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Listening to the Other: Explorations in Subaltern Representation

The Subaltern Studies initiative has largely been concerned over the retrieval of the subaltern voice from the hegemony of elite historiography in South Asia. The use of the term ‘subaltern’ by the Subaltern Studies initiative is based on the work of Italian scholar Antonio Gramsci who used it to describe “non-hegemonic groups” or “subordinate[s]” (qtd. in Morton 96) created by the unequal relationship between different classes in society and the marginalisation of elite discursive practices (Gramsci 48). Early work by Subaltern Studies scholars involved scouring the ground for fragments left behind in the wake of a totalising historical project; examining documents generated by the elite classes in order to shed light on the “small voice of history” (Guha 1) by peeling back the layers of colonial and bourgeois-nationalist sources of historiography. The subaltern subject is thus represented as an opportunity for the interrogation of hegemonic meaning and an attempt to reveal the fragility of history itself. However, the effort to locate the subaltern subject within the margins of historiography and colonial history is marked with intricate complexity, and has been challenged in more recent work over its ability to represent an authentic subaltern consciousness. After all, for Gayatri Spivak, subalternity is an inherent paradox: it is “a position without identity” (qtd. in Morton 97).

In her seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, Spivak explores the representation of human subjectivity with particular focus on the work of the Subaltern Studies scholars. Challenging the notion that human consciousness is constructed with autonomous agency, she invokes the ideas of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze to suggest that identity is in fact

an effect of discourse, and one that is subject to inevitable interpretation. This brings into crisis the work of the Subaltern Studies scholars because it highlights two inherent problems: “perceiving the subaltern as a ‘sovereign subject’ in control of his or her own consciousness, and assuming that the intellectual is a transparent medium through which subaltern consciousness can be made present” (McLeod 192). Representations of subaltern consciousness should therefore never be trusted as reliable sources of agency, because to do so would be to act in complicity with specifically Western modes of thinking conceptualising the ideas of identity and experience; ones that according to Spivak, cannot blindly be transplanted into the realm of the Third World.

Spivak’s own answer to her question in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is a blunt no, and especially not when the voices of the subaltern are retrieved from the margins with methods belonging to the hegemonic representational system, the very constructs which have silenced them in the first place. It is not, of course, that the subaltern subject cannot speak literally, nor is it that there exist no records of the representation of the subaltern subject. Spivak has clarified this herself in *Subaltern Talk*, where she explains that:

Problems arise if you take this “speak” absolutely literally as “talk.” [...] What I was concerned about was that even when one uttered, one was constructed by a certain kind of psychobibliography, so that the utterance itself [...] would have to be interpreted in the way in which we historically interpret anything. (291)

This highlights the failure of the subaltern position, which has been constructed such that it is constantly appropriated as the object of colonialism through hegemonic modes of interpretation. The muting of the subaltern is, therefore, as McLeod aptly suggests, a result of others’ inability to listen: a “failure of *interpretation* and not a failure of articulation” (195).

Spivak goes on to suggest that the language of the elite also seems to be straining to acknowledge the subaltern’s presence, further shattering any illusion of representation. For

her, the subaltern consciousness can be “no more than a theoretical fiction to entitle the project of reading. It cannot be recovered” (“In Other Worlds” 280). Why then, pursue the study of subalternity if any effort to situate resistance is subsumed into the elite collective thought being confronted in the first place? Quite simply, a paradox here has been created between the realms of the theoretical and the political. It would be rather reductive to characterise the subaltern experience as a mere “inaccessible blankness” (“A Critique” 118) particularly because it is one that has been irretrievably marked by the political reality that surrounds it. Bart Moore-Gilbert hence argues that “the more the subaltern is seen as a ‘theoretical fiction’, of course, the more the suffering and exploitation of the subaltern becomes a theoretical fiction, too” (102). Attacking the theoretical focus of Spivak’s argument, he posits that the material reality the subaltern subject goes through is disregarded, and this threatens to further exacerbate its marginalised existence.

If we were to follow Spivak’s logic in its entirety then, this would most critically result in an impossible predicament for the non-subaltern critic: “[s/he] must either maximally respect the Other’s radical alterity, thus leaving the status quo intact, or attempt the impossible feat of ‘opening up’ to the Other without any way ‘assimilating’ that Other to his/her own subject-position, perspectives or identity” (Moore-Gilbert 102). Here, the critic is caught between two positions that both carry their own problematic assumptions. Adhering to the status quo would require relinquishing from the subaltern subject any position from which it can speak, where it will be continually trapped in the passive and muted end of Edward Said’s East/West binary of voice and silence. The critic hoping for a disinterested representation of the subaltern existence will similarly come to realise this a fallacy. According to Deepika Bahri, representation is “always fictional and partial because it must imaginatively construct its constituency [...] and because it can inadvertently usurp the space of those who are incapable of representing themselves” (207). Insisting on a platform from

which the subaltern subject can ‘speak’ and be recovered from the margins will inevitably require interpretation from the critic, but it is also, given its political ramifications, a paradox that needs to be urgently confronted.

But perhaps Spivak has already overcome this double bind herself, when she suggests reading the efforts of the Subaltern Studies project as “a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (“In Other Worlds” 281). McLeod justifies the pursuit of subalternity by explaining Spivak’s much-cited acknowledgment of its political and material importance:

Although it is theoretically improper to assume the existence of a sovereign or essential subaltern consciousness, it is nonetheless important to continue to use the concept of an essential subject as part of a wider political project. (194)

Maybe then the subaltern comes to occupy a kind of utopian position out of necessity, as Priyamvada Gopal suggests, where it is a “real and imagined means of coming to an understanding of human commonalities that have been excised by the marginalising sweep of large historical processes and systems” (“Reading subaltern history” 152). Studying the subaltern subject will always be marked with ambivalence and absence, but it is also possible that we bring to crisis existing institutionalised systems of representation by recognising their inherent inadequacy. We therefore accept that the conceptual framework of exploration, anchored in the modes of dominant discourse may be one that is problematic and requires “persistent critique” (Spivak, “Interviews” 63). Used *strategically* however, and in full awareness of its limitations, it is nevertheless also one that attempts to dismantle the hegemony silencing the agency of the subaltern subject.

