

Introduction

What Tradition Tells, Tradition Wanted: Subjects That Matter

Views are implicit from the direction taken by the subject-matter itself, its entire freedom to move, and freedom of our thought to follow it.

—Theodor Adorno, “Why Philosophy”

It is the matter . . . that brings us to dialectics.

—Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*

There are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt.

—Audre Lorde, *Sister/Outsider*

We excel our ancestors only in system and organization: they lied as fluently and as brazenly.

—C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*

The subject matter of this book is heterogeneity. The book uses this subject matter to challenge Eurocentrism, which prevents postcoloniality as a historical era and distinct conceptual accomplishment from truly making a difference in how we understand subjectivity and agency. This interruption of Eurocentric identity politics is oriented by the following three questions: 1. Is it the subject itself or the disciplinary framework that brings this subject matter to life—that really matters? 2. Does understanding heterogeneity as a common subject matter of philosophy, feminism, and postcolonial theory allow the nonidentitarian value of these disciplines to emerge? 3. Can a

conceptual continuity between philosophy, feminism, and postcolonial theory enable a non-antagonistic understanding of difference? I suggest that only by understanding difference as inherently oppositional and antagonistic can Eurocentrism retain hegemonic insistence. Eurocentrism's identitarian value, which prioritizes not the subject matter to be understood but the worth of its practitioners, is used to caricature non-Eurocentric conceptual frameworks as mere politics and ideological advocacy. The book, therefore, considers heterogeneity, which is diversity not dissonance, as a conceptual continuity between philosophy, feminism, and postcolonial theory. It posits this particular conceptual continuity to foreground philosophy, feminism, and postcolonial theory's essentially historical co-implication in understanding the world in which we live. Their nonidentitarian value as disciplines—that is, the proportionality of their claims to our *actual* lives, rather than their supposed generalizability—makes them subjects that matter.

Why heterogeneity? For two reasons: 1. The book suggests that a non-antagonistic understanding of difference may interrupt interdisciplinary identity politics. If philosophy is the general frame towards which non-Eurocentric disciplines ought to move to be taken seriously, then philosophy and its geopolitical determination mean the same thing: philosophy is identity politics. As Theodor Adorno emphasizes, "What tradition tells, tradition wanted" (*Negative* 47). Because philosophy *uses* its subject matter to render non-Eurocentric disciplines belated and marginal, a proportional footstep by Eurocentrism's practitioners, who presume to be the standardbearers for what counts as thinking, may impede the sanctioned ignorance gussied up for the proverbial *hoi polloi* as the philosophical.¹ A proportional footstep breaks Eurocentrism's claim to the constructive frame by not stopping short at where a perspective comes from, but by privileging where we are going, *for the sake of the subject matter*. This mutually implicated understanding of the promise of philosophy considers the marginalization of feminism and postcolonial theory as their historical privilege: our struggles to find what is worthy about philosophy, amid those who would take this belongingness for granted, ask philosophy to live up to its creed precisely because philosophical understanding is worth fighting for.

2. This book invokes heterogeneity in response to a historical moment defined by the extraordinary collapse of species-life and the destruction of the physical environment. Any postcolonial project must be situated in the frame/arena of anthropogenic climate change, which challenges the standing, roles, and meanings of all disciplines, especially in the humanities, and changes everything about how we think into, and about, our world.² A force multiplier, climate change puts the lie to Eurocentrism as heterogeneity is the very basis upon which terrestrial life, human civilization, and human thought

depend. The localized readings contained herein juxtapose how heterogeneity works in philosophy, feminism, and postcolonial theory specifically when we are facing a devastating *loss* of heterogeneity. Part of this attempt to rejuvenate certain aspects and/or premises of these conceptual frameworks involves reckoning with the scale of climate change. In place of a comparative analysis of climate change discourse in these disciplines (and, relatedly, discourse of the animal, posthumanism, or biopolitics, for example), the book reinvigorates heterogeneity as a tenet and tool. If all critical discourse must somehow be situated in the frame/arena of anthropogenic climate change, what are the implications of valuing heterogeneity in a catastrophically challenged world?

The discretionary reference to extant scholarship is the result of following a common thread in philosophy, feminism, and postcolonial theory to learn about heterogeneity. I do not pit these disciplines against each other, but try to understand the concept of heterogeneity in the work of various scholars. I also do not put forward the somewhat idiosyncratically defined textual selections as representatives of “good” philosophy, feminism, and postcolonial theory. In pursuit of what Adorno calls an “intellectual experience,” which must necessarily remain “grounded in the subject matter” (*Lectures* 29), the book’s lovingly orchestrated moments of exegetical exchange, between traditions and their sacred texts, focus on small moments of affinity and disappointment to confound and limit our habitual disciplinary lexicons.³

