

Intimations of modernity: time and space

This chapter is cast as a personal narrative. It unravels how I arrived at inklings and understandings of space and time – alongside those of disciplines and subjects, modernity and identity – that were explored in the Introduction and which lie at the core of this book. At stake are intimations that are at once familiar and strange. For, born to anthropologist parents, I grew up in Sagar (central India), Delhi (old and new), and Shimla (northern India). My formative years were imbued with a lingering sense of how terrains (or times/spaces) of the “vernacular” and the “cosmopolitan” ever overlapped yet only met each other in curious, quirky, and contradictory ways. A little later, seeking my vocation in research and teaching, I was trained in history but drawn toward anthropology, especially as I cut my pre-apprentice scholar’s teeth on the subaltern studies endeavor. (Indeed, I initiate here an artisanal coming-of-age metaphor that shores up the narrative.)

Early encounters

As was noted in this book’s introduction, from the latter half of the 1970s, critical departures were afoot in the history of the subcontinent. If reassessments of the pasts of Indian nationalism were often central to such endeavors, on offer equally were other convergences of significance. Especially important were imaginative readings of historical materials: from conventional archival records, including reports of colonial administrators, to earlier ethnographies as sources of history; and from previously maligned vernacular registers of history to diverse

subaltern expressions of the past. Such readings could problematize the very nature of the historical archive as well as initiate conversations with other orientations, including those of structural linguistics and critical theory.¹ No less salient were incipient acknowledgments of the innately political character of history writing.

In this wider scenario, attending the history (honors) undergraduate program in St. Stephen's College, several of my cohorts and I were insinuated in the intellectual excitement that surrounded the emergence of subaltern studies. Soon, pursuing a (taught) master's in (modern) history, also at Delhi University, the debates and ferment of those times led to wider critical engagements with historiographical and theoretical currents then underway across the world. Here, even as subaltern studies powerfully pointed in newer historical directions, the endeavor also appeared as privileging the spectacular moments of the subalterns' overt rebellions over these people's more routine, everyday negotiations of power. This suggested, in turn, inadequate, abbreviated articulations of culture and consciousness, of religion and caste, within the project.

Unsurprisingly, seeking a research theme for the MPhil in history, also at Delhi University, I was interested in studying the conduct of resistance in a religious idiom. Specifically, I wished to rescue such negotiations and contestations of authority from their being subordinated – as insubstantial, even epiphenomenal – to the underlying determinations of endlessly economic imperatives and/or principally progressive politics, which abounded in the heroic histories of the time. Rather, at stake was the manner in which the institutions and imaginings of caste, the practices and processes of religion (in this case, Hinduism dominant and popular) could critically structure and shape the actions and expressions of subordinate communities. For a subject of study, I chanced upon a heretical and “untouchable” caste-sect, the Satnamis of Chhattisgarh. The auspices of my parents proved important here, both having conducted, ages ago, at the time of Indian independence and soon thereafter, their doctoral research in this large linguistic and cultural region in central India.

Working toward a social history of the Satnamis for my MPhil dissertation, in unsteady yet insistent ways, the potentialities and problems of subaltern studies concerning temporalities came to the fore.

On the one hand, the analyses within the endeavor located the actions and apprehensions of these groups as entirely contemporaneous, formatively coeval, with the time-space of the British colony and the Indian nation. Thus, in his writings about the peasant insurgent in nineteenth-century India, especially through his criticism of the notion of the “pre-political,” Guha rendered this historical subject as completely coeval with and a co-constituent of processes of politics under colonialism.² On the other hand, the sensibilities of a recuperative paternalism – alongside the procedures of a somewhat salvage scholarly style – meant that within the project the meanings and motivations of these peoples appeared filtered through the master distinction between community and state. The subalterns equally inhabited a distinct prior/a priori time, turning on an implicitly unchanging tradition, marked by a passive space, shaped by the dead hand of ruling culture. Thus, it was only when these subordinate groups claimed the “essence” of their initiatives in the shape of insurgency, an autonomous and truly emancipatory expressive moment involving a “prescriptive reversal” aimed at the complete subversion and erasure of the insignia of subalternity, that they emerged as being within, actually at the cutting edge of, the temporal stage of modern politics.³

Of course, I did not experience or express matters in quite this manner, but the intimations of uncertainty haunted as something of a shadowy presence. Indeed, far from being disabling, the ambiguity was productive. A sign of the times, the tension was fruitful. Now, alongside other theoretical tendencies, I critically engaged subaltern studies in order to build on their former sensibilities, which placed dispossessed protagonists as being formatively within history, while querying their later emphases that presented these subjects as, uncertainly, out of time.

Thus, seeking to understand Satnami articulations of the past, centered on their gurus/preceptors, I found in the group’s myths a modality of historical consciousness which elaborated distinct conventions. Here were to be found renderings and procedures that accessed and exceeded, in their own way, Brahman kingly and popular devotional configurations, but also imperial and nationalist representations. Quite simply, Satnami conceptions of the past were entirely coeval with

modern historiography, even holding a mirror up to its conceits, rather than signaling yet another exotic exception, as dictated by the imperatives of a hierarchical but singular temporality.⁴ Similarly, focusing on colonial justice and village disputes in the Chhattisgarh region, what came to the fore were the contentious conversations, mutual imbrications, and formative face-offs between modern law/order and popular legalities/illegalities. That is to say, far from the indolent opposition between folk-disputing processes and Western adjudicatory rules, which temporally and spatially segregate these terrains, at stake were incessant entanglements between everyday norms, familiar desires, and alien pathologies.⁵

In hindsight, I was exploring processes that braided time, space, and their enmeshments. However, at the time the concerns centered, for instance, on the absolute, even arithmetic, antinomy between the elite and the subaltern. Now, read through the filters of patricians and plebs in eighteenth-century England or the contours of consciousness of African-American slave subjects in the US South,⁶ this opposition within subaltern studies bracketed or short-circuited the making of subalterns and elites – indeed, of class, community, and gender – as relational processes. Further, there seemed to be a vacillation here between, on the one hand, a privileging of elementary codes, or underlying structures, governing subaltern action/insurgency and, on the other, a somewhat naive celebration of their ungoverned agency/autonomy. Filtered through debates on the relationship between agency and structure, especially as expressed in the work of Philip Abram, Pierre Bourdieu, and Anthony Giddens, such fluctuation appeared as analytically inadequate, profoundly problematic, and often unproductive.⁷ Yet my point is that these easy oppositions and ambivalent analytics carried even wider implications. Although barely expressed in this manner, it was hard not to feel a lingering, latent disquiet toward uneasy determinations of singular hierarchical time – that indicated antinomian social spaces – within subaltern studies.⁸

Clearly, my research project – and wider academic interests – turned on the interplay between history and anthropology. It followed that I read enthusiastically in the emerging field of historical anthropology,

particularly works exploring historicity and temporality, practice and process, meaning and power, in Africa and Oceania, Europe and the Americas. Now, it became clear that even as Indian anthropology, particularly its specialization from the 1950s onwards, was shored up by distinct disciplinary demarcations with history, exactly in this scenario, there were discrete efforts by some anthropologists to engage historical issues. At the same time, it was also evident that such efforts were less concerned with rethinking anthropology and history by blurring disciplinary boundaries and more with expressing conventional anthropological considerations by drawing on historical materials and understandings, many of which remained suspect to the professional historians of the time. Also, well into the 1960s, these efforts were often influenced by wider formulations of interactions between “great” and “little” traditions, between processes of “universalization” and “parochialization.”⁹ Held up by quasi-evolutionist schemas, these projections of an overarching Indian civilization unsteadily de-historicized the past and the present, principally rendering vacuous various grounded articulations of time and space, which all too readily turned upon one another.¹⁰

At the same time, I realized that the institutionalization and unravelling of professional history writing of the subcontinent had also proceeded at a distance from anthropological inquiry across most of the twentieth century.¹¹ Concerning the historiography of modern India, earlier studies of British administrators and administration were honed further yet also supplanted by fiercely contending scholarship on nationalism (and communalism), accounts that drew on the steadily increased availability from the early 1960s of previously classified materials.¹² This decade and the one following were further marked by impressive achievements in the writing of economic history, which had its corollaries for understandings of societal patterns.

