Hyper-self-reflexive development? Spivak on representing the Third World 'Other'

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ABSTRACT   This article emphasises the relevance and importance of Gayatri Spivak's work for those of us involved in the field of development (as academics, researchers or development workers). Spivak underlines how our representations, especially of marginalised Third World groups, are intimately linked to our positioning (socioeconomic, gendered, cultural, geographic, historical, institutional). She therefore demands a heightened self-reflexivity that mainstream development analysts (eg Robert Chambers), and even 'critical' ones (eg Escobar, Shiva), have failed to live up to. The article examines Spivak's writings to illustrate the reasons, advantages and limits of this hyper-self-reflexivity.

'Can the subaltern speak?' (1988a), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's influential, albeit controversial,[1] article, underscores what has become her untiring concern—the proclivity of dominant discourses and institutions to marginalise and disempower the Third World 'subaltern'.[2] Her article examines the ethics and politics involved in this othering process, seizing on the question of representation of the Third World.

Spivak begins the piece by pointing out how 'progressive' Western intellectuals such as Foucault and Deleuze tend to engage in gross universalisations when they speak on behalf of the Third World 'masses', or refer to 'the workers' struggle' in a way that ignores the international division of labour (1988a: 272–274). She goes on to show how colonial and 'native' representations are similarly problematic. Focusing on widow-sacrifice (sati) in colonial India, she examines the British move to abolish the practice, which was justified on the basis of the British 'civilising mission' in India (a move which Spivak captures in the now famous phrase: 'White men saving brown women from brown men') (1988a: 297). She contrasts this position with the then dominant Hindu one, which excused the practice by arguing that the widows wanted to die. Spivak indicates how each representation legitimises the other: one purports to be a social mission, saving Hindu women from their own men, the other a reward, allowing the women to commit a 'pure' and 'courageous' act. But all the while, the widow's own voice is ignored. 'Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disap-

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pears...There is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak' (1988a: 306–307). Spivak ends the article by pointing out that, even when the female subaltern does speak, she cannot be heard (1988a: 308). In this regard, she mentions the case of Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, whose suicide in 1926 is interpreted as sati resulting from illicit love, in spite of her deliberately leaving signs that she committed it for other (ie political) reasons.

The crux of Spivak's argument is that the above representations of the Third World conflate two related but discontinuous meanings of 'representation' (1988a: 275–276): 1) 'speaking for', in the sense of political representation; and 2) 'speaking about' or 're-presenting', in the sense of making a portrait. Thus, the British abolition of sati rests on a claim to represent the Hindu widow politically and to portray her 'as she really is or desires'. But not only does this claim end up silencing her, it also erases the role the British play when staging her representation. In conflating the two meanings, in speaking for her even as they re-present her, the British neglect their own complicity in the representational process. And Spivak holds not just imperial and dominant nativist discourses to account here; even Foucault and Deleuze, whom she calls 'two great practitioners' of the critique of the subject, and the 'best prophets of heterogeneity and the Other', are guilty: 'The banality of leftist intellectuals' lists of self-knowing, politically canny subalterns stands revealed; representing them, the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent' (1988a: 275).

Spivak writes from the point of view of a literary/postcolonial critic; but I would like, in this article, to argue for the pertinence and significance of her concerns for the field of development. Many of us who work in this field as researchers and/or development workers[3] struggle with the dilemmas that her writing raises. What are the ethico-political implications of our representations for the Third World, and especially for the subaltern groups that preoccupy a good part of our work? To what extent do our depictions and actions marginalise or silence these groups and mask our own complicities? What social and institutional power relationships do these representations, even those aimed at 'empowerment', set up or neglect? And to what extent can we attenuate these pitfalls? Spivak encourages us to ask such questions. She underlines how our discursive constructions are intimately linked to our positioning (socioeconomic, gendered, cultural, geographic, historical, institutional), and therefore demands a heightened self-reflexivity that sometimes even those 'critical' development analysts among us can fail to live up to. I shall attempt to examine Spivak's numerous writings to illustrate the reasons, advantages and limits of this hyper-self-reflexivity.[4]

Who represents?

Spivak underlines how we cannot encounter the Third World today without carrying a lot of baggage. She joins her fellow postcolonial critic, Edward Said (1978), in maintaining that her own discipline of literary criticism is unavoidably invested in Orientalism, so that literary writing (especially on the Third World) always already means reproducing various forms of Western hegemonic power over the Third World.[5] The same may be said of the field of development. As

the 'postdevelopment' theorists (eg Escobar, 1984, 1995; Sachs, 1992) have reminded us, working in development inevitably positions us within a 'development discourse', where the North's superiority over the South is taken for granted, and Western-style development is the norm. Our encounters with, and representations of, our 'subjects' are therefore coded or framed in terms of an us/them dichotomy in which 'we' aid/develop/civilise/empower 'them'. Changing this relationship is not a question of mere good intentions or semantics: for instance, development organisations or researchers may now call their subjects 'beneficiaries', 'target groups', 'partners' or 'clients', instead of 'poor', 'underdeveloped' or 'disadvantaged', but this does not by itself change the discourse or dismantle the us/them power relationship. So caught up are we in this coding that it becomes important in our encounters with the Third World to ask who represents, and what baggage positions us in this us/them manner.

An inheritance that Spivak frequently emphasises is the history of imperialism. Showing her Marxist leanings,[6] she reminds us of the materialist dimensions of this history, especially the way in which colonialism incorporated the colonies into the international division of labour and thus initiated a process of global inequality and socioeconomic impoverishment, particularly in the Third World. For Spivak, this is a process that continues today under the rubric of 'globalisation', with women bearing the brunt of the costs: 'Marx's prescience is fulfilled in postfordism and the explosion of global homeworking. The subaltern woman is now to a rather large extent the support of production' (1999: 67). But Spivak supplements this political-economy argument with an important semiotic one: like Said, she recalls imperialism's cultural production and domination of colonial societies, a process she refers to as the '"worlding" of what is today called "the Third World" ' (1985: 247). 'Worlding' for her is akin to Marx's 'commodity fetishism', where commodities are so fetishised under capitalism that the (alienated) labour process involved in their production is obscured. For Spivak, the epistemic violence of imperialism has meant the transformation of the 'Third World' into a sign whose production has been obfuscated to the point that Western superiority and dominance are naturalized (1999: 114ff).

