



**Power and Autonomy:
Subaltern Studies and the History of the Subaltern Groups**

Serhan AFACAN*

orcid/ 0000-0003-2223-2227

Abstract: Historiography or the philosophy of history is an integral part of history-writing. The findings of historians do not only bring out new information regarding what happened in the past but can also pose challenges to the theoretical frameworks used while dealing with the existing historical source materials. In this sense, historical and historiographical discussions are closely interrelated. This study deals with Subaltern Studies initiative, which started in the early 1980s to revisit and rewrite the Indian history and in time developed into a useful history-writing paradigm for historians from all over the world. First of all, the article discusses the context in which Subaltern Studies came into being by paying attention to the links between that and post-modernism and post-colonialism. Subaltern Studies was developed at a time when the fundamentals of modernism had already been vociferously put into question for a few decades by intellectuals from the East and the West. This intellectual legacy enabled the Subalternists to question the British rule in Indian history by paying particular attention to the agency of the understudied groups in the making of Indian independence. Secondly, the basic approaches of the Subalternists to the Indian history and to historical source materials are investigated. Here, the relationship between Subaltern Studies and other Marxist intellectual trends are emphasized. Finally, the article shares certain concluding remarks regarding the use of Subaltern Studies for historians working on other cases.

Keywords: Subaltern Studies, subalternity, post-modernism, post-colonialism.

Güç ve Özerklik: Maduniyet Çalışmaları ve Madunların Tarihi

Öz: Tarih felsefesi tarih yazımının asli bir cüzüdür. Tarihçilerin bulguları, geçmişte ne olduğuna ilişkin yeni bilgileri gün ışığına çıkarmakla kalmaz mevcut tarih kaynaklarını kullanırken yararlanılan teorik çerçevelere de meydan okumalar getirir. Bu anlamda,

* Dr. Öğr. Gör., Marmara Üniversitesi, afacanserhan@yahoo.com

tarih ve tarih yazımı tartışmaları birbirleriyle yakından bağlantılıdır. Eldeki çalışma, Hindistan tarihini yeniden ele almak ve yazmak için 1980'lerin başında başlayan ve zaman içinde dünyanın her yerindeki tarihçiler için kullanışlı bir tarih yazımı paradigmasını dönüştüren Maduniyet Çalışmaları girişimini ele almaktadır. Makalede ilk olarak, Maduniyet Çalışmaları'nın ortaya çıktığı koşullar, bu paradigma ile post-modernizm ve post-kolonyalizm arasındaki bağlantılara özel bir dikkat atfedilerek tartışılmıştır. Maduniyet Çalışmaları, modernizmin temel öğelerinin Doğu'dan ve Batı'dan entelektüellerce bir süredir yüksek sesle tartışılmakta olduğu bir dönemde ortaya çıktı. Bu entelektüel miras, Maduniyetçilere İngiliz idaresinin Hindistan tarihindeki konumunu üzerinde daha az durulan gruplara özel bir ilgi göstererek sorgulama imkanı sunmuştur. Çalışmada ikinci olarak, Maduniyetçilerin Hindistan tarihine ve tarihsel kaynaklara temel yaklaşımları incelenmiştir. Burada, Maduniyet Çalışmaları ile diğer Marksist entelektüel yaklaşımlar arasındaki bağlantılar vurgulanmıştır. Son olarak makalede, Maduniyet Çalışmaları'nın Hindistan dışındaki alanlarda çalışan tarihçilerce kullanım imkana ilişkin sonuç kabilinden düşünceler paylaşılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Maduniyet Çalışmaları, madunluk, post-modernizm, post-kolonyalizm.

Introduction

Subaltern Studies is a first and foremost theoretical paradigm designed to revisit Indian history with a particular focus on the subordinate social groups. The question of to what extent theories are needed is still a matter of debate among social scientists in general and historians in particular. Indeed, probably the best way for an historian to achieve a comprehensive theory on a given subject is to use and even develop a theoretical framework hand in hand with the empirical research process. Put differently, as on the one hand no empirical study can indiscriminately and completely dismiss theories, it does not necessarily have to follow a certain theoretical framework at the expense of others. As Peter Burke remarks (2005: 18), neither the past nor the present can properly be understood without the combination of history and theory. Nonetheless, there are certain theories which have proved more lasting and widespread in comparison to others. For instance, the nationalist and Marxist views of history have for long enjoyed almost universal validity and they still, despite the existence of several challenges to their basic premises, remain so to a large extent. Saying this, needless to say, does not in any way mean to ignore the ups and downs within the same theory. Stretching the example of Marxism further, it is obvious that while preserving its fundamental features, several revisions have throughout the twentieth century been proposed within the Marxist school so much so that we today have a much broader and multidimensional understanding of Marxism than, say, we had at the turn of the twentieth century. Thus, as a whole Marxism is no longer confined to a narrow economic reductionism which insists on analyzing the society and the working class only in economic terms. Instead "politics of culture" (Ives, 2004: 3)

