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# Mapping Defiance: Violent, Somatic, and Epistemic Resistance in Mahasweta Devi's *Imaginary Maps*

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**Abstract:**

Post-colonial literature often grapples with the task of narrating the nation, attempting to reconcile the fractured realities of the independent state with the lingering ghosts of imperialism. Few works, however, challenge the official geometry of the nation-state as forcefully as Mahasweta Devi's *Imaginary Maps*. Translated and introduced by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, this collection—comprising "The Hunt," "Douloti the Bountiful," and "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha"—does not merely tell stories of the subaltern; it redraws the map of India. This paper argues that Devi portrays a complex spectrum of subaltern resistance: from the kinetic violent reclamation of agency in Mary Oraon's act of self-determined justice, to the passive somatic inscription of national failure on Douloti's dying body, and finally to the mythic epistemic silence of the Pterodactyl that defies modern categorisation. Grounded in close primary textual analysis and informed by Spivak's framing, this paper contends that resistance in Devi's universe is not a triumphant political act but a tragic necessity—a condition of existence shaped by postcolonial violence, patriarchal capitalism, and epistemic erasure.

**Keywords: Subaltern Resistance, Counter-Cartography, Body Politics, Epistemic Silence, Postcolonial Development, Mahasweta Devi, Spivak.**

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## 01. Introduction

In 1995, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak translated and introduced three stories by Mahasweta Devi under the title *Imaginary Maps*. The act was as much ethical as it was literary. She was not simply rendering Bengali fiction into English; she was staging, in Devi's own words, ‘‘an encounter with realities that official India has refused to see”. The “imaginary” in the title does not signal fantasy. It signals the deliberately unmapped: the blood-soaked, bonded, violated geographies of India's Adivasi communities, erased by the sanitised cartography of independence and development. As Devi states in conversation with Spivak in the introduction, tribals are “your easy victims, they are your prey, you hunt them. The system hunts them. And wants to brand them. The system which hunts them and uses them as a target is the criminal” (Devi xvi).

This is not the language of academic critique. It is the language of direct accusation, and it animates all three stories in the collection. Devi's fiction occupies a singular position in postcolonial South Asian literature because it refuses the consolations of nationalist narrative. Her India is not the shining democratic republic of the Constitution, but the India in which tribals must be put on the maps, by force, by blood, by silence, if necessary.

This paper examines how Devi, through the characters of Mary Oraon, Douloti, and the dying tribal community of Pirtha, theorises resistance not as empowerment but as tragic necessity. It argues that *Imaginary Maps* presents a coherent, graduated spectrum: from violent resistance, which is the most legible to the state, to somatic resistance, which is testimonial and disruptive, to epistemic resistance, which is radical precisely because it cannot be absorbed. These three modes are not separate political philosophies; they are, taken together, the imaginary map that Devi draws against the official cartography of the nation.

## 02. Objectives of the Study

This study identifies and analyses the three distinct modes of subaltern resistance — violent, somatic, and epistemic — as they manifest across the three stories in Imaginary Maps. It demonstrates that resistance in Devi's fiction is not confined to overt political action but is embedded in the practices of survival, refusal, and silence that function as counter-discourses against state systems of meaning. The paper further argues that the graduated movement from legibility to illegibility across the three stories constitutes Devi's most significant theoretical contribution to postcolonial literary thought.

## 03. Hypothesis

The three stories in *Imaginary Maps* are structured along a spectrum moving from the most legible mode of subaltern resistance to the least. Violent resistance can be named, classified, and prosecuted by the state; somatic resistance testifies through bodily destruction; epistemic resistance, grounded in silence and mythic untranslatability, eludes the dominant system entirely. This paper proposes that Devi's arrangement of these three modes is deliberate, and that the most radical form of defiance is the one the state is least equipped to recognise.

## 04. Limitations of the Study

The analysis is confined to Spivak's English translation of *Imaginary Maps*; the original Bengali texts are not engaged with, and questions of translation loss remain outside this study's scope. The paper draws on Spivak's theoretical framework without engaging systematically with the broader Subaltern Studies historiography beyond what the textual argument requires. Other dimensions of Devi's fiction, including her use of oral tradition, the role of the male subaltern, and the historical contexts of the Santal Rebellion and the Naxalite movements, receive only passing attention. Finally, the argument is limited to the three stories under consideration; whether the spectrum identified here holds across Devi's wider body of work is a question this paper raises but cannot resolve.

