasis means literally “a stepping-aside” and, as Mark Sanders points out in his cogent reading of Spivak’s analysis of the role of the native informant as reader, it must be understood within the “thematic of parabasis, irony and allegory” as that which “takes on the activism of ‘speaking otherwise’” (Sanders, 16). Spivak’s introduction of the subaltern practice of sowing is to be read as an instance of stepping aside, “an interruption of the figure in performance, of an assumption of a role” (Sanders, 17), an illustration of “‘ethnicity’ where the disruption of the rhetorical modes appears as a disruption of two value systems” (ibid.).¹⁵ Sanders uses the term “ethnicity,” borrowing it from Paul de Man, to suggest the manner in which the practice of ethnicity in the discursive mode gives rise to multiplicity. Ethnicity of deconstruction, in the de Manian mode, can be named then as an ethics-in-difference.

In Spivak’s “Responsibility,” the two value systems are not oppositional but differential, the one (World Bank) refusing even the semblance of exchange, and the other (Green Party) that attempts to give voice to the subaltern through an investment in identity (doomed to fail given the undergirding rhetoric of benevolence). However, rather than staying within the Derridean ethical turn of affirmative deconstruction by showing “how the terrain of the social does not attain closure, but is an ever incomplete, undecideable structure ... a crucial step in the subversion of totalizing conceptions of society and the development of new political strategies” (Critchley, 101), Spivak, I assert, by documenting the account of subaltern farming practices in the face of discourses

of development and activist interventions by radical environmental groups, breaks the philosophical frame and takes her setting to work of deconstruction “outside the formalizing calculus specific [*only*] to the academic institution” (CPR, 431; parenthesis, italics mine).

I began this chapter with two early instances of Spivak’s engagement with ethics to actually make a simple point. Long before one heard rumors about the turn to ethics and the implications of such a turn, long before one heard about an ethics of reading, about ethics as praxis and principle, about seeing and doing ethics otherwise, Spivak was articulating an ethics of alterity. In the interview that concludes Sanders’s book, Spivak actually marks her interest in ethics as dating as far back as 1978 when she was troubled by the question of whether it was possible to have an ethics that could be in agreement with the rationalization of socialism, a question that was later enriched by the ethical turn in Derrida’s own work and in the latter’s engagement with Levinas (Sanders, 105). One could also make the argument, as Sanders himself does, that, given Spivak’s interest in the gendered subaltern, one could mark 1981 as the turn to ethics in Spivak’s work. Whatever the dates, the larger point is that an ethics of alterity, even when not articulated as such, has been central to a Spivakian oeuvre. Making theory accountable historically and geographically has been her guiding principle, a claim supported by her comments on Marx: “Marx ... attempted to contaminate the economic by the ethical, and failed, taking the most fragile European constitution of the ethical subject for granted and basing a spurious internationalism on an example that could only be located in Victorian England” (OTM, 187); she implicates Marx for his failure to recognize the limitations of his own theoretical framework, both in its origins and in its potential applications.¹⁶ The ethical ideal for Marx was classlessness, the ethical subject he used as a basis of analysis was western. Spivak echoes Walter Benjamin in his sound reading of Marx’s trajectory of time, in which an ideal, stable future will be an inevitable end to a problem-ridden, unstable present moment: “History,” Benjamin writes, “is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now” (*Illuminations*, 261).

Spivak’s work is marked by an investment in historicity. Her contextualized critiques stem from a particular urgency to prevent criticism from floating unanchored in the vastness of time and space, and, instead, contend with the “here and now” of repressive political conditions which involve ethnicity and race, gender and class. I mark Spivak’s more

obvious and insistent turn to ethics in much of her recent work as a reclamatory act with which she explicitly engages with the question of ethics in terms of the possibility of reading the other. In speaking of ethics it would be easy to conflate the terms ethical and political, especially if one focuses on an idea that a number of minority discourse critics share: that the radical critic should be above all defiant and insurgent. It is important to distinguish between a critical ethical attitude and a political stance. Being political is not the same as being ethical in the simple sense that not all politics are ethical. This particular differentiation is perhaps easier for us to grasp than the other more provocative distinction that Spivak makes between the Call to and the Call of the Ethical in some of her recent work revolving around the proper subject of ethics. It is this primary distinction that I will try to grapple with in what follows.

But in order to forge ahead, I must return one last time to the essay "Responsibility" in order to stage my own encounter with a Spivakian ethics. Very briefly and almost in passing, Spivak suggests that if the subaltern practice of local patterns of sowing were to be incorporated, it would never be one of equal exchange because either it would be relegated to the domain of popular cultural practice, or it would suffer translation as traditional agronomic patterns that must be filtered through the language of "information command." Thus "in place of the destroyed culture of learning, a continually expanding amount of money continues to be spent, on the aid-debt model, to collect hydro-logic data, as if nothing had been known" (OA, 89). The reader does not know if this practice was ever recorded or used by either the foreign developers or even postcolonial subjects wild about development. But the example provided by Spivak serves its purpose, as I said earlier, as a permanent parabasis and allows her to initiate a brief paragraph on the call to/of responsibility. Here is what she says in relation to her depiction of the subaltern practice:

[I]s it possible to imagine that, since responsibility must bind the call of the ethical to a response, one must act here as if responsibly to the specter of "commune-ism" whose threat Development must desperately hold at bay? That setting to work need not call on a European left monoculture [here represented by the Green Party]. (OA, 89)

If the setting to work must not inevitably call on a well-meaning European left culture, what should it call on? Early on in "Responsibility,"

Spivak enlarges on the Derridean play in French (a point previously noted above) between *répondre à* and *répondre de*. It is the conundrum of giving an answer to and answering to an other by being responsible, a responsibility even more fraught when the other is face to face, since now “the task and lesson is one of attending to her response so that it can draw forth one’s own” (OA, 61). This is the call and the calling on that Spivak complicates in her reading of the Green Party’s benevolent intervention, a complication that Spivak presents drawing from Levinas, and from Derrida’s reading of Levinas. In “Responsibility,” the nod to Levinas is just that – a nod – since the essay is primarily about the failure of keeping the question of the other open, as illustrated in Spivak’s framing of the FAP conference by her reading of Derrida’s reading of Heidegger. In her numerous other essays that engage with the question of alterity, we see an increasing emphasis on the relationship between the Call to and the Call of the Ethical.

Thinking Planetary

One of the greatest contributions of a Spivakian methodology is the idea of “persistent critique,” – the demand for constant self-vigilance which often undermines the totalizing, teleological structure of the traditional academic narrative. In much of her recent work, Spivak has transplanted her methodology that “follows the logic of the rhetoric – the tropology – wherever it may lead” (OTM, 21), onto her work on ethics and alterity. She uses the literal-minded nature of her readings and applies it to the possibility of ethically engaging with the “other” such that we are placed in a position that makes it impossible to reduce the ethics of alterity to a politics of identity. For Spivak, the question of ethics turns on the idea of responsibility as right, not responsibility as obligation, since the rationalization of responsibility as obligation can only shore up *a* culture as reasonable – the culture of European Enlightenment – relegating all other notions of culture as inhabiting the other side of reason. This in turn assumes that the civilizing mission of the imperial subject has been entirely successful in obliterating “the politico-intellectual culture in its former subjects” (IRP, 50). Thus, Culture as Reason is opposed to culture as non-reason even as that non-reasonable culture is now evoked as a sign of the other in the name of a putative multiculturalism rather than a politicized ethical

multiculturalism that can “perform a critique, however inchoate, of the limits of the rational structures of civil society” (ibid.). The subject of Enlightenment Reason now returns as the “unitary multicultural subject” (IRP, 48) rendered singular only by thinking rights as obligations. This mis-recognition reaffirms the position of power from which such a multicultural subject is presented as the only possible subject of reason and thereby the only subject position available to both the metropolitan citizen and the migrant who wishes access to such citizenship.

Since this is a tenuous subject position at best, it can only be held up in matters of policy-making via a fatal reduction – a reduction that allows “unreasonable cultural practices (to continue) as a sign of freedom, [that leads] to the institutionalization of the interval between colonial and pre-colonial time, the negotiation of which ensured survival under imperialism proper” (IRP, 52). Spivak urges us to rethink responsibility as a right, a paradox definitely, but a paradox that must be sustained collectively. In her long essay, published as a monograph, from which much of the above is garnered, *Imperatives to Re-Imagine the Planet*, Spivak is not engaged in re-imagining the planet so much as she is in re-imagining the globe as a planet where planet is “a catachresis for inscribing collective responsibility as right” (IRP, 56). Is this merely a re-imagining? Spivak is being unduly modest about her endeavor in this essay, given that what she is arguing for is a fundamental epistemic transformation whereby the language of collective rights be discarded in favor of a language of collective responsibility as right. In such a re-imagining, there can no longer be the separation of Culture (as Reason) and culture (as non-reason), because it takes “the social practice of responsibility [as] an imperative imagined as intended from alterity ...” (IRP, 74).

Spivak states that she takes as her point of departure the “immediate postcolonial mandate of neighborliness rather than subjection” (IRP, 38), a directive that refuses the narrative of globalization since “it is achieved by the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere” (ibid.). What is globality but another mode of subjection where the virtual deployment of the globe prevents us from recognizing the differential modes of inhabitation in the globe. Spivak displaces the globe with the planet, with the caveat that she does not condone all uses of the word “planet.” The planet is evoked “for a position that has this particular (non)-relationship to the global ... a position whose defining other is the outer as such; dislocating a position that only seeks to control by digital quantification;” and “the planet is *in* the species of

alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan" (*IRP*, 44; italics mine). The preposition *in* is crucial because the planet is not being set up in opposition to the globe; it is not in a binary relationship with the globe, but is an articulation of what it means to think the other – "a planetarization of globalization" (*IRP*, 82). A definition of the human contains within it the possibility of the thinking of the other, of being intended toward the other. But being human also means thinking the self in relation to the other in time and space, a dialectical relationship which, in order to be animated, often seeks recourse to transcendental figuration such as God, Mother, Nation, Nature. However, these are mere names of alterity, containing within them both radical and reactionary possibilities.

Planet-thought opens up to embrace an inexhaustible taxonomy of such names including but not identical with animism as well as the spectral white mythology of post rational science. If we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us; its not our dialectical negation, it contains as much as it flings away. (*IRP*, 46)

Therefore, despite the push and pull between outer and inner space, between the self and the other, as human or as particularized figurations (Mother, God, Nation, Nature), what cannot be completely grasped in a particular orientation within time and space is neither continuous nor specifically discontinuous with the self. Planetary imaginings or re-imaginings demand a rethinking of our relationship with the planet as custodians, where the idea of responsibility is not tied inevitably to obligation. We need to think of ethics as a problem of relation rather than as an epistemological problem. We must try to imagine the image of the other as self even when we realize that the experience of this figure is not logically possible ("A Moral Dilemma," 221). "Imagination is structurally unverifiable ... the gift of time grasped as our unanticipatable present ... of being hailed by the other as well as the distancing of that call, is launched then a reparation, as responsibility, as accountability" (*ibid.*).

Since globalization is tied to the march of capital and development, the other is either erased as other, consolidated as the almost same, reproduced as subjects of tradition, or negated as not quite subject yet of Reason. Thus other politico-intellectual structures of responsibility

cannot be accommodated because of the investment in the unitary multicultural subject. It is in order to think the difference of the other that Spivak introduces the word *Haq* as both concept and word that means both right and responsibility. Aware of the problems of translation, Spivak notes that responsibility is an approximation of the meaning of *Haq* since it evokes my right to/of responsibility as birthright, as "our true being." Such a sense of responsibility, "a para-individual structural responsibility," eluded in an English translation, is the mark of many cultures that were cast as pre-capitalistic in narratives that equate modernity with the entry into a capitalistic mode of production.¹⁷ But perhaps because of its belatedness vis-à-vis modernity, pre-capitalistic structures of engagement with the earth continue to survive in a residual form and can be accessed in order to generate an imperative to re-imagine responsibility as right. The "planet" functions here as a concept-metaphor for such habitations, as well as "a catachresis for inscribing collective responsibility as right. Its alterity, determining experience, is mysterious and discontinuous – an experience of the impossible" (*IRP*, 56). One could say that planetarity is the willingness to let loose other epistemes (rather than producing them as/in indigenous knowledges for consumption) that undo the conflict between responsibility and right. "Our right or truth is to be responsible, in structurally specific ways ... the imperative comes *in* being-human not necessarily in conscience, *from* planetary discontinuity" (*IRP*, 58). Spivak reiterates this in her Amnesty lecture as well, this time in the context of a discontinuity between the rural poor and the caste Hindu in India. The rural poor, the adivasis, who share neither the language nor the religion of the dominant class, are not evoked as an internally fractured, classed collectivity in the contentious debates about human rights intervention on a North/South axis. In "Righting Wrongs," Spivak wishes to mobilize "subordinate structures of responsibility [that] base the agency of responsibility in that outside of the self that is also in the self, half-archived and therefore not directly accessible" (199). We can only know so much about indigenous social formations because they were not examined as offering anything to the march of social progress. They have stagnated and atrophied as a result, but even "in their current decrepitude the subaltern cultures need to be known in such a way that we can suture their re-activated cultural axiomatics into the principles of the Enlightenment" (191). Perhaps then we can hope for a responsibility-based ethics that can supplement "the

possibility of being the agent of the social productivity of capital as it is of the subjectship of human rights" (190).

It is this "robust notion of responsibility" (IRP, 54) articulated in one instance as *Haq*, that articulates "another" episteme, an episteme that Spivak suggests one can find chiefly in pre-capitalist modes of sociality. Given the victory of capitalist imperialism, such heritages are necessarily compromised. The legacy of "the public use of reason – shorthand for Enlightenment-model social engineering on the Left as well as the liberal capitalistic center – cannot think responsibility and right together" (IRP, 58). But this should not prevent us from thinking differently, educating ourselves in other epistemes so that we can rearticulate a different imperative to re-imagine the planet, a re-imagining that does not resort to the other in the name of tradition, a nostalgic retrieval of a past way of being to replace the present. Rather, it is to "develop a post-capitalist structure that must be filled in with the more robust imperative to responsibility which capitalist social productivity was obliged to destroy. And the imperative must be re-defined as *defective for capitalism*, rather than necessarily *pre-capitalist* on an interested sequential evolutionary model" (IRP, 68). Spivak's use of *Haq* is of course tied to her particular familiarity with the word and its concept, given its usage in the sub-continent.

But it would be wrong to read her deployment of an "other" imperative as *Haq* as speaking either in the name of Islam or for cultural identity. As she diligently notes, her identity-claims as a caste Hindu could actually rest on an eradication of the Muslim heritage in the nation space of a particular evocation of India. "I am resolutely against the reduction of the ethics of alterity to a politics of identity, *pro*, or *contra*, yours, ours, theirs. What I am offering for our consideration is not historically Muslim as was not the *Muselmann* in the camp.¹⁸ It is rather the lineaments of a social practice of responsibility based on an imperative *grounded on alterity*" (IRP, 74). *Haq*, whether tied to Islam or not (as Spivak notes in a footnote, the "Arabic word is much disputed in Islamic theology. I am commenting on perceived usage. *Haq* is also an Arabic origin word in my mother tongue (Bengali) and in my national language (Hindi)" (IRP, 91–2)) remains a productive example of a "social practice of responsibility based on an imperative imagined as intended from alterity," and opening oneself to its articulation could make way for an inclusion of an "inexhaustible diversity of epistemes" (IRP, 74). This re-constellation of diverse epistemes does not eschew the

democratic structures of civil society. Rather, the responsibility-thinking of pre-capitalistic structures must be mobilized within the abstractions of democratic structures of civil society such that ethics as “the experience of the impossible – therefore incalculable – is lived as the possible calculus that covers the range between self interest and responsibility that includes the politico-legal” (*IRP*, 84) via a systemic and systematic overhaul grounded in a mind changing education.

What About Levinas?

We return now to the literal-mindedness of the Spivakian methodology. The epistemic transformation she demands through education is a literal re-reading (perhaps a mis-reading) of the idea of being human, which is irrevocably associated with the ability to think the other, to be intended toward the other (*IRP*, 46). Such an imperative works not so much to deny the binary opposition of Culture/culture so much as it “assumes and effaces an absolute and discontinuous alterity and [becomes] comfortable with the inexhaustible diversity of epistemes” (*IRP*, 74). Now, the burden of social responsibility can no longer be recuperated within the colonial episteme characterized as the “white man’s burden,” and remains as an imperative for all inhabiting the planet. Once again, the act of translation is taken both seriously and literally. For this idea of collective responsibility as a right to work, we need to learn to read and accommodate other practices, perhaps largely unfamiliar, not within the trajectory of a linearly imagined narrative of modernity, but in the interest of a more “just modernity” (*IRP*, 78). The idea of a “just modernity” presupposes the necessity of the structures of civil society as well as the understanding that for the dialogics to work, both the “dominant and the subordinate must jointly rethink themselves as intended or interpellated by planetary alterity, albeit articulating the task of thinking and doing from different “cultural angles” (*ibid.*). This is a tall order for sure, and one might still see traces of the utopian impulse to read difference always non-hierarchically. However, in this injunction to read alterity differently in order to “learn from below” (a familiar Spivakian principle for successful transnational literacy), because of the insistence on the significance of the mode of civil society and a recognition of civility everywhere, it makes possible a space for “shared practices to flourish” (*ibid.*).

