

The Post-Colonial Studies Reader

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Edited by

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GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK

CAN THE SUBALTERN SPEAK?

(Abbreviated by the author)

From 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak *Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999

HERE IS A WOMAN WHO TRIED TO BE DECISIVE *in extremis*. She 'spoke,' but women did not, do not, 'hear' her. Thus she can be defined as a 'subaltern' – a person without lines of social mobility.

Yet the ventriloquism of the speaking subaltern is the left intellectual's stock-in-trade. Gilles Deleuze declared, 'There is no more representation; there's nothing but action' – 'action of theory and action of practice which relate to each other as relays and form networks' (Foucault and Deleuze 1977: 206–7).

An important point is being made here: the production of theory is also a practice; the opposition between abstract 'pure' theory and concrete 'applied' practice is too quick and easy.¹ But Deleuze's articulation of the argument is problematic. Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as 'speaking for,' as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation,' as in art or philosophy. Since theory is also only 'action,' the theorist does not represent (speak for) the oppressed group. Indeed, the subject is not seen as a representative consciousness (one re-presenting reality adequately). These two senses of representation – within state formation and the law, on the one hand, and in subject-predication, on the other – are related but irreducibly discontinuous. To cover over the discontinuity with an analogy that is presented as a proof reflects again a paradoxical subject-privileging.² *Because 'the person who speaks and acts . . . is always a multiplicity,' no 'theorizing intellectual . . . [or] party or . . . union' can represent 'those who act and struggle' (Foucault and Deleuze 1977: 206). Are those who act and struggle mute, as opposed to those who act and speak (Foucault and Deleuze 1977: 206)? These immense problems are buried in the differences between the 'same' words: consciousness and conscience (both *conscience* in French), representation and re-presentation. The critique of ideological subject-constitution within state formations and systems of political economy can now be effaced, as can the active theoretical practice of the 'transformation of consciousness.' The banality of leftist intellectuals' lists of self-knowing, politically canny subalterns stands revealed; representing them, the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent. If such a critique and such a project are not to be given up, the shifting distinctions between representation within the state and political economy, on the one hand, and within the theory of the Subject, on the other, must not be obliterated. Let us consider the play of *vertreten* ('represent' in the first sense) and *darstellen* ('re-present' in the second sense) in a famous passage in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis**

Bonaparte, where Marx touches on 'class' as a descriptive and transformative concept. This is important in the context of the argument from the working class both from our two philosophers and *political* third world feminism from the metropolis.

Marx's contention here is that the descriptive definition of a class can be a differential one – its cutting off and difference from all other classes: '[I]n so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that cut off their mode of life, their interest, and their formation from those of the other classes and place them in inimical confrontation [*feindlich gegenüberstellen*], they form a class' (Marx 1973: 239). There is no such thing as a 'class instinct' at work here. In fact, the collectivity of familial existence, which might be considered the arena of 'instinct,' is discontinuous with, though operated by, the differential isolation of classes. In this context, the formation of a class is *artificial* and economic, and the economic agency or *interest* is impersonal because it is systemic and heterogeneous. This agency or interest is tied to the Hegelian critique of the individual subject, for it marks the subject's empty place in that process without a subject which is history and political economy. Here the capitalist is defined as 'the conscious bearer [*Träger*] of the limitless movement of capital' (Marx 1977: 254). My point is that Marx is not working to create an undivided subject where desire and interest coincide. Class consciousness does not operate toward that goal. Both in the economic area (capitalist) and in the political (world historical agent), Marx is obliged to construct models of a divided and dislocated subject whose parts are not continuous or coherent with each other. A celebrated passage like the description of capital as the Faustian monster brings this home vividly (Marx 1977: 302).

