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INVAGINATED CARTOGRAPHIES

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Doctor of Philosophy

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December 1999
To my grandparents

Protibha Guha Thakurta and Bibhutibhushon Guha Thakurta

who have waited long,

I offer this labor of love.
ABSTRACT

This thesis concerning women’s histories in the Indian sub-continent and Africa looks at the representation of native women at the intersections of colonial, nationalist, and post-colonial discourses. The histories concern raped and “abducted” women during the communal violence following the partition of India in 1947, their treatment by the law, and their representation in post-colonial literary imaginings, women caught between the “development” machine and euro-centric ecological justice in countries of the South, and the production of the domestic sphere in colonial Africa through structures of exclusion, and its representations in post-colonial novels. The central argument in this thesis is that it is through strategic uses of native women’s bodies that social space was made governable during colonialism, and nationalist movements came into being through appropriation of women’s bodies in representations of the nation. How those two structures of violence have passed into post-colonial imaginings, along with the legacies of the Enlightenment project that shape the policies of the post-colonial state, are read in details. Through feminist subaltern historiography, and post-colonial eco-feminism, alternate structures of narratives and representation are sought to frame resistance writings.
Acknowledgements

For being able to make this project see the light of day, my heartfelt thanks go to my dissertation advisor Betty Joseph who read my chapters with interest, gave valuable comments, asked important questions, and was relentless when I refused to write. To Jose Aranda I shall never cease to be grateful for his invaluable support, and for having enabled this project. I owe this dissertation to him. To Jean-Joseph Goux between whose asking and my telling the dissertation project took its coherent shape, I owe more than I have ever owed any teacher in my life. I thank him for providing a space of trust to do intellectual work in, for his generosity with his time, his capacity to nourish a dissenting and demanding student, and for his careful and responsive reading of my writings. I thank Hameed Naficy for his support, time, and comments on my chapters, as well as for his interest in further development of the project. I thank Meredith Skura for her gift of time, and Walter Isle for having given me the opportunity to teach a summer course in which I came up with many of the ideas I engage with in my dissertation.

To Jamila Bargach who gave me a new language to think in, and who pushed me to write, I cannot be grateful enough. I thank her for her invaluable friendship, and mentoring without which writing would not have been possible. For a summer’s benevolence of wine and words, and for enabling language, I thank Daniel Price. To Kimberley Foreman who with her shamaan- poet-dreadlocked wisdom, showed me other ways to be and made me safe to write, I extend my thanks and gratitude.
I thank Nityanand Deckha for valuable help at the initial stages of research work, Angela Williamson for poetry and friendship, Jimmy Clarke for opening me to the magic space of Chenevert house and seeing me through difficult times, Suddhasatwa Roy for having been enabling, Deba, for helping me pack and move innumerable times until I found the place where I wanted to write, Alan Nadel for being there, my family in the U.S, Kaushik Deb and Venkatesh Reddy, and my old roommate Priya Krishnamoorthy, for their support.

To Alain Parquet at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, I extend my gratitude for helping me cross bureaucratic hurdles, and making it possible for me to be in Paris and attend Jacques Derrida's seminar, the spirit of which molded the final stages of writing. To Kalida at the Social Sciences Research Center at Calcutta, I extend my thanks for taking the initiative to help me find useful research material.

To my family who waited for me and gave me moral support from the other side of the Atlantic, I owe much. I thank my mother, Namita Roy Chowdhury, for giving me her passion for words, for her long waiting, her goading me to finish, her making me want to dream, and for her endless generosity through all the hardships. I thank my father, Jagadindranath Roy Chowdhury, for his warmth, laughter, kindness and unflagging support, my brother Debashish Roy Chowdhury, for long-distance spirited conversations and badly needed laughter, my grandmother for giving me a world of strength, my grandfather for his very precious love, my uncle and aunt Ajoy Kumar Guha Thakurta and Malobika Guha Thakurta for their warmth and support. Lastly, I thank Surojit Ghosh for introducing me to the world of Bengali avant garde theater,
supplying me with a steady stream of Bengali books, and helping me realize the need to
do intellectual work in languages other than English.
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Introduction

This study, focusing on women’s histories from the Indian subcontinent and Africa, through literary texts, legal documents, historiographic accounts, looks for reading strategies to give narratives to what Spivak calls the “displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’” in that “violent space of shuttling between tradition and modernization”, “between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation”\(^1\). Hence, as much as these chapters concern the material histories of women locatable in the processes of colonial state formation, nationalist movements, and post-colonial state formations—raped and abducted women during the partition of India in 1947, the discursive production of the normed categories of women, i.e wife and mother, through structures of exclusion in colonial Africa, and women caught between development projects and euro-centric ecological discourse—they are about representation, discourses, and the ethics and politics of narratives as well.

Disparate as these histories seem to be, concerning women in different parts of the globe, what they have in common is the discursive use of women in the violence of state-formations, both colonial and post-colonial. In each of these three chapter-projects, Third World women are read as pharmakonical\(^2\) bodies—incorporated without introjection—around which colonial, nationalist, and development discourses in post-coloniality revolve, using them strategically at each juncture of social change to mark the inside from the outside. The project of this dissertation is thus, to organize readings that enable a study of the production of the category “woman” in colonial discourse, male identified nationalist discourses, and in development oriented post-colonial state-formation where
the colonial and nationalist constructions of women are incorporated, and continue to generate its violences.

The three chapter-studies are thus about the materiality of the production of real women as colonial, nationalist, and development discourses in post-coloniality come to bear on their real material lives, as well as about the blind spots of history. These readings are not about finding new evidence to better understand women's history. Invaginating the borders of several texts—literary, legal, and historiographic—they are attempts at doctoring the blind spots of history to make critical reading emerge in order to question existing structures of value on which readings are predicated. The readings are organized such that the production of a local event is seen as coming to be through a global movement of discourses. The title of this three chapter dissertation study has been named "invaginated cartographies" after the reading strategies that give logocentric certainties over to the "feminine", i.e the place of exclusion and blind spots within history. "Invagination" is a deconstructionist term that indicates the act of reading through textualizing strategies. "Reading" in a Derridean sense means the inversion or displacement of value. This act of displacement itself features as inscription in the social text, and in this sense, a deconstructionist "reading" is writing. The textualising strategies in each of these chapters, attempt at a displacement of value through the act of "reading", and creating new contexts by refolding the edges of the chosen discourses and narratives, in order to see what new questions might emerge to unsettle the transparency of the sign "woman" in legal, historical, and literary texts around which the readability of the socius itself is predicated.
Not just reading women’s bodies in history, but history’s body as woman, the textualising strategy in these chapters is organized such that erasure be read in every structure of evidence, and the question of attempting women’s history be approached only from within the structures of these erasures. Relying on textualising strategies for reading history, I break the linearity of time in organizing texts. Chapter two of this dissertation may be considered most experimental in its textualising strategy where historical and literary texts are set in an interruptive relation with one another to read the production of the gendered subject, and the structures of foreclosure in colonial as well as post-colonial historical and literary imaginings. In this study on the history of the discourse of degeneracy surrounding the representations of the pre-Christian mother, precapitalized nature, and the urban prostitute and her wealth, the critical questions demanded of the extant writings that provide a materialist history of colonialism, emerges from symbolic economy. Hence, the invaginations of the texts, i.e, the displacement of value, attempt a reading of the female body, or the discourses that produced the name-place of the “feminine”, through psychoanalytic race-philosophy writings on the gaze, sociologies of gender formation in Africa, and philosophies of symbolic economy, as much as through legal and other materialist histories.

The chapter on partition looks at how the production of the category “woman” in colonial, nationalist, and post-colonial discourses was a violent event, bearing its effects on the lives of “real” women in the violence following partition. The discursive production of the category “woman” in each colonial, post-colonial, and nationalist period came to mark the boundaries of the socius in violent ways through strategies of exclusion within the category “woman” itself, and generated new regimes of violence,
one of the culminations of which we see in the rhetoric of national honor adopted by both
the newly formed post-colonial nation states of India and Pakistan, and the forced
retrieval of lost women across the borders following the British divide of territories in
1947. Both the rape, abduction, as well as the discourse of honor adopted by the two
newly formed nations, were ways of generating symbolic meanings of the newly formed
boundaries. The discourse of honor initiated by the nation’s fathers, as I argue, was as
violent as the event of rape itself, and silenced women from ever articulating their
experiences. Other than silencing women, these discourses were instrumental in further
creating a language of communal divide, which the division of the sub-continent through
political boundaries had already created.

In attempting to read why only memoirs of martyrs, i.e women who committed
suicide, abound, while no voices of the raped and retrieved women themselves exist, I
organize a set of literary texts in order to structure a genealogical and an invaginated
reading of the economy of exclusion that went in the figuring of native women in
colonial, nationalist, and post-colonial texts. I read the nationalist novels of
Bankimchandra to see how the sign “woman” came into being, and later turned into the
symbol of the nation, figured as the divine mother. Through a genre of post-partition
literature that struggles against the genre of the nationalist novels and fails to represent
the elliptical subjectivities of the women caught in partition violence, I read how the
tropes of continuity like motherhood carry over from the nationalist genre, and make it
impossible to represent the elliptical exiled subject of border violence. I then turn to
Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* for a reading of the birth of a new style in the
diasporic imagining of the nation, where women’s bodies come to be the vehicles of
style. I yield Rushdie’s style to the question of why it cannot narrate rape, despite having parted with the style of the nationalist genre. Finally, through a reading of the *avante garde* writers who attempt a metonymic representation of the nation through a different writing of the woman’s body, I look at the possibility of narrating women’s bodies, and hence the nation itself, otherwise.

In so far as a set of questions emerge from the act of reading, re-situating the relation between the inside and outside of the literary text, and in fact proving that the very conditions of the subject’s utterance is predicated on the social imaginary crafted by the literary text, these are invaginated readings. In the absence of a “voice” text, the possibility of the question of the subject is predicated on the act of reading. Using a “neither . . . nor” strategy of reading, which belongs to a deconstructionist methodology of invaginated reading as well, I attempt at situating the subject at the very place of the text’s failure to succeed at narrating rape or the elliptical subject. In so far as the literary texts are read as worlded through histories and discourses that traverse along several time periods, colonial to post-colonial, I employ genealogical reading as well.

The second chapter on the study of gendering in colonial Africa and its impact on post-colonial literary imagining, is, as I argue, predicated on the figuring of the feminine through structures of exclusions itself. In arranging texts to enable an invaginated reading in the transaction between symbolic economies and materialist histories, my primary argument is that in order to be able to govern and manage the subject populations, the colonial officers had to be able to bring African women within a structure of readability. The sex-gender relations having been of a far different order than that in Europe, women’s bodies were unreadable to them. Consequently,
Christianity's "civilizing mission", the domestication of African women through mother making, and the legal institution of the wife, was a process in organizing a readable, manageable, and governable socius.

The organizing of such a manageable socius took place through structures of exclusion as feminist sociological studies reveal. The institution of pre-Christian motherhood of female husbands, and the urban prostitute, at two very different junctures of capital formation, belonged to such structures of exclusion. Through my study of Ben Okri's novels, I read the perpetuation of those discourses in post-colonial social formation as well as in post-colonial literary imagination. As feminist cultural critics point out, a discourse of masculine anxiety surrounds the body of the urban unmarried woman with access to money. The colonial discourses of female "degeneracy" echoes in these discourses of masculine anxiety. Through historiographic, legal, and race philosophy texts, I organize a structure of reading around Ben Okri's novels, and the anxiety-ridden treatment of the prostitute-entrepreneur body, for a genealogy of such gender exclusions that continue in post-coloniality.

In the final chapter of this dissertation, focusing on subaltern emergences, I look at the question of readability in the aegis of globalization, development and euro-centric ecological justice. A critique of the post-colonial development State, this chapter is not a denial of the importance of technology. Using the work of globalization activists like Arturo Escobar and Vandana Shiva, this chapter reads "development" as economic policy by which technology transfer from the North to South takes place in irresponsible ways and deterritorializes millions through deforestation. "Development" as economic policy and ethical calling is not dissimilar from colonialism's exploitation in the name of
civilizing mission. The transfer of capital from periphery to center is couched in the language of ethical imperatives, in which poverty as discourse⁶, especially the poor woman of the south act as mobilizing signifiers⁷. Between the colonial state and the post-colonial state, between "development" and euro-centric ecological discourses as ethical imperatives, poor women’s bodies in the South occupy that place of "violent shuttling", where the inside and outside of those discourses collapse.

This study, like the two other studies, places the feminine within the question of violence of language, its silences, blind spots, and structures of exclusion, and in deconstructionist terms, situates the turn of reading as "writing". The place of exclusion is read in terms of questions of value. If the regime of the general equivalent predicates structures of readability of the socius, how might one read subjects who fall outside its predications? Vandana Shiva, in her reading of invisible value, Gayatri Spivak, in her attendance to the graphematic moments in Marx, and Mahasweta Devi in her attendance to the question of justice, attend to those subjects that do not fall within the Enlightenment reasoning of progress.

Within the nation, yet outside, the subaltern subject cannot be understood in the metropolitan idiom of the hybrid. Unlike in the case of the metropolitan subject of resistance and emergence, the subaltern can have access to justice through socialized capital, only within a structure of violence. The translational act of Devi’s writing moving through several kinds of languages to give a sense of that heterogeneity, attempts at writing the subaltern within a rights based discourse even as it reads against the grain of various levels of official discourse: Devi attempts, what one in a deconstructionist sense would call, (im)possible translation—taking recourse to the
neither . . . nor structure of performing subjectivity—lest the subaltern be appropriated in an instrumental way of knowing, which Partha Chatterjee\textsuperscript{8} locates as the central problem of the development state.

Focusing on \textit{Puran Shahay, Pterodactyl, and Pirtha}, and “Bayen”, a novel and a short story by Devi, this chapter explores in depth the question of readability, and the value structures that go in the making of readability. If the readability of the socius is predicated on the scripting of the woman’s body, how do we read the bodies of women undergoing forced birth control in the one, and resisting what one would call a progressive discourse of modernity, in the other? In the former, Devi tarries with the question of distributive justice, and in the latter, she poses the question of subaltern consciousness, unreadable within the structures of metropolitan norms of progress or communicative reason. Reading against the grain of Vandana Shiva’s equation of nature with the feminine—a position I claim could be continuous with the Enlightenment project—I attempt at those subaltern spaces that do not answer to an easy fit between the good, the figuring of the feminine, and questions of ecology. The nature-human-production nexus opens to the metabolic time of the “evil” in the unincorporability of Bayen’s production—the burial of dead children—within modernity.

If invagination is another name for reading, or displacement of value, the act of reading Gayatri Spivak, Vandana Shiva, and Mahasweta Devi in this chapter, is itself an act of invagination of the social text, i.e of “reading” by defamiliarizing the terms “nature”, “economic”, and “biology”, which are treated as unmarked categories by development planners, globalization advocates, and those in support of euro-centric ecological justice. That nature and biology are scripted by the global value production
machine, and foreclosures and erasures are part of that scripting is what my reading of Devi’s stories, Vandana Shiva’s eco-critique, and Gayatri Spivak’s theorizing of the traffic in readability between the margin and the center, attempt. In attending to Spivak’s readings of the world as text, that call us to question what we can do as literary critics to pay heed to the structures of erasure within global capital, I attempt at invaginating the borders of the texts we have access to, so that the “other”, the erased subject of invisible value, can enter the time of justice.
5 To my understanding, Derrida’s use of terms like “graphematic” and the “graphein” alludes to a reading, geared to approaching the question of emergences and performances from the neither...nor structure of reading, i.e. a reading against the grain in which the question of the subject, or reading as marking the space of emergence of the subject, does not aim at a presence structure. This is also where he draws the difference between polysemy and dissemination. See “Signature, Event, Context” in Margins of Philosophy. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1982, and “Living On, Borderlines” Deconstruction and Criticism for the articulation of these positions.
Rape, Illegitimacy, and the Margins of the Modern Nation

The event of partition in the Indian subcontinent on the eve of Independence from British colonial rule, and its division of India into two separate nation States, India and Pakistan, on the basis of religion, the dislocation and uprooting of communities, and the spate of communal violence following it, opens a snag in the teleological narrative from colonialism to post-colonialism, that often informs the mainstream historiographies.¹ The snag concerns not only the consequences following the creation of political boundaries, but the very crisis concerning the question of narration of the partition in the subcontinent. Partition, as much as it is a violent event in the subcontinent, and needs to be written about, because of the very nature of its contentious framing of agency, shifts from event to discourse status in any event of narration. Narrating partition from the Indian side of the border, mainstream nationalist historiography ends up mourning the fragmentation of a borderless India, which also amounts to a disavowal of the Muslim agency in the demand for a separate nation-state. Nationalist historiography in Pakistan, in making the affirmation of the two nation theory the take off point in the narration of the nation, i.e casting the event of partition in an enabling light, ends up being elitist in its writing of agency, as the very terms of enabling must disregard the class construct of agency as well as the nature of dislocation and class upheaval in the event of violent border-crossing by millions.

Nationalist historiographies on both sides, thus frame their narratives such, that the minoritarian position is left out of the possibility of narrating the nation, and history ends up being the narrative of the political agencies of Gandhi, Neheru, or Jinnah, and
their encounters with the colonial rulers. The end-game of empire in mainstream historiography—both metropolitan and nationalist—is thus cast in terms of the drama of will between Mountbatten, Neheru, Gandhi, and Jinnah, and not until recently, particularly through the efforts of subaltern historiographers, has partition historiography been attempted from the under-side, i.e. those who had to migrate, were caught in, or participated in border violence, and became the subject-citizens of independent nation-states with the knowledge that home and nation were two mutually exclusive categories.

A spate of writings on partition by writers like Saadat Hasan Manto, journals and autobiographical writings by women social workers like Anees Qidwai who were put in charge by the State to lead the retrieval operations of lost and “abducted” women from the “wrong” side of the border, often against their own wills, are brought to fore by subaltern historians in order to narrate the nation from the underside and its margins, as well as critique the hegemonic constructs of identity.

Perhaps the most noteworthy achievements of Indian subaltern historians, concerning the studies of partition, are the questionings of the meaning of nation and community from the perspective of religious and gender identity, and the critique of the Indian nation-state in the wake of its treatment of the “lost” and “abducted” women. In the event that the “lost” women reclaimed belonged to Hindu and Sikh communities, and were exchanged for Muslim women, they question the very meaning of the newly formed post-colonial state’s secular ideals. Neither of these questions remains geared to the events of partition. They go back to colonial history of community formation, the gender and communal politics in the shaping of the nationalist imaginary, and the implications of such histories for the future.
In their study on patriarchal hegemonies and violence against women in South Asia, Kumari Jayawardane and Malathi De Alvis write about the greater intensity of reclamation of the “lost” women from the Indian side than from the Pakistan side of the border, even over two decades following the partition. Jayawardane and De Alvis’s explanations are that it was the Indian side that had experienced fragmentation, and had been truncated by the partition, and hence their need to repair the sense of fragmentation was more intense and pressing. But perhaps another explanation for the retrieval operations and the discourses surrounding the “lost”, and “abducted” women at the Indian side of the border merits equal importance. Since the Indian nationalist imaginary (the cultural make of which was Hindu) as resistance to colonial discourses of race vilification, drew on the figure of the Hindu woman for the construction of a glorious past of mythological greatness, it was surrounding the Hindu woman’s body that the most angst-ridden discourses were born when the nation was fragmented. The discourses of purity that were deployed in the retrieval operation from the Indian side drew much from the nationalist discourses surrounding the body of the upper caste Hindu woman.

Michel Foucault posits sexuality as a “dense transfer point for relations of power... and one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality”. In the sexual violence inflicted on women during the partition riots, and the legal battles over their bodies in the years following the transfer of power and the birth of new nation states, one can read another version of the empire and its end, the outcome of the hidden life of its power-lines that had shaped the political and civic psyches of its subject populations, and continued to do so through other molds in postcoloniality. In this chapter study, through studies of the framing of readability of women’s bodies in nationalist literature, the
struggles against that structure of readability, and the subsequent failures to represent the event of women’s violation in post-partition genres, I look at Foucaultian transfer points of power through Derridean questions of readability and narratability. Feminist subaltern historiography itself is an important discourse which reorganizes the terms of narratability and readability of women’s bodies, thereby offering another map of the nation. In the following sections, I then turn to subaltern historiography of the partition, before moving on to tracing the nationalist narratives that framed the readability of women’s bodies. In reading the various literary genres, the central tenet of the rest of the chapter will be that violence is narrative, and a critical reading will constantly seek to unravel the terms of such violence.

Of Subaltern Historiography of the Partition

Feminist subaltern historians rewrite the anatomy of communal violence during partition from the underside—the legal action taken regarding raped and abducted women, children born of rape and other “illegitimate” unions, and harijans or untouchables who fell between the dividing lines drawn by the British, and whose demands for rights and citizenship went unheard by both the British rulers and nationalist leaders. The implications of that heterogeneity on the face of rigid religious identities defining the limits of community—Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh being the chief actors on the stage of partition history, and continuing to be the official legatees of the post-colonial nations as par colonial drawing of boundaries—are immense for the present as well as the future, affecting the nature of political visibility and the map of the nation.

The more compelling questions coming out of subaltern historiography of the partition regarding the meaning of subject and socius, concern the rape and forcible
abduction of women during partition, the equally barbaric policies of the two new nation states concerning these women and their illegitimate children, the place of these events in public memory, and their representations in legal, historical, and literary texts. The forced retrieval of abducted women by the two nation states, their exchange, concerning more the symbolic act of restoring national honor than the choice or will of the women concerned, drawn out several decades after the partition in 1947, raises questions regarding the event of partition itself, as well as how to determine what a historical event is. The discursive nature of the event—the rhetoric of women's exchange bearing echoes of nationalist narratives—calls for the reading of the historical event in terms of ruins, fragments, and allegory, as against a homogeneous construct of chronological historical time. The allegorical frame enables one to read history in terms of the discursive production of the category "woman" around which the destinies of the real bodies of women come to bear.

Historians have written at length on the hurried and premature transfer of power, and consequently the uneven nature of the boundaries drawn. The transfer of power—drawing boundaries, division of the army, withdrawal of the British officers—supposed to have taken five years, was achieved hurriedly in a matter of a couple of months. Often by way of carelessness, and sometimes quite deliberately (the case of Kashmir) Hindu or Sikh majority territories were allocated to the Pakistan side of the border, and Muslim majority territories to the India side. For those who had to move to the "legitimate" side of the border, where according to the new order of things they now belonged, the meaning of nation came to be at odds with homeland. Even as historians offer this crisis in meaning of home, community, nation, and the individual's identity itself as the cause
of the mass violence, one may not cease to ask why of the many choices of violence when the very meaning of socius falls apart, sexual violence, and the rape and mutilation of women’s bodies?

The meaning of that violence is many-fold. In the event that during the period of nationalist movement, nation was imagined in the inflation of the sign woman, i.e. through the nation’s figuring as mother and goddess, women’s real bodies became the targets of violence when the sign nation no more promised the plenitude of being or the promise of becoming. If the transformation of real women into symbols through deification, entailed the absolute emptying of the sexual content of the materiality of women’s bodies, or the deification of women in the sexualizing of the signifier nation took place in the negation of the materiality of women’s bodies, then during partition when nation itself had become a sign emptied of signification for those who had to abandon all their belongings, it was through a relation of violence with the materiality of women’s bodies and in the negation of its deified signification, that the violent meaning of nation came to be.

If at the level of communities, symbolic violence was sought through the violence inflicted on the bodies of real women, then at the level of the newly formed national governments, that demanded that “their women” be returned from the wrong side of the border, the violence was of yet another nature. Women were forcibly brought from the other side of the border, and exchanged like bartered goods at the borders. It was less the question of their real well being, than the symbolic meaning of their retrieval that mattered. The symbolic meaning that their bodies continued to generate for the newly formed nations founded on bloodshed and violence, and a fractured identity (not just on
the Indian side where the sense of fracture was obvious and overwhelming, but on the Pakistan side too where the drawing of the political borders made them feel cheated of their expected share of land) can be further evidenced by the fact that women who had been impregnated by the “other men” were aborted at border camps funded by the State.

If abducted women were retrieved several years later, unlike in the case of war babies in most other situations, their “illegitimate” children born of co-habitation with men from the “other” side, were not accepted. Law held that they be left to their “natural fathers”. If the State acting in the name of national honor, “retrieved” the women forcibly, often against their own will, for women rarely wanted to come back to their communities who they knew would not accept them, the reluctance of their kins and communities and the State’s attempts at opening a dialogue with them, opened itself to another structure of violence. The male kins who had first reported the absence of the women and initiated the State’s search, refused to accept the women when they were actually found, and the State intervened by appealing to a discourse of purity. Gandhi and Nehru personally approached the men of the respective communities by appealing to a discourse of purity, not unlike the nationalist discourse of the deification of women. Gandhi claimed that the “violated” women were as pure as his own daughters. The problem of rehabilitating the women once they were brought back, was so acute, that the government started printing and distributing pamphlets on the mythological women like Sita who had been accepted under similar circumstances.

In their research and writings, subaltern feminist historiographers address not only the actual violence perpetrated on women, and question its meaning, but the representation of that violence as well. Urvashi Butalia reads State violence in the
discursive production of the category “woman” in the official registers following the riots of partition. It was not that only women were missing. Men and children were missing too. Quite possibly there were more children lost in the riots of partition than women. Yet, the State never made an effort as elaborate to search for the men and children as it did in deploying an entire State machinery to retrieve its “lost” women and generate an entire discourse of women’s violation.

Besides, despite the British division of India on the basis of religion, if India claimed to call itself a secular State, what kind of secularism was it claiming if Hindu and Sikh women had to be cleansed through abortion of the defiling “other”, i.e, the foetus conceived of sexual intercourse with a Muslim man? If the rhetoric of “exchange” on the Indian side meant the receiving of Hindu and Sikh women against the turning in of Muslim women, what implications did it have for the secular State where there continued to live a large number of Muslims? While during the nationalist period, in retaliation of a vicious Victorian racist discourse of the backwardness of Indian women, nation was imagined in the deification of women, in the post-partition period when nation had to be imagined against the “other”, the discursive production of women’s violated bodies, acted as a sign that reproduced the national boundaries.

Feminist Subaltern Historiography and the Question of Voice

Some of the issues that feminist subaltern historiographers tarry with in their constructions of narratives, concern the question of voice. Writing women’s histories in partition, one encounters three voices—that of the State, of the women social workers working for the State and engaged in the forced retrieval operations, and the voices of the women themselves. None of these voices are contiguous, and it remains the task of the
feminist historian to write women’s history from within the cracks between these voices. The voices of raped and “abducted” women themselves have multiple layers. The women who were forcibly retrieved had a resistant voice before the women social workers, a compliant voice of another key before the Law once they had been retrieved, and a near silence about the very experiences of rape and abductions, asked about which many of them tell their feminist interviewers that it was dangerous to remember “those days”, speaking in metaphors of poison, dissolving the very rock bottom of consciousness.

The structuring of memory regarding women’s experiences in partition is two-fold. The mass of individual suicides of women and their willing or reportedly willing deaths at the hands of their own fathers and brothers for the sake of family honor are remembered in glorified tales of martyrdom, and sung by both men and women of their communities, whereas the accounts of women’s strategies of survival on the face of day to day rejection by their communities and families after they had been “retrieved” and forcibly brought back from the “wrong” side of the border for the sake of national honor, the memories of rape and abduction, or even the memories of life with their rapists, abductors, or protectors of another religion and community at the “wrong” side of the border for those who continued to live there or refused to return to the rejection of their kins and communities, are consigned to silence, and hidden from history.

The subalternist feminist attempts at retrieving these women’s voices from the depths of silence is fraught with many aporias, as some begin to question the very purpose of such research and enquiries which do not diminish the traumas of the survivors concerned. Relying on voices to write history raises other concerns about temporality—for those who speak many years after the event, and hence speak
selectively, perhaps often to give themselves a narrative, and for those who ask questions triggered by another set of events (almost all of the subaltern historians working on partition came from families that were uprooted or had encountered violence during partition, grown up hearing some of those stories the contours of which were often blurred, and began excavating the ruins of partition history after the 1984 mass killings of Sikh and communal riots following Indira Gandhi's assassination), their questions shaping the very structure of the speaker's narrative. But most often, retrieving voices becomes an exercise in decoding the strategies of silence, reading between the lines, interpreting, engaging in a translation contract in which the feminist historian's voice becomes an important determinant on which the axis of history turns.

The question of the historian's voice, however, varies according to the questions that guard the concern of historiography as an ethical project. An instance of that difference lies in Veena Das and Urvashi Butalia's framings. Veena Das intends turning historiography into a work of mourning, drawing on its healing force, making it an "occasion for forming one body with the victim", and "constructing memory through the common sharing of pain" in the event that no tribunals trying the guilty, no theatrical space like the courtroom where women could acknowledge their suffering, or public ritual of mourning took place following the violence of partition. Re-narrativizing in order to establish the continuity of time that had been so violently split in the violence of partition, is her historiographic goal, and the philosophical meaning making structures she employs, are intended to serve that goal. The bodies of the raped and mutilated women on whose sexual parts were often tattooed and cut out the names of the contending nation, as though in a gesture to reclaim lost territory, are read by Das as the bodies of
debtor who had to submit to every indignation because of failed obligation to the
creditors. When the nation as territory valorized as motherland in nationalist imagining
was truncated, it was the body of the real woman on whom the rage over lost territory
was unleashed.

In Urvashi Butalia's framing of women's histories and partition violence, she
treats the event at the level of discourse, and there is a questioning of the meaning of
violence itself. Not just the rape, abduction, and the mutilation of women's body parts
does she read as violence, but women's mass suicide as violence as well. How communal
identity is written in the bodies of women through codes of honor, and the kinds of
violence it generates, and how discourses of national honor initiate other structures of
violence, is her key focus. Not tied only to the event of partition, her queries seem to lead
to a genealogy of how one is constituted as man or woman within the community and the
nation. Butalia's framing seem to call for a machinery of reading as opposed to Das's
writing as mourning. The two historiographic goals can yield very different results.

