general article

POSTCOLONIALISM AND SPECTRALITY

Political Deferral and Ethical Singularity in the Writing of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

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As the writing of Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirlik illustrates, the direction of postcolonial criticism has moved towards an interrogation of its location within contemporary geopolitical power relationships. This self-critical emphasis has worked to foreground the ideological determinants of postcolonial theory, but it can also obscure the political efficacy of western critical frameworks. By emphasizing postcolonial theory's complicity with global capitalism, such approaches are in danger of reducing postcolonial theory to an effect of transnational capitalism, thereby leaving us with no ground from which to criticize contemporary colonialism.

In response to these concerns, this article examines Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's powerful rearticulation of deconstruction, Marxism and feminism, and its critical effectivity in the contemporary context of transnational capitalism. While Spivak's project has gained currency in a range of critical discussions which extend beyond her own geopolitical location – indicating her implication in transnational theoretical production – this is not to suggest that she is simply a beneficiary of a totalizing (though fragmentary) global capitalism. Rather, by focusing on Spivak's sustained dialogue with Marx and Derrida and her 'catachrestic' analysis of her location within the metropolitan academy, I want to suggest that Spivak's deconstructive critique of

international division of labour

subaltern

transnational capitalism

use value

interventions Vol. 1(4) 605–620 (1369-801X)

nationalist and Marxist metanarratives offers a 'situated knowledge' that is adequate to describe the multivalent effects of a transnational finance capital.

> Filling the entire Indian peninsula from the oceans to the Himalayas, here lies *bonded labour* spread-eagled, kamiya-whore Douloti Nagesia's tormented corpse, putrefied with venereal disease, having vomited up all the blood in its desiccated lungs.
>
> Today, on the fifteenth of *August*, Douloti has left no room at all in the India of people like Mohan for planting the standard of the Independence flag. What will Mohan do now? Douloti is all over India. (Devi 1995: 93)

In 'Douloti the Bountiful' (1995) Mahasweta Devi offers a harrowing portrayal of subaltern resistance within the context of a nation-state that has been systematically ravaged by colonialism in its various historical formations. From the early descriptions of bonded labour to the final scene where Douloti's 'tormented corpse' covers the map of post-independence India, Devi registers the embodied yet unarticulated knowledge of disempowered women living in contemporary India.[1] Yet Devi does not merely frame the 'subaltern' within a tragic paradigm of postcolonial subjectivity; rather she emphasizes the *embodied* standpoint of women such as Douloti. Indeed, it is precisely Douloti's body – its continuing subjection to the external forces of neocolonialism and global capitalism – which 'makes the agenda of nationalism impossible' (Spivak 1992: 113).

1 For a further discussion of articulation and embodiment, see Probyn (1993), Rose (1994), Silva (1997) and Hunter (1999).

Gayatri Spivak's translation work and commentary on Mahasweta Devi are well known. But what concerns me in this article is how the embodied knowledge of the subaltern woman informs Spivak's reconstellation of Derridean deconstruction and Marx's labour theory of value. Spivak's work on Marx, Derrida and the contemporary international division of labour does not simply confirm the negativity of the subaltern within a disembodied critical theory that disavows its complicity in global capitalism. Rather, her deconstructive readings of Marx are grounded in the critical standpoint of subaltern women. Instead of containing the emancipatory spirit of subaltern resistance within a closed teleology, Spivak valorizes the 'continual commitment to keep open the relation to the other' (Laclau 1996: 74): to a moment of political resistance which has not yet arrived. For Spivak, contra Derrida, this open-ended political commitment to the alterity of the other (what Derrida terms the Messianic) is not without content; rather it is inscribed and embodied by the situated knowledge of the subaltern woman.

Throughout her engagement with Marx and Derrida, Spivak emphasizes that the body's economic ability to produce more than it needs for its own subsistence forms the basis for the capital relation. The relationship between the worker and capitalist is not determined by a vertical axis of power, but rather through contractual and democratic agreement. As Spivak writes,

'there is no philosophical injustice in the capital relation. . . . Capital*ism* manages the contradictions inherent in capital in its own interest' (Spivak 1993a: 107). The capital relation has provided the ground for other economic modes of production: from state socialism and New Labour to feudalism and potlatch economies. While the concept of capital as the harnessing of the body's surplus energy has been a recurrent theme in Marxist debates since the nineteenth century, this is not to suggest that Spivak simply recapitulates Marx's labour theory of value with a deconstructive twist. Rather, she offers a radical reworking of Marx's labour theory of value which is informed by the embodied knowledge of the subaltern.