The following passage, continuing the quotation from *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, is also working on the structural principle of a dispersed and dislocated class subject: the (absent collective) consciousness of the small peasant proprietor class finds its 'bearer' in a 'representative' who appears to work in another's interest. 'Representative' here does not derive from '*darstellen*'; this sharpens the contrast Foucault and Deleuze slide over, the contrast, say, between a proxy and a portrait. There is, of course, a relationship between them, one that has received political and ideological exacerbation in the European tradition at least since the poet and the sophist, the actor and the orator, have both been seen as harmful. In the guise of a post-Marxist description of the scene of power, we thus encounter a much 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. Again, they are related, but running them together, especially in order to say that beyond both is where oppressed subjects speak, act, and know *for themselves*, leads to an essentialist, utopian politics that can, when transferred to single-issue gender rather than class, give unquestioning support to the financialization of the globe, which ruthlessly constructs a general will in the credit-baited rural woman even as it 'formats' her through UN Plans of Action so that she can be 'developed.' Beyond this concatenation, transparent as rhetoric in the service of 'truth' has always made itself out to be, is the much-invoked oppressed subject (as Woman), speaking, acting, and knowing that gender in development is best for her. It is in the shadow of this unfortunate marionette that the history of the unheeded subaltern must unfold.

Here is Marx's passage, using '*vertreten*' where the English uses 'represent,' discussing a social 'subject' whose consciousness is dislocated and incoherent with its *Vertretung* (as much a substitution as a representation). The small peasant proprietors

cannot represent themselves; they must be represented. Their representative must appear simultaneously as their master, as an authority over them, as unrestricted governmental power that protects them from the other classes and sends them rain

and sunshine from above. The political influence [in the place of the class interest, since there is no unified class subject] of the small peasant proprietors therefore finds its last expression [the implication of a chain of substitutions -- *Vertretungen* -- is strong here] in the executive force [*Exekutivegewalt* -- less personal in German; Derrida translates *Gewalt* as violence in another context in *Force of Law*] subordinating society to itself.³

Not only does such a model of social incoherence -- necessary gaps between the source of 'influence' (in this case the small peasant proprietors), the 'representative' (Louis Napoleon), and the historical-political phenomenon (executive control) -- imply a critique of the subject as *individual* agent but a critique even of the subjectivity of a *collective* agency. The necessarily dislocated machine of history moves because 'the identity of the *interests*' of these proprietors 'fails to produce a feeling of community, national links, or a political organization.' The event of representation as *Vertretung* (in the constellation of rhetoric-as-persuasion) behaves like a *Darstellung* (or rhetoric-as-trope), taking its place in the gap between the formation of a (descriptive) class and the nonformation of a (transformative) class: 'In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life . . . they form a class. In so far as . . . the identity of their interests fails to produce a feeling of community . . . they do not form a class.' The complicity of *vertreten* and *darstellen*, their identity-in-difference as the place of practice -- since this complicity is precisely what Marxists must expose, as Marx does in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* -- can only be appreciated if they are not conflated by a sleight of word.

It would be merely tendentious to argue that this textualizes Marx too much, making him inaccessible to the common 'man,' who, a victim of common sense, is so deeply placed in a heritage of positivism that Marx's irreducible emphasis on the work of the negative, on the necessity for defetishizing the concrete, is persistently wrested from him by the strongest adversary, 'the historical tradition' in the air.⁴ The uncommon 'man,' the contemporary philosopher of practice, and the uncommon woman, the metropolitan enthusiast of *Third world resistance*, sometimes exhibit the same positivism.

I have dwelt so long on this passage in Marx because it spells out the inner dynamics of *Vertretung*, or representation in the political context. Representation in the economic context is *Darstellung*, the philosophical concept of representation as staging or, indeed, signification, which relates to the divided subject in an indirect way. The most obvious passage is well known: 'In the exchange relationship [*Austauschverhältnis*] of commodities their exchange-value appeared to us totally independent of their use value. But if we subtract their use-value from the product of labour, we obtain their value, as it was just determined [*bestimmt*]. The common element which represents itself [*sich darstellt*] in the exchange relation, or the exchange value of the commodity, is thus its value' (Marx 1977: 254).

According to Marx, under capitalism, value, as produced in necessary and surplus labor, is computed as the representation/sign of objectified labor (which is rigorously distinguished from human activity). Conversely, in the absence of a theory of exploitation as the extraction (production), appropriation, and realization of (surplus) value as *representation of labor power*, capitalist exploitation must be seen as a variety of domination (the mechanics of power as such). 'The thrust of Marxism,' Deleuze suggests, 'was to determine the problem [that power is more diffuse than the structure of exploitation and state formation] essentially in terms of interests (power is held by a ruling class defined by its interests)' (Foucault and Deleuze 1977: 214).

