

# MAPPING THE PRESENT: INTERVIEW WITH GAYATRI SPIVAK

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*Conducted by Meyda Yegenoglu and Mahmut Mutman*

YEGENOGLU In a recent conference at Princeton, you remarked on the unease you have with the term postcolonial. I remember you saying, in response to Henry Staten's sympathetic report on your book, that the post-colonial was a term like Asiatic mode of production for your generation, which you used in a derogatory manner, almost as a sort of joke. We also know that the initial title for your *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* was 'Don't call me postcolonial'. It seems the unease you have is with the term's incapacity to capture what you call the failure of decolonisation. You have always been critical of the idioms of postcolonial and cultural studies spoken by new immigrant intellectuals. In your latest book however, you seem to place this epistemological criticism in a more explicit social framework when you talk about 'cultural studies, liberal multiculturalism, postfordist trans-national capitalism in aid of export-based foreign capital investment and so-called free trade' as 'partners' in capitalist globalisation. It seems to me that, while in your earlier work, you criticised the postcolonial immigrant intellectual discourse functioning as a buffer which prevents a more radical criticism by masquerading as native informant, now you place the postcolonial intellectual discourse in a much sharper framework where this group becomes almost part of a historic bloc - although you don't use this Gramscian term - or better perhaps, socially and ideologically complicit in the management of capitalist globality. In Princeton, as a way of disclaiming the term postcolonial, you asked in a rhetorical way, 'who' turned it into what it is today. The answer to this question and perhaps to the question of why such a turn has happened lies in this partnership. Do you agree and can you comment on this?

SPIVAK In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* I have said that it is cultural studies, liberal multiculturalism, post-fordist trans-national capitalism in aid of export-based foreign direct investment and so-called free-trade together. It is something like part of a historic bloc. It is only lately that one is realising that, since 1989, we find representatives from the so-called Third World in the service of globalisation who Hortense Spillers long ago, in the discussion of the middle passage - slavery - said would be the exact specular opposite of the dominant. These persons, who are part of the managerial community, have their cultural counterpart now in aid of the older version of postcolonial criticism and the newer version of multicultural cultural studies. That is why it seems to me that today we

can give a certain sort of narrative explanation of the so-called 'postcolonial voice' which perhaps was not possible ten years ago. Maybe in Princeton I asked why it was accepted so clearly, so soon - to an extent I was being rhetorical - but what I was trying to say perhaps is that those who precisely did not go through the immediately postcolonial experience in a very strict sense, they thought that the post in postcolonialism was unmarked by irony and that it meant that one could decolonise one's consciousness. Because it seemed to be a liberatory adjective which was unearned, it became popular. That unearned liberatory adjective came to match the kind of upwardly mobile minority person who was also Angloclone.

**MUTMAN** Decolonisation requires a change of mind, a change in our ways of thinking, feeling and acting. In the language of the migrant marginal academic, exile or hybridity have increasingly become alibis for this change of mind, as if physical or cultural displacement naturally delivers it. In this context, you often asked who the other of diaspora is, and pointed out that the marginal academic must respond to the subaltern other of capitalist globality in the so-called decolonised space of the developing nation. This subaltern other remains strategically excluded and uninvestigated. Again in a recent talk in Columbia last year, you have further argued that we must forge an ethical relation to all those 'at the bottom', must 'learn to learn' and 'must try to inhabit the interiority of the below'. How do you distinguish this idea of inhabiting the other's space from anthropological or ethnographic research? Can you tell us what you mean by learning to learn, if this is not another instance of knowledge enterprise, hence appropriation of the other? Given the immense heterogeneity of this other or subaltern space we are talking about, what role does literary imagination play, as the realm where singularity might appear and ethical relationship to the other is possible?

