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Tortured bodies, rape, and disposability in Mahasweta Devi's "Giribala", "Dhowli" and "Douloti the Bountiful"

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Abstract: This article offers a close reading of Mahasweta Devi's ethnographic reportage in her short narratives "Giribala" and "Dhowli," in *Women, Outcastes, Peasants and Rebels* and "Douloti the Bountiful" in *Imaginary Maps* to show how ecological marginalization, reproductive rape and unequal resource access have depleted Adivasi female reproductive spaces, disposing them to sexualized and commodified sites of exploitative ideological values. Employing an interdisciplinary approach, I argue that Devi's cultural production provides an ethnographic venue for examining how power relations shape reproduction and reproductive decisions and how women struggle daily to reproduce their livelihoods under local levels of political duress.

Subjects: Asian Studies; Gender Studies; Humanities; Indigenous Peoples; Language & Literature; Literature; Population Geography

Keywords: ethnic literature; gender; adivasi; tribals; reproductive justice; indigenous studies; ecology; Mahasweta Devi; Maria Mies; Gayatri Spivak

1. Introduction

From British Colonialism to postindependence India, Bengali writer and social advocate Mahasweta Devi has witnessed decades of political change that have culminated in India's pivotal presence on the global stage. Inspiring young and old with her strong position in support of India's tribal populations, Devi has been a tireless advocate for the socio-economic protection, security, and political well-being of the Adivasis, also known as the Scheduled Tribes. Described as a political anthropologist for her keen ethnographic observation, Devi captures an ethnographic realism in her writing and a social conscience that have influenced all phases of her prolific career. In this analysis, I specifically examine Devi's reportage in her short narratives "Giribala," "Dhowli," in *Women, Outcastes, Peasants and Rebels* and "Douloti the Bountiful" in *Imaginary Maps*, situated as they are at the cusp of neoliberalism, to

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Mahasweta Devi's cultural production, offers crucial ethnographic observation to show how the adivasi female body has become a historical battleground of deeper socio-economic and political issues, her reproductive systems a discursive site for the examination of insurrection, resistance, and decolonization. Reading women's bodies as occupied territories in Devi's "Giribala", "Dhowli" and "Douloti the Bountiful" reveals how local, regional and national patriarchal and capital arrangements have dispossessed adivasi women from their reproductive systems and livelihoods.

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show how capitalist forces have penetrated female reproductive spaces disposing them to sexualized and commodified sites of exploitive fluctuating ideological values. Devi locates these gender violations in the rural areas where Adivasi women struggle daily to ward off physical thirst and hunger and male predatory advances against them and their children. In a corrupt social system where the Adivasi community is deemed a financial blight to the postcolonial economy, the women in Devi's narratives have suffered the cost of development propaganda. Therefore, it is important to read women's bodies as occupied territories in order to reveal how local, regional and national patriarchal and capital arrangements have dispossessed the Adivasis from their reproductive systems and livelihoods.

In a July 2014 United Nations report entitled, Mary John establishes that India faces a crisis over the dwindling numbers of girls, and claims that the reduction in female birth rates has reached emergency proportions (p. 6). The report attributes the drop in birth rates to sex-detection technology, and the preference for sons, which according to the United Nations has fueled the increase in rape, abduction, and sex trafficking. Maria Mies points out a heading in an Indian newspaper which read: "Doctor, kill it if it's a girl" (Mies, 1999, p. 151). The article details how pregnant women were used as "test-persons in an Indian clinic in sex-pre-selection experiments. A fair number of the women on whom the tests were tried out told the doctors to abort the foetus if it was female" (1999, p. 151). Mahasweta Devi's reportage substantiates these findings demonstrating how low female birth rates are directly related to the systematic exploitation of female reproductive bodies. In her narrative accounts, women have affirmatively removed their future female offspring from a patriarchal system that denigrates and exploits them. In response to this continuing reproductive phenomenon, Lakshmi Puri, Deputy executive director of U.N. Women, launched a new study on "sex ratios and gender-based sex selection," which said, "It is tragically ironic that the one who creates life is herself denied the right to be born?" (Bhalla, 2014, July 22).

