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' … half-sick of shadows': figure and ground in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's imagination of the subaltern

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ABSTRACT

This essay moves the category of the subaltern out of the exclusive domain of colonial historiography and resituates it in the context of contemporaneity. Taking my cue from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's insistence on the dream of postcoloniality in the realm of the global, I examine two 'empirical anomalies' that redefine subaltern insurgency, cultivate democratic reflexes, and defeat the expectations of their moment and milieu. Vivek Chibber's *Postcolonial theory and the specter of capital* serves as a framing device to elicit the still-persuasive dimensions of Spivak's landmark essay for our historical moment. While I remain unpersuaded by both his premises and his conclusions, his argument does throw Spivak's interventions in the project of Subaltern Studies into relief. My method throughout, in the manner of Spivak and Paul de Man, is one of interruption and undoing; my aim is to delineate what Spivak describes as 'the resistance fitting our time'.

KEYWORDS Subaltern; globalization; strategy; agency; ab-use; parabasis

Vivek Chibber's *Postcolonial theory and the specter of capital* (2013) is the latest entrant in a formidable body of scholarship on the Subaltern Studies project inaugurated by Ranajit Guha in the late 1970s–early 1980s. Chibber's uncompromising candour and enviable clarity are very welcome, as are his probing distinctions between the culture of political liberalism and the universalization of capital in the articulation of interest and agency within the context of (post) colonial modernity. I also appreciate his insistence that 'the unceasing struggle' (p. 208) of labouring classes is equally responsible for 'the quality of modernity' (p. 26), the rights and freedoms that have become constitutive of bourgeois hegemony, democracy, and international civil society. Thus, Chibber binds both East and West 'in the same global process': capital's drive to expand and dominate and the struggle of labouring classes to 'defend their well-being […] against this onslaught' (p. 208). This desire to restore 'universal history', as one might imagine, produces his blistering

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challenge to the writings of Guha, Partha Chatterjee, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, all of whom he sets about proving mistaken in their assumptions or wrong in their interpretation of the empirical evidence that bolsters their respective subaltern historiography. My focus in this essay, as my title indicates, is on the legacy of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept-metaphor of the subaltern; however, as I shall demonstrate, Chibber's charges against 'postcolonial theory', that he claims is unjustifiably influenced by Subaltern Studies, allow me to illuminate not only the singularity of Spivak's figure of the subaltern, but also its remarkable prescience, continuing relevance, and abiding significance.[1]

Predictably enough, Chibber's emphasis is on the masculine pantheon; apart from a dismissive reference to Spivak 'who parachuted into the project in 1985' (p. 8), an absurd moment when he includes her among those who 'made their way out of [Marxism's] orbit', who believe 'the dilemmas of late capitalism […] cannot be apprehended by the categories of historical materialism' and who berate Marxism for its 'theoretical inadequacies' (p. 2), and a familiar identification of Spivak's turn from Marxism to post-structuralism, forgetting her loud and constant invocation of Marx, his book does not engage Spivak's writings. My point is that including Spivak in his repertoire would have permitted him to see how she anticipates many of his insights without the anxiety of influence that haunts his passionate repudiation of the trinity of Guha, Chatterjee, and Chakrabarty. In saying this, I am not endorsing Chibber's overblown conflation of Subaltern Studies with 'postcolonial theory'; the latter is an impossibly amorphous and continually mutating field in which Subaltern Studies commands respect rather than wields suzerainty and in which Spivak still occupies a controversial position as, indeed, she did in the Subaltern Studies project.

Chibber displays an exasperating tendency to treat the critique of Enlightenment or elaboration of its ambivalent legacy as equivalent to an abandonment of its principles of rationalism; by the same token, he also deems a critical relation to Marxist historiography an outright rejection of the uses of historical materialism in interrogating colonial pasts and envisioning postcolonial futures. His twin universalisms (the movement of capital and the struggle of labour) neatly evade the double-bind that is the hallmark of the simultaneously premature and belated (post)colonial modern. Chibber claims that complexity is only ever tactical rather than true in enunciating human dignity and social agency and that it is impossible to decide on the facts when the same evidence can lead to radically opposed conclusions. Not only does Chibber refuse to concede that standpoint and interpretation may also lay claim to truth, his disciplinary method, historical sociology, stands or falls on the appearance of or encounter with 'empirical anomaly' (p. 296). Thus, Chibber refuses the option either of deeming such anomaly instructive or of making it symptomatic of a structural constraint that requires

further investigation. As I hope to suggest, such anomalies, excesses, blanks, and silences bespeak the alterity that touches Spivak's unrelenting performance of and identification with 'the task in the field of deconstruction' (2005a, p. 95). Her disciplinary training makes the 'singular' and 'unverifiable' the focus of her analytical and interpretive desire.

Even a cursory reading of Spivak's corpus will elicit the preponderance of rhetorical figures – aporia, parabasis, trace, catachresis, pharmakon, metalepsis – all of which invoke the interrupted, the undecidable, and the impossible in delineating the space of the subaltern, while systematically exposing the non-coincidence of sign and referent, desire and interest, meaning and motivation, individual identity and class consciousness. Where might these figures find their ground? Or, in Chibber's terms, how is it possible to acknowledge and explain global capitalism as 'the most powerful social and structural force in the world' (p. 288), as Spivak has done in a range of historical contexts and social geographies, without implying that social agency and well-being are only manifestations of rationalism and universalism that remain the guiding principles of both the exercise of power and the fashioning of resistance? In other words, Spivak's attentiveness to the figure of the subaltern is not directed to that which escapes the logic of capital, but that which is its inevitable casualty and detritus, just as her examination of the non-identity of the subaltern treats self-determination as arduous and thwarted rather than eventual. She understands the potential for resistance as equally a product 'of what [structural determinations] foreclose' (Dipankar Gupta, as quoted in O'Hanlon 1988, p. 152) and of what regard for and defence of one's well-being enables.

Perhaps the most vituperative charge Chibber levels at Subaltern Studies is that it universalizes or homogenizes capital while orientalizing the East. This premise makes it possible for Chibber to argue that Subaltern Studies, particularly Chakrabarty and Chatterjee, attributes 'an entirely different political psychology' to 'Eastern agents' (p. 288, original emphasis) and 'assigns science, rationality, objectivity, and similar attributes to the West, instead of regarding them as common to both cultures' (p. 289). Chibber alleges, therefore, that Subaltern Studies arrives at 'the bizarre conclusion that for the East even to embark on a political strategy guided by Reason is to consign itself to perpetual subordination' (p. 289). As a corollary to this allegation, Chibber also expresses his witty, if commonsensical, disdain for 'particularities and incommensurabilities'. 'The more marginal, and the more mysterious, the better' (p. 289), that he contends Subaltern Studies 'repackage[s] as resistance to Capital' (p. 289). Because my interest, for the purposes of this essay, is in Spivak's writings, I will not engage here with what I believe is an astonishing obduracy and wilful misunderstanding on Chibber's part. The extremity of his accusations, however, will guide my encounter with Spivak's disclosure and effacement of the subaltern.

