Trespassing Dreams: Rethinking Inequality Through the Concept of Subalternity

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Abstract

I explore the notion of subjective immobility suggested by Spivak's concept of the subaltern through auto/ethnographic accounts and philosophical re-thinking. Through three "departure gates," I aim to provoke the reader to think about how the perennial question, "Can the subaltern speak?" can be transgressed or perhaps rephrased. Philosophically, this article contrasts two ways of looking at desire and their effects on subject agency. I locate this tension in empirical events, including the story of a racialized international student-parent, examples of emancipatory initiatives in higher education, and autoethnographic narrative. Finally, through a discussion of agnotology, I hope to open up a space for thinking of ways of deploying an ethical silence in subalternity, in the hope of "trespassing" the boundary between agency and immobility.

Keywords

subaltern, autoethnography, agency, privilege, desire, racism

In Spivak's (1988) early articulations, the subaltern has stood for a concept that frames an obstinately immobile subject. A member of the oppressed who has no access or means to obtain power, a subaltern person is not only "mute as ever" (p. 295) but also stationary. This article, however, dares to allow the concept to wander, mainly through three "departure gates," whose meaning also travels to the more static label, *terminal*, in which emphasis is placed on immobility instead of flight. I illustrate this contradiction by detailing the case of Ana, an international student-parent in the United Kingdom, whose stymied attempts to "take off" is linked to her subaltern identity. I posit that "thinking otherwise" has the potential to denormalize binaries offered by a traditional conception of the subaltern; desire opens up transformative opportunities that can allow escape from forms of thinking tethered to capitalist fixities.

I first began to think more deeply about the subaltern while working on the experience of international student-parents (ISPs) in the United Kingdom while undertaking my PhD. Like many others, I was intrigued by the question, *Can the subaltern speak?* (Spivak, 1988). Its suggestiveness was attractive, as it seemed that it would not offer an alternative answer to "No, she cannot." What should have been an opening (a question) suggested a closure, which made it an even more appealing focus of inquiry. My research is auto/ethnographic as I also draw from my own thoughts and experience as a fellow ISP. I thought about the extent in which my participants and I could be considered subaltern. Comparatively, we were privileged—many of us received bursaries and tuition fee waivers for our studies and thus were in a relatively more advantaged position from others. Most of us came from global southern countries where many do not have the opportunity to engage in quality higher education (HE), much less so from the global north. However, as parents and international students, we were positioned at the margins of U.K. HE. This identity was different from that of the "bachelor" typical of U.K. HE clientele (Moreau & Kerner, 2012).

With this background, I began an inquiry that went to and fro within and beyond the meaning of subalternity. Indeed, if the more proscriptive aspects of the Spivakian concept of the subaltern are to be taken seriously, a traveling subaltern would only exist in a dream. And just as a dream sequence consists in disjunctive scenes bizarrely bolted together, this article starts with a conversation set in the imagination and is followed by tangents of flight from the concept in question:

> Spivak: Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous. I mean, just by being in a discriminated against minority on the university campus, they don't need the word subaltern . . . They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are, and since they *can* speak, . . . they're within the hegemonic discourse wanting a piece of the pie and not being allowed, so let them

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speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They shouldn't call themselves subaltern . . . (de Kock, 1992, p. 46, my emphasis)

Myself: As an international student-parent (ISP), I am reluctant to agree with your proscriptions of using the word "subaltern" within an academic setting, if the term should exclude people like myself. You reserve the word for those who have limited access to power such as what is offered by U.K. higher education (de Kock, 1992). ISPs' identities exist within tensions of being able to speak and *not* being able to speak and so the term "subaltern" swims between the currents of these shifting identities. In other words, I think the ISP is subaltern not only within academe as a hegemonic institution but also in the family and other societal contexts. Like the woman you refer to in your essay, ISPs are often placed in a subjugated position as a person in a hegemonic institution involved in the politics of care. And if speaking entails listening, then we are uncertain when exactly the ISP is subaltern within these contexts because of the diversity of "ears" an ISP's discourse may enter.

