Chapter Six

The Figure Of the ‘Woman’: Names, Bodies, Inscriptions

Introduction

What is man that the itinerary of his desire creates such a text? (Spivak in Holland 1997, 42)

This chapter, more than any other preceding it, is deeply in engagement with the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. This is prompted by the fact that her work stands a rare exception to the general dearth of scholarship when it comes to the thinking of a juxtaposition between deconstruction and feminism at the site of the postcolonial. However, as I argue below, one also needs to negotiate with Spivak’s work in thinking a feminist ethics of representation. I try to show that through the notion of the ‘work’ as I have fleshed out so far in this thesis.

In this final chapter, I try also to discuss certain textual productions of the name ‘woman’ to think how it can be read and deconstructed to think of an ethicality which would retain the instrumentality of the ‘name’ in its radical usage, as well as try to be attentive to the singularities it stages and yet fails to address adequately. To begin with, I discuss the hazards of using the name ‘woman’ for the work of deconstruction. Later in the chapter I read texts and textualities located in different contexts: an account of the trial of a folk heroine from an early twentieth century pioneering treatise on Bengali folk literature, several texts articulating the postcolonial feminist re-opening of a nineteenth century debate around the legal
representation of a rite of widow-immolation, and lastly the weave of the ongoing
debate around abortion-rights of the woman. These readings, as I endeavour to
show, mark the limits of a thought trying to figure a feminist ethics of
representation. We have already discussed the shape of this thought in previous
chapters. A thought that can be persisted with (even if can never be achieved) where
this persistence is a ‘work’. A work which ‘cuts’ the ‘writing of man’ in both
interrupting it and making it sur-vive. Might this indicate a deconstruction that is
thoroughly ‘feminist’?

Names: Woman (What Is In A Name?)

In ‘Chapter Three’ the importance of thinking ‘distance’ in understanding
self-adequation is discussed with a reference to Martin Heidegger’s key-concept of
‘Entfernung’, the basic ‘de-severance’ through which Dasein tries to both distance
and know its ‘world’. The self, it is told, must ‘put things away’ in order to know
them, in effect knowing itself as away from itself and re-presented. Can one
understand this logic with a reference to the ‘desire of man’ as I have tried to discuss
in the previous chapter? In the much discussed and debated text Spurs: Nietzsche’s
Styles (Derrida 1979) Derrida quotes Friedrich Nietzsche, who writes that the “most
powerful effect of woman […] is, to use the language of philosophers, an effect at a
distance” (quoted in Derrida 1979, 47). For Nietzsche, the figure of the ‘woman’ is
also the figure of the very being or temporally extended nature of meaning, meaning
disseminated in time. As if the very play and dance (Nietzsche writes distance in
German as: ‘Dis-Tanz’ where ‘Tanz’ means dance) of a spacing that both discloses
and effaces meaning and truth, “that distance […] is necessary (emphasis in original,
Derrida, 49). If one goes with the rhythm of Nietzsche then it is the woman who
enchants or “seduces” the man-as-philosopher from a distance (49). Derrida shows,
that for the logic of Nietzsche, this distance is “necessary” since it does not only
disseminate presence, but also protects presence, or the traces of it. It is here that the
question of ‘style’ comes up. For Nietzsche, the ‘style’ is the man. ‘Style’, like the
stylus, Derrida reminds, is also indicative of a pointed object, it keeps nothingness
and absence at arm’s length. This style/stylus is not only a penetrating pointed object
(referring to the phallic figure) but also that which protects “the presence, the content, the thing itself, meaning, truth” (39). It can protect, we may conjecture further, because it is also extended. This spatial extension, I read also as an extension in time, a spatio-temporal distance so to say. Why is it also temporal? Because as I have shown in the case of de-cision, ‘time’ also protects ‘presence’ from being sucked into the nothingness of an unique event. Time makes an event ‘sur-vive’ beyond one time occurrence. This temporal distance therefore, is also like an extended stylus which is needed to produce and guard presence. The metaphor ‘style’ in its embodiment as the stylus must traverse a distance in time, to be extended, and consequently to be able to protect presence. To protect and produce presence therefore, the stylus paradoxically must also be the distance which, according to Nietzsche, is of the woman. The metaphor of man and woman therefore collapse, I propose, as the ‘style’ which is of the man also reveals itself as an extension, a ‘distance’, which is said to be of the woman. It is this style as distance which keeps pure absence or nothingness (an unreserved metaphorical slide) at bay. Derrida does not specifically make this point in the text, but his playful prose likens this metaphor to yet another metaphor, the projected rostrum of a ship which noses its way cutting through waves, reminding one of the production of a textuality curved out of limitless dispersion. This act necessarily involves a violence, not simply of a penetration, but of an inscription, of the production of a passage in time. Therefore, I stress on the ‘extension’ along with the penetration in thinking ‘distance’ along with ‘style’. Can the style then, be simply of the man (even in its paleonymy)?

To go through our argument again: one sees here a key collusion of the figures ‘man’ and ‘woman’ at the site of the metaphor: ‘distance’. If the woman is understood to represent ‘distance’, then woman can be said to also represent or affect the metaphor which is of the man: style. Woman therefore, ironically, becomes the master signifier as if through its assigned effect of being the distance, since the effects of both the ‘manly’ and the ‘womanly’ can be expressed with a single metaphor: distance. One is tempted to perceive here a clear subversion of what Derrida elsewhere called: “the complicity of Western metaphysics with a notion of male firstness” (Derrida in Holland 1997, 29).
What if following these clues one reads this matrix with the key-word, ‘intentionality’? If the intention for self-presence is of the ‘man’, then this intention cannot fully ‘will’ the self, it cannot prefigure and master even the writing of the self totally. It already deconstructs itself in ek-sisting\(^1\), sur-viving, taking a distance from itself. What the distance is, cannot simply be explained by the sign ‘woman’, for distance also is the being of ‘style’ in protecting presence from pure absence or full dispersion. Similarly, what ‘presence’ \(is\), cannot only be articulated through the figure ‘man’, for this presence is neither fully willed not fully produced and protected by style-as-man. What the style therefore protects is not full presence but the trace of it, and this protection/production is a ‘work’ understood as extended in time, like a violence, even if the violence of the pointed object cannot fully be intentional, cannot be intended by the man. The above reading, even if it treats only a fragment of a densely complex text (Derrida reading Nietzsche) shows how risky can it be to use the name ‘woman’ to create a series of related terms because that would be another way of stepping into the man-woman binary. The name ‘woman’ therefore needs to be used cautiously, or as Spivak says, as an ‘unmotivated’ name. And yet, this name (‘woman’) also represents singular bodies, real phenomenal beings, finite lives, aspiring legal subjectivities\(^2\). Can one forget the layers of paleonymy that the name ‘woman’ carries?

Spivak makes the argument\(^3\) that, it is a “difficult consideration” when one wants to “claim deconstruction for or against feminism”, but adds that this issue still has to be confronted and there is “no way around it” (Spivak 1993, 132). She indicates one approach where, if we can lay it down point-by-point: (A) “‘man’ is the duped name of the undivided origin”, (B) which is deconstructed by “différance

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\(^1\) See below for a discussion of ‘ek-sisting’.

\(^2\) It is somewhat in recognition of this gap that Chandra Mohanty writes of the disjuncture between “Woman” as a cultural-ideological “composite” representation and “women” who are “real, material subjects of their collective histories” (Mohanty 2003, 19). Even if I think the ‘material’ and the ‘collective histories’ do not really gel for Mohanty’s critical project. Das shows in further detail how this discrepancy between Mohanty’s ‘criticism’ of the given and what she conceives as her ‘project’, furrows her critique (see Das 2010, 139-142).

\(^3\) This argument is already mentioned before in parts, see ‘Chapter Three’.
as the ungraspable ground of propriation” and therefore a disseminated non-place (Spivak, 132). This deconstruction is feminist since (C) “Différance and “woman” are two names on a chain of nominal displacements where, as unmotivated names, neither can claim priority” (132). Consequently, if one describes deconstruction as a critique of “phallogocentrism”, then within that “discourse”, “woman” is just another name representing the figure of the aporia or of the double-bind (132). Can the name woman claim any priority in that chain of “unmotivated” names (i.e. différance, gift, hymen etc)? Spivak confronts this question in many places of her oeuvre and comes up with answers apparently contradicting the one quoted above. In “Love Me, Love My Ombre, Elle” for example, she writes,

> If the word “woman” can thus be associated with the narrative of this set of problems, it can take its place upon the Derridian chain which contains “differance,” “parergon,” “writing.” It is by no means one among many Derridian themes. (Emphasis added, Spivak 1984, 23)

She opines that being the “most tenacious name for the limit that situates and undermines the vanguard of every theory seeking to be adequate to its theme”, the (non-) proper name ‘woman’, “makes propriation – the establishment of a thing in its appropriate property – undecidable” (22). I read this proposition as an indication that the concept-metaphor ‘woman’ introduces undecidability in its deconstruction of the name, ‘man’, which desires full presence, even if that does not mean either of the two terms (woman and man) are purely absent or non-material.

I want to open a parenthesis here and add a critical note on a widely seen tendency in representing the ‘feminine’ as purely indeterminate. It is a commonplace to project the name ‘woman’ and indeed real women it represents as fully undecidable which fits with the stereotype of women or their ‘femininity’ being ‘mysterious’ or being ‘like a riddle’. This is the way through which a certain textuality uses the mark of the feminine, and circulates its enigma of being indeterminate. I want to distance my efforts clearly from such an agenda. There can be several problems that might arise as a result of this critical slip, most crucially: ontologization of the feminine. As Derrida deftly points out in an interview, not the

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4 An article first published in 1984.
‘woman’ but ‘sexual difference’ is the metaphor of indeterminacy that the metaphor of man relegates to a secondary position, subordinating it but also desiring it as inexhaustible (Derrida in Holland 1997, 34). The question of sexual difference gets inextricably tied with the question of ethics since sexual difference is the other which the “firstness of man” creates to forget an unconditional other (Derrida, 29-34). Conflating ‘sexual difference’ with ‘woman’ would take us to another vicious circle: the knowledge production of the logos of man. If we remember, deconstruction also poses an ‘origin’ in setting to its ‘work’, but here the origin is always already its own double. It does give in to the “undecidability of the fetish”, but still, “deconstruction cannot be pure undecidability” (Spivak in Holland 1997, 54). Rather, it “constitutes an economy of the undecidable […] it is not dialectical but plays with the dialectic” (Derrida quoted in Spivak, 54). Hence the care needed in using a name like ‘woman’. We now pick up the threads of our argument.

Exactly how the name ‘woman’ is still different from all other names or figures that stand for the ‘work of deconstruction’ is not clear. Spivak’s argument in support of her proposition is that, “of all names that Derrida has given to originary undecidability, woman possesses this special quality – she can occupy both positions in the subject-object oscillation, be cathected as both something that différance, writing, parergon, the supplement, and the like – other names of undecidability, – cannot do without special pleading” (24). But how ‘woman’ can do without “special pleading” is not shown by Spivak clearly. It seems to follow from the fact that deconstruction sets up a nuanced “critique of humanism”, which does not merely dissolve the category ‘human’ but interrogates the centrality of ‘man’ in the form of the necessity of subject-predication, which, in effect makes it a critique of “phallogocentrism” (24). This seems to be in tandem with the argument we have been pursuing, even if I have tried to pose my argument in what I have called the ‘paradigm of work’. From that position, I would not be hasty to call the ‘work’ ‘feminist’ or signify it with the concept-metaphor, ‘woman’. I have discussed in the previous chapter that the desire for self-presence structured like the intentional matrix of ‘man’ is persistently interrupted by an extra folding. What interrupts intentionality from fully achieving itself is however not totally outside the mastery of that ‘intention’, and yet, it is not fully within it either. Our argument follows from
this tendency of the ‘self’ to be also ‘cut’ by something that is not of itself. Can this persistence of the ‘cut’ of an outside be called ‘feminist’ or ‘inscription of the woman’ without stepping into the trap of subject formation, and therefore introducing another intentionality? On the other hand, if intentionality as such is phallogocentric, how can there be a ‘feminist intention’? I have argued that it is not necessary to answer these questions definitively to glimpse a feminist ethics, rather the point is to risk repeated failure in lingering with the ‘question’ of an impossible feminist ethics persistently. This persistence is also an affirmation and shadowing of the work of the ‘cut’ which is neither fully ontologized nor fully (of the other or) de-ontologized. The ‘risk’ of ‘repeated failure’ is to be worked out textually each time one confronts ‘singularity’ of an event. The impossible responsibility of representing the event amounts to both denying it (it’s singularity or eventness) and affirming it (making it sur-vive), I contend. It is within this notion of a persistence of the ‘work’ that I have tried to read Spivak’s ‘Echo’ in the previous chapter. ‘Echo’ is the name of that ‘impossible foothold’ which is a work without intentionality, or a position without intention (therefore non-position as well). Can this general argument be placed in the historical production of otherness, or in the geo-graphical writing of the ‘other’ in colonization?

