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## SUBALTERN PEDAGOGY:

### A CRITICAL THEORIZING OF PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES FOR MARGINALIZED BORDER-CROSSERS

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#### *Abstract*

Given the ever-increasing migration in today's globalizing world and the pervasive xenophobic behaviors and attitudes of some U.S. school stakeholders toward vulnerable groups such as refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, I argue for a paradigm shift in the theorizing of educational pedagogy. Based on my qualitative study conducted in Lebanon that examines the lived experiences of African women as border-crossers who migrated to Beirut for economic reasons, I forward a subaltern pedagogy. Three critical theoretical frameworks inform this pedagogical shift: critical pedagogy, post/decolonial thought, and a critical spatial analysis. The latter idea in particular situates marginalized, subaltern groups in their liminal context and takes into account how the space one inhabits impacts their social, cultural and economic worlds, thereby affecting their life and learning trajectory.

*Keywords:* migration, critical pedagogy, post/decolonial thought, critical spatial analysis, subaltern pedagogy.

## **THE REFUGEE CRISIS: A NEED FOR A PEDAGOGICAL SHIFT IN EDUCATION**

Migration and transnational movement is unprecedented since post-World War II. Today, there are 59.5 million refugees resulting from geopolitical conflict, natural disasters, civil war, sexual violence, economic hardship, poverty, and famine (UNHCR, 2015). At present, several cases of mass exodus across the globe proliferate rapidly: the Syrian refugee crisis has received international attention as the world stands witness to Syrians fleeing violence, often drowning in desperate attempts to cross the Mediterranean in an effort to reach Europe. Recently, the conflict between Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Iraq has caused 500,000 Iraqis to flee to the Kurdistan region or to neighboring countries such as Turkey. Along the Mexico-U.S. border, 50,000 children from Latin American countries fleeing extreme violence have been placed in holding centers along the border regions. Such transnational movement is a global trend that does not appear to abate any time soon.

Shifting global demographics also expedite an increase in xenophobia within the host country receiving refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, evident in the myriad examples of structural racism within U.S. immigration laws, English-only language policies, and discriminatory educational practices in schools. This surge in institutional racism necessitates a shift in educational praxis to challenge traditional pedagogy and instruction to encourage the development of young, critical minds that recognize xenophobia and discrimination, in both its micro-aggressions and overt manifestations.

This article draws from data collected during my fieldwork within a grassroots, non-governmental organization (NGO) system in Beirut, Lebanon that provided the physical space of a cultural center and educational opportunities such as language and computer classes for migrant workers from Africa and Southeast Asia. The purpose of this international study was to examine pedagogical practices that are responsive to the lived experiences of subaltern groups. A justification for a novel approach to pedagogical theory responding to subaltern transnational movement arises from an urgency to explain how we

conceptualize and “do” education for subaltern groups (and learners who share spaces with marginalized border-crossers), whose lived experiences are often impacted by structural forces beyond their control. In this article, I will provide a brief outline of my research design, followed by a discussion of the term, “subaltern”, and then an analysis of the three critical frames that inform the new pedagogical framework that emerged from my study.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This article is based on a qualitative research study that was conducted in Beirut, Lebanon during the summer of 2012. I employed an action research approach that took into account the political, social, and historical situatedness of the macro-, meso-, and micro-contexts of the research site. My strategy of inquiry was informed by grounded theory, in which the researcher develops “a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction” (Creswell, 2014, p. 14) derived from the views of the research participants. In the use of grounded theory, I utilized multiple stages of data collection comparing and contrasting data to extract codes throughout the fieldwork process.

The main participants in this study were migrant workers, NGO coordinators, and volunteer teachers. For this article, I draw from interviews with Fakira\*, one of the Lebanese NGO coordinators and community organizers; Faith, a domestic worker from Kenya; and, Omid and Abe, Lebanese activists and volunteer educators who teach computer classes and English classes, respectively. The physical location at which I conducted my fieldwork was the Migrant Center (MC), located in Naba’a, a suburb of Beirut. The MC is a cultural space specifically provided for migrant workers and their families. It came about because Lebanese activists sought the input of migrant workers, asking them what they wanted in terms of material resources. They said they wanted their own space and educational opportunities; as a result, the MC was created.

## DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

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\* I have used pseudonyms for research participants and the NGOs of this study.

I utilized in-depth interviews and participant observation as my data collection tools and I juxtaposed these different data sources against each other in order to validate the emerging themes. The main inquiry this article seeks to address is to learn about the pedagogical process that occurs within interstitial spaces and how it might empower women who are forced to transcend borders, for economic and/or safety reasons; such an inquiry necessitates the use of data collection tools that can thoroughly examine these complexities. The in-depth interview is an excellent data collecting tool for gathering information, as I aimed to capture the more nuanced meanings of these women's lived experiences that a survey or likert-type scale cannot capture: "The in-depth interview is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to 'evaluate' as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). It is more expedient to use the interview process to capture those nuances as women articulate what it means to inhabit in-between spaces.

As mentioned previously, a majority of this fieldwork took place in the space of the Migrant Center where I spent several hours every day as both an observer and a volunteer English teacher. It was within that space that I utilized the ethnographic data tool of participant observation, which helped me understand how the students drew conclusions about knowledge and what informs their knowledge base (e.g., how do their lived experiences inform the ways they interpret the world? How do they use the advice given to them by friends and family? How do they use their formal and/or informal educational experiences?). Because I desired to create a healthy dialogic space in which an exchange of ideas, opinions, questions and contributions can occur, my critical pedagogical stance as an authentic educator encouraged this dialogic space and the building of trust and relationships. By applying an ethnographic lens as a teacher-researcher in the classroom, my aim was to, with the permission of my participants, become aware of the attitudes, opinions, and ideas of the students in my class.

During the fieldwork process, I viewed the participants' interviews as core contributions to the understanding of migrant worker learning and empowerment. As such, I viewed the migrant workers as producing their own knowledge base not just for themselves, but also, for any marginalized group who has transcended borders in search of safe haven from the devastation of extreme weather events, economic collapse, or the violence of war; here, I will unpack the meaning of the subaltern experience and tease out the dialectic comprising a transformative pedagogical framework.

## **THE SUBALTERN: MIGRANT WORKERS, REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS, AND OTHER BORDER-CROSSERS**

The term “subaltern” originates from postcolonial and subaltern studies discourses, which sought to provide a historiography “of India from below” to counter the “colonial elitism” (Apple & Buras, 2006, p. 18) that dominated the field of the history of India. For the purpose of this article, I use “subaltern” to denote a social group who has been rendered dispossessed and marginalized, having often crossed political or natural borders and inhabiting and dwelling, sometimes forcefully, within the social, cultural, and economic margins outside of the hegemonic power structure. The subaltern are refugees, asylum seekers, and migrant workers; they are internally displaced persons or internally colonized (Arteaga, 1996); they flee the violent conflict of their homelands or natural disasters or economic despair; and they often experience in their daily lives the threat of violence, poverty, illness, hunger, prejudice, racism, and xenophobia. This subaltern group's shared “culture” is not defined by a common language, nor similar social mores, but rather, a shared space of struggle, of survival, and of interstitiality, or “inbetween-ness” to achieve a shared resistance of hope and prosperity in oppressive and often racist societies. Here, Bhabha (1994) conceptualizes interstitiality:

These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. It is in

the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. (p. 2)

Within the gaps created by the juxtaposition of the local and “the other” are those liminal spaces where “the overlap and displacement of domains of difference” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2) are located; herein lie systems of knowledge which the subaltern groups accumulate, assess, share, and apply while living in a hostile host country. From this epistemological process emerges a paradigm shift in the theorizing of a transformative pedagogy to be appropriated in educational spaces, such as U.S. public schools, a refugee resettlement program in Europe, or an English language classroom for migrant workers in Lebanon.

In the following, I draw from my interview data and participant observation data to demonstrate and bolster a claim for how critical spatial analysis, post/decolonial thought and Third World feminisms, and critical pedagogy justify and inform a paradigm shift toward what I call subaltern pedagogy.

