

writers and filmmakers of contemporary Africa? Or only with *Beowulf* and the *Mahabharata*? One looks forward to an alternative literary historiography of postcoloniality critical of the hierarchical imprint of "the Commonwealth," or, as today, a thinking that situates the postcolonial as a moment in the history of cultural politics.

Who Claims Alterity?

AS A POSTCOLONIAL, I am concerned with the appropriation of "alternative history" or "histories." I am not a historian by training. I cannot claim disciplinary expertise in remaking history in the sense of rewriting it. But I can be used as an example of how historical narratives are negotiated.¹ The parents of my parents' grandparents' grandparents were made over, not always without their consent, by the political, fiscal, and educational intervention of British imperialism, and now I am independent. Thus I am, in the strictest sense, a postcolonial. As a caste Hindu, I had access to the culture of imperialism, although not the best or most privileged access. Let me, then, speak to you as a citizen of independent India, and raise the necessary critical and cautionary voice about false claims to alternate histories. False claims and false promises are not euphoric topics. I am also a feminist who is an old-fashioned Marxist and some of that will enter into this discussion of the cultural politics of alternative historiographies.

How are historical narratives put together? In order to get to something like an answer to that question, I will make use of the notions of writing and reading in the most general sense. We produce historical narratives and historical explanations by transforming the *socius*, upon which our production is written into more or less continuous and controllable bits that are readable.² How these readings emerge and which ones get sanctioned have political implications on every possible level.

The masterwords implicated in Indian decolonization offered four great legitimizing codes consolidated by the national bourgeoisie by way of the culture of imperialism: nationalism, internationalism, secularism,

culturalism. If the privileged subject operated by these codes masquerades as the subject of an alternative history, we must mediate upon how they (we) are written, rather than simply read their masque as historical exposition.

Writing and reading in such general senses mark two different positions in relation to the uneven many-strandedness of "being." Writing is a position where the absence of the weaver from the web is structurally necessary. Reading is a position where I (or a group of us with whom I share an identificatory label) make this anonymous web my own, even as I find in it a guarantee of my existence as me, one of us. Between the two positions, there are displacements and consolidations, a disjunction in order to conjugate a representative self. (Even solitude is framed in a representation of absent others.) In the arena of cultural politics, whose disciplinary condition and effect are history, anthropology, and cultural studies, this disjunction/conjunction is often ignored. The socius, it is claimed, is not woven in the predication of writing, not text-ile. It is further claimed that, when we push ourselves, or the objects of our study, forward as agents of an alternative history, our own emergence into the court of claims is not dependent upon the transformation and displacement of writing into something readable. By that reasoning, we simply discover or uncover the socius and secure the basis of cultural or ethnic power through the claim to knowledge. By that reasoning, power is collective, institutional, political validation. I do not advise giving up this practical notion of power. If, however, we "re-make history" only through this limited notion of power as collective validation, we might allow ourselves to become instruments of the crisis-management of the old institutions, the old politics. We forget at our peril that we get out of joint with the pre-text, the writing of our desire for validation, which one can only grasp by being "nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength some are endowed with; it is the name that one lends to a complex strategical situation in a particular society," so that one can read that writing.³

I will soon go on to discuss Indian postcoloniality from this perspective. But first I will make a brief detour via Marx.

Of all the tools for developing alternative histories—gender, race, ethnicity, class—class is surely the most abstract. It is only when we forget this that we can set aside class-analysis as essentialist. In the volumes of *Capital*, Marx asks the German worker to grasp, as a preliminary to the planned change involved in remaking history, the abstract determinations of what is otherwise merely suffered as concrete misery.⁴ In the language

that I have been using, one might summarize Marx as saying that the logic of capitalism weaves the socius like the textile of a particular set of relationships. Power and validation within this socius are secured by de-tying that web and transforming/displacing it into "natural" readability. I think it is not excessive to see these general senses of reading and writing at work, for example, when Marx asks the worker to understand (read?) the coat s/he produces as having more signification than it does as itself. Capital is a writing, which we must not read merely in terms of producing objects for use, a few for ourselves and many more for others, and not being given enough money to get more for ourselves. Reading the archives of capitalism, Marx produces a critique, not of cultural, but of economic politics—hence a critique of political economy, political economism.⁵ In the current global postcolonial context, our model must be a critique of political culture, political culturalism, whose vehicle is the writing of readable histories, mainstream or alternative. I think it might be useful to write power in Marx this way: "power is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation"—the social relations of production—forming a particular society, where 'society' is shorthand for the dominance of (a) particular mode(s) of production of value."