Advancing heterogeneity as a conceptual continuity between philosophy, feminism, and postcolonial theory undermines what is conventionally and/or traditionally deemed feminism’s and postcolonial theory’s diagnostic and/or corrective stance vis-à-vis philosophy *tout court*. Feminism and postcolonial theory, which are already in dialogue with the rich tradition of European thought, evince how disparate experiences cannot be grasped with *only* our usual conceptual apparatus. By taking their derivative and marginal rank for granted, Eurocentric identity politics ignore the contributions of interdisciplinary scholarship towards an understanding of our heterogeneous world. As just one example of a common subject matter between philosophy, feminism, and postcolonial theory, heterogeneity allows the nonidentitarian value of these disciplines to emerge. Such fluid family resemblances seem especially salient to reinvigorate heterogeneity as ideal and instrument from within the frame/arena of anthropogenic climate change.⁴

Notwithstanding the book’s aspirational trajectory, I give prominence to disciplinary debates occurring in the western academy. These are the debates I have been privy to, and I have lived some of them. My education in philosophy, feminism, and postcolonial theory began in the United States when I arrived as an immigrant for undergraduate study. During the fall semester of my sophomore year in college, I took my first philosophy class as well as

my first course in nonwestern feminisms. It was then that I noticed how these different fields take up similar questions about truth, justice, and the good life. Prior to my arrival at the age of eighteen, I had already lived in various countries such as Libya, Canada, Venezuela, Greece, and Poland, which complicated any claim to a so-called Indian identity. I am obliged, however, in the United States, to adopt the identity of a woman of color.⁵ I can say that this book is written from the perspective of an Indian citizen who is a woman of color in the Euro-US academy.⁶

What this perspective means beyond the categorial is perhaps illustrated in the texture and feel of the readings themselves because the exegetical exchanges orchestrated in this book are meaningful. They are an attempt to grapple with that unspeakably vile power that defends reason with anything but reason: this fight is never fair; no low is too low; the Great Game usually wins. Just as Hortense Spillers reminds us, we are still struggling to define our object, as the revulsion, brutality, and malice we encounter in the name of tradition can only be called racism on a lazy day (*Black, White* x, xii).⁷ Violent repetition of identity's categorial discharge turns rhetoric into reality by contracting living, vital heterogeneity into mere oppositional antagonism for gratuitous destruction. A relentless narrative devoid of substance—the nihilism of entitlement is obviously soul destroying—ensnares heterogeneous, historical life by obliging its victims to prove a negative. Even the few herculean victories against this real (not cogitative) power rarely seem to change the comfortable social world that is the Euro-US academy. By laboring for the rational and humane, contra the performative cruelty of prolonged categorial prestige, this book attempts to make real the abyss between effortfully created (silent) meaningfulness and effortlessly repeated (noisy) stereotype.

While the protocols of Eurocentric identity politics recommend enlisting a “daddy text” to be considered philosophical, this is a postcolonial book. To whom it may concern: I am not an Adorno scholar in the traditional sense; he figures as a useful fiction to make a philosophical point. I do not use Adorno to reconstitute a critical genealogy of the postcolonial (that is, Adorno as proto-postcolonial) but engage postcoloniality in two ways: as a historical era and as a conceptual accomplishment. The first approach purposes Gayatri Spivak's claim that there is no postcolonialism as long as colonial devastation refurbishes itself as globalization and development. Considering the manifest importance of postcolonial theorists' multifaceted analyses of capitalist exploitation's durability, the book attempts to make postcoloniality real as a historical moment. To this end, I explain how Eurocentric identity politics prevent extremely hard-won historical achievements from making a difference beyond the superficial and perfunctory. Thwarting Eurocentrism requires us to convey and uphold the subject matter and not insulate the

inveterate disciplinary framework at hand. This is the postcolonial move of the book. Its locus is heterogeneity as it emerges as subject matter, and how this subject matter may be reinvigorated from within the frame/arena of climate change.

In terms of postcoloniality as a conceptual accomplishment, the book does not conflate postcoloniality with cultural criticism *par excellence* but focuses on its philosophical dimension. Postcolonial theory and cultural criticism when coalesced lead to a vaguely articulated critical posture that appropriates and displaces other discourses (for example, African-American feminism) and reduces postcolonial theory to the applied version of postmodernism and deconstruction (which is very different from Spivak's "setting to work").⁸ If the particular concentration of understanding known as the concept is at the core of a Eurocentric sense of exceptionalism, then the book takes the conceptual turn to provide an understanding of the philosophical in different terms.⁹ I define postcoloniality as the striving for a non-antagonistic understanding of difference. (This simple definition with all its utopic implications clashes with the violent history of colonialism and neocolonialism and creates a sort of ironic and melancholic stage for the readings the book conducts.) The possibility for the encounter with heterogeneity—that is, for what Spivak terms "the experience of the impossible" (*Aesthetic* 341), heterogeneity being at once utterly omnipresent and out of reach—is exegetical. Assembled at the subject matter of heterogeneity, philosophy, feminism, and postcolonial theory do not rehearse a categorial discharge, but set forth the value of postcoloniality as both a historical era and conceptual accomplishment.

