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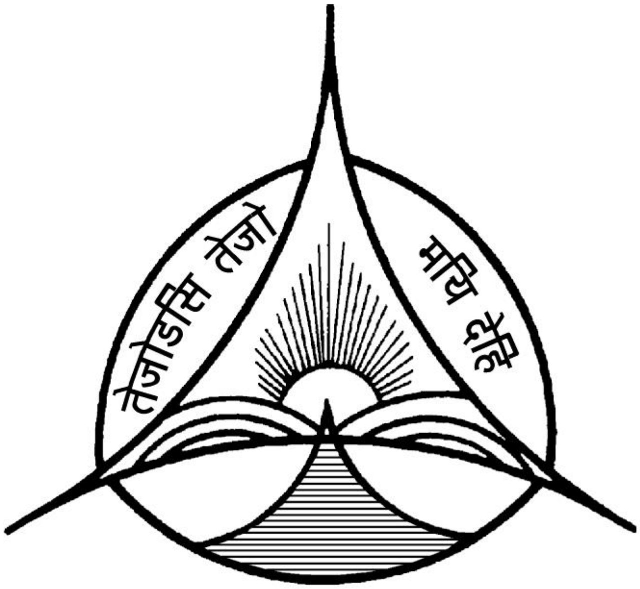
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THE AMPLITUDE OF THE WILL AND THE RUIN OF CULTURE: PEASANT INSURGENCY AND POSTCOLONIALISM

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The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse.

Karl Marx (1993: 101)

Fascism attempts to organize the newly proletarianized masses while leaving intact the property relations which they strive to abolish. It sees its salvation in granting expression to the masses—but on no account granting them rights. The masses have a right to changed property relations; fascism seeks to give them expression in keeping these relations unchanged.

Walter Benjamin (1936: 41)

Introduction

This essay explores the philosophical and ethico-political implications of historiography when it examines the problematic of the subject-will and then transforms this into the problematic of cultural representation.[1] Beginning by introducing the problematic of the 'will' as a subject through Aristotle and Marx, it then illustrates the relationship between history-writing and the 'will' through an interpretation of Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, where the subject of insurgency is the "site of contradiction, bearing the twin signs of a birth mark and a becoming" (Guha 1983: 108).[2] It then traces the ways in which the subject-will—and the ineluctable question of justice—is transformed into a cryogenic focus on (cultural) representation and its power; the latter illustrated by some of the contributions to *Subaltern Studies* (B. Cohn, G.C. Spivak, P. Chatterjee), and their convergence with Edward Said's foundational text, *Orientalism*. Undergirding the power of representation is an uncritical axiomatisation of culture itself. This axiomatisation is a significant departure—in method and implication—from Guha's oeuvre, and one that ultimately results, the paper argues, in neutralising the problematic of the subject-will. An engagement with these texts allows for a reflection on how ascriptions to the human subject, such as freedom and will as much as the desire for justice, might be related to History as a form of knowledge whose norms of validity are paradoxically indifferent to, as well as constitutive of, its subject-matter.

We indicate in brief here the argument that will be extrapolated throughout the essay: To will conventionally signifies the negation of necessity. In the historian's craft conventionally, necessity plays a role, both in time (the succession of past-present-future) and outside it (category); even while neither necessity nor causality can ever be found in an archive as an object, howsoever germane they are in rendering the archive comprehensible. The difficulty lies in relating time as much as the category to the subject-matter, i.e., any subject can be indefinitely extended in time as much as indefinitely analysed by cause**.** Another cause can always be found, just as one may always push further back in time that which has a role in explaining the event. How is this to 'work' with History, which is characterised by the two-fold recognition that one is confronting the human subject as well as confronting the fact that whatever the subject of History, such a subject is formulated by, for and through the human subject. Guha's effort takes account of this situation in speaking of the subject itself as that which transforms itself, i.e. the insurgent, exploding the shell of an abstract past-present-future succession in the name of thinking a vital subject-will with a just cause.[3] This is all the same formulated as an ethical demand riveting the present and the past; implicating the historian in the object of her study. *Elementary Aspects* is unabashed: "For the task of historiography is to interpret the past in order to help in changing the world" (Guha 1983: 336).[4] The past is rescued from its necessary **s**upercession and ascribed the very normative horizon to that which presents itself as present is subject. This ethical demand of and on politics exhibits the existential and essential requirement to think justice in distinction from—even as it articulated through— ethnicity and culture. In contrast, much of the post-colonialist insistence on the general vitiation of knowledge by power, or the ultimate inadequacy of representation and the subject as such, avoids the task of thinking the subject as will, the articulation of ethics as a principle in history, and risking a 'concrete determination'. The focus on culture offers neither the ratio of its construction nor its end, and therefore risks mistaking the logic and value of differentiation for the fact discrete differences.

Necessity and the Problem of the Will

To introduce the problematic of the subject-will as an organising principle of time and not merely that which is subsumed in it, we turn to a very old and venerable source: a citation and its obscurely complicit response. That is, the text *On Interpretation*, Chapter 9, where the problem of the sea-battle is encountered, and where the results of an abstract time of necessity without a 'willing' subject—howsoever compelling—reaches an impasse in describing the human condition (Aristotle 2001: 45–48).

The argument here is as follows: The rules for ascriptions of truth and/or falsity appear to break down when it comes to future events, and by implication, any event. Aristotle formulates the following impasse in the context of propositions, i.e., that which can be characterised as true or false. What is or has been is necessary/true: what is (or has been) necessary/true has always been so: any specific event (such as a sea-battle) if it is occurring (or has occurred) would always have been true/necessary: if it were always to have been true/necessary it could never have been otherwise: therefore all events which are or have happened are to be characterised as having truly happened/happened necessarily. Therefore everything may be characterised as necessary.[5]

Aristotle responds by remarking that such an argument is refuted by our everyday experience of the fact that humans deliberate and act, and things have the capacity to become different things; a coat can be cut up or it can wear out. The fault with the sea-battle argument above is that the specific determination of true or false cannot apply to 'facts' (events) because 'facts' are always in the state of being-potential, incomplete; unlike the always necessary and actual and the always non-existent.[6] In this sense, the future event is in a state of being-potential and therein contingent as an event. Not potential in the sense that there is an underlying necessary immaculate subject—logical or otherwise—that may be qualified in some way. But potential as that which makes no use of an abstract distinction between the present, past and the future but has reference to an actual. Thus, while the relations between truth and falsity as disjunctive apply when speaking of the identical subject—which can only be either that which is always existent or never existent—there is no method to tie the character of propositions to specific facts or events (ibid.), for no fact truly is, and if it were, it would lead to the paradoxes of the sea-battle. Contingency is linked to being-potential and defined by its scope; the cloth and all that it can become or transform into. It is not an uncertainty that assumes or implies an immaculate subject that is only 'subsequently', logically and temporally, qualified, i.e., 'it' of the 'it is uncertain'.

That is to say, there is no necessary subject discrete from qualifications; subject-unity is itself formulated with reference to (its) action, and relations (including potentiality), as its 'nature'. The subject is as temporal as it organises time; neither simply subsumed under time-sequence where it cannot survive its arbitrary context, nor outside time itself like a logical category which is never commensurate with events. Actually walking shows that walking is possible, the building reveals the act/art of building and being healed shows the art of healing but not in the patient qua being healed (ibid.: 58; also Aristotle 1979: 87). All these examples show that the possible-actual 'subjectification' cannot be transparently mapped onto a mere time-relation of succession. It is in action that the present and the past as distinct coincide: the scientist doing science is both doing science and has done science, but the scientist not doing science, is seen as capable of doing science, since he has shown that he has actually 'done' science (Aristotle 1979: 155). At the same time the *telos*—again disruptive of simple time-sequence—is itself such action because we wish to have science so as to do science and do not do science so as to possess a scientific knowledge in abstraction from actually doing science; practicing science by itself shows that one possesses the knowledge of science. It is in this vein that Aristotle speaks against definitions, or identities, arguing for 'analogy' (ibid.: 152), the relation between actuality and potentiality, the building and the art of building, the medical art and the fact of healing, so as to better define. And howsoever defined, justice would have to involve will and cannot be reduced to a matter of necessities of law.[7]

These issues are reiterated by Marx for whom justice is the horizon informing human will, the orientation of history as a dynamic configuration of relations. Revolutions occur and the 'new' emerges only with reference to the activation of the past, an activation that fades only when the new is no longer so. The really new thus emerges in the active mediation of the old; 'thus, the awakening of the dead in those revolutions served the purpose of glorifying the new struggles, not parodying the old' (Marx 1998: 17). This present alteration of the past—wherein the present and the past cannot be separated in the revolutionary *action*—and not mere succession to the past, may well end with the naturalisation of the new. It is precisely in an analysis of action—and the scope of relations thereby delineated—that categories and concepts may be formulated, transformed, and perhaps even invented. Illustrative is the brilliant analysis of Louis Bonaparte, where Marx argues that the small-scale peasantry that was the ally of the bourgeoisie in the early 19th century had, in fifty years, become a 'nation of troglodytes' because of the rule of the bourgeoisie in the form of (the bourgeois state's) taxes and (capitalist) rent; this is not a characterisation of the 'peasant' as an ahistorical category. On the other hand, the (bourgeois) state brutally repressed the 'revolutionary' peasantry, and therefore, the success of Louis Bonaparte in winning the elections, in 'representing' the peasantry, could be analysed (ibid.). In Marx's reading, none of the standard categories such as the bourgeoisie or peasantry retain their conventional or categorical senses. Each is carefully differentiated, calibrated and analysed in terms of their (historical) relations with one another, and their position in a specific set configuration that has to be conceptualised. In analysing the success of Louis Bonaparte, the ambit is not confined to France, since global economic cycles are given crucial importance, thereby doing away with the 'nation' as an axiomatic lens.

