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Writing Autobiography, Writing Spivak: In Lieu of an Introduction

Partial Beginnings

This book has taken a while to take the shape it has. When Andrew McNeillie asked me if I would consider writing a book on Spivak, my immediate answer was a categorical no. I felt the task to be impossible. How would I tackle the vast subject that is Spivak, the collection of works that arrive in every page in a dense prose that seems often impossible to parse? And then how would I write her without diminishing her presence – always excessively present – in that prose. If, as Landry and Maclean say in their introduction to The Spivak Reader, echoing Spivak writing about Derrida, that “Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is also this collection of texts” (2), wouldn’t the reader of my text feel frustrated at not finding a Spivak, or the Spivak they were looking for? Perhaps the fear was even more personal. Would I vanish in trying to write Spivak, reduced to an emulating disciple, whose role would be to enable an “accurate” reading of Spivak? In the end, of course, I did write the book, this book, a version of the many possible books that were discarded and rewritten. Andrew did give me a lot of leeway. Looking back at my correspondence with him, I realize how we negotiated the terrain in which Spivak could be discovered. Should we think of the various terms that one associates with Spivak and examine her development of said terms in a principled manner? I suggested that we think of Spivak in terms of questions posed: a “what is?” model that then would produce, hopefully, complicated answers. Or we could think of the various contributions that Spivak has made to different fields. I could imagine a book (which I did for a while) where I read Spivak’s engagements with Derrida and Marx on the one hand, and postcoloniality, ethics, and feminism on the other. Perhaps this book is closest to that book.
My own encounter with Spivak is, in a way, exemplary.¹ As a graduate student, I discovered Spivak in the covers of Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*. It was the requisite graduate introduction to theory; it was the mid-eighties and I had just arrived via a Pan Am flight to the Midwest. I did not know much theory, but I did know, like most good postcolonial subjects, a lot of British literature. In college in Calcutta, I thoroughly traversed the discipline from Beowulf to Virginia Woolf. Repeating a Master’s degree in the US seemed trivial at best. So to theory I gravitated, attempting to master dense literary criticism as philosophy and vice versa. In that class, taught by a medievalist, who mainly talked with his back to the students while scribbling intensely on the blackboard, I discovered, unlike most in the class, that I liked theory. We read books or a set of articles under several rubrics: terms and definitions came flying at us without much preparation; I spent days and nights in the library trying to marshal my thoughts and keep at least half a step ahead. As a foreign student living on a pittance, I tried to check books out of the library rather than buying them at the bookstore. Looking at the syllabus, I saw that we were supposed to read a major chunk of *Of Grammatology* in a couple of weeks. I raced to check out the book. I remember sitting down and opening the book and coming across this name that seemed Indian; not just Indian but Bengali. I was hooked and I did then what I ask my students not to do – that is, do not read an introduction or an essay by someone else on a theorist.² Read the “original” text. Reading Spivak’s “Translator’s Preface” to *Of Grammatology* remains for me, even today, one of the greatest reading experiences, and not least because it is anything but an introduction, complicating profoundly the distinction between original and originary texts. Now, writing this book 22 years after reading that preface, I remind myself that at the beginning, almost, Spivak had underlined the significance of responsibility for one’s writing and reading:

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

Perhaps it is this cautionary promise of promise that allowed me to write this book, and, while the book that follows is not a preface, maybe I can still use Spivak’s description of the preface as an opening into my
book on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: “[T]here, is then, always already a preface between two hands holding open a book. And the ‘prefacer,’ of the same or another proper name as the ‘author,’ need not apologize for ‘repeating’ the text” (xiii).