The non-identity of the subaltern has also resulted in Spivak's circumspection being mistaken for what Chibber calls 'an entire social ontology [ways of knowing and being] in defense of the exotic' (p. 289). As Chakrabarty would explain, Chibber's Eastern agent, armed with a political strategy guided by Reason, is already equipped with languages and competencies that make it possible for him[2] to demand distributive justice and thus comes to share with the privileged classes their pedagogic drive to transform the oppressed of today into the democratic subject of tomorrow (2000, pp. 272–273). For Spivak, the relations between structure and agency are only ever partially revealed, and in the context of those who have access neither to social mobility nor to democratic institutions, instrumentality and agency have to be thought together rather than as a linear progress from one to the other. The figure of the subaltern, as Spivak originally conceived it, encompasses those who cannot even lay claim to the category of the oppressed. This effort is not a fashionable or, indeed, unsavoury quest for the exotic, but an ethical and intellectual acknowledgement of the *limits* of disciplinary frames and 'cultural empathy' (Rosalind O'Hanlon's phrase) or, in Spivak's famous catchphrase, 'learning to learn from below' (2000, p. 333). As Chakrabarty would put it, educating peasants out of their peasantness (p. 275) harbours losses as well as gains, an induction into governmentality that, ironically, constitutes both the possibility of freedom and the persistence of domination. The scrupulous politics for which Spivak initially lauded Subaltern Studies is thus not only a radical historiography or epistemology, but an ethics: 'the capacity to hear that which one does not already understand' (p. 275). Chibber assumes that such openness to 'other' structures of thought and belief can only lapse into credulousness and irrationalism; however, Chakrabarty prefers to entertain the possibility that it can equally be 'mobilized for the purpose of fabricating new forms of life' (p. 277). Even if, by exoticism, Chibber also means a kind of aestheticism – the fascinating beauties of the richly unknowable other – associating exoticism with the subaltern is a serious misreading. Not only do the range of essays under the rubric of Subaltern Studies involve painstaking archival research undertaken with an eye both to the blindspots of colonial historiography and the artful elaboration of the actions, beliefs, and perceptions of insurgents, but Spivak's writings scrupulously track the itinerary of effacement of the subaltern rather than simply posit her unknowability. Such tracking entails a complex negotiation of the limits of colonial discourse and neo-colonial systems of governance and economy as well as the peculiarity of socio-cultural predicaments in which structural constraints might be overcome and agency exercised.

Chibber's impatience is also no doubt the consequence of the challenge Spivak poses to conceiving of the democratic subject of tomorrow: the scepticism she displays about Foucault and Deleuze's complacent characterization of the oppressed who can know and represent themselves and her insistence

that this assumption is precisely what obscures the subaltern from vision. Moreover, subalternity limns a predicament rather than names an identity; thus, thinking subalternity in the context of contemporaneity requires developing and revising the potential of Spivak's shadowy figure. Since catachresis is the reigning trope in Spivak's articulation of the subaltern, I take its constitutive impropriety as an invitation to such revisionism in the name of injecting both vitality and dynamism in a figure that would otherwise be thought only in terms of an encounter with limits.

In the final sections of this essay, I discuss two exemplary instances of the construction of political sentiment and economic agency: one inhabits the logic of capital and the coding of heteronormative value, while the other operates in the register of affect and intensity, of faith and 'superstition', of 'religious sensibility […] [using] a political structure and vocabulary as a means to a (religious) end' (Chakrabarty 2000, p. 264). Both instances address the suturing of the individual and the structural that Chibber treats as seamless and reciprocal while deploying the differential relation between the literal and the figural (see Sunder Rajan 2010, pp. 122–125) to mark 'the excess of the sexuate' (Spivak 2010a, p. 67, n. 4). The latter remains Spivak's most substantial and demanding contribution to the discourse of subalternity; the (en)gendering of subject and class formation in the logic of capital and of the secular modern is absent in Chibber and, as everyone knows, was noticeably absent in the early days of the Subaltern Studies project.

' … when the proverbial clod of earth turns … '

Ranajit Guha's 'The prose of counter-insurgency' (1983) still bristles with insight and innovation; the dazzling writing on display here makes insurgency anything but prosaic while living up to Guha's assertion that 'The historical discourse is the world's oldest thriller' (p. 11). I invoke Guha's much-thumbed essay partly because Guha emerges comparatively unscathed from Chibber's excoriation (Chibber absolves him of the charge of Orientalism, for instance). More to the point, however, Guha's affecting and arresting desire to deduce subaltern consciousness from elite colonial historiography precisely delineates insurrection as both structure and symbol, thus paving the way for the sexuate as the movement of differentiation *within* insurgency.

Guha's subaltern is the peasant-rebel. In an eloquent description of the codes that define the peasant's existence within a colonial and feudal system, Guha writes, 'his subalternity was materialized by the structure of property, institutionalized by law, sanctified by religion and made tolerable – and even desirable – by tradition' (1983, p. 1). Even in Guha's estimation, subalternity is less an identity or essence than a materialization of a set of social, economic, legal, and religious codes and sanctions, an effect rather

than a cause, institutional rather than primordial. Guha thus reads peasant rebellion as 'extract[ing] a meaning' (p. 1) out of their existence, first to endure and survive and then to question and rebel. Guha's aim is to 'give the lie to the myth […] of peasant insurrections being purely spontaneous and unpremeditated affairs' (p. 1). The risk to the peasant-rebel was simply too great, writes Guha with exquisite irony, for him 'to engage in such a project in a state of absent-mindedness' (p. 1). Here is an incidental example of how writing subaltern historiography requires *both* the universalist attribution of reason, interest, and agency to the peasant-rebel *and* the anti-universalist overturning of colonial, national-elite, and radical assumptions about rebel spontaneity or instinct, as a 'reflex action […] and almost mindless response to physical suffering' (p. 3), and about rebel consciousness mediated by religiosity, sectarianism, and territoriality because the latter embodies a contradiction that cannot be sublated without force into the secular ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity (p. 39). Regarding 'the insurgent as the subject of his own history' (p. 38) requires, in Guha's view, attention not only to the fact of rebel consciousness, but also its specificity: the multiple sources of authority in a rural community that simultaneously enrich and betray militancy.