The question of "reading" appears in the work of most subaltern feminist scholars
in the absence of women's refusal to talk about their experiences during partition. As
opposed to the ritual mourning of women who had committed suicide by consuming
poison or jumping into wells, women who had been raped, abducted, and continued to
live with their abductors have been consigned to silence. They cannot be written into
history from the realm of "voice" because their voices do not exist. When asked
questions, they say that it is dangerous to remember "that time"; they speak in metaphors
of hidden wombs and buried poison which dissolve the grounds of consciousness.
In the event of absence of testimonies and the women's refusal to talk about their experiences, subaltern historians often turn to literary texts for evidence in order to write partition into history. But the visual economy of women's bodies, as well as the politics of their voice in partition literature needs to be questioned critically before being accepted as evidence. Rape, written mostly by male writers, is turned into a sensational event, feeding into the logic of woman as territory, in whose bodies national dishonor must be witnessed and avenged.

The work of a literary critic, aligning herself with the project of subaltern feminist historiography would then be to surround the space of such gaze which motivates the signifiers of evidence in history's text, and make the history of women emerge at every turn of the deconstruction of the gaze's signifying power. Unlike the work of mourning as a strategy and an ethics of memory, this would be a strategy based on an endless deconstruction of value through a reading machine that writes as it reads, rendering the naturalized sign "woman" at the wake of that gaze, denaturalized, putting it within quotes, anticipating a wholly other possibility—in Derridean terms, the move from mnémé to psyché.

Writing women's experiences during partition into history, one must thus find a space-time of reading-writing beyond the economy of mourning. The specular stage must turn in readings against the grain till meaning emerges from the other of "voice" and presence on history's pages, official and legal documents, and from literary texts that historians often use as "voice" in the absence of evidence. Women's histories from the place of poison hidden in invisible wombs would entail reading the conditions of speech, and also the conditions of making visible, from the place of the impossible—the very
impossibility of narrating rape in the existing genres. Shifting from the visibility of death to the invisibility of survival, where performances have not entered the space-time of readable grammar, I then address the space of illegitimacy.

In the following sections I look at the politics of public memory of the martyrs, i.e. women who committed suicide or let their male kins take their lives, and four literary genres, each in a textualised relation with another. The four sets of texts are the nationalist novels of Bankimchandra where the sign “woman” comes to be in its capacity as the vehicle and tenor of the metaphor of nation, consequently characterised by a set of exclusions that go in the making of the “feminine” and normed womanhood, a few stories written during the post-partition period, attempting to represent women’s histories during and following the partition violence but failing to do so, Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children, a novel concerning India’s Independence and its modern history which does not narrate the partition, nor the rape of women despite its having parted with the nationalist styles of writing women, and the stories of avant garde writers that part with the nationalist framings of writing either nation or woman, and the possibilities of metonymic ruptures within this new turn of narrative.

Arts of public memory: Political economies of mnemonic poison and the feminization of death

In Gurdwaras of Punjab, martyrs are ritually remembered. Women’s timely death gives national time, or so is the politics of such remembrance. Women’s “proper” death, like motherhood and other tropes of legitimate womanhood enables the imagining of continuity which holds the nation and religious communities together. In the act of remembering, not only are the dead sung, but the living educated in the arts of
womanhood. The meaning of community and nation are perpetuated in those ritual remembrance.

In Punjab, voices of those who remember the event of women becoming martyrs at the swords and pistols of fathers, brothers, and sons...in Gulab Singh's haveli twenty-six girls had been put aside. First of all my father, Sant Raja Singh, when he brought his daugther, he brought her into the courtyard to kill her, first of all he prayed, he did ardaas, he said sachche badshah, we have not allowed our Sikhi to get stained, and in order to save your Sikhi we are going to sacrifice our daughters, make them martyrs, please forgive us... Maan Kaur...my sister came, and sat in front of my father, and I stood there right next to him, clutching onto his kurta as children do...when my father swung the kirpan...perhaps some doubt or fear came in his mind, or perhaps the kirpan got stuck in her dupatta...then my sister, with her own hand she removed her plait and pulled it forward...and my father with his own hands moved her dupatta aside and then he swung the kirpan and her head and neck rolled off and fell...

Every year such stories are repeated many times in the Gurdwaras to an audience of women, men, and children not only as historical chronicles, but as examples for young women of how to guard one's sexuality from being "stained" or polluted. In the narration of such events to Urvashi Butalia, many of the men come across as seeing their fathers and the other men of the community who had to take their lives to save honor, and not those who gave their lives, as the victims. As moral victims, conscious of their suffering, bearing the burden and pain of responsibility, it is the men who were the moral agents of the act. It is they, who as the keepers of sikhi (the sanctity of Sikh identity), which rested
in women’s sexual morality, sacrificed women to God before they could be polluted by the “other”.

The stories told ritually are not a bare outline of the events, or a list of names recited to invoke the names of the community’s elders. They have a very explicit visual economy . . . the daughter lifting her plait . . . the father removing the dupatta—markers of femininity—which makes the sword hesitate, are pushed aside as woman must overcome and cross out her femininity in the act of martyrdom, and achieve supra-womanhood in the final contract between God and nation where signatory is man. The drama of dilemmas, the outcome of which must inevitably be consent, acquires new dimensions with temporality. The significance of the ritual remembrance of these stories lie in their removal from the actual event in time, as they interpellate the gendered subject of religion, community, family, and nation . . .

. . . one girl, my taya’s daughter-in-law, who was pregnant . . . somehow she didn’t get killed and later my taya’s son shot her with a pistol . . . but she was saved. She told us, kill me, I will not survive. I have a child in my womb. She was wounded in the stomach, there was a large hole from which blood was flowing . . . she said give me some afim . . . in a ladle we mixed opium with saliva . . . she said the jajji sahib path, and said vahe guru, let me become a martyr, and just as the path came to her end, so did her end come . . . she really had death in her control, and when she wanted death to take her away, it did . . . the last sloka . . . pan guru pani pita, mata tat mahat . . . I can’t remember it well. But her life became complete at the time.

Such is the politics of mnemonic poison—it cleanses the socius of illegitimacies, draws the boundaries between the community and its other, and by way of the woman’s
death guards the sacred meaning of community and nation. The politics of language and
visibility of women’s bodies accompanying the political economy of that poison belongs
to the economies of possible gift and exchange. Poison acts as a transsignifying force in
public memory, and women’s bodies are consumed as eucharist sign-bodies in such tales
of women taking their own lives, or giving it as gift to God, nation, and community. The
grammar of illegitimacy belonging to the other economy of hypomnemetic poison—the
one that eats away the floors of consciousness but neither purges nor cleans—belongs to
the other of language, absenced from visibility. I turn then to the nationalist novels of
Bankimchandra for one of the many narrative framings of the language of honor, and
how it came to mark the sign “woman” in its current readable form.

Figuring Women in Nationalist Literary Imagination.

In Bankimchandra’s nationalist novels, women cross-dressed in martial attire of holy men
or brahmacharis, as in Anandamath, or attired in the sannyasini’s holy garb of
renunciation as in Sitaram, abandon their lives of sexual desire, step aside from the
domestic sphere, and become freedom fighters, though invariably to return to the
domestic sphere once more. They are always married Hindu women whose husbands are
alive, and the period of their renunciation of domesticity when they take up martial
identities, is treated as a test which above all affirms the much maligned Hindu domestic
sphere in nineteenth century colonial discourses of social reform. In fact,
Bankimchandra was much against the discourses of social reform that were derogatory of
elite nationalist masculinities. It was not that he supported Sati, child marriage, or
polygamy, but he believed that change should come from within, from the spiritual
spheres, rather than from legal reforms made from without. In the nationalist novels, thus,
the women stepping out of the domestic sphere, undergoing martial and spiritual training of self-discipline, and going back to the domestic sphere once more, enact his at once rebellious and reactionary ideology.

In Anandamath, the female character Shanti becomes a brahmachari (one who renounces riches and sexual gratification), and dressed as a man, joins her husband in the nationalist uprisings. In Devi Chaudhurani and Sitaram, the female protagonists Profulla and Sree coming from polygamous domestic arrangements, married when children, and abandoned by their respective in-laws—the former, for not having brought adequate dowry, and the latter, for having her future divined and told she would bring ill luck to her husband—step out of the domestic sphere, undergo physical and spiritual training. Eventually they meet their lost husbands, come to their aid—Profulla turned Devi, with the aid of her armed men, extricates her father-in-law from the ransom seeking British, and Sree fights an army singlehandedly when Sitaram’s own generals fail—and finally return to the domestic sphere. Shanti turns brahmachari in a script where woman’s ability to renounce or withhold her sexual desire indicates her moral strength and Profulla turned Devi Chaudhurani, the decoit queen leading an army of armed men who rob the rich to aid the poor, proves the Hindu woman’s capacity for leadership, and her ability to combine force with love, mercy with power, much in keeping with Bankimchandra’s philosophy of the superiority of East’s culture in its spiritual dimension over the West. With the sails of her fifty ships ruling the visual economy of the novel, Devi Chaudhurani is literally the veiled phallus, and the metaphor of man. Having punished and forgiven her father-in-law in her own terms, her return to the domestic sphere amongst her co-
wives, finally conveys the message that woman's success lies in making the dominance of man look graceful.

The female characters in these nationalist novels masquerade male desire in their cross-dressed and martial femininity. The nation is born as a sign in the literary and cultural imaginary in these Hindu women's retreat from the domestic realm, and their abnegation of sexual desire. But even as they take up the brahmachari garb, the textual treatment of these women's bodies or the textual gaze that constellates them as symbols of the nation is far from non-erotic. It is a non-carnal eros, far removed from the erotic elements associated with the "lay" in the earlier novels where language gives in to the play of illegitimate desire, even though to affirm legitimacy in the end, i.e. woman's virtue and social good tied to marriage and honor. In the aura of non-carnal spirituality surrounding the Hindu brahmachari and cross-dressed martial women of the nationalist novels, nation as a sacred signifier is born. In Anandamath where the nation is hailed as mother by the male brahmacharis, no woman is present. Once the narrative has set Shanti in the position of moral strength in her renunciation of domesticity, and made her into a source of aura that suffuses the rigors of male struggle in the text, she is no more required. It is in that aura, that men hail the nation as mother as they embrace each other in both homo-social and homo-erotic bonding. And even though no woman is present in that scene, the sign "woman" of the earlier novels turns into symbol in the hailing of nation as mother, and inaugurates a new regime of violence against real women by disabling a discourse of the materiality of women's bodies, or of women's affirmation from the space of that materiality.
Whereas in Bankimchandra’s earlier novels set in the romance genre, woman as “sign” came to be coined in the exchange and gift economies of marriage, in the later nationalist novels, there is more expected of the narrative function of women. They occupy the place of both symbol and sign in their movement away from and back to the domestic sphere. Louis Marin writes of the representational economy of the sign in terms of the culinary metaphor which acts as a vehicle as well as “effects the formation of a dialectic between logos, eros, and sitos, three terms that refer to the three salient poles . . . words within a system of language and communication, women within a kinship system, and goods within an economic order” (125). In the thematics of poison and honor in Bankimchandra’s earlier novels, we see the shaping and the social consumption of the sign woman as well as the transformation of language from a “lower” to a “higher” order. In the later novels, woman as sign already put in place, the shift is towards woman as symbol of the nation.

In the earlier novels, women are legitimised in the domestic sphere through an elaborate narrative engagement with the illicit and the illegitimate and their negation. In Bishobrikho (Trans. Tree of Poison) Kundonandini, who elicits illicit and “poisonous” passions in Debendra and Mahendra, finally takes poison and dies, and the legitimate love of Debendra’s first wife Suryamukhi, whose expression of love as duty is the veneration of husband, is affirmed. In the nationalist novels this veneration turns into the worship of the nation where woman as symbol of nation, comes to occupy the place of the venerated one and it is men who venerate. Women have already turned into symbols of the nation in these novels. The symbol, as Marin writes, has a different representational economy. The symbol shifts the sign to a new regime of meaning. In the
aura of the symbol, the sign “woman” cooked in the discourses of exchange, and consumed through narrative rituals of honor and purity, is transformed into a hyper-sign. The codes of the materialization of the sign “woman” are transformed, and once the woman has undergone transformation in the metaphor of the nation in the nation’s metaphorization through her body turned aura, she returns back to the domestic sphere. From venerating to venerated body and back to being a venerating body, the women in the nationalist novels embody what Spivak reads as woman being the metaphor of man in literary style as a scene of displacement. A reading of the genealogy of that style involves the contextualizing of the sign and symbol of woman as they come to metaphorize and materialize the birth of the sign nation, with nineteenth century colonial legal and orientalist discourses of race, religion, and “native culture”.

Partha Chatterjee writes of the paradoxes of the ideology that goes in the shaping of nationalist imaginaries within the colonial state. Such paradoxes are characterised by both resistance to and incorporation of colonial and orientalist discourses. In the case of Bankimchandra, one can see such splittings and paradoxes at work in his incorporation of the Enlightenment ideals of progress and reason on the one hand, and his resistance to the racist content embedded in those ideals. The very act of resistance itself is split once more between acceptance and negation of the dominant racist discourses of native culture. Bankimchandra accepted the nineteenth century dominant racial discourse of Bengali cultural effeminacy and concluded that a culture could be de-effeminized by empowering itself. The nationalist novels and his writings on Krishna can consequently be seen as such texts of empowerment.
Mrinalini Sinha's study on discourses of colonial masculinity\textsuperscript{16} surrounding the nineteenth century legal discourses reveal the way in which colonial power and polity came to be shaped through racial discourses of cultural effeminacy. The natives were divided into effeminate and masculine races, and often those markers became the tools for dividing the natives amongst themselves, as well as from the norm defining British rulers. The colonial division of labor amongst the natives, i.e who should be in the army, and who should take up clerical positions in the colonial offices was predicated on those categories. Sinha reads the discourses of effeminacy surrounding the Bengali Babu or the Bengali male elite who occupied important positions in the colonial office, Bengal having been the seat of colonial power in India. Her position is that the meaning of race—on which colonial power was predicated—was not itself a fixed category, and had to be invented over and over again through discourses of masculinity, and especially in situations, as in the case of the Bengali elites at the turn of the century, where the natives contented for power in the government. It was the native's effeminacy that made him (race or culture defining a people, always conceived as male) inferior, and proved the colonizing culture superior. And what made the native male, or certain categories of native male like the Bengali Babu inferior was not just the physical aspects—one of the legal discourses this was made prominent in, was during the native volunteer movement in 1885-86 when in rejecting the Indian demand for a native volunteer force, the British used a discourse of "martial" and "non-martial" Indian castes—but in ways in which they treated their women. The British demand for social reforms to better the condition of native women thus became the test of Indian masculinity in the public sphere.
In the backdrop of such colonial racial and gender politics surrounding the native elite, as well as the unique native elite psyche bred under colonialism, that both accepts and rejects colonial values, how does one read the Bengali elite Bankimchandra’s nationalist novels as texts of empowerment? Having accepted the superiority of the Enlightenment principles of progress, the only sphere he believed in which the natives could be proved superior and wage a struggle against the British, was the sphere of culture. And culture of the East, he defined in terms of the spiritual, as opposed to the material culture of the West—a construct which was orientalist as well. In defining the superiority of the Indian culture thus, he drew on Krishna, in whom he saw the combination of mercy and power, which he thought was lacking in Christ. In valorizing the martial Krishna of the Mahabharata, as opposed to the Krishna of the “lay” worshippers, Bankimchandra espoused the orientalist content of the evaluation of Eastern spirituality. The Krishna of the “lay” worshippers effeminized Hindu culture and rendered it degenerate as opposed to the martial Krishna of the Mahabharatas who provided a philosophy of power. In the female characters of the nationalist novels, removed from the domestic sphere and donning their martial garbs, we thus see the embodiment of the virtues of Krishna, i.e, mercy and power, love and strength, and judiciousness in battle, woven in one. The aesthetics of style as well as the language is markedly austere in these later novels, and especially in Anandamath, the best known of the nationalist novels, as opposed to the linguistic play of the earlier novels.

Perhaps, one of the places to point at the reversal of values in literary aesthetics, linguistic taste, as well as in the aesthetics of devotion, is the cross-dressing in the earlier novels, as opposed to that in the latter. In The Tree of Poison, Mahendra cross dresses as
a woman as he goes to woo Kundanandini, the elicitor of poisonous passions. He wears paint, dons false breasts, and goes right into the women’s quarters to sing songs of Krishnoprem or Krishna-love, which are addressed to Kundanandini. Such cross-dressing, the literary treatment of the male devotee’s love of the male God Krishna, the mixing of the physical with the spiritual, and in popular culture, the participation of such devotional sentiments in the aesthetics of the bawdy, informs the literary traditions of old Bengali poetry. It is in moments like Mahendra’s dressing up as a vaishnavee—a female devotee—when there is consent between the author and the readers that the cross-dresser is a man, does one see Bankimchandra drawing on such literary traditions which finally undergoes cleansing, in the redefinition of culture through the cleansing of the “effeminate degenerate” elements in Hinduism, much maligned in orientalist scholarship. In the western genre of the novel he adopts, the woman is cross-dressed, and is the vehicle of both the ideals of a martial and judicious Krishna identified Hinduism, and a western sense of literary taste.

The martial women in the nationalist novels, in their renunciation of sexual desire, and in their rigorous self-discipline, thus embody the austerity of Victorian womanhood, carrying the nation to its Enlightenment inspired destiny of progress, cleansed of the British racist aspersions of Hindu cultural degeneration through lay carnal sexuality, men’s effeminacy, and women’s down-trodden state. Thus, in the nationalist rewriting of literary aesthetics and gender norms, paint must give way to poison, and the illegitimate cast out of the polis. In The Tree of Poison Kundanandini finally consumes poison and dies. In Anandamath the division of women’s sphere into Shanti and Kalyani—the former who cross dresses, enters the phase of male identified renunciation or
brahmacharya for a higher goal to craft the national imaginary, and the latter who takes poison to escape the shame of illicit male advances—establish the norms of womanhood in nationalism. The figure of woman, the equation of woman with nation, and nation with mother, is thus born in the crossing of genre and transformation of literary aesthetics. In the post-partition politics of women’s voices, we see the outcome of the shaping of a national imaginary in such figuring. The women social workers who acted as the nation’s emissaries in retrieving the lost women often against their own will, as well as the only women to be able to have voices, and the retrieved women, considered illegitimate, and silenced, to bear the burden of their poisonous memories for the rest of their lives might be seen as the counterparts of the two categories of women in the nationalist novels.

In the nationalist novels, the illegitimate does not consist only of the lay elements of Hinduism or of illicit passions, that need to be transformed through the metaphorization of Hindu women’s bodies, but of the Islamic as well. The enemy that the martial Hindu female protagonists fight are Muslims, and the nation hailed as mother by its devoted sons, is a Hindu one. The setting of Anandamath, Sitaram, and Rajsinha is not the late nineteenth century of British rule, but the Mughal period, or the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the British were making their presence felt. In Anandamath, the Hindu army fights both the Muslims and the freshly arrived British, and the judgment at the end of the novel is that the British influence would be good for strengthening the Hindus who had become culturally effeminized through centuries of Muslim rule.

Once more Bankimchandra reveals the incorporation of the colonial discourse which acknowledged India’s greatness only in terms of its scriptural past, privileging brahmanic scriptures as the key to Indian society, distinguishing sharply between the
“Hindu” and the “Islamic”, and conceiving them of mutually exclusive and autonomous categories. From the eighteenth century onwards, in colonial Bengal, one sees the impact of such a discourse in the life of intellectual production as the court language of doing intellectual work changes from Persian to English. In Bankimchandra’s nationalist novels, the history of a Hindu scriptural past is invented and imagined in the body of the caste Hindu woman. In the event that in popular culture, as opposed to the colonial discourses of a scriptural “Hindu” past, Hinduism was a heterogeneous affair, and scattered amongst many opposing practices, it had to be imagined in the dye and caste of the orientalist imagining of India’s spiritual greatness. The many figurations of women in Bankimchandra’s novels are thus, not only the sites of discovering an authentic Hindu past, but of defining Hinduism on the face of popular heterogeneous “lay” practices as well. In the course of that defining, language undergoes transformation from its “lay” popular elements and Arabic elements to a Sanskritized form. The romance themes surrounding Hindu and Muslim prince and princesses of the earlier novels like Durgeśhändinī, where the courts of Muslim rulers are caste in the tableau vivante style of orientalist imagining are transformed into the excess of the other orientalist scripting of the Muslim as degenerate, martial, sinister, and hyper-masculine. It is against this that the nation as mother, cleansed of its “lay” elements must fight.

One of the spheres in which Bankimchandra acknowledged the superiority of the West was in its having a history. In order to have power, it was important for the East to have a linear historical narrative as well. The nation could come into being only if it had a historical narrative. In the nationalist novels, cast in the genre of the English historical romance, where the future is anticipated through projection into the past, women act as
supplements between the past and the future, in figuring a present that never was. The scene of displacement is thus completed as the figure of the Hindu woman comes to fill a lack, symbolize the nostalgia for plentitude, and occupy the place of multiple levels of splitting. In the demand for plentitude, in the denial of or often in responses to such splittings bred by the colonial encounter of power, and the invention of a nationalist history whose double was communalism, future seeds of violence were born. In the partition violence, the rhetoric of purity and honor deployed by the nationalist fathers on the Indian side, and in the genres that struggle to represent women’s histories, but remain trapped within the figures and tropes of the nationalist discourse, one witnesses the consequences of such imagining.

*Post-partition Narratives and the Figuring of Women in Genres that Struggle and Fail*

In the literature that followed the partition period, there were attempts by several writers to represent the events of partition, i.e. the uprooting of communities, the violence perpetrated against women, the forced retrieval and the question of their belonging. What is remarkable about these writings is the struggle they undergo with the nationalist genres and often remain trapped within, even as they attempt at representing the elliptical identities of the retrieved women brought back to live in their nations without acceptance, or of abducted women who lived amongst their rapists or abductors because returning “home” amongst kins would meet with rejection.

In many of the stories, as in Intezar Hussein’s “City of Sorrow” women’s rape feature as man’s tragedy, providing a backdrop for the meaning of loss and uprooting fleshed out in male terms. Three men who have undergone moral deaths following their active participation in atrocities during partition, meet and recount to one another the
manner and reason of their deaths. The first man does not die when he makes another man strip his sister at gunpoint or when he strips his own daughter at gunpoint. But he dies a moral death when his father looks at his own disfigured face and dies. Man is the agent of moral failure and tragedy, and the meaning of that tragedy in the shape of judgement can only pass from father to son. The second man’s face was disfigured when he was spat on by another man for having taken his sister’s honor. Again a moral judgement is passed from man to man. Women might suffer rape, abduction, and sexual violence in this story. But they are never the agents of tragedy who can pass moral judgement. Men remain the agents of tragedy where women’s position is akin to what Derrida calls la chose (translated in English as “the thing”)—to whom terrible things happen, but they don’t really happen, “to which ‘accidents’ happen and predicates attach, but which cannot itself be the accident or predicate of something else” (Derrida). 19.

Another instance in which women feature in a like economy—where woman is man’s thing, an inert body activated on—in partition stories, is in the theme of communal empathy, where a Hindu man saves a Muslim woman or vice versa, restoring her safely to her menfolk.

Rajinder Singh Bedi’s “Lajwanti” 20, a short story about a Sikh woman who had lived with a Muslim man from across the borders, and her retrieval and return to her former husband, enacts the crisis in representing the body of the sexually violated woman brought back to the familial fold, and in defining the limits of sexual violation. If a woman was not raped, but had co-habited with another man who had given her shelter, how to write or not write that as violation, and vice versa, the impossibility of representing rape (where representing as showing often ends up bordering on the
pornographic pleasure in the male author’s narrative) and glide over it simply by an aside that says “co-habitation”. The question of perspective from which violation is written, not to mention the ways in which the theme of women’s violation constitutes the violent boundaries of religious divide—in the story the accepting husband is alluded to as Rama, the violated wife, Sita, and the “other” Muslim man, the demon villain Ravana, constitutes the story’s central problem. While in citing parts of policies concerning raped and abducted women after partition, describing the exchange of women across the borders, the dubious terms of their acceptance, and upholding that women be accepted at their own terms, the story obviously means to give an account of the event of women’s “returns” in what it considers to be a progressive politics of acceptance, it ends up being stunningly misogynist in its representation of the question of the woman’s desire.

Bedi emulates several genres for what he conceives to be appropriate for the different treatments of the themes of courtship, marriage, partition violence, retrieval, and finally the acceptance of the wife into the familial realm. Or perhaps in a symptomatic reading of the text, one may say that Bedi’s text quite unwittingly locates the misogyny in each of the genres ranging from social realism to the nationalist literature and puts them all together in the representation of the woman question in partition. In its attempts at using the genre of social realism to depict a “natural” portrait of marriage—a misogynist one, with wife-beating coded as romance—the exchange of women across the borders, the debates concerning the “Ram Rajya” rhetoric of women’s acceptance, a combination of the nationalist genre and the post-partition rhetoric of the retrieved woman’s purity in the deification of the wife, the wife’s fatigue at having been deified and presumably missing the old terms of her marital relation—at which point abuse gets coded as
romance—the story puts in place the very structures that go in silencing women. The light of “realist” description participates in the violence of pornographic pleasure—the gaze on the women standing at the borders to be bargained for, or waiting at the marketplace to be sold, is a male one, and there is no return gaze. Women stand silently as men size them up or prod them, which again is Bedi’s version of giving violence a “realist” treatment.

Once the wife arrives, the narrative seems to attempt to deal with the national crisis of having to face the fact that many women refused to return. The question raised from historiographic quarters following some of the cases of women’s absolute refusal to return and the appeal of the men they had formed new relations with to let go of them, is often posed in terms of whether or not it is possible for a raped or an abducted woman to fall in love with one’s rapist or abductor in a time of such social crisis. Such a framing of the issue of women’s refusal to return or the formation of elliptical identities on the face of violence, is itself a problematic one, and is proof of the difficulties in constructing narratives or histories of consciousness following the displacement during partition. In Bedi’s story, no paradoxes or aporias are perceived in constructing a narrative of the woman’s cross border relationship. Consequently, the wife has ruddy cheeks and her body shows signs of having been treated well. When he asks her what the man’s name is, she coyly replies “Jamal”, at which point he starts calling her “Devi” or goddess, soon after which she begins missing the old marital joys of being beaten as “mark of love”.

One would think that someone was giving the wrong cues from behind the stage in a play in which a series of events had to be shown in quick succession. But, in reading the iterations in Bedi’s narrative of some of the rhetoric of the Sita-like purity of raped
women, the sentiments and style of phrasing that rhetoric in the genre of nationalist literary productions, one can see exactly how the misogyny works in those structures. In reproducing several genres of patriarchal discourses, Bedi’s story, if anything, proves that in narrating women’s real histories, one does stumble into woman as “sign” produced in the literary genres, iterated in the political and legal discourses as well. The act of reading as “writing” then becomes important in extricating woman from the genre produced “signs”, in order to approach women’s real histories. The body of woman emerging out of genre indigestion in Bedi’s story, and making prominent the failure of narrating women’s histories from the genre defined codes, offer such a place of reading as “writing”.

Ramlal’s “A Visitor from Pakistan” 21, where the woman who lives with her second husband is visited by her first husband from Pakistan who she had lost during the partition riots, turns out to be a story about the exchanges between the two men, and the woman’s family and its sense of honor which predicates that their daughter be seen only with one husband. After the first shock of the encounter, the woman recedes behind the door at the insistence of her mother. The rest of the drama is staged as a moral drama between the first husband and the woman’s parents, and after a while between the first and the second husband, where the central question concerns the ethics of coming back, while the woman continues to remain behind the door. In the course of the story it turns out that the men had known each other before, and had been old enemies who had fought viciously fifteen years back—a fight from which the second husband had acquired a red scar. From that point onwards, the story moves along the line of old chivalric codes, relying on male jealousies and rivalry for the mobilization of the plot while the woman
remains beyond the frame. When the second husband finally claims that he would leave it to the court, the first husband turns dramatically to the closed door behind which the woman stands, and announces that he would resort to the final court for settlement. The woman breaks down in a scream—the only time we hear her voice. The postman comes at that instant with a brown letter in hand, enquiring if there was a visitor from Pakistan, and the first husband in a sacrificial gesture announces that he would return to Pakistan that very day. The climactic moment, the denouement of the drama, is meant to highlight the man’s sacrifice. The woman’s story is foreclosed twice—first when the second husband “agrees” to marry her out of idealism and generosity (so the woman’s mother says), and next when the first husband comes back and gives her up in an act of grandiose sacrifice. We are never to know the meaning of the scream. If it tears time apart, the drama of male sacrifice and chivalry, of family honor keeping breathless vigil, muffles it out of signifying audibility as in the grand finale the spotlight falls on the heroic gesture of the first husband’s sacrifice.

In the exchange economy of the story, the woman passes as a possible gift. The narrative tells us: “circumstances had snatched her away from Baldev and offered her to Sunderdas. Otherwise Sunderdas would never have even dared to think about taking her away from Baldev” (Ramlal, 85). It is only in the woman’s scream off-screen, tearing the script of the mask like script of femininity—the blush, eyes filled with tears, and “a lock of hair which had escaped from behind her ear and fluttered across her face”—that the narrative organizes her into at the inception of the drama, can the coded message of woman as impossible gift lie. But the time of its reading is beyond the mirroring and representational frame of the narrative. Its time is elsewhere, with the poison that
separates memory from language. To read from the space of that poison one must disarrange the screens and scripts of femininity into which women in these stories are arranged. Both in “Lajwanti” (the name meaning the shy and delicate touch-me-not plant standing for femininity itself) and in “Visitor from Pakistan” the writing of femininity is a major preoccupation of the narrators. The woman’s blush or pallor, the almost pretty tears, the delicacy of their frames, their coy silences occupying narrative space where their rapes, tabooed co-habitations, and marriages that cannot be contained in legitimate frames, and other gender transgressions cannot be narrated. In the stories of these male writers, the script of femininity is like a cover thrown at random over a dishevelled scene, and eventually the codes of femininity are used to foreclose the possibility of narrating women’s history.

