SW&S | Social Work and Society
International Online Journal

Subalternity, Class-Consciousness and Resistance

Dirk Michel-Schertges, Aarhus University

1 Introduction

What the term subaltern tries to describe can actually only be adequately represented by an all-encompassing reappraisal of the historical development of the exploitation of man by man. Thereby the different involved perspectives, points of views and interpretations of the respective people would have to be taken into account, which is in contrast to traditional historiography. History is usually constructed by the rulers and from the perspective of the dominant culture, rather than from observers or, especially, the exploited themselves.

A distinction must also be made between different forms of oppression, especially of a qualitative nature. The type of oppression is immanently related to the respective community or social structure. The external and (recognized) cultural conditions as well as the organization of the social constitution have a decisive influence on the kind of exploitation. The slave-holding societies legitimized themselves by a morality that did allow the exploitation of categorized non-equals or people who were recognized on a different "evolutionary level" and thus not as (real) human beings. The destruction of a people's history and culture as well as dehumanization as a special form of construction of the other and as an important demarcation line to one's own group is still today a common means of argumentative legitimization of exploitation - even if mostly in a weakened or varying form.

However, this is not necessarily a matter of destroying the other culture, but of emphasizing one's own superior culture.

In this context Raymond Williams contextualizes the 'keyword culture' and he states that culture "in all its early uses was a noun of process: the tending of something, basically crops or animals" (Williams 1983, p. 87) that turned to cultivation versus the un-cultivated. He points to Tom Moore who distinguished in 1834

> "between the 'mob' and the 'cultivated few'. It is obvious, here, how the adjective
> 'cultivated' contributed to the newly necessary abstractions, 'cultivation' and 'culture'.
> In this kind of argument, 'culture' became the normal antithesis to the market."
> (Williams 1960, p. 39)

However, a distinction should be made between different forms of culture. For example, between the dominant culture of subjugation and the working-class culture, which is opposed to the culture of domination. For example, in the 19th century, English urban workers articulated their hatred and resistance to the Aristocrats, which in the following evolved to a working-class culture varying from luddism to trade unions. (Thompson 1964)

2 Colonialism and Slavery

A major turning point in the history of human oppression is the period of physical expansion of (European) nation-states and the accompanying colonization of foreign territory and

enslavement and oppression of other peoples. With respect to European Feudalism, Wallerstein describes the essentials for the early nation state and the beginning capitalist world-economy ▪▪ in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. According to him, this power is constituted via:

> "an expansion of the geographical size of the world in question, the development of variegated methods of labor control for different products and different zones of the world economy, and the creation of relatively strong state machineries in what would become the core-states of this capitalist world-economy." (Wallerstein 2011, p. 38).

Thus, one crucial goal was the unrestricted expansion of the (geographical) sphere of influence in order to ensure the disposability of raw materials and production as well as the possibility of undisturbed trade. To accomplish this, a clearly hierarchically structured organization was necessary as well as a sufficiently strong military force. The empires "had to be large enough to survive and sharpen its claws on its neighbours, but small enough to be organized from one centre and to feel itself as an entity". (Wallerstein 2011, p. 33) It was not just the greed for gold and luxury goods, Western European colonial expansion was even more driven by the need to provide food, "(more calories and a better distribution of food values) and fuel" (Wallerstein 2011, p. 42). To ensure this the expansion of Western European dominions extended to Eastern Europe, Russia, Central Asia, the Mediterranean, the Atlantic Islands, and the African continent. In addition to food and raw materials and other resources necessary to develop a political economy satisfying European consumption, the technical innovation increased, inter alia, the agricultural production as well as weaponry. In the sixteenth century, the European world-economy was already constituted by the fundamentals of capitalist modes of production. A special characteristic of a capitalist world-economy is, on the one hand, that political decision-making is related to small entities such as nation-states and empires, those being in legal control; and on the other hand, that economic decision-making is first-of-all concerned about the "arena of world-economy". (Wallerstein 2011, p. 67)

> "This double orientation, this 'distinction' if you will, of the economic and political is the source of the confusion and mystification concerning the appropriate identification for groups to make, the reasonable and reasoned manifestations of group interests." (Wallerstein 2011, p. 67).

