

# Subalternity as Margin and Center of Anachronistic Discourse

Anakronistik Söylemin Sınırı ve Merkezi Olarak Maduniyet

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## Abstract

Subalternity is a concept that has taken on many different meanings across multiple schools of thought. Beginning with Gramsci, subalternity described the unique position of rural workers as powerless and problematic to the Marxist dialectic. Following the English translation of Gramsci, the Subaltern Studies group extended the position of the subaltern into the post-colonial heterogeneity of rural space. Within this context, through Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern as rural post-colonial woman, subalternity becomes a condition of speechlessness. From Spivak's reworking of subalternity, US third world feminism has developed a theory of difference and a mode of resistance. Meanwhile, Gramsci scholars have criticized these transformations of Gramsci's concept of subalternity as anachronistic. They contend that each of the appropriations from Gramsci have further obscured Gramsci's concept of subalternity producing a theory far from that envisioned by Gramsci. However, as specified by Gramsci, faithful readings and applications of outdated concepts becomes an "anachronism in one's own time" (Gramsci, *Selections*, 628). Thus, while the Subaltern Studies group, Spivak and US third world feminism have resignified Gramsci's subalternity from the rural south of Italian agricultural workers to the voicelessness of the post-colonial woman, their resignifications of subalternity are a development of theory that transcends the texts of Gramsci. This paper argues that Spivak's and US third world feminism's revision of subalternity avoids the Gramscian anachronism while developing a theory of both the state of subalternity and the escape of subalternity on "the long road toward hegemony" (Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason*, 310).

**Keywords:** Subalternity, anachronism, Spivak, Gramsci, voicelessness, feminism.

## Öz

Maduniyet ya da alt-sınıfa ait olma farklı ekollerde birçok farklı anlamda kullanılan bir kavramdır. Gramsci ile başlayan maduniyet kavramı, Marx'ın burjuva ve proletarya diyalektiğinde taşralı işçilerin güçsüz ve problematik durumunu tanımlamak için kullanılmıştır. Gramsci'nin İngilizceye çevirilerinin ardından Subaltern Studies Group olarak bilinen çalışma grubu, madunluk kavramını kolonisonrası dönemde bir zamanlar sömürgeciliğe uğramış ezilmiş toplumlara tanımlamak için kullanmıştır. Spivak'ın taşralı, kolonisonrası kadınları da madun olarak tanımlamasıyla, maduniyet bir suskunluk durumunu tanımlar hale gelmiştir. Spivak'ın terimi bu şekilde tanımlamasının ardından Amerika'da 3. dünya feminizmi bir tür direniş modeli geliştirmiştir. Gramsci ekolüne dahil olanlar maduniyet teriminin anlam değiştirerek kullanımını anakronistik bulmaktadır. Anlamca bu değişimlerin her biri maduniyet kavramının daha da muğlak hale gelmesine yol açmış ve Gramsci'nin ilk tanımladığı şekilden uzaklaştırmıştır. Ancak Gramsci'nin de söylediği gibi güncelliğini yitirmiş kavramların aslına sadık okumaları ve uygulamaları "kendi zamanında bir anakronizm" oluşmasına yol açar (Gramsci,

*Selections*, 628). Bu sebeple, Subaltern Studies Group, Spivak ve Amerikan 3. Dünya feminizmiyle Gramsci'nin madunluk kavramı İtalyan tarım işçilerinden uzaklaşarak koloni sonrası kadınların sessizliğinde yeniden tanımlanırken, bu yeni maduniyet tanımları Gramsci'nin metinlerini aşan bir teorinin gelişimini beraberinde getirmiştir. Bu çalışma, Spivak ve Amerikan 3. Dünya feminizmiyle değişen maduniyet, hem bir durum "hem de hegemonyaya giden uzun yoldan" (Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason*, 310) bir kaçış olarak kuramsallaştırırken, Gramsci'nin anakronizminden de uzak kalabilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Maduniyet, anakronizm, Spivak, Gramsci, sessizleştirme, feminizm.

## Introduction

The word 'anachronism' come from Greek, *ἀνά* (ana) meaning against, and *χρόνος* (chronos) meaning time. This concept forms a central point within the history of ideas. Historian Quentin Skinner posits that one of the most fatal flaws in the interpretation of history and literature is the fallacy of anachronism (3-53). In this context, an anachronism is defined as interpreting events and writings through concepts of the present. Skinner states that "the distinction between what is necessary and what is the product merely of our own contingent arrangements, is to learn the key to self-awareness itself" (53). As such, to read a text and to interpret it accurately requires that the reader apply a contextual knowledge of the past and the meanings of concepts as they arise within this context. Reading in any other way, according to the project of historical knowledge, is to taint the meaning of the past with our knowledge from the present.