**SPIVAK** You begin by saying that 'decolonisation requires a change of mind', a change in our ways of thinking, feeling and acting. I think decolonisation also involves a re-fashioning of the structures that we inherit from the colonial days. That is a narrowly conceived postcolonial task, to see that there is a smooth transition from the structures that one should not throw away, abstract structures, state structures that you know to throw away would be a mistake because they are already in place. But to turn them to the service of the new nation, to make those transitions, is decolonisation in a material sense. Of course it does also require a change of mind. As for the change of mind and the change in our ways of thinking, feeling and acting, some come very quickly and some become the project of slow, painstaking educational reform. But these projects do not belong to the project of the migrant. The best that the migrant can do is to actively destabilise the place where he or she has migrated to and as the generations pass within migrancy you put scare quotes around marginality, because

migrancy is not just the moment of the *exodus*. And when you talk about the academic as marginal you have to take into account the fact that the academic is marginal within the academy. That's why the title of one of my books is *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. Academic marginality has to take into account that one has entered the academy in order to be marginalised. That's a slightly different structural situation from needing to retool and reconstellate the structures inherited from colonialism in the specific postcolonial states. This latter task has changed altogether after 1989 because the role of the states now is so much curtailed. I myself, then, would have to distinguish between the somewhat liberal connections between the idea of decolonisation and the situation of the marginal academic or the migrant marginal academic. We have to think about the passing of generations, the point of entry into the academy, the class of the migrant. As to the question of who is the other of the diaspora, I don't think that the marginal academic can respond to the subaltern other of capitalist globality. I can't require that of the marginal academic [laughter]. There has to be a connection made between even this marginality and its relationship to the states where decolonisation means that other thing that I mentioned a bit ago. Responding to the subaltern other is a difficult thing or perhaps too easy because of the mechanisms of global intervention. The so-called international civil society is in place now so that the many varieties of what we used to call the subaltern can be accessed. Now, you are quite right in saying that they remain strategically excluded but when you say that we must investigate them or you say that they remain *uninvestigated*, you do indeed begin to speak of a certain kind of anthropological or ethnographic research. It would be difficult for me to distinguish that from the good anthropological and ethnographic research which wants, at best, to inhabit the other space. I don't really think that the investigation of subalternity is necessarily different from the kind of databasing that now goes on in the areas of indigeneous knowledge, technology transfer, biopiracy, monoculturalist intervention, genetic engineering and so on. The subaltern now is altogether permeable, rather unlike the definition of subalternity in an earlier conjuncture by the South Asian historians' group where the subaltern is precisely the person outside the circuit of mobility. I have therefore formulated a new notion of restricted permeability. The bottom is altogether permeable from above. The academic woman with the cell phone. But the permeability from below up into the area of the dominant is not only as restricted as, but more restricted than it was before. The investigation of the subaltern is not the real problem for me now because that kind of permeability is now in place. When I said that 'one must learn to learn from below', that 'must' I think was perhaps too quickly said because of the exigencies of oral presentation - I was really trying to say that, that's what my efforts have been for the last ten years. As to what people must do, I don't think I can really outline a project for all others. But I will say that if one tries to do that, then it is this immense

heterogeneity of the subaltern, even subaltern languages. There the idea of the literary imagination can come in to play only when one actually learns a handful of the languages. Some of these languages are not even literary. What we are talking about there empirically is rather different from what we are talking about in terms of the direction of our thinking. So, learning to learn from below, which I have painstakingly tried to undertake in the last ten years without any guarantees of any sort, I cannot recommend as a project to all and sundry, and especially not as an institutional project.