In Lalithambika Antharjanam’s “A Leaf in the Storm”\textsuperscript{22}, a consciousness born of violence is attempted representation, and the discourse of continuity is tarried with, though with its own limits set by the nationalist discourses of the day. In Antharjanam’s story, the issue that occupies the narrative, concern the dilemmas and violence of consciousness that a woman undergoes over her rapist’s unborn child. Unlike the coy and delicate women in the hitherto examined male writers, the female protagonist in Antharjanam’s narrative is emaciated (not delicate) with hunger and outraged as she waits to be exchanged at the borders with fortynine other women to be given away for the “fifty other ‘reclaimed’” (137). When the women social workers try to give her food, she explodes with rage. The story, in flashback sequences of her past, celebrates her free spirit in the idiom of progress. Her rage over her condition, her refusal to give birth to her
rapist’s unborn child, her pleading with the doctors to abort, in keeping with her vocal self, is expressive of her moral indignation, her refusal to remain silent.

But as much as she dramatizes the conflict, Antharjanam’s decision seems to have been made already for the unconditional goodness of motherhood, of making possible the survival of a child, no matter how it is conceived. When Jyoti (the woman) sees the body of a dead baby in the toilet, the narrative voice woven with the narratorial voice\(^2\), seems to have a tinge of sarcasm. The position of the narrative voice is articulated in the voice of the doctor who cites Gandhian ahimsa when he refuses to abort the woman’s child at her insistence. At the borders, relief operations arrive to let the women know that “Young men should be prepared to accept abducted women as their mothers, sisters, and even their wives—those children . . . are indeed the citizens of India, the first citizens of a free India” (142). What follows is the woman’s ironic rumination over the national identity of a child born of cross border rape. But the Gandhian rhetoric of acceptance, which optimistic as it sounds, is also laced with a fair deal of patriarchal values, making men the agents of choice and subjectivity which neither the narrative, nor the narratorial voice seems to have any problems with.

Interestingly enough, history is twisted here in order to maintain an idealistic vision of Gandhi’s position. In reality, as we see from Veena Das and Urvashi Butalia’s accounts, camps with doctors were instituted at the borders in order to abort pregnant women. Whether Gandhi agreed with such State funded operations, while he instituted the discourse of women’s purity so that men might accept them, or where abortion stood vis-à-vis his philosophy of ahimsa (nonviolence) remains to be answered. Whether ahimsa should apply in the case of taking a stand against abortion, and abortion of
foetuses born of rape, as the Gandhian doctor seems to suggest, is itself a vexed question, which in the story does not acquire the status of a question. Ahimsa’s flattening out of context might be problematic when it comes to dealing with questions of gender. In the work of the feminist subaltern historiographers we see such a tight-rope walk when it comes to narrating, or framing within ethical brackets the narrative of forced abortions. Their position against the State does not stem from moral outrage against abortion, and is every bit aporetic in taking a position on what constitutes women’s survival and women’s agency in such situations. The place of such undecidability and the operation of opposites at the same time, follows the logic of what Derrida calls the pharmakon or the hymen’s graphic. The possibility of the question and the doubt must always keep guard the decision of writing women’s pregnancies in rape, caught in the crossroads of nation, and what constitutes women’s agency. At the end of Anharjanam’s story, the woman gives birth, and the narrative is one of eelastic motherhood when earth and sky sing. One might claim that Anharjanam affirms illegitimacy—what does not happen on the pages of history. But she also makes that narrative decision in keeping with the demands of the codes of continuity.

Woman as ground of representation holds the economy of the metaphor of nation and in partition literature, where writers sometimes attempt at representing the elliptical and discontinuous nature of women’s experience, they adhere to the existing genres that narrate women and nation by way of women, through continuities. Thus often, the theme of continuity lingers strongly even in the stories about women living their abductors or deciding to keep the child born of rape. Previously established codes of women’s motherhood and affect inform the decisions of these writers. If the woman in Jamila
Hashmi’s “Exile”\textsuperscript{25}, living on as the wife of her abductor and the mother of his children never forgets her past, the narrative constructed affects of motherhood fall in place, take out the poison of memory, and the reader meets her at the point where the unspeakable has been transferred to the codes of nostalgia and its muted sentimentality—hence the descriptions of weather, sounds of festival, and brother’s love—and travelling on this even keel of nostalgia, the reader meets the subject of rape who has exchanged the sting of poison for the continuity of motherhood. The consciousness of bearing the rapist’s child and its violence remains outside the possibility of narration, its narrative possibilities foreclosed by the affects of continuity, of which the generic sentiments of motherhood comprise an important part.

Unlike the male authors who cannot show or desist from bringing up the topic of rape, Hashmi and Antharjanam cannot make themselves oblivious to the implications of rape or hide the biological inevitabilities of women’s bodies, hence raped and abducted women in their stories bear children. But beyond that point their narrative closure require continuity. Even if as female authors they are not heedless to the materiality of women’s bodies, they give into the code of narrative continuity and the economy of affects, of female sensibility and female sentimentality that constitute those narrative codes. The event of writing women’s survival is perhaps the most difficult one as both Das and Butalia show in extracts from family narratives. If women’s suicides by jumping into the wells or swallowing crushed bangles and poison could become part of the family narratives, sung or recounted with pride or passion, it was because such modes of death were in keeping with the code of narratives of family and national honor, and given a language in nationalist literature. Women’s honorable death by suicide or their men
taking their lives on the face of dishonor did not fracture pre-existing genres or codes of thinking the “proper” place of women’s bodies. They sustained the metaphor of nation. Stories of women’s dishonor or of illegitimacy could enter the framework of narrative only through some kinds of generic codes of continuity in which women remained within the codes of exchange, or contained within the narrative of man’s subjectivity. In the following two sections, I look at two departures from the nationalist codes of writing women’s bodies, and a radical change of the existing nationalist language or genres—that of Salman Rushdie, and Saadat Hasan Manto and Kamaleshwar, amongst the avant garde writers.

*Midnight’s Children, and the Figuring of Women in Diasporic Imagining*

Written in England, with nostalgic longings for the world of his childhood, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* is staged as the possibility of return. In *Imaginary Homelands* he writes: “it’s my present that is foreign, and the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the midst of lost time” (9). An old picture dating from 1946, of a many gabled house in Bombay into which he was born, leads him to these nostalgic ruminations. It is a nostalgia of which the state of being culturally displaced, of being an Asian immigrant in Britain demands the invention of a narrative, history, and a whole new language; a nostalgia coupled with a demand for self-definition and identity which calls for a return which is also an invention of origins.

Like all objects of nostalgia though, the seductive power of the black and white photograph makes Rushdie remember only what he wants to remember, the conditions of return marked by a certain erasure of history. Hence the story of India’s modern history that is told in *Midnight’s Children*, the first two hundred pages leading to the event of
India’s Independence, deletes the other most important event that followed Independence—the partition of the subcontinent into two nation-states—India and Pakistan—and the creation of political borders. It was that history that had required Rushdie and his family to leave India and migrate to Pakistan, before migrating to England. As easy as it had been for Rushdie to visit Bombay from England (as he tells us in *Imaginary Homelands*), it would have been near impossible for him to do so, had he been residing in Pakistan. Such is the meaning of political borders in the Indian subcontinent. Yet Saleem Sinai, the semi-autobiographical narrator of *Midnight’s Children*, crosses the borders, goes to Pakistan, returns back to Bombay, goes back to Pakistan again, fights in the Bangladesh war, and crosses the border one more time, and finally in the last chapter of the novel, returns back to Bombay, the city of his birth, on a train, the wheels of which chant “abracadabra”, the mantra for a new beginning.

If *Midnight’s Children* were to be read as a novel about subcontinental migrations, its accounts of migrations and border crossings would be a far cry from the accounts of the other border crossers and migrants—the raped, abducted, and forcibly retrieved women. And if in the idiom of postmodern pastiche, *Midnight’s Children* were to be read as a novel about illegitimacy—its very unique positioning of the autobiographical “I” crossed between Saleem and Shiva, one of them indeed an illegitimate child of the departing Englishman, Methwold—it would be a illegitimacy of a different kind than the ones known to have been fostered in the event of partition violence. Rushdie’s polysemic style is borne in the metaphor of the bastard, as is his nostalgic imagining of secular India, where borders separating the different regional, religious, linguistic, and class identities are conceived as fluid, as opposed to the fears of
encroaching religious fundamentalism he reveals in the *Imaginary Homelands*. The birth of the two sons Saleem and Shiva, bearing Muslim and Hindu names, interchangeable, and the boundaries of their multi-valenced selves merging in the fluidity of the autobiographical "I", might be read as much as a metaphor of the birth of two nations on the eve of partition, as of the fluidity of the secular India of Rushdie’s nostalgic ruminations. The containment of illegitimacy within such fluidity of borders, and partition metaphorized as the birth of two sons—in the metaphor of the nations’ births there is no place for daughters—is the grammar of foreclosure of the narration of partition.

As remarkable as Rushdie’s refusal to narrate the partition, is his refusal or inability to narrate rape, neither during the partition, and nor during the Bangladesh war. But why in the style that he invents, markedly different from the styles of nationalist literature and its legacies, and breaking with old codes of writing women’s bodies, does he not narrate rape? For Rushdie, the invention of a polysemic style and its translational politics, tied to the need to find “new angles at which to enter reality” (*Imaginary Homelands*, 15), a secular vision⁷⁷, as well as the need to free the Anglo-Indian writer of the rigid constrains imposed by the colonial politics of the English language, is indissociable from the writing of the female body. One may say, that in Rushdie’s novels style invents itself in the female body. The aesthetic codes of a language—both in the narrow and general sense where literary language calls itself the expression of culture even as it crafts a culture’s imaginary—that organizes itself around the deification of the female body, its codes of honor, the economies of exclusion necessitated by those codes, and the politics of the visible within which the nation emerges both as signifier and
signifying machine, are displaced by the carnality of the female bodies of Rushdie’s literary imagining.

From grandmother Naseem Aziz’s body seen part by part through a hole in the sheet, to young Saleem’s peeping at the masturbating body of the mother, Ameena Sinai, to the houris at the edge of the forest who give “divine fucks”, the sexual economy of visuality is considerably different from the “divine” aura in which women emerge as signifiers of nation in Bankimchandra’s novels. Masturbating mothers, provocative aunts, world’s oldest whores with their magical powers of teasing out tabooed secrets and unnameable pleasures, reluctant brides who stall menstruation endlessly in order to delay consummation, fucking houris, half human sorceresses, and two wombed women break the specular and stylistic principles of nationalist and post-nationalist literary imagination structured by the maternal-divine economy of the female body cast in Victorian non-carnal eros.

The “feminine”, in Rushdie, is both the place of the limn and the scattering in which one language is translated into another. The culinary metaphors of history and hybrid language, and the pickling of time emerge from Mary Pereira’s kitchen. The play of the more/less in which the question of the feminine is cast, consists of the very style of Rushdie’s writing. Naseem’s body seen part by part through a hole in a sheet held by the muscled arms of female wrestlers, Padma’s muscled body and piscine smells driving the narrator to write when his own penis has stopped functioning, consists of the grammar of the more/less in which style as “feminine” is caste, and the “feminine” comes to define mass culture as well as the seduction of the narrative. The “feminine” is the site of the profane as well, from where Rushdie writes the secular time of the nation. Tai’s feminine
lips churn out the most obscene tales including the ones with Jesus emerging as the live children eating monster-avatar, gracing the valleys of Kashmir, and in the five hundred year old, world’s greatest whore, Tai bibi’s body, the tabooed smells of desire rupture the State secrets and bring to fore the news of Pakistan’s underworld.

While the deification of women served as the prime vehicle for imagining the nation in nationalist literature, in Midnight’s Children it is the pastiche of the popular Hindi cinema that is the vehicle for imagining the nation. The cinematic metaphor runs throughout the narrative. In the “All India Radio” section, Rushdie tells us that reality is only a matter of perspective, like when we move from the back to the front row in a movie theater hall. Peepshows, and other metaphors of the screen abound to nurture this metaphor. The city of Bombay itself, the Hindi cinema capital of India, where most of Midnight’s Children’s action takes place, and Saleem’s childhood life of imagining is spent, lends itself to such associations as well.

Not just in the imagining of the nation, but in the imagining the collective life and the collective imagining of the nation as well, the metaphor of popular Hindi cinema as narrative device, plays an important role. The autobiographical “I” not only wants to encompass Saleem and Shiva, but the whole of India as well. And it is through the cinematic time of the mass consumed Hindi film that Rushdie undertakes the daring and ambitious task of representing the nation from the space of the masses and its life of imagining. Rushdie’s secular India of diverse possibilities, of narratives that encompass and surmount the many boundaries of the socius, takes place in this imagining of the life of the collective through the one form that is consumed by all, and transcends the barriers of linguistic, class, and religious divides. The magic filled narrative surface, which lends
itself to imagining the impossible, itself functions as the screen of the popular Hindi cinema. It is also perhaps from the Hindi cinema that Rushdie draws the theme of the exchange of two sons—a narrative ploy that combines the events of loss and displacement following the partition, and Hindi cinema’s wishful writing of the transcendence of class, caste, religious barriers. The former is turned into a trope at the very event of the forgetting of partition histories, and quite ironically, in this very secular genre that is mass consumed, the song, dance, and magic filled narrative treatment of the transcendence of class, caste, and religious divides, forecloses any serious examination of the issues that go in the making of those divides—perhaps the reason why millions watch them for pleasure without having been challenged to question anything.

In the form of the Hindi popular cinema that Rushdie adapts to write the secular space-time of India, woman’s body is at once the screen and the medium through which the viewer is made to take a position. The pleasure of the narrative in Hindi popular cinema lies in the positioning of the woman’s body. In Rushdie’s adaptation of the narrative structure and the visual economy of the Hindi popular cinema, perhaps lies the explanation for both how Rushdie structures the pleasure of the narrative, as well as why he cannot narrate rape. In Rushdie’s narrative, women mark the place of male sexual fantasy and excess in the ways in which they are posed before the gaze. In a phallic conception of sexuality, women are reaffirmed as representation and proposed as scene rather than subject (De Lauretis, 27)²⁸. Grandmother Naseem’s body seen in parts through a hole in the sheet, at the very beginning of the novel, where the woman is of consequence only through the gaze that situates the woman, might be cited as one of the many examples of women enacting the position of the scene. The event of women’s rape
that tear all structures of continuity apart, can be written only in terms of the materiality of the body as it comes to exceed the pleasure of the screen, and where the image on the screen undergoes inversion. In Rushdie’s narrative, woman organized as excess—two wombed bodies, supernatural houris, and sorceresses—we do not get to have access to that materiality or the inversion of the image.

Women’s bodies are thus not given to access the real histories of women, but male desires and male scenes of displacement. Not only does Rushdie not write rape, but the event of women’s rape, as in the section on the Bangladesh war, undergoes a narrative displacement in the trauma of the male body. It is not the kind of trauma in which the language of woman’s pain can be shared by the male body, as we see later happening in Manto’s stories. In the section following the Bangladesh war, the male soldiers, including Saleem enter the borderlands of the Sunderban forests where they undergo post-war hysteria, the final remedy for which seems to be the fucking of superhuman female houris who turn transparent. Finally, Saleem crosses the border in Parvati’s womb-like basket where he forgets his trauma, and returns to India one more time. Women’s bodies thus act as vehicles in mobilizing the male plot of cleatic and magic returns to the land of longing. The violence of the Bangladesh war is left far behind, and the question of the unforgettable and unnarratable violence undergone by women is forgotten as well, as the narrator resorts to the metaphoric womb to institute this forgetting.

The same logic of displacement follows earlier in the novel where Rushdie celebrates the event of Independence in the metaphoric doubling of the birth of the two sons. Instead of the violence of partition, the scene of two mothers bloodied with
childbirth in a hospital room whose walls are orange, white, and green (the colors of the 
Indian national flag) fills the screen of Rushdie's historical narrative. Daughters are 
written out of that scene, and mothers are but vehicles for the birthing of the new 
metaphor of the nation coined in terms of the hybrid and the bastard—Rushdie's scripting 
of secular India.

Finally popular Hindi cinema's formulaic code, by way of the magical abilities of 
the sorceress woman, the wrong son ends up having access to the right father, or at least 
to the right genealogical tree. Shiva's son born in the womb of Parvati who is Saleem's 
wife, bears a combination of the name of his "right father's" maternal grandfather—
Aadam Aziz, with whose story Midnight's Children begins, and the Sinai patronym 
which the "wrong father"—also the legal father bequeathes. The fear of absurdity and the 
loss of meaning that looms menacingly in the last third of the novel with Mrs Gandhi's 
rule of Emergency, is managed narratively through the restoration of the legitimacy of the 
patronym. As the nation seems to be on the brink of splitting in the last few pages of the 
novel, hope is restored in the possibility of a future and continuity in the generative 
powers of the son. The legacy of the nation continued from father to son, mediated by the 
magic womb of the woman, Parvati, that always aligns with the narrative's male destined 
ideological position—such are the terms of the "restitution of meaning". The impossible 
debt events of rape and illegitimacy, the legacies of borders and new nation states, are left 
out of the translational event of the linguistic and narrative polysemy. The culinary 
metaphors of hybrid language, and history as pickled time, cannot contain the poison of 
language or memory to read the partition histories of women and illegitimate children 
from. For that we must look elsewhere.
Take Two: Stepping Through the Looking Glass

In Alice Doesn't Teresa De Lauretis writes of women being the ground of representation, the looking-glass held up to man. "Women in phallic order" she writes, "is at once the mirror and the screen-image, ground and support of this subject, projection and identification" (28). Tracing the trajectory of nationalist literature where the nation is imagined in the woman's body, or partition literature where the event of the fragmentation of the nation written on woman's body in rape, mutilation, and displacement, is sought to be repaired through narrative closures that keep eliding the fragment and search for continuity in the very bodies of women, in nation imagined in diaspora where woman is the screen on which the polysemic event of the birth of style takes place, one reads the truth of that statement. The only way in which women can turn the codes, as Laura Mulvey tells us, is by making trouble, by refusing to yield pleasure to the gaze. In the aftermath of partition, among writers and film makers of radical politics, there was being born such a writing in which the materiality of the woman's body exceeded the frames established by existing codes or genres, castrating male gaze through which one reads the nation and constructs the socius in the body of the woman.

In Kamaleswar's "How Many Pakistanis" where a Hindu/Muslim love affair breaks up due to the pressure of communal politics, and the man and the woman keep meeting each other in unexpected circumstances, we read such a story of fragmentation. The spacing of the story in the movement of the subjects, the creation of frames, and the procedures of the point-of-view look, is structured like a film narrative. Starting off in the nostalgic flashback mode where the smells and territorial markers of the lost place are evoked in the woman's body--the story ends up in the vein of what Stephen Heath calls
the political cinema. Heath writes: "the relations of the subject set by film—it's vision, its address—would be radically transformed if the intervals of its production were opened in their negativity, if the fictions of the closures of those intervals were discontinued . . . with the narrative space of the film extended plurally to a movement of spaces and the contradictions of their intersection" (63-64). In "How Many Pakistanis?" one encounters such a discontinuity of fictions of closures, a radical opening to negativity in the denial of expected closures or the satisfaction of the gaze, and such a plural movement of spaces in the contradiction of their intersections. In such discontinuities, the woman's body slips outside the representational frame of national imaginary, predicated on narratives of continuity.

After the male protagonist, the "I" narrator of the story parts with Bano, the woman he loves, they lose all touch except in his nostalgic longings, until he goes back to the new city she lives in after the partition. He goes back to a violence maddened city, and on a night torn apart by the cries of a man who had lost everything in the riots: "Quadir Miyan! . . . Sala, Pakistan has been created! . . . O sister Pakistan has been created . . . ! Now we'll tie charm here itself and perform talbiya . . . this is where we'll perform Haj" he looks into the courtyard where naked Bano lies, crying in agony, her breasts which her mother massages, squirting milk dripping into her navel. Henceforth, the night in Bhiwandi remains etched in his mind as the night of air full of bitter smell of ash, frightful over-flowing breasts hung from the sky, and fountains of blood spurting out of bodies standing at the cross roads.

Later he learns that Bano (who was married to another man now) had given birth to a baby in a hospital that had been attacked by mobbers and burnt down. Many mothers
had thrown their babies from the windows and tried jumping out themselves. Bano too
had thrown her baby out into the streets, and had finally managed to escape home. Now
childless Bano, breasts full of milk, agonizes in pain. Later he hears shocking snippets of
bickering between Bano and her husband who is impotent most of the time because he
sells his blood for liquor. They never see each other face to face until another encounter
in a brothel where there is no conversation between the two of them. Bano, in petticoat
and blouse, barely catches a glimpse of his profile. Presuming him to be an extra client,
Bano asks: “Is there someone else?” He turns, and they look at each other, eye to eye.
They don’t talk; there is a moment of agonizing silence, and then her slow contemptuous
smile, and finally his slow retreat down the stairs. On that note, the story ends.

The politics of the visual economy is to push male subjectivity at the margins, as
the woman’s body refuses to yield any pleasure to the gaze or satisfy the existing codes
of scripting the feminine position. The text of femininity that we saw occupying the
previous genre, is negated, as much as the nostalgia for a place, that mobilizes so many of
the post-partition narratives. The woman’s body itself, refuses to fulfill any of the
recognizable codes of continuity—femininity, motherhood, or the sentiments associated
with the plot of beloved lost and found. Amongst the avant garde post-partition writers
like Saadat Hasan Manto and Amrita Preetam, and film-makers like Ritwik Ghatak, the
defamiliarizing of existing codes of narrative continuity built around the woman’s body,
was a frequent theme. The materiality of the woman’s body, de-deified and de-sacralized
as it slips outside the codes of honor and purity of the nationalist genre, renders another
way of stitching and un-stitching social time. The women in these stories yielded to
narrative gaze after they have been raped, or become prostitutes, act not as metaphors of
time out of joint, or simply as vehicles to make available a larger meaning of the socius. The economy of their bodies before the gaze, function to displace the narrative position of woman as she comes to constitute the metaphor of nation, as well as the agency of desire that aligns the gaze with the narrative position of woman as mother, for these writers locate violence in the act of representation itself. The bodies of mothers, wives, and daughters from “respectable” homes turned prostitutes in the event of class upheaval in the communities affected by partition, the semi-unconscious raped women in Manto’s stories mistaking their own fathers for rapists come to demand their bodies, or women’s disconnected speech following their displacement, do not just serve the demands of a new genre of social realism, in the aftermath of partition violence and women’s displacement. In other words, one cannot simply treat them as evidence to construct women’s history in partition, in the absence of adequate records. These bodies initiate reading—as opposed to constructing evidence—by situating the reader and viewer within structures of negation, from where the familiar codes of reading and viewing are defamiliarised. The historical event itself comes to be organized as a ruin and allegory in this act of reading.

In the light of framing the woman’s body within a different representational structure in this new genre of writing, how do we read the body of the woman in “How Many Pakistanis?” who the narrator meets in the capacity of lover, someone else’s wife and mother, and finally as prostitute in a brothel in the city? In one genre of the post-partition literary narratives, we did see how the woman’s body had been framed in the new code of “someone else’s wife”, where it is the man who is the center of narrative attention, and the woman functions as a predicate. In Kamaleshwar’s story, the woman’s appearance as someone else’s wife takes place in such a manner that there is no space of
melodramatic encounter. A narrative space opens where they do not meet, and the reader and the viewer are called to place themselves in that discontinuity where meetings are impossible. Bano’s lactating body appears within the narrative frame signifying maternal materiality in its absence. It does not replenish the narrative with the plenitude of maternal affect, but rather its monstrous double. Her childless lactating breasts in agony occupying the narrative screen, neither functions synecdochically as in Rushdie’s narrative where the woman’s body is seen part by part, or in the nationalist novels where the woman’s body generates aura in its metahoric function. Denying the pleasure of either, Bano’s breasts, slipping out of the norms of the visual and narrative economy of the maternal feminine, castrate the gaze.

The very last section where the narrator meets Bano in a brothel, is a similar narrative space that frames the impossibility of encounter. Amongst the avant-garde film-makers and writers, prostitution is a very common theme. The transition from village to big city in the event of displacement and migration, class upheaval, and women’s place in the event of sexual violation and their rejection from the domestic sphere, are often treated in the prostitute thematics. But, other than reading the prostitute bodies from this social realist angle, one must also read them in the avant-garde films and literature in terms of a deliberate deviance from the mother-nation thematic-codes of nationalist novels. Not only in terms of sexual bodies as opposed to the deified bodies in nationalist literature, as some historians do tend to read, but in their capacity to disrupt and frustrate existing codes, must these bodies be read. It is often not in their explicit treatment as sexual bodies, but in their negation of structures of continuity that these bodies open time to its other. In Ritwik Ghatak’s film, Komol gangdar, the brother meets
his long lost sister in the brothel, and the film ends leaving the viewer with an irreperable sense of fracture. In “How Many Pakistanis ?” the encounter between the narrator and the woman is cast in a similar narrative structure of negation. In their displacement of nation as mother equation of representing women’s bodies with the fractured time given in the prostitute’s body, these male writers and film makers do not yet approach the question of prostitute’s work or the deconstruction of the extant literary and civic languages such a representational frame would necessitate—an inquiry that can emerge only out of radical feminist quarters. But the move from deified abstraction to the materiality of women’s bodies, and a reframing of the gaze around that body by initiating an act of reading, is itself a step towards such a deconstruction.

Saadat Hasan Manto’s stories concerning the experience of displacement during the partition, disrupt the nationalist representational frame of women’s sexuality in its drawing of the limits of the violence of religion identified nationalisms in the very violence perpetrated on the woman’s body. It is from the space of such sexual bodies that he mocks at the rigidity of constructing identities through religious categories. Saadat Hasan Manto and Ismaat Chughtai, one of the boldest women writers of the subcontinent, writing at the eve of the empire’s fall, dealt in their stories and novels very explicitly with the question of sexuality, tabooed desires, and the violent boundaries of social repression. That they were tried at the court of George the fifth, and their writings censored by the British government in an age when Sigmund Freud and the Bloomsbury group had happened in England, speaks volumes on the sexual politics of empire and the nature of its vigil on its subjects.
Manto’s collection of short stories The Kingdom’s End and Other Stories, political not because they deal with nationalist uprisings, but because of their sexual representation of women’s bodies, elicited a new era of political writings in which the boundaries of the social were traced in the very act of representing women’s bodies. It is on women’s bodies that colonial discourse and the nationalist imaginary vied with one another, and the control over its representation proved the limits of social control. The colonial discourses of native women’s sexual abuse and the accompanying discourse of colonial masculinity unleashed in the “Age of Consent Bill” of 1891, and like politics of colonial representation of women’s bodies throughout colonial rule, prove that there was no dearth of discourses of Indian women’s violation, or the explicit treatment of their sexual bodies. Indian women never appeared as anything but body parts in colonial discourse, and the discursive production of their violated bodies consisted of the sole politics of their visibility in colonial representation. What then did it mean to try an Indian man and an Indian woman in the British court for writing explicitly on women’s sexuality, their desire, or of their violated bodies? It is perhaps from this very question concerning the representation of women, and the discourses surrounding women’s bodies that the political program of decolonization needs to be inaugurated. The women in Manto’s stories, even in their violation, are not merely body parts. Their bodies are war machines that disrupt women’s objectification in colonial representation, as well deification in nationalist representations. Here, I look at two stories, “Open It” and “Mozel” very briefly to read how Manto mocks the limits of national identity through the mockery performed through women’s bodies and their voices.
In “Khol Do” (translated as “Open it”), an aged father and his daughter make the journey from one side of the border to another. On the way, the daughter is lost, and her berserk father requests a few young men who act as volunteers who trace lost relatives, to look for her. The men finally find her in the forest, and assure her that they will take her to her father. She climbs into a jeep, and one of the men offer her a jacket because she has no dupatta to cover herself. We next see a clinic where a corpse is brought in a stretcher. The father, Sarajuddin, recognizes his daughter, and follows the stretcher bearers to the doctor’s chamber. In the final section of the story, the narrative focuses on the three characters, the father, the male doctor, and the unconscious daughter. In reaction to the suffocation of the room, the doctor points at the window and says “khol do” or “open it”. A movement takes place in the dead body, and the hands move towards the tape of the salwar (trousers), fumbling to unloosen it. Old Sarajuddin cries in joy “my daughter is alive”, and the doctor is drenched in sweat.

“Khol Do” is a story that has received much critical attention from feminist subaltern historians. Veena Das offers two sets of reading. In her first reading, she sees the linguistic exchange as the destruction of the normality of language, where Sakina, the daughter can hear words “conveying only the ‘other’ command” (14). To her, the meaning of partition violence and the new border subjects it created can be read in the destruction of language’s relationship with the body. But in the next reading, she sees the possibility of subversion. In the father’s cry of joy, “my daughter is alive”, she reads the father’s affirmation of the daughter—what did not seem to have happened in families following the aftermath of partition violence. She reads in the story both the avowal of violence done to women, as well as the possibility of a new male subject that does not
live in denial of that violence or reject the female subject who has undergone such violence. The father, according to her, "creates through his utterance a home for her mutilated and violated self". Whereas in the events of partition one sees that the meaning of masculinity rests in the according of death to one's dishonored daughter, in the post-partition literary imaginary Das sees the possibility of a new male subject, and a new relationship between bodies that affirm survival.

Das's readings accord with her need to find a place of mourning and affirmation for the unmourned, as her critical act of reading and writing follows from such a purpose. In my reading, I keep both her readings, but read in Manto's writing of the raped body, other critical gestures as well. The woman's gesture of opening her salwar in response to the doctor's request to open the window, can be read in terms of a linguistic exchange as well, the receipt of which encompasses, but stretches beyond the incomprehending father and the comprehending doctor. It is a gesture thrown at the very codes of honor in which one organizes the woman's body in any possible structure of readability. The destruction of the normality of language that Das mourns in her first reading of the text, might be Manto's aim, not just in Das's terms to prove what had become of language and its relation to the body, but to mock at the conditions on which the normality of language is predicated as well.