Contrary to this central concept of interpretation, Antonio Gramsci asserts that such reading commits another type of anachronism. Gramsci asks, "How is it possible to consider the present, and quite specific present, with a mode of thought elaborated for a past which is often remote and superseded?" (Gramsci, *Selections* 628). The answer to this question strikes at the heart of the interpretive project. Gramsci asserts that "when someone does this, it means that he is a walking anachronism, a fossil, and not living in the modern world, or at the least that he is strangely composite... [and thus] social groups which in some ways express the most developed modernity, lag behind in other respects, given their social position, and are therefore incapable of complete historical autonomy" (Gramsci, *Selections* 628). Thus, through the faithful readings and applications of outdated concepts, a person becomes an "anachronism in one's own time" (Gramsci, *Selections* 628).

As such, while it is the task of interpretation to avoid historical anachronisms, the task of critical theory is to move beyond the concepts of the past through a critical analysis from the grounds of contemporary problematics. These two modes of reading form a paradox. On the one hand, within the history of thought, an interpretive anachronism is defined as the interpretation of texts through concepts that developed after that text was produced. On the other hand, within Gramsci's critique, an anachronism is defined as the interpretation of contemporary problematics through concepts of the past. Both of these positions are centrally important to reading, interpretation, and theorizing. In the following

paper, I apply these two forms of anachronism as a paradox within contemporary discourses over the Gramscian concept of subalternity. In this endeavor, I take Gramsci's work in two directions: first as a historically contextual position that prescribes a reading of Gramsci as an actor within his own time, and second as theorist whose concept of subalternity continues to develop.

The first section begins with an exegesis of Gramsci's concept of subalternity and of the revisions and misreadings of subalternity by the Subaltern Studies group. Between these two points of origin, the problematic begins with Subaltern Studies' appropriation of subalternity from Gramsci, an appropriation that transformed the denotation of subalternity as a resignification of the Gramscian concept. Within Subaltern Studies' appropriation, in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Gayatri Spivak resignifies the Gramscian concept of the subaltern in order to create a new explanatory tool in the study of colonized women. Within the discourse of subaltern studies, authors such as Marcus Green represent one side of the dual discursive formation by arguing that this appropriation misinterprets Gramscian subalternity. I argue that Spivak has indeed committed an interpretative anachronism through her resignification of subalternity into a concrete particular representation of silence endured by rural women, but in resignifying this concept, she also avoids a second anachronism. The argument then turns to a discussion of the Gramscian concept of anachronism which I argue Spivak has avoided through her Derridean resignification. Through Spivak's resignification of subalternity, she has provided a substantial theoretical framework to analyze the enforcement of silence and acts of resistance to such enforcement.

Finally, the argument thus turns to describing the appropriation of the Spivakian subaltern by US feminism including Nancy Fraser, Lauren Berlant, Maylei Blackwell, and Chela Sandoval. In her later writings such as *Who Claims Alterity* and *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, she argues that subalternity denotes only the colonized peasant. In her denotation of subalternity, there is no metropolitan subaltern and thus, she argues, the US feminist appropriation of subalternity appears as an interpretive anachronism of the Spivakian subaltern. But if employing the Gramscian anachronism holds true as a defense of Spivak against Gramscian scholars, so too should this concept hold true for some US feminists against Spivak, namely US third world feminism. While I agree with some of Spivak's criticisms of US feminism, I argue that in the case of US third world feminism further resignifications of subalternity do not necessarily result in an anachronism that invalidates the appropriation, but rather have the potential to further elaborate a dual descriptive of the state of subalternity and paths leading down what Spivak calls "the long road toward hegemony" (Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* 310).

## What is Subalternity?

The concept of the subaltern originates in the work of Antonio Gramsci's "Notes on Italian History," first published in English by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith in 1971. The publication of this translation is an important piece of this story, for Hoare and Nowell-Smith's translation, the development of Subaltern Studies moved toward a revitalized analysis of the third world. Although it is only a selection of "the Prison Notebooks," it has been used as the standard resource for Gramsci studies in English. Yet there is a marked difference in the conceptualization and denotation of subalternity between Antonio Gramsci and Gayatri Spivak. Thus in order to provide an accurate account of the subaltern, especially Spivak's restriction of subalternity to a particular group within the wider discourse, it is first necessary to locate the multiple significations behind the term which are amongst the most "slippery" meanings of contemporary political discourses (Louai 4-8). These significations move from Gramsci to Guha, and finally to Spivak whose resignification of the subaltern takes on the greatest importance in contemporary subaltern studies.

