

## **GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK AND ADULT EDUCATION<sup>1</sup> – REARRANGING DESIRES AT BOTH ENDS OF THE SPECTRUM**

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**ABSTRACT** As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identifies deeply with her role both as an educator and a teacher, she writes and talks extensively about her teaching at Columbia University and her teaching activities with adults in the rural areas of India and some African countries. I discuss in this article some of her valuable thoughts, observations, and insights gained over a number of years, which can be inspiring for adult education. After a short introduction to Spivak's working context and her approach to education, some of her most important concepts will be presented in a concise overview: 'The importance of aesthetic education'; 'the necessity to teach at two ends of the spectrum'; and 'the task to rearrange desires and to change epistemologies'. The article ends with a short insight into the current contexts and discourses of adult education, including an example of how some of these concepts can be applied in research projects in the context of 'adult education and migration'.

**ABSTRACT (German)** Da Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak sich zutiefst mit ihrer Rolle als Erzieherin bzw. Lehrerin identifiziert, schreibt und spricht sie umfangreich über ihre Lehre an der Columbia University sowie über ihre Aktivitäten in den ländlichen Gebieten Indiens und einiger afrikanischer Länder. Dabei produziert sie über die Jahre einen außergewöhnlich großen Korpus an wertvollen Gedanken, die für die Erwachsenenbildung inspirierend sein können. Nach einer kurzen Einführung in Spivaks Arbeitskontext und ihre Haltung zu Erziehung werden einige ihrer wichtigsten Konzepte in einem stark gekürzten Überblick dargestellt. „Die Wichtigkeit ästhetischer Erziehung“, „Die Notwendigkeit an beiden Enden des Spektrums zu lehren“ sowie „Die Aufgabe Begehren neu zu ordnen und Epistemologien zu verändern“. Der Artikel endet mit einem Einblick in gegenwärtige Kontexte und Diskurse der Erwachsenenbildung, wobei anhand eines Beispiels gezeigt

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1 The title and concept of this article was inspired by Peter Mayo's book: *Gramsci, Freire and adult education. Possibilities for transformative action* (1999).

wird, inwiefern diese Konzepte auch in Forschungsprojekten im Kontext von ‚Erwachsenenbildung und Migration‘ angewandt werden können.

**KEYWORDS** adult education, desires, migration, subaltern, unlearning

### **Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak – teaching outside in the teaching machine**

*Claiming catachresis from a space that one cannot not want to inhabit and yet must criticize is, then, the deconstructive predicament of the postcolonial* (Spivak, 2009, p 71).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was born in 1942, in Calcutta, India, five years before independence from British colonial rule. At the time of her birth her family lived in one of the cruellest sites of the politically mobilized Hindu-Muslim violence, and Spivak openly shares her first life experiences with her readers: “These are my earliest memories: blood on the streets” (Spivak, 2012b, p 277). Surviving the violence and growing up in the shelter of her Hindu-Brahmin metropolitan middle-class family, she received her master’s at the Presidency College of the University of Calcutta in 1959. Only 17 years old at the time, Gayatri Spivak obtained a first-class honours degree in English, including gold medals for English and Bengali literature, and emigrated from India to Ithaca, USA to do her master’s in English at Cornell University, which is one of the eight US Ivy League Universities (cf. Spivak & Landry, 1996, p 1). Starting her career at the beginning of the sixties in the USA meant finding herself in a social context a few years before the Civil Rights Act was enacted, hence at a time *before* discrimination based on ‘race, colour, religion, sex and national origin’ was outlawed in the US. With regard to those times, Spivak notes: “For me as an outsider who came to the United States in 1961, the voice that still echoes from the Civil Rights/ Black Power movement is [...] ‘This is a struggle against educational colonization’ ”(Spivak, 2012c, p. 146).

These specific experiences of Spivak – first, growing up in a country in the aftermath of colonial power and oppression, which had ruled and influenced society for almost 200 years (1757-1947) and then second, teaching and working in a

country where the norm to belong unquestionably in society and academia required [and still requires to an extent] being an Anglo-Saxon, White, male, Christian native speaker - play a significant role in her writings and also in her academic reception. In 'Outside in the Teaching Machine' she makes her outside-inside role explicit, which necessarily includes being shaped by the institution, she enters from the 'outside': "As the margin or 'outside' enters an institution or teaching machine, what kind of teaching machine it enters will determine its contours" (Spivak, 2009, p x). Practising a permanent self-critique, it is very important for her to underline that in the moment one teaches at a (Western) University, one will profit from the privileges, follow the rules and partly reproduce the hegemonic system. Thus, one can't keep a 'neutral' outside position in the inside - whatever outside position you come from.