## **A TRIPARTITE UNDERSTANDING OF THE SUBALTERN EXPERIENCE**

### **CRITICAL SPATIAL ANALYSIS: THE SPATIAL DIMENSION**

The cultural markers shared by migrant workers as subaltern actors are not anchored by fixed geographical places but rather by virtue of migrant workers’ shared alterity in the face of continued subjugation within the liminal space. They are defined by a collective experience in the face of oppression, and a camaraderie of allies is formed. I interviewed Faith, a woman from Kenya who had migrated to Lebanon to work in the domestic sector. She had run away from an abusive work situation and found refuge with other migrant workers who had also run away. They all learned together how to navigate a racially charged social space hostile toward migrant workers by relying on and trusting each other in order to navigate the city and avoid arrest. She recalls here the story of when other domestic workers helped her avoid police and escape a near-arrest:

My friend called me on my cell phone and said, “Don’t you dare come here to the side of the bridge.” And we were just crossing over. So we had to run back to our house and shut the door and close all the windows. And hide from the police. So then I left the house around 9 PM and I was safe.

These are the shared traits of interstitiality: the commonality of struggle and survival in the third, “in-between” space and the calling upon funds of knowledge (González, Moll, and Amanti, 2005) formulated by survival, endurance, accomplishment, and triumph.

Central to a justification for a subaltern pedagogical theory is the inclusion of a critical spatial perspective. Soja (2010) contends that almost all knowledge existing today is based upon a “twofold ontology linking dynamically and dialectically the social and historical dimensions of individual and societal development” (p. 70) to the neglect of the spatiality of our sociohistorical being. As such, he stresses the importance of including the spatial/geographical dimension in any critical theoretical analysis, as the “spatial turn” can potentially affect every form of knowledge production, “from the abstract realms of ontological and epistemological debate to theory formation, empirical analysis, and practical application” (Soja, 2010, p. 15). Moreover, an increase in transnational movement for subaltern groups precipitates an understanding of the spatial—“thirdspace” (Soja, 2010); “liminality” and “alterity” (Villaverde, 2008); and, interstitiality (Bhabha, 1994)—as it relates to the ontological and epistemological processes of the subaltern in the new spaces they inhabit.

Quite significant to a subaltern pedagogy is an understanding of a critical spatial analysis. The “double consciousness” (Du Bois, 1903) subaltern groups encounter resulting from living in these liminal spaces is often an experience of the duality of self: how one sees oneself and how others view the self as “other.” This duality potentially impacts myriad functions—the cognitive, the epistemological, the social, and the ontological—within the everydayness of life, which shapes and re-shapes how one inhabits the marginal space. As often happens for subaltern groups, host countries view the subaltern with a xenophobic lens, casting them as

interlopers, parasites, persons less-than, and so on. For some members of the subaltern group, resistance becomes a reality of their making in reaction to the oppressor's prolonged racism, sexism, abuse, and human rights violations. hooks (1990) asserts that marginality is the central location for the "production of a counter-hegemonic discourse" as it is a site of production of "habits of being and the way one lives... [marginality is] a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist" (p. 98). She goes on to state that we must understand marginality "as a place of resistance [being] crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people. If we view the margin as a sign, marking the condition of our pain and deprivation, then certain hopelessness and despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way..." (p. 98).

The migrant workers at the center of this study demonstrate how the thirdspace of Beirut, Lebanon is simultaneously a site of repression and resistance. The more they participate in acts of resistance, including micro acts such as defending a fellow African migrant worker to a Lebanese man in a taxi, asserting oneself to their employer, attending language classes or cultural events at the Migrant Center, posting messages of empowerment on social media platforms, or participating in migrant worker protests, the more the thirdspace becomes transformed from a space of subsistence and survival to one of empowerment, activism, and resistance.

Some subaltern groups\* who are subjugated by those in positions of power at times have the choice between resigning themselves to the dominant power structure or resisting and "drawing upon their putative positioning, their assigned 'otherness,' to struggle against the power-filled imposition" (Soja, 1996, p. 87). Both choices are spatial responses because they represent "individual and collective reactions to the ordered workings of power in perceived, conceived, and lived spaces" (Soja, 1996, p. 87). The sensation of "otherness" expedites

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\* Many migrant workers who labor in domestic servitude or some other type of slavery do not have the choice to resist their oppressors, as often is and was the case for many of the migrant workers in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and other Middle East countries who are literally locked in the house of the employer and never are given remittance; however, there are migrant workers who have the opportunity to mobilize in acts of resistance through activism for themselves and for those who are victims of human rights atrocities.



new meanings and new learning by way of lived experience, while also advancing resistance.