Spivak's reading of Marx is not simply an attempt to recover the Marxist mode of production paradigm for its political and rhetorical force. Instead, she works through the affiliations between Marx and Derrida in order to *reconstruct* a materialist critique that is adequate to describe the contemporary international division of labour. As Spivak suggests in her forthcoming entry in *The Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*, her project is concerned with the political mobilization or 'setting to work of deconstruction outside the formalising calculus of the academic institution' (Spivak forthcoming: 6). Embodying the philosophical discourse of deconstruction with the articulations of the subaltern Spivak complicates the political claims made by western critical theory through a vacillation across disciplines, histories and geopolitical formations. By breaking the frame of deconstruction, Spivak thus attempts to construct a critical space outwith the subject–ideology axis,[2] rather than remaining sealed within the terms of the dominant discourse. Her recent discussion of ethics in the translation work of the Bengali writer, Mahasweta Devi, is a particular case in point, which I touch on again at the end of this article. Before addressing this question, however, I want to examine Spivak's deconstructive reading of value in Marx.

Spivak opens her essay, 'Scattered speculations on the question of value' with a discussion of the philosophical construction of the subject in Hegel and Marx. The idealist predication of the subject (or the conscious world historical agent who constitutes the world in his own image) is conventionally held to be exclusive from the materialist predication of the subject as labour power (or the worker, who has the capacity to produce more than s/he needs for her own subsistence). Put simply, the idealist predication of the subject in Hegel provides the philosophical foundation for the expansion of a European capitalist worldview while the materialist predication of the subject provides the foundation for socialism.

But this false dichotomy distorts the Hegelian provenance of Marx's dialectical thinking. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel describes how the subject attempts to transcend the material world in the pursuit of absolute knowledge. In Hegel's account, 'progress in the realm of history was possible because it had already been accomplished in the realm of truth' (McClintock

2 For a discussion of the subject-ideology axis, see Hunter 1999 (forthcoming). The word 'outwith' here is used to describe the location of the subaltern in relation to the nation-state and socialized capital. The term originates from Scottish dialect, and in its prepositional form means 'outside, out of, beyond; out of the control of; away from' (*Concise Scots Dictionary*). This sense of being out of the control of the nation-state ideology, without regard for its boundaries and codes, yet also marked by it as disenfranchised citizens, is powerfully captured in Spivak's discussion of Mahasweta Devi's short story, 'Douloti the Bountiful'. Indeed, Spivak's attempt to think beyond the ideology of the nation-state to the power differential between the subaltern woman living in rural India and multinational corporations provides a more rigorous theoretical map of contemporary geopolitical power relationships. She writes:

> [T]he last sentence of the story pushes

1995: 395). Yet, as Frances Fukayama reveals in his use of Hegel to announce the end of history and the triumph of western capitalism in 1990, this idealist conception of the subject as an object of cognition is always already marked by its social and geopolitical context. As Gillian Rose (1978, 1981) has powerfully argued, Hegel's philosophical system offers a concept of located truth, or truth as process, which has been activated in the work of negative dialecticians. Yet this is also contained by his use of a totalizing philosophical system and a transcendental subject. It is thus difficult to separate Hegel's radical insights from the totalizing ground of his philosophical concepts.

Similarly, Spivak demonstrates how the materialist predication of the subject as conceived by Marx is *complicit* with the idealist predication of the subject.[3] This complicity hinges around her claim that the materialist constitution of the subject in Marx elides the undecidable status of use value in the movement from use value to exchange value to capital circulation. She argues that Marx left the slippery concept of use value untheorized (Spivak 1993a: 109). As a consequence the subject is reinscribed in a linear, continuist paradigm of capital where the contradictions within the various phases of capital circulation are negated in the fashion of Hegelian dialectics. Working within a closed, determinate system of capital circulation, Marx's dialectical methodology does not 'stop at a contradiction', but rather 'indicate(s) the possibility of an indeterminacy' (Spivak 1988: 159). The crucial point of indeterminacy here is the concept of use value. Following Marx's definition in *Das Kapital*, Spivak argues that 'use-value is in play when a human being produces and uses up the product (or uses up the unproduced) immediately' (1988: 155). That is to say, the use value of an object defines value in terms of its utility. Exchange value, by contrast, refers to the substitution of one commodity for another. Surplus value, or profit, signifies the capitalist harnessing of the subject's surplus energy, or the exploitation of the worker's ability to produce more than she requires for her own subsistence.