## 05. Methodology

This paper employs close textual reading as its primary method, moving through each story in sequence and attending to the specific passages and formal choices through which Devi constructs her argument. Secondary sources are used selectively: Spivak's translator's preface and "Can the Subaltern Speak?" provide the theoretical coordinates, while Dhaka, Bose, Mukherjee, and Sen supply scholarly context.

## 06. Literature Review

Scholarship on Mahasweta Devi has expanded substantially since Spivak's translations brought her work to an international readership in the 1990s. The existing body of criticism can be broadly organised around three concerns: Devi's use of history and activist-documentation, the politics of her representation of women and the subaltern, and the theoretical questions her fiction poses to postcolonial studies.

Spivak's own theoretical apparatus is foundational to any reading of *Imaginary Maps*. Her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" establishes the central problematic: the subaltern can attempt to speak, but when she does so within the institutional frameworks of state, court, or development discourse, her speech is recuperated into systems of meaning that do not belong to her (Spivak 271–313). Devi's own translation preface and afterword to Imaginary Maps develop this point into the literary-political field of Devi's fiction through an assertion that Devi's stories portray the "unrecorded geographies of the indigenous" in relation to the state map of the nation (Spivak, "Translator's Preface" xxiii). The dual position of Devi as activist-author and Spivak as theorist-translator has influenced the development of scholarly discussion in such a way that the two are hard to separate.

The research paper of Dr. Jitendra Deo Dhaka titled "Power, Resistance and Subaltern Voice in Mahasweta Devi's Short Stories" provides an immediate point of intersection with the

argument of the current research paper. Dhaka writes, "In the short stories of Mahasweta Devi's, resistance is not limited only to the organized forms of political struggle of rebellion but rather it becomes an integral part of the everyday practices of survival employed by the marginalized groups" (Dhaka 3). Dhaka further writes, "In Mahasweta Devi's short stories, resistance assumes the form of refusal and silence, rejecting the notion that resistance can be expressed only through language or actions. Silence acts as an effective discourse against oppression" (Dhaka 5). While these insights are significant, the research of Dhaka does not systematically distinguish between the varied forms of resistance in each of the three short stories and does not include the gradual scale from the violent to the epistemic as the primary argument of Devi in this paper.

In her essay “Translating Desire: The Politics of Gender and Culture in the Fiction of Mahasweta Devi,” Brinda Bose analyzes the relation between gender and translation in Devi’s fiction, claiming that “the body of the woman becomes the point of convergence of the two forces of postcolonial capitalism and patriarchal oppression, as we can see for example in the story ‘Douloti’” (Bose 61–68). Reading the body of Douloti as a “text” inscribed by exploitation, Bose follows the idea of somatic resistance discussed in Section V of this paper but does not expand it to the entire discussion of the body as a political counter-map.

The study of Meenakshi Mukherjee on Devi in Economic and Political Weekly places the stories within the unique historical circumstances of tribal displacement in post-independent India. According to Mukherjee, the method of writing adopted by Devi in fiction is not independent from her journalism and political activism: the stories are more "testimony" than fiction – documented reality in literary terms (Mukherjee 1176). Such a perspective on Devi's stories is justified in some ways; however, it tends to underestimate the complexity of the stories' structure, including such works as "Pterodactyl," with its mythological and philosophical aspects.

The study of Sambudha Sen "Adivasi Rights and the Postcolonial State in Mahasweta Devi's Fiction" is based on the idea of constitutional and legal failure of the postcolonial state and provides an interesting perspective on the way Devi maps the tension between the rhetoric of democratic rights and their actual violation among the tribal people. Sen's understanding of the state as a primary antagonist in Devi's fiction is relevant in many ways; however, he pays attention mostly to the land rights and bonded labor laws instead of literary and theoretical aspects of resistance (Sen 48- 57).

The unified reading of all three stories in *Imaginary Maps* as constituting a single, graduated theoretical argument about the nature and forms of subaltern resistance is largely absent from the existing scholarship. Existing studies engage with one or two stories, or treat the collection thematically without focusing closely on the transition from “The Hunt” to “Pterodactyl” as a deliberate structural movement. The present paper addresses this specific gap.

