ARCHIVE, DISCIPLINE, STATE: POWER AND KNOWLEDGE IN SOUTH ASIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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It has not been sufficiently recognized that colonialism was itself a cultural project of control. Colonial knowledge both enabled conquest and was produced by it; in certain important ways, knowledge was what colonialism was all about. Cultural forms in societies newly classified as "traditional" were reconstructed and transformed by and through this knowledge, which created new categories and oppositions between colonizers and colonized, European and Asian, modern and traditional, West and East. Ruling India through the delineation and reconstitution of systematic grammars for vernacular languages, representing India through the mastery and display of archaeological memories and religious texts, Britain set in motion transformations every bit as powerful as the better-known consequences of military and economic imperialism.[1]

As Nicholas Dirks suggests, the knowledge/power relationship has become a central preoccupation in South Asian historiography. To some extent this concern predated the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, as intellectual historians (George Bearce), historians of colonial administration (Eric Stokes, Ranajit Guha, but especially David Kopf), and anthropologists keen to unveil the colonial origins of their discipline (Bernard Cohn and Talal Asad) explored the importance of cross-cultural understandings and the relationship between information, ideology, and policy-formation in the colonial period.[2] This disparate and uneven body of literature, however, has been overshadowed by, and largely forgotten with, the emergence of numerous studies of representation and colonial knowledge since the 1980s. The production and

[1] Nicholas B. Dirks, 'Foreword' to B.S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge; the British in India* (Princeton, 1996), ix.
[2] Talal Asad ed., *Anthropology & the colonial encounter* (London, 1973); George D. Bearce, *British attitudes towards India, 1784-1858* (Oxford, 1961); Bernard S. Cohn, *An anthropologist among the historians and other essays* (Delhi, 1987); Ranajit Guha, *A rule of property for Bengal: an essay on the idea of permanent settlement* (Paris, 1963); David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal renaissance. The dynamics of Indian modernization 1773-1835* (Berkeley, 1969); and Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford, 1959).

dissemination of knowledge now stands at the centre of our understandings of the cultural encounter between Britons and South Asians, is identified as a crucial element in the function of colonial institutions, and is seen as a fundamental feature of the colonial political economy.

But this new scholarship is uneven in its focus, methodology, and epistemology. The opposition drawn by Dirks between the primacy of culture and long-established traditions of social, economic, and military history is unfortunate, yet it reflects the reality of this historiographical terrain. While some important scholars within this field, especially C. A. Bayly and Francis Robinson, have written histories of communication that draw upon the sociology of knowledge, the centrality of discourse as a problematic in South Asian history generally reflects the impact of Edward Said and the rise of the Subaltern Studies collective.[3] Said's *Orientalism* has been particularly influential as numerous scholars have extended, contested, and refined Said's arguments about European representations of its Oriental "Others" through explorations of literary representations of South Asian cultures.[4] Said's insistence on the power of representation and its complicity with European imperial enterprises has radically transformed understandings of translation, literary production, and the history of education in India. In foregrounding representation as a key aspect of imperialism, Said's work reoriented studies of empire towards the cultural encounters at the heart of colonialism, loosening the vice-like grip of Robinson and Gallagher (and their students) over the study of the imperial past.[5] Said's work provided an important stimulus for the emergence of the Subaltern Studies collective in 1982. As Partha Chatterjee reflected in a later essay: '*Orientalism* was a book which talked of things I felt I had known all along but had never found the language to formulate with clarity. Like many great books, it seemed to say for the first time what one had always wanted to say.'[6]

Although the notion of the subaltern and a particular understanding of hegemony were derived from Antonio Gramsci and provided important starting-points for the collective, Said's work has proven more influential in the long run. If *Orientalism* could be read as an important rallying cry for intellectual decolonisation, Said's work also provided an important conduit for the introduction of Michel Foucault's visions of discourse and the related knowledge/power relationship. Even though the collective continued its theory eclecticism, from the mid-1980s Foucault's imprint became more explicit, as Bernard Cohn elaborated a Foucauldian analysis of the linguistic project of the East India Company, David Arnold's studies of medicine and famine explored

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[3] C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information. Intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge, 1996); Francis Robinson, 'Technology and religious change: Islam and the impact of print', *Modern Asian Studies* 27 (1993), 229-251 and 'Ottomans – Safavids – Mughals: shared knowledge and connective systems', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 8 (1997), 151-184.
[4] The most important entrance point into this literature is Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford, 1990).
[5] Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: the official mind of imperialism* (London, 1963); Wm. Roger Louis, *Imperialism: the Robinson and Gallagher controversy* (New York, 1976).
[6] Partha Chatterjee, '"Own Words". An essay for Edward Said', *Edward Said: a critical reader* Michael Sprinker ed., (Oxford, 1992), 194.

the Foucauldian problematic of bio-power and, most recently, Gyan Prakash examined the interface between colonial science and another Foucauldian concept, governmentality.[7]

As we shall see, the intellectual trajectory of Subaltern Studies and the centrality of Saidian and Foucauldian approaches to the South Asian past have been highly controversial. Yet, it is important to recognize that these re-orientations have revitalized South Asian history, making it a vital, influential field of historical study. The innovative nature of the Subaltern project and the influence of South Asian intellectuals has placed South Asia, especially India, and particularly Bengal, at the heart of important global intellectual networks and has given South Asian history a cachet it did not enjoy two decades ago.

Each of the terms in my title - archive, state, discipline - have emerged as 'key words' within this transformed and fluid intellectual terrain. Each has a double significance for South Asian historical writing: as well as being important problematics for the analysis of the South Asian past, they are also key sites for reflection about the practice of history. This essay examines these debates, mapping the contours of recent South Asian historiography, highlighting areas of consensus and delineating important analytical fault-lines. The essay begins with a consideration of the relationship between colonialism and the archive, focusing on important recent works by Matthew Edney, Cohn, Bayly, and Eugene Irschick. From this starting-point, I explore the silences and absences within the colonial archive, questions that are of central concern to historians of gender who have grappled with the possibility of recovering female voices and subjectivities from thin and scattered records. As I argue, this critical awareness of the limits of the archive raises fundamental questions about the role of historical writing under colonialism. An awareness of the discipline's complicity with the colonial project, as well as a rejection of the elitist sensibility of nationalist histories, has necessitated a reappraisal of the practice of history in this post-colonial era. Here I explore one particularly imaginative rethinking of history; Ajay Skaria's innovative work on the Dangi eschews the temporal norms and analytical apparatus of post-Enlightenment history. In light of Skaria's radical revisioning of history, this essay concludes by examining recent attempts to defend history as a discipline in the face of these critiques. Such debates illustrate how far South Asian historiography has been transformed over the last two decades and underscore the intellectual and political stakes involved in writing South Asian history today.