**MUTMAN** It seems that there is some change going on in the field of area studies recently. I am thinking for instance of the increasing power of marginal academics in an institution such as the Middle Eastern Studies Association, which used to be much more conservative in the past. Ferial J. Ghazoul has observed long ago that, after Said's book, 'a certain indeterminacy towards Orientalism, if not outright rejection of Orientalist theses, prevails in the academic air'. I have a slightly different view. In a field like Middle Eastern Studies, there is on the one hand increasing suspicion and criticism of Orientalism, which is disreputed by Said's book of course, and on the other hand, when you look closely, what is criticised as Orientalism is often no more than an error of representation that can just be corrected. There is, in this context, a good deal of talk of post-orientalism, a new way of writing history, rejection of binary thinking (as if one doesn't always speak a language), etc. I am not talking about the usual liberal breast beating but a good deal of radical people with the best of intentions. How do you evaluate this new development? I have in mind for instance, that wonderful warning you made in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (see page 21): 'the narrow epistemic violence of imperialism gives us an imperfect allegory of the general violence that is the possibility of episteme'. Since allegory can but be imperfect, one should never lose sight of the sort of relationship without relationship between these two violences, the narrow and generalised senses of writing. For a lot of people, among whom are also your most fierce critics and abusers, this is just a question of writing the correct history. However, thinking of area studies especially because it is not just a theoretically incorrect field but a force field, let me ask: what happens when one wants to write history, culture or literature of an 'area'? How can one *not* represent or restore subaltern subjectivity? How does one struggle with the mask of the native informant, which is already put on one's face? What do you think one must be most cautious of in our so-called areas?

**SPIVAK** If one takes the project of literary criticism as correcting representation, there is also an implicit demand for politically correct literature. Now, I'm not talking about literary criticism that is unexamined, you know, sort of straightening out the mysterious relationship between

the aesthetic and the political. But I feel that one has to think about changes that are upstream from requiring correct representation. I can't talk about history because I'm not a historiographer or a historian. Some of us have been trying to undo the distinction between 'nations', clients of Comparative Literature, generally the European national languages; and 'areas', which are in the heritage of the US National Defense Education act of 1958, when the area studies were established and strengthened by foundations. Area Studies responded to the requirements of the US after the Second World War. We're trying to undo that distinction so that one can take the assumption of the methodologies of Comparative Literature, methodologies of close reading and the requirement of language learning for literary reading - that one takes that into the area studies enterprise so that one learns the language in a way that would approach the ability to imagine literature. So, I am not talking about history at all. If one moves into that kind of language learning by bringing together Comparative Literature and area studies, it seems to me that then there is an ability to see how the literariness of literature actually frames and embeds humanist rational expectations. I think it is too early to tell whether this can bear fruit, but at least it is in that hope that one is progressing now to an exploratory area. I don't think one would actually represent or restore subaltern subjectivity there. I'm only talking about the possibility that, if one looks into literature in terms of that kind of internalised acquaintance with the language and the idiom, one would not be working as a native informant. Even for this you need a huge systemic change. After teaching for thirty-five years in English departments, I still have to fight invitations to anthropologise myself. Thus each situation must call for a strategy rather than a theory, isn't it? This at least is the hope. I don't think it is a question of tertiary education restoring or representing subaltern subjectivity. A disciplinary revision within tertiary education and post-tertiary education either in the United States or in Turkey or in India is not necessarily connected to or continuous with the project of subaltern subjectivity. I do not really know what subaltern subjectivity is and in the field of learning to learn from below, in that struggle, the idea of being on the very long road to opening the access to disciplinary thinking for the subaltern is very specific to India, because it is a precolonial settler colony. India cannot take its models from Australia or South Africa or the United States. And because also there is this incredible scandal of a huge difference between rural and middle or lower middle class, working class education and the education system above that, I'm not sympathetic with the idea that we live in a post-state world. It seems to me that it is a denial of history and it seems to me that each of these nation-states really carries a certain kind of history of education which is going to dictate how the forging of access to disciplinarity for the subaltern is going to work out. I don't think the question of representing the subaltern comes in there. Remember that, in 'Can the Subaltern Speak' I was speaking first of all of an urban middle class person, because I had not yet learned

enough to go into other ideas of subalternity. But I kept moving so that now, for the last ten years - that earlier essay was written in the early 1980s and was published in the mid 1980s - for sure the project for locating subalternity has changed. Secondly, I was talking about a subaltern who had tried to represent herself and had not succeeded. So, I wasn't really representing her in any way. I was just telling that story.