In *Imperatives to Re-imagine the Planet*, the essay mentioned above, the inaugural talk of the Mary Levin Goldschmidt-Bollag Memorial lecture series, sponsored by the Foundation Dialogik “to give critical impetus to the debate on refugee policy and the politics of migration” (IRP, 12), Spivak returns to flesh out a thread that I first encountered in a very elusive essay, “Not Virgin Enough to Say That [S]he Occupies the Place of the Other” (subsequently referred to as “NVO;” published in the collection *Outside in the Teaching Machine*) as well as the introduction to *Imaginary Maps*, and later in the last section of her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. In “NVO,” Spivak attempts to investigate her own desire to understand the “differentially contaminated face of the absolute other” (OTM, 177), not to produce knowledge about others but “open [herself] to an other’s ethic. What is it to ‘open,’ what does one open?” (ibid.). The Levinasian echo is quite audible here, as it is in the introduction to *Imaginary Maps*. The answer that Spivak struggles to provide in this short essay (a five-minute talk she was asked to deliver at a conference titled “Deconstruction and the Call to the Ethical”) comes by way of a detour – via an understanding of a formidable difference posed in a Levinasian mode (with shades of Heidegger thrown in) as the distinction between the Call to the Ethical and the Call of the Ethical. The Call to the Ethical is the one in which the subject comes into being but this “being-called-ness-of being” (OTM, 175), an interpellation of sorts, could misfire precisely because the preposition “to” is not tied into any particular ethic. It is only when the “Call to” is related to the “Call of” – not in the sense of cause and effect or a before and after, but in a simultaneous fashion such that the Call to is also at once the Call of – that one can even begin to think the subject of ethics. In this free falling, unexplained, curious mixture of Levinas, Heidegger, Husserl, Blanchot, and Althusser, what does become apparent is Spivak’s own struggle to distinguish between the ethical subject as the subject of ethics and the easier “celebration of a transcoded anthropological subject/object” (OTM, 177). Once again, as in the introduction to *Imaginary Maps*, a Levinasian ethics is being juxtaposed to the mode of ethical dialogue that underlines even the most self-aware of field worker.

For Levinas, speech, discourse, communication all presuppose a relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor, a relationship that exist prior to belief, desire, interest, even consciousness. Thus the interlocutor is not there to become the object of the speaker’s belief, desire, etc., etc. This prior relationship is what Levinas terms proximity and it

is “by itself a signification,” but, as Michael Morgan summarizes, “this signification proclaims ‘something’ but not ‘as something’” (126). Morgan goes on to cite Levinas on the ethical:

“We call ethical a relationship between terms such as are united neither by a synthesis of the understanding nor by a relationship between subject or object, and yet where the one weighs or concerns or is meaningful to the other, where they are bound up by a plot which knowing can neither exhaust nor unravel” (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, 116, n.6). ... This term the “ethical” ... *reverses*, he [Levinas] says, the vector of a subject representing, judging, claiming, or grasping some object as this or that, which is the character of everyday dealings between subject and object, person and world. Here, on the contrary, there is a “subjectivity that enters into contact with a singularity, excluding identification in the ideal, excluding thematization and representation – an absolute singularity, as such unrepresentable ... Levinas calls the *point* at which the intentional turns into the ethical “the face” and the *contact* with the face “tenderness and responsibility.” (126)

I provide Morgan’s cogent summary of a strong tendency in Levinas’s work where he incessantly engages with the questions of language, representation, identity and alterity, ethics and ontology to mark certain trends in a Spivakian ethics.

One can see a certain Levinasian resonance in Spivak’s engagement with ethics and alterity. At the risk of reducing a complex Levinasian narrative about the relationship of self to other and to society at large, I would suggest that Levinas starts with the stipulation of an “idealism” – what he calls “totality,” which is tied to his notions of the same and other in which “knowledge never encounters anything truly other in the world” (*Time and the Other*, Part III, 68) because of the necessary investment of the I in the “same” as a way of establishing one’s relationship to oneself. Thus, as Morgan puts it, “all such knowing is a kind of idealism, of taming the world, domesticating it to my capacities and venue, as if my capacities were wholly general, detached and impersonal (42). For Levinas, this solitary, phenomenological existence is constantly shattered and interrupted by one’s recognition that the I is not alone in the world and that there exists the Other that I face and experience. One’s social life is full of such others, but I only always confront an other as a particular person who impinges upon my consciousness by simply being there, before me. The other does not just exist before

one but actually demands recognition from the I (the same) in a cognitive sense opening up the space for communication. This relationship, worked out as an encounter in Levinas, has necessarily an ethical character in which the “face” of the other, not in the sense of appearance, but in the sense of immediacy, unmediated and non-reciprocated, demands recognition as pure other that can never be given. The problem one encounters in Levinas is how does one recognize the other without reducing the other to an object of representation? The simple answer is one cannot, hence the idea of ethical singularity. But as Rudolf Bernet has argued, if all authentic modes of encounter with the other had to be in this pure non-reciprocal mode, social existence would be untenable. Levinas thus develops a theory of justice “where the Other is referred to an other Other, or ‘third person (*le tiers*),’ and where the presence of this third with distinct but equal demands, thus competing with those of the first Other [with unequal demands] requires me to apportion what I give to each” (55). Given the tug of war in Levinas between the claims of an unmediated call in the name of the other whose face carries with it the trace of God and an appeal to “the mediated role of the universal” which could only refuse the Other’s alterity and exteriority, Levinas advocates a “limitation of responsibility to the measure of finitude and for an encounter with the Other who must not necessarily be considered an absolute stranger” even though structurally she must exist as such. The question that haunts Levinas is: how does one think ethical singularity without sacrificing the individual on the altar of universal reason? In many ways the answer, for Levinas, lies in an apprehension of God’s love for the stranger in the “face” of the Other. “God makes his face shine upon the face of the stranger. ... The self is always already turned to God who has in turn turned the self to the stranger, deflected it in a certain way, ordered and commanded the self to the stranger, who bears God’s trace and seal” (Caputo, 279).

Of course there is no God in Spivak. Neither is there a first Other who carries in her face the trace of God that becomes the precondition, as it were, for a Levinasian ethical relation between self and other. In other words, for Levinas, the ethical relation is not one consciously made by the subject of reason – the call to responsibility comes from the other and is prior to the formation of the rational ethical subject. In Spivak, the call of the other and one’s response to the call is what shapes the ethical encounter. On the one hand, we get the following from Spivak:

Levinas' *autrui* is a non-phenomenological abstraction. His *visage* ... is mostly a nominal construction from *viser*, to be directed toward, the verb of intentionality. The singular/universal remains a perennial moral dilemma, an ethical conundrum. Granted that this may be the outline of the experience of the possible. But how can we loosen the bracket, how contaminate this austere landscape with the unevenness of grouped persons without falling into the abstraction of collective *rights*? (*IRP*, 60)

On the other, we get this in her essay on Echo in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: "Ethics are not a problem of knowledge but a call of relationship (without relationship, as limit case)" ("Echo," 32), which, as Philip Leonard suggests, shows a remarkable congruence between Spivak and Levinas in trying to imagine the other ethical subject who cannot be comprehended.

Where Spivak's departure from Levinas is absolutely clear is in her sharp excoriation of Levinas for failing to take to task dominant ideologies of sex and gender and thereby using the same (as in the utilization of the discursive framework that frames difference in terms of sex and gender) for grounding his philosophy of difference. In other words, what Spivak calls "the most intimate alterity or otherness [that] defines and offers up our so-called selves to ourselves" (*OTM*, 142), while definitely echoing Levinas, is used to defeat Levinas on the ground that, for Levinas, "the erotic accedes neither to the ethical nor to signification" (*OTM*, 165), as illustrated in the section entitled "Phenomenology of Eros" in *Totality and Infinity*. Thus, when it comes to sexual and gender difference, Levinas falls prey to the shoring up of pre-ontological and extra-discursive production of difference. The "empirical scene of sexual congress behind Levinas' "Phenomenology of Eros" does not just exclude the feminine from the public sphere but also sets set up sexual difference in the notion of the 'involute virginity of the feminine' as being prior to attribution" (*OTM*, 165, 166). Here, "the encounter with the Other [not *Autre* but *Autrui* – "all around"] as feminine is required" so that the father's "relation with the future [may be transformed] into a *power* of the subject" (Spivak's quotes from Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, 267, in *OTM*, 166; emphasis hers). Simply put, the erotic scene of sexual congress brackets the emergence of the male lover as ethical subject, wherein "the female beloved is invariably rendered infantile and animal in order to win back his freedom" (*OTM*, 167).

I wanted to mark Spivak's critique of Levinas in terms of his giving in to, as it were, the pre-ontological given of sexual difference, to make a point in terms of feminist politics (a subject I engage with in the next chapter) and postcolonial politics. For Spivak, unlike Levinas, "the ethics of sexual difference are persistent and to come" (*OTM*, 169). But, even in this essay, "French Feminism Revisited," which carries the critique of Levinas via an engagement with Luce Irigaray's re-reading of him, we see the persistent presence of Levinas in Spivak's refusal to give up on the difficult task of trying to understand the lesson of the "impossible intimacy of the ethical" (*OTM*, 171).¹⁹ It is this very lesson that undergirds much of her engagement with the question of ethics, the ethical subject of knowing, and an ethical engagement with alterity, as she responds to the "call of the larger critique of humanism with which post-coloniality must negotiate, even as it negotiates daily with the political and cultural legacy of the European Enlightenment" (*OTM*, 170).

To return now to pick up the thread of my reading of the difference posed in Spivak between the Call to and the Call of the Ethical: in the translator's preface to *Imaginary Maps*, Spivak is careful to show how ethical singularity is "not identical with the frank and open exchange between radicals and the oppressed in times of crisis" (xxv) because the phrase "times of crisis" refuses the narrative of shared normality and therefore the impossibility that all that has been revealed is totally grasped through/in dialogue. Ethical singularity is not even a simple mobilization of an organic intellectual mobilizing the subaltern; ethical singularity is neither mass contact nor engagement with the common sense of the people. What a Spivakian ethics demands is an acknowledgment that the desire for a full ethical engagement is both enabled and limited by our recognition that not everything gets across, or can be made transparent. Thus it is not ethics that is impossible but that ethics is the experience of the impossible. This is the Spivakian refrain, one that I underlined earlier in the discussion of "Responsibility," and that becomes a mantra through repetition in every articulation of Spivak's engagement with questions of the other.

In the essay, "Not Virgin Enough," the difference between the Call to and the Call of the Ethical lies in the subject's cognizance of the iterative edict to constantly realize her subject constitution in relationship to an ethical obligation that is not simply a reproduction of herself as the subject of public virtue. The latter is the constitution of the liberal subject in response to the Call to the Ethical that equates being with knowing in a

simple and direct fashion. The Call of the Ethical is the thinking into being of the ethical subject as the product in violence of a fractured episteme that, to quote Diane Elam, must begin with "the displacement of the assurance of a self-present subject" (87). Spivak's cites the "inauguration of marginality studies in metropolitan humanities" and the concomitant practice "to simply bring in a so-called non-European example to monumentalize a politically correct ritual moment" (*CPR*, 356) as an example of a particularly disempowering and unreconstructed Call to the Ethical.

The acceptance of the mandate, that "on the other side is the indefinite" could help us undergo the ethical education necessary for undertaking the task that hinges on re-imagining the unarticulated connection between the two positions – the Call to and the Call of. Spivak is suggesting, on the one hand, the impossibility of being able to untangle the complex relationship between the two "callings," while forcing us, on the other, to acknowledge the perhaps unacceptable premise that one cannot fully apprehend an "other" subject given the production of the ethical subject in violence. This is not to be read as a disabling paralysis, because we must remember what Spivak has said elsewhere about "the radical element of the postcolonial bourgeoisie" (one can use other categories of subject formation here) inhering in the desire to "specifically learn to negotiate the structures of enabling violence that produced her." It is the constant, vigilant negotiation with the structures of violence that will allow us to "open ourselves to an other's ethic" (*IM*, 177) without demanding a complete consumption and assimilation of the other into the self's epistemic narrative. The Call to the Ethical in its differential and differed/deferred mode forces us to think "the subject of ethics ... [not] as logically after equality-before-the-law ..." (*IM*, 176) but in those very moments that demand an engagement with the differentially contaminated other and precisely when the subject of an ethics remains unthinkable.. Here, she emphasizes the positive resonances of the paradoxical experiential phenomenon, an emphasis that once again should remind us that Spivak is not advocating either the futility or the endless deferral of action. She writes:

Please note that I am not saying that ethics are impossible, but rather that ethics is the experience of the impossible. This understanding only sharpens the sense of the crucial and continuing need for collective struggle. For a collective struggle supplemented by the impossibility of full ethical

engagement—not in the rationalist sense of “doing the right thing” (here we are back to resting only with the call to the ethical), but in this more familiar sense of the impossibility of “love” in the one-on-one way for each human being – the future is always around the corner, there is not victory, but only victories that are also warnings. (*IM*, xxv)

The act of reading – the art of reading the other – is one of the ways in which the reader can make sense of Spivak’s agenda in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Here, I am only going to look at a small section of the last chapter entitled “Culture,” where Spivak picks up the thread left dangling in the self-cited conclusion of “NVO.” The thread is picked up deliberately, and again in moments of self-citation as an illustration of the methodology of “persistent critique,” but is also elaborated, shifted, and recast via an examination of the word “culture” in its various permutations. The word culture for Spivak can only be used as a strategy, since “culture alive is always on the run” (*CPR*, 355) and because culture is “invaginated in civil society” (*CPR*, 356). For “culture” to do its “differential” work with a modicum of success, we must re-imagine culture in the Foucauldian mode, as “a name that one lends to a complex strategic situation in a particular society” (*CPR*, 353). Only then can we understand that culture is a “regulator of how one knows.” Despite the usefulness of taxonomies of culture for the production of knowledge, we cannot let taxonomy do the work of rendering static the play of culture on the run, “always changeful” (*CPR*, 357). If we can taxonomize and yet not restrict cultures to their taxonomic detail, then we can begin to learn the process of engaging with the other without either glorifying her as a site of absolute cultural difference or making her like me in my desire to grant her similar rights – here responsibility is not accountability but obligation. The tremendous effort needed to establish a “mindchanging encounter on both sides” with the other begins with a critique of multiculturalism invaginated only in the civil society of the metropole and a critique of alterity that bypasses and renders inadequate the need for civil society elsewhere (*CPR*, 383, 397, 399). Ethical singularity, Spivak’s term for such an encounter, is approached when responses flow from both sides and with the recognition that there is always going to be something that does not get across on both sides (*CPR*, 384). In “A Moral Dilemma,” Spivak returns to her account of the “aporia of the ethical” as spelled out in the thinking of various figures such as Klein, Levinas, Derrida, and Irigaray.

When one decides to speak of aporias, one is haunted by the ghost of the undecidable in every decision. ... When we find ourselves in the subject position of two determinate positions, both right – or both wrong of course – one of which cancels the other, we are in an aporia which by definition cannot be crossed. Yet, it is not possible to remain in an aporia. It is not a logical or philosophical problem like a contradiction, a dilemma, a paradox, an antinomy. It can only be described as an experience. It discloses itself in being crossed ... this is the condition of the possibility of deciding. In the aporia to decide is the burden of responsibility. The type-case of the ethical sentiment is regret, not self-congratulation. In the aporia, *to decide* is the burden of responsibility. (“A Moral Dilemma,” 221–2; emphasis in the original).

Is there a better articulation of the great lessons of transnational literacy – always on the run, never quite adequate to its purpose but necessary all the same?

Three Readings

I am a literary scholar who primarily reads anglophone and US minority texts, unlike Spivak, who has increasingly shifted her gaze to non-metropolitan sites such as Bangladesh. As she puts it: “[A]s interest developed in the history of the transnational present, two things became clear: First that the real front against globalization was in the countless theaters of the globe-girdling movements. Bangladesh, a small subcolonial country that came into being when transnational electronic exploitation was beginning to take hold, offered a much more active terrain of resistance”; second, if one wanted to learn from local initiatives one had to know the language and Bengali was a language that Spivak could utilize in all its dialectical shifts (*CPR*, 431).

To put it bluntly, I cannot claim such an ease with a local language – I am in many ways part-and-parcel of the cultural-political narrative responsible for the production of the subject position of an elite postcolonial. But rather than apologizing for a position I occupy or dismissing it as inevitable given the axiomatics of imperialism, I, through my practices of reading the very metropolitan texts that often consolidate the above subject position and narrative of history, do differentiate myself from the racial underclass and undo the charge, often placed upon me, to speak in its name (*CPR*, 358). In order to keep active the critical rather

than the conservative vector of multiculturalism, I concur with Spivak that the critical reader must always step aside and “name a different strategic situation from *only* our desire to be the agent of a developed civil society. Which we need not give up; but let us want a different agency, shift the position a bit” (CPR, 358). I want to now look at three metropolitan texts: Meena Alexander’s *Fault Lines*, Shashwati Talukdar’s short film, *My Life as a Poster*, and Jamaica Kincaid’s *My Brother*, to illustrate a working out of some of the ethical dimensions proffered by the above theoretical articulations about the conditions of the possibility of knowledge – knowledge that is about us or that provides us with certain conceptions of ourselves in a direct opposition to the classical arrangement of knowledge that might say that we are “freely” disposed of our representations of the world and therefore our actions within it.

Meena Alexander’s memoir *Fault Lines* is in many ways a triumphant, concrete realization of Walter Benjamin’s notion, one that Alexander herself paraphrases: “[R]aising up the truth of the past means seizing a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger” (140). One could argue that Alexander’s memoir is replete with such arresting, captive recollections that in their very transitoriness attest to her tormented belief that in First World places memories constitute her as a “female creature from the Third World with no discernible history” (141). The memoir repeats the image of falling through space to capture the sense of being unanchored as a result of her “ravaged history” (139). It strains against the desire to be captured in narratives that seek to write other spaces in the idioms of “national origin, sub-nationalism, nationalism, cultural nativism, religion and/or hybridism” (IM, xxvi). Instead, Alexander insists that in Manhattan, her new home, she is all “surface ... a fissured thing, a body crossed by fault lines. Where is my past? What is my past to me, here, now at the edge of Broadway? Is America a place without memory?” (182).