Spivak: For me, the question, "who should speak?" is less crucial than "Who will listen?" "I will speak for myself as a third world person" is an important position for political mobilization today. But the real demand is that, when I speak from that position, I should be listened to seriously, not with [a] kind of benevolent imperialism . . . (1990, cited in Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.71)

Myself: I understand that you demand that the postcolonial person be treated as a subject, and not merely as an object, from the perspective of which they would only be rendered mute, in spite of being able to speak. A "voice" falling on selectively deaf ears would remain tacit. You and I seem to be in agreement about this, but I still do not know if an international student-mother such as myself and the women I work with can be considered mute subalterns as you have previously discussed (Spivak, 1988). I mean in spite of the relative subjugation in academe, in the society and in our families, we are not completely bereft of agentive power. After all, we are in the UK to do our PhDs. In spite of the mostly patriarchal environments we work in and come from, we can still make our own decisions at home and for our research. At times we maintain our independence from our partners, parents or children. We demonstrate ownership of our work, children and selves, and conduct independent research. So although we can be considered a part of a colonized group, we are not all mute all the time.

Spivak: Exactly. You are not purely subaltern, but are still part of an elite, although in the category Guha would call the "regional elite-subaltern" (Spivak, 1988, p. 285). And I know what you mean. The same class or element which was dominant in one area . . . could be among the dominated in the other. You are in a place of in-betweenness, what Derrida describes as an "*antre*" (Spivak, 1988, p. 284).

Myself: So I am indeed only part-subaltern. But I guess Guha's four strata would also need to be reconsidered[1] (Guha, 1983 cited in Spivak, 1988, p. 285). I don't see a category from this taxonomy where international student-parents belong, because their relationships with different regions are made complex by the instability of what it means to be international, local and dominant. I also doubt the existence of a purely subaltern person, which is something I am sure you would agree with, considering that you acknowledge the usefulness of Derridean différance.

Spivak: With the break-up of the welfare state, the earlier definition of the subaltern as one cut off from lines of social mobility increasingly applies to the metropolitan homeless, although the cultural argument is subsumed under a class argument there. Words and their meanings change through time and in different contexts. For example, . . . Gramsci used the word subaltern to stand in for "proletarian," to escape the prison censors. But the word soon cleared a space as words will, and took on the task of analyzing what "proletarian," produced by capital logic, could not cover (Spivak, 2012, pp. 324 and 328).

Myself: So then if the previous meaning of subaltern excluded international student-mothers, I assume your re-writing of your own philosophical term now includes these women?

Spivak: Today the subaltern must be rethought. S/he is no longer cut off from lines of access to the center. The center . . . is altogether interested in the rural and indigenous subaltern as source of trade-related intellectual property or TRIPs (Spivak, 2012, p. 326).

It struck me upon re-reading this "dialogue" several times that the term subaltern now cannot be "found" in the same conceptual place. Born in prison[2] (Green, 2011) and raised in open fields (Spivak, 2012, p. 326—see above), the subaltern now wanders areas of further rethinking.

Pre-Departure Briefing: Ana's Story

Next in the dream sequence is Ana's story, although her narrative is taken from a more empirical approach as part of my doctoral research. Ana is an ISP from a developing country. I spoke to her about her experience of being a PhD student in the United Kingdom. She told me that she received antagonistic treatment and poor-quality support from her supervisory team. Her supervisors would often engage in fault-finding as they perused her work and would only

comment on superficial aspects of her thesis. She recounted a research meeting when her supervisors aggressively interrogated her about her use of the word *sample*. She said that she received scathing criticism without constructive feedback.

Her grievances escalated when her supervisors vehemently disagreed with her intention to submit her thesis. She stressed the potentially detrimental effects of a late submission on her student visa and ultimately, on the prospects of finishing her PhD. The university had given her enough visa extensions and she would not be able to finish her degree if she was not granted another one. However, her supervisors refused to speak with her about this and stressed that the quality of her thesis has still not reached the required "doctoral" level. It seemed to me that their concern was not only about quality but mainly about asserting authority:

> Ana: So I said to him I'll go and submit by myself, if they allow and they think it's all right. And then Taylor O'Neill was angry and [furious]. He said "I'll make sure that doesn't happen. I don't think you can do that without our permission." (interview transcript)

She then approached Rory, a professor from another university who agreed to stand in as an external advisor for her research. During this time, her supervisors were unavailable and her visa time was nearly expiring. Therefore, she and Rory met several times over during what she described as "focused" meetings the course of 2 months, with the aim of revising her thesis. After this period of revision, Rory assured her that her thesis had improved in quality and that it was ready for submission.