In Hoare and Nowell-Smith's translation of *Notes on Italian History*, Gramsci defines the subaltern in relation to hegemony as the class constituting those who are excluded from political participation thereby locating them in a position where they do not have access to the social and cultural institutions of the state and civil society (Gramsci 191-312). Hoare and Nowell-Smith explain in their introduction that Gramsci's use of subaltern is undifferentiated from his use of subordinated classes, and hence the subaltern represent a non-hegemonic grouping within society whose social positions can be described as subordinate to the hegemonic (Hoare and Nowell-Smith 20). This definition shall prove problematic, but it shall also prove to be the efficient cause of Subaltern Studies. These subaltern classes are categorized within *the Notes on Italian History* in order to formulate a future research constituting what Gramsci enumerates as a six-part program of historical study of:

1. the objective formation of the subaltern social groups, by the developments and transformations occurring in the sphere of economic production; their quantitative diffusion and their origins in pre-existing social groups, whose mentality, ideology and aims they conserve for a time;
2. their active or passive affiliation to the dominant political formations, their attempts to influence the programs of these formations in order to press claims of their own, and the consequences of these attempts in determining processes of decomposition, renovation or neo-formation;
3. the birth of new parties of the dominant groups, intended to conserve the assent of the subaltern groups and to maintain control over them;
4. the formations which the subaltern groups themselves produce, in order to press claims of a limited and partial character;
5. those new formations which assert the autonomy of the subaltern groups, but within the old framework;
6. those formations which assert the integral autonomy (Gramsci, *Selections* 202-203).

Central to the above research program is the study of not only the definitive conditions that locate a group as subaltern, but also the relationship of the subordinated group to a hegemonic ideological structure and the historical context in which a subaltern rises from subordination to elite status within a hegemonic order (Gramsci, *Selections* 202-203). As such, subalternity is always historically determined by the context of hegemonic arrangements which are never static in a Marxist historical narrative, but always remain in flux. Hence according to Hoare and Nowell-Smith's "Selections," the development of new hegemonic elites would appear to signify the rise of formerly unrepresented groups within social arrangements thereby creating new positions for these groups within a social hierarchy. It is in this description of the subaltern history that the transformations from one social ordering to the next are explicated as a struggle between dominant and subordinate groups. Yet even in times of struggle and social transformation, "subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups," for only "permanent victory breaks their subordination, and that not immediately" (Gramsci, *Selections* 207).

After the publication of "Selections," Gramsci's theoretical concepts began influencing the study of culture and ideology across the English-speaking world. Ranajit Guha, one of the foremost theorists of this new wave of Gramscian theory, reinterpreted the Gramscian concept to explain the marginality that mobilized the disparate revolutionary movements fighting British rule within colonial India (Guha 1-17; Guha and Spivak 35-87). Guha, whose work became a key moment toward the development of Subaltern Studies, coedited with Spivak the first book on the subalternity in 1988, *Selected Subaltern Studies*. In the preface to the section on Methodology, Guha explains that the term 'subaltern' is used by Subaltern Studies "as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way" (Guha and Spivak 35-36). Yet while the term is used to denote this subordination and failure as a Gramscian subaltern, it is doubted by Guha that "the range of contributions to [Selected Subaltern Studies] may even remotely match the six-point project envisioned by Antonio Gramsci" (Guha and Spivak 35). Nevertheless, this is not a weakness, but rather a call to future generations of scholars to give treatment to the subaltern.

In his chapter, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," Guha goes on to explain that according to the popular historiography of South Asian studies, the object of inquiry has been centered on a discourse between the colonizing elite and the nationalist elite, but between these two research programs, the "politics of the people" has disappeared in the margins of the discourse (Guha and Spivak 37-40). For Guha, the people represent the subaltern whose subordination restricts their social mobility and political voice through marginalization, and although the people have risen at times within India, the "politics of the people" have always served the interests of the elite in the end. The constitution of the elite, whether it is colonialist or bourgeois nationalist, demarcates a "structural dichotomy" that marginalizes the subaltern from the dominant group (Guha and Spivak 41-42). The structural dichotomy represents a failure on the part of the emancipatory force. Hence the study of subalternity within South Asia and around the postcolonial world requires the study of a

failure “which constitutes the central problematic of the historiography of [the colonial]” (Guha and Spivak 43).

It is in this atmosphere that Spivak’s resignification pressed Subaltern Studies to demarcate the boundaries between the subordination of Guha’s “people” and the subaltern as woman. It was during this period of development that Spivak began working within the Subaltern Studies Group, yet while she eagerly appropriated the Gramscian term with the rest of the group, she simultaneously rejected the foundational premises of subalternity laid down by both Gramsci and Guha (Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* 198-310). Spivak’s first major contribution to the discourse of subalternity, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (271-313), poses an anti-essentialist critique of Subaltern Studies that results in a proposal for mere strategic essentialism. Extending her argument on subalternity, Spivak in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (198-310) delineates her contention with Guha whose project, she claims, “could hardly be more essentialist and taxonomic” (271). She argues that although his definition of subalternity is grounded in the “identity-in-differential” subordination of “the people” (171), it requires a formulation of the subaltern people as constituting a “social being” that is essentially different than the dominant group (172). Although Spivak sees value in their essentialism as a possible strategy in eliminating subalternity, Subaltern Studies Group seems not efficient in providing further solutions to the discussion. Hence, Spivak’s answer to “Can the subaltern speak?”— a question she poses the Subaltern Studies Group— is while Guha’s subaltern can, the subaltern as woman cannot (Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 311-313).