If America cannot contain her memories because her body is “female, Indian, other,” is she being forced to write new stories? – ones that require a

splintering of old ways of being and a recognition that wholeness of being can only make sense as a trope for the mind that casts back wherever for a beforeness that is integral in precisely the ways that only a past can be. After all it is in the very nature of a present time to invade, to confront, to seize. It is the present that bodies forth otherness. (Alexander, 202)

An otherness that is an enticement to constantly make oneself up. But the possibilities are not endless since the color of one's body is "the sticking point" (ibid.). For Alexander's five-year-old son the sticking point is imaginatively unglued; to the question posed, "what are you"?, he can answer quite seriously, "Jedi! I am the Jedi knight!" (172). My reading of this answer is to take it literally as an elaboration of how the memoir defines ethnicity: "[I]t is and is not fictive ... and it will never be wholly spelt out" (202).

For Alexander, though, this fictive dimension is too fantastical and therefore inadequate. In her plotting of the "multiple anchorages that ethnicity provides" (202) for herself in America, multiplicity is not celebrated as much as it is rendered singular. Whereas the son seeks to realize himself as Jedi, Alexander constantly realizes herself as a poet and thus firmly anchored. She is "a woman *poet*, a woman *poet* of color, a South Indian woman *poet* who makes up lines in English, a postcolonial language, ... a Third World woman *poet* ... an Asian American *poet* [who] grapples with a disorder in society, a violence" (193, 195; my emphasis). And the poet, accompanied by all her ethnic modifiers, participates in "the struggle for social justice, for human dignity" that is necessary for each of us. The poet anchored in her identity as a poet avoids the quagmire created by the infernal question, "What are you?" and instead becomes the pure voice that demands justice for all. The voice of the poet "transcends individualism. It is shaped by the forces that ... disorder the brittle boundary lines we create, turn us toward a light, a truth, whose immensity, far from being mystical ... casts all our actions into relief, etches our lines into art" (203). This marvelous, utopian vision is equally fantastical since here too the color of one's skin is no longer "the sticking point." In an interesting move, the poet as artist and advocate of social justice, blurs the boundary between the textile of art and the textile of political activism, and substitutes the sticking point marked by color (enforced by others) with the mark of the poet (self-enforced). Immigrant identity can give rise to mis-readings, an ever-present possibility that scares Alexander. Mis-readings result in free falling, whereas with the emphasis on her identity as a poet, Alexander can parachute down more safely. In *Fault Lines*, to bridge the fissures created by the ravages of history and the tremors of unidentifiable identities, the "New immigrant ... as much the name of a figure as the Native Informant, or indeed, the Postcolonial" reappears as a "poet" through her self-dramatization in the folds of her own text

(I have taken the liberty here of combining a few phrases from *CPR*, 394; fn. 108).

Circling back to the beginning from this penultimate conclusion of the memoir helps me clarify an earlier moment in the text that I was troubled by in the initial chronological reading. In the spirit of "persistent critique," this time of my own earlier reading of the memoir, and charging myself to not want the text to be other than what it is, I offer a moment of auto critique. In my initial reading, I read the concluding lines to her penultimate chapter as a reinscription in many ways of Spivak's *Call to the Ethical*. As one reads this urge to confront and permeate the boundary lines we create, the reader is reminded of the opening chapter where Meena Alexander and Florence Howe, editor of the Feminist Press, are sitting at Café Centro with Howe urging Alexander to "write us a memoir" (Alexander, 1). Are the two entreaties connected – is there a link between the edict to write a memoir and the edict to act in the name of human justice? Is the desire to write in search of a homeland only possible in the attempt to write oneself in the image of the other to "configure the I as other," to "image this life" one leads" (Alexander, 3)? If so, is there a potential danger in this precipitant *Call to the Ethical* to forgo the keen discernment necessary to understand the perspicuity of the notion of the *Call of the Ethical*?

In my first reading, I read the imaging of the narrator/author in the guise of a homeless woman barely covered in tattered clothes as a very problematic accommodation of the material deprivation of the economically deprived homeless woman to register the narrator's exilic and nomadic status. Walking along the streets of Manhattan, Alexander tries to sort out memories that overwhelm her in her effort to write her "katha," her story. One memory stands out with great clarity: her mother and father etched in the doorway of their ancestral house in Tiruvella. A past event that could function as a beginning but is immediately overtaken by the place names that render the past "suspect, cowardly, baseless" (30). A homeless past, not because of the absence of rooms, but precisely because there are too many rooms to count, to describe. The names of places traveled are "scraps of space and much as an indigent dressmaker" she can sew "her days into a patchwork garment fit to wear" (*ibid.*). But the garment does not fit because what one really needs to cover nakedness is not "scraps cobbled together" but a home, a fixed address, a shelter"

(ibid.). This sense of being a “nowhere” creature, often very enabling for a cosmopolitical position, is for Alexander yet another instance of free falling, a free falling reflected in the homeless woman crouching “at the edge of the subway platform that runs under Broadway” (ibid.).

What I had read earlier as a pure moment of self-indulgence, self-pity, as a moment that runs counter to the Spivakian edict to keep the economic visible under erasure (*CPR*, 358), I now see as much more fraught, given the deliberate nature of the evocation of the homeless woman in the subway. The question remains to haunt the reader – why would one use this image as a point of contact rather than the usual investigation of oppressed minorities in decolonized nations one goes looking for in postcolonial informant-based narratives? One answer, very tentative, would be to suggest that the narrative strains to articulate “the lines of contact between imperialism and de-colonization on the one hand, and the march of global capitalism on the other [as constituting] the most encompassing crisis of narrative today ...” (*CPR*, 340). And it chooses to do so by refusing to function as an alibi for the racial underclass in decolonized spaces. Rather, it points to the presence of the literally homeless in the metropole who rupture the legitimizing narrative of capitalism. Thus, even as the narrator sees the homelessness of the subway-dweller reflected in her own multiple displacements, a creature from everywhere and therefore belonging nowhere, the identification cannot suture the rupture since the identification is transitory. It happens in the subway, the train comes and carries off the narrator to her destination, leaving the homeless woman still crouching where she was. While earlier, I had read such identifications as being dubious, a wilful negation of an other’s alterity, I can now offer another reading that casts this fleeting identification as an instance of making visible the (im)possible perspective of the postcolonial elite as oppressed migrant in its tendency to efface an alterity that cannot be grasped in the discourse of identity politics. Could this be a moment that registers the “ethics of the (im)possible”?

I turn to my second example that addresses similar issues about narrating the self, discovering what it means to be born in a female body, finding a space to live in a different fashion and in a different medium – Shashwati Talukdar’s short film, *My Life as a Poster*. This film partakes of the genre of a documentary: it supposedly records the migration and life of a young Indian female adolescent. The narrative

ends with her going away to college. The film is tongue in cheek; therefore it is not a documentary but a pseudo documentary. The voice-over that narrates the life and times of the main character and her family is but the putative "I" of the subject of the film. The viewer who picks up very quickly that the film is a satire is one very well versed in Hindi films. As the disembodied voice narrates this fictive ethnic story about a landowning family living in a huge "haveli" in North India, where the father loves to go hunting with the requisite entourage, we are presented with larger-than-life representations of images of Bombay film actors culled from various movie posters that are such an integral part of Indian urban and village life. As we are told the tragic story of the older sister who got married with all the pomp and ceremony befitting an upper caste traditional arranged marriage, only to return as a corpse – a victim of dowry burning we have to assume: an image of female victimization so sensationalized in the West – we are offered a poster image of a famous Indian female actress very popular for her stagings of the suffering yet voluptuous daughter-in-law.

After the tragic death, the family ceases to talk about the sister, who becomes a portrait on the wall; the father loses all his interest in hunting and the family move to America. The father, who had been imaged in the likeness of a particular villainous-looking actor, loses his power as the patriarch in the West. The mother learns the meaning of freedom, cuts her hair short, and starts to work, since America offers women many opportunities and immigrants must adjust to the demands made by the beneficial melting pot. The younger sister goes to school where no one can pronounce her name and a beautiful blond, blue-eyed boy falls in love with her because she is so exotic. The memory of the dead sister remains shrouded in mystery behind the now closed doors of the old ancestral home and the narrator tells us that the younger sister is off to college far away from the father, whose status as the patriarch is already very compromised.

Obviously, the narration of this ethnic subject fits a typical pattern in terms of oppression, migration, and assimilation. The film plays with precisely such an expectation, and exaggerates it by the imposition of posters from melodramatic Bollywood films. This is a text that demands transnational literacy. The film can only be read as a critical multicultural text by the knowledgeable reader. Unfamiliarity with the genre of the Bollywood film and its cast of actors and actresses could very easily render conservative what is critical, and rather than jarring us from our

complacent subject position by rendering the obvious as a hilarious parody, it could easily reaffirm the viewer's assumptions about a backward India. The viewer not familiar with Hindi films or perhaps even with the genre of the pseudo documentary will take the presentation as truth. Even more complicated is the fact that this narrative may be "true" for many who watch the film. Thus the negation here of the I by a superimposition of a hyperbolic ethnic Indian American "I" also leaves us asking questions about the ideology of identity formation and its concomitant ethically just and careful narration.

Perhaps this is what Spivak means when she writes not only about the ethics of the impossible but also the distance between the "literary text and the textile of activism" (*IM*, xxvi), between what it is to theorize the political and politicize the theoretical. The two are such "vast aggregative asymmetrical undertakings; the hardest lesson is the impossible intimacy of the ethical" (*OTM*, 171).

As a conclusion, I turn very briefly to Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother*, a text that eludes generic classification. It is ostensibly a biography of Kincaid's brother, who dies of AIDS in Antigua. But it is also about Kincaid herself, her inability to come to terms with her mother and her brothers, with the life she has long left behind in Antigua. Family to Kincaid means only the one she has formed in Vermont with her husband and two children. Kincaid's insistence on denying existing family ties makes her a poor reader of the narrative of her life. She returns to Antigua to stave off death; if AIDS in Antigua is the grim reaper, America is the horn of plenty, granting life to a dying brother via drugs brought into Antigua by Kincaid. Responsibility as obligation is the mode that the narrator adopts in this retelling of life on an island in the Caribbean.

If *Fault Lines* is about a postcolonial subject turned migrant in the metropole resisting the status of native informant, and *My Life as a Poster* is about a postcolonial subject turned migrant parodying a metropolitan reader's expectation about the life of a native informant, then *My Brother* is about a postcolonial subject turned migrant who returns to the non-metropole and fails to read the native subject. Of the three examples chosen, *My Brother* best captures the narcissism of the immigrant who returns home as a transnational figure of mobility and fails to grasp the significance of transnational literacy. The first person narrator of this biography, or perhaps "biomythography" (Audre Lorde's term), is consumed by a need to redress the wrongs done to her

as a female subaltern in a patriarchal environment. The occasion that invites this narrative is the subject of AIDS as inscribed on the body of her brother. Even as the narrator vividly describes the vicissitudes of the deteriorating diseased body, the suffering of the AIDS-ridden body gets written over by the body of the healthy heterosexual woman who is so glad to have escaped the possibility of this fate through migration. More insistently, the advocacy of diaspora as the historically necessary ground of resistance is coded as *only* heterosexual. The narrator believes that her brother contracted AIDS through heterosexual sex; she describes him as being obsessed with the female body, gazing at it, wanting it even when his body is least attractive. When she raises the possibility of homosexual sex, it is only in passing and only imagined in the subjunctive: "I suspected he got the virus through sex and I supposed it to be heterosexual sex. I only supposed this, I did not know it with any certainty. If he had had homosexual sex, he would not have advertised it" (40). There is no further engagement with the possibility of an alternative lifestyle, since Antiguaners are "quick to disparage anyone or anything that is different from whom or what they think of as normal" (40). As someone who is genuinely happy to have left such a restrictive place for the open spaces of the United States, the narrator fails to challenge her own assumptions about her brother, thus confirming her status as the much despised Antiguan. She sees her brother and most other Antiguan men as "urges to be satisfied, men who say they cannot help themselves, men who cannot save themselves, men who only know how to die, not at all how to live" (69). Her brother is not creative, not even eclectic – existing only as a compulsion that expresses itself "through his penis, his imagination passing between his legs, not through his hands ..." (70).

The narrative is very harsh on the first person narrator who remains clueless about her brother and, it is implied, about herself. In this book, the encounters that do take place between the brother and the narrator, the self and the other, are perceived as producing transparent subjects only because they reveal nothing about the brother and putatively everything about the narrator. The shock of discovery is simultaneously the shock of recognition. And with almost too perfect an irony, this recognition and discovery happens at a bookstore in the metropole, where the narrator is being indulged as the consummate artist – an author reading from her work. It is at the moment when her subject position as postcolonial, metropolitan migrant writer and

reader has been ardently confirmed and congratulated that she discovers her status as a failed reader of the racial underclass in decolonized spaces. After the reading, she has a conversation with a lesbian woman whose home in Antigua provided shelter to the homosexual community. The narrator's brother, she is told, was a frequent visitor. This discovery of her brother's identity as a homosexual produces a similar sensation of free falling that the narrator of *Fault Lines* experiences whenever she is confronted by the endless deferral of identity. In this case as well, the narrator reigns herself in by mourning for the first time the life of her brother who "had died without ever understanding or knowing; or being able to let the world in which he lived know, who he was; that who he really was – not a single sense of identity but all the complexities of who he was – he could not express fully" (162). Discovery leads to recognition: "His homosexuality is one thing, and my being a writer is another altogether, but this truth is not lost to me" (162).

If Alexander seeks refuge in the identity of a poet, and if the narrator of *My Life as a Poster* denies identity through parody, Kincaid comes to the realization that her becoming a writer, her identity as a writer is based on the ethical, secret encounter with the reader. She writes her life in order to live; so she had turned to writing to understand her brother's death – but instead of capturing his life she had rendered him dead again through her inability to read his life accurately. The book ends with the role of Kincaid as a writer eulogizing her ideal reader, William Shawn, who, though dead, lives in the pages of her writing. Thus a book about a dying brother in Antigua, a dead brother in Antigua, a homosexual brother dead as a result of AIDS in Antigua, cannot conclude either with the brother or in Antigua. This is, I assert, by far the best example of the lesson that Spivak demands is the hardest to learn – the impossible intimacy of the ethical. What Kincaid learns and what we should learn as the ideal reader of Kincaid's attempt at narrating the other is that migrancy cannot be celebrated ad infinitum. It has its radical limit in the lives of those who choose to stay in the same place. "We need not value this limit for itself, but we must take it into account" (*CPR*, 402); we may then learn to appreciate other epistemes that challenge our own ready conclusions. I turn, in the next chapter, to a more thorough engagement with Spivak's various writings on feminism and gender in it various modalities to undertake yet another task of transnational literacy.

Notes

- 1 This is not an investment in the parochial, nor a culturally conservative scripting of the essentialism of the other that registers in the authenticity of language use. Rather, Spivak invites a "kind of language training that would disclose the irreducible hybridity of all languages" (9). I read her argument about teaching among the rural poor of the South in "Righting Wrongs" as an example of such disclosures.
- 2 At this interview, Spivak holds her own in the face of critical challenges from both John Dunn (political theorist) and Ron Aronson (avowed Marxist scholar). Take a look at one of Aronson's articles in the *Nation* entitled "The Left Needs More Socialism" (April 17, 2006).
- 3 Derrida introduces paleonymy as the sign under which "we work out at every turn, with redoubled effort, the question of the preservation of names: of *paleonymy*. Why should an old name, for a determinate time, be retained? Why should the effects of a new meaning, concept, or object be damped by memory? ... This structure of the *double mark* (*caught* – both seized and entangled – in a binary opposition, one of the terms retains its old name so as to destroy the opposition to which it no longer quite belongs, to which in *any* event it has *never* quite yielded, the history of this opposition being one of incessant struggles generative of hierarchical configurations) works the entire field within which these texts move. This structure itself is worked in turn: the rule according to which every concept necessarily receives two similar marks – a repetition without identity – one mark inside and the other outside the deconstructed system, should give rise to a double reading and a double writing" (*Dissemination*, 3–4)
- 4 Subject-effect in Spivak draws from the Deleuzian idea that all identities are effects of differences but departs from Deleuze and Guattari's notions of schizo-subjects. In *Postmodern Theory*, Stephen Best and Douglas Kellner provide a succinct description of the trajectory of the schizo-subject in *Anti-Oedipus*. According to them, Deleuze and Guattari attempt to subvert all theoretical and institutional barriers to "desiring production" in order to create new postmodern "schizo-subjects" who "unscramble the codes" of modernity and become reconstituted as nomadic desiring machines. Their positive alternative to psychoanalysis, schizo-analysis can be read as a post-modern theory/practice that deconstructs modern binaries and breaks with modern theories of the subject, representational modes of thought and totalizing practices (Best and Kellner, 85–6).
- 5 Spivak recasts *Other Asias* in the mode of Jose Martí's *Nuestra America* "Our America," adding the plural. The term *Other Asias* is a form of paleonymy, whereby one must "undo the in-place economic regional solidarities [within

- an Asia], the unrealistic effort to redistribute the claim to the same without an originary name-space to move back to" ("Not Really a Properly Intellectual Response," 155).
- 6 Spivak must be quite aware of the difficulties posed by the essay. When it reappears in a collection that seeks to address the problems of globalism as universalism, she repeats her direction to the reader to skip the first section of the essay in her Foreword to the collection. "Responsibility" seems to belong to another era, which privileges the intermediary role of the World Bank rather than today's "broad network of the international civil society" (*Other Asias*, 5). But the connections between the two are quite clear to this reader.
 - 7 This does not mean that Derrida philosophizes in a Heideggerian mode – Derrida's subsequent embracing of Levinas's critique of Heidegger even as he subjected Levinas to a similar affirmative deconstruction makes it impossible to translate Derrida as Heideggerian.
 - 8 I too am removing the quotation marks around the term Spirit to make it less cumbersome.
 - 9 The collection of essays includes both positive readings of Derrida's engagement with Heidegger as well as some very harsh responses. See, for example, Gillian Rose's "Of Derrida's Spirit," where she diagnoses their shared "program as a blind refusal of spirit's deremption ... concluding that [Derrida] offers us a false and philosophically and politically stultifying opposition between primeval violence and formal law (5).
 - 10 It was under the neologism of "ontotheology," that Heidegger elaborated his seemingly ruthless critique of western metaphysics. But, as Iain Thomson has argued, the forcefulness of Heidegger's *Destruktion* of the metaphysical tradition is "actually premised on his attribution to metaphysics an unparalleled pride of place in the historical construction and maintenance of intelligibility. ... Heidegger's claim is that by giving shape to our historical understanding of 'what is' metaphysics determines the most basic presuppositions of what *anything* is, including ourselves" (7–8).
 - 11 It is interesting to note here that Spivak, in an interview with Tani Barlow, is very clear about how, when she goes to the rural schools to learn about teaching, she refuses to give alms. She says "I am not interested in improving their material conditions. I tell them that I am not interested. I have not come here to give you alms. You are not beggars. I am your teacher ... This giving them stuff ... and they don't even like the crap that is given them, because they may not be educated or share our culture or anything. But the basic human feeling of not wanting constantly to be given stuff is strong there; they have to live, but how the spirit can kill" ("Not Really A Properly Intellectual Response," 150). One can see how different and more challenging this course is than the capabilities approach adopted by someone like Martha Nussbaum.

