



Gayatri Chakravorty

Spivak (Calcutta 1942) arrived in the United States in 1962 to do a doctorate in comparative literature at Cornell University. Although her first book was published in 1974 (a biographical / historical study of the poetry of W. B. Yeats entitled *Myself, I Must Remake*), it was not until two years later, in 1976, when she published the work that led to her acceptance among elite theorists attentive to the evolutions of the French cultural world. The book was her translation into English of Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie*, preceded by a substantial introduction revealing the main axes of Spivak's philosophy. One of

Manuel Asensi: Do you think that the subalterns have today the tools for their liberation, as Negri and Hardt do when they speak of immaterial job as a power against Empire? It would mean, indeed, that the subalterns can speak.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: What do you mean by "liberation?" Are "immaterial jobs" information technology? (I am sorry my homework on Hardt and Negri is not up to par.) The use of information technology by radicals has rather little to do with the millions of people who are completely off the circuit of access. Those are the "subalterns." To be able to "speak" means the possibility of having a response.

MA: I agree with you. There are millions of people that have not the possibility of delivering an answer, but today the possibility of migration and internet give them, even in their terrible situation, the capacity of crossing boundaries that before was impossible to cross. My question is: do you think that the situation of subalterns and the "subalterns of subalterns" has changed today in a way that give more opportunities to them? Or do you think that their situation is the same that before the globalization and post-globalization age? And something else: can we say that the concept of "subaltern" is metaphysic due to the fact that it maintains a binary opposition in relation to the dominants?

CG: I suppose my experience with the rural poor in India and China persuades me that not everyone has access to internet. We are not talking about the students in Beijing resisting through faxes. Also, mere access to internet (unmediated cyber literacy) – even if it were possible for the people I speak of -- is not immediately productive of resistant collectivities. If you read the pages of computer journals, you might be convinced of the contrary. People migrate because of poverty and oppression in their home countries, true. It is also true that the metropolitan countries should be hospitable to migrants. But to think of migration as liberation is to define the global South as a place to leave. I cannot agree with that position.

these axes is related to the need to articulate and modify Marxism, Feminism and Deconstruction. This is clearly visible in the essays she published over the course of the 70s, in which she dealt with problems relating to strategies of feminist reading, the politics of interpretation and the institutional role in literary studies. In fact, it was this line of thought, antithetical in many points, which led Spivak to occupy a somewhat heterodox position as a Feminist, Marxist and Deconstructivist.

On one occasion, the Critical Theory Institute of the University of California at Irvine organised a round table with Jacques Derrida, Spivak and Judith Butler. Someone next to me said, "look, they're like father, mother and daughter". The comment was maliciously intended, but if you think of the family as a place of conflicts with no possible resolution, then you would understand quite well the relationship between Spivak and Derrida (and Butler, of course). I asked her about Derrida's recent death, and she commented: "The loss of Derrida is the loss of a friend and the loss of an adventurous thinker who was always capable of surprises. Was Hegel's death the end of dialectics? When did deconstruction begin?" The latter sentence is "nearly" definitive.

Manuel Asensi

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I use the word "subaltern" to mean people without access to social mobility. If we do not have such a word, subalternization takes place behind our backs. Why should it matter if the word "subalternity" were metaphysical? We cannot operate without binary oppositions. Having said this, let me say also that the dominant is heterogeneous. It is a place which incessantly appropriates the emergent, turning it into mere alternatives rather than opposition. It is a place where the archaic is often invoked into the residual. It is a place where the critic of cultural politics has her nose to the ground, pursuing the scent of the "pre-emergent." The pre-emergent may well be subalternity bringing itself to crisis. My work is to bring the subaltern into the circuit of hegemony, by inserting it into the public sphere. The subaltern always speaks. But does it "speak?" Which would mean "is its resistance recognized as such?"

MA: In your opinion, which is today the position of our bodies in the context of the conflict between East and the West? I mean, what would be what we can do, as a bodies, in a world in which on the one hand women have get some rights (democratic nations), and in the other the position of women is like in Medieval Age?

