

# Subaltern and Marginal Figures in Literature

## Spivak's Reading of Postcolonial Novels

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### ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on Gayatri Spivak's thematization of subalternity and marginality within the field of literature, as distinguished from historiography. In particular, it analyzes her reading of postcolonial novels by Mahasweta Devi and J.M. Coetzee to suggest that the subaltern can speak in literature, through a process of relational subjectivation, where the subaltern becomes the subject of narration and an ethical relationship of responsibility is engaged. The paper also points to the distinction between subaltern and marginal figures made by Spivak. Spivak refers to the different opportunities the subaltern and the marginal (may) have to tell their stories in literature. Concentrating on subaltern literary speech and marginal literary silence, it emphasizes how in both cases literature acts as an adequate medium for the emergence of an irretrievable otherness.

### KEYWORDS

Spivak, subalternity, margin, postcolonial literature, subjectivity

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to analyze Gayatri Spivak's problematization of the analytical category of subalternity, in order to discuss the possibility that the subaltern can speak in literary texts, and to compare the conceptual figures of the subaltern and the marginal as to their ability to tell stories in literature. The first part of the paper is dedicated to subaltern literary speech, the second to marginal literary silence.

Most of the relevant literature discussing the fundamental issue of subaltern speech as problematized by Spivak concentrate on her central, ground-breaking text 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (Didur and Heffernan 2003; Maggio 2007; Morris et al. 2010; Morton 2002; Parry 1995; 2004; Young 1990). However, within Spivak's vast body of work there is also room for the question of figures who can be said to be subaltern or marginal in postcolonial novels. In what follows, I will concentrate on those figures to argue that the subaltern can speak in literature and discuss how the concept of 'marginality', as distinguished from 'subalternity', is relevant in this regard. In doing so, I will focus on what I will call a process of *relational subjectivation* of the

subaltern figure: this process is engaged in literary texts, as an essential feature in enabling the subaltern's possibility to speak. Moreover, the process of relational subjectivation avoids making the subaltern's perspective inaccessible, which is to say, impossible to reach and understand, whereas other approaches to the question of subalternity, criticized by Spivak, fail in accessing a subaltern perspective. In particular, I will concentrate on the following texts by Spivak: 'Theory in the Margins: Coetzee's Foe Reading Defoe's "Crusoe/Roxana"', 'A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: a Woman's Text from the Third World', 'Woman in Difference' and 'Translator's Preface and Afterword to Mahasweta Devi, Imaginary Maps'.<sup>1</sup>

The distinction made between 'marginal' and 'subaltern' in Spivak's work is not explicit; the two terms tend to overlap, and both concern themselves with questions of speech and representation. Nevertheless, I would like to outline the difference between the marginal subject and the subaltern one, as they emerge in the above-mentioned texts. This difference can be introduced as follows: the marginal subject is required to speak the language of the oppressor but can actively withhold its own voice as an act of resistance. The subaltern is not allowed to speak but can paradoxically engage an attempt of self-narration and subjectivation through the medium of literature, although their voice is ultimately inaccessible.

## **SUBALTERNITY BETWEEN HISTORIOGRAPHY AND LITERATURE**

In the essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988) Spivak questions the very possibility for the subaltern to speak. In doing so, she not only challenges the representation of subaltern subjects attempted by occidental intellectuals such as Foucault and Deleuze, she also offers a unique, fundamental contribution to the discussion on subalternity developed by the Subaltern Studies Collective, with whom she herself collaborated in 1985 (Spivak 1985a). Essential to her contribution is the way she positively characterizes the subaltern as a singular woman figure, rather than a collective ungendered agent (this feature was already made clear in Spivak 1987, 339; see also Curti 2006). In this case, the occasion to problematize subaltern speech comes in the form of a dialogue with the historiographic project of the Subaltern Studies Collective, and hence it remains within the field of historiography, albeit with a deconstructive approach. Elsewhere Spivak discusses the same question within a second, no less important field, one that marks her own academic affiliation: literature.

