

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Dialog Theory in Marginalized Settings: A Subaltern Studies Approach

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*This article explores the potential of subaltern studies scholarship to open new vistas of research in dialogically oriented communication theory by bringing forth questions of representing the “other” and suggesting discursive openings for interrogating the privilege embodied in neoliberal discourse. Exploring the intersections of dialog and subalternity, this article seeks to understand ways in which subalternity enters into dialog with the dominant sites of knowledge production in communication studies. By sensitizing the researcher to the position of power and privilege embodied in academic knowledge, the project calls for a reflexive journey of solidarity between researcher and subaltern community. In doing so, subaltern studies becomes an entry point to explore the emancipatory potential of dialog in the backdrop of neoliberal politics.*

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Contemporary theories of dialog emphasize the public nature of dialog and the role of dialogic deliberation as an essential element of deliberative democracy, constituting the sense of community, creating public rationality, fostering public opinion, and forming the public sphere (Hauser, 1999; Heidlebaugh, 2008; Kim & Kim, 2008). This emphasis placed on dialog as a constituent element of the global public sphere coincides with the increasing use of dialog as a neoliberal<sup>1</sup> device that brings far away populations dispersed across the globe under the reach of transnational corporations (TNCs), exploiting the poor and increasing the inequalities within populations (Pal & Dutta, 2008a, 2008b). The subaltern<sup>2</sup> sectors of the globe, historically marked by their disconnection from the public spheres of the mainstream, have emerged as markets and as sources of intellectual property for TNCs through the deployment of dialogic tools that increasingly use terms such as listening, empowerment, participation, and development to perpetuate the economic exploitation of the subaltern classes in the global South.<sup>3</sup>

Simultaneously, as noted by scholars such as Ganesh, Zoller, and Cheney (2005) and Pal and Dutta (2008a, 2008b) in their articulation of “globalization from below,”

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dialog offers a valuable theoretical as well as practical framework for sincerely listening to subaltern voices in ways that challenge the transnational hegemony, disrupt neoliberal knowledge structures, and seek to transform neoliberal policies underlying global inequalities both locally and globally. Drawing upon the foundations of subaltern studies theory, this article (a) interrogates the co-optation of subaltern agency through the deployment of dialogic tools in transnational public spheres and neoliberal epistemic structures, and (b) theorizes dialogic forms of resistance that seek to disrupt transnational hegemonic spaces by engaging with the possibilities of sincerely listening to subaltern voices, transforming dominant epistemic structures, and shifting the realms of praxis that are established on the bases of these structures.

With its theorization of the erasures in the colonial project, subaltern studies is concerned with the condition of being erased from the mainstream public spheres of civil society and from spaces of elitist knowledge production, cut off from lines of access to the center<sup>4</sup> (Spivak, 2000). As noted by Guha (1988), the subaltern studies project emerged with an emphasis on deconstructing the mainstream agendas of colonialist and elitist historiography of the Indian freedom struggle that erased the narratives of people's participation in political processes of the freedom struggle. Therefore, the subaltern studies project was conceived with an emancipatory emphasis on rewriting history from below, based on the argument that dominant narratives of colonial histories have systematically represented the interests of the colonizers and the national elite (Guha, 1982a). Dutta (2008) suggests that the erasure of the subaltern from elite spheres of knowledge production is intrinsically tied to the economic and material marginalization of the subaltern sectors.

In contrast to the colonialist rendering of the subaltern as completely cut off from lines of access to Eurocentric civil society and its means of knowledge production, Spivak (2000) notes the emergence of the "new subaltern" under neoliberal hegemony, who is connected to the politicoeconomic center of neoliberalism as a source of intellectual property under the trade-related intellectual property rights (TRIPS). In spite of her connection to the global market as a source of exploitation, the new subaltern is simultaneously silenced through the universal claims of these neoliberal platforms and policies. In resisting these erasures, sincere dialogs with the subaltern sectors offer entry points for listening to subaltern voices, making alternative knowledge claims that disrupt neoliberal hegemony, and cocreating spaces of praxis in solidarity with the subaltern communities (Dutta, 2009).

Dialog with the subaltern is constituted as a mediation that brings subaltern narratives into mainstream structures/sites of knowledge. Such dialog is founded on consistent skepticism toward the co-optive politics of dialog that serves neoliberal agendas. Of particular relevance for subaltern studies scholars are the ways in which dialog is constituted in the realm of power, difference, inequality, marginalization, and resistance. Hammond, Anderson, and Cissna (2003) address the question of power in dialog, examining the role of dialog in the context of marginality and raising questions about the role of dialog in transformative politics. How are erasures created

and sustained through communication and what communicative possibilities might be theorized for dialog with subalternity?

In engaging with dialog theory, subaltern studies underscores the possibilities of shifting the terrains of Eurocentric communication theorizing as knowledge from elsewhere enters into relationship with the dominant epistemic structures (Godalof, 1999; John, 1996). Furthermore, as contemporary agendas of neoliberalism, embodied in the Bretton Woods agencies and the World Trade Organization (WTO), continually deploy the languages of dialog and participation in the name of TRIPS to turn the indigenous subaltern subject into sources of profit for TNCs (Shiva, 2000), a subaltern studies engagement with dialog interrogates the co-optive and resistive possibilities of dialog both as a site of control and as a site of transformation.

Our engagement with subaltern studies raises the following issues for consideration in exploring the mediating capacity of dialog as a resistive site: power in dialog, dialog and impurity, representation in dialog, and reflexivity in the dialogic processes. Embedded in each of these key issues is the dialectical tension between the impossibilities and possibilities of listening to subaltern voices through dialog within the neoliberal project. Impossibilities are inscribed in increasing academic penetration of the subaltern sectors to serve neoliberal politics and the continued deployment of dialogic tools in the form of participatory forums, community relations activities, roundtables, and corporate social responsibility programs that serve the agendas of transnational hegemony (Dutta, 2009; Dutta & Pal, *in press*; Munshi & Kurian, 2005; Pal & Dutta, 2008a). Simultaneously, deconstructions of discursive spaces that co-opt and erase dialogic opportunities open up possibilities for engaging with subaltern communities, mediating subaltern knowledge claims, and foregrounding these knowledge claims as fulcrums for praxis, policy making, and politics of change (Pal & Dutta, 2008b).

The question of dialog is specifically relevant to contemporary geopolitics as the “new subaltern” is subaltern not only because of her dislocation from the center but also because of her connection to the center as a basis for exploitation (Rabasa, 2001; Shiva, 2000). It is precisely in the backdrop of this co-optive politics of neoliberalism that the subaltern sectors enunciate specific sites of struggle that seek to transform the oppressive global structures through globally connected networks of local solidarities. Local specificities are dialogically interconnected into universal spaces of articulation that narrate subaltern agendas at global sites, resisting the universal politics of neoliberalism that utilize the language of modernization, development, and growth to create entry points for exploiting subaltern spaces through structural adjustment programs and poverty reduction strategies.

### **Dialog, subalternity, and neoliberalism**

Theorizing the dialectical tensions inherent in dialog, Hammond et al. (2003) articulate the centrality of power in determining the possibilities that are mapped out in dialogic communication, determining the ambits of access to dialogic spaces as

well as the agendas and nature of dialogic spaces. In the neoliberal landscape, power plays out in the agendas of TNCs, joined hand-in-hand with international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the WTO, and the dominant nation-states at the center (such as the United States with its power and control over IFIs) that continue to exert their influence on global political economy through their presence and influencing power with the IFIs<sup>5</sup> (Harvey, 2005). What then are the openings for listening to subaltern voices through dialog that offer alternative rationalities to the neoliberal political economy? Subaltern studies continues the dialogic project further by interrogating the roles of structure, access, and epistemic boundaries in constituting the dialectical tensions between the possibilities and impossibilities of dialog under neoliberalism, attending to the subaltern sectors of the globe that have been and continue to be erased from the dominant discursive spaces of knowledge production, economics, and civil society under the neoliberal framework (Spivak, 1988a, 1988b).

