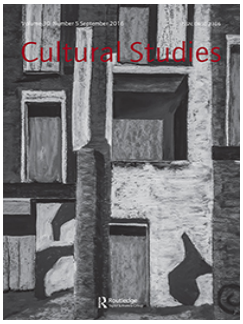

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A position embedded in identity: subalternity in neoliberal globalization

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ABSTRACT

Gayatri Spivak asserts that subalternity is a position without identity and has no examples. This paper demonstrates that identities – imposed and subscribed to, contingent yet naturalized – have to be taken into account, particularly when we consider that such identities are inscribed into a war of positions. It argues that the notion of 'subaltern' in Gramsci, followed through in the idea of 'subjugated knowledges' in Foucault, read commonly as marginality, intervenes in established social relations to expose that Time is asynonymous with History. Subalternity, emblematized through positions, which are held by identities, plays a crucial role in negotiating that discontinuity between Time and History. The paper 'relocates' subalternity by redefining it as a process – in order to convey this, I use 'subalternized' instead of 'subaltern'; identity, then, is also necessarily a process, captured temporarily in the course of political–cultural engagement. The essay reads the positions of racialized and gendered subalternized knowledges in the contexts of neoliberal globalization, in North America and South Asia, through the processes of identity-makings of two groups – the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center (Minneapolis, USA) and the Feminist Dalit Organization (Lalitpur, Nepal).

KEYWORDS Subaltern; neoliberal; globalization; native; Dalit; identity

Dis/continuities

> Subalternities and hegemonies create and produce each other.
> Structures and identities create and produce each other.

The observations above may appear banal and repetitive (also perhaps unconnected to each other). They are intended to recall some of the dynamics in which the concepts of 'subaltern' and 'hegemon' have been embedded. This return is not meant to privilege an originary status of these concepts; in this study of subalternities–hegemonies in the context of the complex processes that constitute neoliberal globalization, a delineation of some dis/continuities provides deeper and wider dimensions to the understanding of the

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terms and their manifestations. In short, relocating subalternity entails locating subalternity.

This opening section presents some dis/continuities that constitute the genealogy of subalternities today. These include the persistent but also changing notions of structure (margin and centre), of identity (perceptions and practices of caste, gender, and nation), and of paradigm (Time and History); this latter issue is addressed in the second section. The third section focuses on the positions of two entities – the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center (MIWRC) and the Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO) – as these emblematize geographically and historically distinct subalternities in the contexts of neoliberal globalization. As their self-representation illuminates, the positions held by these two entities enact some particular complexities of structure, identity, and paradigm, as well as inform them. In other words, subalternity informs the very conditions by which it is shaped. The final section presents the instances of MIWRC's and FEDO's engagement with, and effect upon, the economic, social, and political conditions defining them that require as well as generate contemporary and contextual notions of agency and mobility; these newer notions then contribute to understandings of subalternization today.

The first of the opening statements above, 'subalternities and hegemonies create and produce each other', foregrounds an element in Antonio Gramsci's theorizations of 'subaltern' and 'hegemon' in the 1930s, namely, their mutually formative relationship in the 'war of positions' (Gramsci 1929–35 [1971], p. 88) that characterizes the structures at stake in early twentieth-century Italian politics. To Gramsci, the hegemonic powers of Mussolini's regime construct and control the Italian nation-state as the normative position to which all others are oriented as antagonistic and/or marginal; in the case of the 'subaltern' (Sardinian, Sicilian), conditions are created such that political self-definition is rendered inaccessible, if not impossible. In his 'History of the Subaltern Classes: Methodological Criteria' (in the section 'Notes on Italian History'), Gramsci observes: 'The historical unit of the ruling classes is realized in the State, and their history is essentially the history of States and of groups of States' (Gramsci 1929–35 [1971], p. 52). In this same section, he defines hegemony as the 'protagonists of History' (Gramsci 1929–35 [1971], p. 52). For the 'subaltern' position, the project then, according to Gramsci, is to strive for this self-definition and participate in the making of History. 'Subaltern-hegemon' is presented as a dialectical process in which the subaltern, once it has gained political definition, will overcome its subaltern status and redefine the nature of hegemony by becoming the new 'protagonists of History'. However, the process is never completed; it is continuous because even more subaltern positions will engage in the 'war of positions' with these redefined hegemonies. While this dialectic abides across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it also changes in nature and is reshaped in the

metamorphoses from statist to neocolonial trans-statist structures and flows. Latin American and South Asian Subaltern Studies, together and separately, record these changes; each focuses on various configurations of hegemonic and subaltern positions that create and define each other (Guha and Spivak 1988–2002, Beverley 1999, Rodriguez and Lopez 2001, Morana and Jaurequi 2008, Chaturvedi *et al*. 2012, Mignolo 2012).

What emerges in this subaltern-hegemon 'war of positions' is that positions are dialectically related to identities. In Gramsci's analysis, the position of Sardinians in Italian nationalist structures is inextricably tied to a set of sociocultural identity-markers, namely an ethnic(ized) indigenous (feminized) peasantry that, in turn, becomes a sub-narrative through and affects the manner in which Mussolini projects a muscular, militarized Italian imperial-statist cultural and economic modernity (Gramsci 1929–35 [1971], pp. 97, 192, 272). Identity illuminates the nature of the position, and position impacts both the practice and the development of that identity. The second opening statement to this discussion 'structures and identities create and produce each other', is intended to reflect on the interrelatedness of structure/position and identity, a relationship in which both positions and identities are often read as locked battles of binary opposites, such as oppressor/oppressed, colonizer/colonized, man/woman, black/white.