In the first edition of 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Spivak gives a definite, drastic answer to the question addressed in the title: the subaltern cannot speak (Spivak 1988, 308). In a later edition of the text, she mitigates her first conclusion, admitting it was 'an inadvisable remark' written 'in

the accents of passionate lament' (Spivak 1999, 308). Spivak then leaves the question open, though she appears at least skeptical about the possibility of subaltern acts of speaking leading to a happy ending. As I will discuss, if there is a possibility that subaltern speech can in fact occur and meet a listener, this is to be found elsewhere in Spivak's body of work. Moreover, the instruments for achieving this are different from historiographical archival search, which is the main tool of the Subaltern Studies Collective.

The difference between historiographical and literary work is acknowledged and discussed by Spivak herself. She insists on the different methods of engagement with subalternity that the two approaches enact:

A historian confronts a text of counterinsurgency or gendering where the subaltern has been represented. He unravels the text to assign a new subject-position to the subaltern, gendered or otherwise. A teacher of literature confronts a sympathetic text where the gendered subaltern has been represented. She unravels the text to make visible the assignment of subject-positions. (Spivak 1987, 332)

The two kinds of work discussed in this quotation are complementary. Nevertheless, the author encourages a better acknowledgment of the historian's own mechanisms of representation, and states that literature can play an essential role in such an acknowledgment. This is because literature works to make visible those operations of subject-positioning the historian enacts. We can furthermore observe the use of gendered pronouns in the above quoted passage: the historian is a 'he' while the teacher of literature is a 'she'. The use of pronouns once again stresses gender as a key feature in Spivak's commitment to the issue of subalternity. The work of literature is characterized exactly by its capacity to make visible those unacknowledged processes of representation of subalternity enacted in the work of historiography. This capacity is grounded in a feeling of *sympathy* occurring between the text and the teacher of literature. Such a feeling of sympathy makes possible a sympathetic interpretation of the text, based on the fact that the text and its reader share a common ground (Iuliano 2012, 62). Spivak's own friendship with Bengali storyteller Mahasweta Devi is an example of such sympathy (see Spivak 1996). Sharing the same ground with the object to be explained allows the teacher of literature to acknowledge the work of subject-positioning of which the historian is unaware.

Both Emanuela Fornari (2011) and Lidia Curti (2018) state that, if a retrieval of subaltern female voices in history is ultimately impossible, in some postcolonial and feminist storytelling the relationship between power and subject can be inverted, and a new politics of subjectivation becomes possible. I will now analyze Spivak's reading of two stories by Bengali storyteller

Mahasweta Devi, *Standayini* and *Draupadi*—which were edited in English by Spivak herself. The readings are an example of Emanuela Fornari and Lidia Curti's claims and illustrate a different opportunity for the subaltern to speak. I will also show how this is made possible through a certain conceptualization of the marginal figure, as distinguished from the subaltern one.<sup>2</sup>

## SUBALTERN LITERARY SUBJECTIVICATION

A brief illustration of the plot and themes addressed in Devi's novels is necessary before proceeding to discuss Spivak's reading. The novel *Standayini* follows the story of a woman who sustains herself and her family by breastfeeding her master's children. After contracting breast cancer, she is abandoned by both her former master and her family and consequently succumbs to the disease. The novel *Draupadi* follows the daughter of an indebted outcast who pays for her father's debts with prostitution. She contracts an illness and decides to escape from the brothel where she lives to reach her family's home. She fails to do so and dies on the journey, laying her ill body on a map of the Indian nation that had been left on the ground of a school on the eve of India's Independence Day.

In her comment on *Standayini* (Spivak 1987), Spivak addresses the legitimacy of speaking of, and for, the subaltern from a position of non-subalternity. In this way, she addresses the issue of narration and representation of the subaltern. The subaltern can either be represented as an object of writing, on the one hand, or she can be an active subject—both are cases of narration, but with very different outcomes.