For Spivak (2000), the subaltern sectors have historically been configured as subaltern precisely because they have been erased by the dominant dialogic platforms and the discursive logics of such platforms, being cut off from the processes of upward and outward mobility that would constitute them as colonized subjects. This erasure in contemporary neoliberal politics is not simply a product of the disconnection from the center, but also because of its linkages with the center as a source of profitable knowledge and as a subject of profit, at once linked to the contemporary political economic structures of neoliberalism and simultaneously erased from these structures (Dutta, 2009; Spivak, 2000). For example, the registration of the “TAM Mild Habanero Pepper” with the U.S. plant variety protection (PVP) office database by the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station demonstrates the ways in which dominant sectors of knowledge production carry out their economic agendas through the silencing of the subaltern and through the erasure of dialogic opportunities for the subaltern (Robinson, 2009). The variety, *Capsicum chinense*, bred from a cross between an orange habanero pepper from the Yucatan peninsula and a mild habanero variety procured by a U.S. Department of Agriculture official from a vendor in the Suarez province in Bolivia, promises to fetch a price of \$US3 to \$US4 per pound, as compared with the 50 cents per pound for comparable habaneros.

Ignored in the politicolegal discursive spaces of the PVP in the United States are the voices of indigenous communities in the Bolivian and Brazilian regions that have domesticated and bred mild varieties of habaneros for centuries, and therefore own the knowledge about breeding of the mild habaneros. Absent from the discursive space are the articulations of locally situated communicative processes that would determine issues of ownership and the extent of benefit sharing with the original breeders. The effectiveness of biopiracy under the neoliberal logic precisely works through the erasure of dialogic possibilities and through the absence of subaltern voices from the discursive spaces of bourgeoisie public spheres (legislative, judicial, and executive). Therefore, as noted by Dutta (2009), as the indigenous knowledge in

the subaltern sectors continues to be stolen through the patenting of such knowledge by TNCs under the configurations of TRIPS in global spaces, subaltern voices are erased from these spaces as grounds for claims making.

Moreover, the erasure of subaltern bases of alternative knowledge claims is quintessential to the carrying out of the exploitative practices of the neoliberal project. In the case of the biopiracy of indigenous resources and knowledge bases, global spaces such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture remain inaccessible to the subaltern sectors through their impenetrable judicial–political frameworks, and basic requirements of language, literacy, communication skill sets, information seeking capacities, legal knowledge, etc. The policies materially influencing the subaltern sectors are developed and implemented without the participation of the subaltern sectors of the globe in these platforms. Their effectiveness in usurping subaltern knowledge bases and turning them into exploitable resources fundamentally depends upon their ability to erase the subaltern from these discursive spaces at global sites of policy making.

It is at these very global sites of erasures that local subaltern voices emerge through networks of local–global solidarity that challenge neoliberal oppressions. For example, the emergence of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) on the global stage in 1994 narrated the story of indigenous resistance to the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement and challenged the legitimacy of the Mexican state, presented in the backdrop of the stories of oppression and marginalization of indigenous tribes in the Chiapas region of Mexico (Dellacioppa, 2009; Harvey, 1998). Hundreds of Zapatista support communities such as the Italian *Ya Basta!* and the Irish Mexico group were formed, with strong links of solidarity with the EZLN (Olesen, 2005). Not only did the EZLN challenge the neoliberal policies of the Mexican state, but, through its global solidarity networks and dialogic spaces that brought together activists from across the globe, also created a global site of resistance inspired by the local articulations of autonomy, embodied in the concept of Zapatismo (Barmeyer, 2009; Dellacioppa, 2009).

Resistance against the globalization politics of neoliberalism was narrated through a locally situated and culturally based lens of indigenous autonomy (Esteva, 2005; Esteva & Prakash, 1998; Olesen, 2005). In 1996, the EZLN held its First Intercontinental Against Neoliberalism and for Humanity, one of the first international gatherings that brought together activists from across the globe to organize against neoliberalism (Starr, 1998; Wood, 2005). The Intercontinental created a global site for the formation of the People's Global Action, a transnational organization that brought together hundreds of organizations from over a dozen countries including India, Nigeria, the United States, and Bolivia.

In 2005, the EZLN launched the “Other Campaign” to build support for diverse local struggles across Mexico and the United States, with the goal of cocreating long-term organic grassroots linkages of support across various local struggles (Dellacioppa, 2009) Contrasting itself with the 2006 Mexican presidential elections,

where presidential candidates gave speeches to the masses, the campaign was launched with listening tours as the EZLN moved out into poor communities in various parts of Mexico to listen to the stories of local struggles. Narrated as a cross-border global movement against neoliberal capitalism, the “Other Campaign” signed on activist organizations across borders that sought to carry out a Zapatista mandate in their own local struggles, communicating with each other through *encuentros* (gatherings). For example, the Los Angeles-based activist organization Case del Pueblo was formed in 2002 based on Zapatista principles, working on addressing the housing needs of immigrant families threatened with displacement by gentrification, and doing so by incorporating Zapatista principles and methodologies. The emergence of Zapatismo in the global arena introduces a theory of social change from the peripheries of the neoliberal mainstream into the discursive spaces of globalization, one that systematically suggests pathways of transformative politics by emphasizing local autonomy, self governance, and listening.

As noted with the example of the EZLN, subaltern participation in discursive spaces at the local level seeks to resist global control of TNCs. In other words, local sites are reappropriated for making resistive claims against global policies. For example, in response to the biopiracy of indigenous knowledge by TNCs, indigenous communities in Cusco, Peru, have organized to enact a law outlawing the biopiracy of indigenous knowledge and the patenting of genes and resources that are native to the region (Portillo, 2009). The local and the global therefore continually engage in a dialectical relationship, with the global erasing the specificities of the local as it co-opts the participatory spaces of the local within its agendas of profiteering, and the local emerging through solidarity networks at local and global sites to challenge neoliberal politics.

Culturally, the local threatens to disrupt the universal neoliberal politics of the global through its politics of specificity that offers alternative logics to the neoliberal hegemony. For instance, Vandana Shiva’s (2000) articulation of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* as an organizing principle of earth democracy challenges the monoculture monopolies of multinational corporations such as Monsanto that carry out the neoliberal logic in monopolizing over global seed markets through their hybrid seeds. The concept of earth democracy does not simply gain meaning in the context of the local, but emerges on the global arena by putting forth an alternative economic vision of global participation and governance that challenges the neoliberal logic.

As elucidated by the global solidarity movement grounded in the concept of earth democracy, dialogic engagements with the subaltern sectors dislocate the politics of the center through specific articulations that connect the local and the global by presenting subaltern narratives in global spaces and sites, through projects, methods, theories, and meta-theories initiated in the subaltern sectors (Dutta, 2009, in press; Munshi & Kurian, 2005; Pal & Dutta, 2008a, 2008b). Dialog in subaltern contexts exists in the realm of mediations of the subaltern studies scholar/activist at the global center, engaging in conversations with the locally situated subaltern communities,

through which she/he brings forth these dialogs within subaltern communities in global processes and platforms of organizing for social change.

