

# WESTERN MARXISM & THE LEGACY OF THE NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

**Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak**

I should like to dedicate these few words to Professor Nanjundaswamy, valiant fighter against Cargill and Monsanto, who died in 2004, and who was imprisoned for destroying a Kentucky Fried Chicken in Bangalore, India in 1997. It was my great good fortune to spend some time with him that year. I could not join forces with him because, although we ourselves could converse in English, his field of operation was in the idiom of Kanada, mine in Bengali. I will argue later that linguistic diversity is not an obstacle to alter-globalization, but rather its constitutive double bind.

Compared to the existence of many versions of practical problems and the constitutive double bind of the immense linguistic diversity of the world alter-globalization attempts to change, the cry for universalism is altogether parochial. It cannot stand beside the spectacular presence of the World Social Forum among the radical middle class. Dissatisfaction with the multiculturalism of the metropolitan diasporic and diagnosing it as victimology cannot stand with the WSF's jubilant cry: "Another world is possible."

The social movements—extra-state collective action to attend to problems neglected by state and party alike—were called "antisystemic movements" by Immanuel Wallerstein, Giovanni Arrighi, and Terence Hopkins in 1989. Wallerstein's own fear then was that they would seek state power. These movements have now gained so much strength that they bypass the state almost completely and provoke us into asking if they should take the helm of world governance.

After the influential interview given by Robert Cassens to the British journal *New Left Review* in 2003, we all know that ATTAC—Association pour la Taxe Tobin pour l'Aide aux Citoyens—the French association at the helm of alter-globalization, spawned World Social Forum. But it is also possible to say that it is a necessary outcome of the slow failure of state and revolution, by internal and external forces, that is one of the major narratives of the past century. This gap between the efficient and the necessary cause of the World Social Forum is important. The difference between "Another Europe is Possible" and "Another World is Possible" is a small but crucial part of it. In between the inception of the social movements and the founding of ATTAC in 1998, is the slow appropriation of these movements by the forces of international capital, the congealing of a so-called international civil society recognized as such by our imperfect but venerable organization of world governance—I refer, of course, to the United Nations—in 1994: the opening of the NGO—forum at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo.

It seems significant that the theme of the conference dealt with reproductive heteronormativity in the context of "Development," which was blatantly an alibi for transnational capital. Never had the real difference between North and South come clearer. We were working against pharmaceutical dumping on women's bodies, our sense of reproductive rights was against enforced sterilization. We could only be perceived as "consensus-breakers" against the overwhelming Northern perception that the right to a legal abortion—which we strictly supported, of course—was the only right that could be mentioned in the draft resolution.

I wrote an open letter that year to Gro Harlem Brundtland, then Chair of the World Commission on Environment & Development. I cite it here to give you a sense of what it is to think from the perspective of Bangladesh. I am not myself Bangladeshi, I am Indian.

The perspective is here a linguistic link that pre-dates artificial frontiers. The national language of India is not my mother tongue, but the national language of Bangladesh is. In order to produce in they come close to achieving a simulacrum of idiomatic continuity with the oppressed groups so that the activism in the social movement can represent them, the activists have to learn to inhabit the "lingual memory" of the oppressed. (The idea that the "oppressed themselves" agitate in the social movements is questionable. I am on record, in writing and in life, about this, but do not have enough time to discuss this now.) Since the question of representation in the social movements is not subject to the abstract structures of state-run democratic procedure (for better or for worse, of course), this is particularly important in this sphere and gives the lie to universalism in a practical way. Unless universalism is mediated by linguistic diversity, and not by the ruse of metropolitan "translation" alone, ATTAC, the authoritative France-based alter-globalist organization, which has my unqualified admiration and support, does not have to face the problem on the named-language register, but the World Social Forum does. Without exaggeration, this is a baseline problem and should not be reduced to the metropolitan universalism-singularity-parochialism debate. Here are bits of the letter:

Ms Brundtland[’s speech]... resonates with an unspoken assumption that...the poorest are guiltiest for the current global disaster, the very guiltiest being the poorest women of the South. The move from this to specious comparisons between the harm done by the resource-poor peasant of the South and the monstrous expenditure of resources in the North is only too familiar to some of us.

When overpopulation as the root cause of global disaster is so unquestioned, the approach to education becomes mechanical. "The girl who receives her diploma will have fewer babies than her sister who does not" has a nice ring, and no doubt has statistical support. But internationally aided education schemes propagate the "values" underlying the financialization of the globe, and is too often celebrated as free choice and "women in development."