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

But above all, and in everything she writes, Spivak continues to take to task modes of critical self-representation, whether it be as an embattled Third World scholar in the First, a feminist who is both a Marxist and a deconstructionist, or a teacher who remains ethically responsible to pedagogy. My own engagements with Spivak’s work have
changed and developed over time, especially in relation to her own self-representation in her work and her encounters with those who seek to represent her through her work. Such moments are particularly marked in Spivak’s numerous interviews, beginning with her first in 1963, at the age of 18, in *Newsweek*, in an article entitled “Foreign Students: Diplomas and Diplomacy.” The interview was intended to capture the flow of foreign students to the US as a way of registering intercultural exchange between the US and the rest of the world. It seeks to register the culture shock that many students must have felt, or so the thinking goes, appropriately captured by a photo of Gayatri Spivak appearing on the cover in a sari. She refers to this interview in another one recorded by Angela Ingram in 1987 and notes:

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

Reading this passage always makes me giddy. There is so much to unpack here. Spivak’s recollection of a traumatic event; her dismissal of the, obviously, more empowered interviewers as “blokes,” who had no idea what they were up against; her conviction that she could and must speak her mind and politicize an everyday, seemingly benign, practice as a trauma for the other. Trauma in benevolence. Benevolence as trauma. One can already see in the re-presented 18-year old the Spivak to come. But then she also represents herself, from the present vantage point, as a luscious 19-year old whose clothed image in a sari conjures up images of bare breasted “other women” in *National Geographic*. A representation that is further compounded by her investment in
being a communist and an outspoken Brahmin woman. Race, class, caste, gender, and politics are evoked to challenge the notion of an essential foreigner captured in a seemingly unproblematic rendition of the Indian female student. But the slippages between women ranging from middle-class Indian Brahmin, to impoverished foreign student in Cornell, to subaltern bare-breasted women leaves me gasping for air. Does being a communist somehow help suture, however sloppily, these categories? Does Spivak rest uneasily on the Brahmin note? When she remarks that it is a bad thing to be an outspoken Brahmin woman, is she actually being good because it gives her strength to confront being othered? Does being Brahmin also allow her to be luscious?

A page earlier in the Ingram interview, entitled, “Postmarked Calcutta, India,” Spivak challenges the interviewer’s assumption that she can pass without being noticed in an airport in India. The idea of being different and thus marked carries over everywhere, including home. In India, given Spivak’s height, spiky hair, and “hopeless sense of dress,” she is considered as “some kind of foreign person who is so eccentric that she can dress [and look] like this” (PC, 82). However, the spiky hair produces another possible identity, that of the widow. Hair is an important signifier of femininity. Spivak’s spiky hair was not seen in India, especially in Bengal, as a westernized stylish cut. Being 45, childless, and not married in the traditional sense of staying with one husband for the duration, people read her cut as a signifier of asexuality, a widow’s cut. I wonder if the widow’s cut was perceived as a Brahmin’s widow cut. Spivak does not say so, but given all her work on the regulative psychobiography of women as sati, or rather sati as good wife and good woman, one could be forced to read this image as such. In the interview, Spivak leaves both accounts intact, begging the reader to make the connections between a hyper-sexualized figure as imagined by a 45-year-old looking back at a possible casting of a 19-year-old by the dominant western gaze, and a 45-year-old imagining her production as an hypo-asexualized widow by the dominant Indian. Both are moments of acute discomfort, but only one produces trauma. Why? The question is never answered except through Spivak’s attempt to substitute her being read as a widow by her own reading of her self as an eccentric, a role further accentuated by her recourse to the accents of a British English. Interestingly, it is accent, an English accent, which is used to displace anxiety and lack of control over being read by others. In India, despite her tremendous fluency in Bengali, she can use her
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accent to help produce herself as an eccentric if she so desires. In the US, enraged by a screaming white guy who did not realize that she lived and owned a home in the same street, she can roll down her car window and scold him in a very English accent, “Stop muttering.” “And he was so amazed, that someone dressed like me had said [that] to him” (PC, 90).