At the crux of the theorizing of dialog is the idea of “listening to the other” in the context of human experience, and this consciousness of “listening to the other” is embodied in the goals of the subaltern studies project to listen to subaltern voices that have historically been erased from dominant epistemic structures where knowledge claims are made. The subaltern studies project suggests that the issue of “otherness” is ensconced within a larger politics of power and domination that concerns an engagement with the problematic of modernist epistemic structures and dialogic spaces constituting the “other” through acts of erasure that are framed as civilizing missions of promoting democracy, justice, and participation (see, for instance, the critique of democracy promotion initiatives by Dutta-Bergman, 2005; the rhetorical analysis of the veil in contemporary discourses of the U.S. invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq by Cloud, 2004). Questions are raised at the sites of these erasures regarding the mediating role of scholars and practitioners in the mainstream, so we might listen to subaltern voices amidst mainstream knowledge structures that serve neoliberal agendas. What are the transformative possibilities of dialogically engaging with the subaltern sectors when the subaltern has become the subject of co-optation and control by the dominant narratives of globalization that see the subaltern as a profitable entity? (Rabasa, 2001; Spivak, 1999) Also, what are the possibilities for transformative academic politics that seeks to sincerely engage dialogically with the “new subaltern” as an entry point for talking back to the center and dislocating its oppressive politics under neoliberalism (Pal & Dutta, 2008b; Rabasa, 2000; Shiva, 2000)?

The relationship of the scholar/practitioner with subaltern communities is framed within the questions of intention, nature, source, and outcome of dialog. Although on one hand the scholar/researcher/practitioner in the academic-industrial complex carries out the erasure of subaltern voices and perpetuates the oppression of subalterns through co-optive dialogic exercises framed within the disciplinary boundaries of areas such as anthropology, ethno-botany, and geography deployed in the service of neoliberalism, on the other hand the researcher/scholar/practitioner also serves as an entry point to transformative politics by sincerely seeking to engage in dialog with subaltern voices such that these voices might be heard amidst the colonizing structures of neoliberalism. The nature of the dialogic field and the outcomes attached to the field are constituted by this realm of intention. Noting this tension between co-optation and a sincere commitment to transforming structures, Hammond et al. suggest that the dialogic field exists in a dialectical tension between emergence that contributes to change and creativity, and convergence on outcomes and goals. The authors go on to note that whereas convergent dialog reifies and supports the dominant power structure by limiting the range of possibilities, divergent dialog “challenges the processes and power bases of the status quo” (p. 146).

The subaltern studies project attends to this emergent dialog by looking at the possibilities of engaging with subaltern voices that have otherwise been erased by

convergent dialog, supported by the dominant power structures and utilized as tools to serve the agendas of dominant power structures. It also engages with and builds upon the possibilities of reflexivity as it foregrounds the privileged position of the scholar, and the ways in which this position is connected to silencing subaltern voices as well as articulating possibilities for alternative hegemonies (Rabasa, 2000; Spivak, 2000). Subaltern studies interrogate the discursive closures in dominant articulations and the spheres of emergent dialog where the status quo nevertheless defines the discursive realm of possibilities, outlining the possibilities of reflexive politics where scholars can participate in dialog with the specificities of the local, and bring these subaltern rationalities to global sites to challenge the neoliberal politics of the global (see Dutta, 2009; Pal & Dutta, 2008b).

### **Impossibilities of listening**

Drawing from the writings of Gramsci on the subaltern, the themes of subaltern studies pay considerable attention to the dominant class, as the subaltern exists in a binary relationship with the dominant, being cut off from the modalities of participatory politics in the dominant spheres. The universal discourses of the dominant write over the local specificities of the subaltern, placing the subaltern in a fixed subject position that is devoid of agency. It is therefore in attending to the local specificities that entry points are created for transformation in the universal narratives of the global that construct the subaltern as passive, silent, and without agency (Shiva, 2000).

The subaltern studies project politicizes mainstream academic writing on dialog by raising questions of silencing and erasure that are inherent in our dominant ideals of dialog in mainstream public spheres, pointing toward the dialectical tensions between the possibilities and impossibilities of dialog that are continually created at the intersections of the local and the global. West-centric notions of dialog are interrogated that utilize the language of dialog to co-opt the local specificities of subaltern resistance (Beverley, 2004a, 2004b). For instance, Rabasa (2000) notes how the narration of the Tepoztlan revolution on National Public Radio turns the specificity of subaltern resistance against neoliberalism into quaint cultural practices that are bound to disappear in the face of the universal narratives of globalization and modernity, situated precisely within the parameters of neoliberalism. Here the possibilities of dialog with subalternity become impossible because the resistive agendas of the local are co-opted into the dominant framework of the universal to serve the interests of neoliberal hegemony. Simultaneously, the rebellion in Tepoztlan and the local articulation of diverse subjectivities serve as sites of resistance to transnational interests in the processes of globalization; the “hegemony of the diverse implies the formation of strong subjectivities as a constituent power (the impossible as the condition of the possible) and the exercise of cultural and political practices that up until very recently were seen as in conflict with modernity” (Rabasa, 2000, p. 202).

As Spivak (1988b) notes in her seminal piece on subaltern studies, the inaccessibility of subaltern voices is enmeshed in the academic search for possibilities of



listening to subaltern voices in those discursive spaces that remain accessible to us. The logics of the global constitute the local, co-opting the resistive politics of the local through mainstream methods and turning the folklore into caricature as they reify the dominant structures of neoliberal hegemony (Rabasa, 2000). Simultaneously, however, the oppressive forces of neoliberalism, experienced in flesh and blood in subaltern contexts, are resisted through the specificities of the folkloric and through strong subjectivities engaged in dialog (see, for instance, Casanovas's theorizations of dialog in the realm of the subaltern politics of the EZLN as cited in Rabasa, 2000). For example, the *beeja satyagraha* (seed noncooperation) movement against neoliberal agricultural policies that oppress indigenous farmers by making it illegal for farmers to own and reuse seeds challenges neoliberalism through its articulation of the fundamental right of the farmer to her seed (Shiva, 2000). Here, a locally and historically specific articulation of a concept is introduced into the global arena as an alternative rationality to the rationality of neoliberalism.

The tension between the possibilities and impossibilities of dialogic spaces is articulated in the idea that to the extent these spaces remain accessible to the bourgeoisie, they inherently remain inaccessible to subaltern voices, further reifying the silences of the subaltern sectors (see Rabasa, 2000; Spivak, 1988a, 1988b, 1999). The impossibility of dialog is tied to the rules, platforms, languages, symbols, codes, and procedures required for dialogic engagements in bourgeoisie public spheres; the specificities of the local diverge from the communicative rules of the universal that are set up as requirements for participation. The multiplicity of dialogic spaces is based on the accessibility to acceptable platforms, languages, norms, rituals, and processes needed to engage in dialog. Therefore, to the extent that dialog depends upon certain platforms, procedures, languages, and meanings necessary for the mediations, it must simultaneously exclude those who do not have access to these technologies and procedures of dialog as defined by the bourgeoisie.