The figuring of Echo, indeed, cannot ignore the binds that come from the violence of the history of colonization. Spivak poses the question, can the narrative of ‘Echo, be “read without the specific ethical burden of the feminist in decolonization?” (Spivak 1993a, 37). This problem is not resolved in the text “Echo”, even if it is indicated that within the “homeopathic double bind of feminism in decolonization”, the plotting of ‘Echo’ might inaugurate more complex difficulties, since the colonized subaltern identified without the mark of sexual difference can already take the ‘non-place’ of the figure of the ‘Echo’. But does that project remain conceptually tenable, if one keeps in mind what Spivak has called the “homeopathic double bind of feminism in decolonization”? (see previous chapter, Spivak, 37). In seeking to “cure the poison of patriarchy with the poison of the legacy of colonialism” (37), postcolonial reason runs the risk of effacing the
gendered subaltern yet again. I read below Spivak’s more recent interventions in thinking the name ‘native informant’ along with her figuration of ‘echo’ (as discussed in the previous chapter). I argue that the disentanglement of the ‘echo’ from that elusive figure of the subaltern-woman might take one to the ‘beyond’ of the figure of the ‘native informant’.

Names: Native Informant (Is Postcolonialism a Feminism?)

‘Postcolonial’ history, one notes, is a situation where one confronts another name: the ‘subaltern’, also placed at the margins of a dominant textuality. How does the name ‘woman’ compare and place itself in relation to the name ‘subaltern’? Do they activate totally different discourses, postcolonial and feminist, or can the two be read as intertwined? I discuss this with a reference to Spivak’s concept-metaphor (another name) the ‘native informant’ following a textual clue to pose this figure as gendered.

Reading the Kantian analytic of the sublime (in *Critique of Judgment*, 1790), Spivak shows that the feeling of sublime in the humans for Kant is a necessary result of a pre-programmed circuit that not only produces that effect but also does underline the superiority of reason over imagination. Kant calls it a “*Bestimmung*” (usually translated into English as “determination”) which Spivak

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5 I am referring chiefly to: A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present (Spivak 1999).

6 Spivak reads from the German original where she deems necessary, but chiefly follows the J.H. Bernard translation when it comes to the English version. I have consulted the more recent translations by Werner S. Pluhar (Kant 1987) and by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Kant 2002) as well.

7 This translation of ‘*Bestimmung*’ can be found in the J.H. Bernard translation that Spivak follows. It can also be found in the Pluhar translation in the referred part of the text (Kant 1987, 67). Guyer and Matthews however translate ‘*Bestimmung*’ in the textual moment in contention as ‘vocation’ (Kant 2002, 141). This translation is very close to the Spivakian sense of ‘being attuned’ since vocation can mean a ‘call’ or a ‘summon’, to which someone is drawn.
likens to the related word “Stimmung” which carries a “suggestion of “tuning’” (Spivak 1999, 10n17). Every time imagination fails to account for the sublime (it encounters in a scene produced primarily by the nature, which is outside of the subject) the circuit is tripped and reason takes over. This bypass to the mapping of reason is like a programme which makes us “feel the inadequacy of” imagination, a model to which “we are [...] tuned” (10-11). “In the moment of the sublime”, she writes, “the subject accedes to the rational will” (10). Kant contends that in our “respect” (Achtung) for the sublime we “attribute to an object of nature” that, which in truth is “a respect for our own determination” (Kant quoted in Spivak, 11).

Moreover, as Kant makes clear, “the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation, which we show to an object in nature through a certain subreption (substitution of a respect for the object instead of for the idea of humanity in our subject), which as it were makes intuitable the superiority of the rational vocation of our cognitive faculty over the greatest faculty of sensibility” (Kant 2002, 141). But this upper hand enjoyed by “reason [...] over sensibility” is not unproblematically human for Kant. It is a certain tuning in culture rather than a necessary production of culture (Spivak, 12). It is an attunement that is part of one’s being as human and not a matter of learning or becoming (through education or training), “Kultur rather than Bildung” as Spivak stresses (12). It is here that Kant inserts the “man in the raw [dem rohen Menschen]” (13, ‘the raw men’ would be more literal) who is without the cultural attunement required and consequently incapable of accessing reason, even if in Kant’s own formula this access is somewhat mechanical and not merely intentional. The raw men, who are without culture in this sense, can perceive the sublime in nature only as “terrible” (Kant quoted in Spivak, 14), and cannot be summoned to the dominion of reason, therefore remaining unattached to proper human self, or to the ‘proper’ of humanness,— Reason. Spivak is careful enough to distinguish between the concept of the “raw man” in Kant from those who are identified by the Kantian text as “uneducated” or “naturally uneducated”, namely children and women (13). Compared to the them, the raw man is a very different kind of ‘other’ in the Kantian scheme of things, and includes “the savage and the primitive” (13). It is here that Spivak makes the important inversion showing the distinction between two kinds of mechanisms through which a text deals with its ‘other’. In the Kantian text, for example, the ‘woman’, even if disavowed, can still
figure as an internal moment of the text which the text avows as its inside, and thus intends a certain mastery over. But on the contrary, the ‘raw man’ remains an “unacknowledgeable moment” and in that sense becomes one figuration, one exemplary textual trace of what Spivak calls the ‘native informant’. In the case of Kant, the “figure of the “native informant“”, she contends, “is [...] foreclosed” even if this figuration is key to the “most important moment in the argument”, without being a part of the intentional inside of the text (Spivak 1999, 13n20). The figure of the ‘raw man’ therefore is a moment in the trajectory of what Spivak calls the ‘native informant’ which is “imagined” “on the margins” of her readings of the enlightenment textuality, and which remains an “(im)possible perspective” (352).

The raw-man mentioned in the analytic of the sublime surfaces again when Kant discusses “teleological judgment” (19-27). Here the philosopher wonders about the purpose (“a priori principle of purposiveness”, emphasis in original, 20) of the existence of each thing beyond mere cause-effect relations which connects things in a chain of production and survival. Such an argument might end with man at the top of the chain of consumption and survival, “but then we do not see why it is necessary that men should exist” (Kant quoted in Spivak, 26). The purpose of “man” is furrowed, Kant points out, by the presence of “the New Hollanders or the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego” (Kant in Spivak, 26). These uncanny figures are introduced by a curious twist of argumentative prose. Even if the search for the teleological purposiveness for human existence is given the lie by these figures, they are only inserted into this argument, says Kant, “by chance” (Kant in Spivak, 26), or “casually”, as Spivak puts it (26). But most importantly, the raw man is geographically plotted here, as existing outside of Europe, at the cutting edge of colonial expeditions. As the philosophical enquiry into the concept ‘man’ gets re-plotted in an Eurocentric writing of the world-map (geo-graphy), the conceptual

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8 The Guyer and Matthews translation goes like this: “grass is necessary to the live-stock, just as the latter is necessary to the human being as the means for his existence; yet one does not see why it is necessary that human beings exist” (Kant 2002, 250).
foreclosure$^9$ becomes recognizable in the history of the world$^{10}$. The figuration of the native informant therefore materializes:

the relationship between European discursive production and the axiomatics of imperialism also changes, although the latter continues to play the role of making the discursive mainstream appear clean, and making itself appear as the only negotiable way. In the course of this unceasing operation, and in one way or another, an unacknowledgeable moment that I will call “the native informant” is crucially needed by the great texts; and it is foreclosed. (Spivak 1999, 4)

The trajectory of the ‘native informant’ would be such that in its textual moments, the “European discursive production” would acknowledge it in ‘naming’, but not in its operational role which it plays in construing the rational man of Europe central to its textuality. Therefore, as I have already argued, one should understand the ‘native informant’ not merely as certain aboriginal others named in the text of Kant, but as figurations of that radical alterity which any textuality tries to negotiate with by taming it within its structure, and yet not acknowledging that the very logic of its inside depends on this trace of the outside. The native informant cannot be thought as a subject of politics or an identity-trope, because it is not a subject-position to be assumed, but an otherness which surfaces every time subjectivity is positioned (subject-predication). This enables Spivak to think an ‘otherness’ not only in the Eurocentric textuality, but also in the design of the postcolonial critique itself. This has been a very important facet of Spivak’s work over the years, that she

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$^9$ ‘Foreclosure’ is a term Spivak borrows from the psychoanalytic tradition, which defines a strategy of the ‘ego’ in trying to reject an idea incompatible with itself along with the affect it produces. Spivak proposes that in thinking the constitution of an inside (subject’s ego) by rejection of an idea along with its affect the discourse of psychoanalysis opens up to a mechanism of ethical reading (Spivak 1999, 4).

$^{10}$ Spivak is aware that the “‘proper’ reading of philosophy” would not let one linger on such a “rhetorical detail”, but this is a “misreading” she willingly performs in following the supplement which the inside of the Kantian argument deploys to master its outside inadvertently giving into a logic of historical production, and therefore stepping outside the philosophical as well. See Spivak 1999, 26n32 for detailed discussion.
does not invest full radicality in the figure of the ‘postcolonial subject’, or the ‘scholar’, because the scholar cannot re-present otherness without acknowledging a basic distance from the other. For Spivak, otherness remains by definition not fully accessible. Likewise in political practices, the subject (of politics) only re-presents otherness, but cannot claim to be the other with a claim to full presence. The more one tries to catch the figure of the other, more it changes place. Like the Kantian text, the text of the postcolonial scholar too, is constituted around a ‘gap’, which it would try both to account for and disavow. For Spivak, in the postcolonial text, “the typecase of the foreclosed native informant today is the poorest woman of the South” (Spivak 2012, 6). Since she tracks the ‘foreclosure’ called native informant as a trajectory, she is able to show that the possibility that the “poorest woman of the South” would take the place of otherness, is already prefigured in the Kantian text. Kant, as discussed above, does not place the woman at the margin of rational humanness, but she is given the chance of becoming educated and access cultural attunement. She is not given the place of inaccessible otherness, and is set up as a reserves force as if, slated to become human through training. But the figure of the “native informant” is, “by contrast”, even if “Rhetorically crucial at the most important moment in the argument, […] is not part of the argument in any way” (Spivak 1999, 13n20). Spivak articulates a sweeping but very important question at this moment:

Was it in this rift that the seeds of the civilizing mission of today’s universalist feminism were sown? At best, it is a recoding and reterritorializing of the native-informant-as-woman-of-the-South, so that she can be part of the argument. (Spivak 1999, 13n20)

Put schematically, Spivak is wondering if one can read the trajectory of “universalist feminism”, which takes the western European woman as its privileged subject, as an extension of the same Kantian textuality that forecloses the aboriginal as its other and therefore is complicit with the discourse of colonialism\textsuperscript{11}. In

\textsuperscript{11}This is the point Spivak makes when she points out that “The abolition of this rite [of \textit{sati}] by the British has been generally understood [by the colonial discourse] as a case of “White men saving brown women from brown men.” White women-from the nineteenth-century
countering this discourse, the postcolonial critique might have put the non-European subaltern man at its helm, but the non-European woman remains forgotten even in that construction of subalternity. This amounts to saying that at its secret heart, the postcolonial text is always already summoned to its ‘other’ which it has foreclosed as the subaltern woman, who has been doubly displaced, first by the colonial discourse and then by the discourse which tries to counter it. And therefore, as Spivak contends in her now canonical essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, even within the “effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced”, and if “in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Spivak 1999, 274). The text of postcolonial critique therefore must be re-structured like a feminism, if it tries to account for that otherness which it has foreclosed even in imagining subalternity. One should note that in the paradigmatic declaration, “the subaltern cannot speak” Spivak also means that within the construal of subalternity, the woman as subaltern cannot find her voice, and that her figuration opens it up to further critique, a feminist one this time. The postcolonial text cannot come to terms with its own constitution till it tries to understand this specific lacuna of its own architecture. At its margins then, postcolonialism can be re-thought as a feminism. But if the native informant’s figure is structurally never fully accessible, how to represent the native informant as woman, or name her in writing a new text of postcolonialism as a feminism? Would the feminist project merely consist in adding to the ‘subaltern male subject’ (conceived as yet incomplete) the additional

British Missionary Registers to Mary Daly-have not produced an alternative understanding” (Spivak 1999, 287).

12 As well as the text conditioned by globalization: “the native informant's foreclosed perspective is located in woman's global subalternity, the computing of the great narrative of history by the shifting currents of global imperialism seem more apposite” (Spivak 1999, 89).