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

The Postcolonial Critic: Shifting Subjects

Many feminist and postcolonial critics continue to use a self-defining, clarifying sentence to produce a subject position vis-à-vis a text that they are attempting to read and critique. Here is one that I could use: I am a postcolonial feminist critic educated in a former British colony who now teaches in an American academic institution, and I am therefore intimately implicated in my reading of this text. One could imagine
all sorts of variations through substitution of different marginalized minorities attempting to articulate their racialized, gendered, ethnic, and sexual subject positions. On the one hand, the insistence on the heterogeneity of one’s subject position prevents indulging in any utopic desire that one can exist outside relations of power; it is a methodological trope, evoking an involvement in the dynamics of the very discourses of power we seek to alter. On the other hand, an uncritical appropriation of this methodological trope has become an alibi for doing business as usual. The autobiographical preamble that foreground’s the critic’s subject position is easily transformed into a series of nouns and adjectives that produces a renewable symbolic economy in which one can continue to add denominations endlessly and seamlessly. In one’s desire to argue for multiple mediations, one can seemingly dip into a well of terminologies, unproblematically contextualize oneself, and come up barely wet.

In many ways, this contradicts the spirit of the Spivakian injunction of unlearning one’s privilege as loss. Rather, it points to the way in which the lesson in humility that Spivak wants us to learn becomes a narcissistic enterprise allowing for the passing off of “situated knowledge”5 as “sanctioned ignorance.” That is why, as Spivak has pointed out, she rewrote unlearning one’s privilege as loss as learning to learn from below, an injunction that she says has gone relatively unnoticed (“Claiming Transformations”, 121). Sanctioned ignorance needs to be replaced by “a strongly worded error message” (ibid.), so that we are aware today that while “in earlier days, all we needed to ask was the question of the subject of representation: can the desire of the person behind the work be represented so transparently or be so unproblematically assigned? But in a contemporary context, we must learn to acknowledge that the subject-object relationship is itself woven in the textile of the history of the present” (123). History is on the move and “if the colonial subject was largely a class subject, and if the subject of postcoloniality was variously racialised, then the subject of globalisation is gendered” (ibid.). While one may be sympathetic to the critical use of the autobiographical trope, one could end up claiming an unmediated privileged status for the voices of the oppressed. “Identity politics” at its best challenges the neutrality of the critical narrative voice pronouncing judgments on the state of the world as such; but the insistence on the local, the contingent, the contextual, and the personal raises certain problems for its practitioners.
The underlining of the axioms of self-presentation generates what Laura Kipnis has called the “hypervisibility [of the] ideological category of the subject” (Kipnis, 158). This hypervisibility has its flip side where the fractured voices seeking simultaneously to speak for and as cannot double back to address the gaps occasioned by the omissions produced because of such self conscious practices of representation. The conundrum for such a critic then is not only how to interpret the “fictionality [of] unmarked subjectivities” in relation to the “epistemologies of marked subjectivities” (Hartstock, 24), but how to address the internal imbalance produced in the narrative voice that seeks to present itself even as it challenges the impossibility of the representation of identity in and as presence. A category repeatedly used by writers and critics seeking to problematize the history of difference is “experience,” especially the use of experience as/in autobiography. The subject’s account of lived experience becomes an irrefutable point of departure for an analysis of the epistemology of the other. However, this deployment of experience must be advanced with a change in the structure of address that defines and manipulates the power of experience. Otherwise, despite the seeming move from the universal to the personal, what happens is merely the substitution of the personal as the universal. As Joan Scott puts it:

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

Interestingly my own awareness of the impossibility of capturing one’s identity in experience became quite clear on my first visit back to Calcutta, India, after an absence of five years. Location, I realized, was crucial when using certain categories to define oneself. My experiences at “home” revealed not only the inadequacy of certain subject positions, but also the problems involved in the availability of hitherto inadmissible discursive spaces that are at present overloaded with politically charged epistemological markers. I learned a lesson from Abena Busia, who notes that those of us who struggle to negotiate between cultures, languages, and complex configurations of meaning
and power must simultaneously and constantly be aware that every
time we speak or write we participate in “a social encounter [that]
generates and is generated by complex sets of negotiations between
externally produced meanings and internally created subjectivities,
between the ways we see and hear and the ways in which we are seen
and heard” (Busia, 82).