I want to highlight certain aspects of Guha's landmark essay because I believe that they inform Spivak's conception of the subaltern even though she is sceptical of the lineaments of subaltern historiography that emerge in Guha's writings. These aspects are also, I believe, indispensable to thinking the subaltern beyond the colonial archive and within the current historical and global dispensation, not least because, as she remarks, at the conclusion to her original version of 'Can the subaltern speak?', 'representation has not withered away' and the subaltern remains condemned, in Chakrabarty's inimitable words, 'to live poorly, in and as bad translations,' 'to *be* what we [and they] also *are not*' (p. 268). Chakrabarty conceives of this predicament as the irony of modernity for the pedagogy and performance of elite colonial subject-formation, but it is also, and perhaps more violently, that of subalternity. I share Chakrabarty's formulation because it is sensitive to translation not only as a question of adequation or mimesis, but also as one of effacement and defacement, form and deformation, figuration and disfiguration. These latter connotations are also, categorically and viscerally, Spivak's.

Returning to Guha, then, his account acknowledges the gap between writing the history of insurgency and producing an insurgent history; that is, 'the mediation of the insurgent's consciousness by the historian's' (1983, p. 33) necessarily also mediates the historical present of the insurgent by the narrative present of the historian. The peasant-rebel thus has no more than a contingent role in the 'life-story of the Empire' (p. 27) or in the life-story of the elite nation which also does little to 'illuminate that consciousness

which is called insurgency' (p. 27). This subtle distinction between the history of insurgency and an insurgent history is not often emphasized in accounts of Guha's contribution to subaltern historiography, but it is crucial to historical understanding and interpretation that seek to foreground both 'a system of power and the particular manner of its representation' (p. 7). In other words, the distinction between the consciousness of the peasant-rebel/insurgent and 'the consciousness which is called insurgency' is discernible only when Guha deploys the simultaneous complicity and antagonism between the codes that signify insurgency and those that signify counter-insurgency. Guha thus tells a rather more disturbing tale of coercion by arms and pacification by words in which insurgency gains its authorization and legitimacy from its opposite, counter-insurgency.

The task of the radical and reflexive historian is thus not simply a question of exposing blind spots and replacing them with insights (the necessary work of Enlightenment rationalism) but of 'look[ing] at [historiography's] constituting elements and [examining] those cuts, seams and stitches – those cobbling marks – which tell us about the material it is made of and the manner of its absorption into the fabric of writing' (p. 3). This approach finds contradiction and complicity neither damning of truth nor debilitating of agency but instructive – the very stuff of history capable of demonstrating how individuals become subjects of history and how history in turn becomes a process without subjects. This double-edged discourse is particularly telling in Guha's depiction of peasant-rebel character and action, ranging all the way from cautious and earthy to volatile (p. 2); in *neither* case do affect and emotion undermine reason or inhibit action. Guha clinches the issue when he characterizes rebellion 'as a deliberate, *even if desperate*, way out of an *intolerable* condition of existence' (p. 2, emphasis mine). A desperate action is not by definition an irrational one, just as 'intolerable' is simultaneously an affective, bodily, and rational response to peasant existence. These nuances in Guha's narration suggest not only that political strategy can be guided by more and other than Reason, but that subaltern historiography results in the expansion of the domain of Reason rather than a consignment of Reason, as Chibber alleges, to imperial design.

Guha's emphasis on the irreducibility of experience, belief, practice, and symbol also illuminates the richness of texture, nuance, contradiction, and complicity that might be lost in the assimilation of subaltern dispossession to 'the onward movement of class consciousness and struggle', to subsuming particularity in the universal realm of the reversible and contingent (O'Hanlon's distinctions 1988, p. 77). Because at least Guha's version of subaltern historiography relies on the principles of inversion and compromise, it comprehends both hegemony and insurgency rather than remaining contented with a triumphal logic of struggle and transformation.

Subalterns: dominant, residual, and emergent

Chibber's quarrels with Subaltern Studies were anticipated by what is now a classic in its own right, Rosalind O'Hanlon's 'Recovering the subject: *Subaltern Studies* and histories of resistance in colonial South Asia' (1988). O'Hanlon's thoughtful assessment of the limits of Subaltern Studies was expressed in the spirit of a shared attempt to transcend business as usual in history and ethnography as well as in the name of what remained outside its purview of 'subjugated knowledges' and repressed histories. O'Hanlon still felt the polemical charge of Subaltern Studies' intervention unlike Chibber, decades later, tilting at what he believes is a near impregnable orthodoxy. Her aim therefore, unlike Chibber's, is not to shame the major historians of Subaltern Studies for their inadequacies or to impugn their intellectual and political integrity, but to foreground 'the critically important' (p. 74) questions they raise, questions the most organic of intellectuals cannot afford to be complacent about as indeed the subjects and objects of their scrutiny are not.

O'Hanlon is less persuaded than I am by the subtlety of Guha's negotiation of the historian's 'positional hazard', 'at once a gesture of control and an acknowledgement of limits' (Spivak 2010a, p. 48), and believes him hobbled by 'the tension between the desire to find a resistant presence, and the necessity of preserving difference and otherness in the figure of the subaltern' (O'Hanlon 1988, p. 74). Chibber's impatience with this impasse, which O'Hanlon takes seriously, explains his sense that subaltern historiography has abandoned the rationalism and universalism of the class struggle as the dialectical motor of history. Taking her cue from Jean Baudrillard's knowing disquisition on the masses as the unknown of every political equation that annuls every political equation (p. 79), O'Hanlon neatly puts her finger on the problem of elite historiography that ignores or speaks for the masses and subaltern historiography that insists on filling gaps and breaking silences to ensure that the masses occupy the ground from which they have been evacuated. If, as Baudrillard suggests, the masses 'are the leitmotif of every discourse; they are the obsession of every social project' (quoted in O'Hanlon 1988, p. 79), the intellectual labour of historiography, of critique or solidarity, must account for the mobilization of the category of the masses in the projection of desire, the invasion of curiosity, and the hubris of self-consolidation. The ease with which Chibber moves from class consciousness, thus class identity, thus labouring being good, thus the good labourer's subjectivity, thus the labouring classes' agency throws into relief what Spivak would call the representing intellectual's 'techniques of retrieval' (Spivak 2010a, p. 22) that render him transparent and turn the labouring classes into those who know and can represent themselves.

O'Hanlon discusses the importance of avoiding making the subaltern over in our own image (p. 106) while stressing equally the subaltern as 'the

theoretical means, and the historical material, through which we may examine and call into question the very stuff of which civil society is made' (p. 109). Because Chibber already has a plausible universal history at his disposal, he integrates the struggle of the labouring classes into the values of the civil society that has hitherto excluded their full participation in its institutions. His attempt to 'touch the consciousness of the people' (Spivak 2010a, p. 40) like Foucault, Deleuze, and indeed Guha, participates without embarrassment or apology in 'the thematics of being undeceived' (p. 27) and in the 'ventriloquism of the speaking subaltern [as] the left intellectual's stock-in-trade' (p. 27).