But this still leaves the question of how value is defined unanswered. In Spivak's account, postmodern interpretations of Marx (see Baudrillard 1981; Goux 1990) tend to define value differentially, in terms of the exchange relationship: a commodity does not have an inherent value, but is rather defined in relation to another commodity, in terms of what it is not. Use value is always already exchange value. As Abdul JanMohamed observes:

> Once one moves beyond the hypothetical moment of 'primitive' production – the unskilled gathering of food for the purposes of subsistence – that is, once either a division of labour or an accumulation and dissemination of productive skills is introduced in human society, the activity of labour becomes a form of action that necessarily impinges on the activity of other acting subjects. (JanMohamed 1995: 43–4)

us from the local through the national to the neo-colonial globe.

The word *doulot* means wealth. Thus *douloti* can be made to mean 'traffic in wealth'. Under the last sentence – 'Douloti is all over India' [*Bharat jara hoye Douloti*] – one can hear that other sentence: *Jagat* [the globe] *jara hoye Douloti*. What will Mohan do now? – the traffic in wealth is all over the globe.

I end, somewhat abruptly, with a text for discussion: such a globalization of douloti, dissolving even the proper name, is not an overcoming of the gendered body. The persistent agendas of nationalisms and sexuality are encrypted there in the indifference of super-exploitation. (Spivak 1993a: 95)

3 In this respect, Spivak addresses the 'opposite question' to that which she discusses in 'Deconstructing historiography' (1988: 200–1). In this earlier essay, Spivak addresses the question of whether the subject can achieve consciousness of itself as a subject, or whether in the Hegelian paradigm, the subject must separate from itself in order for the

cognition of subjectivity to take place.

The 'hypothetical moment of "primitive" production' cannot be simply recuperated as an oppositional ground for political agency. But while the use value of labour power is never innocent and is always caught up in 'the activity of other working subjects', it is not entirely determined by exchange value and capital circulation either. As Jacques Derrida writes in *Spectres of Marx* (1994a), 'Just as there is no pure use, there is no use-value which the possibility of exchange and commerce . . . has not in advance inscribed in an *out-of-use* – an excessive signification that cannot be reduced to the useless' (Derrida 1994a: 160). Recasting Marx's claim that 'a thing can be a use value without being a value' (Marx 1977: 425), JanMohamed, Derrida and Spivak contend that use value is a point of excess; it cannot be fixed within the capitalist chain of value determinations. Use value provides the 'slight and contentless resource' (Spivak 1993a: 61) upon which exchange value is inscribed, but at the same time, in order for the value of a commodity to be realized, the moment of consumption must take place outside the system of value determinations, in the sphere of use value. For Spivak, use value functions as a 'dangerous supplement' or 'lever', which both threatens and enables the capitalist system of value determinations. Opposition to multinational capitalism does not take place in a mythical moment of primitive production, but in the liminal space of commodity production/consumption, where a subversive *recoding* of value determinations becomes possible. Such a recoding is exemplified in Donna Haraway's discussion of cyborg writing at the interface of technoscience, late capitalism and feminist epistemology in her Cyborg manifesto (1991). She writes:

> Cyborg writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man. Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other. The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalised identities. In retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin of western culture. . . . The phallogocentric origin stories most crucial for feminist cyborgs are built into literal technologies – technologies that write the world, biotechnology and microelectronics – that have recently textualised our bodies as code problems on the grid of C^3I [command-control-communication-intelligence, an $84 billion item in 1984's US defence budget (p. 150)]. Feminist cyborg stories have the task of recoding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control. (Haraway 1991: 175)

For Haraway, the late capitalist system of value coding is imprinted on the surface of the disempowered female body; subaltern women are integrated into the circuit of late capitalism through Export Processing zones (EPZs) and Free Trade zones (FTZs). But the female body is not merely a passive site of

inscription; rather it subverts this process of value coding through a cyborg writing that articulates the embodied experiences of subaltern women. This cyborg writing is not about an Edenic wholeness before language, or a primitive moment of production/consumption before exchange; rather it involves the never innocent recoding of value from the embodied standpoint of subaltern women.