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

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

My interest in the collection then and now lies both in the interviews
themselves as some of the most cogent and intelligent theoretical pos-
tulations by a leading critic of our times, and also in the commodification
and marketing of Spivak as the postcolonial intellectual. In 1991 and
1999 I felt a need to emphasize that which today we seem to take for granted. As Third World women moving up in the First World, we must be committed to cross-cultural exchanges. Spivak has asked us to “consider the historical (rather than romantic or nostalgic) constitution of geography – how the world (geo) was written (graphy) in the last few centuries. Such considerations would not rule out the desire to cross cultures, but would reveal the difficulty of the task” (“Political Economy of Women,” 115). In my engagement with the collection of interviews, I want to consider Spivak’s success in interrogating her own position as a leading postcolonial critic as she engages in dialogues with various people. I am primarily interested in those moments in the interview where Spivak’s undeniable commitment to cross-cultural exchanges is undermined by the resurgence of her authoritative subject position, instances where she fails to take stock. This dominant voice then deflects productive tensions generated by critical scrutiny of the category “postcolonial” as one that is, to use Teresa de Lauretis’s words in a different context, “multiply organized across positionalities along several axes and across mutually contradictory discourses” de Lauretis, 136).

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

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

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

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

The volume, *The Post-Colonial Critic*, is offered to us as a package with the subtitle *Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. The cover, which is black and white, depicts an illuminated picture of an Indian woman with her long hair plaited, the traditional bindi on her forehead, and big round earrings hanging from pierced ears. What we are offered is a detail from a larger whole entitled “Starry Night in Iowa” – perhaps because Spivak started her academic career in Iowa?9 The picture looks like anything but the iconic image of Spivak, and I have continued to wonder at the choice of such a domesticated image placed beside the title of the book. Is this image intended as ironic, a sardonic comment on what an uninitiated reader tends to expect when she opens the collection? Or is this image somehow supposed to contain the excess that is, in many ways,
the hallmark of a Spivakian interview? Whatever the reason, it is not one that a reader can find in the introduction to the collection. In fact, there is no introduction, just a preface, a short editor’s note, unlike Spivak’s preface to Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*. All it does is quickly catalog Spivak’s contribution to the field. No doubt the interviews themselves function as “active critical commentary” (viii) and need few explanatory notes; however, the presence of the editor, Sarah Harasym (other than in her own interview of Spivak), is missing. Also missing is a theoretical framework that situates the book historically or an explanation as to why these interviews were chosen; or an examination of some of the controversies bound to be generated by interviewers ranging from the Australian critic Sneja Gunew to the New Historian Harold Veeser, across a time span of seven years in settings spread over three continents. The book hangs together only in its name.

That is not enough, given that the collection seeks to establish Spivak’s position as a leading postcolonial feminist critic. Even as Spivak’s name and essays continue to be cited, and certain of her essays repeatedly anthologized, there remains a curious absence of a deep engagement with her work. To be sure, her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* garnered some reviews, but there were very few really expanded, systemic engagements with the book. It is in this context that I had faulted the absence of an introduction that would situate the interviews collected in *The Post-Colonial Critic*. Spivak’s position as a leading cultural and literary theorist requires us to engage critically with her various intellectual formulations that address in manifold ways the interconnectedness of the micro-politics of the academy and the macro-politics of imperialist and neo-imperialist narratives. In the absence of such an engagement, there is a real possibility that a text circulating as *The Post-Colonial Critic*, containing the marvelous voice of Spivak, ends up essentializing a critic who has above all taught us about the limits of essentialism. For one example, there is an interesting relationship between two interviews – “Strategy, Identity, Writing,” conducted in Canberra, Australia in 1986, and “The Post-Colonial Critic,” which took place in New Delhi, India in 1987. Although both discussions center on the problems and politics of cultural self-representation, the interview conducted by the Indian female academics is quite awkward given Spivak’s refusal to respond directly to some of the more crucial questions concerning her privileged position as a renowned critic in the West. She is much more comfortable about her subject position in the other
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interview, willing to put herself on the block, as it were. She underlines the importance of acknowledging her place of privilege in the “conscious struggle to win back the position of the questioning subject.” If one fails to do this, then one cannot unlearn one’s privilege as a necessary step to be able to speak and be heard by “that other constituency” (PC, 42).