The father, in his acceptance of the daughter, continues to dwell within the frame of language's "normality" and hence he does not understand what she is doing, or what the language of her actions mean. That his acceptance of his daughter, and his joy at having see her alive, can only be predicated on this ignorance, might have more than a touch of irony in it. What would have been the nature of exchanges had the father
understood what the daughter was doing? What is the language of male knowledge and avowal of their female kin’s “violation” in societies structured on women’s code of honor? The doctor, the only one who understands and breaks into a cold sweat, is not a male kin, and does not undergo the dilemmas of acceptance that a male kin would. But on his visage one reads the knowledge of woman’s violation and the fear that accompanies that knowledge. Even though she is unconscious, the woman is not a passive or an inert creature in this transaction of knowledge. It is not by accident that the doctor comes to know. The woman comes to play an active role in his knowing, and thus causes very real fear. Not just as victims of sexual violence, but as agents who can disturb the referential frame of language and knowledge, and make their presence felt through that act of disturbance, the sexual bodies of women in Manto’s stories are disruptive of the use of the “feminine” in organizing national and familial time. In looking for historical evidence, one must not just read these bodies in Manto’s stories for evidence of violence, but as bodies that have the power of mocking and disrupting with their knowledge.

In “Mozel”, Manto mocks the language of religious divide oriented national identity through the mockery performed by the daringly sexual body of the Jewish woman, Mozel. The discourse of partition violence, shaping the socius of the subcontinent in terms of Hindu, Muslims, and Sikhs is itself a problematic one. Not everybody who lives in the subcontinent, or even along its very borders is Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh, even though that was the British language of national divide, and neither did partition violence affect only the Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh. Besides, to create such categories as final arbiters of the heterogeneity that goes in the making of the subcontinent is a monstrous lie. Subaltern feminist historiographers reread the event of
dislocation from other angles, like class, and a very different meaning of the subject emerges in those accounts. Manto, extremely critical of the shaping of identity through religious essentialisms, approaches the limitedness of those appellations from a space apart, often making a mockery of them. In "Toba Tek Singh", perhaps his most celebrated short story, the border is read from the space of an asylum where lunatics await exchange. In their ungrammatical speech, the freshly created religion bound national identities are rendered grammarless as well. In "Mozel" it is in the sexual body of the Jewish woman, Mozel, that Manto institutes irreverent laughter at religion based identities.

The story's central characters are a Jewish woman Mozel, and a Sikh man, Trilochen, who falls in love with her. Mozel is set as a daringly sexual woman, irreverent of the codes of honor a woman must be bound to, and irreverent of the limits of speech that guards the boundaries of religious identity as well. Trilochen, modest and shy, is set up as a neophyte who is drawn to Mozel because of her unusual ways even though he does not know what to do with her irreverent laughter at the physical markers that mark him as a Sikh man. There must be more to religion than a turban or a long beard, is the implied meaning of her laughter—a laughter that is only possible and acceptable within the parameters of friendship. There is also another dimension to the semantics of this seeming irreverence. The language of ethnic stereotypes as well as the language of religious identity are both contained within the linguistic bounds of physical markers. To scoff from the outside at the validity of physical markers that mark religious identity is tantamount to participating in ethnic stereotyping. Manto, who questions the boundaries of all socially normed identities, is aware of this problem embedded within language
itself, as well as the end-of-empire representational politics. Hence his literary secularism consists of questioning the very limits of language from within the space of sexual bodies and their transgressive codes—a space situated beyond the bounds of religious and ethnic identity—the acceptance of which must take place through a different grammar. In other words, Manto approaches the question of religious, ethnic, and national identity from the place of transgression, where the woman’s sexual body or transgressive speech ruptures the acceptable grammar of ethnic difference, sexual difference, and the visual economy that organizes national time.

Mozel’s body is such a transgressive body in the story that constantly tests the limits of social acceptance. The first time Tirlochen sees her, she is described as being “dangerously mad” with querulous lips covered with lipstick badly chapped and caked, reminding him of dried blood. It is not just the way she dresses—the loose dress she wears reveals her blue breasts—but the way she carries herself, is marked with deliberate immodesty and mockery of the womanly codes of conduct, often making Tirlochen blush. It is as though from the space of that deliberate immodesty, transgressing the socially acceptable behavioral codes set by the social norms of sexual difference, she reserves the right to be immodest and transgressive of the codes that guard the sacred boundaries of religious difference. Much to the shock and initial anger of Tirlochen, she speaks of things that are tabooed by the unspoken rules of religious difference, i.e. the long hair bound by a turban, the moustache, and the beard that are the religious and ethnic markers of Sikh masculine identity. His moustache, she tells him, could be made good use of, i.e. cleaning her navy blue dress. And undoing his beard, she asks him to give it to her so that she can braid it and make a handbag of it. Whenever he asks her if
she loved him and would marry him, she says that she could not love a Sikh, not unless he shaved his beard.

Within the bounds of a sexual friendship, such speech that breaks the linguistic taboos of religion marked boundaries, can be read as bordering on the comic, perhaps. But they serve a political purpose in the story. Mozel’s teasing of him tests the limits of his “manly” sentiments, and through those limits Manto surveys the language of social hierarchy. In a free indirect discourse, with more than a tinge of irony and mockery, the narrative tells us that Tirlochen suffered humiliation at her hands, and was “belittled in the presence of ordinary Christian boys who were nothing” (157), all because of his love for her. The ethnically marked subject is trapped in the language of representation that marks social hierarchies, and the discourse of othering. Manto looks at the linguistic aspect of that divide from many angles. As much as Tirlochen feels scoffed at, he is described as scoffing as well, by the very tokens of the language of stereotype. Manto’s solution is to attempt a linguistic exchange between Mozel and Tirlochen that turns poison into medicine.

The latter part of the story moves into a different vein. Mozel’s sudden disappearance from Tirlochen’s life, the day after he cuts his hair and shaves his beard so that she will marry him, meets with a considerable amount of hurt on the latter’s part who then finds a “decent” Sikh woman from the villages, and grows his beard once more. When Mozel and Tirlochen meet again, it is a riot torn city, agog with the communal violence of partition. Tirlochen who wants to save his fiancee Kirpal Kaur, seeks the help of the daring Mozail who braves the streets in her loose clothing and wooden sandals that catch the attention of policemen, who let her be. When she reaches Kirpal Kaur’s
apartment, Mozel takes off her clothes and puts them on Kirpal Kaur so that she can escape down the stairs while she herself in order to divert the attention of the men at the doors, runs up the stairs naked in her wooden sandals, and comes crashing down. At the very end of the story, we see Mozel lying on the floor, naked, and about to die of the fall. When Tirlochen offers to cover her with his turban in order to keep her honor, she tells him “Take away . . . this religion of yours”, and finally dies with her arms covering her breasts (172). The visual economy of nation as mother in nationalist novels, in the body of the woman dressed as sanyasi—mark of abnegation of sexuality—is undone in this body denying any garb, covering, or marker that is religiously identified.

Writing at a time when religious identity meant only divisiveness, Manto institutes mockery of religious identities through Mozel’s rejection of Tirlochen’s offering himself to her as a friend or a lover, and finally a savior from the space of religious identity. But even as he constructs this daringly sexual female persona who would be an other to any religious sentiments, Manto gives into certain codes of continuity, and resorts to certain stereotypes and binarizing as well. As opposed to Mozel, Kirpal Kaur is depicted as being shy and timid, and is treated as a non-person. We are told by the narrator that Kirpal Kaur had none of the masculine elements that Sikh women were known to have had. Her narrative function is to be a foil to Mozel, to the point of having no voice or presence at all. Mozel herself though sexually daring, adheres to certain stereotypes of the “good bad woman”. Even though she shocks those around her by revealing her body, she rejects sexual advances by men. And finally, by killing herself to save another woman, she plays the role of the martyr, which seems to be the final validation of Mozel.
Yet, despite these obvious problems, the story's breaking with the codes of writing subcontinental religious ethnicities only from the space of Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh, especially in the context of partition, is novel. One might not desist from asking though, was it possible for Manto to paint such a daring portrait of a sexual persona only in the cast of a Jewish woman, because it is a community that has no political visibility in India, so little is known of it, and no structures of reading or viewing—generic production of woman as sign, or cultural stereotypes—exist. Is it possible to deconstruct nation as mother only from a space outside the existing structures of readability? What kinds of narrative decisions would Manto have to make if the woman was a Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, or Christian—the named communities that constellate political identity? What meanings would either the woman's showing of her body, lying naked, or the scoffing of religion bound identity by using a language of mockery drawing from ethnic stereotypes, take? Could it have the same effect of poison as medicine as it does in the linguistic exchange between Mozel and Tirlochen? In a deconstructive reading of nation as mother, constellated by the figuring of woman in terms of purity, honor, and the rhetoric of communal divide, there are no easy arrivals. The power of Manto's story perhaps lies not in its giving of final answers, but in a new set of questions it enables by disturbing the existing status quo of language and representation.
1 See Gyanendranath Pandey’s “The Prose of Otherness” in Subaltern Studies VIII Ed. David Arnold. Delhi: OUP, 1994 for an account of the problems of constructing partition historiography. For similarly articulated perspectives, see Hayden White’s “Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth” and Dominick LaCapra’s “Representing the Holocaust: Reflections on the Historian’s Debate” in Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution. Ed. Saul Friedlander. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. 1992. White writes about the relativity of representation being the function of language, and LaCapra writes of the transferential relation between the historian and language. In the case of partition historiography, the words “fragment” and “truncated” used by Indian historiographers, is often read as transferential vocabulary by those on the Pakistan side. This is just one of the many examples of how careful one must be in narrating the partition, because of its conflicted place in history.


5 My reading of the historical event in terms of allegory, ruins, and fragment is influenced by Jenny Sharpe’s Allegories of Empire: the Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis. 1993. I borrow from her, the strategy of reading an event through a set of discourses surrounding it. The question of how to determine an “event” when it comes to communal violence see Gyanendranath Pandey’s “In Defence of the Fragment: Writing About Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today” Representations 37. Winter 1992. 27-75.

6 See Y. Krishan’s “Mountbatten and the Partition of India” in History: the Journal of Historical Association 68 (222). 1983


9 See Urvashi Butalia, The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India. New Delhi: Viking. 1998

10 For culinary metaphors to think through sign, symbol, and arts of memory see Louis Marin’s Food for Thought. Trans. Mette Hjort. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1989. Discussions on trans-significance and women consumed as eucharist sign-bodies follow from Marin. In Marin’s philosophical text, the eucharist sign-body functions in political, economic, and linguistic capacities, and lends itself to a wider application of reading culture, and need not necessarily be restricted to the Catholic religion.

11 For Anandamath and all subsequent novels under discussion, see Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay.

12 For all discussions in this section pertaining to Bankimchandra and the colonial encounter, see Partha Chatterjee Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse. Zed Books Ltd. 1986


14 See Louis Marin Food for Thought

15 See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Displacement and the Discourse of Woman.”

16 See Gyanendranath Pandey’s “The Prose of Otherness” in Subaltern Studies VIII Ed. David Arnold. Delhi: OUP, 1994 for an account of the problems of constructing partition historiography. For similarly articulated perspectives, see Hayden White’s “Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth” and Dominick LaCapra’s “Representing the Holocaust: Reflections on the Historian’s Debate” in Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution. Ed. Saul Friedlander. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. 1992. White writes about the relativity of representation being the function of language, and LaCapra writes of the transferential relation between the historian and language. In the case of partition historiography, the words “fragment” and “truncated” used by Indian historiographers, is often read as transferential vocabulary by those on the Pakistan side. This is just one of the many examples of how careful one must be in narrating the partition, because of its conflicted place in history.


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15 See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Displacement and the Discourse of Woman.”
19 See Jacques Derrida, “Living on Borderlines” 103, in Deconstruction and Criticism N.Y: The Seabury Press. 1979
23 For a discussion on narrative voice and narratorial voice, see Jacques Derrida, “Living on Borderlines” Deconstruction and Criticism 104-105.
24 See Jacques Derrida the “Double Session” section in Dissemination for a discussion on the hymen and pharmakon.
27 In Imaginary Homelands Rushdie writes that Saleem Sinai enters India as a secular man.
33 See Mrinalini Sinha Colonial Masculinity
36 The account of Veena Das’s two readings are cited in Veena Das “Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain” Unpublished Manuscript.
Chapter Two

Motherhood, Prostitution, and Pollution: Gender on the Fourth Stage

While in the last chapter, I looked at the ways in which colonial, national, and post-colonial polities were shaped around questions concerning the readability of native women’s bodies in India, and the discourses that consequently emerge in a time when the meaning of socius and the “normative” construct of woman falls apart, in this chapter I read the gendering of colonial capital in Africa, and its effects on post-colonial norms of readability. In my reading of Ben Okri’s two novels, *The Famished Road* and its sequel *Songs of Enchantment*, focusing on the figures of wives, mothers, and prostitutes, I look at the ways in which a post-colonial literary imagination treats these bodies that had been central in the discourses of race, as well as in colonial State formation and its “civilizing” mission. The literary texts enable readings of both the traffic in gazes between empire and colony, as well as their implications for the question of readability of the native female body in post-coloniality. Women’s class mobility, read in terms of the change in sex-gender matrix, is framed within such readability.

In colonial and post-colonial studies, the structuralist discourse of the mode of production narrative of history is being diacriticized by studies on race and sexuality, to reveal what Anne Laura Stoler\(^1\) reads as the “mutual constitutiveness” of the sexual discourse of the bio-politic state in Europe and the colonies through discourses of race, and their relation to the production of value. Women’s bodies in Africa, as objects and targets of “civilizing mission”, and medicalization of the political gaze, were the instruments in the biologization of racism, and accordingly through colonial discipline,
the producers of value, both ideological and economic. Many of those discourses, have passed into the making of the development state in post-coloniality. In my reading of Okri, I invaginate the borders of the literary text with that history. I draw on the writings of African feminist historians who read the colonial production of value as a gendered event, as well as feminist literary critics who read critically the literary productions of male writers who elide or engage with those histories.

Central to the concerns of historical engagement, language, and representation, is the question of the legacies of racial identity and its gendering in post-coloniality, and the ways in which it has influenced the imagining of nation. How racial and sexual identity emerges through the colonial gaze, and language and style as reverse gaze tropes the body of woman is one of the central concerns of this chapter. In such troped production of the woman’s body, where and how is the question of the “feminine” situated, and what implication does it have for women’s histories in post-coloniality? In the earlier chapter I read how the nationalist figuring of the “feminine” through a set of exclusions made possible the violence of representation of the raped bodies during partition. In this chapter, focusing primarily on the representations of mothers, wives, and prostitutes in the post-colonial novels of Ben Okri, I examine structures of exclusions and violence in the figuring of the “feminine”.

In response to feminists like Stephanie Newell’s observations of the clustering of an anxious masculinity around unmarried and financially independent urban women in Nigerian fiction who are portrayed as “sexually deceitful and financially cunning”, iterated in popular culture and gender theorists like Chinweizu as well, this study is an attempt at constructing a genealogy of that figuring, through colonial discourses on
African women, the making of women’s materialist history through those discourses, as well as their impact on post-colonial popular and literary imaginings. A conjunction of Newell’s reading of the allegations of witchcraft and evil in those aspersions, the setting up of domestic childbearing women within the realms of marriage as foil, point at male anxieties that go beyond class rivalry. As in the figuring of Okri’s prostitute-entrepreneur Madame Koto, it is an anxiety of slippages between the known boundaries that separate the male from the female, the legitimate, i.e. “wife” from the “illegitimate” i.e prostitute—threatening the bounds of male control in this slippage.

This chapter, in a reading of Okri’s novels, invaginated with the materialist history of women, colonial discourses of the “normative” and the “degenerate”, the traffic between metropolitan literary styles and post-colonial literary incorporations, attempts a subaltern historiography and a style of critical thinking in a Bhaba-esque methodology where he proposes a mosaic like organization of the disciplines of knowledge for spaces of non-contiguity to emerge. A genealogy of discourses of degeneracy, needs necessarily to tap into both materialist histories as well as symbolic economies. Trafficking between different structures of translation for a genealogy of sexual difference and symbolic economies—translating Ifi Amadiume into Judith Butler—perhaps this reading traces the limits of metropolitan translations as well.

Of Tropes and the figuring of the “feminine”

In “The Fourth Stage” Wole Soyinka writes of the transformative role of art in the context of the Mysteries of the Ogun and the Yoruba Tragedy. In the idiom of Ogun, the forging of a political language, style, and a vision of history, post-colonial writings in Africa can often be read in terms of engaging with the past for a process of healing. In the
imagining of nation, and in the search for such transformative figurative mediums, both
the figures of mother and prostitute act as important tropes and metaphors amongst many
African male writers such as Thiong'o, Farah, Armah, Senghor, and Soyinka. Though
they might take opposing positions along ideological lines, for example the Negritude
movement and its Manichean ideology, in this one respect they often share common
grounds. Feminists like Florence Stratton⁶ analyse the content of these tropes, critique
their staticness as well as their inability to generate the social history of women. As
counter-discourse such tropes replicate the colonial gesture of feminizing Africa, of
course in very different ways, and for very different purposes. Stratton identifies two
strands of the trope—“the pot of culture” strand in which woman is analogized to the
heritage of African values and an unchanging African essence, and the “sweep of history”
strand in which woman serves as an index of the state of the nation. In either, Stratton
reads the trope’s function in terms of transforming the coloniser’s mythologizing of
Africa as the Other, as Female, as treacherous and seductive. It enables to replace a
negative image of Africa as savage and treacherous by a positive one: an image of Africa
as warm and sensuous, fruitful, and nurturing. In most of these writers, there is a
combination of the two tropes, as Africa is written as both a nubile and bounteous body.
Likewise, the conversion of the Mother Africa trope into the prostitute metaphor, in the
“sweep of history” strand, acts as the measure of the African man’s degradation, and the
failures of the nation.

In this context, how may one read the mother and prostitute bodies in Okri’s two
novels, The Famished Road and Songs of Enchantment where the bodies of mothers and
prostitutes generate anxieties such that do not quite make them easy fits in the design of a
national allegory? The feminization of Africa, that Stratton identifies as central to the mother and prostitute tropes, is constantly put to crisis, as the body of Madame Koto, the powerful figure in whom the images of mother and prostitute collapse and remain unresolved, emerges as a phallic body. The narrative crisis in both these novels can be located in their anxiety over the place of the feminine. Consequently, in both the novels, the mother body is divided into two—Madame Koto, the entrepreneur-prostitute, and the mother of the child narrator who belongs to a nuclear family unit of mother, father, and son.

While in the figuring of Madame Koto, Okri draws on the Yoruba and Igbo pre-Christian mothers, the mother of the child narrator Azaro conforms more to the figures of the mother and wife belonging to the Christian family unit. It is not that the two remain completely separated from one another. The need to look for work drives the mother to Madame Koto who provides work for the women in the community in times of need. Moreover, in times of familial crisis, like her husband’s possession by spirits, the mother turns to Madame Koto for help since she has spiritual powers. The worn down image of the mother is associated with spiritual powers in Songs of Enchantment where she leaves her husband and son to work for Madame Koto. As she straddles between the two spaces, her association with Madame Koto giving her power, driving her beyond the ken of her husband and son, while her familial space demanding of her benign motherly and wifely affections, the narrative generates yet another anxiety over this slippage between wife and prostitute. The narrative control of the father at the end of both the novels, manages this crisis by drawing the wife within the familial realm.
The emergence of the father's body as the generative body in the end, and the transmitter of the final spiritual vision, assures both the negation of Madame Koto's phallic body and an affirmation of the unphallicized feminine, as in drawing the wife back to the familial realm, it separates the two, and himself occupies the place of phallic control. The final vision of Madame Koto as synonymous with evil, her unborn children rotting in her womb, and her sinister political affiliations darkening the dreams of those who surround her, and the father as the good, the bearer of Soyinka's Ogun-like vision of transcendence, is established by the arbiter and mediator of narrative valence, the gaze of the son Azaro. The oedipal uniting of the son's gaze with the father's voice, shifts the place of generativity from the disturbingly powerful body of Madame Koto in her sphinx-like defeat.

An engagement with the feminine, different from the regular tropes critiqued by Stratton, how can these bodies be read in the idiom of a post-colonial return-gaze, and engagement with history? How do these novels, tarrying with the phallic-feminine generate a different kind of symptomatic narrative than the ones which use the tropes of mother and prostitute in a counter-feminization of Africa? Madame Koto's body emerges from several spheres of history mediated through colonial representation. The two female bodies treated as degenerates in colonial representation—the body of the pre-Christian mothers—the female husbands of Amadiume's sociological study, associated with bisexual power structures—and the body of the urban prostitute, combine in the figuration of Madame Koto. Okri engages with the exclusions that bring into play the category "woman" in the troping of woman as metaphors of nation and history in other male African writers, which is not to say that he subverts the usual tropes of history, or in his
own narrative, authorizes any of those exclusions to write a woman-centered history from. The anxiety that these exclusions generate in his novels enable the reader to ask a set of questions pertaining to the gendered materiality of language and history, and the transactions between colonial representations of Africa, literary and otherwise, and post-colonial narratives.

_Towards a Colonial History of the Traffic in Gazes_

In colonial representations, the feminization of Africa had taken place in images of moral “darkness”, chaos, and degeneracy, often emerging from those spheres where sex-gender roles were unreadable to the male colonial officials. Unlike in the orientalist feminization marked by hyper-femininity in colonial representations, primitivist feminization was then of a different grammar. On the one hand, Africa was fetishized and symbolized as primitive mother, as in Freud’s _Totem and Taboo_ and D.H Lawrence’s _Women in Love_, where primitivity as the pre-history of Europe was itself the figure of the feminine—a feminine associated with otherness. Moreover the feminization of Africa, associated with the chaotic and the unreadable, was often referred not to the feminine, but to the phallic attributed to women in a different sex-gender structure. Both Oyewumi and Amadiume write extensively on how in pre-colonial Igbo and Yoruba social structures, male and female roles were distinguished only on the basis of reproduction, and not on the basis of body parts, i.e. the penis as privileged signifier. Men and women interchanged identities and social roles. There were male daughters and female husbands who took wives for social status and power. Consequently, the meanings of male and female, and the power relations were considerably different from what the colonial officials, ethnologists, anthropologists, and ethno-psychiatrists were
text of the social. Thus, the "dark continent" as trope of bi-sexuality in Freud’s essay “On
Femininity”⁹ is not a chance by-the-way comment. As in Totem and Taboo, resulting
from a long nineteenth and twentieth century exchange between psychoanalysis and
ethnology, it constitutes one of those invaginated moments of what Ann Laura Stoler
reads as the mutually constitutive sexual discourse of empire and the bio-politic state in
Europe, “their targets broadly imperial, their regimes of power synthetically bound”
(56)¹⁰. In Freud’s essay, the mystique of bi-sexuality renders femininity and its locus of
desire unreadable, unnarratable, and finally rendering femininity itself the site of the
impossible.

Taking the cue from Freud’s treatment of the unnarratable, one may say in the
context of the feminization of Africa that the “feminine” did not refer to any sex-
identified body or figure, but was another name for referring to what was excluded from
the normative sex-gender roles in Europe. The figuration of that exclusion was rendered
in the sexed body of woman, and not in man, as can be evinced in the literary imagining
of European writers, i.e Conrad and Lawrence. The impact of that figuring came back in
the form of colonial governance of women’s bodies, for an excursion into colonial legal
history show that the colonial regime was not as obsessed with stripping men of power,
as it was with stripping women of power and “normalizing” them through domestication.
The subsequent domestication of African women into “normative” sex-gender roles
through christianizing, education, and other legal measures in what Jean-Camaroff⁸ calls
“mother-craft”, and other African historians read as wife-making and mother-making,
testifies to the colonial anxiety of rendering Africa a readable, and hence a manageable
and governable body.
Here we come to the second mother body that was the target of the “civilizing” mission, and the target of another set of negative representations, another regime of the discourse of feminization of Africa. Or in Jean Joseph Goux’s reading of the materialist dialectic, this phase of “civilizing” may be referred to as passing from *mother to woman*, through the mediation of the *phallus*, where phallus is the place of law, i.e the colonial legal machinery. The task of “race-making” was carried on by these disciplined-to-be-women bodies. Colonial psychiatry reveals how not unlike in the current development states, women’s lactation, breast feeding, their work-time, leisure, and time spent with their children were under surveillance so that the mother could be the maker of a better race, where race was a male identified category, and the mother the means to race making. As part such sciences, the woman’s indisciplined breast, nurturing the child for many hours, caused the degeneration of the race. Thus the category “race” was tied to effeminacy and degeneration through its association with a mother body that had not been disciplined into the “normative” yet. The idiom of its degeneracy is different from the one associated with the bi-sexual identified primordial mother of Freud’s unknowable dark continent, the incessant supplier of tropes of psychosis. From *mother to woman* we see what Goux calls the work of the general equivalent to have taken place through paterlist law. From the unreadable psychotic *mother* body to the *woman* body aligned with the European sex-gender role, and inferior to the “normative” European female body—such are the conditions of the capitalization of nature as well as the feminization of race.

If one were to read the history of the feminization of Africa in these above terms and then read a return-gaze counter narrative, what questions would we come up with
concerning style, gaze, language, and subjectivity, and why would such questions be important in situating a body like Madame Koto's? The question of gaze and identity pervades the writings of the African philosopher Frantz Fanon and his post-colonial commentator, Homi Bhabha, as does the question of language, style, narrative, and history in the writings of African writers. It is important to engage with both these sets of concerns in looking at the mother and prostitute tropes of Africa in the male writers, as well as their critiques from feminist quarters. Positions taken on racial identity by Fanon, and Bhabha in his reading of Fanon, are mediated through the question of the gaze and its sexual configuration. The white man's gaze breaks up the black man's body, Fanon writes. The anatomy of the gaze that interpellates both the black man and the white man from within the interstices of race and sexuality, ought to be contextualised within the racist history of the West. Yet, it is not in one particular historical juncture, or in one set of empirical data that the agency or meaning of that gaze can be fixed. The gaze is always mediated through the place of the Other, from where the psychic splittings of demand and desire emerge. In Fanon and Manoni's articulation, and Bhabha's reading, the chiasmic space of desire is a three way juncture consisting of the black man, white man, and the white woman. The white man imagines that the native wants to usurp his place, and as Manoni claims, every native (where the native is grammmered in male terms) does indeed want to usurp the place of the colonizer. The ordinance of this place is more symbolically grammared than empirically determined. Racial history, racial interpellation, and racial identity read from the symbolic ordaining of this place must be fleshed out in terms of the chiasmatic sexual grammar of masculinity and femininity that come into being through technologies of power.
The Manichean splitting of the site of racial identification between black man and white man, even while it takes into account the mediated space of the Other where splitting and doubling takes place, does not account for the place of the black woman in the colonial discourse of race. The site of Other as the site of desire might include the white woman, but says nothing of the black woman. In psychoanalytic terms, is the desire of the colonial black woman an impossibility, or is the symbolic space of desire of and for the black woman in colonial discourse so unspeakable and fearful that it cannot be approached except in terms of psychosis? If the white man’s gaze breaks up the black man’s body, what meaning of the black male body in terms of masculinity and femininity is introjected in that gaze, and what place of the Other is that meaning mediated from?

To what gendered bodies does “the past tethered to treacherous stereotypes of primitivism and degeneracy” refer and to which bodies does that gaze shaped by stereotypes of primitivism address? Could there be a split between the two, and might not Bhabha’s “doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places” and the “disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness” be read from that site of splitting?

In “Interrogating Identity” the black male bodies are those of students and intellectuals in the metropolis, in a relation of gaze and desire with white men and women that is different from those that shape the interactions between the African men and women and colonial officials in the colonies, and a space that Bhabha himself writing in the metropolis can imagine. Black women are significantly missing in the space from where Fanon speaks, except in having been incorporated in the symbolic economy of racial imagining, and introjected in the white gaze that makes the black male body break
up: “I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects”. The last three—intellectual deficiency, fetishism, and racial defects—have direct bearing on the figuring of the colonial black female body as well as the responsibilities and failures attributed to it in “race-making”. Curiously enough, “what does the black man want?”, the terms that Fanon uses to articulate the place of white interrogation, and the ambivalent space of psychic splitting, mimes Freud’s “what does woman want”, asked of the white bourgeois female subject. Situating black male subjectivity in the place of the white bourgeois female subject where black female sexuality has already been turned into the trope of the impossible—the “dark continent” of bisexuality— it is a miming that covers many levels of displacement. Yet, even as it articulates the place of the other in terms of ambivalence and psychic splitting, the possibility of the black man or the white woman being subjects from whatever place of wanting, is not foreclosed.

When Oyewumi critiques the Manicheanism of Manoni and the absence of black women in Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks, it is this foreclosure she comments on. “What if the black woman envied and wanted to occupy the place of the masters, as the black man does?” she asks. In place of two, the black man and the white man, she claims the writing of four—including the white woman and the black woman—for an adequate historicizing of race and empire. Yet, if her own text of writing the differently sex-gendered system amongst the Igbo and the Yoruba and the bi-sexual political structures were to be taken into account, the name and place of “woman” would have to be split. A psychoanalysis of the construction of the category race or of racial identity in the colonial
context would not be possible without a reading of how the name “woman” is given access to through the work of colonial governing.

From the place of critique generated by Oyewumi and the reading of how the black male writer trafficking in metropolitan cultures, re-writing Africa in the colonizer’s language, both incorporated as style and battled against, how might one read the troping of mother and prostitutes as the site of the return-gaze? What reading of the gaze and the return gaze would a conjoined reading of the blind spots in Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks regarding black woman, and the abundance of African women in the troped bodies in male African writers in the post-colonial period yield? How is the blindness in one introjected in the other, and what are the invaginated relations between the two blindnesses?