Just so, Spivak's recoding of value does not involve recuperating the theoretical fiction of use value as a self-identical ground for political emancipation, but rather emphasizes the 'reversing, displacing, and seizing of the apparatus of value-coding' (p. 63). Like Haraway, Spivak's interventions in the integrated circuit of value coding take place at the interface of late capitalism, feminism and identity politics. Indeed, for Spivak the value coding of identity as a 'cherished foothold' (p. 61) in the academic discourse of western feminism effaces its location within the integrated circuit of late capitalism. Against this essentialist notion of identity, which effaces and thus stabilizes the value coding of a postcolonial subject in late capitalism, Spivak emphasizes the subversive potential of 'identity' as a 'series of flash-points in the recoding of the circuitry' (p. 61). Her examples of recoding are taken from the relatively empowered positions of the diasporic postcolonial and the indigenous elite. For Spivak, both of these figures do not simply embody an essential postcolonial identity. Rather, they are coded as postcolonial subjects within a capitalist chain of value determinations which effaces the continued exploitation of the disempowered subaltern woman in FTZs and EPZs. Against this valorization of the relatively empowered postcolonial subject within the integrated circuit of late capital, Spivak offers a subversive recoding of elite and diasporic spaces: 'Claiming catachreses from a space that one cannot not want to inhabit and yet must criticise is, then, the deconstructive predicament of the postcolonial' (Spivak 1993a: 64). While this catachrestic recoding of postcolonial subjectivity situates the complicity of the relatively empowered within the structures of global capitalism, it does little to address the vulnerable process of articulating subaltern women's lives within the system of value determination. Like the concept of use value, the subaltern remains outwith the chain of value determinations. For not only are the subaltern woman's voice, agency and body effaced by global capitalism; she also provides the economic resource for multinational corporations. In contrast to the catachrestic moves of the postcolonial elite, the non-innocently deployed cyborg writing of the subaltern woman offers a far more potent and politically effective recoding of value, which seizes the 'tools to mark the world that marked them as other' (Haraway 1991: 175). Indeed, as I go on to argue, it is precisely the embodied knowledge of the subaltern woman which focalizes Spivak's work on Marx, Derrida and value, even if it does not always figure at the forefront of her interventions.

Spivak's reading of Marx differs significantly from that of other interpretations which attempt to frame his later work on capital circulation within a

linear paradigm that erases the undecidable status of use value. In this paradigm, the movement from exchange value through to capital circulation is represented as a totalizing process. For Spivak, however, it is precisely the undecidable status of use value that undermines this model of capitalist circulation. Drawing on Derrida's contention that the stability and univocality of western philosophy is predicated on the debasement of writing and its repression outside full speech (1976: 3), Spivak suggests that the coherence of capitalist circulation is similarly predicated on the exclusion of *use* value. By locating use value as a lever of displacement, she destabilizes those critiques of Marx that rewrite 'value as exchange value and exchange value alone' (Chow 1993: 3).

This critique of postmodern readings of Marx is simultaneously deconstructive and materialist. The purpose of Spivak's reading of Marx is to jettison his socialist teleology and to remobilize the emancipatory impulse of the later Marx in the service of a 'practical politics of the open end' (Spivak 1988: 175, 297 n21; 1990: 105). By attending closely to the discontinuities that threaten to subvert the coherence and closure of the continuist schema of value, Spivak produces a deconstructive reading of Marx which clearly anticipates (and to a certain extent is confirmed by) Derrida's recent engagement with the Marxian corpus.[4]

It is precisely this deconstructive frame of reference that allows Spivak to recuperate Marx from charges of uncritical economic determinism and to pinpoint those moments where use value threatens the totalizing claims of uncritical theorists and multinational business executives alike. Spivak calls for a reading that *strategically* attends to the radical potential of use value as a 'vanishing moment' (1988: 159) in the circulation of commodities. This concept of use value as a vanishing point – or a non-originary origin – recalls Marx's critique of liberal political theory in the *Grundrisse* (1857). In a series of ripostes directed against the 'Robinsonade illusions' of utilitarianism, Marx invokes the arch text of English territorial imperialism, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719):

> The subject of our discussion is first of all *material* production. Individuals producing in society, thus the socially determined production of individuals, naturally constitutes the starting-point. The individual and isolated hunter or fisher who forms the starting-point with Smith and Ricardo belongs to the insipid illusions of the eighteenth century. They are Robinson Crusoe stories which do not by any means represent . . . a reaction against over-refinement and a return to a misunderstood natural life. They are no more based on such a naturalism than is Rousseau's *contrat social* which makes naturally independent individuals come in contact and have mutual intercourse by contract. They are the fiction and only the aesthetic fiction of the small and great adventure stories. (Marx 1977: 345–6)

4 While Spivak expresses a recurrent concern (even after *Spectres of Marx*) that 'Derrida seems not to know Marx's main argument' (1993a: 97), at the same time, as I go on to argue, Spivak's deconstructive readings of Marx are consistent with Derrida's demand for Marxism to interrogate its philosophical foundations rather than 'constituting the Marxist text . . . as a text that had moved beyond metaphysical suspicion' (Derrida 1993: 197). See also Derrida 1995: 75.

