CHAPTER 5

TOWARDS A DIFFERENT METHODOLOGY OF CRITIQUE:
LEARNING FROM FEMINIST STANDPOINT EPISTEMOLOGIES AND
MARXIAN APPROACHES

Introduction

I have been attempting, in the last three chapters, to trace the critiques of science in the Indian context, and in so doing, also to trace a methodology of critique itself that animates the political in India. I have shown the ways in which these critiques access anterior difference (as in connections drawn in postcolonial work between the ‘resistant’ past as anterior or prior to colonialism and an ‘other’ modernity produced within colonialism), the ways in which they posit resistance as providing the crisis to closure of Western science seen as hegemonic (through the appropriation of the language of resistance of Subaltern Studies into the hybridity framework), and the ways in which this resistance fails to meet the promise of crisis (the crisis being a reference to the Kuhnian understanding of crisis that might signal the fall of a paradigm). It follows that the sometimes implicit claim for the rise of alternate systems of knowledge also fails since the criteria for paradigm shifts is not met.

The discussion in this chapter turns on two axes. One is that of the political, within which I will try to place the various arguments within feminism and gender work that try to examine and explain science as a political institution, and the options available to negotiate with its power. These arguments understand the political as contained in a discussion about power; they also chart shifts from the responses to power as coherent, singular and monolithic, to a more disaggregated notion of power
itself that also then demands a disaggregated response. The basis for this discussion I have set up in Chapter 2, where I also talk about the parallel shift from a politics based on ideology, based on an understanding of structure, to one that proposes an attention to micro-negotiations, that proposes a thick description of these negotiations as the alternative. It is such an alternative that pays attention also to context or situation, as also to experience, and along my second axis in this chapter – that of the epistemological – I examine the case for situated knowledges, for experience as the situation of knowledge-making, and the possible movement from here to the articulation of a standpoint epistemology.

In attempting to ask the question of criteria of knowledge through the allegory of what I have called women’s lived experience, I adopt in somewhat mutated form the strategy of the ‘outside’ consciousness, something that has received much attention, in different ways, in orthodox Marxist and subaltern literature, as an empirical something, a socialist consciousness that can or cannot bring to revolutionary consciousness the ‘mass’;¹ also in feminist literature, at times as the empirical excluded, at others as the sign of the ‘outsider within’ who may challenge dominant formations.² At all points in the history of these formations, the translation of formulations of the outside has been at the level of the empirical. A link possibly exists here between this kind of translation and the apparent difficulty of attaching the political with the epistemological in any useful way. Politics, in such a translation, has either been about championing the entry of the empirical outside, or about championing the knowledge attached, ex-officio, to the situation of outsideness. I will, in the formulation I am about to offer, work with an understanding of exclusion

¹ I have made the reference to the outside consciousness as explicated by Lenin in Chapter 4.
² The idea of the ‘outsider within’ was first mooted by Dorothy Smith (1987).
to which inclusion in this sense is not the answer. In order to do so, I would also then, beginning with a formulation akin to that of the ‘outsider within’, attempt an allegorical description of the way in which such an outsider(‘s) perspective (I bracket the apostrophe in an attentiveness to the difference between the abstract and the empirical here) might offer a response to the act of exclusion.

I am aware as I say this that the first task is to provide a theory of the exclusion itself; in the case of science, to ‘prove’ that it is constituted by exclusionary acts. I have given exhaustive accounts, in Chapters 3 and 4, of the work that has unconvincingly done this. For more convincing accounts, I rely partly, and in somewhat unrepentant fashion, on certain clues available in the work of ‘western’ feminist epistemological thinkers – those ‘global’ feminist accounts that for the first time enabled a possibility of thinking gender analytics outside Marxist frames in Bengal, while remaining hegemonic to the gender analytics themselves, as I have detailed in Chapter 2; partly on the allegory of the dai, whose engagements with the reproductive health system in India I explore in some detail,3 and partly on a different case for the ‘outside’ made in the work of a Marxian4 thinker in Bengal.

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3 The dai, or village midwife, or traditional birth attendant as she is referred to in the development literature, is usually considered the repository of experience and practice in terms of “traditional systems” who might be called upon to fill certain gaps in manpower (not in knowledge) in the reproductive health apparatus. I refer to her, her responses, and her experience, in this chapter, not as repository of knowledge of the traditional canon, but as the aporia, the impasse to the narrative of science. My attention thereafter is not to the discovery or description of such an impasse, but rather to what lessons we may derive from here in a re-cognition of the narrative.

4 I attempt here to make a distinction between Marxist and Marxian in the sense of the former referring to organizational frameworks, practices, attitudes, and theorizations that claim allegiance to texts of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Marxism is in that sense a closed system of theory. By Marxian I refer to theoretical formulations originating in Marx, but engaging with other texts and methodologies as well, and not always in agreement with official or conventional Marxist thinking. I draw from Marx’s own statement “I am not a Marxist”, made in despairing criticism of the many entrenched positions that were being put out in his name. In a letter to C. Schmidt on 5 August 1890, Marx’s fellow-author Friedrich Engels wrote, “As Karl Marx used to say about the French “Marxists” in the 1870s, ‘All I know is that I am not a Marxist’” (Marxist CD Archive 2003).
To summarise, I attempt, in this last chapter, to offer an understanding of the political that moves from ideology toward standpoint, and an accompanying move from one knowledge not to alternative or many knowledges, but towards a standpoint epistemology.

**Notes from a consultation, and from a conversation**

**The consultation**

*Tumi ki roj tablet khao?* Do you have the pill everyday?

Do *You* (the doctor and authority) have the pill everyday?

Do you have to have the pill *everyday*?

Do you *really* have to …

*Aamake niye katha hocche na …* Its not *me* we’re talking of …

*I* am not objectified body; *you* are.

I am separate from you, elsewhere.

Actually, I’m the one who should be asking you the question.  

**The conversation**

In April 2002, I attended, as a medical doctor, a training programme for ‘traditional birth attendants’ – *dais* – who had come from various parts of the island to

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5 I will come back to this vignette from the family planning clinic of a state referral hospital, for now only wishing to draw attention, through the emphases I have placed in the conversation, to the putting to work not only of institutional and knowledge hierarchies, but also constitutive elements of the propositional models of knowledge that are hosted here. For each part of the conversation, therefore, I have set down these constitutive elements in the indented paragraphs – those unspoken, seemingly bizarre, yet constitute elements. I will also say, in continuation of this point, that the somewhat bizarre turn this conversation takes, and that I wish to point to, is not entirely attributable to the apathy or non-personalized nature of care-giving that is the feature of most large state hospitals.
attend an intensive 6-day training programme organized by a non-governmental organization. This was a group of women who had varying degrees of experience with births at which they had assisted. They had been divided into two groups, with one doctor trained in western medicine to conduct the training schedule in each of them. The group I had been assigned consisted of 46 women. The youngest member was 28, the oldest around 60. The programme had the stated objective of imparting up-to-date and accurate scientific methods (adaptable to the field) of attending to pregnant women going into labour, that should be introduced into the village so as to help women with limited access to hospital facilities in rural areas. Local traditional practices could also be taken into account and legitimately incorporated where useful. In the event, it also sought to draw the line between right and wrong practice so that the *dai* could decide when and in which case to seek the help of the local health centre.

“To fill in gaps in manpower at village levels”, as the National Population Policy draft (2000) says. The *dai*, in her own words the *mukkhu sukku maanush*, as yet uninitiated into ‘method’, has the key to a vast field of experience at births, a field waiting to be tapped usefully in development. Her know-how, which is ‘practical’ rather than ‘propositional’, means that she has no value in existing frames as epistemological agent; hers is the voice of experience that with a degree of training and modification can apparently be made useful to the task in hand.

In the time and frame within which I had inserted myself into the picture, I was able to concentrate largely on the level of the gradients of power operating, mostly at the general/macro level, between the *dai* (the “subject[s] of enunciation that

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6 The unlearned people.
subtend epistemology”), the “development expert”, the NGO, the local male quack doctor. The NGO of course had targets to meet – so many women over so many villages covered this year. I was doing ‘research’, and this was one of the ways I could listen in. I was there, however, as the ‘doctor’, the authority. The dais knew there was something in this for them. The kits that would be distributed at the end of session, the legitimation of their knowledge by the sarkar7 – they were now trained dais, not just dais – the meanings this would hopefully carry in trying times when the local (male) quack, armed with the ‘injection’8 and assorted other drugs, in short with a sometimes more than fair working knowledge of allopathic medicine under his belt, had all but edged them out of their already meagre income.

Prior to introductions, the dais were asked to give a written test, where, with the now standard multiple choice questionnaire, they were asked to respond to problems generally faced during the delivery of a child. Later, through lectures, models, role-playing, and video films, the ‘new’, scientific methods were introduced and explained.

The schedule had been planned by the non-governmental organisation and the dais informed accordingly. We started the programme with a short discussion on the availability and advancement of scientific knowledge in the current setting, and the

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7 Government. It is a case in point that for the dai, the analytic separation between government and non-governmental organization does not exist. The space of civil society that the NGO conceptually occupies as separate from the state is unavailable to her; both represent the call of legitimate authority that have brought her here. And yet, does her turn to authority have an element of the conscious? Puti di (Puti Jana, one of the economically more disadvantaged of the group, also one of the most attentive and eager to imbibe the new) approached me the day after the video film showing a trained dai at work in Rajasthan. She had watched the dai in the film fill up her register with the details of each birth she attended, and report to the municipal office, and had come with a request for us to arrange something similar for this group. So that, as she understood, they could make an honest (and just) living, for in such a case payment to the dai would presumably be fixed and commensurate to her efforts.

8 Oxytocin, used (under strict monitoring in hospital settings) to induce uterine contractions, and used freely by these practitioners when called in to assist at delayed labour, with effects ranging from the magical to the disastrous.
consequent responsibility incumbent on those responsible for health issues to avail of this knowledge. Parallely, the dangers of succumbing to uninformed traditional practices were also touched upon. A format had been prepared by the organisation for our guidance in conducting the training; further, members of staff were available around the clock to help us communicate with the dais, many of whom spoke local dialects completely different from urban Bengali.

Each class day started at around nine in the morning after breakfast. We generally started the day with a new topic, discussing it from both ends, that of Western Science as well as the perspective of the local traditional knowledges apparently employed by the dais, the problems they faced therein, their interactions with local ‘quack doctors’ at the time of a birth, the increasing presence and authority of this group, and so on. I would generally question them as to why they employed a particular practice, explain – in logical terms – why the scientific method was better, and then go on to demonstrate the functioning of the female body, as understood in (Western) medical literature, with a ritual of endless repetitions – I even had a wooden duster to bang the table with when the humming got too loud – for the women were hardly used to the attention spans demanded of them. In the event, it did happen that practices or understandings forwarded by the dais afforded me glimpses of knowledges that did not conform to (or compare with, sometimes) the western episteme I was working with; but such difficulties I (had to) set aside for the purposes of my work. And following me, so did the dais.

While planning on ways to communicate with the women, both of us (health professionals working with the two groups) had come to the conclusion that visual models, role-playing etc. would be good methods, since a large number of the
participants were not only non-literate in the conventional sense, but unused to conventional methods of classroom learning. The “students” indeed took to these with enthusiasm; having overcome initial inhibitions, they enthusiastically took on the roles of woman in labour, *dai*, mother-in-law, husband, doctor at the local health centre, to enact the scenes as they should from now on be played out, as I watched in satisfaction – the *dai* had come of age.

The first question that the *dais* asked me when I arrived in their midst was whether I was married. If so, how many children I had. As I realised that I was alone in a room full of mothers, I felt the beginnings of an unbridgeable gap; I might pick up the local tongue, I might sit down with them and attempt to erase authority, but I did not share what they shared with most other women, the kind of experience they valued (or considered necessary for authority). As the classes wore on, this became a little joke amongst us – every now and then, one of the older women would stop proceedings to ask – *Accha, tomaar to nei, tumi eto jano ki kore?* And I would counter sagely – *Aaro jaani*. Finally they settled for – *Aare eto rugi dekheche, ekta abhigyata hoy ni?* An experiential referent had been found, however clinical, and that was something!

*The turn to experience – from consultations to conversations*

I have no names (of protected confidentiality or otherwise) to offer for the women in both the episodes I report above; neither was part of an ethnographic study.

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9 How do you know, having none of your own?
10 I know that much and more.
11 She’s seen so many patients, surely she must know something.
and both are offered more as plausible accounts of a situation, and contexts within which feminist approaches to experience have materialized.

