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Notes for a Politics of Hope

D angis have a rich fund of *vadilcha goth* or stories about the
past, stories sometimes reaching back into the seventeenth
and eighteenth centuries. Storytelling is a major aspect of Dangi
life, and the past provides a means to reflect on and socialize the
present. Social features and identities often have their genealogies
traced back to the past, and narratives dwell on the novelty or
antiquity of stories. This book is titled *Hybrid Histories* because it
tries to explore the distinctive sense of pasts involved in these goth,
to recognize goth as a legitimate way of understanding pasts, to
formulate the questions of the professional historian by taking cues
from goth, and to attempt hybrid, contrapuntal narratives that bring
together, necessarily inconstantly and incompletely, the concerns
of Dangi narrators and professional historians.

THE DENIAL OF DIFFERENCE

These narrative strategies came out of a sense of dissatisfaction with
many aspects of existing approaches. The older academic tradition
of studying oral narratives such as Dangi stories minimizes or denies
difference between oral traditions and the professional discipline of
history. Such scholars as Jan Vansina (who in many senses put the
study of oral traditions on a disciplinary footing) and his students
have converted oral traditions into the equivalent of archival sources,
and written histories that adhere to the norms of western pro-
fessional history writing. They constantly invoke these norms to
legitimize the study of oral traditions. Their thrust is on making oral
traditions like written records, the primary sources that historians
customarily depend on. Indeed, Vansina's principal achievement lies
in the extensive and detailed methods for evaluations of oral sources
which extract historical grain from mythical chaff.[1]

[1] Jan Vansina, *Oral tradition as history*, London, 1985, 2nd revised edition.
Many works have built on and developed through internal critiques of Vansina's

The reasons for this strategy seem clear. The study of oral traditions as a source for history developed in an Africa that was in the throes of decolonization. Denials of difference were part of a radical politics, of a manoeuvre resorted to not only by students of oral traditions but more broadly by many scholars of colonial and postcolonial societies. In imperial ideology, colonial rule was often justified by representing the colonized in terms of a lack — the insinuation that the colonized were backward, or not modern enough.[2] The insistence that the colonized lacked history was a part of this. In this context, the reclaiming of a history was almost everywhere a crucial component of the struggle of colonized peoples for liberation. To claim history is to claim speech and authority and to assert the right to independence, subjecthood, and agency.[3] Denial of difference, whether in oral traditions or histories of capitalism, nationalism, trade or development in colonized societies, is thus part of attempts to claim a specific historical identity within the narratives of modernity.

This strategy of denying difference has yielded considerable dividends. Through the use of oral traditions, agency has been ascribed to marginal actors, and histories have been produced of regions and subjects that written records would not have permitted. Politically too, the new postcolonial identities would have been more difficult without the denial of difference and the consequent use (and subversion) of the categories of the colonizers. The rendering of oral traditions in the styles of western historiography has thus often been a politically radical and empowering gesture.

Much of what follows draws heavily on this tradition of doing oral history. Yet there is a need to be aware of the particular

crucial achievements. See Joseph Miller (ed.), *The African past speaks: Essays in oral tradition and history*, Fokestone, 1980, for one classic collection. For a more recent collection of exciting work in this tradition, see Robert Harms et al. (eds), *Paths toward the past: African historical essays in honor of Jan Vansina*, Atlanta, 1994. For an important external critique of history in this tradition, see Renato Rosaldo, 'Doing oral history', *Social Analysis*, no. 4, September 1980.

  [2] See George Stocking, *Victorian anthropology*, New York, 1987; and Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*, London, 1991; Johannes Fabian, *Time and the other: How anthropology makes its object*, New York, 1983.

  [3] For a useful though not particularly insightful book on the subject, see David C. Gordon, *Self-determination and history in the third world*, New Jersey, 1971. See also Talal Asad's suggestive essay 'Afterword: From the history of colonial anthropology to the anthropology of western hegemony', in George Stocking (ed.), *Colonial situations: Essays on the contextualization of ethnographic knowledge*, Madison, 1991.

semantic load that it can carry: denial of difference is itself a form of participation in the discourse of lack. The constant appeal to the tribunal of literate historical standards is after all primarily an evaluation of these traditions by their suitability for conversion into sources for the professional discipline of history. In this sense, there is a profound dependence on the very criteria that created lack, and the legitimacy of oral sources (which is to say, their equivalence to archival ones) has to be wrested on a case-by-case basis.