The Archive and the Rise of the Colonial State

The relationship between the colonial state and its archives – repositories of cartographic, linguistic, ethnological, ethnographic, religious, economic and

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[7] Bernard S. Cohn, 'The command of language and the language of command', *Subaltern Studies IV* Ranajit Guha ed., (Delhi, 1985), 276-329 {hereafter *SS*}; David Arnold, *Colonizing the body: state medicine and epidemic disease in nineteenth-century India* (Berkeley, 1993) and *Police power and colonial rule: Madras, 1859-1947* (Delhi, 1986); Gyan Prakash, *Another reason: science and the imagination of modern India* (Princeton, 1999).

historical knowledge in various forms – has come to provide a crucial window into the construction of British dominance. As we shall see, many historians of colonial South Asia no longer see the archive as a store of transparent sources from which histories that recover a total image of the South Asian past might be assembled. Rather it is imagined as an important site of power, a dense but uneven body of knowledge scarred by the struggles and violence of the colonial past. As Spivak emphasized some fifteen years ago, the archive of colonialism was itself the product of the 'commercial/territorial interest of the East India Company'.[8] At a fundamental level, this shift in understanding of the archive also reflects a growing awareness of its symbolic power, as we are increasingly sensitive not only to its central role in the day-to-day paperwork that drove the wheels of empire, but also the power of the imperial fantasy of the total archive: the dream that world-mastery might come about through documentation, the construction of an empire of knowledge based on the pen rather than the sword.[9]

If, at one level, this concern with the archive reflects the growing influence of Foucault's notion of the knowledge/power problematic within South Asian historiography, it is also a product of what we might term a 'statist turn' in recent reflections upon the South Asian past. This concern with the history of the state in South Asia has been driven both by historians of Britain and its empire as well as the Subaltern Studies collective, a common analytical interest that is masked by the hostile exchanges between these two 'schools'. Within British history much recent attention has been directed towards the emergence of the military-fiscal state from the seventeenth century, a revisionist reading of the British past which has emphasized the state's coercive power and its rapid expansion and militarization prior to the Napoleonic wars. What this work suggests is that the colonial state in South Asia can fruitfully be located against a broader backdrop of the emerging military-fiscal state, undermining an older vision of the colonial state as the *ad hoc* product of the Company's trading interests and political expediency.[10]

Edney's *Mapping an Empire* provides rich insights into the role of the military in knowledge production and the transformative power of the colonial state.[11] Edney's spatial history traces the British surveys of India from 1765 (when the Company became *diwan* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa) and the Company state's use of this cartographic knowledge to frame a new and increasingly coherent image of India. In part because of the consolidation of Mughal power over the bulk of the region, the British moved away from older conceptualisations of Asia inherited from Ptolemaic and Renaissance

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[8] Gayatri Charkavorty Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: an essay in reading the archives', *History and Theory* 24 (1985), 263.

[9] Thomas Richards, *The Imperial archive: knowledge and the fantasy of Empire* (London, 1993).

[10] On colonialism and the military-fiscal state see C.A. Bayly, *Imperial meridian. The British Empire and the world 1780-1830* (London, 1989); Douglas M. Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon: colonial armies and the garrison state in India 1819-1835* (London, 1995).

[11] Edney reminds us that '[m]ilitary reformers of the later 1700s positioned mapmaking at the core of "military science".' Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an empire: the geographical construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago, 1997), 18. Also see Matthew H. Edney, 'British military education, mapmaking, and military mapmindedness in the later Enlightenment', *Cartographic Journal* 31 (1994), 14-20.

geography to view the whole 'subcontinent' as 'India'. But, as Edney shows, this new image of India was only consolidated, elaborated, and endlessly reproduced with the rise of the Company as a territorial power. Maps produced by James Rennell and other military surveyors and Company cartographers excised Southeast Asia, Afghanistan, and Central Asia to focus solely on 'India'. Edney suggests that with this shift in representational practice 'Modern India was born'.[12] Moreover, in framing India's 'national boundaries', this new cartographic conception both reflected and reinforced the Company's ambitions to extend its power beyond coastal entrepots to operate throughout India. As the region was reframed, the Company worked hard to legitimate the superiority of European cartography: its 'scientistic ideology' simultaneously disputed the value of South Asian geographical knowledge and disseminated new European spatial and disciplinary models. Thus, mapping was not only at the heart of the Company's political and economic power in South Asia, but also was a crucial element in its drive to 'rationalise' and 'modernise' the 'native mind'. [13]

Edney's arguments about the power of state-generated knowledges can be contextualised against a broader picture of colonial knowledge production that has emerged since the mid-1990s. In fact, Edney's work on cartography can be read as a more extensive exploration of the 'survey modality' identified by Bernard Cohn as one of six 'modalities' (along with historiographic, observational/travel, enumerative, museological and surveillance) fashioned by the colonial state to ensure its mastery over its Indian subjects. For Cohn, the colonial state marked a fundamental rupture within the South Asian past; its rise enacted a shift from a pre-modern and indigenous 'theater of power' to a series of '"officializing" procedures' that European states and their colonial projections used to extend their power over their new domains.[14] In a series of wide ranging essays, many of them drawing upon his earlier work on the bureaucracy of the Indian Civil Service and his research upon the social history the mid-Gangetic valley (especially Banaras), Cohn's *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge* highlights the increasingly organized and rigid view that the colonial state developed of South Asian culture and history. In numerous domains, from diplomatic ritual to the composition of grammars, from the working of the colonial legal system to curatorial practice, Cohn argues that the British 'constantly followed the same logic; they reduced vastly complex codes and their associated meanings to a few metonyms.'[15] For Cohn, this simplification and essentialization was the key play of imperial power: in short, India's colonisation was enacted through its intellectual and cultural objectification.