The proto-deconstructive tone of Marx's polemic is reflected in the claim that the liberal social contract is not a transcendental origin or 'starting-point', but rather a product of eighteenth-century bourgeois liberalism. Similarly, use value is figured as a natural starting point for capital circulation that is written back into (a) history as history's origin. The potent images of the 'isolated hunter or fisher' existing in a symbiotic relationship with the earth's natural resources provided a rich metaphorical resource for liberal economic thought. This in turn worked to veil the economic and social divisions that underwrite both the liberal social contract and the capital relation. In *Capital Volume One* (1867), for example, Marx cites Robinson Crusoe again in criticizing the isolated individual of liberal political thought: 'Everything produced by [Robinson Crusoe] was exclusively the result of his own personal labour, and therefore simply an object of use for himself' (Marx 1977: 441). This natural concept of utility effaces the imperialist mode of production underwriting both Defoe's novel and liberal economic thought. Indeed, for Marx the concept of utility cannot be isolated from social production or exchange; it has no *positive* conceptuality. While this is partly a consequence of Marx's self-conscious employment of liberal philosophical concepts, Marx also offers a critique of pure, natural utility. The proto-deconstructive movement in Marx's critique of the bourgeois liberal individual thus provides an insightful commentary on Marx's discussion of use value.

This is not to suggest, however, that Spivak valorizes use value in the same way that Marx does; nor does she fall prey to the 'economic stagism' of classical Marxism that expresses class struggle in terms of the historical tension between the forces and relations of production (Critchley 1996: 1–30). Rather, invoking Derrida's discussion of the trace in *Of Grammatology*, Spivak offers a double reading of the contemporary economic text which sees use value as both inside and outside the system of exchange value determinations (Spivak 1988: 168).

This emphasis on use value as a dangerous supplement, over and against exchange value, demonstrates how her reading is not merely a textualization of global capitalism, but a materialist critique of the contemporary economic text. Whereas postmodern theorists such as Jean François Lyotard argue that Marx's labour theory of value is no longer adequate to describe the contemporary 'postmodern' phase of capital (Lyotard 1984: 12–13; 36–7), Spivak contends that this precludes an analysis of the international division of labour (thus helping to sustain it). At the same time, however, she is not claiming to recuperate use value as a pure concept uncontaminated by capital circulation, thereby falling back on a utopian vision of romantic anti-capitalism. Indeed, Spivak's reading of Marx highlights the way in which Marx's account of value in the nineteenth century *prefigures* the contemporary globalization of capital and the maximization of profit.[5]

Her deconstructive reading of Marx thus needs to be situated in terms of

5 As Marx and Engels wrote: 'The need for a constantly expanding market for its goods chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere' (Marx and Engels 1973: 71).

the contemporary economic dislocation of the nation-state in the face of multinational capitalism and the continued exploitation of the subaltern woman. As Spivak writes in her essay on Marx, 'It is a well-known fact that the worst victims of the contemporary international division of labour are women. They are the true surplus army of labour in the current conjuncture. In their case, patriarchal social relations contribute to their production as the new focus of super-exploitation' (Spivak 1988: 67). While some theorists have pointed to the obsolescence of Marx's labour theory of value in the face of the electronification of capital (Appadurai 1990; Lyotard 1984), Spivak argues that this ignores the continued exploitation of the subaltern woman. Certainly, the global electronification of capital transforms the relationship between the spatial and the temporal,[6] but it also works to obscure the complex networks of contemporary geopolitical power and transnational finance capital. As Spivak writes:

> [W]hereas Lehman Brothers, thanks to computers, 'earned about $2 million for . . . fifteen minutes of work', the entire economic text would not be what it is if it could not write itself as a palimpsest upon another text where a woman in Sri Lanka has to work 2,287 minutes to buy a t-shirt. The 'post-modern' and 'pre-modern' are inscribed together. (1988: 171)

6 For a further discussion of the compression of space and time under late capitalism, see Harvey 1989.

Echoing Swasti Mitter's discussion of the super-exploitation of the subaltern woman in non-unionized, casual employment, Spivak argues that the consolidation of global capital is enabled by regimented spaces such as the Free Trade zone. The agency of the subaltern woman is thus defined in terms of her labour power: 'The subaltern are neither "nationally rooted" nor migrant; their intra-national displacement is managed by the exigencies of global capital' (Spivak 1996: 71). What is at stake in this rereading of Marx is the recuperation of the subaltern's subjectivity-in-labour power. Spivak adds an urgent new dimension to the insights of the later Marx, which recovers Marxism from obsolescence in contemporary critical theory.

Within the logic of capitalism the use value of the subaltern woman's labour power is 'negated' in order to objectify her labour power as an exchangeable commodity. At the same time, however, it is precisely the use value of labour power which generates the production of surplus value, or capital. Whereas in 'Scattered speculations on the question of value' Spivak focuses on use value as a locus of undecidability, in her more recent 'economic' essays she examines the question of surplus value and its relationship to the 'social'.

