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Article

Using Bourdieu to Answer Spivak: On the Study of Historical Subaltern Religious Practices

Curtis Hutt*

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her 1988 publication “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” famously challenges the ability of scholars—educated and operating within the dominating power structures of oftentimes European colonizing transnational political and religious movements—to ever grasp subaltern religion. This skepticism logically extends to the work of historians investigating the obscured religious traditions of past cultures that have been overlooked, overwhelmed, and suppressed. In this paper, I lay out a restrained strategy inspired in part by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and based upon my own historical work for circumventing some forms of historical blindness that conceal subaltern pasts. In conclusion, a plea is made for robust protections securing access to evidence about the historical past.

ANSWERING SPIVAK

This paper constitutes a defense of a critical research strategy for those engaged in the study of the histories of disregarded, subaltern communities. While I will draw upon several examples taken from my own work on marginalized groups and almost erased

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historical practices, the general topic addressed is more far-reaching. I will take up an incredibly influential and serious question posed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak related to surviving modern-day subaltern communities and apply it to the research of similar groups in the past. In “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” Spivak famously challenges the ability of scholars—educated and operating within the dominating power structures of transnational political and religious movements—to ever grasp the subaltern (Spivak 1988). I extend this great skepticism to the work of historians investigating the obscured religious traditions of past cultures that have been overlooked, overwhelmed, and suppressed. In this paper, I lay out a restrained plan partly inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu for circumventing some forms of historical blindness through critical assessments and reassessments of material evidence related to the past.

It is difficult for this historian not to agree with Spivak’s central argument in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Here, in quite plain terms, Spivak strongly argues that this is not the case—no, “the subaltern can’t speak.” This is in spite of the attempts of Western liberals to make improvements to this general state of affairs, for example, as related to “hearing” and elevating the voices of women (*ibid.*, 313).¹ While Spivak has described her answer to this question in the years following the initial publication of this text as “unadvisable” and the result of despair, this does not let us off the hook when it comes to assessing the central argument that she has forwarded in this seminal text for subaltern studies. Spivak throughout her career has expressed pessimism when it comes to our ability to even notice the subaltern, like many women throughout the past, much less to give their voices deserved attention and prominence. This is, however, an almost impossible task like “decolonization” itself (Spivak 1995: 178). Yes, Spivak has tirelessly worked to listen to and privilege the subaltern (Spivak 1999: 308–9). She never claims, however, that this is a battle easily won. This is primarily on account of the “epistemic violence” manifest in many Western scholars implicit overwriting of non-Western ways of knowing and characterizing the world. Such violence, oftentimes working in tandem with physical force, structures and informs our very inquiries into and discussions about the subaltern.

My pessimism, following Spivak, is also extensive and nearly decisive. Influenced especially by the work of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, which I will discuss at length below, I too have come to view even “education” itself as charged by the reproduction of power relations and, hence, social inequalities. The epistemic violence, or what Bourdieu approximately refers to as “symbolic violence,” perpetrated in a wide

variety of educational settings is far from ineffectual.² The “power over words” used and not used according to Bourdieu following Nelson Goodman, is “worldmaking”—encompassing the ability to not only describe the “real” but to actually generate social groupings as well as authorizing or undermining them (Bourdieu 1987: 13–14). What counts as the past across the globe has been and continues to be a battleground. Sometimes the proliferation of what counts as “history” accomplishes what physical force cannot. For example, it prepares the public for war and secures the results of confrontation through legitimizing the victor. Historical forgetting, propelled by common “misrecognitions” enabled and empowered by interest, inhibits our ability to recognize pasts that are even quite close to us. I am continually reminded of this as a present-day resident of midwestern city of Omaha, Nebraska when considering the work of colleagues on traditions of the indigenous people of the Great Plains, as well the shrouded histories of African-Americans and Jews in the north of the city. This is clearly apparent in my own Jerusalem studies, some of which are published in *ID: International Dialogue*, as well as the work of close colleagues working in places like the Balkans and Congo where the remembered past is continually revised for the agendas, interests, and tastes of people in the present.³ Historical blindness and collective amnesias are regularly the product of symbolic violence that takes a plethora of forms and bolsters itself through enculturation. So deeply embedded and expansive are the social structures obscuring the subaltern that the *sati* Bhubaneswari Bhaduri, the subaltern who Spivak famously writes about in “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” is silenced not only by obvious colonizers but the “benevolent” reinscriptions and redescriptions of liberal multiculturalists and humanists as well as her own granddaughters (Spivak 1999: 306–11). Even over short periods of time, accurate accounts of the past can startlingly be lost.

Like Spivak, Bourdieu, and others, I think that critical analysis of what commonly goes unnoticed and unsaid in the study of subaltern religion is of vital importance. To quote Bourdieu, this is “what symbolic domination is all about. It’s a form of domination that works, insofar as the person dominated isn’t fully aware of it” (Bourdieu 2001). According to Bourdieu, like Spivak, the “powers that be” saturate our discourses about the dominated. This occurs in the ways that we divide up the world—in our teaching pedagogies as historians and in our more uncritical historical inquiries. The possibility of doing historical research “outside” of these influences is deemed nearly impossible if not impossible. Bourdieu and Spivak offer tactics of resistance for not just literary and social theorists but

historians as well. Each rightly insists that when making our inquiries, we need to always take into account and adjust for what we bring with ourselves to our historical work. My task will be to extend and slightly revise what I deem Bourdieu's answer to Spivak's famous question might have been. Whereas others like Bruce Robbins (Robbins 1993) have compared the work of Bourdieu and Spivak from the point of view of literary criticism, as a historian and avowed practice theorist, I will argue that we need to turn and return to the study of "unintended" material culture (Hutt 1999; Hutt 2009), evaluating and reassessing empirical evidence about what has occurred in the past. I will conclude by asserting that free and unhindered access to such evidence is a right that historians and others must guard, not only for the sake of preserving disappearing pasts but for our litigations today and in the future.

