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To Speak About the Unspeakable: Marginalized Position of Class, Community and Gender

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Abstract:

"Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another"
Long Walk to Freedom-The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela (1994)

The perception and description of experience as 'marginal' is a consequence of the binaristic structure of various kinds of dominant discourse such as patriarchy, imperialism and ethnocentrism, which imply that certain forms of experience are peripheral. Although the term carries a misleading geometric implication, marginal groups do not necessarily endorse the notion of a fixed center. Structures of power that are described in terms of 'center' and 'margin' operate in reality, in a complex, diffuse and multifaceted way. However marginality as a *noun* is related to the verb 'to marginalize' and in this sense provides a trap for those involved in resistance by its assumption that power is a function of centrality. This mean that such resistance can become a process of replacing the centre rather than deconstructing the binary structure of centre and margin which is a primary feature of post-colonial discourse.

As qualitative research enters what Denzin and Lincoln call the eighth moment, ethnography still harbors some controversial areas, such as notions of truth, representation, colonialism, and power. This "Eight moment" of qualitative research focuses on critical and moral discourses on race, gender, class, ethnicity, and social justice. Research, in turn, becomes a means of social change and represents a call to use reflexivity in decolonizing the production of knowledge. Hill Collins contends that race, gender, and class construct and reproduce differences in the research process. Hooks emphasizes the double impact of whiteness and maleness in shaping the authoritative discourse of traditional ethnography. Among the dilemmas of research the issues of decolonization, issues of race, gender, and class deserve a careful examination. Frank underlines the ethical dimension of dialogical research to avoid finalizing the participants' multiple voices into inescapable essentialist representations.

In this way taking all these into consideration, this paper will make an attempt to critically analyze and deal with the concept of marginalization in relation to class, community and gender in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Monica Ali's *Brick lane* and how these works highlight the savage atrocities, suffering, oppression and exploitation of the marginalized in theoretical perspective.
Keywords: Marginal, Centre, Class, Community, Gender

The perception and description of experience as 'marginal' is a consequence of the binaristic structure of various kinds of dominant discourse such as patriarchy, imperialism and ethnocentrism which imply that certain forms of experience are peripheral. Although the term carries a misleading geometric implication, marginal groups do not necessarily endorse the notion of a fixed center. Structures of power are described in reality, in a complex, diffuse and multifaceted way. However marginality as a noun is related to the verb 'to marginalize' and in this sense provides a trap for those involved in resistance by its assumption that power is a function of centrality. This mean that such resistance can become a process of replacing the center rather than deconstructing the binary structure of center and margin which is a primary feature of post-colonial discourse. Marginality unintentionally redefines centrality because it is the centre that creates the condition of marginality. Spivak suggests that the appropriation of the marginalized as part of postcolonial studies and Western academies relegates them to perpetual marginality. The distinction between centre and margin is retained, even more strengthened by the "third worldism" of postcolonial studies.

Subaltern studies in India first arose in the postcolonial era where scholars sought to challenge the historical narratives which glorified the Western Civilizations and left little agency for Indians. Hence, the main theme of the school was resistance to oppressive systems. Taking inspiration from Marxist like Gramsci and Eric Hobshawn, academicians like Foucault (ideas on power relations) the subaltern received constant renewals in its definitions and implications. In Can the Subaltern Speak?, Gayatri Spivak encouraged as well as criticized the direction taken by the subaltern studies in India. It had only reinterrogated Gramsci's term 'subaltern' which indicated more of economic marginalization more than anything else. In a very broad term the word 'class' refers to divisions in society. Like 'gender' and 'race', the concept of class intersects in important ways with the cultural implications of colonial domination. The first contention to be answered is the notion that the kind of inequity and injustice, exclusion and oppression found in post-colonial societies is simply explicable in terms of class. Now the question to think is "Is the condition of the colonized themselves simply referable to universal notions of class identification, so that they can be absorbed into some general category such as the international proletariat without a need of further culturally discrete distinctions?" The Eurocentric and Universalist bias of such an intention is obvious. Nevertheless, it is clear that in many ways the idea of dualism between a proletarian and an owing class was a model for the centre's perception and treatment of the margin and a model for the way in which imperial authority exercised its power within the colonies.