**YEGENOGLU** You suggest that transnationality further destroys the possibilities of re-dressing the failure of decolonisation as the hyphen between nation and state is further loosened and the civil structures are further undermined. But at the same time there is an increasing activity of NGOs in especially developing nations where essential and urgent struggles for basic democratic rights and civility are at stake. How do you see the role of NGOs in instituting civil structures and for the development of new possibilities of social redistribution in developing nations? Can we see them as *pharmakon*? If we cannot not struggle for transforming the subaltern into a civil subject, what are Gayatri Spivak's most urgent cautionary remarks for those activists who fight in and by NGOs in the so-called developing nations?

**SPIVAK** NGO is not a category. Non-governmental organisation does not describe anything except what it is not. When I was saying that the hyphen between nation and state has been loosened, I was talking about an earlier phenomenon: the failure of decolonisation in terms of the dismantling of the territorial imperialisms. My reference point for the words decolonisation, postcoloniality, has always been the dissolution of the great territorial empires. That was a different conjuncture as it were, though its repercussions come forward even into our own time. Just as in the case of the state, for example, you have to distinguish between absolutist states and welfare states, so you have to see what kind of NGO you are dealing with. I am myself extremely favorably disposed towards what, from a Eurocentric point of view, are mistakenly called the new social movements. They are basically NGOs. But their organisation into NGOs gives an alibi to so-called international civil society. Quite often that is also an excuse for intervening into what used to be called national sovereignty from the finance capital markets where authority and legitimation now reign. So, one has to know what sort of NGO one is talking about. I have indicated in the piece I published in the collection edited by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, *Cosmopolitics*, that the first thing to learn about NGOs is their connection with donor agencies. What kinds of donor agencies, how enlightened, what sort of evaluation structures do they have, who comes to evaluate, how far do they go, how do they evaluate? One used to think of the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, Canada, as enlightened donor agencies, but changes happen constantly on the micro-level. There is a definition now of NGOs in India - they call themselves people's alliances - where one of the

bottomline distinctions is that, if indeed there is foreign aid coming in, the main project of the NGO can proceed without trouble if the aid stops. Some things would have to be closed down but the main projects will not be closed down. The NGO with which I myself associate, in terms of my aboriginal schools in India, would not be seriously incapacitated because the only project dependent upon 'foreign' aid is a cosmetic set of so-called non-formal schools. Our work is absolutely with the people below, their civil rights, the transformation of the subaltern into a citizen. But there are also NGOs, that I will not name, that are basically interested in providing excuses for (a) getting a good salary structure for themselves and (b) allowing the infiltration of local space by these globalising agencies. I need to make a huge distinction between the two types of NGOs, if you know what I mean. NGOs are not a monolithic category at all. I will also say something else. The phrase 'struggles for basic democratic rights, civility' is a happy and good sounding phrase. But the impatience of these kinds of movements, when they actually succeed, with precisely what is left behind in terms of the subaltern area where the fight for these rights was instituted, quite often - I could give you many examples - leads to certain kinds of devastations that nobody thereafter has the time to investigate. The patience of learning to learn from below and the impatience of much civil rights, human rights activism are things that have to be considered case by case. I don't know that I could have any sort of overall judgement about the activity of the NGOs. I am for the global, so-called new social movements, the counter-globalising organisations when they are loose federations of a lot of movements that could pass the test of what we in India call 'people's alliances'. Beyond that, I think, it would be hard for me to proceed, because even there the difference between success and the effects on subaltern ground is so great that we need two different speeds of engagement. As I have already mentioned, one of them relates to the more abstract undertakings and the other to the very patient learning from below with no guarantees. One can supplement the other, perhaps, perhaps, perhaps ... Generally there are not so many takers for the second one. It's too inconvenient for the present speed of electronic do-gooding.