as formulated by Antonio Gramsci and “morel economy” (Burke, 2005: 2) of E. P. Thompson, to mention but two well known examples, also have a lot to say for a better understanding of society still from a Marxist perspective.

As a matter of fact, with the exception of graduate dissertations although it is not very common for a history work to begin with a comprehensive theoretical discussion, historians have for long been interested in theorizing the nature of their knowledge as well as the accuracy of their sources which are occasionally called “facts”, “documents” or “texts”. One can recall, for example, Leopold von Ranke as a model of a “modern” understanding of history according to which historian’s task was “simply to show how it really was” (Carr, 1990: 8). Here, Ranke was actually touching upon a vital epistemological issue which was widely discussed by later generations of historians. Another expression of this overwhelming trust in facts was represented by J. B. Bury who declared that “history is a science, no less and no more” (Brown, 2005: 17). Assuredly relying on the capacity of reason to reveal the “truth” as formulated by the Enlightenment philosophers, such a “positivist” formulation of the historian’s task suggests that what a historian was supposed to do was to ascertain facts and then draw conclusions from them (Carr, 1990: 9). One point is very important in this approach. Apart from indicating to the necessity of a sound method in history-writing (empiricism), there is also a philosophy of knowledge here which posits that an empirical method as such would gain access to “reality” and “truth” (Brown, 2005: 13). It was this very idea of “truth” that was severely criticized especially from the second half of the twentieth century onwards primarily by those who are widely known as post-modernists. Before going into a discussion of post-modernism, one essential consequence of empiricism is worth noting. Since authenticity was enough a merit for a source to be employed by the historian without necessarily problematizing its very nature, historians for long preoccupied themselves with state-centered histories which revolved for most of the time around the stories of “great men”. This focus was also to shift in the twentieth century especially, if not only, once the epistemological critique of modernity undertaken by post-modernists became prevalent. Therefore, as historians’ horizon widened regarding their historical thinking they started to delve into nonconventional subjects by using new source materials including those “whose usefulness as historical sources lies in the fact that its compilers were not deliberately and consciously recording for posterity” (Sharpe, 1991: 30).

Before embarking on discussing its relationship with history it is useful to refer to some essential features of post-modern theory as a backdrop to our discussion. Inspired by a variety of ideas of various personalities such as the skepticism of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), the culture-based analyses of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and the semiology of Roland Barthes (1915-1980) post-modernism is, above all, a “philosophy of knowledge” (Brown, 2005: 32). This philosophy was later on developed as a comprehensive critique of modernity most notably by Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and is now widely known as “linguistic turn”. This turn was famously expressed by Derrida as: “there is

nothing outside of the text” (Brown, 2005: 96). This statement, and the post-modern theory as a whole, leads us to a number of characteristic conclusions of post-modernism which can be summarized as follows:

- A human representation of “reality” can never be complete,
- A representation can never replicate the complexity of relations between things,
- Such a representation can only be possible by giving signs (names) to everything and these signs are culturally determined,
- A representation can only be attempted by giving a specific order to those signs which did not exist in “reality”,
- The representation of “reality” will change from a period to the other as it also will be limited to a given cultural context (Brown, 2005: 46-47).