The consultation was with a recalcitrant mother who had been put on the contraceptive pill following the abortion of an unplanned pregnancy and had returned for follow-up with a continuing carelessness regarding its intake. The entire consultation, as is evident from the report, lasted two sentences, leaving the female physician irritated, and the patient engaged in a certain conversational response – the kind of response that comes the way of the physician every day, but is nevertheless the kind of response that is illegitimate, aporetic. Enough has been said about power-knowledge nexuses that promote one knowledge – in this case the Western medical – as high, as singular. This is the kind of response that, through its own aporicity – neither appropriate, nor oppositional, nor even alternate – makes visible, and bizarre, the positioning of medical knowledge as objective, unanchored to experience, and on that count authoritative. It is also the kind of response that does not sit well with liberal feminist approaches that would wish to mediate authority through information, choice, or consent.

Feminist politics in India, in response to this authoritative stance, initially took a ‘more women-in-science’ position; it asked for increased presence of women as professionals in the scientific enterprise, for increased access for women to the fruits of science and technology, as also to information. It was hoped that changes in gender composition at the professional level would both bring in women’s perspectives, and in so doing transform the disciplines through such inclusion.¹² The entire gamut of women’s right to health campaigns articulated this position. This is a route that has

¹² As suggested in the manifesto of The School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University, 1988.
been taken in later state development agendas as well, where, after the World Bank clauses requiring clear commitments to gender appeared in 1987, states put in place protocols to include women’s perspectives in development. This was a position that stayed with one-knowledge theories, wanting, along with one knowledge, adequate dissemination of the products of such knowledge.

The 90s saw a clearer shift to a politics of ‘third world women’s experience’, from authoritarianism to alternatives. This shift talked about bringing back ‘low’ knowledge, of re-reading marginality as a place for knowledge-making, and of making the ‘third world’ – geographically understood – an empirical site for the same. Eco-feminist moves like those of Vandana Shiva are a case in point. There are a couple of things I would like to point to here. On the one hand, this shift was not so much a chronological as perhaps an ideological shift, and populated more of the rhetorical than the clear-cut theoretical articulations of the turn to experience. It was a turn that allowed a re-making of the third world, for post-developmentalists, from the WID (women-in-development) initiatives that exercised only inclusion rhetoric. It was also a shift that informed a politics of the time – a politics of location, a politics that allowed a community to speak for and in itself on account of being in a marginal relation to what was perceived as hegemonic, that is, the West. This was a politics of

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13 World Bank operations evaluation study reports on ‘gender issues in World Bank lending’ have divided the period from 1967 to the 1990s into the reactive years – 1967 to 1985, and the pro-active years – 1985 to the 1990s. The reactive years, says the document, displayed a consistent failure to draft clear directives (for borrower nations), to have separate chapters on gender, and generally include gender perspectives in policy formulation. No separate department had been allotted for ‘Women in Development’ (hereafter WID) till 1987, the existing WID advisor had few powers and fewer funds, and it was as late as 1980 that higher-ranking officials in the Bank first used the phrase ‘women in development’. But voices, within the Bank and outside, had begun to speak, since the early 1970s, of the absence of the perspective of women in development projects around the world. While the single most landmarked work in development literature in this direction has been that of Ester Boserup (Woman’s Role in Economic Development), documents titled “Recognizing the ‘Invisible’ Woman in Development: The World Bank’s experience” (1975) or statements extolling the “immensely beneficial impact … from educating girls” (McNamara, World Bank president, 1980) have been making their appearance since 1975.
oppositional difference, a politics of resistance, a politics that was born out of and
needed, for its continuation, hierarchical difference, a politics that said, “I know mine,
you know yours, there can be no dialogue”. But it was also a move that populated
rhetoric more than theory or practice, at least in Indian contexts, not always enjoying
full status alongside ‘one knowledge’ theories, so that “empowerment alongside
perspective” became the more acceptable motto. Such an attempt has perhaps been
best articulated philosophically in the work of Martha C. Nussbaum, who talks at the
same time of a uniqueness to women’s perspectives and of the need to raise them to
the common level “human”. Difference – either cultural or sexual – was not the
motive force in this attempt; rather, it was something that needed to be marked in
order to be transcended. Finding a commonality to women’s experiences and raising
them therefore to the universal level was the task. Knowledge was still one and
singular, but a democratization in modes of arrival at such knowledge was the
important goal. “We all know, together” – such would seem to be the motto.

Such a democratization did not obviously require ideological buttressing, and
anthropological work that began in the 90s, calling itself gender work but spurning
feminist stances, drawing upon women’s practices, critiquing trends in globalization
but not naming capitalism, marked a new shift in the turn to experience. I will go into
these in greater detail in a later section.

It is in the context of these shifts that I see the turn to experience in feminist
and gender work. In using the allegory of the two reports I provide, I also wish to
mark my own shift – a shift that I call a re-turn to experience. The particular
relationship between the dai and the doctor could be and has been read as a case of “I
know, you do”, where the dai, in her own words the “mukkhu sukkhu manush” – the
unlearned person – is brought in as experienced but non-knowledgeable, as probable representative of “indigenous health systems” that fit, makeshift, into the overcrowded field of reproductive health care, with the distinction alive at all times between Western medicine and such systems that are neither standardized nor adequately tested for efficacy and safety (NPP 2000). This is the orthodox ‘high knowledge’ position that works well with simple policies of inclusion. In response, both feminism and gender work have attempted to chart a politics of third world women’s experience, to present an alternative picture, as I have briefly delineated. I will, in some detail, categorize two of these moves.

*The global feminist making of the Third World Woman: building capability, fostering agency*

(The ‘typical’ breast-feeding mother as depicted in Community Health posters)

Feminist political philosophy has frequently been sceptical of universal normative approaches. I shall argue that it is possible to describe a framework for such a feminist practice of philosophy that is strongly universalist, committed to cross-cultural norms of justice, equality, and rights, and at the

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14 As is evident from the poster, breastfeeding is part of the exercise of third-worlding that is promoted by development agendas and globalist feminist rhetoric alike. Shorn of any talk of natural birthing or mothering that such a move would be accompanied by in the West, it is nevertheless promoted – ideologically in theory, and pragmatically in practice, as the battle against the bottle and artificial feeds, as the alternative to global Capital making the third world mother self-sufficient provider of nutrition, and as the metaphor for responsible motherhood.
same time sensitive to local particularity, and to the ways in which circumstances shape not only options but also beliefs and preferences.

(Nussbaum 2000: 7)

The first day of the typical SEWA education program for future union and bank leaders is occupied by getting each woman to look straight at the group leader and say her name. The process is videotaped, and women grow accustomed to looking at themselves. Eventually, though with considerable difficulty, they are all able to overcome norms of modesty and deference and to state their names publicly.

(17, fn. 20)

By women as a category of analysis, I am referring to the crucial assumption that all of us of the same gender, across classes and cultures, are somehow socially constituted as a homogeneous group identified prior to the process of analysis. This is an assumption which characterizes much feminist discourse. The homogeneity of women as a group is produced not on the basis of biological essentials but rather on the basis of secondary sociological and anthropological universals. Thus, for instance, in any given piece of feminist analysis, women are characterized as a singular group on the basis of a shared oppression. What binds women together is a sociological notion of the “sameness” of their oppression. It is at this point that an elision takes place between “women” as a discursively constructed group and “women” as material subjects of their own history.

(Mohanty 1991: 56)

Vasanti and Jayamma\textsuperscript{15} entered the development literature when the imperative to attend to the local gained legitimacy, as quintessential representatives of

\textsuperscript{15} Stories of “two women trying to flourish” as perceived and told by Martha Nussbaum. “Unlike Vasanti, Jayamma has been examined previously in the development economics literature … I am very grateful to Leela Gulati for introducing me to Jayamma and her family and for translating.” (Nussbaum 2000: 17, fn. 21). Leela Gulati, known for having brought anthropological perspectives to bear for the
poor, “illiterate” women caught up “in particular caste and regional circumstances in India” (Nussbaum 2000: 21); women situated, especially, on the lower rung of sexual hierarchies, and yet “trying to flourish” (15).

Despite all these reversals (and others), Jayamma is tough, defiant, and healthy. She doesn’t seem interested in talking, but she shows her visitors around, and makes sure that they are offered lime juice and water.

Persistent take-off points, they, or their names at any rate, have gained iconic currency as the ‘real’ local women who can now speak of the sufferings they endured till they moved from the ‘informal sector’ or a place “marginal to economic activity” (15, fn. 14) to the avowedly different and more agential category of ‘self-employed’. Of Vasanti it is said, “She now earns 500 rupees a month, a decent living” (17, contrasted in the text with the Rs. 180 per month allotted to destitute women under the Indian Criminal Procedure Code in 1986). In a world where “letting the women speak for themselves” (17) is the task at hand, and one that is entirely possible, they speak. They break sanctions, form political alliances, learn to name themselves. And it is as a first step toward making possible this movement from the local particularity to the universal value that Nussbaum works hard to prepare the ground for herself as justified observer of Vasanti’s and Jayamma’s struggles. Such a universal will render possible for these women choice, the capability to make that choice, the right to demand political rights according to needs. For Nussbaum, detachment coupled with concern and familiarity is the ideal (and achievable) point from which this is possible.

first time on seemingly economic issues, was the first to discuss widow and brick-kiln worker Jayamma in her work on widows in India (appearing in 1998, in Martha A. Chen, edited, Widows in India: social neglect and public action), and also in other work on women’s studies perspectives.
Speaking to the local

Nussbaum, therefore, begins her discussion on development, women and social justice by stating and grounding her primary focus on “the case of India, a nation in which women suffer great inequalities despite a promising constitutional tradition” (9). It is also a country she is familiar with, and this, she says, helps her “write on the basis of personal observation and familiarity, as well as study” (9):

… I went to India to look at women’s development projects, because I wanted to write a book that would be real and concrete rather than abstract, and because I knew too little to talk about the problems of poor working women in a country other than my own. *I had to hear about the problems from them.*

(ix, italics mine)

Drawing on Jawaharlal Nehru’s concept of “One World that can no longer be split into isolated fragments” to host her project, she also, however, describes being “both a foreigner and a middle-class person”, and thus “doubly an outsider vis-à-vis the places about which” she writes. Nonetheless, a certain mixture of “curiosity and determination” helps “surmount these hurdles – especially if one listens to what people say”. As a foreigner, Nussbaum believes she possesses a “helpful type of neutrality amid the cultural, religious, and political debates” that a local scholar would not be free from. “In a situation of entrenched inequality”, she feels, “being a neighbor can be an epistemological problem” (10).

Speaking of tradition, Nussbaum finds it “impossible to deny that traditions, both Western and non-Western, perpetrate injustice against women”. But though traditions – “local” or otherwise – cannot be denounced as “morally retrograde” through “hasty judgement”, it is important not “[t]o avoid the whole issue” and “stand
around in the vestibule” refusing to “take a definite stand on any moral or political question” (1999: 30), because “there are universal obligations to protect human functioning and its dignity, and … the dignity of women is equal to that of men.” Referring to what she calls Western tradition, an example of sexual harassment at the workplace shows that “[c]learly our own society still appeals to tradition in its own way to justify women’s unequal treatment” (1999: 30, italics mine). But although “there is no country that treats its women as well as its men … [d]eveloping countries … present especially urgent problems” (2-3, italics mine). In such a situation, the need for a cross-cultural universal becomes imperative. As a possibility, it is already in place.

The urgency mounts with paragraph upon paragraph listing the “uneven achievements” of developing nations with respect to areas considered necessary to women’s quality of life – female employment statistics, rape statistics, workplace harassment statistics, literacy, health, nutrition. One must of course be careful, says Nussbaum, even where favourable statistics are concerned, for “local governments tend to be boastful.”

And through the increased magnitude of the problems, only vestiges of which apparently “still” contaminate the West, does one glimpse the spectre of the white woman who takes on the onerous responsibility of saving the brown woman from her traditions? Of course, armed with curiosity and the determination to satisfy it, the “neutral” foreigner, the disinterested observer who is not embroiled critic, can serve, apparently, as trusted confidante for the ‘innocent’ subaltern – a sensitive alliance, as it were, between the concerned intellectual and the yet-to-be-capable-agent – the
moment not yet realized in representation. The brown woman “scholar”, despite her however tenuous commonalities with Jayamma or Vasanti, might here be, by very virtue of her “enmeshed”ness, more suspect than the “unimplicated” foreigner.

It is at this secure subject who is sought to be arrived at or revived on the premise that she exists somewhere before context, and must be reinstated, or given voice, that Nussbaum’s capabilities approach is directed.