**YEGENOGLU** In discussions on globalisation, we are recently witnessing a concern to move away from the binarism of globality versus locality. Indeed, if we consider Anglo-American postmodern cultural studies as a reversal of universalism, i.e. a reinscription of locality, there is now a new trend, which seems to be saying that locality is not sufficient. Rather they look for a new way of thinking locality in structural interaction with globality. One thinks for instance of James Clifford's 'discrepant cosmopolitanism', or Bruce Robbins' 'long-distance, casual cosmopolitanism'. It seems to me that what is being lost here, in the name of rejecting particularism, is the radical difference between concrete, embodied attachment to a territory and long-distance, casual attachment

to another territory. In the face of immense ecological, and not just territorial, loss which you address at length in your recent work, do you believe that one must re-inscribe bodily attachment to land or territory as the eco-logics of a life-system for which terms such as cosmopolitanism and globalism remain rather poor or even irrelevant? Do you see this kind of re-cognition of locality as a precondition for ecological justice?

SPIVAK                    You end this question with the words 're-cognition of locality as a precondition for ecological justice'. I would say that ecological justice is obliged first to move on the register of great and sweeping abstract legality. Unless it has this very broad framework, since it's actually trying to take care of the depredations of global intervention, it cannot operate without something very broad. Amartya Sen quoted Mehbub-ul-Huq as saying, when he devised the human development index (HDI), that although human well-being is so heterogeneous, so intangible a category, 'we need something as vulgar as the GNP to combat it'. That is a very important insight. In order to be able to do the fighting on the legal calculus, one needs an instrument which will be calculable by the same calculus - Marx says this also in *Capital*, that you must use the method of capital in order to find an antidote - but as we know famously from the example of international communism, it is not possible for such legal redress - absolutely essential legal redress - to stick if the approach is not also and at the same time intensely local. Therefore, it seems to me that one must keep supplementing abstract activism by the patience of learning to learn from below how to operate within the pre-existing lines of ethico-political behaviour that the triumph of the above has allowed, sometimes millennially, to languish. As a teacher, since that is the only experience that I can bring to these discussions - even in my activism, that is what I finally am - one realises that the changes in the minds of collectivities are neither isomorphic nor isotemporal with institutional changes. So, unless there is this very collective, very dispersed, very heterogeneous patient engagement with those who deserve justice, there is no recognition that this can't just be done at the same speed as the work for ecological justice. The work for ecological justice will remain unanchored if this other kind of work is not done at the same time. It is more than recognition of locality. In many ways it is that which brings cognition, that which stages cognition, to use the entire resources of the production of the cognising subject in order to restore, redo social agency. That's the work. As for the idea of any kind of cosmopolitanism, I almost can't use that word, because as long as one is trying to find a palliative adjective for cosmopolitanism, I am not there. It doesn't attract me. That's not my bag. It may be some discrepancy in my own project but that is not what I am working in aid of. I don't want some kind of a specular humanist project where you have to construct the other as your - however broadly understood - structural image in a cracked mirror in order to be able to engage that other and to develop that other into



something like yourself because you were the fittest and you survived and that specular other must now be helped to survive. I can't feel any attraction to that abdication from the symbolic at all. I do really find that to be a part of the backlash - humanist, universalist backlash - I really do find that a kind of scandal of the US imaginary, the longing for the specular subject in order to be cosmopolitan. I have nothing to say apart from what I just said. I am not looking for a palliative adjective for cosmopolitanism, no.

**MUTMAN** Your work has always drawn attention to the intersection of marxist and feminist criticisms, joining a number of other socialist-feminist writers (Maria Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, Aihwa Ong, Deniz Kandiyoti, Trinh Minh-ha, Sara Suleri). In this context, you have recently focused on issues as diverse as population control, socialisation of reproductive rights and homeworking. Do you want to say something about any of these?