## 07. Violent Resistance in “The Hunt”

“The Hunt” is set in the tribal village of Kuruda in Bihar. It is a landscape already defined by dispossession. The Adivasi community retains the historical living ritual of sovereignty of Jani Parab. It is the women's hunting festival, as Devi explains in conversation with Spivak, a “Festival of Justice” in which “after the hunt, the elders would bring offenders to justice” through the “Law-bir” (the forest law) outside the jurisdiction of the colonial and postcolonial state alike (Devi xvii–xviii). It is within the remaining remnant of self-governance where Devi places her protagonist, Mary Oraon.

### 07.1 Resistance as Hybrid Survival

Mary is a figure of radical hybridity. She is the daughter of a tribal Adivasi mother, Bhikuni, and an Australian ‘White-man’ timber planter who left India at Independence. The

colonial history of the subcontinent is encoded in her body. She is light-skinned in a tribal community, tall, “flat-featured,” and described as someone who “you wouldn't call a tribal at first sight” (Devi 2). She exists at the boundary of two systems of erasure.

One of the text's most revealing passages locates the source of Mary's freedom in the very illegitimacy of her birth:

> “Just as she knows she'll marry Jalim, she also knows that if she had resembled any Oraon girl—if her father had been Somra or Budhna or Mangla Oraon—the Oraons would not have let this marriage happen. Because she is the illegitimate daughter of a white father the Oraons don't think of her as their blood and do not place the harsh injunctions of their own society upon her.(Devi 6)”

Mary's marginal status, the very thing that marks her as doubly excluded, is simultaneously the condition of a particular kind of freedom. She exists outside the disciplinary reach of both caste-Hindu society and tribal patriarchal custom. In this liminal space, resistance becomes possible.

Resistance, the paper argues, begins even before Mary's own act of violence. Bhikuni, Mary's mother, is herself a figure of quiet resistance. When she was found pregnant with a white man's child, the communal expectation was clear. As Mary herself articulates it with bitter self-awareness: “When you see a white daughter, you kill her right away. Then there are no problems!” (Devi 5). Bhikuni did not kill Mary. She chose life for her daughter against the weight of communal convention, an act of private defiance that plants the seed of resistance in the very fact of Mary's existence.

### 07.2 The Hunt as Juridical Act

The Tehsildar Singh who descends on Kuruda is not simply a predatory individual; he is the embodiment of a system. He is a timber broker who profits from illegal deforestation, bribing local officials and using tribal labour to strip the forests that are the ecological and

economic basis of tribal life. His desire for Mary is inseparable from this extractive logic: both the forest and the woman are resources to be taken without consent or compensation.

Mary's response moves in two registers. The first is verbal. She confronts the Tehsildar with direct, unfiltered refusal. Her language throughout the story is characterised by an absence of deference. She speaks to the Prasads as an equal, argues with market buyers, and addresses the Tehsildar without the softening that the system expects from a poor tribal woman. But Mary understands that speech cannot deliver justice, particularly the speech of a half-caste tribal woman in a legal system that does not recognise her.

And so she uses the only court still available to her. On Jani Parab, the women's hunting festival, she lures the Tehsildar into the forest under the guise of sexual availability, weaponising the very quality—'her desirability', that made her a target. At the moment sanctioned by the ancient law-bir, she kills him.

The text registers this act not as impulsive violence but as a moment of cosmic realignment. After the killing:

> "Today all the mundane blood-conditioned fears of the wild quadruped are gone because she has killed the biggest beast. (Devi 17)"

This sentence is carefully constructed. Mary is no longer afraid of animals, the beasts of the forest, because she has killed what the text identifies as the "biggest beast"— the human predator who operates within the system of law rather than outside it. The word "mundane" is significant: what has changed is not only Mary's external safety but her interior condition. The fear that conditions subaltern survival of blood-deep, passed down through generations of vulnerability, is gone, at least in this moment.

Devi is explicit about the moral logic in her conversation with Spivak: "When the system fails in-justice, violence is justified. The system resorts to violence when people rise to

redress some grievance, to protest ... When the system fails an individual has a right to take to violence or any other means to get justice" (Devi xviii–xix). This is not a romanticisation of bloodshed. It is a diagnosis of what happens when the state abdicates its function of protection for its most marginalised citizens.