Even radical historians amongst those denying difference depend on the 'hyperreal Europe', that is, a reified figure of the imagination which hypostatizes an idealized European experience generalized into a universal set of criteria. As a result, almost all major aspects of colonized societies suffered from a constitutive lack: the Indian working class was insufficiently class-like, Indian bourgeoisie insufficiently bourgeois, Indian capitalism insufficiently capitalist, and Indian revolutionary movements inadequately revolutionary. In a brilliant essay, Chakrabarty remarks that the social imaginary 'Europe' remains the sovereign theoretical subject of all those histories we call 'Indian', 'Chinese', 'Kenyan', and so on.[4] This is because all these histories tend to be written within a 'transition narrative . . . of which the overriding (if often implicit) themes are those of development, modernization, capitalism. Thus the subject of Indian history usually speaks from within a metanarrative that celebrates the nation state; of this metanarrative the theoretical subject can only be a hyperreal "Europe", a "Europe" constructed by the tales that both imperialism and nationalism have told the colonized.' The project of Indian history thus remains a mimicry of the hyperreal Europe, and is marked by lack and failure.

THE AFFIRMATION OF DIFFERENCE

It is precisely as part of the effort to refigure this kind of lack that the affirmation of difference occurs. Practitioners of the strategy assert that oral traditions are different in principle from the discipline of history. The nativist filiation of the strategy which has privileged oral traditions because they are more authentic need not detain us — it is too boring and problematic an approach to need dismantling. One of the more interesting early forms that this kind of affirmation took was the emphasis on the dichotomy between

  [4] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the artifice of history: Who speaks for the "Indian" pasts', *Representations*, 37, Winter, 1992, p. 1.

history and myth — there were the 'hot' societies that experienced change and possessed a sense of history, and there were the 'cold' societies that were relatively changeless and possessed a sense of myth. Though we have not yet been able to entirely shake off the legacy of that distinction,[5] it is no longer seriously sustained.

But the affirmation of difference continues in diverse ways, sometimes positing a difference between history and memory, sometimes calling for mytho-history, and sometimes simply describing oral traditions as forms of historical imagination quite distinct from the forms of the professional historian. The finest works within this tradition have not stopped using oral traditions as sources for a professional history, but what has been most distinctive about them is the way in which they elicit indigenous conceptions of the past, and explore different forms of historical imagination.[6]

As with the denial of difference, the affirmation of difference is a manoeuvre resorted to not only by students of oral tradition, but by students of colonial and postcolonial societies more broadly; indeed, it may be described without exaggeration as the dominant approach now. It is in this broader sense that the manoeuvre is

[5] For an unsuccessful attempt to rehabilitate the distinction, see Jonathan Hill, 'Introduction: Myth and history', in Jonathan Hill (ed.), *Rethinking history and myth: Indigenous South American perspectives on the past*, Chicago, 1988, pp. 6, 9.

[6] Amongst the most important works that have paid attention to oral traditions in this manner, by affirming difference, are: Shelly Errington, 'Some comments on style in the meaning of the past', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 28, no. 2, 1979; Renato Rosaldo, *Ilongot headhunting, 1883–1974: A study in society and history*, Stanford, 1980; Marshall Sahlins, *Historical metaphors and mythical realities: Structure in the early history of the Sandwich Islands kingdom*, Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania Special Publication no. 1, Ann Arbor, 1981; Richard Price, *First-time: The historical vision of an Afro-American people*, Baltimore, 1983; J.D.Y. Peel, 'Making history: The past in the Ijesha present', *Man*, n.s., vol. 19, no. 1, 1984; Howard Morphy and Frances Morphy, 'The "myths" of Ngalakan history: Ideology and images of the past in northern Australia, *Man*, n.s., vol. 19, no. 3, 1984; Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of history*, Chicago, 1985; Robert Borofsky, *Making history: Pukapukan and anthropological constructions of knowledge*, Cambridge, 1987; Joanne Rappaport, *The politics of memory: Native historical interpretation in the Colombian Andes*, Cambridge, 1990; Alessandro Portelli, *The death of Luigi Trastulli and other stories: Form and meaning in oral history*, Albany, 1991; David William Cohen, *The combing of history*, Chicago, 1994; Lisa H. Malkki, *Purity and exile: Violence, memory and national cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania*, Chicago, 1995. For India, see especially Gyan Prakash, *Bonded histories: Genealogies of labour servitude in colonial India*, Cambridge, 1990; Nicholas B. Dirks, *The hollow crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian kingdom*, Cambridge, 1987; Shahid Amin, *Event, metaphor, memory*, Delhi, 1995.

best discussed. In early formulations, the affirmation of difference often took the form of nativist histories, and the claim of a distinctive space from which the colonized subaltern spoke. But with the problematizing and decentering of the subject who speaks, the pitfalls of such straightforward affirmations of difference have come to be well-recognized. Dipesh Chakrabarty's essay represents a suggestive exploration of what it could mean to affirm difference.