Spivak herself repudiates any fixed labels and categories people try to put her in, claiming that "[i]dentitarianism is a denial of the imagination" (Spivak, 2012d, p 406). The power of imagination being one of the strongest tools in her work, she wards off anything that could diminish or confine this energy. She asserts her Indian citizenship and often claims her right to vote in India and to hold an Indian passport, but at the same time distinguishes clearly between her duties as a citizen of the state of India on the one hand and any kind of cultural or national 'identity' on the other. Being one of the most important postcolonial theorists next to Homi K. Bhaba and Edward Said - the three of them were once called the 'holy trinity of postcolonial theory' by Robert Young (2006) -, Spivak's 'origin' and 'identity' are made a pertinent issue by many who work with her texts and listen to her fervent talks. Again and again she has to deal with interpellations reducing her to the 'marginalized woman of colour' who somehow made it into academia through her excellent work; especially in contexts of marginality studies, where people feel like it is doing the 'right thing' and being 'politically correct' when they 'include a position from the margins' at their conference/ plenary talk etc.

But is she, a University Professor in the Humanities Columbia, New York<sup>2</sup>, holding honorary doctoral degrees from all over the world, really the marginalized woman of colour who can speak for the ‘oppressed of the world’? Actually, Spivak would never claim to be doing this. She is painfully scrupulous by naming her privileges again and again so as not to be mistaken by anyone as a person representing the margins. Spivak eventually finds a very personal solution for these claims she is confronted with. At a conference on Cultural Value at Birbeck College, London, Spivak was obliged again to think of her cultural identity (cf. Spivak, 2009, p 59). Instead of taking up the claim to position herself in an ‘identifiable [cultural] marginality’ and accordingly assuring validation from the centre, she decides to position herself as a ‘university teacher’, “a name that would not keep her in (the representation of) a margin so thick with context” (Spivak, 2009, p 61).

This strong identification with her role as a teacher leads Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to write extensively on pedagogical questions, particularly on adult education. She constantly repeats that she is “basically a teacher, rather than something else” (Danius, Jonsson, & Spivak, 1993, p 33) and identifies foremost as a ‘humanities teacher’ – humanities in the wide sense of the term. Influenced by Jacques Derrida’s concept of deconstruction, disciplinary borders between educational science, social science, history, philosophy, gender studies, language and literature studies and many more are crossed easily and permanently by this impressive intellectual, who does not allow herself to be confined between these artificial boundaries. There are few academics as consistent as she is in crossing disciplinary borders, ignoring and deconstructing them in every single text. In addition to crossing disciplinary borders, Spivak’s texts move between issues concerning the

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<sup>2</sup> Out of nearly 5000 tenured professors at Columbia, there are only 15 University Professors. The University Professorship is an award suggested by the President and endorsed by the trustees. Spivak was the first woman of color to be given this award. University Professors can teach in any department. She is the only woman of color in a comparable position who teaches European material to students from the dominant racial group.

planet(~~globe~~)<sup>3</sup>, the state, the region, the people and the single case in a fast, sinuous way. Furthermore, she constantly breaks academic rules concerning the fine lines between science and politics as her writing and acting are deeply political. When she is not teaching in her own university or giving guest-lectures at a conference for one of the many renowned universities in the academic space, she “educates the educators” of the subaltern<sup>4</sup> in the rural areas, investing her private money in the running of five elementary schools on the border of two “backward” states in India (cf. Spivak, 2017). Given the wide range of subjects Spivak writes and talks about and her paths of thinking moving along so fast, it is sometimes hard to follow the argument. Refuting many accusations of being obscure and opaque in writing, Spivak affirms: “We know plain prose cheats” (Danius et al., 1993, p 33). She elucidates that for “the transparent system of representation through which things are known and understood are also the systems which control and dominate people” (Morton, 2009, p 5). Stephen Morton adds, referring to her writing style, that “Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction of the binary opposition between the text and the world has perhaps been most influential in shaping the compositional style and rhetoric of Spivak’s thought” (Morton, 2009, p 17). For readers used to moving in ‘disciplinary defined’ fields and clearly structured texts, the confrontation with Spivak’s form of writing and thinking is quite challenging, needs patience, perseverance and the readiness to cross and un-do ‘borders’ together with her. But then the effort is more than worthwhile.

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3 Spivak suggests to overwrite the globe with the signifier ‘planet’. Her aim is to make the readers realize that we actually don’t control and don’t inhabit the globe/the globalisation, that we live in a constant (non)-relation to it, as globalisation is only ‘capital and data’ and all the moving data is only to be found on our computers with no one really living on it. By using ‘planet’, which is more in the species of alterity, belonging to another system, we get closer to realize that we can inhabit this place - but on loan (cf. Spivak (2013), p 44).