Any analysis of subrepted material conditions of philosophical inquiry begs the question of the *place* of the exegetical, especially because Eurocentrism's closed circuitry hinders the qualitative variety of experience necessary to change one's mind. Yoking heterogeneity to postcolonial possibility also runs the risk of facile demands for representation to mirror reality, even if by albeit a more tortuous route: the epistemic strategy of particularization via essentially historical categories of identity. Granting that heterogeneity is empirical reality, it still cannot be apprehended directly, as the heterogeneous does not await revelation as the unsullied.¹⁰ Whereas Eurocentrism's peremptory stellar strut showcases the specular solidity of the (as proclaimed) singularly conceptual, I seek an exegetical rigor that may instantiate postcoloniality's qualitative divergence from cursory grievance-based censure. As distinct from onomatopoeic contrariety (the "post" in postcolonial), the homology between postcoloniality and philosophy may foster precisely the speculative moves that can bring heterogeneity into possibility. Philosophical speculation in turn gives rise to an apocryphal—not Eurocentric identity politics-based—critical genealogy on account of taking difference seriously.

This book, therefore, does not approach philosophy from the outside to diagnose and/or correct its failures because, as the striving for a non-antagonistic understanding of difference, postcoloniality is an intrinsic part of philosophical understanding. An exegetically created encounter with heterogeneity, with heterogeneous life entering into a concept meant to understand living, may lead to *sincerely* earned negativity: it is the difference between experience and its description that permits us to actually *learn* about our historical inadequacy. Attentiveness to whether our conceptual frameworks are adequate for the historical moment in which they are needed may be helpful in connecting the dots between philosophical speculation and a politics of struggle, for understanding difference as inherently oppositional and antagonistic runs the risk of repeating in political struggle the very premises that led to the injustices in the first place. Only the brush with heterogeneity makes self-reflection possible, and facilitating self-reflection is the common responsibility of philosophy, feminism, and postcolonial theory. In a catastrophically challenged world, these disciplines must accompany one another for the sake of the very heterogeneity that makes them subjects that matter.

Postcoloniality:
A Non-Antagonistic Understanding of Difference

I conceived of postcoloniality as the striving for a non-antagonistic understanding of difference in graduate school when I began my dissertation with Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988).¹¹ The dissertation sought to answer one question: who was Roop Kanwar? Kanwar was a nineteen-year-old widow immolated (*sati*) on the funeral pyre of her husband on September 4, 1987, in Deorala, India, in front of five thousand spectators. No matter what scholarly tradition I used to understand her experience—philosophers such as Theodor Adorno, Immanuel Kant, Michel Foucault, Friedrich Hegel; postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Partha Chatterjee; postcolonial feminists such as Ann McClintock, KumKum Sangari, Mrinalini Sinha, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan; critical race theorists such as Paul Gilroy, Aimé Césaire, Sander Gilman, Lewis Gordon; African-American feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins, Toni Cade Bambara, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, bell hooks; feminist philosophers such as Judith Butler, Eva Kittay, Uma Narayan, Iris Young—I battled contradiction and unknowability. Consequently, I stated in the introduction that the project was about a specific person whose experience evokes horror. But also, the project did not seem to be about her.

When deliberating on my own failure to answer the question my dissertation raised, I did not comprehend why Spivak's concept of subalternity

in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” was assessed as synonymous with sheer victimization. Notwithstanding postcolonial feminist disapproval of Spivak’s putative silencing of the subaltern, the essay’s money line (if you will) is the acknowledgment that the “subaltern *subject* is irretrievably heterogeneous” (284).¹² To refute the normalization of silence, Spivak’s titular question lends the lie to any proxy (*Vertreten*) or portrait (*Darstellen*) that undertakes verisimilitude. At that time in the Euro-US academy, the aggregate ontology of the colonized female body stood in stark contrast to the condition of philosophy that proffered an unknowable subject. Against this desire for authenticity, Spivak interjects her notorious lament that “the subaltern cannot speak” (308).¹³ It may be worthwhile to briefly reread how she got to this statement, especially since “Can the Subaltern Speak?” entered its thirtieth year of publication in 2018.¹⁴