From the middle of the 1960s, influenced by divergent strains of Marxism in the context of radical upheavals across the world, the social sciences witnessed a wider concern with the place of the peasantry in economic development, historical change, and revolutionary transformation.¹³ These concerns had their effect on historical writing on

peasant society, usually entailing questions of economic history yet also concerned with issues of culture and power. The impact extended to social-political histories on counter-colonial movements and popular nationalisms of peasant groupings, working classes, and adivasi (indigenous) communities.¹⁴ As we saw, all of this set the stage for critical debates within history from the late 1970s onward that recast the discipline, including by raising new questions and initiating possible conversations, including with critical theory, sociological understandings, and ethnographic inquiry, thereby augmenting the study of South Asia.¹⁵ However, two points stand out. On the one hand, prior to these transformations, productive engagements with anthropology were very rare in historical scholarship on modern India conducted on the subcontinent. On the other, as was noted, the articulations of time and space in the newer tendencies came with their twists and tendentiousness.

At the same time, from the beginning of the 1960s at any rate, the entanglements between these disciplines found varied articulations in the work of at least one scholar of South Asia. My reference is to the wide-ranging scholarship (and critical inspiration) of Bernard S. Cohn, who over time straddled and subverted the boundaries between anthropology and history.¹⁶ Belonging to the first generation of post-war US anthropology that was trained to conduct sustained fieldwork in Indian villages, Cohn nonetheless resisted the lure of a purely synchronic study. For example, his doctoral work on the Chamars of the village of Senapur in North India, conducted in the 1950s, attended to processes of social change among these subalterns.¹⁷ Within a matter of a few years, Cohn extended his inquiries into diverse questions of history and anthropology, based on varied crossovers between these disciplines.¹⁸ Across the 1960s, these studies entailed explorations set in northern India concerning, for instance, the relationship between revenue policies and structural change, the levels of political integration in precolonial regimes, and the shaping of local life and legal practice by systems of colonial law. Most of this work rested on archival materials yet it was also influenced by Cohn's earlier fieldwork in the region.¹⁹

Such emphases were followed by other departures as Cohn shifted his attention more and more to "the historical anthropology of colonial

society itself.”²⁰ Here, Cohn’s prior concern with investigating the historical bases of social relations in South Asia was not simply forgotten. Rather, it found newer configurations. For example, during the 1970s Cohn’s work on the development and deployment of colonial knowledge of India engaged with the “ethnosociology” of his colleagues McKim Marriott and Ronald Inden.²¹ Such dialogue is evident in Cohn’s semiinal essay on the Imperial Assemblage of 1877, held to proclaim Queen Victoria the Empress of India, where he explores the logics and forms of Indian society precisely as he elaborates the cultural constitution and historical transformation of rituals and symbols of colonial authority and imperial power.²² Yet, it is also the case that Cohn came to increasingly recognize colonial cultures of rule as fundamentally restructuring Indian society. Together, in essays written after the 1980s on themes as diverse as colonial usages of language, the law, and clothing, Cohn focused on wide-ranging dynamics between knowledge and power and the colonizer and the colonized.²³ Cohn wrote two playful and provocative programmatic pieces charting the relationship between history and anthropology, which saw him at home in both these disciplines.²⁴ These garnered wide circulation, much as Evans-Pritchard’s reflections on the theme had found a generation earlier. At the same time, it is in the entire body of Cohn’s work that we find the several signposts and emergent formations of historical anthropology.

This is all the more true since Cohn’s studies were frequently followed and sometimes accompanied by the work of other scholars on related questions, especially his students. Of course, such inquiries were often also influenced by other scholarly tendencies.²⁵ Nonetheless, they can all be seen as articulating a wider set of issues that had been brought to the fore by Cohn’s writing, teaching, and supervision.²⁶ Here is to be found scholarship explicitly yet variously based on conjunctions between anthropology and history: from the study of patterns of social and economic transformation across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in a single village in the Punjab through to explorations of the historical structure of local-level political groupings and their interactions with state governmental machinery in parts of northern India;²⁷ and from discussions of worlds of temples across time through to an

“ethnohistory” of a “little kingdom,” each of these works rethinking caste and kingship by focusing on royal and godly honors, favors, and services, including processes of their redistribution, which were constitutive of differential groups, ranks, and identities.²⁸ These departures were accompanied by other studies that also combined anthropology and history as part of distinct scholarly traditions. Such scholarship elaborated questions of sect, caste, and their transformations,²⁹ configurations of kinship and kingship in South India,³⁰ and the ideological nature of official and ethnographic (colonial) representations of India.³¹

Apprentice engagements

Unsurprisingly, for my PhD at the University of Cambridge and the book based on it, I sought out a dialogue between subaltern studies, historical anthropology, and the “everyday” as a critical perspective as I continued to research the Satnamis.³² Now, various critical encounters and contingent entanglements – in the archive, the field, the library, and elsewhere – pointed me to the immense power encoded in the signs and symbols, metaphors and mappings, and practices and persuasions of the government and the state. Such authority crucially structured imaginings and endeavors of subaltern and community. These emphases ran counter to the central problematic that variously ran through subaltern studies. Two quick important illustrative examples should suffice.

Dipesh Chakrabarty’s salient study of jute mill workers in eastern India issued an invitation for a critical understanding of the everyday experience of hierarchical relations in order to attend to forms of culture and consciousness, which were “the ‘unthought’ of Indian Marxism.” This was the central question for the writing of working-class history in South Asian society where the assumptions of a hegemonic bourgeois culture did not apply. Nonetheless, Chakrabarty ended up exploring the culture and consciousness of Calcutta jute mill workers through innately *a priori* attributes entailing “strong primordial loyalties of community, language, religion, caste, and kinship,” principally homeostatic features of a precapitalist society.³³ Similarly, Gyanendra Pandey’s

sustained critique of the construction of the colonial sociology of “communalism” seized upon community – defined quite simply as “Indian society beyond the confines of the state” – as the sign of alterity and difference, a sign that served to interrogate dominant knowledge(s) of colony, nation, state, and history.³⁴ Here, precisely by holding the two apart, the presence of difference/community was read as opposing formations of power/state. This served to uncertainly upbraid and uphold an exclusive historical temporality, exactly through acute expressions of segregated spaces of community/difference and state/power, with the former taking epistemological and ethical priority over the latter.