The most useful way to think value is as something "contentless and simple" that must be presupposed as the name of the possibility of measuring what is produced by the human body/mind machine—a thing that is not pure form, cannot appear by itself, and is immediately coded.⁶ As Gayle Rubin on the one hand and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari on the other have suggested, in their very different ways, this coding operation is not merely economic; it can be understood in the fields of gendering and colonialism.⁷ This does not involve allegiance to the narrative of the evolution of the modes of production as the only lexicon of readability, or the presupposition that class-analysis is the only instrument of readability. (As for the strategy for dealing with the sexism of Marxists, it seems to me not very different from that for dealing with the sexism of non—or anti—Marxists.)

Yet this counterintuitive thought of value should not make us imagine that we can ourselves escape the codes inscribing the real. We are obliged to deal in narratives of history, even believe them. In fact, it is easier to believe in Marx's historical passions than in his methodological delicacy, and many of us feel that to label one ideology and the other science is only provisionally justified in situations of political calculation. In the celebrated postface to the second edition of *Capital*, Marx offers us a historical narrative: he argues that Germany was unable to develop the

discipline of political economy more or less because in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it had not participated in the first stages of the development of industrial capitalism. Hence Germany had no *bona fide* political economists, who were the ideologues of industrial capitalism. When German savants talked political economy, they produced a bizarre *Mischmasch der Kenntnisse*—a jumble of knowledges.

The peculiar historical development of German society (that the capitalist mode of production came to maturity there after its antagonistic character had already been revealed), therefore excluded any original development of “bourgeois” economics there, *but did not exclude its critique*. In so far as such a critique represents a class, it can only represent [*vertreten*] the class whose historical task is the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production and the final abolition of all classes—the proletariat. (C 1, pp. 95, 98; emphasis added)

The position implicit in the work of the “Subaltern Studies” group of historians is that, since the colonies were not the theater of the development of industrial-capitalist class differentiation, if postcolonial intellectuals keep themselves strictly to the discourse of class-analysis and class-struggle, they might produce a *Mischmasch der Kenntnisse*. The peculiar historical development of colonial society, however, does not exclude the critique of class-analysis as a normative imposition of the instrument of reading. Insofar as such a critique represents a group with a name, it is the subaltern.⁸

It seems obvious to some of us that the disenfranchised female in de-colonized space, being doubly displaced by it, is the proper carrier of a critique of pure class-analysis. Separated from the mainstream of feminism, this figure, the figure of the gendered subaltern, is singular and alone.⁹ Insofar as such a figure can be represented among us, in the room where this piece was first given as a talk, it is, first, as an object of knowledge, further, as a native-informant style subject of oral histories who is patronizingly considered incapable of strategy toward us, and finally, as imagined subject/object, in the real field of literature. There is, however, a rather insidious fourth way. It is to obliterate the differences between this figure and the indigenous elite woman abroad, and claim the subjectship of an as-yet-unreadable alternative history that is only written in the general sense I invoke above. (This has now become altogether more material in globalization and alter-globalization.)

This fourth person is a “diasporic postcolonial,” or a cosmopolitan postcolonial who is the typical participant in international civil society. Who or what is she? (The central character of Mahasweta Devi’s “The Hunt,” altogether different from the two figures described above, my chief

literary example of remaking history in this piece, negotiates a space that can, not only historically but philosophically, be accessible to her.)

We all know that the world was divided into three on the model of the three estates in the mid-1940s when neocolonialism began.¹⁰ We also know that, during the immediately preceding period of monopoly capitalist territorial conquest and settlement, a class of functionary-intelligentsia was often produced who acted as buffers between the foreign rulers and the ruled.¹¹ These are the “colonial subjects,” formed with varying degrees of success, generally, though not invariably, out of the indigenous elite. At decolonization, this is the “class” (as I indicate above, class-formation in colonies is not exactly like class-formation in the metropolis) that becomes the “national bourgeoisie,” with a hand in the carving out of “national identities” by methods that cannot break formally with the system of representation that offered them an episteme in the previous dispensation: a “national” buffer between the ruler and the ruled.