Without causing too much discord in the political, i.e. the "home" territory, and yet generating maximum exploitation in the arena of world-economy the slave trade was a key to the solution. Even though slavery existed long before this kind of aggressive "Western European" expansionist policy - African slavery in Portugal through trade with Mohammedan raiders can be traced back to the year 1000 – slave trade was increasingly practiced, alongside "other commodities" such as sugar and wheat. (Wallerstein 2011, p. 44). In this context, Marc Bloch points out that "all form of human cattle breeding" in its own dominion is associated with many problems, because it requires a large number of cheap human flesh on the market. However, this in turn can lead to social unrest. The solution he implies to circumvent the problem of instability in one's own domain is to expand into other weaker societies in order to procure the required number of slaves there by force. The logical consequence of this was the Atlantic and African expansion. (Wallerstein 2011, p. 87) This subjugation of other peoples by the colonial powers led not only to the mass deportation of large segments of populations for the purpose of slave labor in other geographic locations, but also led, in addition to the expropriation of land and space, to the (creeping) expropriation of the evolved culture and

history of the oppressed peoples, as well as the concomitant destruction of collective memory and identity.

Slavery as a direct form of exploitation within its own species came in its pure form in the course of history in this dimension to its end because, among other things, the control was too costly and slave labor only works for simple (manual) activities, i.e. non-skilled labor. Even though the mode of exploitation of human labor evolved from slavery, through peasantry, to wage labor, i.e., the sale of human labor power and time, remnants of the exploitation-eras of the slave trade and (Western) European colonization continue to be evident in contemporary exploitation regimes. Even if slavery is still an important topic today, albeit modified and adapted to the historical-territorial and economic circumstances (Rodriguez 2011), it is here only the starting point to understand the roots of colonial politics and anti-colonialism and thus of modern subaltern politics.

3 (Anti)Colonialism, Consciousness and "Resistance"

Contemporary anticolonial struggles are legacies of the (European) colonial "golden times", which is the foundation of today's wealth of many (post-) industrialized nations. These are, among others, the struggles and aspirations for freedom in Africa in the context of European colonialism in the second half of the 20th century. (Kempf 2009, p. 14) The possibility of anticolonialism is characterized by the understanding of the relation between the dominant and the oppressed. The knowledge of the oppressed about his situation as well as about the motivation of the oppressor are crucial here.

> "Axiologically, it works with the contextual, temporal, and historical determinants of a given situation in order to establish a course of resistance and social transformation. Ontologically, it works from the premises that change is possible; that oppression can be overcome; and that the tools for such liberation lie in the mental, physical, and emotional/spiritual abilities of oppressed people. Anticolonialism is a strategic approach to decolonization. In order to understand oppression in a concrete sense, the anticolonial approach looks at the day-to-day material and immaterial operations and manifestations of oppression." (Kemp 2009, p.15)

In the course of history the mechanism of oppression and exploitation are in alignment to the respective "civilization process". Public display of physical punishment that served as a deterrent to deviate behavior changed to internalized self-disciplining. However, the more obviously violent oppression becomes apparent and the aggressive oppressor is unquestionably recognizable, the question of possible resistance and resistance strategies arises. In the situation where the oppressors were able to establish a monopoly on violence, the oppressed were left with only the choice of submission or identification with the aggressor. The forms of resistance of the oppressed depend on the intensity of the violence. The greater this violence is perceived by the oppressed and the greater the aggressions that have to be suppressed against the oppressors, the deeper the domination can penetrate into the subconscious.

In the case of the hard physical use of force for the purpose of oppression, the only option left to the dominated is the violent rebellion or the necessary process to make the aggressions unconscious. According to Erdheim, in the first case one has to reckon with brutal repression up to violent death, whereas in the second case it is "the driving force for the social production of unconsciousness." (Erdheim 1984, p. 418) From this Erdheim derives two fatal processes. A narcissism-driven, addictive use of violence on the part of the rulers, which leads

to ever more primitive defense mechanisms for unconsciousness of their aggressions in the ruled, if they cannot defend themselves against the violence. (Erdheim 1984)

If the aggression cannot be carried out against the perpetrator of the violence, fear of the violent punishment leads to defense mechanisms aimed at repressing the aggression. These are, for example, substitute gratifications. Erdheim refers here to Gluckmann (1963), who describes in rituals of rebellion in South-East Africa how the "rebellion" against rulers is restricted in rituals to the sacred space. Rituals in which resilience and rebellion are recreated compensate for the non-execution of actual resistance. Thus, the rebellion is removed from everyday life and, thus, no longer a threat to the social status quo. Furthermore, the alienated work serves as a satisfaction of the proposition, which shows itself in a kind of work mania, which no longer focuses on the object of production or the production process, but puts the work-performance as such in the centre. "The return of the repressed aggression against domination is expressed in the work rage that drives performance." (Erdheim 1984, p. 421) Although these defense mechanisms have (limited) success in the short term, in the long term they consolidate the social power constellation.