For the educator, it is crucial to understand that the act of crossing physical borders is often fraught with peril and violence, especially sexual violence for females and children. Such an experience involves crossing psychic and emotional borders as well. A pedagogical stance that responds, with wisdom and discernment, to the border crosser's liminal experiences by incorporating their powerful transnational epistemologies into the classroom curriculum empowers not just the subaltern student, but all students.

Next, I will examine post/decolonial thought and Third World feminisms and how these inform the conceptualization of new pedagogical thinking.

## **POST/DECOLONIAL THOUGHT AND THIRD WORLD FEMINISMS\***

The necessity for a post/decolonial lens applied in a subaltern pedagogy resonates in the words of the participants of this study, particularly in Fakira. She is the general coordinator of Tamkin, a feminist grassroots non-governmental organization (NGO) located in Beirut. She points out that Tamkin is different from other typically-run NGOs in Beirut in that it is organized in a democratic, collective way and that it lacks an authoritative hierarchy in its management. She also stresses the lack of territoriality or competition Tamkin has with other NGOs. She criticizes how typical NGOs in Beirut are run, in a top-down fashion out of touch with other NGOs and the needs of the people they attempt to serve:

There's a trend [in the NGO systems] of people working on behalf of people without consulting the people... Or talking on the behalf of people whether it's refugees or migrant workers. There are many examples of this. That's a problem.

Tamkin's post/decolonial, third world feminist ideology also sets them apart from other structured groups. Tamkin's coordinators, volunteers

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\* For the purpose of this article, I categorize Third World Feminisms within the post/decolonial framework.

and activists seek to analyze and address issues of inequality not just along the gender binary, but also within the categories of race, class, and sexuality.

The resistance to outside intervention or assistance is evident in Fakira's interview. She relays to me that some of the inquiries she receives from interested volunteers are worded in such a way as to suggest that they are "doing Beirut a favor" by offering to come to Beirut for a month. Fakira interprets these volunteer inquiries as carrying a sense of Western hubris and entitlement. What she is referring to is called "voluntourism," or the combining of volunteerism with a vacation/tourism experience for the purpose of an internship or merely for volunteering. Most people who desire such an experience possess the expendable material resources for such an endeavor, and most voluntourists come from developed/First World countries. Her words are reminiscent of Mohanty's (2003) analysis of First World feminism's academic foray into the Third in which she exposes "the power-knowledge nexus of feminist cross-cultural scholarship expressed through Eurocentric, falsely universalizing methodologies that serve the narrow self-interest of Western feminism" and highlights the "connection between feminist scholarship and feminist political organizing while drawing attention to the need to examine the political implications of our analytic strategies and principles" (p. 501).

Fakira's positionality of resistance to Westerners' attempts at voluntourism/volunteerism is informed by a privileging of the feminist subaltern voice over the First World "feminist" foreign voice that typically lacks an understanding of the complexities of the local's "micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 501). This privileging of the feminist subaltern voice is evident in Tamkin's establishment of the Migrant Center at the request of the migrant population and the selection of Suba, a former migrant domestic worker, as the major leadership of the Migrant Center, in addition to their support of migrant-proposed initiatives such as language and computer classes.

While Fakira does not suggest that it is Tamkin's policy to avoid Western interest in their organization, she does stress that Tamkin is a local collective. She, as a representative of Tamkin, voices a

strong resistance to accepting any kind of funding originating from any intergovernmental organization like the United Nations or other governmental entities such as the U.S. State Department. Given the history of Western colonization, empire building, and, more recently, the 2003 Iraq invasion, it is the Tamkin's members' preference to take into account a critical understanding of global politics and foreign policies of Western countries and enact their own agency in convening as a feminist NGO that will not tolerate Western interference nor hubris.