A good deal of this repetition of the colonial episteme in the presumed rupture of postcoloniality will come into play in Mahasweta’s story. For the moment let us hold onto the fact that de-colonization does quite seriously represent a rupture for the colonized. It is counterintuitive to point at its repetitive negotiations. But it is precisely these counterintuitive imaginings that must be grasped when history is said to be remade, and a rupture is too easily declared because of the intuition of freedom that a merely political independence brings for a certain class. Such graspings will allow us to perceive that neocolonialism is a displaced repetition of many of the old lines laid down by colonialism. They will also allow us to realize that the stories (or histories) of the postcolonial world are not necessarily the same as the stories coming from “internal colonization,” the way the metropolitan countries discriminate against disenfranchised groups in their midst.¹² And the contemporaneity of globalization has dated these instruments of analysis. The diasporic postcolonial can take advantage (most often unknowingly, I hasten to add) of the tendency to conflate the three in the metropolis. Thus this frequently (though not invariably) innocent informant, identified and welcomed as the agent of an alternative history, may indeed be the site of a chiasmus, the crossing of a double contradiction: the system of production of the national bourgeoisie at home, and, abroad, the tendency to represent neocolonialism by the semiotic of “internal colonization.”

Throw into this chiasmic field a phenomenon I invoke often: the shift into transnationalism in the early 1970s through the computerization of the big stock exchanges (this was my way of presaging “globalization” in

the early 1980s).¹³ Of course, changes in the mode of production of value do not bring about matching changes in the constitution of the subject. But one is often surprised to notice how nearly the ruses change in the arena that engages in coding subject-production: cultural politics. And the universities, the journals, the institutes, the exhibitions, the publishers' series are rather overtly involved here. Keeping the banal predictability of the cultural apparatus in transnational society firmly in mind, it can be said that the shift into transnationalism brought a softer and more benevolent third worldism into the Euramerican academy. This was indeed a *ricorso* from the basically conservative social scientific approach that matched the initial dismantling of the old empires. It is in this newer context that the postcolonial diasporic can have the role of an ideologue. This "person" (although we are only naming a subject-position here), belonging to a basically collaborative elite, can be uneasy for different kinds of reasons with being made the object of unquestioning benevolence as an inhabitant of the new third world. (S)he is more at home in producing and simulating the effect of an older world constituted by the legitimizing narratives of cultural and ethnic specificity and continuity, all feeding an almost seamless national identity—a species of "retrospective hallucination."¹⁴

This produces a comfortable "other" for transnational postmodernity, "ground-level activity," "emergent discourses." The radical critic can turn her attention on this hyperreal third world to find, in the name of an alternative history, an arrested space that reproaches postmodernity. In fact, most postcolonial areas have a class-specific access to the society of information-command telematics inscribed by microelectronic transnationalism. And indeed, the discourse of cultural specificity and difference, packaged for transnational consumption along the lines sketched above, is often deployed by this specific class. What is dissimulated by this broad-stroke picture is the tremendous complexity of postcolonial space, especially womanspace.¹⁵

As I must keep repeating, remaking history is a tall order, and we must not take collective enthusiasm or conviction as its sole guarantee. In order to emphasize this point, I will fall into the confessional mode, give you an insider's view of what it "feels like" to taste the freedom offered by political independence in its specific historical moment.

My academic generation in India, approaching seventy now, were children at the time of the Indian Independence, unlike the "midnight's children" who were born with the Independence, and served Salmaan Rushdie to symbolize the confusion of a new nation seeing itself only as rupture, a monstrous birth.¹⁶ These children of the middle class have become

college and university teachers, cultural workers, government servants, political activists, the women household managers with a foot in the women's movement, the professors, the arts. I know surprisingly few executives or scientists as old friends. Our childhood and adolescence were marked by a dying fall that had to be rearranged as an upbeat march. We were not old enough to analyze, indeed sometimes to know, the details of the scenario until later. Those years marked the collapse of the heritage of nineteenth-century liberalism out of which the nationalist alibi for decolonization had been painstakingly fabricated. We could not know then, although it was being bred into our bones, that the people were not behaving like a nation, that the dubious euphoria of 1947, division and violence barely managed, was now turning into a species of *jawaharlalvisādayoga*—the Sorrow of Jawaharlal—out of which a chaufeur of a different kind would drive the national automobile into a new and changed space called the Indian Union.¹⁷ It was beyond our grasp to understand that the grandeur of an internationalist "national" commitment within a necessarily furtive left under imperialism—the undivided Communist Party of India—was just as necessarily breaking up into a split-level insertion into electoral politics. Yet our academic humanist generation would hear the political melancholy of this change. We wrote essays in our school magazines at Gandhi's murder. Yet we had already, in the curious logic of children, settled the "partition riots" (between Hindus and Muslims at Independence), like the "famine of '43" (artificially produced by the British government in order to feed the military during World War II), marked a past that our present had pushed firmly back. In other words, as middle-class children and adolescents, my academic generation was thrust in the space of remaking history, negotiating a new history. This is the subject-position of the children of the national bourgeoisie in decolonization. The adolescent imagination could be persuaded that the disturbing reminders of the past were no more than the ashes that the phoenix leaves behind as s/he leaps into the air reborn. We were already marked by this excusing structure (productive of unexamined allegories of nationalism) when, like everyone else, we perceived that, in terms of religious fundamentalism as a social formation, every declared rupture with the past is always also a repetition. Today's monumentalizing of the "partition" as unspeakable, and the dismissal of the partition of East India because unmanageably cultural-negotiatory, seems a displacement of that structure.