Where older narratives read lack, he argues, it is possible to read 'plenitude' and 'creativity'. Thus, there were persistent ambivalences in Indian appropriations of key colonial categories. They were marked by 'contestation, alliance and miscegenation . . . with other narratives of the self and community that do not look to the [western liberal] state-citizen bind as the ultimate construction of sociality'. Yet, it is not enough to stop with an acknowledgement of this, for, though they may be documented, they are so anti-historical that they will never enjoy the privilege of providing our metanarratives or teleologies; rather, they are more likely to be appropriated by history. That is to say, while the affirmation of difference from history is needed, it is not possible.

Because of this conviction about the inescapability and ubiquity of history, Chakrabarty has a distinctive vision of how to 'provincialize Europe' or limit the reach of theoretical and explanatory models drawn from the experience of European modernity.

the project of provincializing Europe must realize within itself its own impossibility. It therefore looks to a history which embodies this politics of despair. . . . I ask for a history that deliberately makes visible . . . its own repressive strategies and practices. . . . This is a history that will attempt the impossible: to look towards its own death by tracing that which resists and escapes the best human effort at translation across cultural and other semiotic systems, so that the world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous. . . . To attempt to provincialize this 'Europe' is to see the modern as inevitably contested, to write over the given and privileged narratives of citizenship other narratives of human connections that draw sustenance from dreamed up pasts and futures where collectivities are defined neither by the rituals of citizenship nor by the nightmare of 'tradition' that 'modernity' creates. There are of course no (infra)structural sites where such dreams could lodge themselves. Yet they will recur so long as the themes of citizenship and the nation state dominate our narratives of historical transition, for these dreams are what the modern represses in order to be.[7]

[7] 'Postcoloniality and the artifice of history', pp. 22f; see also pp. 8, 18 for

Caught between the apparent impossibilities of affirming memory and escaping history, caught in situations where the only history possible seems that of a hyperreal Europe, a radical politics of despair seems to be all that remains.

HISTORY AS A MYTH OF MODERNITY

There is of course a need to provincialize Europe, to write over privileged narratives of citizenship and modernity that make 'history' their home. But for reasons that will become clear below, I am sceptical about a politics of despair. I am fascinated rather by politics of a different kind — a politics of hope. Hope is a word that we have come to regard with kneejerk suspicion and associate with emancipatory metanarratives. If the politics of hope is to be anything more than a glib phrase, then it is necessary to indicate how we may talk of it. The most persuasive ways to do so would be to focus on the hybrid histories made possible by the recognition that history is a myth of modernity.

I use myth not in the Levi-Straussian sense which ascribed it to cold (read premodern) societies, but in the Barthesian sense, which avoids the western:non-western, traditional:modern, or cold:hot dichotomies. In Barthes' understanding, myths can be seen as the naturalization of meaning, or the moment when meanings take on givenness and fixity, and when the processes that have created meanings, as well as the contingency that always characterizes meanings, become invisible.[8]

In saying that history is a myth of modernity I refer to the naturalization of an association between history and western modernity. The empirical work of professional historians often acknowledges that premodern Europe, China or India had historical imaginations, and that several characteristics which we associate with modern and western histories can be found in modern and premodern European and non-European societies. Still, the positing of a special

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earlier quotes. See also Nicholas Dirks, 'History as a sign of the modern', *Public Culture*, 2, no. 2, Spring, 1990.

[8] See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annete Lavers, New York, 1972, and 'Change in the object: Mythology today', in his *Image music text*, trans. Stephen Heath, London, 1977. Barthes vacillates between this reading and a more structuralist interpretation of myth, which depends in less interesting ways on a distinction between prior meaning and distorted meaning, seeing myth as the latter. See also on this point Sturrock, *Structuralism and since: From Levi-Strauss to Derrida*, Oxford, 1979, pp. 57, 60, 62.

relationship between history and modernity is pervasive, asserted often by those very historians whose empirical work undermines the association. For example, there is the frequent assertion that medieval writers did not recognize 'the pastness of the past',[9] and that it is with modernity that the past becomes a foreign country, thus making history possible.[10] A diverse range of thinkers over the last few centuries have in various ways emphasized how there is something modern about history, or how it is the historical sensibility which makes western civilization (often understood to include the ancient Greek world) so unique. Even the argument of several philosophers of history that the western professional discipline of history is the product of modern historical imaginations which favoured realist vehicles of representation can feed into this position.[11] And certainly, those resorting to the strategy of affirming difference draw implicitly or explicitly on such an association.