What Spivak is suggesting is that the institutionalization of marginality is a dangerous trend. Spivak writes: "I could easily construct a sort of 'pure east'…so that I could then define myself as the easterner, as the marginal or as the specific, or as the parainstitutional". Edward Said in his Orientalism further discussed the term subaltern and its implications. The subaltern is always the centre for its identity. It cannot independently exist. The power struggle between the centre and marginalized or the other is in a constant negotiation. It is in response to these social tensions that the power structure offers compromises through reform movements and change in political agenda. The Orient, according to him was constructed as a negative version of the West. The West propagated the idea of racially based superior Western culture, immediately pushing the Eastern cultures into the margins. Thus, the marginalized were considered inferior, of impoverished cultural background and their art and culture thoroughly mediocre.

The name 'Third World' is useful because, for any metropolitan audience, it can cover over much unease. Sociologists have been warning us against using this expression, contaminated at origin by the new economic programmers of neo-colonialism. And indeed, in the discipline of sociology, in the decade spanning The New International Division of Labor and The End of the Third World, the genealogy of a cultural use of that term seems rather shabby. What need does it satisfy? It gives a proper name to a generalized margin. A word to name the margin, perhaps that is what the audience wanted to hear: a voice from the margin. If there is a buzzword in cultural critique now it is 'marginality'. Every academic knows that one cannot do without labels. To this particular label, however, Foucault's caution must be applied, and we must attend to its Herkunft or decent. When a cultural identity is trust upon one because the centre wants an identifiable margin, claims for marginality assure validation from the centre.

Said's book was not a study of marginality, not even of marginalization. It was the study of the construction of an object for investigation and control. The study of colonial discourse, directly released by work such as Said's has, however, blossomed into a garden where the marginal can speak and be spoken, even spoken for. It is an important (and beleaguered) part of the discipline now. Working in gender principle sees the society as an affectively coded site of exchange and surplus. The simple content less moment of value as it is gender – coded has historically led to the appropriation fiction of sexual identity. Gayle Rubin's The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of sex was a path breaking essay in the analysis of gender coding. Kalpana Bardhan's writings on the status of Indian women is the only scholarly work in the frame of postcoloniality in the subaltern context that we have seen which shares the presupposition that gender determinacy is the coding of the value, negotiating 'sexuality' rather than sexual identity. The operation of value makes every commitment negotiable, however urgent it might seem or be for the long haul of social intervention is not primarily a question of redressing victimization by the assertion of (class or gender or ethnicity or culture) identity. It is a question of developing a kind of vigilance for systemic appropriations of the social capacity to produce a differential that is one basis of exchange into the networks of cultural of class-or gender –identity.

If such a critique and such a project are not to be given up, the shifting distinctions between representations within the subject on the other must not be obliterated. Marx touches on "class" as a descriptive and transformative concept in a manner somewhat more complex than Althusser's distinction between class instinct and class position would allow. This is important in the context of the argument from the working class both from our two philosophers and "political" third world feminism from the metropolis. The last few years have seen a resurgence of interest in the concept of place in anthropology, geography, and political ecology. "Place"- or, more accurately, the defense of constructions of place has also become an important object of struggle in the strategies of social movements. This paper is situated at the intersection of conversations in the disciplines about globalization and place, on the on hand, and conversation in social movements about place and political strategy, on the other. By arguing against a certain globalcentricism in the discipline that tends to effort an erasure of place, the paper suggest ways in which the defense of place by social movements might be constituted as a rallying point for both theory construction and political action. The paper proposes that place-based struggles might be seen as multi-layered; network oriented subaltern strategies of localization.

Susan Hekman has written that "(t) he subject/object dichotomy that excludes women from the realm of the subject has had a profound effect on the status of women in the modern era". Hekman is here referring to the universal, unified subject, "women". If women have been excluded from the realm of "the subject" in Eurocentric discourses, then Third World women have been "object" of discourses (Eurocentric, colonial and post-colonial) even so than Western women. Being the other of man, the other of the West, the other of other (Western/non-Western) women has been as problematical as the place(s) of post-colonial women "as writing and written subject". African and "Third World" women seem to find themselves in an indescribable position within these metonymies of chain of otherness, to borrow Spivak's words, as that of "the historically muted subject of the subaltern women", with a difference. If Spivak subaltern woman is historically muted, I contend the reverse, which is that she has always spoken, she has spoken in alternative ways that have challenged and continue to challenge not only imperialism and colonial discourse but us, the critics as well, who have been shown to or have refused to hear and acknowledge when and how these voices have spoken.