Against the grain of such influential emphases, my work tracked the entanglements between community/subaltern/difference and state/dominance/power in at least four overlapping ways.³⁵ First, the very making of the Satnami caste-sect endeavor was shaped by these enmeshed dynamics of meaning and power, which articulated and interrogated the interweaving of divine, ritual, social, and governmental hierarchies, as well as their attendant temporal and spatial matrices. Second, at stake were the ways in which the patterns of power within arrangements of caste involved the formative braiding of pervasive protocols of authority, at once substantive and symbolic, turning on ritual purity and pollution, cultural kingship and dominant castes, and colonial governance and law. Third, the historical conceptions of the Satnamis – embodied in their mythic and other representations – arrived at distinct spaces of sect/caste and novel temporalities of order/legality by negotiating and querying figures of dominance, which orchestrated the necessarily enmeshed “cosmic” and “social” worlds. Fourth and finally, these orientations toward authority and alterity found different but overlapping expressions as part of Satnami organizational endeavors within Indian nationalism, especially as I sieved middle-class presumptions through subaltern imaginaries in these arenas, thereby revealing alternative glimmers of legality and legitimacy, politics and nation(s).³⁶

At the core of my research, then, lay the incessant interpenetration between constitutive aspects of state/governmental power and quotidian forms of subaltern/community life. These enmeshments straddled

and scrambled a singular hierarchical temporality and its attendant antinomian spaces. It is exactly such entanglements that were frequently kept at a distance in the anthropology and history of South Asia, as witnessed in important work on the subcontinent. At issue were pervasive procedures of the spatialization of time and the temporalization of space, which served to split apart subaltern and state, community and history, tradition and modernity, and emotion and reason as embodying separate spaces through the assumption of an exclusive temporality. At the same time, it is once more the case that none of this appeared to me as a blazing revelation. Rather, these intimations unfolded little by little, bit by bit.

Here, a crucial role has been played by a project on evangelical entanglements in imperial India, which had found its first intimations at the time of my PhD – when I conducted archival work in missionary archives in the US (and Britain) – and which became my first postdoctoral research endeavor, a month after I had submitted my doctoral dissertation. This is a study of American evangelical missionaries and their Indian Christian converts in colonial and independent India. Combining archival and field research, ethnographic and historical perspectives – that are further conjoined with considerations of social theory – the aim of the endeavor is at least threefold. First, it discusses the interleaving of evangelical activities and converts' practices with formations of caste-sect and the dynamics of village life. The contentious enmeshments shaped the mission project and a vernacular Christianity. Second, the endeavor considers the conjunctions and contradictions between the mission project and imperial power, evangelical initiatives and "home" congregations, and a vernacular Christianity and colonial cultures. Such fraught linkages underlay critical articulations of modernity, evangelism, and empire. Third and finally, the study explores wide-ranging expressions of community and nation in the wake of conversion. These underscore controversial issues of the "majority" and the "minority" politics and religion, and the citizen and the convert, especially in independent India. These processes each appear molded by distinctions of gender and caste, race and community.³⁷

If this is how the study has developed over the last two decades, it is also the case that from its very beginnings my concerns stood at odds with much scholarship on South Asia, including especially the uneasy demarcations of time and space in subaltern studies. Consider now my emphases concerning the acute entanglements between missionary and convert, colonizer and colonized, the dominant and the subaltern, colonial cultures and vernacular Christianity, empire and modernity, and power and difference, shored up by overlapping yet heterogeneous articulations of time and space. Away from the mutual constitution of these critical copulas by their constitutive elements as well as each other, the work of subaltern studies principally rested on keeping the segments apart, bringing into play temporal-spatial demarcations, as the following examples illustrate.

To begin with, we have noted that Ranajit Guha (and subaltern studies at large) presented the nineteenth-century subaltern insurgent as temporally coeval with British colonialism on the subcontinent. Although at once undercut by uncertain temporal-spatial demarcations of the South Asian peasant, the analytical measure principally intimated the possibilities of approaching the subaltern in imperial (and independent) India as a subject of modernity, and consequently of understanding modernity itself in newer ways. But this did not come to pass. Only a few years later, Guha made a case for “dominance without hegemony” in colonial India, positing an archetype of bourgeois hegemony where persuasion outweighs coercion in the composition of its dominance.³⁸ On offer was the classic prototype of the hegemonic liberal state representing a revolutionary bourgeoisie and democratic politics in metropolitan Britain, against which stood the hapless instance of dominance without hegemony in colonial India.

Shaped by immaculate assumptions of a vigorous democratic culture and a vital liberal politics of the modern West, Guha’s analytics rendered the central historical narrative of power on the subcontinent under colonial rule as one of failure and lack.³⁹ Evacuated of their own particularity, the meaning of these pasts of dominance inhered innately in their ever lagging behind the time and space of Europe. In these teleological projections of colonial pasts and metropolitan histories,

the incomplete transitions of the former appeared routinely measured against the fulsome trajectories of the latter, so that each shored up the other. At stake here are articulations of an exclusive hierarchical temporality that spatially segregates Britain and India, the empire and its outpost, the West and the Rest.⁴⁰ Put simply, all of this was quite contrary to my attempts to explore the common constitution and reciprocal labor of modernity and colonialism in the metropolis and the margins, as well as the orientations to the temporal, the spatial, and their enmeshments intimated by these emphases.

This brings me to the second example. Partha Chatterjee's influential book, *The Nation and its Fragments*, critically locates forms of community within regimes of modernity, rather than reifying these as "pre-modern remnants that an absent-minded Enlightenment forgot to erase."⁴¹ (This is a fact often overlooked in careless readings of the work.) The move makes it possible for Chatterjee to construe forceful readings that think through the categories of the state and civil society, while equally allowing him to suggest other imaginings of community, nation(s), and modernity. At the same time, it is also the case that such possibilities in Chatterjee's work are at once upheld *and* undercut by two measures: first, the sharp separation that he sets up between state and community, which totally brackets any interchange between symbols of state and contours of community; second, his remarkable assertion that "by its very nature, the idea of community marks a limit to the realm of disciplinary power."⁴² Taken together, in *The Nation and its Fragments* the precise glimmers of newer orientations to modernity and community cannot be separated from the work's postulations regarding the potential of modernity as being realized through the virtue of community, which insinuates a pure difference, an unsullied alterity.

To learn from both the possibilities and the problems of the work requires at least two measures. On the one hand, it is imperative to attend to Chatterjee's implicit interrogation of an exclusive modernity, centered on state and capital, as exhausting all modern imaginaries and actions. This is a critique conducted in the name of community, but one that has rather wider implications. On the other, it is crucial to register that the work's assertion of a single historical time of community and

state is principally a narrative ruse, a temporal placeholder for political modernity that is then filled with two competing storylines. Here, saliently, community/difference is premised upon an epistemological and ethical *priority and precedence* over capital/power: at their core, these contending categories insinuate sharply separate essences, distinct spatial-temporal loci.