This view of knowledge caused much controversy among historians. The denial of “reality” and “truth” as knowable things and reducing historical sources, which were once regarded as “facts” or “documents”, to mere “texts” which, according to post-modernists, were themselves problematic even if authentic, caused stormy debates among historians. Roland Barthes (1997: 122) stated that “in ‘objective’ history the ‘real’ is never more than an unformulated signified, sheltering behind the apparently all-powerful referent”. It followed then that since the past is not in any way re-constructible, each attempt to do so should be met with suspicion since it is no more than another “text”. Departing from such a passionate “textuality”, it becomes all clear what Clifford Geertz means when he declares that “the real is as imagined as imaginary” (Spiegel, 1997: 188). Such a “text” or “language” based understanding of the past was, at least for the opponents of post-modern approach, was not, as Lawrence Stone put it (1997: 242), only a “threat” to the profession of history but also “a flight from ‘reality’ to language”. Those who are skeptical about the basics of post-modern theory in general and an exclusive focus on the “text” in particular, have developed the powerful argument that for language to acquire meaning and authority there should be a specific social setting or a “social context” (Spiegel, 1997: 266). It follows then that language must carry at least be a partial capacity to convey information about historical forms of life for otherwise we could never know anything about the past.

The Subalternists are undoubtedly on the side of post-modernism in terms of the fundamental philosophical challenges it posed against modernity as well as its questioning the political, social and economic manifestation of the modernist thinking. What is most relevant for the present discussion is the way the Subalternists make use of post-modern methods. If there is no absolute truth to be discerned from “texts”, then they could be read in various ways with equal claims to accuracy. This certainly helps a lot in solving the problem of sources in studying those groups of society which were left aside or even consciously ignored in state-centered historiography. If subaltern groups have not themselves produced their own records and if they can only be heard in official texts, which are at times

unfavorable or hostile to them, then these texts could very well be subjected to a discourse analysis. Put otherwise, those texts could be “read against their grain” employing the methods provided by post-modern and post-structuralist approaches (Bahl, 2000: 88). In what follows I will discuss Subaltern Studies in terms of its epistemological approach as well as historiographical position.

Subaltern Studies: Politics of the People

Encouraged by post-modern and post-colonial initiatives, although critical of both in certain aspects and inspired by the works of such intellectuals as Antonio Gramsci, Edward Said, E. P Thompson, a group of historians of South Asia, under the scholarly leadership of Ranajit Guha, published in 1982 the first volume of what was to become a series entitled “Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society”. In order to be able to assess the full value of this historical initiative, its relationship with post-modernism as well as post-colonialism should be clarified. As indicated above, the post-modern approach provided a useful atmosphere as well as necessary tools for a revision of “modernist” historiography. If the very same text could be read, with equal justice, in multiple manners then a certain historical epoch could be narrated in a number of ways. Thus, it is safe to suggest that “if post-modernism in history means anything, at the very least it points to a proliferation of pasts making claims on the present” (Dirlik, 2000: 248). What was misread, contaminated or inadequately written about the Indian society, said the Subalternists, was now to be revised by paying particular attention to the subaltern groups. At this point Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and the subsequent discussions that followed its publication in 1978 contributed much to the formation of the Subaltern Studies project. Said’s radical critiquing of the West in terms of its knowledge-production and the representation of the East in general and of Muslims societies in particular appealed much to the Subalternists for such a critique could easily be applied to the British rule in India.

However, the foreign rule was not the only reason why India was “wrongly” presented. The Indian nationalist elites, say the Subalternists, also played their part in denying agency to the subaltern groups, which make a good bulk of the Indian society, in Indian history in general and in the making of Indian nationalism in particular which brought India’s dependence in the aftermath of the WWII. This latter point together with the British rule, is what Guha attracts our attention to when he argues that “the historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism – colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism” (Guha, 1982: 1). Despite their substantially different narratives, the common feature of both of these elitist versions is their denial of “the contribution made by the people on their own that is independently of the elite to the making and development of this nationalism” (Guha, 1982: 3).

As mentioned above, Subaltern Studies is a revisionist initiative aiming at re-thinking the Indian history by restoring the agencies of those groups whose

voices otherwise remain unheard. The very term “subaltern” has no clear-cut definition not even in the writings of Antonio Gramsci who used the word as a substitute to “proletariat” to escape prison censorship. Indeed, Gramsci used the term to mean two things; First he means by it the industrial proletariat but, against the orthodox Marxist thinking, even when doing this he pays great attention to social relation between the dominant groups and those who are dominated and also to “hegemony” (Chatterjee, 2011: 1). Secondly, Gramsci uses the word to refer to the subaltern groups in the pre-capitalist social formations (Chatterjee, 2011: 2). This meant, at least as far as southern Italy, Gramsci hometown, was concerned, the peasantry which is generally negatively dealt by Marxists if it is not dismissed altogether. The vagueness of the term proved to be an advantage, rather than being a handicap, of the Gramscian reading of social relationships for it came to gain various meanings over time. Generally speaking, the word has come to have a wider meaning than proletariat and is now used mostly to refer to those people who are not systematically included in the traditional Marxist theory. A description of the word given by a Subalternist is of great use: “for the historians of Sought Asia who took the word from Gramsci, ‘subaltern’ came to mean persons and groups cut off from upward – and in a sense ‘outward’ – social mobility” (Spivak, 2000: 325).