Sex education for the adolescent is another excellent idea. But it only fits the established infrastructure in the North. The popular image of a woman oppressed by tradition and ignorance waiting to be "rescued" by Northern body control has little reference to the existing situation: people suffering from centuries of neglect, now bewildered and helpless before an obsessive focus on the reproductive systems of women even as general health declines,...

"Reproductive rights" must be redefined in a global perspective...We are against the criminalization of abortion but perceive access to safe and legal abortion as an important and society-specific issue. In a situation where extreme poverty makes children mean social security, the right to abortion may be immaterial. In a situation where coercive contraception lays waste a woman's reproductive and general health, a right to abortion may be irrelevant. In a situation where the absence of resources makes it impossible to think of male and female children becoming equally competitive in future, the right to abortion may facilitate the removal of female foetuses,...

When [Brundtland] speaks of "allocating at least 4% of Official Development Assistance to population programs," she should take cognizance of the obvious blackmailing potential in the connection between aid packages and population control ... to "empower" women would mean to start a process that would reverse this trend, so that infrastructural supports may be secured through which these women, by no means passive victims, can resist the crimes committed in the name of population control....What I find most astute about ATTAC is that, with its focus on the Tobin tax for foreign exchange transactions, it targets finance capital, the silent killer in capitalist globalization. I also appreciate the idea of a global tax-revenue fund. It puts me in mind of Marx's oft-quoted description of a welfare state in the subjunctive:

If however wages are reduced to their general basis, i.e. that portion of the product of his labour which goes into the worker's own individual consumption; if this share is freed from its capitalist limit and expanded to the scale of consumption that is both permitted by the existing social productivity. . . and required for the full development of individuality; if surplus labour and surplus product are also reduced, to the degree needed under the given conditions of production, on the one hand to form an insurance and reserve fund, on the other hand for the constant expansion of reproduction in the degree determined by social need; if, finally both (1) the necessary labour and (2) the surplus labour are taken to include the amount of labour that those capable of work must always perform for those members of society not yet capable, or no longer capable of working—then nothing of these forms remains, but simply those bases [Grundlagen] of the forms that are communal [gemeinschaftlich] to all social modes of production.'

In globality, the force of the subjunctive is still with us. For the dream of a socialized globality, postponed in the European context with the German Social Democrats voting in war credits in 1914 and with the Third International in D, I can entertain the thought of an equitable global tax revenue fund only on an ad hoc basis. We are obliged to recall that the work of taxes is to sustain a polity, not to solve problems on an ad hoc basis, nor to shore up private sector voluntarism. For the effective functioning of this, in a divided world, the instrument is still the state structure, although it is a broken instrument. Cf. Reich ("my documents: \news\reinventing state) The international civil society is predicated upon the failure of state and revolution, but the emergence of a global functioning structure is, in its turn, predicated upon the establishment of a parity of which would make the World Social Forum powerfully advisory. This question cannot be begged. Only a romantic part-time academic activist would deny this. The many ecstatic remarks of the genre: "the slumdweller in Mumbai know how to build a just world," we have to take into account the difference between our justified moral outrage, and their equally justified self-interest. Freedom from oppression does not automatically lead to the use of that freedom to re-distribute. As for the UN's "millennium goals," I refer you to Samir Amin's criticism, published in English in *Monthly Review*.

It is in the context of this divided world that Antonio Gramsci, who thought "the philosophy of praxis" in an Italy divided by more than class took Lenin's idea a step further into an idea of hegemony that saw the state as pharmakon, medicine as well as poison, working with a civil society that is both imbricated with it and remains its monitor. ATTAC knows this. Robert Cassens says this in his interview: So our task is to persuade the largest number of people possible of the viability of such alternatives, and prepare the ground for a Gramscian hegemony that would allow different policies to be realized.

In the context of the global South, the failure of the first Bandung on the altar of nationalism is no more than a lesson. The second Bandung, called by South Africa, is not necessarily the solution. The Cancun group-China, India, Brazil-Jose Bove's territory-is also state-marked. The usefulness of the deeply ambiguous state structure-so easily claimed by nationalist patriarchy and the forces of Fascism—is not over in the post-colonial world. One unintended consequence of alter-globalization may be to accept the loss of accountability of the state restructured by neo-liberalism. The international civil society is predicated upon the failure of state and revolution. Revolution leading to a change in state-formation looking forward to an altered globe may not have a chance any more. But the structure of the state as a locus of redress may still be useful in a fractured globe, if only as a transition.

In the third thesis on Fauerbach, Marx writes: "the educator must himself be educated. ...The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice."