Journeymen entanglements

Actually, several of these concerns were gradually clarified on my joining the faculty of the Center of Asian and African Studies at El Colegio de México and moving to live in Mexico City from the mid-1990s. Here, an overlapping yet distinct set of concerns now equally came to the fore. I soon realized that in Latin American worlds, Asia and Africa were filtered through rather particular, somewhat peculiar, optics of space and time. This was true of everyday arenas and scholarly spaces. With (mestizo) Latin America uncertainly yet readily poised in the likeness of a reified modern West, Africa's and Asia's cultural/spatial difference and temporal/social otherness, working in tandem, signified a mark of enchantment, *algo bello* (something beautiful); but their political-economic backwardness, entailing a time lag, also embodied a historical holdup, a lack of modernity, a temporal social-spatial inferiority, *algo feo* (something ugly). Thinking through these simultaneous spatial/temporal distinctions, I engaged scholarship on the coloniality/decoloniality of power as well as a range of other vital writing on/from the south of the Rio Grande. Indeed, as I worked toward juxtaposing and connecting critical understandings of Latin America and South Asia, especially in teaching, it was modernity and its multiple linkages with the Enlightenment and empire, reason and race, and colonies (settler and non-settler) and nations that emerged as apposite arenas of conversation.

Questions of colonialism have been apprehended in Latin America as occupying a dim and distant past. After two centuries of formal freedom, modernity is ever understood as an attribute of the

independent nation, unconnected with empire, which is a far-off time, a strange space, an all-but-forgotten episode and entity, except among specialist scholars. At the same time, it soon became equally evident that, following a Baroque aesthetic, the pasts of the colonial quotidian are also often presented in these terrains in celebratory ways, such that markers of space represent the triumph of history, conjoining it with the here and now. Thus Coyoacán, the sixteenth-century *colonia* (neighborhood) where we live, has frequently been joyously described to us by delighted well-wishers as being, well, “muy colonial [very colonial].”

Against these dominant dispositions, an important body of critical thought on Latin America has focused on the subterranean schemes, the pervasive presumptions, and the overwrought apparitions of the modern and the colonial.⁴³ This corpus takes as its starting point the first modernity of Southern Europe – as held together by the Renaissance, the conquest of the “New World,” and the empires of Spain and Portugal – in the margins and the metropolis. It thereby critically considers the place and presence of colonial stipulations of power within modern provisions of knowledge. The writings no less work their way through the second modernity of the Global North, constituted by empires of the Enlightenment and thereafter, holding up a mirror to modernity as a deeply ideological project and a primary apparatus of domination, in the past, present, and posterity. Here, the recursive possibility of secular-messianic redemption often appears as an exclusive future horizon.⁴⁴

Now, these emphases have formidably foregrounded the Eurocentric propensities and epistemic violence of modernity that is already/always colonial, further underscoring the importance of other forms of gnosis and knowing that reveal horizons other than those of the dominant Western modern.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the unraveling by these writings of the “coloniality of power” and “decoloniality of knowledge” is founded on presumptions of the innately dystopian nature of the former and the ethically utopian possibilities of the latter.⁴⁶ These carry profoundly temporal and spatial implications. I shall base my discussion around the arguments and implications of the Argentine philosopher,

Enrique Dussel, in order to unravel the emphases of the coloniality/decoloniality perspective, turning on space and time.

Crucial for Dussel are the writings of Emmanuel Levinas concerning ethics, alterity, and exteriority.⁴⁷ For Levinas, as is generally known, the “other” is a constitutive haunting presence which relationally reveals the limits and horizons of “self,” such that “ethics [was] the first philosophy” rather than epistemology or, say, the Heideggerian ontology of “Being.”⁴⁸ Now, Dussel transforms these innately emergent, necessarily nonempirical attributes of the ethical “encounter between the Same and what forever remains exterior to it” into split and substantialized spaces with concrete geopolitical, factual referents, namely, Europe and Latin America.⁴⁹ In this scenario, it is not only that Latin America is ever temporally contemporaneous with Europe/Euro-America, revealing the dark side of the latter. It is also that Latin America, a unitary space that readily subsumes as well the self of the philosopher, is already/always ethically ahead of Europe, which is a space of unethical hegemony, articulating the colonial dimensions of modern power.

All of this has wide implications. To start with, Dussel’s singular split between Europe and Latin America – alongside the exclusive emphasis on the “coloniality of power” – was too pat, too ready, too tendentious. Unsurprisingly, it came to be supplanted soon by the geopolitical, spatial-moral contrast between Europe/Euro-American hegemony and the “other [or subaltern] side of colonial difference,” variously named as “trans-modernity,” “border knowledge,” and “de-colonial perspectives.”⁵⁰ At the same time, these ethically segregated entities continue to enact, within a shared historical stage, a principled drama, an endless clash between good and bad, virtue and evil, morality and immorality.

Moreover, while Dussel’s original claims concerned a supersession of phenomenology by an ethically oriented politics (recall Levinas’s proclamation of “ethics as first philosophy”), under the decolonial turn the primacy of ethics and politics means that they appear elided, implicitly and a priori, with epistemology and ontology, reading/writing and being/becoming, as ways of knowing and acting, an antidote to authority before the dystopia of power. Put differently, the “subaltern side of colonial difference” has principled precedence (and always triumphs)

over the “coloniality of power.” Here, decolonial scholars not only take the side of but are *already the same as* critical bearers of subjugated knowledge(s), all inhabitants of geopolitical margins.

Finally, the logics of such segregated spaces in these understandings orchestrate time and temporality in distinct ways. On the one hand, the temporal appears here as something of a chronological placeholder, defining the innate coevality of modernity/coloniality and its others. Saliently, such simultaneity signals discrete verities. While forms of colonialism, modernity, and nation evince juridical-political shifts and transformations, coloniality of power has innately unchanging attributes. Alongside this, the other/subaltern side of coloniality, including decolonial perspectives, might have heterogeneous manifestations, but their core logic inheres in unceasing interrogations of modernity/coloniality and heroic articulations of pluriversality/diversity. This is because decolonizing perspectives have innate, *a priori precedence* – in terms of ethics and politics, knowing and being – over modern power.⁵¹ On the other hand, time can be cast in this corpus as a category of reckoning and not of experience, attributed to “culture” and not to “nature”. Time is explicitly articulated as a central concept of the imaginary of the colonial/modern world system, entirely interwoven with the coloniality of power and the production of colonial difference.⁵² However, this querying of time as colonization, as reckoning and representation, while opening critical possibilities, nonetheless remains circumscribed through the positing of the ethical/epistemic/ontological incommensurables that were explored above. It seeks to find entirely *other* expressions of space/time rather than staying with, thinking through, their formative heterogeneity as practice and production in social worlds at large.

Put simply, I was excited by the problems proffered, but uncertain about the answers offered, by this formidable corpus.⁵³ The conjoint impulses had wider consequences. Grappling with the issues and arguments outlined above – a process of implicit unease rather than ready resolution – I realized the importance of approaching postcolonial perspectives and subaltern studies in a critical yet cautious way. From their beginnings, these understandings have been characterized by

intellectual silences and theoretical tensions which circulate amid their formative plurality.⁵⁴ Reading these writings alongside critical work on Latin America crucially brought home to me that to understand these scholarly tendencies as shaped by key contentions is far from a disparaging move. Rather, it is to actually acknowledge the conditions of possibility of subaltern studies and postcolonial perspectives. It has followed, too, that such bids to simultaneously think through their limitations and potentialities, the one braided with the other, require that these knowledge formations be considered in the manner of critical rubrics, rather than readily hypostatized as privileged perspectives and exclusive inquiries. To take these simultaneous steps has been to discover heterogeneous interpretive dispositions that bear productive articulation with other theoretical orientations, especially those offering critical considerations of time, space, disciplines, and modernity.