Spivak's critique of sanctioned occlusions 'in precisely those intellectuals who are our best prophets of heterogeneity and the Other' (p. 24) is based on their incapacity to

> [deal] with global capitalism: the subject-production of worker and unemployed within nation-state ideologies in its Center; the increasing subtraction of the working class in the periphery from the realization of surplus value and thus from 'humanistic' training in consumerism; and the large scale presence of para-capitalist labor as well as the heterogeneous structural status of agriculture in the periphery. Ignoring the international division of labor, rendering 'Asia' (and on occasion 'Africa') transparent (unless the subject is ostensibly the 'Third World'); reestablishing the legal subject of socialized capital – these are problems as common to much poststructuralist as to 'regular' theory. (p. 24)

Because Chibber establishes global capital as the most pervasive social and structural force in the world and the struggle for well-being on the part of labouring classes defending themselves against the onslaught of capital as ceaseless, it might appear that he does not share in the sanctioned occlusions of which Spivak speaks. However, his characterization of the political equation in terms of the twin universalisms of capital and labour results in transforming the international division of labour into *the* struggle of the labouring classes. He also elides the rather complex question of what counts as labour – top management at Walmart, for instance, works and works and works, but they are not exactly labourers.

His empirical expression of solidarity with the labouring classes in their struggle for well-being does not escape the consequences of the subject-effect which emerges: in Spivak's terms, the 'subject-effect that surreptitiously emerges […] may be the legal subject of socialized capital, neither labour nor management, holding a "strong" passport, using a "strong" or "hard" currency, with supposedly unquestioned access to due process' (p. 25). Such solidarity necessarily, according to Spivak, assumes that both the representing intellectual and those on behalf of whom he speaks occupy a level playing field which enjoys the privileges of citizenship despite the potential for social or economic disparities. O'Hanlon expresses reservations about the politics of Subaltern Studies in a similar vein but in the register of 'a conceit of the profession':

> Yet to draw the conclusion, as Ranajit Guha does, that our efforts can be coterminous with the struggles of the dispossessed, feeding directly into them by making sense of them, seems to me fundamentally misconceived. We may wish in all faith for their freedom from marginality and deprivation […] [but] if we ask ourselves why it is that we attack historiography's dominant discourses, why we seek to find a resistant presence which has not been completely emptied or extinguished by the hegemonic, our answer must surely be that it is in order to envisage a realm of freedom in which we ourselves might speak. (p. 106)

Both Spivak and O'Hanlon's cautions against the 'rewriting of accountable responsibility as narcissism' (Spivak 2010a, p. 24) are directed at all 'metropolitan enthusiasts[s] of "third world resistance"' (p. 31), and among whom one must include Chibber; an unavoidable narcissism, perhaps, as Spivak acknowledges and as her persistent rewritings and obsessive returns suggest, but worth heeding, nonetheless.

Perhaps Spivak's most devastating blow to 'the intellectual within globalizing capital, brandishing concrete experience' (2010a, p. 27) and her most sobering account of 'the difficult task of counterhegemonic ideological production' (p. 27) occurs in her now notorious analysis of 'constitutive contradiction' (p. 27). I offer here a hasty pudding of the components of her analysis: the running together of *vertreten* and *darstellen*, the critique of individual and collective agency, the exclusion of the family from discussions of class formation, and the 'two-handed engine' (p. 35) of epistemic violence (the narrative of madness and civilization and the narrative of imperialism) responsible for 'the persistent constitution of the Other as the Self's shadow' (p. 35). Spivak's essay (both in its original and revised versions) is too well-known (if still not completely understood) for me to rehearse the moves she makes in painstaking detail; I want to focus here on what I find most generative and on the aspects of her argument that will become crucial for my analysis of the 'case-studies' I offer in the concluding sections of this essay.

Spivak's contentions might be described as 'moments of productive bafflement' (2010a, p. 40) within the articulation of subalternity. Spivak's dissatisfaction with the subaltern as a substantive social category stems from her interpretation of Marx's *The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in which Marx describes class as a descriptive and transformative concept. Spivak argues that Marx's description of class is 'a differential one – its cutting off and difference from all other classes' (p. 29); this '*artificial* and economic' (p. 29, original emphasis) formation of a class cannot be aligned with instinct in Althusser's sense or with class consciousness in which desire and interest coincide. Class, as Marx understands it, or as Spivak interprets that understanding, simply marks the economic conditions of existence that place classes 'in inimical confrontation' with each other and describes a 'dispersed and dislocated' subject rather than a 'continuous and coherent one' (p. 29).

In the situation that Marx describes, the peasant proprietors are represented by a figure who works for an interest other than theirs. Louis Bonaparte is both a portrait but not a proxy and a proxy who is not a portrait – it is this predicament that prompts Marx to think of revolution and repetition as both tragedy and farce.

This description of 'social incoherence' (p. 30) has grievous consequences for the 'subjectivity of a *collective* agency' (p. 31) too because the same artificial process that creates classes in inimical confrontation might produce an identity of interests but not a feeling of community (p. 31). Guha's account of sectarianism and betrayal in the context of militancy is salutary here as is his emphasis on 'that consciousness which is called insurgency'. Because 'class agency (if there were such a thing) is not an ideological transformation of consciousness on the ground level, a desiring identity of the agents and their interest' but rather 'a contestatory *replacement* as well as an *appropriation* (a *supplementation*) of something that is "artificial" to begin with – "economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life"' (pp. 31–32), both Guha and Spivak might be said to offer an exemplary tracing of how the economic factor (the feudal economy within the colonial episteme and the still nascent logic of capital) inscribes the social text (p. 35).

Spivak suggests that the 'essentialist and taxonomic' project of investigating, identifying, and measuring the subaltern (p. 39) fails within the writings of Subaltern Studies because the elite are defined as a deviation from the people who are themselves deviations from the elite and the actions of the elite in different strata of social being were more likely to correspond to each other's than to their place within the social hierarchy of nation. This scenario is complicated further when patriarchal social relations enter the picture. As Spivak explains, 'The subordinated gender following the dominant within the challenge of nationalism while remaining caught within gender oppression is not an unknown story' (p. 39). Spivak's challenge is two-fold: Foucault and Deleuze, and the Subaltern Studies groups and, in my opinion, Chibber, '[believe] in a pure, retrievable form of consciousness' (p. 40) and agency. In the context of elite and colonial historiography, the subaltern's 'itinerary has not been left traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual' (p. 40) which means that subaltern historiography has to determine not only how to touch the consciousness of the people but '[with] what voice-consciousness […] the subaltern [can] speak' (p. 40). In the context of the international division of labour, the shifts from industrial capitalism and mercantile conquest to multinational capital, development and structural adjustment, electronic communications and finance capital, and international subcontracting have created the conditions for the emergence of the new subaltern who is both the source of cheap and permanently casual labour, cut off from the ideology of consumerism, and increasingly the object of credit-baiting, aid, and population control initiatives in the