If African and "Third world" women are often left in the shadows, this brings problems of identity and difference to the forefront in post-colonial women's writing. Post-Colonial women need to claim a specific identity, one that is crucial to what Patricia Collins has described as that of the "outsider within", because claiming an identity gives to all marginalized groups of women not only the chance to critique gender hierarchies within their own communities from the margins but also the dominant power structures. They can fluctuate between what Bell Hooks has termed "the margin and the centre"; they can draw on what Chela Sandoval has described as "oppositional consciousness" while simultaneously using what Linda Alcoff has called "positional perspectives" to construct meaning, subjectivity, and agency. It needs to be contended that African women need to claim an "identity politics". That foregrounds their ability to fluctuate between the centre and the centre wherever these margins and centers might be, but will also enable them to move beyond constructed and constituting margins and centers, creating their own margins and centers along the way.

Since different groups of marginalized women can create new spaces and social locations for themselves within the dominant culture, marginality (be it represented as racial, sexual, historical or cultural difference) will therefore be the point of intersection for identity politics, the location where identity politics finds full expression. By creating these new spaces and locations, women take the margins to the centers and vice-versa. This constant shifting subsequently subverts dominant political, economic, cultural conceptions of gender, both at the centers and at the margins. What this means for post-colonial women is the need to problematized in "their own internal centers and peripheries, their own dominance and marginality" (Mukherjee 6).

Identity must be constantly constructed in the context of other identities, always shifting depending on which one encounters. In Dangarembga's Nervous Condition, the protagonist's cousin Naysha's identity constantly shifts depending on her (re)actions towards her father, her mother, or her cousin, Tambudzai fixed identity must therefore be de-stabilized and by so doing, fixed relation of gender and power hierarchies can also be dis-organized. This disruption creates simultaneous margins where sexual difference or gender inequalities will find them in potentially fluid, though still problematized shifting locations. African women can, therefore, not only

fluctuate between and within identities and subject positions; they can redefine their racial, cultural, historical difference (s).

Studies of the women's condition in postcolonial societies have been under taken in law, literature, and social sciences. In terms of literature, gender and sexuality have become prominent themes in the last decades of the twentieth century. The linkage between gender and their racial/ethnic identities has been the subject of numerous autobiographical writings by native Canadian, European and African American women's such as Gloria Anzaldua, Maria Campbell, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Monica Ali. Then we can also see themes of race, class and gender through the lens of migration and multiculturalism in a postcolonial setting, which are prevailing themes in these novels.

The two novels, Brick lane and Nervous Conditions comprise themes like migration, multiculturalism, religion, cultural aspects, economic inequality, and fundamentalism. These issues are not new, and they are more relevant than ever in the dynamic picture of the world today. This comparison should therefore be of interest to others as well. Migration has been a major theme through history. The reasons for migration have varied, but climatic, social, religious, cultural and financial factors have been important. In general, the common aim of migration has been to improve one's future prospects through education and work. The issue of race, class and gender are important factors in this connection. After decolonization, many people from the Third World and former colonized countries migrated to the West in order to secure a better future for themselves and their families back home. However, the multicultural societies of today have also been a challenge. Prejudice and intolerance, especially in connection with differences in race and ethnicity have been demanding and problematic. Due to variation in culture and religious background, gender roles have proven difficult in relation to western ideals and other cultures. In accordance with my focus in this paper I would like to analyze and discuss how the theme of gender is presented in Brick Lane and Nervous Conditions. In Brick Lane when reader's first meeting with Nazneen takes place when her mother gives birth to her. The scene is vividly described but also dramatic, as the midwife, soon after the birth, declares that the baby is dead. However, a little cry from the newborn baby tells the three women present that there is hope for the baby's survival, although she is very weak. Rupban is suddenly left to the difficult dilemma: should she send her weak baby to the hospital for medical attention or should she, as the midwife suggests, "'…just see what Fate will do'"? (14). In spite of her sister-in-law's wish, Rupban declares: "'No', she said, 'we must not stand in the way of Fate. Whatever happens, I accept it. And my child must not waste any energy fighting against Fate. That way, she will be stronger'" (14). This scene becomes very important for Nazneen and her view on life. First of all, this passage exemplifies Nazneen's social and cultural background, and the strong heritage from her mother: the absolute belief in fate. Her mother strongly believes that God, ahead of time, has determined what will happen to her weak child. In Rupban's world there is no room for the concept of free will, and this is the most important reason why she does not want to bring her daughter to the hospital. This acceptance of everything that happens naturally makes her a very passive person - she never deliberately makes decisions which can change or influence her own or her daughters' lives. For Rupban this passivity and attitude towards life is closely linked to the concept of both gender and religion. She feels submissive in two ways, both in her relation to God and in her relationship with men. Rupban's fatalistic view of life is passed on to Nazneen, and for an extensive part of Nazneen's life this principle becomes very important to