The two opening statements to this discussion use plural forms to mark the kinds of multiplicities that problematize such binaries, not simply to record or celebrate them, but to underscore some aspects of such subalternities-hegemonies that arise out of their legacies described above, and are pertinent to the positions of MIWRC (miwrc.org) and FEDO (fedonepal.org). The first such aspect of a dis/continuity that signifies a plurality is reflected in my use of 'subalternization' and 'subalternized' in this discussion, rather than 'subaltern'. 'Subalternized' brings attention to the notion of 'position' as the accretion of multiple processes at a moment in time rather than as an already given (and often naturalized) attribute. All past and current instances of subaltern-hegemon may be read collectively as manifestations of an overarching phenomenon of static and antagonistic positions which manifest the same principle: hegemons accumulate and conserve access to political, economic, cultural re-presentation through policies and processes that, in the same balance of power, actively make the same re-presentations unavailable/impossible for the subaltern. The term 'subaltern' may easily be used to designate marginality that either cannot be surpassed or, once surpassed, is permanently shed; it thus tends to identify, or lends itself to identifying, a static position as well as specific people (Spivak 2005, pp. 476, 477, 484). However, if the emphasis is placed on the analysis of the systemic and systematic implementations of various processes/actions to make political and other power unequally available, then the term 'subalternization' marks the continual processes of minoritization and/or marginalization, specific to and

diversely practised in different contexts. In other words, in this discussion, I attempt to move away from shuttling between 'subaltern' as a metaphor devoid of precise meaning and 'subaltern' as a list of overdetermined identities/peoples/examples. I attempt to move towards an exposition of the various similar as well as diverse processes by which heterogeneous/multiple subalternities are produced and negotiated by the various bodies engaged in the 'war of positions'.

Subalternity is not a theoretical instrument; it is a name given to a condition that is experienced on the body. Subalternization, as distinct from subalternity, is a name I give to the processes that lead to this condition. This essay, in foregrounding the specific work of MIWRC and FEDO, distinguishes between 'subalternity' and 'subalternization' – the former has come to signify an aporia, an internal discontinuity for which resolution is continually or perhaps infinitely deferred. The latter, for the purposes of this essay, and to constate the work of MIWRC and FEDO, emphasizes processes of systematic and systemic disempowerment and contestations that are enacted through identities which are positioned materially within and across structures of power and displacement. 'Subalternization', as a term that grounds this essay, attempts to clear some space at the intersection of a number of conceptualizations, often read separately from each other: Gramsci's concern with the material grounds of the im/possibility of political representation (subaltern), Foucault's subject-as-effect-of-power and the diffuseness of identity-networks, Spivak's 'strategic essentialism', and Haraway's 'situated knowledges'.

Subalterns are not born but made, and made again, differently, through these processes. In juxtaposing MIWRC and FEDO, this discussion also emphasizes that not all subalternizations are the same; they are differently and differentially conducted, depending upon historical and cultural contexts. It remains to be said that subalternities, even if aporias *à la* Spivak, are differently experienced, have differing consequences, and that is because of how identity-makings are deployed in various contexts (I say more about this below). Otherwise, Spivak would not write about the gendered or the new subaltern (individualizing identity), and Subaltern Studies groups would not write about 'the subaltern classes' (naming identity-groups).

Still focusing on the dis/continuities embodied through multiple forms, a second aspect that characterizes and stems from these processes of subalternization, which I draw attention to and rely upon, is the diversity of gender/'race'/class/caste/nation formations. I emphasize that plurality exists in the historicity of identity-markers; historicity here signifies that the experience, deployment, and perception of categories such as 'race', caste, gender, and class are context-specific across spaces and times. As mentioned above, 'subaltern' can be associated with specific peoples and cultures, thus leading to an accumulation of discrete entities, whereas 'subalternized' signifies the shifting dynamics within and across structures of power. One could simply count

multiple instances of subalternity, located in different 'races', genders, classes, and sexualities within (and increasingly more recently, across) different nation-state structures – Sardinians and Sicilian peasants depicted by Gramsci, Indian peasants and women portrayed by the South Asian Subaltern Studies group, indigenous peoples by the Latin American Subaltern Studies group, all as diverse examples of subalternity. Yet, as moments taken from the *longue durée* of subalternization, these identity-markers are configured in particular ways during those processes, and those processes then change in nature and consequence as we move through the twentieth century into the present. Put differently, an understanding of process-within-position (metamorphoses in uses of gender, caste, 'race', and nation) is critical to the perception of identities moving and acting in the circuits of power and across geographies and through histories. Throughout this essay, 'race' is marked as such because it is particularly contested and incommensurable with many claimed identities.

In the opening statements of this discussion, I use the phrase 'create and produce' to convey that, for the subalternized, the distinctions between the constructed and the natural are constantly negotiable and negotiated. The two words, 'create' and 'produce', together and separately, can signify the natural as well as the constructed. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Haraway (1991) argue for a revision of the relationships between body and machine (body as machine, and vice versa), which can radicalize our epistemologies of structures, positions, and identities; I draw upon these revisionings to point to the intertwining of organic and machinic relations that inform the metamorphoses of identity-markers over times and across spaces. Organic, in the sense that markers such as gender, 'race', caste, sexuality, and ability, while constructed, are experienced on the body and claimed as the given bases of lived experience; machinic, in the sense that these same markers are instrumentally deployed in the processes of subalternization and resistance. My approach, in positioning MIWRC and FEDO in relation to legacies of subalternization, will be to maintain a focus on both the heterogeneity as well as the changes in the processes of identity-makings. Whether claimed and/or imposed, categories such as gender, 'race', caste, and class shift over time and space, certainly across cultural contexts but even within any perceived cultural history bounded within nation-state structures. So, while gendered or racialized subalternity has been addressed in many analyses, this discussion is premised on two elements: that 'race' or class or gender or caste, separately and simultaneously, carry historically embedded significations but also accrue certain others in the contexts of neoliberal globalization. As I will elaborate below, the connotations of 'Indian' (for MIWRC) and 'Dalit' (for FEDO) have shifted throughout the twentieth century, and these organic and machinic relations inform, and are transformed by, the ways in which they are claimed and deployed by members of the organizations and those from outside.

In attempting to relocate subalternity in the context of neoliberal globalization today, this essay presents my interpretations of the specific conditions, experiences, and positions of MIWRC and FEDO. What emerges immediately, as I elaborate below, is that their work is grounded in identities; it is evident in the names of their organizations (variously Indian, women, feminist, Dalit). As an observer re-presenting their work, I am bound to acknowledge this ground since it is their own perception of their positions in the struggle for political and other representation.