In her essay, Spivak demonstrates the geopolitical determination of discourses that declaredly vitiate the sovereignty of the western subject but in fact rehabilitate this subject’s hegemony by ceding the intellectual as a transparent vehicle of the other’s transparent voice. To garner actual avenues for subaltern women to speak, Spivak aims for a more nuanced understanding of ideology that can dispute subaltern women’s reputed accessibility. First, the beneficent impulse to transmit the other’s authentic voice presupposes a “monolith [. . .] [called] ‘women’ . . . whose unfractured subjectivity allows them to speak for themselves” (278). The subject is typified as fragmented and dispersed (subject rather than Subject) while the oppressed are valorized as unified and whole (for example, “the workers’ struggle” [271]). Second, she is mindful of the intellectual’s constitutive contradiction: any claim to represent the oppressed evades the representer’s complicity in the international division of labor (272). Third, integrating consciousness with knowledge relinquishes the intricate terrain of desire, interest, and subjectivity traversed by ideological production (286).¹⁵ Irrespective of disingenuous self-abdications as endowed by the state of philosophy, the sovereign subject’s geopolitically determined normativity is the noumenal ground upon which the other’s presumably self-conscious identity is promulgated (279–81). But, the intellectual cannot forsake its responsibility to represent (292); it cannot jettison its responsibility to history upon surmising a *sui generis* west; and, it cannot waive its responsibility to ethnography, as incriminated by the (un)canny extraction of its own itinerary via wiping out the other’s (291).¹⁶

Spivak thereby shifts the burden of proof by cautioning that being on the exploiter’s side of the international division of labor substantially incapacitates our philosophical agendas (287). Critical discourse cannot simply ferret out the other’s purity of consciousness but must limn *how* subalternity is produced. By tracking the “*mechanics* of . . . constitution” (289), the intel-

lectual “*systematically* ‘unlearns’ female privilege” (295) to avert the subaltern’s displacement, appropriation, or idealization. On the contrary, the affective and ethical challenges faced by “the female intellectual as *intellectual*” (295, emphasis added), as she excavates an itinerary of unknowing, arbitrate an aporia (302). This is because whether subject or object the “subaltern *subject* is *irretrievably* heterogeneous” (284, second emphasis added). After defining subalternity as structurally produced silence, Spivak moves to her case study of *sati* (*suttee* is the colonial British spelling of *sati*), which exhibits epistemic violence in the narrow and general sense: colonialism serves as an “imperfect” (287) example of the violence intrinsic to establishing an *epistemé*. Colonial and postcolonial debates on *sati* oscillate the woman between subject- and object-status because they adhere to theoretical conceits like veracity (the voice of the woman) and radical subjectivity (the will of the woman). Spivak balks at these discursive constructions and in their stead moves further back in the opposite direction.

At that time in Euro-US postcolonial studies, she returns to the archive of antiquity, the Hindu texts of the *Dharmasastra* and the *Rg-Veda*, wherein she cannot come across the subjectivity of the widows who were burned, and, hence, have the makings of a “counter sentence” (297). When compared with culturalist accounts of *sati* that hypostatize false positives—western culture gives women the right to choose (to live); nonwestern culture gives women the right to choose (to die)—her scrutiny of the *Dharmasastra* and the *Rg-Veda* confirms that subject- and object-status actually mean the *same* thing: the widow’s self (in outline) is a structural effect. Retroactive facsimiles of her voice or will culturally predestine the widow regardless of whether *sati* is ritual or crime. Postcoloniality in turn becomes mired in “a foreshortened history of female victimhood” (Hortense Spillers’s phrase) because the widow’s cultural lineaments are left intact. In place of the seductive expedience of veracity and radical subjectivity, Spivak characterizes the intellectual’s charge as “measuring [the] silences” (296) by which the allegedly nonpareils obliterate their utter contingency. She scrupulously “plots a history” (297) of how structures recuperate the heterogeneity they resist as sexual difference: the woman is either a victim or heroic. Per Spivak’s concept of subalternity, to want postcoloniality (the intricate terrain of desire, interest, and subjectivity) is to want heterogeneity at the site of that violence where meeting the gendered subaltern is the experience of nothing.

In an interview with Elizabeth Grosz, Spivak states that “the limits of . . . theories are disclosed by an encounter with . . . [the] other. . . . So, I am fundamentally concerned with that heterogeneity” (*Critic* 11). The systemic machinery of identity and difference blots (out) this heterogeneity in the interest of its own self-sustaining trajectory: any proper name can be inserted here. This heterogeneity’s very irretrievability sets the course of the

postcolonial critic who tracks a process of unknowing that effects the subaltern's subject and object ventriloquist functions—that is, either the woman wanted to die (*sati*), or the woman was forced to die (*suttee*) (“Subaltern” 297). The knowing and unknowing that so transpire are not contradictory but aporetic. Spivak elaborates that

one is haunted by the ghost of the undecidable. . . . When we find ourselves in the subject position of two determinate positions, both right—or both wrong, of course—one of which cancels the other, we are in an aporia which by definition cannot be crossed. Yet, it is not possible to remain in an aporia. It is not a . . . dilemma, a paradox, an antinomy. It can only be described as an experience. It discloses itself in being crossed. . . . In the aporia to decide is the burden of responsibility. (“Moral” 105–6)¹⁷

The fundamental concern with “that heterogeneity” instigates the experience of crossing an aporia whence the synonymy of knowing and unknowing makes ethics “a problem of relation rather than a problem of knowledge” (105).¹⁸ In this place of undecidability, we accede to “an experience of the figure”—that is, “of that which is not logically possible” (105).