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

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

Asked to talk about myself in 1992, by a Greek-Australian member of a British multicultural collective, who had heard bits of an autobiographical talk I had permitted myself to utter at the University of Cambridge, I first offered a few pages of musings on the thesis that “experience is a staging of experience.” Those musings are of course “too theoretical,” “not autobiographical enough” to be included here; although an undoing of that opposition has been at stake in my temporizing of a life. (“Lives,” 205)
Perhaps it’s the failure of undoing that very opposition, a recognition of the staging of experience as a staging that I mark as absent in the interview “The Post-Colonial Critic.” Of all the interviews, this one is, to me, the least satisfying. In the interviews entitled “Questions of Multiculturalism,” “Postmarked Calcutta, India,” and “Practical Politics of the Open End,” the authority of Spivak’s experiences grounded in a material reality provide a boundary-breaking space, a borderland that allows the participants, who do not always agree on all the issues, to “develop democratic processes for formulating collective postepistemological and postontological judgments” (Brown, 80). This then allows one to “learn how to have public conversations with each other, arguing from a vision about the common (‘what I want for us’) rather than from identity (‘who I am’) and from explicitly postulated norms and potential common values rather than from false essentialisms or unreconstructed private interest” (ibid.). In the failed interview, the desire to argue from a position of “what I want for us” is troubled by what seems to be a denial of the significant differences in terms of location between the I and the you that constitutes the us. Unexamined benevolence is the danger.

If in “The Post-Colonial Critic” Spivak seeks to discount the differences between her position and that of her Indian feminist interlocutors, in “Questions of Multiculturalism,” she registers her angry disbelief at being literally denied the privilege of mobility that she has come to take for granted. Spivak recounts as an anecdote her encounter with an Air Canada employee at Heathrow airport who refuses to allow her to travel to Canada because she does not have a valid visa. Spivak’s nationality makes her an (im)possible traveler. An Indian passport holder with a US green card does not need a visa to travel from the US to Canada, “because of course an Indian resident in the United States would not, the thinking goes, want to become an illegal immigrant in Canada” (PC, 65). She does not require additional papers when she travels from Canada to London. However, the same individual cannot enter Canada from London unless she has a proper entry visa – “look here, I am the same person, the same passport … Indian cultural identity, right? But you become different. When it is from London, Indians can very well want to jump ship to Canada” (ibid.), given the intense racialization of South Asians in general in Britain. The personal injury caused by such an insult – and the fact that Spivak could not attend her invitation to speak in Canada – makes the reader aware of who gets to
cross borders where and how and when. One’s credentials as a professional academic with a history of residence and teaching in the US provide no guarantees when it comes to the politics of travel.