In addition to the ritualization of resistance and the sublimation through work-mania, a third variation of preventing rebellion against oppression that leads to the consolidation of the power of the oppressors should be mentioned here. Using Favre's study of the counterculture of the Maya societies of Tzotzil and Tzeltal directed against their Mexican oppressors, Bosse demonstrates the contra-productive outcome of these attempted resistances. Both societies have maintained a Pre-Hispanic culture, that is, a counter-society to the Mexican bourgeoisie. Despite the dominant capitalist formation of society based on accumulation of capital, these peoples use most of their property to celebrate lavish festivals. These festivals serve as an institutionalized internalization of shared values that contributes to the consolidation of an egalitarian indigenous community. The problem of this self-assertion, which contributes to the maintenance of their (historical) collective identity, thereby also leads to the consolidation of dependencies and power relations.

> "For the indigenous can only develop and ensure their counterculture by actively collaborating on their own economic marginalization, on the consolidation of their economic level of living close to the subsistence minimum, and by cementing their social dependence on the Ladinos." (Bosse 1979, p. 16)

Another form of resistance of the Tzotzil and Tzeltal can be seen in connection with their work as seasonal laborers on the coffee plantations. This form of resistance is manifested in attributes of refusal that find expression in laziness, lying, and theft. These latent forms of resistance, which at first appear to be resilient in the struggle against the exploiter, act in the end as a confirmation of the exploiter's prejudice against the seasonal workers. By, for example, rejecting the Ladino's work ethics, making excuses and lies as well as stealing, the Indians show their inferiority in relation to the dominant culture of the plantation owners. (Bosse 1979) Thus, they confirm the necessity of their oppression due to their immature action. The price of maintaining collective identity is the surrender of independence, which completes the adaptation to domination.

These forms of resistance such as, the ritualization of resistance, the sublimation through work-mania, and identity forming counterculture based on refusal only support the colonialist's efforts. In addition, Kempf explains another part of colonialization, which is "abstract social locations" as a bearing element to concrete oppression. "The concrete

includes material and nonmaterial elements of existence." (Kempf 2009, p. 16) External as well as internal domination, as described here, go hand in hand with Marx's descriptions of external domination and the alienations of human nature as concrete nonmaterial oppression as well as with Dei's (2006) linking of physical and discursive forms of oppression constituting colonial power relations.

Kempf explains the concrete effects of oppression as a reciprocal movement, starting from various (individual) attributes containing colonial moments that have material or non-material implications. These various characteristics, or sites of difference, as he calls them, are ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, race, religion, citizenship/political status, (dis-)abilitiy as well as linguistics, i.e. cultural properties that can be found in social manifestations, inter alia, such as language. These different characteristics are represented in social dimensions (material implications), such as the structural, institutional, economic and cultural ones. The non-material implications are on the spiritual, emotional, epistemological, psychological and ideological levels. That is, the sites of difference are abstract attributes that are manifest in the concrete material and non-material implications, whereby the abstract with the respective concrete dimensions are in reciprocal movements between colonial and anticolonial moments. (Kempf 2009, p. 32).

The anticolonial moments are found, among others, in the language and its use, where new understandings of domination and power and resistance reveal new mechanisms of oppression through the constellation regarding the sites of differences in the abstract dimension.

> This approach challenges the normalizing gaze of the dominant in the construction of what constitutes valid and invalid knowledge and experience (see Dei 2006). While anticolonialism is in many ways a language of resistance for and from the oppressed (see Dei and Asgharzadeh 2001), the dominant must also participate in the anticolonial struggle, as the colonizer is no less colonized than any of his victims. Where anticolonialism is a tool used to invoke resistance for the colonized, it is a tool used to invoke accountability for the colonizer. In both cases, it serves to reveal and challenge the assumptions, silences, and common sense of dominant relations. (Kempf 2009, p. 14)

Moments of modern colonization and oppression are not only remnants of (archaic) power relations of the legacy of (European) colonization that started in the fourteenth century and lasted until the twentieth century. The socio-historically based constellations of oppression that can be found in the various readings of the cultural sites of differences can be identified in the cultural manifestations and (social) figurations within the ongoing process of Westernization and globalization.

Wallerstein's analytical division into center, semi-periphery and periphery serving as a model of the capitalist world economy, is still substantial if the focus of attention is paid not only to the exploitation of labor but also to the socio-historical and cultural dimensions of (collective) identity formation. Of essential interest here is to understand the oppressed's or subaltern's own positioning in the struggle for participation of social resources, possibilities and life chances. That is, the question of one's own positioning is inevitable related to the one of the (collective and) social consciousness.