I suggest that the experience of the figure, of crossing an aporia, of the burden of responsibility, is only viable when we bear a non-antagonistic understanding of difference. An understanding of difference as inherently oppositional and antagonistic repudiates the very heterogeneity that makes any relationship possible. If we are defined by identitarian conceptual cultures, whose administered systematicity is self-perpetuating, then self-preservation performe involves killing off our freedom to be responsible. Few are willing to pay the price for responsibility in an upside-down world that makes liars of us all *by virtue of category alone*. If postcoloniality is the pursuit of the irretrievably heterogeneous, then it strives for that non-antagonistic understanding of difference that lets heterogeneity be.

Section One: Heterogeneity

The first section of the book is “Heterogeneity.” The five chapters that comprise this section introduce heterogeneity as a common subject matter of philosophy, feminism, and postcolonial theory. The first chapter uses the bridges built by postcolonial theorists’ varied engagements with Theodor Adorno to suspend the conventional and/or traditional dialectic of the western philosopher and (their) postcolonial critic. As these scholars have already challenged Adorno’s Eurocentrism, I concentrate on reorienting postcolonial theory from a diagnostic

and/or corrective standpoint to the philosophical charge of its enterprise. I conceive this philosophical charge to be the striving for a non-antagonistic understanding of difference. What is at stake is making postcoloniality real as a historical era and conceptual accomplishment so that it may truly make a difference in how we understand subjectivity and agency.

The second chapter reads the “Introduction” and the “Concepts and Categories” section of Theodor Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* (1973) to stage what may be called the postcolonial Adorno. I do not regard Adorno as a postcolonial critic *avant la lettre*, but indicate how negative dialectics such as postcoloniality is the striving for a non-antagonistic understanding of difference inimical to the inexorability of identity and difference. I recognize this germ of postcoloniality in Adorno’s conceptual framework because he poses for philosophy an essentially historical task: to convey and uphold the heterogeneous. His philosophy and anti-philosophy at once honor the subject matter to be understood against an identity-based philosophical practice that forgets why its tradition brought this subject matter to life.

In chapter 3, I revisit Spivak’s concept of subalternity as a placeholder for heterogeneity by reading portions of the “History” section of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: A History of the Vanishing Present* (1999). Specifically, the chapter follows Spivak as she trails imperial proceedings that dispense the role of agent/implement to the Rani of Sirmur for the changeover of an *epistémé*: from tradition to modernity. (Rani is the Hindi word for Queen. A fuller biography of the Rani is provided in the chapter itself.) The Rani’s figuration in the colonial archive shows *how* identitarian conceptual cultures turn colonialism into civilizing mission. I suggest that Spivak’s venture to experience “relation with” instead of “knowledge of” the Rani is important for three reasons: 1. Rummaging for the colonizer and colonized via an antagonistic understanding difference depreciates their heterogeneity. Both emerge ready-made. 2. These proper names cordon off what could *only* have been a historical relationship *in* colonialism between those identified. 3. Postcoloniality as the striving for a non-antagonistic understanding of difference upends precisely this legacy of Europe and its Others, which is still used to sheath Eurocentrism’s practitioners notwithstanding its utter contingency.

Having located heterogeneity as a common subject matter of philosophy and postcolonial studies, I move in the fourth chapter to feminist theory. It reads Barbara Christian’s iconic essay, “The Race for Theory” (1987), which received much opprobrium upon publication. Although Christian’s statements were stereotyped as boosting minority identity politics, the chapter suggests that Christian’s concept of the race for theory subverts the logic of major and minor traditions: since major theorists lack the cultural competency necessary to provide a meaningful understanding of difference, they cannot combat the

actual historical challenges at hand. Major discourse abrogates this historical inadequacy by relegating non-Eurocentric traditions to perspectival roles in knowledge production without any general implications. In light of the *actual* course of history, however, Christian charts how major discourse erases *that* race for theory that black women will (always) have been.

Any postcolonial project in the Euro-US academy must acknowledge how certain strands of postcolonial theory are complicit in minimizing black women's works. At the time that Barbara Christian published "The Race for Theory," Eurocentrism pitted postcolonial theorists against older minorities by portraying the former's knowledge production as a model minority discourse. In response to this supersession, Spivak posits the African-American experience of negotiated independence as the paradigmatic case of postcoloniality in the United States. Spivak's analysis centers on South Asian migrancy for aspirational class advancement, but the chapter uses Spivak's description of Euro-US postcoloniality to make two suggestions: First, by challenging the antagonistic understanding of difference that prolongs major discourse's hegemony, black women's works are paradigmatically postcolonial. Second, black women's exertion of the heterogeneity dislocated by the diminution to minor status makes black women's works exemplarily western. Inasmuch as the difference from the normative is underived from Eurocentrism, this tradition demonstrates the historical inadequacy of major discourse's conceptual cultures. The heuristic metonymy—black women's works are paradigmatically postcolonial and exemplarily western—brings Eurocentric identity politics to crisis: if the metaphysics of presence is no longer the only knowledge the west has to offer, then black women's works are essential for a philosophical understanding difference.

