

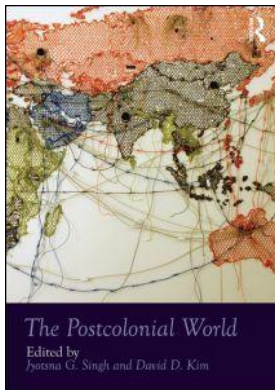
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The Postcolonial World

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Unlocking History

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PART VIII

POSTCOLONIALISM VERSUS
NEOLIBERALISM



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CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

UNLOCKING HISTORY
Postcolonial ethics and the
critique of neoliberalism

Filippo Menozzi

... we have to think again about the sources of that which is not corporate; of those practices, experiences, meanings, values which are not part of the effective dominant culture. We can express this in two ways. There is clearly something that we can call alternative to the effective dominant culture, and there is something else that we can call oppositional, in a true sense.

(Williams 40)

During the past thirty years, postcolonial studies have been attacked for being the mystification of a new phase of capitalist development.¹ In this essay, I aim to suggest that the postcolonial debate should not be reduced to being a fetish, the concealment of a new phase of economic exploitation. Discourses about the postcolonial, indeed, are deeply connected with the living traditions of thinking and struggling for a world free from injustice and oppression. Most importantly, *there are* perspectives within postcolonial theory that emphasize the importance of class analysis and the concrete problematic of imperialism and capital accumulation on a world scale. Whereas the word “postcolonial” does not offer a substitute or a supplement to real struggles against the capitalist world system, this controversial concept can evoke a sense of historicity able to challenge the – deterministic and presentist – idea that neoliberal globalization is the only possible world. This essay will first explore some interventions in the field of postcolonial studies that clearly identify the problem of world economic exploitation and argue for a reconnection between postcolonialism and Marxism. Then, my introduction will raise the question of how postcolonial discourse can contribute to really-existing struggles against the current stage of capital accumulation, neoliberalism. The main part of my reflections will be devoted to a reading of Gayatri Spivak’s recent work on an aesthetic education, especially her engagement with Marx and the need for highlighting the ethical impulse of socialism. The essay will conclude by suggesting a link between Spivak’s remarks on ethics and the possibility of constructing a different history. The idea of the postcolonial, indeed, can identify the dialectics of concrete political opposition and the prospect of constructing alternatives to all that is the case.

Following Crystal Bartolovich's crucial advocacy of "a strong and visible *Marxist* postcolonial studies" (Bartolovich 1), the postcolonial question should not prevent, but rather encourage an engagement with what Samir Amin described, in *Imperialism and Unequal Development*, as "world vision of the class struggle, which implies unequal exchange" (106). The task, as Neil Lazarus has compellingly demonstrated, is to "reconstruct" a sense of the postcolonial that may help the struggle against capitalism instead of simply adapting to the status quo (Lazarus, *Postcolonial Unconscious*, 1). The prevalent academic, nominalist attacks on the word "postcolonial" do not seem to be a very productive contribution to changing the world. If anything, this controversial term should be rescued from being a mere ideological sanction of the world as it is. Instead of descriptive category or textual mystification, the postcolonial should become a tool useful to already existing struggles and resistances against accumulation by dispossession.

For this reason, a first understanding of the term should imply a critique of the present, in the form of historical consciousness able to challenge the idea that neo-liberal doctrines are the only viable way of dealing with the crisis of capitalism. Marxist trends in postcolonial discourse are informed by the awareness that history is something that is actively made and changed by the people, rather than already pre-determined by hegemonic structures of domination. Important authors such as Neil Lazarus, Frederick Cooper, and Ann Laura Stoler have advocated, from different viewpoints, such historical materialist understanding the postcolonial. While Cooper's crucial essay "Postcolonial Studies and the Study of History" provides an important call to address the historical specificities of colonialism, Ann Laura Stoler concludes an engaging essay on "imperial debris" with a plea for "an effective history of the present," one able "to refocus our historical lens on distinctions between what is residual and tenacious, what is dominant but hard to see, and not least what is emergent in today's imperial formations" (Stoler 211). In *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, Neil Lazarus writes that before the academic outbreak of "postcolonial theory" in the 1990s, the term was used by historians of imperialism as a simple historiographical category. Thus, during the 1970s authors like Hamza Alavi and John Saul made use of the term to describe the moment following decolonization. Lazarus writes that "postcolonial" was a "periodizing term" endowed with historical and not ideological value (Lazarus 3). The postcolonial indicated historical determination, while politically charged terms were already available: "capitalism and socialism; imperialism and anti-imperialism; first-world and third-world; self-determination and neo-colonialism; center and periphery; modernization, development, dependency" (3).