In discussing these two types of narration, Spivak provides four possible interpretations of the novel, none of which, according to her, succeed in avoiding the risk of occupying the position and voice of the subaltern. The first interpretation reads the breastfeeding woman as a symbol of the nation, while the other three adopt three different feminist perspectives—liberal, Marxist, and what Spivak terms 'a theory of woman's body' (Spivak 1987, 258).<sup>3</sup> For Spivak, these interpretations consider 'the subaltern as metaphor' for something else (Spivak 1987, 244) or mobilize her as a conceptual feature in their speculations. They consequently fail to give an adequate account of the subaltern herself. However interesting or valid the four interpretations might be, they do not lead to the kind of interpretation of subalternity Spivak encourages, and they leave the subaltern character inaccessible from the reader's point of view.

Moreover, these interpretations run the risk of inducing a process of auto-marginalization of the oppressed, since they actively put the subaltern woman into a marginal position that utterly

exacerbates her own subalternity. In Spivak's words, this process happens by virtue of 'a self-marginalized purism' that results in a 'continuing subalternization' (Spivak 1987, 350).

As we saw in the previous section, the question at stake when dealing with subalternity is a question of assigning subject-positions; the consequence of a perspective that fails to acknowledge subalternity is to construct a subject-position of marginality for the oppressed. The process of self-marginalization entails a victimization that makes it ultimately impossible to abandon the position of the margin, because it reiterates a center/margin dichotomy (Spivak 1987, 350). Such a dichotomy is hierarchical, in that it subordinates the position of 'margin' to that of 'center': by accepting this structure, the marginal subject rests on the subordinate role assigned to her. From such an unquestioned subordinate role, it is impossible to escape the position of marginality itself. Therefore, the center/margin dichotomy is to be dismantled according to the deconstructive approach that Spivak adopts. Furthermore, self-marginalization implies a claim to be representative for one's whole class, something that results in an utter silencing of subalternity (Spivak 1996, 269).

Thus, the kind of literary interpretations Spivak addresses here only engage with the subaltern as an object of writing to be represented, assigned to a static marginal subject-position. On the contrary, subaltern and marginal should not be overlapped.

In Spivak's view, it is necessary to avoid literary interpretations that, in ventriloquizing and marginalizing subalternity, share the same faults of Western intellectuals targeted in her critique in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (Spivak 1988). In order to avoid so, 'a painstaking labor to establish ethical singularity with the subaltern' (Spivak 1996, 269) is necessary. The establishment of an ethical singularity occurs in an encounter of responsibility, where the sympathy we met above is essential, and which Spivak calls a relationship of love—love being 'a simple name for ethical responsibility-in-singularity' (Spivak 1996, 269). Within this singular relationship the responses flourish from both parts and the cultural worker learns to learn from below, 'by the slow effort at ethical responding—a two-way road—with the compromised other as teacher' (Spivak 1996, 277). Within this relationship of responsibility, the subaltern herself is therefore an 'other' actively compromised in the relationship; she participates in the work of interpretation without playing a role stiffly positioned in the margins. Such a relationship of ethical engagement with a singular subaltern woman acts as a necessary supplement to collective struggle, where literary writing and political activism fill each other's gaps, as exemplified by Devi's own activity as a novelist and an activist.

Contrary to the inadequate interpretations she discusses, Spivak insists on texts' capacity to let the subaltern woman remain incommensurable, rather than a symbol for something else or a conceptual feature. This is achieved through a valuable creation of a space for subalternity. The space of subalternity is distinguished from the space of self-claimed marginality. In Spivak's view, there is a postcolonial space on the one hand, made of world metropolises inhabited by postcolonial elites engaged in the process of nation-building, and performing the auto-marginalization she stigmatizes. On the other, there is also a postcolonial space that does not fit in the nation form, although it is forcefully inscribed into it. Its inhabitants thus remain external to the processes going on inside the nation. This is the space of subalternity. Subaltern space is made such because of its invisibility from the point of view of metropolitan internal colonization (Spivak 1993, 78). Such a characterization of subaltern space is consistent with Spivak's connotations of the subaltern as the position of those 'removed from all lines of social mobility' (Spivak 2005, 475) and 'inhabits the space of difference' (Spivak 1999, 271).