**SPIVAK** This is a good question. How do I relate to more focused socialist-feminist work? Well, there I relate as a part of the collective and I do as much as I can in terms of the conscientisation of women. I do as much as I can in terms of intervention at large conferences. I do as much as I can to bring very careful and longstanding knowledge of Marx to supplement what is sometimes a kind of positivist understanding of the relationship to the female body. In the case of homeworking, one of my attempts has been to engage, since I am the kind of worker that I am, a cultural worker, a teacher: someone who is interested in the speed of changing minds impossibly rather than forming very important collectivities quickly, rather than cutting corners so that very important resistances can be successful. My work is in the other mode. I am repeating that for every answer and advisedly. So, in the case of homeworking, my attempts have been to recognise that women who willingly engage in homeworking are really thinking in terms of how an ethical woman is defined and therefore we have to carefully unpeel many layers of our own sense of individual rights - feminism - and see how it should segue in, how it should graft itself with, so that it can use itself within other models of women's ethical responsibility. These are the kinds of ways in which I try to be part of this resistant collectivity as a follower, a public speaker, not a leader. That's my record so far and I hope that engagement will continue and I hope I will be called upon to intervene in that way.

**YEGENOGLU** In what ways do you think your criticisms of postcolonial studies differ from those that are voiced by, say, Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirlik?

**SPIVAK** My criticisms of postcolonial studies differ. I must say that I have not read Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory* because I'm intellectually sensitive. I find it difficult to continue if I have to encounter criticisms

which seem to me to be unjust. I might find myself involved simply in self defence and I think that's not a good way to go. So, sometimes I keep myself from reading things that I have heard a good deal of, seen a lot of quotation from and so I say to myself 'put this in the background for now. There is a lot of stuff to look at. You should carry on so that you don't get into a defensive mode'. So you have to be careful about my answer. This is not an informed answer. Okay, in the case of Aijaz Ahmad: I have a feeling that his criticism probably draws such a binary distinction between those who are located in metropolitan countries and those who are not (I may be completely wrong) that we forget that being located in the so-called Third World country now under globalisation, restructured economies, the development of what in the Indian context is called 'DIPSOS' (dollar income-private-sector), the megacities that are looking towards cyberspace, it is not possible just to become a locationist and speak in a positivistic way of the postcolonial as located in metropolitan space. It doesn't matter where exactly, what nation-state they are located in. There is of course some difference, but it means much more as to what space within the nation-state they are located in. To be located in an elite university with a lot of back and forth movement with the metropolis. Now there is a very solid in place 'semester's teaching' kind of slot for these academics which has become a new way of doing the self-ethnographisation of the intellectual. You have one foot in the Third World States, so-called, and one foot in the metropolitan state and therefore you can in fact keep a sort of purist alibi. I think that's where - although I do not know his book in detail - I would locate my difference. As for Arif Dirlik, I felt that - what I have read is that article in *Critical Inquiry* - that complaint about South Asia based postcolonial studies, I think it is well intentioned and it is correct. I would direct Professor Dirlik's attention to a piece that I wrote in the mid 1980s, it was published both in a collection by the DIA Art Foundation and also in an Indian newspaper for the fortieth anniversary of Indian independence, entitled 'Who Claims Alterity?'. This piece is a careful analysis of the demographics of the Indian - generally Indian rather than South Asian - immigrant group in the United States after Lyndon Johnson changed his quota system, the immigration law in 1965. The real project for me is not to continue to undermine what these people and especially their children do, but really to establish other kinds of approaches. Because it is true that Professor Dirlik is also located in the United States. Sylvia Molloy and others were saying that Latin American Studies should not take on the South Asia model either. What one should see then is an effort to establish different kinds of models rather than disqualifying the other. As for Professor Dirlik's suggestion that I reap the benefits of this kind of stuff by getting a post at Columbia University, I have nothing to say, because that seems to me distinctly unprofessional. Who gets a job where is dependent on many other things. He only has to look at my work to see that it was not in the interest of this that I got a job here. That's beside the point. The task of South Asia

based postcolonial studies is very specific today. The South Asians, the group best developed by the British Empire, are now beginning to come into a certain sector of Asian-American Studies. I have a chapter called 'Our Asias' in my forthcoming book *Reaching Out* where I look at this phenomenon. Rather than continuing to talk about the British empire and British Raj model postcolonial studies, my task has moved to the constitution of the new Asian-American studies.

MUTMAN            What is the role and significance of the rural in global capitalism?