Mary's act is therefore not a crime in any moral sense; it is a juridical execution in the only court that still holds authority in Kuruda. The structural inversion at the story's heart—the hunted becoming the hunter—is Devi's most legible act of counter-cartography in the collection. It is resistance that the state can see, name, and potentially prosecute. It is, of all three modes in the spectrum, the one that speaks most directly in the language of power.

## 08. The Second Coordinate: Somatic Resistance in "Douloti the Bountiful"

If "The Hunt" is an explosion of kinetic agency, "Douloti the Bountiful" is an implosion. Here, resistance does not take the form of action. It takes the form of bodily annihilation. Douloti's resistance is somatic. It is written on her skin, in her lesions, in the decomposition of her flesh until that flesh becomes, in the story's devastating final image, the map of the nation itself.

### 08.1 The Body as National Ledger

Douloti is a bonded labourer whose father, Crook Nagesia, has been pledged to the landlord Munabar Singh Chandela through the hereditary kamiya system. When Crook can no longer repay his debt (a debt mathematically designed never to be repaid), Douloti is taken as payment and trafficked into a kamiya brothel. She is forced to serve men to discharge an obligation that compounds perpetually. Her body is not her own from the outset; it is an instrument of someone else's accounting.

Devi's account of Douloti's physical deterioration is unflinching because the body is the argument. Every transaction that passes through Douloti's flesh is a transaction of the

postcolonial political economy. The absence of effective land reform legislation, the failure of the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act of 1976 to reach Palamu, the patriarchal economy that prices female bodies as commodities, all of this inscribes physically on Douloti. Her body does not merely suffer; it records.

In a passage that encapsulates Devi's method, the imagined dialogue between Crook Nagesia and a “bespectacled gentleman” from the government performs the unbridgeable gap between the system's language and the reality of bonded life: “Write and get in your car, buzz off to town, and I stay behind in the jungle. Each in his own place” (Devi 20–21). The state arrives with its categories and its paperwork; the subaltern remains, categorised but unchanged.

**08.2 The Map Scene: Somatic Counter-Cartography**

Douloti does not fight back. She does not kill. She does not escape. Her resistance is not active in the way Mary's is. It is, rather, testimonial. The body accumulates the irrefutable evidence of what the nation has done to its most marginalised subjects, until that evidence can no longer be ignored. Tuberculosis and venereal disease consume her, the diseases of the exploited and the underfed. She walks toward her home village ‘dying’. She does not reach it. She collapses in the yard of a village school, on a map of India drawn in chalk for the Independence Day celebrations.

Devi describes the scene with the precision of a legal exhibit:

> Filling the entire Indian peninsula from the oceans to the Himalayas, here lies bonded labor spread-eagled, kamiya-whore Douloti Nagesia's tormented corpse, putrefied with venereal disease, having vomited up all the blood in its desiccated lungs. Today, on the fifteenth of August, Douloti has left no room at all in the India of people like Mohan for planting the standard of the Independence flag. What will Mohan do now? Douloti is all over India. (Devi 93)

The map—the official geometry of the nation-state, drawn in chalk by a schoolmaster to celebrate independence and democratic progress, is covered by the body of the woman the nation has destroyed. Douloti fills the map. She becomes the map. In this single image, Devi accomplishes what pages of political argument cannot: she makes it physically impossible to celebrate Indian independence without confronting what that independence has sustained.

The schoolmaster Mohan cannot plant his Independence Day flag because there is no India left to plant it on: there is only Douloti. The official map, drawn with chalk in celebration, is redrawn with blood and disease. The nation's imaginary geography which is clean, complete, sovereign, is overlaid with what the title calls the imaginary map of the subaltern: incomplete, bleeding, irrecoverable.

As Dhaka notes, resistance in Devi's fiction "often takes the form of refusal and silence, challenging the assumption that resistance must be articulated verbally or through action" (Dhaka 5). Douloti's death is neither verbal nor organised. But it is not passive in any simple sense. It is the resistance of presence: the body, by dying exactly where it dies, forces the nation to see itself. In Devi's moral economy, that seeing is an act of resistance more durable than any individual escape could have been, because it makes the structural condition—not merely one woman's suffering—visible.

## 09. The Third Coordinate: Epistemic Resistance in "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha"

The third story, and the most philosophically ambitious, moves the problem of resistance entirely out of the physical realm and into the realm of knowledge. "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha" is a narrative about the limits of comprehension. It is about what the modern state, and the modern media, cannot know, cannot say, cannot process. The resistance here is epistemic: a refusal of the dominant system's right to understand, categorise, and thereby subsume the tribal world.