A simple historical understanding of the postcolonial, however, does not imply any devaluation or dismissal of this concept. On the contrary, Lazarus's reflections show that the earlier meaning of the word, indicating the period following decolonization, is something contemporary critics should return to and retrieve. Indeed, only a historical materialist sense of the term can prevent any mention of "postcolonialism" from becoming a presentist ideology, a replacement of real historical understanding and social engagement against capitalism and imperialism. In a way, the postcolonial should avoid becoming "postcolonialism." In his introduction, Lazarus develops his argument that the emergence of postcolonial studies coincided with main historical adjustments. The end of decolonization struggles for national independence entailed

a downturn of the “insurgent national liberation movements and revolutionary socialist ideologies in the early 1970s” (5).

The return to the 1970s which should be taken as point of departure is but a beginning for recovering the past in order to construct a different future. Post-colonial discourse should contrast the “monumentalization” of the anticolonial past and become useful to the struggles against the hegemony of neoliberal economics. In an essay titled “Predicting the Past,” Deepika Bahri suggests a compelling meditation on this issue. Taking up some crucial questions posed by Arif Dirlik in his essay, “The Past as Legacy and Project,” Bahri writes that the “truly resistive postcolonial quest” must be for a different way of experiencing time, in order to “decipher both the script of domination . . . as well as the trace of a utopia that is yet to be” (Bahri 503).

The kind of historical sense defined by postcolonial discourse should oppose the idea that there are no alternatives to the dominant system. Opposition to neoliberal capitalism needs to be complemented by a sense of the possibility of constructing alternatives to it. Following Raymond Williams’s use of the terms “alternative” and “oppositional” in his important essay “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory,” it might be suggested that the postcolonial situation is caught between being part of an oppositional stance towards the present, and the possibility of retrieving, inventing, and constructing practices, experiences, meanings, and values subverting the dominant culture of capitalism. Without opposition, alternatives risk being incorporated and domesticated by the dominant system. Still, opposition in itself is unable to point to a qualitatively different way of living, a future society free from the violence of accumulation and exploitation.

The main point of my reflections can be summarized by stating that there is a dialectics of alternative and opposition to which postcolonial intellectuals should attend to. Critique of the neoliberal order – oppositional in a true sense – should be accompanied by the project of making an alternative to capitalism. In particular, I aim to explore the relationship between a Marxist, historical materialist postcolonial discourse and the neoliberal phase of capitalism that defines the present state of the world economy. David Harvey defines neoliberalism as “theory of political economic practices” that identifies the attainment of well-being in “the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade” (Harvey 22). Neoliberal ideology emerged as part and parcel of a broader, long-term historical process marked by what Harvey calls “accumulation by dispossession,” that is, the global history of capitalism. This is a process that involves a redistribution of wealth “either from the mass of the population toward the upper classes or from vulnerable to richer countries” (35). Harvey explains the process as follows:

- (1) the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations . . .
- (2) conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusively private property rights;
- (3) suppression of rights to the commons;
- (4) commodification of labor power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption;
- (5) colonial, neocolonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets

(including natural resources); (6) monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land; (7) the slave trade . . . the national debt, and, most devastating of all, the use of the credit system as radical means of primitive accumulation.

(35–36)

Within the current phase of capital accumulation, neoliberal doctrines have been naturalized as the only possible way of overcoming economic crises and advancing human well-being, in truth re-establishing class domination and the continued concentration of wealth in the hands of oligopolies through accumulation by dispossession. Can postcolonial theory help change this global situation, instead of merely mirroring or mystifying it? Can discourses on the postcolonial participate in the movements that are already struggling against neoliberalism, from protests against privatization of health and education systems in Europe to the Occupy movement and the strikes of workers and students in places such as South Africa, Chile, and Hong Kong?

A postcolonial historical consciousness involves a return to the 1970s, when capitalism entered its neoliberal stage. Harvey notes that neoliberal policies were implemented as a way of restoring class power in response to the crisis of capitalism in the early 1970s, when a socialist alternative seemed still possible through “the conjoining of labor and urban social movements throughout much of the advanced capitalist world” (Harvey 27). Indeed, in the early 1970s capital accumulation entered a downturn that reached its climax with the crisis of 2007–8. The collapse of the Bretton Woods system, the abandonment of the dollar’s convertibility into gold, and the *coup d’état* ousting socialist Allende and imposing the dictatorship of Pinochet in Chile signed the beginnings of neoliberalism as the new appearance of capital accumulation.