One does not have to look too far afield in international development to see this obfuscatory process at work. As several analysts have pointed out (eg Frank, 1967; Sylvester, 1999: 717; Escobar, 1991: 675–676), modernisation thinking (eg Rostow, 1960), which has so dominated the field, barely even mentions colonialism. For it, Third World history begins post-World War II, with First World growth patterns serving as history's guide and goal. The pervasiveness of such thinking is visible, for example, in the structural adjustment and 'free-trade' policies of the Bretton Woods institutions, under which countries must liberalise socioeconomic and trade regimes. The policies proceed by a disavowal of the history of imperialism and the unequal footing on which such a history has often placed Third World countries in the global capitalist system. They also proceed by buying 'a self-contained version of the West', which for Spivak amounts to ignoring both its complicity in, and production by, 'the imperialist project' (1988a: 291).

Thus, according to Spivak, the disavowal of the 'worlding' of the Third World, allows the Westerner to overlook the interrelationships between the West and imperialism or globalisation and the conditions of homeworkers. It places the Third World at bay from the West, and either ignores colonialism, or situates it securely enough in the past as to make one think it is now over and done with. Moreover, it reinforces Western ethnocentrism and triumphalism. Spivak writes, for example, that 'the student [where Spivak teaches, at Columbia University, New York] is encouraged to think that he or she lives in the capital of the world. The student is encouraged to think that he or she is there to help the rest of the world. And he or she is also encouraged to think that to be from other parts of the world is not to be fully global' (2003: 622).

But Spivak is careful not to conclude that such thinking happens only along a geographic, West/Third World axis. Increasingly, her work refers to a 'class apartheid', in which the cultures of class are often more important than national or spatial positioning:

> There is an internal line of cultural difference within the 'same culture,' apart from the usual mechanisms of class formation. It is related to the formation of the new global culture of management and finance and the families attached to it. It marks access to the Internet. It also marks the new culture of international nongovernmental organizations, involved in development and human rights, as they work on the lowest strata in the developing world' (2003: 618; cf 2002: 7).

For Spivak, this elite global professional class, made up of both First and Third worlders, is so embedded in managerialist culture that it is easily blind to the Third World subaltern or is prone to projecting developmentalist/ethnocentric mythologies onto the subaltern.

Spivak never shies from implicating herself in her critique of the above-mentioned historical, geographic, cultural and class positionings, often confessing, for instance, to being a privileged Third World academic working in the West (eg 1990a: 57, 60, 75–94). It is perhaps for this reason that she also devotes quite a bit of space in her writings to what she calls the 'native informant', not hesitating once again to implicate herself. She borrows the admittedly problematic[7] term from ethnography to denote a person positioned to speak on behalf of his/her ethnic group or country, typically for the benefit of the Western investigator or audience (1999: 6, ix; cf. Khan, 2001). The term refers specifically to informants from the Third World or Third World diasporas living in the West[8] (like Spivak, I fit the latter category). Spivak is sceptical of the now fashionable celebration of 'marginality' and multiculturalism, and the increasingly important role that native informants play in/for the West. She is weary of these individuals' uncritical embrace of the West's validation of multiculturalism. The problem is that the native informant can too readily don ethnicity as a badge. S/he may indeed be a well informed and prepared investigator, but 'clinging to marginality' (1993: 9) also runs the risk of essentialising one's ethnic identity and romanticising national origins. It can lead, for example, to ahistorical or fundamentalist claims (eg 'feminism is un-Islamic') which, in turn, may be used by those in power to justify the repression of women or subalterns (eg censorship of progressive Muslim women's groups). It can also lead to shaky claims about the native informant as keeper of esoteric 'ethnic' or subaltern

knowledge. Being postcolonial or 'ethnic', according to Spivak, does not necessarily or naturally qualify one as Third World expert or indeed subaltern (1999: 310); in fact, valorising the 'ethnic' may end up rewarding those who are already privileged and upwardly mobile, at the expense of the subaltern.

While defending identity-based movements' attempts at recognition and protection of minority group rights, Spivak is critical of privileged diasporics capitalising on postcoloniality by claiming comparative advantage or disadvantage. She states that, in the academic or political sphere, the 'diasporic' or 'subaltern' has become a 'kind of buzzword for any group that wants something that it does not have' (1996: 290). Similarly, in the economic/business sphere, 'difference' is increasingly becoming commodified, with ethnic culture now being packaged and 'niche'-marketed. She sees upwardly mobile third-worlders and Western diasporics, spurred by the desire to assist their 'home' culture, playing a greater role in this commodification process: as 'well-placed Southern diasporic[s]' or natives, they help advance corporate multinational globalisation through the patenting of indigenous knowledge and agricultural inputs, microcredit programmes for women, or population control (1999: 310; 2003: 611). She therefore concludes that this new-found 'nativism' yields a reverse ethnocentrism: 'It is as if, in a certain way, we are becoming complicitous in the perpetration of a "new orientalism" ' (1993: 56; cf 277).

But Spivak is quick to examine the other side of the equation. She reproaches Western researchers/academics for sometimes too easily distancing themselves from postcoloniality by uncritically situating the native informant as authentic and exotic 'insider': they say '"OK, sorry, we are just very good white people, therefore we do not speak for the blacks." That's the kind of breast-beating that is left behind at the threshold and then business goes on as usual' (1990a: 121). By placing themselves as 'outsiders', they duck their own complicity in North–South politics, often hiding behind naïveté or lack of expertise, all the while congratulating themselves as the 'saviors of marginality' (1993: 61). This inside/outside separation either helps contain and depoliticise ethnicity, or puts the onus for change and engagement exclusively on the Third World subaltern (or on the native informant as its representative).

Thus, for Spivak, it is dangerous to assume that one can encounter the Third World, and especially the Third World subaltern, on a level playing field. Our interaction with, and representations of, the subaltern are inevitably loaded. They are determined by our favourable historical and geographic position, our material and cultural advantages resulting from imperialism and capitalism, and our identity as privileged Westerner or native informant. When the investigating subject, naively or knowingly, disavows its complicity or pretends it has no 'geo-political determinations', it does the opposite of concealing itself: it privileges itself (1988a: 272, 292). It is liable (as discussed above and detailed further below) to speak for the subaltern, justifying power and domination, naturalising Western superiority, essentialising ethnicity, or asserting ethnocultural and class identity, all in the name of the subaltern. In so doing, it is liable to do harm to the subaltern. As Linda Alcoff writes, 'Though the speaker may be trying to materially improve the situation of some lesser-privileged group, the effects of her discourse is to reinforce racist, imperialist conceptions and perhaps

also to further silence the lesser-privileged group's own ability to speak and be heard' (1991: 26).

Why represent?