The potential executives, scientists, and professionals from that generation were the first big brain drain to the United States. If, as children and adolescents, they suffered the same contradictions that I

mention above, they understood them, I think, more in terms of broken promises.

These people, mostly men, did well in the United States. By and large, they did not trouble themselves about the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s in this country. Hard-working, ambitious, and smart, they were upwardly class mobile to begin with. They received some of the benefits of the struggles they did not join. As the only colored community (although, like the colonial subject of the previous dispensation, they basically identified with the whites) in the United States that did not have a history of oppression on the soil, they were often used in affirmative action employment and admission where blacks, Hispanics, and "Asian-Americans" (meaning U.S. citizens of Chinese and Japanese extraction) were bypassed. The constitution of the Indian community is changing rapidly, and beginning to assume some of the more working-class and small bourgeois dimensions of the Indian diaspora in the Afro-Caribbean and Great Britain. It can nonetheless be said, I think, that the first generation of Indian-Americans, just entering university, often innocently searching for their "roots" and their "heritage" (following a route laid down by internal colonization), are the children of the people I have been describing. Some of these young women and men will no doubt lend a certain confessional authenticity to third worldist alternative histories in the coming years. (It might be more interesting for them to intervene in internal colonizing in India, but that suggestion, at that time beside the point, is now happening, with "India rising," and is still beside the point of this chapter, though in rather a different way.)

The sources of the tremendous vitality of underclass British subcontinental culture—rigorously to be distinguished from the Indian academic community in Britain—are to be found in the sort of sectarian "household" religion that has been the strength of subaltern consciousness on the subcontinent.¹⁸ The children of this community (the underclass British subcontinentals) are now producing the "indy-pop" or "panjabi new wave" music that can already be compared in the politics of its provenance to jazz or soul in the United States. These groups are now written up in funky magazines and Sunday supplements of national dailies, listed in city lights, featured in political theater and cinema.¹⁹

A large percentage of the Hindu contingent of Indian-Americans is, in an odd sort of way, fundamentalist. The so-called upanishadic religion of which they promote the fundament is a version of the sanitized Hinduism woven in the nineteenth century, whose most stunning achievement was its co-existence with a polytheism read as personal allegory. It is idle to deny the emancipatory energy of this innovation in its own time. In

contemporary America this emancipatory force is channeled into recording the entry into the great rational abstraction of the constitutional we the people.²⁰ Thus it is that the average cultured "secularist" Hindu Indian-American is often engaged in propagating a fantasmatic Hindu cultural heritage as the flip side of participation in the fantasy of the land of opportunity, a free society ruled by law and the popular mandate. The postcolonial diasporic as native informant finds a nurturing and corroborative space in this group, privileged in India as the non-resident Indian (NRI), and now PIO—"person of Indian origin," carrying a passport that bestows everything but citizenship), who gets investment breaks as well as invitations to opine on the Indian spiritual heritage. This provides a continuous multicultural insertion point into laundered Judaeo-Christianity as secularism in the dominant.²¹

This system of cultural representation and self-representation is the U.S. semiotic field of citizenship and ethnicity. The cultural fantasies of origin of the prominent "ethnic groups" in the United States (including the English and the French) and their imprint on the countries of their origin are well known. (Israel, Ireland, Poland, and Cuba are four other examples.)²² All of these groups (excluding the English) had a history of varieties of oppression on the soil that lent an urgency to the fantasies. In the Indian case, export-import has been speeded up for reasons that I have tried to sketch.