It is precisely this association that is problematic, and can lead on to a politics of despair. I would like to argue instead that the association is part of the modernist understanding of modernity or of the hyperreal Europe, and that this association leads to a curious position for non-western modern (or premodern western and non-western) styles of the past. Repressed and rendered invisible, they form the Other of history, the constitutive outside which defines history and yet cannot be acknowledged. This Other is often conceived of as memory, a category thought to hold everything — including epic, chronicle and myth — which is premodern or non-western. It is to this Other, memory, that we need to turn.

At least since Halbwachs, the distinction between history and memory has been drawn repeatedly by historians and social scientists.[12] A recent survey, though it remarked that Halbwachs'

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[9] Mary Carruthers, *The book of memory: A study of memory in medieval culture*, Cambridge, 1990, p. 193.

[10] David Lowenthal, *The past is a foreign country*, Cambridge, 1985.

[11] Amongst the works which point in this direction, especially relevant are White, *Metahistory*, and his *Tropics of discourse*; Antony Kemp, *The estrangement of the past: A study in the origins of modern historical consciousness*, Oxford, 1991; Stephen Bann, *Romanticism and the rise of history*, New York, 1995; Bann, *The inventions of history: Essays on the representations of the past*, Manchester, 1990; Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (eds), *A new philosophy of history*, Chicago, 1995. For a useful survey of the relationship between history and modernity, see also Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *Sequel to history: Postmodernism and the crisis of representational time*, New Jersey, 1992.

[12] Maurice Halbwachs, *The collective memory*, trans. F.J. Ditter, Jr. and V.Y. Ditter, New York, 1980 (1950), pp. 80ff.

'circumscribed definition of history may be one that few historians would today accept', concluded in terms not very different:

In traditional societies, the past was continually being updated in living memory, and imagination and memory were perceived to be inter-changeable. One lived continually in the presence of the past. . . . The move into modern historical understanding opened up a divide be-tween past and present.[13]

The distinction between memory and history both resembles and is tied to the more famous one between speech and writing. Memory is usually thought to be characteristic of primarily oral societies, and to be displaced by history in societies with widespread literacy and a print culture.[14] Even the emergence of history in the west is often seen as deeply intertwined with the story of writing, especially in its print form. As Frances Yates suggested, the arts of memory, such as mnemonics, were very well developed in the manuscript culture of medieval Europe, but declined with the easier availability of printed books.[15]

Derrida has explored a series of contrasts between speech and writing in western culture, where speech stands for liberty, natural goodness, and spontaneity, and writing stands for servitude, ar-ticulation and death. He describes this as logocentrism, or the privileging of speech and its treatment as authentic. At the same time, he suggests, logocentrism ascribes a civilizational role to writing. One could take his point further, as de Certeau has done, and say that a deep connection is often postulated between writing and modernity. Writing epitomizes learning, civilization, and all that distinguishes the West from the Rest:

The 'oral is that which does not contribute to progress; reciprocally, the 'scriptural' is that which separates itself out from the magical world of voices and traditions. A frontier (and a front) of Western culture is established by that separation. Thus one can read above the portals of modernity such inscriptions as 'Here, to work is to.write', or 'Here, only what is written is understood'. Such is the internal law of that which has constituted itself as 'Western'.[16]

13 Patrick Hutton, *History as an art of memory*, Hanover, 1993, pp. 77, 156.
14 Jacques Le Goff, *History and memory*, trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman, New York, 1992 (1977), p. xi. This is the subtext of Le Goff's argu-ments: pp. 54–62, 129–34.
15 Frances Yates, *The arts of memory*, London, 1991 (1966); see also M.T. Clanchy, *From memory to written record: England, 1066–1307*, Oxford, 1993, 2nd edition.
16 Michel de Certeau, *The practice of everyday life*, Berkeley, 1984, p. 134.

Elsewhere, I have implied that the association of writing and modernity is itself one of the myths of modernity. Both Derrida and de Certeau in some senses accept this myth, for while showing the association of writing and modernity to be a construct, they also fetishize that construct rather than challenge it.[17] Further extending that point, it seems possible to argue that the association of history with modernity is an even more central western myth of modernity. Just as writing is often portrayed as supplementary to speech, so is history seen as supplementary to memory. In this sense, both writing and history are unoriginal; only speech and memory are original. But the similarities end here. Writing is usually seen as simply the inscription of speech, not necessarily involving its trans-formation. If it is after and above speech, it is seen as so primarily in the sense that it develops after speech, and provides other ways of carrying on speech, ways that are very much more effective than speech. In this sense, writing is principally viewed as a technology, and as such capable of being exported or imported to societies. Its modernity or civilized nature springs essentially from this — it is viewed as a technological prerequisite of modernity.