Because her supervisory team were unable to support for her submission, Ana asked for the help of another senior academic in her university who agreed to help her speak with the postgraduate research office. This senior academic asked about the possibility of Ana submitting her thesis in this situation. Rory also wrote a letter of support detailing Ana's experience and why she needed help. His strong words propelled the submission process forward:

> Rory: In my judgment this is a PhD. It is ready to submit. The supervisory team's opinions are highly negative, unconstructive, and plain wrong. It seems to me that they are also extremely vague. I will put that down to a deficit in experience, and an excess of opinion. I believe that none of the team was entered in the last REF (2012) [Research Excellence Framework], and indeed there is the troubling fact that Ana's recent publication record is much better than the team's. (letter to Ana's university)

Rory drew on his professorial authority and experience and also from the rhetoric of metricized research productivity. This negotiation eventually resulted in a decision that would allow Ana to submit her PhD thesis for examination.

She later filed a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator which ruled in favor of her claims against unethical practice in her university. However, her charges against racism are yet to be institutionally acknowledged.

Can Subaltern Immobility Be Transgressed?

-gate does not only suggest an act of traveling or leaving one place to enter another. As a suffix, it mobilizes feelings of indignation related to words derived from the name of the notorious 1972 scandal, the "Watergate" (Maier, 2019).[3] Ana's narrative about her experience of a scandal in research supervision in a U.K. university can be juxtaposed with emancipatory promises that exits could offer. With reference to the concept of the subaltern, I explore another scandalous tendency in academic engagements to silence the subject with theories of mobility. I put the spotlight on privileged spaces that intellectuals occupy, most prominently the university. As institutions, universities can become places from which academics are able to define or articulate what constitutes social justice. Thus, they also contribute to institutional definitions of who could be considered marginalized and how they can/must be helped. But I will also illustrate how, from the same vantage point, academics can also "play integral roles in processes of subalternization" (Rabasa, 2010, p. 89). But first, a digression:

> I recall an especially memorable event that happened as I was flying as an airplane cabin attendant around ten years ago. On this flight, I was assigned to serve food for a special needs passenger. I placed a plastic container on a tray to get the special meal ready for serving but because I was in a hurry and was not careful enough the food slipped from my hands. I looked in horror as the string beans and sauce sat on the galley floor. (research diary)

The above anecdote, although again abruptly inserted here, precedes the "gates" as a relevant story. First, it lays out an auto/ethnographic experiential route that uses the metaphor of an airport departure area. Second, the story features failure, which could also be the least that the following "gates" might have to offer. Third, it parallels in form the story about Ana, as previously outlined. Finally, *flight attendant* as occupation is not alien to the subaltern. Mostly females who perform caring roles, they are subject to consumerist demands during commercial flights and in this regard tend to be deemed more pragmatic than cognitive. This distinction also partly contributes to their subalternity as nonacademics and therefore as nonintellectuals, another binary that is addressed in this article in relation to Ana's experience.

Spivak argues that the post-Lacanian sense of desire put forward in *Anti-Oedipus* does not acknowledge a subject-in-lack but merely puts forward desire as a "flow," independent from a fixed subject. In contrast, Spivak's (1988) articulation would posit an *occlusion* instead of free movement. I intend

to leave the following three gates open to the perennial question, "Can the subaltern speak," and invite the reader to enter them at their own risk. At each of the following gates, I placed "alternate signboards" (in parentheses) which forebode the traveler about what is (not) to come. With the tonality of a jest and enclosed in parentheses, they suggest constraint or fixity instead of mobility.[4] It is not within the remit of this article to trace the term *subaltern* to its origins nor to suggest any final word on its meaning. If anything, this lack of consensus could serve as a "passport" to enter the following "gates" with the hope of emerging forth with further renewed thinking about the concept and its implications.