Spivak locates her resignification of the subaltern within the grammatical margins of the discourse between British and Hindi rights over the Indian practice of Sati requiring widows to commit a suicidal self-immolation (Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 300-313; Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* 289-303). These self-immolating widow/martyr women were the object of discourse between Indian men who claimed the right to continue the practice and British men who eventually placed a prohibition against the practice; women, in that context, were denied subjectivity and the voice to declare their claims over the matter (Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 300-313; Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason*, 289-303). As such, these women could not speak for themselves and existed only within what Derrida referred to as the empty spaces at the margins of the historical narrative (Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* 423-431).

From the above description of subalternity and Spivak’s adaptation of Gramsci’s subletarnity the denotation of the subaltern shifted from what appears to be a subordinated subject (proletarian) in Gramsci to a marginalized people in Guha and finally to the marginalized woman in Spivak. As such, the signification of subalternity appears to have evolved over time in an organic fashion. Nevertheless, in what follows this organic evolution of subalternity shall be problematized. Rather than as a simple evolution of subalternity, the shift in denotation from Gramsci to Spivak depends on a certain reading of Gramsci that has provided the proper circumstances of resignification, but the reading appropriated from Hoare and Nowell-Smith by Subaltern Studies is incomplete and based on an anachronistic interpretation of the Gramscian subaltern. The

following section shall outline this anachronism through a rereading of Gramsci that has become available since the publication of his multi volume *Prison Notebooks* that have become available in English. Still, although Subaltern Studies shall be deemed guilty of an interpretative anachronism, it is also argued in the following section that a Gramscian anachronism has been avoided through the resignification of subalternity. Below, I defend Spivak's denotation as an effort to apply subalternity to the colonized woman and to critique the Western view of alterity.

### **Anachronisms Interpretive and Gramscian**

The concept subalternity of Subaltern Studies is compared to the original concept of the subaltern by Marcus Green. He argues that the original concept was subverted in part because the primary source material used by subaltern studies was taken from the abridged "Selections from the Prison Notebooks". As explained above, for many years the Hoare and Nowell-Smith translation was the only primary source in English of Gramsci while Gramsci's "Notebook 25," titled "On the Margins of History: the History of Subaltern Social Groups," was only partly translated (Green 1-2). Thus because Subaltern Studies began their project from an abridged work, their signification of subalternity was from faulty grounds leading to inaccuracy (Green 15-19). Stefano Selenu seconds Green's criticism and argues that Gramsci himself was worried about such misinterpretations and misappropriations of his work (Selenu 102-109). Green argues that Gramsci's "Notebook 25" gives the most complete picture of his subalternity, a picture that he argues does not accord well with the post-structuralist reading of Subaltern Studies (Green 2-3). This faulty reading is grounded in the foundational interpretive thesis of Subaltern Studies which is based on the assumption that Gramsci used the term subaltern in order to release his notebooks from the prison censors (Green 15-19).

Spivak explains her interpretation of Gramsci's term subaltern as a codeword for the proletariat used by Gramsci in order to evade the prison authorities. Spivak explains that "the imprisoned Antonio Gramsci used the word to stand for 'proletarian' to escape the prison censors. But the word soon cleared a space, as words will, and took on the task of analyzing what 'proletarian', produced by capital logic, could not cover" (Spivak, *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, 324). Following Green's reading of Spivak (17-19), I call this misinterpretive step the censorship thesis. As a misreading, this thesis provides Subaltern Studies with the premise leading first to their disregard of Gramsci's theoretical interventions against orthodox Marxism and second to criticize Gramsci on the same level as Leninism. Green points out that Gramsci could not have equated the subaltern with the proletariat, for the words subaltern and proletariat are used together as distinct concepts in the Prison Notebooks (Gramsci, *Notebook 3* para. 18; Gramsci, *Notebook 25* para. 4; Gramsci, *Notebook 7* para. 33). Hence the misreading of Gramsci's subalternity causes Subaltern Studies to commit anachronism by equivocating the Gramscian subaltern with the proletariat and then arguing against the strawman of a Gramscian proletariat-as-subaltern,. As such, in its Spivakian formulation, the concept of subalternity moved away from both Guha and Gramsci: from Guha, through an anti-

essentialism as strategic essentialism, and from Gramsci, through a misinterpretation of proletariat-as-subaltern. Yet more importantly Spivak's denotation of the term also shifts from a masculine subalternity to the subaltern as woman, a critical step in the development of subalternity as a concept.

Nevertheless, the same reading that Green presents from "Notebook 25" can also be interpreted, with a close reading, from some of Gramsci's earlier translated works. In "Some Aspects of the Southern Question" (Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* 28-50), the question of subordination is explained in specific terms of metropolitan and rural political consciousnesses. Gramsci further specifies the subaltern's marginality is distinct from the proletariat's marginality because of the locatedness of the Italian subaltern within the southern Italian rural peasantry. Because the hegemonic construction of ideology is developed independent of the peasants' common experience, the peasants are forced into holding a defensive rather than offensive posture. Thus the Weltanschauung of the peasants and the struggles of which they become a part are created for them by a hegemonic structuring of knowledge that preserves the structure of the industrial center's hegemonic dominance over the subordinated rurality of peasant life. Furthermore, Gramsci explains that even when the peasants have rebelled, the rebellion has played into the hands of the elite groups through the hegemony of a metropolitan reactionary consciousness that has pitted the subaltern peasantry against the revolutionary socialist. As with the previous discussion of Gramscian subalternity, the elite seizes the subaltern political momentum in order to put to rest the concerns and demands of the subordinated. Thus it is only through the peasants' seizure of agency within a struggle for hegemony that the division between the dominant industrial center and the subordinated rural margins can become united against the hegemony of the state and civil society.

