

## **Voices of Subaltern. Introduction to the Special Issue**

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With this theme issue, readers are invited into a number of research areas paying special attention to giving voice to the subalterns in terms of research and practice.

The term subalternity is a term originally coined by Antonio Gramsci (2011). While Marx (2009, p. 198) had already analyzed in his 18th Brumaire, using the example of the French small farmers, why they – although they live under the same economic conditions of existence and share the same way of life – were not able to organize their interests politically, for Gramsci, too, the Sicilian farmers are the prototype of a subaltern group that cannot see itself represented with its interests in society. The term subalternity has also been taken up in postcolonial discourse. In this context, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) has dealt with this concept critically under the question “Can the Subaltern speak?”. On the one hand – using the example of a conversation between Foucault and Deleuz – she criticizes the cynicism of claiming, as white male members of an imperial colonial power, that subalterns can speak for themselves. In doing so, their post-representationalist conceptualization would let them overlook the fact that only being heard completes the speech act. On the other hand, Spivak points out that speaking for subalterns in an advocacy way also implicitly contributes to depriving them of their own language. This dilemma also arises for social work, social pedagogy and special pedagogy, whose addressees are mostly not represented with their interests in society and thus belong to the category of subalterns.

The Social Exclusion and Pedagogy in the Welfare State (SEP) research program, Aarhus University, Denmark has focused on this theme based on giving voice to the subalterns, which in the modern welfare state include i.e. the vulnerable, the excluded, stigmatized and socially marginalized groups in society. The research program aims to examine and identify significant conditions that can help prevent social vulnerability and stigmatizing and socially excluding living conditions, thereby helping to enhance and improve the social, mental and learning well-being and development of children, young people, adults and the elderly.

The contributors to this theme issue counts several members of the research program all doing research within social science in relation to social work, social and special education, as well as educational research. Common is the exploration of how research and practice contribute interdisciplinary and with a plurality of theoretical and empirical approaches by giving voices to the vulnerable, the excluded and socially marginalized groups in society and thereby contributing to create better conditions for well-being and development in the welfare society.

### **Overview of the papers in this issue**

Niels Rosendal Jensen’s article “Understanding subaltern classes and their struggle – past and present” deals with Gramsci’s concepts and mental tools and demonstrates by means of a historical outline how the subaltern groups are capable of getting influence and conquering

power. Based on that it discusses how these experiences are usable in pedagogy and education in current society, implying the detection of the ‘masked’ class society, a sort of ‘meritocratic’ society.

In his article “Subalternity, Class-Consciousness and Resistance” Dirk Michel-Schertges focuses on relations of oppression and consciousness that are reflected in the discussions of the “subaltern.” That is, the constitution of (postcolonial) power relations and their relevance in order to understand contemporary social relations of domination and mastery in the light of subaltern consciousness.

Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork during several trips to Kenya Kari K. B. Dahl explores in her article “Speaking for the ‘other’? Representation, positionality and subjectivity in ethnographic fieldwork in Danish and Kenyan education institutions” the dilemma of making subalterns ‘speak for themselves’ or ‘speaking for them’, positioning informants in diverse roles, including entering a potentially foreign discourse, i.e. a ‘matrix of domination’ (Collins) which may deprive them of their own language.

The article “The Point of View of Stigmatised Young Girls: Managing Class, “Race” and Place in Polarising Copenhagen” by Edita Ademi, Maia Porting and Christian Sandbjerg Hansen draw on the bourdieusian theoretical and epistemological tradition of “subaltern voices” in order to explore and expose the everyday difficulties and social conditions of suffering among racialized girls from a deprived neighbourhood in Copenhagen as well as on the notion of territorial stigmatization coined by Loïc Wacquant in order to analyse the social injuries and practical management of this particular form of consequential categorisation.

In her article “The muffled voices of the insane child – tracing the small voices of early child and adolescent psychiatry” Trine Elisabeth Møbius Sørensen argues that children’s statements was muffled with discourses of psychiatry and hospital management, leaving them as ‘silenced subjects of history’ (Spivak). By drawing on theoretical perspectives on subjugation represented by postcolonial historiography she tries to reconstruct their silenced voices by questioning who was speaking to whom, to what purpose and through which system of representation?

Following Lorenzer's work on symbol theory Michael May argues in his article “Can people diagnosed as chronically mentally ill speak?” that extreme experiences of physical and/or psychological violence can often not be adequately represented in language-symbolic terms by their victims and therefore find expression in sensual-immediate or sensual-symbolic forms of interaction, which can also be understood as a “subaltern rebellion” in Spivak's sense. Furthermore, he discusses the attempts made in the VISION-RA practice research network, following Paulo Freire and Lorenzer, to open a space for psychiatric patients to find their own language.

Drawing on concepts from social practice theory and critical psychology of situated inequality Anne Morin discusses in her article “Suppressed voices and lost opportunities in education and the psychiatric healthcare system – a structural analysis of dilemmas in inter-professional collaboration between sectors” dilemmas, limitations and possibilities between system logics and procedures and the collaborative inter-professional everyday practice across education and the psychiatric health care system. She shows how situated inequality as part of structural dilemmas may result in suppressed voices and lost opportunities in early inter-professional and inter-sectoral interventions.

The article “Recalibrating disability towards the term subaltern. The social work of neoliberal-academic-ableism in Danish higher education” by Tine Fristrup and Christopher Karanja Odgaard explores ways in which disabled subjectivity and disabled life emerge in Danish higher education when disability is recalibrated towards the term subaltern. In the tradition of Spivak’s lens of the subaltern the authors suggest new ways of approaching ‘voicing’ in the field of social work scrutinising the dogmatic modes of representation and offering a new conceptual framework on neodisability to be elaborated in formations of social (work) support systems in Danish higher education.

Also against the background of the current situation in the field of disability in Denmark, which after cutbacks and decades of neoliberal policies is quite precarious, Bjørg Kjær focuses in her article “Voicing the silenced – One Million Voices and the Danish disability experience” a contemporary example of the Danish fight for disability rights and welfare the grass root movement ‘En million stemmer’ (one million voices), trying to give voice to human beings with disabilities and their kin.

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