Strategic methods of approaching the liminal position of the subaltern subject will thus be explored in this essay. In the first chapter, I make use of Sadaat Hasan Manto’s *The Room with the Bright Light* in order to argue for the right to represent the specifically

gendered subaltern subject, provided that the author remains highly attentive of his or her position in the existing patriarchal representational system. The decision to use a male writer was not one that was done on the basis of convenience or gratuitousness, but rather as a demonstration of the heightened awareness that should always be present when attempting to approach the complex subject of subalternity. *The Return*, another short fiction by Manto, will be examined in the second half of the chapter for the ways in which he negotiates the processes of subaltern (non-)representation in the face of Spivak's assertion that its presence can be no more than a certain "theoretical fiction" ("In Other Worlds" 280). It is the unspeakable nature of the violence exerted on the gendered subaltern subject that Manto evokes in this text to destabilise existing structures of hegemony, particularly through the emphasis of the necessary absences within language itself.

I then make use of Trinh T. Minh-Ha's filmic reaction to conventional ethnographic documentary, *Reassemblage*, in the second chapter to interrogate the ways in which the genre has attempted to speak for the subaltern subject through the surveillance of the all-knowing camera. The gendered subaltern subject will once again be evoked where I draw a similarity between the apparent benevolence that the First World feminist project bestows upon her, and the veil of social interest that conventional ethnographic documentary often makes use of. Trinh's use of various cinematic devices through distinctly subversive methods finally attempts to dismantle the notion of a fixity of meaning within the traditional dichotomy between interpretive and interpreted communities, the subject and the object, in order to emphasise our shifting positions in the cultural and historical grid.

I will conclude by arguing that the seemingly disparate texts of Manto and Trinh are ones that fundamentally serve to draw attention to the reader and the spectator respectively and their roles in the interpretation of meaning. For Spivak, the question 'Who should speak?' has always been less crucial than 'Who will listen?' ("Interviews" 59). After all, even

as we consider the position of subalternity an important platform for political mobilisation today, the real demand is lies in being listened to seriously, [and] not with a kind of benevolent imperialism (Spivak, “Interviews” 60) that often marks the interpretive scholarship. This can only occur by prioritising the act of *listening*, and respecting the consciousness of the subaltern subject as being “something unique, irreducible, especially to [one’s] own, as something new, as yet unknown” (Irigaray 116).

CHAPTER ONE

Extending the possibility of a gendered subaltern representation to Sadaat Hasan Manto may initially seem like a very problematic move. After all, the Punjab writer spent years of his short life (1912-1955) defending five of his over 250 short stories dealing with controversial themes of rape and eroticism against their alleged obscenity. Suggesting that Manto offers a feminist perspective in his stories also brings about the necessarily complicated negotiations of whether a male writer can accurately represent the experiences of a (subaltern) woman, especially when they involve the infliction of violence on the female body. Although Toril Moi admits that in principle, feminists need not *be* females, men however, “will always speak from a different position than women [under patriarchy], and their political strategies must take this into account” (122). Using Toril Moi’s essay to help disentangle the terms “feminist”, “feminine” and “female”, I first build a case for Manto’s ideological position as both non-subaltern and male in continuing to allow him the right to negotiate the (im)possibility of representing a gendered subaltern experience. The polysemic silences and gaps in Manto’s texts as I will argue, then *perform* the representation of this experience as one that is paradoxically unrepresentable, and are especially appropriate for dealing with instances of unspeakable trauma on the female subaltern body.

WHOSE RIGHT TO SPEAK?

It would firstly be unwise to reject the alliance of men in the pursuit of feminism particularly because the overarching system of representation is an inherently masculine one, where “all ideas, including feminist ones, are in this sense ‘contaminated’ by patriarchal ideology” (Moi 118). Calling on women to acknowledge men as “comrades in struggle” in the feminist movement, bell hooks goes on to explain that:

since men are the primary agents maintaining and supporting sexism and sexist oppression, they can only be successfully eradicated if [they] are compelled to assume responsibility for transforming their consciousness and the consciousness of society as a whole. (83)

Thus, in order to destabilise the masculine hegemony, there needs to be change within the anti-feminist system itself, and it is neither effective nor progressive to reinforce the sexist binary by declaring a “woman only” feminist movement. A declaration that men are the enemy would only serve the idea that “the empowerment of women would necessarily be at the expense of men” (hooks 68), a position that remains trapped within the logic defined by the patriarchal representation system, and one that resists any possibility of political change.

We then approach the more complex issue of suggesting that males are capable of feminine, and even feminist writing, despite coming from different histories and existing in different social realities. To suggest outright that only biological females can write in a feminine manner would be sympathetic with “the patriarchal strategy of collapsing the feminine into the female” (Moi 130), and ultimately go against the feminist project in establishing femininity as a social construct instead of being based purely on biological essentialism. Moi goes on to argue that “to believe that common female experience in itself gives rise to a feminist analysis of women’s situation is to be at once politically naïve and theoretically unaware” (121); at the same time however, we should not discount the material

realities that women face either. Male writers need to carefully negotiate the privileged positions they hold in the representational system in order not to encroach on or speak for the female experience, but Devon Carbado notes that the very fact that both sexes occupy different spaces may be an effective starting point for male feminism (525). He goes on to argue that “men’s realisation of gender difference and gender hierarchy can provide [them] with the opportunity to theorise about gender from the gender privileged positions [they] occupy as men” (525).

Manto’s short stories, which often centre on traditional figures of female weakness and exploitation such as prostitutes and women who have been raped, are typically filtered through a male character’s consciousness. Rather than try to speak on behalf of his female characters however, his stories bring to crisis a dominant patriarchal system by highlighting the perpetration of violence inflicted on the female body through the consciousness of a typically male narrator. Many of Manto’s stories instead “initiate the process of decoding the male subject and launching a male epistemological self-criticism” (Carbado 527). Manto offers an allegory of the dangers of the representation of the female experience through a masculine perspective in *The Room with the Bright Light*, which “sets up a distinction between the cognitive presence of [a male] figure and the physical presence of [a] prostitute to whose consciousness the former has very limited access” (Gopal, “Literary radicalism” 117). A man visits a prostitute in a brothel and comes to feel sympathetic towards her and the situation she is in after hearing her pimp threaten her into getting to work. Unable to get her out of his mind after he leaves her, he returns to “smash the head of the man who had brought [him] there” (*The Room* 124) but finds that she already done the job herself, not needing to be saved by her benefactor-to-be.