According to Spivak, Devi's novels portray a subaltern space in two ways. First, they enact a cartography of the Indian nation that powerfully shows the heterogeneity of its components and casts a light on tribal and pariah groups, thus dismantling a nationalist, unitary narrative of India (Spivak 1993). Second, they displace the relationship of colonialism to independence as a linear transition. This displacement occurs within the gendered, localized body of the subaltern figure, because her experience of exploitation exceeds a narration of linear progress. In Spivak's analysis, the exploited body of the subaltern woman is shown to precede, and always remain outside of, those affective chains of value that putatively occur within a linear progress of emancipation. Processes of value-making of labor and motherhood, which are fundamental in the institutionalization of a community, are imposed only in a second moment on a subaltern body that remains, however, to a certain extent separated from them (Spivak 1993, 86).<sup>4</sup> In *Draupadi* the image of the subaltern prostitute who lays her dying body on the Indian map is an effective example of a subaltern female space superimposing her own experience of dispossession and suffering over the official narrative of the Indian nation. The novel thus acts as an evocation of the embodied space of subaltern womanhood.

Based on Spivak's reading, we can see that subaltern space is different from marginal space and that acknowledging this difference is important so as not to put the subaltern in a marginal position.

By virtue of the literary evocation of a subaltern space, room is made for a certain emergence of subalternity, so that the literary text does not silence, nor superimpose, the voice of the subaltern.

On the contrary, the emergence of a subaltern subjectivity makes possible an interpretation of the literary text to which the subaltern herself collaborates, through a relation of mutual responsibility and sympathy.

On this basis, I would like to slightly disagree with the analysis of Fiorenzo Iuliano (2012). Iuliano points to the ultimately unavoidable disruption of subaltern subjectivity in the novels, because the mechanisms of subject production are necessarily imbricated with the exploitative practices of postcolonial capitalism. Both novels do end with the death of the subaltern woman, whose body and subjectivity are disrupted by the capitalist, nationalist structures they cannot inhabit. Nevertheless, it is also true that the creation of a space for a subaltern subjectivity to emerge and be heard is effectively enacted by the novels themselves; the novels can do so because they portray the subaltern as a subject of speech and not as the marginalized object of narration. Through the medium of literature, the sympathetic reader and teacher can hear the voice of the subaltern and engage in an ethical relationship with her. In Spivak's words, her own work of interpretation is an attempt to thematize 'the (im)possibility of making the subaltern gendered the subject of its own story' (Spivak 1987, 339).

### **'WHAT'S THERE TO TELL?'**

A close reading of a passage from 'A Literary Representation of the Subaltern' is necessary to understand this last point, and the meaning of the bracketed 'im' in the word '(im)possibility' from the sentence quoted above. In the novel *Standayini*, Spivak identifies, alongside the subaltern woman, who is the main character, a second character, who effectively represents a marginal subject-position. During the story, this marginal character addresses the violence and exploitation to which she is subjected by asking the rhetorical question: 'what's there to tell?'. The character behaves according to the economics of a rhetorical question and gives no answer. Consequently 'the voice of the marginal disappears from the story' (Spivak 1987, 363). Characteristic of the marginal subject-position here is that of not being interested in telling her own story, of not acknowledging that there is something to tell at all. On the contrary, in Spivak's view, the operation of Devi's storytelling acts as an attempt to give in fact an answer to the unanswerable question 'what's there to tell?'. The novel is 'the result of an obstinate misunderstanding of the rhetorical question that transforms the condition of the (im-)possibility of answering—or telling the story—into the condition of its possibility' (Spivak 1987, 363–4).

