



Can the Subaltern Speak? Postkolonialität und subalterne Artikulation

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Spivaks Aufsatz 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', bislang noch nie vollständig ins Deutsche übersetzt, zählt zu den Schlüsseltexten der postkolonialen Theorie.

Anknüpfend an die Arbeit der indischen Subaltern-Studies-Gruppe sowie in kritischer Auseinandersetzung mit poststrukturalistischen Theoriebildungen widmet er sich zentral der Frage von Unmöglichkeit und Möglichkeit eines Sprechens der Subalternen.

Der vorliegende Band enthält neben einer Übersetzung der Originalfassung von Spivaks Aufsatz ein Interview mit der Autorin zur Diskussionsgeschichte, eine Nachbemerkung zur 1999 veröffentlichten zweiten Version des Textes sowie eine Einleitung von Hito Steyerl.

Can the Subaltern Speak? Postkolonialität und subalterne Artikulation Details

Date : Published 2008 by Turia + Kant (first published January 1st 1985)

ISBN : 9783851325065

Author : Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Format : Broschiert 158 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Theory, Feminism, Nonfiction, Academic, Writing, Essays

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Aisha says

Painful read! It was really hard not to hate this! The language was way too annoying for me to care what she had to say :/ Sometimes I wondered if she actually had anything to say, really! But then again i may not be "sophisticated" enough although no amount of sophistication can allow for such a ridiculously contrived use of language.. Life is too short & i promise you can be an accomplished human being without reading Ms Spivak (unless you're a literature grad student in which case I suggest you fake it till you make it!)

Mollie ~Ravenclaw Romance Reader~ says

Let's just slam everyone theorist and use impossible verbiage to cover our lack of actual work, shall we? Because short of wanting to rip this apart in frustration, the only person who I think shouldn't speak is Spivak. Let the subaltern speak--I do believe they have a voice, and Spivak isn't the end-all like she believes to be.

Lit Bug says

Some of the most radical criticism coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject.

Spivak is (in)famous, notorious for her dense prose, and rightly so. This little essay took me an entire day, though I'd read it some years back. Not only does she draw upon innumerable relevant theorists to eventually tease out her own amazing, brilliant, inter-disciplinary argument, she uses technical research terminology that requires me to keep Google handy. To write a review that gives a simple gist of **one** essay by her that also explains her multiple positionings in the theoretical world – those of a Marxist postmodern postcolonial feminist – is a **mammoth** task. Her prose is heavily condensed, a dynamite that blows up into fast-moving, searing fragments/arguments flying into all conceivable theoretical positions you could challenge her from.

She espouses feminism, but not Euro-centric. Yet she draws from Euro-feminism instead of attacking it. She talks about Third-World feminism, particularly Asian, but also moves beyond the stereotypical racial feminist discourses of the Afro-American position to talk about Afro-French positioning and the dissolution of 'color' from the tag 'women of color' in the case of African women in Africa, where color is no longer an issue. She brings in Freud, she brings in Marx and Eagleton. She tackles Cultural Studies theorists while acknowledging both their usefulness and their drawbacks. She makes inferences from postmodernist and post-structural theories, to come upon a unique perspective of her own, a practical one derived of various standpoint perspectives. **All in a single essay.**

She is more famously known as the person who first translated Jacques Derrida's *De La Grammatologie* into English, which included a translator's introduction that has since been described as "setting a new standard for self-reflexivity in prefaces". Her dissertation was on W.B. Yeats, directed by Paul De Man, titled *Myself Must I Remake: The Life and Poetry of W. B. Yeats*. In March 2007 Spivak became the University Professor at Columbia University, making her the only woman of color to be bestowed the University's highest honor in its 264-year history. Interestingly, even Eagleton and Judith Butler, whose own texts are sufficiently difficult to read, rank her among the most difficult theorists ever to read.

Note: Her argument about the practice of Sati/Suttee is dealt with in greater detail in the spoiler tag for those interested. It is not really a spoiler.

By using the text *The Intellectuals and Power: A Discussion Between Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault*, as an example, Spivak examines how seemingly benign Western Discourses unwittingly suffer from the same standpoints they apparently criticize. Drawing upon the discussion between Foucault and Deleuze where they theorize about the working class and Maoism, Spivak points out that their conception of Chinese Maoism is an act of Orientalizing, to quote Edward Said – it is a West-specific idea of what Chinese Maoism *must be like*, which ends up to be completely different from what Chinese Maoism *was*.

Going against Enlightenment's assumptions that people behaved in a 'rational' way and possessed complete power over the ways their minds thought, Foucault and Gramsci held that consciousness is constructed discursively, which, in Althusserian terms, means that we are "*always, already interpellated*". Shifting discourses of power influence a person's inclinations and beliefs. The subject no longer has sovereignty over the construction of the self. Foucault and Deleuze also ended up misconstruing the subject as a sovereign in their book.