4 Spivak uses ‘subaltern’ in the trajectory of the Marxian, Gramscian and Guhan notion of subalternity. She defines the word ‘subaltern’ as: to be removed from all lines of social mobility. [...] Subalternity is a position without identity. [...] No one can say ‘I am a subaltern’ in whatever language. [...] Subalternity is where the lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognizable basis of action (Spivak (2012e), p 430f).

As Gayatri Spivak identifies deeply with her role as an educator, as a teacher, she writes and talks extensively about her teaching at Columbia University and her teaching activities with adults in the rural areas of India and some African countries. As a result, she provides an extensive amount of inspiring thoughts gained over the years, which can be fruitful for those working in adult education. In the format of this short article, I can only shed light on the most important concepts, which are repeated in various forms in different texts, books and lectures by Spivak. These are: ‘The importance of aesthetic education’, ‘the necessity to teach at two ends of the spectrum’ and ‘the task to rearrange desires and to change epistemologies’. The article ends with a short insight into the current contexts and discourses of adult education, including an example of how some of these concepts can be applied in research projects in the context of ‘adult education and migration’.

### **Aesthetic education - Productively undoing another legacy of the European Enlightenment**

*The imagination is our inbuilt instrument of othering, of thinking things that are not in the here and now, of wanting to become others (Spivak, 2012d, p 406).*

As Stephen Morton remarks, “Gayatri Spivak’s deconstruction of European enlightenment thinkers, such as Kant, Schiller, Hegel, and Marx, and her activist work in rural schools in India has involved an ongoing commitment to rethink the hegemonic structure of colonial education and its legacies from the standpoint of the subaltern” (Morton, 2011, p 70). In her latest book entitled ‘An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization’, Spivak also confronts this challenge and takes up the challenge of productively undoing a legacy of European Enlightenment – the aesthetic” (cf. Spivak, 2012f, p 1). Her book title is based on Friedrich Schiller’s letters entitled, “Die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen (On the Artistic Education of Man)”, written in 1794/95. Friedrich Schiller ruminates about the role of aesthetic education dealing with Kant’s transcendental aesthetics and the French Revolution. Spivak points out critically that Schiller, interpreting Kant, is depriving Kant’s work of the power lying within the asymmetrical.

The destructive potential of the asymmetrical, the force resident in a structure that is askew, is taken away and made into a balance. [...] When Schiller reads Kant he symmetricalizes, makes things into chiasmuses, into binaries that work together and become resolved into totalities (Caruth, 2010, p 1022f).

In respect to this misreading of Kant by Schiller, Spivak makes an interesting observation. In her perspective, Schiller's way of interpreting Kant and hence Schiller's concept of the aesthetic, becomes 'typical' of the Enlightenment. She states that "Schiller, in his vulgar strength, is exactly the kind of thing that, for educated, good-hearted folks of a certain sort [...], people who do theory at elite universities all over the world - represents that strong, wonderful voice of something that is very loosely called the Enlightenment" (ibid, p. 1023).

This is why Schiller becomes of special interest to her, approaching the concept of the 'aesthetic'. Referring to aesthetic education Schiller elaborates in his letters:

For example, the *intellectual man* has the idea of virtue, of truth, and of happiness; but the *active man* will only practise virtues, will only grasp truths, and enjoy happy days. The business of physical and moral education is to bring back this multiplicity to unity, to put morality in the place of manners, science in the place of knowledge; the business of aesthetic education is to make out of beauties the beautiful (Schiller, 1794, p 21, emphasis added)<sup>5</sup>.

The sublimity of the concept, found in many texts of that historical period of 'Enlightenment' is questioned thoroughly by Gayatri Spivak. She succeeds in showing how the aesthetic

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<sup>5</sup> In the English translation Mensch' is translated as 'man', although it should be 'human'. Even though even Schiller wouldn't have deliberately implied women in his writings, at least they are enclosed in the general meaning of the word 'Mensch' in contrast to the implications which come with the translation: 'man'. 'Der reflektierende Mensch' was translated to 'the intellectual man'. Actually 'der reflektierende Mensch' means 'a human being who contemplates or cogitates about something'. So Schiller is contrasting 'thinking/cogitating humans' to 'active humans'.

in the canonical texts of the philosophers of the Enlightenment is a form of 'elitist' aesthetic, separating the world into those who have the privilege to experience it and those who are too 'primitive' and 'savage' to relish this kind of aesthetic experience. Deconstructing this legacy of aesthetic education, she rewrites it as a form of education which is able 'to train the imagination of everyone' – especially for those who do not count as sublime in this world. For Spivak, the concept needs to be used particularly with and for those who are forcibly kept away from 'intellectual' work.