The complicated reproductive politics in Devi's "Giribala," "Dhowli," and "Douloti the Bountiful" dramatizes the real lived experiences of how a phallocentric economy depletes women's reproductive systems, resulting in violent reproductive collapse and the eradication of sexual procreative behaviors. It is crucial to understand when reading this analysis that I consider each work as a narrative form of ethnographic reportage. Similar to Anjum Katyal's observation of *Rudali,* such works "are not intended to be fictional. They—or their prototypes—exist outside the novella" (Sen & Yadav, 2008, p. 62). Devi's characters, sadly, live "real" lives of systematic impoverishment and subjugation, offering a shared witnessing practice between Devi as the ethnographer and the reader as co-witness of shared responsibility. Devi's cultural production provides an ethnographic venue for examining how power relations shape reproduction and reproductive decisions and how women struggle daily to reproduce their livelihoods under local levels of political duress. Although delving into reproductive choices is often a difficult topic for Western feminists, these works offer a valuable venue to examine what Faye D. Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp argue in *Conceiving the New World Order*—"rights are always historically and culturally located" (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1995, p. 9). Within the specific historical regional positioning, Devi testifies to the struggle Adivasi women face in trying to retain control over their reproductive bodies and livelihoods.

2. "Giribala"

In "Giribala," we witness how women's reproductive bodies have become a political space of social activism and political resistance against a privileged patriarchal power structure that persistently subordinates women's lives to years of injustice and gendered brutality and impoverishment. Devi's ethnographic reportage of the sale of young girls into prostitution testifies to an entrenched history of gendered violence aimed at young pubescent girls.

In this short narrative, Devi's protagonist Giri is only 14 years of age when she is married off to the abusive Aulchand and indoctrinated into the patriarchal dictum: "A daughter born. To husband or death. She's already gone" (Devi, 1990, p. 247). In this property exchange in which Giri's father paid Aulchand "eighty rupees and a heifer before he married her," Giri is cast into the patriarchal bargain

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for exchange (Devi, 1990, p. 247)."After the birth of her fourth child, a daughter she named Maruni,[1] she asked the doctor at the hospital, where she went for this birth, to sterilize her" (Devi, 1990, p. 276). Her request for sterilization raises questions of reproductive control and incurs the wrath of her husband. When Aulchand terrorizes her to tell him *why*, it becomes apparent that Giri chooses to preclude her reproductive system from any further patriarchal control in a society where, "having a daughter only means having to raise a slave for others" (Devi, 1990, p. 276). Giri's uterus goes permanently on strike from further patriarchal intrusion in a country that devalues daughters as disposable second skins.

The sexual commodification of young female beings comes to full fruition when Auchland marries off his "scared 12 year old daughter," for "four hundred rupees in cash" while Giri is away visiting her parents. Later, Giri learns: "There were five girls like Bela taken there to be married to five unknown blokes. The addresses they left are false. This kind of business is on the rise" (Devi, 1990, p. 281). Here, we witness the drastic inner workings of a corrupt gendered economic structure—the selling of young girls for survival. It is a system that has been reinforced by hegemonic inculcation in order to maintain its epistemic validity and the acceptance of the "status quo" by the wider community.

Giri's Bela had become another victim of a duplicitous business venture of "procuring girls on the pretext of marriage" (Devi, 1990, p. 281). Devi observes that the police do little to help the mothers and young girls in these circumstances. Instead, they blame it on the father and the fact that "Poor Bela had this written on her forehead"; she was a girl after all (Devi, 1990, p. 281). Giri's first response is to bang her head against a patriarchal ceiling that positions men as owners and women's as oppressed producers. It is a determining logic that sustains gendered subordination, as "A daughter, until she is married, is her father's property. It's useless for a mother to think she has any say" (Devi, 1990, p. 281). Here, we co-witness how young girls have become alienated commodities to be bartered, bought, and sold as instruments of sexual labor.