Thus, in line with Aristotle, subjects and events are defined in terms of concrete actions, the (historical) material at hand, and the scope of relations that are thereby engendered. Analysis is not merely giving context to a term or subject that has meaning in itself—whether it be 'France' and the 'state' or the 'bourgeoisie' or the 'peasantry' or 'property'[8] —but rather is a conceptual and concrete determination that fundamentally alters the meaning of terms to better address a certain problem: in this case the success of Louis Bonaparte in winning the support of the small-scale peasantry or, in other words, in a chilling lesson for the day, universal franchise supporting a dictator. Conceptualisation is itself an act in so far as the unity of the category has to be formulated and defended. Such an almost Aristotelian (concrete) conceptualisation of labour as 'purpose activity' allows one to see the presence of wage-slavery presented as juridical freedom.

In the language of the *Grundrisse,* 'the concrete is the concentration of many determinations' (Marx 1993: 101); concentration is as much the imprint of as the signal for action.

The problematic of action focuses the question in such a manner that dismisses the meaningless piety that every subject is in fact acting, for such a position dispenses with the need to formulate a subject-action. A concrete analysis disallows abstract determinations based on such spurious subject-identities. To give an example from recent controversies in the historiography of modern India, what is presented as the empirically rigorous demand for the 'agency' of 'Indians' is in fact expressive of the most impoverished theoretical abstraction.[9]: for where is one to find the 'Indian' in Colonial India? If one uncritically borrows from the present, why not ask at each and every instance, what about Tamilian or Bengali, or this or that caste grouping? Identities can be infinitely multiplied or divided and one loses sight of the fact that the subject will have to be conceptually determined as much as recognised to be historically produced rather than merely be assumed or construed based on current political experience. For can there be any justification to the theoretical demand that one has to find agency in every subject, and how is this to be defined, established or defended? Such an argument about agency in pretending to be empirical ascribes one abstraction (the nature of agency, which is never explicated) onto another (often a generalised and wholly anachronistic subject such as 'Indian'). One is reminded of the priceless advatin's apt (non)description of an absurdity: the fictitious object of a non-existent sense.

Ranajit Guha's Elementary Aspects: The Amplitude of the Will

In the light of how to think the subject and action as well as justice one may probe Guha's investigation of the elementary aspects of peasant insurgency.[10] The subject of the will—in denial and realisation—is itself expressive of an aim that Guha is the last one to shy away from. In fact the text ends with a statement claiming that peasant insurgency has relevance "for all efforts to bring about a more abiding and comprehensive reversal" (Guha 1983: 337). [11]. The point of convergence between Guha's writing and his subject is thus explicitly formulated in terms of an ethical demand whose horizon as that of the urgent present is unambiguously laid bare. At the same time, as we will see, thinking the subject in its specific actuality also lays bare the pulse of the element in which it beats. The delicate outlining of the 'will' allows one to extract justice from politics as representation, and act that is as descriptive as it is injunctive.

The colonial condition as described in the text is not an *a priori* category whose essence is to be found in a dictionary definition or current use but through the subject. It is sketched as that which is recognised and felt by the insurgent in the act of insurgency; as a violation of justice and the ground of her politics.[12] The preliminary theoretical gain of analysing peasant insurgency is to outline the nature of the colonial condition as it burns in the eye of the insurgent: oppression by the nexus that is the state-landlord-money lender.[13] This has nothing to do with the nationalist claim that foreign rule—taking for granted the latter's definition as ethnic—is unjust because it is foreign, leaving the actual content of such rule undisturbed. A redefinition of politics is presented throughout the text where politics is defined as that injustice which is overwhelmingly experienced and the absolute risk that is undertaken to overcome the same, thereby overcoming oneself/what one was. Politics is here the will to recognise and negate the totality of a condition as much felt as recognised to be one's own.[14] The absolute risk of one's life cannot but be characterised as an impetus that is 'felt', the will for an action whose rationality is proved by Guha to be undeniable. "There was no way for the peasant to launch into such a project [of power] in a fit of absent-mindedness. For this relationship was so fortified by the power of those who had the most to benefit from it and their determination, backed by the resources of a ruling culture, to punish the least infringement, that he risked *all* by trying to subvert or destroy it by rebellion" (ibid.: 9, emphasis mine)[16]. The massive archival documentation of a colonial power that pervades and infects to the last detail the very granularity of peasant-life surges into relief in the will of the peasant-insurgent to overcome the same. The transposition of freedom and rationality allow for a characterisation of justice—or the demand for justice and not the representation of a subject—that the historian establishes through archival testimony.

The politics as ascribed to the peasant-insurgent is fundamental to her very being in that she is able to reject that into which she is born so as to realise herself in that which she can become and bring about. In this rejection we see the image of culture that was otherwise naturalised as a feature of violent exploitation; the detailed description of everyday life and language as being suffused by the dominant idiom of power from which the peasant detaches herself as insurgent. Language (*diglossia*), words (different words for the same term, such as house, to designate status), objects (umbrellas, shoes), attire (and accoutrements) and anything to do with the body, all carried and conveyed a 'hierarchical imprint',[15] signifying the relation of dominance. "For the authority of the elite had over the peasantry was nearly all-pervasive and symbolized by many objects and attitude. Indeed the struggle for any significant change in existing power relations in the countryside often appears as a contest between those who are determined to retain their traditional monopoly over such status symbols and those who are keen on appropriating them – that is, as cultural conflict" (Guha 1983: 6). Culture is that which is maintained by—as well as signified power,[16] and insurgency is not the representation of an authentic culture but destruction and appropriation, i.e., transformation of that which appears dominant and unjust (ibid.). Such destruction and appropriation revealed its rational nature in being discriminatory; account books, and other signs of the dominant culture were targeted by the insurgent revealing an understanding of the modes of domination. The colonial state was itself one of the constitutive elements of what appeared as 'traditional' culture and played a role in 'revitalizing' a quasi-feudal structure, a complicity well recognised by the peasant-insurgent. 'The collusion between sarkar and zamindar was indeed a part of the common experience of the poor and the subaltern at the local level nearly everywhere' (ibid.: 7).

All of the above will be lost if we were to fail to recognise Guha's subject-object, that is, if we were to mistake peasant insurgency for a generalised peasant consciousness. The force of the insurgent's will bring into relief both the persistence as well as fragility of the paradigm of the colonial condition. The latter is concealed, not without unalloyed success, by what Guha calls the historiography of the (colonial) state that simply cannot afford to recognise its true image in the mirror of peasant insurgency. Seeing insurgency as a mere law and order problem the colonial state denies the politics of insurgency that Guha wishes to demonstrate; naming it but a 'criminal conspiracy'. Such naming is necessary so as to conceal the violent and appropriative everyday nature of colonial rule that the insurgency symbolises. The instrument used to deny the public nature of insurgency, conspiracy, treats the insurgent as a deviant will working in secret or as a machination by an ‘elite group’; for the common peasant is by nature without initiative.[17] It is paradigmatic of the ‘law and order’ approach to require a conspiracy so as to trigger a juridical process that will ultimately resolve itself in the retribution of those who cannot be seen as in any sense ‘representative’ or constitutive of the public. Justice cannot punish the ‘public’ and the attribution of conspiracy is to facilitate a path to retribution that can only judge and punish individuals and/or small groups unrelated to the community-public.[18] However, the misdiagnosis that is statist historiography is persistently reminded of its failure by the massive continuity and insistent repetition of insurgency throughout the colonial period. This colonial inability to face the peasant-insurgent for who she is, is no different from a failure in self-knowledge. The subtraction of insurgent will is as much a function of a theory of conspiracy as it is of a theory of nationalism and nationalist politics, which ultimately reduces violence to the form of (purportedly) alien rule, where alien is given ethnic content, leaving the question of the everyday—and spectacular—content of such rule undisturbed.

For it is Guha’s argument that the insurgent’s will is a recognition of the fundamental nexus between the zamindar, sahukar and sarkar. This recognition is not to be found in the mainstream of the later nationalist movement.[19] For a nationalist movement has to always be caught in the embarrassing contradiction of presuming and projecting what is in effect the same fictitious content, the nation. If the elementary aspects of peasant insurgency do not find their impetus or goal in nation-making, it is clear that it is to be found in its ‘politics’, i.e., the will to transform that which is perceived and experienced as unjust. The attention to detail in the specific nature of colonial violence and expropriation, documented in *Elementary Aspects*, gives body to what we might recognise as gross injustice and violation. These details are acknowledged by the archive; details of poverty caused by the taking over of sources of income, peasant indebtedness, life destroying taxation. But the next step to insurgency cannot be acknowledged in the same way. The fact that people live in such conditions makes it impossible to formulate a science whereby one can anticipate rebellion by any symptoms; Mahesh Daroga paid with his life for lacking such a science, mistaking rebellion for the everyday feature of poverty-induced crime. Precisely because rebellion is an expression of the everyday, there is no means by which the two can be discerned with the help of any known characteristic feature. The economic conditions, whether usurpation of land, exploitation of labour or debt bondage, while all right there and acknowledged, cannot explain or anticipate action by any rule: "Banjara Singh slapped the sahukar fled. That night Banjara Singh decided to leave his dilapidated house and his semi-deserted village" (Guha 1983: 84). [20] That which distinguishes Banjara from the 'peasantry' is the un-assignable gap between the continuity of economic condition and insurgent event.