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

**Autobiographical Interlude**

It is in order to understand one’s investment in discourses of self-representation that I insert this story. It is to critique the use of experience to underline one’s sense of dismay at the use of identity, national, racial, sexual, gendered, to define and keep the other in place, that I evoke an experience of my own. If, according to Spivak, it ought to be possible for cultural critics to “make visible the assignment of subject positions” (IOW, 241), I would hope that a critique of my own failure to negotiate the structural complexities of identity formations is an illustration of the difficulty involved in letting go of one’s own privilege – a lesson that I have learnt from reading Spivak.
I returned to India after an initial absence of five years – a grueling five years during which I received a Master's degree from one University, a PhD from another, and finally a position as an assistant professor at the University of Maryland. My time in India was spent with my immediate and extended family. The space that I inhabited during my month's stay was therefore largely homogeneous. Most of my relatives and close friends belong to the upper-middle class, are westernized, and have either visited various parts of the US and Europe or have close ties with at least one person who lives abroad. I, of course, inhabited this same space before I left in 1985; however, my presumption that I would be able to resume where I had left off was naïve, to say the least. Throughout my stay, I struggled repeatedly to be perceived as everyone else. Today, the scene in India is quite different. The dollar has lost its prestige and India’s entry as a significant player in a global economy has fundamentally altered cityscapes across the nation. But in 1990 things were different, especially in Calcutta (which is still not Bangalore, Delhi, or Mumbai). The divide between resident and non-resident Indian was quite sharp and often divisive. There was a persistent desire to cast me as other because of my dislocation, leaving me with a choice: either accept their vision of me as someone who must have changed because of her alliances abroad or insistently question their desire in wanting to perceive me as different. I attempted to fracture the totalizing logic of their representational practices by othering myself from the stereotypical consolidation of the rich, non-resident Indian subject. I did not, then, own a home; I drove a car that cost me five hundred dollars; I had not been able to return home in five years, etc. etc. I was constantly engaged in asking them to deconstruct the horizon of their “social lifeworld” (Benhabib, 226). I was, obviously, very complacent about my ability to discursively reproduce myself through my experiences outside the boundaries of a geographically defined Indian space as both the subject and object of a rationale for the transformation of representational practices. In trying to rupture the dialectic of a symbolic construction of identity based on the opposition of us and them, I failed to acknowledge that my contestatory theory of agency was guided by a desire to be included in the community I had left behind as still untainted and yet contingent upon my difference from the non-resident community that had but a marginal impact on my notion of myself.

What brought into vivid relief my investment in an originary identity was not just my dismay at being called a non-resident Indian, but that
of being perceived by strangers as a non-Indian, a bideshi, a foreigner. One strikingly humbling and humiliating experience was my futile attempt at refusing to be cast as a “shada chamra,” a “white foreigner” (this really brings home the construction of race and whiteness!), by speaking in fluent Bengali to my mother.¹¹ I overheard a heated conversation between two men about my racial (national, ethnic?) identity. One was absolutely convinced about my absolute difference, while the other was trying to suggest that perhaps I was part Indian, maybe even a North Indian. The former, in order to assert the infallibility of his judgment, forcefully asserted in Bengali: “But look at her. Just look at her.” It was then that I started to speak quite loudly in Bengali to my mother, expecting a shock of recognition on their part, a sense of shame at so miscasting me in their play about identity. But no. They registered their amazement at a foreigner who could speak their mother tongue so fluently and their only sense of shame was at having been overheard and understood by a foreigner. One can see an echo of what Spivak recounts in “Postmarked Calcutta, India” in my own desire to have a “kind of cultural fix as a resident alien” (PC, 82). Spivak recounts in the interview how she would spit back at men in Delhi who would spit at her when she went running; or in Calcutta, where she would verbally and publicly flagellate them by saying “horrible things in extremely elegant obscene Bengali” (PC, 88). For Spivak, being absolutely fluent in her mother tongue gave her the power “to decimate them and tell them to blast off” (ibid.). My own experience registers differently.

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

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

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

Postscript: An Introduction?

The revisions undertaken of an earlier essay for a book being written 16 years later, with the title Gayatri Spivak: In Other Words, begs the question of beginnings. In the preface to his book Beginnings: Intention and Method, Edward Said succinctly captures the dilemma of attempting to define beginnings. What makes a definition of beginnings difficult is its ideational connection to a “whole complex of relations” (Said, Beginnings, 5–6) and its paradoxical, theoretical, and philosophical status as both a kind of action and an originary moment for future action. “[T]he beginning, then, is the first step in the intentional
production of meaning” (5) as well as an “activity which ultimately implies return and repetition rather than simple linear accomplishment, that beginning and beginning-again are historical ... that a beginning not only creates but is its own method because it has intention” (xvii).