CG: "Woman" is a rather broad category. I don't understand the question well. If you mean reproductive rights as opposed to genital mutilation or punishment for "being raped," I do not see these as "body" issues. They are legal issues, and education issues – involvement with infrastructure issues.

MA: I explain a little more: do you think that technologies of genre has any sense in a world in which on the one hand we have reproductive rights and in the other genital mutilation. How can we be sensitive, as a thinkers, as a writers, to that oxymoron (as we can name it)?

CG: As thinkers and writers, we should try to understand how certain gender practices (from reproductive rights to genital mutilation) are philosophically imagined at their best. Then we have to remember that reproductive heteronormativity is the oldest and broadest institution in the entire world. Therefore, sexual difference is used as the ingredient for cultural semiotic in every way from mere negotiation to oppression in reaction against class-domination in the diaspora. As activists, we confront the problem of gender oppression by earning the right to join or support movements against such oppression from within the so-called cultural community rather than presuming to lead as agents of liberation. It is also necessary not to see multiculturalism as a demand for "recognition" for traditional practice, but to understand the predicament out of which the denial of political and civil rights displaces itself into a demand for cultural rights; and work at the bigger problem.

MA: What do you think of “queer studies?” Is there any conflict between feminism and queer studies? What is your position?

CG: As I practice feminist studies, queer studies is related to it. There is as much conflict between queer studies and feminist studies as there is within varieties of feminist studies and queer studies. I believe that the metropolitan definition of homosexuality should not be imposed upon the heterogeneous histories of homosexual practices in the periphery even as the class-determined emergence of the metropolitan definition all over the world should be recognized rather than repudiated. Given my belief about reproductive heteronormativity, it is possible to learn a good deal from queer theory. I should also mention that two very strong sources of my enlightenment are Luce Irigaray and Michel Foucault. I have also spoken of the possibility of an “originary queerness” in the aboriginal areas of Western West Bengal, where I train teachers, but I do not know how to theorize this.

MA: Do you agree with Julia Kristeva when she contended that woman does not exist?

CG: I am afraid I am not sufficiently well acquainted with Julia Kristeva’s work to answer. I think “woman” “exists” for some situations and does less so for others. I am generally careful about “exists-does not exist” binaries.

MA: Obviously, Kristeva is using the lacanian reference in the sense that the subject who becomes woman does not enter in the symbolic order in the same way that the subject that becomes man. But there is more: for Kristeva to say that woman does not exist is the only way for finding a revolutionary strategy. It is like to say that woman is a kind of derridean unspeakability. And for you?

CG: I do not know what revolutionary strategy would be. I also think the unspeakability of gender goes across sexual difference. As a feminist activist, when I listen to the testimonies of the survivors of trafficking in women, of those who live with HIV/AIDS as a result of trafficking, of transgendered folks at the bottom of the social strata in the South, of the victims of credit-bating, and so on – it is enough for me to work in terms of the fact that the agents of exploitation, domination, and oppression think of these beings as “women.”

MA: What does the loss of Derrida mean for you? Is it the end of Deconstruction? Or can be a fact that opens and develops Deconstruction?

CG: The loss of Derrida is the loss of a friend and the loss of an adventurous thinker who was always capable of surprises. Was Hegel's death the end of dialectics? When did "deconstruction" begin?

MA: But there are a lot of people who are burying deconstruction, and more now when Derrida is not with us. Which is for you the situation of deconstruction in the context of united states and in the rest of the world?

CG: I am not a defender of deconstruction, as I am not a defender of anything. I believe I am deeply permeated with some deconstructive strategies, so that all my work, in the university and outside, is at least in part a setting-to-work of deconstruction. I think when the frenzy of envy, fear, and nervousness subsides, as it will, the usefulness of deconstruction will be recognized if some of us keep working with it. I believe my energy would be misspent if I tried to keep "deconstruction" alive as a fashion.

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