Notwithstanding detailed specifications of time, place and event, Guha emphatically argues that insurgent acts were hardly to be found only in colonial India (ibid.: 144, 195).[21] And while such acts might be characterised as 'universal', one has to be careful in the use of this word. Universal not in the sense of some*thing* found *every*where, but rather as that which is common to many even as each is in its own way**.** The universal may be understood in its etymological sense of '*turning* into one' in so far as it is located in the 'will'. The peasant-insurgent in his act makes clear the nature and totality of the colonial condition as well as the need, possibility and reality, in transcending it. This 'colonial condition' that is the nexus between sahukar, zamindar and sarkar is a diagnosis that cannot be based on mere ethnicity. In the chapter on 'Solidarity', Guha extricates a fascinating account of how insurgency cuts across tribes and castes, even while it may at various moments retain an ethnic component. The colonial archive resists acknowledging this fact by constantly stating that there were only five castes that were spared by the Santal insurrection. "Far from providing an accurate description of the *hool* as a vast alliance of peasants and rural artisans of all ethnic groups, it narrows down and falsifies our vision of this historic event. The only value it may be said to have is to illustrate how the official mind committed a priori to a perception of Indian society in caste categories fails to understand even the most explicit evidence about the class character of peasant activity and ends with an erroneous identification of the actors—an epistemological legacy which colonialism was to bequeath to the discipline of social anthropology in the next century" (Guha 1983: 183).[22]

Solidarity once again speaks to politics by informing and inflecting the everyday. It is through labour that the ‘tribals’ interact with the ‘lower castes’ of the rural artisans, bringing such shared activities to bear in the event of rebellion. The everyday inflects acts of insurgency in language as much as modality. Proverbs link the communal activities of the hunt and fishing to rebellion, and at times in the preparation for one the former transforms into the latter (Guha 1983: 115, 124, 126–30, 177). There is much evidence that Guha provides to suggest that solidarities are built alongside shared livelihoods at moments when attempts to persuade authorities fail. This once again reveals as much about the colonial condition as it does about the peasant-insurgent; the colonial structure cannot but leave the peasant as alienated. The granular reading of alienation, and the emergence of insurgency from the everyday, may be compared to Marx’s analysis of the Silesian revolt. Here too alienation from labour, and therefore life, is “disproportionally more far-reaching, unbearable, terrible and contradictory than the isolation from the political community, so too the transcending of this isolation and even a partial reaction, a rebellion against, it, is so much greater, just as the man is greater than the citizen and human life then political life” (Marx 1975: 419). [23] Thus peasant insurgency at its root may well be read, following Marx, as universal in a way that a political revolution ‘howsoever colossal’ is in fact ‘narrow in spirit’ (ibid.).

If there is a near and full universality in peasant-insurgency, there is another more direct, even if circuitous and differentiated, universality of the colonial condition, as a vector of the modern. Following Marx, Guha diagnoses the latter as Capital, and it is to this form of universality, analysed in *Rule of Property* and *Dominance without Hegemony*, that we will turn to briefly in the conclusion of this section. The ‘colonial condition’ is constitutive of the site in which arises peasant insurgency; it is constituted by a specific inflection of the ‘universal tendency of capital’. Such a diagnosis of modernity is not one that is given to accept conventional cultural and national distinctions as *a priori*, distinctions that regulate and define the scope of analysis. Empirical and conventional designations such as ‘Europe’ and ‘India’ themselves being contingent, cannot sustain analysis. The subject would have to be conceptually determined**.** Citing Marx, and taking Capital as its subject-object to diagnose modernity, Guha argues that there is a fundamental interruption inherent to the 'universal tendency of capital' (1996: 222–29, and the fracture between the 'ideal' and its 'realization' is a marked feature of European *as well as* of colonial conditions. The fact that Europe and the colonial are simultaneous, means that while at one level, Europe is itself composed of distinct trajectories of capital (ibid.: 225)[24] operated by the ideal-real fracture, at the same time, in another sense, this differentiation can be localised as 'European' purely in terms of its own difference with the colonial. The latter differentiation is a function of the unity—howsoever differentiated at the first level—of the European 'metropolis'. In the light of Vivek Chibber's recent critique, it is this important to underline that Guha does not either ignore the differentiation within Europe, nor does he insist on an aboriginal identity native to the locality that is India. Acknowledging the differentiation composing Europe, yet focussing on the means by which the former is unified in its differentiation from the 'colonial' is the task that *Dominance without Hegemony* sets itself. It is only in this sense that one can understand the emphasis on the argument that the colonial is not simply an 'organic extension' of the European, for there is a specificity of the colonial condition which has little to do within native cultural markers but everything to do with the form of (colonial) capitalism and its peculiarities, which inform the former. While the mode of domination and power neo-landlord, semi-feudal[25]—is a specific feature of the colonial condition, universality is found in subaltern-insurgency.

The paradoxes of the transmutation of metropolitan ideas, the universal 'tendency' of ideology rather than capital, in a colonial setting are analysed in minute detail by Guha as early as *Rule of Property for Bengal*. Purportedly an essay on the 'idea' of the permanent settlement in India, it is simultaneously an interpretation of ideas as lines of force that take place in response to catastrophic events. The discussion of Philip Francis's famous plan is a way to address the devastating famine and a crisis of naming—what precisely is the status of Bengal. The section of the text, 'Who is the King of Bengal?' (Guha 1996: 151–70), shows that Bengal has no recognisable status, its identity cannot be formalised because one does not know who rules the country. For it is not 'nationality'—that would be too anachronistic and unfounded—but sovereignty that will determine the unity and identity of a place-name-polity, and in the 1770s it is precisely such sovereignty that is in question: who rules? Such a situation is scarce addressed by the ready-made categories of ‘Indian’ or ‘European’, notwithstanding the use to which they are put.

Discussions about land revenue settlements in *Rule of Property for Bengal* are as much about alleviating an ‘economic’ crisis of death and devastation as they are about asserting the sovereign right to demand revenue and determine accountability for the state of affairs. This is why ‘physiocratic’ arguments are necessarily altered in a colonial condition, not because one can say in advance that the colonial condition is irreducibly foreign, but because sovereignty in the subcontinent is fraught and contested in a way that is not the case in Absolutist France. The very same argument—such as doing away with local market duties—are radically different in a case where there is one recognised sovereign and in a case where the trader is the de facto sovereign.[26] Marked by the specific strength and needs of the Company, all terms of the theoretical argument redistribute their sense and are therein oriented. Thus power is not interchangeable with representation. Rather, an analysis of power—in this case the brute domination of the Company—is the horizon in which forms of representation, such as the controversies as to who holds property and who can be made to pay revenue, are analysed. Even while representation can always be analysed in terms of power, the analysis will only achieve a unity, coherence and direction if there is a subject that is proposed. Power as an action, returning to Aristotle and Marx, requires a subject who acts and in its actions determines the meaning and value of the series of subject-objects in its domination. More concretely, to give an instance, revenue demand determines the very nature of who will be assigned property rights.[27] This tells us something specific about the nature of colonial rule that is not reducible to the general and abstract argument that all forms of representation involve power.

Representation: Postcolonialism and the Ruin of Culture

It is this subtle relationship between power, representation and the necessity of conceptualising a subject-act that is severed in much of the field called postcolonial theory that problematises representation, but does not follow through such problematisation. The subtlety of analysis here is no substitute for the risk of a proposition. How can one speak of justice or its violation without addressing the problematic of the subject-will beyond the critique of representation? If the critique of representation becomes a mere abstract critique of all representation, surely an impasse on these matters are reached. Disempowered, in postcolonial studies, are the otherwise supremely important emphasis on the political, and the implication of knowledge in power, and perhaps most importantly, the recognition that conventional disciplinary boundaries cannot be respected in the analysis of the essential problems of the human condition and human history. The following tendentious reading of certain important arguments in the field of postcolonial studies is no more than an incision; symptomatological rather than comprehensive.

Any representation is a proposition. If not an overt one, as Locke would say, at least a tacit one.[28] Whether it is a statement or even a word, there is a subject that is, at least implicitly, qualified or predicated; the universal is thus unavoidable for identity as much as identification. Such a characterisation cuts across conventional distinctions between the sensorially perceived and the mentally known.[29] Therefore evaluating a representation would be an evaluation simultaneously of the terms of the representation 'internal' to the representation-proposition (subject, subject-predicate) as well as the 'representation's' relation to the ostensive object. Much hinges on the 'as well as'. While representation is critiqued as being naturally and habitually inadequate, there is often the simultaneously tacit expectation that such an ostensive object—in its perfect individual self-representation—does indeed exist howsoever obscure. If the ostensive object (as tacitly individuated) is disavowed there erupts the terrible contradiction—or should one say absurdity—of finding fault with something with no conception/expectation of truth. One cannot say that something or someone has not been represented correctly if one doesn't believe such a (true) representation to be possible, i.e., that something or someone in fact or actuality exists in a particular way.