So 'identity' can be more closely described as identity-making, that is, also as process, in the course of the organizations' struggles to claim rights and representation. In other words, the members of the organizations negotiate between ethnicized, gendered, and class-based essentialisms/reductiveness and constructedness to claim grounds for action within the sociocultural and political (ultimately, existential) discontinuities and deferrals of representation.

For the purposes of observing/interpreting/representing the subalternizations that MIWRC and FEDO experience, it is impossible to de-historicize or un-locate those as abstract deferral. The contradictions informing the deferral of representation are experienced materially, that is, in the continuity of possibility to claim rights and recognition, and the serial and temporary closing off of that possibility. In proposing that subalternizations are imposed and contested processes conducted through identity-makings, I address the anxieties over essentialisms/reductionisms/static-ness that arise immediately upon invoking the word 'identity' as well as take note of the politics of constructedness and of deferral of meanings.

Other critical dis/continuities remain to be addressed, so that change is not assumed to occur easily or automatically. First is the overlap of eras, at least in their naming, which needs to be explored especially in relation to re/locating subalternization for MIWRC and FEDO, specifically, the relationship between 'postcolonial' and 'neoliberal globalization'. Both terms imply that change has occurred: 'postcolonial' signifies the departure of colonial powers and the emergence of independent nation-states that have shed hegemony of a particular kind, while neoliberal globalization signifies the (re)assertion of control by private capital, endorsed by national and international hegemonic structures, influencing the circuits of the movements of bodies, knowledges, and goods. The latter builds on older circuits already established in colonial times which are reinforced by now-independent nation-states as well as former colonial powers, that is, by both native and foreign hegemonies.

To recognize the continuation of processes of subalternization through old and new mechanisms, including the deployment of identity-makings ('race', caste, gender, class) in ways that hinder or disable re-presentation, I will use the term 'neo-colonizing' to indicate the current contexts in which MIWRC and FEDO function. Since 'postcolonial' usually implies national-sociocultural renewal along with political birth as independent nations, the notions of

liberation, rejuvenation, and self-definition carried in the experience of 'after colonization' can obscure the re/assertion of colonizing forces in the form of hegemonic national and cultural traditions. In addition, the explicit or implicit presence of former colonial powers remains in the form of international relations. Neo-colonizing forces (internal and external) become invisible in being absorbed as the normative. In other words, hegemonies such as neocolonizing structures exercise and attempt to maintain control over the construction of historically embedded discourses and actions to predicate the terms (made normative and thus invisible) through which re-presentation is made possible and intelligible.

Furthermore, the dis/continuity between the conditions indicated by the terms 'postcolonial' and 'neoliberal globalization', that is, the degrees to which they are different and similar, means that re/locating subalternities also entails re/locating hegemonies themselves. The location of FEDO in Nepal invokes the successive subalternizations of Dalit women in the power struggles of the Dalit community, Nepali monarchy, Maoists, and parliamentary forces, informed/inflected further by the trans-national histories of Dalit across South Asia colonial and postcolonial eras. The location of MIWRC in the United States calls up the successive subalternizations of First Nation women in the struggles of power among First Nation tribal sovereignties and the United States federal as well as state forces, inflected further by the histories of other minoritized positions in the United States as well as the trans-national networks of indigenous histories across the Americas. Separately, the United States and Nepal manifest diverse subalternizations, uniquely characterized by economic, cultural, and political histories; in juxtaposition, their unequal global political status in relation to each other provides another dimension to Dalit and First Nation subalternizations.

If, for a moment, one considers various postcolonial periods and neoliberal globalization as dis/continuous histories of modernity, they are premised upon a subject propelled by the will to freedom and progress. Where there is will, there must also be an ability to enact it. If the dialectic between hegemony and the subaltern is lodged primarily in conditions that make it structurally impossible to become politically intelligible, to become 'protagonists of History' (Gramsci 1929–35 [1971], p. 52), then the issue arises of the very ability to enact the struggles to claim that validity. Given the contexts of neocolonial-neoliberal structures and processes described above, agency, for subalternized positions such as MIWRC and FEDO individuals/groups hold, is a function of the uneven confluence of a number of elements: the conditions of self-definition (embedded in historical and cultural viability), the perception of the legitimacy of claims, and economic sustainability, to name some key aspects. These are not ranked in order of priority or importance; they are simultaneously necessary and most often unequally unavailable. In other words, as emerges from the positions of subalternized experiences in the neoliberal-

neocolonial circuits of material and intellectual flows/exchanges, agency becomes a function of dis/continuous conditions that create the (im)possibility of action.

The agential subject/position, in a liberal-hegemonic perspective, is already assumed to be autonomous, and able to express and enact claims to rights such as political franchise and to cultural legitimacy. The subalternized subject/position in neoliberal-neocolonial circumstances works in a set of conditions and with a set of terms that systemically and systematically disable or mis-recognize re-presentation (both as self-definition and advocacy). In this reading, I interpret Gayatri Spivak's question 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' to mean 'Can the Subaltern be Heard by Currently Hegemonic Ears?' The subalternized is rendered mute and is a 'non-agent' or non-subject by virtue of the fact that subjecthood and agency are defined in hegemonic terms. The subalternized does/can speak and enact but remains inevitably mis-recognized and thus incommensurable since the terms, at least in part, derive from invisible/normative vocabulary. It is worth underscoring here that the invisibility of the normative rests upon hegemonic power and is distinct from the invisibility, stemming from the inaccessibility of power, that is experienced by the subalternized.

I would like to offer one clarification about hegemonies (in the plural): in this discussion, there is no 'powerless' that stands outside and apart from hegemony. Identity-makings, by MIWRC and FEDO, and those by prevailing powers in the US and Nepal, respectively, can be read in the following way – currently dominant powers impose their cultural and political paradigms (what Gramsci calls their 'buon senso'); contesting powers, made subordinate to them, such as MIWRC and FEDO, seek to bring their own other 'common senses' (reliant partially upon the same paradigms) to bear upon this prevailing definition, to transform political and civil society. I relocate, in the neoliberal moment, the Gramscian notion of how the dialectics of history create the transformation of meaning for 'the integral State' to be realized; I move away from Ranajit Guha's idea of 'dominance without hegemony' because it ultimately decontextualizes the concept.