Mother bodies in these writers are symbols for the weave of culture, but none of these bodies yield the contradictions that have gone in the colonial paterialist construction of the mother and the “feminine” that the bodies of Oyewumi and Amadumé’s study of the pre-Christian mothers reveal. Stratton reads the manichean divide of male and female in Soyinka’s writings, even as he protests against the manicheanism of the Negritude movement. Even though her critique is directed at the male author-subject and female-culture divide in these writings, and the very nature of the gaze that the act of writing performs on the woman’s body, that critique could be extended to include Oyewumi and Amadumé’s historicizing of sex-gender relations in pre-colonial and colonial Africa to make the argument that the women’s bodies that male African writers trope, are bodies that are readable as female bodies, and subject of an adulating gaze within the metropolitan norms of femininity. In that sense, the female bodies can be read as black
male projections of a desire of the civil and the aesthetic normed in the metropolitan mode, perhaps in an attempt to cleanse Africa of its primitivist associations. Significantly enough, while the question of the differently sex-gender idiomed bodies of women are approached by African feminist theorists of colonialism, and colonial power read in terms of how that body was legislated upon, it is something that is not approached by the male intellectuals who theorize history, culture, and language in decolonization.

That women have been exploited, colonialism impoverished them, or the trend of modern capital in Africa conflates male power with class closure (Chazan), is by itself not an adequate description of the gendering of colonial and post-colonial capital without a consideration of how power normed the body into modern sex-gender roles, and how capital came to be gendered through these norms. Amadiume writes on the gendering of modern capital in Nigeria. A strong cash economy and European firms undermined women's economic and political powers, and that erosion of power went hand in hand with the advent of the legal institutions of Christianity and the change in the pre-Christian institution of motherhood. Women's titles that enabled them to command positions of power were banned because of the rituals attending them, while men's titles were not. Amongst the Igboas, the taking of Ekwe titles by women was based on the institution of female husbands, which was accompanied by rituals that came to be considered wrong by Christianity. A change in power structure entailed a change in the readability of the body and the socius, and around the new regime of the norm, capital's new grammar came to be organized.

Kamene Okonjo attributes women's loss of power in politics with the advent of colonialism to the change from a bi-sexual nature of political system to an uni-sexual
nature of political system. Amadiume notes how amongst the Igbo the ban on women’s titles and the Christian Church’s refusal to accept the worship of pythons and of the goddess Idemili, embodying both male and female qualities, eventually took away the powers of motherhood, and consequently from the Women’s political organization, the Women’s Council as well. Amadiume’s analysis of the change of the power structure and the gendering of colonial capital is also an analysis of language, of bodies made to lose social power or gain social power through the freezing or flowing of language, where the meaning of body boundaries constellated through religious signs, the human-nature changing relation through the production of capital, is the very content of language’s embodied life.

Soyinka, Okri, and Gender on the Fourth Stage

In contrast with any of these treatments of colonialism and its impact on language, gender, kinship, and power structures by feminist sociologists and historians like Okonjo and Amadiume, we might turn briefly to Soyinka’s Ogon and the Yoruba Tragedies where he formulates a philosophy of language, history, and spirit. In “The Fourth Stage” Soyinka likens Ogun to Nietzsche’s Dionysius, but whereas Nietzsche’s Dionysius for Soyinka represents the “principle of illusion”, the Yoruba Tragedy in which Ogun’s drama of becoming is staged, rests on the principle of revolution. Ogun plunges into the abyss of chaos, disintegrates, “surrenders his individuation to the fragmenting process”, undergoes ritual anguish of the will, passes through areas of terror and blind energies, and having re-assembled himself, emerges wiser and more powerful. Ogun organises the “mystic and the technical forces of Earth and cosmos to forge a bridge”. In other words, Ogun’s is the will that combines the forces of tradition and modernity through a constant
anguish and triumph of the will. Ogun’s revolutionary struggle surpasses the principle of dialectics within which Soyinka claims, the Negritude movement has its place. It engages with the forces of history as well as with the ancestral spirits, and its transformative vision is born out of such an engagement. But the tragic spirit of struggling will and the poetics of transcendence and transition are male.

Soyinka writes of the festival of Ogun in which the bearers of phallic staff dancing among the revellers, can only be men. He touches very briefly on the bawdy comic spirit of camaraderie and irreverence that exists at the core of the grief one experiences at the loss of one’s ancestors, and even more briefly on the sexual ambience and its comic presentation through which terror—an essential component of the tragic art form as well—is released. The terror released through the grotesque of the comic spirit, and a sexual ambience, is considered by Soyinka to belong to an inferior realm of the poetics of tragedy and its conflicts, unable to attain the full power of cosmic vision” (30). Yet, a close reading into colonial history would tell us that the spirit of abyss, chaos, or transition can hardly be written without looking at colonial history as gendered history, playing itself out within a “sexual ambience”, not just involving the lives and interactions of men and women, but a constant shifting of the relations between sex and gender through changes in relations of production, and relations of power. If in Ogun’s fragmentation and re-assembling in the struggles and triumphs of will, lies the possibility of that history, Soyinka does not really tell us its terms. By leaving the tragic spirit of Ogun unmarked by the story of gendered power, gendered struggle, gendered survival, and gendered transformations, Soyinka writes the Yoruba tragedy’s space in terms of the unmarked male.
The visionary and linguistic worlds of Okri’s novels, structured in the idiom of the tragic spirit of Ogun and engaging with history through mytho-poetics, conforms to a male identified phallic poetics of Ogun by making the father the final arbiter of moral vision. Yet, in the novelizing of Soyinka’s revolutionary philosophy of language and history, Okri’s engagement with history and the cultural unconscious from within which the spirit of healing is sought, betrays the terror and the grotesque of the comic spirit of sexual ambience that Soyinka considers inferior to the Tragic spirit. Even though the final vision of transcendence belongs to the father with whom the son-narrator’s perspective coincides, much of the narrative energy is spent on the contending female bodies of power and the anxieties they generate. Such anxieties are not just over the spectacle of female power, but concern the very shifting of body boundaries and the crisis of the meanings of male and female that female power evokes. Madame Koto’s bearded body and her inability to give birth to the three abiku children that rot in her womb, testifies to some of those anxieties in the text which are finally overcome by the spectacle of the father’s spiritually empowered generative body in the end.

In Madame Koto, the prostitute-entrepreneur’s body, the signs and symbols of the Igbo pre-Christian mother, and female husbands are evoked in describing the powers she has over the women who work under her. The pregnant Goddess unable to give birth at the very beginning of The Famished Road, and her female devotees preparing to sacrifice the child narrator, are reminiscent of the pre-Christian Goddesses around which the institution of motherhood and women’s political organizations empowered themselves. The Goddess is evoked in the figuring of Madame Koto’s body in the middle of the text, as she too is described in terms of her grand pregnancy, and is unable to give birth. As
opposed to Ogun’s phallic staff, here then we have Goddesses who cannot give birth. In the *Songs of Enchantment*, Madame Koto pampered, bathed, and almost worshipped by the women under her, reminiscent of both the female husband and the Goddess, is also filtered through a primitivist and orientalist representation.

The gendered spiritual vision of the novel, amongst many other complexities, may be phrased in terms of the framing of the novel with the Goddess at the beginning, with her formidable pregnancy facing the sea, and unable to give birth, and by the father at the end from whose enchanted lips the words of a language of social healing and transformation flows. The very male terms of a re-generative language of spiritual vision and language, attempting at re-assembling the fragmentation that the nation undergoes in colonial exploitation and post-colonial failures, may be read in terms of Soyinka’s vision of Ogun’s festival where male bearers dance with their phallic staff in the celebration of the reassembling of the fragments of Ogun’s body. Other than that of the State’s corruption and history’s brutalizing, the text of fragmenting and reassembling is also a gendered one. In the valence of the novel, Madame Koto’s corrupt power fragments the moral universe which the father’s vision re-assembles. The phallic terms of that reassembling may be read in terms of the father’s sojourns into the spirit world where he wrestles with male spirits.

If on the one hand, the visual image of the laboring body staggering under the loads of garri, being humiliated before the very eyes of the son, is one of fragmentation, and the homo-erotic bondings with the male ancestors in the spirit world, is one of re-assembling. The wrestling matches with men from which the father emerges as victor in the latter half of *The Famished Road* are replete with the visual economies of male eros.
and male power. These are also sections where the narrator's gaze dissociates itself from Madame Koto's body and aligns itself with the father's body, the oedipal narrative of family union and the terms of that gendering gathering force to see its culmination in the father's spiritual triumph at the end. The "sexual heat" in Madame Koto's bar associated not only with corrupt money, corrupt power, but also with the free flowing of female sexual energy, and gradually appearing to be revolting to the child-narrator Azarro, is assuaged in the visual economy of male bonding and male power.

If the father's bonding with male spirits, gradual empowerment, and the very largeness and heaviness of his body in the end be read in phallic terms, how may the body of the pregnant goddess and Madame Koto heavy with pregnancy, but unable to give birth, be read? Not only are these images reminiscent of the pre-Christian goddesses of the Igbo and Yoruba, they are also images that are negatively valenced, bordering on the terrifying. Jean-Joseph Goux's reading of the mother drive in terms of the death drive (drawing on the French assonances between pulsion de mere and pulsion de mort) may be applied to the narrative behavior, and to the narrative mediating male child Azarro's gaze as it meets these bodies. The two devouring mother-goddess bodies--that of the goddess at the beginning of The Famished Road and Madame Koto who picks up assonances of the figure of the devouring goddess in the course of the novel, are textually positioned to occupy two ends of a historical trajectory. The Goddess, large with her pregnancy, belongs to some abstract realm of pre-history, or one may say, to the repository of the symbols of the unconscious, while Madame Koto belongs to the material history of colonial and post-colonial capital, or in Goux's terms, to the history that follows the trajectory of "from mother to woman" through the mediation of the phallus.
The rise of cash economy, the breaking up of the agrarian structure in the villages, and of laborers migrating to the colonial cities comprises the materialist history of prostitution. While one structure of women’s power, i.e. that of the political institution of motherhood associated with female husbands broke with the advent of colonial capital, another was born in the cities. Prostitutes were amongst the first African petty bourgeois in the colonial cities (White)\(^8\), and were powerful enough to mobilize political dissent, and organize other women into political action (Okonjo)\(^9\). Other than both being associated with female economic and political power, what they had in common was perhaps their association with otherness in colonial representation. While the institution of female husbands and the worship of the bisexual Goddesses were considered unacceptable by missionaries, the body of the urban prostitute was instrumental in the colonial rationale for segregating cities on the basis of medical discourses of sexual diseases (White).

Okri’s narratives seem to internalize that otherness in its own post-colonial rationale as it presents these bodies as threatening and terrible in their castrating power, even though fascinating before the narrative gaze. The Goddess whose “mighty and wondrous pregnancy faced the sea” is surrounded by the archetypal symbols of eggs and water, reminiscent of intrauterine life, indicative of pre-patriarchal socialized matter (Goux). Her body in its enormous magnificence is reminiscent of “matter that is still ‘phallic’” prior to patriarcal domination, i.e., associated with the primary elements of earth, water, fire, and the powers of “creation, generation, reproduction” (Goux). But on the other hand is her inability to give birth unless a male child be sacrificed to her. It is as though the text was commenting on her inability to generate history by herself without
the mediation of a sacrificed male. The Goddess body in the text is thus a
castrated/castrating body since it needs other male matter to generate history, and fulfill
its destiny, and since it terrifies the male gaze by not conforming to the expectations of
body boundaries. The womb-like maternal space is threatened by death and killing, and
the textual space of this threat both in the case of the Goddess and Madame Koto, is
symptomatic of what they demand to be sacrificed in terms of the expectations of
normative body boundaries, and what the narrative perspective cannot sacrifice.

Even though both of Okri’s novels create a style and language that moves fluidly
between the real and the imagined worlds, the world of real-politic and of spirits, to forge
as what critics like Ato Quayson\textsuperscript{20} claim a mythopoeic language, it remains unable to
hold the female form frustrating the “normative” expectations of body boundaries within
its novelistic vision of transcendence. Goddesses and prostitutes alike, the bodies
associated with female power are also bodies that are associated with bi-sexuality. In
Songs of Enchantment, thus Madame Koto and her women other than tied in a relation of
work, are depicted in relations of physical intimacy, as the women bathe and attend to her
“leviathan body”, much as the female devotees treat the Goddess in The Famished Road.
The images of women crawling under Madame Koto’s seat, bowing down before her,
combining both the images of power and eros, emerge out of two frames—that of the
female husbands of Igbo, Yoruba traditions, and the primitivist, orientalist representations
of African women in terms of sexual excesses. The former filtered through the latter is
made emptied of history as it comes to represent, and turns itself into a language that is
equally emptied of the possibilities of representing the materiality of either the
prostitute’s sphere of influence or her work in colonial and post-colonial Africa.
Historicizing the body of the urban prostitutes in Nairobi, Luise White situates prostitution within the central contradiction of colonialism characterized by the way it mobilized and utilized wage labor, her central claim being that in the case that the colonial State could create and recruit a wage labor force, but could not maintain it, because it did not provide living conditions in which one might survive, prostitutes emerging as entrepreneurs who owned property, rented rooms, sold or provided with the materials of sustenance, i.e. food and bath-water, over and above their companionship, comprised the sustaining force. How might one read this sustaining language of room, food, bath-water and companionship turned into rotting abiku children unable to be born, and the nightmare caste by the “Leviathan body” in Okri’s novels? While White writes the body of the prostitute from the spaces of community, or central in the organization and sustaining of community—other than being the only sustaining force for migrant laborers in the cities, their wages sent back to the villages went to support the tradition bound hierarchies that were under threat by the new cash economy, the break up of the agrarian structure and relations of production.

In Okri’s novels, the prostitute-entrepreneur moves in and out of the community spaces, and is treated as a body of sustenance when it is associated with food, and its spiritual powers associated with medicine. In The Famished Road Madame Koto’s bar where humans and spirits both visit, is situated in the liminal spaces where the outskirts of the city blur into the village. Humans turning into spirits and vice versa, the grotesque muse of that transformation, and the bawdiness of the ambience builds the spirit of a place where laborers fatigued, often dehumanized by the load of work visit, and form a community of sorts. Filtered through the consciousness of the child narrator, the
atmosphere comes across as both warm and grotesque in the spirit of camaraderie with food, palm wine and the eccentricities of the male clients deftly managed by Madame Koto, acting as the glue. Madame Koto cooks food, provides wine, and controls the revelry of over-worked laborers drinking away their fatigue and shabbiness of their lives at the day’s end. Matriarchal and entrepreneur body blend into one as she provides food, and beats up men who misbehave and refuse to pay money. Her blending with the community too takes place through her offerings of generous quantities of food when a party is in the midst of food shortage.

The naturalizing glue of community that come with food images and shaping Madame Koto as a certain body of metaphor, changes as she moves amongst the echelons of power and opens her bar to prostitution. That is when she becomes heavy with unborn children, gathers assonances of the Igbo female husbands and bi-sexual goddesses, and becomes “leviathan-like”. From being associated with community, where community’s meaning is male-sanctioned, even though it signifies a conglomerate of men and women, with her moving into power and opening a house of prostitution, she is associated with another kind of community—that of women. Songs of Enchantment occupies itself with this new community that Madame Koto builds up around her. Madame Koto’s place is associated with “secret sects of women” comprising of wives who keep disappearing from the community. The narrative, as though determined to give Madame Koto a more salutary treatment than the way in which the The Famished Road ended with the declaration of her evil, wars between these two positions—one of her “evil” influence, and the other of her power amongst women.
As the two influences and powers collapse in the figuring of Madame Koto, it is not clear which one it is that makes her incapable of reproduction, or in the narrative valence, renders her body boundaries outside the norm. Between Luise White's community sustaining body of the prostitute and Kamere Okonjo’s prostitute’s body of political power and organizing force amongst women at the wake of a new era of colonial capital, we might place Okri’s novels as narratives of anxiety. Where the bodies of prostitutes become bodies of power, they slip outside community. In a gendering normed through colonial governance, the terms of community identity is male identified, and its accepted sex-gender roles set thus that the “bi-sexual power structure” in Okonjo’s terms would not be considered acceptable if bi-sexual has the same connotations as in Amadiume’s study, i.e sexual difference not determined through a discourse of difference based on a privileging of meanings attached to body parts, but fluid according to the roles one assumes. In the context of a materialist dialectic traced in terms of sexual difference, in Goux’s terms, the return to matter is to another matter, we read a nomadic body within re-territorialized capital, simultaneously empowered and stigmatized, in a turn of history where matter and nature are thrown back to “bad reproduction”, “a subreproduction and a nonreproduction consisting of errors, counterfeits, misfits, the inability to preserve the notion of the living from accidents and contingencies” (Goux). While the prostitute’s body can be read as a space of resistance to colonialism’s urge to produce universals through the matter of women’s bodies—the domestic training of motherhood to fit women into “normative” sex-gender roles, and the production of disempowered wives through a legal machinery that gave women less power—the terms
of such resistance may also be seen in the ways in which their bodies even while being
vestiges of power, are discursively produced as bodies that host misfits and errors.

From *nature to nature, from mother to woman, from matter to another matter*,
the turn of the dialectic materialism is framed in Okri’s novel through the Goddess
surrounded by primal matter of elemental spirit and the Madame Koto then, who brings
the magical products of modern capital amongst her community. It is she who buys the
first car, and brings electricity. While on the one hand the thrill of these objects is
conveyed through the child narrator’s eyes, a sort of negative valence is attached to them
as one of the prostitutes die of electrocution, and the car is smashed up in an accident.
The narrative, even as it brings to bear the reader to witness the male section of the
community’s envy at her success, tends to make her acquisition of these objects the proof
of her greed. As much as her unborn abiku children, the destroyed car and the electricity
that kills becomes part of the world of errors and misfits surrounding her.
While the father emerges as the hero in the spirit of Ogun-like transcendence in the end,
the lesser Gods in Soyinka’s drama—the Appolonian Obatala, the God of plastic arts, of
endurance and suffering, and Sango, the retributive god of technology take gendered
shapes in Okri’s tale of transcendence. As the father goes off to sleep, combatting the
spirits in the spirit world, the mother in the Obatala like spirit of martyrdom and
endurance, becomes frail, and Madame Koto, in the Sango-like spirit of technological
greed, evoking pity and terror, but in the end losing moral dignity, grows large and
menacing. It is perhaps no coincidence that, like Shango, the Yoruba God of electricity,
Madame Koto is associated with electricity in the novel since it is her bar that gets the
first supply of electricity in the area. And when one of the girls in her employment die
electrocuted, and Madame Koto carries on as though nothing had happened, electricity as well as all the other new icons of power and technology acquire a sinister air.

*The Politics of Gaze, Voice and Cartographies of the “Feminine”*

One of the uses of the mother and prostitute trope used by African male writers, Stratton writes, is to recreate the moral geography of Africa on the nubile or bounteous body of the black woman. Consider for example, Senghor’s “Femme Noir”:

Naked woman, black woman

Clothed with your colour which is life, with your form which is beauty!

In your shadow I have grown up; the gentleness of your hands was laid over my eyes

And now, high up on the sun-baked pass, at the heart of summer,

at the heart of noon, I come upon you my Promised Land.

And your beauty strikes me to the heart like the flash of an eagle.

What comes across as most striking in these lines is woman made synonymous with land, the lingering on the color black, almost as if he were reinventing it and recreating its terms anew, wresting it from its barbaric connotations in the colonizer’s language. The linguistic surface is smooth and does not betray any struggles. The aesthetics of the language is one that follows the rhythms of mainstream European lyrical aesthetics. The black woman’s body recreated in that language, intending to recreate Africa’s geography, racialized as primitive in European imagining, does not address the fragmenting of the black woman’s body itself in the racialized bio-politics of empire. Okri’s novels, at the other end, digests that history, not necessarily to protest or fight the colonial representational machinery that went in the perception of women’s bodies. The political
intent of the two novels, signified at a visual level by its frequent use of the mask and the camera—symbolic of the hybrid ways of looking, and the use of language itself—does not politicize the representation of the woman’s body, even though they touch the very nodes of the history that had enabled the cartography of empire to take place through women’s bodies.

In Okri’s novels, the linguistic politics of style and gaze that relates itself to the construction of a moral geography is gendered in the following way: while Madame Koto is related to the specular, the father is related to speech. The natural world in the two novels unfolds differently in relation with either of these presences. While death is associated with Madame Koto’s fascinating presence, through the father’s speech in the end, the natural world of plants, insects, animals acquire a new lease of life, and new linguistic expressions. A new vision of mytho-poetic language is born, the putrid dead darkening and dimming the natural world finally disappear as Madame Koto’s heavy body is lifted from the community’s unconscious life. It is in fact Dad’s voice that makes it possible for the immense weight of Madame Koto to lift. “Madame Koto’s monumental form was no longer sitting on him. Maybe he noticed for the first time how light he felt”.

While the The Famished Road ended with Dad’s becoming large and heavy, as though contesting Madame Koto’s form, and in that symbolic heaviness, acting as a generative body for a new vision of transcendence, the Songs of Enchantment ends with his lightness that itself becomes symbolic of the new brilliance that flows into the natural world, and of a new lease of language. Dad names the world anew and fills the oral void that the great fear of the dead had caused. In Dad’s voice and words lies the promise of a new language: “histories that don’t become fixed only into written or spoken words,
stories that are re-invented in each new generation, myths that always live because they are allowed to die, melodies that spring from the same unchanging source of the redemptive heart, philosophies hidden in rituals, hidden in stories..." (150).

Different from Senghor’s linguistic aesthetics that does not change the stylistic terms of the English literary language, Okri proposes an alternate philosophy of language and an alternate source of historical knowledge, i.e. oral histories. But whereas previously in the novel, it was Madame Koto who was associated with oral history, with the ancient spirits of African languages, in her unborn abiku children the possibility of “myths and deities who would extend her powers, offspring worthy of her ancient blood, a blood as old as oral history” (Songs of Enchantment 141), in the end it is the father whose agency as keeper and generator of history and language is affirmed. Such a resolution is in keeping with the Marxist idiom of Okri’s ideology that falls somewhere in a cross between Soyinka and Fanon. Even though Madame Koto occupies plenty of narrative space, the two novels are meant to explore the possibility of a revolution coming from the underclass. The father thus envisions founding an university for beggars. The exploited class and the possibility of a subject of revolution is treated as quintessentially male. Even though the mother too is harassed by the politicians, and her work extends beyond the domestic sphere, she is not made to be the subject of any worker’s revolution. She is included in the visionary world of the husband in the end.

The vision of a new language of mytho-poetics and a new medium for historical knowledge different in content from the colonizer’s language and representation of Africa thus goes hand in hand with the vision of a revolution emerging out of the worker’s struggle. Madame Koto remains a foil because she is not considered to belong
to the underclass, and is associated with the wealthy, the corrupt, and the powerful. Thus it supplements the bias that extant literature on prostitution in Africa reveals on quite different grounds that echo much of the negative colonial representations. Madame Koto is a body of pollution because her money is not clean enough for the revolution, and neither can her labor be incorporated in the idioms of labor that go in the making of worker’s struggle. Along with this as a possible explanation for the divide in labor, value, and narrative treatment of revolutionary possibilities in linguistic and political consciousness, the division of the separate spheres might also be attributed to the treatment of the feminine. The other woman in the novels, Helen, who is given a leadership role as she leads the beggars is a foil to the aggressive Madame Koto and the aggressive spirit of the Mother. In The Famished Road Helen enters the plot when the father begins to acquire spiritual and physical powers, and the birth of a new vision of politics. Mysterious and beautiful, she exudes an ability to have influence over others. Wielding a strange influence over the father, and refusing to leave his side, she becomes the mother’s competitor in uncomfortable ways. Her hallmark is her beauty, silence, and composure, as opposed to the mother’s constantly harassed and often vocal presence. Comporting herself as the father’s most devout follower, carrying herself with a sexually charged silence, she locates herself in the space between the father and the son’s desire, drawing a line of axis between them, surprisingly not to alienate one from the other, but to bond them. Her leader-like qualities executed in silence stands as a foil to Madame Koto’s aggressive leadership. The preferred model of femininity that however emerges with the image of the half-child Helen, surprisingly canny about adult desire, and the sacrificing emaciated mother at the end of both the novels, is one of submission.
Either body of submission, or body of aggression, the treatment of the female bodies in roles of leadership, power, and influence, is one that appears in the economy of the gaze and not of voice. And even though the final vision of linguistic transformation rests with the voice, the anxiety that the visual economy of female bodies generate, informs the nature of the dialectic in which voice finally emerges having contented with death and the negative, i.e. the anxiety that the question of the feminine generates in the novels. In order to read the economy of the gaze, the question of a very different moral geography than the one in mother/prostitute tropes in male African writers, and the anxiety Madame Koto’s body generates, I draw on Judith Butler’s reading of the “feminine” after Luce Irigaray in terms of the “specular” and the “excessive”, and her deconstructive lesbian resignification of the phallus that call into question both the “feminine” and “masculine” morphologies.

Butler’s position on a gendered matrix at work in the constitution of materiality, may be summed up as following: matter is founded by a set of exclusions and violations. The “feminine” for her does not connote any essentialized category, but the very place of these exclusions, which she calls excessive feminine. In trying to tease out the place of such exclusions from a given text, she reads deconstructively Lacan’s formulation of the subject producing meaning of the phallus. In the two essays of Lacan, “On the Mirror Stage” and “The Signification of the Phallus” the position of the phallus symptomizes the imaginary transformation of a decentered body in pieces into the specular and idealized body, and finally the differential accession of bodies to sexed positions within the symbolic. In Butler’s reading the first essay concerns the narrative recourse to the body before the mirror, while the second concerns the narrative recourse to a body before the
law. In both cases, the idealizing specular and the Law demands exclusions before
constructing the meaning of the subject through the category of "sex". Her deconstructive
move in the reading of Lacan consists in making the claim that the phallus need not
symbolize any body part, or the penis that Lacan seems to privilege, but belongs to the
very principle of erotogenic transferability. The lesbian phallus for her thus demands that
a morphological imaginary be written through the degredation and castration of specific
feminine and masculine morphologies. Organizing a reading of matter as body, nature,
and socius in these terms, one would thus conclude that the moral valence and with it the
legitimation of power changes with the change in the location of the phallus, and
consequently, with the location of the "feminine" within any given structure of
signification.

Butler's deconstructive reading is useful for a radical theory of the subject as well
as for ideology studies. By deconstructing the phallus in terms of erotogenic
transferability, she enables a reading of the radical subject of desire. Offering a
decomposative reading of the specular subject, which concerns both the gaze as well as
the construction of the subject through the economy of the gaze, Butler enables a theory
of ideology. For a reading of the treatment of Madame Koto's body before the narrative
gaze, I shall use the latter in my reading, rather than the former. Butler's deconstruction
of the phallus, the political relevance of which is the deconstruction of the culture
privileged heterosexual matrix of meaning, is effective only within cultures where the
materialization of bodies takes place around the privileging of the signification of phallus
and men and women are differentiated on the basis of the penis. In cultures that have sex-
gender roles like that of the Igbos of Amadiume's study, and where the penis is not a
privileged signifier for gendering difference, a different psychoanalytic and deconstructive frame would have to be put to work in theorizing both materiality and exclusions in the mattering of the “feminine”.

Butler’s deconstruction of the phallic idealization of matter or the morphological imaginary through the possibility of the lesbian phallus, has important consequences for a theory of ideology. Where Lacan’s coming to being of a morphological imaginary through a specularized subject fixes the materialized being of the subject in an unified sex-identity, Butler’s reading of the phallus as a “transferable phantasm” constantly underscores that “there is not one imaginary schema for the bodily ego” as her lesbian resignification of the phallus calls into question both the “masculine” and “feminine” morphologies. The place of this coming into question is one of violence, of either or both “an imaginary and cathected degrading of the feminine” and/ or the “castrating occupation of that central masculine trope”.

If one were to align narrative gaze with the role of specularization, which indeed is the case in Okri’s two novels, where the fragmented being of the father comes into an idealized whole in the narrative alignment of the father and the son’s gaze, mediated through the male mattered ancestor bodies in the spirit world, then indeed the question of gaze fleshed out in terms of style and writing, can be tied up with the question of ideology as well. The alignment of the narrative gaze with the father’s specularised body at the end of both the novels, achieves a narrative exclusion of the “feminine”. Matter as language, politics, re-inscribing the signifiable limits of the natural and the religious worlds, and indeed as in the case of Okri and Soyinka, crafting a language of revolutionary poetics through such re-inscriptions, organizes around the idealized
morphology of a male-sexed body. The feminine is divided in the process of this specularization. Madame Koto and the wife’s spheres are separated at the end of the two novels, as the father comes closer to his spiritual empowerment. The mother’s vocal protestations is subsumed as the father’s voice lifts, and Madame Koto’s heavy presence finally vanishes.

The anxieties generated in the text is not just centered around Madame Koto’s “corrupt” power or money, but in the slippages between wife and prostitute. While in The Famished Road the spheres of the wives in the community and Madame Koto cross one another at the market place during the political rallies, the former helping the latter in eking out an income, in the Songs of Enchantment the relation between the wives of the community and Madame Koto takes on a different note. Wives disappear from their homes, and men suspect that they belong to a secret sect. Madame Koto’s place is associated with pagan rituals, the power of women’s menstrual blood, witches and sorcerers, and women’s secret cabals. The visual economy of Madame Koto changes considerably in the second novel, where her power is associated with erotic energy, the combination of both often exuding a sinister air in the narrative valence. Men are significantly missing from the erotic ambience in these sections of the novel which seem to be singularly the domain of women, of errant wives empowered in the secret cabals of prostitutes. The light that flows into these parts of the narrative is both dense and opaque, as the narrative intent seems to be to generate an atmosphere of women’s formidable spiritual powers, and say nothing about their work. What do wives do at the prostitute’s bar, and is it only the spiritual powers of women that threaten the men of the community?
While in *The Famished Road*, the child narrator Azaro is very clearly inimical to the "sexual heat" in the transforming bar, and the father's being against the mother's visits to Madame Koto in search of work, expressed in clear terms, in the *Songs of Enchantment* a dubious language of spiritual powers crossing between the erotic and the sinister shrouds. The harassed mother betrayed by the father's association with the mysterious and manipulative beggar woman, Helen, is empowered as she joins Madame Koto's bar. Her emaciated, submissive, and domesticated body at the end of *The Famished Road* changes form and energy as she seems to turn into another person through her association with Madame Koto. Again the text betrays nothing about the source of her power. Is it money that she earns, or is it the company of women that give her power? If she earns money, how does she earn it? Nothing except the description of the mother "changing from a woman full of love and suffering into a half woman half-antelope, her milk turning sour, her body wrinkling under the force of the night" (*Songs of Enchantment*, 43) in the second third of the novel gives a hint of the work she does. But very soon after, she comes back into the familial fold, and is subsumed into the father's entity. At the end of the novel, the earlier opacity of erotic and spiritual light, openly turns into a discourse of moral darkness and heaviness associated with Madame Koto's heavy and pregnant form, the moral universe waiting to regain the sparkle of language and spiritual vision in the father's empowering voice once more.