Spivak writes, 'Capital is only the supplement of the *natural* and *rational* teleology of the body, of its irreducible capacity for superadequation, which it uses as its use value' (Spivak 1993a: 107). In other words, the constitution of the subject as labour power is not simply imposed on the individual by

capitalism, rather capitalism harnesses the body's surplus energy in very particular ways. Indeed, what is distinctive about capitalism as a mode of production is not that it harnesses the body's economic energy to produce more than it needs, but that this harness was originally secured by the liberal democratic social contract which underwrites it. Hence, as Spivak argues, 'there is no philosophical injustice in the capital relation. . . . Capital*ism* manages the contradictions inherent in capital in its own interest' (ibid.). Within a capitalist economy the consensual basis of the capital relation is elided, and as a consequence, the mechanics of capitalism are seen as natural and totalizing. By making this crucial distinction between the capital relation, and the rational*ist* appropriation of this surplus energy by capital*ism*, Spivak unhinges a deconstructive lever within the economic text, which threatens to subvert the totalizing movement of capital circulation. This begs the question, though, of how effective this deconstructive lever is as a political tool. That is to say, how dangerous is Spivak's dangerous supplement to contemporary global capitalism, particularly after the fall of the Soviet bloc?

Spivak is clearly not advocating the reconstruction of a socialist state, nor is she claiming that deconstruction can completely overthrow the contemporary financialization of the globe. Yet her reconstellation of Derrida and Marx in the context of the contemporary international division of labour enables a recoding of the subaltern woman within the economic and social text. Significantly, all her engagements with Marx and Derrida are marked by a desire for Derrida to 'get Marx rightish' (Spivak 1995a: 72), when her deconstructive readings of Marx actually demonstrate the radical potential of Derrida's project for social criticism. In order to clarify the critical and political efficacy of Spivak's interventions, in the next section I want to situate Spivak's work on Marx and Derrida in relation to her critique of the gendered new world order.

Following Derrida's discussion of ethics, justice and the Messianic, in her recent work on Mahasweta Devi Spivak elaborates a practical politics of the open end, which respects the singularity of the subaltern's resistance to global capitalism in the context of contemporary Bangladesh. As she writes in *Imaginary Maps*: 'For a collective struggle *supplemented* by the impossibility of a full ethical engagement . . . the future is always around the corner, there is no victory, but only victories that are always also warnings' (Devi 1995: xxv).

Spivak's emphasis on the postponement of a political decision marks her ongoing commitment to building an ethical relation with the subaltern, rather than a gestural politics which endlessly defers the political agency of the subaltern. For instance, in a recent paper presented in 1997, Spivak discussed the targeting of subaltern women by non-governmental organizations such as the Grameen bank micro-lending programmes, where global capitalism and development strategies appropriate the rhetoric of feminism, and economic

7 Lorraine Code (1995) similarly notes how contemporary technological societies have appropriated the rhetoric of caring. She writes:

> Impersonal carers seek to colonize their 'targets', oblivious to the possibility that those targets might experience the proffered caring as insulting and invasive; that it might be destructive of practices and institutions that matter to them. These incidents

exploitation masquerades as care.[7] As Julie Fisher (1996) argues, the micro-credit system in Bangladesh seems to *empower* the subaltern woman, in that it shifts the management of loans to grass-roots organizations (GROs) under the aegis of poor rural women, but does little to *enfranchise* the subaltern woman. She writes:

> Grassroots enterprise development has been remarkably successful in reaching millions of people. Yet this process of 'scaling out' must be matched by an equal ability to 'scale up' to the economic institutions of society. In many countries commercial credit is still denied to women, even after they have already created successful microenterprises through access to revolving loan funds. And marketing beyond one's own village remains a formidable challenge. (Fisher 1996: 101)

While this system seems to be democratic in that it shifts the management of loans to the subaltern, the targeting of peasant women as creditors represents a further instance of how capital bypasses the nation-state via particular NGOs, leaving no civil structure in place to address the systematic disempowerment of subaltern women. It is against the categorical imperative of multinational corporations,[8] where the ethical singularity of the subaltern is conflated with the economic interests of global capital, then, that Spivak's deconstructive reading of the economic text gathers a clear political imperative.