Working on the local

The “capabilities approach” has been proposed by Nussbaum in basic agreement with Amartya Sen. Nussbaum talks of the capabilities approach as a “foundation for basic political principles that should underwrite constitutional guarantees” (70-1), and draws on “Aristotle’s ideas of human functioning and Marx’s

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16 It would be important to note here that the ‘subaltern’ is another space of contestation. Is the subaltern a person with a pre-given identity? Does there exist a subaltern consciousness? Can the subaltern be known? Can the subaltern be ‘developed’? The answers to all these questions within development discourse, and especially in Nussbaum’s version of critique, would be yes.

17 Is one allowed to turn that virtue on its head and talk of enmeshedness, for instance, as one reason among many for the local scholar to begin to understand or build “ethical singularities” (to use Spivak’s phrase) with the subaltern? Spivak clarifies that “I have no doubt that we must learn to learn from the original practical ecological philosophies of the world. Again, I am not romanticizing … [this] can only be attempted through the supplementation of collective effort by love. What deserves the name of love is an effort … which is slow, attentive on both sides … mind-changing on both sides, at the possibility of an unascertainable ethical singularity that is not ever a sustainable condition” (1999: 383). Enmeshedness may not be enough for critical intimacy: is it necessary? What would I mean by enmeshedness? An involvement, both historically and existentially, with the issues at hand. This is not to say enmeshedness is enough, or can be looked at in isolation. It would be in an intersection with location. And location would be understood not only as historical or geographical context but as relational, between worlds, where the question of consistently perpetuated structural inequalities between ‘first’ and ‘third’ worlds would come up, where the implication of white feminism in defining issues on the global feminist agenda would have to be faced. It is a different story, however, when I, “local brown woman scholar” (and the scare quotes might remind me of the politics of identity implicit in that self-naming), essentialise both my geographical location and my “scholarship” to ground representative status for myself. Then again, local scholars always stand the chance of over-compliant alliances with the coloniser. It would also be useful to remember that this is not to initiate a battle over representation, as it too often turns into.

18 An Indian economist, Amartya Sen is known for his contributions to welfare economics including his work on famine, human development theory, understanding the underlying mechanisms of poverty, gender inequality, and political liberalism. In order for economic growth to be achieved, he argued, social reforms, such as improvements in education and public health, must precede economic reform. Sen was called the “conscience of his profession”. He has addressed problems related to individual rights (including the formulation of the liberal paradox), justice and equity, majority rule, and the availability of information about individual conditions, and has inspired researchers to turn their attention to issues of basic welfare.
use of them” (70). It is proposed as a universal and ethical approach that must nevertheless “focus appropriately on women’s lives” (71) in order to be relevant, that is, it must “examine real lives in their material and social settings” (71). Premised on the “intuitively powerful”, “core idea … of the human being as a dignified free being who shapes his or her own life in co-operation and reciprocity with others” (72), an “awe-inspiring something” that is “above the mechanical workings of nature” (73), the capabilities approach moves primarily in the direction of looking at each individual as an *end* in her own right, and endeavours towards promoting “central human functional capabilities”, that is, capabilities that deliver readiness to make (certain) choices regarding functioning in ‘multiply realizable’ ways that are “truly human” (72), and living “a life that is shaped throughout by these human powers of practical reason and sociability” (72). These capabilities are to be promoted, and social and political institutions so structured, so that at least a threshold level, a “social minimum”, of these capabilities may be attained. It is the idea of this threshold that Nussbaum concentrates on, stating that “we may reasonably defer questions about what we shall do when all citizens are above the threshold, given that this already imposes a taxing and nowhere-realized standard” (12, italics mine). On the other hand,” says Nussbaum, “… [one is] not pushing individuals into the function; once the stage is set, the choice is up to them.”

Based on an approximation of “what seems to be part of any life we will count as a human life” (Nussbaum 1995: 75), Nussbaum lists, provisionally, what are “basic functional human capabilities … 1. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length … 2. Being able to have good health; to be adequately nourished … 3. Being able to avoid unnecessary and non-beneficial pain … 4. Being able to use the senses; being able to imagine, to think, and to reason … 5. Being able to have attachments to things and persons outside ourselves … 6. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s own life. … 7. Being able to live for and to others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings … 8. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature … 9. Being able to laugh, to play … 10. Being able to live one’s own life and nobody else’s … 10a. Being able to live one’s own life in one’s own surroundings and context.” (Nussbaum 95: 83-85). Each of these are, stresses Nussbaum, “separate components [such that] [w]e cannot satisfy the need for one of them by giving a larger amount of another one” (81).
There is a distinction drawn, and stressed, between capability and functioning. The concept of capability is generally discussed in conjunction with rights, and the State is seen here as guarantor of these rights, not an enforcer of discipline. The presence of capability, then, is taken as reflection of a developed State, and the presence of functioning flowing from this capability as reflection of a good State that encourages citizens to express the choices they have been initiated into. Nussbaum says, “Thus, we want soldiers who will not *simply* obey, when an order is given....”

But in cases where functioning is considered important, like casting one’s vote once the capability has been given, citizens might be forced into exercising their given capabilities – that is, into functioning. This argument is extended to innumerable situations, including children who need to function in a particular manner to make for capable adults, the spheres of health, maintenance of environments, literacy, nutrition, citizens’ responsibilities like the paying of taxes, and others. “In general, the more crucial a function is to attaining and maintaining other capabilities, the more entitled we may be to promote actual functioning in some cases, within limits set by an appropriate respect for citizens’ choices” (92). “Even compulsory voting would not be ruled out, if we were convinced that requiring functioning is the only way to ensure the presence of a particular capability” (93).

In attempting to arrive at a normative theory of social justice, Nussbaum considers state policies and principles of development in the third world as faulty not inasmuch as they do not take into account the perspectives of *women in an essential sense*, but inasmuch as they neglect women “as people who suffer pervasively from acute capability failure” (6). A focus on “women’s problems ... will help compensate for the earlier neglect of sex equality in development economics and in the international
human rights movement” (6-7). Her approach to development, therefore, is from the point of view of asking for recognition and inclusion in the category of the “truly human”, and towards producing the ability to deserve it. Capability building and agency are, to this end, essential components, as is also the taking into account of the lived everyday experiences of women in the third world, that reflects on the absence of this capability.

Before addressing the several questions begging to be asked on universalist values endorsed by Nussbaum, I will briefly go into what implications such a position might have for a response to science. Nussbaum sees in her listing of “central human functional capabilities” the potential to suggest a normative ideal of bodily health, as well as a principle that has been applied in definitions of reproductive health:

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) adopted a definition of reproductive health that fits well with the intuitive idea of truly human functioning that guides this list: “Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and its processes. Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when, and how often to do so.” The definition goes on to say that it also implies information and access to family planning methods of their choice. A brief summary of the ICPD’s recommendations … “1. Every sex act should be free of coercion and infection. 2. Every pregnancy should be intended. 3. Every birth should be healthy.”

(Nussbaum 2000: 78 n. 83)

Following from the general notion of capability, this approach has a critique of modern medicine and development with regard to inclusion, taking as neutral and commonsensical the definitions of health or illness; the key question then is one of
building the capability to make informed choices on contraception, for example. For women vis-à-vis development programmes, the question would not be about the resources available at their command, or their satisfaction with those resources (the Rawlsian account), but of what part of those resources – medical facilities – they are capable of using – “what her opportunities and liberties are” (71). The argument then is one for access and inclusion into an apparently universal(ly understood) framework.20

Nussbaum's position runs immediately, as she is well aware, into charges of colonialist, imperialist and universalist attitudes, and this is where it might be useful, as a first step, to recall a critique like Chandra Mohanty’s, on “third world women and the politics of feminism”. In her innumerable pointers to the “Western eye”, Mohanty21 has pointed to the construction of the archetypal and “average” third world woman in Western feminist work, as also in other kinds of feminist discourse sited in the universalist frame. Such an archetype, in her argument, is the constitutive difference that makes possible the image of the Western feminist herself. This archetype is constructed through a slippage between the analytic and descriptive categories “Woman” and “women” respectively. “The relationship between “Woman” – a cultural and ideological composite Other constructed through diverse

20 There is also, of course, an elision between sex and reproduction in the third world here; how it follows from the ICPD recommendations that a satisfying sex life is being talked about is a mystery.
21 Although the arguments quoted here are from Mohanty’s text (1991) published well before Nussbaum’s, and although Mohanty's critique is specifically based on the Zed Press ‘Women in the Third World’ series of publications (as being “the only contemporary series … which assumes that “women in the third world” are a legitimate and separate subject of study and research” [75, endnote 5]), Nussbaum has already been expressing her position vis-à-vis the capabilities question from the 1990s itself, drawing on Aristotle as a resource for an account of human functioning. Further, Mohanty’s work seems to read directly, critically, and powerfully into some of the concerns in Nussbaum’s self-avowed feminist political philosophy, particularly her writing on women in the third world that largely follows the women-in-development approach. Mohanty has been one of the more vociferous and visible critiques of first world feminism, and as such, it is necessary to engage her critique at this point. There are also significant ways in which Nussbaum’s text shows up shifts in thinking in first world feminisms themselves, and it is with these in mind that I juxtapose the two.
representational discourses (scientific, literary, juridical, linguistic, cinematic, etc.) – and “women” – real, material subjects of their collective histories”, states Mohanty, “is one of the central connections the practice of feminist scholarship seeks to address … [and is] not a relation of … correspondence or simple implication” (53). The feminist writings of the Zed Press that she analyses, Mohanty suggests, “discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular “third world woman” – an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse.” (53) As part of this effect, Mohanty traces “the similar effects of various textual strategies used by writers which codify Others as non-Western and hence themselves as (implicitly) Western. It is in this sense”, she says, “that I use the term Western feminist” (Mohanty 1991: 52), thus clarifying both her separation from the geographical sense, and the ways in which certain articulations, positioned alongside others, acquire a particular sedimentation of meanings that constitute Eurocentrism. Mohanty traces some of these discourses – colonial anthropological, western feminist, developmental, multinational capital – as addressed in the Zed Press publications to make her point, and following her argument, it is possible to also trace the continuities between these discourses.

Such an archetype, Mohanty points out, rests on the presumption of sexual difference as primary to the oppression that women in the third world might suffer – “that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries” (53-4). For one, it takes as stable and before the event ‘third world women’ as a sociological category, an “automatic unitary group”, (7) building on this then to show up their ‘victimization’ under “underdevelopment, oppressive traditions,

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22 With its nativization of the “third world woman” (32).
high illiteracy, rural and urban poverty, religious fanaticism, and “overpopulation” of particular Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American countries” (Mohanty 1991: 5-6). In doing so, it irons out the absolute heterogeneity of the lived experiences of women in the third world.

So there is a “third world difference” too that is naturalised in and through this archetype, and thereafter, an easy connection made between “third world women” and feminism.23 Mohanty herself, following Dorothy Smith (1987), points to a more productive way of looking at colonialism as processes of ruling instead of as a fixed entity, and suggests ways in which multiple contexts for the emergence of contemporary third world feminist struggles may be traced. These include the configurations of colonialism, class and gender, the state, citizenship and racial formation, multinational production and social agency, anthropology and the third world woman as “native”, and consciousness, identity, writing.24 Mohanty would therefore ask for the delineation of a more complex relation between struggles rather than sexual difference as a primary origin for the category of third world women, if at all it can be deployed – and that deployment she is not entirely against. “What seems to constitute “women of color” or “third world women” as a viable oppositional alliance”, she says, “is a common context of struggle rather than color or racial identifications … it is third world women’s oppositional political relation to sexist, racist, and imperialist structures that constitutes our potential commonality” (7). The

23 “First, there are the questions of definition … Do third world women make up any kind of constituency? … Can we assume that third world women’s political struggles are necessarily “feminist”? How do we/they define feminism? … Which/whose history do we draw on to chart this map of third world women’s engagement with feminism? How do questions of gender, race, and nation intersect in determining feminisms in the third world?” (2-3). Needless to say, these questions are by now commonplace in any discussion of feminism, and the question of ‘how’ may perhaps be a more useful one to attempt to answer.

24 Where, for Mohanty, the writing of testimonials as public record, rather than autobiographies, becomes the space not merely for recording and recovery, but formation of subjectivities of resistance (34).
Woman-women connection, then, as she sees it, needs to be adequately historicized, set in context. And the category of Third World Woman has to be seen, in order to be useful, as a process of subject formation through these multiple conjunctures rather than as a pre-existing victim category.  