In the cross between Kamene Okonjo's history of reterritorialized colonial capital in the cities, of a new class of women entrepreneurs, often prostitutes, and their leadership roles amongst the wives of the community, and Muthoni Likimani's *Passbook Number F 47927*²² where she writes on the division of the category woman into wife and
not-wife as colonial strategy of managing the subject populations during the Mau Mau, where do we situate Okri’s narrative anxiety over the slippages between the prostitute and the wife, the threatened place of the “feminine” that slippage generates, its symbolic fleshing out in the two mother narrative, with the father finally managing the narrative crisis by becoming the primal generative force? The father’s specularization in the end is not just the idealizing of his decentered poverty humiliated laborer’s body. The decentering and fragmentation of social space lies in this anxiety over the slippage between wife and prostitute. Unlike in the other writers where the fragmentation of the social space, of the black male psyche, the racist narratives of degeneracy are cathexed, and the moral geography of Africa reinvented on the trope of the bounteous mother and prostitute bodies, Okri locates the fragmentation of the social space in the women’s bodies, and erects the father-body as both specularized and generative body in the end.

Between Kamene Okonjo and Likimani’s texts on the deterritorializing and reterritorializing of capital, and of the management of colonial space through women’s bodies, lies a colonial racial discourse. Likimani writes in the Passbook that at the height of the nationalist movement in Kenya, women could not have mobility unless they had passbooks, and the only way they could get passbooks was by being guaranteed by a man of high power, preferably a loyalist, or by pretending to be someone’s wife. Such measures were obviously taken to police the body of urban prostitutes who had substantial power amongst the rebelling migrant laborers. Besides, such a policy created discursive divisions between two groups of women, drawing on previous differential productions of them as subjects of empire—the colonial legal production of the category
“wife” with much less powers and rights than that sanctioned to the man, and the stigmatized and policed category “prostitute” in the colonial cities.

Given that many prostitutes were entrepreneurs and potential employers, such a policing of women who might have been new migrants to the colonial city, was a colonial device of making sure that the women had male guarantors, instead of women, which can also be read in terms of the colonial state’s fear of the women’s quarters during the nationalist uprisings. Likimani’s text, other than calling for all these possibilities, testifies to the fact that one could pretend to be a wife, and reveals the slippage that could take place between the two. If in a colonial state it is the colonial police that guarded against such slippages through its policing of women’s bodies, in post-coloniality, such place of anxiety is occupied by the native male.

A geography of the colonial state and its biopolitics of racial rule can thus be constructed through the division and policing of women’s bodies. On the one hand were the “degenerate” prostitutes who controlled the sale of sexual relations, and were hence unmanageable and unreadable. On the other were wives, the purely legal category, produced under the norms of colonial readability, and as much subject to the colonial state as to their husbands. Martin Chanock23 writes how in the construction of customary law women were disadvantaged. Even though customary law is considered to be representative of African “tradition”, Chanock warns us against considering it unproblematically so. He looks at how customary law was produced through recording only the categorical statements and erasing the accompanying qualifications that were indicative of the workings of everyday life. Local chiefs and other witnesses were asked hypothetical questions relating to community life, and the statements that could be
solidified into rules, were written down, and functioned as universals. But these laws both in their writing and their applicability were biased against women. If a woman left her husband, she was held punishable. Laws worked in favor of male migrant workers whose wives left alone in villages often wanted to elope. Thus colonial and native men joined forces in male allegiance against female indiscipline.

A cartography of the colonial state through women’s bodies can thus be read through Butler’s framing of the “specular” and the “excessive” feminine—the feminine which is figured within the binary (culture normed heterosexual matrix), and the feminine which is erased and excluded from that binary. While the bodies of prostitutes were central in circulating capital from cities to villages under the aegis of a new cash economy, as well as through the maintenance of migrant laborers in colonial cities, they, unlike the bodies of wives and mothers, fell out of a manageable or readable structure that would render colonialism a civilizing mission. The place of that “specular” and “excessive” feminine in post-colonial literary imagination is not only tied up with the legacies of colonial state formation and its production of a gendered social imaginary, but in the traffic in style with the European literary imagination as well. Okri’s Madame Koto is thus as much a product of the colonial representation of the prostitute, its inheritance in the post-colonial representational machinery, as well as the orientalist and primitivist treatment of the African woman’s body. For a politics of a post-colonial literary gaze thus, the transformation of European stereotypes, or a lack thereof needs to be read from the perspective of style.

In both of Okri’s novels, while the sections on the father and Azaro’s vision are treated in the language of mytho-poiesis, the sections on Madame Koto are filtered
through the orientalist and primitivist languages of imagining the otherwise of Africa through the figure of woman: “I noticed the eunuchs around her, washing her skin in the milk of young girls, bathing her swollen body in the oil of alligators, washing her feet with rosewater. They dressed her in a velvet robe and when she stood up the men fell to their knees in prostration” (Songs of Enchantment, 40). If in the West’s imagining as in Joyce Cary’s The African Witch, or Joseph Conrad’s The Heart of Darkness, or D.H Lawrence’s Women in Love, the likes of such figures can be read in terms of the fetish, or over-determined signs that come to occupy the place of otherwise, then in what economy of the other can one read their return in the post-colonial male writer’s novels? Bhabha writes of the fetish object in terms of the substitute for the phallus: “The fetish reacts to the change in the value of the phallus byfixing on an object prior to the perception of difference, an object that can metaphorically substitute for its presence while registering the difference” (“Signs Taken for Wonders” 115)24. The racial stereotype of colonial discourse conducting itself like a fetish, giving access to an “identity predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence” reactivates and repeats the subject’s primal fantasy—“the subject’s desire for a pure origin that is always threatened by its division . . .” (“The Other Question”, 75).

At the juncture of sexual difference when the European male imaginary is under threat by a change in the scripting of value and the very meaning of the phallus itself because of the changing meaning of female sexuality, the African woman as fetish and totem are invented by the European male writer. In D.H Lawrence’s Women in Love, the carved figurine of the naked and child-bearing African woman in the section entitled “Totem” acts as suture for various nodes of crisis in the textual imaginary—a crisis in
heterosexual love—where the possibility of women's other-wise desire is unnamed and
disavowed, male homosexual desire, the anxieties of the nation's borders being
threatened by the entry of racially other foreigners, and with it the tainting of a culturally
white European identified Christianity itself. Like a totem figure itself, it defines the
"normative" boundaries of the socius through taboos, as well as functions as the nostalgia
and desire for pure origins. In Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, the regal and
"savage" African woman in the end, emptied of all possibilities of history, not only
comes to occupy the place of Europe's moral darkness, but of the inevitable failure of
Mr. Kurtz's promise to his intended.

Given, the changing meaning of female sexuality in England at the time when the
high modernist writers write, and with it the change in primacy occupied by
heterosexually normed love, as can be evinced from the lives of the female faction of the
Bloomsbury group, Kurtz's failed promise might itself be a statement of impossibility of
the promise of heterosexual love, the African woman signifying both the "nothing" and
"everything" economy of fetish that fills up a narrative gap. The fetish, always feminine,
drawing the nationalist gaze to the promise of plenitude, then comes to both occupy and
fill up a place of crisis and anxiety in the national imaginary associated with the crisis in
masculinity at the vanishing point of the "specular feminine", i.e the feminine figured
within the culture sanctioned male/female terms of the binary that according to Butler,
keeps in place the political economy of the heterosexual phallus.

When the fetish-as-racial stereotype in European literary imagining returns in the
post-colonial writer's narrative as stylistic device, in what terms might one frame the
questions of style, gaze, body and history? Is it possible to subvert the fetish through the
hybrid as Bhabha claims? In other words, can the fetish body in Bhabha’s terms be made to acquire signification such that it can come to have a “metonymy of presence to so disturb the systematic construction of discriminatory knowledges . . .” ("Signs Taken for Wonders", 115). In the case of the stereotype’s figured body being that of the colonial woman, and its passing from European male writer to the post-colonial male writer to become a troped body, measure of national success or failure, whose line of gaze does she come to occupy or disturb, to be transacted terrain in whose histories?

In Okri’s writings where the stereotype participates in the economy of the trope (instead of being reversed by the trope) by making the prostitute’s body the measure of corruption and failure of a transforming vision, it lends itself to other economies of the figuring of the “feminine” as well. Analogous to the fetish-as-racial-stereotype’s function in the European literary imaginary, Madame Koto’s body features at the vanishing point of the “specular feminine”. But unlike the fetish which comes to both signify a lack, and promise plenitude to the gaze, Madame Koto’s body generates anxieties and performs a castrating operation on the narrative gaze, even as Okri draws from the economy of the feminine fetish in its capacity as stereotype.

Madame Koto’s body is treated as the cause of the threat to the “specular feminine” and partakes of the economy of the “excessive feminine” as well. Butler situates the “specular feminine” within the binary, both the sides of which are occupied by the masculine, she claims. The “excessive feminine” is the feminine which is erased and excluded from that binary, and occupies the place of the unnameable itself. The anxiety generated in the slippage between the wife and the prostitute, articulated in the
threat to the economy of the male/female binary, comes to be signified in the monstrous shaping of the prostitute’s body.

It is significant that in *The Famished Road* Madame Koto and the mother talk of work over the father’s tranced and sleeping body. The spectacle of powerful, yet marginalized women coming together—the herbalist who had been accused of witchcraft and stoned by the community and Madame Koto the resourceful entrepreneur—prostitute—in aid of the woman belonging to the domestic realm, comprises of one of the most compelling sections of that novel. The father, tranced, and in the midst of his homo-erotic jousts in the spirit-world, the mother and these two women watching over him, attempting to bring him back while holding a conversation they would not have been able to hold in the presence of the awakened father, comprises of both the spectacle of an asymptotic relation among the genders, as well as the displacement of the terms of the binary. The displacement is played out in scenes of violence, as the father emerges once in a while from his trance to punch and hit whichever woman is within reach, because he confuses them with the male spirits of his trance-world. The separation between the male and female sphere is complete in this section, and creates an economy outside the binary. Just as over the sleeping body of her husband, the mother enters into relations with other women, and plots her slippage from the domestic realm, the father too enters into relationships with the male spirits of the spirit world. He is so alienated from the world of women then, that he cannot recognize anyone when he opens his eyes.

Towards the end of the novel, the anxiety generated by the wife’s slippage from the domestic sphere is managed, the “specular feminine” brought back into the arrangement of the binary, as the father takes on the leading role, both within the family
and in the narrative rationale. In fact, the entire structure of the two novels can be read in terms of the arrangement of the “specular feminine” and the “excessive feminine”. Every time the mother is brought back into the economy of the binary, it is through two other operations—Madame Koto’s disappearance, and the father’s coming into specular subjectivity through a world of male mattering. Or framed differently, the specularization of the father as subject of the revolutionary muse, is enabled by the mother’s containment within the binary, or with her maintaining the “place” of the “specular feminine” that predicates the binary and materializes the culture normed heterosexual phallus.

The religious, economic, and political mattering in the two novels can be read in these terms as well. The representation of the prostitute’s money, mis-shaping the normed boundaries of the socius, the phallic goddess, castrating in its need for the sacrifice of a male child, belong to the economy of the excessive, i.e., the excluded, in keeping with the colonial shaping of Law, management of space, the engendering of capital, and their norming of a post-colonial imaginary.

In whatever ways the narrative structures of the two novels validate the voice in the end, normed by male-mattered political visions of language and socius, the visual economy of Madame Koto’s body, with its castrating function on the narrative gaze, as opposed to the fetish-stereotype that offers plenitude in the place of castration, enacts itself in the grammar of Butler’s lesbian phallus, with its “imaginary and cathected degrading of the feminine” and/or “the castrating occupation of that central masculine trope”. Situated at the vanishing point of “specular feminine”, Madame Koto is depicted in her relation with men in terms of physical prowess, and with other women in terms of love and violence, both of which seem to caste her in dubious moral light. Earlier in The
Famished Road Madame Koto’s beating up of men who misbehave in her bar, is treated with much narrative delight. But later in the novel, the violence of prostitutes in extracting payment for their labor from their reluctant male clients, is seen in a sinister light, and female aggression treated in a tone of disjoint.

Women’s anger and aggression is associated with the unnatural, especially since it concerns sexual labors and the extraction of payments from men. Thus women are depicted as screaming and clawing, and Madame Koto herself sinister, with eyes of red stone, the “exact color of blood” (291). Madame Koto’s treatment of her women is characterised by both love and violence. When one of her women die electrocuted, she seems to remain indifferent, which seems to be a narratorial statement on the evils of the famished road and its ever expanding need for technological acquisitions and new money. At the same time she empowers women with her money, which coming as part of a series of Madame Koto’s good deeds in the early part of Songs of Enchantment seem to be part of the narrative decision to make her come across in a more positive light.

But whether, negative or positive, steadily from the second half of The Famished Road. Madame Koto is seen only in relation with women—the errant wives who slip out of their containment within the specular feminine structure—and thus treated by the narrative as the contender of the men. And simultaneous with the birth of the women’s sphere, Madame Koto’s centrality within it, and the division of the community in gender antagonistic terms, are the assonances of Madame Koto’s body with the animalic. The snake twining around her neck and arms, is reminiscent of the rites of the pre-Christian motherhood that Amadumie writes about, as she is described as having the “urgency of a great mother” as well (Songs of Enchantment, 196).
The echoes of a pre-capitalized nature in the mother-animalic body co-exists with capitalized nature, and Madame Koto’s body, mediating between the two, is narratively aligned with death. The confluence of both these natures—pre-capitalized and capitalized through the wealth of the prostitute—is read in terms of the space of death in both the novels. In *The Famished Road*, Madame Koto’s car is associated with deaths and killings. In *Songs of Enchantment*, her car is again associated with spectacles that relate to both the animalic and death as she dashes the head of the snake on the car. Not only does Madame Koto cause death, she occasions male attempts at murder. Ade aims his knife at her arm, soon after which he himself dies. One may frame such spaces of death and spectacles of violence, reminiscent of Butler’s grammar of the lesbian phallus, in terms of the castration of the gaze itself. Unlike in the orientalist and primitivist associations of the fetish with desire of plenitude come to occupy the place of lack, Madame Koto’s body, associated with death and violence, signifies the castrated gaze, having to look for plenitude elsewhere, in the coming together of nature embodying language in the father’s voice. In these sections, the body of degeneracy—combining that of the pre-Christian mother and the rich prostitute who causes the slippage of the wives—comes full circle in describing an imperiled natural world, for the redemption of which the end of the novel anticipates the coming together of the nuclear family and the father’s prophetic voice.
3 Homi k. Bhabha in Location of Culture. N.Y Routledge. 1994
5 Judith Butler Bodies that Matter N.Y: Routledge. 1993
6 Florence Stratton Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender
8 Oyeronke Oyewumi The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses
13 “The African as Suckling and as Adult” J.F. Ritchie. Northern Rhodesia. 1943.
15 Homi K. Bhabha “Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative” The Location of Culture. N.Y: Routledge. 1994
16 For an articulation of a philosophy of Manicheanism, see Abdul R. JanMohamed Manichean Aesthetics: the Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa Amherst, University of Amherst Press, 1983
22 Muthoni Likimani. Passbook Number F47927. Macmillan 1985
23 Martin Chanock Law, Custom, and Social Order: the Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia N.Y: Cambridge University Press. 1985
24 Homi. K Bhabha “Signs Taken for Wonders” The Location of Culture. N.Y: Routledge. 1994
Chapter Three

Invaginated Cartographies: Post-Colonial Eco-feminism and Three Women’s Texts

In the previous chapter I read how colonial capital came to be formed through structures of exclusion surrounding the bodies of native women in Africa, and the perpetuation of those discourses in post-coloniality, and in the chapter before, I read how women’s bodies came to frame the symbolic economies of national identities and national violence through structures of exclusion that were put in place in nationalist imaginings. In a different frame of historical inquiry, this chapter continues with the project of the last two chapters in questioning what constitutes readability, and locating the structures of exclusion in post-colonial discourses, as they continue from the Enlightenment project in colonial state-formation as well as nationalist discourses. Through a reading of the texts of post-colonial eco-feminists in the first section of this chapter, and a focus on two short stories by Mahasweta Devi, I look at the discourses of globalization within which such structures of exclusion surrounding the body of indigenous people and the poor women of the South come into being.

Like the studies in the last two chapters, this chapter too, concerns the question of reading for strategies of subaltern emergences through invaginations\(^1\) of texts that shift the borders of inside and outside. In the last chapter, the production of colonial capital predicated on the change from a bi-sexual to an uni-sexual nature of political system, the disciplining of women’s bodies in the process, as well as the discourse of race it generated, was historicized and genealogized through a strategy of textual invagination.
that moved back and forth between different disciplines of knowledge, and time frames. The nature of the historical enquiry being not something that can be known in an empiricist mode—concerning itself with the colonial gaze, race identity, symbolic economies, the change in the signification of woman from bisexual to uni-sexual political structures—the literary text itself acted as a folding mechanism through which the borders of other texts were invaginated to enable a genealogy of exclusions in the figuring of the feminine and its relations to capital formation. The reading was so organized that the change in the signification of native women's bodies under colonial rule was seen to be a product of many intersections of many discourses, the locus of which was not just Africa. In other words, the figuring of African woman and the disciplining of their bodies under colonial rule, as well as the foreclosures of that knowledge was read to be a global affair.

This chapter too looks at the global nature of local productions, through critical reading strategies that doctor the blind spots of global capital where indigenous people are pushed out of production, and poor women's bodies in the South act as mobilizing signifiers in the transfer of capital from periphery to center. In a critique of discourses of development and eurocentric environmentalism, I look at what it means to read the post-colonial nation from the space of subaltern struggles. The question of writing in both general and narrow senses, the gaze of globalized capital, and the question of representation are central in attempting a non-instrumental writing of the subaltern-space. Unlike in the last two chapters where the historical inquiries concerned women, real or imagined, here in this chapter, the place of the feminine is associated with the other of logocentricism, invisible value, and the work of dead time, and thus involves indigenous people as well as those who are deterritorialized due to deforestation as well.
Subaltern Framings

In Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, Partha Chatterjee charts the uneven path of Third World nationalist movements fostered within the colonial state. Even though the incontrovertible good of Third World nationalisms, as he claims, is the doing away with the "white man's burden" discourse of colonialism as civilizing mission, nationalism ultimately accedes to the Enlightenment principles of Reason and its sciences that had generated colonial capital and structured the colonial state. The movement from nation to nation-state takes place in the embrace of the values of technological modernity as progress, and in the coding of commodity acquisition as freedom. Accompanying it is the historiographic imperative of giving historical time to the "globally determined... inexorable logic of universal history" held in place by the vectors of Reason, science, and capital. Subaltern struggles that rupture the bounds of such a narrative fail to arrive at both colonial and nationalist histories. In order to connect "the popular strength of those struggles with the consciousness of a new universality", the critique of nationalist discourse, and the formation of civil society in the post-colonial nation state, as Chatterjee writes, must also seek to replace the old problematic and the thematic in which nationalist discourse was born.

Implicit in Chatterjee's argument, is the need to question the assumptions of progress, and through a critique of the formation of civil society in colonial and post-colonial worldings, enable a displacement of values that affirm the modern subject of technology and historical time. Such a critique, as he insists, must question the relations of production, and tap into subaltern philosophies of nature left out of the Geist—nationalism expressing itself as Spirit—fostered within a racist and imperialist colonial
state, albeit a very different *Spirit* than Hegel's—and delivering its promise in the post-colonial nation-state. But access to subaltern philosophies of nature, and their different predication of the human, yields one to not only look for new sites of historical discourse i.e., oral histories, criminal records, but also to yield the extant archive to a machinery of critical reading, so that the *arche* and *telos* of historical time, framing and predicking the modern subject of science and freedom open to other ends.

In the wake of the critique of a decade long fetishizing of transnationalism and globalization by cultural critics, as the site of radical ruptures and emergences that challenge the power of the concept-metaphor nation, Spivak's articulation of "globe-girdling" movements in support of non-eurocentric ecological justice as the space of radical rupture, promises such a critical rubric. Globalization and transnationalism, as she writes, is continuous with the north's imperialist intent of exploiting the south, in which "development" as economic policy and ethical calling is not dissimilar from colonialism's exploitation in the name of civilizing mission. The transfer of capital from periphery to center is couched in the language of ethical imperatives, in which poverty as discourse⁴, especially the poor woman of the south act as mobilizing signifiers⁵. The discourses of environmentalism, the thrust of which is from the North, and which in the name of "worldwatching" takes on an imperial stance, is not discontinuous with the intent of development⁶. The new laws of euro-centric environmentalism do very little in terms of curtailing the privileges of the North, and facilitate control over the South, mainly through laws concerning bio-technology and patenting rights. Nature as a repository of "common" resources needs to be guarded, and hence the birth of a legal discourse that is continuous with the North's history of production.⁷ It becomes possible to conceive of the
South’s resources as “common” through the erasure of “other” subjects who are considered to be outside the modern and scientific discourses of production.

The erasure of “other” subject in the production of nature in the age of globalization—be it through discourses of development or through euro-centric environmentalism—is thus a linguistic event. Even as the poetics of transnationalism is read in terms of translation, polysemy, and hybridity by cultural critics, globalization and transnational capital read from the side of transfer of value from periphery to center with the help of the elites of the South, offers nothing else but the failure or the refusal of translation in the construction of the global subject of tele-technology. Hybridity and polysemy as critical discourse, and an articulation of the political subject in linguistic terms, are effective in garnering a discourse of political resistance in the West, as it ruptures its constructions of homogeneity. But the euro-centric economic migrant, the hybrid subject of racial and cultural difference, entering the West’s metropolitan national imaginary through a “both . . . and” structure of identity, is framed within the rationale of socialized capital and consumer training. In Homi Bhabha’s⁸ coining of nation as metaphor, the nation finally remains the place of arrival from the perspective of the immigrant, and finally undeconstructed.

The other side of transnational capital read from the space of value transfer from periphery to center yields another history of the subjects of globalization—people becoming exiles in their own nation, where the nation-state turns into a service sector for transnational corporations, protecting their interests against its own citizens. The idioms of translation in subalternity where one is not incorporated within socialized capital—socialized capital in post-coloniality emerging out of the rationalization of the
development machinery which go in the making of subalternity—are different from the polysemic idiom of hybridity. Subaltern emergences in narrative can only take place through a "neither . . . nor" structure of denegation, as opposed to the "both . . . and" structures of narrating metropolitan hybridity. If the subaltern's emergence into nation is predicated by her incorporation into socialized capital, then the terms of that emergence are very different from the metropolitan subject of hybridity. For, in the case of the subaltern, justice as sending that can take place only from the space of socialized capital, can never adequately arrive without doing violence to its addressee.

The idiom of the hybrid subject does not host this violence as condition of emergence. Its structures of violence and aporias—which celebratory discourses of transnationalism elide—are of a completely different order. An attending to the violence of the denegated space of subaltern emergence, entails attending to the nature-human-language nexus of production, and of opening resistant spaces to the development machinery which first creates real poverty through deforestation and deterritorialization, and then through an extensive discursive machinery, turns the poor into those who need assistance, denying them as producing subjects in such a framing of justice. Euro-centric discourses of environmental justice continuous with the idioms of development, working within the frame of instrumental reason, overlooks the question of language and subaltern consciousness.

Thus the event of a truly democratic representation of environmental justice would be a Babelian event of many tongues, where the many predications of being human cross each other in the space of (im)possible translation—impossible in the sense of giving to each other through the aporetic. Such an event of crossing and giving by
way of the impossible, would entail a wholly new predication of the productive, and consequently of freedom, which in the age of technological modernity derives its predication from market driven forces, and serves the interests of capital. Post-colonial civil societies, through legislation and economic planning, are shaped according to such determinations of Freedom. Both development, i.e. technology transfer and the modernization of Southern nation-states as par the values of North’s technological modernity, and euro-centric environmentalism, overrides the question of subaltern consciousness and translation as responsibility. Spivak’s coinage of “globe-girdling” in place of globalization offers the possibility of rethinking the question of the public sphere and justice, through such events of translation that take into account discontinuities and the heterogeneity of subaltern consciousness.

Here in this chapter, I situate the writings of Post-colonial ecofeminists, Vandana Shiva, Mahasweta Devi, and Gayatri Spivak to chart an alternate possibility of the thematic and the problematic that had shaped the question of Freedom and history in nationalist literatures and historiographies, and continues to do so in the aegis of “development” and “modernization” rhetoric. I frame my reading of these eco-feminists within a Derridean approach to worlding through translation, where translation as diacritical event, replaces the teleological structures of framing time and thinking the “good” through a modern technological destining of the question of productive—conditions for the writing of history. At stake in such a framing, is also the necessity to read nature not in any abstract or essentialist terms, but as tied to the social history of production, where language and production relate to the question of subaltern consciousness.
In *A Critique of Post-colonial Reason*, Spivak suggests an attending to the
graphematic moments in Marx (330) in order to render “the secret of estranged labor as
instrument of resistance” (328). Such an attendance to the “graphematic moments in
Marx” calls for a reading of Marx where he “attempts to break into that pure outside—
pre-originary and post-teleological—of pure nature and humanity” as opposed to the
Marx for whom “the fearful alterity of the technological sublime . . . [is] . . . written . .
. .within the drama of the natural and the human”. (328). At stake in either reading of Marx
is the question of where and how to situate the body’s mattering, and how to approach
value. The question of estranged labor leads one to ask what constitutes value, time (that
predicates history) and freedom (whether it must necessarily be telos bound as in
technological modernity’s framing of progress). And if one were to write history from the
space of estranged labor, generate a discourse of resistance as Subaltern historians and
Vandana Shiva in their very different ways attempt to do, how must one frame the
question of justice in a nature-human-production-language nexus?

If where the human and nature open to the pre-originary and post-teleological
must necessarily be approached through the question of language, then it must also
require us to enquire into how we situate ourselves as readers who invaginate texts.
Spivak critiques post-colonial reason on the grounds that the metropolitan post-colonial
scholar who invaginates texts, is a subject rationalized through socialized capital, and
produces critical terms likewise, i.e post-colonial “culture” as hybrid, reading capital and
culture as endlessly deterritorializing and reterritorializing through globalization as an
enabling force. The work of dead time, and a history of that which is pushed out of
exchange through the process of globalization, is left unattended. *A Critique of Post-*
colonial Reason is a critical examination of what consequences such invagination and a formation of a discipline thus, has for writing the historiography of subaltern pouvoir/savoirs, the site of globe-girdling ecological justice in the Third World. Critical idioms that come to float in Euro-American academy predicate the terms of research done on nations and peoples of the South, arrange the world picture, and become instrumental in framing economic policies supported by discourses of ethical imperatives. The framing of women in the South within the development rhetoric is a most poignant example of how cartographies come to be “made” through discourses, and how categories of knowing born in Euro-American academic spheres order the terms of ethical categories in discourses concerning production and distribution in the South. The shift from “Women in Development” to “Gender in Development”13 in policy making is an example of how critical categories from feminist studies in the U.S are transferred to the periphery to mobilize the development machinery, without there being any discourse of translating the terms “woman” or “gender” in the idioms of that locality.

Locating a history of the discourse of the human under the aegis of socialized capital, Spivak reads critically imperialism’s validating of itself as social mission, followed by the development machinery in decolonization. In both cases, it is in the body of the Third World woman, that colonialism and development as civilizing missions are cathected. Her reading does not attempt a retrieval of real women’s histories, as much as it does in calling in question the values that frame the discourses of history and political economy. Preparing the grounds for another way of invaginating, i.e, constituting the inside and outside of our readings, the thrust of her critical inquiry may be summed up in the following terms: “. . .the bare fact of understanding is not economic, but ethical, not
determinate but indeterminate; the activity of consciousness is a reading and not a writing; freedom is feminine and not masculine” (Price, 348)\(^4\). The same may be said of the critical thrust of Shiva and Devi too who critique unequal development, the exploitative nature of value transfer from periphery to center, the development machinery and its discursive regime, and attend to “the work of dead time” (Derrida)\(^5\) and “invisible value” in very different ways in their different narratives.

Derrida frames “the work of dead time” thus: “the economy of death inscribed in the presence structure of the linguistic sign” (*Of Grammatology*, 68), where value no more comes from exchange, but from the space of death. The act of reading as displacement of value is to labor at impossible mourning in order to represent the subject of dead time and to disrupt what constitutes the conditions of the linguistic-sign, made possible within a certain thinking of what political economy is. The political economy of the development State in decolonization is geared to the rhetoric of progress, since it is progress that promises the eradication of poverty and foreign investments, without which the nation has no credibility. Deforestation, in order to build hydraulic power plants, dams, and industries, thus displace indigenous people. Their displacement do not become events in history, because they do not exist as juridico-legal subjects of rights.