One cannot object to this minimalist summary of Marx's project, just as one cannot ignore that, in parts of the *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari build their case on a brilliant if 'poetic'

grasp of Marx's *theory* of the money form. Yet we might consolidate our critique in the following way: the relationship between global capitalism (exploitation in economics) and nation-state alliances (domination in geopolitics) is so macrological that it cannot account for the micrological texture of power.⁵ Sub-individual micrologies cannot grasp the 'empirical' field. To move toward such an accounting one must move toward theories of ideology -- of subject formations that micrologically and often erratically operate the interests that congeal the micrologies and are congealed in macrologies. Such theories cannot afford to overlook that this line *is* erratic, and that the category of representation in its *two* senses is crucial. They must note how the staging of the world in representation -- its scene of writing, its *Darstellung* -- dissimulates the choice of and need for 'herocs,' paternal proxies, agents of power -- *Vertretung*.

My view is that radical practice should attend to this double session of representations rather than reintroduce the individual subject through totalizing concepts of power and desire.

One clearly available example of ideological epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity. It is well known that Foucault locates one case of epistemic violence, a complete overhaul of the episteme, in the redefinition of madness at the end of the European eighteenth century (see Foucault 1965: 251, 262, 269). But what if that particular redefinition was only a part of the narrative of history in Europe as well as in the colonies? What if the two projects of epistemic overhaul -- European madness and colonial normality -- worked as dislocated and unacknowledged parts of a vast two-handed engine?

Here, then, is a schematic summary of the epistemic violence of the codification of Hindu Law. If it clarifies the notion of epistemic violence, my final discussion of widow-sacrifice may gain added significance.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Hindu Law, in so far as it can be described as a unitary system, operated in terms of four texts that 'staged' a four-part episteme defined by the subject's use of memory: *sruti* (the heard), *smriti* (the remembered), *sastra* (the calculus), and *vyavahara* (the performance). The origins of what had been heard and what was remembered were not necessarily continuous or identical. Every invocation of *sruti* technically recited (or reopened) the event of originary 'hearing' or revelation. The second two texts -- the learned and the performed -- were seen as dialectically continuous. Legal theorists and practitioners were not in any given case certain if this structure described the body of law or four ways of settling a dispute. The legitimation, through a binary vision, of the polymorphous structure of legal performance, 'internally' noncoherent and open at both ends, is the narrative of codification I offer as an example of epistemic violence.

Consider the often-quoted programmatic lines from Macaulay's infamous 'Minute on Indian Education' (1835):

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.

(Macaulay 1835: 359)

The education of colonial subjects complements their production in law. One effect of establishing a version of the British system was the development of an uneasy separation between disciplinary formation in Sanskrit studies and the native, now alternative, tradition of Sanskrit 'high culture.' Within the former, the cultural explanations generated by authoritative scholars matched the epistemic violence of the legal project.

The place of the subaltern, as complicated by the imperialist project, is confronted by the 'Subaltern Studies' group. They *must* ask: Can the subaltern speak?

Ranajit Guha, the founder of the collective, gives a definition of the people that is an identity-in-differential. He proposes a dynamic stratification grid describing colonial social production at large. Even the third group on the list, the buffer group, as it were, between the people and the great macro-structural dominant groups, is itself defined as a place of in-betweenness. The classification falls into: 'dominant foreign groups,' and 'dominant indigenous groups at the all-India and at the regional and local levels' representing the elite; and '[t]he social groups and elements included in [the terms "people" and "subaltern classes"] represent[ing] the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the "elite."⁶

For the (gender-unspecified) 'true' subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation. The problem is that the subject's itinerary has not been left traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual. In the slightly dated language of the Indian group, the question becomes: How can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced.⁷ The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is 'evidence.' It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.

The regulative psychobiography of widow self-immolation will be useful in tracking this double silencing.