her: "What could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne. This principle ruled her life. It was mantra, fettle and challenge" (16). When she asks Chanu if she can leave the flat, he replies: "'Why should you go out?'" (45). Nazneen, "never said anything to this" (45). She also tells Chanu that she would like to learn English, but Chanu only says: "'It will come. Don't worry about it. Where's the need anyway?'" (37). These examples illustrate that Chanu is the dominant part in their relationship, and that he uses his power to make decisions on behalf of them both. However, it is important to be aware that Chanu's superiority is part of his cultural background. To him, these were his expectations when he decided to get married. Nazneen seems to accept all this. And she does not expect much either from her married life or from life in general. In this situation Nazneen is passive, partly because of her cultural background and her upbringing, but also because of her gender. In this way I just noted some example which shows how issue of gender is related in Brick Lane.

Nervous Conditions derives its title from Jean-Paul Sartre's renowned introduction to Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth (1961), which states that 'The colonial condition is a nervous condition'. Dangarembga's characters (Nyasha, Maiguru, MaShingayi and Tambu) experience nervous conditions brought about by gender discrimination, social class and the cultural norms, which relegate these women to inferior positions. Nyasha's identity crisis in the novel corresponds with Dangarembga's assertion that, 'I do not have a fund of our cultural traditions or oral history to draw from' (Wilkinson 1992: 02). Dangarembga acknowledges that during her early childhood she had not been exposed to her traditional culture due to the influences of western culture. The novel examines unequal power relations between men and women in the Sigauke clan which was largely steeped in tradition. Women (Nyasha, Maiguru, Lucia, Tambu and MaShingayi) challenge the practices of male domination in various ways, usually unsuccessfully. Each of these women makes an effort to question some of the decisions that were the prerogative of the patriarch. The women also attempt to break out of the role of domesticity and servility to the surprise of the men.

The relationship between Tambu and Nhamo was reduced to that of the privileged and the non-privileged. Nhamo had all the opportunities because of his gender, while Tambu had to be content with being groomed as a prospective bride. The relationship between these two siblings was mutually destructive. Nhamo tried by all means to bring her down, as when he stole her maize and gave it to friends, and to dominate over her as a male. Tambu, on the other hand, grew to hate her brother, to the point that even when he passed away, she felt no sadness as expected. In fact her opening remarks in the text are about her apathetic attitude to Nhamo's untimely demise:

Driven by a desire to educate herself, Tambu sought to sell mielies as a vendor. Incidental to this exercise as a merchant, she met a generous white woman, Doris, who donated ten pounds towards Tambu's school fees. The question that arises is: why were the funds that were sent by Babamkuru from abroad for educating Nhamo and Tambu, not used to help out Tambu's education even before the donor came into the picture? Was it not that mindset of the patriarchal society that promotes male empowerment at the expense of the other gender? This mindset is further corroborated by Tambu's father, Jeremiah, when he asked her whether it was possible to 'cook books and feed them to your husband's? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables' (1988:15). These remarks by Tambu's father served to worsen her contempt for her father, and brother. Tambu and her conservative father never agreed

on anything significant and, finally, they simply co–existed in peaceful detachment. With the gender-based tension between Tambu and Nhamo, it is not surprising that at the time of Nhamo's death she showed no feelings; rather she had nursed sentiments of hatred towards her privileged brother. On the other hand her feelings for Babamukuru were somehow different because he took care of his family and provided all their needs.

To conclude, this paper has made an attempt to deal with the concept of marginalization in relation to class, community and gender in Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions and Monica Ali's Brick lane. It has also highlighted the savage atrocities, suffering, oppression and exploitation of the marginalized in theoretical perspective. Endeavour has also been made to see the notion of "Third World" through different viewpoints: Dangarembga's view as opposed to Ali's. These novels have spoken about the unspeakable; the marginalized position of class, community and gender. Thus the paper has tried to establish the fact that Glocalisation is a reincarnation of globalization.

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