In pointing to the absolute heterogeneity of the experiences of third world women, Mohanty does not, however, give up on the idea of domination or hegemony. What she suggests, instead, is that in understanding the “complex relationality that shapes our social and political lives … it is possible to retain the idea of multiple, fluid structures of domination which intersect to locate women differently at particular historical conjunctures, while at the same time insisting on the dynamic oppositional agency of individuals and collectives and their engagement in “daily life”” (13). The parallels with Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybridity are here apparent, and indeed Mohanty herself points to the parallel (75, n. 3), both in promoting a more complex notion of hegemony than that offered by easy binaries of colonizer and colonized, and in identifying the ways in which multiple negotiations in “daily life” can constitute resistances that are intimately imbricated with the hegemonic.

Mohanty’s critique of such a difference as suggested by the naming of a ‘third world woman’ is then, in sum, a reference to the hierarchization on which it stands; in a more useful sense, it is part of an attempt to define “context” in a conceptual manner, and it is this attempt that I will take up in greater detail in the last section.

25 I have mentioned the Marxist trajectories that are one of the contexts underlying development critique, and this would include the experience of becoming feminist in Marxist spaces. This experience included, after the first enabling encounter with Western feminist texts, the recognition of that qualifier – Western – and my contention would be that it was the peculiar co-presence of postcolonial Marxist discourses rather than direct experiences of oppression or marginalization that made possible the primary recognition of this qualifier, as against others. I am, then, somewhat in disagreement with Mohanty’s argument on colonialism as a straightforward condition of possibility for third world feminisms.

26 I would like to clarify that throughout this discussion I am referring to third world women as referenced by Mohanty.
Let us, however, also examine Nussbaum’s own account of such charges and her subsequent defence of the universal. Nussbaum considers three arguments generally offered against universalist values – “the argument from culture”, the “argument from the good of diversity”, and the “argument from paternalism”. The argument from culture apparently presents a different set of norms as constitutive of Indian culture – norms of “female modesty, deference, obedience, and self-sacrifice that have defined women’s lives for centuries” (41); norms that need not definitionally be bad, norms that work, presumably, for Indian women, and norms that may actually be preferable to Western norms that promote individualism for women. Nussbaum responds to her reading of the culture argument in several ways. For one, she talks of the cultural diversity of India, both temporal and spatial, that hardly allows for reference to such a homogeneity of norms – there are women who resist tradition, for instance. Therefore, “[c]ultures are dynamic … and [c]riticism too is profoundly indigenous … to the culture of India, that extremely argumentative nation” (48). Further, such norms would be acceptable if women had choices about adhering to or rejecting them, which women like Vasanti or Jayamma do not, in her opinion. They do not even endorse the norms they adhere to, and this strengthens her argument against simply accepting a relativist thesis on norms. After all, “[w]hy should we follow the local ideas, rather than the best ideas we can find?” (49) And a position of moral relativism also fails when one realises that a relativist position, conceptually, is not one that is tolerant of diversity or of other cultures.

Regarding the argument from the good of diversity, Nussbaum feels that cultural values that are different from the ones we know still demand a judgement of and decision-making on which ones to endorse and which to reject. “And this requires a set of values that gives us a critical purchase on cultural particulars … it does not
undermine and even supports our search for a general universal framework of critical assessment” (51).

As for the argument from paternalism, which would object to any effort at “telling people what is good for them” (51), Nussbaum responds by saying that “a commitment to respecting people’s choices hardly seems incompatible with the endorsement of universal values … [specially] the value of having the opportunity to think and choose for oneself” (51). Further, she says that every law or bill does this, “telling people that they cannot behave in some way that they have traditionally behaved and want to behave” (53), which is “hardly a good argument against the rule of law” (51), particularly when it is required to protect some from the behaviour of others. Also, in order to build the “material preconditions” of choice, “in whose absence there is merely a simulacrum of choice” (51), law notwithstanding, it might indeed be necessary to “tell people what to do”, something that obviously requires a universal normative account – what Nussbaum will call ‘political’ rather than ‘comprehensive liberalism’.

Does the build-up of Nussbaum's argument for intervention in “the particularly urgent problems of developing nations” then indeed, after reading her defence, seem to constitute West-centrism? Is she, as postcolonial critics of universalism and third world feminist engagements would have it, and as I have also been tempted to flag in her text, marking an archetypal third world woman who needs rescuing? Are her ‘universal values’ constituted by such an archetype?27 Although her conversations are with women who are typically poor, tradition-bound, victimized, yet defiant and speech-worthy, for a philosopher like Nussbaum, the archetype is marked so as to be

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27 Let me clarify that rather than being a digression in the debate on possible feminist critiques of development, these questions are relevant to where the positioning of such a possible critique could be.
transcended, shed, saving the brown woman from those of her traditions that are constricting, transforming her, through an accurate application of universal principles, into ideal human and citizen. To this end, Nussbaum also needs to demonstrate that victimhood is not the essence of ‘woman’, just as difference in any form is not. Indeed, essence or difference will find no place in her philosophy, and her painstaking description of cultural particularity is merely a preamble to then argue for commonality – these are features of “women’s lives everywhere”, where the seeming oddities are only differences in manifestation of stereotypes of women and men, rather than being signs of an “alien consciousness” (23). She also quotes ‘local’ scholars to endorse their views on the undeliverability of “a representative, authentic Third-world woman … [e]ven in India, there is no such thing as the Indian woman – there are only Indian women. And the individuals are far more interesting than any assumed stories of authenticity” (Indira Karamcheti, quoted in Nussbaum 2000: 47). However, “the body that gets beaten is in a sense the same all over the world, concrete though the circumstances of domestic violence are in each society” (23). In that sense, India, with its extent of poverty and difference, merely offers the model ‘case study’.

Nussbaum sees herself, then, in a peculiar relationship with these women. Her primary interlocutor is not so much the feminist sited in the third world, who has attempted to offer an interpretative edge to the naming itself. The purported conversation is, instead, directly with the poor, tradition-bound, victimized, yet defiant and speech-worthy third world women, each different from the other, at the most mediated by a Leela Gulati, the anthropologist in the field. There is no absence of commonality between women here and women elsewhere; there is, however, a value to the ‘local’ that the feminist political philosopher needs to acknowledge, a specificity to the problems that, though identifiable in “women’s lives everywhere”,
asks for the exercise of a *non-imperialist universal* recognition of the particular *before it can be represented*. It is this impulse that produces the insistent declaration that her proposals are based on and grew out of her experience of working with poor women in India. The ghost of colonialism, once it is shaken off, can produce for Nussbaum the reality of the ‘third world’. It is this “defence of universal values” that can be adequately represented by her (34), and that is enacted here.

What rests on this exercise of delineating Nussbaum’s position and challenges to it? I would suggest that the problem, at least in so far as current global feminist analyses identify it, lies elsewhere than economo-centrism and the non-attention to difference. For Nussbaum, the chief interlocutor is in fact the field of development economics that does take into account various non-economic indicators. Victimhood is no longer the critical discourse, if it ever was. Nor is homogeneity of experience asserted, although commonality indeed is. In fact, both Nussbaum and Mohanty are aware of and attempting to nuance binaries here – Nussbaum to challenge the ‘West as evil’ image and development as a totalizing discourse by pointing to the problem as one of bad practitioners, and Mohanty working on the other arm of the binary, to point to the impossibility of “third-worlding” in any simple sense. Mohanty’s critique of universalism is accurate inasmuch as she points to the binariness of certain existing critiques. It fails, however, in her insistence on historical and socio-political heterogeneity as the necessary context of category formation; any category, no matter how minutely contextualized, is by definition nominalist, unintended to capture the entirety of experiences, and to that extent, presence of heterogeneity *per se* can hardly constitute a critique of category formation. Nussbaum’s categories are, by her own admission, provisional, nominalist, *stable*, and hence not philosophically subject to this particular charge of rigidity.
But … the charges of the “Western eye” are not merely charges about faulty practitioners, as Nussbaum would have it, nor, surely, can proof of resistance to norms be proof of their absence? Further, the “third world” that Nussbaum names in the plural and as a non-essentialist category, yet needs delineation in a manner that pointing to *practices of bias* cannot begin to get close to. It is in the assumptions of the unimplicated foreigner, then, that Nussbaum’s universalism lies, as in her complete indifference to the anchoring “sample populations” on which the ideal citizen, or the neutral definitions of reproductive health, for example, have been built. Herein lies the validity of Mohanty’s charge of “ethnocentric universality” (53). While Nussbaum’s arguments actually clarify for us that universalism in its ideal description is hardly the problem, there is a double move in the delineations of the universal *and* the particular in her writing, and in other work in this frame. Vasanti and Jayamma are clearly not, in Nussbaum’s lexicon, victims of the mute kind. They have been, despite the unavailability of infrastructure and mechanisms that could reverse hardship, negotiators and survivors. They are ‘lacking’ apparently only in the capabilities that would allow them to access legal and economic structures. And yet, embedded as they are in their “particular caste and regional circumstances”, their negotiations with those circumstances are tied to their bodies in ways that seem to embody their very specificity. A putting together of body-situation-circumstance that makes up ‘third-worldness’ as a category of description for Nussbaum and her fellow-universalists, be it the embodied images of ‘mothers of colour’ breastfeeding their newborn, or the detailed physical descriptions of Vasanti and Jayamma and their surroundings, then, is not incidental to the narrative of their flourishing; *it is, singularly, the narrative of the particular.* In a frame of lack of capability, Vasanti or Jayamma can hardly be expected *not to have a body*; and they can hardly be expected
to produce analytic statements. As a “political explanation”, therefore, when Jayamma says that “[a]s a [domestic] servant, your alliance is with a class that is your enemy”, her “use of the Marxist language of class struggle” must be taken with a pinch of bemusement – “whether one endorses it or not” [19]. It is after this particularity has been described in its entire nuance that Nussbaum can set out to draw her comparisons with “efforts common to women in many parts of the world”.

A useful critique of universalism would mean, as Mohanty begins to suggest, an attention to context, a beginning of knowledge *and of categories* from enmeshment rather than outsideness, although it would require a movement from that enmeshment to a form of objectivity – the movement from perspective to story that Lorraine Code speaks of, in her work on feminist epistemology.28 It would also require, and here Mohanty’s and other critiques of first world feminism fall short, a recognition that *relationality* between struggles in what I continue to provisionally call the third world will also mean a space between them that is hardly ever *common* in the sense of a happy relation. It will, then, involve the recognition that such struggles are sited in different *worlds*, and will, in their cohesion, also mean a movement away from each other. It is only in the attempt to interpret this movement that a discursive space of negotiation with the ‘first world’ can perhaps be forged.

To such a universalist position, ecofeminists have replied with the following:

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28 I have discussed this argument in chapter 2. I will elaborate on the possibilities inherent in this formulation, in my suggestion towards a feminist methodological critique of development, and science, in the last section of this chapter.
A soliloquy of the local – ‘I know mine, you know yours, there can be no dialogue’

The ‘third world woman’ as perspective to speak from has perhaps not been articulated as clearly anywhere else as in Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva’s writing on ecofeminism, and this work is also evidence of the ways in which development becomes a powerful organizing metaphor for ‘third world feminism’. Building on the notions of organicity, wholeness, and connectedness as the primary postulates of ecofeminism, Mies and Shiva thereafter take up certain cultural characteristics associated with the Third World to offer a picture of third world women as already in convergence with nature, as upholders of the subsistence economy as against the “capitalist patriarchal” system, and as offering perspectives for resistance to such an economy of the Same. Critiquing both Western science and development, they endeavour to demonstrate the reductionist and universalist paradigms that the former occupies. For these critics, the mechanicity that Western science relies on, the ways in which it dominates nature-women-third world, treating and re-producing each of these as a dead object, are symptomatic of a subject-object dualism that is carried over into development philosophies too. Western science, says Shiva, is philosophically embedded in dualisms of subject-object, which allow for such a possibility only vis-à-vis nature or any researched object. The neutrality that this apparently guarantees the researcher is however a false one, since the universal position from which it emanates is itself anchored in Western paradigms. Mies traces continuities here from Francis Bacon onwards – “scientists since Bacon, Descartes and Max Weber have constantly concealed the impure relationship between knowledge and violence or

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29 There are strong ecofeminist positions on duality, however, that this approach fails to take up. See Plumwood, 1993.
force (in the form of state and military power, for example) by defining science as the sphere of a pure search for truth … [thus lifting] it out of the sphere of politics … [a separation] which we feminists attack [as] based on a lie” (46). This scientific principle, constructed through “violently disrupting the organic whole called Mother Nature” (46), became then the route to knowledge, creating the “modern scientist [as] the man who presumably creates nature as well as himself out of his brain power … [after] a disruption of the symbiosis between the human being, Mother Nature, and the human mother … [and this is] the link between the new scientific method, the new capitalist economy, and the new democratic politics” (47). Similar to this, asserts Mies, is Immanuel Kant’s evolution of a concept of knowledge and rationality through an extrusion of emotion.