The complication in re-presentation, in both senses of *Vertretung* ('rhetoric as persuasion') and *Darstellung* ('rhetoric as trope') (Spivak 1988, p. 277) is that the territories of discourse and action for subalternized positions re-claim some of the very same terms that create subalternization. Identity-makings through gender, 'race', caste, nation, religion, or the composite of accumulated practices known as tradition, constitute the grounds as well as the means of re-presentation. These very terms are also protected and contested, retained and reconfigured towards the goal of establishing and gaining cultural, political, and socio-economic claims. At least two other complications arise out of wrestling with past (colonizing) and recent (neocolonizing) means of disenfranchisement as the territory of self-definition and re-

presentation. One emerges particularly in the later twentieth century – the crisis of the autonomous subject who is assumed to exist a priori and as a whole entity invokes the anxiety about essentialisms, that is, about the deployment of attributes of identity-markers as confining and constraining the multi-faced, fluid, and aspiring political/economic/cultural agent. It is interesting that this anxiety is discontinuous with the intentional claim that MIWRC and FEDO make of 'women', 'native', 'Indian', 'Dalit', 'indigenous', 'tribal' (miwrc.org; fedonepal.org). Spivak might read these uses as examples of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak 1987, p. 205); in the next section, I explore the views of the subalternized such as MIWRC and FEDO members on whether gender or caste or nation is a strategy. Another, and related, concern, is, as Lorde puts it: 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (2007 [1984, p. 110 [title of essay]). I explore this below as well – the possibilities and avenues of re-presentation may indeed confirm agency. However, it needs to be explored to what extent subalternized positions can re-utilize 'the master's tools' (normative or prevailing terms) to reconstruct 'the master's house' (physical and intellectual habitations such as nation and discourse, respectively) into the new material and conceptual territories they seek to create.

Before I explore the aspects that inform the subalternization of MIWRC and FEDO further, and their responses, it is necessary to describe the dis/continuity between these entities and my own position. I cannot speak for subalternity. I am only partially able to represent or re-present subalternizations, only able to produce the organizations' partial and situated knowledges (Haraway 1988). I have been acquainted with the work of the two organizations for the past few years, observed their programmes over that period of time, visited the MIWRC in Minneapolis and communicated by email with the director of FEDO in Nepal, and am now interpreting their relevance and significance within the rubrics of this discussion. I am also aware that my own subject position, as formed through and under neoliberal capital in the circuits of globalization, affects this discussion. Our mutually defined positionalities (mine in relation to the two organizations) give rise to issues of truth-value, mediation, and the production of knowledges. As Persram comments, discussions about subalternizations are not about the fact that they cannot be known but rather about how various layers of mediation obscure and silence the subaltern (1999). While aware that inaccuracies of re-presentations are endemic to my endeavour, my intention is to 'speak nearby' (Trinh 1982). I will have to acknowledge these incommensurabilities while attempting to convey MIWRC's and FEDO's understanding of subalternizations today.

Perhaps I hope to mitigate/offset the epistemic violence that I inevitably commit as interpreter by ascribing to the words of MIWRC and FEDO, as I do in the following section, an indisputable authenticity to them as sources whose epistemic privilege is beyond question. My intention is not to 'use'

them as dis/embodied 'case-studies' that bear out an already formulated theory of subalternization. I am not interested so much in applying theory to practice but in looking closely at how theories appear when related to practices, and what theories the practices themselves generate; otherwise, MIWRC and FEDO are re-subalternized.

My interaction with MIWRC and FEDO define me as much, even if unevenly, as I define them in this discussion. We (they and I) also co-exist and co-define multiple and overlapping hegemonic perspectives. My intention, while somewhat similar to seeing history from below, is more about speaking nearby and acknowledging that my narrative mediates in particular historically and culturally-embedded ways in the context of neoliberal globalization.

One of many ways to relocate subalternity is to resituate the relevance of the term to the positions of those who are signified as such. For whom and how have the circumstances changed? To whom is the term 'subaltern' relevant? To what extent does the relationship between structure and identity signify something to the subalternized?

Rather than make them impossible, the many dis/continuities described above are constitutive of the discussions of subalternizations today.

History and time

One more distinction remains to be addressed. Re/locating subalternizations have to take into account geographical and/or historical changes but also encounter epistemological shifts in structure- and identity-formations. The dynamic 'war of positions' in which the subalternized confront the hegemons is not any longer the classic, pitched battle of oppressor and oppressed that liberal modernity envisions. As the work of MIWRC and FEDO illustrates, there are 'wars of position' in progress between identities created and produced through historical legacies and their re-constructions. These webs of relationships are further defined by and, in turn, impact the forces at work in the context of neoliberal globalization. If these 'wars' are about claiming rights and re-positioning historically constricting identities, they are also about epistemological reconceptualizations. That is, about clearing a space in hegemonic discourse to change its content and direction (see Appiah 1991 and Suleri 1992 on this effort in postcolonial practices to intervene in hegemonic colonial discourses). But for MIWRC and FEDO, what are those spaces? Are they the same as those invoked by Appiah and Suleri? And clearing for what purpose? Are claims for legitimacy, visibility, intelligibility the ultimate goals?

Gramsci makes the case that it is

> necessary to study [among six elements]: 1. The objective formation of the subaltern social groups […] 2. Their active or passive affiliation to the dominant political formations […] 4. The formations which the subaltern groups themselves produce, in order to press claims of a limited and partial character

> 5. Those *new formations* that assert the autonomy of the subaltern groups but *within the old framework*. (Gramsci 1929–35 [1971], p. 52; italics added)

The normalized identity (in Gramsci's vocabulary, the hegemonic, 'the old framework') in the entity of the masculinist, corporatist State universalizes itself as the possessor of History; according to Gramsci, subalternities strive to become coherent by entering History on the terms of the hegemon. Made up of both native and foreign hegemons (gendered, classed, sexualized) that overlap and also conflict, the State is the symbol as well as structure of political legitimacy and power. To return to his statement, the emphasis on History is the reason for aspiring to this unity; the arrival into the space of Statehood, by articulating identity/position in hegemonic terms, marks the arrival into history and, by extension, acknowledgment as an entity.