It is not until Giri has been duped into marrying her almost ten-year old daughter, Pori, off into what she believed at the time was a way to protect her from the same fate of her first daughter Bela that Giri begins to find another way out of her predicament. Unfortunately, the mother and father have been swept away by the desire to marry their daughters. Trusting Mohan, a family friend, to find her daughter a mate before Auchland intervenes, Giri, unknowingly, delivers her second daughter into a large-scale prostitution ring:

> ...[M]ohan was now in a business flung much further, procuring girls for whorehouses in the big cities, where the newly rich businessmen and contractors went to satisfy their newfound appetite for childlike, underdeveloped bodies of Bengali pubescent girls. Fed well for a few months, they bloomed so deliciously that they yielded back within a couple of years, the price to procure them. (Devi, 1990, p. 285)

Although Devi's reportage is fictional, it testifies to a deep-rooted history of gender-specific violence targeted at young pubescent girls. Rita Banerji's *50 Million Missing Women's* international campaign reports that "More than 50 million women have been killed in India in 3 generations" and "more than 100,000 young women are gang-lynched by their husband and in-laws in dowry murders every year" (2011). Siddharth Kara's *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery* similarly narrates a disturbing personal account of how pubescent girls have become a fetishized commodity in India's lucrative sex trade. In this text, Siddharth Kara interviews an owner of four brothels in Mumbai "each with approximately four hundred women," detailing how the brothels comprise "prostitutes from various places. Sometimes *dalas* brought batches of them to Kamathipura and auctioned them; other times he frequented a market north of Mumbai where women were brought from Nepal, Bangladesh, and other regions in India for sale" (Kara, 2010, p. 53).

The brothel owner testifies to the persistence of Mohan's fictional entrepreneurialism that "There is a premium on young girls under fourteen years of age" (Kara, 2010, p. 53). Kara's ethnographic account further notes that the sexploitation of young women is a daily occurrence as "Every minute of every day, the most vulnerable of women and children in the world are raped for profit with impunity" (2010, p. 3). Unfortunately, we see as in the case of Devi's "Giribala," how extreme poverty and economic severity force the sale of young girls like Bela and Pori. In the "The Power of Women," Selma James points out: "This is a strange commodity, for it is not a thing. The ability to labor resides only in a human being whose life is consumed in the process of producing" (1997, p. 37).

It is for this reason, that Giri sterilizes herself and removes any future daughters from her womb to this fate. For the commodity Giri produces, "unlike all other commodities, is unique to capitalism: the living human being"—the pubescent sexual laborer herself (James, 1997, p. 36). By taking control over her body, "Giribala" directly subverts her husband's domination over her reproductive organs and contests the transformation of her daughters into surplus labor to feed male sexual appetites. Because Giri's fertile womb is essential for Auchland, Giri's refusal to reproduce is the ultimate form of social power and resistance. Auchland's chastisement of Giri's actions confirms his economic motives: "Foolish woman, you shouldn't have done that operation. The more daughters we have, the more money we can have" (Devi, 1990, p. 288). Giri precludes her womb from begetting more fetishized commodities to be sold into sex bondage, for "no matter what euphemism is used, nobody ever sets up home for a girl bought with money" (Devi, 1990, p. 289). Motivated by survival, Giri leaves Auchland "to work in other people's homes in order to feed and raise her remaining children" (Devi, 1990, p. 289).

While Devi positions her protagonist in the act of patriarchal resistance, she more importantly unmasks the deep-rooted institutional relations, which sustain female vulnerability and sexual subjugation. "What happened to Bela and Pori was happening to many others these days. But leaving one's husband was quite a different matter. What kind of woman would leave her husband of many years just like that?" (Devi, 1990, p. 289). Here, rather than take action against a system that reifies and exploits their young daughters, the community has been indoctrinated into the patriarchal tradition of scapegoating the rebellious Giris of the system who refuse to service patriarchy's sexual machinery. In this instance, Devi indicts the oppressive socio-political apparatuses at play within the community that bind women into their disposable second skin status. Indian demographer Ashhok Mitra makes a similar observation of the expendability of women's reproductive systems:

> In the last thirty years after Independence Indian women have increasingly become an expendable commodity, expendable both in the demographic and in the economic sense. Demographically woman is more and more reduced to her reproductive functions, and when these are fulfilled she is expendable. Economically she is relentlessly pushed out of the reproductive sphere and reduced to a unit of consumption, which therefore is undesired. (qtd. in Mies, 1999, p. 123)

In Giri, Bela and Pori's case, they have been pushed out; yet, their bodies and labor are desired and essential for fueling an economy that demands a cheap service sector to sustain the sexual appetites of its political structure. It is precisely this unrestrictive exploitative process of pushing women out of their domestic spaces and reproductive units that churns them into disposable commodities.