Perhaps the most common answer in the field of development to the question about why we represent the Third World is that we want to better get to know it so as to be of help (to the 'less fortunate'?). Yet Spivak stands with Foucault (and Said and Escobar) in arguing that such noble and altruistic claims are never just that: knowledge is always imbricated with power, so that getting to know (or 'discursively framing') the Third World is also about getting to discipline and monitor it, to have a more manageable Other; and helping the subaltern is often a reaffirmation of the social Darwinism implicit in 'development', in which 'help' is framed as 'the burden of the fittest' (2002: 22). We have already examined how our framing is influenced by our geopolitical positioning; but Spivak adds and underlines that the 'why' of our representations cannot be divorced from our institutional positioning.[9] She insists, in fact, that there is no such thing as a 'non-institutional environment' (1990a: 5), and hence that our representations are constructed, at least in part, based on such an environment. I propose, in this section, to examine her argument in relation to some of the key organisations in which we researchers/professionals work—academic institutions and governmental and non-governmental development organisations.

Universities have tended to pride themselves as institutions where knowledge can be pursued for its own sake, and where education is delivered in a neutral and objective manner. But of late, these claims have fallen into disrepute. Far from being pure and unmotivated, knowledge and learning are shown to be subject to myriad institutional demands (Bérubé & Nelson, 1995; Kuhn, 1970; Miyoshi, 2000): pressures to 'publish or perish' (for faculty tenure and/or promotion); the imperative for prestige and 'originality'; competition (among students and faculty) for research funding and grants; jockeying between students for high grades; or 'turf wars' among researchers. These institutional demands are shaped, in turn, by external factors, such as government funding or cutbacks to education, corporatisation of the university, the relative availability of research funds for humanities/social sciences versus natural sciences, or state policies on immigration or multiculturalism (that may affect pedagogical content and style, for example). Spivak encapsulates this intersection of academic learning and will to power, this knowledge framing according to institutional demands and pressures, under the rubric of 'teaching machine' (1993; cf 1990a: 5). But she casts a particularly critical eye on how this knowledge framing intersects, in turn, with the Third World.

She is concerned primarily with the politics of knowledge production, specifically the way in which Western university researchers, armed with personal/institutional interests, go to the South to do fieldwork and collect data. She calls this a process of 'information retrieval' (1990a: 59), wherein the Third World becomes a 'repository of an ethnographic "cultural difference" ' (1999: 388).[10] It is, for her, another form of imperialism, the Third World once again providing 'resources' for the First World; but unlike classical imperialism, it is

'extraction of surplus-value without extra-economic coercion' (Spivak 1988a: 290; cf Best, 1999: 486, 492). Seen in this light, Western intellectual production mirrors, and is in many ways complicit with, Western imperialism. Cultural imperialism supplements classical (socioeconomic) imperialism, with the Third World producing both 'the wealth and the possibility of the cultural self-repre-sentation of the "First World" ' (1990a: 96; cf 1988a: 271).

Spivak picks up two specific dimensions of this cultural imperialism. The first is what she refers to as the 'benevolent first-world appropriation and reinscrip-tion of the Third World as an Other' (1988a: 289). She means by it the retrieval of information from the South, not to encounter the Third World on its own terms, but for other, usually First World, purposes. To illustrate, she takes Julia Kristeva, the noted French feminist scholar, to task over her book, About Chinese Women (1977). Ostensibly a feminist book about ancient Chinese matriarchical institutions, Spivak reproaches it for being ahistorical (for too easily extrapolating the category of 'woman' to ancient Chinese social institu-tions), romantic (for implying that contemporary China has 'declined' relative to the former idyllic age), and colonialist (for benevolently using the Chinese example, but to argue for the ultimate Western feminist political agenda—a non-patriarchal feminist utopia). For Spivak, Kristeva is not interested in Chinese women per se, but in appropriating them for her own purposes. This amounts to exoticising and orientalising the women, treating the 'margin' as tourist (1988b: 134–153).

A second dimension of academic cultural imperialism is the privileging of theory (1988a: 275). Spivak has in mind here researchers who see themselves as transforming 'raw facts' or 'information' gathered from the South into 'knowl-edge'. Thus, the 'field' becomes the repository of data, the academy the 'centre' for value-added theory; subalterns/women tell stories, (male) researchers theorise for them; workers have concrete experience and practice, intellectuals distil and systemise them; social movements do local politics, academics formulate 'new social movement theory'. The Third World is 'worlded' on the basis of this theory/practice binary, which perpetuates the pattern of placing the Western academy and intellectual at the centre. That the researcher does not see subaltern stories as sophisticated theory probably says more about her/him, and what s/he constructs and values as 'theory' and 'story', than about the subaltern. Moreover, what s/he disavows, according to Spivak, is that 'the production of theory is also a practice' (1988a: 275), and conversely, that practice and narrative are never free from theory or theoretical bias. But in this mêlée, once again, the subaltern is not heard.

Perhaps because she is herself an academic, Spivak has more to say on academic institutions than on development organisations; however, she does seize on the issue of gender and development. She describes gender programmes as the 'matronizing and sororizing of women in development' (1999: 386). The programmes often represent Third World women as oppressed by 'second-class cultures' (1999: 407), thus rationalising feminist intervention and reinventing, under guise of enlightened benevolence, the colonialist 'civilising mission'. For Spivak, gender specialists in development agencies 'must learn to stop feeling privileged as a woman' and refrain from assuming 'women's solidarity because

they are women' (1988b: 136; 1990a: 137, both italics in original; cf. Marchand & Parpart, 1995; Mohanty, 1991; Sylvester, 1995: 956). By generalising themselves, by speaking for all women's desires and interests, they disavow the many obstacles to gender liberation and equality in the West. They also neglect the historical, cultural and socioeconomic differences among and between First and Third World women's groups.

Although she does not specifically consider other institutional dimensions of development, several of Spivak's arguments are pertinent. Just as universities can lay claim to 'pure' knowledge (as mentioned above), development organisations can promote the image of benevolence and disinterestedness. However, the construction of development as 'aid' and 'assistance' to the Third World is belied by what can be called the 'business' and 'conditionality' of development. Thus, in a fashion not untypical of all aid organisations, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) justifies its aid budget to Canadian 'taxpayers' by boasting that 70 cents on every Canadian aid dollar returns to Canada through the creation of jobs and the purchase of goods and services (ie 70% of Canadian aid is tied), and that such aid sustains 30 000 Canadian jobs and provides contracts to 2000 Canadian businesses, 50 universities and 60 colleges (CIDA, 2003). The aid programme may (or may not) help or reach its Third World audiences, but in the meantime, it is an export subsidy to First World businesses and a job creation programme for NGOs. It is also laced with power by dint of its conditionality: in this case, it means tying the recipient to procurement of Canadian goods and services; but in other cases (eg an IMF structural adjustment programme), it could mean the recipient must buy into an ideological programme (neoliberalism) and carry out serious socioeconomic structural reform. Finally, an aid programme can be used as a pretext to open up developing-country markets for Western businesses. Here, Spivak cites the World Bank's recent promotion of itself as a 'knowledge organisation' and its consequent encouragement of developing-country and subaltern group access to new telecommunications technologies (computers, internet, cell phones). The by-product of 'selling access to telecommunications-as-empowerment' is capitalist penetration by global computing and telecommunications industries (1997: 3; 1999: 419; 2003: 613).