This venerable difficulty may well be found in one of postcolonialism's founding texts, *Orientalism*, where Edward Said critiqued 'Orientalism' as a 'Western style of dominating, restricting and having authority over the orient', and claimed further that, "because of

Orientalism, the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought and action" (Said 2003: 20). And on the other hand, as the preface of the 2003 edition puts it, the Orient and the West are but 'supreme fictions', and Said himself makes clear that he has "no "real" Orient to argue for" (ibid.: 7–8). The reconciliation of the two sets of statements is impossible because without a belief in an Orient, to speak of the domination of the Orient simply does not make sense. For it is only in showing the transformation of the 'real' Orient[30] into one that has been subjugated can one meaningfully speak of domination or injustice. Dominating as a mode of characterisation would require a tracing of the dominating and the being dominated, as series of actions and relations in which the question of the subject is ineluctable. Once again, how does one speak of justice if one fears of speaking of the subject?

In fact, the root of the problem is the articulation of representation after subtracting the problematic of power operationalising a subject. If the Orient and the West are 'supreme fictions' what sense does it make to *characterise* fictions as fictions. And then go on to detail the specific ways in which, further, one fiction dominates another by describing it, i.e., 'Orientalist' depictions as themselves signs of power. To characterise surely means to qualify, to make recognisable, identifiable, meaningful. Active abstention from speaking of the 'Orient', such a disavowal, cannot erase its tacit, negative, characterisation, the hinge on which the force and meaning of, 'the West', itself lies. Said's framing his key terms—the West and the Orient—as 'supreme fictions' without either relating such a framing to the specific descriptions or arguments in the text or detailing the implications of the key terms to particular arguments has the effect, in less supple hands, of simply jettisoning the frame and freezing particular arguments and the descriptions of the book as definitive and ahistorical. The argument about the 'Western style of dominating, restricting and having authority over the Orient' is literalised without qualification in Bernard Cohn's contribution to *Subaltern Studies* VI, where he states, "The conquest of India was a conquest of knowledge".[31] Cohn excludes the debilitating qualifications, East and West as 'supreme fictions', by declaring: "Europeans of the 17th century lived in a world of signs and correspondences, while Indians lived in a world of substances" (ibid.: 279). This is a radical departure from *Elementary Aspects* that thought across Europe and India in terms of subaltern-insurgency as well as diagnosed in Capital a univocal mode of power, however differentiated the local effects.

Cohn's argument followed through the logic of 'Western domination' by almost believing it to be possible to definitively characterise Europeans and Indians as though they were distinct, discrete substances with natural attributes. In such an imagination conquest is annihilation, the 'conquest of knowledge'. Nothing is as totalitarian as knowledge, and to speak of dominated knowledge is not to speak of knowledge at all. In Cohn, little defence of such characterisation is undertaken, nor is such an undertaking even possible, because, there is scarce consensus even in the predicates used, 'signs' and 'substances'. Such axiomatic distinction-making disallows a tracking of the various concrete ways in which power is exercised, and as often happens, it is exercised most forcefully by concealing itself. A striking example would be the East India Company claiming to rule by indigenous law while all the same constituting it for particular ends. Such transmutations and deceptions—whose charm continues to work—are impossible to sustain in an analytic frame of essentialised difference.

Such a differentiation of 'East' and 'India' is also to be found, in a much subtler form, in Chatterjee's construal of the subject-will of *Elementary Aspects*, as (Indian) 'peasant consciousness'. Chatterjee writes, 'It is the historical record of those brief moments of open rebellion which gives us a glimpse of that undominated region in peasant consciousness and enables us to see the everyday and the extraordinary as parts of a single unity in historical time (1993: 171). [32] Insurgency is thus a mark of the past as datum, a spatial metaphor speaking of discrete parts making the whole. Rather than a sign-step striking into the future, and recapitulating the past, that singularises a universal. Spatialisation, as a set of discrete parts, allows for a neutral objectivity that can be disclosed, in a manner at fundamental variance with Guha's primary reliance on 'subject-will'; while the former is perpetually contingent on context, the latter is propelled an undeniable and urgent present relevance.[33] Illustrative is Guha's specific critique of the caste system as a perceptual deficit of the colonial archive that is unable to recognise rural solidarities across castes and tribes in the act of rebellion; rebellion and solidarity might well be a continuing ethical demand while it is 'colonial knowledge' that is knowable as an error. On the other hand, for Chatterjee, the system of castes, howsoever internally differentiated, itself becomes a paradigmatic feature of Indian history.[34] There is a subtle but all important distinction between taking insurgency as the subject-will that reveals the colonial condition (including the non-insurgent peasant and cultures of domination), and peasant consciousness that has the contrary features of being-dominated and autonomy. The rationale and logic behind the latter distinction is itself never thematised. Whereas in *Elementary Aspects*, insurgency as act cannot be studied as an aspect or region, i.e., as a representation. It is only as action, that its 'universality' can be studied across time and space, including 'the present'; not as representation of a pre-existing aspect of peasant-consciousness.

In a more recent critique of Guha, Chatterjee argues that peasant insurgency as analysed by Guha is no longer relevant because the crucial feature of 'rebel consciousness' in colonial India lay, notwithstanding *Elementary Aspects'* arguments as well as much historical work to the contrary, in the fact that the 'the state and ruling authorities lay *outside* the bounds of the peasant community' (2008)[35] (emphasis mine). 'Rebel consciousness' is thus characterisable as a fact exhausted by its particular context, in this case colonial India. The 'structural externality' of colonial state apparatuses is contrasted with the present—post-1990s—where governance has penetrated deep into the everyday lives of the people. This fundamental historical distinguishing of the colonial and the late postcolonial is congruent with Chatterjee's invocation of Sudipta Kaviraj's argument that the 'West' and 'India' will have to be fundamentally distinguished in terms of their distinctive trajectories, their "alternative sequences'. Europe saw the following: commercial society—civic associations—rational bureaucracy—industrialisation—universal suffrage welfare state ('West'), while elsewhere rational bureaucracy and universal suffrage precede the others (Chatterjee 2012: 13–14). However, in our own interpretation of Guha's *Elementary Aspects,* the question of injustice as the violation of livelihood—massive expropriation being met by resistance and ultimately violence—is anything but a closed chapter**.** The evidence of present day laws and state-action—for instance the well documented internment of lakhs of adivasis in Chattisgarh in 2008[36]—would require us to think otherwise.

This double differentiation of Europe and India as well as the colonial and the late postcolonial is an abandonment of the problematic of colonialism as modern. It implies that both European and Indian history—and present—can be analysed without colonialism as a constitutive feature of either.[37] Therefore a whole range of issues that had brought the two together—imperialism and democratic franchise, scientific knowledge and its imperial articulation, the nation-state form and its imperial locus, global political-economy and minutely local famines—are rendered redundant.[38] Analogously, thinking the modern as colonial, and popular action as historical actuality as much as normative resource, is similarly obliterated.[39] The actuality of insurgent-will in its qualification of Europe as much as Indian offers little redemption once exhausted in a particular historical context.

The transformation of insurgent-will into peasant consciousness—whether as characterisable datum or asymptotic limit—may at times result in some of the most uncritical representations. For instance**,** in contrast to Guha's reading of culture as the ground and 'prize' of insurgency, Spivak writes, "Let us also remember that the mind-set of the peasants is as much affected by the phonocentrism of a tradition where *sruti*—that which is heard—has the greatest authority, as is the mind-set of the historian by the phonocentrism of Western linguistics" (1988: 23). The critical edge of a critique of representation is blunted when the latter is neither linked with the subject-will nor formulated as a 'concentration of determinations' in its illumination of a problem that both determines description as well as scope. Invoking Marx of the *Eighteenth Brumaire,* Spivak had famously argued that two distinct notions of representation signify the 'necessary gaps' between the 'influence' ([of] the small peasant proprietors), the representative [Louis Napoleon] and the historical-political phenomenon (executive control), i.e., what is called class rather than being homogenous is in fact descriptive *and* transformative, implying 'a critique of the subject as *individual* agent but even a critique of the subjectivity of *collective* agency'.[40] This is the way, she argues, to interpret Marx's much cited statement on the small peasant proprietors who 'cannot represent themselves' and must be represented. However, Spivak does not sufficiently attend to the fact that but a page onward Marx speaks of *that other* peasant; already 'other' without the gap of a 'representative' (Marx 1998: 125). She does not capture the small peasant proprietor as itself the 'concentration' of multiple determinations including the global economic crises, the nature of bourgeois rule, the critique of parliament, the failure of workers' movements, increasing taxation and debt, the brutalisation of revolutionary peasants. Thus, in contrast to Marx, the discussion on representation ultimately leaves the 'small peasant proprietor' as abstract, as but a term, like 'executive control' and 'Louis Bonaparte', without the charge of the effective constellation that Marx had sketched in response to the specific problem of democratic franchise and (global) political-economy.