It is significant that the prostitute in *The Room*, contrary to what we would expect of a helpless, victimised character bullied into starting work, rejects all attempts of the protagonist

in communicating with her and trying to empathise with her situation. Instead, Gopal points out that the woman remains unnamed and resists establishing a relationship with the man who tries to understand her (116):

‘What is your name?’ he asked.

‘Never mind.’ Her tone was like acid.

‘Where are you from?’

‘What does it matter?’

‘Why are you so unfriendly?’

The woman was now wide-awake. She stared at him with blood red eyes and said,

‘You finish your business because I have to go.’

[...]

‘Why don’t you finish your business? Why are you trying to ridicule me?’

‘I’m not trying to ridicule you. I feel sorry for you,’ he said in a sympathetic voice.

‘I want no sympathisers, [...]’ she almost screamed. (*The Room* 124)

The conversation between them can be read as an allegory of the male critic attempting to transcend the distance between himself and the gendered subaltern subject. Despite his seemingly benevolent motives, she stubbornly refuses to plug the gaps of knowledge that stand between their two disparate positions. Additionally, her decision not to comply with his display of kindness could also embody an important feminist move. Earlier in the story, we learn of the protagonist’s constant patronage of brothels when he recalls “the good time he had [in Qaiser Square] in those days, [thinking] nostalgically of the women, the drinking, the elegant hotel rooms” (*The Room* 121). His decision to treat this prostitute differently from the others he had patronised in the past could in fact then be “born of an earnest desire to distance himself from the very institution he feels himself to be complicitous with” (Gopal

117). The prostitute refuses to facilitate his alleviation of guilt, leaving him instead to feel “greatly depressed by the events” (*The Room* 125).

The symbolically blinding “bright light” in the story can be taken as representative of hegemonic reason with which the protagonist chooses to illuminate the life of the prostitute and try to understand her position in the patriarchal representational system. Backfiring on him however, it has no effect on the woman despite lighting up her room, and instead blinds him when he first contemplates her situation of being abused by her pimp.

He thought of the woman who wanted to sleep. Who was she? Why was she being treated with such inhumanity?

[...]

His eyes were still partly blinded by the dazzling light bulb in that terrible room upstairs. He couldn’t see very well. Couldn’t they have hung a softer light in the room? Why was it so nakedly, pitilessly bright? (*The Room* 123)

It is only when he takes a cue from “the shadows of the February evening that had begun to lengthen” (*The Room* 121), when he relinquishes his grip on his desire to understand the prostitute’s position, does the protagonist manage to see the horrifying final scene.

“[Advancing] towards the doors but in a way that his eyes should not meet that blinding light” (*The Room* 125), he discovers that the prostitute has already murdered the pimp whom he returns to finish off. Terrifying dreams continue to haunt him, bringing the patriarchal hegemony to crisis and warning of the insidiously “naked” (*The Room* 123) act of trying to speak for the subaltern subject, which can in fact be as violent as the “naked and ravaged” (*The Room* 121) massacre inflicted on the women we learn about earlier in the story.

The possible theoretical violence that a male writer could inflict on the gendered subaltern subject by imposing the patriarchal representational system on her has been clearly highlighted in *The Room*. Manto emphasises that assigning him the right to retrieve her from

the margins of non-representation risks an anathema to feminist politics. However, it does not do well to dwell too heavily on the position a writer inhabits and dismiss his/her ideas on the sole basis of biological sex. As Moi argues:

The point is not the origins of the idea (no provenance is pure) but the use to which it is put and the effects it can produce. What matters is therefore not so much whether a particular theory was formulated by a man or a woman, but whether its effects can be characterised as sexist or feminist in a given situation (118).

While Manto has foregrounded the trappings of insisting on ‘seeing’ through a hegemonic patriarchal representational system in *The Room*, he remains acutely aware of the place that he as a writer speaks from and works diligently to “earn the right” (Spivak, “Interviews” 62) to speak. For Spivak, earning the right to criticise arises when you develop a *historical* critique of your position (“Interviews” 62), and this is exactly what Manto sets out to do. Silencing yourself in certain situations based on deterministic positions such as sex may instead be an act of “salving your conscience” (63); in contrast, taking a risk in criticising a position you used to dominate will welcome you into the conversation, where you can hope to be judged with respect (“Interviews” 63). We will now consider the ways in which Manto continues to offer the possibility of representing the gendered subaltern subject by considering the paradoxical position that she occupies.

A NECESSARY (NON-)REPRESENTATION

The modes of creation that writers adopt are equally essential as a negotiation with their subject positions in challenging a dominant representational system. Julia Kristeva notes that it is possible in aesthetic creation to occupy several positions (“A Question of Subjectivity” 133). Making the distinction between ‘the semiotic’, which is a state where a child “doesn’t yet possess the necessary linguistic signs, and thus there is no meaning”, and

‘the symbolic’, where “the individual becomes subjectively capable of taking on the signs of language” (“A Question of Subjectivity” 133), she suggests that the former is normally repressed but sporadically breaks through the hegemony of the symbolic order. Feminist writing can be made available to every creator, so long as s/he is willing to take on an inherent bisexuality that has the potential to challenge the patriarchal order:

“All speaking subjects have within themselves a certain bisexuality which is precisely the possibility to explore all the sources of signification, that which posits a meaning as well as that which multiplies, pulverises and finally revives it” (“Desire in language” 165)

It is the modes of writing that determine the emergence of the semiotic regardless of the gender of the creator, those that are characterised by the silences and absence in symbolic language. Importantly, these are techniques that have been incorporated by Manto in many of his short stories, which are marked by a distinct ambivalence that confronts the impossibility of representing the gendered subaltern subject.