Spivak has variously argued that deconstruction cannot in itself ground a political programme, and is restricted by its location within the western academy. In 'The setting to work of deconstruction' (forthcoming), for example, Spivak asserts, 'as long as the othering of deconstructive philosophy remains confined to discourses at least accessible to related academic disciplines (such as literature, architecture, theology, or feminism), it gives rise to restricted but useful debates' (p. 5). In a move that 'breaks the frame' of deconstruction's institutional horizon, Spivak mobilizes the conceptual apparatus of *différance*, deferral and spectrality for political interventions in the contemporary economic text. She writes:

> Currently the most critical and dynamic enclave of marginalized cultural systems is in counterglobalist or alternative-development activism (just as the financialization of the globe is the most robust vanguard of the Enlightenment). In this area, the 'setting to work' mode of deconstruction breaks hesitantly into an active resistance to the inexorable calculus of globalization, where 'democratization' is often a description of the political restructuring entailed by the transformation of state capitalisms and their colonies to tributary economies of rationalised financialization; or it may be engaged in displacing the binary opposition between economic growth and well being by proposing alternatives to 'development'. These efforts do not of course, produce a sustained formalized theory that is recognizably deconstructive. This is the risk of a deconstruction without reserve. (Spivak forthcoming: 5)

recall Third World recipients of 'foreign aid', who often find that inadequately informed development practices fail to empower them to cope with hunger, disease and death. How, then, can people and organizations in positions of impersonal power and privilege care without colonizing? How can people in less powerful positions accept care without being co-opted? (Code 1995: 104)

8 In *Derrida and the Political* (1996), Richard Beardsworth connects Immanuel Kant's notion of the categorical imperative and the limits of western democratic concepts, which also underwrite the ethos of multinational capitalism and development. Discussing the limits of Kantian ethics, he argues:

> It is only by presuming from the start ethics to be something like knowledge that they can be separated out. This implies that the limit is not natural as Kant would retrospectively wish, so disavowing his own writing in

Spivak's political interventions in the 'inexorable calculus of globalization' cannot be systematized into a coherent theory that is 'recognizably deconstructive'. Nor does she claim to do activist or extra-institutional work that is in line with her theorizing on Marx and deconstruction (Spivak, in Bahri and Vasudeva 1996: 73). For such a mode of praxis would be cognitively incapable of examining the very economic structures underwriting it. Rather, by embodying the abstracted concepts of the aporia, *différance* and spectrality with the situated knowledge of disenfranchised women living in homeworking economies and Export Processing zones, Spivak disrupts the integrated circuit of multinational capitalism and academic knowledge. As Spivak (1995a) points out in her response to *Spectres of Marx*, the Derridian concepts of *hauntologie*, spectrality, the aporia, and the incalculability of ethics cannot address the gendered international division of labour. Taking Derrida to task for not addressing the evils of late capitalism may seem erroneous when one considers that Derrida is primarily concerned to interrogate the mechanics of European philosophical texts. Yet as Rey Chow (1998) points out, the ethical claims made on behalf of critical theory, particularly deconstruction, often invoke otherness or alterity as the negative limit of western thought (Chow 1998: xv–xvii), and are cognitively unable to address the agency and embodied knowledge of particular disenfranchised groups. Rather than adhering rigorously to the conventions of western critical theory, Spivak extends the insights of Derrida's ethical turn to disrupt the logic of late capitalism. In 'Love, cruelty and cultural talks in the hot peace' (1995b), for example, Spivak highlights the erasure of the subaltern woman's body in cultural studies through the delinking of transnational migrancy and development in western academic discourses on identity politics and multiculturalism. Spivak argues that 'unexamined Cultural Studies export/import between a "developing" country and its migrant group in the United States, emphasising hybridity, can provide crucial ideological support for the crude cultural relativism of the received narrative of development' (1995b: 7). In Spivak's account, 'the keeping apart of migrancy and development' in cultural studies has grave consequences for disenfranchised women living on the borders of global capital. Against this erasure of women's sweated labour, Spivak argues that 'The village must teach us to make the globe a world. We must learn to learn. Cultural Studies is otherwise only a symptom' (1995b: 13).

The spectre of the subaltern woman's (re)productive body also resurfaces in 'Diasporas old and new' (1996), where Spivak criticizes the US-based feminism of Rosalind Petchesky for failing to recognize 'theoretical sophistication in the South, which can only be the repository of an ethnographic cultural difference' (Spivak 1996: 266 n.8). In Spivak's account, the colonizing gaze of this US-based feminist theory relegates the 'Third World woman' to a silent space of negativity within western conceptual frameworks. In