Acknowledging the significance of Spivak's being interpreted by different methodological perspectives, Cosimo Zeene highlights that only focusing on the Gramscian concept cannot fully capture the importance of Spivak's resignification of the subaltern (Zeene 83-99). Zeene argues that instead of reintroducing a purely Gramscian concept, Spivak has reconceptualized subalternity by sketching a Foucault-Derrida positional chasm within postcolonial discourse identifying her own theoretical and physical location as an Indian and Marxian intellectual in its employment of a Derridean grammatology from a Foucaultian/Deleuzian Orientalism. He points out that it was never the intention of Spivak to provide an unbiased interpretation of the Gramscian subaltern, for the purpose of subalternity elaborated in Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is not to represent a Gramscian approach to subalternity, but rather provide a resignification that merely finds its point of origin in Gramsci. As such, according to my argument thus far, Zeene's contention with Green may be located in the very nature of anachronism. Therefore if the concept of the subaltern as used by Spivak is representative of a conceptual growth within postcolonial theory and not as a rigid Gramscian problematic, then Spivak's anachronism is merely interpretive. Dipesh Chakrabarty explains Guha's resignification of subalternity similarly as no mere anachronism in his own time (Chakrabarty 9-27).

Hence it is through the Derridean grammatology that Spivak marks herself as antianachronistic, through reading the empty places in Gramsci. Furthermore and



ironically her antianachronism can be explained through the Gramscian concept of anachronism. Gramsci explains his concept of anachronism as an analysis of the problematics of the past to the present as if the problematics of the present may be answered from the past (Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* 59; Gramsci, *Selections* 628). In "Notebook 1," Gramsci argues that when a person commits to those problematics of the past, that person is an "*anachronism* in one's own time" (Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* 59; Gramsci, *Selections* 628). Gramsci writes in "Note II" of "The Study of Philosophy:"

Philosophy cannot be separated from the history of philosophy, nor can culture from the history of culture. In the most immediate and relevant sense, one cannot be a philosopher, by which I mean have a critical and coherent conception of the world, without having a consciousness of its historicity, of the phase of development which it represents and of the fact that it contradicts other conceptions or elements of other conceptions. One's conception of the world is a response to certain specific problems posed by reality, which are quite specific and "original" in their immediate relevance. How is it possible to consider the present, and quite specific present, with a mode of thought elaborated for a past which is often remote and superseded? When someone does this, it means that he is a walking anachronism, a fossil, and not living in the modern world, or at the least that he is strangely composite. And it is in fact the case that social groups which in some ways express the most developed modernity, lag behind in other respects, given their social position, and are therefore incapable of complete historical autonomy (Gramsci, *Selections* 628).

Spivak, to the contrary of Gramsci's interpreters such as Green and Selenu whose rigid hermeneutic forces them back into the text, has looked into the subalternity of her own postcolonial historical and geographical context to find answers for a contemporary localized problematic that cannot be solved through an anachronistic gaze into 1920s-30s Italy. Therefore on one level Green is correct that the interpretation of the Gramscian subaltern is improperly represented in Subaltern Studies. And yet, as a critique of modernity, Spivak's resignification of subalternity represents a movement away from earlier Subaltern Studies. Accordingly, Spivak's resignification of subaltern is not guilty of the Gramscian anachronism. Rather, the resignification of subalternity represents a living critique that acts as a Kuhnian revolution, or paradigm shift, from the Gramscian concept to the Spivakian resignification (Chakrabarty 17). As a Copernican Revolution within Marxist discourse, Spivak's subalternity may thus be described as a paradigmatic shift within the study of the subaltern from the Marxism of Gramsci to Spivak's own strand of Marxian post-structuralism where the older theory has, during the course of the past twenty years, been replaced by the new instruments of the postcolonial subaltern project. From this discussion two distinct concepts of anachronism arise which according to the situational context of the anachronism remain central to critical theory.

The first concept, as problematized above, is found in textual interpretation as the elaboration of a historically situated idea from concepts which were not available at the time of composition. On the one hand, interpretive form of anachronism remains important to the interpretive methodology within the history of ideas. On

the other hand, it is nonetheless useless in terms of the evaluation of contemporary problematics. Thus guilty of the Gramscian anachronism, the faithful interpreters of Gramsci becomes a reintroduction of historically situated problematics into present contexts as if these problematics were situated amongst the living. Meanwhile, the interpretive efforts of Subaltern Studies have developed a "Postcolonial Gramsci" (Srivastava and Bhattacharya 1-16) that goes beyond the initial signification of subaltern. On the one hand, this development provides a means to evaluate contemporary problematics. On the other hand, the development of a "Postcolonial Gramsci" is not faithful reading of Gramsci's ideas. Thus, guilty of a misinterpretation, Subaltern Studies has resulted in an anachronistic misappropriation of Gramsci's work through an interpretive failure. And yet, Subaltern Studies has avoided the critical failure of the Gramscian anachronism by resignifying subalternity into a concept that describes the postcolonial present.