In other words, these sites for resistance from within the Western discourse themselves unwittingly became agents of oppression – by conceiving the West as the Subject and producing neocolonialist assumptions that answered the queries of the Western Subject by depicting the Third World as the Other, and not responding to the Other as a Subject. (Refer to Edward Said's *Orientalism*)

Her charge against Western post-colonialism is that through the heterogenization of diverse cultures into a singular, essentialist nomenclature of 'oppressed women' or 'Dalits' or 'Africans' or 'labor/working class', "*postcolonial studies ironically reinscribe, co-opt, and rehearse neo-colonial imperatives of political domination, economic exploitation, and cultural erasure*".

She also cites Said's critique of Foucault as putting forth such a mystifying discourse of power that allows him "*to obliterate the role of classes, the role of economics, the role of insurgency and rebellion*", which, I think is quite apt – and furthermore, I personally feel that Althusser too only slightly escapes this trap by being a Marxist theorist, lending him access to economics and class with reference to the role of knowledge and power as Foucault in his Euro-centric discourse alludes to. (Of course, he cannot talk about other subalterns, though his ideas have been the basis for others to build upon their own distinct fields.)

Spivak, as far as I know, has been the only postmodernist deconstructionist theorist of consequence so far who has articulated the most crucial pitfall of her methods – she acknowledges on her own that 'deconstruction', one of her tools through which she examines 'how truths are constructed' not only opens up potential gaps in other 'essentialist' discourses, but is an essentialist discourse in itself. She herself, then it follows, accepts that she is in fact complicit in the production of social formations that she ostensibly opposes.

Furthermore, even while critiquing essentialist positions, she acknowledges the necessity of ‘essentializing’ one’s position as a strategy, to combat the ‘epistemic violence’ that the former discourse inflicts on the latter. She contends it is important to *strategically* make essentialist claims while simultaneously being aware of its crude generalizations, coining the term **Strategic essentialism**.

The Leftist tendency to homogenize and romanticize subalterns (her attack is directed at Ranajit Guha, founder member of Subaltern Studies Group, who appropriated the Gramscian term to highlight the silence of the subalterns in discourse), especially Indian subalterns, who, by their diversity are more complex subjects than Europeans on a number of counts, Spivak says, has created two major issues:

(a): A logocentric assumption of cultural solidarity among a heterogenous people

(b): A dependence on western intellectuals to “speak for” the subaltern condition rather than allowing subalterns to speak for themselves

While at one point it was novel, radical and of utmost urgency to ‘*make visible the unseen*’ as Foucault says, now, contends Spivak, it is time ‘to render vocal the individual, both avoiding any kind of analysis [of the subject] whether psychological, psychoanalytical or linguistic’, and which is, in her own words, “*that is consistently troublesome*”.

Spivak, in the **next section**, then turns to Freud who recognized colonialization as a cultural/political discourse whereby the very identity of Whiteness is established by self-proclaimed benevolence on their part, their colonial policies garbed in missionary work.

Then, to counter Freud’s use of women as a scapegoat as an ideological formation that informs the monolithic image of ‘Third-World Woman’, Spivak argues, the process of ‘unlearning’ has to be initiated, by “*measuring silences into the object of investigation*”.

Siting the removal of ‘sati’ or ‘suttee’, as the British transcribe it (the immolation of women till the 19th century on her husband’s funeral pyre when he died) as not a British practice of protecting women against patriarchy and misogyny, Spivak argues that it was an act of political/colonial consolidation by etching in women’s and official history’s memories a genial picture of the British as “*white men who are saving brown women from brown men.*”

While this statement seems almost blasphemous to many women among us who cannot imagine being burnt when our husbands died, Spivak’s concern is not with defending ‘brown men’ and scapegoating ‘white men’, but with the exposing of how complex reality is, how fluid it renders discourse owing to diverse ideologies that are deeply incompatible yet generalized by discourse, and how essentialist it would be even on the part of postcolonialism to indulge into simplistic notions of ‘savior’ and ‘scapegoat’.

(view spoiler)

While this is just a short mention of the multiple perspectives from which she views Sati as it was viewed in the 1800s by Hindus, i.e., the social POV, the economic POV, the religious/shastra/Vedic POV, the political

POV and the patriarchal ideology POV, it follows that the British neither really understood what really plagued women under the guise of immolation, nor did they care.

A gross simplification of it is misrepresentation alright, but when opposed in the literal sense in the light of Spivak's argument, the fallacy of generalization becomes all the more clear, because then the roles would be inversed, with white men becoming the scapegoat and the brown men becoming the savior – when all the while, *women*, the original subject-subaltern, have no say in it, and are effectively silenced in the rhetoric. If the former argument was espoused by Colonial theories to model history on their ideology, postcolonialist theory slips as well by not being able to let the real 'subaltern' speak for themselves by initiating an alternative take on history on their behalf. (hide spoiler)]

Similarly, Spivak discusses the ritual of *Jauhar* (Mass suicide of Rajput women when their husbands, who were kings, were taken as POW, or were about to be defeated, in order to escape the fate of being gangraped) from various standpoints. Finally, she discusses the 1926 suicide of Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, a single 16-year old woman and a member of India's armed struggle against the British, and unable to come to terms with being entrusted a political assassination, waited till she began menstruating before she committed suicide – knowing well that her act otherwise would be construed as the result of illegitimate pregnancy. Despite her menstruation when she died, her family, let alone the society in general, *still* believed it was due to illicit love.