4   Subalternity, Common Sense and Consciousness

Conventional historiography is shaped by the views of the ruling and privileged, as they have the necessary means and cultural techniques to formulate, document, and archive historical

events. This monopoly of historiography led to a one-sided interpretation of what had happened. Not only were historical events such as battles and wars a reflection from the point of view of the victors, but negative events for the rulers were also omitted so that they would appear in a good light for posterity. This, of course, plays a crucial role in the socio-historical description of social positioning of social groups. The historiography also contains the justification of how the respective social position comes about. For example, whether it is a "God-given" position or whether the social position depends on certain group-determined successful or negative attributes or on individual success or failure or other criteria.

The subaltern studies emerged out of an attempt to give voice, and thus social influence, to the oppressed and non-privileged. In the early 1980s the "subaltern studies collective of historians" began under the leadership of Ranajit Guha to write histories from below. The aim was to give voice to the subaltern and the powerless in order to understand their point of view instead of getting the narrative of the privileged or interpretations of the subaltern perspective by hegemonic liberals and orthodox left intellectuals.

> "Discontent became rupture in the wake of political events in India from the late 1960s onwards. In 1967, the Maoist Naxalbari peasant uprising in West Bengal was brutally crushed by government forces. In a savage twist of history, the cadre of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which had been elected to a majority in the state legislature, was at the forefront of repression. Naxalbari and subsequently the suspension of civil liberties by Indira Gandhi's regime during the 1975–77 'Emergency' years laid bare the authoritarian tendencies and fissures within Indian democracy, and the failure of Nehruvian socialism as a nation-building program." (Gidwani 2009, p. 65)

According to Gidwani, the subaltern studies is an attempt to overcome "hegemonic Liberal and Marxist narratives of colonialism, nationalism, and modernity in India." (2009, p. 65) The critique of the subaltern does not apply to these Indian intellectuals alone, but also refers to the classical theoretical emancipation narrative of Western intellectuals. In this context, it is problematized that the intellectual enlighteners are, for the most part, European and North American privileged men who - consciously or unconsciously - have incorporated their socio-culturally shaped views into their writings. (Gidwani 2009, see also Connell 2008)

A common background and reference point to the discussion of the subaltern are the thoughts of Gramsci, who produced much of his writings in the times of his imprisonment, where he had to stay as result of his oppositional position to Mussolini. Here, he presented the subaltern (classes) as the counterpart to the ruling social classes or groups. According to Gidwani, Gramsci worked with the term "subaltern" instead of "proletarians" because he wanted to avoid prison censorship. The concept of the subaltern includes peasants and syndicalists in contrast with the Italian fascists and the northern Italian bourgeoisie. With the concept of an ideologically homogeneous oppositional mass to be achieved by means of a political hegemonic process, Gramsci saw a way to gather the underprivileged potential revolutionary mass and consolidate it as a (common) group. He assumed that philosophical considerations and the influences of (European) high culture would not have a changing influence on the subaltern and could not lead to a sense of community. Even the opposite was the case. The dominant social narrative had as external hegemonic oppression a rather dominant effect on the masses' consciousness. However, following Gramsci

> "subalternity resides in the crevices of common sense. Or more exactly, popular consciousness as the accreted experience of being underclass, as well as a realm of

unsystematic and officially disqualified knowledge, is a living record of subalternity."
(Gidwani 2009, p. 66)

This means that the lived ideology of the masses manifests itself in the popular consciousness and that the intentional (political) mobilization of the masses must start there. As a result, in the second half of the twentieth century, scholars of the political left based their work, inter alia, on non-conventional empirical material such as leaflets, protest flyers, workers' diaries, folksongs, and narratives of historical experiences. (Gidwani 2009, p. 66) This perspective from "below" contradicts the idea of the ruler and privileged of the lazy, thieving, irrational and violent "savage" and subaltern that supports the legitimization of discriminatory actions as discussed by Bosse in the case of the Tzotzil and Tzeltal. Furthermore, this new perspective sheds an ambiguous light on the emancipatory goals of modernity, i.e. "that Europe and its modernity were on the side of culture, reason, history and development, while subaltern classes were precisely those who 'lacked' these attributes." (Gidwani 2009, p. 68)

However, it does not mean that the emancipation aspiration, which is immanent to the constitution of modernity, is to be understood as a planned deception or instrumentalization of the subaltern, but that the development of modernity is mistakenly conceived as a linear progress. The result is the ignoring of the dialectical movement and its consequences, i.e. the intended (social) rationality that has turned into its opposite: social irrationality and thus sophisticated forms of exploitation and concealment of the given relations of domination. (cf. Horkheimer/Adorno 2002) Or that well-intentioned plans in their historical implementation do not bring about "good" but "bad". Schneider points to this phenomenon of "Gutewichte[1]" (people with good intentions that lead to bad doings and outcomes) to the actions of the Jacobins after they took power following the French Revolution. Their actions that were supposed to lead to the liberation of all only ushered in another reign of violence. (cf. Schneider 2001)