Regardless of whether or not Subaltern Studies has failed to accurately interpret Gramsci, the influence of Spivak's concept of the subaltern in the contemporary dialogue over marginalization and resistance has had much further reaching effects than Gramsci's, for in contradistinction to the Gramscian concept of the subaltern which in its rigidity has been mainly studied in academia, the concept elaborated by Spivak has proven to be a powerful explanatory tool in the work of contemporary critical theory to explicate the conditions of resistance within a postcolonial context. Thus as an explication of both marginalization and resistance, Spivak claims that "the subaltern thinks that either to have no access to lines of mobility is normal... or they want to get the hell out of subalternity" (Spivak, *Conversations with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* 65-66). The drastic shift in the denotation of the subaltern raises the problem of anachronism in the interpretation of the Marxian discourse. Beginning with Guha's conceptual appropriation of subalternity from the Italian historical condition in Gramsci's writings to explicate the situation of peasants in postcolonial India, the term moves out of its original temporal and geographical context. Spivak then further resituates the term from the initial anachronistic usage of subalternity by the Subaltern Studies group, and thus makes the anachronism more explicit by reintroducing the subaltern as constituting the lowest strata of woman whose silence within the postcolonial world defines her ontology.

### **Appropriation, Misinterpretation and the Western Subaltern**

From Spivak's interpretation of subalternity blooms a powerful critique of both western feminism and the postcolonial world which has been taken up like a battle-cry by western feminists who wish to challenge the old paradigm of feminist thought. These US feminists who have appropriated the Spivakian subaltern can be put into two separate camps. The first of these groups, Nancy Fraser, Lauren Berlant, and Maylei Blackwell, represent a theoretical strand that interprets Spivak's subalternity as a methodology of resistance, while the second one, US third world feminism, represents a theoretical strand that interprets subalternity as a description of the subaltern state while simultaneously retaining a methodology of resistance. Although Spivak argues that both of these strands of feminist thought have misinterpreted her resignification of subalternity, the

subalternity proposed through US third world feminism is in line with Spivak's resignification.

The first group of US feminists, including Fraser, Berlant and Blackwell, blur the lines between subalternity as a state and the movement from subalternity as a form of resistance. Fraser transforms Spivak's subalternity from postcolonial state to oppositional counterpublics (Fraser 67-71). According to Fraser, these counterpublics mobilize the Western subaltern in order to move grievances from the private sphere into the public sphere (Fraser 67-71). Lauren Berlant implements a Spivakian subaltern in her idea of Diva Citizenship which explains a resistance practice of the subaltern as a coup within the public sphere where the subaltern does not belong (Berlant 9, 13 27, 36, 221-222). And Maylei Blackwell uses Spivak's concept as a theoretical model for oral history as auto ethnography by reinterpreting the record spinning D.J. and listener-become-speaker practice of "represent'n" (i.e. "This is Claudia represent'n El Monte!") as the selflocation and selfactivation of a subaltern silent voice within urban radio broadcasting (Blackwell 41-42). While these authors represent disparate strands within cultural and critical theory, they too are unified through a collective interest in the voice of the subaltern. As such, Fraser, Berlant and Blackwell describe a state outside of or a movement from voicelessness as resistance. Fraser's counterpublics, Berlant's Diva Citizenship and Blackwell's represent'n require that the subject to seize the power to speak and act. This proves problematic to Spivak's project.

In the second group of US feminists, theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, and Chela Sandoval describe subalternity and third worldism through both the circumstances and the resistance to the state of subalternity. Chela Sandoval explains that US feminists can be grouped into "what Gayatri Spivak characterizes as a hegemonic feminist theory' on the one side and what [Chela Sandoval names] 'US third world feminism'" on the other (Sandoval 1). Thus, US third world feminism is a theoretical constellation that began with women of color feminism as a critique of white dominated radical feminist spaces (Sandoval 4-5). The group which coined the term, the US Third World Women's Alliance, developed a concept of third worldism existing within the borders of the US linking "differences of culture, race, and ethnicity to the fight against common exploitation by capitalism, stereotypes, and drug and alcohol abuse in communities of color" (Springer 49). Taking its name from the US Third World Women's Alliance, US third world feminism is a diverse constellation of women of color theorists working within the liminality between womanhood, color, language, ethnicity and class. Within this liminal space, resistance becomes focused across multiple oppressions thereby explicating both state of subalternity while simultaneously remaining focused on the process of identification. Unlike the first group of US feminists, US third world feminism remains in line with Spivak's description of the state of subalternity while simultaneously mapping the path out of subalternity. US third world feminism has reconceptualized subalternity as an anti-anachronistic subalternity like Spivak's.