3. "Dhowli"

In "Dhowli," Devi adds another layer of caste privilege into the construction of patriarchal rape in which both women's reproductive systems and women's livelihoods are under siege. In this reportage, Dhowli, a young "untouchable Dusad girl," is impregnated by an upper caste Brahman and left to fend for herself (Devi, 1990, p. 186). Devi establishes that the sexual taking of young Dusad girls is nothing new in this village as the Misra[2] landowners are accustomed to treating girls as chattel. To thwart Misra's sexual advances, Dhowli charges, "You landlord people, you take whatever pleases

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you. If you want to take my honor, take it then. Let me be through with it" (Devi, 1990, p. 191). Dhowli resigns herself to her fate as, "All the Misra men do that, and there is not a thing that the Dhowli of the world can do to stop it" (Devi, 1990, p. 191).

Fearful of how they will survive, Dhowli's mother asks her to visit the Sanichari for medicine "to remove the 'thorn' from the womb" as her fetus is a product of "greed and ruthless power" (Devi, 1990, p. 188). After Dhowli refuses to give up the child, her mother takes her daughter and grand-children's destiny into her own hands by enlisting Sanichari to deliver the baby and "to make sure she would be infertile after this baby" (Devi, 1990, p. 196). Here, again, we witness an affirmative attempt to remove the womb as a social factory for reproduction. Dhowli's mother is quite aware of the plight of young girls and refuses to let her daughter produce sexual laborers for upper caste desire and entertainment.

After Dhowli gives birth, her mother and child are shunned and starved out of existence. Dhowli finally charges her *deota* (god): "You ruined my life, turned it to ashes, and you can't even hear the hard truth? Is it being rich that makes one so tender-skinned?" (Devi, 1990, p. 200). In Devi's testament to the truth, the answer to this question is a resounding "yes." Devi indicts a system, which tramples women's rights to human dignity. She charges the moneylenders who appropriated Dhowli's mother's land, when the latter's father died; she charges the *deotas* of the world who force both mother and daughters into indentured labor for food; she indicts the community that continues to believe that the fault for this national predicament lies with the foolish Dhowlis who give their bodies away on the pretext of love (Devi, 1990, p. 188).

Dhowli further questions a similar fate experienced by Giribala's daughters. "What will she do then? Will she end up opening her door at night when the pebbles strike the door? For a few coins from one, some corn or a sari from another? Is that how she must live?" (Devi, 1990, p. 198). Will she too become a prostitute in order to survive? Full of rage, she accusingly interpellates Misra: "Why did you destroy me like this?" (Devi, 1990, p. 199). Dhowli contemplates suicide until she meets a "coolie supervisor and a coolie himself" and realizes it was he who was throwing clods of dirt at her door as a solicitation of sex (Devi, 1990, p. 201).

Dhowli is forced to prostitute her body in order to survive. When a suitor comes to the door, she lets him in. "The man has brought corn, lentils, salt and one rupee. Dhowli pays him back with her body, to the very last penny" (Devi, 1990, p. 202). When Misra's brother discovers Dhowli's business he tells his brother to do something and taunts his masculinity: "You're not a man! Just a scared worm!" (Devi, 1990, p. 204). To prove his manliness, Misra takes charge of the situation and visits Dhowli at night. "It is a changed Dhowli who opens the door—she is wearing a red sari and green bangles, and her oiled hair is in a plait down her back" (Devi, 1990, p. 204). He affirms that she has indeed become a *randi* (prostitute). She confirms this as her only way of surviving. "How else can I live? How can I bring up your son?" (Devi, 1990, p. 204) His response is "Why didn't you kill yourself?" (Devi, 1990, p. 204).

This question reflects a patriarchal ideology, which reinforces the victimization of women and what Maria Mies refers to as "the ideology of the eternal victim, the ideology of self-sacrifice" in that her sole sexual and reproductive purpose is to quench the desires of patriarchy (1999, p. 165). Mies reinforces Devi's ethnographic observations that within the Hindu religion women take on roles of the self-sacrificing mother; a husband worshipping and self-sacrificing wife, with "no autonomy over her own life, her own body, her own sexuality" (1999, p. 165).

