

AUDIBILITY REGAINED: THE SUBALTERN'S ECHOES IN VERONICA ROTH'S DIVERGENT

Mostafa A. S. Rosheed

Asst. Prof. Amer Rasool Mahdi (PhD)

University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq.

ABSTRACT

This paper aims at revisiting Spivak's article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" which investigates the audibility of the doubly oppressed people under the postcolonial domination. The paper brings into discussion the recent work of Veronica Roth, the trilogy Divergent that comprises Divergent (2011), Insurgent (2012) and Allegiant (2013). The paper highlights the non- and ill-representation of the subaltern within the trilogy in order to investigate the possibility of the audibility of the subaltern and conclude whether or not those subaltern can speak when they have the chance to, focusing on the development in Spivak's assumption a propose of Roth's fiction.

Keywords: Spivak, subaltern, audibility, voiced, divergent, factionless.

INTRODUCTION

The simplest way of analyzing enslavement is to look at it in terms of two opposed unequal forces, the powerful one is the master, and the overpowered is the slave. Since the two forces are correlatives, they depict the structuralists' conception of binary opposition. It is argued that binary opposition is the definition of a pair of related terms that are in opposed relationship to each other (Breesler 2007, 334). As a subsequent to this definition in opposition, the opposing term is subordinate to its counterpart; in other words "one of the two terms governs the other" (Derrida 1981, 41). In addition, this opposition comes in harmony with the conflict theory which states that those people in power will always suppress the poor and powerless to obtain the limited resources of the state as they see themselves the self and the rest of the society as others. This situation is almost identical to what Hegel presents in his relatively ambiguous explanation of the contrast between the self and the other.

On approaching the other it has lost its own self, since it finds itself as another being; secondly, it has thereby sublated that other, for this primitive consciousness does not regard the other as essentially real but sees its own self in the other. (1977, 111)

Defining oneself in terms of a superior other is not exclusive to Hegel's frame of mind; within the postcolonial argument, Gayatri Spivak features a character called the subaltern designating the doubly oppressed populations under the colonizing domination. The colonial domination is applied to the Indian society among other societies, and this society is characterized back then by masculine domination. Since the Indian woman is oppressed by the masculine society she lives in, and this society is oppressed by the colonial domination, then the Indian woman is placed in the position of the doubly oppressed.

While investigating the audibility of the voice of the doubly oppressed in her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak describes that a "woman is doubly in shadow" (1994, 84) referring to the first shadow/oppression which is represented by the masculine society and the second shadow/oppression which is represented by the colonizer. Due to this double oppression, Spivak states that Indian women are the subaltern, owing to defining themselves in terms of their western colonizer, they must adopt western ways of thinking, reasoning, and knowing in order to be heard after their previous self-definition in terms of the masculine society. It is argued that overcoming the domination requires alliance, and the "most separated from any possibility of an alliance among 'women, prisoners, conscripted soldiers, hospital patients, and

homosexuals' are the females of the urban subproletaria" (Spivak 1994, 84). Consequently, this definition leads the identity of the subaltern and their cultural thinking, reasoning, and knowing to be buried under the name of westernization (Sharp 2008). Reference to the ones with buried identity is made as the subject of exploitation as Spivak describes, "the subject of exploitation cannot know and speak... even if the absurdity of the nonrepresenting intellectual making space for her to speak is achieved" (1994, 84). In compensation, there were other voices that took responsibility of representing those subaltern by indicating that there is "no need to hear your voice, when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself" (Hooks 1990, 242). Hence, the subaltern are basically not voiced.

The significance of the said article is highlighted by stating that "What is important in a work is what it does not say" and "what it refuses to say." Therefore, Spivak is held responsible for "the task of *measuring silences*, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged" (1994, 81). In other words, Spivak intends to highlight the unheard voice of the subaltern.

This study investigates the results of taking Spivak's arguments into consideration and applying them to the trilogy *Divergent*. The results of the investigation will determine the accuracy of subaltern's inaudibility as assumed by Spivak.

THE TRILOGY *DIVERGENT*

Written by the American novelist Veronica Roth, the trilogy *Divergent* is a Young Adult science-fiction sequel of adventurous novels set in a post-apocalyptic dystopian Chicago. The events of *Divergent* take place in Chicago, Illinois. The narration describes the city as mostly abandoned and fallen apart into ruins; its momentums are half-broken and unused, and lakes are dried up. The habitat is so designed that people are grouped in different parts of the city according to their factions: Abnegation, Dauntless, Amity, Candor, and Erudite.

The society is structured in such a way that the categorization is explicit in each of its aspects. First, the faction system categorizes people into factions and puts some of them superior over the others, and the system allows weapons in the hands of a faction and deprives others of all types of weaponry. Beside the oppressed factions from within the faction system, there

is the group of factionless who aren't represented in the system at all, and they act as the oppressed of the faction system. After continuous rebellions and the eventual decline of the faction system, new terminologies float to the surface and new people are oppressed by different mechanisms geared by the former rebels. Then when the protagonists succeed in fleeing the city, and when their vision is not clouded anymore the way it was within the city, they notice that the categorization of their city is no more than a small part of a big categorization process through which some people are appointed superior over the others.