poorest sectors of the global South (I am relying on Spivak's impressively efficacious account on pp. 41–43). As Spivak indicates, intellectuals such as Foucault, Deleuze, (and Chibber), 'who choose the "naturally articulate" subject of oppression [such articulateness could apply equally to speech and action]' (O'Hanlon 1988, p. 42), 'must question [their] implicit demand […] that such a subject come through a history that is a foreshortened mode-of-production narrative' (pp. 42–43). One has only to recall Spivak's famous interpretation of Mahasweta Devi's 'breast-giver' to discern the problem with imagining the subject of oppression as incorporated into the dialectic between forces and relations of production or into the progressive transition from feudal to capitalist economies. The domestic economy of nature and nurture within bonded labour makes it impossible to determine whether breast milk counts as use or surplus value while rendering the economy in question undecidable – the 'gift' of milk reveals the inadequacy of both. Second, '[within] the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced' (p. 41). The issue for Spivak is not the uncovering of female presences or articulations of female silences within historical evidence and within narratives of exploitation but of interrogating 'the ideological construction of gender [that] keeps the male dominant' 'both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency' (p. 41). This double-effacement is also at stake in O'Hanlon's marvellous questioning of the virility of the subject-agent in discourses of domination and resistance (p. 96), as well as of the emphasis on spectacular and successful and, I would add, collective action. I share with O'Hanlon (and Jean Comaroff and Raymond Williams, from whom she takes her cue) the emphasis on a humbler scale of action, as I do the desire to investigate what constitutes courage, endeavour, sacrifice, heroism, and subversion (pp. 101 and 111) in the examples that I choose to examine.

Perhaps the most salient aspects of Spivak's series of double-sessions on the subaltern have been, in John Beverley's words, 'how the subaltern represents the dominant subject to itself, and thus unsettles that subject, in the form of a negation and displacement' (1999, p. 26) and, in turn, 'how the knowledge we construct and impart as academics is structured by the absence, difficulty, or impossibility of representation of the subaltern' (p. 40). Writing the subaltern is thus, as Guha reminds us, and as Beverley also emphasizes, always a 'writing in reverse' (1999, p. 27). Both versions of 'Can the subaltern speak?' assert the irretrievable heterogeneity of the subaltern because subalternity 'is where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognizable basis of action' (Spivak 2012, p. 431). This position without identity is also to be distinguished from agency, which Spivak defines as 'institutionally validated action, assuming collectivity' and which requires 'infrastructural institutions to make speaking and doing count' (p. 432). Subalterns who are cut off from upward social mobility

are also ‘cut off from the cultural lines that produced the colonial subject’ (Spivak 2000a, p. 325). Spivak does not imagine the subaltern, even though it escapes the logic of capital and the enabling violations of Enlightenment and imperialism, as the rejoinder to class. Instead, in keeping with the spirit of the double session and the productive undoing that is the hallmark of deconstruction (2012, p. 1), Spivak poses the question of subaltern consciousness as ‘the beyond’ of postcolonial discourse, ‘its negation, its condition, its effect’ (Spivak 2000a, p. 332), as the simultaneous injunction to ‘keep intact and destroy’ (p. 332). Roughly a decade later, Spivak describes this tactic as ‘ab-use’ (2012, p. 3), to ‘counteract the fact that the Enlightenment came, to colonizer and colonized alike, through colonialism’ (p. 4). I propose to examine and interpret the examples that appear below as the means ‘to thinking an uneven and only apparently accessible contemporaneity that can no longer be interpreted by such nice polarities as modernity/tradition, colonial/postcolonial’ (p. 2) with this tactic of ab-use in mind; however, I do so in the affirmative spirit in which Spivak describes her ‘concern for preserving the dreams of postcoloniality in the face of globalization’ (2005c, p. 35). This spirit and tactic mark a modest shift from negation and interdiction to imagination.

‘The Indian sanitary pad revolutionary’

Vibeke Venema’s story, ‘The Indian sanitary pad revolutionary’ appeared in *BBC News Magazine* on 3 March 2014. It tells the ‘rags to riches’ (the pun here will become obvious in due course) story of Arunachalam Muruganantham, who was forced to leave school at the age of 14 when his father died and his mother could not support the family on her meagre income as a farm labourer. The headline describes him as a ‘school dropout’ – I prefer to avoid the fecklessness and moral opprobrium that this term implies. As Venema explains, Muruganantham ‘has revolutionized menstrual health for rural women in developing countries by inventing a simple machine they can use to make cheap sanitary pads’. I was first drawn to this story because Muruga is the brother of Ayyappa in Hindu mythology. The latter’s abode, Sabarimalai, is the destination of an annual pilgrimage, which excludes menstruating girls and women out of respect for Ayyappa’s celibacy. This exclusion has stayed with me because it was a rebellion/trespass I did not manage to accomplish when I was growing up in South India. From such streams of consciousness is analysis born!

Venema goes on to elaborate the circumstances that produced Muruganantham’s patentable invention and his subsequent entrepreneurial success. On discovering that his wife used ‘nasty cloths’ or dirty rags during menstruation rather than sanitary pads because these latter were too expensive and would therefore make it impossible for her to run the household or

buy milk for the family, he attempted to fashion one himself but realized that he would have to wait another month before his wife, Shanthi, could try it. This circumstance led to a journey of discovery and transformation for Muruganantham, his family, and his community. Not only did he discover that only 12 percent of women across India used sanitary pads, the figure was considerably lower among rural women who were more likely to use 'sand, sawdust, leaves and even ash', substances that Venema describes as 'unhygienic'. Besides, the rags themselves were not disinfected by drying them in the sun. Both maternal mortality and reproductive diseases in India are largely the result of 'poor menstrual hygiene'.

The impossibility of finding female volunteers to test his products led to the ingenious creation of a uterus that he pumped full of goat's blood and wore under his clothes to test his sanitary pad's capacity for absorption and to the study of used sanitary pads. Next, he had to discover what sanitary pads were made of and find a way to use the inspiration of his father's wooden handloom to create a machine that would manufacture them. This machine won him a national innovation award and became the foundation of his business which employs poor rural women to work the machines and sell sanitary pads in exchange for money or produce to women who would otherwise be too reluctant to ask for or buy them. Muruganantham has resisted either selling the rights to his patented technology or his business to multinational companies. His aim has been to expand his domain to include similar rural communities in other parts of India, to ensure young girls do not drop out of school when they begin to menstruate, and to create jobs for poor women in other parts of the 'developing' world. He also succeeded in overcoming the ostracism to which his family and community subjected him: his wife and mother left him only to return on hearing of his success five years later. Venema also relates the mixture of prudery, ignorance, custom, superstition, fear, and disgust that turned Muruganantham into an object of ridicule and his obsession into a mark of insanity and possession by evil spirits. As Venema recounts it, he survived this experience with both grace and humour.