In *Ending the Crisis of Capitalism or Ending Capitalism?*, Samir Amin also describes neoliberalism as a strategy enacted to overcome the crisis of capitalism started in the 1970s. Amin describes it as follows:

[P]rivatization and liberalization aimed at opening up new frontiers for the expansion of capital; the globalised opening that would enable delocalization; the imposition of structural adjustment programmes on the countries of the South; and the liberalization of the rates of interest and currency exchange.

(Amin 23)

Neoliberalism can hence be understood as a new form of “management of the world” characterized by oligopoly capitalism and a new imperialism of Europe, the United States, and Japan.² Far from being the realization of “freedom” on a global marketplace, the neoliberal phase of capitalism is marked by widespread war and violence, concentration of wealth, dispossession and a systematic destruction of what should be common and public through strategies of appropriation and privatization. Between opposition and alternative, postcolonial intellectuals should take up Amin’s question, concerning actually existing struggles against imperial rule and neoliberal policies:

[W]ill these struggles manage to converge in order to pave the long way – or ways – towards the transition to world socialism? Or will these struggles remain

separate from one another, or will they even clash with each other and therefore become ineffective, leaving the initiative with the capital of the oligopolies?

(Amin, *Ending the Crisis*, 3)

Postcolonial reflections could be a way of reconnecting past and future, going back to the past in order to rediscover unrealized potentialities of human liberation. In what follows, I will explore how an influential postcolonial critic, Spivak, has engaged with these issues in her recent book *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*. Because of her emphasis on deconstruction, singularity, and the works of Derrida and de Man, Spivak is usually put together with academics whose work was appropriated, as Benita Parry points out, “to license the privileging of ‘discourse’ as the model of social practice, and consequently to promote an incuriosity about enabling socio-economic and political institutions” (Parry 69).

Instead of adding one more critique against Spivak or the ideologies of postcolonialism, I will try to show how Spivak can offer really productive insights on how to think about the dialectics of alternative and opposition in an age of neoliberal globalization. The formation of a materialist postcolonial historical consciousness requires that the struggles left in abeyance at the beginning of the 1970s are neither mourned as a thing of the past nor simply recuperated in a somehow melancholic, nostalgic way. Anticolonial struggles need to be reactivated, inscribed in a living tradition of resistance against neoliberal globalization. The postcolonial can work as a connective tissue articulating twenty-first century struggles against neoliberal capitalism to twentieth-century ideals of a viable socialist alternative to the imperialist world system.

Indeed, a main problem concerning contemporary struggles is the finding of a shared language and the possibility of creating an internationalist collective subject able to overthrow, not only authoritarian regimes or impositions against democracy and freedom, but also the global system of capitalist exploitation. The idea of the postcolonial is crucial because it identifies a historical and theoretical articulation that can reconnect past struggles against capitalism to contemporary movements of resistance. Thus, academic discourse needs ways to relink to ongoing struggles such as, for instance, the Chilean student protests against privatizing education, the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil, the Maoist insurgency in India, the Anti-Free Trade Strike in Colombia, miners’ strikes in South Africa, the Indignados and Zapatista Movements in Mexico, alongside global movements such as Occupy. Nothing guarantees that the unrest of the twenty-first century will lead to a real, long-term transformation, unless “the struggles of the peoples in the South and in the North succeed in building their convergences into a universal and pluralistic socialist perspective (respecting diversity in the invention of the future)” (Amin, *Ending the Crisis*, 189). For this reason, these convergences can be forged through the idea of struggling against a unifying system of exploitation, capitalism, and the corollary of a world-scale class struggle, where the classes in conflict are constantly being reshaped and redefined. As Giovanni Arrighi, Terence Hopkins, and Immanuel Wallerstein write, this is a “struggle over the development and organization of productive forces; hence over the directional control of means of production and means of livelihood; hence over the social relations factually effecting that control” (67). Class struggle is also a “historical process . . . a process that continually forms and reforms the relational

classes it joins in conflict” (67). Whereas during the twentieth century movements inspired by socialist ideals and national liberation have achieved various degrees of success, the struggle now needs to continue, as Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein note, on a “transformed historical ground” (41) signed by the centralization of capital, the international division of labor, and privatizing policies ruled by the needs of the financial economy. Yet, the transformations of the twenty-first century should not overshadow the profound continuities that join different forms of rebellion in a common history of globalized class struggle.