13 Is this lacuna also not a ‘necessary darker edge’ of a ‘thought’, an edge which remains always as its ‘un-thought’, where the point is not to exhaust all darkness or unthought by hoping to reduce it to ‘truth’, but to stretch the ambits of thought to find darker and denser ‘unthought’. Thus Derrida quotes Heidegger, “The more original a thought [...] the richer its Un-thought becomes” (Heidegger quoted in Derrida 1991: 13).
dimension of the ‘gendered subaltern subject’? Can feminism be content with such an additive model? In the next section, I address these questions.

Names: Representing/Naming the ‘Other’

But the question of scholarship, feminist or otherwise, is always already furrowed by a distance between one who represents, and the many who are represented\(^{14}\). Mary E John, thinking specifically from an Indian context has opined that, “There are no shortcuts for the distances we must travel \textit{or the time} it takes to see from another’s point of view” (emphasis added, John 2011, 9). The mention of both space and time to indicate the immense problem of knowing the other (at a distance) is to be noted. For John, this “distance” cannot be traversed by ‘reducing’ “the difficult task of building solidarity to so many “clear examples”’” (John, 9)\(^{15}\). It is important here to note that this cannot just be prompted by the specific make-up of the “Indian side of the story” but it is rather to be read as conceptual articulation of a question that the feminist scholar representing ‘others’ must face irrespective of her location. ‘Location’, after all, is a generality common to all feminists even if not all are historically or conceptually invested in it the same way.

How then, does the feminist postcolonial scholar try to ‘re-present’ the subaltern woman? I will ask this question within the bounds of the Spivakian corpus. One gets a clue to Spivak’s specific ‘work’, when she writes that in reading the subaltern subject, “the historian and the teacher of literature must critically interrupt each other” (Spivak 1987, 241). ‘Subjectivity’, Spivak reminds quoting Foucault, is not only contained in investigating what was said/intended to be said and by whom but, “what position can and must be occupied by any individual if he is to be the subject of it” (Foucault quoted in Spivak, 242). The “I slot” (242), as she calls it, is a vacant placeholder, to be filled in. This slot, left by the subaltern woman, “marks” the “place of “disappearance” with something other than silence and nonexistence,

\(^{14}\) I am not going into the discussion of the Spivakian distinction between \textit{Darstellung} and \textit{Vertretung} here (see Spivak 1999).

\(^{15}\) John quotes from and makes a critique of Chandra Mohanty’s concept of “feminism without borders” here (see John 2011 and Mohanty 2003, especially 9-13).
a violent aporia between subject and object status” (Spivak 1988, 307). A gap from
where the woman can neither speak with full intention, nor is she totally silent.
Representation as such is incomplete definitionally. “There is no space from which
the sexed subaltern subject can speak” (Spivak, 307), but still the point is to go
through the work of it, ethically. The figure of the feminist postcolonial scholar
comes to view, who must re-present real women, even knowing that she cannot play
the role of the ‘native informant’, because that would be merely ‘fixing’ the gap
between self and other which must be retained in any ethical re-presentation
 THERE IS NO SPACE FROM WHICH THE SEXED SUBALTERN SUBJECT CAN SPEAK.
(therefore the ethical re-presentation is that which tries to also stage the im-
possibility of full representation). One must be attentive here to the fact that in
thinking particularities of the ‘gendered other’, one has to take recourse to
generalities which would, again, leave certain other specificities unassimilated16.
This is not to say one does not need a grammar or the ‘law-like structures’, but one
also is to be aware of ‘law’ as an ongoing process17. When the gendered other is re-
presented in law, to enable her in claiming certain rights, that represented ‘subject of
law’ is still an abstraction and cannot fully represent the living, tarrying figures who
go through the experience of everyday, and yet those experiences remain subject to
certain law of representation (to self and to others). This gap-within, is also
described by Spivak as the difference between the ““woman” and woman: the name
and, as it were, the thing, the phenomenal essence” (Spivak 1993, 137). Spivak
makes a parallel between this difference and Michel Foucault’s use of the concept-
metaphor ‘power’. Foucault makes a short circuit between power the “name” and
power the “thing”, she argues (Spivak, 138). For feminism however, one needs to
make this leap, but by being conscious of the obligatory reduction. It is crucial that
one increasingly takes the particularities into consideration, but law-making cannot
forget that ultimately its work is the work of appropriating the ‘particular’ for the
‘universal’ or for the ‘name’, and therefore one of abstraction and reduction, which
is nonetheless necessary. But one must be attentive to the fact that re-presentation

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16 When one thinks of interrupting the universal shorthand ‘woman’ with ‘third world
woman’ for instance, then the later also works as a universal reducing different instances of
the third world woman.

17 As against ‘justice’, which is “not deconstructible” (Derrida in Cornell, Rosenfeld, and
(legal or scholarly) also reduces the ‘other’. As Spivak puts it, the two should go together, “right to be claimed” and “[double-] bind to be watched” (Spivak, 124).

The postcolonial feminist scholar, for Spivak, can be that “constituted subject that forgets the other in its haste to claim otherness” (Spivak 2008, 176). The scholar is to be attentive to the fact that as a scholar she would always have an unassailable distance from the ‘real’, ‘phenomenal’ women conceived as the other. In another register, this same distance would also work between her scholarly self, and her own experiences which cannot be available to her without mediation, and that while representing the other (or herself as other) she has to take recourse to a normative structure and to short-hands or ‘names’. It is from this conviction of an ever inadequate but necessary calculation that Spivak sounds the following program:

Incanting to ourselves all the perils of transforming a ‘name’ to a referent – making a catechism, in other words, of catachresis – let us none the less name (as) ‘woman’ that disenfranchised woman whom we strictly, historically, geopolitically cannot imagine, as a literal referent, [just like the] “Subaltern” is the name of the social space that is different from the classed social circuit. (Spivak 1994, 139)

‘Catachresis’ is the informed mis-use of a metaphor. Spivak’s definition: “reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding”. Seizing, grasping is connected to the German verb begreifen which is also related to the German for ‘concept’ (das Begrief). It is about thinking/seizing the old metaphor. Spivak writes,

The task of a feminist political philosophy is neither to establish the proper meaning of “true,” nor to get caught up in a regressive pattern to show how the proper meaning always eludes our grasp, nor yet to “ignore” it […], but to accept the risk of catachresis”. (Spivak 1994, 161)

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18 This follows a critique of the position of Jacqueline Rose who seems to side with “right to be claimed” while Spivak also stresses “bind to be watched” (Spivak 1993, 125). Spivak seems to indicate here to a politics-thought distinction as well, a consideration of which would take us off-course, I refer to my discussion of ‘speculative reason’ and its language with reference to Deconstruction’s proximity to the Hegelian signatures in ‘Chapter Two’.
But this is not only about naming the ‘other woman’ from a distance, because that would run the risk of construing an arrogant scholarly subject too sure of her power to represent. It is instead, also about a division within. Spivak therefore would propose, “Let us divide the name of woman so that we see ourselves as naming, not merely named”, with this impossible hope “that the possibility for the name will be finally erased” (Spivak, 139-40).

Bodies: Mālaṅcamālā’s Trial and the ‘Persistent Female’

In this section, I refer chiefly to two related moments both of which concern the figure of the ‘woman’ and her subjectivity within the time of the ‘post-colonial’, even if their placements are different. The first comes from what can be called a text of ‘literary history’, a pioneering work on the Bengali folk literature written in the early twentieth century. The second moment, in contrast, is situated at the site of the postcolonial feminist critique, and therefore is already a step removed. Unlike the first moment which is instantiated in a particular text, the second is comprised of a series of feminist re-readings of a nineteenth century debate (around the legal abolition of the rite of ‘sati’). In the course of this juxtaposition, I hope, contours of a feminist ethic of representation which is postcolonial will come out in sharper relief.

The first moment comes from a pioneering study of Bengali ‘folk literature’, published in 1920, penned by Dineshchandra Sen (1866-1939). Sen, who is a scholar at the turn of the century in more ways than one, needs little introduction. He wrote what many (Rabindranath Thakur, most notably among them) held to be the first comprehensive account of the history of Bengali literature (Bangabhāsā O Sāhitya, 1896) and enjoyed immediate acclaim among the contemporary scholarly

19 Dineshchandra Sen’s life (1866-1939) falls in equal halves into the nineteenth and twentieth century. He suffered a dramatic reversal of fate as a historian of literature so far as the reception and criticism of his own works are concerned. After the success of his first major work, the first volume of the history of Bengali literature, Bangabhāsā O Sāhitya (1896) written in Bengali, and his subsequent rise to fame, he gradually slid out of favour of most of the young critics after the turn of the century. See the notes below.
community. Two decades hence (in 1917), when as ‘Ramtanu Lahiri research fellow’ he gave a series of lectures at the Calcutta University, his scholarship however had already come under a cloud of severe criticisms. Even if his position in the Calcutta University remained influential still, and mostly as a direct result of these lectures, he could embark on a project sponsored by the University, of collecting and documenting oral literature, mostly long ballads, from the eastern parts of the Bengal province, employing a band of young filed-workers and scholars. The lecture-series delivered in 1917 is therefore crucial in terms of the inception of the study of folk-literature as an important component of Bengali literature and literary history. In the context of our discussion, it is to be noted that

20 The timing of Sen’s ‘Bengali literary history’ could not have been better as this was also the era when the figure of literary historian emerges as a scholar-activist whose work is not only to write commentaries on available literary texts, but to actually go to the ‘field’ in search of old manuscripts unknown to the new reading-machinery of national-history-writing. Soon this search for the old texts would change into an enthusiastic documentation of ‘living traditions’, the textual re-productions of oral literature. A project which seemed at the time to give a more hands-on access to the essence of the ‘nation’, could make it more present and material. The conception of this project of searching and documenting oral literature from the interiors of rural Bengal by a dedicated army of young scholars is first articulated in Rabindranath Thakur’s famous speech, “Chhâtrader prati sambhâsan” (literally “address to the students”) delivered at the Bangiya Sâhitya Parishad (Literary Society of Bengal) in 1904.

21 This set-back is generally attributed to his inability to keep pace with his time, his outright refusal to adopt new methodologies of writing history and his dogged adherence to his own brand of knowing and recounting the past. This has been termed “romantic” by Dipesh Chakrabarty in a recent essay on Dineshchandra (Chakrabarty 2004).

22 Chiefly from the areas known as ‘Mymensingh’ (hence the naming of these ballads as Mymensingh Ballads: maymansingha gîtikā), now part of Banglaesh. Sen published a series of volumes both in English and Bengali edited by himself. The volumes comprised, other than the documented ballads, of the translations and long accompanying introductions and notes by Sen, presented again as ‘Ramtanu Lahiri Research Fellowship Lectures’, the general title of the English series being Eastern Bengal Ballads Mymensing (Sen 1923).

23 One detail to consider: these lectures were prepared after Sen stumbled upon a short piece on the rural poetess Candrâbatī by one Chandrakumar Dey but before actually getting hold
these lectures are delivered in the same year when Thakur’s short story “Paylā
Nambar” is published in the journal Sabuj Patra. These lectures by Sen are later
compiled into a volume titled, The Folk Literature of Bengal (1920, Sen 1985)
which also indicates the inception of a long engagement of Sen with the study of
folk-literature. It is from this volume, Sen’s first foray into the study of folk
literature, that we single out a fragment to read.

The fragment concerns the story of Mālaṅcamālā, which Sen in turn picks
up from Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar’s collection of fairy tales24. It is an
account of a woman’s extreme sacrifices for her father, husband (the infant prince
and future king, with whom she is forced into a marriage due to a prophecy and
plays mother to), and the king. These sacrifices could not have been fulfilled without
“an absolute indifference to the body” as Sen puts it (Sen 1985, 325). At one point in
the story, Mālaṅcamālā’s body is systematically dismembered and mutilated, but
she comes out of it un-flinched. Sen articulates it in a joyous celebratory tone, in a
sub-section titled “She cares not for the body”:

This absolute indifference to body and heroic devotion to truth rank her as a
martyr of first order. This ideal womanhood is no unrealised dream in this
country. Times without number instances have occurred in our history
showing such firm rectitude and devotion in the fair sex. (Sen, 326)

The excitement that oozes from Sen’s re-telling of the story is hardly to be missed.
“And what a trial!” Sen writes, “Her eyes were taken out. She still insisted on the

of numerous folk ballads from Eastern Bengal with the help of Dey and others employed by
the University. I believe it can be textually shown that he still made all his central
assumptions about the ‘folk literature of Bengal’ in this very first book, before going
through the enormous material sent from the ‘field’ which would later be edited and
published by him in several volumes.