In contrast to the two examples mentioned here, in which emancipatory efforts prove counterproductive or even turn into the opposite despite (hopefully) good intentions, the variant of deliberate manipulation of the subaltern must also be considered. Pandian discusses the example of the politician M. G. Ramachandran in Tamil Nadu. Ramachandran enjoyed high popularity among the subaltern population despite massive repression of the subaltern and ruthless suppression of any form of protest against his politics. This case is so interesting because despite the obvious use of power and violence directed against the subaltern, it turned out that the vast majority of the subaltern classes in Tamil Nadu accepted the dominant hegemony and the values inherent in it. Ramachandran's "government ruthlessly used the state machinery to put down even the mildest of protests from workers, peasants, fisher people, teachers, government employees, etc. Also, his rule diluted unrecognizably the cultural gains achieved by the subaltern classes" (Pandian 1989, p. 62). In the case presented here, the focus is on the influence of the constituents of subaltern consciousness. Actually, it is about the power of definition and interpretation of the discrepancies between thought, communication and real action.

---

[1] Gutewicht is a play on words that refers to the term "Bösewicht" (villain), i.e. someone who does something criminal. The term Bösewicht is outdated and is often used in today's usage as a joking term for young boys, in the meaning of rogue or rascal.

Although Gramsci considers the unconscious deviation between thoughts and actions as possible only for individuals and small groups as "self-deception", and explicitly rejects it for large masses. However, he reflects the possible difference between "common sense", as a result of lived life, and a mediated submissive and subordinated understanding of the world, which is adopted by the (ruling) group.

> "But at this point we reach the fundamental problem facing any conception of the world, any philosophy which has become a cultural movement, a 'religion', a 'faith', any that has produced a form of practical activity or will in which the philosophy is contained as an implicit theoretical 'premiss'. One might say 'ideology' here, but on condition that the word is used in its highest sense of a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life." (Gramsci 1973, p. 328)

Whereas further on in this text Gramsci refers in particular to the transmission of the ideology of faith of the Catholic and Roman Catholic churches, the example of Ramachandran in Tamil Nadu is about "staged" transmission of values through propaganda by means of the culture industry in general and the film industry in particular. In contrast to Charlie Chaplin's movies, which have emancipatory aspects in the image of the vagabond or the kind-hearted oppressed, Ramachandran plays a hero in his films who liberates himself. In the former, it is the visualization of the pure alienation of man, which contains deeper human traits than what it negates, i.e. the negativity given by the destruction caused by the exploitative form of society. The positivity of the subaltern, of the proletariat, is politically and the philosophical critique is embedded in social critique through actions aimed at escaping faintness and powerlessness. However, according to Lefebvre, Chaplin's images do not generate political consciousness, though they do move the masses. (Lefebvre 1974, p. 20) Lefebvre sees Chaplin's cinematic protagonist less as a myth than as a type. This type is "poor but vital - weak, yet strong in weakness - struggling tenaciously for money, work and recognition, but ultimately in search of love and happiness". (Lefebvre 1974, p. 22) This type is active striving for a happy life, a life without unnecessary suffering. Yet political consciousness in relation to everyday life is essential here. Another acceptance and "silent" legitimization of the relations of domination is the "deselection" of active (and reflected) everyday life as a place of potential self-determination. This is expressed in the acceptance of everydayness, i.e. surrendering to non-reflective routines, mechanical actions and fragmentation, which is due not least to the social division of labor in the capitalist social system and social relations. (Lefebvre 1975)

Contrast this with Ramachandran, although he too plays a worker or subaltern person in his films, fighting against everyday oppression. These films are not about the removal of societal asymmetrical power constellations.

> "At one end of the power spectrum are grouped upper caste men/women, landlord/rich industrialists, literate elites and, of course, ubiquitous male – all of whom exercise unlimited authority and indulge in oppressive acts of power; At the other end of spectrum can be found the hapless victims – lower caste men, the landless poor, the exploited workers, the illiterate simpletons and helpless women. Power is seen as all-pervasive, omnipotent and undifferentiated while its victims are always already meek, beaten and homogeneous in their suffering." (Pandian 1989, p. 63)

In his roles, Ramachandran as a hero fights against the overbearing authorities (as Odysseus rebels against the gods). Ramachandran confronts the male power elite and triumphs over them, i.e., he breaks with the social norms and comes from the lower caste to socially

recognized positions, marries off to upper caste women and accumulates power himself. His role is that of the invincible "individual justicer" who easily outclasses his opponents. (Pandian 1989, p. 63) According to this narrative, it is up to everyone to realize themselves and to assert themselves against the overbearing authority. As an artifice serves him the recourse to (historical) heroic ballads in order to integrate the subaltern common sense in the Tamil Nadu.