Spivak makes it clear that the universal subject referred to as 'human' in the different texts of the Enlightenment does not refer to all humanity, but only to the educated, bourgeois, masculine subject of the European enlightenment (cf. Morton, 2009, p 116). Jean-Paul Sartre comments on the colonial empire which was about to fully unfold while Schiller was writing his letters:

Since the native is subhuman, the Declaration of Human Rights does not apply to him; inversely, since he has no rights, he is abandoned without protection to inhuman forces – brought in with the colonialist praxis, engendered every moment by the colonialist apparatus, and sustained by relations of production that define two sorts of individuals – one for whom privilege and humanity are one, who becomes a human being through exercising his rights; and the other, for whom a denial of rights sanctions misery, chronic hunger, ignorance, or, in general, 'subhumanity' (Sartre's Foreword in: Memmi, 2016 [1957], p 20).

Most of the 'humans' living in this world were and are still today not included in the concepts of the Enlightenment. However, the concepts are used in a universal way and are wielded as a weapon against those who need to be controlled because they have resources (oil, gas, etc.) or because they belong to the large number of people who are kept poor and disenfranchised, and are therefore a dangerous threat for the affluent in the global north. The 'civilizing mission', the approach to bring the Enlightenment to those who seem to live in the 'dark', was and is one of the most important legitimization discourses, when the imperial powers have to defend their invasions and oppressive economic politics.



Gayatri Spivak therefore describes the shortcomings of the project of 'European Enlightenment' and – using her favourite instrument of 'affirmative sabotage' – she engages with it and takes what is useful for her thinking and her pedagogical work. She does this – as she often repeats in texts and lectures “without accusation, without excuse, with a view to use” (Spivak, 2012f, p 1). Referring to the concept of aesthetic education, sabotaging Schiller (ibid., p 2), she finds two important tools to use: the 'power of imagination' which is included in the concept of aesthetic education and the idea of an education which is 'not instrumental in the neoliberal capitalist sense'.

In his third letter, Friedrich Schiller makes an observation which could be equally made today, 220 years later:

For art has to leave reality, it has to raise itself bodily above necessity and neediness; for art is the daughter of freedom, and it requires its prescriptions and rules to be furnished by the necessity of spirits and not by that of matter. But in our day it is necessity, neediness, that prevails, and bends a degraded humanity under its iron yoke (Schiller, 1794, p 3).

This applies equally to the discourses in adult education, which are increasingly succumbing to the demands of the labour market, and as a result non-functional offers in continuing education are becoming rare. As I will develop later in this text, for Spivak, working with the power of the imagination is one of the most important pedagogical tasks teachers have to concentrate on. It makes it possible to break the lines of reality, to think utopian, to invent oneself as different to the one you are today and visualize 'things that are not in the here and now'. Furthermore, it triggers the 'Spieltrieb'<sup>6</sup>, Schiller's tool to re-unite the formal and the material impulse in the human being. Spivak ab-uses<sup>7</sup> the concept of the 'Spieltrieb' to play

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6 “There shall be a communion between the formal impulse and the material impulse, that is, there shall be a play instinct [Spieltrieb], because it is only the unity of reality with the form, of the accidental with the necessary, of the passive state with freedom, that the conception of humanity is completed” (cf. Schiller, 1794, p 19).

7 The notion 'ab-use' refers to Spivak's form of affirmative sabotage. She suggests, that we learn to use the European Enlightenment from below (Spivak, 2012f, p 3)

with the double binds one is confronted with in the myriad ambiguous contexts of this world. Examples are the double bind between caste and class/race and class, body and mind, self and other (cf. Spivak, 2012g, p VIIIIf). Aesthetic education, sabotaged in the Spivakian sense, is 'play training' for her, an epistemological preparation for democracy, with teachers of the aesthetic using material that is historically marked by the region, cohabiting with, resisting, and adapting to what comes from the Enlightenment (cf. Spivak, 2012f, p 4). Spivak even claims that an aesthetic education can continue to prepare us for the cultural 'task of globalization', "thinking an uneven and only apparently accessible contemporaneity that can no longer be interpreted by such nice polarities like modernity/tradition and colonial/postcolonial (ibid., p 2)".

### **The elite and the subaltern - teaching at both ends of the spectrum**

*In order to shift [the] layered [epistemic] discontinuity we must focus on the quality and end of education, at both ends (Spivak, 2008b, p 18).*

The task of globalization is one which is very much in focus in Spivak's work. Thus, she starts her book on aesthetic education with the sentence: "Globalization takes place only in capital and data. Everything else is damage control. Information command has ruined knowing and reading" (Spivak, 2012f, p 1). Knowing and reading for her are crucial for the development of an informed critical perspective in the globalized world. Hence, Spivak emphasises on various occasions how any act of reading (especially in the Western university classroom) can have social and political consequences (cf. Morton, 2009, p 76). Another important 'working difference' is made by Spivak "between 'knowing something and learning to do something'. The relationship between knowing and learning is crucial as we move from the space of opposition to the menaced space of the emerging dominant" (Spivak, 2012c, p 140). It is therefore not enough just to know that there are elections coming up, for example; one also has to learn about the necessity to inform oneself about the different candidates and their policies and to exercise an informed vote and even be able to 'govern', to be an active part of a new evolving hegemony.