I focus on this story because I want to find a way to think the subaltern in contemporaneity rather than only in the annals of colonial or elite historiography and to find a way to reconcile 'unlearning my privilege as my loss' with 'learning to learn from below'. Like Spivak, I can only claim accidents of birth (in India) and location (in Canada) as reasons (as good as any, I suppose) for my choice of examples. I have not been quite sure I understood 'the excess of the sexuate' as Spivak and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan describe it, as well as the graphematic body as trace of the subaltern in Spivak's narrative of Bhuvaneshwari Bhaduri. Because this excess is poignantly manifested in the menstruating body of Bhaduri, I thought Muruganantham and Shanthi might serve as quotidian or 'idiomatic', as Spivak would prefer, challenges

to the heteronormative value coding of chastity and reproduction. I found the becoming woman and becoming animal dimensions of Muruganantham as male revolutionary charming and touching antidotes to the virile heroism usually attributed to agents of social transformation, a victory for those who inhabit 'the lower frequencies' (Ellison 2001, p. 581). It is certainly a tale of courage and sacrifice, but without self-righteousness or conscious virtue. Spivak has recently designated the rural poor as the new subaltern, with a special place for indigenous life and knowledge that have become targets of genetic engineering and victims of 'stolen harvests', to borrow Vandana Shiva's phrase, in the corporate patenting of intellectual property. Muruganantham's technology is a throwback to industrial capitalism and, indeed, to the self-sufficiency of the cottage industry/handloom rather than a creature of the financialization of the globe. This is certainly a tale of social mobility but undertaken without guarantees and in the name of 'imagination supplementing knowledge', as Spivak defines both aesthetic pedagogy and the ethical relation (2012, p. 104), because Muruganantham must imagine the other as a self in order to make his invention work. His example provocatively uncouples education from literacy and, perhaps more disturbingly, makes his interrupted education the condition for his enterprise and freedom from wage labour. I make this controversial move from 'the subaltern' (as a generality) to 'a subaltern' (as an actual person) in part because of Guha's and Spivak's respective soft spots for the peasant and the rural poor; however, I am equally interested in circumstances that might expose how subalternity is continually generated and transcended and sometimes where we might least expect such a transformation. I found it intriguing to consider what the difference might be between a figure such as Muruganantham whose decline in fortune disenfranchises him and a more familiar perdurable subalternity as well as how one would place his wife in this regard. Besides, his situation illustrates Guha's and Spivak's cautions about the potential for collision rather than coincidence between desire and interest, individual and community, while complicating Chibber's exhortation to collective agency. Spivak's conception of the subaltern attends to what slips unnoticed into master narratives of hegemony and resistance, what sutures their seamlessness, and what exceeds and eludes them. Muruganantham appropriates and reinvents the foreshortened modes of production narrative but he also expands the scope of subalternity to include Spivak's current concern with making subjects *for* democracy such that distributive justice is not only ever an aspiration rather than a realization. The gains are modest, at best, and perhaps only serve to throw into stark relief those who may never acquire such recourse to redress or articulation or agency, but are they then merely corrupt or negligible?

The picture is not completely rosy, of course. Venema's account relies on the tradition/modernity binary, the colonial rhetoric of cleanliness and

moral hygiene to indict women and rural communities mired in superstition, ignorance, and bad physical hygiene, and a patronizing reference to Muruganantham's 'idiosyncratic English'. I also do not share Venema's somewhat condescending sense of 'the clever peasant' – with the hint that if all peasants were so ingenious, they would all be millionaires. Despite its unsettling of the sexuate, the male remains dominant in this construction of gender and development or recoding of the civilizing mission as the cure for maternal mortality and reproductive diseases. Muruganantham is also the architect of globalization from below. Even if he is able to resist the incursions of multinational capital, he still requires the financialization of the globe to pull off his menstrual coup. His rhetoric of empowerment and self-sufficiency works on the register of individualism while forcing a new set of relations among gender, class, and community. His is a tale of downward class mobility with a happy ending (while his father was alive, he appears to have held his own among competing textile mills) and thus different from the demographic Spivak imagines whose poverty is well-nigh primordial. The transformation he effects is at the level of the social inscription of economic conditions; his vision begins, as Chibber might argue, with regard for physical well-being. If gender no longer functions as an alibi for violence abroad or the resurrection of cultural sanctions in diasporic contexts, it is still the alibi for indigenous patriarchy recoded as social or, in this case, medical mission.

Spivak would indicate, borrowing from Raymond Williams' analysis of the dominant appropriating the emergent, that 'revolution' such as Muruganantham's is destined to remain an alternative rather than actively oppositional (2012, p. 435), but I would like to suggest some possibilities that might allow us to recognize change that may have occurred, as Spivak often says, when she was not looking. Muruganantham is not cut off from social mobility but his case certainly reveals the fault lines in the construction of mobility along the axes of gender and class. I like to think of him as the subaltern who brings subalternity to crisis *to speak for* the sexual differential in the coding of heteronormative value. The protection of menstrual health to prevent maternal mortality has undergone ever so slight a shift to the promotion of education and employment for menstruating girls and women rather than only matrimony and the reproductive body. Most significantly, perhaps, the transcendence of subalternity resides, for Spivak, in the patient cultivation of 'rituals of democratic behavior' (2012, p. 439) and the 'uncoercive rearrangement of desires' (2010b, p. 230) rather than only justified self-interest (Chibber's rational regard for well-being). The latter matters, of course, but more is required for the intuition of the public sphere and the creation of a class consciousness that is also a feeling of community. Muruganantham's success is the consequence of rather than the motivation for his initial transgression of taboos. The latter, instead, began with curiosity and love. Spivak warns against turning the investigation of subalternity into a history

of the singular or a celebration of the exception. Certainly, the rags to riches masterplot in which Venema embeds him is so familiar that it appears difficult to separate Muruganantham from these conclusions. I prefer to think of Muruganantham's story as the iconoclastic power of 'the empirical anomaly' Chibber dismisses so contemptuously because his is not only a story of entrepreneurship. I measure his 'success' equally in terms of the amelioration of the impoverishment of his community as well as in terms of what Spivak would call his persuasive rather than coercive rearrangement of its desire.

The world before her

At the end of her essay 'Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular' Spivak exclaims, 'The Hindu Right is not Subaltern!' (2012, p. 441). The interest exhibited by members of the Subaltern Studies collective in the mediation of subaltern insurgency by multiple sources of authority within peasant communities including rumour, custom, superstition, and religiosity provoked Sumit Sarkar, an erstwhile member of the project, to worry that the collective was turning words such as secular, rational, and progressive into objects of ridicule and thus inadvertently feeding into the Hindu Right's blaming secularism for all the ills of the modern nation-state (see Sarkar 2000, pp. 300–323). Chibber's imputation of Orientalism and irrationalism to members of the collective was preceded by Sarkar's defence of the proper material mode in Marxist historiography. It is this debate that no doubt prompts Spivak's impassioned response.