**The “otherizing” lens.** The ideological framework that informs Tamkin's functionality as an advocacy and action group and as a non-governmental entity partly stems from the ideas of Edward Said (1978) and his seminal text titled *Orientalism*, a post/decolonial discourse that asserts that Western constructs of the “other” are viewed through an exoticized, romanticized, uncivilized, and largely racist lens in the study and understanding of the Middle East. Said asserts that “every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric” (p. 204) and that

Along with all other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral political-admonishment...Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or—as colonial powers openly coveted their territory—taken over. (p. 207)

Fakira and some of her colleagues find it problematic that those from the West, be they lay people, volunteers, researchers, development practitioners, or students, desire to volunteer in Beirut when they have no vested interest in the region. She is wary of the orientalist gaze as it is this fetishization of the “other” that perpetuates a knowledge production that “mimics Western imperialism” (Kupoor, 2004, p. 633). The leadership of Tamkin refusing to accept any funding from a Western/U.S. source is an act of political and organizational resistance, which is exactly what they exemplify in their own mission as a feminist NGO.

**Centrality of social class.** The low socioeconomic class of the migrant is a determinant to the absence of socialization between migrant domestic workers and the Lebanese people, according to some of this study's research participants. Omid, a 21-year-old Lebanese activist, medical student, and volunteer computer teacher for the Migrant Worker Educational Group, mentions that his parents were against his friendship with their Ethiopian domestic worker when he was growing up. Much to Omid's chagrin, his parents said to him: "There is classism that we cannot get over. We are from a different class than they are." The literature reiterates the existence of class segregation, pointing out that female employers, or "madams," feel threatened by the domestic worker's presence in the home, stemming from feelings of jealousy, insecurity, and loathing toward the migrant domestic worker. Such feelings lead the madam to employ control over the worker by way of physical abuse. Jureidini (2011) notes how some Lebanese take pride in their racist attitudes toward migrant workers, as such sentiments somehow pardon the elitist behavior and distances the Lebanese from those they deem to be of lowly stature. As in any system, micro level incidents of classism are indicative of broader, institutional levels of classism, and Lebanon exemplifies this case. For example, according to a CNN news report, in one incident caught on video, an Ethiopian woman was not allowed inside a beach resort and was falsely told it was a "members only" resort. Responding to the incident, Fadi Abboud, from the Ministry of Tourism in Lebanon, commented:

If people think that we are a racial [racist] country, I think we can kiss tourism goodbye, so for me this is very serious, and [discrimination] can only happen once. We let them know if it happens [another] time, we close them for one week—if it happens again, we close them for good. (Damon, online, 2013).

His comment speaks to the economic concerns and implications of Lebanon being deemed a racist country by the international community, while ignoring the human rights aspect.

**Politics of representation.** Fakira's concerns about politics of representation are reminiscent of post/decolonial literary theorist and philosopher Gayatri Spivak's work. Spivak writes extensively about

the representation of the “other,” the Third World, and the subaltern in Western intellectual discourses. The topic of Spivak’s (1988) most recognizable work “Can the Subaltern Speak?” examines how British colonizers and other power brokers viewed self-immolation in India while neglecting the very voices of those who commit the act. Kapoor (2004), through an analysis of Spivak’s work, problematizes subaltern representation by asking critical questions such as:

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? (p. 628)

While Fakira does not iterate the above questions verbatim, her sentiments regarding Western involvement in the Middle East echo Kapoor’s interrogation of one’s positionality in working and conducting fieldwork in the Third World broadly and the Middle East region specifically; as such, Tamkin and its leadership act as advocates not just for marginalized groups such as migrant workers and refugees, but also endorse civic engagement and collective action at the grassroots and local level, as opposed to a top-down, hierarchical system of non-governmental organization. In essence, Tamkin and its leadership are advocates for oppressed groups and advocates against the intrusion of a “help” or “assistance” that resembles a Euro- and Western-centric “white savior complex.” Abu-Lughod (2002) discusses the orientalist and imperialist sentiment in the post-9/11 era that circulates throughout Western media and perpetuates these ideas that Muslim women are in need of Western intervention for their own good. She asserts,

Projects of saving other women depend on and reinforce a sense of superiority by Westerners, a form of arrogance that deserves to be challenged. All one needs to do to appreciate the patronizing quality of the rhetoric of saving women is to imagine using it today in the United States about disadvantaged groups such as African-American women or working-class women. We now

understand them as suffering from structural violence. (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 789)

It is precisely the notion of “white men saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak, 1988, p. 296) that post/decolonial scholars and activists like Fakira resist.