- 12 Had she concluded the essay at this point, it may have confirmed Simon Critchley's fear, posed as a series of questions about an ethics and politics based on deconstruction: "Is the account of politics given by Derrida either too formalistic and abstract at the level of undecidability, or too contingent and empty at the level of decision? More gravely, in the rigorous and quasi-transcendental delineation of undecidability as the dimension of political responsibility, is there not a refusal of the ontic, the factual and the empirical, that is to say the space of doxa, where politics takes place in a field of antagonism, decision, dissension, and struggle. In this sense, might one not ultimately speak of a refusal of politics in Derrida's work" (102).
- 13 For an elaboration of the persistent critique of the hierarchy between metaphor and concept, see Derrida's "White Mythology," in his *Margins of Philosophy*. Also see Robert Young's *White Mythologies*.
- 14 It is always amazing to me how Spivak anticipates critical discourses long before their appearance in academia. Here we see how, in 1992, she is working on what currently appears on the horizon as green post-colonialism.
- 15 Paul de Man in his *Allegories of Reading* elaborates on the function of irony as "no longer a trope but the undoing of the deconstructive allegory of all tropological cognitions, the systematic undoing, in other words of understanding" (301). Such systematic undoing releases the "practical ethical dimension of allegory" (209). Here is de Man's quite famous passage: "Allegories are always ethical, the term ethical designating the structural interference of two distinct value systems ... The ethical category is imperative (i.e. a category rather than a value) to the extent that it is linguistic and not subjective ... the passage to an ethical tonality does not result from a transcendental imperative but it is referential (and therefore unreliable) version of a linguistic confusion. Ethics (or, should one say, *ethicity*) is a discursive mode among others" (206).
- 16 For a brilliant reading of Spivak's reading of "value" in Marx, "not as the representation of labor but as difference," see Rey Chow's *Ethics After Idealism* (34).
- 17 Spivak returns to the idea of *haq* in her essay "Global cities: Terror and its Consequences" (79), to rethink the relationship of citizenship and rights in the context of both the Taliban in Afghanistan and the war.
- 18 Spivak is obviously referring here to the essay by Levinas translated into the English as "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights."
- 19 In *A Politics of Impossible Difference*, Penelope Deutscher notes that Spivak reads "Irigaray generously, finding the ways in which she works best. Irigaray's emphasis on the unknowable, sexually different other, can be deployed, Spivak notes, as an intervention into Levinas' supposition that the erotic does not accede to ethical signification" (179).

Reading Woman, Reading Essence: Whither Gender?

Transactional Reading and Strategic Essentialism

While Spivak herself has sometimes articulated a dissatisfaction with being labeled a postcolonial critic, she has never disavowed the term feminist. Her contributions to a feminist criticism grounded in the differences between women in terms of East and West and North and South have been the hallmark of her career. In fact, Spivak's position as a postcolonial feminist grounds her critical engagements with both French and Anglo-American feminisms. Spivak's readings of the desire by Anglo-American feminists to posit woman as a subject of individualism is, as I pointed out, in the first chapter, tied to the idea of soul making.¹ Though this critique comes to us by way of literary readings, it gestures to the significant mode in which Anglo-American feminism in general writes the narrative of female subjectivity. According to Spivak, "within mainstream US feminism the good insistence that 'the personal is the political' often transformed itself into something like '*only* the personal is political'" (*OTM*, 4). This transformation is one example of the manner in which the tendency towards essentialism in Anglo-American academic feminism gets articulated. In a 1984 interview with Elizabeth Grosz, Spivak comments that "when we speak for ourselves [as academic feminists] we urge with conviction that the personal is the political. For the rest of the world's women, the sense of whose personal micrology is difficult (though not impossible) for us to acquire, we fall back on a colonialist theory of the most efficient information retrieval" (*PC*, 9). This is not to say that all feminists in the US academy are essentialists – of course they are not. Let us not forget the tremendous contribution that feminists such as Joan Scott, Diane Elam, and Judith Butler,

among others, have made to draw us away from essentialism and individualism.

However there are few feminists who can achieve the kind of critical position vis-à-vis essentialism that one finds in Diana Fuss's *Essentially Speaking*. Fuss's cogent take on essentialism as that which can be deployed "effectively in the service of both idealist and materialist, progressive and reactionary, mythologizing and resistive discourses" (xii), and her contention that "there is no essence to essentialism, that (historically, philosophically, and politically) we can only speak of *essentialisms*" (xii) echoes Spivak's early attempt to critically investigate the setting to work of essentialism in certain discourses. In that early interview with Grosz in 1984, Spivak alerts the reader to the universal oppression of women under patriarchy, and to see whether

the unexamined universalizing discourse of a certain sort of feminism [can] become useful for us, since this is the space of hegemonic feminist discourse ... I am fundamentally concerned with ... heterogeneity, but I ... felt that rather than define myself as specific rather than universal, I should see what in the universalizing discourse could be useful and then go on and see where that discourse meets its limits and its challenge within the field. I think we have to choose again strategically, not universal discourse but essentialist discourse. (PC, 10–11)

To Grosz's follow-up question about how to "use universalism, essentialism, etc. strategically without necessarily making an overall commitment to these kinds of concepts," Spivak replies:

You see, you are committed to it, and I think its absolutely on target to take a stand against the discourses of essentialism, universalism, as it comes in terms of the universal – of classical German philosophy or the universal as the white upper class male ... etc. But *strategically* we cannot. Even as we talk about *feminist* practice, or privileging practice over theory, we are universalizing – not only generalizing but universalizing. Since the moment of essentializing, universalizing, saying yes to the onto-phenomenological question, is irreducible, let us at least situate it at the moment, let us become vigilant about our own practice and use it as much as we can rather than make the totally counter-productive gesture of repudiating it. (PC, 11; emphases in original)

This was, as far as I can tell, the first articulation of the idea of strategic essentialism that would later become the mantra for the manual on identity politics. But it is in her 1987 essay, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," that Spivak produces the most cogent illustration of strategic essentialism when she reads the way in which the Subaltern Studies group's attempt to read history from below becomes invested in a positivistic search for a subaltern/peasant consciousness.² However, rather than dismissing this desire as naive and romantic, she situates their humanist aspirations as "a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (*IOW*, 205). Spivak argues here for a "transactional reading" that sees the collective as "strategically adhering to an essentialist notion of consciousness," in order to write the "subaltern as the subject of history." Such a move, despite its investment in the idea of consciousness, must be read as an interventionist strategy of the translation of the "bits and pieces of discourse theory and the critique of humanism back into an essentialist historiography" (206–7). Spivak simultaneously critiques and endorses the use and usefulness of essentialism for the Subaltern Studies Collective. What separates this move from the kind of essentialist moves that Spivak identifies more generally in Anglo-American feminist discourse is that the female individualism posited by the latter is most often achieved at the expense of an "other" woman. I will return to Spivak's reading of the Subaltern Studies Collective later in this chapter. For now, though, I want to concentrate on her various statements on Anglo-American feminism in general, as well as her contentious evocations of strategic essentialism.

While the articulation of strategic essentialism occurred, initially, as an endorsement of the particular methodology adopted by the Subaltern Studies Collective, it lost its very particularity as an illustration of a mode of transactional reading, becoming instead an indexical reference for coming to terms with the inevitable presence of essentialism in various feminist discourses. Rather than a mode of reading, strategic essentialism became a mode of address, a buzz phrase denoting one's situated subject position for engaging in a feminism that refused essentialism. Spivak herself has relied on such positionings, deliberately and often contradictorily insisting on the politics of naming, because she refuses the positioning of the postcolonial migrant academic as Third World, especially when it comes to gendered subjects engaged in academic feminism. In a 1989 interview, "Naming

Gayatri Spivak," she addresses the issue directly when she says: "[M]y work would not be an undermining of names but an acknowledgment of the vulnerability that there is nothing but naming ... I think the historicizing of the inevitable production of names is a much more productive enterprise than a counter-name calling (85–6). Again and again, Spivak reminds us of how the center always needs its margins and when "certain peoples have been asked to cathect the margins" it sometimes forces them to see themselves as marginal. When that happens, the "only strategic thing to do is to absolutely present oneself at the center" (PC, 40–1). One can already see how different Spivak's idea of strategic essentialism is from how it currently registers in feminist discourse. For example, in *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies*, there is no mention of Spivak's first coinage of the term and strategic essentialism is reduced to the following:

The idea of strategic essentialism involves philosophical acceptance of the anti-essentialist argument that there are in principle no essential identities while nevertheless suggesting that in practice people act, and need to act, as if there were. Thus strategic essentialism means acting "as if" identities were stable for specific political reasons. For example, one might temporarily accept the category of "woman" as a stable unity for the purpose of mobilizing women for political action. (Barker, 189)

Place this alongside another formulation by Spivak on the subject: "Since one cannot not be an essentialist, why not look at the ways in which one is an essentialist, carve out a representative essentialist position, and then do politics, according to the old rules, *whilst remembering the dangers in this?*" (PC, 45; emphasis mine). The difference between the two positions is quite stark. The former fails to engage with the very questioning of the hypostatization of essentialism as such in the very moment that one articulates it strategically; this lies at the core of Spivak's formulation. This again begs the question of transactional reading so crucial to an understanding of the Spivakian notion of strategic essentialism.

However, despite the nuanced theoretical articulation of strategic essentialism, Spivak herself fails to sufficiently acknowledge the dangers of doing politics, anchored however strategically, in essentialist identity bits. To the question posed in 1987, by (then) Indian (in terms of location) women academics,³ about the manner in which Spivak

constitutes herself, on the one hand, "as the postcolonial diasporic Indian who seeks to decolonize the mind" and, on the other, her representation of the interviewers, "for convenience, [as] 'native intellectuals,'" Spivak, a tad ingeniously, argues that she thought she had constituted them "equally with the diasporic Indian, as a postcolonial intellectual" (PC, 67).⁴ While it may not be inaccurate to assert that the Indian intellectual in India is postcolonial in the historical and even intellectual sense, the elision of the differences of a gendered postcoloniality within the Indian nation-state and in the diaspora marks the circulation of being Indian as the essentialist identity around which other identity categories are mobilized. When the interviewees persist in marking their difference, Spivak seeks to deflect their claims by refusing any claim to essentialism, strategic or otherwise: "No one can quite articulate the space she herself inhabits. My attempt has been, to describe this relatively ungraspable space in terms of what might be its history" (68). So, if history is inextricably woven into the matrix of one's identity, then one could argue that it is precisely this history that Spivak seeks to render uniform in her attempts to see them as similar in her strategic deployment of their identity in the postcolonial. The above statement is slightly different from what she says in the interview conducted in Canberra, Australia less than a year earlier. In "Strategy, Identity, Writing," Spivak seems to be making a different claim from the one she does in her interview in New Delhi. Tackling the idea of perspective, Spivak rightly suggests that one may think of perspective as an "eye metaphor":

[A] perspective is a glass, right? It's like a spectacle through which you see everything. Now we also talk about the position that one is in. Perspective is something that you have to articulate – I mean, in terms of my political position, for example, I would say that you have to clear a *representative space* for yourself, because there is no way that you can, in fact, not speak from a place. (PC, 45–6; emphasis mine)

Thus strategic essentialism is tied not just to the narrative of history that produces and is produced when articulating one's subject position; it also points to the politics of location and the relationship between people, in this case between feminists of different hues conversing either in Australia or India. The shift from one cannot but speak from a place to the defensive claim that no one can articulate Spivak's

position points to the difficulties in evenly utilizing strategic essentialism(s).⁵

In the interview in New Delhi in 1987, the Indian academic feminists generate another identity for Spivak to adopt, that of the academic feminist. This intellectual position, rather than an intellectual identity, allows Spivak to resituate her discussion of a shared postcolonial Indian identity. According to her, "if one has to define oneself irreducibly, it must be in minimal terms," suggesting that academic feminist is one such minimal position (*PC*, 68). In the rest of the interview, Spivak uses this minimal position to think through the category of woman and the woman question as well as to deflect the tension between her and her interlocutors. The interviewers mark Spivak's "series of discontinuous displacements of the concept" woman, and Spivak answers, this time, in terms that keep strategic essentialism alive:

I think that the hardest lesson for me to learn – and I have not learnt it, one attempts to learn it everyday – is that the word 'woman' is not after all something for which one can find a literal referent without looking into the looking glass. And ... what I see in the looking glass is not particularly the constituency of feminism. (70)

This is an interesting gesture because it both claims and eschews identity based on the body, a claim necessary for essentialism. I look at the mirror and try to understand how the concept woman applies to me while I also realize that such a woman is not part of academic feminism in its minimalist sense understood in the US.⁶

Throughout the 1980s, then, Spivak continues to have a conflicting relationship with the idea of strategic essentialism, especially as it swept through academic feminist and other minority discourse theories. It is to Spivak's credit that when the issue is revisited in yet another interview, this time in 1993 with Ellen Rooney, she has adjusted her perspective on strategic essentialism. This interview actually opens the volume *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, an appropriate book with a singularly apposite title; an ideal location to place an interview wherein Spivak rethinks her commitment to the deployment of strategic essentialism. The interview is called "In a Word," and, as Rooney posits in her opening remarks that frame the interview, "In a word" is an idiomatic turn of phrase that highlights the form of the most proper locution. The question that Rooney wants Spivak to think through is

whether the problem of essentialism is a problem of form and thus a problem of reading. For Rooney, essentialism is a bracketing of context, since the act of reading necessitates a demarcation of context. Thus, as she succinctly puts it, "context would thus emerge as a synonym for reading" (*OTM*, 1). So, if essentialism refuses contexts then one could argue that essentialism "appears as a certain resistance to reading" (*ibid.*). Thinking of essentialism thus highlights my explanation of the idea of strategic essentialism as advanced and used by Spivak as a form of transactional reading. Strategic essentialism introduces context as reading, a context appropriate to the strategy. In this interview, Spivak emphasizes the practice of strategic essentialism as a theoretical move that would undermine the vanguardism of a theory of essences as well as a reading of essentialism, especially, in the US context, which privileges the empirical (15). For Spivak, "strategy works through a persistent (deconstructive) critique of the theoretical. 'Strategy' is an embattled concept-metaphor and unlike 'theory,' its antecedents are not disinterested and universal" (3). She warns again and again of the dangers of the strategic use of an essence becoming a master word, a mobilizing slogan. And when that happens one has to step in to "critique the fetish-character (so to speak) of the masterword ... even when it seems that to remind oneself of it is counterproductive. Otherwise the strategy freezes into something like what [one would] call an essentialist position, when the situation that calls forth the strategy is seemingly resolved" (3–4). And again, "a strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory;" and still again, that in academic feminism, the strategic use of essentialism "inevitably falls on being able to speak from one's own ground, rather than matching the trick to the situation, that the word strategy implies" (4). Looking back at the interview in 1987 conducted in India, one can see how Spivak was attempting to simultaneously marshal speaking from her own ground (postcolonial Indian feminist in the diaspora), while also trying to map that ground onto the general template of Indian feminists at large. The problem was one of positioning – she was positioning not just herself but also constituting the Indian feminists in her image. Thus the 1987 interview became a disturbing exemplification of what Spivak condemns in the 1993 interview with Rooney: "the strategic use of essentialism [turned] into an alibi for proselytizing academic essentialisms" (4). She has since reconsidered her

cry for a strategic use of essentialism. In a personalist culture, even among people in the humanities, who are generally wordsmiths, it's the idea of strategy that has been forgotten. The strategic has been taken as a point of self differentiation from the poor essentialists. So long as the critique of essentialism is understood not as an exposure of error, our own or others', but as an acknowledgement of the dangerousness of something one cannot not use, I would stand by it as one stand among many. (5)

Another way, then, to think through the notion of strategic essentialism in its relationship to identity politics would be to question the idea of representation and representativeness. Landry and Maclean argue that Spivak has "gone further than any other cultural theorist in engaging with, retelling and ethically and imaginatively inhabiting other people's narratives." They quote Ellen Rooney, who observes (they say) in an unpublished essay that in feminist politics the strongest narrative has been to tell "*my* story as the story of my feminism." This would be the kind of essentialism, or the kind of strategic essentialism, that Spivak negates. Instead, Spivak has the extraordinary talent to tell "*your* story as the story of *my* feminism" without making it one's own. "She investigates and respects difference but acknowledges the anger or the political passion that the story generates as her own" (Landry and Maclean, 16)⁷. Essential to an understanding of Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism, then, is a marking of the critical moment that makes the strategy viable. In 1993, Spivak seizes on the fact that the critical moment that made strategic essentialism in terms of feminism necessary has passed. Here is Spivak once again:

When I began to write as a feminist, the idea of differences being unjustly made and unjustly not recognized needed the presupposition that what was self-same or identical was an essence. It was okay as a strategic presupposition; it certainly allowed me to learn and teach. But It does seem that like most strategies, for me at least, it has served its purpose and at this point I can't go on beating that horse anymore. And as I say, my feminism now takes a distance from that debate. (OTM, 17)⁸

Reading the Other Woman in French Feminism

Academic feminist discourse in general maintains a sharp distinction between Anglo-American (itself a curious collapse of US and British

feminism) and French feminisms.⁹ However, when it comes to the deployment or not of essentialism, the differences get a little muddled. I'd like to turn to Spivak's 1981 essay, "French Feminism in an International Frame," to mark the persistence presence of essentialism in French feminism. My purpose here is not to track essentialism in its various manifestations in French feminism. It is, rather, to read Spivak reading the "other" woman as essence in French feminism. Spivak begins the essay with an anecdote about a Sudanese woman who announces that she has written a structural functional dissertation on female circumcision.¹⁰ Apart from noting that clitoridectomy would be a more appropriate term than the sexist "female circumcision," and chastising the Sudanese academic for failing to register the difference, Spivak finds herself perplexed by the possibility of actually writing such a dissertation, one that would fail to understand that "structural functionalism takes a 'disinterested' stance on society as functioning structure. Its interest is to applaud a system – in this case sexual – because it functions" (IOW, 134). What would it mean to structurally examine a system that would deny an understanding of the cruel disciplining of gendered bodies in the name of functionalism? But rather than sit contentedly on her moral high ground, Spivak steps back and takes a long look at her own structural functionalist position as a "third world" feminist academic in the West. Thus the Sudanese woman's story functions as an allegory of her own "ideological victimage," where, even in the narrative of an International Feminism, "so called Third World Women in a broader scope ... [are inevitably] caught in a web of informational retrieval inspired at best by 'what can I do *for* them?'" (IOW, 135). As Mark Sanders so effectively puts it, "the expatriate Sudanese scholar is the uncanny double, an encounter with whom leads her [Spivak] to think and write her life otherwise" (77).