“The speech of the book,” Pierre Macherey asserts, “comes from a certain silence, a matter which is endowed with form, a ground on which it traces a figure. Thus, the book is not self-sufficient; it is necessarily accompanied by a *certain absence*, without which it would not exist” (85). What is implied here that everything spoken in a text gestures towards that which is unsaid, or perhaps in the case of the subaltern subject, that which “must not be said” (Macherey 85). Silence is a space the subaltern inhabits, and its negative presence acts to reveal the limits of representation through the conventional use of language. After all, since speech falls short for the subaltern as elaborated earlier on in this essay: “[it] has nothing more to tell us; [and so] we must investigate the silence, for it is the silence that is doing the speaking” (Macherey 86). We need to understand that it is not a simple expanse of blankness that can effectively represent the subaltern experience however. Since all texts are

bound by words and the hegemonic system of language, we cannot escape the “institutional structures of representation” (“Subaltern Talk” 306) of which Spivak has warned. But the possibility of agency resides in “an effort to involve oneself in representation *not* according to [these] lines” (Spivak, “Subaltern Talk” 306), and here we invoke the unspoken meaning that exists in the recesses of the written word. I will now go on to argue that the significant silences that render some of Manto’s stories undeniably incomplete effectively consider the unique position the gendered subaltern subject occupies, the violence commonly perpetrated against her, and the historical reality which surrounds her.

The mainstream feminist project has largely been concerned with retrieving the silenced voices of women from the margins of a phallogentric tradition. This important anti-patriarchal strategy is not one that can be easily translated on to the narratives of subaltern women however, for whom a restoration of voice is much more complex. The concern for their representation should instead revolve around “questions as to how we are to configure their presence, if it is not to be in terms of liberal humanist notions of subjectivity and agency” (O’Hanlon 74). After all, a recuperation of a subaltern consciousness, as elaborated on earlier in this essay, will only serve to diminish an inherent subalternity – precisely that which makes it resistant to hegemonic discourse. These arguments are further complicated when the issue of gender is brought into question because according to Spivak, “the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant, [and] if in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Spivak “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 82-83). It is with these considerations that we approach Manto’s *The Return*, and the character of Sakina whose voiceless presence effectively surfaces the hypocrisy of patriarchal discourse.

The Return is, like many of Manto’s stories, once again told through a male consciousness, this time of a father, Sirajuddin, in search of his daughter after they are

separated when fleeing from the violence that has descended upon their hometown. He turns to a group of young men who say they are recovering missing women and children for help. When he finds out that she has been found, Sirajuddin goes to the hospital to see her and the story ends with a scene that leaves the reader reeling in horror:

A light was switched on. It was a young woman with a mole on her left cheek.

“Sakina,” Sirajuddin screamed.

The doctor, who had switched on the light, stared at Sirajuddin.

“I am her father,” he stammered.

The doctor looked at her prostrate body and felt for the pulse. Then he said to the old man, pointing at the window, “Open it.”

The young woman on the stretcher moved slightly. Her hands groped for the cord which kept her shalwar tied round her waist. With painful slowness, she unfastened it, pulled the garment down and opened her thighs.

“She is alive, my daughter is alive,” Sirajuddin shouted with joy.

The doctor broke into a cold sweat. (*The Return* 41)

Significantly, it is Sakina’s *gesture* in this scene that exposes the depravity of her so-called rescuers. The reader is called upon to interpret her ambivalent silence, revealing the implied sexual violation she has been put through by the men whose success in finding his daughter Sirajuddin “[had prayed] for” (*The Return* 40).

Sakina’s character runs entirely tangential to the main narrative in *The Return*, which enacts the position of the subaltern subject as one that is outside hegemonic discourse altogether. Marked by a distinct non-containment, Sakina’s consciousness resists access to the reader: although we find out at the end that she was a possible victim of rape, the perpetrators are described as “very kind” (*The Room* 40) throughout, taking care of her after finding her, and even giving her a jacket to cover herself. This, I argue, acts a completely

subversive strategy when the final realisation of horror dawns upon the reader, causing those who have unwittingly sided with the patriarchal hegemony earlier to “[break out] in cold sweat” (*The Room* 41) alongside the doctor.

Some critics may take issue with the seemingly passive role that Manto assigns Sakina, which seems antithetical to a conventional form of resistance. Here, we recall the character of colonised female subject Christophine in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*, who is “simply driven out of the story, with neither narrative, no characterological explanation or justice” (Spivak, “Three Women’s Texts” 372). Although Spivak notes that this constitutes a certain textual violence on the part of the author, she agrees with Rhys in “not giving Christophine a larger or more directly oppositional role, since this would fall into the trap of ‘selfing’ her as ‘the intended subject of resistance’ with a coherent and unproblematically accessible subjectivity” (Moore-Gilbert 96). In other words, if Christophine had been given a more obviously counterinsurgent role in the narrative, she would have simply been reinscribed into the patriarchal binary, albeit one with a shift in the power dynamics. It would have been the same in Sakina’s case if she were configured into a character of direct confrontation, and I argue that Manto’s ambivalent (non-)representation of her in *The Return* works precisely because he preserves her marginal status as a gendered subaltern subject, thus disallowing her from being subsumed into hegemony. Despite literally not being given a voice, the character of Sakina still effectively tears down the flimsy guise of goodwill held up by the patriarchal project in a display of unorthodox agency.

The Return is also characterised by conspicuous narrative silence surrounding the abduction and sexual violence suffered by women. It is Manto’s acute awareness of the limitation of language in representing such inhumanity that leads him to approach this subject matter in such an indirect manner. Early on we learn that Sirajuddin’s wife has clearly been murdered, and perhaps even raped before she was killed, but “all he could remember at that

moment was “the dead body of his wife, her stomach ripped open” (*The Return* 39). A distinct absence also follows the paragraph detailing Sakina’s meeting with her ‘rescuers’, which ends off simply with a foreboding image of her “trying nervously to cover her breasts with her arms” (*The Return* 40). We immediately jump back to a scene of Sirajjudin worrying about his daughter, and the reader is left to fill in the gaps of the violation we learn of later that Sakina has to endure. Cathy Caruth in *Trauma: explorations in memory*, notes a collapse of understanding that inhabits all traumatic experience (7):

While the insistence on the reality of violence is a necessary and important task, [...] the impact of the traumatic experience lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time. (Caruth 8-9)

Although there is a need to consider the inaccessibility of violence in its representation, Caruth continues to suggest that this also opens up the reader to “a new kind of listening, the witnessing, precisely, of *impossibility*” (10). This I argue is what Manto sets out to do in *The Return*, where he places the responsibility on the reader in confronting the atrocity of gendered violence through a gaping void in the narrative events. This textual exclusion also acts to mirror the inadequacy of language in approaching traumatic experience. We take comfort however, that if “[a] trauma is a repeated suffering of the event, but it is also a continual leaving of its site” (Caruth 10). Thus, if the reader considers carefully the necessary elision on the part of Manto in representing Sakina’s violation, then s/he is a therapeutic listener of her departure from the event as well.