Now, before going into the details of the project itself a reference to the relationship between postcolonial historiography and Subaltern Studies should also be made. In order for the Subaltern Studies initiative to be possible it ought to rely on the epistemological questioning of the European Enlightenment philosophy which was primarily undertaken by post-modernists. Both in the Enlightenment philosophy and also in the historiography informed by it, non-Western societies are almost totally neglected and left in oblivion. This is what also makes it a paradox for a Third World social scientist that he/she finds the theories produced through such an epistemology useful despite the obvious facts that the Third World itself is denied an agency in it (Chakrabarty, 1998: 265). Thus, the attention paid by such historians to the European history is largely unreciprocated by their European counterparts. This is what Dipesh Chakrabarty (1998: 265), a prominent Subalternist, mean by “asymmetric ignorance”. Then, to quote Chakrabarty (1998: 264) again, “in this sense ‘Indian’ history itself is in a position of subalternity: One can only articulate subaltern project positions in the name of this history”.

Therefore, a methodology which would be different from meta-narratives and teleologies and would instead focus more on local and indigenous theories and approaches was to be found. This is what the Subalternists had in their minds when they started their project for the first time in the early 1980s. This is what also Chakrabarty (1998: 286) means by “provincializing Europe”. To locate Europe within its physical and mental boundaries will in turn enable “other” parts of the globe to be analyzed more in their specific conditions. However, there is a thin line between such an endeavor and a blind cultural relativism or nativism. The purpose of such a project of provincializing Europe and its history, then, should be put straight forward and this could only start by problematizing the very concept of “Europe” and its role in India in this case. What Chakrabarty himself understood

from the project was “push[ing] history to its limits and rewrite[ing] history from the grounds of ambivalence and contradictions” (Bahl, 2000: 88). Such an objective, needless to say, did not come out without problems. What, for example, criteria do we have to determine the limits of history? Why subaltern groups who are told to constitute an “autonomous domain” (Guha, 1982: 4), are thought to be destined to determine the limits of history of India or of any other country for that matter? Obviously, to criticize the role of Europeans in India would require the Subalternists to come up with a new thinking, apart from a historiographical methodology, that runs counter to the Enlightenment philosophy. This is what the Subalternists basically found in post-modernism and post-structuralism. Also, the very concept of Europe as an alien ruler was to be problematized. This is where Said counts the most to the Subalternists and this is also what Guha aims at doing when he criticizes “colonialist elitism”. Another interesting point to raise here is that being inspired by the analyses of post-structuralists, the Subalternists are very much concerned with de-constructing elitist and Eurocentric historiography in order to “make its unworking visible” (Bahl, 2000: 89). Yet, once this historiography is de-constructed, how can we claim that a new one based this time on the autonomous agency of subaltern groups is comprehensible? This question partly explains the shifts in the initiative over the years. Such concerns and critiques were voiced from the beginning of the initiative. Yet, the project proved to be an enduring one publishing several volumes so far and touching upon various topics in Indian history. Furthermore, the Subaltern Studies project is no longer an exclusively Indian enterprise but instead has been adopted in studying many other cases as well. Thus, from here on the fundamentals of the Subaltern Studies initiative, the themes covered and the types of historical sources used by the Subalternists as well as the shifts which took place within the school over the years will be discussed.