On the other hand, in spirit and detail, in the (revolutionary) peasant detaching herself from (her) class, there is a resonance with Guha's distinction between the peasant-insurgent and the (conservative) peasant; the past and the future, the 'birthmark and a becoming'. For Marx had argued with reference to Louis Bonaparte, "But let there be no misunderstanding. The Bonaparte dynasty represents not the revolutionary, but the conservative peasant; not the peasant that strikes out beyond the condition of his social existence, the small holding, but rather the peasant who wants to consolidate this holding, not the country folk who, linked up with the towns, want to overthrow the old order through their own energies, but on the contrary those who, in stupefied seclusion within this old order, want to see themselves, and their small holdings saved and favoured by the ghost of empire. It represents not the enlightenment but his prejudice; not his future, but his past; not his modern Cevennes, but his modern Vendee" (1998).[41] This statement, not cited by Guha, must be read along with a citation from Marx, presented in Guha, regarding not the peasantry, but the revolutions of 1789 and those thereafter. The statement that (even) these revolutionaries spoke the new language only by translating it 'back into their mother tongue' (Guha 1983: 75). This translation-transmutation when characterising the peasant-insurgent in colonial India cannot in any sense be construed as a transparent mark of 'backwardness', but rather the backward movement that any real action will necessarily take in breaking into the future. Rather than time as abstract sequence, it is in the peasant becoming peasant-insurgent that the concrete multiplicity of the 'colonial condition'—sahukar, zamindar, sarkar—flashes: that which is (the undeniability of state induced poverty and exploitation) and that which needs overcoming (the latter's recognition of the colonial condition as unbearable and the will in overcoming). History thus becomes a powerfully resonant plenum.

Resonance may be linked to universality—Aristotelian analogy or might one say with Guha, Paninian *atidesa*—and rather than any totalitarian determination it is this that charges the vectors of analysis in Guha's oeuvre. Not the ultimately frozen distinctions between the West and other societies that many postcolonialist arguments in effect are, notwithstanding contrary intentions.[42] There is a curiously double perspective that regulates such postcolonial analysis, which is at once naively realist when it comes to the West and curiously nominalist when it comes to the East. While the West is an unproblematised coincidence of concept and reality, the Eastern subaltern[43] is an individual raw 'datum' forever inadequate to any conceptualisation (universality). The insistent critique of representation feeds off the real expectation that an individuated object exists, much like the nominalist critique of conceptualisation in giving priority to the unsubsumable individuated object.[44] Such a critique of representation ends up as an all-pervasive fear of representation, avoiding the transformative task of risking any determination, all the while uncritically taking an ideologically determined determination as the *a priori* individual fact. A good illustration of this problem is to be found in Dipesh Chakrabarty's critique of Guha's analysis of one aspect of the *Santal* rebellion. Confronted with the statement that the Thakur had commanded the leaders of the rebellion to rebel, Guha argues that this statement is 'religious', i.e., characterised by a self-alienation that saw one's own actions as in fact flowing from the will of another. For Chakrabarty the real task lies in taking *both* the 'subaltern's view' seriously as well as the view of the progressive historian who will assign the very agency to the subaltern that the latter denies in invoking the Thakur. Chakrabarty's critique is that Guha does not "listen to the rebel voice seriously, his analysis cannot offer the Thakur the same place of agency in the story of the rebellion that the Santal's statements had given him" (2001: 104). He insists that the Santal's statement offers a possibility of being in the world, and one will have to stay with both Guha's position (as the modern historian) as well as the *Santal*'s, so as to signify 'an irreducible plurality in our own being in the world' (ibid.).[45]

In this manner, Chakrabarty freezes the position of what he implicitly interprets to be the position of the *Santal* , plurality is here many rigid individuals brought abstractly together. The *Santal* can be a life possibility only if it were interpreted to be a possibility. This interpretation is neither explicated nor justified except in terms of defining the *Santal* in its irreducible 'distinction' from the rational historian. The rational historian is the absolute coincidence of a concept and content named Western (or its natural inheritor), while the *Santal* is barely described.[46] However, one has to ask how that which is irreducible to 'principles of narration that can be rationally defended in modern public life' can even be named '*Santal '* since such a naming uncritically brings in determinations that the overt disavowal of determination can do little to combat. This retaining of a tacit characterisation, that might well be an ideological reproduction of an archive colonial or otherwise,[47] is, on the other hand, that very transformative subject whose transformative will is presented in Guha's work. For the analysis of the *Santal* rebellion in Guha is traced to specific exploitative colonial conditions that are challenged, and in this challenge the reference to Thakur is explicated in terms of its 'public' character. As Guha argues, Thakur might well be taken as that 'incorporeal sign' that would bring together not only the *Santal s*, but other 'lower' castes, with whom the *Santal s* extended bonds of solidarity.[48]

Guha's interpretation of self-alienation is certainly debatable, but it is so precisely because in the analysis of the Santal, the Santal appears as contemporary in a much more fundamental sense than Chakrabarty's overt attempt to do the same. With all of Chakrabarty's insistence that we take the Santal seriously as a contemporary, one gets no sense of the Santal from *Provincializing Europe*, except the name Santal, and therefore to speak of the latter as 'illuminating a life possibility' for the contemporary historian does not persuade, especially when no concrete signs are given of this possibility. And if indeed it were a possibility one might in effect ask what happens to the 'irreducible plurality'. By retaining the name and little else, what in fact emerges is the 'tribal' of a colonial encyclopaedia, whereas Guha's detailed study of Santal life and rebellion breaks the bounds of the colonial archive. No doubt one strand of Guha's critique forecloses other lines of investigation and conversation; perhaps the statement on the Thakur's order was simply the natural reflex of one who was imprisoned, perhaps becoming a vehicle for the Thakur is as emphatic an agency that is conceivable. Even so, if the last century is anything to go by, in merely historical terms, ‘tribals’ taking to a thoroughly irreligious militancy is anything but outside the scope of what may be termed ‘tribal’. It is in this sense that Guha’s analysis of rebellion and its causes—the taking away of land and livelihood—has immense relevance in the recognition of Santal action as a symbol of the colonial condition and its limit.

The series of real determinations that make up the ‘West’ in distinction to which is posited the Santal in Chakrabarty reminds one of Benjamin: “The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice, the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology”.[49] To posit something in distinction is always itself a form of (negative) determination, and the result may well be the reification of the two terms, one constantly said to be inassimilable, but in actually (already) continuously determined by the other. Little else can explain the insistence with which the identity of aspects Indian is distinguished from what is taken to be a known West; as though distinguishing were itself not a determining. To see distinguishing as itself determining is to recognise identity itself in terms of difference, rather than understand a term solely in terms of (abstract) identity and difference.

As Aristotle had argued, action is double in including seeing and having seen, and is not an object that is either completely self-identical or not so. One cannot merely say that either peasant insurgency in colonial India is identical to peasant insurgency today or different from it, implying the impossibility of treating the question of change from colonial to postcolonial in terms of mere identity and difference. Rather, we might use analogy to look at the internal relations within each term to see if there is difference, significant enough, there; relations such as that between various classes and tribals, laws of landownership and legal subterfuge. One might ask whether the existence of universal franchise in one term, i.e., the postcolonial significantly alters the internal relation, and if so in what sense. For it is all the same undeniable that franchise appears to have left intact a colonial/modern system of draconian laws, whether it concerns sedition, terrorism, or the extraordinary powers of the President and governors, all of which, and each in their own way, directly call into question any semblance of ‘democracy’.[50] Alongside, the more granular, but undeniable, increase in economic inequalities, notwithstanding claims to the reduction of absolute levels of poverty.[51]

To say that conditions have improved since colonial times negates the claim to qualitative change that franchise, or more grandly freedom, is to have brought about. To demonstrate qualitative change, a norm is called for, and for a norm to have actuality it cannot but be grounded in an intelligibility that will have to encompass the past as much as the 'other' societies. To passionately keep insisting on the newness of the new, that nothing in the contemporary can be explicated with reference to the past, finds little to distinguish itself from a position that nothing new indeed has happened, and all is past, including genetic surgery. The past as familiar, the prototype of certain knowledge, is undeniably an ineradicable constituent of what we recognise to be human. It is in such consciousness that change itself may be recognised, alteration staked, as is clear in a study of peasant insurgency. Action can be recognised, while a fact may be known, and it is in keeping this distinction that the (human) subject of history may be studied. Not merely determined by the necessity of time and logic, but as the active subject that may and has ordered the relations of the latter.

In Conclusion

Much contemporary criticism of the universal is self-destructive, reducing the universal to the mere extension of the self-identical individual content; the fear of homogenising and universalising presupposing the adequacy of the term in operation. On the other hand one might learn from Aristotle who succinctly spoke of the universal as the 'as such' and not a 'this'. The very definition and demonstration of an individual requires critical analysis because identification is always caught in the one and the many, i.e., the common among many with each being in its own way. To propose and know—identify—a culture or category (such as state) already includes universality or that which is common because a definition is possible only through terms which will always apply to things beyond that which is defined. Marx, in his own way, speaks of the 'double perspective of labour' —labour itself, one might as 'as such' —as 'purposive activity' (1992: 284). [52] and the 'valorisation process' indexing changing historical conditions of labour; proposing what would otherwise seem as contradictions, such as 'free' labour and the reality of unfreedom. Labour as purposive activity as a 'universal' thus allows for analysis as much as praxis in recognising what appears to be 'free' as in fact coercive and therefore a condition to be overcome. Such are the commonsensical distinctions between past and present (colonial and postcolonial) as well as opposing categories (capitalism- feudalism) themselves analysed in their fundamental contingency in terms of a principle. The ideological kernel of the organisation of the human sciences—where the social sciences and their categories (lifeless in an eternal present) are cleaved off from time (historical contingency and change)—could well be done away with by Marx's critique of the social sciences stopping history at the gates of its (pseudo) classifications and categories (2010)[53] Justice and freedom are themselves operators of the past-present distinction and neither outside of time nor reducible to specific content.