SPIVAK            In global capitalism the rural must be understood as the arena which is accessible to the spectralising networks of finance capital and telecommunication, very much more successfully than the diversified conglomerate things called cities which are not places with actual urban outlines anymore. I acknowledge the instrumental importance of the urban in global capitalism. But there are many ways in which the rural is accessed. I have already mentioned the credit baiting of the rural woman in order to tap a huge untapped market for the commercial sector. There are ways in which unmediated cyberliteracy is offered with seductive promises. Last week I was looking at the new announcement sent out for accessing particularly Gambia and parts of Nigeria for new cybernetworks. We are not really looking at green fields and trees. We are looking at something which is already virtualised for global capitalism. I go through the litany again: patenting indigenous knowledge, biopiracy, pharmaceutical dumping, DNA patenting, genetic engineering, you name it, even huge bridge building, dam building, and now imbrication as data in a telecommunication which is indistinguishable from the circuits of finance capital. I try to understand the relationship between knowledge and knowledge power by way of the analysis in Marx of labour and labour power in the context of telecommunications. The spectralisation of the rural as data is directly possible. In today's Sunday *New York Times* there was an item about the devaluation of agriculture in the United States, because, if I remember right, 'the Americans are getting their food in other ways'. The 'real rural', green fields and trees and harvests and so on, already capitalised in agribusiness is now capitalised as data. Just as industrial capitalism is disappearing or taking on crisis-management roles in the much broader circuits of commercial-cum-finance capital in globalisation - so also agribusiness is now beginning to be dismantled because of the virtualised, spectralised rural directly accessed by global capitalism. We have to unthink and rethink the urban as the last instance of our examination of globalisation. We have to be able to think that the rural is not just the bastion of Luddite, local resistances but that it is the virtualised new frontier.

YEGENOGLU        What are your thoughts on the argument of de-

nationalisation, the diminishing role of the nation-state in the Third World, etc?

SPIVAK

De-nationalisation. We have to realise that globalisation still works by distinguishing between nations because globalisation is not apolitical. It has a different politics but the Group of 7-Group of 77 relationship still obtains and it is written in terms of nation-state. The structure of the WTO would not be what it is if US national economic laws being imposed internationally on the world were not still nationalised. I think it is really a sign of not knowing what is going on to say that globalisation - because it is talking about the globe - means that there are no nations. No. These arguments are made in terms of nation-states. It is not realistic to say that there can be de-nationalisation soon. On the other hand, it is also true in one sense - we just had two Indian colleagues, who are working on the cyberspace of India - to say that there is no working class in the cyberspace of India. But then another colleague brought up the fact that someone had to make those machines, and those are women in South East Asia. A lot of Indians from the audience, too, said in chorus 'but India is only software'. Now, when you are thinking about globalisation in cyberspace, then, in the resistance mode too you have to think de-national. You must realise that you cannot say just that South East Asia is hardware, therefore they have a working class related to the cyber economy and India is software, therefore there is no working class. I think that is criminal and, of course, nationalist. So, there you have an argument for de-nationalist thinking. The question of the national depends on where it is situated. There is no general argument for de-nationalisation. The diminishing role of the nation-state in the Third World is because, in order for globalisation to operate, the same system of exchange must be established internationally and therefore all the barriers between the fragile national economies and international capital must be removed. Therefore, clearly the state has no social redistribution powers anymore. But that doesn't mean that the state's repressive powers have been taken away. Quite often, in fact, the state engages in repressive power so that this kind of restructuring can operate. Since state is abstract and nation is fuzzy and identity is fuzzy, citizenship is abstract, one item in these couplets does not move at the same speed as the other. Just as I said earlier that the subject is neither isomorphic nor isotemporal with the institution. Nation-think and continent-think do not move at the same speed as state-think because the state is an abstract structure. The nation is there to manage the crisis of the state. I don't think one can say that there is a diminishing role of the *nation-state* as such. There is a diminution of the powers of the state because of this general economic restructuring and the general intervention of the WTO in terms of national sovereignty. But it does not mean all across the board the *nation-state* has a role that is diminished. One has to think here not only of nation-states but also of central banking systems. I am not going

to talk about central banking systems right now because that would open a completely different argument, about how central banking systems can be uncoupled from national interests and national economies. Maybe I have already directed our attention to that early, popularising hope.