This is the lesson that Spivak wants all of us to learn. How to write one's life otherwise, critically, in order to unlearn one's privilege? The essay then recounts Spivak's memory of a conversation that she had overheard in 1949 between two washerwomen, on the estate that her grandfather managed, about who owned the rights to the river where the clothes were being washed. One of the "ancient washerwomen" still believes incorrectly that the river is owned by the East India Company. Spivak notes the impossibility of this formulation, since India became independent in 1947, and yet insists that even though their "facts were wrong, the fact was right." The

relationship of these two women to the land and soil was one of utility and not a map of where one belonged. Despite the change in power, to the women the land still belonged to the Company. Spivak's use of this second fragmentary, necessarily anecdotal, memory does not function as an allegorical repetition with a difference of a bourgeois "ideological victimage." The washerwomen are represented as a limit of such allegorical substitution, a reminder to us academic feminists, Third and First World, that despite our careful disquisitions on the term "woman," the one thing we have yet to learn as academic feminists is to "stop feeling privileged *as a woman*" (*IOW*, 136). It is this privilege that Spivak sees as unaddressed in the works of the French feminists she uses in the essay. French feminists like Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous¹¹ are often exemplary in their critique of humanism much like

French theorists like Derrida, Lyotard, Deleuze, and the like [who] have at one time or another been interested in reaching out to all that is not the West, because they have, in one way or another, questioned the millennially cherished excellences of western metaphysics: the sovereignty of the subject's intention, the power of predication and so on. ... [T]he French feminist theory that makes its way to us comes to a readership more or less familiar with this enclave. (*IOW*, 136)

However, when it comes to relating to the "other woman," they ignore precisely the emphasis on difference and heterogeneity by marking the other as unalterably other. The other woman in French feminist theory, especially in the case of Kristeva, becomes the repository of that which is singular in its difference and thus for the French feminist is adduced as a figuration of absolute value that is temporally always on the other side. For Spivak, a reconfiguration of the other woman as the temporal other brackets the "micrology of political economy," and reduces the other woman to a mirror that only reflects the gaze directed at her. Despite their interest "in touching the *other* of the West, of metaphysics, of capitalism, their repeated question is obsessively self centered" (*IOW*, 137). It is almost as though the very heterogeneity of women in the west needs to be shored up by anchoring that heterogeneity in the homogeneity of the other. Spivak's assertion that a "*deliberate* application of the doctrines of French High 'Feminism' to a different situation of political specificity might misfire" (*IOW*, 141) hinges on the binary

set up between the heterogeneity of women in the West to the homogeneous, ahistorical woman elsewhere.

French feminism, at its best, is concerned with founding a discourse of woman that troubles the relationship of the significations of "woman" to woman; or, to phrase it differently, what concerns French feminism is the relationship of the feminine and woman in discourse, literary and philosophical, to woman as such.¹² As long as this discursive relationship is bounded by an internationalism that is situated only in the West, French feminism may offer a radical rearticulation of the double vision necessary for a productive liberation of the heterogeneity in and as woman – a double vision that is at once against sexism and for feminism. However, when that French feminism invaginates the other, the differences between French and Anglo-American feminism seem minimal at best. In order to engage with the other, the mirror must make room for the questioning gaze of the other. The question that French feminists must ask of themselves is not just about the self but also about the other in what is an asymmetrical relationship, given that the condition of women is fractured by the international division of labor. Spivak demands of us all "a simultaneous other focus: not merely who am I? but who is the other woman? How am I naming her? How does she name me? Is this part of the problematic I discuss" (*IOW*, 150)? This returns us to the Spivakian injunction of unlearning one's privilege as loss and learning to learn from below. Spivak demands that we stop using culturalism as a way out of ethnocentrism and "actually track the regulative psychobiographies that constitute the subject-effect" of women differently and differentially ("The Political Economy of Women," 223).

It is as an illustration of one such "regulative psychobiography ... the model narratives that give 'meaning' to our readings of ourselves and others" (227), that I read Spivak's deliberate and jarring evocation of clitoridectomy again in the end of the essay as the symbolic representation of "the 'normal' accession to womanhood and the unacknowledged name of motherhood" (*IOW*, 151). Despite the emphasis on pleasure in French feminist discursive castings of woman, with its privileging of the clitoris as that which marks the excess associated with non-reproductive pleasure, *this* clitoris cannot be read outside of the deployment of clitoridectomy which is precisely the canceling of pleasure in the name of uterine heteronormativity in reproductivity.¹³ One cannot

think a clitoral economy of pleasure in sorority outside of the uterine economy of motherhood in patriarchy, since

even as we reclaim the excess of the clitoris, we cannot fully escape the symmetry of the reproductive definition. One cannot write off what may be called uterine social organization ... *in favor* of a clitoral ... since it is the ideological-material repression of the clitoris as the signifier of the sexed subject that operates the specific oppression of women, as the lowest level of the cheap labor that the multi-national corporations employ by remote control in the extraction of surplus-value in the less developed countries. (*IOW*, 153)

The troubled and troubling conclusion of this essay, in its attempt to, however provisionally, situate the “regulative psychobiography” of the French feminist elsewhere, is captured in the impossible juxtapositions that Spivak lists at the end of her essay. Helena Michie calls this a “list-with-a difference [whose] syntax tells us how difficult, how painful, this list is to hold together in the most utopian imagination ... in the production of a united if multiple feminism” (Michie, 197). It is in the imagining of a multiple feminism as impossibly utopian that Spivak marks her difference from French feminism’s essentialist representations of the other. In Spivak’s list, the other woman pushes up uneasily against the pleasure-producing French female body. But it is precisely the uneasiness that such a list produces that could prove to be more productive as we think through and with the other woman. Spivak urges a sex-analysis that would disclose how the repression of the clitoris in the general and particular sense is the governing principle of all patriarchal societies that can imagine woman as only within the reproductive, heteronormative family. And so she reasons:

I emphasize discontinuity, heterogeneity and typology as I speak of such a sex-analysis, because this work cannot by itself obliterate the problems of race and class. ... It might, one hopes, promote a sense of our common yet history-specific-lot. It ties together the terrified child held down by her grandmother as the blood runs down her groin and the “liberated” heterosexual woman who ... in bed with a casual lover ... confronts, at worst, the “shame” of admitting to the “abnormality” of her orgasm ... the radical feminist who, setting herself apart from the cycle of reproduction, systematically discloses the beauty of the lesbian body; the dowried bride – a body for burning – and the female wage slave – a body

for maximum exploitation. There can be other lists; and each one will straddle and undo the ideological-material opposition. (IOW, 153)

The essay concludes diffidently because, while Spivak earlier on insists that French feminism is hardly different from Anglo-American feminism when it come to engaging with the "other woman," she notes that in the end it is French feminism that allows her to produce such a list that provides a "theme that can liberate my colleague from Sudan, and a theme the old washerwomen by the river would understand" (IOW, 153). I can imagine, as I said earlier, the theme to be the utopian theme of a united yet multiple feminism that Michie registers. But another answer may lie in that early interview with Grosz, where Spivak first articulated the idea of strategic essentialism. I have quoted part of the passage that follows above, but had deliberately withheld the question posed by Grosz till now. Here is Grosz's question: "In a number of published texts you have discussed 'universal' oppression of women under patriarchy in terms of the effacement of the clitoris, of women's sexual pleasure whereby clitoridectomy can be considered a metonymy of women's social and legal status. Could you elaborate on this?" Spivak answers as follows:

I was talking not only about clitoridectomies as such but also about symbolic clitoridectomies as marking the place of women's desire; but I should also say that the choice of universality there was sort of a strategic choice. ... I was asking myself the question ... How can the unexamined universalizing discourse of a certain sort of feminism become useful for us, since this is the hegemonic space for feminist discourse? I chose that one and tried to scrupulously work it through in terms of not actual clitoridectomies but symbolic ones. My own interest, on the other hand ... is in working out the heterogeneous production of sexed subjects. It is also to move the question out of subject-constitution – in terms of recognizing the international division of labor. ... I am interested in looking at these women who are being shafted by post-modern capitalism. I am interested in looking at them also in terms of their subject constitution, which would throw a challenge to being caught within psychoanalysis or counter-[psychoanalysis] ... I find that the limits of their [French feminist] theories are disclosed by an encounter with the materiality of that other of the West – that is one of the limits. (PC, 10–11)

I have quoted Spivak at such length because I wanted to highlight how the conclusion of the essay echoes what she says in this interview.

The theme is clearly articulated above and it is precisely French feminism's failure to know the other even as it knows the sexed body of woman that provides the imperative for Spivak's list. In this list, the material encounter of variously sexed female bodies makes us aware of the heterogeneity of women simultaneously evoked and then bracketed off by essentialism in French feminism.

In "French Feminism in an International Frame," Spivak questions the value of French feminism in its engagement with the other. Her reservations are best captured in words that appear in another of her essays: "If the non-'European' feminine is ungeneralizable as woman, socio-culturally constructed or otherwise, what is the validity of Eurocentric feminism?" ("Feminist Literary Criticism," 613). In "French Feminism Revisited," written and published ten years later, Spivak has an affirmative answer to Grosz's question: "I have come to think that in the face of patriarchal reappropriation of decolonization, isolationist nationalism, and internalized gendering, there can be an exchange between metropolitan and decolonized feminisms" (*OTM*, 144). Spivak marks this shift, as always, in terms of thinking critically through her own subject position. If in the early essay she saw her assigned subject-position as being determined by a particular moment in the United States that called her to be a radical postcolonial emigrant intellectual, it now appears more important to her that the same radical postcolonial subject learn to negotiate the

structure of enabling violence that produced her ... [since] the normative narrative of metropolitan feminism is asymmetrically wedged in that structure. Simply to resist it as "white feminism" is to yield privilege to the migrants' and the diasporics' struggle, crucial *on* their terrain, and to forget that they too want to inhabit the national subject by displacing it; Black Britain, Arab France; it is to neglect the postcolonial's particular generalization in the vaster common space of woman. (*OTM*, 145)

I must point out that the later essay first appeared in the anthology *Feminists Theorize the Political*, edited by Judith Butler and Joan Scott. There, it had a subtitle that disappears when it is reprinted in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. The original essay was called "French Feminism Revisited: Ethics and Politics." The subtitle provided the two terms necessary for the negotiations between postcolonial and metropolitan feminists. Ethics is the site where "theory is persistently normed by

politics" (OTM, 142), and an opening up of the space between ethics and politics allows feminists (postcolonial and metropolitan) to both theorize the political and politicize the theoretical in order to know that one has to learn to know the other. The other cannot be known, but what can be learned is the willingness to learn to know. Feminists need to realize that the ethical and the political are "vast, aggregative, asymmetrical undertakings" (171) and, given all that goes into shaping the self and the other, the other is never accessible in an immediate sense. This is the lesson to be learnt that "the most intimate alterity or otherness defines and offers up our so called selves to ourselves. Most intimate, yet least accessible. So close that we cannot catch it through the self or selves that it frames for us" (142).

Ethics, as I discussed in chapter 3, is central to Spivak's theoretical and practical negotiations with the other. In "French Feminism Revisited," Spivak articulates the possibility of ethics of feminist engagement in certain kinds of French feminism. She takes an essential category, that of woman as mother, and works to deconstruct the implications of both motherhood and the word mother. She highlights how the emphasis on "situation" in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* can become a theoretically inclusive way of rethinking other situations where the structural picture of "the Mother, so intimate that it is intuitively inaccessible" can be evoked to think the Mother elsewhere: "gay parenting, mothering by the gendered subaltern" (OTM, 146). Spivak reads Beauvoir's description of the female body in gestation as "species-life" and thus the "site of the wholly other, rather than the man-consolidating other that woman is supposed to be ... It then becomes a space before access to the properness of the species-being of each female subject, where she is proper to herself" (148). Mother as situation marks the ethics of sexual difference precisely because it must take responsibility without actually situating itself in "species-being." It is this philosophical garnering of the Mother as Other that Cixous pluralizes in her literary staging of woman in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa." The mother in both Beauvoir and Cixous is not to be confused with being a mother, being maternal, or being motherly. Mother, in Cixous, stands for the ethical relationship that sutures women in reciprocal gift-giving marked by the use of *tu* in Cixous's address to the other woman. Spivak quotes Cixous here: "[I]t is necessary and sufficient that the best be given to woman by another woman for her to be able to love herself and return in love the body that was

"born" to her'" ("Laugh of the Medusa," 252; *OTM*, 154). As in the list that Spivak produces at the end of "French Feminism in an International Frame," the loosening of the word mother from its biologism to a "general sense of mothering as *selfless* love ... that Cixous is turning into a relationship with the other woman" is difficult to articulate. But one must make the effort to understand that it is in the strained iterability of the mother that "responsibility to the trace of the other seems to have literalized itself as a reminder of the limit-case as other rather than self" (*OTM*, 156).

Once one has understood the literalization of the other as a limit case rather than the self, the metropolitan feminist does not need to "defend herself against these unknown women whom she's surprised at becoming, pleasuring (*jouissant*) in this gift of alterability" ("Laugh of the Medusa," 258; *OTM*, 156).¹⁴ The next step for Cixous in reading woman seems almost seamless. The passage that Spivak cites at length from "Laugh of the Medusa" is the one where Cixous writes that:

As a subject of history, woman always occurs simultaneously in several places. Woman un-thinks or squanders the unifying, ordering history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into the practice of a single battlefield. In woman, the history of all women blends together with her personal history, national and international history. (Cixous cited in *OTM*, 158)

This internationalizing of women in classed, raced, nationalized histories is a refusal of that ossification of the other woman in an atemporal space that Spivak finds in Krsiteva. In "French Feminism in an International Frame," the international is framed in and as the West. In "French Feminism Revisited," either with or without ethics and politics in the subtitle, the play of ethics and politics is highlighted in Spivak's reading of Cixous as offering "a narrativization or figuration of women" that tells a new story, a story that "offers a persistent critique of history" (*OTM*, 158–9). Stephen Morton notes that, "Cixous' feminist subject alters the structure of history, which universalizes the struggle of a masculine subject" (Morton, 129). I would add that Cixous does more; she refuses the script of individualism in which women following this male subject equally becomes a universal subject of female history. Rather than this subject who is intent on soul-making everywhere, Cixous's feminist subject "will bring about a mutation in human

relations, in thought, in all practices" (Cixous cited in *OTM*, 158), where individuality becomes "a production of individualities" by understanding it as a "necessary underived fiction, the agent's springboard for a decision in the face of radical undecidability" (*OTM*, 159).