By taking distance from the marginal subject-position which disavows its own storytelling, that evocation of a subaltern subjectivity, brought about by the novels, makes it possible to tell an

unforeseen, unrequired story. In this way, the impossibility to speak is transformed into the very condition necessary for self-narration. We can see here a second difference between the marginal character and the subaltern one: while the former disavows its own storytelling and rests on the impossibility to articulate, the latter stubbornly tries to bring about its narrative, even if the economics of the narration do not allow it. We can observe that such an attempt at speech occurs even though this subaltern, narrative subject remains a non-intending one; ‘Mahasweta does not represent Douloti as an intending subject of resistance ... Douloti is not represented as the intending subject of victimization either’ (Spivak 1993, 92; see also Spivak 1987, 366). Precisely because of this unintentional character, the intervention of a sympathetic storyteller and reader is required for the subaltern subjectivity to be heard. The triangular relationship between a subaltern character, a storyteller, and a reader we discussed above needs to be activated here. This relationship is consistent with Spivak’s definition of the act of speaking as ‘a transaction between the speaker and the listener’ (Spivak 1999, 289), suggesting that this kind of ethical relationship acts as a way for the subaltern to speak.

With reference to this triangular relationship I would like to introduce here the notion of *relational subjectivation*. We can notice that, in the case we examined, the attempt to speak for the subaltern woman is linked to her attempt to become a subject. Namely, through speaking she can become the subject of her own narration. What postcolonial, sympathetic storytelling and a responsible reading enables is precisely the emergence of the subaltern woman as the subject of her own story. The process through which the subaltern character becomes a subject requires the intervention of a storyteller and a sympathetic reader. For this reason, the process of subjectivation is a relational one.

With reference to the distinction between historiography and literature that was examined in the second section, it is now possible to argue the following: while unravelling the operations of subject-positioning enacted by the historian, the teacher of literature also shows that the postcolonial writer also creates a subaltern subject-position. Contrary to the historiographic one, this second kind of subject-positioning acts so that the subaltern is not positioned in the margins of narration.

Based on the above, we can therefore state that in Spivak’s account there are two important and interconnected differences between ‘marginal’ and ‘subaltern’. Firstly, the marginal position is internal to the space of capitalism and abides by its narrative rules; as shown above, the marginal character does not try to tell her experience of oppression. This implies the repetition of a margin/center dichotomy that makes it impossible to abandon the position of marginality itself,

entailing a self-victimization of the oppressed. On the other hand, there is a subaltern space characterized by its invisibility and externality to capitalism. Such a space is represented within Devi's novels. Secondly, because of this different subject-positionings, the marginal character disavows her own narration, while the subaltern paradoxically attempts to be the subject of her own story, through a process of relational subjectivation that occurs in an ethical relationship between the subaltern, the writer and the responsible reader. The process of relational subjectivation, that makes it possible for the subaltern to be the speaking subject of her own story, occurs in the literary field: it is therefore possible to claim that literature deals with the possibilities for the subaltern to speak more adequately than historiography.

### **CAN THE MARGINAL BE SILENT?**

So far, we have discussed how the subject-position of subalternity is distinguished from the subject-position of the marginal character. By claiming its own marginality, the marginal fits into a dominant neo-colonial narration and offers its voice to it (even if this voice only says that there is nothing to tell at all, as is the case examined above). I will now turn to a second literary case discussed by Spivak to analyze another, different connotation of the literary marginal. In her reading of the novel *Foe* by South-African writer J.M. Coetzee, once again Spivak clearly identifies one of the novel's characters as a marginal subject. In this case, however, her reading of the marginal subject-position is different from the one we met before.

Spivak claims that what drives her to discuss the novel *Foe* is an interest in the question of margin as 'the figuration of the wholly other' (Spivak 1999, 174). Her works on Devi, however, characterized the marginal figure rather as a side position of induced self-victimization, whose otherness cannot be whole since it is manipulated by the dominant narrative. We should concentrate on this apparent inconsistency before proceeding to analyze Spivak's reading of *Foe*.

In order to clarify this ambiguity on the very definition of 'margin', it is helpful to turn to a distinction Spivak makes between a 'margin in a general sense' and a 'margin in a narrow sense'. The former is the custodian of 'the wholly other', the latter are the 'victims of the best-known history of centralization' (Spivak 1999, 176). The custody of the wholly other, that is the 'margin in a general sense', plays the function of reminding us of the ultimate uncertainty of our work—which is sometimes even useful to ignore. An attention to the general sense of 'margin' though, and hence the acknowledgment of an otherness that cannot but remain outside, is necessary in order to positively engage with the question of the margin in the narrow sense, that is, the question of marginalized subjects (Spivak 1999, 176). We can here briefly notice that the ethical

acknowledgment of otherness—so important in Spivak’s thematization of an ethical relationship of responsibility with a subaltern acting as a ‘compromised other’—plays an important role also in shaping the engagement with marginal subjects.