Departure Gate 1: International and Global HE (You Are Not Allowed Here)

Marc Augé (1995) puts forward the idea of "non-place" as a transitory space lacking in identity and permanence. It is "more functional than lyrical" (p. 82) than an established "anthropological place":

> If a place can be identified as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. (p. 78)

Augé recounts the story of a certain Pierre Dupont who was waiting for boarding time in an airport. The airport held Dupont's identity at bay, rendering him an unknown user of its facilities:

> . . . neither identity, nor relations, nor history really make any sense; spaces in which solitude is experienced as an overburdening or *emptying of individuality*. . . (1995, p. 87, my italics)

This idea of a place in which identity is irrelevant seems to echo the notion that subjectivity is fluid and variable (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977). From this perspective, a "non-place" such as a grocery shop can be seen as arguably "global" customers, cashiers and other staff members share a part of the "solitude" that Dupont experienced. As an effect of being in this non-place, their personal history and identity become suspended.

Similarly, universities as non-places abjure features that can differentiate between students and scholars. In the name of globalization and internationalization, students' nationality, ethnicity, gender, class or age are purported to be consciously dismissed during admissions and other processes. However, Spivak (1988) suggests that such an idealized conception of non-place elides the effects of power relations in sites that are taken as unquestionably "global."

Recent research has found widespread ill treatment of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students in U.K. universities (Batty, 2019; "Tackling Racial Harrassment: Universities Challenged," 2019). An Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) report on this issue helps in the material legitimization of racism in academe. Ironically, however, it utilizes market language in an opening section about tackling racial harassment. The following extract is underpinned by a view of the globe as a two-dimensional (2D) pie chart, divided by marketable slices of "produce" called "higher education" — an interesting echo of the globe as egalitarian grocery shop:[5]

> But we can't afford to be complacent if we want to retain our slice of the global education market. A feeling of belonging and inclusion is important to people deciding whether or not to work and study in Britain. We must therefore do all we can to make sure the university experience is positive for everyone. (p. 5)

Linking this to Ana's trajectory, her journey to the United Kingdom should ideally be understood as an effort toward "collaborative research" ("What Does It Mean to be a Global University?," 2017). A supervisory meeting, for instance, can be ideally regarded as a meeting of minds occurring in a "third space" (see Deterala et al., 2018) in which scholars engage with ideas in mutual respect of each other's intellectual capacities. But Ana's experience suggests that such a space can be far from neutral. Instead, she found herself in an unimaginable place of loss:

> Ana: I used a word called "sample." And he [her supervisor] went on and said, "You are claiming to be qualitative researcher, you have used the word 'sample.' How come you have used the word sample?" And he went on and on . . . You cannot imagine where I found myself. (interview transcript)

By refusing to look at things from their student's perspective, Ana's supervisors widened the gap between her and their professional selves. Viewed largely as an institutional accountability than a fellow intellectual, her dislocation ran opposite to the idea of singular presence with "sky and cloud, wind and rain, earth and rock, animal and plant, friend and stranger" (Malpas, 2012, p. 257). Although occupying a small, physical area (a supervision meeting room), Ana and her supervisors were hardly sharing a third space. Her alienation was made possible through the use of language or rather, a *refusal* to do so:

> Ana: [My supervisor said,] "I don't want to hear anything about visas, Ana. This is you. You cannot tell us about visa (sic). It is our responsibility to talk about the thesis. We're only going to talk about the thesis" [He said] I can go back to my country and submit my visa because all he wants to know is about my work. (interview transcript)

This reference to repatriation and ardent demonstration of authoritative power contrast sharply with learning in university as a collaborative enterprise valued universally in all global sites of education. Instead, an oppressive imperialism displaced Ana from this egalitarian globe and placed her in the position of a desiring-subject. Her lack of power was established through historiographic erasure, which Rabasa (2010) argues is also necessary for the colonial domination of indigenous societies:

> The destruction of the indigenous states led to forms of collaboration that proved indispensable for the efficacy of colonial and national rule. . . The "without" may be interpreted as peoples who exist *without* (outside) history and the state. . . (p. 142, author's emphasis)

A removal of character usually occurs before an imperial takeover.

Caldwell's (2007) critique of Foucault's view of agency as merely counter-resistance parallels that of Spivak's. He argues that this theory lacks "alternative definitions of what power is, how it is legitimated and how it can be transformed" (p. 20). In other words, Foucault does not theorize agency apart from a subject who experiences oppression. In contrast, Spivak's critique puts a "face" to the subject.[6] It would be relevant to ask whether subalterns possess any power to change their situation, which seems to sound like a rephrasing of her original question. Further reconstructing this question from the context of Ana's narrative, did she gain the right to submit her thesis only from being ventriloquized/"empowered" by Rory?