Now, if one returns to the melancholy story of the years of Independence, whose shadow fell on my childhood, then one begins to see that the cultural, communal (religious), and class heterogeneity native to the subcontinent has been asserting itself in spite of the unifying hopes on assorted sides, based on those assorted concept-metaphors: nationalism, secularism, internationalism, culturalism.

Any extended discussion of remaking history in decolonization must take into account the dangerous fragility and tenacity of these concept-metaphors. Briefly, it seems possible to say that an alternative and perhaps equally fragile mode of resistance to them can only come through a strategic acceptance of the centrifugal potential of the plurality and heterogeneity native to the subcontinent. Yet heterogeneity is an elusive and ambivalent resource (except in metropolitan "parliamentary" or academic space), as the recent past in India, and indeed on the globe, have shown. Its direct manipulation for electoral or diplomatic results constitutes devaluation. (Manipulation in commercial interest can lead to a dynamic "public culture.")

It is only in situations like this that institutionally placed cultural workers have the obligation to speak predictively. These scrupulous

interventions are in fact our only contribution to the project of remaking history or sustaining ever-shifting voices with an alternative edge. In a sense our task is to make people ready to listen, and that is not determined by argument. Indirect and maddeningly slow, forever running the risk of demagoguery and coercion mingled with the credulous vanity and class interests of teacher and student, it is still only institutionalized education in the human sciences that is a long-term and collective method for making people want to listen. As far as I can see, remaking (the discipline of) history has its only chance on this unglamorous and often tedious register.²³

Therefore I propose the persistent establishment and re-establishment, the repeated consolidating in undoing, of a strategy of education and classroom pedagogy attending to provisional resolutions of oppositions as between secular and nonsecular, national and subaltern, national and international, cultural and socio-political by teasing out their complexity.²⁴ Such a strategy of strategies must speak "from within" the emancipatory master narratives even while taking a distance from them. It must resolutely hold back from offering phantasmic, hegemonic, nativist counter-narratives that implicitly honor the historical withholding of the "permission to narrate." The new culturalist alibi, working within a basically elitist culture industry, insisting on the continuity of a native tradition untouched by a Westernization whose failures it can help to cover, legitimizes the very thing it claims to combat.

In a longer piece of which this is a part, I go on now to deal with the emphasis on technical education in contemporary India, and suggest some alternatives. That discussion would be pertinent to comments on "re-making history" with India as its space of agency. That it is not pertinent here should remind us that our perfectly appropriate collection is still within a "parochial decanonization debate."²⁵ Remaining then within the system(s) of representation negotiated by internal colonization, let me simply remark that the kind of predictive pedagogy that I engage in the longer piece is, however hardheaded, always to come.

That peculiar space, of a future that is not a future present, can be inhabited by paralogical figures.²⁶ In chapter 3 of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* I have attended to two such paralogical figures. I have indicated in this essay why the subaltern female seems particularly meaningful within postcolonial themes. I will now look, therefore, at such a paralogical literary case that rewrites ethnicity and reads race appropriatively—in the strong senses of reading and writing that I brought up earlier.

I will look again at Mahasweta Devi's "The Hunt."²⁷

In the previous pages, I have suggested that the disavowal of postcoloniality in the name of nativist ethnicist culturalism is a species of collaboration with neocolonialism, especially in its benevolent instance. Not to be able to see error on the other side is to feed the arrogance of the benevolent neocolonialist conscience. By contrast, Mahasweta's story makes visible the suggestion that the postcolonial negotiates with the structures of violence and violation that have produced her.

History cannot be reversed or erased out of nostalgia. The remaking of history involves a renegotiation with the structures that have produced the individual as agent of history. In "The Hunt," the figure for this negotiation is the rewriting of ethnicity and the reappropriation of rape. And the name of the agent of this remaking is Mary Oraon.