Contrast this to what Le Goff says, speaking from within the common sense of the hyperreal Europe: 'Memory is the raw material of history. Whether mental, oral or written, it is the living source from which historians draw. . . . The historian must be there . . . to transform them [memories] into something that can be conceived, to make them knowable.'[18] That is to say, history is seen not as the inscription of memory but as the evolution of memory; it transforms memory.

Because of this, history in the mainstream western tradition is not simply a prerequisite of modernity or western civilization: it *is* modernity or western civilization. It is perceived not so much as a technology as a sensibility peculiar to, created by and creating, modernity or western civilization. As such, it cannot be exported or imported. And to uncover, discover or recover history requires, in this discourse, a historical sensibility, a sensibility that the tech-nology of writing amongst others enables but does not create. History is the supplement that eventually displaces its moment of origin, memory; and memory is the constitutive outside that history

17 These arguments are made in more detail in my 'Writing orality and power in western India', in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (eds), *Sub-altern studies*, vol. IX, Delhi, 1996.
18 Le Goff, *History and memory*, pp. xif.

has to deny affinities with. Since the time of the Greeks, *mythos* or the word as a decisive final pronouncement or authoritarian thinking has been contrasted to *logos*, the word whose validity or truth can be demonstrated or enlightened thinking.[19]

THE IMPOSSIBILITIES OF MEMORY

Maybe this difference in the representations of writing and history explains why there is no equivalent of logocentrism in the representation of memory. Logocentrism is often part of a radical, though flawed, critique of western society. By privileging speech and oral cultures, it attempts, as in the case of Levi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*, a critique of the subordination of 'primitive' peoples by 'civilized' ones, in which writing has played a major role.

What is striking is that while such radical logocentrism is a pervasive theme in western thought, the use of memory to critique history — what one might call a mythocentrism — is a very muted trope. It does occur occasionally, as in Eliade's withering remarks about the inability of modern social science to comprehend the meanings and richness of myth, or in the fascination shared by many scholars for the richness and fluidity of Homeric or other epics. But these arguments are really logocentric rather than mythocentric: they do not valorize myths and epics for epitomizing memory but for epitomizing what they take to be the fluidity of speech and orality. Consider the way Levi-Strauss views memory. In *The Savage Mind*, he suggests that the centrality Sartre accords to history is a form of ethnocentrism: just as myths of so-called primitive people invariably designate their own tribes as uniquely human and all others as inhuman, the centrality accorded to history allows Sartre to place western civilization above others. As this indicates, Levi-Strauss has been one of the few thinkers to view history itself as a myth. Yet in his distinction between hot and cold societies Levi-Strauss also affirmed the history–myth dichotomy, and claimed that there were societies 'without history'.[20] He tried to avoid the ethnocentrism of such a strategy not by deconstructing the dichotomy but by decentering it. He suggested that history,

[19] Peter Heehs, 'Myth, history and theory', *History and Theory*, vol. 33, no. 1, 1994, p. 3; Jurgen Habermas, *The philosophical discourse of modernity*, Cambridge, 1987, p. 107.

[20] Claude Levi-Strauss, *The savage mind*, Chicago, 1966, especially chs 8 and 9.

though not bound to disappear, would no longer dominate the social sciences. He envisioned it being replaced by anthropology, and felt that historical culture would occupy just one place amongst others in a system of differences and similarities between societies.

This vision contrasts with his attempt to avoid ethnocentrism in situating societies 'without writing' and 'without history' (two themes in his work which he considered closely related). There he was logocentric and passionately affirmed the primacy of speech; here instead of being mythocentric and affirming memory he displaces the whole dichotomy.

Memory, quite evidently, is far more difficult to affirm than speech. This is why, in other writers too, even when myths or epics as memory are acknowledged as a crucial source for history, the acknowledgement is hedged in by cautions. Le Goff warns us: 'to privilege memory excessively is to sink into the unconquerable flow of time'.[21] And radical historians usually affirm history rather than memory. So it is that Jameson opens his *Political Unconscious* with the injunction 'always historicize!'. He describes this 'slogan' as 'the one absolute and we may even say "transhistorical" imperative'.[22] Similarly, the history-from-below movement was basically about recovering the history of subordinated groups; feminist scholars have tried to recover the history of women; and early volumes of *Subaltern Studies* had similar, though differently inflected, aims of recovering the history of subaltern groups.[23] Even Chakrabarty and others who are hostile to the discourse of history conclude that there is no alternative to it. In sum, history (seen as necessarily western and modern) is a central arena in which claims to legitimacy have to be made.[24]

[21] Le Goff, *History and memory*, pp. xif.