Demystifying the manifestation of rape “requires that we listen for those stories that differ from the master(’s) story, [and] that we recuperate what has too often been left out: the physical violation and the women who find ways to speak it” (Higgins and Silver 4). In the case of Sakina, readers must strain to listen in a different manner in order to hear the

paradoxical way she ‘speaks’ of her experience. Representations of the act are also often inseparable from accusations of the possible eroticisation of events, a practice that many writers arguably fall victim to. This transforms the rape victim into an object acting out the assumption of the male and female roles of dominance and submission, undermining any possibility of acknowledging the incommunicable suffering that she suffers. By refusing to go into explicit detail of Sakina’s sexual violation in *The Return*, Manto resists the depiction of the atrocity of such violence in an aesthetic and seductive manner, allowing the reader to focus instead on the pure brutality of the act.

Higgins and Silver go on to suggest that “the story [of rape] that often gets told is that of an inability to tell the story” (5). This has implications that reach beyond the margins of the text. In the context of the Partition of India in 1947, during which *The Return* is set, nearly 75,000 women were raped and abducted at both sides of the border (Butalia 105). When these women were eventually returned to their families, they were forced to face the “ideas of purity and honour [that] densely populated [...] family and political narratives” (Das 77), and this explains the zone of silence surrounding their experiences during that period of time. Thus, Didur noted that while collecting the oral narratives of women who suffered during Partition, it was almost impossible for the women to speak of their violation “without lapsing into the vocabulary of dishonour and shame, [leading them into not being able] to provide a ‘conclusive’ account of those events” (126). The hypocrisy of the “patriarchal logic of a cultural system that dictates that rape signifies a woman’s shame and the dishonour of her male protectors” (Didur 126) then further necessitates a non-representation, a conspicuous absence that acts powerfully to paradoxically expose the patriarchal origins of such violence.

In her project collecting the oral narratives of women’s experiences during Partition, Butalia noted her initial frustration with “the difficulty of speaking to and with women, of

learning to listen differently” (12). Often, she had to turn to “their silences, the half-said things, the nuances” (Butalia 100) that structured their speech in order to access a part of their lives that they had closed off a long time ago. On an overarching level then, I am suggesting that Manto as a writer in dealing both with the elusive gendered subaltern subject and the violence that characterised the events of Partition, has now placed the burden on the reader to turn our attention to “gaps in attempts to represent that [subaltern] experience (imaginary or otherwise) in order to understand the power relations that inform its construction” (Didur 137). After all, the reader for Roland Barthes is “the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination” (148). And for Manto, this unity that surfaces in the process of reading is also the possibility of transcending an apparent impossibility of representation.

CHAPTER TWO

Subaltern representation on film is no less fraught with difficulty. Ethnographic documentary will be examined in this chapter for its blunt demarcation of different cultures, and the ways in which it perpetuates the power imbalance between interpretive and interpreted communities. As an extension of the realist characteristics of the genre, traditional ethnographic representational practices are seldom interrogated due to the assumption that objectivity prevails behind the camera, and that they often serve a certain benevolent cause by revealing the nuances of another culture to the genre’s more privileged viewership. The uncontested assumptions of objectivity however, surface more sinister ideological ramifications that uphold the construction of the ethnographic subject as a clearly ‘Othered’ figure by reducing “us” and “them” into a hierarchical dichotomy. The proclaimed social interest of ethnographic documentary is also exposed when we consider its similarities with the imperialist gesture of the appropriation of Third World women, often the subject of

scrutiny in the genre, in serving the cause of First World feminism. Both are disguised under the fallacy of a misplaced benevolence that often goes unquestioned. It is with these considerations that we examine Trinh T. Minh-Ha's *Reassemblage* (1982) for its "rejection of virtually all ethnographic conventions and its avowed anti-representational intent" (Basu 101) in a response to the portrayal of the subaltern subject on screen.

TO ONLY "SPEAK NEARBY"

Reassemblage was made during the filmmaker's three years in West Africa, where she was teaching music at the Institut National des Arts in Dakar. Confronting issues of authenticity and representation, the film is a reaction to more conventional ethnographic documentaries about other cultures, which often claim an unchallenged objectivity in 'knowing' the Other. Trinh also seems all too aware of the complexities surrounding the nature of the subaltern subject and its subsequent transformation into an image on screen. Filming the subaltern subject under the guise of omniscience could easily construe to be an act of violence by appropriating the 'otherness' of subalternity as a means to serve the interests of the developed world. Early on in the film, Trinh claims that instead of "speaking about" the community she observes in Senegal, she can only "speak nearby" ("Framer Framed" 96). This phrase gives light to her attempt to portray the subaltern subject on camera, where it "conveys an idea of a closeness but with a necessary distance because of difference; a concept of "approaching" rather than "knowing" an Other" (Kaplan 201).

Returning to the paradox of subaltern representation as earlier discussed in this essay, we consider once again the complex position the subaltern subject inhabits. Insisting on retrieving the subaltern subject from the margins of hegemony could result in the loss of the very alterity that defines its existence, and yet a resigned acceptance of the impossibility of understanding its position seems like a futile exploration as well. In *Reassemblage*, Trinh

seeks a compromise between these polarised views, which will “both reflect [the subaltern’s] fundamental alienness, and yet present it in a form which shows some part of that presence at least to stand outside and momentarily escape the construction of dominant discourse” (O’Hanlon 106). Using these considerations as a platform for once again exploring the (im)possibility of representing the subaltern subject, I will firstly use the concept of Laura Mulvey’s cinematic gaze and its associations with knowing and possessing a subject in order to interrogate the assumptions of documentary and the perceived reality it presents to the spectator. I will then examine the formal elements of *Reassemblage*, particularly in its use of various cinematic devices, to demonstrate Trinh’s suggestions in unearthing new ways of approaching the subaltern subject.