YEGENOGLU & MUTMAN We have a question regarding the recent attack or abuse you received from Terry Eagleton. We do not particularly ask you here to engage the content of his criticism, since there is not much to engage with. Precisely for this reason, we are asking: what do you think is at stake in Eagleton's attack? But if you don't want to answer this question that's okay.

SPIVAK No, I don't mind saying something. I am not that troubled by Terry Eagleton's attack because it's the one that has been read most. It was a bit mad because, as people have pointed out, there was already a lot of it in the journal *Interventions*, that Terry had written before my book came out. I have known him for a long time and I think there are some admissions here and there of the fact that I can think. There has been a lot more abuse which is much more troubling. In general I think it is because I don't write like a British-made Indian. My position does not fit what I call 'little Britain left conservatism'. My prose is odd, I admit. But should it call forth such virulence? It seems to me it is because I engage with texts that are not confined to Third World women and yet I don't write like Habermas in drag. That is one of the reasons why I think I am found to be so threatening. What those abusive accounts did was stop reviews. I don't mind critical reviews but constructive criticism is very different from abuse. Terry may have succeeded because his was the first and the best known, but I myself do not find his piece as deplorable as some of the others in the *Independent* and in the *New Statesman*. One anonymous reader's report stopped a favourable review in *Diacritics*. It suggests that I underdemonstrate. Now the problem is that if you read, let's say new historicism, you see that new historicist literary critics do not demonstrate more than I do. I am not a legalist or a disciplinary historian. I think there is plenty of demonstration, but the problem is, since I do not echo their generalisations, they don't feel that I have demonstrated anything, number one. Number two: this person says 'how is it that she doesn't read the really good, solid places in Kant but just takes one example. This is unserious'. The problem is that, in the text, I said that one of the reasons why - this is true for 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' as well - I am not reading the central texts is, because quite often it is when the philosopher is engaged in something other than arguing these positions, that the unexamined choice of example reveals more. This is nothing new. Freud said this a long time ago. But this is argued in the piece. Since my entire book is about the *suppression* of the Aboriginal, it was important to me to see that this particular way of solving the antinomy, which is central to

Kant's philosophy, was predicated upon the dehumanisation of the Aboriginal. That's why I chose that example and I made it very clear that this was not a discussion of Kant's philosophy. But this person, because - I think I know who it is - he is engaged in not wanting a review to see the light of day, a serious review, he feels obliged to say that this is not serious, although I laid out my project. Another person says, 'Spivak thinks Sati is empowering'. Now, this can only be called abusive. You don't have to be an incredibly careful reader to see that my critique is not of the British government abolishing Sati. It is really scandalous to even suggest such a thing. Yet another person says I find it terrible that the British government did not allow the Rani of Sirmur to commit Sati. Where do these things come from? It seems to me that there is a desire not to allow me to say things about general texts, although I lay out my principles carefully enough, because they would threaten the old fashioned, organised left conservative readings of these texts. The thing that is maybe most interesting about me, that is to say, my wide imaginative range - I am not a very scholarly person, but I can make certain kinds of connections - is denigrated in as many ways as possible. It is a kind of silencing of discussion and I think at the end of the day, it is because I am a woman and as it happens a woman of colour who does not remain confined to the modes of discourse that she is allowed to engage in - speaking about women and speaking about Third World women and speaking about our victimage. That's fine. If a person such as me de-anthropologises herself and reads the great texts of the European tradition in a way that does not resemble the general rational expectations way of reading then she is punished and I think that's what all that abuse is about. But I must also say that I found Terry's intervention a little pathetic [laughter] rather than destructive, you know ... It is the other ones that are more scary.

*This interview was conducted by Meyda Yegenoglu and Mahmut Mutman at Columbia University, New York, 2 April 2000.*

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