[22] Frederic Jameson, *The Political unconscious: narrative as a socially symbolic act*, London, 1989, p. 9; for some criticisms of this, see Geoff Bennington, 'Demanding history', Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington and Robert Young (eds), *Post-structuralism and the question of history*, Cambridge, 1987, p. 20.

[23] For the ways in which the Subaltern Studies project has developed, see Gyan Prakash, 'Subaltern studies as postcolonial criticism', *American Historical Review*, vol. 99, December 1994; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Subaltern studies: Deconstructing historiography', *Subaltern studies IV: Writings on South Asian history and society*, New Delhi, 1985; Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Recovering the subject: Subaltern studies and histories of resistance in colonial South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1988.

[24] Of course, there is also a long tradition of attacks on the inescapability of this history, a tradition which can be traced back to Nietzsche's moving 'On the uses and disadvantages of history for life', in his *Untimely meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge, 1983.

Why should the discourse of history seem so inescapable? It seems to me that the logocentric critique of western society rests, paradoxically, on a more fundamental affirmation of that culture. Though speech is depicted as natural and original in relation to writing, it is already seen as an act of enunciation by the thinking subject. Thus there can be broad acknowledgement that oral cultures produce great western civilizations — witness the canonical position long accorded to the Homeric epics. Since writing is not seen as a qualitative transformation of speech but only its inscription, speech is not inappropriate for modernity — even if writing is more appropriate. So to reject writing is not to reject modernity or civilization as a whole but only particular aspects of these.

In contrast, since history not only inscribes but transforms memory, it is seen not merely as a technology but the very sensibility of modernity and western civilization. Because of its transformative work, it leaves memory with no legitimate existence save as the prehistory of history. If memory is represented as natural, this is so in a different way from speech: unlike speech, memory is portrayed as prior to even enunciation by the thinking subject. Put another way, one might say that speech is the articulate natural of western civilization while memory is its inarticulate and primal natural, it is the unimaginable space of wildness. An affirmative discourse centred around memory is thus a far more profound rejection of modernity and western civilization than logocentrism; and it is because history is an even more central myth of modernity than writing that mythocentrism is impossible.

Hybrid Histories

Memory then is not about lack (or about permanently marginalized plenitude and creativity as Chakrabarty implies). Rather, as a site for those narratives which potentially challenge the hyperreal Europe, it is the moment of the naming of this challenge as lack. In hoping for hybrid histories, I refer to the reconstitution of this lack as surplus, to the telling of narratives which provincialize that most pervasive hyperreal of Europe — history.

But how is such provincializing to proceed? Quite clearly, it is not simply a matter of insisting that historical narratives exist in non-western or premodern societies — a manoeuvre that has been resorted to by a number of scholars over the last decade. While that manoeuvre by itself might be adequate for precolonial or

premodern societies, it is not enough for contemporary non-western or agonistic western styles of the past. The problems with it are best indicated by a parallel. Derrida suggests that Levi-Strauss perceives some societies as being 'without writing' because he privileges phonetic writing, and that if one were to think of writing more broadly so as to include any form of inscription, it would be more difficult to talk of societies without writing. But in discussing inscription so broadly, Derrida also glosses over, at least in this context, the relations of power in which phonetic writing has been imbricated, and on the role that it has played in the subordination of many societies without it. It is this which has made phonetic writing seem so much more powerful than inscription that societies without the former appear to be and become societies without writing.[25]

Similarly, the association of history and modernity, part of the hyperreal Europe, is not less powerful because it is a myth; to the contrary, its power is derived from just that fact. Because it has been closely associated, since at least the seventeenth century, with western domination, because it now defines the very way in which societies can imagine themselves, it has become as much more powerful relative to other contemporary narratives about the past as phonetic writing has become relative to other forms of inscription.[26]

Given all this, hybrid histories are best understood as simultaneously produced by a constant engagement with the hyperreal Europe and by proceeding beyond its limits. I do not mean to imply that hybrid histories occupy, commence from, or end up in a sort of unsullied space untouched by the hyperreal Europe. Rather, what is being suggested is that they are created through active escape from the hyperreal Europe; they are the consequence of traversing the hyperreal to reside in sites beyond it but marked by it. It is this act of traversal which makes hybrid histories the moment when powerlessness betokens power, when blindness betokens insight, and lack betokens surplus.