Like university programming, development programming is also subject to numerous procedural demands. Technical requirements, deadlines, budgetary time frames, funding priorities—all of these intervene in programme delivery, having little to do with on-the-ground needs. In a Foucauldian vein, many (postdevelopment analysts) in fact maintain that these bureaucratic procedures and interests are integral to the disciplinary and regulatory character of development institutions. James Ferguson's study (1990) of World Bank poverty reduction schemes in Lesotho, for example, shows how the representation of communities as 'underdeveloped' and 'poor' helps justify and reproduce bureaucratic red tape and power. He argues that, ultimately, it does not matter whether the schemes are a success or failure; the main outcome is the depoliticisation of poverty issues and the advancement of state authority (1990: 256). Thus, rather than working themselves out of a job by reducing poverty, development administrations (local and external) can often ensure, through the construction

and/or strengthening of a bureaucratic and technical apparatus, their own survival, if not expansion.

Not just the state or the large international or multilateral development organisation such as the World Bank is complicit here; NGOs are, too. Spivak is sceptical of them because they tend to be 'too involved in the New World Order—in terms of the big players like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation as the economic arm and, unfortunately, more and more, the United Nations as the political arm' (1997: 4). Yet, even those NGOs that stand at the margins of the New World Order are not necessarily immune. Sangeeta Kamat's recent analysis (2002) of grassroots organisations in India demonstrates how small, ostensibly 'progressive', organisations can succumb to a development straightjacket. Comparing the work of a more mainstream organisation (Seva Sansad, devoted to the health and literacy of bonded labourers) and a more radical one (Shramik Hakk Sanghatana, a workers' trade union), Kamat concludes that each in its own way ends up casting off its political militancy: each may well oppose the state through court cases or denunciation of corruption, but neither meaningfully questions 'development', by challenging, say, property laws or socioeconomic inequality (2002: 161). In spite of being financially autonomous and relatively independent of state/international development institutions, each is reluctant to contravene state authority. Both end up choosing band-aid, technical solutions over political ones, thus legitimising state hegemony and reproducing development discourse.

Of course, the above critique is not meant to pose as a comprehensive examination or indictment of academic and development institutions, or to argue that all such institutions are imperialistic all of the time. Rather, Spivak's point is to underline that our representations of the Third World/subaltern cannot escape our institutional positioning and are always mediated by a confluence of diverse institutional interests and pressures, such as those described above. If professional motives dictate, at least to a degree, what and how we do (in development), we cannot pretend to have pure, innocent or benevolent encounters with the subaltern. To do so, as argued earlier, is to perpetuate, directly or indirectly, forms of imperialism, ethnocentrism, appropriation.

At least two implications follow. The first is that, to the extent that our lenses are institutionally (or geopolitically) tinted, our representations of the Third World are likewise institutionally constricted (as some of the examples above illustrate). The construction of development institutions and discourses is simultaneously the circumscription of what and how we can and cannot do (ie development discourse defines our type and mode of encounter). Invoking Foucault, Spivak writes, 'if the lines of making sense of something are laid down in a certain way, then you are able to do only those things with that something which are possible within and by the arrangement of those lines. Pouvoir-savoir—being able to do something—only as you are able to make sense of it' (1993: 34). The second implication is that we produce the Third World or subaltern (Said, 1978: 3; Beverly, 1999: 2), and to a rather large extent we produce them to suit our own image and desire. When we act in accordance with personal, professional, organisational interests, our representations of the Other

say much more about us than about the Other, or at a minimum, they construct the Other only in as far as we want to know it and control it.

Represent whom?

I would like, in this section, to examine the above Spivakian argument that our discourses circumscribe what/how we can and cannot represent, although more from the perspective of the subject of our representations—the subaltern. Specifically, I want to assess three attempts at 'allowing' the subaltern to speak. I shall argue, from a Spivakian viewpoint, that all three are problematic.

One such attempt is Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), an approach that has become enormously fashionable in both governmental and non-governmental development circles. Popularised and developed by Robert Chambers, PRA is 'a family of approaches and methods to enable local (rural and urban) people to express, enhance, share and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act' (1994b: 1253). It is critical of top-down approaches dominated by outsiders and 'experts', and instead aims at valorising local knowledge and 'empowering' the subaltern so that s/he can 'determine much of the [develop-ment] agenda' (1994b: 1255). Accordingly, outsiders become facilitators of a participatory process, in which the 'poor, weak, vulnerable and exploited...come first' (1997: 11, emphasis in the original). PRA evolves a number of techniques that ensure inclusion of marginalised groups, emphasise open and collective learning, and valorise oral, visual and written inputs. These techniques are meant to secure subaltern participation in a number of development programmes, ranging from environmental management to gender and social programming (Chambers, 1994a: 959–962; 1994b: 1254–1257).

But while outwardly benevolent in wanting to enable the subaltern to speak, PRA is naive in believing that it actually can. Chambers' bottom-up approach rests crucially on the idea that PRA helps make the subaltern voice transparent so that development organisations can hear and represent subaltern desires and interests. The reason is that, for Chambers, PRA minimises, if not eliminates, power from the PRA space, thereby freeing the subaltern to participate. To him, power is negative and repressive: 'For learning, power is a disability', and moreover, 'All power deceives, and exceptional power deceives exceptionally' (1997: 76). But he appears to neglect the knowledge/power problem, wherein every knowledge framing (that of PRA included) produces power relationships (Kapoor, 2002c). For example, women, whom PRA purportedly takes great care to include in the public space, can feel intimidated (and be intimidated) when speaking in public, especially on such sensitive issues as sex, rape and violence. Often, if they do participate, they soften their words or ask men to speak for them (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Mosse, 1994; Parpart, 2000). The participatory space is thus a panoptic one: even if subalterns speak, they (like anyone) may perform the roles they think are expected of them (by their own communities, the facilitator, the funding agency). They may modify their speech when under pressure, or exaggerate their praise to please the funder. So much, then, for Chambers wanting to banish power to enable the subaltern 'to speak'.