The masculine character of Western science, constituted through such an extrusion of emotion, such a “subjection of nature and women”, was also associated with a violence that is evident in all technologically advanced societies. Mies and Shiva cite the examples of military, new reproductive and biotechnologies that accompany new globalized economies, pointing out that such technology is never neutral but functions through the “principle of selection and elimination” that provides the “main method of conquest and control” over what will survive and what will not be allowed to (195).

Development, Shiva asserts, has in its overall philosophy followed the principles of Western science. It would follow that development has then always been about ‘catching up’ with a universal model that has apparently worked in Western countries to provide a good quality of life, freedom from poverty, hunger, illness, and so on. The socialist states were the first to set up the model, and despite strong evidence
contradicting its effectiveness even in those states, it has remained the model in dominance today.

But Shiva has more than the ineffectivity of the model to offer as critique. The accumulation model, she asserts, is built on the premises of colonialism and capitalist patriarchy, that “interpret[s] difference as hierarchical and uniformity as a prerequisite for equality” (Mies and Shiva 1993: 2). “This system emerged, is built upon and maintains itself through the colonization of women, of ‘foreign’ peoples and their lands; and of nature, which it is gradually destroying” (2). Technology is one of the tools of such colonization. Technological advancement is accompanied by externalization of costs, so that workers in colonized peripheries are treated differently and paid less than workers in the metropole. The “colonization of women” involves the unpaid labour of women – the “free economy” of mainstream economics – that shores up the market economy. The “hidden costs generated by destructive development … [include] the new burdens created by ecological devastation, costs that are invariably heavier for women, in both the North and South” (75).

Although this ecofeminist approach, like the other kinds of gender work I have highlighted that negotiate science or development, speaks of the need for “a creative transcendence of … differences” between women the world over in order to offer resistances little or large, it is also in dissonance with them in proposing a far more fixed position – a philosophy already embedded in ‘the people’, here the women by virtue of being woman. The intensification of the local provided in Mies and Shiva’s ecofeminist approach, then, separates itself somewhat from other approaches to the local as a critique of development. Such an intensification is not in the frame of stark

30 For more work on this, see Fraad, Resnick, and Wolff, 1994.
31 There are ways in which the third world as local is re-produced in this discourse, even in the “transcending of differences” among women the world over that it proposes.
cultural difference that would, in Mies and Shiva’s opinion, produce a cultural
relativism, nor is it interested in distilled essences of the local or the “romanticization
of the savage” (150) that appear in globalized market discourse, but rather in a
connection between the spiritual and the material – a relation of soil-nature-
subsistence that is somehow to be found in the practices, intuitions, and indeed protest
movements of third world women. In so doing, ecofeminism of course exposes itself
to the standard critique of essentialism.32 What is important for our purposes here is
the need to recognize that ecofeminism is far closer to old ideological positions in the
spectrum between these and the new dynamic local or hybrid, and as expected,
discredited for the same reasons in the current climate. The understandings of
colonialism and capitalism that animate Mies and Shiva’s version of the ecofeminist
project are, insofar as they are spelt out, inadequate as provisional arguments. Further,
the manner in which the category of ‘third world women’ is activated through a
reference to the organicity and wholeness of their practices, fails to give an adequate
account of how this may happen; as such, it continues to fall into the trap of
romanticization that it seeks to avoid. A philosophy that is intuitive and already in
place, along with the interpretative ability to put it into practice through various
movements of resistance, fails to provide any evidence of its assertions.

32 This is a critique that ecofeminists counter with the view that it stems from a dualistic thinking on the
historical-materialist Left that considers that nature is also socially constructed, and that any attempt to
say “body” is automatically reverting to biology and some form of naturalism. On the other hand,
“[f]emaleness is and was always a human relation to our organic body [and] [o]nly under capitalist
patriarchy did the division between spirit and matter, the natural and the social lead to the total
devaluation of the so-called natural … a necessary integration of both [ecofeminist and social
ecologist] views … would not be possible [they say, following Mary Mellor] ‘without reconstructing
the whole socialist project’” (160).
A disaggregated (third) world: women negotiating meanings

But there is another kind of scholarship now in currency that negotiates meanings of gender differently. Global gender work disdaining the universalist approach takes on the hybridization argument and works toward identifying contingent moments of resistance. This scholarship is in alignment with postcolonial approaches. Anthropological investigations into midwifery and childbirth practices exemplify this position. This is what I call the space of not-feminist gender analysis. I take up, in this section, a particular text that is fairly representative of such analysis, and that, to begin with, marks its separations from post-development positions like Escobar’s, concentrating instead on the heterogeneity of experiences as well as the disaggregated nature of institutional apparatuses that apparently make a description of hegemony difficult, and further, on the impossibility of even identifying such a hegemonic role for Western science in the Indian context. Of course, having made this argument against the hegemonic nature of Western science, in this case Western medical frameworks, this kind of global gender analysis also carries with it the imperative to separate itself from universalist positions, both in justifying the impulse

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33 “Arturo Escobar has proposed that development is first and foremost a discourse, a coherent system of representation that creates the “reality” of its objects and exerts control over them. … This Foucauldian approach accomplishes a radical relativization of development discourse by showing it to be a distinctively modern and Western formulation. It suggests, as well, that the logic of development discourse is fundamentally cohesive. Ethnographic research, however, highlights the gaps in what appears to be a totalizing development discourse. The perspectives and experiences of both the people who are constituted as the “objects” of development as well as the people in the institutions that implement development locally point to a much messier and often contradictory experience of development. Akhil Gupta describes this experience as the “complex border zone of hybridity and impurity.” In short, we cannot assume that the logic of development discourse as produced by official reports, studies, and programmatic statements necessarily structures the way that development is used and experienced at the local level” (Van Holle 2003: 168).

34 “… anthropologists have begun to examine the diverse and uneven ways … [in which] childbirth is being biomedicalized throughout the world” (ibid: 15).

35 “Unlike the situation in the United States and many parts of Europe, the biomedical establishment’s control over childbirth in India can by no means be viewed as hegemonic” (ibid: 55).
of choosing subjects of research\textsuperscript{36} as well as in declaring a detached commitment to such research.\textsuperscript{37}

\emph{On culture and the local}

Cecilia Van Hollen – who is fairly representative of a body of work in anthropology (see Rozario 1998,\textsuperscript{38} Ram 1998, 1994, 2001, and a large number of other anthropologists working especially on reproductive health issues in India) – begins her argument at the site of a shift she identifies as useful in anthropological work, from a reading of practices as reflection of a culture, to a reading of culture as “in-the-making” through everyday practices. Using this “processural view of culture-in-the-making”, she clarifies that her anthropological approach does not seek to imply “one monolithic thing that we can call “modern birth” in the contemporary world order” (5). For her, it is important “to stay within the specific ethnographic field of [her] own research and to underscore [her] point that biomedicine always takes on a unique form at the local level” (8). At the very moment of her refusal to call it monolithic or by a common name, however, she is speaking of the re-interpretations of the global project of biomedical knowledge at the “microphysical level by individual actors, collectivities, and institutions”, and it is in this re-interpretation and the possibilities of hybridisation and reconfiguring along caste, class and gender axes through it that she is interested. In her case, she finds it important to “view[ing]

\textsuperscript{36} The impulse being an avowedly a personal one – “My initial decision to carry out this research in Tamil Nadu … had more to do with my own personal history in the state than with a purely scholarly interest in filling a lacuna in academic research” (ibid: 18).

\textsuperscript{37} “My intent is not to criticize from afar the work of so many hardworking and dedicated health care providers and policymakers. In fact, I am keenly aware of the historical legacy of the damning depiction of maternal and child health care in India by colonial discourse to legitimise colonial rule. So I present these criticisms with a certain amount of discomfort about my role in perpetuating this discourse in the postcolonial era, despite the fact that I strive to show how international and globalizing forces are intricately implicated in women’s critiques” (ibid: 9).

\textsuperscript{38} Who, during case studies of \textit{dais} in Bangladesh, finds unpardonable the luxury of “mythologizing and romanticizing the process of ‘natural childbirth’ and of projecting this image on to a Third World context where it is not always appropriate” (Rozario 1998: 144).
reproduction itself as a key site for understanding the ways in which people re-conceptualize and re-organize the world in which they live” (5). She has a similar approach to gender ideologies, hierarchies, or practices, and is at pains to demonstrate the impossibility of cross-cultural assertions that do not take into account these practices and their different sedimentation of meanings.

Such a disciplinary move is accompanied, perforce, by the need to challenge the clear separation of biomedical technological systems and indigenous practices of healing that has characterized earlier analyses of Western medicine and by extension, science. It is accompanied by a challenge to the notion of development as totalizing discourse philosophically anchored in the geographical West (and hence the separation from Escobar). It is accompanied by a challenge to the need to identify resistance in a straightforward rejection of Western medicine or technology. In doing this, then, it is also avowedly a move away from those feminist readings of the agency of third world women as sited in the ‘natural’, the ‘cultural’, or the ‘indigenous’, and of Western biomedical practices as controlling of women (15). This means a re-cognition of the ‘local’ as itself multiply constituted and constantly in flux. And it is accompanied by the mandatory recognition, akin to Nussbaum’s, of the problem of being the Western feminist and intellectual who must constantly strain towards transparency. Here, of course, the anthropologist’s new requirement of self-reflexivity has manifested as an expression of near-guilt – a moral problem.

The agency question gets taken up differently from Nussbaum in such an analysis that invokes the ‘local’ but at a more avowedly involved level. There is a pattern to this kind of scholarship that affirms the burden of a feminist re-invocation of experience while needing to disavow existing feminist modes. Van Hollen has, for
example, attempted to speak of the marginalization of women’s labour within modern medical systems. So “ethnographic stud[ies] of how modernity was impacting the experiences of poor women during childbirth in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu at the end of the twentieth century” become a part of the attempt to understand “how the relationship between maternity and modernity is experienced, understood, and represented” (4).

While feminist activism and scholarship has done much to point to “medicalization” in Western medicine – “the process by which medical expertise “becomes the relevant basis of decision making in more and more settings” … the process whereby the medical establishment … incorporates birth in the category of disease and requires that a medical professional oversee the birth process and determine treatment” (11), anthropology has avowedly contributed to a disaggregation of biomedicine itself as it is practised in the ‘Western world’, through descriptions of how it is actively redefined in the ‘third world’. Van Hollen states that such disaggregations challenge “those feminist studies that view all the controlling aspects of biomedicalized births as derived from a Western historical legacy of the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution and that present a romanticized vision of holistic “indigenous” birth, or “ethno-obstetrics”, as egalitarian, “woman-centered”, and non-interventionist” (15). As she proceeds to unravel the “historical and cultural specificity of the transformations in the experience of childbirth” (15), it is clear that she sees resistance as embodied in these specificities; moreover, she sites resistance in the bricoleur-like response to various biomedical allopatic procedures rather than in a soliloquous ‘natural therapy’ movement. And this difference between, say, the African home birth movement and the individuated responses in Tamil Nadu, signals what she calls cultural specificity.
What happens to the agency question in this exercise? Clearly, empowerment here is through frames other than the modified inclusions suggested by Nussbaum. Any use of the modern, states Van Hollen, is bound to refigure it in ways that bear back on the definition of the modern. Anthropological exercises such as Van Hollen’s see themselves as different from ‘postcolonial’ studies that focus on rural areas and that, like feminist work, tend “to depict childbirth practices as relatively untouched by allopathic institutions” (8). By locating her own investigation in metropolitan Madras (now Chennai), for instance, Van Hollen prefers to home in on more central locations for allopathy, aiming to look at “the central role which allopathy plays in women’s decisions regarding childbirth and … how women choose from among different allopathic options as well as non-allopathic practices.” In other words, the hybrid, mixed bag of tradition-and-modernity, also a bag that is being negotiated in a way that avoids “falling into the trap of representing others simply as victims” (10).

With such a frame in place, Van Hollen proceeds to look at the various negotiations made by women in Tamil Nadu vis-à-vis allopathy.

*After ideology*

In the shift from a notion of strong hegemony to a description of disaggregated discourses – which is actually a different exercise from suggesting hybridity as a *model* – Van Hollen acts, then, as representative of a position that determinedly embeds itself in the local, in the category “women”, in experience, to propose weak and diversely articulated structures of power rather than a singular monolith. Rather than express these as ‘binaries’, Van Hollen finds it a more fruitful exercise to concentrate on the processes of modernization that, for the purposes of her study, “impact childbirth in Tamil Nadu: 1) the professionalization and institutionalisation of
obstetrics, 2) transformations in the relationship between consumption patterns and reproductive rituals, 3) the emergence of new technologies for managing the pain of birth, 4) the international mandate to reduce population in India, and 5) development agencies’ agenda to spread biomedical conceptions of reproductive health for mothers and children. These processes,” she contends, “taken together, have transformed cultural constructions of reproduction and social relations of reproduction in myriad ways” (6). She is also interested in “assess[ing] how the five processes of modernity mentioned above, in relation to other factors, influence the “choices” poor women and their families make about the kind of care to seek for childbirth-related needs.” In referring to choice, she clarifies that “the decision-making process is never a matter of the free will of rational, value-maximizing individuals, but, rather, it is always enacted in political-economic contexts and shaped by socio-cultural factors such as gender, class, caste, and age” (7).