The image of progress, the modern universal as the final referent, came to be in existence through colonial mediation. What could not be made to fit into the mould of the modern universal, or in Marxist terms, the march of the general equivalent, had no history. In the colonial period, settlement records, meticulous in documenting enclaves of settled cultivation, took no notice of those engaged in “intermittent” or “shifting cultivation”. Hence in terms of new legal definitions ordained by colonial rule, tribal
people ceased to have any legal legitimate existence, and had become non-persons. Thus, the modern day persecution of indigenous people continues to persist through the machineries of science, defining what course development should take. For Sharma\textsuperscript{16} thus, the prevalent and accepted definition of a tribal is essentially legal juridical, even though colonialist archives have documented them in race-essential or ethnic-essential terms.

Unravelling that history, as activist legal historians do in order to write back the tribal people within a discourse of rights, is to read into the “work of dead time”, the time that was left out of the general equivalent, and hence out of the production of exchange value, upon which social value, the readability of the subject as social being and as inheritor of historical time is predicated. “Dead time” is not forgotten time. “Doing” (be it an academic or a writer-activist like Devi) “the work of dead time” is deconstructing the very notion of time itself, and of all that makes possible the imagining of time and history, i.e production and mourning, in order to cut a path so that the other/subaltern may enter the sphere of law and justice. It is an event in breaking the circle of time, predicated on bourgeois values of production, and an attending to what Derrida calls the gift supplement which is to be understood not in terms of surplus-values (on which capital is predicated) “as the necessity to . . . return with interest”, but as the definitive predication of the human (Derrida, \textit{Given Time}, 24)\textsuperscript{17}. The gift supplement falls under the sphere of the incalculable. Interrupting the calculability of Reason, it is also the place of justice. Devi opens the space of the ethical in narrative, by attending to the space of the gift-supplement. Spivak offers critical readings of institutions like the World Bank, that rely on the public use of Reason in the Enlightenment mode and channelize the gift event
through exchange, their professed goodwill towards the subaltern not outside capitalist value-coding. Such acts take place through linguistic erasures, and the effacing of the subaltern’s voice, even while attending to the question of ecology.

An euro-centric ecological Justice, continuous with development, and an Enlightenment reasoning of calculation, articulates the sphere of implementation of law thus: “We should tie conservation ever more closely to economic and social development in the Third World. Most of the problems of tropical countries, ranging from poor health and overpopulation to stalled economic growth, are ultimately biological in origin” (Wilson). The “biological” as the ground for making value judgment, remains an essentialist category, because Wilson does not take into account that it is the nature of uneven and unequal development, and what Samir Amin claims, the nature of value transfer from periphery to center, that is the cause of poverty. The “spatial fix” between “conservation” and economic development is the body of the subaltern woman, subject to forced sterilization, and other coercive means of birth control. While Wilson writes the biological in essentialist terms, Shiva, Spivak, and Devi’s eco-critique codes it as social, and already within a structure of writing.

For Shiva, the biological is indissociable from the meaning that capitalist values of production inscribe on the body. To evoke the biological is to evoke writing and history. And development is certainly not a promise out of the evil of disease and other malaise that as par Wilson, invariably inheres the “biological” in the third world. For Wilson, who tries to keep ecology and development within the same frame, the “economic” appears as promise to fix the malaise of biology. In order for development to be scripted as social mission, with its accompanying medicalization of the political gaze,
biology thus must necessarily be read as preceding the economic. Wilson’s use of the word “economic” comes to bear on a very definite idea of production and circulation of value implicit in which is the assumption that nature is unproductive and yields no value unless “developed”, or that nature’s productivity prior to “development” does not count as economic. Those whose productive beings, and their ebbs and flows of life are tied to this pre-capital-invested-development, are not considered productive. Their bodies only eat up value, and yield none. Any promise of social good for the Third World must hence arrive in the language of capital intensive production, where through capital investment, the North eats up the profits, and the South’s wages keep going down (Amin).

Such promise of good is as much a linguistic as an economic event, as it consigns to dead time and unwrites the languages of production where nature and human interact and languages are worlded as well as enable worldings in a frame that precedes the telos of freedom set by modern technology and its writing machines. Shiva writes such worldings in terms of the feminine, as opposed to the masculine, patriarchal ways of structuring knowledge, value and production. The forest, for her is the feminine principle, and the market, the masculine patriarchal. The disappearance of forests in Third World countries from colonialism onwards is tantamount to the disappearance of local knowledges through globalizing dominant systems. From diversity to “monocultures of the mind”, from many ways of producing food to market ruled single seed variety, from many languages to the scientific few to name nature in.

The values governing the power/knowledge system in a capitalist market system do not change in euro-centric environmental discourses. In “Biodiversity, Prosperity, and Value” Edward Wilson makes a case for conserving nature by extending research. “We
need to explore the diversity of life on this planet in full. A complete biotic survey, with each species given a scientific name and the beginnings of a biological dossier, is needed to plan the preservation and use of biodiversity”. Here is what Heidegger calls the laying of a ground-plan of nature, only within the perspective of which does an event in nature become visible as such an event. The constituting of nature as ground-plan takes place according to the rules and calculations of science which decides on what constitutes value22. The creation of a “biological dossier”, exploring “diversity of life in the planet”, naming everything through science, and as what Adorno claims “resigning language to calculation in order to know nature” is also a constant process of “demythologization”, of “abstraction”, and of the creation of a “principle of equivalence” (Adorno)23. The principle of equivalence requires that nothing be left out of the purview of knowledge, and in doing so, also assumes a subject who can act as common denominator through whom knowledge of the differentials can come under the judgment of a single value code.

Shiva traces the history of the march of the general equivalent, coded as progress, from colonial capital to development capital in post-coloniality, and names it anti-feminine. Shiva’s writing of the principle of the forest and the economies of production and survival around it as feminine, shifts back and forth from the real histories of women to symbolic meaning attempting to generate a new critical discourse of genders. The destruction of forests entails the deprivation of countless women from their source of livelihood. Making the Chipko movement, in which hundreds of women prevented deforestation by hugging trees and singing songs of protest, the stronghold for a rhetoric of the forest as the female principle, was also a strategic move on Shiva’s part. At a time
when Third World women were considered environmentally problematic, and because
they gathered firewood for fuel, the destruction of forests blamed on them, and not on the
development machinery itself, mobilizing Chipko into environmental discourse changed
the rhetoric of environment politics and activism. (Sturgeon). 24

Shiva’s move from the instance to the symbolic where she uses what she calls
“Indian cosmology” to write Nature or Prakriti as feminine principle, is a reading against
the grain of the Cartesian principle that treats Nature as “environment” or “resource” to
be developed. It is based on a principle of duality where nature is considered inert and
passive, uniform and mechanistic, separable and fragmented within itself, separate from
man, and inferior, to be dominated and exploited by man (Staying Alive, 41), as opposed
to the principle of Nature as Prakriti in Indian cosmology where the feminine is the
creative power of the cosmos, both animate and inanimate. Shiva’s reading of Prakriti as
a non-dualistic principle, embodying the dialectical harmony between the male and
female principles, and between nature and man, and becoming thus the basis of
ecological thought and action in India, as opposed to the Western views of nature, fraught
with the dichotomy or duality between man and woman, has been critiqued by Anglo-
American feminists on charges of essentialism, as well as elitism, since Shiva, a woman
from upper caste and class Hindu background qualifies for the beliefs of peasants,
indigenous people, and women from lower caste and class hierarchies. Shiva’s use of
the Prakriti myth-philosophy while it homogenizes the languages and consciousnesses of
an entire people, both in religious and secular spheres, expresses the need to speak of
nature-human nexus of production-consciousness-history in linguistic terms other than
those offered by market governed science. The sphere of religion with its symbolic
language, offers her that option. Claiming Nature to be constituent of both animate and inanimate, and the enabling force of energy, is to tap not on the doors of abstract principles, but stir the cauldron of language. Granted that the writing of nature from such a linguistic space cannot take place in a homogeneous language frameable within the principle of “good”, and must tap on subaltern languages of resistance that are discontinuous with Hindu theologies, often considered “evil” by the mainstreams of secular as well as the religious, the value of Shiva’s theoretical frame lies in its claim for making biodiversity a linguistic event, and thinking ecological justice within a translational space. “The collapse of global distances hid[ing] the creation of unbridgeable local distances between those who have previously shared homes, streets, villages, towns, and countries” is an event of “rupture of vernacular relations”. Writing nature in terms of a feminine principle and reading against the grain of market governed science’s promise of freedom through “capitalization of nature” is inaugurating a reading program by which one may retrieve the text of “invisible” wealth created by women, peasants, and indigenous people. Shiva’s reading of the “invisible” wealth might be given over to Spivak’s reading of the graphematic moments in Marx.

The question of subaltern consciousness at the juncture of nature-human interaction in production, interactions with hegemonies, scripting by legal machineries, and other writing machines from the birth of modern capital in colonialism onwards, is extremely important for thinking through eco-feminist philosophies of nature. For subalternity does not only concern caste and class hierarchies. One must necessarily read subalternity in terms of nature-human relations in production, and the entire apparatus of value coding that codes the work of dead time as evil, its subjects to be restituted into
meaning through incorporation into the good, i.e. development capital. The grammar of subalternity concerns the very languages of good and evil, not just in terms of the pure and the polluted in caste hierarchies, but also in terms of modern capital and its other. Such relations and languages of good and evil concern the raw and the cooked destinations of the body's meaning, where subjects of modern capital get predicated along the lines of who gets to tend to the raw, and who to the cooked. Spivak turns to the metaphors of metabolism while attending to the graphematic moments in Marx\textsuperscript{25}. The "trace of the human in the natural and the trace of the nature in the human" is Spivak's fleshing out of Marx's concept metaphor of "metabolism" that upsets the teleological frame of exchange value and the general equivalent.

Another way of addressing the teleology breaking metabolism would be through the raw and the cooked, their histories in machines of value coding, and the trace structure of that which refuses to be restituted to a technological destination of freedom. Shiva's Prakriti if given over to such a framing must necessarily yield the linguistic energies that comprise of the feminine and masculine principles, the Prakriti and Purusha, which she says are in synch with one another, to the nature-human-production nexus as the great upheaval of the evil and the good, the telos of history and progress made possible by capital constantly validating itself by writing itself on the side of good and promising to deliver mankind from the raw to the cooked. In the colonial legal machinery, subalternity was officially constructed through writing those who could not be incorporated into modern capital as criminal castes and tribes. Compounded with the colonial machineries of writing and production, the brahminic machineries of culture and writing (which was largely a product of colonial enabling) destined social meaning for
those on the side of the raw (cooked being invariably tied up with technology, which includes writing as well) to the realm of crime and evil. Eco-feminism’s interaction with that history, and a reading of nature-human-production nexus as par those valences is important in order to consider the meanings of nature and human both in terms of socially constructed, and linguistic events. The feminine, in a deconstructionist frame of reading, is the place name for that which does not appear in the presence structure of value belonging to the patriarch’s writing machines. “Invagination”, is the name of the reading that enables a displacement of value for the other of logocentricism to emerge. Hence, as Daniel Price writes, giving history over to the feminine, entails reading, or what one would call writing in a general sense. Spivak’s reading engages in such a critical act, defamiliarizing the name of native woman whenever it appears as a transparent category, and in the colonial machinery of writing, and development machineries in post-coloniality, cathects the place of “evil” with the promise of “good”.

Shiva’s attending to “invisible value” produced by women, peasants and indigenous people as feminine, is such an act too. Yet, Prakriti’s pot of value, striking a harmony between nature and human does not take account of the subaltern linguistic energies, or the relation of subaltern productions of value at the juncture of conflicts. Even though the interruptive power of the questions of value and production she frames through Prakriti is radical and deconstructive, Prakriti’s linguistic frame, borrowing from a Gandhian philosophy of the feminine as resistant, and hegemonic Hindu mythologies of the power of mother nature as creative force, is also continuous with an Enlightenment language of enabling, in that it is read as conflict-less. Gandhi’s use of the discourse of feminine as non-violent might have been effectively resistant to the might of colonial
powers, India could never have battled with armed forces, but it did so by disregarding all the conflicts of sexual difference, generating its own inner violence against the sexual bodies of real women, and by disavowing subaltern struggles as irrational. Likewise, in his benign discourse of acceptance of harijans or subaltern castes and classes as God’s people, there were no attempts at dealing with the violence of conflicting identities and interests, and a complete disavowal of their struggles against colonial rule, when it came to clash with elite interests.²⁶

Perhaps, Shiva chooses powerful, yet naturalizing metaphors because of the nature of production, i.e. food, she writes about. Her choice of treating food production in terms of naturalizing metaphors of sustenance, instead of the metabolic energy that in the nature-human interaction borders on violence, is in keeping with her political agenda of resisting a “development” oriented discourse of “sustainable development” in which women, peasants, and indigenous people are targeted as responsible for environmental degradation, and neither their work, nor production is considered to have any value. The nature-human-production nexus in her writings, is one body against the violence of the outside force of colonizing and development technology, forever pushing out women, peasants, and indigenous people out of the survival chain. Such being the discursive thrust, that one body made to hold out discursively against a violating outside, is divested of conflicts. From religious to secular, thus, she claims a homogeneous avowal of the laws of Prakriti as language of resistance, for her battle is situated where the post-colonial nation is steadily becoming a service sector for the Northern nations, and neo-colonialism reigns with violence.
Like Spivak and Shiva, Mahasweta Devi too attends to the body’s scripting in the “social” while attending to the trace structure of subaltern consciousness. Devi’s narrative and linguistic frames, situates the body’s mattering where no State programs or circuits of international capital in the name of human rights, can bring justice within the frame of calculability of reason. Even though, as writer-activist, she attempts to write the indigenous people into their right to food, health, education, and their share of socialized capital the development machine had not incorporated them in, her literary narratives tarry with what cannot be represented by law. Not just, interruptive of the development machinery, or of euro-centric environmentalisms where it becomes continuous with development, Devi’s writing attends to that space where the human-nature productive is read in terms of the abject and alterity by dominant structures of readability. To represent the tribal people as subject of rights, Devi creates narrative and linguistic frames where this space of alterity, appearing as crypts or unincorporable non-passages, call the reader to the act of impossible translation. I use “impossible translation” in a Derridean sense which points to those non-passages without attending to which all easy victories in conceiving of the community, communication, and translation as communication, would mean nothing.

Devi’s literary texts are deconstructive in this sense, because they approach the question of social justice, the relation between the nature, human, production, language, and technology from such non-passages. Very often, in Devi’s novels and stories, the non-passage or aporia features through the question of writing itself, in the relation between a grass root communist worker, who might be a journalist like Devi herself, and the tribal people left out of democratic representation. How can encounter be turned into
relationship, and writing become the embodiment of this question as ethics, seems to be the intent of Devi’s narratives. The question of justice is framed within the possibility or impossibility—where impossibility does not fall on the side of failure—of translation as writing, or even as relationship. Implicit in these questions concerning justice and translation, is the question of representation. In the following readings of Devi’s stories, I then attend to Devi’s translational and interruptive frames, laboring at the work of dead time, invisible values, and the irreducible heterogeneity of subaltern consciousness and subaltern labor.

*Cartographies of the Fleshly*

The journey of Puran Shahay from his communist ideology influenced Hindu middle class urban familial space to the famine struck area of Pirtha in search of a story, is implicated with questions concerning ethics, writing, and responsibility as meaning of being in the world, borne by a certain metaphor of the fleshly. In the fullness of familial space where husbanded sisters bring up their children and mother raises her grandson, the life of the widowed Puran, eternally deferring consummation with Saraswati, his sister-in-law, is scripted in terms of a denial of the “fleshly-hungry-thirsty”, and in Puran’s own mind akin to a moral failure, intimately tied to the question of writing: “how will a person merely floating in the everyday world, who has not attempted to build a human relationship with Mother-son-Saraswati, be able to do justice to a subject as a journalist?” (97).

The journey to Pirtha, the famine struck area where tribal people starve to the point of near extinction, is traversed by the travails of the fleshly—deaths due to starvation, enteric fever, poisoned water, and consequently low birth rates. Puran’s
answer to the call of ethics, writing, and responsibility takes place as a response to this fleshly, left unrepresented in the circuits of capital. That responding as responsibility entails stepping out of the book of printed words—what Saraswati had accused him of not doing, and hence not be able to have a relationship with her—even though initially it was the book that had acquainted him with the histories of tribal people, and gave them a recognizable face in his psyche.

Called from the deferred space of writing, stepping out of the book, and into the realm of a lived relationship with Bikhia and the silent eyes of the ancestor’s spirit, Puran finally gives himself to a writing marked by an ethics of relationship that demands the other’s right to difference. As much as he is trusted by Bikhia and his people for having brought rain to the parched land, and as much as he is addressed by the ancestor’s embodied spirit in the shrine room, Puran realizes that they were never really one. We are told by a free indirect speech that flows sometimes through Bikhia’s consciousness, sometimes through Puran’s, and sometimes as an overview of the situation itself:

As if in a strange situation of war two people from separate worlds and lives, who do not understand one another’s language, were obliged to cross some icy ravine, or to pass an unknown and violent desert, and then complete mutual help became necessary. A time of danger has brought them together. Although their hands were clasped, at the end of the episode of danger they realized that they belong to two different worlds.

(182)
The ancestor's embodied spirit in the shrine room addresses Puran because it knows that "invaded even in extinct burial-grounds of the vanished settlements, even in the after-world, the only resource is to take shelter in the mainstream" (182). But there remains a greater message in its eyes that Puran does not understand. Bikhia's eyes speak it: "You remain you, and I remain me, and after this heavy phase is over each will return to the orbit of his life" (182). Puran accepts his responsibility as someone from the mainstream, and gives himself to the impossible and possible translation acts of writing.

The last section of the novel consists of Puran's journalistic account, giving a different version of the state of the tribals in Palamou, than the one official version allows. The appearance of the strange bird, believed to be the ancestor's embodied spirit, the death-wish of the tribals, mourning the loss of their sacred land, the death of the bird, the burial of its ashes, its stone grave in the waters of the hidden cave, and the mourning rituals, are left out of that writing. So that the mainstream does not appropriate the tribals as some romantic figment of the imagination, Puran lets the appearance of the bird and the death-wish of the tribals remain an encrypted event, his journalist's narrative, the visible part of his political activism, deliberately marked by its absence. For the bird's coming, its urgent message in the language of silence, the death-wish of the tribals and their refusal to accept relief food amidst famine and starvation, defy the norms of a language of calculability—the only political language in which legal reforms can arrive.

Puran's journalistic narrative, writing within writing, resembling Devi's own endless political-activist tracts in newspapers and journals, marks a deliberate outside where other battles are waged, calculability calculated from the space of the very arsenal of calculus, i.e the asking of constitutional reforms, rechannelizing of tribal funds, and
bringing the news that previously made legal reforms have failed. Puran knows that the death-wish cannot, and must not be written in that language, the language in which he asks for more relief food, tribal housing, self-determination on the part of tribal people in matters of food production. The death-wish, an expression of will in psyche's own language, marks the place of tribal consciousness, outside the calculations of "good" reason that the language of political economy understands. Puran honors it by keeping it a secret, and attempting a translation other-wise, writes from the partition within language which guards the other's signature. Accepting ethics and the destination of his writing as responsibility to this signature, he undertakes to write draught as famine. He is not of the forest, hence a romantic identification with the other's loss, or an appropriation of the other's mourning he will not attempt. His is the pen, and his is the carrying on the task of impossible mourning through questioning, critiquing, and intervening in the State's policies.

_Puran Shahay, Pterodactyl, and Pirtha_ is a political text because "it calls one outside oneself without nostalgia for return" (Price, 247). Unlike in deep ecology and such Western ecological poetics of return, where nature is treated as a spiritual principle in the abstract, and its death in a modern technological civilization mourned, without absolutely any attempts at reading nature in terms of a social principle, scripted, made productive, and destroyed within circuits of value, and tied to people and their languages, Devi writes the event of a bio-holocaust from the very space of the dying bodies of indigenous people, around which value's circuit revolves. And just as Puran responds to the avowal of his being an outsider by taking up the pen, Devi's literary text demands of us to dispel any easy identifications or romantic nostalgias that the sombre moments of
the text might evoke, and read against the grain of development, and discourses of euro-centric ecological justice, that draw on discourses of production or and nostalgia, both in which nature is thought in the name of a euro-centric idea of common "we" and appeal to an euro-centric idea of common "good". Placing the feminine within the question of violence of language, its silences and blind spots, and in Derridean terms, situating the turn of reading as writing where logocentric certainties are given over to the feminine, the text of "Pterodactyl" can be read as a writing apparatus that generates such a reading.

Puran’s journey from the place of suspension of culture normative masculine behavior, through a denial of the “fleshly-hungry-thirsty” to the question of writing, and through the cartography of the bureaucratic machinery that enables representation, into the blind spot of all representations in post-colonial and global flows of value, is the journey from phonetic writing of value to its other. The fleshliness of the bird demanding that communication exceed verbal signs, Bikhia’s art hidden in the cave, and incalculable death’s rupturing of the certainty of the world picture, beckon us to read for another history from the space where the “verbal is cathected and its phonetic transcription is bound, far from the center, in a web of silent script” (Derrida)²⁹. The history of that cathecting is a history of the West’s writing of “good”, its mission carried out in “just wars” through a phonetic scripting of value. Through the textual web of Pterodactyl flows the history of the violence of such “good” and “just wars”, i.e. development, and ecological justice requiring that the poor women of the Third World be subject to forced birth control even though starvation might render them infertile anyway.

Situating the parameters of the text between Saraswati with her critique of hegemonic Hinduism and the state of women in decolonizing India, and the silent eyes of
the ancestor’s embodied spirit amongst a near extinct people, one reads a writing which is a “subversive movement of replacement” (Derrida) of the values governing the phonetic writing of capital for the feminine principle of the forests (Shiva) from the place where Puran sees history beyond pre-history and Devi scripts a future anterior vision of freedom in the anticipation of “a graphematic yet to come” (Derrida). An alternate distributive justice and a reproductive ethics through another scripting of nature, social, and the biological, are the terms of such anticipation.

The State declares Pirtha a drought area, i.e., struck by natural disaster, and in doing so, it absolves itself of all responsibility for the starvation and mass deaths. Declaring Pirtha a famine area would entail admitting that the people die not because the weather has failed and crops have dried, but because of a failure of distributive justice. In other words, people starve to death not because there is no food, but because of the ways in which value’s chain ordains the distribution of food. And the distribution of food is predicated on the already socially inscribed predication of the human. Devi renders the phonetic script of that predication in the frame narrative. Statistics and numbers, the official language celebrating bumper crops, miracles of Green Revolution, exports, growing markets in global economy, and revenues are reported in the impersonality of an official discourse.

The very borders of the nation-state dissolve in a cartography of the flows of goods and capital, and of technology transfer, that emerges out of these numbers. It is a script of the making and unmaking of the Third World through value transfer from periphery to center. The numbers coming across like voice-overs constellate a script of the “making”. A history of the unmaking untold in these numbers, appears in the space of
death where Devi inscribes the fleshly—that which exceeds or is left out of exchange—in
the work of dead time. The discourse of numbers hides and enables the forgetting of
those pushed out of production’s exchangeable value chain, of land made uncultivable, of
forests torn down.

The cartography traversed by the frame narrative is one of capital’s two handed
writing machine, with its double function of writing and erasing, of development and
euro-centric ecological discourse, both accepted by the nation state as economic policy,
and in the supplementary relation between which is written nature and woman’s body as
value. Food transfer through exports, and surplus of food production through Green
Revolution constellating the map of India is reported in the language of numbers and
statistics—capital’s phonetic language.

The map of the post-colonial nation as food exporter is also the map of
development, of technology transfer, of the North’s legal writing machines, of the
South’s incorporation of them in order to be mobilized into progress. It is the history of
orientalism continued through economics—Green Revolution entails the rich white
farmers and policy runners of the North teaching the poor brown farmers of the South
what to grow and how to grow, the control of seeds, the birth of what Shiva calls
“monocultures of the mind”, deforestation, modernization, deterritorializing of millions,
pushing them out of their right to be productive, scripting them as poor and unproductive,
thus generating development’s own internal reason for developing more to eradicate
poverty. The map of food transfer, or the incorporation of the post-colonial nation into
global economy, hides another history of the unincorporated, of bio-holocausts, of
Bhopals, of famines, the rendering visible of which goes in the making of Puran’s
journey from the visible—"the ancient clandestine friendship between light and power"—to the invisible, where the fleshly being of the pterodactyl draws another circle of time.

Development’s rationale for more “economic growth”, more investments to undo poverty, also gives rise to another discourse of imperiled nature that burdened by the poor and the unproductive, generates negative value. The “verbal is cathexed and its phonetic transcription bound far from the center” in the body of the poor southern woman in whose “evil womb” is sought the malaise and the cure for nature’s falleness in economic terms. Nature’s meaning is thus supplemented through the economic predication of woman’s body. Wilson’s malaised biology is born there and the law of diminishing returns and its predications of value demand that for nature’s urn to bear more fruits for value transfer from periphery to center, and per capita consumption in the North not be questioned, the evil of poor women’s wombs, “eating up value and returning none”, must be cleansed for the common good of humanity.

The frame narrative of the novel, through its citations of export statistics, G.N.Ps, food transfer abroad, starvation and reproductive engineering at home, maps the space of the allegories of the “nature” and “biology” that the economic scripts. An allegorical reading puts in question the referential possibility and reveals the figural status, or in other words, it offers an ethics of reading. Writing draught to famine, the natural as social, Devi renders the naturalised reading of both nature and biology—resulting from a constant process of erasures and forgetting—to their allegorical structuring in value’s script.
In rendering the “natural” to the social, from rendering Pirtha from invisibility to visibility, the question of representation turns out to be of central concern in the novel. It is not that the tribal people or their poverty is not represented. But the more it is represented through films and delegations, the more abstract and unperceivable it becomes. The more money is allocated for tribal welfare, the less is achieved. Thus Kausalji’s film on tribal poverty replicates images of starving bodies, but cannot represent. What does representation mean, what is an ethics of representation, and how is it possible to represent, seems to be the driving question in “Pterodactyl”. On the possibility of representation lies the possibility of social justice and distributive justice. Money allocated for tribal welfare sit paralysed because representations do not generate any meaning. An unbridgeable chasm exists between political will and subaltern consciousness that no films, photographs, official narratives, legal measures can bridge.

How can we put Pirtha on the map, is Harisharanji’s question. Kausalji’s intent is to make videos so that the plight of the tribals can be known, and if his wishes come true, then he will take the distressed of Pirtha “from stony hills to the green of the plains, [where] they will have rooms fit to live in, drinking and irrigation water, agricultural aid and land, . . . training for women, school for children and adults, health care, [and] live like humans”. “They need this video-image as they need food for their aid” is his dictum. There is not much benevolence in the gesture even though it comes across as an instance of political will for change. Shankar, the organic intellectual says, “Everything finally becomes a deal, even giving food to the hungry. At this moment we are eating his food, in exchange he wants to capture us in film. His dictionary cannot include the self-respect of the hungry.” Journalists arrive with cameras and tape recorders. The tribals feel
that they have been desecrated. “Everyone comes to see us, see us, and we get dirty” they say. The violence of light pervades the failure of representation.

Representation, as Escobar claims, under the aegis of development rhetoric, entails the bringing of people into discourses by consigning them to fields of vision. “The God trick of seeing everything from nowhere”, the work style of the World Bank, carrying out most of the development projects in the Third World, best describes the framing of the world as spectacle under the scopic regime of modernity. (Escobar)\textsuperscript{35}.

Such regimes of visuality, framing a world view of the social, allocates to each its share of function and meaning in the chain of value. The language of social good, and certainly foreign donation influenced Kausalji’s vision of justice follows from that predication. In his consciousness there exists no semantic violence between his articulations of relocating the tribals and doing them good because nothing of avail can come about on that land, and proposing a scheme to turn Pirtha into a picnic spot with government funds. And neither does the will to change articulated in terms of moving the tribals from the unyielding stony hills to the grassy plains accomodate the wish of the tribal people themselves who do not want to leave the burial grounds of their ancestors.

In the will for change from above, the tribal’s own needs and desires do not feature, because the language of social change cast within an economy of visuality, has no way of recognizing itself as meaning through the other’s gaze. Cameras can look at them, but they never get to look back. Between the consciousnesses, “they need this video image as they need food for their aid” and “everyone comes to see us, see us, and we get dirty” an unbridgeable chasm remains, and turns every effort of social change based on representation within the phonetic economy of the world picture, into failure.
Devi turns the question of the ethics of representation into one of translation. Puran leaves his camera and tape recorder behind, in order to write from the place of a relationship in the "face-to-face" encounter, and in the beckoning of the other’s face to “[look] from another origin of the world” (Derrida)\textsuperscript{36}. To the spirit of Bikhia’s art, testimony of the survival of the tribal will to live, hidden in the cave, not meant for the outsider’s gaze, he commits himself. An answer to the commitment are both his journalist narrative, making a case of tribal self-will in matters concerning food and housing—the war economy of fighting light with light—and the keeping of the other’s space of revelation as secret, unknowable even to himself who witnesses the Pterodactyl’s fleshy presence.

Devi thus approaches the ethics of translation through the possible and the impossible translation, the Babelian performance that does not arrive at a restitution or maturing of meaning\textsuperscript{37}. Linguistically, Devi offers two economies of war against the blindness of light. One is the war of discourse, belonging to the economy of the calculable. The other belongs to the economy of invention, shattering the transparency of language that comes from the side of the calculable. Devi invents the fabulous, “the invention that invents us” ("Psyche" 342)\textsuperscript{38} to rupture the certainties of phonetic language, and “[set] in motion, the difference of the other” (“Psyche”). The Pterodactyl comes from the outside, and yet is not really from the outside. Its construction gives us the only possibility of understanding the history of the tribal’s exploitation, their past, present, and future. Thinking back on the Pterodactyl, Puran thinks of it as both myth and analysis, performative and constative. It is in the face-to-face encounter that the other
dimension of history—the work of dead time—opens up, the crypt narrative, citing its
frame, interrupts the scripts of “nature”, “biology”, and the “economic” generated in
modernity’s language of the productive.