On the one hand, the persistent contentions of the postcolonial and the subaltern as categories and perspectives register unproductive ambiguity. Actually, this unhelpful obscurity is intimately linked to the simultaneous exclusive claims made on behalf of these knowledge formations. Apparent certainty and actual ambivalence regarding demarcations of time and space both have an important role here. Thus, as has been repeatedly emphasized by prominent postcolonial critics among others, the concept of the postcolonial has rested upon the divide between the colonial and the postcolonial.⁵⁵ Here, an entirely exclusive temporal trajectory and formidably split social spaces mutually sustain one another, such that narrative ruses of historical time lead from one totalized terrain (the colonial) to another undifferentiated arena (the postcolonial). This serves to homogenize critical difference, instate historical hierarchy, elide unequal social spaces, and sanitize postcolonial politics.

Yet there is more at stake. For, at the very moment postcolonial understandings cast the colonizer and colonized as inhabiting a common history, undoing temporal hierarchies among them, they implicitly sharply segregate the habitations of Europe, its proper space-time, from that of the colony, which is accorded an exclusive epistemic revelatory priority. And so is it also worth asking whether the charges

against subaltern studies of empirical imprecision, analytical aggrandizement, and epistemological obfuscation are not, actually, closely linked to presumptions that the perspectives constitute unified, fully finished understandings? Rather than rely on such easy assumption, is it not important to stay with and think through the constitutive limits and formative possibilities that shore up the heterogeneity, the contention, and the curious elision and expression of space and time within subaltern (and postcolonial) studies?

On the other hand, across different scholarly disciplines and diverse academic contexts, various endeavors engaging and articulating postcolonial and subaltern perspectives, broadly understood, can be cautiously read and understood as having undertaken salient tasks. To begin with, such efforts have variously rethought empire. Especially important here have been pointers to the prior and persistent play of colonial schemes in contemporary worlds. These emphases have highlighted the immense import and ongoing influence of the enmeshments between Enlightenment and empire, race and reason, the metropolis and the margins, and religion and politics. Moreover, as noted earlier, writings in this terrain have severally questioned the place of an imaginary yet palpable West as history, modernity, and destiny for each culture and every people. This has suggested newer understandings of community, history, and modernity which have challenged prior modular conceptions of these categories-entities. Finally, endeavors elaborating subaltern and postcolonial perspectives have unraveled the terms and limits of state, nation, and citizen in Western and non-Western worlds, prudently underscoring the significance of critical difference in such distinct yet entangled terrain.⁵⁶

Indeed, in taking up the tasks outlined above, the most prescient efforts have pointed to the critical place and presence not only of elite and heroic protagonists, but of marginal and subaltern subjects – simultaneously shaped by the crisscrossing matrices of gender and race, caste and class, age and office, community and sexuality – in the making of colony and modernity, empire and nation, religion and politics, and state and citizen. To register such critical developments is to cast postcolonial propositions and subaltern studies – in constant conversation

with historical anthropology and social theory – as participant interlocutors in wider ongoing debates rethinking the nation-state and the West, the colony and the post-colony, and history and modernity, including especially their socio-spatial-temporal attributes.⁵⁷

Some of what I have been saying about reading for possibilities and limitations of critical understandings – including decolonial, postcolonial, and subaltern perspectives – can be clarified by considering the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty which offers salient reflections on history and modernity, articulating questions of space and time. To begin with, he has imaginatively raised key questions concerning the presence of Europe in the writing of history. Carefully constructing his arguments against the backdrop of Heidegger's interrogation of the artifice of a meaning-legislating reason, Chakrabarty has focused on "history" as a discourse that is produced at the institutional sites of academe, making a compelling case for the ways in which Europe remains the sovereign theoretical subject of all histories. Admitting that "Europe" and "India" are "hyper-real" terms that refer to certain figures of the imagination, Chakrabarty critically points toward how – in the "phenomenal world" of everyday relationships of power – Europe stands reified and celebrated as the site and scene of the birth of the modern, working as a silent referent that dominates the discourse of history. Unraveling the consequences of this routine privileging of Europe as the universal centerpiece of modernity and history, Chakrabarty reveals how the past and present of India or Mexico – indeed, of all that is not quite an imaginary yet tangible West – come to be cast in terms of irrevocable principles of failure, lack, and absence, since they are always/already measured against apparent developments in European/Euro-American arenas.⁵⁸

These are outcomes of developmental regimes of time, temporality, and history that Chakrabarty frames as "historicism": a pervasive mode of thinking and manner of knowing, which appears intimately implicated in social-scientific understandings and wider historical practice. Based on the principle of "secular, empty, homogeneous time," historicism has found acute articulations since the nineteenth century, when it made possible "the European domination of the world."⁵⁹ Here are

to be found, then, key queries concerning a singular yet hierarchizing time that splits social worlds into “developed” spaces and “backward” ones. Indeed, Chakrabarty further opens up questions of historical difference, revealing glimmers of heterogeneous temporal-spatial terrains through various measures: explorations of the deferral-difference of a Bengali modernity in colonial India; discussions of the time of gods and the writing of history; and avowals of the plurality of lifeworlds against an overweening historicism.⁶⁰

At the same time, it is worth considering the closures that accompany the opening up of these questions by Chakrabarty. Thus, he imaginatively attempts to “write difference into the history of our [Bengali/Indian] modernity in a mode that resists the assimilation of this history to the political imaginary of European-derived institutions … which dominate our lives.” Nonetheless, Chakrabarty ends up by replicating a priori attributes of the principal categories that lie at the heart of the “epistemic violence” he seeks to challenge and interrogate.⁶¹ This is because the gendered domains of the public and the domestic, the key concepts of personhood and the civil-political, and indeed the opposed categories of state and community, seemingly derived from a master scheme of modern history, appear as always there, already in place, under every modernity. Here is a rendering of difference *against*, *into*, and *ahead* of discipline. Exactly this manner of reading continues into Chakrabarty’s attempt to recuperate the difference of subaltern pasts (and the time of gods and spirits) in front of the discipline of minority histories (and the work of the radical historian), and in his bid to articulate the alterity of “necessarily fragmentary histories of human belonging that never constitute a one or a whole” as existing alongside yet exceeding the authority of historicism.⁶²

How are these measures connected to questions of time and space? Consider now pervasive constructivism(s), ever in the air, that project totalities and universals as principally insubstantial because they are socially constructed. Against these presumptions, Chakrabarty rightly sees totalizing universals, their disciplines and logics, as actually existing.⁶³ Yet, it warrants asking if this acceptance overlooks the making of these universals in relation to particulars, of totalities in relation to

margins, entailing processes of meaning and power, acutely producing space and time. Do these measures reading difference against, into, and ahead of discipline – bracketing their mutual fabrications and productions – result in analytically segregated spaces, whose sociopolitical attributes derive from their epistemic bases? Does Chakrabarty query the aggrandizing terms of homogeneous time yet accept the ruptures of modernity on which they are founded?

Latter-day enmeshments

As I reach the end of this personal narrative, it is time to tie together my uncertain yet insistent apprehensions of time and space, unraveled above, with issues of their usual understandings, hegemonic representations, and quotidian productions, which were broached in the [last chapter](#). Especially important in these considerations is the production of space-time within academic practice as itself a species of everyday activity.⁶⁴ Such construal through epistemological action occurs in dialogue with routine and hegemonic apprehensions of space and time quite as it articulates underlying terms of power and difference. Here, the first formations of subaltern studies were founded on dominant singular yet hierarchizing temporal and spatial representations that located (passive) subaltern groups and their governing (feudal) cultures of rule in times and spaces that lay behind those of modern politics. However, acutely interrogating the pre-political and political divide, on offer equally were instantiations of novel temporal-spatial matrices: but only once the subalterns broke through the codes that governed their passivity, since in place now were entirely autonomous expressions that were not merely coeval with, but at the cutting edge of, modern democratic politics.