This is why she tries to teach the capacity of ‘reading’, which does not mean just to decipher letters, but to develop something which could be summarised as ‘transnational literacy’. For Spivak, “it is through transnational literacy that we can invent grounds for an interruptive praxis from within our hope in justice under capitalism” (Spivak, 2012c, p 152). She teaches this kind of critical reading to her students at both ends of the spectrum - to the elite students at Columbia University, New York and the educators she works with in the rural areas in India and African Countries. For Spivak, it is necessary to teach the world’s elite simultaneously to the world’s subaltern to set social change into action as it is the world’s elite who are complicit in the production of the world’s subaltern. This acknowledgment of complicity provides a crucial starting point for her, from which one must develop a more responsible intellectual practice (cf. Morton, 2009, p 41).

In her canonical text ‘Can the subaltern speak’, Spivak (1994) “performs a pedagogical act of ethical responsibility that counters the paternalism associated with the pedagogic techniques of colonial governmentality” (Morton, 2011, p 75). She clarifies that it is important not to wipe out the voices of the subaltern by speaking *for* them and at the same time not to leave them alone in a situation where they are not able to represent themselves as long as there are no structures which would make it possible for them to be heard. Until these restrictive conditions change, until the subaltern are no longer subaltern, the politically-engaged postcolonial intellectual has an ethical responsibility that she cannot renounce, hiding behind the idea that the ‘masses can speak for themselves’. She must therefore tackle the ambivalent work of representation rather than resigning from it. Morton adds in respect to teaching in this intricate situation: “This subaltern pedagogy, [...], not only demands a rethinking of what teaching means, but also questions the role of the intellectual as educator and political proxy” (Morton, 2011, p 71).

Next to writing ‘about’ the situation of the subaltern, Gayatri Spivak, today 76 years old, travels regularly to the rural areas where she is trying to develop the intuitions of democracy in the children of the landless illiterate. In India, she is running five elementary schools on the border of two “backward” states and training teachers hands-on how to

teach the state curriculum. It is her deep conviction that this can help people to make informed voting decisions and enter the mainstream (cf. Spivak, 2017). Democracy is the only form of government which has to be learned, states Oskar Negt (2004, p 197 (transl. AH), and Spivak notes: “In order not only to destabilize capitalism, but to turn capital toward the social, the electorate must be trained in the habits and rituals of democracy. Not once and for all but persistently, forever. One never closes the schools” (Spivak, 2008a, p 3). Albert Memmi, writing while colonial powers were still in place, also points at the power people could achieve when they would be enabled to vote in an informed way: “In fact, the colonialist system favors population growth to reduce the cost of labor, and it forbids assimilation of the natives, whose numerical superiority, if they had voting rights, would shatter the system” (Memmi, 2016 [1957], p 20). Enabling people to stand up for their own rights – to shatter the system - is one of the core elements in the field of critical pedagogy which conjoins important voices such as Antonio Gramsci (1999), Paulo Freire (1996), Frigga Haug (2018), Henry Giroux (2017), bell hooks (2010) and many more. Another interesting link can be done to the pivotal project of Cultural Studies here (Williams, 1993; Hall, 2000; Roman, 2015).

By teaching the elite on the one hand and rendering them complicit to the social change necessary and supporting the subaltern to get ready for taking an active part in civil society on the other, Spivak’s work makes an invaluable contribution to the goals of critical pedagogy, especially in the field of adult education. At both ends of the spectrum she focusses on the ‘training of the mind’, which I will now discuss further.

**Teaching is about training the mind – rearranging desires by changing epistemologies**

*The world needs an epistemological change that will rearrange desires* (Spivak, 2012f, p 2).

The colonial emperors knew very well how to use the tool of education to change/train the mind of the colonized. The classic example is Macaulay’s ‘Minute of Indian Education’ from 1835 which exemplifies the hegemonic function of British colonial education policy. In his famous ‘Minute’ Macaulay states:

I have never found one among them [orientalists with expertise on Eastern languages] who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. [...] And I certainly never met with any orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanscrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations. [...] It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England. (Macaulay, 02.02.1835).

Therefore – given the cultural superiority of European literature and culture in Macaulay’s argument, he claims that the central objective of educational policy is “to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern, - a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’ ” (cf. Morton, 2011, p 71). This is one of the many examples where education was (and is) used as a political tool to govern millions of people by getting power over their minds, in this case by shaping organic intellectuals (Gramsci) who act in favour of the hegemony established by the colonial power. How effective the British were can be measured when we see that even today English is the official national language in India next to Hindi and that the whole school system is still oriented towards the British School System.