24 Sen’s short circuit of the genres, between ‘fairy tales’ and ‘folk tales’ is not to be
overlooked, but falls outside the domain of our discussion. Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar
brought out the pioneering collection of Bengali fairy tales, Thākurmār Jhuli
(‘Grandmother’s Bag of Stories’, 1907). The story under consideration however is to be
found in another compilation also by Mitra Majumdar titled Thākurdādār Jhuli
(‘Grandfather’s Bag of Stories’, 1907).
fulfilment of her conditions; her beautiful hands were cut off, but she insisted on, as if nothing had happened” (326). What of this discourse that seems preoccupied with the dismembering of the woman’s body and yet tries to get at an elusive ‘essence’ which determines the ‘feminine’25, but which is still not of the body? Then again, if that essence is not of the body, not physical, then what this discourse tries to get at by staging the systematic dismembering of that very body26 (of the woman)? I make the following conceptual speculations on these questions.

In the scene of Mālañcamālā’s trial, the body of the woman is a recurring location which can never be wholly sanctified (the epic Sīā27, who has to prove her purity repeatedly by going through fire, becoming the type). The woman, it seems, can strive but never can completely transcend her body, which always has to be ready to be subjected to perpetual tests in proving its subjection to a certain properness. But looked from the other side, the body may also be seen to produce an excess which cannot be tamed or domesticated within the logic of mere physicality. The body of Mālañcamālā, in mute suffering, seems always to carry some possibility of a deviation that can never be fully domesticated by violence. One remembers here the spectre of the “persistent female” that the psychoanalyst’s readings encounters, even if in another context. Reading the Renaissance ‘romantic epic’ La Gerusalemme Liberata (Jerusalem Delivered, 1581) by the Italian poet

25 In this case, the essence of the Bengali folk heroine, and by extension, the essential feminine that can stand for that part of the nature of the ‘Bengaliness’ which falls beyond the pale of western reason, and instrumentality.

26 Michel Foucault has pointed out specifically in the case of European modernity that in the context of ‘biopower’, death becomes “power’s limit” or the “moment that escapes” power (Foucault 1990, 138), but one is tempted to put that conceptual structure to work in understanding this specific textuality as well. To unpack Sen’s discourse which is obsessed with the (systematic and spectacular) dissection of the female body and yet, short of the limit of death.

27 Wife of the epic hero Rām, who has to prove her chastity by going through the sacred fire more than once. For the connection between satidāha and the myth of Sītā see Sunder Rajan 1993, 59n42.
Torquato Tasso, Sigmund Freud runs into a curious incarnation of death which returns repeatedly as physicality, and as body of the female. The critical narrative of this reading is provided in turn by Samuel Weber (Weber 1982). In the story, the hero Tancredi, leading a crusading army inadvertently kills his lover Clorinda, who had joined the other side, the Muslims, even if she converts to Christianity before death (see Froemmer in Gifford and Hauswedell 2010, 125-127). But this conversion textualised in the epic-poem which is part of a definite Christian textuality, is interrupted by a curious re-turn of Clorinda from beyond death. But what does return, her ‘soul’ or the ‘body’, is the question that haunts the psychoanalyst. Her “soul” is trapped in a tree which the hero must slash at to make a passage for his army through the woods. But this also make his lover’s blood flow yet again, stalling the crusader in his way, “but blood streams from the wound and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in this tree, accuses him of once again injuring his beloved” (Freud 2011, 64). Is it the ‘soul’ or the flesh that returns, as the wound remains ever open streaming with blood and with the voice of the woman? What is this cut which never stops flowing with blood? Freud does not ask these questions. What strikes him instead, is the very logic of ‘repetition’: “eternal repetition of the same” (64). Freud is apparently not bothered by the physicality of the returning wound, even if “nothing is more difficult to do away with than this persistent female”, if she is killed “her soul returns” as a physicality, “imprisoned in a tree” (Weber 1982, 174). What returns therefore, which the discourse of the psychoanalyst looking for typicality seems to miss is the “persistent female”, not a mere logic of repetition, but a ‘work’ of the inexhaustible body, and therefore an

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28 In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920, Freud 2011). I encountered this reading of Freud by Samuel Weber (quoted) in Spivak’s “Echo” (see Weber quoted in Spivak 1993a, 38; Weber 1982, 173-174). This connection (Spivak-Echo-Weber-Freud) is also important as a validation of the line of argument we are pursuing.

29 To repeat, Freud is reading the story as ‘ethical instantiations’ (see previous chapter), plotting the specific text into the larger textuality of ethics, and therefore the connection with our reading of the textual moment in Sen.

30 In Froemmer, Judith, “Crusesignati – signed with the cross: Tasso’s poetics of crusade” (Gifford and Hauswedell 2010, 113-132).

‘embodied work’ of re-presentation. According to Weber’s thesis, this is a crucial moment in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, when ‘death’ enters Freud’s text. This entry of ‘death’ is through the figure of the “passive female”32, a persistent passivity which is also an unshakable materiality or embodiment which cannot be exhausted even as the psychoanalyst’s pen tries to articulate it.

To return to the trial of the folk heroine Mālañcamālā, the discourse of the literary historian itself seems unwilling to let go of her body, therefore producing the ‘persistence’. As if ‘death’ constitutes the outside limit of this playful discourse whose play ends just short of death. It tries to get rid of the body and also cannot lose it completely, since that would end its ‘use’ of the body as an object of play. This discourse therefore tries to get at an essence beyond the body and still cannot confront ‘death’, or in other words, it is incapable of thinking the feminine essence beyond a simple negation of physicality (which death cannot be33). The discourse under consideration, as I try to argue, tries to keep death at the realm of the private, contending as if, the right of the individual in committing an existential suicide, which might then be used to activate the paradigmatic self-sacrifice of the satī that works however with the “sanction” of a regulative patriarchal machinery, that puts into effect a whole set of textual interpretations and discursive twists to actually produce that space for the widow’s choice (see Spivak 1988, 308). Sen the scholar is complicit in this discourse, in his value-laden representation of the folk-heroine as well as in his efforts in connecting her to the figure of the ‘willing sati’(see below) who apparently chooses to commit suicide. The moment this short-circuit is made, the isolated textual moment gets its place in a larger text and discourse, which, as I argue below, the postcolonial feminist scholar can ignore only at the expense of

32 Ibid.

33 Das, for example, marks “two distinct moments”, the modern and the postmodern to think the negotiation of the notion of death with the notion of ‘body’, “[in] the modern moment, the body tries to deal with death as a separate other to be won over in battle. In the so-called postmodern moment, an apparent dissolution of the body-death binary questions this separation” (Das 2010, 73). In out mapping the position of the discourse under consideration would roughly fall in the former moment as described by Das.
passing over the fundamental *aporia* of a feminist justice. Let us first examine how that crucial connection is made in Sen’s text.

*Mālaṅcamālā* hardly ever speaks, and never speaks out. This, I think can be linked to her apparent rejection of body and desire. One immediately remembers Foucault here, “in appearance, speech may well be of little account, but the prohibitions surrounding it soon reveal its links with desire and power” (Foucault 2005, 216). For Sen’s discourse, this passivity and silence marks the essential nature of the folk heroine. *Mālaṅcamālā* is like “the tree that gives its flowers and fruits to one who cuts it with axe” (Sen 1985, 233). If this valorised figure of the woman, who willingly ‘gives’ to the one who violates her, calls for a feminist reply, what might that be? It becomes more difficult, if that reply also strives to stay clear of any notion of the body as a site of unique non-negotiability, as a proper, or a property of the individual subject. But that is precisely the kind of reply we have tried to set up in the course of this thesis. In short, to think of a feminism which can work at a remove from any notion of originary essence or ‘properness’, identifying them as phallogocentric or as ‘of the man’. It might be key here to remember that Sen follows this moment in his text with an account documented by a high ranked colonial official\(^{34}\) (the incident takes place probably sometime between 1813 and 1829\(^{35}\)), in which the official tries, in vain, to dissuade a woman resolved to perform

\(^{34}\) The official in question is Sir Frederick James Halliday, a product of the Fort William College, later the Governor of the Bengal Province, from 1854-1859. The incident took place when he was a lieutenant-governor of the Bengal province. This event however seems not to have convinced him about the generality of the pain’s non-effect on the body of the widow, as he was instrumental in enforcing the anti-\textit{sati}\ laws. I think this quote is correct and is from the book *Bengal under the lieutenant-governors; being a narrative of the principal events and public measures during their periods of office, from 1854 to 1898*, by Charles Edward Buckland (Buckland 1901). Halliday never mentions the age of the woman, whom Sen identifies as “young and beautiful”. Halliday however mentions that she had a son, thirty years of age. He also writes, “So ended the last Suttee that was lawfully celebrated in the district of Hooghly and perhaps in Bengal” (Halliday in Buckland 1901, 161).

\(^{35}\) This is the logic of the time-frame: Halliday mentions that the \textit{sati} he witnesses might very well be the last ‘legal’ performance of the rite. This dubious status is only possible
(the rite of) sati. As she is warned of the unimaginable pain one would surely suffer if burned alive, the resolute woman reportedly stages a trial of her own to prove her indifference to pain, and scorches her finger in the flame of a lamp. To magnify the effect, Sen quotes from the text, juxtaposing an eyewitness account of an event which happened almost a century before, and yet more palpable than the fairy-tale in its claim of truth,

Writes Sir F. Halliday, “The finger scorched, blistered and blackened and finally twisted up in a way which I can only compare to what I have seen to happen to a quill in the flame of a candle. During this time she never moved her hand, nor uttered a cry or altered the expression on her countenance.” (Sen 1985, 326-327)

For Sen, this unnamed girl, representing the figure of the ‘willing sati’, is “verily a cousin” of folk heroines like Mālāṅcamālā (327). The strategic placing of this account verified by the western observer is not to be overlooked. What is the logic under the ‘1813 circular’ issued by the East India Company according to which the rite is to be deemed lawful if certain conditions are fulfilled, chief among them, that it is “voluntary” which was to be certified by a witness representing the law (Halliday played that role in the quoted event). This circular was in effect until the rite was “outlawed in 1829” (Mani 1998, 19). Also see below for the ‘1813 circular’.

36 The rite of widow-immolation, The actual name of the rite in the vernacular (various Indian languages) should be ‘sātīdāhā’ (burning of the widows), and the rendering “sati or suttee as the proper name of the rite of widow self-immolation commemorates a grammatical error on the part of the British” (Spivak 1988, 305). For a critical account of the rite and the debate surrounding its sanction in the ancient Indian scriptures see Spivak 1988, 299-306. For a more descriptive and historical account of the debate and its background see Mani 1985, and Mani 1998, especially 1-41. For a ‘re-turn’ of the rite in the independent post-colonial Indian state, and the reactions and responses of the new Hindu-right, media and legal and administrative machinery of the state see Sunder Rajan 1993, 15-60. I have discussed these texts in detail below.

37 “Lamp” (and not “candle” as Sen describes) in the ‘original text’ (Halliday in Buckland 1901, 161).

38 ‘Willing sati’ is the figure of the widow who apparently embraces death by her own free will. This figure is important for my argument and will be unpacked gradually below.
working behind such a re-staging of the figure of the willing sati? Sen’s discourse effectively uses the figure of the ‘willing sati’ as a quotation, and refers back to the same figure construed by the so called “pro-sati” (Mani, 70) discourse in the nineteenth century debates over the legal abolition of the rite. As I have indicated already, it is a very modern discourse that tries to produce a dubious ‘private’ for the individual (woman) where she apparently is free to take her own decision, even if the decision works surreptitiously under the sanction of a patriarchal law, and therefore a similarity with the ethical instantiation of ‘Echo’ where she is given a “choice in no choice” (Spivak 1993a, 37). This takes us to the second moment to which I want to refer in setting up our problematic,— the re-opening and review of the ‘sati-debates’ in the texts of postcolonial feminist critique. For a feminist discourse primarily based on the assumption of the (legal) rights of the woman-individual over her own body, the figure of the ‘willing sati’ creates considerable critical challenge.