These ideas presented within a post/decolonial framework help unpack what it means to fetishize and exoticize the “other” when he/she is their student. Often, the idea and act of exoticizing a student from the Middle East or foreign country is not viewed as problematic, but rather, as a compliment of sorts. However, to the student, it oftentimes spotlights linguistic, physical, religious or cultural difference in a way that makes them uncomfortable.

Here, I will examine Freirean pedagogy as the last sphere of critical thought that informs the idea of subaltern pedagogy.

## **CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: A FREIREAN PERSPECTIVE**

An important aspect of a subaltern pedagogical framework is the educator’s awareness of the social and political circumstances that affect our migrant students’ lived experiences and how to teach to those who have transcended borders and face race, class, and gender discrimination and economic hardship in the new country. While the central focus of the Western educational model consists of the intent of changing the student into a “rational” or educated person, constructed by the acquisition of knowledge that is not within their social context (e.g., physical sciences, geography, social studies), the work of the NGOs and grassroots collectives at the center of this research is inherently Freirean, as evidenced by the classroom practices, curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching philosophies of the volunteer teachers central to this study.\*

## **PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED**

Freire’s most recognizable and influential work is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), a Marxist class analysis that objects to the traditional model of education, one that includes the banking concept,

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\* For a more in depth analysis of the Freirean nature of this study’s classroom data, please see Keyl (2014), chapter 8.

a teacher-centered, authoritarian method of teaching and learning. Here, Freire (1970) defines a banking system, one that “becomes an act of depositing in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits, which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (p. 72) in a passive manner. Other indicators of a banking system of education are teacher-centered teaching practices, such as indicating that the teacher holds all the knowledge and should not be challenged; emphasizing one right answers and assessments; only framing the students as learners, never the teacher; and encouraging a culture of competition (Huba & Freed, 2000).

In Freire’s work with illiterate peasants he stressed the necessity of “reading the world” (1985) instead of reading words. In his Portuguese classes, he would write a word, such as “slum” on the board, and then he and his students would discuss its meaning and what this word represented in their lives. Essentially, he and his students were deconstructing the social meaning of words within a class analysis. In so doing, he encouraged the building of a critical consciousness by way of dialogism—one aspect of a liberatory and transformative pedagogy that seeks to counter the passivity expected of and, in essence, taught to students within the banking system of education.

## **DIALOGIC ACTION**

Essential to a learning space that seeks to create a liberatory education model is an understanding of dialogic action. According to Freire (1970), dialogue “... is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world” that “cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming—between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them” (p. 88). Dialogic action is undertaken by a “dialogical teacher”: one who re-represents the world’s social ills not in the form of a lecture, but

as a problem-solving exercise (Freire, 1970). We see an example of dialogic action at the Migrant Center's classrooms in Beirut. The volunteer teachers created a lesson based on the suicide of a domestic worker Alem Dechasa, the Ethiopian migrant worker who was publicly beaten by her Lebanese job agent on a Beirut street (Chonghaile, 2012). A chilling video of the beating was uploaded to Youtube (Niggli, 2012) and a few days later she committed suicide in a psychiatric hospital, leading to a public outcry. The Migrant Worker's Educational Group, the volunteer-run NGO that teaches English to migrant workers, contextualized Dechasa's death in the classroom space. Contextualizing was a way to read the world and transform the world through political action by holding a discussion as part of the day's English class. Teachers used class time to have a dialogue about Alem's death and to facilitate a discussion about the frustrations, fears, and anger of migrant workers about a system that seemed rigged to perpetuate domestic servitude, class disparity, and Jim Crow-era racism. The volunteer teachers used social media for the purpose of students to show their hand-written messages about Alem's death written in English and their native languages as well to bring awareness to the migrant worker plight in Lebanon in the international arena.