The subaltern studies project raises questions such as: (a) who has the power and resources to define the parameters and processes of dialog, (b) who has the power and resources to participate in dialog, (c) who are included within the modernist epistemic structures to participate in what we understand as dialog, and (d) what are the boundaries for conversations to be considered as dialog within the dominant communicative frameworks? For example, in the creation of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the UN determines the selection processes, frameworks for representation, the agendas for participation, and the rules and procedures for dialog among the indigenous communities participating at the United Nations. The participation of indigenous communities in the forum is intrinsically dependent upon the ability of the communities to master the tools and resources necessary for participation at the UNPFII. Although the UNPFII positions itself as a space for dialog with indigenous communities across the globe, particularly on projects of development, it also co-opts the participatory agendas of these communities within the frameworks of the United Nations, thus threatening to minimize the resistive politics of the indigenous movements against neoliberalism

while at the same time creating the appearance of participation. Although on one hand the participation of the indigenous actors at the table of the United Nations creates an opportunity structure for engagement with the dominant structures, on the other hand it runs the risk of being co-opted within these structures to perpetuate the interests of neoliberalism.

What then are the possibilities of recovery of subaltern consciousness outside of elite discourse that is fundamentally co-optive in its organizational structure and constitutive processes? Spivak notes, “subaltern consciousness is subject to the cathexis of the elite, that is never fully recoverable . . .” (p. 11). Hence, can the subaltern be adequately represented by academic knowledge in the mainstream? Here through her accounts of subaltern narratives such as the death of Bhuvaneshwari Bhaduri, Spivak (1999) discusses the impossibilities of listening to the subaltern. Bhuvaneshwari, a middle-class Bengali woman of 16 or 17 years of age in colonial Bengal, hanged herself in her father’s apartment in 1926. Her suicide was a puzzle because she was menstruating at the time and therefore this was clearly not a case of illicit pregnancy, a causal link typically attributed in public discourse to suicides committed by menstruating women. Almost a decade after her death, it was discovered in a letter written to her sister that she was a member of one of the many groups involved in the Indian revolutionary movement and was entrusted with a political assassination. She killed herself because she was “unable to confront the task and yet aware of the practical need for trust” (Spivak, 1999, p. 307). In waiting for the onset of menstruation, Bhuvaneshwari resisted the

sanctioned motive for female suicide by taking immense trouble to displace (not merely deny), in the physiological inscription of her body, its imprisonment within legitimate passion by a single male . . . the displacing gesture—waiting for menstruation—is at first a reversal of the interdict against a menstruating widow’s right to immolate herself—the unclean widow must wait, publicly, until the cleansing bath of the fourth day, when she is no longer menstruating, in order to claim her dubious privilege. (p. 307)

Although Bhuvaneshwari had taken painstaking trouble to resist the erasure by the dominant narrative by attempting to speak through her body as a site of resistance, when asked about her death, her nieces and granddaughters, embedded within a neoliberal ideology, seemed to think it was a case of illicit love. It is based on this observation that Spivak notes the narrative of Bhuvaneshwari’s resistance through her rewriting of the social text of sati-suicide went unheard even among the women in her own family constituted in the modernist mainstream; “the subaltern cannot speak.” Modernist discourse wrote over the agency and intention of Bhuvaneshwari.

Its interjection with issues of power makes subaltern studies a paradigm that radically challenges modernist epistemologies by interrogating the violent erasures inherent in these epistemologies (Beverley, 2004a; Mallon, 1994; Prakash, 1992). Because the effort of the subaltern scholar is to recover the history of the erased “other” against the institutionalized system of knowledge constructed by the West and

the national elite in postcolonial states, it becomes a critique of the dominant system of knowledge production itself, legitimized by the West. At the same time it is postmodern as it endeavors to bring about “epistemological rupture” (Beverley, 2004a, p. 15) or what Lyotard (1984) regards as interrupting the grand meta-narratives of the universal. In critical readings of the mainstream calls for dialog, those foundations of civil society are interrogated that we take-for-granted as democratic spaces of participation, and as platforms for dialog and participation in the public sphere. As demonstrated by Dutta-Bergman (2005) in his analysis of democracy promotion efforts in Chile, Nicaragua, and the Philippines, the networks of civil societies promoted as spaces of dialog by transnational hegemony become the oppressive structures that limit the opportunities for subaltern participation through their requirements for language, literacy, and procedural skills necessary for so-called dialog. Furthermore, they carry out a specific political economic agenda serving the interests of transnational hegemony under the chador of dialog. In the case of Chile for example, the U.S.-sponsored democracy promotion initiatives worked in collusion with the local elite to destabilize the democratically elected popular government of Salvador Allende in order to open up the country to TNCs and to create pro-U.S. spaces.

The subaltern studies project seeks to “displace the question of power” (p. xvi) from the elitist agenda by drawing attention to the “other.” It envisions chronicling those histories that are not foretold in the hegemonic discourses of the capitalist mainstream, formulating the complex relationship between “subalternity and representation” (Beverley, 2004a, p. 1). As the subaltern studies project seeks to recover subaltern voices, it also is confronted with the impossibility of recovering the subaltern essence. In Spivak’s (1988b) words, if the subaltern could speak, then she would not be subaltern. This tension between the possibilities and impossibilities for subaltern voices is reflected in an article written by Ranajit Guha titled “Chandra’s Death.”<sup>6</sup> Chandra’s story demonstrates the politics of patriarchy in a subaltern context that completely evades the dominant articulations of a hegemonic juridical system; it also demonstrates the further subalternization of the subaltern woman (Chandra) whose voice remains absent from the dominant articulations of both the mainstream public sphere and the subaltern public sphere that runs parallel to the dominant juridical system.

It is this impossibility of subaltern representation that Spivak (1988b) addresses in her landmark piece *Can the Subaltern Speak?* She writes, “between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the third-world woman caught between tradition and modernization” (p. 306). The alternative solidarity network of subaltern women articulated in Guha’s narrativization of Chandra’s story engages with the possibilities of subaltern dialog enacted in forms of resistance that often remain shrouded in secrecy in a domain that is inaccessible to the dominant discursive spaces, and thus marking the impossibilities of dialog.

The specificities of the local interrupt the seamless narratives of the global with gaps, fragments, and contradictions, containing the reach of the universal gaze.

Sommer (1993) suggests that silence here is an ethicoaesthetic strategy that marks the limits of the dialogic space, offering limited access and imparting an awareness of the restrictions that texts of resistance place on readers. Despite this impossibility of recovering the subaltern subjectivity, it is in these mediations that possibilities are constituted for resisting global neocolonial and capitalist structures through the enunciation of local specificities that emerge in the global stage.

### **Power, dialog, and neoliberal economy**

Subaltern studies attends to the erasures in dominant discursive spaces. Who is present and who is absent in the dialogic platforms is tied to questions of power, and the politics constituted in the calls for dialog in mainstream public spheres. The material resources underlying the networks of power as well as the relational and symbolic resources that dictate power configurations also determine who does and does not have the opportunity to participate in dialogic platforms. The location of dialogic spaces at the sites of neoliberalism is constituted by power differentials in material access to communicative resources. The subaltern is “subaltern” precisely because she/he has been erased from the discursive spaces of the mainstream, marked out by the tools that construct the dialogic space. Her absence/presence is dialectically connected with dialog, existing outside the dominant spaces of bourgeois public spheres that constitute dialog, and subalternized by the intellectual processes of appropriation that erase the diverse (see Rabasa, 2001). The location of dialogic spaces within the dominant structures of neoliberal hegemony constitutes dialog as a function of the neoliberal configuration. For instance, the location of UNFPII within the spaces of the United Nations also constrains the dialogic scope of UNFPII within the agendas of the United Nations in neoliberal hegemony.