This seems so much like the strategic essentialism that Spivak says she has abandoned in the interview that opens *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. Perhaps she was too quick in her refusal. But then again, maybe not. Spivak notes that one of the lessons she has learnt from the deconstructive view of language is "the acknowledgement that the political use of words, like the use of words, is irreducibly catachrestic" (*OTM*, 161). The problem she notes with Anglo-American feminism is their failure to apprehend such a catachrestic strategy in the face of an essentialism grounded in the personal (162). In decolonized feminism, it is necessary to keep alive the idea of a plural agent while simultaneously evoking the idea of woman in terms of a strategic essentialism for a "truly" international feminism. The word "truly" is the one that needs to be thought of in terms of a catechistic strategy along with woman. The question on the table of a revisited French feminism in the guise of Cixous is this:

Is Cixous able to become apart of the body of the struggle for national liberation, or against imperialism? That struggle too is pluralized – traveling up and down, and in a discontinuous way – from the familiar to the aggregative and out, from the epistemic to the legal and away. The way in which Cixous attached to this moving base, is inevitable, interpretable. (159)

One doesn't look to Cixous's literary writings for a complex depiction of the postcolonial world, and we must register the lack of the naming of Cixous in activist circles in the decolonized world. But we can attempt to do what Spivak does – read Cixous with a feminist from the decolonized world, in this case Marie-Aimée Hélie-Lucas. When we turn to the subject of individuality and individualities, by reading Cixous against Hélie-Lucas, given their emphasis on plurality, we can understand Hélie-Lucas's double emphasis on woman as woman and women in the plural as a means to an end: "defending women's rights 'now' (this 'now' being ANY historical moment) is always a betrayal – of the people, of the nation, of the revolution, of Islam, of a national identity, of cultural roots, of the Third World ... according to the terminologies in use *hic et nunc*" ("Bound and Gagged by the Family

Code," 13; quoted in *OTM*, 161). Hélié-Lucas pushes for a feminist agenda through the idea of a female collectivity in the name of women's rights that bypasses the mother in the name of a sisterhood. So rather than identify woman as necessary split by nationality, religion, culture – a necessary move for imagining individuality as does Cixous "in the possibility of fiction" – Hélié-Lucas enacts a "postponement of the production of individualities," in order to create as fiction the possibility of a global sisterhood. If "the enabling violation of imperialism laid the line for a woman's alliance in decolonization," then the giving of woman to other woman "can split up and fill that thought of sisterhood so that it does not become the repressive hegemony of the old colonial subject" (*OTM*, 161). Beauvoir, Cixous, and Hélié-Lucas use their specific subject productions to project strained alliances with the "other woman," whether it is the scared novice writer in Cixous, or the French peasant woman in Beauvoir, or the Algerian subaltern woman in Hélié-Lucas. But, as Spivak, citing Hélié-Lucas, asserts: "We should link our struggles from one country to the other for the reason of *ethics*. ... we have everything to gain by being truly internationalist" ("Bound and Gagged," 14; *OTM*, 161).

Internationalism here is deployed as that which could allow a critique of a nationalism, nationalism as a necessary step for a "true internationalism,"¹⁵ that, even as it evokes the "Marxist idea of internationalism after national liberation," actually calls into question women's liberation in decolonized nations. If Cixous takes the nation as a given and can then imagine a true internationalism, for Hélié-Lucas, the nation is the great inhibitor. For Hélié-Lucas, it is the nation that seeks to consolidate woman as woman and it is only through the *pouvoir/savoir* of the feminine as a radical critique of woman qua woman that she can articulate female solidarity. Such an attempt could and does resonate in other places in the South where discourses of women's rights are being written in the "civil machinery of many different forms and stages of nation-state consolidation, in many different economic and political alignments" (*OTM*, 163). The task of the postcolonial feminist critic seems to be to not dismiss European feminism on the grounds that it repeats the political and cultural legacy of the Enlightenment; it is to pay critical attention to the manner in which the "differed/deferred grounding of sexual difference" (*OTM*, 170), deployed in the rhetoric of, in this case, French feminism, can be used to open up a space for thinking "woman" in woman's rights in the

decolonized world. Spivak realizes that not all feminists in the decolonized world would find this useful, and perhaps one can only revert, as Spivak does, "to the task of decolonizing the mind through negotiating with structures of violence" (170–1).¹⁶

In 1992 Spivak published "Acting Bits/Identity Talk" in a special issue of *Critical Inquiry*, entitled "Identities." I am not sure whether "French Feminism Revisited: Ethics and Politics" was written at the same time as "Acting Bits," but they both appeared in 1992. "French Feminism" does not provide a sustained discussion of H  lie-Lucas; the question that occupies Spivak is whether French feminism has something to offer the feminist from the decolonized world. Her answer seems to be a cautious yes. H  lie-Lucas reappears at the end of "Acting Bits," after a textual visit with Assia Djebar's novel *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, followed by a lengthy stopover at a gallery displaying Lebanese-Canadian artist Jamelie Hassan's mixed media show, to a quick stopover at Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* and Derrida's *Glas*, finally arriving at a not quite desired destination with Bengali filmmaker Gautam Ghosh's film, *A Voyage Beyond*, which is itself a "translation" of a "magisterial text" of Bengali fiction, *Antarjalyatra* ("Acting Bits," 799). The essay juxtaposes the "varieties of Creole and migrant art and theory, writing by a woman who takes the history of slavery seriously, art and theory that try to cope with the problem of the politics of translation, the politics of culture and the politics of identity" (798). In this narrative, it is the national artist, Gautam Ghosh, who gets the short end of the stick for making a "topical film," to cater to an audience – national, international, and diasporic – which may be disturbed by the rise of sati in contemporary, postcolonial India. The film appears to send a feminist message by introducing the forced death of the young wife, a death not present in the "original" novel, to capture the continuing oppression of women. Feminists in India had mobilized considerably following the instance of the self-immolation by Roop Kanwar.¹⁷ "In that legalized context it was understandably not possible to approach gendered subjectivity with any subtlety" ("Acting Bits," 802). The political question was key. Spivak looks to the film for subtle engagements with "woman-in-sati" in the postcolonial world. Instead, the introduction of sati is merely "recoded as a return to a cultural base without any cultural justification. To play thus with textual subtlety seems to me to be an abdication of responsibility of the national artist, trafficking in national identity (in the name of woman) for international consumption" (802–3).¹⁸

On the other hand, artist Jamelie Hassan eschews an easy invocation of national identity by offering “scrupulous and plausible accounts of the mechanics of staging. A most tenacious name, as well as the strongest account of the agency or mechanics of the staging of experience-in-identity is ‘origin’” (“Acting Bits,” 781). Hassan displaces the partition of India, wrenches the title of Salman Rushdie’s novel *Midnight’s Children* from its original reference, and gives it “over to the children of Egypt – who seem, to most sympathetic spectators in North America, and they are in a minority, to be the children of Palestine” (783). This is not to be read as an easy celebration of identity-in-difference, migrancy, and hybridity, but as a staging of a “collective origin” as oneself in another place, in North America. Every script of history, in another space, is a borrowed script, and the restitution of truth to history through a borrowed remembrance points to the impossibility of identity management through a grounding in ethnic or gendered reality (788, 791). Spivak thus begins with Djebar’s autobiographical novel, which stages the author as an Algerian Muslim woman who can only give a fragmented version of the “graph-ing of her bio in French” (770). The spilling of identity in wound can only be insufficiently sutured by “mimicking” the identity and language of the colonizer. One must also reach out to the gendered subaltern who has not mastered the colonizer’s language. It is in the intimate encounter, a single episode in the autobiography, where “the narrator speaks in the ethical singularity of the *tu-toi* to Zohra, an eighty year old rural *mujahida* [female freedom fighter] who has been devastated both by her participation in the Nationalist struggle and by the neglect of women’s claim in decolonized Algeria” (771), that we see again an echo of Cixous woman as plural, women evoked in the address of gift-giving in/as *tu*, and which returns us in the end again to Hélié-Lucas. Once again, feminism as acting bits in identity talk leads us to the understanding that it is against the grain of the supposed responsibility of the national in the international that international feminist must act (803). Hélié-Lucas’s description of the ethical activism of the worldwide group called Women Living Under Islamic Law must remind us that

feminist internationalists must keep up their precarious position within a divided loyalty. ... Women can be ventriloquists, but they have an immense *historical* potential on *not* being (allowed to remain) nationalists; of knowing, in their gendering, that nation and identity are

commodities in the strictest sense: something made for exchange. And that they are the medium of that exchange. (Ibid.; emphasis in the original)

Reading the Gendered Subaltern

The reader can probably tell where I am going next. Any discussion of the gendered subaltern and the impossibility of the discursive representation of the subaltern as a nationalist must take us inevitably to Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" I am going to use a discussion of this essay to lead me to an examination of Spivak's work on gender and development and transnational feminism.

In a more recent publication titled "If Only," in *The Scholar and Feminist Online*, Spivak articulates her position as woman by tracing her relationships with women in her family. The essay, written in the genre of a memoir, and given first as a talk, has a sense of mourning, but a mourning that is tied intimately to a celebration, a commemoration of women in her family. "Autobiography is a wound where the blood of history does not dry" ("Acting Bits," 795). The title of the essay, Spivak says, comes from Assia Djebar – "if only one could occupy with desire the single spectator body that remains, and circle it more and more tightly in order to forget the defeat. The defeat that is life" ("If Only," 12). The elegiac tone echoes throughout the essay as Spivak attempts to capture the knowledge she garnered from the various women in her family in writing their life and hers. Women here are encountered as that singular other, but a singularity that is a repetition of difference. Her relationship with the women in her family is the scene of difference in repetition, difference as repetition, repetition with difference forming shifting female collectivities that mark the singularity of women. "If Only" can be read then as a prolonged epigraph to Spivak's career as a feminist.

But there is another, more academic reason for turning to "If Only." It returns us to the narrative of Bhubaneswari, she who has been immortalized in Spivak's most famous, infamous, essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" As Spivak catalogues the lives of the various women who populate her extended family, the mark of widowhood as a singular manifestation of becoming single and singular haunts her narrative. Widowhood is also the subject, among other subjects, of "Can the

Subaltern Speak?" wherein Spivak reads the various ways in which sati was deployed by both sides in colonial India at the expense of woman herself. In her attempt to capture the itinerary of the silencing of women as sati, Spivak introduces another kind of silencing captured in the refusal of reading female suicide as rebellion in the "single spectator body" of Bhubaneswari.¹⁹ We find out in "If Only" that Bhubaneswari belongs to Spivak, in that she is part of Spivak's family: her grandmother Raseswari's sister. This possession, revealed in an autobiographical moment, years after Bhubaneswari has become synonymous with the impossibility of subaltern speech, makes it possible for Spivak to register her in another singularity – this time as a 17-year-old "who engendered [her] intellectual trajectory" and from whom the author (Spivak) gets her sense of singularity ("If Only," 10).

In this essay Spivak also comes right out and acknowledges that she was speaking on behalf of Bhubaneswari in that other earlier essay. In "If Only," Spivak continues to speak for and about Bhubaneswari, but this time as an intimate familial member, a woman among many other singular women whom Spivak wishes she "could occupy with desire ... encircle them more and more tightly, in order to forget the defeat" (9). This displacement of Bhubaneswari as the name of the subaltern who "cannot" speak, or speaks only to be misheard, to Bhubaneswari as the name of a young girl, who, with her suicide, brought disgrace to the family, becomes Spivak's "allegory of reading of a powerful woman-moment in [her] past" (11). It would be a mistake to read this production of Bhubaneswari as an attempt at authenticity that authorizes Spivak's representation of Bhubaneswari in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" It is just the opposite, since while reading a familial history may allow one to privatize the public sphere "and to contextualize and decontextualize the other ... all reading transforms and holds the key to making public our most private being" (8).

What both "If Only" and "Can the Subaltern Speak?" probe is the problem of representation. In the original essay and its inclusion, as the second of the two stories about the "informant in history" (*CPR*, 198), of the chapter entitled "History in A Critique of Postcolonial Reason," Spivak grapples with the relation between "descriptive and transformative conceptuality in terms of an older debate: between representation or rhetoric as tropology and as persuasion. *Darstellen* belongs to the first constellation, *vertreten* – with stronger suggestions of substitution – to the second" (Sanders, 62). I am less interested in

Spivak's criticism of Foucault and Deleuze as two radical western theorists who, despite their critique of the western humanist subject, pretend that that subject has "no geo-political determinations," and thereby their "much publicized critique of the sovereign subject ... actually inaugurates a subject" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 271-2). Rather, I am interested in picking up on the problem of representation to examine Spivak's engagements with representations of the gendered subaltern. Spivak's representation of Bhubaneswari in a memoir seems to me to be an attempt at reclaiming, quite problematically, through *dars-tellen* (representation in an aesthetic and philosophical sense), the various ways in which the figure of Bhubaneswari as represented by Spivak in her essay and in the book has been read and misread. I find Spivak's move to the personal register as a way of rescuing the various readings of her deployment of Bhubaneswari's suicide as marking, paradoxically, Spivak's own desire to represent accurately the story of Bhubaneswari, the 17-year-old girl. "If Only" shuttles between *darstellen* and *vertreten* – after all, in the essay Spivak does attempt to read Bhubaneswari's menstrual body alongside the story of Draupadi in the epic *Mahabharatha*, the queen who was dragged into open court while menstruating because she was waged and lost as "property" by her five husbands in a game of dice. But again there is a slippage. Spivak attempts to give agency to Bhubaneswari in "If Only" thus: if Draupadi was dragged out menstruating into the court, the 17-year-old "*dragged herself* into the open court of death menstruating" (10; emphasis mine).²⁰ But of course this sentence is precisely an illustration of rhetoric as tropolgy; and, in the analogy being set up with Draupadi, it also functions in the mode of persuasion through substitution (*vertreten*). For Spivak, this moment of rectitude is both necessary and imminent, and, I would argue, dangerous. We are told that her mother had questioned Spivak's decision to name the example as Bhubaneswari. Spivak's rejoinder was that no one would pay attention to her. Spivak notes in 2006 that she was right about her prediction. The focus shifted to Spivak, the intellectual who refused to give the gendered subaltern voice. The essay became not about Bhubaneswari's suicide but about the interrogative in the title of the essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and the quick popular answer as, "Spivak says no!" While I understand Spivak's desire to countermand this popular rejoinder, I remain concerned about the manner in which this desire could be seen as similar in form to the very desire she critiques in Foucault and Deleuze.

While Foucault and Deleuze may fail to recognize the international division of labor, the other side of which the subaltern seeks to inhabit, and thereby romanticize the oppressed as speaking subject, Spivak resorts to the personal and familial to restore agency to the 17-year-old girl who is repeatedly misread by the family and then is erased when a family member seeks to read her misread body to make a case for the impossibility of registering subaltern speech. Isn't this an attempt to mop up the blood necessarily spilled from an autobiographical wound? Isn't this an instance of what Spivak faults Foucault and Delueze for: "telling life stories in the name of history" (*CPR*, 249)?

Perhaps the essay is best read without the autobiographical presence. Then the tracking of Bhubaneswari as the putative gendered nationalist subject follows unnervingly after the construction of the Rani of Sirmur as an object of knowledge generated to facilitate the commercial/territorial interests of the East India Company (*CPR*, 227). Spivak's interest in the Rani stems from the fact that she was thought by the colonial administration to be about to be a sati. Spivak aims to conduct historical research to see if she can discover the Rani in the imperial archives. But "there is not much text in her name" (207), and within the "discourse of colonialism when one moves from the discourses of class and race into gender ... we are in the shadows of shadows" (231). She only emerges as an individual in the archives, "because she is a king's wife and a weaker vessel, on the chess-board of the Great Game. We are not sure of her name. She is once referred to as Rani Gulani and once as Gulari. In general, she is referred to properly, as the Ranee by the higher officers of the Company" (*ibid.*). Names of women appear in the colonial registers only in the context of widow self-immolation and then terribly misspelled. The Rani's wish to be sati was the subject of a series of letters between colonial officials who, on the one hand, did not want to step into delicate "native" matters when it came to the royal families and, on the other, did not want to lose their control over a kingdom with a king who was still a minor.

But the archival track runs dead. In order to find out what happened to the Rani, Spivak makes five visits to the hill region. There she caught the Rani in an "alternative record," not in books but in the priests' scrolls recounting the names of the dead. The Rani dies a natural death in 1837. She was not a sati. So what is the lesson for the postcolonial feminist? It is to understand that "woman outside of the mode of production narrative marks the points of fadeout in the writing of

disciplinary history even as they mime 'writing as such' footprints of the trace (of someone? something? – we are obliged mistakenly to ask) that efface as they disclose" (*CPR*, 244). When we move from the colonial register to the incipient nationalist register, the feminist should assume a similar movement – an effacement in disclosure. For Spivak, this is the task of the "feminist literary critic pulling deconstruction into the service of reading" (245). The Rani and Bhubaneswari and, perhaps even, Roop Kanwar become figural and enter the narrative "for us in their death" (*ibid.*; Spivak's emphasis). "[T]hey are the figures of justice as the experience of the impossible" (*CPR*, 246).

In the conclusion of the chapter "History," the reader realizes that Bhubaneswari is known to Spivak. We are provided with enough details to deduce that. Spivak tells us that the great-grandniece of Bhubaneswari works for a US-based transnational company. "She will be helpful in the emerging South Asian market precisely because she is a well-placed Southern diasporic. ... Bhubaneswari had fought for national liberation. Her great-grandniece works for the New Empire. This too is a historical silencing of the subaltern" (310–11). Why lessen the lesson by making the autobiographical explicit in "If Only"?