C.A. Bayly's monograph *Empire and information*, which appeared in the same year as Cohn's work, emphasises the dynamics of information-gathering and dissemination in the rise of the British in South Asia (whether through military surveys, spying, the rise of print capitalism, or the publication of 'useful knowledge' in vernacular languages). Although Bayly

[12] Edney, *Mapping an empire*, 9.
[13] Ibid., 309-18.
[14] Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge: the British in India* (Princeton, 1996), 3.
[15] Ibid., 162

acknowledges the importance of Cohn's earlier work on the Company state, fundamental differences underlie Cohn's *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* and Bayly's *Empire and information.* Where both Foucault and the Subaltern project imprint Cohn's later work, Manuel Castells's model of the 'informational city' and Harold Innis's pioneering work on empire and communications shape the interpretative framework of *Empire and information.*[16] These influences lead Bayly to cast his study as a work on 'social communication' rather than as a post-Foucauldian analysis of 'knowledge'. This sociological inflection is manifest in Bayly's greater interest in knowledge communities and communication networks than in representation or discourse: although this embeds knowledge production within social, institutional, and technological change, unfortunately it also allows Bayly to avoid any sustained engagement with Saidian or Foucauldian models of knowledge production.

Empire and information must also be read within the context of Bayly's earlier work on north Indian commercial culture in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[17] Just as his studies of merchants and bazaars played a central role in undercutting older understandings of Mughal decay, *Empire and information* delineates a new vision of the cultural and political terrain of the late Mughal period. Bayly suggests that the Mughals fashioned an effective and flexible 'information order', one that ensured a steady flow of knowledge from regional kingdoms, satellite states, and rival courts to the imperial centre without becoming excessively centralized or autocratic. Bayly argues that the consolidation of the British colonial state was, in large part, the story of their ability to 'turn' this Mughal system and fashion new and increasingly dense information-gathering networks in the South Asian countryside. This project was never complete, as notable military failures in Nepal and Burma revealed, and the British constantly worried about the limitations of their archive, succumbing to 'information panics' in periods of rapid social and political change (such as the rebellion of 1857).

In contrast to Cohn, who emphasises the hegemonic power of the colonial state, Bayly insists on the ability of South Asian groups, especially scribal elites, to negotiate positions for themselves within this increasingly commercialised 'information-order' and emphasizes important elements of continuity between the pre-colonial and the colonial periods. *Empire and information* presents a image of South Asia where knowledge, or at least information, remains at the centre of our understandings of the colonial period, but its position, like that of the colonial state itself, is much more fragile and open to contestation. Moreover, where Cohn's interest is firmly fixed on Britain's relationship with South Asia, Bayly's work has exhibited a consistent interest in South Asia's location in the global frameworks of empires, whether Muslim or British.[18]

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[16] Harold Innis, *Empire and communications* (Oxford, 1950); Manuel Castells, *The informational city: information technology, economic restructuring, and the urban-regional process* (Oxford, 1989).
[17] Bayly, *Empire and information* cf. C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, townsmen and bazaars: north Indian society in the age of British expansion 1770-1870*(Cambridge, 1983).
[18] E.g. Bayly, *Imperial meridian,* 16-74 and 'India and West Asia, c. 1700-1830', *Asian Affairs* 19 (1988), 3-19.

Empire and information also sees Bayly move towards an emphasis on the 'dialogic' construction of colonial knowledge, gesturing towards the importance of Eugene Irschick's work on land tenure in the Madras hinterland. Irschick's *Dialogue and History* draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the dialogic construction of texts to stress the hybrid and dynamic nature of colonial knowledge. Irschick argues that social meaning was composed through 'a negotiated, heteroglot construction shaped by both weak and strong, the colonized and colonizer, from the present to the past.'[19] He warns that 'we can no longer presume' that British understandings of India were the 'product of an "imposition" by the hegemonic colonial power onto a mindless and subordinate society.'[20] This insistence on the agency of indigenous groups and the importance of indigenous languages and mentalities chafes against both the Foucauldian emphasis on state power and undercuts Said's insistence on the hegemonic power of European representations, restoring the voices of at least some of Europe's "Others". Local aspirations and British policy were in a constant dialogue; a dynamic process of exchange where claim and counter-claim led each interest group to modify its position almost constantly. Saurabh Dube's study of the Satnamis of central India affirms this approach, stressing the dynamism and fluidity of identity within a colonial context. Dube argues that the Satnami past cannot be read as a simple clash between 'timeless tradition' and colonial modernity. Rather, he argues that 'the symbols and practices of imperial rule offered a pool of resources that were deployed in selective, diverse, and even conflicting ways by the Satnamis to redefine identities, construct traditions, fashion legalities, and define pathologies within the community, and to thus participate in the construction of a colonial modernity.'[21]

It is, of course, important to recognize the material, cultural, and political constraints that increasingly impinged on the ability of South Asians to shape such dialogic processes: caste-identities, material conditions, gender, literacy, and the textualisation of indigenous traditions (which disembodied knowledge and slowly marginalized native "informants") were crucial forces in determining the ability of individuals and communities to mould the outcomes of these cross-cultural encounters. In light of these power discrepancies and the centrality of knowledge in the consolidation of colonial authority, the archive has become deeply problematic; the manuscript collections, Parliamentary Papers, court records, periodicals and newspapers used by historians of South Asians are not simply documents that allow us to access the colonial past, but rather were constitutive of the multiple inequalities of that past. This recognition of the archive as both the product of the uneven dialogics of the colonial encounter and a space where the conceptual schemas of colonialism were worked out and frameworks for imperial 'education', 'improvement', and 'government' were elaborated, raises fundamental questions about historical scholarship. If this is the nature of the archive of colonialism, how must it be read? Given its centrality to the colonial project,

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[19] Eugene F. Irschick, *Dialogue and history: constructing South India, 1795-1895* (Berkeley, 1994), 10.
[20] Ibid., 8.
[21] Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable pasts: religion, identity, and power among a central Indian community, 1780-1950* (Albany, NY, 1998), 17-8.

what colonial perspectives are foregrounded, which groups are privileged? More importantly, what are its exclusions, whose voices are silenced, which groups and individuals are reduced to fleeting traces and isolated textual fragments?

Gender and the Archive

These questions are particularly pressing for historians committed to documenting the experiences of South Asian women and the dynamics of gender construction and performance. The colonial archive itself was heavily gendered; not only was the bureaucratic machinery of empire overwhelming male, but most of the texts produced by South Asians were written by those indigenous male experts, scribal professionals, and text-book authors recognized and supported by the colonial state. In effect, the dialogic construction of colonial archives was the product of the negotiations between British and indigenous males: the most striking unevenness of the archives of empire is their gendered nature and the relative absence of female-produced texts. Beyond the confines of the state, the marginalisation of women in pre-colonial political life and textual production, together with highly gendered pattern of literacy over the long sweep of South Asian history has compounded the privileging of male voices in the historical record.