Gramsci thought most carefully about this question. Already in the period of the *Ordine Nuovo*, he could see the need for the formation of the proletarian intellectual, "those who will enjoy...after the transitional period of national proletarian dictatorships, the fullness of life and development of international communist democracy." Gramsci thought of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a transition to a democratic world-state. I am asking you to consider the possibility of the state structure as a transition to the globe. This will mean relaxing the implicit and only sometimes self-critical control of the movement by the North. In the old days, when obliged to deal with NGOs, we would inquire into the funding and evaluation structures. That day is now long past. But take comfort from the fact that in the European and Latin American theater, ATTAC calls upon the resources of the state, in its international face, seeking to win back the right to redistribution. When expanded internationally through the WSF and other new social movement institutions, this is the force of thinking a left future. Yet, if unsupplemented by ethico-political education of the subaltern as potential agent of redistribution, this future may well come to as ignoble an end as the Bolshevik or Maoist experiment.

When Gramsci had time in jail, he elaborated his plans on education. It is appropriate that ATTAC also sees itself as an "action-oriented movement of popular education".... What does it mean today? Essentially, that militants must be well-informed, intellectually equipped for action. We don't want people turning out on demonstrations without really knowing why." In the context of language-learning, I have said that the World Social Forum faces certain kinds of problems that ATTAC does not. In the context of educating into alter-globalization also, I will say that the models of teach-ins, workers' education and the pedagogy of the oppressed, or indeed the 19th century *Ligue de l'Enseignement* specifically mentioned by Cassen, will not travel to the largest sectors of the electorate of the global South. Here I speak as a person who has been "educating the educators" and running rural elementary schools for twenty years. India often describes itself as "the largest democracy in the world." West Bengal, my home state, saw the founding of the Communist Party of India in exile in 1920, and has the world's longest-running democratically-elected communist government. At these lowest reaches, however, the Party is hardly Gramsci's modern prince. Sometimes the old feudal landowners, former tax collectors for the British, still hold power (though the system was abolished by the government of India in 1952). On the state level, the party, following the neo-liberal policies of the national government, is industrializing (globalizing?) and has exercised considerable violence on the unwilling peasants whose land they want to acquire for this purpose. The social movements are protesting vehemently against this but the leaders, often female, retain a benevolent feudality. It is against this background that I stolidly continue to run my schools, and educate the educators.

I never thought or think of Gramsci as I try to devise . But, as I teach or speak on Gramsci and, incidentally, also on the great African-American Marxist intellectual WEB. DuBois, in the US and Europe, I realize quite how prescient they really were. Both wanted an education in the humanities as the base for the subaltern. This is where that romantic confusion between middle class moral outrage and working class self-interest has no purchase. Without an iota of Mussolini's "Latinitas," Gramsci even wonders if Latin can't be instrumentalized to produce . Here again, subaltern idiom is extremely important. NGOs building schools or Human Rights Watch shaming states into good behavior is not a systematic plan for the future. If we want to "change the world," alter-globalism must think of the education of the disenfranchised into disinterest in a double bind with the interest of class struggle : "democracy... cannot mean merely that an unskilled worker can become skilled," writes Gramsci. "It must mean that every 'citizen' can 'govern' and that society places him, even if only abstractly, in a general condition to achieve this."

We need the state-structure to fight the power of the big snarling beast-states that prowl still in a Hobbesian world. I hold in my hand a slim book written by Prakash Karat, the General Secretary of the CPI(M) its subtitle : "the Nuclear Deal and India-US Strategic Relations." In the geopolitical sphere, which manages capitalist globalization as crisis, the alter-globalization lobby is inefficiently and insufficiently oppositional. We need "citizens" still, to work the state structures of rising nations impatient with the arrogance of European leadership, slouching towards Africa without a civilizing mission. For that Gramsci's project, coming to terms with ideology practically, as pharmakon, instrumentalizing the organic intellectual is still on target. The impatience of the WSF, its idealist love affair with the speed of the digital, is tempered here with: "Intellectuals develop slowly, far more slowly than any other social group. ... to think it possible that such intellectuals" self-selected moral entrepreneurs "can, en masse break with the entire past and situate themselves totally upon the terrain of a new ideology, is absurd".

In conclusion, I touch on the question of gender, bigger than capital, since both sides are caught in reproductive heteronormativity and use gender as an instrument, an alibi-"the surrogate proletariat"; a question that the organized left intellectual, out of touch, expects only women and queers to ask, and where the epistemic impatience of alter-globalization is perhaps most wanting.

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