The problem is magnified when we consider the role played by socioeconomic inequality. Chambers appears confident that people can reach agreement through PRA, but he does so because his narrow and localised view of power ignores the macro social impacts of imperialism or such difficult issues as unequal land tenure (Mohan & Stokke, 2000; Kapoor, 2002c). The consensus-reaching process, for him, is a relatively tame and harmonious affair. It is as if people can leave important power imbalances outside the door of the PRA space. Thus, he achieves harmony and consensus through disavowal. But as Medevoi et al point out, denying subalterns' subordination, in effect, reinforces their subalternity: it 'reproduce[s] the subalternity of the people at the very moment that it seem[s] to let them speak' (1990: 134). And Spivak adds, '"being made to unspeak" is also a species of silencing' (1999: 408–409; cf 1990b).

Even when the subaltern does speak, Chambers takes no account of the numerous intervening institutional structures. As we have seen, far from being neutral relays, they filter, reinterpret, appropriate, hijack the subaltern's voice. PRA tries to get around the problem by advocating use of direct testimonials or multiple narratives (1994a: 959). However, here too, there is no avoiding the question of who edits the stories, how they are presented, for whom and what purposes they are framed, and so on. So much, then, for PRA's belief in development organisations hearing and representing the pure, unmediated subaltern voice. As Spivak observes, despite appearances, it is another case of the first-world analyst or development organisation 'masquerading as the absent nonrepresenter who lets the oppressed speak for themselves' (1988a: 292).

But it is not just this mainstream (liberal?) approach that is questionable in this context; I want to argue that even 'progressive' critics like Vandana Shiva and Arturo Escobar can be guilty (in the manner that Spivak thinks Foucault, Deleuze and Kristeva can be).

Shiva's Staying Alive (1989) is considered one of the first analyses to focus our attention on Southern ecofeminist issues and problems. In many ways, the book inaugurates a feminist critique of development and mainstream science, as well as the validation of Third World grassroots environmental movements. But the book also makes problematic claims. Shiva essentialises subaltern women by feminising 'nature' through the retrieval of what she calls a 'feminine principle' (1989: xviii, 38ff) and identifying subaltern women as the embodiment of the principle: she writes about 'Women's ecology movements, as the preservation and recovery of the feminine principle' and nature as 'the experiment and women, as sylviculturalists, agriculturalists and water resource managers, the traditional natural scientists' (1989: xviii). By depicting subaltern women as 'naturally' close to nature and giving them an epistemologically privileged position on (feminised) nature, Shiva creates too neat a divide between subaltern men and women, thus reinforcing gender roles and stereotypes.[11] In addition, to counter her critique of mainstream development and science, she champions Chipko, the now famous forestry movement in the North-Indian Himalayas, as an ecological and feminist alternative (1989: 55ff). She praises the movement's successes and women's active involvement in them. But she has been taken to task for painting too rosy a picture (Jackson, 1995; Rangan, 2000: 13ff; Seminar, 1987): critics reproach her for neglecting to appreciate Chipko's patriarchal political structures (significant male leadership, despite women's overwhelming

participation) and ignoring the tensions between three main factions within the movement (an agro-ecological wing, advocating intermediate technological solutions; a Gandhian wing; and a radical student-led wing). Her strong political support for Chipko thus yields to a romanticisation of the movement.

Escobar's work has been found wanting for many of the same reasons. As alluded to earlier, in many ways, his critique of development (1984, 1995) echoes Spivak's on the disciplinary character of hegemonic and institutionalised discourse. But, like Shiva, his anti-development stance issues in a blanket endorsement of social movements as political alternative. Critics (myself included) accuse him of romanticising the 'local' and assuming social movements are necessarily benign, in spite of substantial evidence to the contrary (Kiely, 1999; Mohan & Stokke, 2000; Nederveen Pieterse, 1998, 2000; Kapoor, 2002a: 472). They argue that, far from being 'progressive', many movements are internally and externally sexist, racist, homophobic, xenophobic and undemocratic (eg right-wing Hindu movements in India, left- and right-wing guerrilla movements in Colombia, etc). Moreover, the critics point out Escobar's overemphasis on grassroots 'anti-development' struggles, showing that he misses the diversity of Third World movements and the fact that many are struggles for development (ie demanding access to health, education, irrigation, technological inputs) (Nederveen Pieterse, 1998: 363–364; Storey, 2000: 42).

Thus, both Escobar and Shiva fail to recognise the heterogeneity of the subaltern, ascribing to it a single and ahistorical consciousness. The popular movements they champion tend to be represented as monolithic, overlooking the many differences (regional, ethnic, linguistic, class, gender, caste, age, sexual, historical, institutional) within and between such movements. Partly, this may be because of their use of what Spivak calls 'catachreses' (1993: 139), which are 'master' or 'code' words that are without literal referents (eg 'subaltern', 'people', 'social movements', 'women', 'workers', 'Third World', 'West'). Although we are all liable to use such abstractions, Spivak warns of the accompanying dangers of generalisation and simplification. Nonetheless, partly, Escobar and Shiva do more than speak catachrestically: they essentialise. They tend to fix the political orientation of social movements or the 'nature' of Nature and women.

They also romanticise, tending to eulogise subaltern women, indigenous knowledge and/or local politics. This gives the impression that subalterns are transparent to themselves, immune to struggle or failure; as Linda Alcoff puts it, it 'essentializes the oppressed as nonideologically constructed subjects' (1991: 22). Escobar and Shiva are not merely 'speaking for' the subaltern, they are attempting to produce an 'authentic' and 'heroic' subaltern. Yet such gestures, as Spivak indicates, are the founding act for the consolidation of an inside, of the self (1988a: 293). Escobar and Shiva's stinging critique of development requires, and is made possible by, a hyperbolic construction of the subaltern. This desire for the Other as heroine or hero, this species of 'reverse-ethnic sentimentality', is a desire of the intellectual to be benevolent or progressive; it 'gives an illusion of undermining subjective sovereignty while often providing a cover for this subject of knowledge' (Spivak, 1988a: 289, 271). It is, ultimately, another form of silencing of the subaltern.