Drawing upon various arguments through which Spivak marks women's bodies through socio-economic discourse by going beyond "deconstruction", she ends on the note that *the subaltern cannot speak*. Because the very act of speech denies them the status of a subaltern.

I find this very curious as an observation when I remembered an essay by Aniket Jaaware some years ago, titled *The Silence of the Subaltern* - though the context was that of the silence of subaltern students in a classroom, I remember distinctly that Jaaware ended his essay with the note that "the subaltern is not silent per se – their silence is their scream to be heard, which is conveniently not heard – the subaltern speak through their silence."

While Jaaware's argument is about 'making visible the unseen', Spivak's argument is supported by her own admission that the next step is trickier – that of escaping essentialist positions in the quest to be 'heard'.

Required Basic Prior Reading/Familiarity with:

Foucault's discourse on *Power and Knowledge*

Althusser's notions of *Ideology and Interpellation*

Gramsci's concepts of *Subaltern* and *Cultural Hegemony*

Ranajit Guha's *Subaltern Studies Group*

Marx

Terry Eagleton

Deleuze

Freud on women/female psychology

Hegel

Jonathan Culler

Derrida's *Deconstruction* and basic summary of 'Of Grammatology'

Edward Said's '*Orientalism*'

Jean-Francois Lyotard's *differend*

Noora says

Incredibly dense essay, but the reward of working with and understanding this piece is undeniable.

Francis White says

Well I know I certainly can't bloody speak after reading this. Spivak's intent is justified and her passion clear, but what help exactly does it do to render this crucial and ground-breaking exposition of her theory of subalternity wholly opaque? So much so that the only readers trained enough to actually engage with it in any meaningful fashion are precisely those she spends the initial half of her essay criticising for being elitist. I suppose I will just have to return to this one once I've brushed up on my Foucault, Deleuze, Hegel, Derrida, Althusser, Said and the whole Western philosophical tradition, let's hope those in the Third World can do so too!

Duygu Öksünlü Beytur says

Avrupamerkezcili?e müthi? bir atak. Spivak felaket zeki bir dü?ünür, söylemin ötesine geçmeyi bu söylemle hesapla?t???n? söyleyen isim ve metinler için bile uygulay?p yap?sökümünün ne oldu?una dair ba?ar?l? bir örnek sunuyor. Fakat metinde baz? problemler var. Öncelikle, Spivak'?n anlat?m tarz? akademik metinlerde pek de onaylanmayan dü?ünürleri, kavramlar?, metinleri okuyucunun tamamen bildi?i varsay?m?na dayan?yor. Spivak'?n metnini anlamak için kitapta at?f yap?lan tüm dü?ünürleri ve metinleri bilmek gerekiyor zira bazen yar?m sayfa bahsetti?i metnin neye dair oldu?unu bile aç?klam?yor. Bu bir problem. Bunun d???nda daha metnin ilk sayfas?ndan itibaren tercüme hatalar? var. ?mkan varsa ?ngilizce'den okunmas?n? naçizane tavsiye ederim. Son olarak da, teori ile aksiyonu birle?tirdi?i ikinci bölümde Spivak bir closure yapmaktan daha da uzakla???yor ve Bhubaneswari vakas?na neden e?ildi?ini bir ç?rp?da anlatmaya kalk???yor, "adaletin hukuki enstrüman? olarak bir sekülerlik aray???" deyip metinde yeni bir iddia atarak çalakalem bitiriyor.

Metne gelen ele?tirilerden biri, Spivak'?n Bhubaneswari vakas? üzerinden kendisinin bir madun sesi olmaya kalk???t??? ve madunun m?r?lt?s?n? susturdu?una dair, zira Spivak kitab?n o uzun birinci bölümünü, madun konu?amaz, diyerek sonland?r?yor. E?er Spivak kitab?n ikinci bölümünü, "Yan?t Olarak: Geriye Bakmak" bölümünü, kaleme almasayd? bu ele?tiri haks?z olurdu. Yine de bu ele?tirinin sonuna kadar hakl? oldu?unu zannetmiyorum zira Spivak 120 sayfal?k metnin yakla??k 110 sayfas?nda bir hasar tespiti yap?yor. Neyse i?te, "Madun Konu?abilir Mi?", Foucault ve Deleuze'e sol bir kro?e Spivak'tan. Zorlu ama nefis bir metin. Tercümedeki sorunlara ra?men Türkçe'de Spivak'? okumak çok k?ymetli.

Lucy Carrillo says

"According to Foucault and Deleuze (in the 1st world, under standardization and regimentation of socialized capital), the oppressed, if given the chance (problem of representation) on the way to solidarity through alliance politics (Marxist thematic at work here), can speak and know their conditions. We must now confront the following question: on the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside and outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, can the subaltern speak?"