Dhowli admits that she had indeed entertained the idea of suicide, but later questioned why she, the woman, mother of his child should have to die. "You'll marry, run your shop, go to the cinema with your wife, and I'll be the one to die? Why?" (Devi, 1990, p. 204). The question "why" disturbs the patriarchal universe; unfortunately, Devi shows how the legal system is also a fabrication of male privilege and power as Dhowli is restrained from prostituting herself by orders of the village spokesman,

Hanumanji. She is forced to leave her village and travel to Ranchi to register as a prostitute. If she remains, the community threatens to burn down her home (Devi, 1990, p. 204). Dhowli is banished from the village, leaving her mother in charge of the baby son (Devi, 1990, p. 205). Devi suggests that Dhowli's perceived indentured occupation as prostitute is actually an act of sexual defiance in which Dhowli individually takes control over her sexual body and her destiny. In a declaration of self-determination, Dhowli ruminates on her socio-economic positioning. She contemplates:

> If she were married she would have been a whore individually, only in her private life. Now she is going to be a whore by occupation. She is going to be one of the many whores, a member of a part of society. Isn't the society more powerful than the individual? Those who run the society, the very powerful—by making her a public whore—have made her a part of society. (Devi, 1990, p. 205)

Readers are left to consider whether Dhowli's claim of sovereignty over her sexual behavior is a viable resistance strategy to patriarchal exploitation; as in this society, a universe dictated by patriarchal impulses for power, money, and sex is indifferent to female suffering and subjugation. Maria Mies observes that "The concept of autonomy, usually understood as freedom from coercion regarding our bodies and our lives, emerged as a struggle concept in the context of body politics, the sphere where women's oppression and exploitation was most intimately concretely experienced" (1999, p. 40). If we consider Dhowli's decision to maintain control over her sexual body and what Mies refers to as her "innermost subjectivity and area of freedom," then we must consider whether or not Dhowli has really truly freed herself from the master's house. Mies argues that Women's first and last "means of production" is their own body. The worldwide increase in violence against women is basically concentrated on this "territory", over which the BIG MEN have not yet been able to establish their firm and lasting dominance (1999, p. 40). Whereas, Dhowli has taken control over her "means of production," she is nonetheless producing for the structure that created her surplus labor to fuel the political economy. While her decisions to use her body for profit, might appear to be an act of autonomy, it is a "perverted" version of the concept (Mies, 1999, p. 40). What has transpired in the lives of the *Dhowlis* of the Global South is an illusory concept of freedom of choice and freedom to make individual decisions concerning physical, sexual, and emotional needs. "Individual consumerism" influences all spheres of "self-activity and subjectivity" (Mies, 1999, p. 40). Marx has referred to this as the "the democracy of unfreedom," in which Dhowli has been led to believe that her recruitment into prostitution has led her to sexual-economic freedom from a single Misra master. Instead, Dhowli will serve many masters.

Important to this discussion is the examination of how violence against women in Devi's stories is tied up in complex processes of "ongoing primitive accumulation." According to Maria Mies' observations of India:

> We have seen that violence against women as an intrinsic element of the "ongoing primitive accumulation of capital" constitutes the fastest and most "productive" method if a man wants to join the brotherhood of the "free" subjects of owners of private property. (1999, p. 170)

Through Devi's reportage, we witness the pubescent face of these ongoing processes experienced as lived struggles as young women face violence, coercion, and the extraction of their sexual and reproductive labor—a crucial and necessary byproduct of both traditional and patriarchal capitalism.

In Devi most troubling inquiry, she asks, Has nature too gotten used to the Dhowlis being branded as whores and forced to leave home? Or is it that even the earth and sky and the trees, the nature that was not made by the Misras, have now become their private property? (Devi, 1990, p. 205). This provocative rhetoric raises questions about the naturalization of gendered commodification of reproductive systems, according to the logic of bourgeois patriarchy.