Spivak has a deep understanding of how the lives of many disempowered groups are already damaged by dominant systems of knowledge and representation. “I am speaking of the scandal that, in the global South, in the schools for middle-class children and above, the felicitous primary use of a page of language is to understand it; but in the schools for the poor, it is to spell and memorize” (Spivak, 2008b, p 44). She renders visible the fact that there are groups of people whose minds were obviously never trained for intellectual work. They are born to be peasants or workers and those responsible for building an educational infrastructure never thought about training them in order to enhance their chances of moving up the social mobility lines and developing a democratic habitus

which would make it possible for them to assume an active part in civil society, engaging themselves in the struggle for social justice for everyone.

W.E.B. Du Bois, thinking about an education feasible to those who were living in slavery and shielded from any kind of education for centuries, notes:

“So here we stand among thoughts of human unity, even through conquest and slavery; the inferiority of black men, even if forced by fraud; a shriek in the night of freedom of men who themselves are not yet sure of their right to demand it. This is the tangle of thought and afterthought wherein we are called to solve the problem of training men for life.” (DuBois, 2015, p 56).

Spivak, focusing on the subaltern today, ‘solving the problem of training them for life’ and - in the tradition of DuBois - teaching them how to ‘communicate with the stars’ (cf. Caruth 2010, p.1023), also searches for answers to questions like: What kind of education is necessary to train the mind, to rearrange desires non-coercively in the face of historic and present violence? How is it possible to interrupt desires and visions which are embossed by the experience of the complete deprivation of rights, exploitation, war, famine and permanent humiliation? Some of the most important tools she names in this context are first, an education which is not to be qualified in terms of years of schooling but in respect to the content and the quality of the teachers and second, a constant training of the imagination to open up other, powerful vistas in the minds of those whose visions were oppressed by the hegemonic powers for centuries.

As explained in the previous section, epistemologies have also to be changed within the hegemonic powers. In the West, she says, taking Columbia University, New York as an example,

the teacher can try to rearrange desires noncoercively [...] through an attempt to develop in the student a habit of literary reading, even just ‘reading’, suspending oneself into the text of the other – for which the first condition and effect is a suspension

of the conviction that I am necessarily better, I am necessarily indispensable, I am necessarily the one to right wrongs, I am necessarily the end-product for which history happened (Spivak, 2008b, p 23).

The change is therefore very much an existential change in attitudes and the general stance towards one's own position in this world. Another tool Spivak names here, which should be used along with the 'rearrangement of desires', is the project of 'un-learning our privilege as our loss' (cf. Gross/Spivak, 1999, p 163). In an interview with Elizabeth Gross (recorded in Sydney, 1984), she cites an example to elaborate on this project: "To my students in the United States, I talk about 'instant soup syndrome' – just add the euphoria of hot water and you have soup, and you don't have to question yourself as how the power was produced" (ibid). You do not know what is actually inside the soup as it is ready-made and the production process is invisible to you. So Spivak demands the privileged in the West – however disadvantaged they might be themselves - to reflect on the given (ready-made) privileges they still have, and to understand that to have these privileges means at the same time not to realize and experience the positions and conditions of many others who live in completely different contexts. This could be adapted for example to the female academic fighting for women's rights at a Western university who must not universalize her demands for the female subaltern in the rural areas of the so-called global south or to the metropolitan migrant [with a student visa, scholarship, regular income etc.] who cannot just equate her own experiences of racism and exclusion with, for example, the Rohingya refugee living on the borders of Bangladesh.

The place from where one speaks is crucial for the question of who will listen and what effects the speech will have. Spivak exhorts especially those in privileged positions to be cautious with their position. "One must begin somewhere" is a different sentiment when expressed by the unorganized oppressed and when expressed by the beneficiary of the consolidated disciplinary structure of a central neocolonialist power. Spivak notes:

if the 'somewhere' that one begins from is the most privileged site of a neocolonial educational system, in an institute for the training of teachers, funded

by the state, does that gesture of convenience not become the normative point of departure? Does not participation in such a privileged and authoritative apparatus require the greatest vigilance? (Spivak, 2009, p 64)

Vigilance and self-critique are crucial to Spivak's work and even though she is often accused of behaving like a diva, of being arrogant and detached, there are few academics in her league (and anywhere else) who are so consistent in their self-critique and the openness for discussing their positions.