It appears that Roth sets herself the task of mapping out the modern day representations of enslavement through *Divergent* (2011), *Insurgent* (2012), and *Allegiant* (2013) making her trilogy extend so readily to be inspected from post-modern conceptualization and sensibility to serve as a model for highlighting the intricate improvement of dominating power performance within modern day societies.

CONCEPTUAL IMPLEMENTATION

The events of the trilogy are summarized in that Erudite, one of the factions, gain power and authority over the rest of the factions. They show off their domination with the decline of the ruling regime that was held by another faction. Erudite enslaves Dauntless to act as their weapon against the rest of the factions.

When the enslaved Dauntless know about Candor covering up for and refuting divergents, Erudite send them to represent their domination to Candor right away. It was supposed to be a negotiation between the factions, but the opening line of Dauntless negotiator's speech proves otherwise by declaring that "I should inform you that this will not be a negotiation" and the justification is that "In order to negotiate, you have to be on even footing, and you... are not." The lead figure in the negotiation further explains that "you are the only disposable faction. Candor does not provide us with protection, sustenance, or technological innovation. Therefore you are expendable to us [to the faction system]" and in conclusion, "you are completely vulnerable and completely useless. I recommend, therefore, that you do exactly as I say" (Roth 2012, 252). The concluding line is that Candor is under the control of the already controlled Dauntless and as a faction they do

not have say in the matter. In addition, the leading figure in the negotiation lists the terms that they want Candor to comply with, and on top of which is the term that states, “deliver the Divergent to Erudite headquarters” (Roth 2012, 263).

The problem with the terms is that Candor are unable to comply because the divergents, who are supposed to be delivered to Dauntless, are rebellious and armed figures who are willing to die for what they believe in. As a leader of divergent team comments “You don’t let us do anythingIf you don’t step aside, we will be forced to walk over you instead of past you”(Roth 2012, 277). This comment puts Candor in the place of the doubly oppressed subaltern: the first oppression is by Dauntless, and the second one is by the rogue divergents they refuted. Due to being defined as subaltern, Candor’s voice is silenced and their opinion is unheard. Even throughout the storytelling of the novel before and after this incident, Candor’s opinion is not declared, which serves as an indication that it is not heard whether it is stated or not.

In addition to Candor, when the protagonists fled outside the city, they witness another type of people being oppressed under different terminologies. Within the pretext of being genetically damaged, social discrimination is spread among the population of the Bureau, the place outside Chicago. Genetically damaged people are the replicas of the ill-represented subaltern inside Chicago, namely, the factionless.

Genetically damaged people are technically-legally-equal to genetically pure people, but only on paper, so to speak. In reality they're poorer, more likely to be convicted of crimes, less likely to be hired for good jobs.(Roth 2013, 243)

The reason behind that is the history of purity war which is “A civil war, waged by those with damaged genes, against the government and everyone with pure genes” (Roth 2013, 123). Hence the government discriminated against those with damaged genes to prevent further rebellions. There is, what is more, a situation that is almost identical to what is happening inside Chicago as when the factionless had a “destruction [that] was heaped on them from outside when an uprising was quelled”

(Wein 2016, 226) as a defense mechanism of preventing further rebellions. They are subaltern, oppressed by the system of the Bureau which is oppressed by higher authorities of the government.

Back inside the city, Beatrice encounters a factionless and the first thing he has to say is “Excuse me ... Do you have something I can eat?” (Roth 2011, 25). This signifies the fall of the man and how difference in beliefs and principles leads a faction of people to define another faction—or in this case the factionless—by opposition to the image of the civilized man. Such definitions by opposition feature the factionless as subaltern. Due to defining themselves in the criteria of the faction system, the factionless had their identity, reasoning, and knowing buried under the umbrella of the faction system. They see themselves as nothings and nobodies just like the way the faction system sees them as “worthy of nothing, neither attention nor food” (Paravano 2015, 129) to the extent that it is not an issue to be deprived of food and beg the pedestrians for some. Hence, even through food, the factionless are associated not only with poverty and homelessness, but also with being outcast.

What if they tell me that I'm not cut out for any faction? I would have to live on the streets, with the factionless. I can't do that. To live factionless is not just to live in poverty and discomfort; it is to live divorced from society, separated from the most important thing in life: community.(Roth 2011, 20)

The integration of a particular faction’s members is positively emphasized through gatherings, uniforms, and patterns of thought. And this positive emphasis made consequential reservations on the level of the individuals by making them live in a fear of being othered by society.