Ironically it seems this first departure gate has not allowed her any escape from oppression but has placed her in the region of *without* in which she received no acknowledgment as equal collaborator. Her reappropriation into the dominant discourse came through the familiar voice of one from *within*—indeed a dominant White professor's voice was summoned in order to "emancipate" a brown female subject. At this point, the globalizing rhetoric of HE has turned into one which "subsumes subaltern peoples in narratives of Empire . . . " (Rabasa, 2010, p. 140). As warned, we have had to move on even before we could enter the first gate.

Departure Gate 2: Failures of Empowerment in Deconstructive Educational Research (Enter at the Risk of Return)

As a minority ethnic researcher in the United Kingdom, my experience in academe has led me to think with and beyond binaries arising from Spivak's differentiation between exploiter/exploited, oppressed/oppressor, and transcendental subject/subaltern (de Kock, 1992; Spivak, 1988). Although I do not uphold this bifurcating tendency, this earlier conceptualization of the subaltern remains useful in rethinking the ever-muted status of marginalized peoples. Its strong challenge to naïve conceptions of voice and agency lies in its consistent insistence on the futility of emancipatory initiatives. Spivak (1988) describes a stealthy reinstatement of the intellectual's hegemony:

> . . . when the connection between desire and the subject is taken as irrelevant or merely reversed, the subject-effect that surreptitiously emerges is much like the generalized ideological subject of the theorist. (p. 273)

In educational research, some experienced researchers highlight doctoral students' capacity for productive thought through conscious emancipatory processes of conscientization (Freire, 2007). During my own doctoral supervision meetings, my supervisors and I agreed to create a level plane for thought wherein we tried to bring to surface structures of oppression in our own academic engagement (Deterala et al., 2018). We attempted to upend existing hierarchical positions that each group member occupied as an academic professional. My position of leadership (in spite of occupying the lowest "rank" in the group) was recognized and upheld:

> [The supervisors] noted the leading role Sophia had taken during the supervisory meetings, despite being a student. This did not seem to fit with the progression of seniority suggested by our titles, nor does it accurately reflect the thinking done by the group as a dynamic whole. (p. 8)

But this brouhaha about the success of our egalitarian enterprise seemed to conceal a clandestine reinscription of power relations that still existed among us. When supervision sessions were finished, we retained our tiered roles as professor, heads, and members of faculty and student. Like performing a somersault, we managed to do a double reversal: Standing on our heads mid-air, we landed back on our feet again, notably on uneven ground! Spivak's (1988) resistance of poststructural analysis invokes a similar retrospective look at our own narrative of empowerment.

Stronach et al. (2014) made a similar deconstructive attempt to upend hierarchy with a group of doctoral students. Together, he and a group of students asserted multiple authorship in the spirit of collaboration: "We had to pool our information . . . " with "necessary equality," staying "apart together" in "collective" inquiry. In their examination of data, however, this collective was torn between an "Asian perspective" and a "more Western" reading. Drawing on White male continental French philosophy, Stronach's dominant voice slipped to confess the group's failure: "Ordinary pedagogy installs a permanent dependence on the learner, an 'intellectual inequality of teacher and student'" (Ranciere, cited in Stronach et al., 2014, p. 391). His appeal toward

"*more anarchy, not the chaos of more order*" (p. 398, authors' emphasis) highlights a Frierian (2007) subversion of established oppressions. Stronach et al. (2014), however, is to a certain degree more subjugating because all other collaborators aside from the first author were regarded as "data," or at least sources of it.

Jónsdóttir et al. (2015) tell a story about collaboration in Master's supervision through inhabiting a third space. The supervisors highlight "empowering" students, albeit "behind their backs," after meetings have been finished. The third space has then become an exclusive domain of the supervisor-as-researcher. They recognize how institutional roles set students and mentors into a kind of hierarchized role-play:

> . . . are we written into specific identities as university teachers that say "you should be like this and this" and we all play along? (p. 43)

They also acknowledge a disconnection between them and their students:

> . . . they look at it as "doing time," to deal with this theoretical chapter, whereas we see it as a way to empower them—and that is the struggle. (p. 42)

However, their paper was largely celebratory of how supervisors helped one another. It lacked a recognition of collaboration with students, whose experience seemed to be mainly viewed as empirical material for reflection. A similar argument can as be made against my current analysis which so far has been "based" on Ana's narrative and my own autoethnographic experience. Like previous examples cited from academic emancipatory endeavors, am I as an academic (or "intellectual," in Spivak's words) brandishing "data" as epistemological material to derive conclusions from? In other words, am I also participating in the reproduction of repression?