If I ask myself: how is it possible to want to die by fire to mourn a husband ritually, I am asking the question of the (gendered) subaltern woman as subject, not, as my friend Jonathan Culler somewhat tendentiously suggests, trying to 'produce difference by differing' or to 'appeal . . . to a sexual identity defined as essential and privileg[ing] experiences associated with that identity' (Culler 1982: 48). Culler is here a part of that mainstream project of Western feminism which both continues and displaces the battle over the right to individualism between women and men in situations of upward class mobility. One suspects that the debate between U.S. feminism and European 'theory' (as theory is generally represented by women from the United States or Britain) occupies a significant corner of that very terrain.

Sarah Kofman has suggested that the deep ambiguity of Freud's use of women as a scapegoat may be read as a reaction-formation to an initial and continuing desire to give the hysteric a voice, to transform her into the *subject* of hysteria (Kofman 1985). The masculine-imperialist ideological formation that shaped that desire into 'the daughter's seduction' is part of the same formation that constructs the monolithic 'third-world woman.' No contemporary metropolitan investigator is not influenced by that formation. Part of our 'unlearning' project is to articulate our participation in that formation – by *measuring* silences, if necessary – into

the *object* of investigation. Thus, when confronted with the questions, Can the subaltern speak? Can the subaltern (as woman) speak?, our efforts to give the subaltern a voice in history will be doubly open to the dangers run by Freud's discourse. It is in acknowledgement of these dangers rather than as solution to a problem that I put together the sentence 'White men are saving brown women from brown men,' a sentence that runs like a red thread through today's 'gender and development.' My impulse is not unlike the one to be encountered in Freud's investigation of the sentence 'A child is being beaten' (Freud 1961 vol. 17: 174–204). For a list of ways in which Western criticism constructs 'Third World Woman' see Mohanty 1991: 51–80).

Freud predicates a *history* of repression that produces the final sentence. It is a history with a double origin, one hidden in the amnesia of the infant, the other lodged in our archaic past, assuming by implication a preoriginary space where human and animal were not yet differentiated (Freud 1961: 188). We are driven to impose a homology of this Freudian strategy on the Marxist narrative to explain the ideological dissimulation of imperialist political economy and outline a history of repression that produces a sentence like the one I have sketched: *white men are saving brown women from brown men* – giving honorary whiteness to the colonial subject on precisely this issue. This history also has a double origin, one hidden in the maneuverings behind the British abolition of widow sacrifice in 1829,⁸ the other lodged in the classical and Vedic past of 'Hindu' India, the *Rg-Veda* and the *Dharmasastra*. An undifferentiated transcendental pre-originary space can only too easily be predicated for this other history.

The sentence I have constructed is one among many displacements describing the relationship between brown and white men (sometimes brown and white women worked in).⁹ It takes its place among some sentences of 'hyperbolic admiration' or of pious guilt that Derrida speaks of in connection with the 'hieroglyphist prejudice.' The relationship between the imperialist subject and the subject of imperialism is at least ambiguous.

The Hindu widow ascends the pyre of the dead husband and immolates herself upon it. This is widow sacrifice. (The conventional transcription of the Sanskrit word for the widow would be *sati*. The early colonial British transcribed it *suttee*.) The rite was not practiced universally and was not caste- or class-fixed. The abolition of this rite by the British has been generally understood as a case of 'White men saving brown women from brown men.' White women – from the nineteenth-century British Missionary Registers to Mary Daly – have not produced an alternative understanding. Against this is the Indian nativist statement, a parody of the nostalgia for lost origins: 'The women wanted to die,' still being advanced.¹⁰

The two sentences go a long way to legitimize each other. The archived examples of the testimony of the women's voice consciousness allow for the mobilization of such help. As one goes down the grotesquely mistranscribed names of these women, the sacrificed widows, in the police reports included in the records of the East India Company, one cannot put together a 'voice.' The most one can sense is the immense heterogeneity breaking through even such a skeletal and ignorant account (castes, for example, are regularly described as tribes). Faced with the dialectically interlocking sentences that are constructible as 'White men are saving brown women from brown men' and 'The women wanted to die,' the metropolitan feminist migrant (removed from the actual theater of decolonization) asks the question of simple semiosis – What does this signify? – and begins to plot a history.