How exactly does Van Hollen undertake this project? Her conversations with the women she meets in her two primary field-sites in Tamil Nadu produce for her a vast collection of words that are in common conversational usage in terms of negotiations (between modernity and shakti, for instance), are also part of the canon of Hinduism, and the subject of much critique. For Van Hollen, the feature to be noted is the ways in which these words travel and acquire a rich concatenation of meanings – which concatenation, she will contend, is what actually constitutes culture – an act of bricolage.39

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39 Levi-Strauss has used the word ‘bricolage’ to suggest the origin of myths from tales put together, to abandon “all reference to a center, to a subject, to a privileged reference” (Derrida 1978: 286), and to separate method from truth. In French, a bricoleur is a jack-of-all-trades. Derrida, critical of the value of the distinction between the bricoleur and the engineer, sees in the ethnographic impulse the pressure to interpret, arrive at “a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign” (292).
What, then, does such an anthropological exercise achieve? Is it, in also shifting from the earlier ethnographic impulse, talking about the bricolage that constitutes culture? Van Hollen is definitely building up a glossary of words – *vali, maruttavaci, shakti,* and so on, but these are words that she refers to as the *originals* in the analyses she makes. It may be that the particular word referred to in translation may travel to the reader of her text against the grain as well, as alternative interpretations of the words she has heard and put down. In the act of simply putting down *vis-à-vis* western concepts of pain etc., however, there is no suggestion towards such a move, and the glossary seems to act more as evidence of fidelity to the ‘object of knowledge’, namely the “poor women of Tamil Nadu”; like Nussbaum, a way of “listening to what they are saying”. Reflexive anthropology, in this case, makes the claim to transparency as much as the earlier ethnographic exercise, with the difference that it wants to do this through the insertion of the researcher into the frame, as against earlier forms which unapologetically museumized the cultures being studied as exotic, other, and as object of knowledge separate from the anthropologist.

What does such a position offer in terms of furthering the understanding of hegemony, or, as Van Hollen herself puts it, of “how modernity was impacting the experiences of poor women during childbirth in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu at the end of the twentieth century” (4)? What does the shift from a notion of strong hegemony to a description of disaggregated discourses mean for conceptual strategies to read the same? The disaggregated picture that Van Hollen describes, the hidden corners it uncovers, all mark ways in which childbirth is viewed differently, as also ways in which seeming centres of power – institutions and policies – are negotiated. In her invocation of the different relationship to labour pain or *vali* – for instance the idea that “poor women in Tamil Nadu” seem to have a relationship of attachment to,
practically a summoning of, suffering as a necessary constituent of childbirth, as against standard mainstream moves and feminist calls for painless labour – she also wishes to point to different ways in which both culture and gender may be constituted as dynamic practices, rather than as an identity or reserve that is drawn upon, or as structures of domination and resistance. In any useful extension of her project, then, it would be necessary to say that the categories of domination and resistance are themselves difficult to define. Why? Is it because of their contradictory nature? Their ambivalence? Van Hollen, as indeed more and more anthropologists, performs the task of description with fidelity and often with ingenuity. This task of description is expected to offer a critique of macro-analyses, as also of rigid, monolithic descriptions. In what often turns out to be a misunderstanding of macro-analyses with generalization, of structural understandings with rigidity, however, the task of description does not, as Van Hollen would have us believe, offer a model of hybridity as a framework of hegemony. The engagement I set up between Mohanty and Nussbaum shows us the same slippage.

There is something else happening here. While Van Hollen strains to clarify that she does not wish to refer to an authentic and fixed notion of a culture, or a cultural past, her use and interpretation of her glossary terms falls back on relating conversational usage to the canon in some form. Such a method might well, as postcolonial theorists have attempted, recall a notion of repetition rather than origin. Van Hollen’s stress is on difference, however, and in articulating this difference, it is a stable notion of culture that she falls back on, still associating with cultural essentialisms while always disavowing them. As such, the easy transposition of dichotomies like public-private that make sense in Western intellectual contexts, to
conversations Van Hollen has with these women is in itself a simulation of the local that hardly works.40

In the notion of a ‘gap’ or a ‘failure’ to understand or hegemonize the local, this kind of anthropological analysis aligns with the framework of hybridity put forward by the postcolonial school. It does not, however, do the same work in even attempting a conceptual strategy, merely ranging itself alongside instead.

**Bringing the economic back home**

In the influential and important 1991 World Bank report on *Gender and Poverty in India*, principal author Lynn Bennett announces:

… now, researchers, women’s activists, and government departments are reaching a new consensus. … [W]omen must be seen as economic actors – actors with a particularly important role to play in efforts to reduce poverty.

(John 1999: 105)

There is another difference from other anthropological work that Van Hollen asserts, and offers as a more strident critique of globalisation than isolated cultural analyses. This she does by bringing in questions of consumer practices and globalisation, and the various changes in birth practices in the light of changes in the economic; in so doing, she re-configures third world women as important economic actors.

‘Third world poverty’ is here a significant allegory. For Nussbaum it is a condition to be resisted along with sexual hierarchies; for Van Hollen, economic

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40 The analysis of vācal (translated as doorway), for instance, as metaphorically separating the private and the public. Why is it not simply a description? At the very least, what are the disciplinary methodologies by means of which anthropology, for instance, seeks to apply this semantic construction?
disparities and changing forms of the economy create different conditions of possibility for changing cultural practices. In both, there is a sense that economy is being brought back into the discussion, after a period of much-vaunted culture as the last instance of difference. In both, then, the ‘economic’ becomes a metaphor for connection (Nussbaum will say that the lives of poor women are the same everywhere; Van Hollen will refer to the ‘politics of globalization’) as well as difference, in some sense actually regaining importance, as it were, in causal frameworks.

The World Bank report itself drew entirely on the findings of the 1988 Shramshakti report on the condition of women in the informal sector, compiled after extensive field surveys in different parts of the country. The Shramshakti report, states Mary E. John, “was intended to show women’s extremely vulnerable working conditions across diverse occupations under high levels of discrimination, as well as the range of health hazards women were exposed to on an everyday basis. The recommendations of the report addressed to various ministries … included enlarging the definition of work to encompass all women engaged in production and reproduction, recognizing women’s position as major rather than supplementary wage earners, and finding strategies to enhance women’s control over and ownership of resources” (John 1999: 112). This is a finding that is set up, in the World Bank report, to actually say that these are women who are more efficient resource managers, and therefore better negotiators of poverty, than their men. In that turn, in the shift from exploitation to efficiency (as John points out), in the shift in focus from the formal to the informal sector, and in the examination of poor third world women in this space as a given rather than as a problem (94% of the informal sector is constituted by women, but this is not considered the problem, as is not the conditions of employment that
prevail in this sector), a fresh image of the “third world woman” is constituted –
enmeshed but not mired in her cultural practices, poor but a survivor, and an
important economic actor, as a glance at the literature on social capital or New
Communitarianism will also show.41

What does a moment when such a report was appearing alongside a vast literature
on the micro-politics of negotiation by women of third world countries, ask to be read
as? Clearly, negotiation as a strategy of power and economic resources, encouraging a
re-inscription of the ‘third world’ as agential, sits in a not uncomfortable alignment
with a concentration on the problem of development as a ‘third world problem’ –
something mainstream development language has always done. Further, the move
from ideological critique to description, finds another parallel, in an apparent move
from politics to self-help.

And after feminism

We have seen, in Van Hollen’s text, the impulse to move away from feminist
articulations. Feminism here is, of course, seen as the ideological stance that is both
epistemically unreliable in its monolithic description of social conditions, and
vanguardist in not taking into account women’s spontaneous consciousness/
negotiations. Given such an understanding of feminism, the only alternative would be
to move away from feminism to women, sometimes positioning women as ex-officio
knowers, sometimes as learning through living, never as a coherent community, and
never as subjects of feminism. Apart from being the new and acceptable micro-
politics in the new globalised economy, this could also be read as a response to rigid

41 Also referred to as progressive conservatism, this proposes a political economy embedded within
local communities, as a buffer to the continuing collateral damage of capitalist economies. Needless to
say, this relies on community networks already in place, including patriarchal ones.
ideological stances in feminism that read both women and science in homogenous frames. It is also, in other words, a movement from ‘difference’ – both the hierarchical difference that was promoted in Marxist perspectives on gender and the feminist call to a different perspective to break free of Marxist methodologies – to differences.42 We would do well, I believe, not to simply label this the backlash against feminism, for it has not merely resulted in an antagonistic positioning of feminist and other kinds of gender work vis-à-vis development; there are significant overlaps, too, in the two movements. The turn to autobiographical/ ethnographic narrative as experience, for example, has driven much feminist analysis that struggled to shed rigid ideologies, as we have seen at least in part above. The most significant overlap here with non-feminist gender work would be the need to build a narrative of experience against that of Reason, or Culture, or the concomitantly named hegemonic entity. In this sense, the task in both later feminism and gender analysis has been to turn to experience, as it were, and describe it faithfully, in its diversity and heterogeneity.

42 I have examined, in Chapter 2, how legacies of Left critique worked for those ‘growing up feminist in Marxist spaces’ in Bengal in the ‘80s. My hypothesis is that this legacy actually shaped the methodologies of feminist work on science and development, including the shift from ‘access’ to ‘terms of access’, as a parallel reading of the shift in Left approaches to science and technology from the nationalist to the postcolonial moments would suggest. This is not to suggest a relationship of bonhomie or emulation between feminist and Marxist practice in Bengal, but rather a fraught and largely unacknowledged relationship of antagonism. In Left spaces in Bengal, the positioning of the ‘feminine’ as inchoate and perspectival, as experienced but non-knowledgeable, shores up Marxist discourse, rather, is necessary to the articulation of a Marxist standpoint, and it is from here that I propose that, in our contexts, feminist methodologies too have at least partly been fraught with the need to retain the element of ‘perspective’ as a particular, sometimes limited ‘way of looking’, an experience addressed to and contained within the hegemonic – here masculinist Marxist practice – rather than an interpretative tool that could provide both a knowledge of dominant systems, as well as a better account of the world.
Alternatives? From situated knowledges to standpoint epistemology

One should expect control strategies to concentrate on boundary conditions and interfaces, on rates of flow across boundaries – and not on the integrity of natural objects.

(Haraway 1991: 163)

First, the question of experience. This one statement subsumes several questions, on politics, on knowledge, that I have been trying to raise in the thesis. What I have been calling the old ideological model of critique – the possibility of critique from the vantage point of a coherent set of material interests – was also tied to a model of knowledge, a model that said – I know, you do. This constituted the rationale for the vanguard, this constituted the knowledge of oppression. For a feminism having drawn from Marxist legacies of politics, this then was the model to be adopted, and the politics around women’s lives that gave birth to this entity, feminism, and has nurtured it ever since, definitionally became that benevolent umbrella, that liberatory tool, that protects those lives and inserts itself into them (the personal must be politicized). Having identified the problems of vanguardism during the post-nationalist, subaltern turn, however, a portion of the rethinking Left and a global, universalist feminism may consider that what remains for us to do or think is a turn to experience. The slogan changed; it became – we all know, together. Both these moves were, however, hyphenated in the premise of ‘one knowledge’.

There were several moves critical of ‘one knowledge’. Those that took the ‘Third World’ route either proposed a ‘different reason’, a different canon, an alternative system (as postcolonial scholars sometimes did), or articulated a politics of complete heterogeneity that held knowledge as necessarily provisional and separate from a
rationale for politics (as did those that took on the name ‘third world feminism’). A third position here was of I know mine, you know yours, there can be no dialogue. For this school of knowledge, the experience of oppression was necessary, and sufficient. The consciousness of oppression, which was ex-officio, offered knowledge. The community of knowers here was a closed community. Asserting that the ‘one knowledge’ claim rested on the active exclusion of other knowledges, it suggested a remaking of ‘low knowledge’ through the experience of oppression. This is the impulse that starts, and ends, with the embodied insider, speaking with[in] and for itself, a complete closed community. This impulse we have seen with respect to sexual minorities, women, the subaltern – an impulse also tied to the organic or pastoral as opposed to the technological, an impulse sometimes tracing direct connections with a cultural past, and often offering a choice between systems of knowledge. The above mentioned third worldist positions sometimes tied up with this third position, proposing a politics of coalition while keeping knowledge bases separate (as in third world feminisms), or realizing implicit connections between ‘low knowledge’ practices and a different system.