Elsewhere (Sarker 2014), I have observed, in a discussion about the connection between Gramsci's notion of 'subaltern' and Michel Foucault's 'subjugated knowledges', that, in both their works, hegemonic forms become mechanisms and methods to co-opt History as the domain of modernity (activity, progress) and relegate those deemed 'un-modern' or 'traditional' to the realm of Time (static, cyclical). Rather than pluralize Time, I posit that hegemonic forces attempt to eliminate opposition that makes claims to History by consigning potential insurrection to a different category of time-space. In other words, pluralization (of times and spaces) can function as a form of totalitarianism and colonialism in which diversity can be controlled by hegemonic forces, either by subsuming it or by relegating it to a disempowered zone.

The State co-opts the power to particularize its 'others', including the 'subaltern', as non-normative and living outside history, in the unstructured stream called Time. These 'others' are particularized in terms of their ethnic, gendered, sexualized, or class category, for example, the Sardinian, the woman, the worker, to name some. However, it is not only a matter of spatialities (material, virtual, and otherwise) intersecting with temporalities but of space-time. As Sanjines observes about subalternities in Latin America: 'History is actually interwoven with coloniality in a spatial distribution of nodules that fill a "structural" space, not merely a time line' (2013, p. 5).

Neo-colonizing practices organize simultaneous narratives with different valencies, that resonate with what Johannes Fabian called 'heterosynchronous structures' (1983) and Bloch termed 'the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous' (1992 [1935], p. 106). It is at these disjunctures that I read Gramsci's analysis of subaltern-hegemon to convey latent distinctions between History and Time. In Gramsci's own words, subaltern history is 'fragmented and episodic' (Gramsci 1929–35 [1971], pp. 54–55) which, by implication, does not rise to the unity and integrity of Statehood (dominant

history). The narratives of subaltern groups are perceived, through hegemonic lenses, as adjacent to dominant narratives and consigned to Time that is signified as abstract, un-linear, and outside material structure. In other words, subaltern groups may have internal histories but, in their inability to participate or actualize, exist in the a-historical (see, for example, Gramsci's depictions of Sicilians and Sardinians (Gramsci 1929–35 [1971], pp. 68, 95, 97, 98). Subalternized groups, in this aspect of inhabiting Time rather than History, are characterized by their paradoxical inclusion as marginal in, and thus exclusion from, statehood. Sivaramakrishnan contends that Subaltern Studies itself suspended peasants into a timeless space and created a binary opposition to elites, a space to which groups such as the Chipko and Bodadu were relegated (1995, p. 411).

Since the struggle for arrival into History is ongoing, subalternity-hegemony can be read not so much as a closed system to which there is an 'outside', 'beyond', or 'after', but rather as a nodality at the confluence of numbers of forces that redefine its nature from era to era. This continual struggle also speaks to the decision, in this discussion, to refer to current conditions as neo-colonizing rather than postcolonial. Spivak comments that while we need to be attentive to the most recent configurations of subalternity, the difference between the old and the new subaltern is 'only conjunctural' (2005, p. 484). Certainly, newer forms may hide older oppressions. However, to say that the difference is 'only' conjunctural (if conjunctural here means a combination of circumstances) is a dismissal of a change in, or contestations of, existing epistemologies. As long as new/old conditions of disenfranchisement prevail, and an actual 'post' has not been made manifest in significant ways, subalternization will continue, but also continue to be contested. The positions of MIWRC and FEDO illustrate this ongoing struggle to emerge from a formless Time into the legitimation that History promises but through a redefinition of the terms of engagement.

What the subalternized say

In a March 2014 email exchange, the then director of MIWRC replied in the affirmative to my query as to whether the term 'subaltern' was relevant to the definition of the position of the group, while also saying that it was unlikely that members of the group would actually use the term itself. This self-defined distance on the part of the entity from the term inevitably qualifies the enquiry here in two ways: if subalternity is a 'position without identity', then how does 'strategic essentialism' relate to the identifications of MIWRC and FEDO? And, if the project of the subalternized is to intervene into the narratives of History through claims to belonging in the neoliberal nation-state, then to what extent does the use of 'the master's tools' enable or disable that enterprise?

To address the first question first, through the words of the subalternized:

> The Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center (MIWRC) is a non-profit social and educational services organization committed to the holistic growth and development of American Indian women and their families … located in the Phillips neighborhood of Minneapolis, which has the third largest urban American Indian population in the United States. MIWRC is the only organization addressing the gender and culturally specific needs of our community. (the main page of www.miwrc.org, originally in English)

And: 'FEDO strives to create a movement against caste and gender-based discrimination in order to protect and promote civil and political rights of Dalit women and to support their socio-economic empowerment' (http://www.fedonepal.org/vision–mission-and-goals; The FEDO, working across 45 district chapters in Nepal; originally in English).

MIWRC and FEDO, founded in 1984 and 1994, respectively, ground themselves firmly and prominently in identities that are bound to the geographical and political histories that inform their work. This basis in seemingly unproblematized categories (Dalit, Native American, women, poor) may constitute a surrender to hegemonic terms of identity-formations in multiple ways, and thus be read as reductive claims to histories of oppression. Both MIWRC and FEDO explicitly use 'women' and 'feminist' in the names of their organizations. Like most women's organizations, they are not focused on whether 'woman' is an essentialized term but rather on how 'woman' is understood on a historical as well as on a daily, material basis. Some of the roles and attributes that are considered 'constructions' in feminist terms are understood and practised as inherently part of women's identities and roles in both organizations. At the same time, there is an understanding of the gap between expectations of women by local, national, and foreign masculinist hegemonies, and their own reformulation of their identities.