Bodies: Confronting the ‘Willing Sati’

Lata Mani, through her acute historical analysis convincingly argues that the colonial legal machinery literally ‘invented’ the contours of ‘sati’ as a legal object at the beginning of nineteenth century, and the abolition of the rite of sati by the East India Company in 1829 has become “a founding moment in the history of women in modern India” (Mani 1989, 88). Rajeawari Sunder Rajan, on the other hand, underlines how the ensuing debate between the ‘pro’ and ‘anti’-sati camps, depends crucially on the widow’s ‘body’ and ‘pain’. Her method is more literary-textual in

39 One again remembers Foucault and his juxtaposition of ‘power’ and ‘death’ in the context of biopower. I have already quoted from this argument (see above) where death is said to be outside of the realm of power’s reach. But then how to think of death, when it is not under the power of any ‘sovereign’? What of the killing of self or suicide? Foucault opines that precisely for reasons of a privatization of death, “in the course of the nineteenth century”, suicide was “one of the first conducts to enter into the sphere of sociological analysis; it testified to the individual and private right to die, at the borders and in the interstices of power that was exercised over life” (Foucault 1990, 138-39).
the sense that she uses cultural texts like films, short stories, newspaper articles, propaganda leaflets etc. She treats the debate more as a paradigm, showing some typical patterns, not only in the nineteenth, but also in its re-eruption in the late twentieth century. The recognition or non-recognition of ‘pain’ suffered by the widow is decisive, she contends, since the question of consent and subsequently of the ‘agency’ of the widow performing *sati* depends on it, “female subjectivity has in its turn hinged on the questions: Was the sati voluntary? Or was the woman forced upon the pyre?” (Sunder Rajan 1995, 18). Mani effectively bypasses this issue in confessing that, “the meaning of consent in a patriarchal context is hard to assess”, and that, “it is fair to assume that the mental states of widows were complex and inconsistent” (Mani 1989, 97). Sunder Rajan, however, endeavours to break away from this dichotomy and notes that the pro-*sati* discourse deals with pain by dismissing it altogether: “those who claim that the sati embraces death do not also claim that she embraces pain” (Sunder Rajan, 23). To her, a viable critique can be constituted by developing “both a phenomenology of pain and a politics that recognizes pain as constitutive of the subject”(23). The problem with the ‘anti-*sati* discourse’ she proposes, is that it invariably rejects any decision on the part of the widow in a bid to foreclose any possibility of *sati* being portrayed as ‘free choice’. She astutely reminds, “if one subscribes to a liberal ideology of the freedom of choice one must sometimes grant sati the dubious status of existential suicide and a total refusal might result in a total objectification of the woman as victim” (18)\(^\text{40}\). The clue to this double-bind facing especially the postcolonial feminist critique is implicit in Mani’s historical analysis as well. The 1813 circular issued by the East India Company, based on the interpretations of scriptures by the court-pundits could come up with a category like the ‘willing sati’ (or what Mani calls the “so-called

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\(^{40}\) The notion of an ‘existential suicide’ is however dubious, since it can be asked that if suicide can at all be an existential ‘act’. Reading Heidegger, Tina Chanter reminds, “I am not master of my own death. Suicide [merely] provides a shallow reprieve – I reach for death, but my aim is mistaken” (Chanter 2001, 199). One can read ‘aim’ and ‘intentionality’ here in the sense I have been using the word in my argument. For the time being, I am keeping Sunder Rajan’s idea to point at the *aporia* faced by a feminism which would have to retain some notion of intentionality to have a politics.
“voluntary” sāti⁴¹) and stage a scene where (a representative of) the law would play witness to each satīḍāha legally ascribing the performance as ‘voluntary’ suicide of the widow. But this scene, as I have already indicated, can be deconstructed with the question of power, since the production of the individual choice is always already determined by the sanctions of a patriarchal-textual-legal complex. That however does not nullify the double-bind that the feminist scholar faces, for it can be argued that any production of individual choice might work only due to and at the same time instead of, some authoritative sanction. Can feminism afford to do away with the minute foothold of subjective choice which may work in spite of the sanction of power and ‘law’?⁴²

As a way out of this quandary, Sunder Rajan proposes an alternative way of thinking subject-constitution. Drawing on Elaine Scarry’s notion of the “radical subjectivity of pain”⁴³, Sunder Rajan claims that “the condition of pain can serve adequately to define the human subject in certain contexts” (emphasis added, 20).⁴⁴

Putting her own gloss on Scarry, she wants to think of the “gendered subject” as “embodied pain”, body becoming the ground for subjectivity (20). This foregrounding of the body-in-pain, she claims, would disrupt the “body/mind dichotomy [...] so firmly in place in theoretical discourse, religious, as well as

⁴¹ Mani writes referring to the 1813 circular: “The structure and emphasis of European eyewitness accounts are a product of the fundamental colonial ambivalence toward so-called “voluntary” sāti” (Mani 1998, 161).

⁴² It is interesting to note here that Nivedita Menon makes the forceful point that in the Indian context “the access to safe and legal abortion should not be defended as a right of privacy” because even if “it is a decision taken by individual women, that decision is shaped and driven by public and social arrangements and limitations – indeed, by a collective failure of social responsibility” (see Menon 2012).


⁴⁴ Scarry’s argument also stresses on a radical presence of pain in the body of the victim. “Expression”, Scarry contends, fails the victim in her efforts in articulating pain, pain is so intrinsic that it resists signification (Scarry 1987, 5). Pain, for Scarry, becomes a radical ‘presence’ that takes only the body of the victim as object and seems not relatable to anything other than itself. It is radically different from any other object outside (of the victim’s body) as well as, one may conjecture, ultimately to the body itself.
philosophical” (20). Sunder Rajan adds that the “subjectivity of pain [...] needs to be conceptualized as a dynamic rather than passive condition”, where this ‘dynamic’ is premised on the axiom that the subject in pain is “definitionally in transit towards a state of no-pain” (21). Sunder Rajan therefore, apparently achieves a blue-print where both the subjectivity of the widow and an ethics of intervention are secured. To intervene, one needs just to look for the typical symptoms of a body-in-pain, and since ‘subjectivity’ is contained in the body’s journey to a state of “no-pain”, intervention only enables subjectivity. Subjectivity, in this scheme, if one might tentatively submit, becomes rather a matter of clinical diagnosis, since the “experience of pain” is “universal” (19). Sunder Rajan is, after all, self confessedly “anxious” to “discover what might make intervention possible” (32-33). But does this foregrounding of the ‘body-in-pain’ not take ‘pain’ as immediate, fully expressible as ‘body’ with no real gap between the two? Would the ‘dynamic’ of the body, if made immediate and ontologically more authentic than mind in expressing the subject’s itinerary, not always remain haunted by the “untheorized spectre of the ‘mind’”? Sunder Rajan thinks it would be counterproductive to depend too much on ‘intentionality’ since “it can only be a matter of conjecture” (18). But in positing the body-in-pain as definitionally in transit toward a state of ‘no-pain’ she imposes intentionally onto the body instead. As if this intentionality inscribed on the body can be read without hesitation. A transparent writing. The argument also implies a more authentic state, a horizon of sorts for the body to achieve, when the body would have ‘no-pain’. But one wonders, if a thinking of ‘death’ surreptitiously creeps in through this gap, claiming such an authenticity. What if someone argues that death is such a horizon, where the body would feel no pain? Would dying then be the ultimate ‘justice’ that each body is to be given with no regard for the matrix of ‘intentionality’? As I have argued in this dissertation, the point here is not to think of ‘intentionality’ as something entirely non-material and therefore to be get

45 See Das 2010, 49.
46 She seems to agree with Mani on this point (see above).
47 Sunder Rajan does underline that the subject in pain is to be “historically” understood, rather than “ontologically” or “psychologically” (Sunder Rajan, 22). But does not any meditation on subjectivity invariably assume the temporal? And Sunder Rajan does assume that, in conceptualising the passage of pain crucial for her notion of subjectivity.
rid of at the expense of physicality which is material. Instead, the two cannot be separated easily and both can be figured in a certain ‘sensuous nonsensuous’ way. Likewise, one cannot do away with ‘intention’ completely to achieve an argument which is solely dependent on ‘matter’, as a full de-ontologization is as elusory as a full ontologization. The question is rather, how to put that lingering surplus to work, which is both of the intention and yet beyond it and undoes it. I try to think a way of putting these observations in effect in the last section of this chapter.

To stay with the problematic, how to think of the subjectivity of the widow without presuming a radical presence of pain as well as materiality of the body as its site? How to re-present the subaltern-as-woman which both retains a space for her subjectivity and still opens a way to ethical interventions? In the case of ‘sati’ the woman’s voice is lost between two competing but “interlocking” statements, as is famously illustrated by Spivak. If one voice says, she must be saved (or in a colonial setting, “White men are saving brown women from brown men”), the other claims she “wanted to die”, former erasing the agency of the woman, latter dubiously claiming agency in her supposed ‘embracing’ of death (See Spivak 1988, 297). The crucial impasse in the feminist re-readings of this nineteenth century archive has been this: how to criticize sati as a performance of a brutal rite and also retain woman’s subjectivity and ‘choice’; how to intervene (an act of delivering ‘justice’) without objectifying the woman, without giving into a general pro-life position. Spivak is trying to set up this double-bind in the context of sati, by asking how her consent is produced or denied by citing the textuality of the two contending positions which are, for her, also “dialectically interlocking sentences” (297). ‘Dialectic’ can be taken as the operative term here. For Spivak, the point is not to find a way to retain and sublate both to a ground of higher knowledge, but to ask what fell in-between: a ‘third’, or a logical middle term, ‘witness’ to both. A third which is not part of either and cannot be sublated. Unlike the two contending positions, which, in their dialectical embrace “legitimate each other” (297). It is for this reason that between “subject-constitution and object-formation”, Spivak would write, “the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling that is the displaced figuration” (304). What might be the trajectory of such a “displaced figuration”? I read ‘dis-place’ not as a violent removal of the
(metaphor of the) ‘woman’ from a proper place which is woman’s own but as the production of mark of the violence of an effort at forced placement of that name ‘woman’ into either colonial-legal or patriarchal-normative (law-like as well) stasis. Such efforts necessarily fail in producing the figuration as a concrete figure, or in knowing fully the trajectory of a figure dis-placed, which is not limited to merely being a violent production of any law-like structure. What however does not follow from this is a feminist political; the assumption of such a political would still have to claim this dis-placement for the name ‘woman’. But the name, is a place, which one needs eventually dis-place, and therefore one parenthetically wonders if a ‘politics of the possible’ can ever claim an analytic of dis-placement. The former is a deconstructive reading which, in a given time dominated and sutured by patriarchal hegemonies necessarily becomes ‘feminist’, but the latter needs to perform a suturing to re-stage the work of dis-placement as (feminist) politics. The two are always already intertwined as long as deconstruction is not totally free of an intentionality.

There is then, a fine line between ontology and ethico-politics or between the staging and claiming of the aporia. I am not proposing that at the level of ontology one does not take sides, aporia is always thought, as I have mentioned, from the side of the ‘trace/inscription’ rather than from nothing. But siding with the trace does not already anticipate a politics. It is at that site where one starts by siding with an inscription, a machine-like writing which writes ‘us’, and in that sense is prior to ‘us’, and yet must sur-vive through ‘us’, a taking of sides even before the divide.

48 ‘Politics of the possible’ is a politics that “is thought of only in terms of elements that can be derived from the present” (Das 2010, xxi). For a detailed discussion of the ‘politics of the possible’ see Das 2010, 165-171. Das counter-poses an im-possible politics. For a forceful articulation of such an im-possible politics which tries to touch an ethicality is to be found in Das (Das 2010).

49 This difference between a ‘politics’ and a ‘deconstruction’ which is given to the work of dis-placement is key. It is generally argued that when a deconstructive aporia is staged in a textuality, it does not pre-figure a taking of sides. But if such a pure aporia can really be staged, that would in effect assume a deconstruction without a memory or any prior archive or inscription. Therefore it seems more correct to propose that an aporia is only staged in hindsight, and its staging already prefigures a taking of sides.
between machine and non-machine/event, but taken only from within the closure of human language, that the deconstructive aporia is staged. It is here that the paradigm of ‘work’ as I have tried to set it up might become helpful. The ‘work’ signifies an effort in staying with the double-bind, or with the ‘question’ that the ‘work’ tries both to set up and address. As I have argued, such a question is not to be simply answered either in the negative or in the affirmative. Rather, the deconstructive work would consist in affirming the question itself, letting it sur-vive.

Even after painstakingly reconstructing the historico-textual context of power and (patriarchal-legal-colonial) sanction which conditions and produces the ‘consent’ of the ‘willing sati’, Spivak is unwilling to fully write-off the presence of the woman’s intentionality. Contrary to the commonsensical interpretation of the oft quoted phrase “the subaltern cannot speak”, Spivak does not reject the ‘intention’ of the widow fully, and instead tries to stage it, testing its im-possibility, even if Mani or Sunder Rajan would like to fully ignore intentionality as unreliable (“matter of conjecture” says Sunder Rajan) or fully conditioned by power (Mani, see above). Is this rejection a result of an all or nothing logic, where intention is taken to be validated only by full presence of articulation with no distance between the scholar and the one whom she represents, a successful ventriloquism of sorts? Mani, 50

50 This might be a way of grasping, in Spivak’s words, human being as “written before will”, in answer “to an outside call” (Spivak 2008, 37).