Gavin Armour says

Wer den französischen Poststrukturalismus angreifen oder gar verächtlich machen will, muß nur entweder die Frage nach der Verständlichkeit bspw. des Derrida'schen Schreibens und Philosophierens stellen oder aber jene danach, wozu all das Differenzieren, das Nachdenken über das Uneigentliche und vorursprüngliches Werden eigentlich gut sein solle? Wen die Frage aber ernsthaft interessiert, der sollte unbedingt Gayatri Chakravorty Spivaks *CAN THE SUBALTERN SPEAK?* lesen, findet sich darin doch nicht nur eine ausgesprochen weitreichende Beantwortung der oben gestellten Fragen, sondern auch und vor allem ein Schlüsseltext sowohl postkolonialer wie auch feministischer Literatur. 1988 erstmals in einer wilden, wilden Denken in nahezu unstrukturierter Weise ausdrückenden Version erschienen, ist dies neben Edward Saids *ORIENTALISMUS*-Buch vielleicht der Schlüsseltext schlechthin, was das Nachdenken hinsichtlich dessen, was lange Zeit „die Dritte Welt“ genannt wurde und deren Entwicklung hin zu einem historischen Subjekt betrifft, zugleich aber auch einer der zentralen Texte der (Post)Moderne in Bezug auf ein (post)modernes Verständnis des Marxismus und, möglicherweise, des Sozialismus.

Es ist ein – das sollte man wohl allen geneigten Lesern fairerweise vorausschauend ans Herz legen – schwieriger Text, ein vielschichtiger Text, der sich die Mühe macht, den eigenen Standort und den Weg zu diesem Standort permanent mitzudenken. Spivak gelingt es, sich gegenseitig befruchtende, bedingende Ebenen fast gleichwertig zu benennen und sie immer wieder in ihrem Text kenntlich zu machen, was die Lesbarkeit allerdings beeinträchtigt, was wiederum keine Kritik sein soll. Wir erleben in diesen Tagen ja eine immense Abneigung gegen jedwede Form des Intellektualismus, komplizierte Sachverhalte sollen bitteschön auf, wenn möglich, 144 Zeichen runter gebrochen werden etc. Das ist allerdings eben nicht mit jedem Sachverhalt möglich. Der Philosoph der frühen Bundesrepublik Karl Popper forderte einst, man solle bitte so sprechen (und schreiben), daß das, was man zu sagen habe, allgemeinverständlich sei. Mag sein, daß das einem Denker der Demokratie gut zu Gesicht steht – es gibt aber Bereiche des Denkens, gerade was historische, soziale und auch emotionale Bereiche und Entwicklungen betrifft, die sich nicht „einfach“ sagen lassen, sondern nur in komplizierten Denkbewegungen darstellbar sind. Ganz besonders gilt dies dann, wenn man versucht denen eine Stimme zu geben, die bisher nicht einmal wussten, daß es „Stimmen“ gibt.

Kann das/die Subalterne sprechen? Was ist das/die Subalterne? Spivak grenzt sich in einer weitausholenden Bewegung zunächst von den gängigen europäischen Intellektuellen ab, die „für“ die unterdrückten Massen in der damals noch so genannten Dritten Welt sprechen – und ihnen damit erneut den Subjektstatus verweigern, indem sie sie nicht „für sich“ sprechen lassen. Namentlich Gilles Deleuze und Michel Foucault sind hier angesprochen, die dieses Gespräch de facto geführt haben. Das hier genannte ‚Subjekt‘ leitet sich aus dem Marxismus ab, aus dem proletarischen Subjekt, das Spivak allerdings in Frage zu stellen wagt, wenn sie fragt, ob es das Marx'sche Proletariat in der Dritten Welt überhaupt gebe? Sind die eurozentrischen Theorien – Ideologien – unmittelbar auf die Bedingungen Afrikas, Südamerikas oder des indischen Subkontinents zu übertragen, dem Spivak selber entstammt? Um den marxistischen Proletarierbegriff zu umgehen, nutzt Spivak den Begriff der „Subalternen“ in dem Sinne, wie er auf der Basis von Gramscis Definition von der ‚Subaltern Studies Group‘ genutzt wurde. Doch stellt sie ihn massiv in Frage, wenn sie ihn zwar gültig findet in dem Sinne, daß in der Dritten Welt genau die Gruppen zu finden sind, die von jedwedem Diskurs durch den Hegemon wie durch die sozialen, die infrastrukturellen und institutionellen Bedingungen ausgeschlossen sind, ihn jedoch weiter ausdifferenziert und spezifisch auf die arme, schwarze Frau anwendet.

Anhand des Beispiels des britischen Verbots des Witwen-Opfers – der Selbstverbrennung von Frauen bei der Beerdigung ihrer Männer – dekonstruiert Spivak den Begriff der Subalternen und weist durch eine

literaturwissenschaftliche Lektüre gültiger Wahrheiten – Sätze wie: „Weiße Männer beschützen braune Frauen vor braunen Männern“ nach, daß die Bedingungen, die das Subalterne definieren, eine Diskursfolge – auch eine Folge eines männlichen, eines weißen, eines eurozentrischen Diskurses – sind. In ihrer Abgrenzung gegen Foucault und Deleuze und deren aus Spivaks Sicht typisch eurozentrischen Blicks auch und gerade der sich links oder kritisch gebenden europäischen Intellektuellen, gelingt es ihr, sich aus vorgefertigten Kategorien und Narrativen verschiedener intellektueller Diskurse zu befreien und dennoch keine Haltung einzunehmen, die in Opposition gehen muß.