Subalternity-hegemon had always been gendered. The muscular modernity of Mussolinian dictatorship remained unnamed (thus invisible and normative) in Gramsci's texts while the position of Woman is directly addressed in *The Prison Notebooks* 1929–35 (1971, pp. 279; 294–301; 204–206). MIWRC and FEDO base their work most explicitly on the gendered category of Woman. Their programmes deal with what are considered 'women's' issues – both organizations are multi-pronged efforts: education, emotional/physical health; legal rights and participation through which subjecthood and identity-making are conveyed and transformed; violence against women (domestic violence, sexual abuse) is a primary concern in both MIWRC and FEDO. In the case of Dalit women, the latter organization lists distances between sanitation and water resources that make them vulnerable, child marriage, dowry, bigamy, accusations of witchcraft, torture, and non-Dalit male aggression as issues of concern.

However, each of their programmes is configured as a social issue, in relationship to masculinist hegemonies as well as the subalternized that are part of their daily lives. Moreover, the representations are not just of 'the female subaltern' but the delineation of kinds of femaleness – racialized, gendered, sexualized, stratified in different ways, within the organization and within the communities for whom they advocate.

In her more recent writings, Spivak has introduced the figure of the 'new subaltern' who is 'no longer cut off from the lines of access to the centre' but corresponds to the 'rural and indigenous subaltern' who is incorporated by the centre as 'source of trade-related intellectual property' (2000, p. 326). MIWRC and FEDO could be seen as instances of such positions, since they are part of the rural and the indigenous, and can access centres of power. However, rural and indigenous positions have often been subalternized in analyses from the middle through to the end of the twentieth century. The two organizations are based on historical rural and indigenous positions, located diversely as they are in the national landscapes of the United States and Nepal, respectively. Rural (and urban) Dalit identification has been both claimed and imposed in Nepal, as across South Asia, and FEDO negotiates these histories, nationally and transnationally, in ways that overlap but also differ from the ways in which MIWRC navigates the histories of rural and urban indigenous Native American identities in the United States today.

The intersection of diversely inflected indigeneities and genders, across class and caste, defines the claims to History that MIWRC and FEDO make. Subalternization creates subordination/oppression through systematic and systemic denial of access or power to control labour, production, and capital (Prakash 1994, Srivastava and Bhattacharya 2012). Both the statements above refer implicitly or explicitly to the 'needs' (MIWRC) and 'rights' (FEDO) that have been denied or remained beyond access. These dynamics of mutually in/formed representations create, as well as inhabit, the spaces where MIWRC and FEDO exist and do their work of claiming 'needs' and 'rights'. While Spivak holds that '[s]ubalternity is a position without identity' (2005, p. 476), what is palpably evident in the groups' statements is that the most critical issue for subalternized positions, differently situated as they are, is not so much whether and how identities exist. It is rather that subalternity is not engraved in the identity of a subject; identification is, however, urgently necessary in a 'war of positions'.

The clear demarcation of their ethnicized and gendered spatialities in the words of the subalternized above may invoke the essentialisms that lead to equating 'subaltern' with 'the marginalized'. My focus on specific identities (women, the disadvantaged) and spatial locations (Minneapolis, Lalitpur) are constative; in singling out identities, these reductive enumerations appear to undermine the structural analysis that Gayatri Spivak emphasizes in 'Can

the Subaltern Speak?' (1988) as well as in 'Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular' (2005).

The MIWRC main webpage presents images that are stereotypically attached to Native American culture. It highlights issues, both local and beyond – the sex trafficking in Minnesota female youth, the signing of the Tribal Law and Order Act in 2010, participation in the United Nations (2009–2010). The organization's webpages concentrate on women, children, families, and networks of state social services, partners, researchers, and community members. Also prominently featured are individual stories of women who, in the space of the organization, 'heal from their sexual trauma, addictions, mental health issues, and cultural co-occurring disorders (e.g. loss of: culture, language, family roles; grief and shame) and, live sober and fulfilling lives'. (http://www.miwrc.org/our-programs/endaad/ The Nokomis Endaad: Shki Bimaadzi Mikaana Statement).

What emerges from my reading of MIWRC and FEDO is that positions are embedded in identities that are inflected such that subalternizations consist of diverse understandings of ethnicity, gender, 'race', caste, and nation; this also further complicates 'strategic essentialism'. The self-definitions of MIWRC and FEDO, embedded in and derived from material bodies, are not included here to invoke or ascribe any absolute or irreducible purity to the speakers; they are self-constructions of identities that are mediated in their own particular contexts. They are also constituted of the elements ('races', nations, genders, sexualities, classes, etc.) that, however constructed and contingent, have had material effects on the beings/positions described. The positions of the women themselves are marked by these identities such as to create a multitude of subalternities, variously configured in diverse spatialities – the United States (MIWRC) and Nepal (FEDO). For instance, as FEDO points out, not only have Dalits experienced historical disenfranchisement, they are themselves unevenly located in relation to state and transnational hegemonies; even internally, there are 'six sub-caste groups of Dalits from the hills (Hill Dalits) and 10 sub-castes from the Terai (Madhesi Dalits)', with the 'worst' situations for Madhesi Dalit women (http://www.fedonepal.org/strategy).

Moreover, how the axes intersect differs between the members of the two organizations but they are common enough to create a platform for identity claims as well as claim to rights. I am focusing on organizations that have banded around some shared understandings of Native American and Dalit women, respectively. Each of those cultural-political gendered markers is, however, also diversely interpreted by members of each group. We are actually observing heterogeneous yet discernibly coherent profiles. I would consider these positions not to be 'strategic essentialisms' since the women of these two organizations, individually and collectively, do not consider their gendered or other positions to be only discursive constructions but

grounds from which to make particular claims to experience and, thus, policy. For instance, First Nations are themselves different from each other, diversely situated in relation to the United States Federal and State governments yet similarly located in terms of encountering difficult, if not inaccessible, means of political franchise.

In a 1993 interview, Spivak distances herself from the interpretations made in the United States, Australia, and Britain of 'strategic essentialism' in that it emphasized identity-politics and overlooked the notion of strategy. She expresses interest in 'considering the differences between the sexed subject–female agency, feminist theory–and a variety of individualisms, and their inter-relationships' (in Danius and Johnson 1993, p. 35). 'Strategic essentialism' emphasizes the configuration of the subject and focuses less on the structures with which subjectivity and subjecthood interact. The representations of MIWRC and FEDO relocate the conversation to pay attention to the dialectical relationships of subject and structure, and demonstrate that subaltern(ization) can be seen as a process of de- and re-legitimation.