### 09.1 The Failure of the Mainstream to Listen

Before the Pterodactyl appears, the story establishes a pervasive, structural failure of communication between the tribal world and the state. This failure is most dramatically embodied in the SDO (the Sub-Divisional Officer) whose exchanges with the journalist Puran Sahay are characterised by a desperation to explain what cannot, apparently, be explained.

The text stages this explicitly. When Puran asks about Pirtha, the SDO responds:

> "How do I explain? Starvation for years. Fewer children are being born to them, and the Administration still doesn't attach any importance to Pirtha. They have taken it for granted for some time that the government has given them up."(Devi 101)

This answer circles that the SDO understands the situation, but his understanding cannot cross into the language systems available to a journalist, a bureaucrat, or a legislature. Devi's formal choice here is remarkable. The text itself performs the breakdown it describes:

> "The SDO is talking like that man. He is moving his hands, trying to explain, as if there's a tremendous communication gap between him and Puran, a tremendous (mental and linguistic) suspension of contact."(Devi 102)

The parenthetical qualification "(mental and linguistic)" is central. This is not merely a practical failure of information. It is a structural failure of epistemology. Two people speaking the same language but operating within incommensurable frameworks of meaning.

The SDO's speech escalates into one of the text's most formally arresting moments. The phrase "how shall I explain" or its variants—"how do I explain," "I cannot make you understand," "how will I make you understand", recur throughout his dialogue like a trapped refrain:

> "Go to Pirtha. Explain this to them. I cannot make you understand. You are not understanding how it is in Pirtha ... A few thousand people have now accepted despair. They don't know how to ask, don't ask, but they take if given. How will I make you understand that it is not possible for those tribals to think reasonably, to offer

explanations? You will understand them with your urban mentality? You will fathom the Indian Ocean with a foot-ruler?" (Devi 104)

The final image, fathoming the Indian Ocean with a foot-ruler, is Devi's most concentrated statement of the epistemic problem. The instrument (journalism, development discourse, the liberal state's apparatus of empathy) is simply too small for the reality it is trying to measure. This is not a failure of the SDO's personal capacity; it is a structural inadequacy of the systems through which the mainstream approaches the tribal world.

**09.2 The Pterodactyl: Ancestral Soul and Epistemic Sovereignty**

The introduction of Pterodactyl within this context of communication failure occurs. It is an ancient species of animal, long since extinct millions of years ago, but has apparently been sighted in Pirtha. The tribal boy Bikhia, who has witnessed it, ceases to speak. In her discussion with Spivak, Devi explains: "The pterodactyl cannot say what message it has brought" (Devi xxi–xxii). This is neither a zoological impossibility nor an anomaly surviving since ages ago. It is rather the ancestral soul of the tribe. A spirit-beast that appears because the tribe carrying the memory of the beast is dying.

The Pterodactyl belongs to a semiotic system of Adivasi cosmology, oral tradition and ancestral memory that has no interface with the systems through which the modern state produces and processes knowledge. The journalist Puran cannot report on it. He cannot explain it. He cannot translate it. And it is exactly this 'untranslatability' that is the creature's power. As Devi says: "If read carefully, 'Pterodactyl' will communicate the agony of the tribals, of marginalised people all over the world" (Devi xxi). But the communication takes place beyond the channels of modern communication, in a register that the mainstream cannot understand without first breaking down its own system.

The silence of Bikhia is the human counterpart to the untranslatability of the Pterodactyl. It is not the case that the child uses silence as a strategy. Rather, the silence of

Bikhia is an epistemological condition. The experience that the child has had in realizing the presence of the ancestral spirit within the body of a dying world has no terms that exist in the languages of Puran and the mainstream community in Pirtha. As Devi points out elsewhere in the narrative, there are no terms in Ho language to describe the processes of “exploitation” and “deprivation,” not because the Ho people have not gone through them but because their experience is beyond those categories (Devi 118).

**09.3 Silence as Defence**

The statement made by Dhaka about how "silence operates as a powerful counter discourse" is highly important (Dhaka 5). The tribe's refusal to make the Pterodactyl legible to the journalist is a defence. By remaining incomprehensible to the mainstream, the tribe's most sacred knowledge, that connects them to a history and geography remains absolutely safe from appropriation, commodification, and administration. The state cannot seize what it cannot name.