Section Two: The Resurrection of the Flesh

The first section of the book addresses heterogeneity as a common subject matter of philosophy, feminism, and postcolonial theory. It identifies this common subject matter to refute practitioners of Eurocentric identity politics who presuppose thinking to be their exclusive purview. These chapters delineate how a non-antagonistic understanding of difference prioritizes the subject matter rather than the theoretical framework at hand. In the second section, this postcolonial move of the book—not using the subject matter to sustain a tradition's sanctioned ignorance and hegemonic posture—brings these disparate conceptual frameworks together to confront climate change. I begin with the recognition that the sheer scale of climate change and its associated threats defy the book's operational logic of using heterogeneity as

a value and tool to set a frame and facilitate the action. At issue is whether our understanding of postcoloniality as the striving for a non-antagonistic understanding of difference is adequate for a historical moment defined by a staggering *loss* of biological heterogeneity amid the ongoing and further anticipated devastation of species-life with the physical environment.

In Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Ozymandias" (1818), "a traveler from an antique land" describes his encounter with "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone / [that] Stand in the desert . . . [and] Near them, on the sand, / Half sunk a shattered visage."¹⁹ The traveler observed this ruined, almost lost visage, "whose frown, / And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command, / Tell that its sculptor well those passions read / Which yet survive." He further recounts an inscription on the pedestal beneath the trunkless legs: "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; / Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!" Whereas surety in our exceptionalism entitles us to presume a recipient of this ancestral injunction, Shelley ends his poem with a truer prospect: that "Round the decay / Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare / The lone and level sands stretch far away" (870). Shelley does not reassure the reader of the continuity of an intelligence who receives the admonishment because the "sands" subsume the human remainder. The extension of these sands around the almost entombed artifacts of disintegration—and then beyond the scope of the imaginative eye—undermines the posterity figured by hearsay: a speaker who relates to the reader what the traveler related to it.

In the middle distance of a humanized world, our grasping the possible impossibility of our self-preservation seems to require some future intelligence that gazes comprehendingly at flooded cities, whose towers and skyscrapers are hopefully at least nesting sites for colonies of seabirds. Yet, climate change is the ultimate context that imperils all that we presume and are. In lieu of an intelligence receiving an antecedent's warning, our geologic legacy may be met by illimitable silence. As the apotheosis of our life as a species, climate change takes us over a threshold: it mocks the "[h]alf sunk . . . shattered visage" of human exceptionalism. When nothing remains to interpret our oblivion, why the merciless infliction of *this* forgetting of our actual proportions? The very vastness and intimacy of climate change calls into question the prospect of exegesis, for there may be no apocryphal genealogy of a nameless traveler who saw the "Works" of a nameless sculptor who left a mark "on . . . lifeless things." It is *this* sculptor who made the "frown . . . and sneer" that "well . . . read" the abject silliness of a "King of Kings" whose decapitated head, lying askance, half-buried amidst "boundless and bare . . . sands," proclaims itself among his peerless "Works" (870).

The chapters in the second section do not necessarily refigure the absurdity of human hubris but follow the logic of scholars whose disputations

of cultural determinism reiterate rather than rupture human exceptionalism. From within the catastrophic frame/arena of anthropogenic climate change, these readings garner how the striving for a non-antagonistic understanding of difference is historically inadequate when grounded by the nature and culture dualism. I chart the route that culminates in subalternity to arrive at that aporetic juncture where we might gain a cosmogonic peek at how a world is (un)made. At this moment of exegesis, we witness *how* nature's heterogeneity is cut (out) from our sacred texts *for* the functional concept of nature, which keeps nature itself in the penumbra of an exceptional species. *This* heterogeneity is experienced as the crossing of an aporia because cultural overdetermination manufactures nature as the signifier of irreducible human difference.

This section's chapters scuttle the logic of a humanized world that deflects its utter contingency by dint of a benighted cultural identity for which nature and culture actually mean the same thing: they are the result of conceptual cultures that fortify human exceptionalism. I suggest that because of the bloody brutality by which we damn nature—a history of theft, cruelty, and murder that (now) calls itself postcolonialism—the nature and culture dualism is no longer the exclusive provenance of western culture. The possible impossibility of our self-preservation as a *species* exposes the unrelenting silence that awaits us all. In keeping with our traditional doggedness and eternal hope, at least when it comes to lost causes, we may assume the risk of our further debasement in our equivalence with nature to embolden culture. Against this doctrinal casuistry, postcoloniality as the striving for a non-antagonistic understanding of difference allows explanations to come “from all sides” (Spivak, “Culture” 360). These explanations of culture—that is, of how *this* explanation of culture came to be *the* explanation of culture—invalidate cultural continuity fomented by an antagonistic understanding of difference.