THE MYTH OF OBJECTIVITY

The concept of the cinematic gaze is essential in examining the ways in which the conventional documentary claims possession of the subject being filmed, and as an extension of this, assumes the role of speaking for the subject in question. “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance,” notes Laura Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, “pleasure has been split between the active/male and passive/female” (442). Within this constructed binary then, she argues that the man controls the film fantasy, and emerges as the representative of power since his gaze crystallises woman as an image which he can indirectly possess (Mulvey 442). As there typically is no central male protagonist in the genre of documentary as opposed to fictive film, the gaze can thus be defined as the seemingly objective look of the camera, with which the spectator directly identifies. The conventional documentary representation of the subaltern subject brings about two major problems as an extension of Mulvey’s cinematic gaze. The realist nature of the documentary genre often functions under the pretence of ‘not looking’ at the subject being filmed, and allows too easily the dangerous

assumption of an unproblematic knowledge of what is on screen, if only through the interpretive tradition of a Western hegemonic discourse. Secondly, since the gendered subaltern is the primary focus of the camera in *Reassemblage*, it is also essential to consider her position as a particularly vulnerable victim of the gaze, not merely to a male spectator but to a White female consciousness as well.

In *Reassemblage*, Trinh attempts to dismantle the all-knowing and unchallenged position of perceived objectivity that documentary often inhabits. Objectivity in documentary is a fictionalised result of the realist characteristics of the genre tradition. According to Bill Nichols, “documentary realism negotiates the compact we strike between text and historical referent, minimising resistance or hesitation to claims of transparency or authenticity” (165); this is built upon the presentation of things as they appear to the eye and ear in everyday life as filtered through the camera and the sound recorder (165-166). Since the image on screen appears very similar to what a spectator would expect it to be in real life, then this realism easily translates into an objectivity that the spectator assumes to be true. This has several implications for the practice of ethnographic documentary, which typically serves to reveal the life of another culture to an interpreting audience. The motives behind the representative modes that the filmmaker chooses to use are seldom scrutinised by the spectator in a tradition that is ironically structured on an insidious imbalance of power.

The fiction of objectivity is particularly sinister when we consider the inherent desire of ethnographic documentary in ‘knowing’ another culture; it is, quite simply, an extension of the patriarchal discourse of dominance. Nichols continues to explain the affinity between pornographic and ethnographic modes of filmmaking, where both are guided by similar ideological links, albeit in different degrees of complexity:

What does it mean to say pornography and ethnography share a discourse of domination? For one thing, they represent impulses born of desire: the desire to know

and possess, to 'know' by possessing and to possess by knowing. Each is structured hierarchically. In pornography, male subjectivity assumes the task of representing female subjectivity; in ethnography, 'our' culture assumes the task of representing theirs. The appropriateness of these tasks, though sometimes given a historical context, remains, for the most part, an assumption, responsibility or power, conferred by dint of membership in the interpreting community rather than through negotiation with the interpreted community. (209)

The clearly subjective mode of discourse parades under the guise of the "objective" filmic tradition of ethnographic documentary: the wide-angle camera placed at a distance, and the "eternal commentary that escorts images" ("Framer Framed" 103). Ethnography's proclamations of serving a self-righteous social interest also add another dimension to the blind acceptance of the spectator towards its production. Trinh notes that:

the socially oriented filmmaker is thus the almighty voice-giver [...] whose position of authority in the production of meaning continues to go unchallenged, skilfully masked by its righteous mission. The relationship between mediator and medium or, the mediating activity, is either ignored – that is, assumed to be transparent [...] – or else, it is treated most conveniently: by humanising the gathering of evidence so as to further the status quo. ("When the moon waxes red" 36)

If ethnographic research is built on the politics of representation and clearly demarcated lines of power, then its masquerade behind the perceived objectivity and social interest of the documentary genre brings about an even greater need to interrogate the responsibility of the filmmaker. In response to this, Trinh offers no veil of disinterest in *Reassemblage*. She readily admits her ideologically charged position behind the camera; seeing the tribes through her lens for instance, she watches them "becoming mine" ("Framer Framed" 101). In order to draw attention to the partial nature of documentary filmmaking then, she continues to offer

jarring subversions of the conventional modes of documentary throughout the length of the film, which will be examined in detail in the later part of this chapter.

Since the politics of representation in ethnographic documentary have now been surfaced, it is important to understand the position of the interpreted community in *Reassemblage*. The gendered subaltern subject is made the focus of the film, the same subject who is, according to Spivak, “even more deeply in shadow” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 82-83) within the intersections of postcolonialism, feminism and the Subaltern Studies project. *Reassemblage* features various tribes in five regions across Senegal, but its primary concern is the women in the villages, and this problematises Mulvey’s filmic subject as a singular representation of Woman by adding another consideration to the violence that the cinematic gaze exerts. First World feminists, although perhaps embodying benevolent intentions towards their Third World sisters, may now also partake in the patriarchal control that the camera’s look represents, thus serving solely the project of First World feminism. This appropriation of Third World women will often occur when “some feminists use the term ‘Third World’ women not as a useful *figure of speech* but as a clearly defined empirical group” (McLeod 187), and this places the need for an added consideration of the differences *within* the feminist project itself when analysing Trinh’s film.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues in *Under Western Eyes* that in the process of assuming a common oppression that all Third World women fall victim to, “Western feminists alone become the true “subjects” of this counter history [while] Third world women [...] never rise above the debilitating generality of their object status (71).” This “colonialist move”, according to Mohanty, disregards the complex realities that Third World women face, and is ultimately a reductive gesture that serves only the cause of First World feminism. Furthermore, the appropriation of Third World women does not necessarily have to be an

antagonistic gesture on the part of First World feminists; it may in fact be a kind of misplaced benevolence, as Deepika Bahri explains that:

even within the feminist project, then, there is no guarantee that the perspective of the Third World woman will be represented or honoured. There is even the danger that the mechanism of “othering” that characterises colonial hegemonic discourse will become instrumental in the project of producing the individual and individualist feminist self *against* its other (206).