The silences in dialogic spaces are located in the marginalizing practices of the dominant discourses that serve the power structures of neoliberalism and in the competing interests of these discourses to write universal narratives of the local such that the local can be incorporated into the neoliberal market principles (Mohanty, 2006). Chandra’s narrative is embedded in her erasure from the discursive spaces that become available to us through this absence; similarly, Bhuvaneshwari’s locally specific story is inaccessible to the reader situated amidst neoliberal politics (including her granddaughter working in the heart of the Empire) as the universal demands of this politics must erase the necessities of the specific story (Spivak, 1999). In contemporary public spheres such as the United Nations, the local voices of indigenous communities across the globe are written over within predetermined agendas and procedures of these spheres. Similarly, indigenous communities that own much of the knowledge that is patented by TNCs are largely absent from global spaces of neoliberalism where patents and rights over knowledge are discussed and determined. Not only is this absence predicated upon access to the sites of power but also it plays a key role in perpetuating the economic bases of the power differentials.

Situating the condition of subalternity within the realm of power equips us with an understanding of the situations and contexts in the flow of power that create and

sustain the silencing of subaltern voices. It also offers us opportunities for engaging with subaltern voices by resisting the one-way flow of power in the neoliberal framework and exploring alternative possibilities, both materially and discursively through bottom-up approaches of global organizing. In doing so, subaltern studies turns dialog into a political act, inherently connected with the ideology of the involved actors and with the possibilities of social change. It raises question such as: What are the political and economic agendas of dialog under neoliberal frameworks? How are dialogic outcomes attached to the source of dialogic initiatives? Who are the actors in the neoliberal configuration that raise calls for dialog and toward what goals?

Subaltern interpretations of dialog suggest that the logic of dialog within modern social systems is inherently tied to the interests of the capital and the ways in which this capital operates to create and sustain conditions of subalternity. The location of dialogic platforms within neoliberal spaces frames the agendas and strategies of dialog with the interests of TNCs. For example, the indigenous-mining dialog group set up by the Australian Uranium Association to bridge the gap between Aboriginal Australians and uranium mining industries is constituted within the agendas of the mining industry to usurp indigenous land to build mines (Statham, 2009). Who gets to participate in dialog is dictated by the interests of the system in sustaining itself as an economic enterprise. By turning our attention to the ways in which power shapes the nature, form, content, processes, and outcomes of dialog, we become sensitized to the ways in which dialog continues to sustain the imbalances and inequities within social systems. Along these lines, Dutta-Bergman (2005) articulates that the subaltern is the subaltern precisely because she is located outside the realm of those discursive spaces that constitute the dominant notions of dialog.

In modernist constructions of civil societies as avenues for dialoguing with the subaltern sector, the existence of civil society creates the condition of subalternity as the avenues of communicative exchange, and the communication skills required to participate in civil society, remain inaccessible to larger sectors of social systems. The basic requirements of civil society such as literacy, formal education, nuclear family units, and private property exclude significant sectors of the population from full citizenship and limit their access to communicative platforms. The subaltern, therefore, exists in the interstices of modern civil societies, rendered invisible through the lack of access to the discursive spaces of the mainstream public spheres where issues are debated and policies are formulated. She/he exists because of civil society and because of the absence of discursive spaces that are accessible to him/her and responsive to his/her communicative needs.

Furthermore, the economic basis of civil society is built upon the creation of capital, and the capital must continually create conditions of subalternity in order to sustain itself, finding markets for itself through colonialism (Hegel, 1991). What becomes evident here is the symbiotic relationship between civil society and colonialism as an economic enterprise that sustains it. The existence of civil society is dependent upon the creation and sustenance of markets, which, in turn, suggests the necessity to continually manufacture positions of inferiority that would sustain

the economic functions of such markets in the form of development interventions. Applying this logic to an analysis of U.S. efforts of nation building in the Philippines, Chile, and Nicaragua, Dutta-Bergman (2005) points out that U.S. attempts to create civil societies and public spheres elsewhere in the world underlie U.S. neocolonialist interests and serve the economic interests of transnational hegemony, embodied in the goals and objectives of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

In their analyses, subaltern studies scholars suggest that the condition of subalternity is tied to the inaccess to discursive spaces, and yet, it is through their linkages to the dominant discursive spaces of neoliberalism that the new subaltern is constituted as a subject of exploitation (Shiva, 2005). For instance, the access to indigenous subaltern spaces created by the reach of contemporary TNCs such as Monsanto turns the traditional knowledge systems of forest-dwellers, farmers, and healers into profitable properties of TNCs (Shiva, 2005). Simultaneously, the (in)-access to the dominant spaces of communication in contemporary hegemony is quintessential to the identity of subalternity because the participation of the subaltern threatens the fundamental oppressive structures of transnational hegemony (Dutta, 2008; Tihuwai Smith, 2006). Acknowledging subaltern agency removes the necessity for neoliberal projects framed under the rubric of development that take over collective subaltern resources under the premises of effective and efficient management. For instance, research articles published in academic journals often serve as the exclusive communicative spaces where knowledge is articulated, contested, and propagated, being written over the bodies of the subaltern subject and far removed from the subaltern spaces. With their limited access to the modalities of production within the academy, subaltern groups are typically erased from these sites of knowledge production. It is, however, in the backdrop of these erasures that subalterns enter into dialog with dominant discursive spaces with the goals of transforming these spaces (see, for instance, Tihuwai Smith, 2006).

Dominant articulations in dialogic spaces of neoliberalism are challenged through the politics of the particular that engages in dialogic projects of solidarity for transforming the neoliberal agendas. The universality of dialog gets situated in the backdrop of the specificities of dialogs among heterogeneous subaltern groups that constitute the hegemony of the diverse through emphasis on the collective. Citing the example of the Zapatista movement, Rabasa (2000) notes:

Central to the new politics of the Zapatistas are an autonomy from political parties and a struggle that does not aspire to take over the State. The learning processes involved in the dialogue the Zapatistas have promoted between different sectors of civil society . . . has a deeper modality in the emphasis on consensus and communalism that underlies all the decisions of the EZLN. (p. 202)

The collective as an entry point to dialog in the Zapatista movement in Chiapas not only challenges the power of the state and the transnational hegemony through its articulation of alternative narratives that interrogate the neoliberal logic but also

enters into a specific reading of dialog that brings into play multiple and diverse sectors of civil society with diverse narratives. The EZLN dialogs in Chiapas turned the local into a site that resists the politics of the global through the participation of Indian communities in defining and debating questions of autonomy, demanding respect for traditional cultures, and giving prominence to women's issues.

### **Dialogic spaces: Pure and impure**

There is both an inside and outside of dialog; the subaltern studies project draws close attention to the communicative processes through which these insides and outsides are created, attending to the gaps, fragments, ruptures, hybridities, and impurities that constitute dialogic possibilities with the subaltern, set in the backdrop of a universalizing quest for the subaltern essence (see, for instance, Shome, 1996). The locally specific attends to the hegemonies of diverse, the fragments, the tensions, and the ongoing negotiations in subaltern spaces that resist the intellectual search for the subaltern essence (Spivak, 1999).

The possibilities for multiple fragmented hegemonies emerge in Hammond et al.'s discussion of the dialectical tension between monovocality and mutuality as dialog struggles between the need for a collective voice in the realm of collective action, and simultaneously opens up the space for multiple voices and spaces for multiple contested meanings. In their analysis of dialogical possibilities, subaltern studies scholars explore the ways in which dialogic spaces are interpreted and resisted among subaltern groups as they connect the local specificities of subalternity with the global politics of neoliberalism, demonstrating the intersections between the possibility–impossibility and local–global tensions of discursive spaces (Guha, 1982b, 1983, 1986; Rodriguez, 2001; Spivak, 1988a, 1988b).