I would like to return to that aporetic juncture wherein knowing and unknowing mean the same thing: both are an encounter with irretrievable heterogeneity. Spivak creates a “relation with” (not “knowledge of”) the gendered subaltern to avoid what she terms her “moot decipherment” (*Critique* 309) as either subject or object, while I stage the experience of crossing an aporia quite differently. When exegesis shows us how nature is turned into its mercenary concept, we may experience the crossing of an aporia as what Adorno terms “the resurrection of the flesh” (*Negative* 207) to aver the actual suffering of subjects immured by the systemic machinery of identity and difference. The proper names conferred by this kind of conceptual culture are products of abstraction that turns what is alive into what is ancillary.

Marshaling Adorno's call for resurrected flesh, I turn the aporetic juncture into a kind of zero degree: here, knowing and unknowing take us to a potentiality of embodiment that is heterogeneous. The crossing of an aporia,

when experienced as the resurrection of the flesh, fills (in) what is hollowed (out) to conjure an exceptional human being. *In* the place of the undecidable, where flesh is both itself and its own opposite—everything and nothing, matter and form, nature and culture, animal and human—its resurrection is when a decision must be made: if culture is “its own explanations” (Spivak, “Culture” 360), then *who* are we going to be? Postcoloniality as the striving for a non-antagonistic difference resurrects the flesh of an *anomalous* species venerated for its *lack* of self-preservation to create “a solidarity that is transparent to itself and all the living” (Adorno, *Negative* 204). This philosophical understanding of difference may provide a cosmogonic peek at how to suture the King of Kings to the world in which we actually live.

In the second section, chapter 6 reads Adorno’s lecture, “On Dying Today” in *Metaphysics: Concepts and Problems* (2000). This lecture criticizes metaphysics that confuses the absolute abstraction of human experience with transcendence of cultural determinism. Adorno criticizes those metaphysical inquiries of death that recapitulate the dehumanization and functionalism modernity inflicts as naturalized culture. He posits dying *today* as the object of metaphysics, as opposed to the side of being turned away from us, because the concept of death should be adequate to the manifold ways in which people actually die, today; otherwise metaphysics relegates people to the same nothingness wreaked by capitalist culture. In this lecture, however, Adorno makes an offhand comment that in comparison with all other species, humans are singularly aware of our biological floor. But, how can we ever know? The chapter tracks how it is possible for a species constituted by *lack* of self-preservation to be nonetheless singularly aware of its biological floor. In response to Adorno’s swift dismissal of *all* other species, the chapter contests the radical humanization of death by figuring our species as animals. At this aporetic juncture, where all other species are present and absent, known and unknown, self-preserving and unaware, this figuration is proportional to our actual predicament. Anthropogenic climate change, our dying, *today*, extends a cosmogonic peek at how effortless generalization extracts nothingness from heterogeneity for the sake of human exceptionalism.

In chapter 7, I read Paul Gilroy’s Wellek Library Lectures at the University of California, Irvine, that were published as *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2006). In these lectures, Gilroy invokes Adorno’s negative dialectics to call for a vital planetary humanism, which is modeled on the demotic multiculturalism of urban spaces. Their organic and unruly forms of *bon homie* create a negative dialectics of conviviality that can tackle ongoing environmental catastrophe. The chapter suggests that Gilroy’s recoding of liberal humanism as planetary humanism dislocates the planet itself: though the planet is radically humanized, this humanized planet is radically urban. Such a naturalized evolution

progressively expands the scale of liberal humanism's alleged provenance: human → urban → planetary, which reiterates the nature and culture dualism that obliges a vital planetary humanism in the first place. Gilroy argues against an explicitly racial logic via the congruity between the planetary and urban culture—that is, by valorizing the demotic multiculturalism of a space categorially defined by the *absence* of nature. At this moment of undecidability, when the planetary is simultaneously urbane and natural, city and earth, concrete and galactic, the chapter figures the planetary as nature. In other words, I move in the opposite direction from Gilroy's naturalized evolution: if postcoloniality truly matters as a historical era and conceptual accomplishment, then for a vital planetary humanism, *today*, empire's first victim is the animal.

Although Spivak addresses problematic representational claims made by Foucault and Deleuze in "Can the Subaltern Speak?," chapter 8 focuses on contemporaneous postcolonial accounts of *sati*, which deploy an epistemic strategy of particularization via essentially historical categories of identity. I suggest that particularization may provide a better representation of the widow's predicament but this strategy also yields her readability: as sign of history, bearer of sanctified culture, exemplar of good wifeness, manifestation of the goddess, individual free will, honorable family woman, etc. These explanations lead to an aporia: the widow is culturally saturated yet also in possession of authentic voice and free will. The widow's ability to embody professedly exclusive narrative arcs signals these explanations' utter contingency: when we attempt to know her, she recedes further from our grasp. I provide these contemporaneous discourses on women's victimization because they capture a particular moment in postcolonial theory's institutionalization: while one exemplar of postcoloniality was harnessed for antagonistic cultural scripts by Euro-US multiculturalism, the other ignominiously lamented the subaltern's irretrievable heterogeneity for unevenly decolonizing space. These analyses provide the context for Spivak's reading of Bhuvaneshwari Bhaduri's *sati*/suicide, whereupon she submits the intellectual's responsibility as to conceive radical alterity, discussed in the following chapter.