Green (2011) contrasts Gramsci's conceptualization of the subaltern with the more stringent Spivakian one. He explains that Gramsci allows for a "revolutionary change and the empowerment of subaltern groups in overcoming their subordination" (p. 400). Later developments in Spivak's (2012) work suggest that she has also acknowledged a more agential understanding of subalternity. Agency can also be found in my contextualization into various concepts and configurations in this current paper. Participants in collaborative engagement might not have been completely futile in resisting the innocent assumption that academe is a level playing field. However, these initiatives could not fully change the larger structural conditions in place in U.K. universities.

The space that has opened up is that of mobilization, with "intellectuals" performing somersaults and concepts of subalternity "vanishing" in the air. In this way, the second departure gate could not offer a smooth exit.

Departure Gate 3: Moving Identities, Unsettling Subjectivities (The Transcendental Ghost Was Here)

> We pass from one field to another by crossing thresholds: we never stop migrating, we become other individuals as well as other sexes, and departing becomes as easy as being born or dying. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, p. 85)

The nomadic subject as described in the above quote is a conceptual challenge to singular phallic goals such as a diploma. In Ana's context, a PhD can be seen as a unifying representation of a degree earned, a telos fulfilled, and a palpable evidence of achievement. The graduation ceremony also has all the paraphernalia of a marriage ritual: a gown, a sash, a change of name (or title), or the blessing of the book. As discussed, Spivak's argument against the nomadic subject is that it serves to reintroduce a transcendent entity who possesses excessively strong intellectual access (Robinson & Tormey, 2010; Spivak, 1988). Visualizing desire as "flow" therefore does not acknowledge that the subaltern is bereft of the same power accorded to the intellectual (Spivak, 1988).

Subalternity would then seem to inflict a crippling immobility. However, Robinson and Tormey (2010) argue that the concept of a wandering thinker can offer a conceptual approach to creating and thinking otherness. Emphasis is on connectedness instead of individuality:

> . . . [T]here is no Lenz-the-self, author of dramatic works, who suddenly loses his mind and supposedly identifies with all sorts of strange states of being (blissful contact with rocks, metals, plants, and so on); rather, there is a Lenzian subject who passes through a series of states, and who identifies these states with the elements of nature as so many names from history . . . (Buchanan, 2008a, p. 42)

Another autoethnographic anecdote might illustrate how, through a proposition about a hotel key card, my child engaged his imagination to think of what could be, or in what I would call the "otherwise":

> I was descending the flight of stairs on Liverpool Lime Street train station with Gio, (my five year-old son). We were coming back from a night's stay at a Holiday Inn in Cardiff. He recognised the same hotel brand on a building across the road. Clutching the key card given to us for our Cardiff room, he asked to enter the Liverpool Holiday Inn in front of us. I burst out in laughter.

Buchanan (2008b) suggests that conceptual freedom can allow thinkers to become more creatively involved with un-actualized possibilities. My son's radical conceptualization about the affordances of an expired hotel key card exposed the capitalistic absurdity of the barring of access to places, materials and information: *Why can this card open that door and not this one?* he must have thought. Oblivious that the card is symbolic of a fixed space and

time rented out in exchange for money, he subverted "accepted norms of unconscious expression, presenting an option of discussing the unconscious in social context" (Zohar, 2014, p. 184). By laughing at his seemingly mistaken supposition about hotel access, I failed to acknowledge the insanity involved in neoliberal processes that limit entry to places that belong to a "global" society. Thinking the "otherwise" transgresses interested capitalist restrictions by bringing to the surface forms of uninhibited mobility (Hardt & Negri, 2000). A person having a dream is often assumed to reside in a world outside consciousness. However, Zohar (2014) describes how the unconscious can create "cracks in the envelope of sanity" (p. 174). The "passport" (or hotel key card) of the nomadic thinker might be something we stumble upon in this anomalous space, a key that can open routes different from what "rational" ways of thinking have normally made available. This understanding of desire summons the imagination and allows for an ethics of immanence, of working toward what "ought to be" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005).