While I have made no attempt here to directly examine the complex of phenomena often referred to by the short-hand ‘globalization’, I will now refer back to my first mention of development as a practice and to the gender work that involves itself with disaggregated description as part of this phenomenon. The reaction to the ideological has meant, in this frame, a shift from politics to self-help, from the ideological to the intuitive, where the intuitive is taken as a flat description of immediate reality as experience. While it might be tempting to read this immediate everyday reality as organic, whole, feminine, and often able to escape an
overdetermination by patriarchal norms, the new gender analyses do not necessarily rely on organicity. Rather, politics, or the politics of representation, have shifted, as Haraway notes with deadly precision, to a game of simulation in what she calls the “informatics of domination”, and the new gender analyses are as much part of it as any other (recall Van Hollen’s terms – culture-in-the-making, “processural”, etc). While none of this new critical scholarship addressing development or technology actually denies domination or power, it has contributed to making it so increasingly difficult to define or identify, as to make counter-hegemonic attempts appear very nearly anachronistic.

What, then, of alternatives? After a rejection of those feminist strands that seek to build a common, sometimes homogenous narrative of feminine experience, and of gender analysis that thrives on the heterogeneity of women’s experiences, but yet agreeing with the need to “speak from somewhere”, as against older models of one knowledge that offered a “view from nowhere”, a neutral view, what could be the nature of this critique?

There is a wealth of theorizations on the feminine, not going for such a simplistic reading of experience or the everyday. Feminist work in India that looks at autobiographies, for example, has taken on the notion of the everyday as a fraught space, but also a liberating one, following on the re-reading of the personal as the political. Parallels with theorizing in western feminism may be found where the spectrum has, in talking of women’s experience, included a valorizing, as in Adrienne Rich’s description of the experience of motherhood in the Anglo-American second wave of feminism (1986), as also a speaking of the body, of corporeality, of embodiment, and of subjectivity as a foil to identity (as in the French feminist school, where notions of touch as against vision [Luce Irigaray], of ‘there being no place for woman’ in the patriarchal Symbolic’ and women needing a different Symbolic to ‘be’[Irigaray], have been suggested. The subjectivity-identity theorization also recalls the sati debates). This has proceeded to either pit experience against ‘abstract reason’, or to demonstrate, more interestingly, how reasonableness is itself infected by bias, in some cases a ‘male sexualization’ (Grosz 1994). Other powerful analyses could be made, following on Judith Butler’s concept of the ‘constitutive outside’, to show how Reason enacts its hegemony through a continuous production of experience as the constitutive outside to discourse. (This need not be construed as a structural model, as a detailed reading of Butler’s theorization of ‘politically salient exclusions’ will show (Butler 1993). Parallelly, ‘experience’ has been articulated, in the work of Joan Scott, among others, not as an ‘out there’ but a historical production (Scott 1992).
I would suggest that it will have to be a re-turn to experience, a re-cognition, rather than a turn. That we pay attention not only, or not even so much, to the fractured narrative offered by the wide variety or heterogeneity of experience, as to its possible apority in dominant frames, so as to enact such a re-turn treating the perspective of the excluded, aporetic experience as momentary resource – not authentic, fixed, or originary, but appropriate. Drawing on Haraway’s suggestion of a gift of vision, of situation as a visual tool, this would mean a momentary cognizance, a momentary gift of ab-normal vision – abnormal by way of not making sense in dominant frames – that could describe the dominant in terms different than its own, as also point to other possibilities. This would mean, most importantly for a notion of the political, a shift from marginality to aporicity as a vantage point for critique.

Perspective, here, would therefore take on the third of the three meanings I have delineated in Chapter 2, as the fantastic spur within the dominant, as a moment of seeing, of ‘possession’, that can be lost in the looking. In this sense, it is also not possible to map perspective onto identity or individual taste. Perspective as that moment of possession not only gives a completely different picture of things, it also gives a picture not available from anywhere else – that makes visible the dominant as such, as that which had rendered invalid other possibilities. This invalidation, this exclusion, could then be understood differently from a removal from circulation of that which is disobedient – “At my heel, or outside”, as Le Doueff puts it; it is better

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44 I have referred to the way in which I use aporia, in the introduction to the thesis. To recapitulate, aporia is referred to as a logical impasse or contradiction, that which is impassable, especially “a radical contradiction in the import of a text or theory that is seen in deconstruction as inevitable” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online).

45 A clarification here. I am not saying that experience is always aporetic to a narrative, but I am asking for an attention to a particular perspective that might be so positioned as to be aporetic.

46 I have referred, in Chapter 2, to three meanings of the word perspective. This is the meaning that I activate here, a perspective that appears fantastic, or absurd, except from a particular point of view.
understood as a constitutive or primary exclusion with an entry later on the dominant’s terms. As Le Doueff puts it again, “Outside, or at my heel.”47 Here I find useful, as a beginning, the model of the excluded available within feminist standpoint theory, of the woman as ‘outsider within’.48 While this formulation evokes a degree of unease about whether this social location can be enough as a starting point (whether women then always have to be the outsiders within to be able to speak from this space), it offers, I think, valuable clues for working toward a possible model of feminist critique. To understand this, we need to understand, also, that the issue here is not only that of recognizing hierarchies, nor is it about building a stand-alone alternative system of knowledge that may be called feminist. The very first example I gave in this chapter, of the clinical consultation that turned into a conversation, tries to demonstrate this.

The very notion of a feminist standpoint would be then the act of interpretation that puts this positioning, this transient possession, to work, not a place already defined, as earlier understandings of standpoint would have; this process

47 “Exclusion in principle seems to function as a formidable method of forcing dependence. And it is indeed a choice between “being on the outside or perhaps at my heel,” conveying first an exclusion in principle, and then conditions for secondary entry, rather than the reverse, “at my heel or on the outside,” which would indicate first a frank authoritarianism and then punishment for insubordination.” (Le Doueff 2003: 25)

48 Feminist Standpoint theory talks of the possibility of a situated, perspectival form of knowing, of such a knowing as necessarily a communal project, and of this knowing as one where the community of knowers is necessarily shifting and overlapping with other communities. While Haraway would speak of ‘situated knowledges’ as against the ‘God trick’, as she calls it, of seeing from nowhere – a neutral perspective (Haraway 1992), Sandra Harding would go on, however, to propose a version of strong objectivity – a less false rather than a more true view; this, Harding would suggest, can come only from the viewpoint of particular communities, sometimes the marginalized, sometimes women. This is where Harding’s version of standpoint epistemology is still grappling with the question of whether the experience of oppression is a necessary route to knowledge. (Harding deals with this with this by treating women’s lives as resource to maximise objectivity, Haraway by treating these women as ironic subjects and seeing from below as only a visual tool). A related question is whether the very notion of standpoint epistemology requires a version, albeit a more robust one than in place now, of systems of domination, and it is here that a productive dialogue could be begun between Haraway’s more experimental version of “seeing from below” and Harding’s notion of strong objectivity.
involves the production of an attached model of knowledge that begins from perspective, one that requires a speaking from somewhere.

Such a speaking from somewhere obviously requires a conceptualization of this ‘somewhere’; in other words, a fidelity to context. Here context, I would suggest, is not (only) about date-time-place, such that a concept of ‘one knowledge’ can be critiqued from a situation. It is most importantly about relationality, the space between you and me, both intra-community and inter-community. Once we take cognizance of this, we realize that that space does many things – it induces a porosity of boundaries (body, community), it creates attachment, it also creates separation. With this in mind, we then have to talk of building a story from perspective, where it is the turning from within outward (from attachment to separation) that does the work of building the story. Such a standpoint ‘is’ only in the constant interrogation of both dominant discourse – masculinist Marxist discourse, and of the category of resistance – feminism – within which it may be named.

What we may have to gain from an attention to either consultations or conversations, then, is not so much the shift in form that we have made in moving from one to another, but the recognition of the fantastic perspective as a visual tool. Perspectives are made fantastic by their positioning in an imbrication of power and meaning; and unless the position is required to be static through any counter-hegemonic exercise, they cannot be the source of a permanent identity, nor an alternative system. I present my report on the dai training programme, then, in a different detail and from a different perspective than as a look at indigenous systems of health or as a lesson to be learnt from women’s experiences, or indeed as an essentially feminine perspective. What I call the allegory of women’s lived experience
serves, for me, as a test case, an example of the fantastic perspective that both helps provide a different picture of the dominant, and a glimpse of other possible worlds. I will attempt to delineate this in more detail now, but would like to put in a statutory warning prior to the attempt.

**Min(d)ing the turn**

Does this re-turn to experience that I have talked about show up in individual *dai* experience? Is this a concrete turn, something that can be applied in straightforward ways? We turn to the Bengali Marxist who tried to find a subaltern Lenin –

The concept of the outside as a theoretical category is rooted in the concept of abstract labour as opposed to concrete labour. Concrete labour, located within particular industries, is within the sphere of production; abstract labour is not. … It is situated where, as Lenin puts it, all classes meet – outside the sphere of production.

(Chaudhury 1987: 248)

Chaudhury is using the concept to gently remind the Subaltern School of the difficulty of positing a ‘subaltern consciousness’ as a separate domain, or the equal difficulty of speaking of inversion, in other words revolution, from this vantage point. For my purposes, the turn from within outward faces the same difficulty. It is a turn that has to be mined for its possibility, not one that offers, straightforwardly, the description of a different world.
Marking the turn: returning to the conversation

In what might perhaps be an unwarranted dissection of events, but one useful for our purposes nonetheless, let us go back to the *dai* training programme, mapping onto my narrative of it the paleonymies and possible difficulties of such a narrative. I have refrained from relating to this exercise as either participant observation (in anthropological mode) or as case study (the qualitative approach in medical parlance). Both of these, positioned at the same end of the methodological spectrum, were efforts that came up to serve a need for ‘qualitative’ analysis – the latter from within the scientific establishment, the former from within the social sciences. In its acting out, however, there is an effort to capture the microcosm that is a stepping away from earlier structural analyses; and a meshing of ‘observer’ and ‘observed’, a moving away from complete objectivity, that all self-respecting qualitative analyses undertake. These analyses are also an attempt to either expand or critique complete objectivity. This is what I have in mind when I refer to that time as ‘conversation’ rather than ‘consultation’. What I am attempting here is a further *bracketing of that effort*, a bringing to bear, on the conversations, the weight of my identification of the problems with existing frames of critique that I have identified in the thesis. This is so that what I have been laying down as a different contour of critique, finds its possibility. To perform such a bracketing, I use the narrative of my experience with the *dais* as a template within which I identify moments of the anthropological narrative, and from which I move towards a different possibility.

This exercise will involve, therefore, as I have stated, through a re-turn to experience, a re-examination both of dominant discourse and of the category of resistance within which it has been named. Such a re-turn will mean an attention to
experience – not as narrative, resistant or otherwise, nor as fractured and unpredictable, but as aporetic – as affording a fantastic perspective on the dominant that had hitherto appeared as normal. An attention to the fantastic perspective will result in a turn from within (a community) outward – a different notion of the political from that of either organizational, organic, or individual responses. It is, however, a notion that is hardly structural, a notion of the political as interpretation, but one that will have to be done each time. With these telegraphic steps in order, let us proceed.

We had started the classes from the *dais*’ voices – what they had written or what they had to say regarding their experiences with the births they had attended. The attendant presumption on both sides was that these voices were constituted by experience, the only prerogative of those uninitiated into *method* – *mukkhu sukkhu manush* (the unlearned people). I then set about introducing a gentle reworking of the boundaries of this category “experience” – till its quarrels with “method” had diminished to negligible levels.