Nevertheless, Spivak rejects the analysis of both of these groups of US feminist appropriations. Spivak claims that the concept of subalternity is misinterpreted by the first world feminist through a character of resistance to the hegemonic

cultural structure of the west, and as such, these appropriation of subalternity is markedly different between the “third world” and the “metropolitan” (Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education* 57-72). Spivak argues in conversation with Suzana Milevska that the appropriation of subalternity as an identitarian framework for academic “subaltern normality” is “meretricious and criminally wrong” (Spivak, *Conversations* 66). Here, and in her most recent book, “An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization” (57-72), Spivak chides the subaltern normal for appropriating subalternity as constituting a mere minority identity, for according to Spivak, in the identitarian politics of US feminism, the ontology of marginality is fallaciously equivocated with the ontology of difference (Spivak, *Conversations* 66-7). In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak explains this difference through Gramsci’s concept of hegemony:

Simply by being postcolonial or the member of an ethnic minority, we are not “subaltern”. That word is reserved for the sheer heterogeneity of decolonized space. When a line of communication is established between a member of subaltern groups and circuits of citizenship or institutionality, the subaltern has been inserted into the long road toward hegemony. Unless we want to be romantic purists or primitivists about “preserving subalternity”—a contradiction in terms—this is absolutely to be desired (Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* 310).

Here, Spivak’s explication provides the pattern of subaltern movement from the heterogeneity of the decolonized space experienced by the rural third world woman toward the representation and voice of the metropolitan experienced as a shedding of subalternity. In this context, Spivak’s use of the phrase, “the long road toward hegemony” (Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* 310) holds an important place within the discourse. As a Gramscian concept, hegemony signifies ideological dominance. This ideological dominance is significant of the control of knowledge by the bourgeoisie over the proletariat, but it is also central to mapping the process that the oppressed transform the world of ideas from the current state of ideological dominion. It is exactly this “long road toward hegemony” (Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* 310) that Gramsci describes in the revolutionary process through which the proletariat struggles for an ideological hegemony against the bourgeois class. Through the shedding of subalternity, the subaltern subject acquires a partially emancipated subjectivity that has begun to build power. According to Spivak, this is clearly desirable.

Hence, Spivak contends that there are no subalterns in academia because academia marks the locationality of the road toward hegemony, and hence because this road toward hegemony is the exit of subalternity, the academic has no recourse for claiming subalternity. The alterity of the third world requires the subaltern status of rural peoples’ otherness through speechlessness while the metropolitan alterity of minorities resides within a fixed locationality that provides the minority subject with escape from marginality via democratic political process. Thus, the key difficulty with these feminists is that the concept no longer describes the state of subalternity but only describes the process out of subalternity. Hence, any movement outside of voicelessness toward representation means a movement out of subalternity toward power: a subject who speaks is qualitatively different from the subject who cannot speak.

Furthermore, while stating that the metropolitan cannot be considered subaltern, Spivak also notes that subalternity should not be romanticized but be actively dismantled through resistance.

As such, Spivak's assessment of the first camp of western feminists is correct. According to Spivak, what follows is that because the first world subject always has at her disposal the ability to make herself heard through the fissures of imperialism, and this is as much the case with the first world woman as it is with the resistance movement within the third world. Resistance signifies the beginnings of emancipation from subalternity. While the subaltern counter-politics described by Frasier, the coup within the public sphere of Berlant, and the "represent'n" of Blackwell all signify a movement out of subalternity and into citizenship, and while this is clearly a desirable goal, it is not representative of subalternity: under conditions of resistance, the subaltern subject has begun the road toward hegemony, and even the mere mobilization of the subaltern as a voter within a representative democracy is a sign of movement toward power (Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* 309-310). However, these conditions do not always hold within the US, and thus the same critique does not hold for US third world feminism.

Although not consistently and explicitly speaking in terms of the Spivakian subaltern, US third world feminism's discussions meet two requirements of the Spivak's subalternity which are the conditions of living as a US third world woman and of resisting this marginal status in order to break the silence. This characteristic supplies a theory of subalternity as a state while simultaneously demonstrating how establishing "a line of communication... between a member of subaltern groups and circuits of citizenship or institutionality... [inserts the subaltern] into the long road toward hegemony" (Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* 310). From this conception of the US third world woman, Chela Sandoval describes the subalternity of the woman of color in terms their alterity to the whiteness of the hegemonic feminist woman (Sandoval 3). According to Sandoval, this is different than the identitarianism criticized by Spivak in that the third world locationality of US third world feminism is not geographical, but rather situational within and in-between the contexts of US citizenship and the identity/identification (Sandoval 1-2). Sandoval explains that there is a split within US feminism of "what Gayatri Spivak characterizes as a hegemonic feminist theory' on the one side and what [Chela Sandoval names] 'US third world feminism'" (Sandoval 1).