But then, again, in the Spivakian mode of persistent critique, perhaps I should take a step back from my own invested reading. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" continues to be misread as denying agency and voice to the gendered subaltern. The essay provides two framing theoretical arguments – (1) the manner in which western radical intellectuals' "postrepresentationalist vocabulary hides an essentialist agenda" (*CPR*, 271) when it comes to granting "undivided subjectivity to the workers' struggles" (*CPR*, 248); and (2) her critique of the Subaltern Studies Collective, whose very worthwhile historical project of practicing a history from below reproduced the subaltern as a kind of collective individual, conscious of itself as an author, actor, in short as a classical subject, and ended up denying the heterogeneity and non-contemporaneity of the subaltern itself. They are often bracketed, as critics rush in to condemn Spivak's interpretation of the suicide and the young woman's menstruating body. The essay, with its prolegomenon, is a significant and necessary prelude to the description of Bhubaneswari's suicide as a body that can only be read through a deliberate misreading, despite the young woman's conscious mobilization of the register of a nationalist who would rather die than give [it] up. Reading it as a complete chapter in the book that seeks to track

the figure of the Native Informant in all its guises is equally compelling. Perhaps situating it alongside Spivak's memoir, where she deliberately gives agency to Bhubaneswari, is also, in the end, critically gratifying to the postcolonial feminist.²¹

What happens when the postcolonial feminist moves from the colonial and national to the transnational with Spivak. For Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal, Spivak "has [always] used moments of crisis and contradiction to theorize the relationships between cultural and economic value systems (Kaplan and Grewal, 437). Thus, the concept of "crisis management" may translate to a theorizing of the various linkages in transnationalism and "practicing solidarity and coalition work in resistance to these linkages ... [since] a misrecognition of transnational links is an important political agenda in the service of reactionary interests" (441). One such reactionary movement can be perceived in the idea of "global feminism" following the 1975 Declaration of Mexico issued by the United Nations in the name of women, and a decade later in the Strategies for the Advancement of Women in Nairobi. While the documents are generally equitable toward women, "the task of *establishing* a new world economic order could only devolve upon women in a dominant position" ("A Moral Dilemma," 216). This repeats the narrative of benevolence, only this time it comes from an alliance forged between the elite feminists of the new diasporas and their counterparts in the South, who are quick to celebrate a global public sphere that privileges a particular version of private culture as the only valid culture for the domestic sphere. Those who get written out or ignored are the underclass and the rural poor. Thus, discourses of gender and development, NGOs helping women to help themselves, cannot grasp "the problem of thinking ethics for the other woman" (217). "Woman" is now either the upper-class woman of an international civil society, or the postcolonial, metropolitan subject of a multicultural society. Either way she is the woman who trains other women to become woman by becoming the placeholder for development through benevolence. The located gendered subaltern falls through the fracture "between globality and development on the one hand, and immigration and multiculturalism on the other" (220). The gendered globalized subject manufactures a gendered alliance and legitimizes its ethical agenda in the name of a too easy global justice which fails to address the "capital/culture aporia on the other side of capital" (223). NGOs, such as the Self-Employed Women's

Association, have today lost their ethical ideal and have become a voice for microlending as an end in itself. How does one address the celebration of a disturbing picture in the *National Geographic* magazine of female borrowers saluting male fieldworkers of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh (ibid.)? "Will mainstream feminism ever think critically of the model of cultural indoctrination," where the amassing of capital, however marginal, is the only path to woman-ness in the new global order and the only way to think women's liberation? (ibid.). On the other side, lies the danger of slipping back into a global-local binary which is a substitute for the older modernity-tradition divide. What Spivak suggests is "their constant displacement by paying attention to woman's positioning on the axis of abstract capital needing 'cultural' coding" (225).

Spivak returns to the idea of postcolonial feminist bereavement at the feet of a patriarchal nationalism.²² What, she asks, would the "mourning of postcoloniality look like when it slips from figure [of the other?] to accountability" (ibid.)? One can find two instances in Spivak's work of such accountability – one leading the reader back to Bhubaneswari and the other to a feminist in the mode of Hélie-Lucas. The first example returns us to the rewriting of the "social text of sati-suicide in an interventionist way" (CPR, 307) this time in the terror-inducing, uncanny figure of the female suicide bomber: "Suicidal resistance is a message inscribed in the body when no other means will get through" ("Terror," 96). In this situation, can there be a recoding in terms of gender struggle? According to Spivak, "Bhubaneswari Bhaduri ... was a woman who used her gendered body to inscribe an unheard message; the bomber who died with Rajiv Gandhi, also a woman, did not" (97).²³ Suicide bombing is not a gendered phenomenon. But the female suicide bomber is hyperbolically gender-marked, in the male imaginary, by the reproductive norm whereby her body is blown up as a sign of desired liberation (96–7). While all bodies are blown up in the case of suicide bombings, I feel that gender does matter; gender does trouble the narrative of violence. Spivak's urge to the humanities to "train the imagination so that the ethical interruption can postpone the attempt merely to know the other" (98) must necessarily work with an eye to the workings of gender. I am not suggesting that Spivak does not recognize this. Only that I am not sure why we cannot enter the "regulative psychobiographies" of female suicide bombers in the vein of Bhubaneswari's rearticulation of the narrative of sati as a form of "sanctioned suicide."

The next example is much more upbeat. It takes us to the work of another postcolonial, metropolitan feminist, Mary Maboreke, and her essay, "Women and Law in Post-Independence Zimbabwe: Experiences and Lessons." Maboreke, a feminist constitutional lawyer, is engaged in a painstaking reinvention of customary law so that the subaltern woman can be addressed in the new nation. Thinking through the protocols of gendered custom in order to provide legal subjectivity to the gendered subaltern may have its dangers, but it opens up an investigation into the manner in which custom was used by colonial officials to not only "regulate women but also to keep power frozen in the hands of tribal chiefs" ("A Moral Dilemma," 227). By understanding the circulation of the woman in colonial discourse and its repetition in difference in decolonization, one can open up the founding gap between the two discourses covered over by the figure of woman. When the gap is opened, one finds that woman means many things in different locations: one thing on the streets of the capital city and another at the rural home to which she may return. One "cannot engage one without engaging the other" (228). One cannot hold onto a single-issue feminism, as gender becomes the rallying point for discourses not just about development but also about war – and war in the name of the emancipation of women in "other" worlds. Which women are being evoked in such discourses? All women? If one has learned anything from the various feminisms taken up, challenged and critically deployed by Spivak, it is that "there is an internal line of cultural difference within the same culture. The emancipation of women has forever followed this line, and that story is bigger than wars, if anything can be" ("Terror," 85). Who else but Spivak would we turn to to understand the narrative dynamics and the ethico-political charge of this story?

Notes

- 1 In chapter 2 (note 4), I have footnoted the use and abuse of the term Anglo-American feminism.
- 2 I am of course referring here to the Subaltern Studies Collective, the group of South Asian historians who initiated the movement of undertaking the writing of history from below.
- 3 Of the three Indian academics who interviewed Spivak, I know that at least two, Rashmi Bhatnagar and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, have since moved and are now teaching in the US.
- 4 I have referred to this interview in chapter 1 as well.

- 5 It may be worthwhile here to highlight an early cautionary reminder by Trinh T. Minh-ha: "[T]he moment [when] the insider steps out from the inside she's no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of not-quite an insider and not-quite an outsider. She is, in other words, this inappropriate other or same who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming "I am like you," while persisting in her difference and that of reminding "I am different" while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at" ("Women, Native, Other," 73).
- 6 What Spivak performs here is something that poststructuralist feminists confront consistently: "[T]he category 'woman' is a fiction; then, post-structuralism suggests ways in which human beings live by fictions; then, in its turn, activism requires of feminists that we elaborate the fiction 'woman' as if she were not a provisional invention but a person we know well, one in need of obvious rights and powers. Activism and theory weave together here, working on what remains of the same basic cloth, the stuff of feminism" (Snitow, 19).
- 7 I have since found out from Ellen that the essay was actually published under the title "What's the Story? Feminist Theory/Narrative/Address," "where I [Rooney] talk about the different relations to narrative and Gayatri" (personal communication). It was published in *Differences* 8:1 (1996): 1–30.
- 8 I have been talking above about essentialism as it relates primarily to US feminism. I started with Anglo-American feminism and narrowed it to US feminism because of the relationship in Spivak's work between postcolonial feminist readings of literary works, what I refer to as Anglo-American, and her pronouncements on US feminism.
- 9 I have always enjoyed Shirley Geok-lin Lim's ironic take on the subject of Anglo-American feminism as an Asian American feminist. I quote at length because it is so lovely a critique: "It is highly ironical that I have been invited to offer my position on Anglo-American feminism. A year ago, the copyeditor working on the proofs of my essay, "Asians in Anglo-American Feminism: Reciprocity and Resistance" sharply criticized my use of the term "Anglo-American feminism," as a reductive and totalizing move and requested that I change it to "European American feminism." The editor was living in Wales ... which might explain her taking exception to my use of the race-specific term "Anglo." ... I did not hesitate in placing the search (and destroy!) command for each time "Anglo-American" appeared in my essay and substituting "Euro-American" instead. The cavalier attitude towards my own diction suggests my

cynicism as to determinations of differences in these signifiers, "Anglo," and "Euro." But it also acknowledges my belief that, in the production, circulation, and reception of feminist theory and criticism, the terms overlap in overdetermined ways; my collapse of the terms mocks the sensitivities of Anglo/Euro/America (AEA) women nationalists and asserts that to non-AEA women readers like myself these overdeterminations, solidifying as a single lens whose opaque bias forms an aporia for AEA feminists, function as a colonialist crust under which we seethe" (Lim, 279).

- 10 See Sylvia Tandeciarz's "Reading Gayatri Spivak's 'French Feminism in an International Frame': A Problem of Theory" for a discussion of the perceived limitations of this essay.
- 11 I talk about Cixous below. I have also evoked Irigaray in the context of Levinas in chapter 3. Here I rely on a summary of critical readings of Kristeva's depiction of Chinese women provided by Su-lin Yu in "Reconstructing Western Female Subjectivity." Yu summarizes the views of three critics, Spivak, Rey Chow, and Lisa Lowe. She says that, in general, "Kristeva, the Chinese woman is neither what she distinguishes herself from nor the absolute other she cannot understand, but the necessary possibility that makes her subjectivity possible. ... In Spivak's view, Kristeva reproduces stereotypes familiar from Orientalist discourse about the immemorial and unchanging nature of Chinese women so that the 'classical East is studied with primitivistic reverence' (*IOW*, 138). ... Kristeva's work, according to Spivak, proceeds without regard for archival evidence, relying instead on translated anthologies and Western theses, so that speculation is assumed as historical fact. ... Spivak claims that Kristeva's work can be at best understood as a case of 'colonialist benevolence'" (*IOW*, 138; I have used the page numbers from *IOW* for the sake of consistency).

"Following Spivak's criticism of Kristeva's project, Rey Chow observes that Kristeva's idealization of Chinese culture in terms of 'femininity' should be understood as a critique of Western discourse. Yet, this critique is complicated by the fact that China is seen to be different, primitive, and feminine" (Chow, 32).

Yu cites Lowe as observing that "Julia Kristeva's *Des Chinoises* occupies a peculiarly paradoxical position within the French orientalist tradition.

... Kristeva's text is at once both strikingly different from the earlier French colonial orientalism and yet disturbingly reminiscent of its postures and rhetoric. The principle manner in which Kristeva's 'China' differs from the orientalist texts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is that its various deployments of orientalist tropes are meant to represent *breaks* with colonialist ideology" (Lowe, 150; emphasis in original; Yu, paragraphs 20–3).

- 12 For an enagaging discussion of the various modes of French feminism, especially in terms of reading French feminism in an American context, see Kelly Oliver's introduction to the *French Feminism Reader*.
- 13 Penelope Deutscher notes succinctly that Spivak emphasizes "the relevance of the excess of the clitoris and female pleasure in third world contexts where poor women are defined as mere reproductive subjects, both the constituents and the producers of the cheap labor that the multinational corporations employ (179).
- 14 Perhaps this is what Helena Michie means by her reading of the last paragraph of Spivak's essay "French Feminism in an International frame." The conclusion of that essay reintroduces the washerwomen and the Sudanese colleague. The latter "brought into an erotic dialogue with the washerwomen, learns from them, from the juxtaposition of French feminism and information from the Third World. French feminism and lived experience of the Third World themselves form a list of two that are other to each other" (Michie, 198).
- 15 See Spivak's "A Note on the New International," for an interesting vision of the new international as an "alliance without an institution." The essay broaches the subject via a reading of Derrida's *Politics of Friendship*.
- 16 See Kaplan and Grewal's "Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies" for a critique of Spivak's endorsement of French feminism for an international feminism.
- 17 Here is a passage from a news article about the incident. I have deliberately taken an excerpt from a paper that calls itself *Hinduism Today*: "A pretty, young bride of eight months, Roop Kanwar, gained universal fame September 4th at Rajasthan's Deorala Village in northwest India. She became a sati – burning herself to death on her husband's funeral pyre. The reaction in India was an unresolved mixture of shock, admiration, outrage, reverence and embarrassment over the young girl's action. Local police failed to stop the sati. The Indian press called the act 'a pagan sacrifice' and 'a barbaric incident which blackened India's image in the world.' Women's groups demonstrated against the sati all across India, prompting belated government action against Roop's relatives. Yet private opinions, even of prominent politicians, were ambivalent" (December 1987).
- 18 Spivak has written quite extensively on the place of woman in Derrida. For one example, see Spivak's essay, "Love Me, Love My Ombre, Elle" that appeared in *Diacritics* in 1984, and which takes as its starting point the charting of the movement of woman in Derrida's vocabulary (22) in *Spurs*. Briefly put, Spivak recognizes that the sign woman "makes appropriation – the establishment of a thing in its appropriate hererty – undecidable" (22) and thus "to see indeterminacy in the figure of women might be the effect

of an ethicolegal narrative whose oppressive hegemony still remains largely unquestioned" (922).

- 19 Stephen Morton reads it as resistance, Sanders (103) as "an act of desisting." I think I prefer Sanders's reading.
- 20 Sanders notes that Spivak interprets sati "as an extreme case of the constitution of the female subject" (Sanders, 100). For an extended discussion of the manipulation of the discourses of sati in Hindu scriptures, see Shetty and Bellamy's "Post-colonialism's Archive Fever."
- 21 In an interview with Spivak, entitled, "On the Cusp of the Personal and the Impersonal," Laura Lyons and Cynthia Franklin refer to a public conversation that Spivak had in Hawaii, with Lilikala Kame'eleihiwa, where she gave "an especially detailed and brilliant story about [her] earrings, one that illustrated how the victim can take agency through the act of giving or of helping the benevolent helper" (211). Spivak seeks to illustrate this show and tell as a bringing into the public sphere an act of private moment of giving and agency on the part of an aboriginal woman, Boisakhi, in order to effect a transformation of the public sphere. According to Spivak, it did not work because the story of the earring continued to register as a personal encounter even as it was recounted in the public. Was the account of subaltern agency heard?
- 22 See Spivak's essays "Terror: A Speech After 9-11" and "Global Cities: Terror And Its Consequences" for a discussion of the role of various women: women soldiers, women newscasters, Afghan women, women of RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan), female suicide bombers and still others.
- 23 Spivak here is referring to the female suicide bomber, a member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who blew herself up while simultaneously killing the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. She too had a name, Thenmuli Rajaratnam, though she was also known as Gayatri and Dhanu.

Bibliography

Cited Works by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Books (chronologically)

- In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Methuen, 1987. [IOW]
The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues, ed. Sarah Harasym.
New York: Routledge, 1990. [PC]
Outside in the Teaching Machine. New York: Routledge, 1993. [OTM]
Imaginary Maps. New York: Routledge, 1995. [IM]
A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present.
Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999. [CPR]
Imperatives to Re-imagine the Planet/Imperative zur Neuerfindung des Planeten, ed.
Willi Goetschel. Vienna: Passagen, 1999. [IRP]
Death of a Discipline. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. [DD]
Other Asias. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008. [OA]

Other Works by Spivak (alphabetically)

- "Acting Bits/Identity talk." *Critical Inquiry* 18/4 (1992): 770–803.
"Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary
Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988,
271–313.
"Claiming Transformations: Travel Notes with Pictures." In *Transformations:
Thinking Through Feminism*, ed. Sara Ahmed et al. London: Routledge, 2000,
119–30.
"Displacement and the Discourse of Woman." In *Displacement: Derrida and
After*, ed. Mark Krupnick. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983,
169–95.
"Echo." *New Literary History* 24/1 (1993): 17–43.
"Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching."
Diacritics 32/3 (2002): 17–31.

- "Feminist Literary Criticism." In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig. London: Routledge, 1998, 611–14.
- "Foreword: Upon Reading the *Companion to Postcolonial Studies*." In *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Henry Schwarz and Sangeta Ray. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000, xv–xxii.
- "Globalcities: Terror and its Consequences." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 4/1 (2004): 73–94.
- "If Only." *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 4/2 (2006): www.barnard.edu/sfonline.
- "Lives." *Confessions of the Critics*, ed. H. Aram Veesser. New York: Routledge, 1996, 205–20.
- "Love me, Love My Ombre, Elle." *Diacritics* 14/4 (1984): 19–36.
- "A Moral Dilemma." *What Happens to History: The Renewal of Ethics in Contemporary Thought*. ed. Howard Marchitello. New York: Routledge, 2001, 215–36.
- "Naming Gayatri Spivak." Interview with Maria Koundoura. *Stanford Humanities Review* 1/1 (1989): 84–97.
- "'Not Really a Properly Intellectual Response.' An Interview with Tani E. Barlow." *Positions* 12/1 (2004): 139–63.
- "A Note on the New International." *Parallax* 7/3 (2001): 12–16.
- "'On the Cusp of the Personal and the Impersonal': An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak." Interview with Laura Lyons and Cynthia Franklin. *Biography* 27/1 (2004): 203–21.
- "The Political Economy of Women as Seen by a Literary Critic." In *Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics*, ed. Elizabeth Weed. New York: Routledge, 1989, 218–29.
- "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality, and Value." In *Literary Theory Today*, ed. Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, 219–44.
- "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives." *History and Theory* 24/3 (1985): 247–72.
- "Responsibility." *Boundary 2* 21/3 (1994): 19–64.
- "Righting Wrongs." In *Human Rights, Human Wrongs: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 2001*, ed. Nicholas Owen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 164–227.
- "Teaching for the Times." In *The Decolonization of the Imagination: Culture, Knowledge and Power*, ed. Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh. London: Zed Books, 1995, 177–202.
- "Terror: A Speech after 9–11." *Boundary 2* 31/2 (2004): 81–111.
- "Thinking about Edward Said: Pages from a Memoir." *Critical Inquiry* 31/2 (2005): 519–25.