How did I rework these boundaries? What were the contexts in which this was made possible? What were the terms of reference for the exchange between “experience” and “scientific method” that placed each, firmly, on a particular side of the divide between the untrained *dai* and the development expert, the body and the mind, the sensible and the transcendental? Several notions of the feminist political are at work here, working vis-à-vis dominant and other responses to the experience question. The responses may be charted in the following way. In the turn to experience as narrative, feminism has addressed the representation of the female body. The “female body”, we have seen, is the site for the understandings as well as operations of science (with its invisible qualifier Western). In its project of defining the form and delineating the workings of the female body, this body of knowledge
enjoys the status of a value-neutral, objective method that purportedly bases itself on solid empirical evidence to produce impartial knowledge. In the case of the female body, it would then appear that science has found it exclusively and powerfully fashioned by nature to bear and nourish children; in the event, all it is doing is putting the facts before us. Feminist engagements have sought to detect several disclaimers to the purported value-neutrality of science. For one, the standard body is that of the male, by which the female body is judged small, inferior, or deviant; and through this a subtle process of othering or exclusion of the woman is instituted within science. Further, accounts of the workings of the body, its organs, its reproductive processes, are strewn with gendered metaphors that privilege the male as decisive, strong, productive, and the female, as complementarily passive, wasteful, unreasoning. In the event, this part of the feminist project has been to make explicit the hidden cultural weight of scientific knowledge. Further, in addressing the methods of science itself, feminism has pointed to the homogenization inherent in the manner in which the scientific concept of the “female body” is derived. It is somewhat against this authoritative, homogenising strain that women's bodily experiences are posited in feminism – as something that is not only missed in science’s project of objectivity but something that is excluded from or unable to articulate itself in and through science’s abstractions. In the event, the experience of the “woman” within science is seen as that which, through the explicit introduction of an apparently inassimilable, pre-

49 This would be stressing the empirical foundations of science, but human sciences have always been the area where the subjective is most easily detected – hence the name ‘soft sciences’. Things are changing, however, with the biological sciences rooting themselves in the ‘knowable’ gene – their accession to hard objectivity is now a reality.

50 As would be evident in the models of sexual intercourse in the medical texts with the masculine/feminine metaphors for sperm/ovum – a model we used in the class as well, with a lively response, for it spoke to traditional languages of patriarchy as well. This has been discussed in some detail by Emily Martin (1991).

51 Where experience is separate from the empirical.
discursive subjectivity, questions the *explanatory* potential of science, while also offering possibilities for agency.

There are certain collusions in the goals of these two projects, however, that bear looking at. Both are moving toward a single truth, whether derived from scientific theory or subjective experience, which they alone can represent. To this end, both homogenize and both declare the undisputed presence of this ‘reality out there’ that can be represented without mediations. And from here also flows a claim to objectivity. If science posits a naturalized universal female body, experience would posit the “woman” universalized through socialization. No experience can exist here outside narrative history, unless as aporia – the seemingly insoluble logical difficulty. One would then derive that if scientific theories are built on exclusions, so is the category “experience”. If science claims value-neutrality, a simple valorization of experience ignores the “historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experience”. In the process, both science and experience in turn achieve status as categories, homogenous and uniform in themselves. Both become discourses that have the right to regulate entry, so that what counts as science or experience becomes the qualifying question.

If we then conclude that there is in this separation a certain essentializing of categories that ignores their very constitutions by the other, as also their constructions through cultural intelligibility, several questions arise. Can experience be that essential outside of Science that can grant agency? Or would it be also explicable as reflective of hegemonic norms that grant the sensible body as “women’s generic identity in the symbolic” while retaining a masculine topology for Science? This
brings us to another feminist cognition of experience as constituted by history, circumstance, and as circumscribed by the norm as outside it.

But, caught as I was between the conventional registers of science and feminism, I kept falling backwards into the question of results, and their reflection on validity. Experience, it would seem, was faulty by virtue of its very constitutivity, while science continued to look rigorous and unbiased. As critical courier of scientific knowledge, I thought I was trying to weave myself into the discourse of the dais with minimum damage to their framework, and to that end I had decided to keep the question marks alive throughout, directing them towards science as well. But as I sat down to look at the assessment sheets on the afternoon of the first day’s session, ‘I’ was fairly stunned. Of the ten questions put to the dais, one was worded as follows –

If the child does not cry soon after birth, we must –

a] say prayers over the baby

b] perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation

c] rush the baby to the nearest health centre

d] warm the placenta in a separate vessel.

Almost all 46 of the dais had affirmed the last answer. I remembered the asphyxiated babies that used to be rushed to the nursery in Medical College from the labour room that was on another floor. I remembered the bitter debates as to why the nursery was not stationed nearer the labour ward so that we could lose less time in resuscitating them. I decided this could not be allowed to pass. And I conducted the classes accordingly. When we repeated the written examination at the end, none had
ticked the last answer, and I was both relieved and vindicated. Until I had come away, still thinking, and then I realised that I had succeeded only because I had adopted a more positivist, authoritarian approach – right and wrong – to get across. And why had I done that? I realized, again, that with all my criticality, I was very much a scientific subject, and not merely because of my disciplinary training. I had retained reflexivity and criticality for as long as there was non-contradiction. Beyond that, I stayed put – well within Science. I too had my experiences – I could look at them as inseparably constituted by my production as scientific subject. But I had been trained to look otherwise – at experience as empirical evidence of theory. And there I was.

In current development policy, though, there is not so much the suppression of subaltern voice as its making visible in extensions of scientific discourse. It has become part of development policy to include women’s voices in their own development; the ‘third world woman’ is no longer considered to have no voice. On the contrary, she has a *specific* voice that is apparently being heard now in development projects in the third world. In order to articulate this voice, however, she must have the capability to streamline it, make it universally understood as well as reasonable, and this is the cornerstone of the ‘capabilities approach’. Here the *dai*, once named as dependable repository of traditional knowledge, can now be appropriated by notions of development flowing from liberal theories, for she also represents, in this frame, the rigid face of patriarchal traditions that have not given the woman voice. Development here is taken to mean empowerment – a granting, or rather restoration, of voice to the woman hitherto suffocated by tradition – and it is to this end that the efficient model of scientific method may be adopted. The old order will indeed change, for the *dais ... Aage ek rakam chhilo ... ebar anya rakam korte*
... but that is hardly an exchange of tradition for modernity, or of experience for science; it is an accommodation of one by the other. In the pluralism of current development discourse, the *dai* is a figure who exists before context, occupies an underprivileged class position, and has a voice that may be heard or streamlined into the mainstream.

And in feminism, despite, or after, the recognition of ‘women’s experience’ as constitutive of hegemonic norms, there is a renewed positng of experience as resistant, as the natural habitat, perhaps, of the woman …

This is of course clearly in evidence in what I have called the global feminist undertaking, which is most well argued for philosophically in Nussbaum’s work, and most tellingly represented in her examination and insertion of ‘Jayamma-the-brick-kiln-worker’ – who *cannot not* have a body that speaks – into the lexicon of development literature. As ‘third world women’s practices’ that contribute to culture-in-the-making, it is visible in the gender work that I have talked about.

What of my ‘conversations’ with the *dai*? As medical-professional-feminist-addressing-gendered-subaltern, I recognized and tried to steer clear of the various precipitations of such a binary; I ended, however, looking for a connection *through experience* between the ‘professional’ and the ‘unlearned’; for an essence to the feminine, perhaps, or to woman in the Symbolic. The earlier legacy of experience, then, inheres here; in asking questions of an epistemic status for experience, in the anxiety of not being able to accord it equal validity, in looking for a separation between feminist critical projects and dominant discourse through a recourse to a feminine difference which will be different from the place accorded to women in the

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52 Things were different before … they will have to be done differently now …
patriarchal Symbolic. Most telling, perhaps, it inheres in the anxiety over the similarity or otherwise of perspective between the (feminist) professional and the (woman) dai … one that presumed that the origins of an organic connectedness was to be found in the unspoilt dai who talked of meyeder meyeder katha. So the first attempt that the dais made to connect with me was through abhigyata – experience. And the overwhelming feeling at the end of those 6 days amongst the dais, and in me, was of a solidarity that had perhaps been established. A solidarity across boundaries of authority (though not disruptive of it in any way), across science, across different experiences. But … where then are feminist projects going to differ from development initiatives? What do third world women want, if one may ask the blasphemous question, a question that gathers momentum, nevertheless, in the context of first world vanguardism. Can the solution be that we must give up on capability altogether as a universal? While accessing a connectedness that would not mean the place accorded to women in the patriarchal Symbolic would definitely be a move, where would this connectedness be situated? If not in family or traditional community, would it be in some other sense of being together? Will we seek to continue its residence in women? Will we travel from an erasure of experience, the feminine, the subjective, to an essentialising of the same? Will women be the “embodied others, who are not allowed not to have a body, a finite point of view”? If

53 The place of women – in patriarchy, in a language outside patriarchy, has been a recurrent theme in the thought of Luce Irigaray. Interpreting Plato’s myth, she draws a picture of the analogies with the patriarchal arrangement, and proposes another topology. Plato’s Idea she designates as the realm of the Same – “the hom(n)osexual economy of men, in which women are simply objects of exchange. … The world is described as the ‘other of the same’, i.e. otherness, but … more or less adequate copy … woman is the material substratum for men’s theories, their language, and their transactions … the ‘other of the same’ … [or] women in patriarchy … [I]n so far as she exists already, woman as the ‘other of the other’ exists in the interstices of the realm of the [Same]. Her accession to language, to the imaginary and symbolic processes of culture and society, is the condition for the coming-to-be of sexual difference.” See ‘The same, the semblance, and the other’ in Whitford (1991: 104).

54 This is between us women – a common saying in Bengali that carries connotations both of an exclusivity – a woman’s domain – as well as insignificance – this is just something between us women.
so, are we still going to stay with the biological body as pre-discursive resource of experience? And if science is to remain the ultimate arbiter, is experiential agency then to be only the aporia, showing up as resistances through gaps in policy, that must let be, or can there be a feminist policy-framing that can work on the aporcity of experience?

What of collaboration? Caught between the conventional registers of science and feminism, where science is about knowledge and feminism about politics, not only is the dai’s experience waiting to be rehabilitated within science but also within feminism. While the mainstream policy dialogues with science remain at the level of “filling in gaps in manpower”, the philosophies of science attempt to talk about whether “midwives’ tales” might be justified – questions of validity. The politics of inclusion have operated to bring ‘low knowledges’ into circulation, and feminism must be the natural host to these politics in a frame where feminism is about politics and about women. Hence the whole debate about representation – institutional science versus the dai, the dai as gendered subaltern versus the third world feminist, that populate the space of critique of knowledge by politics, of science by feminism. The questions therefore continue to be – In frames where the dai as “gendered subaltern” has been appropriated into governmental apparatuses, and made to speak that language, are conscious tools of collaboration with the master’s discourse available to her? Or is this the tool lying there for the feminist to pick up, to create a discursive space of negotiation for ‘third world feminisms’? Is this, then, yet a battle for representation, a vanguardism, a speaking for that continues to slip into a speaking of, where third world feminists freeze their examinations of their own enmeshedness or location in their negotiations with global feminism and global development? Is such a
freezing inevitable? Or is the dai as gendered subaltern as much outside third world-first world feminist negotiations as outside empire-nation exchanges?

But there is also a question here of the continuing separation of experience and knowledge. If these attempts to rehabilitate experience seem to be at the level of according it equivalent status to knowledge, thus actually keeping alive the binaries feminism has been straining to step out of, what of experience as condition of knowledge-making? The apority of experience I speak of might be a beginning.

Having identified these existing trajectories for feminist critiques of science in the Indian context, therefore, I pick up on the gaps in the quintessentially anthropological narrative, to bring back the question of apority. We have spoken extensively of the fractured narrative. Rather than the fractured narrative, however, it might be the fracture we need to speak of now. And rather than look at women as being essentially capable of mimetisme, and therefore as the essential content of fracture, it might be useful to access the moment of fracture, using as allegory, not narrative resource, the responses of the dais to the reproductive health apparatus, or the bizarre consultation between the recalcitrant mother and the female physician. It might not be the connectedness between me and the dai as women, then, that will serve as my resource, but our very asymmetry of dialogue, our seeming separation. This might be the fantastic perspective that must be worked on, in feminism, to create the discursive space required to articulate the inversion – an overturning of the dialectic of one knowledge – that Chaudhury (2000) speaks of. Such a concentration

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55 To travel from ‘mimesis imposed’ (Irigaray’s term for the mimesis imposed on woman as mirror of the phallic model) to ‘mimetisme’ – “an act of deliberate submission to phallic-symbolic categories in order to expose them”, where “[t]o play with mimesis is … to try to recover the place of … exploitation by discourse, without … simply [being] reduced to it … to resubmit … so as to make ‘visible’, by an effect of playful repetition [mimicry, mimetisme] what was supposed to remain invisible …” is the Irigarayan project (Irigaray 1991, quoted in Diamond 1997: 173).
on momentary fractures, disallowing as it does a final and fixed concentration on ‘woman’, or a continuing separation of registers between politics and knowledge on account of the ‘fantastic’ perspective opening up a fresh vantage point both of knowing and critique of possible worlds, I submit, would constitute what I have been calling a feminist standpoint epistemology.