I turn to Nisha Pahuja's documentary, *The world before her*, to explore the contradictions that emerge when the lines of social mobility converge on the figure of the Indian woman in the fabric(ation) of cultural modernity. Pahuja's startling move is to render (invented) tradition and (belated) modernity coeval when she follows the lives of Ruhi (a contestant in the Miss India pageant) and Prachi (a militant in training in the Durga Vahini wing of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a prominent branch of the Hindu Right). The distinctions between these opposed worlds begin to fade and blur as the film proceeds, transposing emancipation into the realm of the undecidable rather than the exclusive province of tradition or modernity and revealing the system of gendering that constrains and constructs social mobility and individual personality.

While the contestants are plucked, primped, and polished, their modesty shamed and privacy invaded, and are even paraded in sacks with eyeholes (making them resemble the Ku Klux Klan) to maintain the focus on the shape and beauty of their legs, the young militants undergo a different brand of social engineering designed to inculcate hate and vengeance and learn how to bear arms but also, surprisingly, how to acquire self-confidence, dignity, courage, sacrifice, respect for the sanctity of their bodies, and techniques of self-defence. Both these sites give a whole new meaning to the

rote learning that characterizes the neglected schools where Spivak, with painstaking slowness and unwavering commitment, has engaged in pedagogical training of both teacher and student, establishing an ethics of relation rather than only one of knowledge. Prachi forgives her father's bouts of violence because he let his infant daughter live, while another contestant recalls her mother's sacrifice in choosing her daughter's life against her husband's wishes and despite the subsequent loss of her marriage and source of financial support. Both women thus live in the shadow of female infanticide. Prachi also believes her father was justified in burning her when he caught her lying, thus shedding light on the dangerous and ennobling rectitude of her existence. While the beauty contestants appear to be divesting themselves of the heteronormative coding of value in pursuing their dreams of fame and fortune, they actually unwittingly reinforce it in marrying their desirability with their market value. Ruhi basks in the haven of her family that promotes her every aspiration and welcomes her back into the fold when she loses while Prachi discovers that tradition is no refuge. The young militants inexorably lose all their softness, compassion, and empathy, acquiring a hard shell in which Prachi too revels. She is plain and fierce rather than beautiful and pliant and wishes to sacrifice herself for the cause, believing marriage is the obstacle to her desire rather than its fulfilment. It is not clear whether she or her father will win this battle; in an intriguing scene where the family watches the beauty pageant, Prachi's mother expresses her admiration for the young contestants' courage in making themselves vulnerable to scrutiny, for braving the world. She contradicts her husband's outrage at modern women who lack respect for themselves and their traditions, seemingly without fear of reprisal.

The film's relentless defeat of viewer expectations culminates in the close-up of Prachi with which we leave the film, confirming that she, rather than the beauty contestants, has the world before her. The double entendre of the word 'before' does not escape our notice either. Prachi's loneliness and resolve, and the violence that she suffers as well as the violence she embraces require 'the labor of affect' on our parts but interrupt 'the movement from affect to ethical response' (Sunder Rajan 2010, p. 128). In other words, our ethical response relies only on a reluctant sympathy for or identification with her desiring subjectivity because of the scandal of the cause she represents and because we cannot say with certainty that her desire and her power have been *coercively* rearranged. Neither category of woman in this film escapes the codings of various systems such as nationalism and capitalism and neither is denied access to social and cultural mobility or to intuitions of the public sphere; therefore, neither qualifies as subaltern. If, as Rajeswari Sunder Rajan suggests, Spivak is interested in the system of gendering rather than only women's oppression, then they do merit consideration not as embodiments of the subaltern as entity but as determined by 'the Hindu

regulative psychobiography' (2010, p. 126) of the gendered subaltern. A woman like Prachi becomes, to my mind, immediately fascinating because this psychobiography dictates the conditions under which she acquires voice and agency rather than, as we might expect, becomes instrumental to her silence and passivity or at least to the illegibility of her actions. Prachi fulfils rather than destabilizes its potential. It is the prospect of her death that infuses her with life while her commitment to sacrifice allows her to escape the heteronormative coding of value and yet, while we may understand her, we cannot mourn her in quite the same way we do the sati or Bhaduri. Why is it easier to insert the beauty contestants within a system of gendering that generates violence against women than to insert the young female militants in similar fashion? The political violence for which Prachi will become responsible in the name of (Hindu) tradition does not qualify her easily for the name of terrorist or of revolutionary because she is both the aggressor and the victim. Prachi is the excess that eludes both solidarity and betrayal, and both hegemony and subalternity, who will not become figurable in death just as she remains illegible in life. Put another way, Ruhi and Prachi cancel each other out thus leaving viewers in a double-bind, as Spivak defines it.

I wanted to find out whether the category of the subaltern was more supple than proscriptive without compromising the stringent ethical relation to representation Spivak demands of its deployment. The rigour and resonance of Spivak's 'Can the subaltern speak?' are consequences of her careful explanation of how the postcolonial present continually forecloses on subalternity which remains a vanishing or receding horizon in both radical and hegemonic discourse. Perhaps because I like to contemplate more than bleak scenarios once in a while I wondered how subalternity might retain its inclusive character rather than only wear the badge of exclusion. Muruganantham's story offers a different lens on tradition and modernity, compromising the logic of development and the missionary impulses of both science and technology, but, to my mind, the contingency and unpredictability of his emergence, as well as the absence of socio-economic and political guarantees that his triumph can be readily replicated or poverty and illiteracy (in its broadest sense) eradicated, are precisely what make his 'subalternity' convincing. By the same token, he has succeeded in improving his family's and community's prospects and thus his ingenuity and perseverance do matter – some denizens of the lower frequencies succeed some of the time. His story, however, foregrounds how the masculine remains dominant even in a situation where the focus of his energies is the lives and physiognomy of women. For this reason, I was drawn to the tale of Prachi and Ruhi as exemplary of the traffic between tradition and modernity in the fabric of nation and the self-fashioning or soul-making of its women. Again, the contradiction between the inevitability of the regulative psychobiography they live

and their relative privilege (also Spivak's point where Bhaduri is concerned) made me think more deeply, *pace* Tennyson, of how subalternity always consigns women to the shadows of labour and representation. Shanti and her mother-in-law ride on the coattails of Murugantham's success and it is their desire that has to be (gently) re-arranged while the language of voice and autonomy does not prevent either Ruhi or Prachi from playing their parts in a pre-determined script. In this sense, Spivak's cautions about women and revolutionary agency proved instructive for *both* poor and middle-class women, making it possible to expand the possibilities of subalternity in a different sense.