Sich des Beitrags der Foucault'schen Theorien zu Machtbildung und Machtdiskursen vollends bewusst und diese sehr wohl würdigend, kann Spivak – und diese Wechsel der Ebenen und der dauernden Hinweise der Relais-Stellen, wo die Ebenen ineinander übergehen, bzw. sich bedingen, machen die Lektüre oft anstrengend – nutzen, was ihrer Argumentation nutzt und dennoch Kritik üben, wo sie begreift, welchen Begrenzungen Wissenschafts- und Ideologietheorien unterliegen. Im Rückgriff auf den Dekonstruktionsbegriff, wie Jacques Derrida ihn in seiner GRAMMATOLOGIE entwickelt und definiert hat, kann Spivak scheinbar unvereinbare Ebenen kritischen Diskurses, kritischer Betrachtung, zusammenbringen und dringt tief ein in die Konstruktion dessen, was diskursiv als „Dritte Welt“ bezeichnet wird.

Gerade mit dem Beispiel der Witwenverbrennung und anhand der doppelten Dekonstruktionsbewegung, die sie unternimmt, kann Spivak die sich oft widersprüchlich verheddernden Ebenen aufzeigen, die aus diskontinuierlichen Zeitabläufen entstehen. Mag die urbane, emanzipierte, weiße, mitteleuropäische oder amerikanische Frau einen Diskurs über die Metaebene feministischer Diskurse führen, darüber, ob man viral feministisch sein kann oder welche seltsamen Bündnisse es einzugehen gilt, wenn die verstärkten Einflüsse eines patriarchalen islamischen Denkens in unsere Gesellschaften zurückgedrängt werden müssen - der „Feminismus“ einer Subalternen in Spivaks Sinne besteht schlicht darin, sich zunächst einmal selbst als Subjekt zu begreifen.

Wenn in den Kasten, von denen Spivak spricht, also einige Frauen bereit waren, ihren Männern in den Tod zu folgen – was de facto nur in wenigen Fällen zutraf, während weitaus häufiger Zwang dahinter gestanden haben mag – mag das aus europäischer Sicht ein grausames und barbarisches Verbrechen sein, es war jedoch auch ein Moment, der diese Frauen einmalig zum Subjekt machte (sic!). Da die Briten in ihren Kolonien das Prinzip anwandten, die herrschenden Systeme zu belassen, solange die britische Oberherrschaft und deren Rückzugsräume akzeptiert wurden, wodurch die Briten meist von den Bevölkerungen der jeweiligen Länder, die sie unterwarfen, separiert blieben, dauerte es lange, bis sie gegen die Witwenverbrennung einschritten und dann auch eher auf Geheiß, sprich in Folge einer Öffentlichkeit, die sich zu erregen begann, was also selbst wieder auf einen eurozentrischen Movens hindeutet. Der Weg, den die britische Besatzung dann wählte, war der des formaljuristisch institutionellen Verbots, also ein rein bürokratischer Terminus, in dem weiße Männer schwarzen Männern Vorschriften machten, wie sie mit ihren Frauen umzugehen hätten. Im Kern aber - also strukturell - bleibt es ein männlicher und europäischer Diskurs, der einer schwarzen Frau das Subjekt-Sein nicht nur einfach nicht erlaubt, sondern in dessen Analyse und Dekonstruktion ergibt, daß die schwarze Frau hier als Subjekt nicht einmal gedacht wird. Man sollte dieses Beispiel nicht als irrelevant abtun, wie man auch den ganzen Text, weit über 20 Jahre nach seiner Veröffentlichung abtun sollte, denn seine sozialen und historischen Implikationen sind bis heute nicht zufriedenstellend beantwortet worden, sind nach wie vor in Indien, in Teilen Asiens und vor allem in Afrika mehr denn je vorhanden.

Spivaks Text – mag er in seiner ursprünglichen Form auch schwer zugänglich sein und in der Vielfalt in seiner Themen und Ebenen, die er durchmischt und zueinander in Bezug setzt manchmal fast wirr erscheinen; Schwächen, die in späteren Ausgaben bereinigt wurden – selbst stellt schon eine Subjektwerdung innerhalb eines Diskurses dar und ist damit schon in seiner reinen Existenz und seinem Zugang zu

europäischer Philosophie ein Beitrag auch zu durchaus Europa bestimmende Themen. Spivak – sie weist mehrfach im Text darauf hin – erlaubt sich einen sehr freien und deshalb durchaus auch befreienden Umgang mit den postmodernen Theorien, wodurch sie gerade dem Denken Derridas ganz neue, über seine innere „Grammatik“ hinausweisende Möglichkeiten entnimmt und ihn – wie durchaus von ihm gewünscht – in offene kulturelle Diskurse einspeist, in denen dekonstruktives Denken durchaus zu einem Mehr an sozialem, kulturellen und historischen Verständnis führen kann. Zugleich überführt sie diese Theorien aber auch derer oft engmaschigen eurozentrischen Horizonte und kann, wie nebenbei, nachweisen, wie gerade die, die es doch oft „gut“ meinen, zur Verfestigung von Herrschafts- und Machtstrukturen, von diskursiver und terminologischer Hoheit und somit der Zementierung teils uralter Klischees und daraus resultierender Vorurteile beitragen.