Thus female voices, restricted within the cultural terrain of pre-colonial social systems, stifled by both the colonial state and the power of patriarchy, are difficult, and some would say even impossible, to recover. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has argued, the search for South Asian women's subjectivities in the archive is analogous to being 'in the shadow of shadows'.[22] In her important essay, the 'Rani of Sirmur', Spivak is critical of Foucault's belief that oppressed subjects were able to speak, to articulate their subjectivity. Spivak asserts that this position is untenable within a context of colonialism and especially within the context of a heavily gendered colonialism saturated by masculinized ideologies. As Spivak shows, the Rani of Sirmur, the wife of the ruler of a small hill-state in what is now Himachal Pradesh, emerges in the colonial archives 'only when she is needed in the space of imperial production'. As the expanding Company state attempted to consolidate its northern frontier in the Shimla hills, it exhibited a strong interest in the political structure and courtly politics of those states on its borders. It is within this political and diplomatic framework, where the Company attempted to pacify and subordinate the hill-states through their "Settlement", that the Rani appears briefly in the Company's archives as 'a king's wife and a weaker vessel.'[23] Spivak elaborated this vision of the 'shadowy' nature of the archive in her seminal article 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' which rejected the possibility of recovering subaltern mentalities and subjectivities in general, but especially those of the 'female subalterns'.[24]

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[22] Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur', 265.
[23] Ibid., 266, 270.
[24] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?', *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg eds., (Urbana, 1988), 271-313.

While Spivak's work was crucial in highlighting the primacy of gender in determining the space of the colonial archives, her vision of colonial authority is too totalising. Lata Mani's exploration of gendered forms of alterity through an examination of sati presents a more nuanced view of agency and the archive. While Mani acknowledges the importance of Spivak's argument, reading within the context of the 'multiple determinations of archival sources', she guards against seeing Spivak's argument as 'conclusions about colonial discourse in general', instead using it as a starting point for an extensive rereading of contemporary accounts of sati.[25] Mani reveals the highly uneven texture of the dense archive of materials generated by evangelical missionaries, state functionaries, and indigenous male reformers surrounding this most contentious tradition. Thus, intense debates over the scriptural basis of the practice and its meaning within high-caste Hindu 'tradition' generally erased female subjectivity, as women became instead the 'ground' for debate about the nature of custom and modernity.

Although Mani's analysis follows Spivak to the extent that she makes it clear that any desire to affect a full recovery of female subjectivity is misplaced, it also suggests that a nuanced reading of colonial texts can unsettle the fundamental assumptions of male-produced eyewitness accounts of sati. Mani traces acts of resistance to the coercive techniques that often enabled the performance of sati and highlights the occasional accounts that disrupt official discourses by focusing on the physical and emotional pain inflicted upon women: these accounts compromise and even rupture key 'fictions' about sati, especially the dominant representation of it as a 'religiously inspired act of devotion to the deceased husband'.[26]

Equally importantly, Mani delineates the ways in which members of learned male indigenous elites were authorized as experts within the colonial system through debates on sati: pandits employed in the Company's legal system and Brahmanical experts were subjected to 'continual and instinctive questioning' by British authorities, and out of their competing opinions and interpretations a new synthesized vision of 'custom' was textualized and ensconced as the bedrock of colonial policy. This 'incitement to discourse' directed towards male 'authorities' must be set in contradistinction to the muffling of female voices, revealing the fundamentally gendered dynamic of British knowledge-construction and policy-making in relation to sati.[27]

If the figure of the sati embodies the disempowering work of elite discourse, whether produced by Britons or South Asians, texts written by women have not generally enjoyed the same authority as male authors working in well-established literary and nationalist traditions. As Susie Tharu and K. Lalita observe in the preface to their momentous two-volume collection *Women Writing in India*, composing a body of texts by women was a battle against the transitory nature of archives, especially ones that are so highly gendered: library holdings (that were indelibly etched by assumptions about

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[25] Lata Mani, 'Cultural theory, colonial texts: reading eyewitness accounts of widow burning', Ibid., 396. These arguments are elaborated more fully in her *Contentious Traditions: the debate on sati in colonial India* (Berkeley, 1998).
[26] Mani, 'Cultural theory, colonial texts', 403.
[27] Lata Mani, 'Production of an official discourse on *sati* in early nineteenth century Bengal', *Economic and Political Weekly* (1986), WS-37.

female literary production) were dispersed or damaged, key texts they sought were sold as 'junk' and compiling bibliographical profiles of authors was almost impossible in many cases because there 'were few biographies to draw on, little formal documentation, and almost no criticism'. Thus the key repositories for the reconstruction of South Asian women's writing lay, and no doubt continue to lie, beyond the records generated by the colonial state and its successors and outside public institutions and universities. Rich stores of women's writing, Tharu and Lalita note, are most frequently found in the private holdings of enthusiasts, personal libraries, and collections of letters and hand-written poems.

As Tharu and Laita emphasise, such archival limits necessitated an active 'reading against the grain of literary histories', required 'slipping past disciplinary gatekeepers' and encouraged an active re-envisioning of the literary canons constructed after Independence, acts that interrogated the 'imagined communities' and 'new citizens' sculpted by the nationalist tradition.[28] The resulting picture of female literary production is both culturally and chronologically uneven: their 'archive' thickens noticeably in the final two decades of the nineteenth century and although the volumes include writers from eleven languages (apart from English) - Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu – writers in Indian's national language Hindi and in Bengali (which remains the fetishized site for South Asian intellectual history) predominate. These asymmetries are not necessarily accurate reflections of shifting patterns of female literacy and literary production, but are themselves the effect of important divergences in gendered patterns of educational opportunity, material status, and 'taste' over the *longue durée* of South Asian history.