It is not only the embeddedness in identity but it is also the nature of this identification that is significant – gender means what it does only in relation to the changing, not static, understandings as well as deployments of racialization, class-stratification, caste-segregation, and nation-state structures. As FEDO states: 'It is the one and only NGO engaged in raising issues in all three sectors simultaneously, like: women, Dalit women and Dalit'; (http://www.fedonepal.org/strategy). The MIWRC's focus on women includes members of diverse First Nation peoples (Lakota, Anishinaabe, and others) – in this case, the intersection of gender with class and nation produces different experiences of gender. In these two specific 'identities', caste and 'race' are not equivalent to each other and also qualify the experience of gender in both these locations.

It remains to be asked not only what strategies are undertaken to deploy identities but what the goals of those strategies may be. Here lies the connection to the second question: what is the viability of relying upon identifications and practices that are deployed by hegemonies to mobilize the projects of groups such as MIWRC and FEDO? As both groups convey through their records of systemic and systematic disenfranchisement, the neoliberal State renders the subaltern outside History by romanticizing or otherwise objectifying their group and individual entities. This orientalism (in which Sivaramakrishnan would situate Subaltern Studies), aided by Capital and State, facilitates the distinction between Tradition and Modernity (Sivaramakrishnan 1995). Gender, 'race', caste reductionisms become fantasies and narratives in State history. As FEDO points out:

> Nepal is still largely governed by a male dominated, rigid social structures, norms, and values that make Dalit women, and the associations that represent

> them, more vulnerable. In general, there is a low awareness level about Dalit women and their plight and Dalit women issues have not been addressed in the women's movement. (http://www.fedonepal.org/challenges)

Added to this is the ongoing communal violence and mismanaged government resources (roads, hospitals, schools). The structural obstacles to representation in History are captured in the phrase 'more vulnerable' – the constant and increasing exposure to hegemonic narratives and policies slow down, if not block, Dalit women's ability to participate in changing the course of national discourses.

The act of the subalternized is to rise from the formlessness associated with Time and intervene in History, not in order to assimilate into the latter but to reshape it – to be heard/be visible but not fully or only in currently hegemonic terms. But is it true that 'the master's tools can never dismantle the master's house'? For MIWRC and FEDO, this condition signifies that the virtual and physical presence at once mean gaining political ground but also fighting the continual pressure of disappearing. In this condition, the two organizations are being constantly subalternized and do not attain the status of a class (if they did, as Gramsci points out, they would no longer be subaltern). The struggle continues and agency is qualified by the constraints in the circumstances – however, it does not mean that agency is impossible. Just as the current status is produced out of processes, the condition is not static since the nature of hegemonic pressure also changes. So this discussion is a snapshot in time, in scale and not in longue durée.

In the constant insurrectional present (Sanjines 2013, p. 35), civil society becomes the place for this 'war of positions'. The issue is not to 'relocate' the subaltern but to redefine the condition in its direct negotiations with more recent definitions and formations of History and Capital. Subalternity negotiates and strategizes between the possibility of representation and unrepresentability. Subalternity finds it not only necessary but urgent to locate a position, even on a contingent identity, so that the possibility of representation is opened up, misinterpreted and co-opted as it may be by hegemonic frameworks.

To go further in our analysis would consist of 'exploring the dialectical relationship between stratified discourses of protest and the multivocal discourses of rule' (Sivaramakrishnan 1995, p. 418). In the simultaneous materializing and dematerializing of subalternization, agency and power are produced through process and can be systemically and systematically denied or made inaccessible. 'The subaltern' can be exoticized as the bringer of historical change, moving 'from the deduced subject of crisis to the logic of agency' (Spivak 2005, p. 480). MIWRC and FEDO both demonstrate that 'agency' is already defined in hegemonic terms, thus fraught with complications, yet is the threshold to self-definition.

Beyond the issue of speaking or being heard, the struggle of the subalternized is to claim and define not just identity but identity-makings as I have referred to above, that is political enfranchisement and economic participation and social respect, by attempting to move from Time into History. At least in the presentations of MIWRC and FEDO, this attempt can only be reconstituted through the struggle to redefine identities, not by superseding them. The alternative is to reject historical circumscriptions, an option that is not altogether feasible. 'Subaltern', in Spivak's terms (2005, p. 476), describes 'a position without identity' but that reading is relevant/applicable to the two groups' identifications only to the extent that 'identity' is often a way of essentializing and reducing, in effect, re-colonizing subjects by typifying them as powerless and having no agency. Groups such as MIWRC and FEDO that are positioned as the disadvantaged caste/class, in terms of citizenship, derive some of their grounding by referring to this historical identity of subordination; on the other hand, their struggles of political empowerment are motivated by the desire to surpass the disenfranchisement based in, and implemented through, this very identity.

It may appear that the work of both MIWRC and FEDO is assimilationist, and is based on recuperative and restorative work among, and on behalf of, the subalternized. Subaltern communities are drawn into Statist conceptualizations of subjecthood, responsibilities, and community, and into hegemonic notions of progress, development, efficiency, excellence, and innovation. MIWRC provides housing, budgeting, life-planning activities, early childhood learning, education, and family support to build strength in American Indian families and the community. Programmes such as the Native American Parenting Traditions Revisited parenting curriculum and Cherish the Children Learning Center 'regularly update [their] curriculum to provide new program enrichment that aligns with NECPA accreditation standards' (http://www.miwrc.org/our-programs/cherish-learning/). In addition, the Indian Child Welfare Coordinator 'works closely with Minnesota tribes to ensure culturally appropriate services are provided to tribal members in need of Family Stabilization or reunification services' (http://www.miwrc.org/our-programs/family-stablization/).