In "Postcolonialism's Archive Fever" (2000), Sandhya Shetty and Elizabeth Bellamy reread Spivak's reading of Bhuvaneshwari Bhaduri's *sati*/suicide. Chapter 9 shows how this rereading cedes heterogeneity to sexual difference. Shetty and Bellamy state that the section on ancient Hindu scriptures in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" holds the key to subalternity: women are written-in into the archive as an exception to the general rule of suicide, which is prohibited except for men who reach a particular form of self-knowledge. This is the way subalternity is produced: written-in only as the good wife, she is irretrievably heterogeneous. Shetty and Bellamy agree with Spivak that Bhuvaneshwari flips the script of *sati* when she hangs herself while menstruating.

(Menstruating women are barred from ascending the husband's funeral pyre because they are unclean and inauspicious.) As an addendum to the archive, Bhuvanewari is the exception (menstruating) to the exception (good wifehood) to the exception (male self-knowledge) to the general rule (of suicide). The chapter suggests that their rereading of her menstrual blood does not flip *sati's* principal conceit of good wifehood because Bhuvanewari's *sati*/suicide preserves this teleological potentiality: she is not an unsanctioned mother. At this instant, when menstrual blood is actual and potential, auspicious and inauspicious, clean and unclean, the chapter figures menstrual blood as the erasure of sexual difference. Upon her hanging, Bhuvanewari is cut (out) from our sacred texts to leave behind (her) menstrual blood: "she" is (now) utterly contingent. For the heterogeneous, Bhuvanewari annuls her symbolic integrity. In this upending of the antagonistic difference that ensconces both colonizer and nationalist, she makes outside what is inside: a horizon of potential embodiment—that is, of all that life can be.²⁰

Chapter 10 reads Hortense Spillers's essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987), which was published a year before Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In this essay, Spillers remarks that American feminism's "foreshortened history of female victimhood" ignores the particular cultural logic that establishes New World domesticity: due to the slave-holding civil codes, which installs the curious interchangeability of "black women" and "it," black women breed property not children. Spillers's search for these missing persons takes her to The Middle Passage when tools of the trade (whips, chains, knives, etc.) must (first) make black women into flesh and blood entities to (then) turn them into unsanctioned mothers. Black women so *ungendered* bear the hieroglyphics of an impossible futurity that orders all (else) that follows. In Spillers's revision of an American Grammar, however, gendered and *ungendered* come to mean the same thing: sanctioned motherhood, as she maintains sexual difference as the ground of culture. Since the heterogeneous possibilities available for pre-view on board the slave ship are *already* human in outline, Spillers misses the *other* flesh and blood entity listed in the logs of commercial enterprise: livestock. The radical humanization of the planet manifest in *this* oxymoronic name thwarts our recognition that to have bodies ripped apart, torn open, seared, mutilated, divided, is what it means to be (an) animal. A prior ordering of nature and culture, therefore, is the essentially historical condition of possibility for making a slave. In this aporetic predicament, when the flesh and blood entity is gendered and ungendered, live and stock, human and animal, the chapter figures the flesh and blood entity as that unsanctioned Mother who is the (only) possibility for (a) culture.

In the conclusion, the book's accruing a sense of scale moves from flesh and blood, rural and urban, animal and earth, to the planet. Spivak's concept of planetarity dislocates human exceptionalism with a para-galactic alterity by depositing us as a planetary accident. Understanding life as accidental (for example, but for the meteor sixty-six million years ago . . .) is an imaginative endeavor because radical alterity, as underived from identitarian morphologies, eludes our conceptual cultures. To this end, the conclusion is modeled after Spivak's canonical essay, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985). In this essay, Spivak reads *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), and *Frankenstein* (1818) to limn the limits of feminist individualism, which occurs at the expense of the native subaltern. My conclusion supplants what Spivak terms "soul making" (248) (the colonial imperative to humanize the globe) with the planetary (the postcolonial imperative to dehumanize the planet). It reads three women's texts that model how to provide a cosmogonic peek at our not-quite-not-a-relation with radical alterity. The shift in perspective, from cultural saturation to the utter contingency of living, does not rely on an antagonistic understanding of difference, but stages how a world is (un)made from the heterogeneous to condemn us all to an illimitable silence. In this time of consequences, these women's texts affirm that learning to take proportional footsteps may lead the way home.