My (Spivakian) critique of the three analysts above is not meant as complete or definitive; rather, my point is to show that attempts at speaking for the subaltern, enabling the subaltern to speak, or indeed listening to the subaltern, can all too easily do the opposite—silence the subaltern. Chambers, Shiva and Escobar are, in different ways, analysts who are taken seriously in our field, because they each have a systematic critique and a political vision. Yet, like Foucault, their critique of development can hide 'an essentialist agenda' and their 'much publicized critique of the sovereign subject [ie the West, modernity, patriarchy]...actually inaugurates a Subject' (Spivak, 1988a: 272). What Spivak helps drive home to those of us working in development is how decolonisation in both the North and the South has been a failure (she argues, in fact, that 'postcoloniality is a failure of decolonization'; 1995: 178, emphasis in original). Or to put it the other way around, what she reveals is decolonisation as an unfinished project and the extent and depth of anti-oppression thinking/acting that we all have yet to learn. So what specifically must we do, according to her?

How to represent

Spivak's work is largely an attempt to valorise the subaltern, although as we have seen, she proceeds by a via negativa, showing how the discursive space from which the subaltern can be heard is disabling. But this negative and deconstructive approach has often been the subject of criticism. As mentioned at the start (cf note 1), she has been interpreted as saying that the subaltern cannot speak and has no agency (Parry, 1987: 35, 39; Moore-Gilbert, 1997: 104). She has countered that, on the contrary, her argument is that elite or hegemonic discourses are deaf to the subaltern, even when s/he does speak or resist (1996: 289; 1999: 308). 'Speaking', for her, is to be understood as a speech-act, wherein 'speaking and hearing complete the speech act' (1996: 292). As John Beverly writes, 'if the subaltern could speak in a way that really mattered to us, that we would feel compelled to listen to, it would not be subaltern' (1999: 66). There is no question, then, of denying the subaltern insurgency or action.

But there have also been other criticisms. Spivak is accused of paralysing the intellectual and the pursuit of knowledge through her 'unremitting exposure of complicity' (Varadharajan, 1995: 89). She has also been taken to task for not specifying how one is to validate and support the subaltern: Moore-Gilbert opines that 'While Spivak is excellent on "the itinerary of silencing" endured by the subaltern, particularly historically, there is little attention to the process by which the subaltern's "coming to voice" might be achieved' (1997: 106). Finally, she is charged, ironically, with reinforcing the West's self-obsession by focusing too much on questions of self-reflexivity. Here is Moore-Gilbert once again: 'Though one appreciates the irony of her reversal of the West's anthropological gaze, this focus nonetheless reinscribes the West as subject, leaving Spivak open to the kind of accusation she makes against Foucault and Deleuze' (1997: 105).

Spivak defends herself against these allegations, stating that she 'question[s] the authority of the investigating subject without paralysing him' and that deconstruction can lead 'to much better practice' (1988b: 201; 1990a: 122). She

does not systematically lay out what such a practice may be (her musing, deconstructive style tends to be averse to so doing), but I think her work is strewn with arguments that respond to the above criticisms, while also revealing an approach to the question of representation of the subaltern, a way of looking at the world. In what follows, I have culled from her writings what emerges as a step-wise approach: a deconstructivist position, followed by a process of self-implication, which yields the possibility of an ethical encounter with the subaltern.

(i) 'Intimately inhabiting' and 'negotiating' discourse

Taking Derrida's lead, Spivak insists that deconstruction and critique are only made possible by what is already there, by what inevitably surrounds and inhabits you. 'The only things one really deconstructs are things in which one is intimately mired. It speaks you. You speak it' (1990a: 135). You can never represent or act from an 'outside', since you are always already situated inside discourse, culture, institutions, geopolitics. Spivak thus describes her deconstructive approach as the persistent critique of 'a structure that one cannot not (wish to) inhabit' and as saying 'an impossible "no" to a structure, which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately' (1993: 60). Not surprisingly, she warns against the total repudiation of one's 'home', arguing, as we have already noted, that it amounts to a disavowal of one's complicities and results in claims of purity, transparency or triumphalism. Instead, she advocates negotiation from within. As Moore-Gilbert puts it, 'For Spivak...directly counter-hegemonic discourse is more liable to cancellation or even reappropriation by the dominant than a "tangential", or "wild", guerrilla mode of engagement. For this reason, too, she advocates the modes of "negotiation" and "critique", which unsettle the dominant from within' (1997: 85). The point is to take seriously that with which one is familiar, to acknowledge that one is seduced by it, even as one engages in a persistent critique of it. Or to put it differently, the point is to try to negotiate by 'persistently transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility' (Spivak, 1988b: 201).

In a sense, Spivak is cautioning the likes of postdevelopment critics such as Escobar against throwing the baby out with the bathwater by being uncompromisingly 'anti-development' and arguing for 'alternatives to development' (Escobar, 1995: 215). If development were that dominant and oppressive, then how could the critic claim to be outside it (this is unacknowledged complicity) or represent the subaltern and social movement as pure and untangled (which amounts to essentialisation and romanticisation) or indeed posit a utopian alternative (ie from where would such an alternative arise if not from the bowels of development itself and how could it miraculously escape from creating its own disciplining/power structures?)? Hence Spivak motions: 'let us become vigilant about our own practice and use it as much as we can rather than make the totally counter-productive gesture of repudiating it' (1990a: 11). It is possible to work within the belly of the beast and still engage in persistent critique of hegemonic representations. Development may indeed have become a shady business, but this does not mean one cannot retrieve from within it an ethico-

political orientation to the Third World and the subaltern. Thus, for instance, the World Bank and IMF may well be 'imperialistic' organisations, but they are too important and powerful to turn our backs on; instead, we can engage them unrelentingly from all sides to try to make them accountable to the subaltern.

(ii) 'Acknowledging complicity'

Acknowledging complicity is the most obvious implication from the above analysis of Spivak's work. Because we are all 'subject-effects' (1988b: 204), that is, inescapably positioned in a variety of discourses, our personal and institutional desires and interests are unavoidably written into our representations. We need, then, to be unscrupulously vigilant (ie hyper-self-reflexive) about our complicities. Acknowledging one's contamination, for Spivak, helps temper and contextualise one's claims, reduces the risk of personal arrogance or geoinstitutional imperialism, and moves one toward a non-hierarchical encounter with the Third World/subaltern.