This 'classic gesture of "liberal" rationality' is replicated in the discourse of multinational capitalism, where the international division of labour (a neo-Kantian form of violence) is concealed in the democratic rhetoric of development and globalization. The ethical singularity of the subaltern is thus subsumed under the regulative ideas of an ahistorical reason

the name of an ahistorical Reason which humanity essentially betrays. Rather, the limit is *forced* and *institutional*, and thus, like any frontier, this limit must be maintained in violence. Kant's claim to 'defend' a limit which precedes his own act of legislation represents a classic gesture of 'liberal' rationality which disavows its own force under the cover of naturality. As we shall see, this disavowal cannot fail, like all democratic thought, to place violence *outside* the law. The violence in maintaining the limit as natural is revealed as/ in the *contradictions* of Kant's thought. (Beardsworth 1996: 62).

that was produced in the social formations of western Europe.

contrast, Spivak learns from the embodied knowledge of disenfranchised women living in homeworking economies how to disrupt her pedagogical practices (Bahri and Vasudeva 1996: 72). By dislodging academic feminism from its complicity in the ideology of liberal multiculturalism – which in turn obscures the capitalist circuits of globalization and development – Spivak opens a space for the articulation of a counter-globalist activism. This space of articulation is precisely aporetic in its engagement with the singularity of political movements: it cannot be framed within the idealist teleologies of feminism or Marxism, but rather demands the suspension of such analytical machinery. As Spivak writes:

> I really sometimes think of Freud's idea of suspending yourself when you are analysing. That is a model of transference. Transference is a model of responsibility. Responses coming from both sides. I really do try the hardest I can to suspend my analytical machinery. Even with indigenous NGOs, I am careful. There are a few NGOs that actually conscientize, change the lives of women from the same stratum as the people who are 'being helped'. (Bahri and Vasudeva 1996: 87)

This moment of political deferral is not merely a theoretical manoeuvre that works against the residual idealism of Marxism. Rather, Spivak's suspension of her analytical machinery represents a moment of ethical singularity, which respects the locatedness of subaltern women's knowledge. To this extent, Spivak's work resonates interestingly with the emergent position of transnational feminists, 'who argue that class struggle, narrowly defined, can no longer be the only basis for solidarity among women workers' (Mohanty, in Alexander and Mohanty 1997: 6). As Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues:

> [T]he logic of a world order characterised by a transnational economy involves the active construction and dissemination of an image of the 'Third World/ racialized or marginalized woman worker' that draws on indigenous histories of gender and race inequalities, and if this worker's identity is coded in patriarchal terms which define her in relation to men and the heterosexual, conjugal family unit, then the model of class conflict between capitalists and workers needs to be recrafted in terms of the interests (and perhaps identities) of Third-World women workers. (Mohanty, pp. 6–7)

Spivak's mobilization of deconstruction as a conceptual tool for materialist critique does not simply abstract the labour power of the gendered subaltern subject from her material location at the interstices of race, class, gender, culture, religion or literacy. On the contrary, Spivak draws on the tacit knowledge of subaltern's women's lives in order to disrupt and complicate the production of postcolonial knowledge in the western academy.

Coda

The superexploitation of the subaltern woman by transnational corporations is prefigured in Mahasweta Devi's short story 'Douloti the Bountiful' (1995). During an exchange between the washerwoman Rajbi and the Gandhian prophet *Sadhuji*, the narrator foregrounds the split between the everyday lives of tribal women and the gendered discourse of the nation state. As the narrator asserts:

> You are not untouchable. You, me, Munabar Chandela, are offspring of the same mother.
> Hearing all this the washerwoman Rajbi said, 'How can that be, *Sadhuji* [Mr Holy Man]?'
> – Yes, sister, quite true.
> – Why, what happened?
> – We are all offspring of the same mother.
> – No Sadhuji, untrue, untrue.
> – Why?
> – If the offspring of the same mother, we are all brothers and sisters, yes?
> – Should be.
> – But Munabar doesn't know that. Munabar's children in my room, Munabar's children in Mukami Dusadin's place as well, and all these boys are bonded labor. Tell me how this can be.
> – Sister, not that kind of mother, Mother India.
> – Who is that?
> – Our country, India.
> – This is our country?
> – Of course.
> – Oh Sadhuji, my place is Seora village. What do you call a country? I know *tahsil* [a pre-independence-revenue collecting unit], I know station, I don't know country. India is not the country.
> – Hey, you are all independent India's free people, do you understand?
> – No, Sadhuji. (Devi 1995: 41)

While Rajbi is nominally enfranchised by the nation-state as a citizen, she continues to remain outwith the nation-state ideology;[9] she has no access to representation and no concern for India's national boundaries. Yet Rajbi's 'misreadings' of the Mother India myth and her identification with bonded labour provide a rhetorical space for the articulation of subaltern women's lives: one that recasts the 'cartography of bonded space' in the context of transnational finance capitalism as well as post-Independence India.

9 See Hunter 1999.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to Professor Lynette Hunter for her comments and suggestions on this article.

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