51 It is important to acknowledge Spivak is not only dealing in, what is derisively called ‘abstract theory’. Sumit Sarkar recognizes Spivak’s work in this historical reconstruction of the figure of the sati, and Spivak quotes him much in gratitude in a footnote to an extended later version of the piece, “I remain grateful to Professor Sarkar for noticing that “Mani’s article stands in marked contrast to the much more substantive discussion of pre-colonial and colonial discourses on sati in Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’”” (Spivak 1999, 289n137).

52 For another influential but not very rigorous critique of Spivak, see Parry 1987 and Parry 1997. Benita Parry thinks locating histories of struggle in the third world might indicate something very different from the “epistemic wasteland Spivak implies” (Parry 1997, 10n27). Spivak replies to Parry in Spivak 1999, 190-191, 217n33. In short, Parry misses the literary-philosophical thrust of Spivak’s work, and her critique is too dependent on assumptions which uses categories shot with ‘presence’ uncritically.
dealing with “Eyewitness accounts of widow immolation” maintains that, “testimonials of women”, might call “Spivak’s conclusion” that the ‘subaltern cannot speak’, “into question” (Mani 1998, 160). But this critique seems to miss the point that Spivak is not merely talking about unavailability of archival evidence, but also about the ontological questions of representation, subjectivity and speech as such. For her “Such a testimony would [still] not be ideology-transcendent or “fully” subjective” (Spivak, quoted in Mani, 158), and Mani herself quotes this logic from Spivak, but fails to read it. “Fully” is the key-word here, Spivak is not either negating intention of the (‘willing’) sati ‘fully’ not is she reading any speech as ‘fully’ representative of a subject’s intention.

But still the feminist scholar has to go through the labour of representing the other, ‘ethically’. Not representing is not a choice, since the kind of theory that abstains totally from representation based on the argument that it can never be total, runs the risk of surreptitiously re-inserting the fully knowing/speaking subject into the equation. “Left to itself”, the idea of the incalculable and of ‘justice’ can very well be “reappropriated by the most perverse calculation”, and so the “incalculable [...] requires us to calculate” (emphasis in original, Derrida in Cornell, Rosenfeld, and Carlson 1992, 28). If the fixity of a determined scheme or law of representation cannot reach the fullness of a ‘just representation’ ever, this is a commonplace that every law-like structure works with, but “the intellectual’s solution is not to abstain from representation” (Spivak 1988, 285). Then again, what of the trace of an ‘intention’ that remains in the persistence of the figure of the ‘willing sati’?

Feminist Inscriptions: Body, Intentionality, Ethics

Spivak concludes “Can the Subaltern Speak?” with the account of a suicide. A woman of “sixteen or seventeen”, hangs herself in the city of Calcutta under colonial rule, in 1926 (Spivak 1988, 307). Her name is Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri.53

53 In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” the name of the young woman is spelled: ‘Bhuvaneswari’, even if in the subsequent re-writing of the essay (included in Spivak 1999) she is mentioned as ‘Bhubaneswari’. I have kept to the former spelling.
This event defies common patterns of interpretation since, she “was menstruating at the time” and it could not have been “a case of illicit pregnancy” (307). Where does this singular event come into the discussion of widow-immolation? According to the scriptural discourse, and it is mentioned in the replies of the court-Pundits answering the criminal court in 1905, a widow cannot perform sati, “in a state of pregnancy or uncleanness” (quoted in Mani 1989, 98). According to the scripture, Spivak informs, “the unclean widow must wait, publicly, until [...] she is no longer menstruating” (Spivak 1988, 308). On this point therefore, Bhuvaneswari escapes the confines of the ‘dubious subjectivity’ ascribed to the sati, and also as if makes a separate space for wilful killing of the self. Bhuvaneswari’s decision is embodied, there is a marked concreteness about it and yet it is only a textual representation by the woman-intellectual (played out by Spivak here) that produces her as such. Spivak does indeed follow a track, of the “physiological inscription of her body” (308), but this reading works from a clear distance. Bhuvaneswari herself cannot speak, beyond these traces. The traces of her death and decision, the placing of them on her body. If a deconstructive critique of presence denies full speech, it also does reject total silence. The declaration, ‘the subaltern cannot speak’ cannot be read in isolation of this work of deconstruction. “All speaking, even [...] the most immediate, entails a distanced decipherment by another”, as Spivak would remind us, “an interception. That is what speaking is” (Spivak 1999, 309). As long as speaking as such already assumes this necessary ‘interception’ and ‘distance’, the subaltern can speak. As long as speech is only that with a claim to full presence and immediacy of expression, she cannot. Representation as transformation must work with the presumption that “knowledge of the other subject is theoretically impossible” (Spivak 1999, 283)54.

54 This is from a later re-worked version of “Can the Subaltern Speak?” appended into of her book, Critique of Postcolonial Reason (Spivak 1999). My discussion traverses between the ‘original’ essay (Spivak 1988) and this more recent re-writing. Given the clues pointing to a nuanced reading of Bhuvaneswari’s text scattered elsewhere in her corpus, I do not see the justification of Spivak giving a psycho-biographical excuse for citing Bhuvaneswari’s case, in a recent re-writing of “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in the following manner, “I was so unnerved by this failure of communication that, in the first version of this text, I wrote, in
But more than a few things remain unresolved. For one, the doubt,— can one understand this ‘example’ at a level of generality where the ‘postcolonial’ and the ‘gendered’ nature of the event can be shown as part of the conceptual make-up of the argument and not merely chancy marks of history (Bhuvaneswari dies in nineteenth century Bengal) or too easily decipherable materiality (menstruation writes the traces of her intention, hence, a very ‘present’ womanly writing)? Let us lay out these doubts in further detail. It is to be noted that Spivak’s entry into this “example” is prompted by a specific problem,

If the oppressed under socialized capital have no necessarily unmediated access to “correct” resistance, can the ideology of sati, coming from the history of the periphery, be sublated into any model of interventionist practice? Since this essay operates on the notion that all such clear-cut nostalgias for lost origins are suspect, especially as grounds for counterhegemonic ideological production, I must proceed by way of an example. (Spivak 1988, 307)

It is a search therefore, for a “resistance” without nostalgia for any uncritical conception of an origin, or, to tally with our discussion, for a ‘proper’ source of representation where the resistance itself cannot claim any “unmediated access” to any proper of (“correct”) resistance. The example is paradigmatic not of an exceptional situation which is especially ripe to show the ‘impossibility of representation’, but it is exemplary of representation as such, which remains ever incomplete. One might say that it is the body of the woman which stages this ‘example’ as such, presents body as evidence. But, does body taken as evidence not also work as a ‘proper’? How to relate this to the proposition that we have made

the accents of passionate lament the subaltern cannot speak! It was an inadvisable remark” (Spivak 1999, 308). This follows the revelation that she knows “of Bhuvaneswari’s life and death through family connections” and part of the “failure of communication” is inside the family-circles, by educated family members (308). These attempts at an explanation (albeit relevant to an extent) surely cannot exhaust either the textual imports of “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (written 20 years before the re-writing) or the sharper edges of the signature: ‘Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’.

about representation being an embodiment? I try below to intervene with the notion of a feminist inscription which might indicate a feminist ethics. I therefore start with a discussion of the notion of ‘inscription’ which I employ in relation to the notion of the ‘body’\(^{56}\), suspending a discussion of the case of Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri for a while.

The body is not needed to be ‘theorized’ or ‘known’ in full to ‘know’ it’s ‘actualities’ since its lived experience is also a sur-vival in time, and therefore the trajectory of a generality: ‘body’. The body exists in continuity with itself, it ‘ek-sists’\(^{57}\) in time, it therefore is the being-temporal of re-presentation. This re-presentation presumes a gap between the ‘body’ and its (previous and) subsequent moments, hence body and itself. Deconstruction also sets up this ‘gap’, an *aporia* that cannot be stepped over. However, it is only at the risk of ‘knowing’ the gap between body and itself (its representation) as *continuous* that one starts to plot a ‘body’. Once the gap it stepped over with this presumed continuity between the ‘body’ and its sur-vival, it seems that the same body lingers in time, has a being. This step of re-presentation, as argued before\(^{58}\), is an embodiment. In this re-plotting, the gap becomes continuous with the body, and without thinking it as

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\(^{56}\) I am enabled by Das’s juxtaposition (see Das 2010, 8-13) of Deleuze and Spivak to configure a ‘rare’ Foucault.

\(^{57}\) I use ‘Ek-sist’, in the sense of standing outside of self (therefore ‘being’ as temporal re-presentation). The term is used by Heidegger to mean “disclosedness of beings as such” (see Heidegger 1978, 128; also see Strambaugh 1986, 83). This expression, which in a general sense means standing outside of self, however, can be traced back to early German romanticism (Jena romanticism). Novalis breaks the etymology of the concept-metaphor ‘existence’ to propose that what is ‘lost’ in the search for a lost previous moment is produced by the very nature of our being, by its going outside of itself. “We ek-sist by standing outside our own being, thus transforming into an appearance and relating to it as something lost” (Novalis quoted in “Early Romanticism” by Manfred Frank in Ameriks and Sturma 1995, 77). Human “consciousness”, for Novalis “is not what it represents and does not represent what it is” (ibid, 77). The Novalis quotation is from his *Fichte Studies* (1796, see Novalis 2003, 123). Little wonder then, that Novalis is one of the main theorists of ‘representation’ in the era of Jena Romanticism (see Helfer 1996).

\(^{58}\) See ‘Chapter Four’.
embodied, the body cannot survive. This ‘imagination’ of a trajectory I propose to call an ‘inscription’. Inscription is different from body or materiality in the following way.

‘Embodiment’ takes body and its survival as its key terms and its trajectory is extended between two bodies in that sense. ‘Inscription’ takes as its main term the ‘gap’ which stays between two bodies, the body and its ek-sisting other, and therefore tries to work with that which is neither body nor its re-presentation and yet must be thought in continuity with the two to achieve the ‘body’. It works between body and ‘its difference with its representation’ and therefore comes before the ‘body’ or ‘embodiment’. This is one way of thinking ‘inscription’, I indicate another (related) way below.

The very term ‘body’ can also be made more nuanced. Firstly, it cannot only mean the body of an individual entity, but rather the conceptual units or traces of embodiment. One way of thinking such a body would be the Foucauldian way which Deleuze’s textured reading presents as a set of “resistances” which congeal in the precipitating nodes of a force-field. “Force” in this sense has a “power” to affect and get “affected” when encountering each other, resisting each other in the nodes of resistance (see Deleuze 1988, 71-72). Such a weave indicated by Foucault is called a “force field” by Spivak (Spivak 1993, 33). In Deleuze’s version, Foucault comes very close to a Derridian notion, namely, ‘invagination’ (see ‘Chapter Five’), when the body is conceptualized as “deep foldings which did not resuscitate the old notion of interiority but constituted instead the new inside of this outside” (Deleuze, 97). This “inside” consequently is also the “unthought” residing “inside of thought” when “invoked in the finite” (97), i.e. when unthought is called to represent itself in thought. This objectification is a precarious one, which has a certain “depth”, as if “a density withdrawn into itself”, an inside to life, labour and language” (97). It is also the “constant fold of finitude” (emphasis added, 97). Finitude therefore, having

59 An ‘impossible possibility’, see ‘Chapter Five’.
60 This force-field cannot be “constituted” as an “object of knowledge” (Spivak 1993, 33). See Das 2010, 8-13 for a detailed discussion of Spivak’s reading of Foucault along with Deleuze’s.
called to represent infinitude, or the inside when representing the outside, must have a persistence in its folding-refolding work, unfolding the “depth” of such a representation in time. It is, in other words, a persistent withdrawal of the “Same”:

the theme which has always haunted Foucault is that of the double. But the double is never a projection of the interior; on the contrary, it is an interiorization of the outside. It is not a doubling of the One, but a redoubling of the Other. It is not a reproduction of the Same, but a repetition of the Different. (Deleuze, 97-98)

Even if, as Spivak shrewdly points out, in Foucault, one can distinguish between “the merely inductive force field” and “the strategic field of power relations” (Spivak 1993, 33). The former retains a descriptive neutrality, even if in the latter, one may put strategies into practice. What we are trying to get at however, with the catachrestic name ‘inscription’, is the differential which falls between these two ways of knowing the ‘force field’. Let me try to unpack this argument further which specific reference to previous chapters.