Afterthoughts

I had not read Spivak's artful review of Chibber's *Postcolonial theory and the specter of capital* when I completed the first draft of this essay. On the prompting of my editors, I did peruse it, and was pleased to discover that our respective responses to his work were in mutual accord. I will not reproduce her simultaneously excoriating wit and discerning critique (her essay deserves to be relished in its entirety), and the similarity of my contentions to hers will be obvious to anyone who has read her review, but I do want to express the hope that my essay has gone some way towards addressing what she describes as having 'no foothold in his book except as an object of mockery' (p. 197). I say this in retrospect not simply as a gesture of homage but because my aim throughout has been to take seriously the question of the subaltern in contemporaneity and to acknowledge Spivak's own example as a supple thinker whose thinking on this issue has itself undergone considerable change while maintaining both historicity and nuance. Moreover, in noting Spivak's subtle and tongue-in-cheek reference to herself in the third person in this review, thus recalling not only her painstaking interrogation of knowledge and representation in her signature piece (I evoke writing rather than speaking deliberately here), but the crucial distinction between ideology and psychology that she convincingly demonstrates Chibber ignores, I want to emphasize that my interpretation of the examples I have chosen is conducted in the spirit of Spivak's signal contributions to the production of subalternity: reading as 'the transactional or performative relationship with the social fabric, the social textile, the social text' (2005c, p. 27) and what she described as analysis of 'subject-formation producing the reflexive basis for self-conscious social agency' (in Spivak and Barlow 2004, p. 153).

The title of this essay alludes to Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott' because I wanted to begin with the scene of (feminine) desire and representation, with the moment when the Lady's articulation of desire shatters the mirror of representation and seals her fate (Tennyson 1842). While she inscribes her name

before dying, it does not signify when her body is discovered and her intention and action remain inscrutable to Lancelot, the object of her desire, who offers an empty, if kindly, prayer for grace on her behalf. I was struck by the similarity between the structure of the figures in question (Spivak's Rani of Sirmur also comes to mind) that illustrates how the regulative psychobiography of female desire and agency transcends divisions wrought by class and colonialism. I dwell on this aspect in order to explain why my examples are concerned with anomaly and aporia but also with the logic of parabasis that reveals how figures come to acquire referential productivity (2005c, p. 21). In other words, Spivak's tribute to de Man asserts that the latter's insistence on interruption and undoing, on how figures interrupt and thus undo the expectations of a given moment or referent, is, for her, 'the description of the resistance fitting our time' (2005c, p. 28).

The world before her piqued my curiosity because it seemed to elaborate upon Spivak's intuition that 'the internal split of cultural difference within the same culture … may be the real motor of cultural change' (Sharpe and Spivak 2003, p. 618). Spivak describes this as 'international civil society [crossing] borders in the name of woman' (p. 618), as the crisscrossing of global finance with human development and the discourse of human rights. What Pahuja impressively explores, however, is what Spivak only briefly describes as 'the negotiation of sexual difference and the relationship between the sacred and profane […] spell[ing] out the rhythms of culture' (p. 618). The film traces the fracturing and simultaneous reinvention of modernity in and through the registers of the sacred and the profane, neither of which is innocent of violence against women. Their juxtaposition rather than contradiction explains why 'fundamentalism' is not in opposition to 'modernity' and why the control and distribution of social and cultural capital are dependent upon female bodies both suffering and exercising violence. The move from colonial historiography to woman-in-modernity allows me to shift the emphasis from inserting 'the subaltern into the circuit of hegemony' (Spivak 2000b, p. 111) to considering what happens to women who have neither moved away from customary ways of life nor have remained squarely rooted within it (Spivak, discussing Mary Maboreke's work, p. 111) as well as to demonstrate what it might mean to note the persistence of the system of gendering within the same cultural idiom rather than within the struggle between brown and white men over women's desire and agency. Pahuja traces 'the irreducible and determining production of subalternization in all systems using capital' (Spivak 2009) revealing the inadequacy of a project of resistance such as Chibber's that is blind to nuance and excess as well as impatient with the moment of transition on the road to transformation. Attention to the crucial engendering of such transitions would tell a different story about revolution and nationalism.

The 'deconstructive caution' (Spivak 2000a, p. 332) that Spivak exercises throughout her writings equally characterizes my deployment of the 'sanitary

pad revolutionary' as does my commitment to interruption as a method of reading. I take seriously Spivak's caution against celebrating sex education initiatives 'without prior incentives to sustained social redistribution' or without recognizing that 'the absence of resources makes it impossible to think of male and female children becoming equally competitive in future' (2009). By the same token, I want to insist that his is a small example of the fostering of the will to social justice, the cultivation of democratic reflexes, that Spivak equally endorses (2005b), as well as a fine attempt to yoke the demand for human rights to the righting of wrongs (2005b). To my mind, Muruganantham embodies what Spivak identifies as 'a strategy-driven' rather than crisis-driven globalization, stepping 'into a modernity not forever marked by the west and contrasted to a tradition necessarily defined as static' (2000b, p. 109). Pahuja's film reveals a similar predicament but with far more disturbing consequences. Muruganantham describes not radical alterity as such, but subaltern consciousness, the making of a subject for democracy and development, the step beyond that, for the moment, negates the restriction within (Spivak 2000a, p. 332).

Notes

1. Peter Hallward defines the singular, or any singularizing entity, as 'constituent of itself, expressive of itself, immediate to itself'; 'it becomes what it fundamentally *is* through its transcendence of relations with other sorts of social or political power'; the singular acts without criteria, or, to express this in another way, its criteria are utterly immanent to its action, or its efforts towards self-actualization (Hallward 2001, pp. 3, 7). That is, the singular transcends all relations. Hallward has no quibble with the concept of the singular per se, only with the political and cultural implications of the singularizing thought adopted by the major postcolonial thinkers. He argues that postcolonial theory operates in the singular mode. The consequences of this are that these singularizing modes of thought, which create their own mediums of existence or expansion, and which operate without external criteria, defeat or evade any efforts at mediation or adaption because they are fundamentally non-relational. Singularizing thought cannot even be called theory as such, he argues, because it cannot be applied to different contexts as it is in the process of becoming or creating its own object of inquiry – itself. As I hope will become clear, Spivak's attention to singularity bears no resemblance to Hallward's version. Making the subaltern singular in Hallward's sense would, for her, be tantamount to rendering wretchedness normal, permanent, and inevitable.
2. Spivak describes *Postcolonial theory and the specter of capital* as 'a book that has no feminist concern' (2014, p. 184); thus, my use of 'him' while referring to the Eastern agent of his imagining is deliberate.

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