This is what Devi meant when she talks about how the tribal world and the mainstream “have always been parallel. There has never been a meeting point. The mainstream simply doesn't understand the parallel” (Devi x). The silence of Pterodactyl enforces this parallelism against the journalist's desire to report, explain and make consumable for a metropolitan readership. Puran's failure to write the report is the acknowledgement that some realities are not available to the language of the state.

Yet Devi refuses to romanticise this silence. The tribe is dying. The arrival of Pterodactyl is the mark of extinction. Epistemic resistance is the notable form of resistance because it preserves the integrity of the subaltern's knowledge-world at the cost of those who carry it. The resistance is real although it does not win. Pirtha's children starve. The Pterodactyl disappears. The perennial famine continues.

This is the harm truth that sets Devi apart from writers who aestheticise marginal life. The tribe's illegibility to the government is a form of sovereignty. It is also a form of abandonment. A state so comprehensively alien to the people it governs that the only way to deal with sovereignty is to make it incomprehensible to them. This is Devi's most strong and direct indictment.

**10. Counter-Cartography as Argument**

Reading in sequence, the three stories of *Imaginary Maps* constitute a single argument about resistance. They are three coordinates on the map that Devi is drawing against the official cartography of the Indian nation-state.

The movement between the three texts is a movement from legibility to illegibility, from visibility to invisibility, from acts of bodily resistance to a resistant body to the silence that surpasses the body altogether. The violent act committed by Mary Oraon is the most legible. The state can understand acts, and can classify them as crime, rebellion and social disorder. On the other hand, Douloti's somatic resistance is less legible. There are many dying bodies in the subaltern world, too many to interpret each as a political act. But Douloti gains legibility in death through the accident of location. She dies on the national symbol, forcing the state to encounter what it has produced. The Pterodactyl's epistemic silence is the least legible of all, and therefore the most sovereign. It is the one form of resistance that the state cannot categorise, prosecute, or absorb.

The unity of all three modes is Devi's refusal of the heroic stance of resistance. No one "wins" in any conventional sense. Mary achieves justice but in a world where such justice requires a killing. Douloti's resistance is posthumous. The Pterodactyl disappears. Spivak is absolutely correct to insist, in her preface, that these stories do not offer "the pleasure of sympathy." They offer the discomfort of accountability.

In fact, the "imaginary maps" suggested by the title are still imaginary only because they have not been seen in the mainstream nation. Devi's stories do the imagination for the nation. It does not provide answers but draws the map of the problem. In fact, as Devi said herself, she wants "to make a big noise in whatever way and put tribals on the maps of India" (Devi ix). The three stories are noise of violence, somatic and silence.

**11. Conclusion: An Archaeology of the Buried Foundation**

*Imaginary Maps* does not offer the consolations of postcolonial optimism. It does not tell us that the subaltern has found her voice and entered the national narrative on her own terms. Instead it offers the understanding of different forms of resistance that are available to the most marginalised subjects of the Indian nation. These resistance are shaped, distorted, and often destroyed by the very conditions they seek to resist.

In the case of Mary Oraon, it is seen that where the state fails to provide justice, the mode of resistance takes the form of a seizure of power. In the case of Douloti, it is seen that even if she is unable to fight back, the subaltern body is able to speak in testimony that marks her illness and her death in the language of the official map of the nation, a testimony that speaks an indictment that nothing in the administrative language of the state will be able to expunge. The Pterodactyl demonstrates that some forms of knowledge are defended by silence and that this illegibility remains the only sovereignty of the state whose members have been comprehensively failed.

The paper has argued that these three modes constitute a hierarchical transition from the legible to the illegible and from the kinetic to the testimonial to the epistemic. The shared condition of communities for whom resistance is not a choice but a tragic necessity it is a way of being that exposes the failures of postcolonial “progress” and forces the mainstream to confront the existence of parallel, bleeding realities within the nation.

In order to read *Imaginary Maps* carefully, it is necessary to understand that the nation is not what the official map says it is. It is also the map drawn by Mary's machete, the map bled by Douloti's body, and the map hidden in the Pterodactyl's silence. The nation cannot be understood without reading these maps. “We cannot celebrate the nation without first learning to see them”, is the obligation that Mahasweta Devi places on the reader.

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