Next to the 'rearrangement of desires' and the approach of 'un-learning privileges as a loss', Spivak suggests the need to 'learn to learn from below' as another way to change epistemologies in the West:

I suggest that we have something to learn from the underclass immigrants, in the interest of a more just modernity: the remnants of a responsible pragma [...] What is new here is that the dominant re-defines himself in order to learn to learn from 'below', learns to *mean* to say [...] I need to learn from you what you practice, I need it even if you didn't want to share a bit of my pie; but there is something I want to give to you, which will make our shared practice flourish. You don't know, and I didn't know, that civility requires your practice of responsibility as pre-ordinary right. To teach this saying is the support that cultural workers and educators can provide for the entire planet (Spivak, 2013, p 78 - emphasis in the original).

Learning from below also demands a self-reflective stance which can be developed as a result of un-learning one's own sublimity. If it is no longer just me, myself, who is the only one indispensable, then I can open up towards the 'other', really learn from his/her practice, exercise my duty and my right to be responsible towards the 'other' and at the same time respect the space where the 'other' practices his/her responsibility.

While the training of the minds of the poorest aims at empowering them to take an active part in civil society and slowly change the oppressive hegemony, the training of the



minds of the privileged aims more at un-learning their own haughtiness and sanctioned ignorance.

These are what should, in Spivak's perspective, be the central aims of the humanities. But considering the ongoing changes, she remarks: "It is a persistent effort at training the imagination, a task at which we have failed through the progressive rationalization of education all over the world" (Spivak, 2008a, p 2).

**What's left of Adult Education – Is efficiency the new ethics?**

*Teaching in the humanities cannot sustain a calculable good. This may be one of the reasons why, although I do not believe in the immortality of the soul, teaching comes closest to sacred for me (Spivak, 2009, p xi).*

In the academic discourses of adult education, one of the most frequently quoted 'revolutionary' pedagogies is that of Paulo Freire, as well as that of Antonio Gramsci with his concept of hegemony and the project of Cultural Studies. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's work has found very little reception in this field so far, even though the whole of her considerable work has such a strong emphasis on education and as could be shown, includes important insights and concepts, which can be used for developing responsible adult education, one that is aware of its own important role in civil society. We live in a world where currently thousands of Rohingya are being killed and displaced in Myanmar, as well as Kurds in Rojava and Palestinians in Gaza, where racist killings in Western countries are on the rise. This list could be continued, identifying the persecution and killing of people just because they belong to a group which is not the dominant one. At the same time, we live in a world where climate change is a threat to everyone, whilst those with the most power continue to ignore the obvious facts at the expense of the poorest, in a world where global capitalism is responsible for the suffering of millions who work for the affluent and wealthy, with a child starving every five seconds (UNICEF, 13.09.2013), while in Western supermarkets tons of wholesome food are wasted every day. In short – as long as we live in a world where social change is absolutely essential – it is crucial to re-think adult education as a tool for social change.

Institutionalized adult education started as a revolutionary project, educating male workers in the industries of the West, to render them capable of fighting for their own rights. Humanities in academia also had an 'idealized' concept of sustainability, in the early days, which "was to maximize imaginative training and minimize the mind-numbing uniformization of globalization" (Spivak, 2012a, p 2). Still, many of those academics who are active in favour of critical adult education, support the idea of a responsibility of adult education for social change, even if it can't be the panacea for the whole complex structure of social inequalities of course (cf. Holst, 2018; Tett, 2018; Lucio-Villegas, 2018). But today, confronted with the curricula of the current institutions of Adult and Higher Education, we have to ask ourselves: "Is efficiency the new ethics" (cf. Kim 2018)? Similar to the management strategies in the corporate industry, it is the final figures of successful participation, passed tests, numbers of participants and usefulness for the working place, which are used as criteria to measure the success of education.

As I am currently working on a research project in this context, let us take as an example the classrooms for German as a Second Language in Germany and Austria where adult migrants (most of them from the global south) sit and learn the hegemonic language of the country they immigrated to. Spivak's perspectives on adult education help to inform the analysis of what is happening inside these classrooms. They help us to reflect on how learners are addressed, what kind of teaching material is used, how reflective the teachers are about their own involvement in the migration regime of their country and how the structural conditions of the courses are organised. Spivak's perspectives make it possible to connect our descriptions and analysis to a wider global context. In this example, it becomes obvious that we are missing a big opportunity. Instead of using this fortunate circumstance in the global north of having so much knowledge from different parts of the world to widen the imagination, to 'learn from below', to develop the whole of society in respect of new ways of negotiating privileges, rights and even language-use, governments force immigrants to learn the 'new language' which has to be 'proofed' by passed tests, and they are sanctioned if they fail. In case of failing, they suffer reductions in welfare money, their residence and work permit is in danger and sometimes even their chances of finding a place to live is linked to their capability to reproduce the German language

at a level allowing them to pass the test. While it is important and a form of 'enabling violation' (cf. Spivak, 2008b, p 15) to provide possibilities to learn the hegemonic language, it is at the same time used to select the 'useful' fast learning migrants who can be integrated at the lower end of the job market from the 'useless', slow or not-learning migrants, with 'usefulness' defined according to neoliberal logic.