A subaltern reading of dialog disrupts the purity of dialogic spaces (see Godalof, 1999). Resistance is enacted through the choice of diverse communicative strategies, forms, and channels, the inclusion of which disrupt the ways in which universalist epistemic structures understand the relationship between communication and dialog, the meaning of dialog, and the conventional constructions of dialog. One such example of a communicative text that enacts the voice of the subaltern is the American Spanish *testimonio* (or testimonial narrative in English), which enters into the center by disrupting the very logic and attached expectations of communication. In discussing *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, Beverley (2004b) describes the *testimonio* as a new form of communication, “a novel of novella-length narrative in book, or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a life or a significant life experience” (p. 31). The *testimonio* serves as a site of social change by presenting the authority of the subaltern voice in its accounting of events and the narrative construction of these events.

Subaltern experiences strategically construct the narratives of testimony with an agenda, rupturing the dialogic expectations of the mainstream that construct the subaltern as the native informant and producing texts of “local history” that are

concerned with elaborating hegemony (Beverley, 2004b). As a representation of those subjects who have traditionally been excluded from authorized representation, the *testimonio* operates as a resistive strategy, rupturing the dominant notion of “what is valued and understood as [culture] by dominant groups” (Beverley, 2004b, p. 19). Beverley adds:

Almost by definition, the voice that speaks in *testimonio* is not, in its act of enunciation, part of what Hegel would have understood as civil society or what Habermas means by public sphere: if it were, it would address us instead in novels, essays, films, TV shows, letters to the editor, op-ed pieces. On the other hand, *testimonio* as an enonce—that is, as something materialized in the form of transcript of text—serves to bring subaltern voice into civil society and public sphere. (p. 19)

As a representation of the subaltern voice, the *testimonio* exists outside the traditional boundaries of civil society and dialog, disrupting the articulations of dialog as pure spaces and offering dialogic hegemonies of the local by rupturing the modernist notions of what dialog is and where it is made possible; simultaneously, by entering into conversations with civil society, the *testimonio* becomes the resistive site of the specific that challenges the hegemony of the universal. These dialogic hegemonies of the local, however, are politically directed at attending to the impurity of dialog and at transforming universal structures through the political co-optation of mainstream platforms of dialog by rendering them impure (Beverley, 2004b; Godalof, 1999). As a communicative form, the *testimonio* challenges our assumptions of both literary texts and ethnographies, rupturing these pure spaces with its boundary blurring impurities.

Expanding the traditional conceptualizations of what constitutes communication takes us into the realm of exploring a variety of communicative acts such as *testimonio*, protest marches, songs, dances, and blockades where subaltern groups articulate their voices through participation in communicative platforms. The folkloric is not simply a site of the specific, but also a catachresis for the global struggle against neoliberalism (Rabasa, 2001). In the Latina American context, during the Nicaraguan Contra War, the Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs of Matagalpa choreographed a dance that depicted the loss of their children in the revolutionary struggle, the search for answers, and the birth of a new conviction to join the movement. In their performance in front of fact-finding delegations, the mothers drew their audience into the narratives of loss and mourning contextualized in the realm of the death of their children in the hands of a U.S.-funded army, often ending with a plea “please go tell your President Reagan . . .” (p. 143).

Noting the resistive capacity of the folkloric that connects the local with the global, Rabasa notes:

firecrackers are forms of communication (calls to action, signals of alert), and brass bands are forms of social reproduction (every *barrio* of Topztlan has its



particular kind of musical ensemble). There is more than an entertainment value when, for instance, the contingent from the Barrio de la Santisma appears at the evening change of guard at the Presidencia Municipal with a drum and a chirimia (a flageolet) that accompanies the chanting of slogans. Music functions as an intensifier of solidarity and a definer of a particular barrio identity. (p. 205)

Similarly, the South Asian subaltern studies project has explored the role of rumors and gossip (*jonorob*) in enacting resistance and in serving as spaces for speaking back to the dominant public spheres. In the example of Chandra's death, it was the locally situated informal solidarity network of women that mobilized secretly beneath the dominant discursive spaces of society (*samaj*) and the colonial juridical system to pool together resources for Chandra's abortion, thus resisting the dominant public sphere through its very invisibility. These subaltern forms of dialog teach us that our theoretical journeys with concepts of communication are always fragmented, impure, and incomplete, threatened by the disruptions of subaltern silences.

Even as subaltern scholars explore alternative spaces that open up possibilities for listening to mediated narratives, they are faced with the impossibility of dialoguing with subaltern sectors as it is strategically critical for the subaltern sectors to keep hidden from bourgeoisie public spheres the strategies, processes, and tools that are mobilized for subaltern resistance. It is this strategic silence that Menchu (1984) refers to in the conclusion of her testimony: "I'm still keeping secret what I think no-one should know. Not even anthropologists or intellectuals, no matter how many books they have, can find out all our secrets" (p. 247). The silences and fragments in subalternity interrogate the quest for essence in the mainstream structures of dialog, demonstrating that such an essence is continually at risk, continually threatened by the multiple intersections of power, control, and resistance in the material and discursive spaces of neoliberalism. The notion that there is a possibility for pure dialog is interrupted by the terrains of subalternity, raising questions about the conceptual framework of authentic and uninterrupted mediations that underlie the essential configurations of dialog theory.

A subaltern treatment problematizes the ontological and epistemological configurations of dominant knowledge structures, forever questioning the ideas of authenticity and truth as constituted through dialog. The binaries that constitute the terrains of these structures are fractured by the complexities of race, class, gender, and nation that intersect with these terrains, raising questions about the purity of the ontological frameworks on which knowledge is constructed, permanently shaking up the very bases and tools of these knowledge structures, and continually questioning the discursive rules of these structures that must exclude in order to make ontological claims (Godalof, 1999; Hegde, 1998). Dialoguing with the subaltern sectors of the globe then offers these fragmentations and impurities as entry points into epistemic structures, setting up as problematic the very bases of these structures of knowledge. Godalof takes up the insights brought into the realm of feminist theory from the postcolonial terrains of subalternity, pointing out: "How listening to voices from

elsewhere might complicate our views of ourselves” (p. 6). She notes, “if what we are looking for is an ‘authentic voice’ from elsewhere, then mediation is a problem. But if we want to resist recourse to a logic of authenticity which concepts like postcoloniality, or ‘diaspora space’ have problematised, and if we want to ask what the ‘elsewhere’ can tell us about ‘in here,’ then it is precisely the mediated voices that we should be listening to: the voices which share this impure space of feminist theory with us.” For Godalof, dialog with the subaltern is an entry point for rearticulation of feminist theory, for considering issues of identity and the ways in which this identity is constituted in mainstream feminist scholarship. It is through dialog at the peripheries that the subaltern studies project informs feminist theory, offering a reflexive tool and a space for listening.

For the communication scholar who seeks to create dialogic spaces for listening to subaltern voices, Spivak argues that these voices that we set out to listen to are always representations, not just of the subaltern voices but also of us as scholars, thus constituting reflexivity as a tool that turns the lens on the self through engagement with subaltern contexts. She suggests that “a deconstructive awareness would insistently be aware that the masterwords are catachreses . . . that there are no literal referents, there are no ‘true’ examples of the ‘true worker’, the ‘true woman’, the ‘true proletarian’ who would stand for the ideals in terms of which you’ve mobilized.”