- "Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's *Foe* Reading Defoe's *Crusoe/Roxana*." In *Consequences of Theory*, ed. Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, 154–80.
- "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *Critical Inquiry* 12/1 (1985): 245–61.
- "Translator's Preface." In *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, ix–lxxxvii.
- "Translators Preface." In *Imaginary Maps; Three Stories*, by Mahashweta Devi. New York: Routledge, 1995, xxiii–xxix.
- "'What is Enlightenment?' Gayatri Spivak Conversing with Jane Gallop." In *Polemic: Critical or Uncritical*, ed. Jane Gallop. New York: Routledge, 2004, 179–200.
- "Who Claims Alterity." In *Remaking History*, ed. Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani. Seattle: Bay Press, 1989, 269–92.

Cited Works by Other Authors

- Alexander, Meena. *Fault Lines: A Memoir*. New York: Feminist Press, 2000.
- Attridge, Derek. J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Attwell, David. J. M. Coetzee: *South Africa and the Politics of Writing*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Bal, Mieke. "Three-Way Misreading." *Diacritics* 30/1 (2001): 2–24.
- Barker, Chris. *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies*. Oakland: Sage Inc., 2004.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley. London: New English Library, 1969.
- Benhabib, Seyla. *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Post-Modernism in Contemporary Ethics*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.
- Bernet, Rudolph. "The Encounter with the Stranger: Two Interpretations of the Vulnerability of Skin." In *The Face of the Other & the Trace of God*, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000, 43–52.
- Best, Steven and Douglas Kellner. *Postmodern Theory*. New York: Guilford Press, 1991.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "The Commitment to Theory." *New Formations* 5 (1988): 5–23.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. "Let's Post-Post-Post 'Victoriorialism': A Response to Erin O'Connor." *Victorian Studies* 46/1 (2003): 97–105.

- Brown, Wendy. "Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures." *Differences* 3 (1991): 63–84.
- Busia, Abena P. "Silencing Sycorax: On African Colonial Discourse and the Unvoiced Female." *Cultural Critique* 14 (1989): 81–104.
- Butler, Judith, and Joan Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Caputo, John D. "Adieu – sans Dieu: Derrida and Levinas." In *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God*, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000, 276–312.
- Chow, Rey. *Ethics After Idealism: Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading*, Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1998.
- Chow, Rey. *Woman and Chinese Modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Chrissman, Laura. "The Imperial Unconscious? Representations of Imperial Discourse." *Critical Quarterly* 32 (1990): 38–57.
- Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." In *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. New York: Schocken Books, 1981, 245–64.
- Critchley, Simon. "The Question of the Question: An Ethico-Political Response to a Note in Derrida's *De l'esprit*." In *Of Derrida, Heidegger, and Spirit*, ed. David Wood. Evanston: Northwestern Illinois Press, 1993, 93–102.
- David, Dierdre. "She Who Must Be Obeyed: A Response to Erin O'Connor." *Victorian Studies* 46/1 (2003): 106–10.
- Derrida, Jacques. "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," trans. David Wills. *Critical Inquiry* 28/2 (2002): 369–418.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority.'" In *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar. New York: Routledge, 2001, 228–98.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri C. Spivak. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Peggy Kamuf. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins. London: Verso, 1997.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- Deutscher, Penelope. *A Politics of Impossible Difference: The Later Work of Luce Irigaray*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Dirlik, Arif. "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism." *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1994): 328–56.

- Elam, Diane. *Feminism and Deconstruction*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Emery, Mary Lou. *Jean Rhys at "World's End": Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.
- Friedman, Susan Stanford. "Relational Epistemology and the Question of Anglo-American Feminist Criticism." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 12 (1993): 247–61.
- Fuss, Diana. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Hartstock, Nancy. "Postmodernism and Political Change: Issues for Feminist Theory." *Cultural Critique* 14 (1989–90): 15–34.
- Hélie-Lucas, Marie-Aimée. "Bound and Gagged by the Family Code." In *Third World, Second Sex: Women's Struggles and National Liberation*, vol. 2, ed. Miranda Davies. London: Zed Books, 1983, 3–15.
- Johnson, Barbara. "Introduction: Truth or Consequences." In *Consequences of Theory*, ed. Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- Kaplan, Caren and Inderpal Grewal. "Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies: Beyond the Marxist/Poststructuralism/Feminism Divides." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 2/2 (1994): 430–45.
- Kincaid, Jamaica. *My Brother*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999.
- Kipnis, Laura. *Ecstasy Unlimited: On Sex, Capital, Gender and Aesthetics*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Landry, Donna and Gerald Maclean. "Introduction." In *The Spivak Reader*. New York: Routledge, 1996, 1–14.
- de Lauretis, Teresa. "Displacing Hegemonic Discourses: Reflections on Feminist Theory in the 1980s." *Inscriptions* 3/4 (1988): 127–44.
- Leonard, Philip. "A Supreme Heteronomy: Arche and Topology in *Difficult Freedom*." In *Facing the Other: The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Sean Hand. New York: Routledge, 1996, 121–40.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987.
- Lim, Shirley Geok-lin. "Hegemony and 'Anglo-American Feminism': Living in the Funny House." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 12/2 (1993): 279–87.
- Lowe, Lisa. *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- de Man, Paul. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.
- Mani, Lata. "Multiple Mediations: Feminist Scholarship in the Age of Multinational Reception." *Feminist Review* 35 (1990): 24–42.

- McLeod, Lewis. "Do We of Necessity Become Puppets in a Story? or Narrating the World: On Speech, Silence, and Discourse in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 52/1 (2006): 1–18.
- Meese, Elizabeth A. "The Political is the Personal: The Construction of Identity in Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*." In *Feminism and Institutions*, ed. Linda Kauffman. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989.
- Michie, Helen. *Sororophobia: Differences Among Women in Literature and Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Morgan, Micahel L. *Discovering Levinas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Morton, Stephen. *Gayatri Spivak*. Cambridge: Polity, 2007.
- Minh-ha, Trinh T. "Women, Native, Other: Interview with Pratibha Parmar." *Feminist Review* 36 (1990): 65–74.
- O'Connor, Erin E. "Preface for a Post-Postcolonial Criticism." *Victorian Studies* 5/2 (2003): 217–46.
- Oliver, Kelly. *French Feminism Reader*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.
- Probyn, Fiona. "J. M Coetzee: Writing With/Out Authority." *Jouvert* 7/1 (2002): 45 paragraphs.
- Radhakrishnan, R. "Negotiating Subject Positions in an Uneven World." In *Feminisms and Institutions*, ed. Linda Kauffman. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989.
- Ray, Sangeeta. *En-gendering India: Woman and Nation in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.
- Ray, Sangeeta and Henry Schwarz. "Postcolonial Discourse: The Raw and the Cooked." *Ariel* 26/1 (1995): 147–66.
- Robbins, Bruce. "Soul Making: Gayatri Spivak on Upward Mobility." *Cultural Studies* 17/1 (2003): 16–26.
- Rose, Gillian. "Of Derrida's Spirit." In *Of Derrida, Heidegger, and Spirit*, ed. David Wood. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993, 56–72.
- Said, Edward. *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. New York: Basic Books, 1975.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Sanders, Mark. *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. New York: Continuum, 2006.
- Scott, Joan. "Experience." In *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. New York: Routledge, 1992, 22–40.
- Snitow, Ann. "A Gender Diary." In *Conflicts in Feminism*, eds. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller. New York: Routledge, 1990, 9–43.
- Talukdar, Shaswati. *My Life as a Poster* (short film).
- Tandeciarz, Sylvia. "Reading Gayatri Spivak's 'French Feminism in an International Frame': A Problem for Theory." *Genders* 10 (1991): 75–90.
- Thomson, Iain D. *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

- Wood, David. "The Actualization of Philosophy and the Logic of *Geist*: From Avoidance to Deployment." In *Of Derrida, Heidegger, and Spirit*, ed. David Wood. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993, 73–82.
- Wood, David. "Responses and Responsibilities: An Introduction." In *Of Derrida, Heidegger, and Spirit*, ed. David Wood. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993, 1–11.
- Young, Robert. "Introduction to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak." In *Human Rights, Human Wrongs: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures, 2001*, ed. Nicolas Owen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 164–7.
- Young, Robert. *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Yu, Su-lin. "Reconstructing Western Female Subjectivity: Between Feminism and Orientalism in Julia Kristeva's *About Chinese Women*." *Jouvert* 7/1 (2002): paras 1–38.

Index

- aboriginal narrativity, 40–1
accent, 5–6
affirmative deconstruction, 79
agency, 17
anthropology, 69–70
“Apoman” (Tagore), 52, 53, 55
Arac, Jonathan, 45
Attridge, Derek, 63 n22
Attwell, David, 63 n17
author function, 36, 37, 38–9, 41
- Bellamy, Elizabeth, 138 n20
Benhabib, Seyla, 17
Benjamin, Walter, 80, 96
Bernet, Rudolph, 90
Best, Stephen, 104 n4
Bhabha, Homi, 20–2, 25 n7
Brahmin woman, 5
Brown, Wendy, 15
Busia, Abena, 8–9
- Chow, Rey, 106 n16
Chrissman, Laura, 63 n7
Chuh, Kandice, 23
civil society, 87
Cixous, Hélène, 121–3, 126
class, 15–16
clitoral, clitoris, clitoridectomy, 115, 117–19
comparative literature, 24 n2
- Critchley, Simon, 79, 106 n12
cultural studies, non-locationist, 34, 35
culture, 94
- de Beauvoir, Simone, 121
deconstruction, 47–8
de Lauretis, Teresa, 10
Deleuze, Gilles, 129–30
Deloughrey, Elizabeth, 40–1
de Man, Paul, 106 n15
Derrida, Jacques, 2, 3, 63 n8, 71, 72–3, 74, 75, 104 n3, 106 n13
Deutscher, Penelope, 106 n19, 137 n13
Devi, Mahashweta, 10, 11, 37
Dirlik, Arif, 20–1
Disgrace, 52, 56 (Coetzee)
Djebar, Assia, 125, 126, 127
- Elam, Diane, 93
Emery, Mary Lou, 33–4
episteme of alterity, 22
essentialism, *see* strategic essentialism
ethical encounter, 57, 90
ethical interruption, 133
ethical singularity, 90, 92, 94
Ethical, Call to and Call of, 81, 82, 88, 90, 91, 92–3
ethics, 22, 40, 50, 52, 55–7, 59, 61, 120–1 of alterity, 80, 85–7 of the impossible, 67, 87, 92

- ethics (*cont'd*)
 and politics, 81
 and responsibility, 70, 71–2, 76–7, 78, 81, 82, 84–7
 of sexual difference, 91–2
- ethnicity, 79
- European Green Party, 76–7, 78, 79
- experience, 8, 9, 15, 16, 24–5 n6
- Fault Lines* (Alexander), 96–9
- feminism, 42
 Anglo-American, 29, 30, 36–7, 47, 48, 107, 117–19, 123, 135 n8
 French, 115–17, 121–5
 global, 132
 metropolitan, 38, 42
 postcolonial, 124, 130, 132–3
- fiction as event, fiction as task, 53–4, 56–7
- Foe* (Coetzee), 43–50
- Foucault, Michel, 129–30
- Frankenstein* (Shelley), 35–6
- Franklin, Cynthia, 138 n21
- Fuss, Diana, 108
- Geist*, 74–5
- globe, globality, globalization, 83–5
- Grewal, Inderpal, 132, 137 n16
- Grosz, Elizabeth, 119
- Gunew, Sneja, 13
- Haq*, 85, 86
- Harasym, Sarah, 13
- Hartstock, Nancy, 8
- Hassan, Jamilla, 125–6
- Heidegger, Martin, 71, 74, 75
- Hélie-Lucas, Marie, 123–4, 126
- human rights, 60–1
- hybridity, 47
- identity politics, 7, 9, 15, 17–18, 25 n12
- identity in wound, 126
- internationalism, 124
- Jane Eyre* (Brontë), 30, 31–2
- Johnson, Barbara, 45, 46
- Kant, Immanuel, 31
- Kaplan, Caren, 132, 137 n16
- Kellner, Douglas, 104 n4
- King Lear* (Shakespeare), 51
- Kipnis, Laura, 8
- Landry, Donna, 1, 114
- Leonard, Philip, 91
- Levinas, Emmanuel, 88, 89, 90
- Lim, Shirley Geok-lin, 135–6 n9
- literacy, 58
- Lyons, Laura, 138 n21
- Maboreke, Mary, 134
- Maclean, Gerald, 1, 114
- Mani, Lata, 24 n6
- McLeod, Lewis, 65 n19
- Meese, Elizabeth, 18
- methodology, 42–3
- Michie, Helena, 118, 137 n14
- Minh-ha, Trinh T., 135 n5
- MLA Postcolonial Division Group, 11
- Morgan, Michael, 89
- Morton, Stephen, 9, 25 n8, 70, 122, 138 n19
- My Brother* (Kincaid), 101–3
- My Life as a Poster* (Talukdar), 99–101
- native informant, 35, 59
- native voice, 48
- non-resident Indian, 17–18
- nothing, 50–1, 53
- O'Connor, Erin, 28
- paleontology, 68, 103 n3, 104–5 n5
- parabasis, 79

- pedagogy, 28, 29, 41, 43, 54, 55, 58, 60–2
 persistent critique, 82, 131
 personal is political, 9, 18, 25 n7, 107
 planet, 83–4, 85
 planetary imaginings, 83
 postcoloniality, 11, 19, 42, 65 n15
Pratichi Report, 54, 55
 privilege, 13, 14, 15, 16
 Probyn, Fiona, 64 n16
 Proust, Marcel, 38–9
Pterodactyl, Pirtha and Puran (Devi), 34, 37–43

 Radhakrishnan, R., 18, 25 n12
 Ray, Sangeeta, 24 n4, 25 n13
 reading silence, 47, 48
 regulative psychobiography, 5, 14, 117, 118, 133
 representation, 49, 128–31
 Retamar, Roberto, 30
 Robbins, Bruce, 64 n11
 Rooney, Ellen, 112–14, 135 n7
 Rose, Gillian, 105 n9

Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies (Barker), 110
 Said, Edward, 19–20
 sanctioned ignorance, 41
 sanctioned suicide, 18, 24 n4, 133
 Sanders, Mark, 25 n8, 63 n10, 79, 80, 115, 128, 138 n19, 138 n20
 sati, 5, 125, 128, 130, 131, 133
 as good wife, 5, 24 n4, 30
 Schwarz, Henry, 25, n13
 Scott, Joan, 8
 self representation, 4–5, 6, 8, 9
 Shetty, Sandhya, 138 n20
 Snitow, Anne, 135 n6
 soul-making, 3, 35–6, 43, 45, 46, 49, 50, 52, 54, 57
 Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty

 “Acting Bits/Identity Talk,” 22, 125–7
 “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 127–9
 “Claiming Transformations,” 3, 7
Critique of Postcolonial Reason, 13, 25 n14, 28, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 72, 73, 74, 80, 93, 94, 95, 96, 99, 103, 128, 130, 131, 133
Death of a Discipline, 24 n3, 67, 104 n1
 “Echo,” 91
 “Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching,” 28, 50–9
 “Feminist Literary Criticism,” 120
 “Foreword,” in *Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, 19, 23 n1, 63 n3
 “French Feminism Revisited: Ethics and Politics,” 120
 “Global Cities: Terror and Its Consequences,” 106 n17, 138 n22
 “If Only,” 127–9
Imaginary Maps, 34, 37, 38, 40, 93–4
Imperatives to Re-imagine the Planet, 82–7, 88, 91
In Other Worlds, 3, 10, 16, 68–9, 78, 109, 115, 116, 117, 118–19
 “Love me, Love My Ombre, Elle,” 137–8 n18
 “Lives,” 14
 “Moral Dilemma,” 60, 84, 94–5, 132–4
 “Not Really a Properly Intellectual Response,” 58–60, 104–5 n5, 105 n11
 “Note on the New International,” 65 n24, 137 n15
 “On the Cusp of the Personal and the Impersonal,” 138 n21
Other Asias, 11, 70, 71, 72, 74–9, 81, 82, 105 n6

- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (*cont'd*)
Outside in the Teaching Machine, 22,
 80, 82, 87, 91, 92, 101, 107, 112,
 113, 114, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124,
 125
 "Political Economy of Women," 10,
 117
Post-Colonial Critic, 4, 5, 9, 11–15,
 18, 20, 68, 69, 108, 110, 111, 112,
 119
 "Poststructuralism, Marginality,
 Postcoloniality, and Value,"
 64 n15
 "Race before Racism," 62–3 n3
 "Righting Wrongs," 60–2, 65 n25, 85
 "Teaching for the Times," 27
 "Terror, A Speech After 9–11,"
 133–4, 138 n22
 "Thinking about Edward Said,"
 23–4 n2
 "Three Women's Texts and a
 Critique of Imperialism," 27, 30
 "What is Enlightenment?" 3, 14
 "Who Claims Alterity," 23
 strategic essentialism, 107–14, 123
 subaltern, 78
 agency, 48
 gendered, 126, 127–31, 132
 practice, 78, 79, 81
 Subaltern Studies, 109, 131
 subalternity, 47–8, 68
 subject-effect, 68–9
 subjectivity, 18
 suicide, 128, 131
 suicide bomber, 133
 Tandeciarz, Sylvia, 136 n10
 Third World literatures, 10
 Thomson, Iain, 105 n10
 transactional reading, 109, 110, 113
 translation, 41–2, 87
 transnational literacy, 27, 87, 95
 unlearning one's privilege, 7, 16, 115,
 117
 Vesser, Harold, 13
 Wellman, Jennifer, 58
Wide Sargasso Sea (Rhys), 30, 32–4, 36,
 43, 46
 widow, widowhood, 5, 127
 Wood, David, 75
 World Bank, 76, 77, 79
 worlding the Third World, 30, 43, 49
 Young, Robert, 60
 Yu, Su-lin, 136 n11