> "This transformation of the folk hero of the ballads into a non- problematic hero on the screen who seeks justice within the moral economy of system is a reconstitution of the former hero to serve elite interests. This reconstitution is possible as the common sense of the subaltern classes is largely contaminated by the sediments of elite ideologies." (Pandian 1989, p.65)

Chaplin points to the powerless position of the subaltern generated by social conditions and thus to the exploitative social formation that needs to be changed, which precisely do not have their main goal in happiness and love. In contradiction, Ramachandran fulfills his satisfying dream of positioning himself in the upper caste of the semi-feudal society of Tamil Nadu. He ruled for eleven years as chief minister of Tamil Nadu (1977 -1987) and fed his popularity not least through his roles as leading actors in films that showed the diametrically opposite of his political actions. Through his cinematic heroic deeds, which celebrated the meritocratic-individual myth, he distracted attention from his political oppressive deeds and thus contributed to the constitution of false consciousness among the population in Tamil Nadu with the utilization of social-historical ballads, the common sense. It is the deliberate deception of the masses by the societal elite and hegemonic powers.

5 Subaltern, Citizenship, (Class) Consciousness and Resistance

The example of the politician and actor Ramachandran shows that the achievement of a subaltern consciousness and the overcoming of false consciousness is crucial for (human) emancipation. Therefore, it is essential to understand the various constituents of class-consciousness.

The starting point for the discussion of a possible group-specific subaltern consciousness is Marx's concept of class-consciousness. The class-consciousness (in itself) of the proletariat arises as negation to the social-concrete realities, i.e. their exploitation within the capitalistic labor process. On the background of the modern economic structure the worker-class's subordination and exploitation is based, inter alia, on the absence of means of production, the commodity character of their labor power and the alienation of their work activity. On the one hand, the common consciousness is a negative consciousness as an opposition to the ruling one, i.e. it is always to be thought only in relation to the respective counterpart in time and space and thus inevitably bound to the historically changing social conditions. A class-consciousness of itself is based, on the other hand, on the active-conscious overcoming of particular interests and the associated transcendence of the class situation producing these particular interests. Thus, an active and processual element is immanent to class-consciousness.

With regard to the discussion of the subaltern, it makes sense to extend the socio-historical (exploitative) conditions in the formation of class-consciousness with Kempf's (2009) sites of difference, i.e. to operate in addition to (social) class and caste with other categories such as gender, age, office, etc. This extension goes hand in hand with Spivak's considerations of the social changes that have occurred in the wake of neoliberalism since the 1990s. In this

context, she refers to a new figure of the subaltern, who is "no longer defined by its removal from social mobility but by the invasive workings of globalization at social, political and biopolitical levels." (Thomas 2018, p. 863) This is about the positioning of the subaltern not only as a phenomenon of the global periphery but also in the global centers and semi-peripheries. The concept of subalterness is thus not (only) limited to forms of exploitation such as slavery, oppression in connection with colonization and its socio-historical consequences, but is also linked to modern social constructions of inequality that are connected to other or/and additional sites of differences. These differences, which serve as legitimation of oppression and domination, can be found in the manifold expressions of civil society. Institutionally entrenched in the allocation and rejection of bourgeois rights, the struggle of the subaltern is evident not only in the struggle for official equal rights, but also for (non-official) equal opportunities of participation in social spheres, such as the possibility of education and advantages concerning social mobility.

On the one hand, civil society offers historically unprecedented opportunities for political struggle through the collective organization of countervailing power, as in the form of social movements, trade unions, the creation of new political parties, and cultural associations. On the other hand, the heterogeneous nature and market transformation of modern civil society makes it difficult for subaltern groups to (re-)unite, as it involves a diversity of subaltern groups that are being played off against each other and treated unequally in different ways against their background of their respective sites of differences. Contrary to unifying similar characteristics, these differences bear the danger of rivalry for social and legal recognition. In this struggle for social participation, it is problematic to consider the subaltern just as excluded, since they are part of the (albeit unequal) power struggle.

> "Subaltern social classes are thus represented not as excluded from the modern state, nor as merely oppressed or subjugated by it. Rather, they are fundamentally transformed and reconstituted by its expansive logic, mobilized to participate in the projects of the dominant group in contradictory and frequently passive forms." (Thomas 2018, p. 868f.)