Spivak reads Coetzee’s novel as a rewriting of the famous story of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* from a postcolonial perspective. Coetzee introduces a character absent from the original novel by Defoe: a white creole woman named Susan Barton, who survives a shipwreck on Crusoe’s island and then returns to the colonial homeland, carrying with her an indigenous man that Crusoe enslaved, Friday. Another important difference between the original novel and Coetzee’s rewrite, stressed by Spivak, concerns the figure of Friday; in *Foe* he is mutilated since his tongue was removed, but this feature was not in the original story, where he is taught to speak by his master Crusoe. This marks a difference between ‘the colonialist who gives the native speech and the metropolitan anti-imperialist who wants to give the native voice’ (Spivak 1999, 187). The former is Defoe’s Robinson, the latter is *Foe*’s Susan Barton, who wants to engage a writer to narrate her story, and to teach a tongue-less Friday to speak. This operation is essential for the recovery of the full story that is to be told. However, the recovery of Friday’s voice is doomed to fail, as are similar attempts to teach him to write or draw.

In Spivak’s reading, Barton constructs a position of marginality for Friday (Spivak 1999, 182) and wants to construct him as a subject (Spivak 1999, 186). The theme of constructing subject-positions returns here; the operation of collocating someone in the margin for the sake of a complete storytelling is connotated negatively. The marginal subject is required to occupy a marginal position and to give its marginal voice to a hegemonic subject in this case as well. This is what Spivak warned against when interpreting subaltern figures in literature. Her attention here rests on the failure of such an operation, as the native Friday’s voice remains inaccessible.

Friday actively resists any attempt of the ‘metropolitan anti-imperialist’ (Spivak 1999, 187) to give him a voice and a subject position. He does not simply content himself with playing the role of the marginalized victim but is an active agent:

Yet is Friday ... the unemphatic agent of withholding in the text. For every territorial space that is value coded by colonialism *and* every command of metropolitan anticolonialism for the native to yield his ‘voice’, there is a space of withholding, marked by a secret that may not be a secret but cannot be unlocked. ‘The native’, whatever that might mean, is not only a victim, but also an agent. The curious guardian at the margin who will not inform. (Spivak 1999, 190)

We can observe that in this case as well Spivak emphatically reads Friday's inaccessible subjectivity as a space that stands against colonialism *and* anticolonialism; the marginal space acts as the space for an agent to withhold its voice, to refuse to be the subject of its own story and to remain the silent custodian of something that could be a secret.

Spivak's distinction between two senses of 'margin' seems to be operative here. We can argue that Friday's marginal space of silent withholding is a case of margin in the general sense, as a custodian of the wholly other. This is suggested by Spivak's initial statement about her interest in the novel being driven by the question of margin as 'the figuration of the wholly other' (Spivak 1999, 174). As the active agent of withholding in the text, a custodian of the wholly other, Friday avoids playing the role of the marginal only in the narrow sense of marginalized subject, which is the position Barton wants to assign him. We can thus say that the two connotations of margin we found before are shown here to intertwine and to be consistent with one another.

I would now like to consider the role of literature in Spivak's reading of *Foe*. This seems to be very different from what we discussed in the previous sections about *Devi*. In this case, the writer engaged by Barton cannot fulfill his work of storytelling because Friday's voice is inaccessible. In a way, literature here fails to portray the subjectivity of the marginal figure. And yet, it is possible to give praise to the very acknowledgment of such a failure in the novel as something that opens a space for marginality. Coetzee's operation of writing, by way of rewriting the colonialist novel of *Robinson Crusoe*, denounces the incompleteness of this storytelling and the impossibility of restoring it. It points to an unknowable space of silence and marginality, and leaves empty the space of margin 'in the narrow sense', as Friday refuses to occupy this subject-position. Coetzee's intervention to 'correct Defoe's imagination of the margin' is one of the possible outcomes Spivak praises, along with 'halting before Friday ... that is the arbitrary name of the withheld limit' (Spivak 1999, 193).