Such production of time-space as part of knowledge-making activity continued through the broader opposition between community and state within subaltern studies. This was the case whether, through principally antimodernist measures, the temporal-spatial valences of modernity were inverted to find communities (and fragments) rooted

in custom as triumphing over nation-state (and history);⁶⁵ or, through recourse to Foucault's spatial-temporal distinction between prior authority and modern power, the cultures of hierarchy of Indian subalterns, grounded in custom, were shown as querying the hegemonic assumptions of historiographical discipline;⁶⁶ or, community was placed at the heart of modernity in ways in which innate virtues of community and difference became antidotes to endless aggrandizements of capital and state.⁶⁷ In each instance, the hegemonic spatial-temporal blueprints of modernity, as analytical template and chronological placeholder, were accessed yet also exceeded: community, subaltern, fragment, and difference were now accorded ethical and political priority, epistemological and interpretive precedence, over capital, state-nation, history, and power. At stake was the epistemic fabrication of space-time, insinuating an alterity ahead of authority, as part of the everyday practice of subaltern studies.

Actually, these presumptions and protocols of subaltern studies hesitantly unfolded as linked to wider dispositions to difference and power within anti- and post-foundational understandings. Quite simply, here are orientations that render power – of state, nation, empire, modernity, patriarchy, or discipline – as dystopian totality, frequently a distant enemy. Against this, on offer is the work of difference – of community, subaltern, alterity, border, and margin – as “unrecuperated particulars,” ever an antidote to depredations of dystopia.⁶⁸ Much more than formal analytics, we are in the face of structures of sensibility, tissues of sentiment, which then undergird critical orthodoxies, also underlying their distinct production of time and space in the quotidian key.⁶⁹ If the antinomies of community and state within the labor of subaltern studies provide one illustration, decolonial perspectives proffer another apposite example of such elaborations.

As was explored above, in these dispositions space stands configured in mainly bounded or relatively open ways and time can be rendered as a chiefly neutral chronological framework or a highly normative colonizing device. Yet the ethical, epistemological, political, and indeed affective force of arguments for/of decoloniality derive from the manner in which they actively produce, as image and practice, the discrete

moral locations of “the subaltern [or other] side of colonial difference” as unvaryingly ahead of – bearing principled precedence and a priori priority over – the dystopian spatial-temporal coordinates of “modernity/coloniality” that seek to overwhelm all in their wake. Indeed, as sentiment, sensibility, and spirit, the split between authority and alterity has formidable force. This means, too, that a scholar such as Dipesh Chakrabarty, having been formed once within such imaginaries, might not now subscribe to discipline as distant enemy and look beyond difference as essentially heroic, yet in practice must segregate the two. Here are to be found epistemic productions of space-time, of difference and discipline, which often actually coalesce but whose exact analytical separation allows the presence of the former to be read into/against the claims of the latter, such that formidable radical heterogeneity faces up to inescapable critical singularity.

These considerations foreground two sets of critical questions. On the one hand, what is at stake in critically exploring terms of power and dominant knowledge(s) without turning these into totalized terrain? Are attempts to pluralize power – for example, the forces of colonialism and capitalism, the stipulations of globalization and modernity – mere exercises in the empirical and conceptual refinement of these categories? Alternatively, do they also imply an “ontological turn,” not only pointing to the problem of “what entities are presupposed” by theories and worldviews, but also carefully questioning “those ‘entities’ presupposed by our typical ways of seeing and doing in the modern world”?⁷⁰ What is the place of the particular, of “details” in unravelling the determinations of power and difference?⁷¹ How are we to learn from yet reach beyond newer critical orthodoxies that render dominant categories as dystopian totalities?⁷² Put briefly, what are the terms and textures of understanding power as shaped by difference, of authority as inflected by alterity?

On the other hand, what distinctions of meaning and power come to the fore through the elaboration of tradition and community, the local and the subaltern as oppositional categories? Must such contending categories inhabit the locus of “unrecuperated particulars” as a priori antidotes to authority in the mirrors of critical understandings?⁷³ How are we to

articulate the dense sensuousness and the acute mix-ups of social life, not only to query cut-and-dried categories and modular schemes of ordering the world, but also to think through axiomatic projections of resistant difference that abound in the here and now, characterizing scholarly apprehensions and commonplace conceptions? Put simply, what is at stake in understanding the determination of difference as stamped by the productivity of power, of subaltern formations as bearing the impress of dominant designs? These questions run through *Subjects of Modernity*.

Notes

- 1 Ranajit Guha, “The prose of counter-insurgency,” in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 1–42; Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); Spivak, “Subaltern studies: deconstructing historiography”; and Rosalind O’Hanlon, “Recovering the subject: subaltern studies and histories of resistance in colonial South Asia,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 22 (1988): 189–224.
- 2 Guha, *Elementary Aspects*. Such a reading of Guha’s work on the insurgent peasant in colonial India was powerfully developed later in Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity*, especially pp. 8–14. However, Chakrabarty does not stay longer with the tensions in this work as well as in Guha’s other writings.
- 3 Guha, *Elementary Aspects*.
- 4 Saurabh Dube, “Social history of Satnamis of Chhattigarh,” unpublished MPhil dissertation (University of Delhi, 1988); some of this work was later embodied in Saurabh Dube, “Myths, symbols, and community: Satnampanth of Chhattisgarh,” in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (eds.), *Subaltern Studies VII: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 121–56.
- 5 Dube, “Social history”; Saurabh Dube, “Telling tales and trying truths: transgressions, entitlements and legalities in village disputes, late colonial central India,” *Studies in History*, 13 (1996): 171–201.

- 6 E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York, The New Press, 1993); Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1974).
- 7 Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory*; Philip Abrams, *Historical Sociology* (Shepton Mallet: Open Books, 1982).
- 8 I admit to space having been for me then a somewhat nebulous, hazy idea, except for its articulations in Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory*.
- 9 Robert Redfield, *Peasant, Society, and Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1956).
- 10 Here important work included the study of patterns of “local” history in North Indian bardic castes and their genealogical accounts, the social structure of a village in early nineteenth-century western India, and historical linkages between state formation, royal myths, and tribal integration. Not all such writings were (equally) influenced by the “great” and “little” traditions paradigm. See, respectively, Mckim Marriott, “Village structure and the Punjab government: a restatement,” *American Anthropologist*, 55 (1953): 137–43; A. M. Shah and R. G. Shroff, “The Vahivancha Barots of Gujarat: a caste of genealogists and mythographers,” in Milton Singer (ed.), *Traditional India: Structure and Change* (Philadelphia, PA: American Folklore Society, 1959), pp. 40–70; A. M. Shah, *Exploring India’s Rural Past: A Gujarat Village in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), which is based on earlier research; and Surajit Sinha, “State formation and Rajput myth in tribal central India,” *Man in India*, 42 (1962): 25–80. These emphases came to be extended in the 1970s to explorations, set in precolonial middle India, of the formations of myth, legend, and kinship in royal genealogy as well as of social structure, kingship, territory, and property in these regions. See, for example, K. S. Singh (ed.), *Tribal Situation in India* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1972), and Ravindra K. Jain, *Between History and Legend: Status and Power in Bundelkhand* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2002), which contains several essays written in the 1970s.