Imaginative thinking can also put emphasis on oppressive states and events. To alter our main narrative about Ana, imagine what would happen if her supervisors would move to her country in order to work in a university there. The way they could be treated in her country would most likely be a consequence of colonial events and her supervisors' privileged status as White academics. But let us recall that when they asked Ana to move back to her country to work on her PhD from there, she imagined the worst:

> Ana: "You can go back to your home country," [my supervisors said]. You can imagine how it would be. I wouldn't have the facilities that I have here. I wouldn't be able to do anything, submission or anything. You can throw PhD out of the door. (interview transcript)

Her imagination relates to the more Spivakian end of the desire continuum described earlier. This "otherwise" offers a mobility similar to a mere airport transit before moving on to another (real) destination (e.g., As a former flight attendant, how could I assert that I have "been" to Guam, when I was only there for around two hours, and did not leave the confines of the airport?). In this sense, not all "mobility" can get us anywhere, including Ana's engagement in a global, international kind of education.

But at the same time, it would be deterministic to suggest an easy dualism between agency and incapacity, as illustrated by my son's radical thinking. Subaltern people's ability to travel is affected by positionality: Where are they local? Where would they be considered more dominant? What are they capable of imagining or dreaming of? As alternatives to Spivak's (1988) question which is more often taken to be a suggestion that subalternity renders the oppressed voiceless, these questions open up some possibilities in "thinking otherwise."

Departing From Epistemology

> *Neither* Deleuze *nor* Foucault seems *aware* that the intellectual within socialized capital, brandishing concrete experience, can help consolidate the international division of labor. (Spivak, 1988, p. 275, my emphases)

The subaltern as one who cannot—or perhaps *refuses to*—speak, does help us think about voice in the sense of "who speaks for whom" (Alcoff, cited in Mirza, 2015, p. 5) who listens to whom, and why/not. However, it can easily introduce a division between oppressed and oppressor and speaker and non-speaker. It tends to reductively categorize identities, a way of thinking which Mirza (2015) would not recommend: "[O]ur social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands" (p. 3). As an "unsettlement," however, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) sets into play the relationship between static attributes and individual experience, serving not only to contextualize oppression but also to question extant worldviews shaped by structural constraints. It allows working with and within tensions of desire through intersections in identity and also with specific lived and embodied events. These can become "points of departure" from which we can further perceive the world and experience it. It offers the possibility of working from a point of fixity that does not hastily seek to "settle." As our own positionalities are also perceived in view of others, our consciousness is mobile at the same time as fixed. Therefore, this nomadic position of ethical knowing can challenge certain hegemonic knowledge.

Perhaps a way to put forward nomadic subjectivity while heeding Spivak's call to address ideology and power in its analysis is to illustrate how desire itself "travels." This takes me back to the initial motivation for "speaking" with Spivak. I recognized that my desiring subjectivity is different from the desire of other marginalized people in my home country. This perception was multifaceted, one which was conscious of other alternative consciousnesses that could surface in different contexts or places. The privilege that Ana and I have as graduates of research degrees from an Anglophone country can be juxtaposed with *their* lack of what *we* have. We inhabit a world which gives us access to power—a world that we might not occupy together with some people from developing countries. In this way, we can think of nomadic subjectivity in terms of shifts in how we perceive power, instead of static identifications. The oppressed can potentially become the oppressor, depending on the geography of power (the placement of subjects in relation to it).

However, this would still leave some questions unanswered. Why do certain types of identities such as being White and male seem to remain constantly hegemonic and dominant? In spite of these fixed aspects of identity, however, particular trajectories can affect how power may take effect. For example, Ana's narrative shows how agency can result from the influence of a White male agent (Rory) *and* her own self-determined resistance. Her journey to

emancipation was a collaborative engagement. Acting and thinking with the hope to change the status quo required action on the part of the oppressed, *and* the privileged.