4. "Douloti the Bountiful"

In "Douloti the Bountiful," Devi extends her reportage of the cycle of abuse portraying a Douloti, a 14 year-old girl who dies at 27, after years of systematic exploitation, her "tormented corpse, putrefied with venereal disease" spread over the "map of India" on India's day of Independence (Devi, 1994, p. 93). Described as a "parable of post-colonial India, a parable addressed to whatever/whoever professes to be the nation," it is more importantly the story of gender-specific violence that locks disposable subaltern women into subservient sexual surplus labor to support the system (Sen & Yadav, 2008, p. 86). In "Douloti," Devi further explores the exploitation of the female reproduction system, this time focusing on the reification and commodification of virgin flesh in the Himalayan District of Uttar Kashi, which she fictionally calls Seori. I proffer that readers must look past the metaphorical constructions of parable to witness how Devi narrates the epistemic gendered violence of decolonization in which fathers unknowingly and knowingly sell their wives and daughters into bonded sex labor to pay off their debts. After their women are sold off in the city, they have only paid off the interest on their loans, never fully able to free themselves from upper-caste moneylenders. In both instances, the protective structure of the family is abandoned.

Devi observes how decolonization created pockets of patriarchal exploitation and the development of "making slaves on hire purchase" (1994, p. 21). Within this decolonial infrastructural building process, Devi links the "unnatural" imposition of census surveys to tally individuals so as to determine famine and to create strategic political districting. In this story, "women are just merchandise, commodities," and unquenchable male sexual desires have created a premium demand for fresh untouched hymen (Devi, 1994, p. xx).

In "Douloti" we witness yet another account of how the plight of the tribals did not improve in postindependence India and instead continued to deteriorate under the nation-state, as decolonization seldom reaches the poor (Devi, 1994, p. xx). Devi writes that "What I have written about in Douloti is how women were especially exploited" (1994, p. Xix). Devi confirms the same ethnographic accounts narrated in "Giribala" and "Dhowli" that the young flesh of pubescent daughters is a saleable commodity on the sexual market (1994, p.76). She further corroborates what Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva, Rosemary Hennessy, Gayatri Spivak, and other social justice advocates have argued that "the sales of girls for rape still goes on" and "Douloti is still true, and true for the rest of India" (1994, p. XX). Important to this discussion is Maria Mies's observation that "the rape of women was part of the feudal or semi-feudal production relations," a proclamation she verified by collecting newspaper articles about the "atrocities" against women (1999, p. 147). Mies's analysis contributes to an understanding of Devi's reportage on how women "had become victims of rape, molestation, and particularly sexual harassment and eventually murder because of ever-growing dowry demands" (1999, p. 147). Devi's *Imaginary Maps* provides substantive reportage that the female body is fashioned by the struggle for reproductive rights.

Sold into sexual slavery "after or before marriage" so that husband or father patriarchs can pay back "the borrowed money from the money-lending upper caste, they are taken straight to brothels in the big cities to work out that sum" (Devi, 1994, p. xix). Once initiated, girls must take up to "thirty clients a day" without consideration of the physical toll on the female body. Devi not only indicts husband and father, but "Government—unine—contractor—slum landlord—market trader—shopkeeper—post office" in a corrupt bio-political arrangement in which women serve as playthings for patriarchal pleasure and commodity guarantees for loan obligations (1994, p. 25). She further notes how government officials exploit the poor through their belief system, as the people of Seori believe that they have been subjected to bonded labor "because of their sinfulness" (40), because "the West Wind" (42) entered the home country. The inability of different regions and districts in India to recognize that they are of "Mother India," and "all independent India's free people," shows how even within the country there is an interstitial space of misrepresentation and misunderstanding that has been manipulated for personal profit. The oppressive hunger for meager wages and little grain has created what Devi refers to as a government supported "agri-capitalist caste" of Kamiya[3] exploiters, raping the resources and people of India in a complex political web of socio-economic and personal interests.