Following Gramsci's approach of the subaltern, Thomas refigures the notion of the subaltern in terms of the contemporary situation. In this respect, he discusses three different dimensions that is the "irrepressible subaltern", the "hegemonic subaltern" and the "citizen subaltern". The first category contrasts with Spivak's understanding of the subaltern as absolutely (historically) excluded, without any voice, and thus defined exclusively deficit-orientated and in terms of incapacitations. Although the subaltern do not do the historiography, does not mean that they are outside of or even without history. According to Gramsci, this is called integral historian, that is the subaltern "are fully present actors on the stage of history, though reduced to minor and fleeting roles in the official script" (Thomas 2018, p. 872). The subaltern are not just an undifferentiated homogenous mass but they are composed of multidimensional and intersectional sites of differences.

> "Just as significantly, the fact that they are actively and differentially incorporated in historically specific systems of hegemonic power, in forms of passive citizenship just as much as by practices of pacification, also means that there are different potential stages in the emergence from subalternity. There is no Rubicon lying between subalternity and hegemony, just as civil society and political society are not conceived as spatially distinct zones. Rather, there are degrees of subalternity, and degrees of emergence from it, ranging from inchoate rebellion, co-optation, partial or merely asserted autonomy, to complete autonomy." (Thomas 2018, p. 873)

In contemporary civil society, it is not a simple dual relationship of power and oppression, but rather a continuously changing process of interdependent hegemonies and subordinations, of struggle and attainment of political possibility spaces of action and positioning. The second category, the hegemonic subaltern, also underlines once again in particular the importance of the dialectical relation between the rulers and the dominated. Especially when the subaltern

> "are both fully 'modern' and fully 'political,' however, subaltern classes or social groups, whether in the metropolitan 'centers' or their colonial 'peripheries,' participate in hegemonic relations in varying forms." (Thomas 2018, p. 874)

However, a general statement without consideration of the respective process dependencies makes little sense. The broader picture is not just about the local, state, international and transnational relations, but also about global linkages between centers, peripheries and semi-peripheries. Here it concerns, inter alia, the (ongoing) post-colonial international power relations, as manifested in (state) economic dependencies as well as historical dialectic relations that are preserved and transcended (aufgehoben) from the "slave era" until now, which are intertwined with even more recent sites of differences. The multiplicity of these different entanglements of historically evolved and continuously changing power relations makes the development of class-consciousness and the sense of class affiliation difficult. It is not only about the rulers and the subaltern, but about the most different forms of domination, control and the corresponding (social) consciousnesses constituting each other. However, this dialectical movement, is not accidental, but serves to maintain the dominant status quo in the global world system. "Ruling classes in political modernity need to produce—and to reproduce continually—subaltern social groups in order to become and to maintain themselves as ruling classes." (Thomas 2018, p. 875) On the one hand, these continuous changes and the resulting obscurities serve the dominant status quo, but on the other hand, they also open up opportunities for disruption and possibilities for resistance and self-initiated social changes. However, this presupposes an awareness of the real societal conditions as well as the willingness to take active action. The third category is that of citizen subaltern. This form is the manifestations of subalternity in the so-called Developed World, i.e. the (imperial) global centers. If in the global semi-periphery and periphery the possibilities of (political) participation are still (very) limited, if not made impossible, the perspectives of conscious political action seem to exist in the global North. The concept of citizenship implies a status that guarantees certain rights, for example, such as the right to integrity, personal development opportunities, medical care, (to a certain extent) equal opportunity and share, the right to free expression and vote and certain individual freedoms, etc. The traditional image of the subaltern thus seems to have been transcended. However, the threat of partial exclusion is still present and associated with certain marginalizing characteristics.

> "Subalternization, conceived in terms of 'minoritarization,' continues to represent a primary experience of exclusion, oppression, and marginalization. It both precedes (historically and logically) the affirmation of citizenship, and continuously threatens to re-emerge within it, frustrating the full realization of citizen-ship's promises." (Thomas 2018, p. 876)

In other words, the emancipatory concept of citizenship is not free from subalternity but presents another form of subalternity, that is subaltern's otherness "as a form of political expression of subalternity". (Thomas 2018, p. 876). Thus, being a citizen implies first only the condition of the possibility of equal life chances depending on certain sites of differences that may result in minoritarization. A crucial role in this process is how social categorization

and/or stigmatization is consciously perceived and reflected, and how it is dealt with, individual and in association with other subaltern. However to gain social consciousness is even more complicated not just simply because of the ubiquitous presence of the culture industry but also due to "the impact of neoliberal economic policies and the rise of new political rationalities." (Thomas, 2018, p. 877) Among other things, this has resulted in a process of disaggregation and splitting of the subaltern classes and groups, which degrades them to objects of directive instances of political administration and organization. In this context Thomas points to Nielsen and Roy arguing