Along similar lines, Beverley (2004b) argues that “a politics of the subaltern can happen only in a process of continual displacement marked by conjectural but precarious possibilities of collaboration between intellectuals, such as Spivak herself, working in the postcolonial or metropolitan academy and the subaltern” (p. 52). Dialog is made possible through this displacement of the subaltern identity, always existing in the context-bound exchanges and the transitive moments of dialog, shifting between the possibilities and impossibilities between the terrains of the local and the global. In this sense, the subaltern as a subject is not totalizable into a homogenous category, but exists in its hegemony of the diverse that challenges the universal through its local enunciations.

Reflexive engagement with subalternity also disrupts the dominant articulations of what we typically count as knowledge, and the tools that we privilege in our understandings of what it means to know. Referring to the *testimonio* once again as a subaltern text that challenges the privilege associated with the dominant constructions of knowledge, Beverley (2004b, p. 7) writes:

I would suggest, then, that what *testimonio* requires of the academy is not that we “know” it adequately, but something like a critique of academic knowledge as such . . . it would allow us to recognize what academic knowledge is in fact: not *the* truth, but a *form of* truth, among many others, that has fed processes of emancipation and enlightenment, but that is also both engendered and deformed by a tradition of service to the ruling classes and to institutional power.

As dialog, the testimonio challenges academic knowledge by opening up alternative possibilities that not only question the content of knowledge but also the epistemic processes through which we come to know. Referring to this inherent failure of the epistemological and ontological foundations of knowledge to engage with subalternity, Guha (1987, p. 138) writes “the ordinary apparatus of historiography has little help to offer us here. Designed for big events and institutions, it is most at ease when made to operate on those phenomena which visibly stick out of the debris of the past. As a result, historical scholarship has developed, through recursive practice, a tradition that tends to ignore the small drama and the fine detail of social existence, usually at its lower depths.”

Engaging current theorizations of dialog with the subaltern studies project highlights the “inside” and “outside” of dialog, with the outside offering discursive entry points for interrogating the insides of the dominant epistemic structures. In the backdrop of neoliberalism, knowledge from elsewhere offers possibilities for reimagining alternative economic rationalities, built upon alternative criteria and alternative objectives. Neoliberal theories of development and modernization get turned on their head with the dialogic engagement with theories from elsewhere that privilege local autonomy, balance, harmony, and sustainability. In its examination of processes of erasure in mainstream narratives of knowledge, the subaltern studies project draws attention to the dialogic possibilities of engaging with the “other” as constituted in dominant epistemological structures, brought about through the turning of the lens on the self. It is this self then, with its subjectivity and the privileges, that becomes the entry point for dialog, at once interrogating the privileges that mark its enunciative position and simultaneously coming to terms with the loss that is written into such as subjective position (Spivak, 1999). John (1996) elucidates this reflexivity of a privileged and dislocated self as she constructs the narrative of an Indian feminist located in the spaces of the West, negotiating the contours of power in the Western academy amidst the complexities of class, race, nation, immigration, and identities of the collective:

Even in a restricted context or in cases where a theory is being applied on its home ground, so to speak, we would be better off being more aware of the biases motivating its use and the institutions that are thereby promoted than to rest content with business as usual. Moreover, instead of getting locked into unproductive debates such as whether or not the existence of the unconscious is universal or whether feminism is indelibly Western and little else, why not think of these bodies of theory as compositely structured—made up of a network of assumptions, disciplinary affiliations, historical sedimentations, and global connections that have never been fixed or uniform but that evolve in an uneven power-laden flux? (p. 38)

Opening up the discursive spaces of theory through such dialogic readings to the continually displaced, fractured, and heterogeneous nature of theory, with its tensions and ambivalences, creates possibilities for continued negotiations that attend to both

the partiality and compositeness of theory. Such ambivalence forever shifts the enunciative spaces of knowledge by turning the eye toward the subaltern, by seeking to engage in dialog with the subaltern and by simultaneously noting the impossibility of this engagement as predicated by the rules of the theory.

## Conclusion

The subaltern studies project offers an entry point for resisting neoliberal politics by creating spaces of dialog that exist in resistance to the bourgeoisie public spheres of neoliberalism. On one hand, dialog in subaltern studies enters into the possibilities of engaging the global through the articulations of the hegemonies of the diverse at local sites; on the other hand, these hegemonies of diverse are continuously written over by the universalizing practices of the bourgeoisie. As possibilities of transformative politics are constituted through enunciations and silences in dialogic spaces, these possibilities are continuously co-opted by contemporary neoliberal politics that seeks to map out the subaltern as a profitable resource.

It is in the midst of these tensions between the local and the global that the local continually gets co-opted under a universal framework, and simultaneously offers entry points for transformative politics by disrupting the dominant West-centric epistemologies, and the economic attachments to these epistemologies. The concept of continually displaced subaltern identities situates the project of dialog within an impure transformative political space. The interrogation of the specific agendas served by the academic/scholar/researcher demarcates the academic exercise as a political process that coparticipates in the erasure of subaltern groups and continually seeks out opportunities for dialogs with subaltern groups based on reflexivity and a willingness to disrupt the dominant epistemological configurations of neoliberalism. Ultimately, it is with a plea of respect, acknowledgment of the autonomy of subaltern communities, and sincerity of commitment to dialog with the subaltern sectors that the subaltern studies project issues a call for grassroots politics of social change that seek to bring about transformations in the unequal structures of contemporary neoliberal politics.

## Notes

- 1 Neoliberalism is an economic and political concept that argues that global economies function the best when they operate as free markets, that is, when state intervention is minimal and conditions are created for the operation of the free market globally (Harvey, 2005). Therefore, neoliberal policies operate through entities such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to reduce trade barriers and government subsidies such that free markets could operate globally. At the heart of neoliberalism is the deployment of policies such as privatization and the minimization of trade barriers in order to facilitate the optimal environment for TNCs to survive. Neoliberalism operates through the interventions of the IFIs in setting up structural adjustment programs promoting privatization and liberalization in exchange for loans in third-world economies. Dialog