A word on "figure." I do not mean to read Mary as the representative of the postcolonial, or as an example of directly imitable correct practice. I am looking rather at the logic of her figuration, at the mechanics of the fabrication of the figure called Mary. I will read the fabrication of the narrative in this way as well. Our usual way of reading involves character and plot. Often we call our reading "political" if we read these two items as allegorical in the narrow sense. My reading of the figuration of Mary and her story is not unrelated to these practices, but tries to take into account that the line between aesthetics and politics is neither firm nor straight.²⁸

Mary Oraon. Oraon is the name of one of the largest of the three-hundred-odd tribes of India. In Hindi, the national language, the tribes are called *adivasis* (original inhabitants; see my comment on p. 568, note 9). In English, they are referred to collectively as the "scheduled" tribes, because of the special sanctions (honored altogether in the breach) written for them in the Indian constitution. With the "scheduled" castes, the lowest Hindu castes (the outcastes), these original inhabitants are the official subalterns of the Republic of India. In the language of the government as well as that of political activists they are the SCSTs (Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes, where "schedule" stands for "quota"). They are outside of the seven religions listed in the Indian national anthem: Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Islam, and Christianity. This then is Mary, simply Oraon, simply identified with her tribe. But she was christened Mary. Her father was a white planter who raped her mother before leaving India for Australia. If we think of the postcolonial, figuratively, as the living child of a rape, the making of Mary is, rather literally, its figuration. She is not a "true" tribal.

Mary, servant in the house of a caste Hindu, is and is not a Christian. All the appropriate categories are blurred in postcoloniality.²⁹ Her mother

stopped being a Christian when a Hindu in independent secular rural India would not hire her for fear of caste contamination. Mary will marry a Muslim. This negotiability of "religions" is rather different from the official post-Enlightenment secularist agenda, devastated, as I have mentioned earlier, by the violent communalism on the soil.

It is not only secularism as defined through the culture of imperialism that is put into question in Mahasweta's story. The reinscription of post-coloniality as the product of an enabling violation puts the militant "tribal" in the place of the bourgeois intellectual as its representative figuration. (Today secularism is a double bind for me: the need to keep in place a secularist law that took for granted that educated Judaeo-Christian, educated Muslim-Buddhist-Hindu, etc. protected the intuition of the transcendental through an inherited humanism, seemingly privatizing it in favor of the rule of law.)

Every detail in that figuration shuttles between "literal" and "metaphorical." Admiration for the courage of the White, for example, is part of the subaltern repertoire. Thus Jalim, Mary's boyfriend, comments on her insistence upon the commitment of marriage rather than mere cohabitation. "Yes, there is something true in Mary, the power of Australian blood" (IM, p. 3). She herself puts it with an impersonal rage against her mother that can provide a text for decoding: "When you see a white daughter you kill her right away. Then there are no problems." "What about you if she'd killed," one of the tribal boys asks. "I wouldn't have been" (IM, p. 5).

Describing her mind-set authorially, Mahasweta writes: "She would have rebelled if they had imposed the harsh injunctions of their own society upon her. She is unhappy that they don't. In her in-most heart there is somewhere a longing to be part of the Oraons. She would have been very glad if, when she was thirteen or fourteen, some brave Oraon lad had pulled her into marriage" (IM, p. 6).

Mahasweta is careful not to privilege this mind-set into the self-marginalizing or self-anthropologizing ethnic's project of dining out as an exile or an expression of her semi-tribal voice-consciousness. The provenance of this scenario and these sentiments is the one or two Hindi films Mary has seen. The overcoming of caste and creed barriers for the sake of love is one of the basic themes of the immensely productive Hindi film industry, now somewhat misleadingly called Bollywood.³⁰

The description of Mary's everyday life as a bridge between the "outside world" (represented by the obscure rural township of Tobri) and the arrested space of Kuruda (the little community on the borders of which the tribals live) is orchestrated to provide empirical sanction for Mary

Oraon as the name of woman, worker, postcolonial. I will pass over that rich text and focus on the moment when, "suddenly one day, stopping the train, Collector Singh descends with Prasadji's son, and Mary's life is troubled, a storm gathers in Kuruda's quiet and impoverished existence" (IM, p. 6).

The train no longer stops at Kuruda, as it did in British India, when the white planters lived there. The train is a widely current metonym for the unifying project of territorial imperialism, the "colonialism" of which Mary is the postcolonial.³¹

"Collector"—a petty revenue collector under the British raj—could be a proper name or a descriptive honorific. The man acts with what Lukacs would have called "typicality." He violates the land by selling the sal forests of the area, cheating the small landowners of a fair price. He violates the tribe by employing them as wage labor at a murderous rate of exploitation and entertains them with quantities of liquor and a travesty of the commodified so-called mass-culture of the West. In fact, the story of the silent sal forests is also a carefully articulated historical metonym. As follows:

The ecology of the sal tree is thoroughly intertwined with the precapitalist communal economy and social relations of the tribes. Its transformation into colonial constant capital was performed through the imposition and production of the elaborate social relations of white planter and tribal servant. The transformation of the culture of imperialism in post-coloniality is figured forth by the incompetent but good-natured Indians living in the nooks and crannies of the great plantation houses. The real legatee of the imperialist economic text, the necessary trajectory from high bourgeois to petty bourgeois social manipulation under decolonization, is the despicable Collector Singh, who renobilizes the sal forest into constant capital and the tribals into variable capital without inserting them into generalized commodity exchange.³² Marx described this a hundred years ago as "capital's mode of exploitation without its mode of production."³³ Mary Oraon, the not-quite-not-tribal, not-quite-not-Indian, is the not-quite-not-self-conscious, not-quite-not-self-identical agent who would defeat this continuous narrative of exploitation.

I will not focus on this aspect of the story either. For our present purposes, I must concentrate on Mary's appropriation of the structure of rape as not-quite-not-man. And here, the aspect of Collector Singh that becomes important is his attempt to violate Mary sexually and his various related exchanges with Mary. The narrative resolution of this sequence happens on the day and night of the spring festival of the Oraons.

Mary, as the vigilant and alert critic of what is violating the land and the people, rewrites the festival, turns it from the hunt game to the hunt. She brings the festival to crisis—literalizes the metaphor—to be able to act. The “authentic” version of the tribals monumentalizes the past. There the sexual division of agency is intact. The men know. The women masquerade: “they [the women] don’t know why they hunt. The men know. They have been playing the hunt for a thousand million moons on this day. Once there were animals in the forest, life was wild, the hunt game had meaning. Now the forest is empty, life wasted and drained, the hunt game meaningless. Only the day’s joy is real” (IM, p. 12).

If for the men the ritual of the hunt seems a functioning metaphor, for the women, allowed every twelve years to perform the hunt, the ritual is staged as a catachresis, an analogy without an accessible historical or literal pole, in classical rhetoric a metaphor in abuse. Mary undoes this gendered opposition. She dynamically literalizes the literal catachresis of the hunt by negotiating with the structure of rape—violation as such—and appropriates it as a weapon. For her the forest does come to hold an animal, and the reality of the day’s joy is both “real” and “full of meaning.” How does she operate this? It is the festival that rewrites the collector as animal, for her, and legitimizes him as prey.

Some years ago, writing on *Jane Eyre*, I had described the scene where Jane first encounters Bertha Mason as a situation that made indeterminate the difference between human and animal so that the narrative could move Jane from the letter to the spirit of the law (CPR, p. 121). This is not such a “making indeterminate,” but rather its opposite. Let us consider the text. Mary is returning from work, the monotone of the festival music is in the air, Collector accosts her on the lonely path:

At first Mary was scared. . . . After a good deal of struggling, Mary was able to spring out of his grasp . . . long sideburns, long hair, polyester trousers, pointed shoes, a dark red shirt on his back. Against the background of the spring songs Mary thought he was an animal. An-i-mal. The syllables beat on her mind. Suddenly Mary smiled. (IM, p. 13)

Mary makes the rendezvous with him, intending to kill him. But she cannot kill him without help from the inscribing power or from the ritual. There is, once again, a negotiation and a transformation. The tribal women at their post-hunt picnic are at that very moment getting drunk on liquor donated by Collector. For Mary he brings “imported liquor” to the tryst. This substitutes for the festival music and Mary begins to drink. “Yes the face is beginning to look like the hunted animal’s.” Indeed Mary transforms that face. She “caresses it . . . gives him love bites on the lips.

There’s fire in Collector’s eyes, his mouth is open, his lips wet with spittle, his teeth glistening. Mary is watching, watching, the face changes and changes into? Yes, becomes an animal” (IM, p. 16).

One is not sure who speaks the next question: “Now tak me?” In this moment of indeterminacy, Mary appropriates rape. She holds him, lays him down. The machete becomes the phallus of violation. The killing of the ritual beast is also a punishment for the violation of the people, of the land, as also a historically displaced return for the violation of her birth: “Mary lifts the machete, lowers it, lifts, lowers.”

Every detail seems to bristle with “meaning.” Violating, Mary feels sexually replete. This is a negotiation with the phallus, not merely masquerading as a man. Before the kill, dancing, “she had clasped Budhni [an old tribal woman], and said, ‘I’ll marry you after I play the hunt. Then I am the husband, you the wife.’” After she returns from the kill, “she kisse[s] Budhni with her unwashed mouth.”