The introduction of Spivak’s *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012) offers much food for thought to all who have been following Spivak’s work for some years. In one of the most interesting passages of her introduction, Spivak goes back to the 1970s. She writes:

It is time to recode and reterritorialize a message from the 1970s, a time when globalization in its contemporary form was starting to get moving. The Euro-U.S. subject must court schizophrenia as a figure . . . we must plumb the forgotten and mandatorily ignored bi-polarity of the social productivity and social destructiveness of capital and capitalism by affecting the world’s subalterns, in places where s/he speaks, unheard, by way of deep language learning, qualitative social sciences, philosophizing into unconditional ethics.

(Spivak 27)

Spivak’s reference to the 1970s, in this passage, is not only the contemporary form of capitalism, that is neoliberal globalization, but also the time when Gregory Bateson’s *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* redefined the concept of “double bind” at the core of schizophrenia. Spivak adopts Bateson’s perspective in order to “reterritorialize” his message from the 1970s – his theory of the double bind. To put it simply, the double bind is the reception of two contradictory statements that cannot be solved through meta-communication. This situation can lead to schizophrenia or, in Spivak’s reflections, to a new understanding of the role of the intellectual in a neoliberal economic system. In the passage reported above from her introduction, Spivak makes reference to an important contradiction or “bi-polarity” that the intellectual should learn, not to simply “solve” but rather to inhabit productively. The double bind in Spivak’s text is the contradiction between the “social productivity” and the “social destructiveness” of capitalism. The terms adopted by Spivak need to be further qualified.

The reader familiar with the words “recode,” “reterritorialization,” and “schizophrenia” in a philosophical setting is immediately surprised by the absence of extended references to Deleuze and Guattari, two authors who employed these concepts extensively in their works and with whom Spivak engaged in her milestone work *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999). The political and philosophical projects of Deleuze/Guattari and Spivak are substantially different. However, it is really surprising not to find any mention of Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of Bateson, especially of Bateson’s theory of the double bind, as they proposed it in their *Anti-Oedipus*. The point made by Deleuze and Guattari, indeed, is that the “double impasse” or double bind is not productive of schizophrenia (psychosis). The double bind is the result of superimposing the grid of psychiatric or psychoanalytic categories, especially the organizing principle of the Oedipus complex, on schizophrenic patients.³ According

to Deleuze and Guattari the double bind occurs when schizophrenia is submitted to the theory of Oedipus as organizing principle. The double bind derives from the submission of schizophrenia to the forced alternative of having either to become “normal,” that is, resolve the Oedipus complex, or having to become “neurotic,” that is, repress the drives of the id. The crucial aspect of the double bind, hence, is not so much the problem of receiving two contradictory messages, but of being faced with a contradiction that reproduces a system of power and authority from which one cannot escape: in the case of Deleuze and Guattari, this is the power of the Oedipus complex reproduced by the psychoanalyst.

Spivak seems to tackle the crucial problem that Deleuze and Guattari pointed out in relation to the double bind: what is the political and social implication of the double bind? Can the double bind have any role in transforming society, dismantling the status quo? Or, rather, does the double bind simply reproduce a social order by excluding alternatives and immobilizing social action? The sort of social transformation aimed at by Deleuze and Guattari is not the same that is envisaged by Spivak: the former point at the unconscious as the site of social subversion, whereas the latter is interested in the concrete existence of the dispossessed in a world system defined by the international division of labor. Notwithstanding her identification of double bind and schizophrenia (unlike Deleuze and Guattari), Spivak emphasizes the most problematic aspect of the double bind. The issue at stake between Spivak’s and Deleuze/Guattari’s positions is whether the contradiction faced in a situation of powerlessness can become a tool for social and political transformation. The contradiction experienced by Spivak, however, has not to do with the Oedipus complex, but with the construction of a society alternative to neoliberal capitalism, that is, the possibility of socialism today.

In the passage from Spivak’s *Aesthetic Education* mentioned at the beginning of the second part of my essay, the double bind or “bi-polarity” is the simultaneous “productivity” and “destructiveness” of capitalism. As Marx pointed out in the first volume of *Capital*, the capitalist mode of production is characterized by a fundamental aspect: the confrontation between, on the one hand, the capitalists – “owners of money and commodities” – and, on the other hand, the proletariat, “men possessing nothing but their own labor-power” (Marx 273). The concept of “labor-power” is a central feature of capitalism. In Marx’s words, capitalism “arises only when the owner of the means of production and subsistence finds the free worker available, on the market, as the seller of his own labor-power” (274). Capitalism depends on the alienation of the worker’s productive abilities through a process that transforms these abilities into a commodity that the worker can “freely” sell to the capitalist, in order to be exploited by the latter. The capitalist “consumes” the workers’ labor-power in order to produce wealth. However, this wealth is not entirely given back to the workers. The working class is hence deprived of a part of the wealth it constantly produces. The remaining part of wealth produced by the workers is appropriated by the capitalists who aim to realize it by expanding the production and making more profit. Marx poignantly wrote, “the worker himself constantly produces objective wealth, in the form of capital, an alien power that dominates and exploits him” (716). This process of exploitation is based upon an abstraction: the commodification of labor-power, which becomes a commodity that can be consumed by the capitalist, and which is then at the basis of a process of accumulation of wealth. Capitalism reproduces social relations through the commodification of labor.