I have written elsewhere of a constructed counternarrative of woman's consciousness, thus woman's being, thus woman's being good, thus the good woman's desire, thus woman's desire. This slippage can be seen in the fracture inscribed in the very word *sati*, the feminine form of *sat*. *Sat* transcends any gender-specific notion of masculinity and moves up not only

into human but spiritual universality. It is the present participle of the verb 'to be' and as such means not only being, but the True, the Good, the Right. In the sacred texts it is essence, universal spirit. Even as a prefix it indicates appropriate, felicitous, fit. It is noble enough to have entered the most privileged discourse of modern Western philosophy: Heidegger's meditation on Being (Heidegger 1961: 58). *Sati*, the feminine of this word, simply means 'good wife.'

Figures like the goddess Athena -- 'father's daughters self-professedly uncontaminated by the womb' -- are useful for establishing women's ideological self-debasement, which is to be distinguished from a deconstructive attitude toward the essentialist subject. The story of the mythic Sati, reversing every narrateme of the rite, performs a similar function: the living husband avenges the wife's death, a transaction between great male gods fulfills the destruction of the female body and thus inscribes the earth as sacred geography. To see this as proof of the feminism of classical Hinduism or of Indian culture as goddess-centered and therefore feminist is as ideologically contaminated by nativism or reverse ethnocentrism as it was imperialist to erase the image of the luminous fighting Mother Durga and invest the proper noun Sati with no significance other than the ritual burning of the helpless widow as sacrificial offering who can then be saved. May the empowering voice of so-called superstition (Durga) not be a better starting point for transformation than the belittling or punitive befriending of the white mythology of 'reasonableness' (British police)? The interested do-gooding of corporate philanthropy keeps the question worth asking (see Spivak 2001: 120-63).

If the oppressed under postmodern capital have no necessarily unmediated access to 'correct' resistance, can the ideology of *sati*, coming from the history of the periphery, be sublated into any model of interventionist practice? Since this essay operates on the notion that all such clear-cut nostalgias for lost origins are suspect, especially as grounds for counterhegemonic ideological production, I must proceed by way of an example.¹¹

A young woman of sixteen or seventeen, Bhubaneswari Bhaduri, hanged herself in her father's modest apartment in North Calcutta in 1926. The suicide was a puzzle since, as Bhubaneswari was menstruating at the time, it was clearly not a case of illicit pregnancy. Nearly a decade later, it was discovered, in a letter she had left for her elder sister, that she was a member of one of the many groups involved in the armed struggle for Indian independence. She had been entrusted with a political assassination. Unable to confront the task and yet aware of the practical need for trust, she killed herself.

Bhubaneswari had known that her death would be diagnosed as the outcome of illegitimate passion. She had therefore waited for the onset of menstruation. While waiting, Bhubaneswari, the celibate girl who was no doubt looking forward to good wifehood, perhaps rewrote the social text of *sati*-suicide in an interventionist way. (One tentative explanation of her inexplicable act had been a possible melancholia brought on by her father's death and her brother-in-law's repeated taunts that she was too old to be not-yet-a-wife.) She generalized the sanctioned motive for female suicide by taking immense trouble to displace (not merely deny), in the physiological inscription of her body, its imprisonment within legitimate passion by a single male. In the immediate context, her act became absurd, a case of delirium rather than sanity. The displacing gesture -- waiting for menstruation -- is at first a reversal of the interdict against a menstruating widow's right to immolate herself; the unclean widow must wait, publicly, until the cleansing bath of the fourth day, when she is no longer menstruating, in order to claim her dubious privilege.

In this reading, Bhubaneswari Bhaduri's suicide is an unemphatic, ad hoc, subaltern rewriting of the social text of *sati*-suicide as much as the hegemonic account of the blazing, fighting, familial Durga. The emergent dissenting possibilities of that hegemonic account of

the fighting mother are well documented and popularly well remembered through the discourse of the male leaders and participants in the Independence movement. The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read.