When Guha (or anybody) explicitly writes about peasant-tribal rebellion in a time of such rebellion, what is at stake is the relationship between writing and bearing witness to the past by showing present concern. Is not the feature of speech, and thought, the fact that it cannot immediately be identified with something in particular as already known, but wagers the scope of the possible in midst of what is seen as necessary. The immediate recognisable and almost paralysing hectoring can be heard: the writer should stop writing and if he believes so much a political or militant movement he should go and join the same. Such a response can only be enunciated in a society that has no place for speech and persuasion, no time for patient listening, no ability for thought, and therefore no capacity for any transformation. We are even far away from the 'enlightened despotism' of the 18th century where Kant could argue that the 'public' was constituted precisely as that place where one could think and speak—the distinction turns out to be nominal—freely about altering the state of affairs without inviting punishment so long as one is not threatening. It is only a colonial legacy that can criminalise speech itself because speech when directly resulting in violence cannot be called speech. 'Facts' only need to be identified and not negotiated, and therein both in politics and history the active nature—and requirement—of thought as labour is rescinded just as is the potential for change. The conceptualisation of the subject as 'will' allows for a disruption of such ideologically determined distinctions, and elicits the force of what is possible through what has happened.

Human history cannot be about 'facts' because strictly speaking no articulated fact could escape the charge of anachronism. Something as seemingly straightforward as 'Akbar was born on 15th October 1542' is anachronistic in so far as the baby born—leaving aside the controversy over deciding the question of when actual birth takes place—is not (yet) Akbar. 'Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon' cannot be nailed on a discrete 'part' of a time of discrete succession; at the risk of the paradoxes of the sea-battle as much as the Megarians and Zeno. The archivist and antiquarian may well take heed of Hobbes's precocious response to those who prodded him to cite the old authorities: as the most recent, he was himself the oldest. To treat the past as truly past is to treat the event as one that has already happened, to treat the action as complete, and to trap the subject as a subject-object without will, to deny it a future as much as denying the active constituents involved knowing; that have their own stories, their own pasts. What appears as adherence to the strict cannon of rationality in understanding the past as past turns out to be the crudest application of a morality in which only the victor remains; the defeated is documented and her identity as a demanding-desiring being, a subject with its own will, is eradicated (Benjamin 1968). The actuality of the will signals at once the totality and its limit, and should be sharply distinguished from culture as identity, an abstracted expression that leaves the relations of totality intact; Benjamin's critique of fascism which offers expression in exchange for keeping the totality constituted by (property) relations, i.e., the negation of the 'right' of the masses, undisturbed. If the human subject is not to be a mere object, the former's self-interpretation in action would have to be considered constitutive, bringing together the two senses of the word cause; origin and commitment as also contingent context. Since one cannot be committed to the mere future, the latter has a reality only in an altered relation with the past shot through with expectation.

Notes

[1] I thank Sanghamitra Misra for her comments and suggestions. I also wish to thank my students at the University of Delhi with whom I have discussed some of the texts referred to in the paper.

[2] Throughout Guha's text, he does speak of the 'will', although it is not merely by the number of such uses that the problematic is articulated. To cite just a couple of instances: discussing the change in the conventional use of language, "the Thangal of Thirurangadi called upon his followers to drop the customary V and return T for T in verbal exchanges with the *jenmi* as an open demonstration of their will to challenge the latter's over lordship". And later, "At this level the distinction between crime and insurgency corresponds to that between two types of violence— partial and total, the former as the expression of the will of a single individual or a small group in any society and the latter as that of the will of the Many" (Guha 1983: 51, 157). In a later work too, not about public insurgencies, the question of the will is crucial. In 'Chandra's Death', Guha argues, 'To try and register the latter [humble peasant voices] is to defy the pretensions of an abstract univocality which insists on naming this many-sided and complex tissue of human predicament as a 'case'. For, to take that word to mean, as it usually doesn't, an 'instance of a thing's occurring' or 'a statement of facts in cause *sub judice'*, is to confer on these statements the function of describing this death merely as a thing's occurring, as a fact shorn of all other determinations than being sub judice. It was as if there were no room in such description for a will or purpose and all that was said was meant to speak of an event without a subject' (see Partha Chatterjee 2009: 277–78).

[3] For an insightful argument relating the science of History to the question of justice see Navjyoti Singh (2003).

[4] In much of his later work too, Guha reflected explicitly on the nature of time and the experiencing subject. 'However there is nothing about experience that is really so straight. It is, as we have seen, a curdling of memory in which all that has been perceived is subject to a dual process of condensation and realignment. One of these selects the part of the material that must be left out so that the rest may be retrieved as past remembered. But for this to happen, the other, that is, the reconstructive part of the process, has to arrange the residual moments in a new composition and invest it with a significance that had not been known before.' 'The past does not come into such repetition as time gone dead but rather as something handed down as a living heritage, strong in its knowledge of the possibility of what has been. In repetition the latter makes itself available to that other possibility—the possibility of what is to come—for adoption in projects which critically affirm as well as disavow it for the future. The process concerned with such critical engagement is what historicizing is all about, and it works closely with destiny understood as the extension of the possibility of what has been to the horizon of the possibility of what is to come (see Chatterjee 2009: 336, 386).

[5] "But if it is always true to say that a thing is or will be, it is not possible that it should not be or not be about to be, and when a thing cannot not come to be, it is impossible that it should not come to be, and when it is impossible that it should not come to be, it must come to be" (ibid.: 46).

[6] "Since propositions correspond with facts, it is evident that when in future events there is a real alternative, and a potentiality in contrary directions, the corresponding affirmation and denial have the same character. *This is the case with regard to that which is not always existent or not always non-existent*" (ibid.: 48,emphasis mine).

[7] "Acts just and unjust being as we have described them, a man acts unjustly or justly whenever he does such acts voluntarily; when involuntary, he acts neither unjustly nor justly except in an incidental way…whether an act is or is not one of injustice (or of justice) is determined by its voluntariness or involuntariness" (ibid.: 1015). Later, "Similarly to know what is just or what is unjust requires men to think, not great wisdom, because it is not hard to understand the matters dealt with by the laws (though these are not the things that are just, except incidentally)" (ibid.: 1019). It is important to note that the distinctions between laws and justice are arrived at after dealing with questions regarding the universality and conventional nature of justice through various constitutions.

[8] As Marx argues in *Poverty of Philosophy* (2010: 101), "economic categories are only the theoretical expressions, abstractions of the social relations of production". This allows him to later write, 'Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeoise industry as machinery, credits etc. Without slavery, you have no cotton, without cotton you have no modern industry'(ibid.: 104).

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[9] Referring to the work of Christopher Bayly, O'Hanlon writes, "These are very salutary emphases, which take account both of longer-term structural continuities and of the *agency of Indians themselves* in these historical processes" (emphasis mine). Elsewhere, "In fact, there is much to suggest that some of at least what we now call 'colonial knowledge' about India emerged from the late 18th century as the jointly authored product of officials of the East India Company and of their chosen and interested Indian informants…(a)s Christopher Bayly and others have recently reminded us, the legal codes of the Company drawn up in the later 18th century were often put together in consultation with Brahmans…". To make a point about 'agency' we have the conflation of 'Indian' and 'Brahmin' (see O'Hanlon 2014: 87, 119).

[10] This section draws largely on a presentation that I had given during the opening session on 15 February 2013 at a workshop organised by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies celebrating thirty years of Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*. I thank Shail Mayaram for extending me the invitation to participate.

[11] should be clear that in our interpretation we therefore depart strongly from recent readings of Guha's *Elementary Aspects* that read it as 'structuralist', without fully explaining what precisely is meant but such a label. For such a recent appraisal see the introduction to Partha Chatterjee, Tapati Guha-Thakurta and Bodhisattva Kar (2014).

[12] "Yet we propose to focus on this consciousness as our central theme because it is not possible to make sense of the experience of insurgency merely as a history of events without a subject. It is in order to rehabilitate that subject that we must take the peasant rebel's awareness of his own world and his will to change it as our point of departure. Later, the object of this work is to try and depict this struggle not as a series of specific encounters but in its general form. The elements of this form derive from the very long history of the peasant subalternity and his striving to end it" (ibid.: 11).

[13] "His subjection to this triumvirate—sarkari, sahukari and zamindari—was primarily political in character, economic exploitation being one, albeit the most obvious of its several instances…indeed the element of coercion was so explicit and so ubiquitous in all their dealings with the peasant that he could hardly look upon his relationship with them as anything but political. By the same token too in undertaking to destroy this relationship he engaged himself in what was essentially a political task, a task in which the existing power nexus had to be turned on its head as a necessary condition for the redress of any particular grievance" (ibid.: 8). It might be worth recalling that for Marx, speaking towards the end of the 19th century, says with reference to Europe, "In present-day society, the instruments of labor are the monopoly of the landowners (the monopoly of property in land is the basis of is even the basis of the monopoly of Capital) *and* the Capitalists"; Marx emphatically critiqued Lassalle, for critiquing only the capitalists and not the landlords. See *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Critque_of_the_Gotha_Programme.pdf. From this breach may be found the direction that Lenin will take.

[14] "In short, we have been led to conclude that the documentation on insurgency must itself be turned upside down in order to reconstitute the insurgent's project aimed at reversing his world" (Guha 1983: 333).