The curricula include nothing which could support the widening of the imagination – on the contrary. In the state-licenced course books, Germany and Austria are presented in a highly essentialist culturally identitarian way, with remnants of the civilizing mission to be found in almost every chapter (cf. Heinemann, 2018). Taking Spivak's use of aesthetic education into consideration a lot could be gained to re-arrange the learning environments, the teaching material and the learning objectives. Another problem, which can be pointed at with Spivak's considerations, is that the teaching is directed only into one direction. It is the migrants who have to learn the language to adapt themselves to the receiving society. But in this concept of one-sided-education the dominant group doesn't get the chance to develop, to un-learn their privileges, to learn from below. "I go toward accessing the other through deep language learning in the collectivity of the classroom" suggests Spivak (2008a, p 2). But in Germany and Austria the only legitimized 'other' languages - taught in school - are those which became powerful through colonial power: English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. To approach the 'other' it would be necessary to teach Turkish, Arabic, Pashto, Russian, Tigrinya and many more migrant languages. But there is no habit of and no commitment to providing wider opportunities for learning these languages. Spivak's approach to teaching, which is very much focussed on rearranging desires and changing epistemologies at both ends of the spectrum by using the power of imagination, can be of invaluable help when thinking about adult education in the immigrant societies in the West today. She works with a perspective of 'critical regionalism' (Spivak, 2008a, p 1), always keeping the global perspective in mind.

Therefore, in times where migration movements from the global south to the north are rising, critical adult education, which is ready to accept its responsibilities for a less unequal and unjust society, can gain a lot by considering Spivak's way

of thinking both parts – the regional and the global - together. Adapted to our example – the postcolonial language classroom in the Western Society – we have people from different parts of the world, from the so-called global south, sitting together in one classroom, with a teacher ‘representing’ the receiving country. Although marked by radical lines of inequality, this room is a rich contact zone (Pratt 2008) offering options for the development for protean negotiations in respect to ‘ideologies’, ‘values’, ‘norms’ and ‘utopias’. How to use these options is something which has to be probed by those interested in the development of responsible adult education - considering the respective regional specifics.

But of course, teaching is not ‘instrumental’. Human minds – luckily – are not as predictable as a computer programme. For Spivak, it is obvious that “[o]ne cannot coerce while one teaches, however at ease the teacher-class situation may be. Whatever happens, happens in spite of scrupulously intended teaching. That something will have happened is the assurance and constraint in view of which one makes the attempt for a collective rearrangement of desires (Spivak, 2008a, p 4)”. She is not naïve in the hope she attributes to the powers of teaching. Furthermore, referring to Marx’s Third Theses on Feuerbach, she is very clear that it is essential, that “[t]he materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by [wo] men and that it is essential to educate the educator him[her]self (Third Theses on Feuerbach, Marx 1845)”. Thus, critical adult education cannot be part of a counter-hegemonic movement if the teachers themselves are not reflective about the tangled and intricate situation in which they live and teach. This is an aspect which is very much neglected in teacher training at most Western Universities and should be taken into account not only in adult education but also for school teachers, who are responsible for the education of children in mutual appreciation.

In her inspiring lecture in Vienna in 2017, Spivak makes a demand to ‘de-humanize education’ (cf. Spivak, 13.05.2017). As we know about the destructive powers humans have and still use against nature, against objects, against themselves and especially against other human beings, Spivak makes a crucial point. Perhaps the solution for a ‘better world’ will be to eventually give up the false hope that love and care, which

are deeply connected with the image of a ‘good’ inner self of the human being, will be the pivotal lever to change anything. Instead we should – counter-intuitively - concentrate on possibilities of how justice, less violence and oppression can be brought into the world *in spite of* the constitution of human beings – but still ab-using the greed that drives humans from the bottom to the top.

Those responsible in institutions of adult education must find ways of protecting them from being exploited by the state as simple acolytes. The financial pressure which weighs on most of the institutions subsidised by the government is a real threat. However, if we do not even attempt to resist, adult education will have lost every chance to regain its revolutionary power. Theories, produced in the academic sphere, also have to keep this intricate responsibility in mind. Spivak can be a precious part of those voices who lead us along this track. I will end here with another of Spivak’s tailor-made quotes:

If academic and ‘revolutionary’ practices do not bring each other to productive crisis, the power of the script has clearly passed elsewhere. [...] The reader must accustom herself to starting from a particular situation and then to the ground shifting under her feet (Spivak, 2009, p 58 - emphasis in the original).

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