

Jazeel, Tariq; Legg, Stephen (Hrsg.): *Subaltern Geographies*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press 2019. ISBN: 9-780-8203-5488-0; 250 S.

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–This collective volume edited by Jazeel and Legg is resulting from two sessions of the 2014 annual conference of Royal Geographical Society, concerning subaltern forms of space-making and -understanding. The book elaborates on the intersections between Subaltern Studies and critical geography while casting a light on subaltern modes of production and reflection on space. It expands on the notion of 'subalternity': drawing from the genealogy of this concept from the Subaltern Studies collective to its intersections with postcolonial studies, it explores the usages of the category 'subaltern' in the production of geographical knowledge. The challenge to employ the concept 'subalternity', in order to conceptualize configurations of space, that are external from the hegemonic colonialist points of view, is grounded in the specific spatial connotation of the notion of 'subaltern', that describes an inferior position within a spatially hierarchized structure. Precisely because of this spatial connotation of the very meaning of 'subalternity', the move to put subaltern questions in conjuncture with geography is a brilliant one, helpful in giving a new productivity both to the concept of 'subaltern' and to postcolonial geography.

The introduction by the editors, 'Subaltern Studies, Space, and the Geographical Imagination' is probably one of the most valuable parts of the book. The authors insist on the necessity to investigate the nexus between geography, space, and representation, and suggest the possibility to extend the scope of the Subaltern Studies project to explore spatial invisibilities: for this to be accomplished, they call for a reframing of the geographical lexicon, to enable radically different ways to portray space. Furthermore, questions are raised about the methodological and philosophical implications of a geographical interest in the subaltern questions, and the kind of skills required to track subalternity, both in the past and in the present. They highlight the op-

portunity to work on subalternity as both an empirical and analytical category. The authors discuss different subdisciplines where a useful deployment of the concept of subalternity could occur - black geographies, urban studies, area studies, indigenous geographies, development geography and colonial history. All these fields are practically engaged in the subsequent nine contributions.

The contributions from other authors each suggest a specific case studies and/or reflection about the usage of 'subalternity' in geography, especially, but not exclusively, with reference to postcolonial contexts. Though, the authors do not rely on a shared meaning of 'subalternity': some draw from the Subaltern Studies a geographical understanding of subalternity as a relational site to negotiate access to state and citizenship, while others engage with this concept in a more creative way. Although this variety of meanings do not denote an inconsistency within the book, but rather a productive heterogeneity, a concluding reconstruction of the different ways in which the authors use the notion of 'subaltern' would be useful, as well as an analysis of the advantages of such different uses for the specific case studies presented: the book would probably benefit from a concluding chapter that connects the multifarious interventions, questions, perspectives, and case studies raised in the single chapters. In what follows I will give example of a few contributions that think in an innovative way the relation of subalternity to space.

The chapter by David Featherstone „Reading Subaltern Studies Politically: Histories from Below, Spatial Relations, and Subalternity“ stresses how subaltern political activity shapes oppositional agencies within geographies of connection and contestation: it points to a link between subaltern agency and the situated geographies that take place precisely through this agency. Featherstone suggests the possibility that subalternity, far from being a mere space for doubt and pain, can in fact be reshaped as an active determination of space and society. He in part contests the spatiality of the Subaltern Studies, and in part draws from it to rework the production of spatial relations, proposing a strategy to spatialize and dislocate difference: he

highlights a coexistence between multiple differences not to be aligned in binary, opposing structures, but rather to be explored in their multifarious, plural, and overlapping configurations. This makes possible to outline the multiple, alternative connections between spatial instances of subalternity, themselves shaping a new cartography of relations. It is worth noting how the author suggests that this approach overcomes the impossibility of agency and consciousness for the subaltern implicit in Spivak's account.¹ Furthermore, Featherstone hints at a promising productivity coming from oceanic studies, in exploring simultaneous, conflictual routes, alongside which different connotations of democracy, equality and freedom take shape. This last point recalls another intervention in *Subaltern Geographies*, „Subaltern Sea? Indian Ocean Errantry against Subalternization“ by Sharad Chari. This essay provides quite an innovative perspective in proposing the sea as a space of resistant subalternity. Chari focuses on the history of the seas to grasp routes of resistance, through the image of a „maritime globe“. The oceans allow for the possibility of a productive revision of the concept of subalternity, so that the subaltern is no longer positioned in a radical, localized alterity, but rather in a spatially scattered difference, visible from a planetary, non-essentialist point of view. From this perspective, capital's operations to hierarchize difference in space are contradicted by creative processes of creolization that connect the Caribbean, the black Atlantic and the Mediterranean into a fertile web based on the image of a maritime interconnected globe. Chari thus challenges the notion of black geography as a dead space of alterity - inscribed in the image of plantation - and substitutes it with a concept of 'errantry', that allows to portray the movements, whether forced or otherwise, of subaltern subjects.

In „Practicing Subalternity? Nyerere's Tanzania, the Dar School and Postcolonial Geopolitical Imaginations“, Joanne Sharp analyses Nyerere's political interventions in postcolonial Tanzania as a conscious attempt to provincialize Europe, through a pan-Africanist project reworking the categories of 'margin' and 'center', and collocating Tanza-

nia at the center of a geopolitical and educational enterprise: Tanzania became a site of Afrocentric geographical imagination that challenged cold war geopolitical binarism. Within the creation of Dar es Salaam University in particular, a powerful shift of ideological leadership and postcolonial politics occurred: intellectuals coming from Africa and the global North engaged an educational program aimed at decentering colonial knowledge. In this way, a subaltern imaginative spatiality was brought into geopolitical and academic practices. To better grasp this complex enterprise, Sharp interprets the concept of subalternity as a relational one, that allows to understand the complex interplay between subaltern and elite positions.

Subaltern Geographies is a valid attempt to reinvigorate both postcolonial studies and geographies. Postcolonial studies have recently been questioned as to their relevance and productivity today, after the initial groundbreaking impact of the most known early elaborations: ²*Subaltern Geographies* challenges such questionings by casting a special light on the notion of subalternity: far from having exhausted its theoretical productivity with the famous elaborations from Gramsci, the Subaltern Studies collective, Spivak and Latin American subaltern scholars, subaltern questions can in fact productively meet the very discipline of geography, so as to give a new vigour to the postcolonial call that the latter has been facing in the last decades ³ and hence foster a new productivity. Moreover, the volume helps to move beyond a merely destructive critique of colonial power/knowledge, and actively respond to the challenge to reconfigure a positively postcolonial world. Far from confirming the end of postcolonial studies/geographies, the book shows how much is still to be done to de-

¹ Spivak Gayatri 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' in *Subaltern Studies IV*, 1985, pp. 330-62.

² Stam Robert / Ella Shohat 'Whence and Whither Postcolonial Theory?' in *New Literary History* 43, 2, 2012, pp. 371-90.

³ Sidaway James / Bunnell Tim / Yeoh Brenda 'Editors' Introduction: Geography and Postcolonialism' in *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 24, 3 (2003) pp. 269-72. Sidaway James / Chih Woon / Jane Jacobs 'Planetary Postcolonialism' in *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 35, 1 (2014) pp. 4-21.

colonize knowledge, why it is still important to think in terms of coloniality and subalternity, and furthermore effectively shows concrete ways to do so.

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