[15] "This imprint of hierarchical divisions within a speech community is perhaps most clearly witnessed in diglossia" (Guha 1983: 43; also 42, 55, 62). It is thus rather surprising when a recent commentator has argued that for Guha, "peasants and rulers exist in fundamentally different cultural worlds" (see Wilson 2005).

[16] "Indeed it would be quite in order to say that insurgency was a massive and systematic violation of those words, gestures and symbols which had the relations of power in colonial society as their significata. This was perceived as such both by its protagonists and their foes" (ibid.:39).

[17] "Conspiracy theories figure prominently in the official response to many Indian peasant uprisings. The conspirators are in most of these cases suspected to be members of one or the other rural elite group on the simple assumption that the peasant has no initiative of his own and is a mere instrument of his master" (Guha 1983: 80).

[18] One might well relate this to Nietzsche's argument in *Genealogy of Morals*—to be pursued by Foucault—regarding the relationship between subject-formation and punishment. This objectification of the subject is the obverse of the active-subject that we are attempting to delineate. Needless to say, the latter is in no sense simply the 'individual' as instance of the species mankind.

[19] See Gyanendra Pandey (1982) for a following through of this line of investigation.

[20] Guha spends a great deal of time recognising the economic conditions of the day, citing from the archive, the importance of poverty and its relation to crime. For instance, after speaking about Banjara Singh, he discusses the

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Lodhas and their condition in the face of colonial expropriation, and their ultimate branding as a criminal tribe. Elsewhere discussing the Santal *hool*, Guha writes that the Santals had clearly expressed their protests against the vicious oppressions of the mahajans, and this context cannot be ignored—even if it cannot fully explain—the *hool*. Such instances can be multiplied.

[21] Chibber recognises that in such 'universality', Guha's work is very different in approach from that of Partha Chatterjee's. The difference between the two has been noted earlier. For instance, in an early review of Subaltern Studies, Mridula Mukherjee, had argued, "Thus whereas in Guha's version the traditional elites who exercise their power through 'the residua of semi-feudal political institutions of the pre-colonial' are included in the elite domain, in Chatterjee's version, since they exercise 'class power…outside the legal political processes of the state' they inhabit the second domain" (Mukherjee: 2110).

[22] Contrast this analysis of the 'perceptual deficit' and history of enumeration with that of Cohn's (1990). Guha's brief remarks are closer to the historical origins of the census in forms of coercive rule, than Cohn's understanding of the colonial census as standing for the "efforts of the British colonial government to collect systematic information about many aspects of Indian society and culture" (Cohn 1990: 231). Cohn's succeeding discussion of revenue collection subtracts any discussion on conquest and sovereignty, an important theme in Guha's detailed study, *Rule of Property for Bengal* (1996).

[23] The equation of the 'social' with life as a critique of the 'political' as the state, has been lost sight of in more recent Marxist social history which treats the latter as squarely within a political framework. On the other hand, Marx was as critical of the State when/as alienated from society as he was of the emerging 'nation-state' framework. In as late a text as the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme', Marx had written, "Lassalle, in opposition to the Communist Manifesto and to all earlier socialism, conceived the workers' movement from the narrowest national standpoint. He is being followed in this…and that after the work of the International! It is altogether self-evident that, to be able to fight at all, the working class must organize itself at home as a class and that its own country is the immediate arena of its struggle…insofar as its class struggle is national, not in substance, but, as the Communist Manifesto says, 'in form'. But the 'framework of the present-day national state', for instance, the German Empire, is itself, in its turn, economically 'within the framework' of the world market, politically 'within the framework' of the system of states. Every businessman knows that German trade is at the same time foreign trade, and the greatness of Herr Bismarck consists, to be sure, precisely in his pursuing a kind of international policy". https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Critque_of_the_Gotha_Programme.pdf. This is consistent with the line taken in, among other places, *The Communist Manifesto* and the *Civil Wars in France*.

[24] "Marx did not subscribe to this illusion at all. On the contrary, the discrepancy between the universalizing tendency of capital as an ideal and the frustration of that tendency in reality was, for him, a measure of the contradictions of Western bourgeois societies of his time and the differences which gave each of them its specificity. He used this measure to define and explain the uneven character of material development in the contemporary bourgeois world, as illustrated by the clearly differentiated moments of that development in Germany, France, England, USA, considered in ascending order…since the universal claim rested largely on the recent series of historic defeats inflicted in the ancient régimes of continental Europe, Marx designed a litmus test for that claim by an examination of the tolerance for feudalism in the most representative aspect of 19th century bourgeois thought, namely political economy. The latter emerged from this test as a body of knowledge which could by no means be said to have transcended the limits of feudal thought. On the contrary, some of its theoretical tensions arose directly from the compromise forced on it by varying degrees of proximity to feudalism in time and space" (Ibid., 225). It has been necessary to cite this long passage to contest Chibber's recent critique that doesn't see universalisation as itself being the vector of a difference (ideal and real), which is itself differentiated in time and place. In the light of the above passage, it should be clear how inaccurate the following reading of Guha by Chibber is (see Chibber 2013: 39). On 'universal interests' one might just allude to two things: (1) On 'bourgeois ideology' that according to Chibber's reading of Guha are universal, one may cite the following; 'Equality and Liberty—two words which heralded the advent of a new ruling class and a new ruling culture —are the hallmarks here of a pure externality. They leave the reader in no doubt that this philosophy criticism stands outside the paradigm of slave-owning ideology and has its feet planted firmly in another paradigm, that of the ideology of wage-slavery', and (2) Chibber doesn't recognise the ironical use of the word 'representation'— an irony that cannot be forgotten for the reader of

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the *Eighteenth Brumaire*—when Guha speaks of the bourgeoisie. In fact the quotation marks given by Guha to the word ‘representation’ in the passage cited by Chibber is simply ignored, thereby obfuscating the meaning (ibid.).

[25] “In other words it was a relationship of domination and subordination—a political relationship of the feudal type or as it has been appropriately described, a semi-feudal relationship which derived its material sustenance from pre-capitalist conditions of production and its legitimacy from a traditional culture still paramount in the super structure. This authority of the colonial state, far from being neutral to this relationship, was indeed one of its constitutive elements. …the British infuse new blood for old in the proprietary body of the Permanent Settlement in the east, ryotwari in the south and some permutations of the two in other parts of the country. The outcome of all this was to revitalize a quasi-feudal structure by transferring resources from the older and less effective members of the landlord class to younger and for the regime, more dependable ones. For the peasant this meant not less but in many cases more intensive and systematic exploitation.” And later, “…one important consequence of his revitalization of landlordism under British rule was the phenomenal grown of peasant indebtedness” (Guha 1983: 7).

[26] I have tried building on the implications of some of Guha’s arguments in *Infinite Double* (2015: 335–51).

[27] An illustration of the pitfalls of taking categories without the specific relations that constitute them may be found in D. Washbrook’s argument regarding property (1981). When for instance he discusses ‘public law’ as ‘The law defined and protected the private rights of subjects against all-comers, including the encroachments of the executive itself (ibid.:651), it is not clear what is meant. The nature of ‘property right’ or ‘private right’ was precisely that which was under dispute. Did it include rights to markets? On what basis could the Company legislate on the amount of revenue due; for Francis, following contemporary English understandings of property, would see this itself going much further than interference, amounting to an ‘inquisition’. Could one really call something property if its determination— since it was granted on the condition that revenue be paid—was wholly extraneous to the so called property-holder? Such was undeniably the case of Company Raj; on these and related issues, the richest and most insightful study remains that of Guha (1996).

[28] Locke (1997: 345). One could always return to Aristotle on truth and falsity as characterising propositions.

[29] This problem at least goes back to Plato’s *Theaetetus*; perception and what is ‘common’.

[30] I use ‘real’ in the older sense as simply something that has been (conceptually) determined, not something that is an immediate or certain experience.

[31] The specific arguments of the essay are contestable, framed as they are by axiomatic characterisations. Thus when discussing the ‘farman’ from Farukshiyaar and the employment of the same for the trade, Cohn speaks about the increasing knowledge of Persian acquired by the English, but fails to mention the all important fact that the ‘farman’ was the subject of dispute between the English and Aliverdi Khan; or how the *farman* was used, beyond all conventional understandings of the same, ultimately leading to the wars in the Bengal. On these disputes, see Sushil Chaudhury (1995). Similarly, Cohn takes the self-representation of Hastings to be true, i.e., ‘India would be governed by Indian principles, particularly in relation to law’. However, especially, in the light of the recent work of Nandini Bhattacharya Panda (2007), this can no longer be considered tenable. It is not that Cohn is to be expected to anticipate future work, but that Cohn’s framework does not allow for the detailed manipulation and construction—in the interests of concrete politico-economic interest—of what we take to be native markers such as ‘Hindu law’ that is to be critiqued.

[32] Chatterjee had also argued, that the “immediate project of an Indian history of peasant politics, is first, that the domain of legal-political relations constituted by the state cannot be regarded as the exclusive, perhaps not even the principal, site of peasant struggle”. This possibility of abstracting the ‘state’ from the social cannot be found in Guha for whom insurgency revealed a fundamental conflict affecting life and therefore everything from ‘culture’ [umbrellas and shoes] to the ‘economy’ [taxes and debt]. In such an analysis, Guha would be more on the side of Marx, for whom “from a political point of view the state and the organization of society are not two different things. The state is the organization of society” (Marx 1975: 411). It is in acting on this recognition that the peasant-insurgent is political. The difference in the approaches between Guha and Chatterjee have been noted before, though not precisely in these terms.