It has already been shown that the factionless are the oppressed group within the city of Chicago, and it has been said that “the whole point of their [the factionless] existence is that they don’t identify with any faction” (Wein 2016, 225). Despite their oppression, the factionless as a group “represents the transitional social and spatial dimension” in the city of Chicago because it comprises people of different backgrounds and “most of the narrative occurs at the

factionless territory” (Elddoleify 2015, 8). In the very opening of the trilogy, the factionless are “underprivileged outcasts of faction society” (Wein 2016, 225), so they are oppressed to the extent that they are considered dead in the city. Beatrice describes the factionless’s living place and compares it to Abnegation’s where she grew up: “we are in the part of the city where the factionless live, about a mile from where I grew up. I recognize each building.... The one with the broken bricks. The one with a fallen streetlight leaning against it” (Roth 2012, 92). So their living place is miserable and each alleyway “stinks of garbage. Rats scatter... with squeaks of terror, and I see only their tails, slipping between mounds of waste, empty trash cans, soggy cardboard boxes” (Roth 2012, 93). The description of their habitat indicates what an oppressed kind of people the factionless are to live in poverty in broken alleys that are loaded with garbage and rats. The description of the habitat of the factionless supports the similarity between the factionless and the subaltern. Their living place and lifestyle prove that they are oppressed by the faction system and they fit the profile of the subaltern, because their identity, cultural ethos, and reasoning are buried under the name of faction system. Being othered, the factionless, furthermore, lost the right of being alive within the confinement of Chicago.

Almost all faction members live decently in comparison to the factionless. Given the disadvantageous opportunities in fitting in a faction, the factionless “struggle to obtain enough to eat, much less clothes to wear and comfortable places to sleep” (Karr 2016, 197). They are obligated to do “the work no one else wants to do. They are janitors and construction workers and garbage collectors; they make fabric and operate trains and drive buses” (Roth 2011, 25). Although described as doing things that no one else wants to do, the factionless do things that are “absolutely necessary to a functional society-city life” (Wein 2016, 227). Despite making fabrics, they have to be given clothes and are not allowed to make clothes for their own out of their production of fabric, yet “In return for their work they get food and clothing, but... not enough of either” (Roth 2011, 24–5) in order to remain empty-handed and dependent on the system.

Nevertheless, amid piles of trash where no life is expected, Beatrice states, “into a dark room. In the flickering glow of a lantern, I see... people” (Roth 2012,

94). It is argued that despite the expectation of being an empty mass of people, the factionless “have formed a community of people from different backgrounds, all equally committed to improving their situation” (Blokker 2014, 54). Moreover, critics state that the factionless “become the revolutionaries who want to lead the way to a new world” (Wein 2016, 225). The expectation of life and cooperation obscurity is assured by Beatrice the moment she encounters the factionless “who are supposed to be scattered, isolated, and without community... [yet they] are together inside it. Are together, like a *faction*” (Roth 2012, 94). The factionless are also seen as a united faction when the factionless encounter the divergents in a train cart and show their alertness to fight and kill for the transports they use.

The factionless are known to be “all split up.... Too hungry to do much of anything except look for food” (Roth 2012, 95). Featuring the subaltern, the factionless are the oppressed group of the society of Chicago who are not only ill-represented, but not even represented in the society at all, and their lifestyle, ethics or ethos, and whereabouts are drowned among the faction conflicts.

However, the turning point is when they waited “For the world to fall apart” (Roth 2012, 96) in order to take action and fight over authority and take control of the city and oppress their oppressors as they declare that “there’s not much stopping us from controlling the government ourselves” (Roth 2012, 110). With such mentality and determination, Spivak’s assumption in the said article become debatable. She states that the subaltern cannot speak nor act even by hypothesizing the opportunity of their audibility; yet the factionless, embodying subaltern, are taking advantage of the first chance they come across to set things right and their voice is to be heard whether society likes it or not. In addition, beyond taking back their stolen rights, the factionless—the subaltern of the situation—oppress the faction system that used to enslave them. The factionless rose to become “twice the size of Dauntless” and they became powerful enough to say that this their “actions may determine the future of this city” (Roth 2012, 100). It is argued that their planning and attempts is “Overthrowing one corrupt government and instating some kind of factionless tyranny” (Roth 2012, 110). This statement refers to overthrowing one corrupt government that is led by Erudite in the meantime and instating a new

government instead to be led by the factionless and allow them take vengeance over their oppressors and the faction system.

CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of the trilogy *Divergent*, the depiction of the subaltern is confirmed through multiple stances within different types of people, yet more importantly the factionless stand as the best representatives of the subaltern as defined and theorized by Gayatri Spivak.

The factionless achieve the requirements that Spivak identified in her description of the subaltern by featuring the doubly oppressed. They are socially and economically enslaved by each one of the factions, and the factions are oppressed by the faction system and its regulations which lead back to the oppression of the factionless. The result of this multi-layered oppression is that the factionless are silenced the way subaltern are silenced under the dominant regimes.

However, by the time they have the chance to fight back, the factionless take the first chance and overtake their oppressors and become the oppressors of their oppressors and avenge themselves. Consequently, they could successfully make their voices heard to the others' bewilderment in which case Spivak's assumption of the subaltern's disability to be voiced becomes debatable. For in her assumption, being voiced is something to be trained on, while in the trilogy *Divergent*, it is seen that what the subaltern need is only a chance to climb and fight back against their oppressors, and their voice will be heard.

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