Subaltern oral traditions represent a particularly fascinating kind

25 For this point in relation to writing, see my 'Writing, orality and power'.
26 For a superb analysis of the relationship between history and forms of western domination, see Robert Young, *White mythologies: Writing history and the West*, London, 1990. For an analysis of how the production of history has been inseparable from domination over women, see Christina Crosby, *The ends of history: Victorians and the 'woman question'*, London, 1991.

of hybridity, for they are one of the prime sites ascribed to that *other of history* — memory. In this sense, they are often far less collusive with the hyperreal Europe than even subalternist histories rendered from within the professional discipline. The latter, by virtue of the very fact that their challenges are situated on professional historians' terrain, are usually far more complicitous with the hyperreal Europe. In some ways we have for long recognized the peculiar hybridity of subaltern oral traditions — it is surely not accidental that radical historians, even if they ended up denying difference with history, should have turned to oral traditions so regularly in trying to tell different stories of women, forest communities, working classes, the colonized, or other groups marginal to the hyperreal Europe.

As should be clear from all this, there is nothing necessarily new about hybrid histories. To the extent that the hyperreal Europe is never hegemonic, hybrid histories are coeval with it. The very enactment of subalternity — whether female, working class, colonized or other — involves some creation of hybrid histories. Also, while they may be radical in terms of their challenges to the hyperreal Europe, there is nothing necessarily radical about them in terms of their commitment to a related politics of subaltern empowerment. In some cases, the surplus of hybrid histories springs from their fetishization of the hyperreal Europe, as for example in Hindu fundamentalist constructions of the Babri Masjid–Ram Janmabhoomi dispute.[27] It is important to recognize this, for else we slip into claiming an (infra)structural site for hybrid histories and for a politics of hope — we assume that postliberal politics broadly speaking (and challenges to the hyperreal Europe more specifically) are by themselves always empowering for subaltern groups.

The point then is not that hybrid histories are entirely new, or are always about an empowering politics, but that struggles against relations of domination will be about accentuating the hybridity of such histories, and about foregrounding ways in which they challenge the hyperreal Europe. Further, many subaltern hybrid histories — such as those involved in Dangi oral traditions — are relentlessly radical in their envisioning of the past and in the challenges they articulate to relations of domination and the hyperreal

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[27] For analyses of Hindu fundamentalist constructions, see Gyanendra Pandey, 'Modes of history writing: New Hindu history of Ayodhya', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 29, no. 25, 15 June 1994; Heehs, 'Myth, history and theory', *History and Theory*, vol. 33, no. 1, 1994.

Europe. It is precisely moments of this sort that we (both scholars and activists) need to seize on, for these are the moments for dreaming of a politics of hope.

Dangi Historical Epochs

Dangi concerns frame the broad issues that the book is concerned with. The sequential order of the book is not that of professional historians. Rather, it proceeds in accordance with the two major epochs within which most Dangis frame their past, *moglai* and *mandini*. Roughly speaking (the rest of the book will qualify these meanings) *moglai is the time of freedom* — freedom to move in the forests, to raid, to collect a due called *giras* from the plains, and to have a distinctive pattern of political authority. Moglai informs radical politics in the Dangs today. Mandini is both an epoch, and an event that marks the end of moglai. With mandini, often associated with British dominance, Dangi political authority was undermined and they could no longer move about as formerly, or raid surrounding plains.

These Dangi epochs are subtly different from epochs or periods in the sense that professional historians use these terms. For the latter, an epoch or a period is marked by chronological continuity: despite some overlap, it could be broadly said that one epoch succeeds another. Sometimes, Dangi narrators too talk similarly: thus, moglai is often identified with the precolonial and early colonial period, and mandini is associated with *gora raj* or British rule. Quite as often, however, Dangi epochs traverse diverse chronological times, almost running parallel to each other. It is not unusual for events that occurred as recently as twenty years back to be part of moglai, and those that occurred two hundred years back to be part of mandini. Indeed, in some very suggestive ways, moglai is about what is extra-colonial. By extra-colonial, I obviously do not only mean precolonial — it is precisely that kind of chronological separation that I am trying to avoid. What I mean is something that often includes the precolonial (and this should not be forgotten), but is in more important ways defined in opposition to the colonial, and in opposition to the relations of domination over Dangs that surrounding plains areas have established. This is not to say, again, that moglai is about some unsullied Dangi space — rather, it is about spaces and times created by traversing and exceeding colonialism and the relations of domination that it is

associated with. Similarly, mandini is often about that which is extra-Dangi in origin or intent, and mandini in this sense ranges across the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial.