[33] Chatterjee argues, “...following Guha, the argument of the Subaltern Studies group of historians has been that by studying the history of peasant rebellions from the point of view of the peasant as an active and conscious subject of history one obtains an access into that aspect of his consciousness where he is autonomous, undominated...peasant

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consciousness, then, is a contradictory unity of two aspects; in one, the peasant is subordinate, where he accepts the immediate reality of power relations that dominate and exploit him; in the other, he denies those conditions of subordination and asserts his autonomy" (1993: 167).

[34] "What is necessary now is to formulate the concept of community within a set of systematic relationships, signifying the mutual identity and difference of social groups. In the Indian context, the system of castes seems to represent an obvious paradigmatic form for signifying identity and difference". Analogously this transforms insurgent-will and action into the feature/resource of a general 'peasant consciousness' (see Chatterjee 1993: 164–65). It is through such a prism of 'consciousness' that Gayatri Spivak too intervenes. She argues, "To investigate, discover and establish a subaltern or peasant consciousness seems at first to be a positivistic project—a project which assumes that, if properly prosecuted, it will lead to firm ground, to some *thing* that can be disclosed" (1985: 338). Elsewhere Spivak writes, "In the slightly dated language of the Indian group, the question becomes, how can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak? Their project is after all to rewrite the development of consciousness of the Indian nation"(1988: 1444).

[35] A persuasive critique of this line of argument may be found in Mihir Shah, 'Structures of Power in Indian Society: A Response', *EPW*, 15 November 2008, as well as in A. Baviskar and N. Sundar, 'Democracy versus Economic Transformation', *EPW*, 15 November 2008.

[36] There is much recent literature on this. See G. Navlakha (2012) and S. Choudhary (2012).

[37] European self-representation in the works of historians who have otherwise been critiqued for their disavowal of colonialism is here accepted *in toto*, in the characterisation of the 'alternative sequences' argument. This abandonment of the force of the colonial may be found in emerging forms of 'intellectual history'. Ananya Vajpeyi argues, "In other words I am asking that we pay attention to these categories precisely because they break the mould of Western reason, and thereby loosen its hold as well, on ways of being, thinking and writing in colonial India" (Vajpeyi 2012: 29). One might ask in response, what might 'Western reason' be, and is it characterisable as a mould? Neither issue is satisfactorily approached, let alone addressed by Vajpeyi, who spends as little time on 'Western reason' as on 'colonial India', as though either were self-evident.

[38] The relationship between modernity and colonialism is succinctly put by Guha in relating the project of Subaltern Studies as he sees it and postmodernism: "In what sense does that experience lead our project to take its stand alongside other postmodernist critiques? For an answer one could consider that experience in the light of three salient aspects of modernity's intersection with colonialism., which stated briefly, are as follows: first, that the development of post Enlightenment colonialism is constitutive of and presupposed in modernity even though it is not always explicitly acknowledged to be so; secondly that postmodernism as a critique can never be adequate to itself unless it takes colonialism into account as a historic barrier that reason can never cross; and thirdly that the colonial experience has outlived decolonization and continues to be related significantly to the concerns of our own time" (see Chatterjee 2009: 355).

[39] See Guha's critique of Benedict Anderson in 'Official Nationalism' in Chatterjee (2009). Guha's critique of Benedict Anderson's treatment of 'nationalism' that takes as its focus the lack of an analysis of the 'popular initiative' and the peasantry is therein rather different from that of Partha Chatterjee's critique of Anderson in *Nation and its Fragments* (1993).

[40] Via Marx she argues, "The following passage, continuing the passage from the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, is also working on the structural principle of a dispersed and dislocated class subject: the (absent collective) consciousness of the small peasant proprietor class finds its "bearer" in a "representative" who appears to work in another interest" (1988). This would not be the place to dwell on the implicit critique of Said, who cites the passage of representation from the *Eighteenth Brumaire* as epigram.

[41] This might be profitably compared to *The Civil Wars in France*, and the (possible) relationship between the Commune and the French peasant.

[42] For a powerful critique of strands within early Subaltern Studies and the tendency of later Subaltern Studies towards decontextualised binaries see Sumit Sarkar (1999).

[43] "Concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social

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justice, scientific rationality, and so on all bear the burden of European thought and history. One simply cannot think of political modernity without these and other related concepts that found a climactic form in the course of the European Enlightenment and the nineteenth century" (Dipesh Chakrabarty 2001: 4). Notwithstanding arguments about the 'hyperreality' of Europe (which Chakrabarty never elaborates upon other than saying that it's not the same use as that of Baudrilliard's) which never affect the detail of the arguments made in the book. This form of argumentation may be traced to Chatterjee, where it is argued, "…the feeling of unmanageable complexity is, if we care to think of it, nothing other than the inadequacy of the theoretical apparatus within which we work. Those analytical instruments were fashioned primarily out of the process of understanding historical developments in Europe. When those instruments now meet with the resistance of an intractablely complex material, the fault surely is not with Indian material but of the important instruments" (Chatterjee 1993: 169). As though one could even apprehend ('Indian') 'material' without any analytical apparatus, leaving, once again intact, the coincidence of the latter with European history. This is precisely the direction that certain strands of 'intellectual history' are taking, where reason reasons itself as provincial, and can be treated as datum having a specific context.

[44] The debt to Abrogasht Schmitt (2012) on the critique of (nominalist) representation, throughout this essay, must be emphasised here. A good introduction to Ockham's distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition may be found in Eleonore Stump's contribution in P.V. Spade (1999). The intuitive singular is apprehended in sense-perception, and therefore taking a concrete content—like 'Santal' or 'Indian peasant' —for the same in terms of its priority towards and ultimate inassimilability to any conceptual operation (itself the identity of thought and history in the 'West') is equally, if not more, problematic.

[45] Aniruddha Chowdhury makes an important critique of Chakrabarty when he argues, "The major drawback from which Chakrabarty's argument suffers is the absence of any relation of alterity and otherness in regard to what he calls subaltern pasts. Chakrabarty, in fact, refuses the temporal otherness of the subaltern pasts and thus disavows the claim of otherness on the historiographic operation. Without the conception of the otherness of the pasts the plurality of times would simply amount to a spatialization of "times" co-existing together, which can then be amenable to totalization" (2014: 14). Chatterjee writes, in a manner that might well be referring to Chakrabarty, "To call this the co-presence of several times—the time of the modern and the times of the pre-modern—is only to endorse the utopianism of Western modernity" (2001: 403).

[46] "And since difference is always the name of a relationship, for it separates just as much as it connects (as, indeed, does a border), one could argue that alongside the present or the modern the medieval must linger as well, if only as that which exists as the limit or the border to the practices and discourses that define the modern. Subaltern pasts are signposts of this border. With them we reach the limits of the discourse of history. The reason for this, as I have said, is that subaltern pasts do not give the historian any principle of narration that can be rationally defended in modern public life. Going a step further, one can see that this requirement for a rational principle, in turn, marks the deep connections that exist between modern constructions of public life and projects of social justice" (Chakrabarty 2001: 110). Chakrabarty's 'Santal' is very much akin to Chatterjee's 'Indian material', cited above.

[47] For all Chakrabarty's claims about the impossibility of assimilating the Santal into the discourse of the historian, he all the same gives us what is almost a definition of the Santal: "(The Santals were a tribal group in Bengal and Bihar who rebelled against both the British and nonlocal Indians in 1855.)". How is such a definition to be understood in relation to the Santal as a 'sign-post' or as a contemporary life-possibility? Compare this with the rich description of Santal-action in Guha (1983).

[48] "Here it will suffice to say that in claiming to act on "the order of the Thacoor" the Santals were merely affirming the public character of their rebellion" (Guha 1983: 112).

[49] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*; https://monoskop.org/images/6/6d/Benjamin_Walter_1936_2008_The_Work_of_Art_in_the_Age_of_Its_Technological_Reproducibility_Second_Version.pdf

[50] The recent controversy over the powers of the Governor with reference to the dissolution of the legislative assembly of Arunachal Pradesh, and the immunity of the Governor with regard to the Courts, prompted no less than the Supreme Court to speak of the 'slaughter of democracy'. There exists a huge amount of literature in the public domain about the draconian aspects of UAPA, and other such legislation, such as AFSPA. One might pose the same question to and for 'globalisation', the latter cannot be taken to be a stark and indisputable feature of 'today',

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because, among other studies, Ranajit Guha's *Rule of Property* disclosed the concrete concatenation between Bengal, England, China, Africa and America at various levels (1996).

[51] Amit Bhadhuri (2000: 30) argues that "42% of the Indian population is absolutely poor by international standards with an income of less than one dollar in purchasing power…nearly half of the children of India are undernourished which renders many crippled". Notwithstanding arguments about decrease in absolute levels of poverty, there is consensus on rising inequalities.

[52] Marx *Capital* I (London: Penguin 1992), 284. I have attempted to explore some of these issues in *The Infinite Double* (2015: 514–25). In the light of this, Hannah Arendt's interpretation of Marx in *Human Condition* will have to be strongly disputed.

[53] Part II of *Poverty of Philosophy* (enunciates one of the most powerful critiques of the abstractions of classical political economy; abstractions that are taken as categories which are themselves outside of history, even though, ironically, history is to have taken place until their arrival.

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