As Kamala Viswerwaran has recently observed, members of the Subaltern Studies collective have exhibited limited interest in the gendered nature of the archive and, more generally, the place of gender in the constitution of subaltern agency and consciousness. Visweswaran stresses that within the published writings of the collective, gender either 'is subsumed under the categories of caste and class, or gender is seen to mark a social group apart from other subalterns': the question of '*subaltern* women' is rarely broached.[29] In an important essay published in the same volume of *Subaltern Studies*, Ranajit Guha frames a discussion of gender and the archive within a larger exploration of the 'small voice' of the South Asian past. In reflecting on the archival base for the reconstruction of the colonial period, Guha advocates the construction of a multi-vocal history grounded in 'listening to and conversing with the myriad voices in civil society'. Attention to these 'small voices', such as those recorded in the petitions of communities of agriculturalists to their Brahman in rural Bengal, provides a greater awareness of the texture of the lived past. Most importantly, such petitions reveal the 'limitations of colonialism', the continued power of 'tradition' for communities who were increasingly subject to the power of the colonial state

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[28] Susie Tharu and K. Lalita eds., 'Preface', *Women writing in India: 600 BC to the early 20th century* (London, 1991), xviii-xxi.
[29] Kamala Visweswaran, 'Small speeches, subaltern gender: nationalist ideology and its historiography', *SS IX*, 88.

and its institutionalisation of medicine and science as the bulwarks of the colonial order.[30]

Although we must reject Guha's use of the adjective "small", which simply reinforces pernicious divisions between the "big" history of the state and the public sphere and the "small" history of women and other subordinate groups, the need to recover and reflect upon these silenced voices is pressing. Guha forcibly underlines this with a discussion of the Telangana movement, an insurgent uprising of peasants and labourers directed against the Nizam of Hyderabad and then the Government of India between 1946 and 1951.[31] Guha praises P. Sundarayya's contribution in assembling a history of this movement, but notes that his monumental account imposed a unity of purpose upon the movement, masking the conflict that surrounded the prominence of women in the actions, effectively silencing female voices.

Guha notes that a revisionist history of the movement, one that explores gender, must start with exploding this assumption of the existence of a shared perspective that transcends gender and a commitment to discarding a unitary narrative: 'If the small voice of history gets a hearing at all in some revised account of the Telangana struggle, it will do so only by interrupting the telling of the dominant version, breaking up its storyline and making a mess of its plot'.[32] Thus, Guha's realization of both the multivocality of the past and the ways in which women's voices have been elided calls the very future of 'history' into question: 'suppose there was a historiography that regarded "what the women were saying" as integral to its project, what kind of history would it write? The question is, for me, so complex and far-reaching that I can do no more than make some general observations at this stage.'[33] Gender cannot simply be accommodated into 'history', as the reconstitution of women's voices and the analytical weight attached to gender exceeds the limits of a liberal inclusive tradition, fundamentally transforming the conventions and purpose of history writing itself.

Although Guha's exploration of the gendered archive is somewhat belated in recognizing the fundamental challenge of gender history and effaces important models that were already in print by the mid-1990s, it stands as an important affirmation of gender as a central site for the re-imagining of the relationship between the archive and historical practice within the South Asian context.[34]

History as a Colonial Discipline

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[30] Ranajit Guha, 'The small voice of history', Ibid., 3-6.
[31] P. Sundarayya, *Telangana people's struggle and its lessons* (Calcutta, 1972).
[32] Guha, 'Small voice', 12.
[33] Ibid., 11
[34] He neglects the important contributions made by: Alice W. Clark, *Gender and political economy: explorations of South Asian systems* (Delhi, 1993); J. Krishnamurty ed., *Women in colonial India: essays on survival, work, and the state* (Delhi, 1989); Rosalind O'Hanlon *A comparison between women and men: Tarabai Shinde and the critique of gender relations in colonial India* (Oxford, 1994); Bharati Ray, *From the seams of history: essays on Indian women* (Delhi, 1995); and Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid eds., *Recasting women: essays in colonial history* (Delhi, 1989).

More generally, Guha's essay raises central issues about the reconstruction of the past and the ways in which interrogating the archive, and especially its gendered nature, necessitates a fundamental rethinking of history as a discipline. This project has been invested with even greater urgency with the growing imprint of Foucault on South Asian historical writing, as the construction of knowledge and the emergence of intellectual disciplines in nineteenth century India have become increasingly central in our understandings of colonialism.

Composing histories of 'colonial disciplines' - from linguistics to medicine, from anthropology to psychiatry, from literature to penology – have become central projects within South Asian history. This endeavour has overthrown the older narratives of social and intellectual history received from British colonial administrators, the British tradition of imperial history, which focused largely on local political cultures and their connections to elite politics at an all-India level, and nationalist narratives of nation making. Within these three traditions, a central narrative of progress framed historical analysis. Within the colonial tradition, it was the beneficent 'improvement' enacted by the colonial state. Within the more recent imperial tradition, it was the impact of colonial education and the growing political power of elite 'factions'. While in the nationalist tradition it was the national 'renaissance', beginning in Bengal with Raja Rammohan Roy and culminating in the attainment of independence.

This shared assumption of progress has been dismantled over the last three decades, not just by the Subaltern Studies collective but also as a result of numerous articles, theses, and monographs produced by an array of researchers writing from disparate cultural and political locations. The great 'Age of Reform' supposedly ushered in by Bentinck in the 1820s, culminating in the crusades against *sati*, *thagi*, and in the Anglicization of the educational system, now appears as a period of 'traditionalisation', where the state machinery, rather than 'native society' was the main site of meaningful reform.[35] Simultaneously, the key analytical categories inherited from the colonial state and various Orientalist traditions, especially 'caste', but also 'tribe' and 'village', have either been dismissed as fictions fashioned out of the power of the Enlightenment and the requirements of the colonial state or, perhaps more usefully, are now seen as the product of the complex re-workings and renegotiations of indigenous discursive traditions and social forms.[36] The dynamics of colonial knowledge production are not only pivotal to our analysis of colonial power relations, but also provide a central starting point for the reconsideration of our fundamental analytical categories deployed for understanding South Asia's past and present.

While burgeoning literatures explore science,[37] literary studies,[38] and medicine,[39] the discipline of history itself has assumed centre stage in these

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[35] Much of this revisionist scholarship is synthesised in C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the making of the British empire* (Cambridge, 1988).
[36] Compare, for example, Inden, *Imagining India* and Susan Bayly, *Caste, society and politics in India from the eighteenth century to the modern age* (Cambridge, 1999).
[37] In addition to Prakash, *Another reason* see Deepak Kumar, *Science and the Raj, 1857-1905* (Delhi, 1995).
[38] This literature is huge, but an important starting point is Harish Trivedi, *Colonial transactions: English literature and India* (Calcutta, 1993).

new visions of colonialism. A large and significant literature has emerged on British historical writing on India from the 1760s through to the early twentieth century. While the important contributions of early Company historians such as Dow and Orme have received limited attention, beyond a brief discussion by Metcalf and a recent dissertation by Tammita-Delgoda, the work of Scottish Orientalists has been subject to closer scrutiny.[40] An overlooked but important article by Jane Rendall mapped the interface between Orientalism and the Scottish Enlightenment, delineating the intellectual make-up and Company careers of such leading figures as John Malcolm, John Leyden, Alexander Hamilton, and John Crawfurd. Martha McLaren's work on Malcolm, the great Scottish historian William Robertson and Mountstuart Elphinstone can be fruitfully read against this backdrop, as can Majeed's study of James Mill's *History of British India*, the culmination of this Scottish philosophical history tradition.[41]