The image of the educated and free Western woman to which Third World women are held up to ultimately label the latter as “powerless”, “exploited” and “sexually harassed” (Mohanty 56) victims of oppression, calling out for them to be ‘saved’ from their plights by their more privileged sisters of the West. This however, only “implicitly and complacently reaffirms [the developed world’s] superiority to the rest as the norm or referent (Mohanty 56), enacting a “discursive colonisation” (51) that disregards the intersections of society, class and ethnicity. Thus, the interpreted culture may be placed at the centre of attention during the course of an ethnographic documentary, but according to Trinh,

“the privilege to sit at the table with “us” [...] proves both uplifting and demeaning. It impels “them” to partake in the reduction of itself and the appropriation of its otherness by a detached “us” discourse.” (Woman, Native, Other” 67)

She remains ever aware of the possibility of the carelessness of the First World when framing the Third World, and this figures into her portrayal of the Senegalese women in *Reassemblage* where conventional documentary techniques, typically congruent with emphasising the otherness of another culture and a subsequent domination over them, are eschewed for a more postmodern, self-reflexive approach instead.

THE FLUID SPECTATOR

Reassemblage constantly points towards its own constructedness as a film in order to subvert the myth of objectivity in documentary practice. In order to disrupt a perceived objectivity on the part of the spectator, Trinh first acts to unsettle the conventions of realism found in more traditional ethnographic documentaries. The numerous jump cuts in the filmic sequence, the unsteadiness of the hand-held camera, and the curious faces of villagers directly looking into the lens all function to highlight the subjective, intrusive presence of the filmmaker and to dismantle her authority. The omniscient commentary which accompanies most documentaries is also markedly absent, replaced by a fragmented collective of silence, music, and the repetition of both Trinh's narration and the villagers speaking in their native language. Objectivity is thus presented as a flimsy fantasy that can only be upheld in the mind of a naïve spectator.

The film goes beyond the notion of self-reflexivity and exposing the fiction of the objective camera however, Trinh further aims to challenge the conventional binary of a singular 'I' interacting with a singular 'Other' figure; for her, the concern has always been that of "multiple 'I's coming into contact with multiple 'Otherised 'I's" (Kaplan 198). In other words, the interpreted community in the film is as fluid as the imagined boundaries of the 'Third World', such that a binary between them and the supposed opposite of the interpretive Western world can no longer stand. Trinh's films are made instead to "offer spectators many entries, many exits. There are multiple foldings, not simply different interpretations" (qtd. in Kaplan 197) in reflection of the instability of the concept of culture, and as an extension of this, the futility of representation itself. *Reassemblage* thus presents a confrontation of "the habit of imposing a meaning to every single sign" ("Framer Framed" 96), proposing instead a fluidity of meaning where:

when the magic of essences ceases to impress and intimidate, there no longer is a position of authority from which one can definitely judge the verisimilitude value of the representation. [...] The questioning subject, even if s/he is an insider, is no more authentic and has no more authority on the subject matter than the subject whom the questions concern. This is not to say that the historical “I” can be obscured or ignored, and that differentiation cannot be made; but that “I” is not unitary, culture has never been monolithic, and more or else is always in relation to a judging subject. (“When the moon waxes red” 75-76)

Returning to the theoretical violence inflicted on Third World women through the danger of a fixed definition then, Trinh asks that we re-examine the relationships between the subject and the object instead; not just the communities being represented on screen, but also to consider ourselves as spectators existing in relational, ambivalent categories as well.

We first turn to the concept of spectatorship in order to explore its contribution to the constitution of meaning in texts. Filmic spectators are “necessarily inscribed in the filmic text; they interact with films, they decode texts using their interpretive strategies and ideologies and they eventually constitute textual meanings” (Martinez 132). According to Martinez then, spectators are *sutured* into the text at the level of a common ideology, which then interpellates and forces them into participating in that particular discourse (140-141). In the case of ethnographic documentary, the unsuspecting spectator is even more likely to participate in the “unconscious domination” (Martinez 141) of a hegemonic ideology because they can easily identify with the normalised, albeit false objectivity that characterises the genre. Spectators also carry with them their own cultural and historical assumptions in the generation of ethnographic knowledge. After all, according to John Berger,

we never look at just one thing, we always look at the relation between things and ourselves. Our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are.” (9)

Trinh thus makes use of the cinematic elements of *Reassemblage* in order to firstly, disrupt the ideologically restrictive suture that more conventional ethnographic films wield over the spectator, and secondly, to emphasise the continuous movement of meaning that circles both the spectator and the subject on screen.

The camera work of *Reassemblage* performs the rupturing of suture by never allowing the spectator to settle on one particular perspective. It is deliberately disorientating, unstable, and refuses to conform to the “A, B, C [...] of photography” (Trinh, “Framer Framed” 105). An early sequence of shots in the film show a man smoking a pipe, but he is framed multiple times, from different planes and at varying distances. These shots are spliced by a rapid succession of jump cuts, and such sequences, featuring a singular subject on screen from a variety of angles, are heavily used throughout the length of the film. For Trinh, this plurality of shots exposes the limits of *both* the camera and the looker (qtd. in Macdonald 361), who is now “constantly missing and moving along the flow of images” (Heath 88) instead of being implicated in an unconscious totality of ethnographic knowledge. The unity that the spectator holds with *Reassemblage* is never allowed to be one that is congruent with a hegemonic ideology, and instead creates “contradictory subject-positions that allow space for spectators’ agency and resistance” (Martinez 142). Through Trinh’s hesitant and fragmentary lens, *Reassemblage* thus reveals the spaces in filmic discourse that often need to be filled in by the interpretative gestures of the spectator, spaces which empower the spectator through the creation of meaning, but are all too often cleverly concealed in the genre of ethnographic film.

The micro-level of the spectator however, further complicates the generation of ethnographic meaning. As elaborated on earlier, there is no singular position from which the spectator speaks, s/he is “not a unified subject, a fixed identity or that solid mass one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face. [The] “I” is, itself, *infinite layers*” (“Woman, Native, Other” 94) instead of any kind of essential identity and be seen *in relation* to the immediate presence of the Other, and to themselves as non/presences (94, emphasis mine). This immediately reveals the assumed relationship between the subject and the object, where a conventional dichotomy is relinquished for a consideration of the fluidity of positionality instead. Trinh’s use of sound in *Reassemblage* demonstrates the dismantling of the constancy of identity, and as an extension of this, the rigidity of a fixed meaning as well. She calls one of the most prominent features of documentary, the omniscient voiceover:

an oppressive device of fixed association. To bring out the plural, sliding relationship between ear and eye and to leave more room for the spectators to decide what they want to make out of a statement or a sequence of images, it is necessary to invent a whole range of strategies that would unsettle such fixedness. Here, silence and repetitions can play an important role. (“When the moon waxes red” 206)

The multiple layers of silence, speech and music thus interact in the film to destabilise an immutability of meaning, and also to draw attention to the spectator’s own marginal identity in relation to the filmic subject of the subaltern.