Locke posited the necessity of consciousness prior to the emergence of a self-as-subject but this perception, according to Hume, was Janus-faced (Locke, 1975 and Hume, 2000, cited in Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005): In perceiving myself through something, there are aspects of what I am *conscious* of that I am also *unaware* of. But this comes as "part of the package" in that knowledge does not only consist in *knowing* but also in *not* knowing. The conferment of a doctoral degree is based on this heterogeneous kind of (non)knowledge. That a thesis is at "PhD level," that Rory is an academic expert, or that a student in the United Kingdom is more privileged are all positions of certainty in the same way that they are also positions of doubt. We all depend on a fraction of ignorance! However, these are also positions of power, something that Spivak (1988) consistently supports in her articulation of a voiceless subalternity.

In his critique of the welfare reforms in the United Kingdom, Slater (2014) argues that sanctions on the poor are deployed on the basis of a strategic creation and use of ignorance about the highly documented damage that these policies have on the marginalized. Drawing on Proctor's (1995, cited in Slater, 2014) concept of "agnotology," he describes "an ignorance that is not one of blissful unawareness or of innocent absence of knowledge, but rather one of rational calculation" (Slater, 2014, p. 15). Calculation spells the difference between innocence and ignorance. This strategy was deployed by Ana's supervisors in "not wanting to know anything" about her visa. Proof of ignorance thus serves its purpose as the "ugly side of evidence."

Although the errant behavior of Ana's supervisors might have emerged from a self-knowledge of their superiority over their student, their power was wielded through an insistence of their ignorance of Ana's personal life. This allowed them to operate only from the domain of the professional. As stated earlier an "unpresence" was produced, similar to the blank slate version of indigenous peoples (Rabasa, 2010). Other instances of such erasure in the economy of evidence in HE would be too numerous to address here, but for now it would be sufficient to acknowledge that Ana's case is only one of the many other occasions of such acts of elision.[7]

When viewed using a market perspective, flows of international students tend to be regarded as unrestricted and free. The language of marketization in internationalization discourses of education echoes that of commercialized forms of global citizenship and cosmopolitanism. These discourses embrace and welcome diversity without regard to what problems could occur in processes of dislocation that global movements involve (Matthews & Sidhu, 2005). A Eurocentric, White, masculine subjectivity does arise in discourses that disconnect mobility from issues of power

(Matthews & Sidhu, 2005). However, subaltern peoples' own narratives are "subsumed into the discourse which portrays 'flows' of people as benign, smooth and unmediated by structural problems such as poverty, war, failed states and an inequitable global trade" (p. 53). Rabasa (2010) describes a "new ethics of respect for silence and gaps in . . . 'resistance texts,' 'a new subaltern practice that strategically deploys silence—the subaltern-*cannot*-speak syndrome—to make manifest the racism and parochialism of dominant discourses'" (p. 84). Such 'subaltern insurrections' resist dangerous acts of 'professionalism':

> Equally dangerous to missing the gaps is the tendency by professional readers who because of a shared space, hastily fill in the gaps. (p. 83)

Enacting ethical silence could mean refusing to represent knowledge, thus taking the professional intellectual, productively, nowhere.

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Notes

1. Guha proposed a stratification in which elites are differentiated from the subaltern (Spivak, 1988).
2. Green (2011) rejects the widespread assumption that Gramsci used the term "subaltern social groups" (p. 387) to avoid prison censorship.
3. *-gate* has been named a suffix referring to scandal, after a string of (-gate) derivations have been coined in mass media following the Watergate event. Its prevalence has been established so much so that Watergate has even been re-introduced as "Watergategate" (Maier, 2019).
4. Although prefixed with a truncation of *portable (port-), portalet* can also be re-interpreted as "portal-et," suggesting a gate through which one may enter but in which users would eventually encounter some form of terminality.
5. A playful imaginary can depict this shop as subdivided into different Anglicized geographic regions such as the United Kingdom or the United States, product categories (higher education [HE] courses), and brands (universities and other HE institutions).

6. This is in reference to Giddens' criticism of Foucault's theory of the subject, "Foucault's bodies do not have faces" (cited in Caldwell, 2007, p. 9).

7. For example, research assessment tools such as VITAE ("Vitae Researcher Development Framework [RDF]," 2011) are unable to take into account the more embodied and asynchronic aspects of narrative—emotion, contingency, irresolvability, and so on.

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