I know of Bhubaneswari's life and death through family connections. Before investigating them more thoroughly, I asked a Bengali woman, a philosopher and Sanskritist whose early intellectual production is almost identical to mine, to start the process. Two responses: (a) Why, when her two sisters, Saileswari and Raseswari, led such full and wonderful lives, are you interested in the hapless Bhubaneswari? (b) I asked her nieces. It appears that it was a case of illicit love.

I was so unnerved by this failure of communication that, in the first version of this text, I wrote, in the accents of passionate lament: the subaltern cannot speak! It was an inadvisable remark.

Bhubaneswari Bhaduri was not a 'true' subaltern. She was a woman of the middle class, with access, however clandestine, to the bourgeois movement for Independence. Woman's interception of the claim to subalternity can be staked out across strict lines of definition by virtue of their muting by heterogeneous circumstances. Bhubaneswari attempted to 'speak' by turning her body into a text of woman/writing. The immediate passion of my declaration 'the subaltern cannot speak,' came from the despair that, in her own family, among women, in no more than fifty years, her attempt had failed.

For Europe, the time when the new capitalism *definitely* superseded the old can be established with fair precision: it was the beginning of the twentieth century. . . . [With t]he boom at the end of the nineteenth century and the crisis of 1900-03 . . . [c]artels become one of the foundations of the whole of economic life. Capitalism has been transformed into imperialism.

(Lenin 1969: 15)

Today's program of global financialization carries on that relay. Bhubaneswari had fought for national liberation. Her great-grandniece works for the New Empire. This too is a historical silencing of the subaltern. When the news of this young woman's promotion was broadcast in the family amidst general jubilation I could not help remarking to the then eldest surviving female member: 'Bhubaneswari' - her nickname had been Talu - 'hanged herself in vain,' but not too loudly. Is it any wonder that this young woman is a staunch multiculturalist, believes in natural childbirth, and wears only cotton?

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Notes

- 1 Foucault's subsequent explanation (Foucault 1980: 145) of this Deleuzian statement comes closer to Derrida's notion that theory cannot be an exhaustive taxonomy and is always normed by practice.
- 2 Cf. the surprisingly uncritical notions of representation entertained in *Power/Knowledge* (1980: 141, 188). My remarks concluding this paragraph, criticizing intellectuals' representations of subaltern groups, should be rigorously distinguished from a coalition politics that takes into account its framing within socialized capital and unites people not because they are oppressed but because they are exploited. This model works best within a parliamentary democracy, where representation is not only not banished but elaborately staged.
- 3 This is a highly ironic passage in Marx, written in the context of the fraudulent *Representation* by Louis Napoleon and the regular suppression of the *Revolutionary peasants* by bourgeois interests (Marx 1973: 239). Many hasty readers think Marx is advancing this as his own opinion about all peasantry!