INTIMATIONS OF WILDNESS

A second way in which I try to sustain hybrid and contrapuntal narratives is by searching for narratives from within the professional discipline of history which correspond to these Dangi narratives. It is this search which led me to the theme of wildness. Moglai is often about particular kinds of wildness, ways of being *jangli* that are in an agonistic relationship to surrounding plains societies; and mandini is about the transformations of these forms of wildness.

Because most work on South Asian history has been on settled agricultural or urban communities and their economies, politics and culture, it has often been overlooked that such agriculture was not practised in those widespread tracts, covering nearly a third of the subcontinent, where the bulk of those who came to be called tribals lived.

When, inspired by goth, I looked carefully at records, I felt I could read here stories about forms of wildness, and their transformations. In telling professional historians' stories of wildness, I have tried to create an overlapping epoch to moglai by attempting, like Dangi narrators, an extra-colonial history. This includes both the precolonial period and those spaces and times which might in conventional chronologies be part of the colonial period, but that could also be thought of as escaping (or, more precisely, exceeding) the colonial. In this sense, moglai cannot be understood save in the context of mandini. Similarly with professional historians' overlapping epochs to mandini: what I attempt is a history that roughly corresponds to the period of colonial domination, but is not exclusively defined by such domination.

APORIAS

One more remark. This book may be read as at least two books. The first can be read in the normal sequential fashion. It explores the various meanings of moglai for Dangis and historians' equivalents to these; it then goes on to mandini and historians' parallels to it. In this way, mandini at least can be approached with an

understanding of the myriad meanings of moglai. Such a reading has its strengths, but we do need to recognize that this is just one style of reading. If it is the one preferred by professional historians and social scientists, this is most of all because of its will to comprehensiveness: it purports to be exhaustive, to begin at the beginning and tell all there is to know, to make few presumptions about what the reader might know. As the next chapter suggests, Dangis share in some ways this will to comprehensiveness. So the sequential narrative presented below is not entirely outside Dangi understandings.

Still, more is lost in the sequential narrative here than would be lost in Dangi accounts. When most Dangis discuss an aspect of moglai, they simultaneously always already know something of how it is inflected by the mandini, and vice versa. This does not only mean that they can make multiple connections between narratives, that there is a deep cross referentiality made possible by simultaneous knowledge of many goth, or that the transition from moglai to mandini consists of several narratives tacking back and forth rather than being one single overarching narrative. These are true but by now predictable points. Most of all, their simultaneous knowledge of goth makes narrators sensitive to the excess of moglai. In contrast, a sequential narrative such as the one attempted here runs the risk of missing out on this excess, on the sense in which moglai is extra-colonial rather than only precolonial. After all, in the narrative that I present here, we learn of moglai before we learn of mandini; there is therefore a real danger of seeing moglai as prior in some chronological or ontological sense, of forgetting that moglai and mandini are produced simultaneously, that moglai is not so much prior to mandini as about that which exceeds mandini.

In order to try and produce a similar excess, I suggest that the book be read also in some supplementary ways. These supplementary narratives, which would explore the meanings of mandini and moglai in more simultaneous ways, and maybe define and displace the sequential narrative, can be attempted through reading the book in the following manner: 3–10–11–9–16–6–17–7–12–4–13–14–15–5–18–8–19–20. (Possible subsequent chapters in this supplementary narrative are indicated in brackets at the end of each chapter.) Read this way, there are four overlapping narratives. Chapters 3, 10, 11, and 9 look at the meanings of moglai and mandini for relations with the plains, and at the meanings of the

completion of the inner frontier; chapters 16, 6, 17 and 7 explore aspects of what it meant to be a raja in moglai and mandini, and of the transformation of forest polities; chapters 12, 4, 13, 14, 15 and 5 look at moglai and mandini in terms of the transformation of Dangi relations with the forests, and of Dangi identities as a forest community; chapters 18, 8, 19 and 20 look at how the meanings of being Dangi and of being wild have changed. Of course, these supplementary narratives are much more patchy and partial than the sequential narrative, but maybe this patchiness is itself reason for hope.

So the two hybrid histories, those from oral narratives and those from archival sources, remain in tension. Even when Dangi and professional historians' narratives focus on the same issues, there remain irreducible differences between them. Sometimes, there are no shared issues that can bring together in the same vision these two very different narratives. And even where the two narratives are around shared issues, an accretional approach alone ignores the distinctive trajectories of each: the two have to be simultaneously kept distinct, not within the same framework. As all this suggests, the book is intended to be read in at least two ways — as professional histories of Dangs, and as Dangi histories.