Das macht CAN THE SUBALTERN SPEAK? zu mehr als einem historisch relevanten Text, es macht ihn zu einem Referenztext, den sich europäisches Denken – neben anderen, jüngeren – immer vor Augen halten, ja, dessen er sich unumwunden bedienen sollte, weist er doch vielerlei Anschlußmöglichkeiten auf, die gerade in Zeiten kultureller „Clashes“ bitter Not tun.

Güzin says

Subaltern Türkçesiyle Madun alt s?n?f ya da belki öteki olarak çevirebilece?imiz bir topluluk anlam?na geliyor. Spivak gerçek bir olaydan yola ç?karak tart??may? ba?latt??? makalesinde, Foucault, Althusser, Marx ve Derrida ba?ta olmak üzere önde gelen dü?ünürlerin görüş?lerine ithafen madun olma konumunu irdeliyor. Hindistan'da kocas? ölen kad?n?n kurban edilmesi Sati/Suttee gelene?i üzerinden ayr?ca kendi babaannesinin intihar eden k?zkarde?inin mektubunu alarak madun kad?na yönelik bak???n alt?ndaki temel sorunlar?n alt?n? çiziyor. Oldukça akademik ve yo?un bir metin ancak ele ald??? bu konu itibari ile sizi içine al?yor. Madunun lehine/onlar? temsil edecek görüş?ler belirtme görevini üstlenmi? ya da üstlendi?ini zanneden hegemonyan?n eksik oldu?u ya da göremedi?i noktalar? yakal?yor. Vard??? sonuç: Madun konu?amaz, kad?n olarak madun ise i?itilemez ve okunamaz. Sekülerlik ve s?n?f bazl? olmayan sürdürülebilir bir e?itim bu durumu iyile?tirebilmek ad?na önerileri.

Metnin argümanlar?n? tam olarak kavrayabilmem için daha çokça yan/arka okumalar yap?p tekrar okumam gereken bir makale.

Manuel says

I'm still unsure whether this book is useful for anyone who isn't either in Western academia or involved in some well-intentioned nonprofit-industrial complex type politics. That being said, its critique of Deleuze, Foucault, and its uses and misuses is canonical and worth knowing. I also liked the whole "subalternity as difference" stuff.

Una crítica despiadada de la academia occidental y sus intentos de "darle voz a los sin voz". No deja de ser una crítica interna, de esas que aceitan el aparato ideológico académico-político norteamericano. De cualquier modo, me parece que el concepto de subalternidad como diferencia es muy piola como herramienta en el pensamiento poscolonial o decolonial.

Lorena Fernandes says

Too many words to say the same thing, over and over. Despite the pretty awesome question, just got the point of it all on the last page.

Guess I'm not intellectually ~mature~ enough for this book yet (?!).

Zanna says

Here is a summary of the highlights of what I understood from the title essay, the only one I have read (taking 6 days). I have written this for *aide memoire* purposes and because I think through writing. In sharing it, obviously, I mean to entice you to read the essay, not to offer my inept interpretations as a substitute for it, but I have tried to make my 'review' as accessible as possible.

Spivak examines a conversation between Foucault and Deleuze (MF&GD), in which she says they 'ignore the international division of labour, render 'Asia' transparent and reestablish the legal subject of socialised capital' and treat 'the workers struggle' as a monolithic subject, linked to desire (to destroy power or which destroys power). They fail to explain relations between desire, power and subjectivity, and they are totally down on ideological critique, so they cannot articulate a theory of *interests* (as in holding a stake).

Spivak quotes Althusser on the ideological reproduction of social relations (submission to the ruling class, and the ability to manipulate ruling ideology are made for/in each generation) and notes that while Foucault had a go at shaking this up, he didn't admit that a theory of ideology admits its own institutional production (as postcolonial academics, for example, do). In MF & GD's talk desire, which always follows from interest, is opposed to ideology (seen as 'being deceived' or 'false consciousness') and desire implies an undivided subject, which becomes... Europe!

Intellectuals' valorizations of oppressed subjects and their location of them 'reality is what actually happens in a factory, in a school, in barracks, in a prison, in a police station' serves to reinforce rather than undermine their own epistemic authority: they judge and mark 'reality' and the people who can reveal it. Spivak notes that 'positivist empiricism [is the] foundation of capitalistic neocolonialism and so this use by the intellectual of 'concrete experience' can help to consolidate the international division of labour (the current mess). Intellectuals give us lists of subalterns who can speak, making themselves, representing those folks, transparent.

Spivak highlights the two distinct meanings of the word represent, working through a passage of Marx on class interest, to show that keeping them separate undermines the idea of an undivided subject, whether individual or collective, for whom interest and desire are one as Deleuze suggested. For Marx, *class* agency is not natural, not rooted in desire (its source is not the erotic in Audre Lorde's sense), because the conditions it responds to (the economic conditions that form a class) are artificial (though they reflect interests - of the ruling class/ideology).