- 4 See the excellent short definition and discussion of common sense in Errol Lawrence, 'Just Plain Common Sense: The "Roots" of Racism,' (in Carby 1982: 48). The Gramscian notions of 'common sense' and 'good sense' are extensively discussed in Marcia Landy, *Film, Politics, and Gramsci* (1994: 73-98).
- 5 The situation has changed in the New World Order. Let us call the World Bank/IMF/World Trade Organization 'the economic;' and the United Nations 'the political.' The relationship between them is being negotiated in the name of gender ('the cultural'), which is, perhaps, micrology as such.
- 6 Ranajit Guha, *Subaltern Studies* (1982: 8). The usefulness of this tightly defined term was largely lost when *Selected Subaltern Studies* was launched in the United States under Spivak's initiative (1988). A new selection with a new introduction by Amartya Kumar Sen is about to appear from Duke University Press. In the now generalized usage, it is precisely this notion of the subaltern inhabiting a space of difference that is lost, e.g. in statements such as the following: 'The subaltern is force-fed into appropriating the master's culture' (Emily Apter, 'French Colonial Studies and Postcolonial Theory,' (1995: 178); or worse still, Jameson's curious definition of subalternity as 'the experience of inferiority' in 'Marx's Purloined Letter' (1994: 95).
- 7 I do not believe that the recent trend of romanticizing anything written by the Aboriginal or outcaste ('dalit' oppressed) intellectual has lifted the effacement.
- 8 For a brilliant account of how the 'reality' of widow-sacrificing was constituted or 'textualized' during the colonial period, see Lata Mani, 'Contentious Traditions: the Debate on *Sati* in Colonial India,' (1989: 88-126). I profited from discussion with Dr Mani at the inception of this project. Here I present some of my differences from her position. The 'printing mistake in the Bengali translation' (109) that she cites is not the same as the mistake I discuss, which is in the ancient Sanskrit. It is of course altogether interesting, that there should be all these errancies in the justification of the practice. A regulative psychobiography is not identical with 'textual hegemony' (96). I agree with Mani that the latter mode of explanation cannot take 'regional variations' into account. A regulative psychobiography is another mode of 'textualist oppression' when it produces not only 'women's consciousness' but a 'gendered episteme' (mechanics of the construction of objects of knowledge together with validity-criteria for statements of knowledge). You do not have to 'read verbal texts' here. It is something comparable to Gramsci's 'inventory without traces' (1971: 324). Like Mani (p. 125, n. 90), I too wish to 'add' to Kosambi's 'strategies.' To the 'supplement[ation] of the linguistic study of problems of ancient Indian culture, by intelligent use of archaeology, anthropology, sociology and a suitable historical perspective' (Kosambi 1963: 177), I would add the insights of psychoanalysis, though not the regulative psychobiography of its choice. Alas, in spite of our factualist fetish, 'facts' alone may account for women's oppression, but they will never allow us to approach gendering, a net where we ourselves are enmeshed, as we decide what (the) facts are. Because of epistemic prejudice, Kosambi's bold and plain speech can and has been misunderstood; but his word 'live' can take on board a more complex notion of the mental theatre as Mani cannot: 'Indian peasants in villages far from any city *live* in a manner closer to the days when the Purānas were written than do the descendants of the brahmins who wrote the Purānas' (emphasis mine). Precisely. The self representation in gendering is regulated by the Puranic psychobiography, with the Brahmin as the model. In the last chapter I will consider what Kosambi mentions in the next sentence: 'A stage further back are the pitiful fragments of tribal groups, usually sunk to the level of marginal castes; they rely heavily upon food-gathering and have the corresponding mentality.' Kosambi's somewhat doctrinaire Marxism would not allow him to think of the tribal episteme as anything but only backward, of course. After the *sati* of Rup Kanwar in September, 1987, a body of literature on the contemporary situation has emerged. That requires quite a different engagement (see Radha Kumar 1993: 172-81).
- 9 See Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Colonial Rule* (1995). Envy, backlash, reaction-formation; these are the routes by which such efforts may, in the absence of ethical responsibility, lead to opposite results. I have repeatedly invoked Melanie Klein and Assia Djebar in this context. See also Spivak (1994: 66-9).
- 10 The examples of female ventriloquist complicity, quoted by Lata Mani in her brilliant article 'Production of an Official Discourse on *Sati* in early Nineteenth Century Bengal (1986: 1-36), proves my point. The point is not that a refusal would not be ventriloquism for Women's Rights. One is not suggesting that only the latter is correct free will. One is suggesting that the freedom of the will is negotiable, and it is not on the grounds of a disinterested free will that we will be able to justify an action, in this case against the burning of widows, to the adequate satisfaction of all. The ethical aporia is not negotiable. We must act in view of this.

- 11 A position against nostalgia as a basis of counterhegemonic ideological production does not endorse its negative use. Within the complexity of contemporary political economy, it would, for example, be highly questionable to urge that the current Indian working-class crime of burning brides who bring insufficient dowries and of subsequently disguising the murder as suicide is either a *use* or *abuse* of the tradition of *sati*-suicide. The most that can be claimed is that it is a displacement on a chain of semiosis with the female subject as signifier, which would lead us back into the narrative we have been unraveling. Clearly, one must work to stop the crime of bride burning *in every way*. If, however, that work is accomplished by unexamined nostalgia or its opposite, it will assist actively in the substitution of race/ethnos or sheer genitalism as a signifier in the place of the female subject.