I use Said’s meditations on beginnings to open up a space wherein I can speculate not only on the makings of my continuing engagements with Spivak but also on the status of the book on Spivak.

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

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

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

I feel like the woman with a cigarette in the Old Virginia Slims ad who delightedly confesses that she has come a long way. Looking back at my own relationship with Spivak, I must say that I have moved from a place of some trepidation and resistance to one of deep, critical immersion. Spivak’s increasing emphasis on ethics and intimacy has shaped my own work on an ethics of reading. Her continuing interest in literary texts, especially novels, resonates with my own interest in the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. And her deep and abiding commitment to feminist politics and women in the South has always suggested the possibilities of practical politics in an academic setting. This is not a book about Spivak. Spivak paradigmatically refuses paradigms. To write a book about Spivak’s work would be to do exactly what her work demands we not do. Her work is not about reading; her work is a reading practice. Spivak does not just talk about ethics in the abstract; her work performs an ethics of the impossible; it executes “the subjectship of ethics and the subjectship of culture, past the threshold of naming, in and out of claims to alterity,” by complicating the relationship of the global to the local, the global in the local, the local in the global, and by “tracking the exorbitant as it institutes its culture” (“Acting Bits,” 775). Spivak’s work continually marks the “confidence in accessibility” in the house of “official feminism” (792) insisting on
the lesson of the impossibility of translation in the general sense but a need for translation as literacy through an intense labor that demands a recognition not just of the “complexity of postcolonial space [but] especially womanspace” (“Who Claims Alterity,” 277). This then cannot be a book that simply explains Spivak, or a book that delineates Spivak’s various engagements with this or that theorist. It may be read as that. But I hope, instead, that the reader sees it is a book that offers a thinking through with Spivak the important questions about reading, pedagogy, ethics, and feminism. I remain thoroughly indebted to Kandice Chuh, the book’s ideal reader, for articulating the project in such a manner. This book owes much to her critical scrutiny as it does to my many conversations with her. This book is for my students who have studied Spivak with me all these years.

Notes

1 There were two other encounters as well, one which I write of as a failed one because I doubt whether Spivak remembers it. And the other at George Washington University in 1991 or so, when Spivak saw me across a very crowded large hall and which generated her first recognition of me as another tall, Bengali woman. I have met her many times since. I held an MLA session, under the Postcolonial Discussion Group, the first I believe on her work, to which I invited Bruce Robbins, Lauren Berlant, and Brett Edwards to participate. Just two MLAs ago, there was a special session organized by Rashmi Bhatnagar, one of the (in)famous interviewers of “The Post Colonial Critic,” in which I participated alongside six other women, including Spivak. That session has since been published in the Forum section of PMLA. I might as well also admit that I did meet Spivak over drinks – actually, she drank tea, I drank a martini – where I discussed the contours of this project. I bring this up because at this meeting Spivak had left her wallet in the hotel room. I paid for the tea and the drink and she said humorously, “Is this going to end up in the book?” And I said, of course and it may become one of those legendary Spivak stories depending on how I tell it. I tell it here simply without hyperbole.

2 My encounter with Spivak in the pages of Of Grammatology is an uncanny repetition of Spivak’s encounter with Derrida. She came across an entry in the Minuit catalog for De la Grammatologie, and ordered it “because it looked interesting” (Foreword,” xix). Spivak had never heard about Derrida or about the Structuralist Controversy at Johns Hopkins University in 1966.
J. Hillis Miller took it to Johns Hopkins University Press because “he had already started organizing Derrida’s US career” (“Thinking about Edward Said,” 519). The translation appeared in 1976. The rest is history. Out of such accidents are careers made.