Towards the end of the novel, Barton and Friday suffer a second shipwreck and die before managing to reach Crusoe's island. This episode is read by Spivak as 'the staging of the wish to invade the margins' envisioned in the novel, a final attendance of the impossibility to breach that margin as symbolized by Friday's mute mouth.<sup>5</sup> This is why Spivak suggests that the novel does not recuperate the margin. In a way, by not recuperating the margin and acknowledging this failure, literature itself operates as the custodian of a marginality that remains wholly other.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the above, I demonstrated the importance of acknowledging that Spivak deals with the question of subaltern speech not only in works dedicated to historiography, but also in ones dedicated to literary interpretation. Moreover, I suggested that within this second, often neglected field, the answer might sound less pessimistic than in the first.

In analyzing the way Spivak discusses this question in literature, the distinction between margin and subalternity appears fundamental, because it shapes the different roles played by speech and silence in literature, with reference to the processes of subjectivation enacted through the (im)possibility of speaking. Furthermore, this analysis revealed that Spivak's elaboration of the notion of margin presents two different connotations, and that there is consistency in this.

It is important to acknowledge the question of the subjectivation of characters. In the case of subaltern characters in the novels by Devi, I outlined how the subaltern's impossibility to speak is transformed into a necessary condition for her to become the subject of her own narration. Such a narration takes the form of a process of unforeseen subjectivation, rather than of a representation from an external point of view. What the novels do, then, is not represent subalternity as an object of writing, but to open the possibility for the subaltern figure to become a subject of narration. For this to happen, the cooperation of the storyteller and the reader is necessary, so that the process of subjectivation of the subaltern can become relational.

On the other hand, the analysis of Spivak's reading of *Foe* showed how the denial to occupy the subject-position of marginality is what constitutes Friday's agency as a withholder and a custodian, making it possible for him to retain a positive marginality. A process of subjectivation thus does not occur here, but this lack does not mean that Friday is condemned to be represented as a passive figure; the novel acts precisely so as to portray the failure in giving a representation of what stands in the margins of narration. By doing so, it leaves open a space for marginality as custody.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Woman in Difference' was first published in 1989–1990 in *Cultural Critique*, XIV, and then re-published as a chapter in Spivak (1993). Quotations are from this second edition. 'A Literary Representation of the Subaltern' was published as a chapter in Spivak (1987), along with Spivak's translation of the short novel *Stanadayini* by Devi, under the English title *Breast-giver*. 'Theory in the Margin' was first published in 1990 in *English in Africa*, 17/2. I quote this text from its later publication as a part of Spivak (1999). The preface and afterword to Devi's *Imaginary Maps* were first published in the 1995 English edition of the novels. I quote them from their reprinting in Landry and McLean eds., *The Spivak Reader*, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> For an interesting comparison of notions of subaltern and marginal women between Spivak and bell hooks, see Mascot (2012).

<sup>3</sup> Feminist theories of the body are also discussed, more extensively and in a mostly appreciative manner, in Spivak 1981 and 1993, pp. 141–72. Using the label 'a theory of woman's body' (Spivak 1987, 258), Spivak refers to 'so called Feminist theory, generally associated with developments in France of the last thirty years ... [discussing] the question of *jouissance* as orgasmic pleasure' (Spivak 1987, 258). In particular, she mentions works by Luce Irigaray, Monique Wittig, Alice Schwarzer and herself.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to acknowledge that Spivak's discussion of the codification of value is much broader than this reference: see Spivak (1985b) and, for an interesting discussion thereof, Shad (2007).

<sup>5</sup> For an interpretation of the final of *Foe* as a 'postcolonial allegory of untranslatability', consistent with Spivak's reading, see again Fornari (2011).