> "rather than the negation of an 'autonomous domain' of subaltern politics, these developments can be productively analyzed in terms of transformed 'entanglements' between civil and political societies, which have been both shaped by subaltern resistance, and have helped to produce new forms of subaltern agency." (Thomas 2018, p. 878)

The question that arises here is the relationship between subaltern consciousness in (an alienating) neoliberal consumer society and the goal of subaltern resistance. The risk of fragmentation of the large homogeneous subaltern groups into small groups with individual particular interests, each of which is constituted by minoritarization, entails not only the danger of diminishing the common strength of resistance, but also that of changing the common universal emancipatory goal to particular issues of social betterment and positioning within the social status quo. It is not a social consciousness that aims at general universal improvements of the subaltern, but a (false) consciousness of fragmented groups that pursue only the improvement of their particular interests, regardless of the general societal consequences. On the one side, this tendency has a counterproductive effect and the successful resistance of one fractional group undermines the legitimate struggle of another. On the other side, the many (justified) resistance struggles, some of which are mutually exclusive, conceal the general mechanisms and processes of social inequality.

A true resistance that can address the universal problems of social processes of oppression therefore lies only in processes of social consciousness-raising and processes of Bildung, i.e. education for agency, that illuminate the interconnections of socio-historical global dynamics and reveal the associated (political) national and local social relations.

References:

Bosse, H. (1979). *Diebe, Lügner, Faulenzer. Zur Ethno-Hermeneutik von Abhängigkeit und Verweigerung in der Dritten Welt.* Frankfurt/M.: Syndikat.

Connell, R. (2008). *Soutern Theory. The global dynamics of knowledge in social science.* Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.

Dei, G. J. S. (2006). Mapping the Terrain: Towards a New Politics of Resistance. In Dei, G. S. and Kempf, A. (Eds.), *Anti-Colonialism and Education: The Politics of Resistance* (pp. 1-23). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Erdheim, M. (1984). D*ie Gesellschaftliche Produktion von Unbewußtheit. Eine Einführung in den ethnopsychoanalytischen Prozeß.* Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.

Gidwani, V. (2009). Subalternity. *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, 11, 65–71.

Gluckmann, M. (1963). Rituale der Rebellion in Südost-Afrik. In: Kramer F. und Sigrist, Ch. (Ed.) *Gesellschaften ohne Staat, Bd. I, Gleichheit und Gegenseitigkeit* (pp. 250-280) Frankfurt/M.: Syndikat.

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers.

Horkheimer, M. & Adorno Th. W. (2002). *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Kempf, A. (2009). Contemporary Anticolonialism: A Transhistorical Perspective. In: A. Kempf (Ed.), *Breaching the Colonial Contract. Anti-Colonialism in the US and Canada* (pp 13–34). Dodrecht: Springer Netherlands.

Lefebvre, H. (1974). *Kritik des Alltagslebens.* Vol. 1, München: Carl Hanser Verlag.

Lefebvre, H. (1975). *Kritik des Alltagslebens.* Vol. 3, München: Carl Hanser Verlag.

Pandian, M. S. S. (1989). Culture and Subaltern Consciousness: An Aspect of MGR Phenomenon. *Economic and Political Weekly.* 24, (30), 62-68.

Rodriguez, J. P. (2011). *Slavery in the Modern World. A History of Political, Social, and Economic Oppression. Vol. I.* Santa Barbara, Denver, Oxford: ABC-CLIO.

Schneider, M. (2001). *Der Traum der Vernunft. Roman eines deutschen Jakobiners.* Köln: Kiepenheuer und Witsch Verlag.

Spivak, G. Ch. (no year). *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Retrieved March 2022, from Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/CanTheSubalternSpeak.

Thomas, P. D. (2018). "Refiguring the Subaltern. *Political Theory*. 46 (6), 861–884.

Thompson, E. P. (1964). *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Random House.

Wallerstein, I. (2011). *Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century.* Berkerley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

Williams, R. (1960). *Culture and Society 1780 – 1950*. New York: Anchor Books.

Williams, R. (1983). *Keywords. A Vocabulary of culture and society.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Author´s Address:
Dirk Michel-Schertges
Aarhus University, Faculty of Arts
Danish School of Education, Dept. of Educational Sociology
Tuborgvej 164, D-325, 2400 København NV, Denmark
Tel: 45 93521802
dimi@edu.au.dk