- and participation are presented as tools in these neoliberal platforms to gain local buy-in and participation in the neoliberal economy. For example, the Australian Uranium Association set up an indigenous-mining dialog group to bridge the gap between Aboriginal Australians and uranium mining industries, such that mines could be built on indigenous land (see Statham, 2009). The dialog group served as a tool for disseminating biased viewpoints catering to the agendas of the mining industry and for co-opting subaltern participation through bribes, etc.
- 2 The term subaltern refers to the margin of the margins, to the very bottom of society that remains hidden from discursive articulations of that society. This nature of being hidden is manifest in the condition of being cut off from the mainstream platforms of civil society. Therefore, although marginalization is intrinsic to subalternity, not all forms of marginalization constitute subalternity.
  - 3 The global South refers to the geographically, economically, and politically disadvantaged nation-states in Latin America, Africa, and Asia that are often referred to as underdeveloped under the logic of development. The South is marked by material and economic inequalities, high infant mortality rates, and low life expectancy as compared with the nations in the North, referring to the United States, Canada, and EU nations.
  - 4 As Spivak (2000) notes, the conceptualization of the center in subaltern studies theory refers to the Eurocentric public sphere, civil society, and spaces of knowledge production that lie at the heart of the neoliberal project. As compared with the center in the colonial project, the center in the neoliberal framework is represented by the Bretton Woods agencies and the WTO that determine global economic policies through their structural adjustment programs. Although traditionally the subaltern was subaltern precisely because of her inaccess to the center and to the lines of upward and outward mobility that would constitute her as a colonial subject, the “new subaltern” is now connected to the center under the neoliberal framework as the source of trade related intellectual property and market for goods and services of TNCs. Although geographically dispersed and interconnected, the center continues to be a key theoretical marker in the subaltern studies project as a site that writes over the body of the subaltern subject through its production of knowledge, deployment of development programs, and framing of local policies through structural adjustment programs.
  - 5 This article focuses on the Marxist foundations of subaltern studies, and even as it articulates the fragmented nature of subaltern narratives, the emphasis is on engaging with a politics of structural transformation in the backdrop of the inequalities that are perpetuated by neoliberalism. Therefore, as noted by a strand of scholars such as Dirlik (2005), we emphasize the differentials between the local and the global, the universal and the specific, the resource rich and the resource poor. Our theorization of the center and the periphery is based upon a critical engagement with the neoliberal project that sees neoliberal hegemony as a reflection of the consolidation of power in the hands of transnational capitalism that continues to create and perpetuate exploitative economic policies through structural adjustment programs, contributing to the increasing inequalities across the globe.
  - 6 Guha’s reconstructed narrative of Chandra’s death explored the general connections between caste, patriarchy, social class, and colonial rule narrated in a local context through the fine detail of a small drama that embodied a structurally mapped social existence of marginality. From the court documents that were perhaps maintained by a local clerk, Guha suggests that Chandra Chashani was a widowed bagdi who became

pregnant in an affair with her husband's sister's husband and died during an attempt to abort the fetus by being given herbal remedies (*goributi*). The document presents the depositions (*ekrars*) of the parties immediately involved in Chandra's death, her sister Brindra who administered the medicine, her mother Chandra, and Kali Bagdi, who had prescribed the medicine. Although absent from the official depositions, the voice that sets off the chain of events that lead to Chandra's death is the voice of Magaram Chasha presented in the deposition of Bhagaboti Chashin, Chandra's mother, "I have been involved for the last four months, in an illicit love affair with your daughter Chandra Chashani, as a result of which she has conceived. Bring her to your own house and arrange for some medicine to be administered to her. Or else, I shall put her into bhek (Bhek refers to the places in nineteenth century Bengal where women who had fallen out of the social norms were expelled from the caste and converted to the *Boishnob* faith. Mostly women in rural Bengal outcasted from the village community were sent to bhek, which meant that they typically ended up in *akhras*. Akhras often were shelters for women who were castigated by Bengali society)" (Guha, 1987, p. 136).

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## 边缘环境的对话理论：一个草根研究方法

### 【摘要：】

本文通过提出代表“他人”的问题以及通过开始对话询问新自由主义话语中存在的特权，探讨了对草根阶层研究的潜力，以打开以对话为导向的传播理论研究的新局面。通过研究对话和草根阶层的交集，本文旨在理解草根阶层如何进入传播研究知识生产主要领域的对话。通过提醒研究者学术知识所蕴藏的权力和特权，本文呼吁研究者和底层社会之间进行团结自反。如此，草根研究可成为在新自由主义的政治背景下探讨对话的解放潜力的切入点。

## La théorie du dialogue dans des contextes marginalisés : une approche des études de la subalternité

Cet article explore le potentiel des études de la subalternité à ouvrir de nouvelles perspectives de recherche pour les théories de la communication centrées sur le dialogue. En effet, ce domaine de recherche soulève les questions de représentation de l'« autre » et suggère des ouvertures discursives pour mettre en question le privilège incarné dans le discours néolibéral. En explorant les intersections du dialogue et de la subalternité, cet article cherche à comprendre les manières par lesquelles la subalternité entre en dialogue avec les principaux sites de production du savoir en sciences de la communication. En rendant le chercheur ou la chercheuse sensible à la position de pouvoir et au privilège incarnés dans le savoir universitaire, le projet demande un voyage réflexif de solidarité entre le chercheur (ou la chercheuse) et la collectivité subalterne. Ce faisant, les études de la subalternité deviennent un point d'entrée pour explorer le potentiel d'émancipation par le dialogue dans un contexte de politique néolibérale.

## **Dialogtheorie in Grenzfällen: Ein Ansatz der Subaltern-Studien**

**Dieser Aufsatz untersucht das wissenschaftliche Potential der Subaltern-Studien hinsichtlich neuer Blicke auf die Forschung in der dialogorientierten Kommunikationstheorie. Verfolgt wird dieses Ziel, indem die Repräsentation der „anderen“ hinterfragt wird und die diskursiven Öffnungen für die Befragung von Privilegierten verkörpert im neoliberalen Diskurs vorgeschlagen wird. Durch die Untersuchung der Schnittstellen von Dialog und Subalternität versucht dieser Artikel die Wege nachzuzeichnen, wie Subalternität in den Dialog mit den dominanten Seiten der Wissensproduktion in der Kommunikationswissenschaft eintritt. Durch die Sensibilisierung der Forscher bezüglich der Machtposition und Privilegien, die mit akademischem Wissen einhergehen, spricht sich das Projekt für einen reflexiven Weg der Solidarität zwischen Forscher und der subalternen Gemeinschaft aus. So betrachtet, werden die Subaltern-Studien zu einem Ansatzpunkt, das emanzipatorische Potential des Dialogs vor dem Hintergrund neoliberaler Politik zu erforschen.**

Dialogue Theory in Marginalized Settings:  
A Subaltern Studies Approach

소외된 상황에서의 대화이론:  
서벌턴연구접근

요약

본 연구는, 질서를 대표하는 네번째 질문을 통하여 그리고 신자유주의 담론에서 나타난 특권을 조사하기 위한 추론적 서두를 제안함으로써, 대화적으로 지향적 커뮤니케이션 이론에서 연구의 새로운 지평을 열기위해 서벌턴연구의 잠재성을 연구하였다. 대화와 하위성의 교차를 연구하는것에 의해, 본 논문은 하위성이 대화로 들어가는 방법을 이해하려고 추구하였다. 학문적 지식내에서 구현된 파워와 특권의 포지션에 대하여 연구자들을 자극함으로써, 본 연구는 연구자와 하위커뮤니티사이의 연대와 반영적인측면을 요구하였다. 이러한 과정을 통해, 서벌턴 연구는 신자유주의적 정치의 배경에서 대화의 해방의 잠재성을 연구하는 출발점이 되었다.

## La Teoría del Diálogo en los Entornos Marginalizados:

### Una Aproximación a los Estudios Subalternos

#### Resumen

Este ensayo explora el potencial de la erudición de los Estudios Subalternos para abrir nuevos panoramas de investigación de la teoría de la comunicación orientada hacia el diálogo para fomentar preguntas de representación del “otro” y sugerir aperturas discursivas para interrogar el privilegio personificado por el discurso neoliberal. Explorando las intersecciones del diálogo y lo subalterno, este ensayo busca entender las formas en que lo subalterno entra en el diálogo con los sitios dominantes de producción de conocimiento de los estudios de comunicación. Al sensibilizar al investigador con la posición de poder y el privilegio personificado por el conocimiento académico, el proyecto convoca a un viaje reflexivo de solidaridad entre el investigador y la comunidad subalterna. Al hacer esto, los estudios subalternos se convierten en un punto de entrada para explorar el potencial emancipante del diálogo en el telón de fondo de la política neoliberal.