Discovering the Subaltern Groups

When the first volume of the Subaltern Studies series was published in 1982 Guha wrote a brief piece where he set the basic concerns and principles of the Subalternists. Apart from their aforementioned and apparent position against elitism, both colonialist and nationalist, the Subalternists aimed at focusing on the “politics of the people” which, says Guha (1982: 4), was an “autonomous” domain that neither owed its existence to the elite politics nor its existence depended on the latter. This was what was left in the elitist historiography. What is crucial here is that in the Subaltern Studies initiative, nationalism and the making of Indian national identity constitute the core concern and the departure point for many studies. This is what Guha (1982: 1) attracts our attention to when he says that the prejudice shared by both types of elitism was their conviction that the development of Indian nationalism along with the making of Indian nation was almost exclusively elite achievements. Put differently “it (elitist historical writing) fails to acknowledge far less interpret the contribution made by the people on their

own that is independently of the elite to the making and development of this nationalism”(Guha, 1982: 3). This issue of autonomy, as one critic points out, is where the Subalternists diverge from Gramsci in their conceptualization of “subaltern” since subaltern groups by definition cannot be autonomous (Bahl, 2000: 94).

Yet, if there was really an “autonomous” domain where subaltern groups acted independently of the elite then how come that such a vast country as India remained under the British rule for so long? Why this domain did not develop into a “national” movement before? Guha answers this question by arguing that this is the “historic failure of the nation to come to its own” and this is, he suggests, what their project aimed at studying (Bahl, 2000: 7). Certainly, once nationalism is placed in the centre of discussions about British Raj then uprisings, particularly those of the peasantry, were to enjoy close attention. Clearly, subaltern politics was not powerful enough to develop some kind of a full-fledged national struggle for liberation for its fragmentary, violent and spontaneous nature, accompanied by lack of leadership, made such a thing almost unthinkable. In this sense, one had the impression that the Subalternists do not claim to explain Indian nationalism as a phenomenon produced by subaltern groups. They rather argue against the nationalist-elitist version of national identity. In other words, the Subaltern Studies initiative, at least in its early stages, provided a rather de-constructive historiography of Indian nationalism.

Another difficult issue concerning Subaltern Studies is the question of sources from which the traces of subaltern politics can be followed. This is what makes an overwhelming focus on extraordinary conditions such as revolts and uprisings so important. As one Subalternist says “if one had to look for evidence of an autonomous subaltern consciousness in the historical archives then it would be found in the documents of revolt and counterinsurgency” (Chatterjee, 2011: 4). When studying that kind of historical episodes, the documents concerning uprising are, say the Subalternists, read “against the grain” which means that these sources are revisited this time to hear the voices of subaltern groups (Bahl, 2000: 89). The Subalternists also tried to come up with new sources materials for the study of the subaltern groups. A good example of this is “rumor” which is analyzed by Guha (1986) in his *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* as a way of communication among insurgent peasants (Spivak, 1985: 351-356). But as far as the overwhelming attention paid by the Subalternists to peasant uprisings, some critics assert that such an overemphasis on such episodes of unusual times can result in inadequate attention given to the 99 per cent of the times when peasants were not involved in any insurgency (Arnold, 2000: 40). Also, as another critic asserts, it appears from their overall focus on certain aspects of the peasantry that “in the name of theory, then, a tendency emerged towards essentializing the categories ‘subaltern’ and ‘autonomy’ in the sense of assigning to them more or less absolute, fixed, decontextualized meanings and qualities” (Sarkar, 2000: 304). This critique was partly answered by saying that the peasant is subaltern due to the fact that he accepts the immediate reality of power relations and hence his subalternity

but at the same time he asserts his autonomy which becomes most visible in times of uprising (Chatterjee, 2000: 18). Furthermore, studies on everyday forms of resistance which were more enduring and continuous aimed at filling the same gap.

Apart from the topics that are dealt with and also the methodology which is employed by the Subalternists it should also be indicated that the project has experienced important shifts from its inception onwards. As a matter of fact, as indicated above the basic concern of the Subalternists was to discover the reasons behind the failure of the Indian nation “to come to its own” and initiate a country-wide struggle for national liberation. Further, Guha put it with much clarity that “there is no one given way of investigating this problematic” (Guha, 1982: 7). The Subalternists first started to investigate the autonomous domain of subaltern groups in the Indian nationalist movement. But at this point they felt the urge to find out a new epistemology which brought them to criticize Western way of producing knowledge. At this point they started to preoccupy themselves with criticizing European meta-histories and the basic premises of modernity which was in a sense in perfect line with the basic objective of the project. Because, from the very beginning the Subalternists concerned themselves with what was different as far as Indian history was concerned. This was formulated as autonomous agency of subaltern groups, which was thus far denied in elitist historiography, in the making on Indian nationalism. Now having realized that India itself was in a position of subalternity when compared to Europe they made extensive efforts to invert the reading of Indian history over “failure”, “lack” and “inadequacy” of all the good and subtle characteristics that Europeans had (Chakrabarty, 1998: 272).