In her reading of Marx, Spivak emphasizes that this process of abstraction and production of wealth is the precondition of capitalist exploitation, but, paradoxically, may be the precondition of socialism as well. In “What Is Left of Theory?” – an essay reprinted in *Aesthetic Education* – Spivak provides a reading of Marx that plays a fundamental role in her conception of an aesthetic education. Spivak writes, “when labor is abstracted into labor-power, it is used for capital accumulation by the capitalist; only if it is still abstracted into labor-power can it be thus used by associated workers, for socialism” (Spivak 193). Capital has a tendency to unify people, to create social relations through the mechanisms of production. The double bind that Spivak addresses concerns the possibility of creating social justice by abusing the abstraction of capital. Instead of adopting the productiveness of the capitalist mode of production to reproduce capitalism as a social and economic system, there might be the possibility of dismantling capitalism by redistributing the wealth it constantly produces, adopting the productiveness of capital in order to create social justice and equality. Indeed, Spivak follows the reflections of Teodor Shanin, who writes in an essay published shortly after 1989:

The substance of socialism has never been its ability to act as an elixir to stimulate “development” and the GNP, nor its capacity to reveal the inevitable future to everyone else. Socialism as a real human phenomenon has been about the ideas and images of justice.

(Shanin 73)

This possibility of socialism as social justice depends on the ability to inhabit the kind of socialization produced by the abstraction of capital, in a way that would overthrow capitalism as system.

This is what Spivak calls the “pharmacology” of the social as understood by Marx: the social, that is, the association of workers through the commodification of labor, is a *pharmakon*, both medicine and poison.⁴ It is poison because, under capitalism, the subjection of workers to the commodification of labor makes them instruments in the reproduction of capitalism. However, it is also medicine because, through commodification of labor, a surplus is produced that could be redistributed, working towards an alternative form of human existence not ruled by the violence and injustice of capital accumulation. The possibility of socialism relies on the ability to turn the violence of capital on its head, to use it for abolishing capitalism and constructing an alternative global society. Yet, the crucial question is: how can the poison turn into a medicine? How can the transition from global capitalism to socialism be achieved?

The main point Spivak makes is that the only hope of realizing socialism rests with an “epistemological revolution” that needs to pass through the contradiction of capitalism instead of simply rejecting or denying it. The passage from the current state of things to a socialist future is not pre-determined and cannot be enforced. Historical change entails an acknowledgement of what Susan Buck-Morss calls “the hidden potentialities of the present, the untimeliness of our time that demands in response a rupture in collective imagination, a transforming rescue of tradition that is the antithesis of reactive return” (Buck-Morss 77). Spivak’s reflections complement this awareness of the potentialities of history with the call for a kind of intellectual labor able to create the preconditions for historical change. Spivak develops some

crucial aspects of her argument in an endnote of her introduction, where she engages with the movement of alterglobalization and, in particular, the concluding work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* trilogy, *Commonwealth* (2009).

Whereas Hardt and Negri analyze very thoroughly the productiveness of capital, what they call the process of “biopolitical production” of labor, what these authors miss is that “without a rearrangement of desires toward the impossible willing of the law, persistently and epistemologically inscribed, there is no looking forward to a just society” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education*, 517–518). Spivak draws on Schiller's concept of aesthetic education to supplement the revolutionary ontology of Hardt and Negri. The term “aesthetic” is adopted by Spivak to indicate a use of the education in the humanities, especially the study of literature, as a way of forming citizens. What is “aesthetic” pertains to the habits, desires, and emotions instead of being merely theoretical understanding or knowledge. The aesthetic is the link between habit, perception, and thought. Spivak's aesthetic education involves “English teachers reaching hearts and minds, against the interests of a maximal capitalism” (111). Spivak's concept of the aesthetic is greatly influenced by Romanticism, yet she also opposes the individualistic ideology of the creative imagination advocated by Romantic poets. Spivak's aesthetics could be affiliated to the Romantic critique of what Michael Lowy calls the “*quantification of life*, i.e. the total domination of (quantitative) exchange value, of the cold calculation of price and profit, and of the laws of the market, over the whole social fabric” (Lowy, “The Romantic and Marxist Critique,” 892). Without recourse to ethics and the aesthetic, Hardt and Negri's notion of democracy seems to remain unviable, bound to a repetition of the past. In her reading of Hardt and Negri's *Commonwealth*, Spivak engages with the concept of “multitude,” defined by Hardt and Negri as a political project aimed at constituting a collective subject able to oppose capitalism today. The multitude is not a descriptive, but rather a programmatic category: it identifies the aim of constructing a global political subject able to be together against capitalism without being unified by a hegemonic power or ideology. The multitude is not a social class because it is not based on exclusions and oppositions. Instead, it is an inclusive project of keeping together different, or rather “singular,” forms of resistance against capital. It is a process of making politics through a cooperation of the oppressed, what Hardt and Negri explain as “the conflictual and cooperative interactions of singularities in the common” (Hardt and Negri 175). Spivak's remarks on Negri are a very important argument to be taken on in discourses on the “postcolonial” today. Indeed, Spivak writes:

. . . insofar as they [Hardt and Negri] say that “the multitude is not a spontaneous political subject but a project of political organization, thus shifting the discussion from being the multitude to making the multitude,” I can go along with them. . . . I can never accept, however, that the multitude “authors” itself in “an un-interrupted process of collective self-transformation” . . . producing a desire for a real, rather than the actually existing, commonwealth in a robust extra-moral sense.

(Spivak 518)

The point at issue, in other words, is the construction of a collective subject able to overthrow capitalism – the making of an alternative society, a redefinition of the

“social” itself in a way that could oppose the current state of things. Spivak does not share Negri’s trust in the fact that the multitude “authors itself” – there is still need for education, for the dissemination of democratic habits, that is, the desire of turning the socialization of capital into a will to redistribute, a real alternative to capitalism.

The question concerns what Spivak calls a “reflexive rearrangement of desires” (11), whether the form of sociality produced by oppression under capitalism can become a motor for overthrowing capitalism itself. It is not the awareness of being exploited, hence class consciousness, which paves the way to socialism, but a real “epistemological revolution” able to instill a democratic habit and change the will and desire of the oppressed. Spivak makes this more explicit in her introduction:

Here let me point out the obvious failure of any Marxism to produce the impulse to redistribute without state control and enforcement. The breakdown of the first wave of Marxist experimentation through the seduction of capitalism for leaders and people alike may have something to do with the absence of the ethical aspects of communism in the epistemological project of popular education. If ethics and aesthetics are defined as devoid of and even as opposed to the political, which is confined to a certain state-formation and structure and a certain management of the economic, we can hope for a short or enforced life for the communist system. (Spivak 18)

The double bind pointed out by Spivak is the place of the ethical-aesthetic-political impasse: without “an impulse to redistribute” there is no hope of achieving socialism, and this impulse can only be created through education. The essential contribution of Spivak to Marxism is hence her emphasis on the problem of how humanities education can help create an alternative society through the struggle against capitalism. Spivak suggests that Marxism is still caught in a “freedom from,” a struggle against the capitalist order of things, but not yet ready for a real “freedom to,” that is, the realization of an alternative society, not through enforcement or the power of the state, but as something that is actively willed and desired by the multitude. The precondition for realizing socialism is the construction of a sense of the social able to explain why “people as a whole would want to exercise the freedom to arrange for the upkeep of other people” (198). Without this ethical, democratic impulse turned into a reflexive “habit,” any political transformation runs the risk of disintegrating or simply repeating the history of the past.

Discourses on the postcolonial, today, need to address the ethical and political issues raised by Spivak. How can these discourses contribute to the struggle against capitalism? Debates on the postcolonial are not a substitute for really-existing social movements against the world economic system, nor should they occlude the reality of class struggle on a global scale. The central question concerns the creation of values, meanings, and practices that would not repeat the past, but rather reconnect the past with the future, recovering the hopes of struggles against imperialism. Postcolonial discourse can be seen as part of a humanistic education contributing to the creation of democratic habits and what Spivak calls a “will to socialism” opposing the violence and injustice of accumulation by dispossession. A postcolonial historical consciousness needs to be motivated by an ethical impulse, what Michael Lowy significantly describes as a “universal moral exigency – to fight for the abolition of

unjust and inhuman social systems . . . irrespective of the chances of victory and whatever the ‘scientific’ predictions of the future” (Lowy, *Fire Alarm*, 114).