- 11 For a survey, see Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), ch. 1; see also Partha Chatterjee, “Introduction: history and the present,” in Partha Chatterjee and Anjan Ghosh (eds.), *History and the Present* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), pp. 1–23. In different ways, Sarkar and Chatterjee both point to the existence of social histories in vernacular idioms that have for at least a century now existed outside of the canons of professional history writing. Such issues require further examination.
- 12 It bears emphasis that since independence the developments in the study of ancient and medieval Indian history have been rich and revealing, including the more recent emphasis on “social formations” in this terrain, but only a few scholars in these fields have engaged the terms of anthropology. I discuss this issue in Dube, “Anthropology, history, historical anthropology.”
- 13 Indeed, social scientists could turn toward the historical record to explicate considerations of peasant societies and movements. See, for example, Kathleen Gough, *Rural Society in Southeast India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); D. N. Dhanagre, *Peasant Movements in India, 1920–1950* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); and Hetukar Jha, *Social Structures of Indian Villages: A Study of Rural Bihar* (New Delhi: Sage, 1991).
- 14 For example, Ravinder Kumar (ed.), *Essays on Gandhian Politics: The Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1926–1934: A Study in Imperfect Mobilization* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); David Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat: Kheda District 1917–1934* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981); and Majid Siddiqi, *Agrarian Unrest in North India: The United Provinces, 1918–22* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978).
- 15 Bernard Cohn, “The command of language and the language of command,” in Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies IV*, pp. 276–329; Veena Das, “Subaltern as perspective,” in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies VI: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 310–24; Upendra Baxi, “‘The state’s emissary’: the place of law in subaltern studies,” in Chatterjee and Pandey (eds.), *Subaltern*

Studies VII, pp. 257–64. See also Sherry Ortner, “Resistance and the problem of ethnographic refusal,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37 (1995): 173–93.

- 16 For different assessments of Cohn’s work, see Nicholas Dirks, “Foreword,” in Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. ix–xvii.; Axel, “Introduction: historical anthropology,” especially pp. 7–9; and Ranajit Guha, “Introduction,” in Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. vii–xxvi.
- 17 Cohn, *Anthropologist among the Historians*, chs. 11 and 12.
- 18 Bernard Cohn, *India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971).
- 19 Cohn, *Anthropologist among the Historians*.
- 20 Dirks, “Foreword,” p. xii.
- 21 Some among Cohn’s anthropologist colleagues working on South Asia at the University of Chicago also addressed questions of temporality and history in distinct ways. See, for instance, Ronald B. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture: A History of Caste and Clan in Middle Period Bengal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); Milton B. Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization* (New York: Praeger, 1972). See also Milton B. Singer and Bernard Cohn (eds.), *Structure and Change in Indian Society* (Chicago, IL: Aldine, 1968).
- 22 Cohn, *Anthropologist among the Historians*, ch. 23.
- 23 Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*.
- 24 Bernard Cohn, “History and anthropology: the state of play,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22 (1980): 198–221, and “Anthropology and history in the 1980s: towards a rapprochement,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 12 (1981): 227–52.
- 25 All these understandings discussed below, not unlike some of Cohn’s own writings, frequently carried echoes and resonances of dominant disciplinary notations of time and mappings of space. These require a separate discussion, which I cannot offer here. The point is that work in historical anthropology should not be seen as easily, inexorably, solving problems of the temporalization of space and the spatialization of time.

26 It is important to note that the impact of Cohn's work was equally felt in the world of historiography. Such impact can be traced from the manner in which his writings – on the census, for example – could open up specific fields of research through to the ways they served to orient wider terms of historical inquiry. Cohn, *Anthropologist among the Historians*, ch. 10; Frank F. Conlon, *A Caste in the Changing World: The Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmins, 1700–1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978).

27 Tom G. Kessinger, *Vilyatpur 1848–1968: Social and Economic Change in a North Indian Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Richard G. Fox, *Kin, Clan, Raja and Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). See also Richard G. Fox (ed.), *Realm and Region in Traditional India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1977).

28 Arjun Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, "The South Indian temple: authority, honour, and redistribution," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* [n.s.], 10 (1976): 187–211; Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). This is of course an indicative list. Other writings intimating distinct emphases and arenas include Paul Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); and Nita Kumar, *The Artisans of Banaras: Popular Culture and Identity, 1880–1986* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

29 Richard Burghart, *The Conditions of Listening: Essays on Religion, History, and Politics in India*, ed. C. J. Fuller and Jonathan Spencer (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996); Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth: The Management of Religious Experience and Identity in a North Indian Pilgrimage Centre* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988); Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and D. H. A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military*

Labour Market of Hindustan, 1450–1850 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

30 Thomas Trautmann, *Dravidian Kinship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

31 Inden, *Imagining India*.

32 Saurabh Dube, “Religion, identity and authority among the Satnamis in colonial central India,” unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Cambridge, 1992); Dube, *Untouchable Pasts*.

33 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890–1940* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. xii, 69, and *passim*.

34 Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 109 and *passim*. From a different perspective, Sandra Freitag examines the domain of “public arenas” – a coherent and consistent realm of symbolic behavior in which “community has been expressed and redefined through collective activities in public spaces” – as being in opposition to (and by implication, in its internal constitution, sealed off from) the imperial state and its institutions. Sandra B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 6 and *passim*.

35 The early 1990s were exciting times to conduct research in Cambridge, and my own work took forward some of the concerns arising from the writings of C. A. Bayly as well as profiting from conversations with Ajay Skaria on archival work and fieldwork, history and anthropology. C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Skaria’s work was later published as *Hybrid Histories*.

36 Dube, “Religion, identity, and authority”; Dube, *Untouchable Pasts*.

37 For some of my work on the subject articulating these emphases, see Dube, *Stitches on Time and After Conversion*. The wider project is embodied in Saurabh Dube, “Formations of an evangelical modernity: Christianity, conversion, colonialism, 1860–2005,” manuscript in progress; and Saurabh Dube, “Native witness: colonial writings of a vernacular Christianity,” manuscript in progress.

38 Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), ch. 1.

39 According to Guha, the lack was assiduously articulated by the bad faith of an autocratic imperial power and the ingrained limits of an ineffectual indigenous bourgeoisie.

40 It is precisely by attending to the simultaneous discourses in different tongues in Guha's writings that it becomes possible to query the notion of an implacable breach, an innate contradiction, between a modern democratic regime at home and its endless retrograde omissions in the colony – and to question as well other common assertions regarding the entirely exceptional nature of “colonial governmentality” and “colonial modernity” – in order to track instead the mutual constitution and reciprocal labor of modernity and colonialism in the metropolis and the margins.

41 Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*.

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 237–8.

43 Unsurprisingly, not long after the move to Mexico City, I attempted to initiate a dialogue with these writings as part of critical conversations between distinct perspectives from/on the south. See, for example, Saurabh Dube, Ishita Banerjee-Dube, and Edgardo Lander (eds.), *Critical Conjuncções: Foundations of Colony and Formations of Modernity*, special issue of *Nepantla: Views from South*, 3 (2002): 193–431; Saurabh Dube, Ishita Banerjee-Dube, and Walter Mignolo (eds.), *Modernidades coloniales: otros pasados, historias presentes* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2004); Saurabh Dube and Ishita Banerjee-Dube (eds.), *Unbecoming Modern: Colonialism, Modernity, Colonial Modernities* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2006).