Apart from these systematic shifts, the editorial handover in 1993 also brought about a thematic turn. From 1982 until 1993 Ranajit Guha remained the editor of the six volumes published during these years during which such themes were covered: Critiques of elite historiography, uncovering peasant belief systems, peasant movements, peasant revolts, Indian nationalism, sectarianism, the colonial construction of communalism, power relations within the community, peasant insurgency, subaltern consciousness and politics, the people’s perception of Gandhi and his politics, the mentalities of people, critiques of feminist writings but very few themes related to working class movement and similar subjects (Bahl, 2000: 91). From 1993 Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey became the new editors. The volumes published from that point on revolved around the nation, the community, the Bengali middle class, forest people, colonial prisons, India’s partition, Indian religion and language (Bahl, 2000: 91).

Finally, mention also be made about the relationship between Subaltern Studies and “history from below” of the British Marxists. Certainly, works of Eric Hobsbawm and above of E. P. Thompson, primarily his *The Making of the English Working Class*, have contributed a lot to the outlook of the Subalternists. Of particular importance was Thompson’s “moral economy” and “class struggle without class”. From the very beginning, the Subalternists were skeptical about the

accuracy of basic Marxist concepts such as “bourgeois”, “prebourgeois”, “capital” etc. due to their relationship with the Enlightenment thought (Chakrabarty, 1998: 266). In this sense the British Marxists appealed to the Subalternists in a similar fashion as Gramsci did since both challenged and revised the basic classical Marxist concepts. However, Subalternists use of *The Making*, to give but one example, brought about its problems because the use of certain concepts in the book was “at odds with his [Thompson’s] historical method and analytical style” (Chandavarkar, 2000: 63). Taken as a whole, the Subalternists did not accept the British Marxist approach altogether. The primary reason for this is that according to the Subalternists “history from below” “could not persuasively challenge the existence, stability or indeed the historical legitimacy of capitalist modernity itself” (Chatterjee, 2011: 5). One wonders whether a similar critique can be directed to Subalternists who themselves do not challenge and even are not willing to do so the idea of reading Indian history over nationalism. If the Subalternists insist so much on “other modernities” (Chatterjee, 2011: 6) and try to revisit Indian history in its own terms, why then they do not challenge the idea of nationalism but rather they try to attribute autonomous agency to subaltern groups in the making of it in the Indian context? In other words, the Subaltern Studies initiative was apparently developed not against European modernity as a whole but against its reflections in Indian history and historiography. Thus, the analytical tools developed by them proved to be more lasting than their initial concerns.

Conclusion

The Subaltern Studies initiative provides us an alternative approach for looking at history particularly within the confines of post-colonial historiography. The strength of the project originates from the fact that it does not only place itself against colonial elitism but also against the nationalist one since the latter prefers to present a country of homogenous people united behind nationalist protagonists to achieve national liberation. This is what saves the project from being a naïve nativist or a simple cultural relativist. Yet, there is still the danger of replacing an agency, the elite in this case, by another one, the subaltern groups. One should focus, therefore, on the cases of convergence between the interests and the agendas of the elite and subaltern groups to see how they influenced each other. In any case the works produced by the Subalternists so far added much to our knowledge of colonial domination and the ways it manifests itself in general and the way it did so in India in particular.

However, taken as a whole Subaltern Studies is a good and illuminating historiographical endeavor and a well-established mixture of post-modernism and post-colonialism along with the other inter-disciplinary features it has. It has achieved a lot in getting India out of “the waiting room of history” as Chakrabarty calls it (Chatterjee, 2011: 8). After all, the productivity of the members of Subaltern Studies provided for us enough material to judge their methodological success.

Their achievements in revisiting Indian history have also been beneficial to historians studying other cases. To what extent this methodology can be useful in studying other histories, let's say that of the Middle East, very much depends on how effectively it is employed within the specific conditions of a given area both in terms of the source materials and the structure of the society under question. Otherwise, it is true not only that the subalterns "cannot speak" (Chatterjee, 2011: 7) by themselves but also that when they do speak, they definitely speak in their vernaculars. Despite all the problems, however, the Subaltern Studies initiative provides useful theoretical tools without imposing a strict framework and this, more than anything else, is its underling merit.

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