(iii) 'Unlearning one's privilege as loss'

A concomitant step is the 'careful project of un-learning our privilege as our loss' (Spivak, 1990a: 9; cf 1988a: 287). In a sense, for Spivak, one cannot do 'fieldwork' without first doing one's 'homework'. The itinerary toward representing the Other 'over there', requires scrutiny of the 'here' (Visweswaran, 1994: 112). Or it necessitates reversing the gaze, re-imagining what we mean by the 'field' or the 'there'. Thus, Spivak characterises her teaching in the West (at Columbia University) as fieldwork, in a deliberate attempt to anthropologise the West (1993: 278; 1997: 5; 2003: 620). What this means, in effect, is casting a keen eye on the familiar and the taken-for-granted. It is not enough to try and efface oneself, to benevolently try and step down from one's position of authority; in fact, as Spivak has reminded us, this gesture is often a reinforcement of privilege, not a disavowal of it (cf Alcoff, 1991: 25). Rather, the idea is to retrace the history and itinerary of one's prejudices and learned habits (from racism, sexism and classism to academic elitism and ethnocentrism), stop thinking of oneself as better or fitter, and unlearn dominant systems of knowledge and representation. This is what Spivak calls a 'transformation of consciousness—a changing mind set' (1990a: 20), and what others have variously penned as 'decolonisation' (Fanon), 'conscientisation' (Freire) and 'accountable positioning' (Haraway).

(iv) 'Learning to learn from below'

'Learning from below' is a tried and tired formula, particularly in development. For Spivak, despite its politically correct message, it results mostly in more of the same. Serious and meaningful learning from the subaltern requires an anterior step: learning to learn. I have to clear the way for both me and the subaltern before I can learn from her/him. In effect, this is the on-the-ground application of the above-mentioned unlearning process. It is suspending my

belief that I am indispensable, better, or culturally superior; it is refraining from always thinking that the Third World is 'in trouble' and that I have the solutions; it is resisting the temptation of projecting myself or my world onto the Other (Spivak, 2002: 6). Spivak cautions, for instance, against assuming that such concepts as 'nation', 'democracy' or 'participation' are natural, good or uncontestable. To impose them unproblematically in the field is to forget that they were 'written elsewhere, in the social formations of Western Europe' (1993: 60). Unlearning means stopping oneself from always wanting to correct, teach, theorise, develop, colonise, appropriate, use, record, inscribe, enlighten: 'the impetus to always be the speaker and speak in all situations must be seen for what it is: a desire for mastery and domination' (Alcoff, 1991: 24; cf Spivak 1990a: 19).

It is this itinerary of de-coding which, for Spivak, can yield to an openness to the Other, enabling the subaltern to become not the object, but the subject of development. It of course requires patient and painstaking work, but as Spivak underlines, 'our engagement with the world's disenfranchised women has to be as thick as the engagement with our students' (2003: 615). Being open to the subaltern ensues in meaningfully coming to terms with her/his difference and agency, ready to accept an 'unexpected response' (2002: 6). It implies, specifically, a reversal of information and knowledge production so that they flow from South to North, and not always in the other direction. One of Spivak's suggestions to this end is that we 'learn well one of the languages of the rural poor of the South' (2002: 18). By so doing, we begin the process of not defining them, but listening to them name and define themselves. We lay the groundwork for a two-way conversation and non-exploitative learning. Spivak sometimes likens this process to reading a novel: when we read, we put ourselves in the protagonist's shoes, suspend belief, and let ourselves be surprised by the twists and turns of the plot. In fact, while maintaining that empirical/field work is important, Spivak recommends literature as a way of remembering again how to imagine, because the imagination, for her, 'is the possibility of being somewhere that is not the Self' (1997: 2).

What emerges about Spivak's project of 'unlearning' and 'learning to learn from below' is that it turns crucially on establishing an ethical relationship with the subaltern. Spivak's goal of enabling the subaltern is about issuing a 'call' to the 'quite other', or what Derrida refers to as 'rendering delirious that interior voice that is the voice of the other in us' (quoted in Spivak, 1988a: 294; cf 1999: 427; Morton, 2003: 140; Landry & MacLean, 1996: 3, 10). If we are able to have a conversation across wide differences, suspend our beliefs to experience the impossible, then we are beginning to respond to the appeal of the Other. It is 'not so much a sense of being responsible for, but of being responsible to, before will' (Spivak, 2002: 9): 'the dominant redefines himself in order to learn to learn from "below," learns to mean to say...I need to learn from you what you practice, I need it even if you didn't want to share a bit of my pie; but there is something I want to give you, which will make our shared practice flourish. You don't know, and I don't know, and I didn't know, that civility requires your practice of responsibility as pre-originary right' (2000: 16).

This, then, is Spivak's response to the earlier-mentioned criticisms. Far from paralysing the intellectual or researcher, her project is an appeal to acknowledge our complicities and unlearn our prejudices as a way of clearing the space for the subaltern speech act. This may not be an easy task, but it is not an incapacitating one; indeed, it may well be a challenging and motivating one. Far from refraining from specifying how the subaltern voice might come to the fore, moreover, Spivak traces a clear enough itinerary for the investigating subject. That this itinerary insists on a prior unlearning phase is not an evasive or delaying gesture; it is a crucial step in being able to encounter the Third World, without which representing the subaltern or 'learning from below' will continue to be a benevolent and self-consolidating act. And a similar response is due the other charge: Spivak's hyper-self-reflexivity can hardly be accused of being a navel-gazing exercise that reinforces Western ethnocentrism when it is expressly carried out in order to clear the way for an ethical relationship with the Other.

But while I disagree with the criticisms of Spivak on these points, I believe there are other points on which her thinking appears incomplete, if not unclear. Her hyper-self-reflexivity may not be paralysing; however, it tends to be inadequately layered, in my view. That is, it does not distinguish between varying degrees of complicity. Now Spivak may respond that this type of objection is really an exculpatory attempt, aimed once again at self-validation ('I am not as guilty as X, so therefore I am better than X'). It can be. But it can also be important for the purposes of strategising and prioritising. For example, an advocacy group may need to distinguish between complicities to assess if these NGO activities are more benign than those World Bank ones, and hence decide where efforts and resources are better spent for organising against them. Unfortunately, Spivak provides no way of making such assessments. Her deconstructivist approach may have an unmistakable ethico-political horizon, but it lacks any adjudicative mechanism for sorting among and between greater goods and lesser evils (cf Kapoor, 2002b: 660).

Moreover, Spivak is adamant about taking account of institutional positioning in representation; yet she appears to neglect the institutional implications of the ethical encounter with the subaltern. She points, ultimately, to the necessity of a one-to-one relationship for it to be intimate, caring and non-exploitative. Reflecting on her own recent work training primary school teachers and spending quality time with 'tribal' (adivasi) children in Bangladesh and India, she refers to such a relationship as striving towards '"answer"ability' and 'ethical singularity' (1999: 384; cf 1996: 276; 1997: 5; 2003: 622–623). Her reasons for prescribing a face-to-face encounter are important, but the institutional consequences are unclear and perhaps untenable. How does a personalised and micrological approach translate into institutional or macrological politics? Given the scale and depth of global and local inequalities, how practicable is a one-to-one approach on a large scale? Is an intimate relationship with the subaltern even compatible with institutional processes, let alone on a large scale? Unfortunately, Spivak leaves these types of question unanswered. Yet not attending to issues of do-ability gives her work a romantic, utopian dimension. It endows her discussion of the ethical encounter with the subaltern with a quasi-mystical, ecstatic character that is at odds with her otherwise Marxist–deconstructivist leanings.