44 This corpus is an immense one, known earlier under the rubric of (understandings of) “coloniality of power” and more recently grouped under (perspectives on) “decoloniality of knowledge.” Having linkages with prior traditions in Latin America of “dependencia” theory and “liberation theology,” in its current configurations an important presence are the works of Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, and Walter Mignolo, alongside a host of other scholars, some of whom will be cited below. While it would be an error to underplay their internal distinctions by readily folding these writings together, it is also the case that work within these perspectives often attempts to express their principal commonalities, mutual unity, rather than dwell on their differences. See, for example, Ramon Grosfoguel, “Decolonizing post-colonial studies and paradigms of political economy: transmodernity, decolonial thinking, and global coloniality”

Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World, 1, 1 (2011): 1–37. Most articles on coloniality/decoloniality in this journal, *Transmodernity*, bear out my claims above.

45 Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the Other” and the Myth of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 1995); Enrique Dussel “Europe, eurocentrism and modernity (introduction to the Frankfurt lectures),” *Boundary 2*, 20 (1993): 65–76; Mignolo, *Darker Side of the Renaissance*; Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

46 These are lingering implicit sensibilities, sometimes strikingly explicitly expressed, that course through most of the works cited below on colonial/decolonial perspectives.

47 Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987); Enrique Dussel, *Etica de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión* (Madrid: Trotta, 1998). See also Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987). In considering the relationship between Levinas and Dussel, I have found especially illuminating Silvana Rabinovich, “Alterity,” in Robert McKee Irwin and Mónica Szurmuk (eds.), *Dictionary of Latin American Cultural Studies* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), pp. 17–22; and Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*. Maldonado-Torres ethically attends to the tensions and contradictions as well as problems and possibilities in the work of both Levinas and Dussel, particularly when they are read together. Having learned from his splendid work, it should be clear that the critical affirmation that I seek intersects with, yet also departs from, Maldonado-Torres’s emphases.

48 Levinas, *Time and the Other*; Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*.

49 Dussel, *Etica de la liberación*; Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, p. 176.

50 Dussel, *Invention of the Americas*; Enrique Dussel, “Transmodernity,” in Dube, Banerjee-Dube and Lander (eds.), *Critical Conjuncions*, pp. 221–44; Aníbal Quijano, “Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad,” *Perú Indígena*, 29 (1991): 11–21; Aníbal Quijano, “La colonialidad del poder y la experiencia cultural latinoamericana,” in Roberto Briceño-León and Heinz R. Sonntag (eds.), *Pueblo, época y desarrollo: la sociología de América Latina* (Caracas: Nueva Sociedad, 1998), pp. 139–55; Aníbal Quijano

“Coloniality of power, ethnocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla*, 1 (2000): 533–80; Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*; Grosfoguel, “Decolonizing post-colonial studies”; and Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

- 51 My concern here is with the assumptions and presumptions – frequently tacit, often underenunciated – that shore up these writings.
- 52 See, for instance, Walter Mignolo, “Coloniality at large,” in Saurabh Dube (ed.), *Enchantments of Modernity: Empire, Nation, Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 67–95. See also, Walter Mignolo, “The enduring enchantment (or the epistemic privilege of modernity and where to go from here),” in Saurabh Dube (ed.), *Enduring Enchantments*, special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101 (2002): 927–54.
- 53 Some of this excitement and these possibilities are revealed by my efforts at conversations with protagonists of coloniality/decoloniality noted above.
- 54 Dube, *Stitches on Time*; Dube, “Terms that bind.”
- 55 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Ella Shohat, “Notes on the post-colonial,” in Padmini Mongia (ed.), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Arnold Publication, 1996), pp. 321–34.
- 56 As we shall see, particularly in [Chapter 5](#), all of these carry acute implications for critical considerations of modernity, time, space, and the disciplines offered by this book.
- 57 None of this is to deny the tangible tensions that abound in historical anthropology, postcolonial perspectives, and subaltern studies. For example, in these terrains approaches according analytical primacy to processes of political economy and state formation contend with orientations attributing theoretical privilege to discursive orders and representational regimes. I return to this question in [Chapter 5](#). See also, Dube, *Stitches on Time*.
- 58 Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the artifice of history: who speaks for ‘Indian’ pasts?,” *Representations*, 37 (1992): 1–26.
- 59 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.
- 60 Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The difference-deferral of a colonial modernity: public debates on domesticity in British Bengal,” in David Arnold and

David Hardiman (eds.), *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honor of Ranajit Guha* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 50–88; Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity*.

- 61 Chakrabarty, “The difference-deferral,” p. 84.
- 62 Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity*; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 255.
- 63 See Dipesh Chakrabarty and Saurabh Dube, “Presence of Europe: an interview with Dipesh Chakrabarty,” in Dube (ed.), *Postcolonial Passages*, pp. 254–62.
- 64 Needless to say, such production of space-time as part of epistemic practice can be tracked equally in relation to the tendencies in historical anthropology discussed earlier, but I defer these issues to another time, another space.
- 65 Pandey, *Construction of Communalism*; Gyanendra Pandey, “In defense of the fragment: writing about Hindu–Muslim riots in India today,” *Representations*, 37 (1992): 27–55. These dispositions bear affinities with the writings of Ashis Nandy that have expressed and endorsed anti- and counter-modern sensibilities (which have of course been a critical formative part of modernity for a very long time now). Nandy’s work has envisioned and articulated modernity (and its associated institutions and imaginings) as signaling an overweening project, constitutive of a colonization of the mind (of the colonized and the colonizer), against which have to be pitted the labors of creative difference, psychic decolonization, and resolute recuperations of critical tradition, in the past and the present. Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*; Ashis Nandy, *Traditions, Tyranny, and Utopias: Essays in the Politics of Awareness* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992); Ashis Nandy, *The Savage Freud and Other Essays on Possible and Retrievable Selves* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Ashis Nandy, *An Ambiguous Journey to the City: The Village and Other Odd Remains of the Self in the Indian Imagination* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- 66 Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History*.
- 67 Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*.
- 68 I first initiated and elaborated issues arising from such dispositions in Dube, *Stitches on Time*. They have been a critical component of my work of research, writing, and teaching ever since.

69 A distinct work that actually avows the productivity of power is a case in point. Gyan Prakash has approached modernity as an authoritative apparatus that ever engenders critical alterity. In his reading, the terms of modernity as expressed in the work of science find form and assume substance in the productivity of power of colonialism and nationalism. At the same time, content with having established the presence of alterity, Prakash barely stays any longer with the burden of such difference, particularly in the post-colony. Here, authority engenders alterity, yet such alterity intimates only an interstitial space-time whose principal logic is to be, well, *different* from the matrix of power in which it is embedded. Prakash, *Another Reason*. On the other hand, the productivity of power, including “governmentality,” finds rather distinct configurations in the recent writings of Partha Chatterjee, a testimony to the formative heterogeneity and shifting emphases of subaltern studies. See, for example, Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*.

70 Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 3–4. Consider too the move toward a “strategic practice of criticism” in Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, pp. 3–10, 17–18.

71 de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. ix.

72 I borrow this notion – and that of “unrecuperated particulars,” which follows – from John McGowan, *Postmodernism and its Critics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

73 *Ibid.*