As ontology located both epidermically on the bodies of women of color as difference and also systemically through access to representation as marginality, the concept of the US third world describes both subalternity and difference while simultaneously prescribing a roadmap toward hegemony (Sandoval 1-24). It is through her locationality that the US third world feminist is alienated from the universal feminist subject and creates an oppositional consciousness out of her alienation. Hence, the descriptive circumstances of the US third world woman's subalternity find its representation within the alienation from which oppositional consciousness arises (Sandoval 10-17). It is not until the oppositional consciousness takes form that the woman of color becomes audible and visible. Yet while the oppositional consciousness necessarily signifies the road toward

hegemony in the denotation of the Spivakian subaltern, it also denotes the subaltern woman's movement from subalternity to agency. In her book *Talking Back*, bell hooks explains a similar oppositionality through a back talking speech act that signifies US third world woman's beginning the long road from subalternity to hegemony:

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "talking back," that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice. (hooks 9)

At the moment of talking back to power, subalternity is left via "the long road toward hegemony" (Spivak, *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* 310). The post-subalternity of the US third world feminist in her resistance to hegemonic ideology seemingly contradicts claims to subalternity, but only through her resistance to hegemony that the subaltern woman begins to move towards hegemony. Thus in the description of identity and oppression provided by US third world feminism, there is a dual Spivakian purpose of both signifying the state of subalternity while simultaneously signifying the process through which subalternity is left behind on the long road toward hegemony. This "talking back" requires the resistance of the US third world woman to the silence that she faces, and thus the requirement of the descriptive circumstances of subalternity is met in her silence as well as the circumstances of resistance to her silence on the long road to hegemony.

On the one hand, the US third world feminism describes the subalternity of US marginalities while on the other hand it describes the path away from subalternity by providing a methodology to resist oppression and domination. Where the first group of feminists provided only a descriptive of resistance in their resignification of subalternity and therefore limit the claims of Spivak's subalternity, the US third world feminists provide that Spivak's conditions are met of subalternity while also developing a mode of resisting that state. Thus, Spivak's complaints that first world feminists have misappropriated subalternity are accurate under certain condition, the conditions which describe the resisting subject as subaltern, but in the case of US third world feminism the dual descriptive escapes these criticisms. Spivak's resignification of subalternity is meant to describe a particular state experienced by women in rural decolonized space. Nevertheless, the circle that began between the interpretive anachronism and the Gramscian anachronism resurfaces in the dialogue between the US third world feminist and the Spivakian subaltern. There is no failure on the side of the US third world feminists, but rather only resignification.

## Conclusion

Analyzing the various camps of theorists working within the realm of the subaltern, the critical theorist must constantly move between these two forms of anachronism, inside, outside, and finally to the margins. The mistake constitutes an interpretive anachronism of Gramsci that divorces the concept from its

Gramscian Marxist connotations. However this misinterpretation as anachronism constitutes a resignification that has proven to be more influential and powerful than Gramsci's concept. Furthermore, through Gramsci's concept of anachronism as a problematic contained in past discourse reintroduced as a contemporary problematic, Spivak reinscribes subalternity as anti-anachronism by moving beyond the Gramscian problematic of 1920s-30s Italy. In conclusion, while Spivak has resignified Gramsci's subalternity from the rural south of Italian agricultural workers to the voicelessness of the post-colonial rural woman, Spivak's resignification of subalternity is a development of theory that transcends the texts of Gramsci.

In this way, Spivak has evaded the Gramscian anachronism by not falling into the trap of pure interpretation. Instead, while committing interpretive fallacies, she has created a mode of theorizing about the heterogeneity of post-colonial space that moves outside of the purely hermeneutic reading of the Gramscian text. Accordingly, the concept of subalternity is a living concept that continues to develop. However, as a concept, subalternity must provide a denotation of the subaltern, a subject who is without power and is below all others. As such, US feminists such as Nancy Fraser, Lauren Berlant, and Maylei Blackwell have misinterpreted the definition of subalternity. In this respect, Spivak's criticism of US feminists is accurate. However, this is not the case with US third world feminists. And as Spivak evaded the Gramscian anachronism through her dynamic reapplications of subalternity, so too have US third world feminists evaded the Gramscian anachronism through a reapplication of the Spivakian subaltern.

As a state of affairs and a condition of subjectivity, subalternity describes the state of voicelessness and powerlessness. Whether this state of affairs is in rural India or the inner cities of the US, subalternity exists wherever a subject finds themselves in a state of voicelessness and powerlessness. Here, subalternity breaks through the borders prescribed by Spivak to become a mode of theorizing the state of voicelessness while also charting the path toward hegemony. As such, from Gramsci's original concept, Spivak and US third world feminism develop this conceptualization beyond Gramsci's denotation to encompass a critical body of research that stretches the limits of theory and praxis. Together, Spivak and US third world feminism forms a collective body of theory that both describes the state of subalternity as voicelessness and powerlessness while also describing the movement out of subalternity through resistance and self-representation.

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