Perhaps more significantly, an important body of work has emerged on the relationship between history-writing, the Company state, and communal identities. Gyanendra Pandey's *The construction of communalism in colonial north India* highlighted the development of a particular analytical tradition within colonial history-writing that cast India's history into the mould of communalism. Pandey traces the calcification of this discourse on communalism through the official records produced by the colonial state, focusing on the creation and repetition of divergent narratives concerning a conflict in Banaras in October 1809. While all British accounts exhibited a shared concern to identify a cause for the conflict, locating its origins in the 'fanaticism' or 'irrationality' of the 'natives', details about the precise trigger for the violence and the location where the conflict began varied. Over time, the size and scale of this event were also amplified: where the earliest government records suggested that 28 or 29 were killed, by the time the 1907 District Gazetteer for Banaras was published this number had grown to 'several hundred'.[42] Pandey suggests that such historical texts produced by the colonial state were crucial in confirming a fundamental antagonism between Hindus and Muslims and fashioning a view of South Asian history that emphasized religious identity and conflict: 'This historical reconstruction was characterized…by an emptying out of all history – in terms of the specific variations of time, place, class, issue – from the political experience of the people, and the identification of religion, or religious community, as the moving force of all Indian politics.'[43] In effect, colonial policy worked to

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[39] In addition to Arnold, *Colonizing the body* see Mark Harrison, *Public health in British India: Anglo-Indian preventive medicine 1859-1914* (Cambridge, 1994).

[40] Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge, 1995), 8-10; Asoka SinhaRaja Tammita-Delgoda, '"Nabob, historian and orientalist": the life and writings of Robert Orme', (King's College London PhD, 1996).

[41] Jane Rendall, 'Scottish Orientalism: from Robertson to James Mill', *The Historical Journal* 25 (1982), 43-69; Javed Majeed, *Ungoverned imaginings: James Mill's The history of British India and orientalism* (Oxford, 1992); Martha McLaren, 'Philosophical history and the ideology of the Company state: the historical works of John Malcolm and Mountstuart Elphinstone', *Indo-British Review* 21 (1993), 130-143.

[42] Gyanendra Pandey, 'The colonial construction of 'communalism': British writings on Banaras in the nineteenth century', *SS VI*, 138-9.

[43] Ibid., 132.

reinforce the centrality of the 'religious' and to consolidate and police the boundaries of religious communities.

Although Katherine Prior has contested Pandey's interpretation in her important work on the colonial state's use of history as a guide to arbitrating in "communal conflicts", we can identify a shared awareness of the centrality of historical-consciousness in moulding British colonial ideologies: in effect the archive constituted the 'memory of the state', as its records of the pre-colonial past moulded the official mind and guided the policy making process.[44] The most sustained deconstruction of colonial traditions of history-writing is Ranajit Guha's *Dominance without hegemony*. For Guha, colonialist historiography was crucial in 'laying the foundations of the [British] raj.' During the middle part of the nineteenth century an increasingly elaborate and powerful body of historical writing was fashioned by the British. This 'colonialist knowledge' fashioned history as 'a pedestal on which the triumphs of the colonizers and their instrument, the colonial state, could be displayed to best advantage.' History as a discipline became a legitimating-machine for empire, producing, reproducing, and disseminating endless proofs of an apparently 'irreconcilable difference between colonizer and colonized.'[45] In turn, nationalists eager to reclaim South Asian identity and to construct a lineage for their vision of a nation-in-the-making 'made it [history] the ground for marking out their differences in cultural and political terms'. This clash was between two competing bourgeois visions, one colonialist and one nationalist. But beyond this struggle for political paramountcy, Guha suggests that these visions were united at a conceptual level by shared elitist understandings of culture and politics, visions that worked tirelessly to reproduce these elite values and exclude non-elite (and therefore potentially threatening) visions of the past, present, and future.[46]

Contesting "History"

One of the central and oft-repeated critiques of Guha and the Subaltern studies collective is that their practice has fallen short of its prescription: that the foregrounding of non-elite perspectives has faded from view as elite groups, but especially Bengali literary figures and nationalist ideologues, have continued to be privileged in the work of the collective. In effect, as Ramachandra Guha put it, 'Subaltern Studies' has become 'Bhadralok

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[44] Katherine Prior, 'Making history: the state's intervention in urban religious disputes in the North-West Provinces in the early nineteenth century', *Modern Asian Studies* 27 (1993), 179-203. These arguments are developed more fully in Katherine Prior, 'The British Regulation of Hinduism in North India, 1780-1900', (University of Cambridge, Ph.D. thesis, 1990). On the archive and the state see Matt K. Matsuda, *The memory of the modern* (New York, 1996).
[45] Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without hegemony: history and power in colonial India* (Cambridge Mass., 1997), 2-3.
[46] Ibid., 3. These arguments were first developed in his programmatic overview: 'On some aspects of the historiography of colonial India', *SS I*, 1-8.

Studies'.[47] In his recent *Writing Social History* Sumit Sarkar, a former member of the editorial collective, elaborates this charge to rehabilitate a Marxist-inflected social history, and, more particularly, to analyse cast in the mould of E.P. Thompson's seminal studies of the British working class as the privileged idiom for historical analysis.[48] While I share Sarkar's discomfort with the elision of the pre-colonial in the *Subaltern Studies* volumes to date, I am skeptical of the rigid opposition drawn by Sarkar between the Thompsonian tradition and recent 'cultural' approaches to the Indian past. This tidy dichotomy is misleading given that Thompson's work itself marked an important turn towards 'culture' within social history, a turn which, as Kale and Gregg have shown, ironically reinforced the excision of empire, non-metropolitan subjects and race and gender in British history.[49] Moreover, this opposition between the social and cultural is all the more ironic given the close attention to culture in Sarkar's own research. Although Sarkar does not deploy the 'thick description' characteristic of the new cultural history, his later work combines finely-textured analyses of time, cosmology, and space with a close attention to group-formation and economic change.[50] More substantively, Sarkar's claiming of Thompson for 'social history' forecloses the possibility of productive dialogues between social and cultural history and the very possibility that this divide itself might be deconstructed.