An aesthetic education should involve a sense of historicity able to contrast the current phase of capitalism as the only possible alternative. The study of literature can become the place where this sense of history is reconnected to the awareness of the injustice of capitalism. Thus, close reading and the learning of the languages and literary cultures of different regions of the world can become, instead of production of knowledge and data, the occasion for grasping the effects of capitalism on societies and environments. More radically, the study of literature can lead to the formation of subjects – citizens – who have grasped the bi-polarity of capitalism not so much on a mere theoretical level, but as a concrete situation affecting the perception of the world around us. The “ethical” aspect of Spivak’s perspective can be understood as a striving to achieve a sense of justice and power of action, an impulse that Paulo Freire defined as a “struggle for humanization” (Freire 50). Aesthetic education contributes to the struggle of the oppressed to become active agents without becoming oppressors in their turn: it participates in the making of a qualitatively new transformation that would not merely reiterate the past.

In the preface of a very thought-provoking book titled *Between Past and Future*, Hannah Arendt points out a crucial problem, which underlies the issues facing post-colonial discourse in the current historical conjuncture. Against the accent on novelty, break, and disjuncture proper to a cultural logic well-suited to the needs of neoliberalism, socialist alternatives have to be forged by dealing with the question addressed by Arendt, the relation between past and future in a world deprived of “tradition,” that is, of universally recognized rules of cultural transmission. Arendt wrote her reflections on the issue in relation to the problem of the aftermath of the Resistance. Following a remark by poet René Char, Arendt proposed compelling meditations on the idea that “our inheritance was left to us by no testament” (Arendt 3). In the words of Arendt, this sentence captures the situation of the inheritor left with an important inheritance but no blueprint for action, no instruction about how it should be used and kept. Arendt wrote:

The testament, telling the heir what will rightfully be his, wills past possessions for a future. Without testament or, to resolve the metaphor, without tradition – which selects and names, which hands down and preserves, which indicates where the treasures are and what their worth is – there seems to be no willed continuity in time and hence, humanly speaking, neither past nor future.

(Arendt 5)

Similarly, the situation inhabited by postcolonial intellectuals is determined by an apparent loss of continuity and tradition. If there is something that gets to be bottom of the neoliberal order, it is the beginning of a new phase where the heritage of decolonization and the struggles for socialism seem to have passed on without leaving any testament. The postcolonial condition started with the neoliberal regime of the 1970s because the political struggles for decolonization and socialism were felt to be a mere “failure” and a great disillusionment paved the way for an unchallenged adjustment to the rules of capital accumulation, a new phase in the history of imperialism. Yet, as John Comaroff has noted in a recent essay, “those forces covered by the adjective

neoliberal, not to mention its adverbs of practice, are no less colonizing than the forms of empire to which the global South has been subjected before now” (Comaroff 146). A deep historical continuity can be recognized as a link between past and present forms of exploitation, from the expansion of capitalism in the colonial era to the current neoliberal stage of accumulation by dispossession.

Drawing on a parable by Kafka, Arendt reimagines the contemporary as a situation caught between two forces: a force from the past, pushing the present forward, towards the future, and a synchronic push from the future, preventing the present from making a leap forward and, on the contrary, keeping the present back, pushing it toward the past. The present is described by Arendt as a gap, an interval caught between the opposing forces of past and future. In Arendt’s words there is:

a small track of non-time which the activity of thought beats within the time-space of mortal men and into which the trains of thought, of remembrance and anticipation, save whatever they touch from the ruin of historical and biographical time.

(Arendt 12–13)

What is really inspiring about Arendt’s reflection is that she provides a perspective on this “gap” that connects very deeply with Spivak’s plea for an aesthetic education – an education, that is, reconnecting “reason” and thought to desire, habits, and the material conditions of existence where thought takes place. The aesthetic education necessary to provoke the epistemological revolution that will create the multitude takes place in an untimely region, in a gap that is not physical or chronological but coeval with human existence and yet present as a “small track of non-time” within the time of human life. According to Arendt, this non-time within time has a specific quality, which is explained as a “small non-time-space in the very heart of time” that “cannot be inherited and handed down from the past,” but rather must be rediscovered and “ploddingly” paved anew by each generation (Arendt 13). The extraordinary thought presented by Arendt identifies the realm of thought as something that cannot be inherited. The exercise of thinking is, for her, the antidote to a past that has been left without testament. This view implies that the gap between past and future is the space where each new generation needs to rediscover possibilities of change, reconstructing a sense of the future qualitatively different from the present. In the postcolonial condition, this would amount to the necessity of studying the history of decolonization and the struggles for socialism in a different way, with the aim of reviving it and “ploddingly” paving it anew, instead of keeping it back, inert, in a past forever gone.