I don’t quite address Spivak’s *Death of a Discipline*, but her articulation of the resurrections of a discipline resonates with her general emphasis on a pedagogy of reading the other through “responsible effort” (*DD*, 13). She eschews the idea of “cultural informants,” and demands a “language-based literary investigation.” She argues that “if a responsible comparativism can be of the remotest possible use in the training of the imagination, it must approach culturally diversified ethical systems diachronically, through the history of multicultural empires, without foregone conclusions … In order to reclaim the role of teaching literature as training the imagination – the great inbuilt instrument of othering – we may, if we work hard, as old-fashioned Comp. Lit is known to be capable of doing, come close to the irreducible work of translation, not from language to language but from body to ethical semiosis, that incessant shuttle that is a “life” (12–13). Such a Comparative Literature would be an integral and necessary theoretical supplement to today’s more empirically driven gender training and practical and narrowly conceived human rights intervention. Spivak’s version of Comparative Literature would undermine the emphasis on what is reduced to practical considerations by showing how the “proper study of literature may give us entry into the performativity of cultures as substantiated in narrative” (13). Humanism with a difference seems to be the name of the new game that could be Comparative Literature.

The distinction is briefly evoked in the essay “The Rani of Sirmur,” which was first read at a conference titled “Europe and its Others,” and then at great length in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” When the two essays reappear in sequence as the chapter titled “History” in *a Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, the “mobilizing of woman into Sati,” is used to think through the various incarnations of woman outside a simplistic “cultural difference,” in not just discourses of colonialism, imperialism, and Indian nationalism, but also through repetition as a trope in the idea of sanctioned suicides by women in discourses that seek to articulate gender and development. I provide a brief summary of the role of sati as good woman, good wife and its implications today, by marking the use of sati by Allan Bloom in my book *Engendering India*.

A term made famous by Donna Haraway.

As Lata Mani has pointed out in “Multiple Meditations,” “the relation between experience and knowledge [is] fraught with history, contingency, and struggle” (26). I am deeply indebted to this article for its exploration of
“the questions of positionality and location and their relation to the 
production of knowledge as well as its reception” (25).

7 In his essay, “The Commitment to Theory,” Homi Bhabha presents a 
convincing case against the “binarism of theory vs politics,” the belief that 
“the Olympian realms of what is mistakenly labeled pure theory” is 
assumed to be “eternally insulated from the historical exigencies and 
tragedies of the wretched of the earth” (5).

8 Stephen Morton’s *Gayatri Spivak* is a wonderful introduction to Spivak’s 
work. Mark Sanders’s *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Live Theory* is quite 
lovely because it reads Spivak through the lens of translation. Spivak as 
translator, loosely put, par excellence.

9 A version of what seems to be the entire picture that appeared in an early 
Routledge catalog raises even more questions. I don’t want to analyze the 
picture at length, but suffice it to say that the woman in the picture is 
cradling a bespectacled white man and in the background there looms a 
bear. Knowledge among the “Primitive,” perhaps.

10 See, for example, “Three-Way Misreading,” by Mieke Bal, in *Diacritics*, a 
journal that has been a significant venue of some of Spivak’s key essays.

11 I am a tall Bengali woman, standing six feet one. I have lighter skin tone 
than most Bengalis but can in no way pass for white.

12 Radhakrishnan writes: “I wish to argue that the structuralist rhetoric of 
‘positionality’ does not have to result in empty allegorical readings of 
history, but instead can be used to sensitize our awareness of historical 
process as *chrono-topic*. … If one’s sense of identity in ‘one’s own time’ 
endows the ‘self’ with a sense of personal authenticity, a spatialized 
perception of one’s own personalized identity leads to the realm of the 
‘political’ which necessarily relativizes and/or sublates the *personal* as 
such” (281).

13 For a critical response to Dirlik’s essay, especially his dismissal of post-
structuralist-oriented postcolonial critics, see the essay by Ray and Schwarz 
titled, “Postcolonial Discourse: The Raw and the Cooked.”

Feminist issues are pre-emergent in the first chapter. They are the substance 
of the rest. In the fourth, a critique of contemporary culturalist universalist 
feminism is offered” (*CPR*, xi).