(v) Working 'without guarantees'

A final and important Spivakian test is being able to work 'with no guarantees' (2001: 15). This is because we need to recognise that, ultimately, not only is the subaltern heterogeneous, it is 'irretrievably heterogeneous' (1988a: 284) and hence 'non-narrativisable' (1988a: 284; 1990a: 144). Coming to terms with the Other's difference is precisely reckoning with the impossibility of knowing it, accepting that it exceeds our understanding or expectations. This includes being open to the 'non-speakingness' of the subaltern, its refusal to answer or submit to the gaze and questioning of the ethnographer. Thus, the subaltern's various silences (as distinguished from its silencing) need to be recognised as forms of resistance and agency: reticences, equivocations, lies, secrets, refusal to be named or labelled, etc (Visweswaran, 1994: 60; cf Morton, 2003: 122–123).

Working without guarantees is thus becoming aware of the vulnerabilities and blind spots of one's power and representational systems. It is accepting failure, or put positively, seeing failure as success. The implication for development is that we need to learn to be open, not just, in the short-term, to the limits of our knowledge systems, but also to the long-term logic of our profession: enabling the subaltern while working ourselves out of our jobs.

Conclusion

Spivak's call to action, as I have tried to argue, is compelling and highly pertinent to development studies/work. It demands vigilant self-implication and painstaking, ethical engagement. While it recognises that our representations cannot escape othering, it argues for us to be scrupulous in so doing, especially in the case of unequal power relationships, ie when representing the West's Other (the Third World) and the Third World's Other (the subaltern). This is a much-needed wake-up call to those of us who unquestioningly and unaccountably narrativise the Third World. It is also a reminder that our narration does not take place in a vacuum: we function in geopolitical institutions that circumscribe what and how we narrate. Spivak shows us, in fact, that such entanglements can both produce and disable the subaltern. In the end, she steers us toward a face-to-face ethical encounter with, as opposed to an institutionally prescribed narrativisation of, the subaltern. Her proposed mode of encounter may be impractical, but her challenge to us to engage in an intimate and dialogical manner remains.

Notes

Thanks to Kent Murnaghan, as always.

[1] The controversy turns mainly on Spivak's statement, towards the end of her article, that the 'subaltern cannot speak' (1988a: 308), which some have interpreted as saying that the subaltern has no agency or is doomed to silence. Spivak has often had to defend against such interpretations, and has recently revised both the article and the statement (cf 1999: 246ff). This controversy will be dealt with later in the article.

[2] The term 'subaltern' is a Gramscian one, central to the work of the Subaltern Studies Collective (of which Spivak is part). It refers to groups subordinated and marginalised based on 'class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way' (Guha, 1988: 35). What Spivak means by the term is 'subsistence farmers,

unorganised labor, the tribals, and the communities of zero workers on the street or in the countryside' (1988a: 288), emphasising the marginalisation of the women members of these groups.

[3] See my biography in Notes on Contributors for (a few) details of my own involvement in this field.

[4] I use the term 'hyper' as a prefix, suggesting a vigilance above and beyond conventional self-reflexivity, a radical self-reflexivity (hence my hyphenation, viz 'hyper-self-reflexivity'); and not as the slang 'hyper', short for 'hyperactive' or 'over-stimulated' (which would not be hyphenated, viz 'hyper self-reflexivity').

[5] Said's work (eg 1978, 1993) shows how Orientalism (the West's cultural representation and subjugation of the Third World) pervades the writings of such icons of Western literature as Dickens, Austen, James and Hardy, as well as present-day Western media reports about the Third World, particularly the Islamic world.

[6] Spivak often refers to herself as a 'Marxist-feminist-deconstructivist' (eg 1990a: 133), by which she indicates that her analyses are informed by all three perspectives, recognising that each one has its limits and problems, and that each can sometimes complement, but also be discontinuous with, the other two (ie a critical interdisciplinarity). Note here, for example, how she complements her Marxist political-economy reading of imperialism with a feminist one (ie the condition of subaltern women under globalisation) and a semiotic/culturalist interpretation of Marx's 'commodity fetishism'.

[7] The term is problematic for Spivak because it derives from a field (ethnography) in which the power relationship between the Western ethnographer and the native informant, that situates the former in a dominant role and the latter in a subordinate one, has until only recently been left unquestioned (1999: 6). Note that in A Critique of Postcolonial Reason (1999), Spivak uses the figure of the native informant in several ways: as the West's Other, as collaborator in Western ethnographic work on the Third World, but also as Spivak's implied reader (ie she exhorts the reader to put her/himself in the difficult position of the native informant).

[8] Note that Spivak tars both diasporic and Third World native informants with the same brush here, arguing that all—intellectuals, researchers, professionals—are privileged and complicit in capitalism and Western(-ized) education. Thus, an Indian academic has no credible claim to being 'purer' or having a more 'authentic' ethnic identity or experience than his/her Western diasporic counterpart. Spivak is adamant that intellectuals and elites cannot claim a space uncontaminated by capitalism and imperialism (cf 1990a: 67–70; 1988a: 291).

[9] Of course, as is implicit here, there is much overlap and slippage between 'who represents' and 'why we represent', since our geopolitical positioning intersects with our institutional positioning, thus confounding the 'who' and 'why' of representation. Or, to put it another way, who represents and why we represent are part and parcel of the same process of discursive framing. I have only formally separated the two in this article for the sake of (my own) organisation of arguments; their interrelationship is at the very least implied throughout.

[10] Spivak does not really delve into the microtechnics of fieldwork, but there is a rich ethnographic literature that generally supports her line of thinking (eg Crewe & Harrison, 1998; Khan, 2001; Lal, 1996; Sylvester, 1995; Visweswaran, 1994; Wolf, 1996). Lal, for example, shows how the researcher's voice is often used to support his/her arguments and interests: the 'narrative serves to whet the readers' or audiences' desire to know, and the narrators need to prove that one really was "There!"...there is thus always a danger that "the people one studies are treated as garnishes and condiments, tasty only in relationship to the main course, the sociologist" ' (1996: 201).

[11] Shiva provides a more nuanced and less essentialist argument on this issue in her later work with Maria Mies (compare Mies & Shiva, 1993: 20).

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