A recent example may be the case of ex-anti-colonial fighters who in 2011 sued the British Government requiring compensation for the tortures inflicted by the British during the Mau Mau rebellion, which took place in colonized Kenya from 1952 to 1960. How should the memory of this extremely violent episode of imperial history be remembered? As Priyamvada Gopal writes in the pages of *The Guardian*, tens of thousands were killed by the British in the attempt to suppress the anti-colonial insurgency. Gopal asks:

How should Britain and Britons deal with the (not all that distant) imperial past? From racial hierarchies to artificial national borders and a deeply inequitable

economic system which enshrined as a core principle the devastating profiteering we see around us, imperial history still shapes all our lives within Britain and beyond.

If the memory of imperial violence and anti-colonial resistance is crucial today, this is not solely because anti-colonial memories are a powerful antidote to colonial amnesia and colonial nostalgia. Going back to the past can reconnect contemporary struggles to what upheavals of the past have not yet accomplished, and constantly raise the question of justice and reparation for past and present forms of oppression.

The stakes of an aesthetic education in an era of neoliberalism, indeed, have to do with the construction of this alternative sense of history, where the struggle for a real decolonization has been interrupted but does not rest in peace. It is only by rediscovering and resuming the incomplete task of the liberation against both imperialism and capitalism that a return to the past could lead to making a real transformation in the present. This is something that Spivak indicated in one of her most hopeful moments, in a very hopeless perspective on the contemporary:

If, instead of each identitarian group remaining in its own enclave, some of us engage in ab-using the enabling violation of our colonial past to converse with each other, we may be able not only to turn globalization around, but also to supplement the necessary uniformization of globalization with linguistic diversity. But such hope is out of joint; better doubt.

(Spivak 28)

What is “out of joint” in such thoughts is not hope but thought itself. And yet, it is precisely by inhabiting the gap between past and future that the humanities can make the difference, in a continuing dialectics of opposition and alternative. Aesthetic education cannot be inherited. It looks at the past in order to discover new potentialities in it, assuming the task to remember and resume what past struggles against capitalism have left unfinished.

ENDNOTES

1. Since its establishment as an academic discipline, postcolonial discourse has been seen as a mystification of the concrete reality of capitalism, a critique that Arif Dirlik famously put forward in his pivotal essay “The Postcolonial Aura” (Dirlik 1994). Twenty years later, critiques of this field of inquiry seem to follow along similar lines, as appears from Vivek Chibber’s recent book, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak shows convincingly Chibber’s disregard for the “range, roots and ramifications of postcolonial studies” in her review of the book (Spivak 2014, 185).
2. In their “After Neoliberalism,” the late Stuart Hall and colleagues provide an important analysis of neoliberal hegemony and its underlying ideals of “the supposed naturalness of ‘the market,’ the primacy of the competitive individual, the superiority of the private over the public” (13), while Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston demonstrate in their introduction to *Neoliberalism* that “neoliberalism involves extensive and invasive interventions in every area of social life” (4).
3. According to Deleuze and Guattari, “the double bind is not the schizophrenic [i.e. psychotic] process; on the contrary, the double bind is Oedipus insofar as it arrests the motion

of the process” (121). Deleuze and Guattari go back to Gregory Bateson in order to revise substantially the meaning of this theory: “*Double bind* is the term used by Gregory Bateson to describe the simultaneous transmission of two kinds of messages, one of which contradicts the other. . . . Bateson sees in this phenomenon a particularly schizophrenizing situation. . . . It seems to us that the double bind, the double impasse, is instead a common situation, opedipalizing par excellence” (88). Deleuze and Guattari do not attribute the origin of schizophrenia to the double bind: on the contrary, the double impasse is the result of the forced channeling of schizophrenia into the false alternative between “normality” and “neurosis.” Schizophrenia is completely foreign to Oedipal theory and its double bind, as Deleuze and Guattari remark: “But isn’t it true instead that, in psychosis, the familial complex appears precisely as a stimulus whose quality is a matter of indifference, a simple inductor not playing the role of organizer, where the intensive investments of reality bear on something totally different (the social, historical, and cultural fields)?” (134).

4. The concept of *pharmakon* testifies to Derrida’s influence on Spivak. In a chapter of *Dissemination*, Derrida writes: “the word *pharmakon*, even while it means *remedy*, cites, re-cites, and makes legible that which *in the same word* signifies, in another spot and on a different level of the stage, *poison*” (Derrida, 100–101). Spivak makes this insight productive by exploring the commodification of labor proper to capital as *pharmakon*: medicine and poison.

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