Most teachers incorporated not only their students' lived experiences with racism and sexism in Lebanese society into their curriculum, but also racism in the United States. In his in-class exam, Abe, a Lebanese activist and volunteer English teacher, refers to a monumental event in United States' history of civil rights and racial desegregation—the 15-year-old Elizabeth Eckford's attempt to enter Little Rock Central High School in 1957. These lesson plans served to initiate discussion among students about the racism that takes places in other countries and to bring them to critical awareness and action. As Giroux (1985) notes, "Freire's view of power...stresses that there are always cracks, tensions, and contradictions in various social spheres such as schools where power is often exercised as a positive force in the name of resistance" (p. xix). The classroom space becomes both liberatory and resistant to the hegemonic power structures that perpetuate a classist and racist "us-them" binary.



These three critical frameworks described above shape a new pedagogical thought I call subaltern pedagogy, which I will now discuss in its relevance to the U.S. context.

## SUBALTERN PEDAGOGY: TEACHING BOLDLY IN PRECARIOUS TIMES

Based on my fieldwork in Lebanon of migrant domestic worker education, I have theorized and created a subaltern pedagogical framework (Figure 1.1) informed by three spheres of critical thought: critical spatial analysis, post/decolonial thought and Third World Feminisms, and lastly, critical pedagogy.

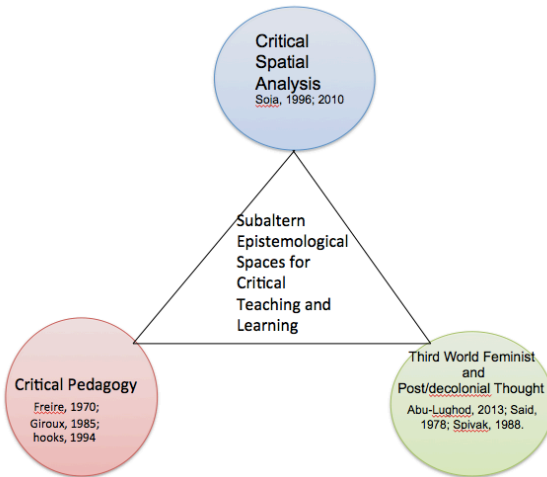


Figure 1.1: Subaltern Pedagogy

As described throughout this article, these three ideas inform a pedagogical stance that takes into account the subaltern experience of marginalized and disenfranchised border-crossers. U.S. K-12 educators can allow for their pedagogical position to be impacted and shaped by the subaltern students' liminal experience, thereby teaching to it in ways that carefully acknowledge the epistemologies they carry with them into the newly inhabited space. In order to do such hard work, our teacher training programs in U.S. colleges need to integrate the critical thought of, for example, Said's (1978) *Orientalism*, and feminist border pedagogies of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), and an understanding of Soja's (2010) critical spatial analysis.

These ideas contribute to a pedagogical position that speak to and are comprehensive of the refugee/subaltern experience.

An example that necessitates an urgent re-framing of pedagogy and practice in the U.S. context is the influx of children from Latin American countries fleeing extreme violence during summer 2014. Another example is President Obama's pledge to resettle Syrian refugees in the United States who are fleeing the ongoing war in their homeland. As the public education systems begin the work of addressing the educational needs of these children, it is crucial that educators do not view their new students through a deficit lens, but rather, through a lens of tremendous resilience, intelligence, perseverance, conscientiousness, and determination, all characteristics that go a long way in the classroom.

Teaching & Teacher Education (TTE) programs in our colleges should focus specifically on the readings particular to subaltern pedagogy. Such a college level curriculum would include three main components. First, a TTE program would include history and/or area studies courses to provide historical and anthropological contexts of subaltern groups' lived experiences; second, a thorough grounding in a subaltern pedagogy, comprised of literature about critical pedagogy, critical spatial analysis, and post/decolonial studies would be provided. Third, a component to learn about a subaltern practice is essential: how to create place-based curriculum, how to contextualize students' funds of knowledge and create niche openings, and how to create counterspaces to build a powerful critical and social consciousness within all of our students. Marginalized border crossers are in need of educational services that better "fit" and contextualize their lived experiences; subaltern pedagogy provides that needed framework for our future teachers.

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