By narrating the "true stories" of the commodification of fresh "virgin unwounded hymen," Devi shows how government officials and commercial interests collude to violate the "naked Harijan[4] woman's helpless body" (1994, p. 58). Lawmakers, contractors, government officers, policemen—"they all come" for virgin flesh and so Devi asks, "Who will stop it?" (1994, p. 73). The lower-caste women have been turned into "land." The boss plows and plows their land and "plows their bodies' land" (59) until it is abused and ravaged to "quench the hunger of male flesh" (1994, p. 61). Devi's Douloti is haunted by the relationship between the reification of the "unwounded hymen" and its brutal exploitation for profit and the ways in which women resist this feudal labor system. One such instance in "Douloti" is Devi's medicine woman character, Jhalo, who concocts medicine to abort any offspring that might be born into this brutal system in which children, born into the factory whorehouse of flesh trade, must beg on the street for survival. The fresh untouched virgin body is traded "until their bodies dry up" (79), its life forces devoured, at which point it is tossed aside and new "fresh uncut Harijan cunt" is sought after in every nook and cranny of the village fairs (1994, p. 76). In this world of Misra's brothel, women are forced to resume sexual duties immediately after abortion and, in some instances, die from lack of care. Radway Chakavarty observes that "Models of Western Feminism break down here; as Spivak says, abortion in this context is an expression of 'maximum social need', rather than an assertion of individual reproductive rights" (Chakavarty, 2008, p. 198).

Devi's Douloti is moreover repeatedly traumatized by the insatiable sexual hunger of the male upper caste in which she is "bloodied many times all through the night" to the sound of "grunt, grunt" (1994, p. 58). Again, we see women caught within a pervasive system of slave relations that shapes all its members. As the socio-economic system that turns women into prostitutes is made by men, Douloti and other kamiyas must "quench the hunger of male flesh" in order to survive (1994, p. 61). Reduced to sexualized body parts, women become dissociated from their reproductive systems (1994, p. 76). Spivak's observation holds true here: "Woman's body is… the last instance in a system whose general regulator is still the loan" (1993, p. 92).

Within this indentured system, Devi includes the social scientists who arrive to research and "write everything down," then get in their cars to "buzz off to town" while the object of research remains static and supine in her same place, her body repeatedly tilled and plowed like ravaged land (1994, p. 20). In this context, the social researchers become part of the problem by blaming the victims for their circumstances. Devi, as in her other stories, criticizes the cyclical pattern of abuse through the voice of Father Bomfuller, who argues for the abolition of "bonded labor" throughout the region by creating "workable laws" through the "pressure of public opinion" along with the development of WNGOs for "social" and "economic rehabilitation" (1994, p. 86). Devi condemns the complicated process of "passing laws" as sex trade still persists throughout India (1994, p. 86). Moreover, she questions whether the law itself can offer a viable solution when corrupt patriarchal institutional arrangements fail to enforce the law. Can passing and/or quoting the law create equitable economic and class and gendered relations? Can it subvert the value systems that have women internalizing their victimhood? These are complex questions further interrogated within the prostitute's oral songs:

> They are all the Paramananda's kamiya.
> Douloti and Reoti and Sommi
> Fieldwork, digging soil, cutting wells is work
> This one doesn't do it, that one doesn't do it,
> the other one doesn't do it
> The boss has turned them into land
> The boss plows and plows their land and raises the crop
> They are Paramananda's kamiya. (1994, p. 59)

The prostitute's song demonstrates their isolation and alienation from a postindependence India that has turned a deaf ear to their suffering. It also raises the question, which Spivak addresses—that of personal agency. Are Devi's women confined to their disposable second skins to be plowed over and over again? Chakravarty suggests examining the "rhetorical structuring of the text" within the "gaps, disjunctions, and aporias," for a resolution to the inherent "contradiction" (2008, p. 198). Within these spaces, we witness what Spivak refers to as the "bonded prostitute's body that Mahasweta makes visible as graphic cement on the entire map of India" (1994, p. xxvii). It is within this space that the inscriptions on the subaltern womb are made visible. It is also a space to recognize the hegemonic internalization of gendered violence, in which reproductive systems have disappeared and collapsed onto the map of India itself—a complicit space in which wombs, hymens, breasts, and other reproductive organs occupy marginalized emblematic territories where individual women become subsumed as allegorical byproducts of its creation.