However, both MIWRC and FEDO draw upon the resources as well as rights of citizenship claimed from the same hegemonies that constrain them, to move from the suspension in Time to the narrative of History. Spivak asserts that '[t]he reasonable and rarefied definition of the word subaltern […] interests [her] […] to be removed from all lines of social mobility' (Spivak 2005, p. 475). This assertion can be interpreted to mean either that hegemonies systemically and systematically remove the subaltern or that the subaltern, by definition, remains removed from these lines that are defined in hegemonic terms (thus incomprehensible). The stated goal of MIWRC is to 'encourage American Indian women and families to exercise

their cultural values and integrity, and to achieve sustainable life ways, while advocating for justice and equity' (http://www.miwrc.org/about-us/). FEDO's goals are to ensure 'rights and opportunities including equity, development and participation', economic and political empowerment, 'for a just and equitable society' where 'Dalit women can live their lives with dignity and self-respect'.

There is another twist here. FEDO claims that its 'apolitical nature … has gained its Neutrality and impartiality in the field of advocacy and human rights. So, it has a challenge to keep up with this value' (http://www.fedonepal.org/strategy; the word 'neutrality' begins with a capital 'N' on the original webpage). FEDO's achievements include greater national and transnational visibility, representation in the Constituent Assembly, village development committees, school management committees, forest user groups, and mobilizing Dalit women in large numbers. They are working on awareness about proportional representation (local and national), increased access to and ownership of resources, and continuing missions to eliminate violence through discrimination against Dalit women. Re-presentation and political agency is 'understood' only when it is recognizable in hegemonic terms, even (liberal) feminist ones. The significance of the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges' (Foucault 1980, p. 81), as seen in the rhetoric and actions of these two groups, invokes the dilemma of subalternity in this era of neoliberal globalization – that it practices the identity-makings and language of hegemonic structures and yet seeks to remain incommensurable with them by reclaiming and redefining those very terms.

Networks, capital and mobility

This section focuses on the ways in which twenty-first-century capital and technology are constitutive of agency and re-presentation in formations of subalternities-hegemonies. The nature of subalternized positions such as those of MIWRC's and FEDO's communities do arise from and within historical environments but, as discussed above, are not mere historical accretions/accumulations. Spivak's distinction between the 'old subaltern' and the 'new subaltern' includes the idea of movement from definite/defined spaces to fluid spaces, the transition from relative immobility to relative mobility (often enforced), and the transfiguration of a 'position without identity' to 'rural and indigenous' who have 'access to the centre' (Spivak 2000, p. 326). As also discussed above, much of the new has been present in the old, but is identified differently precisely because of the nature of cultures and economies in neoliberal globalization.

The changing shapes of subalternity and the economic/cultural environments in which they emerge and to which they respond are mutually constitutive. In other words, the economic and cultural milieu informs/defines/

creates the particular kind of subalternities today, and the presence of the subalternized affects the way these political, economic, and socio-cultural forces are defined and implemented. This dialectical engagement runs counter to the narrative about an already-constituted neoliberal globalization that determines and oppresses an already-formed subaltern identity in a one-sided struggle that heavily favours the hegemonies at work.

Yes, there is mobility, but of what kind and to what end? On the one hand, the assumptions of privilege in this notion of the new subaltern are misplaced – subalternity is 'on the move' often because economic and cultural sustainability are made impossible due to famine, war, unemployment, etc.; however, these and other forms of 'mobility', virtual and otherwise, often enable access to resources at 'the centre', as Spivak (2000, p. 326) points out. But this is based in a binary understanding; hegemonies and subalternities, characterized by contingent centres and margins, can be said to be more plural and layered today.

MIWRC and FEDO engage the possibility of negotiating between local histories, nation-state sovereign cultural and political domains, and trans-border affiliations. In these webs of relations created in late capitalism, identities and positions are complicated by the engagement of non-governmental organizations and transnational partners/donors with their own effect in both directions – upon the subalternized as well as upon state-governmental institutions. For instance, FEDO lists international partners and donors that do not align cleanly along opposite lines of affiliation: the European Union, the Open Society Foundation, the World Bank, the Australian Embassy, the National ministry for the development of women. FEDO is also part of an international network of Dalit and women's rights organizations in Nepal and elsewhere – the *Empowering Dalit Women Against Gender-Based Violence* project was funded by Womankind International, UK and worked in four districts: Siraha, Bajhang, Bara, and Bajura from April 2009 to March 2010.

These networks simultaneously connect feminist allies and economically powerful nations, some of which are also former imperial powers. Added to these incongruent sources of support are their virtual representations that both flatten out as well as emphasize difference and inequality. Structurally, these dis/continuities affect identity-constructions in both the material and virtual spatialities that, in turn, the subalternized are constrained by but also claim as their own. The web-presence of the subalternized such as MIWRC and FEDO reveals a number of elements – their subscription to values of justice and equity that they claim and aim to participate in, if not redefine. However, as both MIWRC and FEDO show, the subalternized are caught negotiating between two simultaneous and contradictory positions facilitated by the internet: the hypervisibility of being perceived through essentialisms, entrenched through neocolonial-capitalist circuits, and the invisibility of constant marginalization. The constriction into reductive categories can be read

as one more control that hegemonies place in terms of participation and outcomes; concomitant with this is the ability of hegemonies to remain unhampered by the constraints of identities except as the 'norm' or 'the standard'.

Added to this is the nature of that visibility – it can also be a matter of speculation as to how organizations like MIWRC and FEDO are 'drawn into' the circuits of hegemonic play, for example, nation-states conduct the trading in indigenous and rural identities, expressing a symbolic political consciousness in support of the marginalized. Transnational networks of neoliberal capital and technology open up the possibility of political visibility (speaking and being heard). Through the relationships with international and local donors and supporters, conformity is enforced such that visibility or being heard becomes tenuous and impossible. Thus, the dialectic continues. Therefore, we cannot afford to be 'tired' of the subaltern (Spivak claims that she is, in Didur and Heffernan 2003, p. 2). Rather, we could seek not only to 'undo' it, but undo it in its prevalent or normatively perceived forms. The economic, sociocultural, and political conditions today call not only for a redefinition of 'subaltern' but also for its continued viability. The concept of subalternization, especially when extricated from its exclusive identification with reductive notions of powerlessness, marginalization, and disenfranchisement with which it is constantly associated, can be productive. Subalternity is a lived condition, one that can be physically and epistemologically understood as a necessary, even urgent, space for thinking beyond the constraining logic of currently dominant discourses.

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