The Pterodactyl, both rupturing language’s semantic transparency, and making an
appeal for social justice to the mainstream itself, is an economic principle within Devi’s
narrative—an economic principle that labors at the aneconomic, the gift event of justice.
Derrida writes of the “gift” as that which suspends economic calculation, no longer
giving rise to exchange or circulation. But then again he writes: “if the figure of the circle
is essential to economics, the gift must remain aneconomic—not that it remains foreign to
the circle, but it must keep a relation of foreignness to the circle, a relation without
relation of familiar foreignness. It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is the impossible”.
The Pterodactyl, as linguistic event, or one may say “linguistic chance” (Given Time) opens a relationship between the state’s development language that keeps death invisible,
the dying who must be brought into visibility so that famine relief can arrive, and the
death-wish of the tribals. that cannot be made known.

If the rhetoric of development is violent because in its production of real poverty
and then its deployment of the discourse of poverty it makes disappear the human body
and its labors of life, then the rhetoric of planning, in its instrumentality and scientific
objectification of the body it meets out social justice to, is violent as well. And it is to that
level that Puran’s political activist writing is addressed. Linguistically it is not possible to
undo the violence of that rhetoric, for it is only within the structure of that violence that
one can be enabled. Puran’s strategies are to remain within the circle of that language and
generate positions by negating it as well as negotiating with it through calculation, and
putting into effect a model of representation that is attentive to its subject in a manner
different from instrumental reason. Thus, in his report, not only does he make a case of
providing the tribal area with food supply in times of starvation, but also of attending to
the tribal’s self-will in planting the forests with whatever plants they want, and their
having a say in what will help them live.

But the death-wish of the tribals, marking them as subjects, and the negativity of
subaltern consciousness that will not mobilize exchange or history in the economy of
incorporation, belongs to the aneconomic, without an attending to which no ethics and no
justice within the frame of calculation or otherwise can ever be possible. The pterodactyl
partitions language such, that a relation opens between death and the death-wish, between
what must be made known in order to implement laws, and what kept secret as the
condition of justice. In “Force of Law” Derrida writes on the difference between Law
and Justice. While Law is the element of calculation, Justice tarries with the incalculable.
As Spivak writes, Law is the site of politics, and Justice of ethics. Justice belongs to the
realm of the impossible, not in the sense that it is deemed Justice never come about, but
in that it opens an ethical relation with the other from the place of the aporetic. Spivak
calls for a political program of reading the social from this space of difference, fleshed
out in the following terms: Capitalism and Socialism are each other’s difference;
Communism is the figuration of the impossible. Socialized capital, intending to repair
losses, functions within a logic of calculability in which the State operates the rules of
measurement which are in accordance with the norms of development. It is just that there
be laws. But in the difference between Law and Justice, the ethical is inaugurated.
It is this impossible vision of the ethical that sends Puran to work in the world of the instrumental reason of Law. And it is to Puran from the mainstream and not to Bikhia that the Pterodactyl makes its silent appeal, beckoning from the place of the partition, beckoning for a relationship between these two spheres in his capacity to negotiate for social justice. Devi herself, like Puran, is sent to ethics, writing, and representation from her encounter with, promise, and commitment to the aneconomic, which as a gift event of justice arrives "if it arrives, only in narrative. And in a poematic simulacrum of narrative" (Given Time, 41).42

Arturo Escobar writes of the vigil that institutional ethnography must keep over discourses such as "market, planning, population, environment, production, equality, participation, needs, poverty, and the like" that are generated through institutions, and read deconstructively the world picture they come to comprise. Devi’s frame narrative with a cartography of institutional discourses, given over to the other side of meaning from the partitioning within language, generates the same critical charge as Escobar’s institutional ethnography. But it is a charge which could not have come to be without the aneconomic opening time to the labors of death. The form of Devi’s crypt narrative thus, laboring at the work of dead time, work as force, instituting the "opening of history, historicity itself" ("Force and Signification", 27), with its "excavating work of interrogation" (27), calling up the other of language outside the "peace of a response in which two affirmations espouse each other" (30).43 The peace of a response concerning the institution of social justice would be the political will for change coming from above, the radical act of framing laws for tribal land reclamation, and the granting of funds for tribal welfare. Yet without an understanding within political institutions that such justice
sent from the place of socialized capital cannot arrive without doing violence to the
addressee, they cannot ever succeed. What marks the utopian nature of political
institutions that will social change, is the failure of an accountability of that violence.
Opening time to that violence risks the narrative of “good” and “just” on which political
action is predicated. While the frame narrative gives account of the violence of political
inaction, of unequal distribution, of starvation, death, disease and deprivation, the force
instituted by Devi’s crypt narrative is an avowals of a very different structure of violence
that ruptures the time of “good” of phonetic language. The Pterodactyl calls for another
history to be written from that rupturing.

The “Evil” Work of Dead Time and Other Metabolic Ruptures in Prakriti

The linguistic energy of Shiva’s Prakriti, even though it offers one of the most
important critiques against the biases of development rhetoric as well as euro-centric
ecological justice, and opens a valuable space in eco-feminist discourse by stressing on
the linguistic dimension of thinking nature differentially, tends not to consider the
subaltern spaces of conflict without which no critique of the Enlightenment project of
history as progress, and no articulation of the complexities and discontinuities of meaning
in the nature-human-language-production nexus can be possible. Perhaps Shiva’s
Prakriti tends to be a zone of continuities, and her hermeneutic charge gathers force from
tending metaphors, because of the area of production she focuses on—food—and of the
set of discourses she sets her critique against—sustainable development.

“Sustainable development” is a phrase used by developers and policy making
environmentalists alike in making laws and implementing them in the countries of the
South to adopt food production measures and environmental engineering out of which the
countries of the North benefit. All of Shiva's writings are counter-narratives against the power of the well meaning and the commonsensical that the semantic valence of "sustainable development" generates, and hides its violence so effectively.

Shiva's feminist eco-critiques generate resistant force to show what sustenance in the nature-human-production nexus really looks like. Sustainable development's two handed machine concerning itself with food producing nature and women of the South—both of which are manipulated to suit the value transfer from periphery to center better—Shiva relates the two integrally in her counter-discursive narrative to prove otherwise. Hence, because of the very nature of what she resists—discourses that are made to gain currency by proving that both women and nature of the South are "undeveloped" and need to be engineered to produce value—she frames a discourse in which prior to their being engineered to suit the purposes of transnational capital, they both exist in a symbiotic relation of production. Thus, there are several levels at which Shiva's narrative can be read—as resistance writing against neo-colonialism, as a nuclear physicist's critique of the post-colonial nation's use and development of technology, and as discourse that fights the violence of light with light. Powerful and valuable as it is, the feminist statement emerging from her works, in having to be wholesome, has to forego important critical nuances that a project concerning itself with partial truths achieves.

In this part of my chapter, I read some of those spaces of partial truths, ie discontinuities, where nature and woman cannot be read continuously in a politically enabling gesture, where the nature-human-production-nexus cannot be contained in the benevolent language of good, since the places of subaltern struggle ruptures the accepted norms of "good", and emerges into a claim for justice through such rupturings. The
nature-human production nexus I focus on, concerns social refuse, i.e. the cremation of the dead, the linguistic charge of thinking through which is different from the language of thinking nature-human relation through food production. Also, while Shiva's discourse of Prakriti, extending to the labour and production of real women, can fall prey to assuming a continuous meaning of femininity, Devi's denaturalizing of the sexed body, where a rift opens between the meanings generated by the productive and reproductive body of woman, marking discontinuities in the unified category of sex, offers another space of reading the feminine, at the juncture of human-nature relation of production.

In order to attend to such spaces of discontinuity, I read “Bayen”, a short story about a woman made an outcaste by her community. From Chandi to bayen (witch) to Chandi again, Devi scripts a crypted space of the trace structure of gendered subaltern consciousness, both within the hegemonic coining of national culture, as well as within the dome community, itself marginalized from nationalist hegemonies carried on to post-colonial state formation.

The story goes thus: Chandi, the daughter of a dom—outcastes within hegemonic class and religious structures in India because of their work, the cremation of the dead—takes on the work of the burial of dead children after her father's death, because she feels a divine calling to pursue her father's profession. Possibly, the only woman in her community to pursue what is considered a man's work, she works with intrepid enthusiasm, burying dead children at the dead of night. She meets Molinder, who taken by her fierce courage and beauty, marries her. After she gives birth to her son, she is riven with doubts and hesitation about her work, perhaps, as the narrator tells us, because motherhood has made her see her work and the dead children in a new light. Eventually,
the death of her sister-in-law’s child is blamed on her, and the consequent rumors that she might be a witch, weakens her, but does not make her give up her work, which she now performs stealthily, because the darkness with its thousand shrill tongues calls her to provide the earth’s covering for the dead children.

During one of her nightly sojourns to the grave site, the men of the community summon Molinder to witness her “evil”, i.e. the supposed giving of her milk to the dead. To all the men present, the proof of evil is apparently self-evident, and Chandi is declared a bayen—a witch of left leanings who is to be consigned to the margins of society, as opposed to a dayen, a witch of right leanings, who must be stoned to death. Thus, Chandi bayen lives at the very margins, feared, deplored, and ostracized, while her son, Bhagirath grows up in the care of a despondent father and a non-chalant step-mother, until one day, trying to warn a running train of impending robbery, she is run over and killed. The story ends with the state’s martyring her for her bravery, and officials coming to the village to grant her posthumous martyrdom. The evil aspersion of bayen is unwritten, as Bhagirath cites her proper name, and claims himself as her descendent.

Chandi’s emergence as Bayen is simultaneous with the modernization of the Dom community treated as untouchables and outcastes in the Hindu hegemonic caste hierarchy, because of their work, the cremation of the dead. At the story’s beginning we see Chandi Bayen already an outcaste, while her husband Molinder and Bhagirath have entered the modernization process as subjects of social reform. Molinder enters the economy of the modern state successfully through wage labor, the work of disposing the dead having been modernized, demythologized, computed into labor time, the dead itself made productive in the circuit of technology—Molinder working in the morgue of a
government hospital, now bleaches the body of the dead, takes the bones out, so that the government can sell them to medical students. The crematoriums with their modern ways of disposing of the dead, frees the doms from their socially stigmatized labor, and the post-colonial state channelizes them into other forms of work—running chicken coops and doing cane work. Bhagirath, the son goes to school on the walls of which are written in bold letters “untouchability has been abolished in 1950”. Between the success and failures of these reforms, stand the body of Chandi Bayen, her becoming outcaste a linguistic event, marking the heterogeneous space of subaltern consciousness, as well as rupture in what would be considered a dialectical movement of progress in the social text.

The question of heterogeneity of subaltern consciousness, and the aporias of its narratives in legal discourses and teleology bound historiographies can be framed thus: from a progress bound discourse of social reform, achieved by the political will of the enlightened from above, the subaltern castes and classes are read as oppressed, and the goal of reform in a post-colonial modernizing and development state is to undo their oppression by incorporating them into the modernization process with the help of socialized capital. Such reforms are no doubt consequences of considerable amount of political activism and political consciousness. But the language of acceptance and social reform, as much as Gandhi’s discourse of harijans (translated as God’s people) and his benign love for the untouchables during the nationalist movement is such, that it does not account for the linguistic structure of subaltern consciousness that would require one to frame the question of subaltern identity in a much more complex frame than the narratives of benign acceptance from above or of instrumental reason supported by discourses of oppression would.
In the frame of Spivak’s argument in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” one might say that subalternity consists of not being able to bring forth the question of heterogeneity of subaltern consciousness or its complex reasoning of freedom in political discourses of freedom and liberation. Subaltern consciousness, as Partha Chatterjee\textsuperscript{46} writes in critique of Louis Dumont’s classic structuralist work \textit{Homo Hierarchicus}\textsuperscript{47}, does not emerge out of a society strictly divided into pure and polluted. The reality of work keeps bringing the social castes and classes together and languages of resistance and identity are born in these complex interactions, the idioms of which are more accurately framed within a political and philosophical discourse of the aporetic, than the hybrid. Likewise, what are considered myths and rituals belonging to hegemonic Hindu religion are recontextualised in subaltern religious practices and work philosophies, and become vehicles of identity and resistance against the hegemonic. The consciousness of oppression and freedom that emerge from these linguistic energies are far more dynamic and heterogeneous in their valences than the languages of instrumental reason with its technology telosed discourse of rights can frame, even though such discourses are absolutely necessary for any kind of political change to be effected.

While the sending of justice through socialized capital and social reforms seems to arrive successfully with the community, or at least with the men we are told about, Chandi’s body, as the site of knowledge, yields a very different meaning of transformation of a community from the pre-modern to modern, from work that is associated with dirt, evil, and the abject by the mainstream to gentrified labor. It is in Chandi’s consciousness that we read the heterogeneous space of subalternity that yield a very different language of being or freedom than the reformer’s language of subaltern
oppression or freedom. After her father’s death, Chandi takes up the work of burying dead children, because she knows that her ancestor’s work of burying the dead is inheritance from divine will. The Hindu mythology of king Harishchandra has it that the king was in exile for a year, and he spent it in a burning ghat amongst the doms, burning the dead along with them. After he ascended the throne, he made gifts of rivers, lands, lakes to people as par their work—a mythological birth of civil society. When the doms asked him what he would give them, he granted them all the burning ghats of the world. What in dominant Hinduism is read as exile and renunciation, and hence made into a script of spirituality, is read as “work” by subaltern consciousness, and claimed as divine lineage, myth of origin, and legitimization of their work—the work of the dead.

Chandi works fearlessly in the dark, calling out into the night to ward of jackals. It is thus she meets Molinder, her husband, who surprised by her unique courage and beauty, marries her. There is no indication in the story that any other woman of her community does that work. The narrative conveys an element of surprise on the part of those who see her work following her father’s death, and ask for food offerings in the ways of her father. But no one stops her from working, and the narrative valence establishes her as a heroic figure, until the birth of her son. Following the death of her sister-in-law’s daughter she had taken to the village goddess for cure, the community spreads a rumour that Chandi is possessed by a bayen, an evil spirit of left leanings, holds secret alliances with the dead, and feeds her milk to the dead children. Very soon after, she is ex-commnicated and made to live at the very outskirts of the village.

A witch of left leanings, excommunicated, and made to live at the village’s outskirts like a lonely guardian at the margins, is quite obviously a reference to
communism. But, what script of communism does Devi write in the body, soul, and psyche of Chandi Bayen who is neither incorporated within the state’s reform oriented modernizing and “humanizing” efforts through socialized capital, nor accepted by her community, itself marginalized within hegemonic caste and class structures? What event of justice in rupturing does her narrative beckon us to? And why does that event of justice appear only in failure? For the martyring of Chandi Bayen by the state, her posthumous fame, and her son’s having the legal sanction to undo the name “bayen”, cite her proper name, and claim himself as her descendent, cannot be read as arrival. The State’s arrival into Chandi’s life posthumously, and the scripting of suicide into martyrdom, if anything, can be read only ironically. Chandi Bayen can be made to arrive into the proper only within our act of reading, and in the possibility of knowing without the instrumentality of reason that only a literary text or an engagement with the literary act can possibilize.

To enable the violence of Devi’s text into meaning—a meaning not towards restitution, i.e, contained within a frame of dialectical resolution, but in the scattering of the semes of the text beyond the arche and telos predicated by the reason of development—we as readers who are enabled by socialized capital, must invaginate the text differently, deferring the place of our “knowing selves” by bringing into crisis our readings on political economy with the enabling violence of the literary text. For a woman reader, the question of invagination through a reading of “Bayen” involves the defamiliarizing of a continuist narrative of the place of the “feminine”, since it is in making a discontinuous appeal for meaning from the mattering of a female body, that the transition of a community from the raw to the cooked, from the “evil” to the “good” takes
place. How then can one read Chandi Bayen’s body in terms of linguistic investments, and as a place of knowing non-instrumentally?

The Dom community’s incorporation into modernity, the transition from the raw to the cooked entails a linguistic change, where language, just as writing in a Derridean sense, ought to be taken in a general sense—an upheaval in the value chain itself. Yet Devi’s narrative acts with the detachment of a reportage when she comments on Molinder’s new life style—from his raising of pigs to earn extra money to his visits to the town in new clothes. The son Bhagirath goes to school, and learns from the letters on the walls that untouchability had been abolished, but knows that in reality they are still treated as outcasts. The caste Hindu children sit apart. Bhagirath has no memory of what it was like in the days prior to being accepted in schools. But he is aware of unbridgeable differences. Bhagirath speaks in the language of gentlefolks, and Molinder listens with rapt attention. We know thus that the reforms have succeeded in their intent of bringing the Dom community within the mainstream’s fold of values. That the reforms have not changed the mainstream, is evident from the behavior of Bhagirath’s classmates.

In this transformed community, seeming to accept the gains and prices of transformation, Chandi Bayen’s feared and ostracized figure features as the only reminder of their past. The men of the community offer her food offerings every Saturday, and stand aside when she passes. Treating her and her son well is important for the well-being of the children in the community. Noons when the sun is too hot, the elders guard their children, for they fear Chandi Bayen’s spell on them, of her ability to become invisible, cover their faces with the edge of her saree, and lure them into the other world of death. As though, having given up their profession entailing the work of
the dead surrounded by the unmodernized raw forces of nature, their only relation to those feared and raw forces was Chandi Bayen’s body itself.

The transformation from the raw to the cooked, also entails a transformation in the community’s perception of Nature. Prior to their modernization, the textual treatment of Nature belonged to a level other than the calmness of the village roads now associated with Bhagirath and Molinder’s walks to work or to school. The dynamic space where nature and human interacted, life and death crossed paths, the meaning of the dead as abject and social refuse and the dead as vested with divine call to work crossed each other, and where fierce animals and fierce humans braved each other, featured in the sections where Chandi worked in the dark of night, goaded by divine obligation to perform the community’s obligatory labor. For the transformed community, Chandi’s body, charged with symbolic meaning, associated with the raw forces of nature—death, evil, unknown powers—is the site of negativity, that will not be restituted into the verticality of the social, and of the predication of the human in capital tamed or capital developed nature. It is a place Chandi had not desired, but the community demanded, as though in its own internal need to mark a linguistic site that can neither be incorporated, nor restituted, a place analogous to the aporetic negative in the dialectics unmobilized and unmobilizable in the history generating movement of aufhebung.

We are told at the very first paragraph that Chandi was not a dayen, a witch of right leanings who the community stoned to death. She was a bayen of left leanings, who the community kept at the margins, a necessary reminder of what will not be incorporated in their vertical accession to capital. The necessary abjection of Chandi bayen supplements the knowledge of Bhagirath and his lot that they will never really be
accepted by the mainstream, even though the Indian constitution says otherwise. For that knowledge to be accepted by Bhagirath and Molinder’s lot—since without that acceptance, no social mobilization through partial incorporation will be possible—Chandi bayen’s body vested with the symbolism of the abject must exist at the margins.

At the margins, the visual economy of her body, described as harshly unkempt, generating the visual charges of nature in its rawness, thus performs the labour of the abject at two symbolic levels. On the one hand, her abjection acts as a symbol for what the community should leave behind. Molinder tells Bhagirath that since one of them had gone beyond the doors of evil and ceased to be human, the other had to become more human in order to compensate. Molinder was the first one of his community who had learnt to write, sign his name, taken a job at the government hospital, and earned regular wages, in other words become “more human”. On the other hand, her abjection does the work of dead time by becoming a symbolic investiture of that which cannot be incorporated. Chandi bayen’s body thus enables history, by being the very place where the negative will of the community to enter partial incorporation into modern subjecthood is cathected, while she herself stands apart, Antigone-like, offering a wholly different text of will first by taking up the work of burying the dead, through continuing to work on the face of hostilities, pernicious rumours, technological revolution and social change, and largely through suicide.

The gendered account of the will of subalternity Devi gives in Bayen, supplements Spivak’s critique of the assumption of homogeneous resistant communities offered by Guha. The meaning of community emerges in a wholly different light, once we read its constellation through Chandi bayen’s productive and reproductive body.
Devi’s text, working at three different levels—from the space of Chandi bayen’s consciousness, from the space of the community which exercises its will from a male space, and the textual consciousness that mediates the heterogeneity of each of these spaces—unwinds this heterogeneity. The heterogeneity of subaltern will is thus fleshed out on several accounts—at the level of a gendered community, of the discontinuities within the sexed female body itself, as different meanings are attributed to it at different times, and of the difference that arises between the official version of subaltern oppression and the one that subaltern linguistic consciousness expresses. In order to shed light on all of these elements of heterogeneity of subaltern will, I turn to the text where it offers possibilities of constructing a psychobiography of Chandi bayen.

At a textual level, Chandi bayen’s psycho-biography begins with her father’s death, and her taking up his work. As daughter-body, she becomes a laboring body by addressing herself to divine calling from the place of the dead father and all the absent males of her family. Situated between the divine and the dead, both of which are male-mattered, Chandi’s daughter-body and its labor is value coded such, that it does not rupture the male identified coding of community, labor, and value. It is only after her marriage that she becomes marked differentially. At first as kinswoman who must play certain roles within the community, like taking her sister-in-law’s daughter to the village goddess for cure, and next as a reproductive and lactating body, both her body and her labor are marked, and finally through the community’s coercion, satisfies its negative demand for meaning by being made to occupy the place of evil.

Two things must be noted in this process though. First, that the community we see giving meaning to her, comprises solely of men. It is men who apprehend her at the burial
grounds, and surround her, accusing her of evil, and of giving her milk to dead children. And then again, when she is made out to be a bayen, and excommunicated, she is offered food every Saturday by the community’s men. Secondly, that it is she who acts in the capacity of the letter bearer between the community and the divine, is finally charged of evil. The questions then to be asked are, how does a sign change in the place of the meaning of God, of good, and evil take place within this transforming community, and how is it made possible to take place through the body of a woman? What place of the Other—where meaning as excess resides—does Chandi’s body come to occupy? And how does one frame the question of Chandi bayen’s own consciousness?

The first time then, the rumours begin that Chandi might be a bayen, is when her sister-in-law’s daughter infected by pox dies. Since it is she who takes the child to the village goddess for cure, she is the one who is blamed for the child’s death. When goddesses fail, the fault must be attributed to absolute evil, and where else to find it but in the body of a mortal woman? These are times when villages are served by medical units, and communities stand between divine cure and scientific cure. If divine cure fails, one might not necessarily be willing to accept it as the ordaining of divine will, since one is also often saved by medical help.

Yet failure of divine cure does not result in disbelief. In a transforming social space, where science, gods, and goddesses come to coexist, the terms of belief and disbelief change. It is not a matter of choosing between science and gods when the latter fail, since gods and goddesses in such societies pervade linguistic consciousness, and constitute the very ground of a moral and sentient being going through the life world, whereas modern science can come to affect one’s life only partially from outside, even if
it is to do good. Hence the failing of gods must be resolved in the work of the negative, so that faith can be restored again. Thus, woman’s body is appropriated as the space for the work of the negative in liminality, and made into “other” in order to manage the crisis of sign change.

Chandi bayen’s work previously not considered gender marked—she took up work to continue the lineage of the Son of the Ganges—thus comes to be marked after the event of the girl’s death. At a time when mediated by the state, the community makes a shift in its work practice, Chandi bayen’s work, the burial of dead children in communities that would not let machines cremate children and relied on the labor of human hands instead, is coded as evil by Chandi’s community, using the previously generated markers of difference. While earlier, the place of the divine had to be restored, now the place of the newly arriving technology centered work had to be secured, and in both, Chandi’s body offers the labor of the negative. It is in her differentially marked body in reproduction that evil is imagined.

Since she goes out to work at night, the men of the community believe that she has secret alliances with the dead, i.e. gives dead children her milk. It is not any alliance. It is erotic alliance, shohag. The community imagines her as the absolute other by appealing to the signifying power of the languages of affect bordering on the eros, that in times of peace comprise of the language of the oikos. In times of war, it is the power of that language, its valences opposed, that marks the absolute other. The milk of motherhood, aligned with use value in feminist discourses, is the site of exchanges that make possible sign changes. Spivak writes of woman’s jouissance in a heterosexually organized world: “where an unexchangeable excess is tamed into exchange”, and where
signification emerges. (In Other Worlds, 259)⁴⁹. In not wanting to give up her productive labor—heterogeneously marked in terms of what it means to her—she yields her reproductive labor, the work of producing milk—to the community’s linguistic appropriation, and the mobilizing of sign change in times of social change when the State required the Domes to give up their “lowly” work.

Devi’s reading of the will of social change, quite different from the positivist accounts of consciousness offered by development planners, supplements Partha Chatterjee’s critique of the scientific nature of planning through instrumental reason following colonialism’s Enlightenment model of Reason which does not take into account the linguistic beings of those it brings within the frame of law and justice. Devi’s text is neither nostalgic of the mythological sanction of Chandi’s work, nor does it attempt at indicating in any manner that the lot of Molinders and Bhagiraths of the dome community should not earn wages or go to school while India marches into the twentieth century. In attending to the heterogeneity of subaltern will within the space of Chandi’s resistant consciousness, neither does Devi attempt at framing a case against technology, nor make the statement that the work of social refuse not be done through technology.

What emerges from Devi’s text are the non-contiguous spaces that invariably open up when one reads social change through linguistic consciousness. The sphere of the nature-human-production-language nexus is ever dynamic at the intersections of the raw and the cooked, where “good” can tip off into “evil” within the chance of a moment. No discourse of nature as sustaining force, or ground of linguistic consciousness, can ever be possible without attending to this chance. Eco-feminism, a Messianic discourse, a new force of critical thinking gathering charge to frame history otherwise, would become
prey to essentialisms if it did not attend to heterogeneities, discontinuities and ruptures. While Pterodactyl and Water labor at invisible value in ways that would have an easy fit with themes concerning ecological justice, Bayen labors at discontinuities, opening non-contiguous spaces where easy victories on the side of either nature or technology are treated through the aporetic, and when justice, and the predication of the human has to be negotiated between the two.
"Invagination" is a term used by Derrida in "The Law of the Genre" in Acts of Literature, and in "Living On, Borderlines" in Deconstruction and Criticism. It is a term that indicates the act of reading through textualizing strategies, by which logocentric certainties can be given over to the feminine. "Reading" in a Derridean sense means the inversion and/or displacement of value. This act of displacement itself features as inscription in the social text, and in this sense, a Derridean deconstructionist "reading" is writing (note that I have put reading within quotation marks, for caution, i.e., rendering the transparent and self-evident, value marked, is what a deconstructionist sense of reading effectuates). In this chapter, the act of reading Gayatri Spivak, Vandana Shiva, and Mahasweta Devi, is itself an act of invagination of the social text, i.e., of "reading" by defamiliarizing the terms "nature", "economic", and "biology", which are treated as unmarked categories by Development planners, globalization advocates, as well as those for euro-centric ecological justice. That nature and biology are scripted by the global value production machine, and foreclosures and erasures are part of this scripting—Spivak speaks of the "graphematic" moments in Marx, and Shiva of "invisible value"—is what my readings of Devi's stories attempt. A reading through displacement of value is attempted through questions of Law and Justice, as well as of violence and representation.

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3 In Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World Partha Chatterjee uses the terms “problematic” and “thematic” to structure his arguments on the nationalist resistance to and incorporation of the Enlightenment discourses put in place by colonialism. The former alludes to the site of rupture, and the latter to the discursive frame that go in the making of historiographic practices.


10 The turn from polysemy to dissemination lies in the (im)possibility of translation, and inaugurating reading structures that make the emergencies possible within the structure of (im)possibility. The question of critical thinking, critical reading, creating possibilities for the ‘other’ to arrive are related to the question of translation. Almost all of Derrida’s works engage with the question of translation. In this chapter I use the form of argument he uses in “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials” in Derrida and Negative Theology for thinking through translation, “writing”, “reading”, and its relation to subaltern emergences.


13 See Naiila Kabeer Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought London: Verso 1994, for discussions of such shifts.


See Noel Sturgeon Eco-feminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory, and Political Action. N.Y: Routledge. 1997 for how Third World rural women became scapegoats within development planning. She notes how the “oil crisis” of the 1970s spurred development experts to look closely at the use of firewood by peasant Third World societies for energy, and a quick link made between women, environmental degradation, southern population growth, and poverty. Vandana Shiva’s insertion of the Chipko movement in Northern India into the international political context at a time when the environment became a major agenda item, helped present Third World women as natural environmentalists instead of environmentally problematic.

See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak A Critique of Postcolonial Reason


I use Jacques Derrida’s formulation of the difference between Law and Justice, as articulated in “Force of Law: the Mystical Foundation of Authority” in Cardozo Law Review October, 1989

Daniel Price Without a Woman to Read: Towards the Daughter in Postmodernism

Jacques Derrida “Freud and the Scene of Writing” in Writing and Difference Trans. Alan Bass


Jacques Derrida “Violence and Metaphysics” Writing and Difference

See Paul De Man Allegories of Reading. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1979


Jacques Derrida “Violence and Metaphysics” Writing and Difference

See Jacques Derrida’s “Des Tours de Babel” in Translation and Difference for a discussion on translation in terms of unmediated meaning as opposed to Walter Benjamin’s writing of translation in terms of substituted meaning, and the teleological movement from a lower to a higher order of language which ushers in the messianic, and which he claims is the language of nature itself. See Walter Benjamin in “The Task of the Translator” in Illuminations. Trans. H. Zohn. London: Cape 1970, and “On Language as Such and the Language of Man” Reflections. Harvest: HBJ 1978. Derrida’s “diacritical”, i.e that which does not submit to a teleological frame of meaning, as opposed to a Marxist “dialectical” frame can be approached through the critical framing of “(im)possible translation”. I approach the writing of subaltern consciousness through such a framing of the (im)possible translation, so that Devi’s writings appealing to a rights based discourse, does not get appropriated by the development discourse that treats its subjects instrumentally, i.e not as people with languages and consciousness, but as objects of scientific planning.


Jacques Derrida Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money

Jacques Derrida “By Force of Law” Cardozo Law Review


Jacques Derrida Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money

Jacques Derrida “Force and Signification” Writing and Difference

See Vandana Shiva Staying Alive for a discussion of Prakriti


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