In the course of this dissertation, I have tried to focus more on the ‘presence which lingers’ as a surplus and in spite of the presence that is intended, rather than on a total subversion or effacing of intentionality. Therefore the stress has been on the materiality that remains and interrupts matter as such, rather than on pure non-materiality. The trace of ontology which works to undo ontologization rather than desire for a full de-ontologization, etc. In ‘Chapter Three’ we pursued, a ‘new materiality’ (and not simply non-matter), which ‘is also an excess of the sensuous’, and therefore a ‘sensuous nonsensuous’62. A ‘materiality’ which makes the existence or survival of the matter (as we know it) possible ‘through an inscription of

61 If one is attentive, one can hear in this formulation the murmur of a ‘third’ term (“repetition of the Different”) which is neither the ‘one’ nor the ‘other’, a discussion we have already pursued. The “Non-self” is “never the other who is a double in the doubling process, it is a self that lives me as the double of the other” (Deleuze, 98). The depth of immanence is also disclosed in showing how the “Distant” is “also the Near and the Same” (98).

62 See ‘Chapter Three’.
materiality’ which might not even be ‘regular spacing’\textsuperscript{63}. We conjectured that, ‘the crux of this materiality would always lie in analytically separating that unshakable trace of ontology that remains, from a strategic ontologization which can be claimed by a politics, or a subject of intentionality’\textsuperscript{64}. Therefore we cannot concur with ‘Spivak’s Foucault’ and agree that the other of the ‘strategic field’ is simply a ‘neutral field’. I propose instead, that it is rather in the ‘difference’ which always guards a field of pure neutrality, that a precarious materiality lies. In ‘Chapter Four’, we studied a ‘materiality that tries to ground the trace, never letting it totally free of the ‘inside’, in effect also producing it’, a materiality which is both ontological and spectral\textsuperscript{65}. It is a materiality, we suggested, which cannot be claimed for any subject or consciousness ‘before recognising it also as a production of the very ‘work’ of the ‘cut’ that ‘spills its margins’\textsuperscript{66}. For Derrida, it is this ‘materiality’ of the cut which remains, along with and instead of the ‘matter’ intended by the subject. This restance materiality being both the ‘support’ of the scene and the ‘resistance’ which produces the scene that is the body\textsuperscript{67}. Foucault’s notion of the sub-individual is shown in this chapter to come close to such a Derridian notion of body and materiality. Pheng Cheah’s term ‘mattering’ might be useful here, which he coins in reading Butler’s and Grosz’s work (Butler 1993 and grosz 1994): “a nonsubstantialist reinscription of the concept of matter outside the form/matter distinction as the dynamism of subindividual differences of forces” (Cheah 1996, 124)\textsuperscript{68}. Likewise in ‘Chapter Five’, Spivak’s “Echo” proved to be an useful tool precisely for staging the logic of the ‘echo’, “as the instrument of the possibility of a truth not dependent upon intention” (Spivak 1993a, 24)\textsuperscript{69}. This prompted us to think of repetition or re-presentation of a male voice, ‘which is not merely a materiality

\textsuperscript{63} See ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} See ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} See ‘Chapter Four’.
\textsuperscript{66} See ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} See ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Indeed Cheah is trying here to argue against what he describes as Butler’s assumption that “Derrida and Foucault are incompatible” (Cheah 1996, 125).
\textsuperscript{69} See ‘Chapter Five’.
but an opening into ethicality as such’, and which ‘necessarily presupposes a
(sensuous nonsensuous) body’.

This entire conceptual move is placed within what we have called the
paradigm of ‘work’. The ‘crucial departure of this ‘work’ lies’, as we have
mentioned, ‘in thinking of it as an ongoing persistent ‘doing’, rather than a stasis, re-
presentation rather than a node where presence organizes itself’. It is this
persistence of the work then, or the trajectory of it, of the cut, of the lingering
materiality, of the sensuous nonsensuous body, that I now call ‘inscription’. Can this
lingering presence, or materiality be claimed for a feminist ethics? In the present
chapter I have discussed why answering such a question definitively, cannot produce
an ethicality, and that the point is rather ‘to risk repeated failure in lingering with the
‘question’ of an impossible feminist ethics persistently’ (see above). This lingering
trace of materiality, this inscription thought as a work cannot be touched or claimed
but only to be pursued by an affirmation persistently. ‘Body’ therefore, does not
come into being with the subject, but there is something that predates both the
subject and the body, and that pre-figuration can be read only inadequately in
continuity with both, in terms of a sensuous nonsensuous inscription. This writing or
inscription pre-exists any structure of intentionality, yet it works only like an
intentionality (therefore the figure of the ‘quasi’). I have already argued how a
‘work’ which affirms this inscription (or a question ‘can this inscription be
feminist?’) is to be thought as an impossible feminist ethicality.

We come back to the problem of thinking the figure of the subject willing
pain (willing sati) from a feminist perspective now. How to retain the subjectivity of
the woman, enabling her legally, and yet not to objectify her in the process? As Lata
Mani reminds, the “1813 circular” deemed ‘sati’ “legal” provided it met with
“certain criteria, chief among which was that it be voluntary” (Mani 1998, 28). This
circular defined the colonial government’s position on sati, till it was abolished
legally in 1829. During this span of time, colonial officials would play witness
representing law to ensure that the widow is willing to perform sati, and in that

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70 See ibid.
71 See ibid.
sense *satiādāha* could be lawful\(^{72}\). This is a considerable problem for feminism to tackle conceptually, because here the law apparently does side with individual choice. Again, what might be a feminist reply? And this is precisely why, the reopening of the *sati*-debate by the Indian feminists, in the 1980’s was not at all easy. Sunder Rajan’s point that the feminist cannot ignore the possibility of interpreting the performance of *sati* by the widow as an “existential suicide” shows the perils of being uncritically either ‘pro-life’ or ‘pro-choice’, especially in view of the contemporary feminist debates, both in and outside India, above all in the debates where the right of the individual over individual’s body is at stake. For example, in the debates around euthanasia rights. Before taking a fresh look at Spivak’s ‘example’ then, I will try an analysis of an exemplary debate, where the pro-choice and pro-life positions are curved at their starkest, namely the abortion-debate, in light of the conceptual arguments just made. I hope this would also let us deal with the figure of the *willing sati*, the returning figure, or help to think beyond the binary of pro-life and pro-choice.

Within the given framework of ‘rights-talk’, the right of the woman over her body is closely intertwined with a certain notion of the ‘proper’ as it bargains with the other side which sets up a different itinerary and locus of that same idea, even if the first is generally identified with a feminist politics, and the second with various essentialisms. It seems that to argue with essentialism one has to think one’s politics through some minimal essentialization, sometimes called ‘strategic’ to stress their provisional nature. The abortion debate on either side of its divide is informed and shaped by these limits. As Anirban Das discusses, the pro-life argument “renders the woman invisible” (Das 2012, 230) by thinking life preservable as that ground from which the very survival of the species flows. ‘Life’ in this formulation becomes as if a ‘proper place’ which comes before any choice, being the very condition of individual right and therefore not part of it. The pro-choice argument on the other hand, as Das reminds, “is [placed] in the space of rights based on the individual”, and thus takes the ‘body’ as that proper which is constitutive of a matrix of intentionality and therefore inextricable from it, subject being the locus of both. Both arguments then (pro-life, and pro-choice), in their general delineations, work

\(^{72}\) Therefore the scene prompting the Halliday account.
within the same register where a certain notion of the ‘proper’ is put into motion to either annul or reinstate the individual subject without any exception.

Let us follow the logic of this weave carefully. The argument that poses ‘life’ as that proper which comes before any choice, in effect also overrides the singularities of instances, events and bodies claiming them for the generality ‘life’, making them exchangeable with each other with a force of violence. Each differing and singular moment now becomes only different instances of the same itinerary of the proper: life. Even if each is posed primarily as ‘different’, at the last instance, life, being the transcendental sign, and ground of reason, renders them relative, and merely ways of inscribing itself in different moments, and therefore retains the force of redrawing those lines to itself in a call to self-preservation. In introducing an originary ontologized ‘proper’ (in ‘life’) which only parades as a ‘generality’ but does not work as such, this logic leaves no room for singularities, even if apparently it remains attentive to the different manifestations of that proper. The ‘difference’ it introduces, is therefore, in effect an “indifference”. I am borrowing from Marx (Grundrisse) here, “in the developed system of exchange […] individuals seem independent (this is an independence which is at bottom merely an illusion and it is more correctly called indifference)” (emphasis added, Marx 1973, 163; quoted in Spivak 1987, 159); so much for the free individual in the market. I read this also as a philosophical argument, as a critique of the self-adequation of a notion which works as a proper, a body of bodies. Das’s critique of Menon’s73 idea of the relativity of contextualized ‘justice’, since “a blanket ethic of responsibility for all constitutive others may amount to a nonresponse to each”, in effect leading to a blurring of the “specificity of each”, is, I think, in the same line (Das 2012, 132).

As Nivedita Menon puts it, the “pregnant body is not two individuals with equal rights, it is a unique entity incomprehensible to modern political theory” (Menon 2007). Indeed it also poses enough difficulty to strain the grasp of the philosophical categories that the feminist finds at her disposal. Donna Haraway has named the representational figure of the fetus in the photographs which reconstructs

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73 In Menon 2004, 59, 93.
and in a way objectifies the inside of a woman’s body, a “virtual speculum”\textsuperscript{74}. These reconstructions are done with a technological and scientific poise seemingly inscribing the ‘inside’ of the body in continuity with the outside. Haraway studies a “feminist cartoon” by Anne Kelly which is not only exemplary of the representational phenomenon ‘virtual speculum’ but also a comment on it (Haraway 1997, 175). Haraway mentions that this cartoon is a gloss on “Michelangelo’s painting Creation of Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel”, with the difference that in Kelly’s depiction it is the woman who takes Adam’s position, extending her hand not to “God the father” but to a keyboard connected to a monitor (175-176)\textsuperscript{75}. In the representation, the fetus shows itself as if like a blob straight out of a monster movie, which is included in our imaginary as something that can be put inside a frame, and yet, not quite in it. To this represented fetus, the woman has a direct and yet virtual relationship. This indicates the extreme difficulty any conceptual production must also face in re-presenting ‘a thought of the fetus’ as continuous with ‘thought as such’ which is bound by the limits of an inside which is however not the inside of the body. Likewise, in the ‘cartoon’ the fetus is seen in the screen of a monitor wired to an invisible source, which might indicate the ultimate groundlessness of the rationality of this image, or the secrecy of its source. The source/ground of the image therefore tries to \textit{pose} as a generality, which is as unfoundational as truth, and therefore not to be faulted other than at the cost of questing ‘truth itself’. Haraway does not directly comment on this blurring of the ominous presence of ‘grounds of reason’ which can be read in Kelly’s work, but this reading is in line with her argument. As the ‘virtual speculum’ tries to domesticate the outside in the inside of the body and yet misses it, the frame of the cartoon both indicates to and cuts the cord which connects it to the truth-machine which produces and validates the ‘virtual speculum’ in general, and this cartoon as an image with a meaning, in particular. Can thought grasp the outside which is (also the) inside (of)

\textsuperscript{74} See “Fetus: The Virtual Speculum in the New World Order” in Haraway 1997.

\textsuperscript{75} At first the image of the fetus is only a part of cartoon by Anne Kelly that Haraway “names” “virtual speculum”, and then the fetus becomes the virtual speculum. She further writes, “Virtual Speculum is a caricature in the potent political tradition of “literal” reversals, which excavates the latent and implicit opposition that made the original picture work” (emphasis in original, Haraway 1997, 176-177).
the body? I refer to Das here who discusses how a notion of otherness might inform the abortion-debate (see Das 2010a). I follow the same clue, but not entirely in the way Das does it.

The figure of the ‘other’ is embodied by the fetus which is identifiable as a different body and yet not entirely amenable to a calculation which takes the individual as its privileged unit. This figure which hovers not only between human and non-human but also between life and non-life, gives one a glimpse of the ‘singular’ that posits itself “in the species of alterity, belonging [as if] to another system; and yet [inhabiting us]”, as Das writes putting his own gloss on Spivak (Das 2010a, 133). Not alterity, but a species of it, or a quasi alterity. If the fetus is not of the body it inhabits, it is not fully outside or beyond it either. But in this sense the fetus is a quasi-singularity as well, or a singularity that sur-vives its first unique occurrence as event by occurring again, lingering, and therefore having a trajectory or ‘writing’ of its own. Can this writing be generalized as ‘life’? Life, standing as a master signifier, I propose, perpetrates a certain violence which homogenizes any ‘survival in time’ as merely its ‘part’. The fetus however, has a course in time, as the body it inhabits goes through the experience of nurturing an-other inside its fold, an outside in the depth of an inside. And yet, both, in the given scheme of things, are homogenised as folds of the master-sign ‘life’. It might seem at this point that the experience of this survival that the fetus goes through, clinches the argument for a discourse conditioned by ‘rights-talk’, since, as we have already indicated, both the pro-life and the pro-choice positions can be based on such a notion of sur-vival, called ‘life’, of a locus of intentionality, called ‘the individual’. It is for this reason that debates over abortion-rights have focused much on the notion of continuity or dis-continuity of life and on human-ness of the fetus:

As the liberal (“pro-choicer”) tries to define a distinctive trait that differentiates some one stage in the life of the fetus from the previous ones, so that abortion may be justified before that stage, the conservative (“pro-lifer”) points at the continuity of consecutive stages and the impossibility of such a definition and extends this notion of continuity to that between the fetus and the child so that feticide and infanticide become the same. (Das, 130)
But as is clear, both these contending calculations give in to the same law of the proper, namely life. Both pro-choice and pro-life remain complicit in this. I would like to chart two counter points.