A great deal more can be said about Mahasweta’s articulation of the negotiative, strategic postcolonial in the figure of the gendered subaltern. I will do no more than comment on her use of the word *bonno*, which I have translated as “wild” in the following passage: “A great thirst dances in her blood. Collector, Collector, I’m almost there. Collector wants her a lot. . . . With how much violence can Collector want her? How many degrees Fahrenheit? Is his blood as wild as Mary’s? As daring?”

What blood is named “wild” here? The blood of the forest-dwelling tribals? (The word *bonno* literally means “of the forest.”) Or the blood of the violating Australian? (In its signifying scope, *bonno* also means “brute.”) A group of bourgeois feminist English professors, intellectuals, and organizational activists, strongly charged with ethnicist pride in its own place, thought that the word could only mean Mary’s return to tribal authenticity.³⁴ Mahasweta’s peculiar burden might well be that the wildness of the blood is both Mary and Oraon and purely neither.

I hope it is clear by now that, in the space that I occupied in front of the New York audience at the Dia Art Foundation that evening, the demand that only the Indian tribal can speak as the Indian tribal for the Indian tribal at their tribunal cries mightily to make invisible the mechanics of production of that space, this book. By those demands, Gayatri Spivak attitudinizing on the occasion of Mahasweta Devi writing about the tribal can be at best cathartic. Attend rather to this: my contractual situation as a postcolonial is in a place where I see claims to the subjectship of alternative histories coming, and becoming called for, in an often unexamined way. A literary pedagogy, choosing texts carefully, can at

least prepare another space that makes visible the fault lines in slogans of the European Enlightenment—nationalism, internationalism, secularism, culturalism—the bulwark of nativism, without participating in their destruction. This, strictly speaking, is de(con)structive pedagogy. Like all good teaching in the humanities, it is hopeful and interminable. It presupposes and looks forward to a future anterior of achieved solidarity and thus nurses “the present.” In the strictest sense, then, (para)logical: morbo-genetic (giving rise to new ways of reading, writing, teaching in the strongest sense), without terminal teleological innovation. Its “present” is a field of value coding, in a sense of “value” that is not logically (but not necessarily chronologically) prior to the economic; the political, the economic, the affective are entangled there.

In the contractual site that held speaker and audience that evening, or in this book, the remaking of history is a persistent critique, unglamorously chipping away at the binary oppositions and continuities that emerge continuously in the supposed account of the real. The cultural politics of repetition are in play with the strategically necessary gesture politics of rupture attendant upon the political independence that is the minimal requirement for “decolonization.” As it happens, generations like “my own” (I could just hear the purist murmur of “essentialism” from theoretically correct friends), straddling the transition, and groups like my own (again!), diasporics circulating within patterns of “internal colonization,” can put one item on the agenda when they speak to a group like “that audience” (again and again!), serious metropolitan radicals, when the speakers belong to the trade of cultural work: I repeat, a persistent unlearning of the privilege of the postcolonial elite in a neocolonial globe. A false hope, as I now repeat.

How to Read a “Culturally Different” Book

ONE OF THE PAINFULLY slow results of the demand for a multicultural canon is the inclusion of Global English on the college curriculum. The results of this uncertain victory are often dubious, because neither teacher nor student is usually prepared to take the texts historically and/or politically. This chapter is an attempt to walk a conscientious teacher through a limp novel, R. K. Narayan’s *The Guide*.¹

In the late 1950s, the term “Indo-Anglian” was coined by the Writers’ Workshop collective in Calcutta, under the editorship of P. Lal, to describe Indian writing in English. Although the term has not gained international currency, it is useful as a self-description.

The first question to be asked of a piece of Indo-Anglian fiction is the author’s relationship to the creative use of his or her native language. This question is not identical with that asked by Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o, referenced in Chapter 1 of this book.

The complexity of Ngūgĩ’s staging of the relationship between English and Gikuyu also involves the relationship between dominant literature and subordinate orature. To draw that parallel in an admittedly asymmetrical way, we should have to consider the millennially suppressed oral cultures of the aboriginals of India. We have not yet seen an Indo-Anglian fiction writer of tribal origin; we are far from seeing one who has gone back to his or her own oral heritage. Indeed, anyone aware of the ruthless history of the expunging of tribal culture from the so-called Indic heritage and the erasure of the tribal paraph—the authenticating flourish above or below the signature—from Indian identity will know that the case is difficult to imagine.