Without the anchor of a conventional soundtrack, *Reassemblage* “[disperses] in numerous diverse directions” (“When the moon waxes red” 202). The lack of a harmonious relationship between image and sound brings to crisis the typically stable foundation for the construction of meaning. For instance, the spectator encounters moments of complete silence that intersect a sequence of images on screen, while instances of speech in a native language are accompanied by the emptiness of a black screen. If the congruence between sound and

image provides a continuity of meaning in filmic discourse, then this meaning is completely undermined in favour of the futility of interpretation. Trinh also provides a voiceover, but never to describe the image on screen, and significantly, she also repeats the line: “the habit of imposing a meaning to every single sign” (“Framer Framed” 96) throughout the film.

Repetitions of certain sequences of sound serve a special purpose, where:

the same sentence in slightly different forms and in ever-changing contexts help to unsettle [...] fixity, and to perceive the plural, sliding relationship between eye and ear, image and word. (“Framer Framed” 228)

The *relational* characteristic of meaning is thus revealed by the repetition of numerous sound sequences in utterly different contexts. This surfaces the fallacy behind the possibility of a singular mode of interpretation from even a single spectator precisely because of the spectator’s and filmic subject’s own relational positions.

The use of sound towards the oppressive construction of meaning is further subverted in *Reassemblage* by signalling a “[movement] from that which is easily identifiable to that which is at the limit of being identifiable” (“When the moon waxes red” 205). Thus explains Trinh’s refusal in providing accompanying subtitles to the native language that is spoken in the film, and to focus instead on the musicality of the voice, the “melodies and the grain [...] – the combination of tones and rhythms, the relation between body and sound uttered or heard” (“Framer Framed” 226). Where spoken language is conventionally seen as a mode of communication, a vehicle for the transference of meaning from one person to another, she chooses to emphasise instead its potential to create dissonance through the nuances of its musicality. The limits to the generation of meaning, particularly that of the subaltern subject, are revealed by Trinh to be structured around the complexity of its representation, and our inherent desires in “giving voice” (“When the moon waxes red” 60) to those whom we would not otherwise understand.

In consideration of Trinh's strategic use of these various cinematic techniques, we can then take the film as a suggestion for "us", the interpretive spectator, to assume different positions when trying to understand "them", the interpreted community. According to Macdonald, the subaltern subject stays in its world this way, and it is the spectator who then tries to figure out what his/her relationship to it is instead (362). This thus preserves its inherent alterity as subaltern, but allows at least a marginal presence existing "outside the official institutional structures of representation" (Spivak, "The Spivak Reader" 306) for us to understand it better. The relationship between subject and object is not one that is bereft of power relations; instead it is one where positions of power are constantly shifting, and where no singular ideology dominates the conversation. This is Trinh's answer to the one-sided dialogue that often occurs between the First World and the Third, the non-subaltern and the subaltern subject:

A conversation of "us" with "us" about "them" is a conversation in which "them" is silenced. "Them" always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless, barely present in its absence. ("Woman, Native, Other" 67)

To her, the solution in part to this conundrum lies in the examination of the fluid spectator, who needs to assume the responsibility of "[speaking] nearby" ("Framer Framed" 96) instead of speaking for, and to always reject a totalising construction of meaning by maintaining a "self-reflexively critical relationship toward the material" ("Woman, Native, Other" 76) that is presented to him/her. It is an awareness of the cultural grid on which each of us is encoded, a complex, dynamic interface where we exist not as solitary beings but always in relation to one another.

LISTENING TO THE SUBALTERN VOICE

We began with the necessary confrontation of the paradox subaltern representation: on the one hand, the retrieval of the shadowy figure of the subaltern from the margins of the text would subject it to interpretation and diminish its fundamental alienness from hegemonic discourse; on the other hand, a refusal to attend to the political, often violent reality that surrounds the subaltern condemns its suffering to be congruent with Spivak's "theoretical fiction" ("In Other Worlds" 280). What is implied is that we should not attempt to "speak for" the subaltern subject, to approach it through institutionalised structures of representation, but neither should we expect it to "speak for itself" because of its unique position outside the hegemony of representation itself. There is no easy way out of this (im)possibility of representation, as Manto and Trinh have demonstrated in the chapters above. What they have offered instead are texts marked by ambivalence and the fluidity of meaning, exposing the futility of a prescriptive representation and emphasising that "everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*" (Barthes 147).

As much the Subaltern Studies initiative may have been driven, albeit by benevolent intentions, to retrieve the forgotten fragments left behind in an elite historiography, both Manto and Trinh have instead focused on the complexity of subalternity and its subsequent translation into text or on to the screen. They have constructed complex, and yet unfinished literary works that are deliberately riddled with gaps and absences in their narrative structures in order to demonstrate the central role of the *reader* in the constitution of meaning. While we can discuss the responsibility of the critic on not imposing on the subaltern subject, the "one place where the multiplicity [of the text] is focused" (Barthes 148) – the reader – is often excluded from the conversation. The argument can be made that the reader himself is equally oppressed by hegemony, but by acknowledging that we are all inevitably interpellated in one way or another, and remaining aware of these inherent problems, we can

hope to move towards the act of attentive *listening*. The texts discussed in this exploration of subaltern (non-)representation thus demand that listening to subaltern voices should come before any attempts of interpretation, both on the part of the critic *and* the reader approaching the text. According to Luce Irigaray, listening is a conscious effort to remain silent when the other party is speaking:

Listening to you thus requires that I make myself available, that I be once more and always capable of silence. To a certain extent this gesture frees me too. But above all, it gives you a silent space in which to manifest yourself. It makes available to you a still virgin space-time for your appearance and your expressions. It offers you the possibility of existing, of expressing your intention, your intentionality, without you calling out for it and even without asking, without overcoming, without annulling, without killing. (Irigaray 118)

Listening on our part therefore requires a respect of differences, the critical recognition that the subaltern subject is ultimately irreducible, steeped in an inherent alterity that cannot and should never be subsumed into a hegemonic collective. It is a declaration that the Other “[is] not nor ever will be me or mine” (Irigaray 119).

(10,223 words)

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