I. The given state of the debate takes the body of the woman pregnant with the fetus as its terrain of contestation forgetting that the fetus as ‘inscription’ carries a memory, or a prior inscription. The female reproductive organ and its parts have a survival and work of its own, prior to the coming of the fetus, and it follows a certain embodiment and materiality which is inside the body and yet not fully under the authority of the woman-subject who is supposed to retain the body. This is what we have already discussed as an inscription which articulates not the continuity of bodies, but the gap of re-presentation between bodies, between ‘body’ and itself (i.e. its representations) in time. If we call that ‘prior inscription’ an ‘use’ which has a materiality, then the inscription of that ‘use’ can be neither fully intentional, nor can it be conditioned solely by the telos of the fetus (whose ‘difference’ is ‘exchanged’ in the name of the generality: ‘life’). If then, the survival of the fetus is claimed by the master-sign ‘life’, exchangeable with other lives and therefore generalisable to life as such, then this generality is also haunted by that previous ‘inscription’ (a materiality that remains), of its prior ‘use’ inside a woman’s body. This specific haunting, radically breaks, I contend, from any pro-choice position that claims individual’s right over her body by positing an undivided body owned by an individual. But how still to retain the feminist endeavour? The crucial feminist question can then be articulated as follows: why the discourse of life must forget and empty out a previous materiality, a previous inscription, a memory which is produced within the space of a woman’s body, and therefore a sexualized materiality? How the master-signifier ‘life’ can write-over that prior inscription which is both organic as well as machine-like or inorganic? The new life is only inscribed upon that prior inscription. If it then is exchanged as ‘life’, how that life can totally get rid of that writing-before, which is also a writing of the woman. It is a writing of the woman, because the inscription is also a surplus intentionality which spills over the intentionality that desires full presence, undoing it. It is as if the metaphor of the ‘woman’ can be sublated through the circulation and exchange of an object belonging to her, merely as ‘pure signifier’, as if this exchange does not leave
a trail of desire that is of the ‘man’, which one might unravel and put to question. Thought from within the ‘paradigm of work’, the master signifier ‘life’ conceived as a ‘proper’, itself can then be deconstructed as being haunted by an inscription it ignores to produce itself as a-sexual (even if it is only a production of the desire of man). Derrida has deftly pointed out that not the ‘woman’ but ‘sexual difference’ is the metaphor of indeterminacy that the metaphor of man relegates to a secondary position, subordinating but desiring it as inexhaustible, “secondariness, however, would not be that of woman or femininity, but the division between masculine and feminine” (Derrida in Holland 1997, 34).

II. At the same time, not everything is left to the individual will. The subject of choice or of decision does not remain totally free as well. Therefore we are gestured toward a way to confront the figure of the willing sati, or the body that wills pain and yet retains a critique of the discourse that tries to objectify the body. The work of the ‘inscription’, both continuous and dis-continuous with the bodies in exchange, interrupts both pro-choice and pro-life discourses. And since such a subject of choice, who chooses and authorises the objects around him, is generally the figure of a male subject, the ethical pre-propriative, the inscription that interrupts him, necessarily becomes feminist, I propose.

I end this chapter with a fresh re-view of the now canonical ‘example’ of Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri cited by Spivak (in Spivak 1988 and Spivak 1999) in light of our argument so far. The broad contours of this case of suicide has already been delineated above. Here, we are juxtaposing the suicide of a woman who left no note, to the figure of the ‘willing sati’. The ‘willing sati’, as we have pointed out, haunts a feminist discourse, and indeed deconstructs a liberal feminist position which bases itself on the notion of free will and choice of the individual. The difficulty in confronting this figure follows from the fact that it is most difficult to imagine a ‘sati-suicide’ as it cannot have any structural difference from the production of the event by the hegemonic patriarchal-legal machineries. To have the event produced as structurally the same and yet differently intended might be difficult but it seems altogether impossible to have a method of recognizing and isolating such an event in hindsight (after its occurrence). Merely searching for a definite mark of intentionality is not enough, since, as we have already argued, intentionality itself
works as a quasi-mechanicity, and it is not possible to analytically disentangle to two\textsuperscript{76}. This conceptual double-bind is especially important when one re-plots the abortion-debate in the context of India, where systematic “female feticide” has put the very production of ‘choice’ at stake, ‘haunting’ “feminists in India”\textsuperscript{77} making way for a rift between ‘correct politics’ and ‘conceptual understanding’ or prompting “Profound philosophical incoherence” as Nivedita Menon puts it (Menon 2004, 72). Without reducing one to the other, we might remember that the figure of the ‘willing sati’ too, stages a similar aporia for the conceptually inclined and philosophically sensitive feminist. Not promising a solution therefore, I want to append a comment to Spivak’s argument in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. We therefore, pick up the thread which concerns the suicide of a young woman in colonial Bengal, again.

Bhuvaneswari leaves a physical mark on her body which seems to intentionally break with at least one condition of such a repeating production, separating her ‘choice’ from the repeating ‘no choice of a choice’ given to the woman who gets pregnant outside of wedlock. She uses her “menstrual blood as a way to inscribe her message” (see Spivak 2006). In a different context, Spivak has written that “menstruation is a familiar site of the body as something like a writing without writer-agent and, since all women are not mothers, with the structural necessity of the impossibility of reading” (Spivak in MacCannell and Zakarin, 49). This is precisely the impossibility we are aiming at, of an exemplary indecipherability which stands as the scene of all reading. But if ‘menstruation’ is “like a” (quasi) writing without a “writer-agent”, then how can it be claimed for an intentionality? It cannot, but since it writes, and writes a site on which the body is written in turn, it works as an excess, and in spite of the matrix of intentionality, both producing and effacing it. The mechanical inscription which is the ‘familiar site’ of the body, then, is not merely without intentionality. It is an inscription of the body’s difference with itself which cannot be willed and yet, the gendered body is

\textsuperscript{76} In “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, Spivak shows meticulously the terms of production of such a sanctioned ‘will’ for sati-suicide within the scriptural-textual context.

\textsuperscript{77} John 2011, 13. See Mary E. John’s illuminating juxtaposition of the different shapes of the abortion debate in India and in the US in John 2011.
both produced as a generality, and, also as a difference through it. Spivak makes the point that if ‘reproductive heteronormativity (RHN)’ repeats itself in interrupting the cycle of menstruation as a necessary telos of it, giving the woman’s body a certain fixity, producing it merely as a cog of the reproductive heteronormative machine, then the mechanicity of the periodic cycle itself, in producing and re-producing a female body not yet accessible to the machinations of RHN, is, each time, a suspension and interruption of it. Each suspension is logically limitless, because no singular suspension can prefigure the return of what is suspended. In leaving the marks of the menstrual inscription, in making this suspension coincide with the death of the individual’s body and therefore making the suspension permanent, in staying with the ‘cut’ that bleeds in defiance of the telos of RHN, does Bhuvaneswari’s suicide not open up such a potentially limitless différence from the writing of the man? However, this suspension logically threatens each time the mechanical inscription produces the scene of the gendered body. Each time it is a singular deviation. Each time, each gendered body, a persistence of defiance. The event of ‘death’ only enacts this différence in the case of one body, not in the sense of individual body, but a ‘body’ staged by the undoing of the phallogocentric body. Death as if produces a very different body, which is of the individual woman, and yet, it is also an undoing of the body which is thought in terms of possession and property. Bhuvaneswari’s body is written as the site of a persistent feminine inscription which deconstructs the mechanicity of RHN, death working here not as a finite limit of the body, but as an enduring suspension, an open cut only through which can the gendered body glimpse its materiality.

I would however like to differentiate here between ‘death’ and ‘suicide’, where our theme is really the latter, or the possibility of the latter because we are asking if an ‘fully intended event’ is possible. ‘Death’ works in two very separate ways. Firstly, it negotiates life at each node of it; secondly, it is a non-event, in the sense that the self cannot have an experience of the instant of death, one can only experience death of others. It is only in the first sense of death, which produces life

78 Spivak writes, “my reading, each time the woman menstruates, lording [of the woman by man/husband] has misfired in the suspension of reproductive heteronormativity” (see “if Only”, Spivak 2006).
in a law-like manner, that we are using ‘death’ here. The second sense would open up a separate line of argument where we cannot go within our chosen limits.

Who or What undoes the writing of phallogocentrism? The one who intends to end her life, or the work which does not give into any structure of intentionality as such? These two questions are intertwined. Bhuvaneswari’s intention can only be read as part of that work which is intentionality’s fold upon itself, a trajectory of difference of the (indented) body from its (intended) re-presentation. The itinerary which is of the step of re-presentation, of the ‘third’ which is neither the body nor its repetition, can that be claimed in Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri’s name? For ‘her’? One can only answer this question at the cost of reducing it, but, as I have tried to argue in the course of this dissertation, the point is rather to affirm the question. And therefore when it is asked, can she speak, does she speak, can the subaltern? One hears, ‘yes, yes’\(^{79}\), not as an answer to the question, but as affirmation of it, of the materiality it inevitably produces.

At stake then, is a materiality which is never static or precipitated as a matter, but a materiality at work, in time. Such is the persistence which is demanded of a feminist ethics which is also a persistence to stay with the im-possible. Read in line with our argument about a ‘feminist inscription’, this seems a possible reading of the event. The feminist scholar, in re-presenting the other-woman, works from a distance, and still, the ethical call is for her to represent. In representing the other woman, the feminist walks the ‘cut’, the ‘cut’ that stages and writes the aporia of representation that stays between her and the other woman she represents. The figure of the ‘willing sati’ haunts any act of ventriloquism that intends to fully speak for the other. Representation’s burden is to relentlessly plot the (im)possible trajectory of an inscription which is the undoing of the phallogocentric voice.

Did Bhuvaneswari intend to leave that physical mark to write her body in such a way? This question cannot be answered definitely. But there is certainly a

\(^{79}\) The logic of this affirmation is related to the logic of the ‘as if’ or of the ‘quasi’ as I have indicated in ‘Chapter Four’. As Derrida writes, “This yes is common to both the affirmation and the response; it would come even before any question” (emphasis in original, Derrida 2005, 74).
persistent undoing of the intention of a ‘proper’ (revealed and repeated as RHN) at work here. Paradoxically she can deviate from the ‘social text of sati-suicide’ only by taking part in this other possibility which is also in a way, ‘structural’. But like the working of ‘echo’, repeating/undoing the male ‘voice’, this persistence of a folding which is of the ‘intention’ and yet, not fully within the grasp of its mastery works “as the instrument of the possibility of a truth not dependent upon intention” (Spivak, 1993a, 24, see ‘Chapter Five’). The ‘work’ is this making possible of an impossibility by instrumentalizing it, by persisting with it. I call ‘Feminist ethics’ the figuration of such a persistent possible impossible which can only remain with the difficult question of the ethical by lingering with it, and therefore can only do so at the pain of a persistent failure.

To put it succinctly in conclusion, it seems any politics must work with a certain presence, or materiality or intentionality, does that make ‘ethics’ (pre-political) impossible? If ‘intention’-as-such is always driven by a desire for self-presence, and if this is the writing of man, then how can there be a materiality claimed by the feminist inscription? ‘Intention’, however, is always cut from its self-presence, and this is also a materiality, but not quite an intended one. That extra folding of intentionality on itself is a materiality at work, and not simply dispersed non-matter or precipitated matter. As I have tried to argue in the course of this dissertation, the feminist ‘work’ of representation can only linger with the ‘ethical’ persistently, even if at a crucial distance. If that distance denies feminist politics to ever become fully ‘ethical’, then it also produces a certain ‘political’, in the way of a materiality which protects the trace of presence, with which any politics must work.

The work of a feminist ethics however, can only remain with the impossible question of the ethical by lingering with it, by being a persistent ‘work’, overcoming persistent failure in making an articulation. If one had worked for the possible, she would have stopped, and simply decided. But one returns to work, if one tries to strain the limits of unthought with thought.