Born a year after India's Independence from British Rule, Douloti dies at 27 years of age, her body ravaged from tuberculosis and venereal disease. The doctor overseeing her body is surprised that her skeletal body "had the innocence of a field of grain" (1994, p. 92). Douloti's ravaged body is the geographic symbolization of Mother India dying on the day of Independence "filling the entire Indian peninsula from the oceans to the Himalayas" with the cruel effect of "bonded labor spread-eagle" across the decolonial map of India (1994, p. 92). Douloti's "body graphematic"[5] and her death speak beyond her narrative representation, as Devi posits that "Douloti still exists in India today." However, I would challenge her assertion that "Decolonization has not reached the poor" (1994, p. xx): indeed, Douloti's tormented corpse bears truthful witness to the fact that decolonization has colluded in the collective processes of patriarchal rape of mother earth and gender specific violence against the many individual female bodies that populate India.

5. Conclusion

Further research is needed to examine how patriarchal scientific projects have cashed in on mother's fears of raising girls in a country, which views their existence as a societal affliction that warrants remedying through new reproductive technologies. According to Vibhuti Patel, "84% of gynecologists currently perform amniocentesis in Bombay and view it as a 'human service to women who do not want any more daughters'" (qtd. in Shiva, 2005, p. 135). Vandana Shiva is correct in arguing that NRTs are a strategic form of femicide to reduce the number of female fetuses and in turn reduce female population. Shiva quotes Vibhuti Patel who contemplates an advertisement promotion for amniocenteses:

> "Better Rs. 5,000 now than Rs.5 lakhs later" i.e. better spend Rs. 5,000 for female feticide than [500,000 rupees] as dowry for a grown-up daughter. By this logic, it is better to kill poor people or third world masses rather than let them suffer in poverty and deprivation. This logic also presumes that social evils like dowry are God-given and that we cannot do anything about them. Hence victimize the victim. Investing in daughter's education, health, and dignified life to make her self-dependent are far more humane and realistic than brutalizing pregnant mother and would be daughter. (Shiva, 2005, p. 136)

Like Shiva and Patel, I argue that it is imperative we recognize how the systematic exploitation of the female reproductive body is directly related to low female birth rates. Patriarchal scientific projects in the form of NRTs aimed at the surveillance and monitoring of women's wombs have targeted women's bodies by rendering women susceptible to disposability. Current research by ActionAid and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) demonstrates plummeting female birth ratios since 2001 and approximately 10 million aborted female fetuses during the last twenty years (Disappearing daughters—sex selection in India 18 June 2008).

Mahasweta Devi examines the meaning of female disposability by personalizing accounts of how Adivasi women have been rendered vulnerable by capital's international reach. In so doing, she attempts to expose the myth by which her female protagonists grow to embody the meaning of

human disposability. According to this myth, women are dispossessed, displaced, and destined to misery as a form of "human waste"; sadly, this myth is narrated and played out in many of Devi's ethnographic narrations. In this patriarchal insurgency, women are bought and sold, desecrated, raped, and disposed of when their reproductive bodies are no longer fruitful. Mahasweta Devi's cultural production offers crucial ethnographic observation to show how Adivasi women's tortured "second skins" become the historical battleground of deeper socio-economic and political issues, their reproductive systems a discursive site for the examination of insurrection, resistance, and decolonization.

Through a close explication of Devi's literary sexual reportage in "Giribala", "Dhowli" and "Douloti the Bountiful," this essay hopes to contribute to a greater understanding of how global capitalism has persistently colonized, commodified, and sexualized the female body by turning it into a contested site of reproduction. I have proffered that persistent layers of patriarchal oppression and exploitation have doubly marginalized Adivasi women; moreover, I have examined some of the reasons why women have affirmatively removed their future female offspring from a patriarchal system that denigrates and exploits them. I have explored women's acquiescence and resistance to often violent sexual inscriptions on the productive and reproductive copulating body in order to expand the thematics of women's body politic.

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Notes

1. "Literally meaning a girl likely to die; the name is perhaps intended to repel death, following the belief that death takes the lives people want to cling to most".
2. Misra word is a Sanskrit word for friend. In this context, the Misras are the wealthy landowners and members of the Brahmin Caste.
3. Young girl.
4. Harijan is a term Mohatma Ghandi employed to describe the untouchables in the Hindu Caste System.
5. I use the term "body graphematic" to mean written with her body.

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