Sarkar's advocacy of a return to a British tradition of social history is all the more perplexing given the elision of empire within that tradition and the ways in which "social history" itself has worked to elide important aspects of the South Asian past.[51] Sarkar's optimistic view of social history is not shared by leading historians of Dalits and Adivasis.[52] Ajay Skaria's history of the forests and frontiers of western Indian places a critical examination of historical practice at its very core. Not only does Skaria contest the equation of history with Europe, the Enlightenment, and modernity, but his analysis offers a radically different vision of how history might be written. In exploring the *goth*s (narrative, account) of the Dangi people, he exposes the limits of the analytical categories inherited from the colonial archives which so often structure analyses of the South Asian past, and the probes the complex relationships between writing and orality, colonialism and resistance.

In mapping the divergent genres of *goth*, their very different temporal logics and truth claims, Skaria underlines the complex and overlapping narratives of the past produced within one community. But most importantly, Skaria's own work eschews the linear temporality of most professional history, adopting its structure from the temporal logic of Dangi *goth*s that divide the

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[47] Ramachandra Guha, 'Subaltern and Bhadralok studies', *Economic and Political Weekly* (1995), 2056-58.
[48] Sumit Sarkar, *Writing social history* (Delhi, 1997).
[49] R. Gregg and M. Kal, 'The empire and Mr. Thompson: the making of Indian Princes and the English working-class', *Economic & Political Weekly*. (1997), 2273-88.
[50] E.g. his essays on *Kaliyuga* in *Writing Social History*, 186-215, 282-357.
[51] Vinay Lal, 'Subaltern Studies and its critics: debates over Indian history', *History and Theory* 40 (2001), 135-148; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: deconstructing historiography', *Selected subaltern studies* Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak eds., (New York, 1988), 3-34.
[52] E.g. Kancha Ilaih, "Productive labour, consciousness and history: the Dalitbahujan alternative', *SS IX*, 165-200.

past into two distinct epochs: the *moglai* - an age of freedom and mobility - and the *mandini* – a subsequent age of restricted mobility and disempowerment. While these two epochs occasionally paralleled the common chronological division between Mughal and British India, Skaria notes that frequently these 'epochs traverse diverse chronological times, almost running parallel to each other' and frequently privilege the cultural content of events and eras rather than temporal specificity (with the *mandini*, for example, referring to 'that which is extra-Dangi in origin or intent', whether in precolonial, colonial, or post-colonial time).[53]   Skaria structures his text according to these cultural and temporal logics, but also suggests that his book can be actively reread to explore the tensions between his key sources – the Dangi oral narratives – and supplementary written texts produced by the Dangi's rivals, the British, and later nationalists. In providing this alternative trajectory (suggesting that the reader should in fact begin with chapter three, followed by chapter ten, and culminating with chapter twenty), Skaria forcibly reminds us of the contrivance of history and emphasizes the multiplicity of narratives that communicate the Dangi past: this second itinerary through his text underlines the tension between the records of the colonial archive and Dangi narratives, highlighting the 'patchy and partial' nature of elite records.[54]

Such attempts to radically re-imagine the theory and practice of the discipline, underpinned as they are by critiques of the centrality of history-writing in the colonial order, have proven contentious, as several historians have moved quickly to shore up disciplinary traditions. Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook's polemical exchange with Gyan Prakash certainly exposed important inconsistencies within the epistemology and practice of the Subaltern collective, even if such dissonance was not entirely surprising given the collective's theoretical eclecticism and its invocation of *bricolage* as an analytical strategy. While O'Hanlon and Washbrook relished exposing these epistemological tensions, the central drive of their critique was to reassert the primacy of class and the analytical power of 'social history'. This was a curious double move given the growing emphasis on the 'languages of class' in British social history and the reluctance of earlier British Marxists and social historians to engage with imperialism.[55]   More recently, Washbrook has revisited 'colonial discourse theory', again lamenting 'the shift from "social" to "cultural" history', which has meant that 'concepts of class and capital have gone missing'. Beyond important questions regarding the translatability of concepts such as 'class', this charge is hard to fathom within the South Asian context, where class, as one of many forms of alterity, has consistently stood at the forefront of the Subaltern Studies project. [56]

For Washbrook, the cultural turn not only leaves deprivation and poverty unexplained, but it is both a product and a reflection of the

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[53] Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid histories: forests, frontiers, and wildness in western India* (Delhi, 1999), 15-6, 20-5.
[54] Ibid., 17-8.
[55] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton, 2000), 11-3; Antoinette Burton, 'Who needs the nation? Interrogating British history', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 10 (1997), 227-248.
[56] David Washbrook, 'Colonial discourse theory and the historiography of the British empire', *The Oxford history of the British empire: Vol. 5: Historiography* Robin Winks ed., (Oxford, 1999), 608-9.

westernization of South Asian intellectuals. Reworking Aijaz Ahmad's and Arif Dirlik's discussions of the emergence of post-colonialism, Washbrook suggests that colonial discourse theory has allowed members of 'Third World' elite émigrés in the west to remain privileged interpreters of their homelands: in effect, post-colonialism has become 'a new mechanism of imperialism in an age of multicultural, globalized capitalism.'[57] More specifically, blind as he is to the strength of African, Australian and Pacific post-colonial traditions that have enjoyed minimal support from the American academy, Washbrook suggests that post-colonialism marks the Americanization of the humanities: its concern with culture, ethnicity, and discourse mark its fundamentally American nature.[58] The strength of the oppositions Washbrook draws between social history and cultural history, class and ethnicity, 'society' and 'culture' means that his work can be fruitfully located in a long trans-Atlantic debate over the future of the humanities. Taking a darker view, Washbrook's shoring up of British social and imperial history is not only borne out of the crisis of British identity itself but can also be read as a reassertion of the power of British intellectual traditions over its former colonies, especially India. For Washbrook, only a return to real history, a history that foregrounds older Marxist notions of class, development, and the primacy of the material, can prevent the 'Americanization' of South Asian historical writing and save its intellectual and political integrity.

Despite playing a pivotal role in fashioning a new imperial history that has revealed the constitutive role of the empire in imperial culture, both high and low, John MacKenzie's *Orientalism: history, theory and the arts* was a sustained attack against disciplinary interlopers. Although the second half of this work provides important insights into the productive engagement between European artistic traditions and the "Orient", MacKenzie opens with a stinging critique of those literary critics, art historians, and post-colonial theorists, most notably Linda Nochlin, Gauri Viswanathan and, to a lesser extent, Sara Suleri, who have embraced historical analysis without, in MacKenzie's view, following the cherished norms of disciplined practice. Without a doubt Viswanathan and Suleri make too many presumptions about the agenda of the colonial state and the hegemonic power of colonial representations. Nevertheless, they have made significant contributions to our understanding of the ideological significance of literature in South Asia and helped refocus our attention on the centrality of education and language in the colonial encounter. But for MacKenzie such insights are no compensation for inattention to the norms of professional history-writing. On the other hand, where MacKenzie exhibits some discomfort about the plausibility of Javed Majeed's analysis of James Mill and British Orientalism in the Romantic era, he expresses admiration for Majeed's careful contextualisation and historical specificity: in MacKenzie's eyes Majeed's analysis may not be entirely

[57] Aijaz Ahmad, *In theory: classes, nations, literatures* (London, 1992); Arif Dirlik, 'The Postcolonial aura, Third World criticism in the age of global capitalism', *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1994), 328-356.