Here is an observation that I really like

'the relationship between global capitalism (economic exploitation) and nation-state alliances (geopolitical domination) is so macrological that it cannot account for the

micrological texture of power'

To do that, we need theories that examine the subjects micrologically working the interests that work the macrologic relation (reveal the details of how people/groups on the level of daily interactions structure the global situation). Such theories grasp both kinds of representation: they note **how the world is staged in representation to make 'heroes, paternal proxies, agents of power' appear necessary**

So, rather than do as Foucault and Deleuze here and 'reintroduce the individual subject through totalising concepts of power and desire' by loudly refusing to speak for the subaltern, the intellectual should show that the subject can't be undivided, and that their refusal to occupy the subject position is disingenuous because impossible (representation and re-presentation are not the same). Intellectuals should formulate theories of ideology that make their role in ideological reproduction visible. Pointing out this irresponsible sleight of hand that reinstates the subject can be added to Edward Said's critique of Foucault - by mystifying power Foucault can ignore class, economics, the role of rebellion (just like (neo)colonial ideology). Said and Spivak emphasise the intellectual's *accountability*.

Spivak reminds us that Foucault described the redefinition of sanity at the end of the European C18th and marked it as epistemic violence (*Madness and Civilization* right?) but she suggests that this is part of the same history of Europe that includes the epistemic violence in constructing the colonial subject as Other, noting the British codification of Hindu law and colonial education in India.

So, from the 'First World' and 'under the standardization and regimentation of socialized capital' (the academy/institutionality/'Western' intellectual status I think), Foucault and Deleuze declare that the oppressed, the illiterate peasant, tribal etc etc, given the chance (issues of representation & re-presentation) and on the way to solidarity, can know and speak their conditions. Spivak replies, *on the other side* of the international division of labour from the European intellectual (socialised capital) and from 'inside and outside of the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, *can the subaltern speak?*'

This is a question that a particular group of intellectuals - the 'Subaltern Studies' group, who acknowledge Foucault's influence - must ask. Spivak looks at Ranajit Guha, attempting to rewrite the history of the development of Indian national consciousness (because it had previously been written under (or by?) the colonised episteme, and is all about the leadership and importance and heroism of British elites and neocolonial all-India elites (I paraphrase flamboyantly)) and what looks like his strategic essentialism on behalf of 'the people' (subaltern) to locate them and their consciousness, and compares this to Marx (she finds 'moments of productive bafflement' in Marx about subjectivity and consciousness). At least the struggle to make the impossible possible *remains in sight* and the subject remains divided and heterogeneous? I am at sea for a bit...

Woah then she says that the international division of labour depends on the urban proletariat of the comprador countries (Third World ruled by members of the international elite who have no responsibility to the population) not being trained in the ideology of consumerism, because that ideology leads to... political resistance. People who work in Third World sweatshops must not be able to buy the goods they make, or they would form coalitions and demand their rights.

To recap - one side of the international division of labour is the intellectual, and then Guha's buffer zone, the indigenous bourgeoisie and/or other dominant social groups (who may believe in coalition, who may be consumers, who may speak?) and on the other 'those most separated from any possibility of an alliance among "women, prisoners, conscripted soldiers, hospital patients and homosexuals" [this is Foucault's list]...

the females of the urban subproletariat' who 'cannot know and speak the text of female exploitation even if the absurdity of the nonrepresenting intellectual making space for her to speak is achieved'. Spivak then points out that there are people on or beyond the margins of the international division of labour (eg subsistence farmers) who are part of the 'heterogenous Other' that, in confronting, we would have to learn to see ourselves...

Foucault then, ignores the production of the West by the imperialist project. He reinstated the unacknowledged Subject of the West, presiding by disavowal, by pretending to vanish, and his admirers are fooled by the trick. It is absurd, and dangerous, for the First World intellectual to 'masquerad[e] as the absent nonrepresenter who lets the oppressed speak for themselves'.

In contrast to everyone thinking good old Foucault is so politically right on, everyone hates Derrida, but, have a look at this bit of writing by Derrida on grammatology, which actually helps 'the task of the First World subject of knowledge in our historical moment to resist and critique the 'recognition' of the Third World through 'assimilation', by marking and critiquing European ethnocentrism in the constitution of the Other (Spivak says this isn't an apology for Derrida, helpfully, as I am always tempted to see lit crit as a horse race). Keep doing this: mark the *positionality* of the investigating subject

A little further on *glosses over more stuff I don't really understand* Spivak mentions widow sacrifice in India:

The abolition of this rite by the British has been generally understood as a case of 'White men saving brown women from brown men'. White women - from the nineteenth British Missionary Registers to Mary Daly - have not produced an alternative understanding. Against this is the Indian nativist argument, a parody of the nostalgia for lost origins: 'The woman actually wanted to die.' **The two sentences go a long way to legitimise each other.** One never encounters the women's voice-consciousness. Such a testimony would not be ideology-transcendent or 'fully' subjective of course, but it would have constituted the ingredients for producing a countersentence

Imperialism paints itself as establishing a good society, and this picture includes woman as the object of protection from her own kind.