[58] Washbrook, 'Colonial discourse theory', 608-9.

convincing, but at least it is a recognizable work of intellectual and literary history.[59]

It is important to emphasise that it is not only British South Asianists and imperial historians who have been fighting a rear-guard action against the cultural turn. In a recent 'postmortem' for Subaltern Studies, the American Islamist Richard Eaton has made some important points about the uneven thematic and chronological interests of the Subaltern collective. Eaton, however, attacks the 'postmodernism' of the collective, asserting the special authority and integrity of history (read 'traditional' history) as a discipline. Eaton denounces the shift towards knowledge and discourse as a move from 'a positivist and empiricist orientation to one grounded more squarely in a literary criticism that draped itself in the banner of an amorphous, obscurantist phrasing: cultural studies.'[60] Cultural studies, for Eaton, is an 'arm-chair' discipline, lacking the methodological rigour and 'traditions' of history. Eaton complains that the questioning of the archive has transformed the research basis of historical writing: 'Indeed, the 1980s and 1990s saw a sharp drop from levels of earlier decades in the number of historians who applied for support or permission to conduct research out in the *mufassal*--that is, in district archives, local libraries, private collections, zamindari records, and so forth. Most ended up in London, and a few in national or state archives in India, studying colonial records that were then subjected to discourse analysis.'[61] This rather exaggerated image of the practice of colonial discourse analysis reveals deep-seated anxieties about the discipline of history in an age of post-structuralism, post-modernism, and post-colonialism. As this essay has made clear, we can no longer imagine the archive as transparent. The 'recovery' of subjectivity, so long the staple of historical analysis, now seems an uncertain project, and we must recognize the implication of the discipline of history in colonialism. Each of these developments poses a radical challenge to the traditions of disciplinary practice defended by Eaton. Not only is Eaton's 'postmortem' premature, but it is best read as a fantasy borne out of deep seated fears about the future of history.

Conclusion: the Future of History in a Transnational Age

Indeed, it may well be history, or at least the kind of history that Eaton appeals to, that will be in danger of dying over the next two decades. If the Subaltern collective, historians of gender, and analysts of colonial discourse have besieged the discipline of late, a new and powerful intellectual force is emerging that will not only reinforce the turn to 'culture', but also will contest Eaton's invocation of the archive and the local as the basis of historical

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[59] John MacKenzie, *Orientalism: history, theory and the arts* (Manchester, 1995). MacKenzie is responding to Majeed, *Ungoverned imaginings*; Sara Suleri, *The rhetoric of English India* (Chicago, 1992); Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of conquest: literary study and British rule in India* (New York, 1989).
[60] Richard M. Eaton, '(Re)imag(in)ing Other²ness: A postmortem for the postmodern in India', *Journal of World History* 11 (2000), 60
[61] Ibid., 72.

practice. This challenge is the rise of transnationalism, which already enjoys substantial disciplinary support in anthropology, sociology, and gender studies. For history, however, the opportunities and threats offered by transnationalism are profound: its foregrounding of mobility, its emphasis on the movement of commodities, technologies, people, ideologies, and ideas across national and cultural boundaries, and its interrogation of the nation-state are at odds with many of the conventions of history, a discipline that has been nourished by the nation and its archives and where strict spatial parameters are typically imposed on research and teaching. [62] Important works on South Asia have already anticipated or gestured towards such an approach. Despite its limited attention to 'culture', the voluminous scholarship on early modern trade in the Indian Ocean world offers an important model for a transnational *historical* scholarship, one that disrupts simple equations of globalization with Westernization while simultaneously challenging the truncated temporal sensibility of recent studies of transnationalism and the common insistence on transnationalism's novelty. For a later period, works by S.B. Cook on policy exchanges between India and Ireland, Richard Grove on understandings of the environment, and Madhavi Kale, John Kelly, and Radhika Mongia on migration and diasporic communities have highlighted the transnational circuits fashioned by empire.[63] This growing body of research makes it clear that despite concerted efforts to police the boundaries of the colonial state and modern nation, the borders of South Asia have always been porous and that the region's cultures have been constituted out of complex networks and a multiplicity of cultural exchanges.

What Eaton, Mackenzie and Washbrook will make of this most recent reorientation remains to be seen and we await the response of the members of the Subaltern Studies collective with anticipation, particularly given their deep investment in the state and their privileging of the nation as a site for historical critique.[64] The challenge that lies ahead is to fashion new approaches to historical writing: to create new models that view knowledge-construction as the product of uneven dialogic processes, to develop analytical practices that are sensitive to mobility and interrogate the position of the nation-state (without denying its power), and to adopt forms of analytical practice that consistently question rigid oppositions between the social and the cultural, embedding representation and the performance of identities within material conditions and the formation of social groups and movements. These projects will push South Asian history in new and exciting directions, enriching our

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[62] E.g. Paul Gilroy, *The black Atlantic: modernity and double consciousness* (London, 1993); Aihwa Ong, *Flexible citizenship: the cultural logics of transnationality* (Durham, NC, 1998).

[63] S.B. Cook, *Imperial Affinities. Nineteenth Century analogies and exchanges between India and Ireland* (New Delhi, 1993); Richard H. Grove, *Green imperialism: colonial expansion, tropical island Edens, and the origins of environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge, 1995) and *Ecology, climate and empire: colonialism and global environmental history, 1400-1940* (Cambridge, 1997); Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of empire: capital, slavery, and Indian indentured labor migration in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 1998); John D. Kelly, *A politics of virtue: Hinduism, sexuality, and countercolonial discourse in Fiji* (Chicago, 1991); Radhika Mongia, 'Race, nationality, mobility, a history of the passport', *Public Culture* 11 (1999), 527-56.

[64] Guha, 'Small voice', *SS IX*, 3.

understanding of the complexities and richness of the South Asian past and its global contexts.