Spivak asks if, allowing that the abolition of *sati* is 'a good thing', an intervention in the poisonous dialectic of white saviours and nativist nostalgia both speaking for the subaltern woman is possible. There follows a look at Hindu scripture (Spivak marks her positionality as postcolonial woman, non-expert etc etc) and what can be salvaged of the history (overwritten by colonial episteme) of *sati*. She finds that 'what the British see as poor victimised women going to the slaughter is in fact an ideological battleground' (I think of Said here: Orientalist thought erases ideology) since its prevalence in Bengal (it was generally unusual, following the scriptural investigation Spivak calls it an '*exceptional*' signifier of her own desire) is linked to the fact that widows could inherit property (ie pressure from family members) to population control, to communal misogyny. Moreover, while some praise the courage and devotion of the self-immolating widow, two incompatible 'diagnoses' of female free will are made.

The British had homogenized Hindu law under the imperialist episteme, and using this construct they consulted with learned Brahmins on the legality of *suttee* (as the British called it), often appearing to condone the practice, but when the law was written this history of collaboration was erased and the writing gives an impression of the noble Hindu triumphing over the bad Hindu and *sati*, which might be better read as a form of martyrdom, was positioned along with murder, infanticide, the lethal exposure of the very old, erasing 'the dubious place of the free will of the sexed subject as female', so, I conclude, we can no longer

see and critique the agenda that paints self-immolation as free will, and as the path to release from the misfortune of having a female body in the cycle of rebirth, or the interests (patriarchy!) that lie behind such an agenda. We are left with (Said's) ritual-obsessed, transfixed, unchangeable, homogenous Orientals and White saviours.

This loss of the subaltern subject also happens even more forcefully in the case of widow *celibacy* (the word used for this is the word for the pre-sexual stage of life, so the implication is that the widow regresses to a pre-sexual state - there is another word for the virtuous post-sexual elective celibacy accessible to men), **because it was ignored while *sati* was energetically debated.**

In fact (I love this point), the word *sati* means good wife, and the word for widow immolation is 'the burning of the *sati*' so the British made a grammatical error in their naming (like Columbus, she notes, with 'American Indian'). And this error **identifies self-immolation with good-wifeness**, narrowing the ideological space to emphasise the heroism of the White man. Spivak looks at Edward Thompson's list of literally translated names of burned widows - pure Orientalism. She then notes that Sati is a popular given name among Hindus, after the goddess Sati, the wifely manifestation of Durga, whose story is one of sacrifice for her husband. Between the two sentences 'White men saving brown women from brown men' and 'The women really wanted to die' then, there is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak.

Spivak gives (with lots of cautions obviously) as example of the possibility of interventionist practice the case of a young woman, Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, who killed herself (in 1926) because she had been entrusted with a task of political assassination that she could not face, but waited until she was menstruating so that it would be clear that it was not a case of illicit pregnancy. Spivak's reading makes this a subaltern re-writing of *sati* because Bhuvaneswari inscribes in her body its non-imprisonment within legitimate passion by a single male. Menstruating widows had to wait for the 4th day ritual cleansing before self-immolation. This unread text recovered by Spivak parallels the nativist rewriting of the social text of *sati* with the hegemonic Durga story that is 'well documented and popularly remembered through the discourse of the male leaders of the independence movement [and thus, I venture, speak in the place of Foucault & Deleuze's 'people', the 'worker's struggle']. The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read'

And given that the subaltern cannot speak, 'the female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish'

Manal says

Can the Subaltern Speak? Is an Excellent essay written by a powerful Indian writer. Gayatri Spivak is known as a post colonial theorist. The title of her controversial essay is catchy! Who are the Subaltern? In general the term "subaltern" refers to the poor & the marginalized people in any society. However, the term here refers to the colonized women in India.. Spivak chooses the "sati" women in India as a subaltern who cannot speak. According to Spivak the word "sati" means a good wife and the Hindu female woman will not be good & loyal until she burns herself with her dead husband. This practice was common among the Hindu minorities in India. Surprisingly , the number of the sati women increased during the British colonization. According to Spivak the increased number of sati woman can be interpreted as a form of resistance against the British colonization. Spivak argues that Satis is an Indian ritual, but according to the Colonizer it's a crime! The colonizers claim that it is the social duty of the "white men" to save the "brown women from brown men." Spivak moves to make fun of Edward Thompson's book "suttee" and his failed attempt to

anglicize the word "sati." Spivak asserts that the ideology behind the British failed attempts to stop this practice in India is to justify their imperialism! Thompson & many others consider the imperialism as a civilizing mission! Therefore, the subaltern woman cannot speak! Her voice is lost between 2 ideologies . First, the ideology of the Indian culture (tradition) and the ideology of the social mission of the colonizer (modernization) that consider sati as a crime or a suicide! Finally, Spivak ends her essay by answering her question. She states that the subaltern cannot speak because no one will listen to them....

Asam Ahmad says

My brain has never hurt this much.

Simone Sampson says

Can the subaltern speak? is a wonderful essay that explores the question of subject constitution and object formation in the postcolonial world. The post-colonialist wants to rid the intermediaries to allow those placed in the position of the Other the moment to speak but how will the Other speak when all experience is already constituted through representations? Language is filled with power and so authenticity and transparency are impossible. There must be an interpretation of Other's cultures although it is a messy process. Dashabi criticizes her work for being politically suicidal and untenable, nevertheless Spivak has given us the opportunity to understand the process of subject constitution and object formation is much more complicated in the postcolonial world.