Trained historians, as not only active inquirers but in their role as teachers, play an irreplaceable role in ongoing battles for the past. For if they were replaced by mere story-tellers, the product of their work—justified accounts of historical pasts—would in most cases disappear as well. This key responsibility should not only be recognized by historians but most importantly secured through commitments to professional standards to which these experts owe their allegiance—not to national, religious, or financial interests. This is something advocated by the proponents of critical historiography, from the time of Leopold von Ranke to John Dewey. Such historical work, as noted by Spivak and Bourdieu, is done in the face of saturating epistemic/symbolic violence. To cite the work of scholars like Van Harvey and Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, professional historians inevitably run up against and lock horns with those committed to authorized political and religious accounts of the past. To quote Harvey, for example, the work of historians "constitutes a skeleton in the closet of Christian theology." Similarly, Yerushalmi argues that the Jewish past of historians is specifically "the faith of fallen Jews" who are inevitably separated by professional commitments from their local communities on account of differences between what they encounter in their historical work and contradictory public memories of the past.⁴ Critical historians are regularly described as unbelievers and bad citizens as the product of their work is regularly received as a challenge to the symbolic violence perpetuated through conventional, "politically correct" beliefs about the past—especially religious ones. As such, the product of their work aligns well and offers some hope to those studying subaltern pasts. While historians' voices are oftentimes drowned out by the proponents of other accounts of the past, their work where it reaches and survives

retains its persuasive potency. Given the tools and new kinds of evidence available to the twenty-first century historians, even long forgotten and obscured subaltern pasts can be partially plumbed.

This paper is, therefore, not supposed to be an exercise in futility. Agreeing with and echoing Spivak and Bourdieu's pessimism, I do not think that we can speak of that which is entirely "Other." In addition to promoting a revised view of Bourdieu on practices (Hutt: 2007; Hutt: 2009), I take a different pragmatic approach to the "Other" than Spivak, one influenced more by John Dewey and Donald Davidson. What is radically "Other" in the present and past cannot even be spoken of in the language of colonizers. Differences can be so great that not only is mutual understanding unmanageable but simple recognition as well. But alternatively, that which is often described as "Other" is in many cases somewhat translatable. There is much that we humans share familiarity with, from our biology to a basic trust in the efficacy of inquiry. As inferred from Davidson's principle of charity or "rational accommodation," where cultural differences and disagreements can be articulated, this presumes the existence of minimally enough linguistic agreement to do so (Davidson 1973). New languages, cultures, and pasts can be learned as well as some entrenched biases potentially overcome. Material evidences related to the past can be accessed in novel and more reliable ways. Following Bourdieu's lead, I propose some augmented and revised strategies of resistance intended to secure access for present and future historians to evidence concerning subaltern religious communities in the past. Not only can we assay subaltern pasts with guarded success, but frankly, it is an ethical imperative that we do so.

FOLLOWING BOURDIEU TO THE SUBALTERN

My Bourdieu-inspired answer to Spivak's question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" has two principal parts. I am going to focus primarily on the latter as this is where the bulk of my own contributions lie—in the actual historical investigation of past subaltern religious practices. It is the first step, however, that provides the reason why this essay was initially presented at a European Studies conference. For all non-indigenous and likely most dominated indigenous peoples, the first crucial move to be made in such a setting when addressing subaltern groups, one that is not obvious to all, is to investigate what Spivak calls the "European subject." In order to talk about subaltern religious traditions we must first examine ourselves, the progeny of colonizers—in this case transnational European and

American based powers. Our cultural training as just noted above informs and inscribes upon us not only our political and religious proclivities as a group but our selections for scholarly research. Spivak, to the degree that this is possible, would have us not only “decolonize” narratives about the past in the present but to make a shift in our specific choices for inquiry—listening to different “voices.” I think that Bourdieu, takes us even further—providing a general prescription for how this can be done. It is not enough to research new topics of interest to the dominated instead of dominant. One needs to insulate historical research from the symbolic violence that so often accompanies the narration of the past inherent in historical literary sources. This is done by turning to practices and evidence gained through analyses of material culture. The big question once again is the degree to which we as individual scholars can wrest ourselves from our education and training to assert our own agency as inquirers. To use the language of Bourdieu, how capable are we of being “reflexive”? Bourdieu’s general response calling upon us to focus on practices, skirts his pessimism. We, as scholars, in keeping with what is to be argued below, are best approached as an object of study through analysis of our own scholarly habits and actions.

Bourdieu’s description of sociology as a “martial art” consists of activating trained counter-movements that allow us, like other scientists, to compensate for our own enculturations. For Spivak, and more clearly Bourdieu, epistemic/symbolic violence can be wielded to shield oneself from one’s own cultural bias. Sociologists, inspired by their work, understand that in our examinations of European and American scholarship concerning the colonized we generally learn more about the colonizers than the necessarily strange subjects they write about. As theorized, this referring back to ourselves is supposed to have an effect upon the sociologist’s investigations. It allows us optimally to differentiate between what we bring with us to our research and the objects of our study. Once we recognize the forces on our field of play and position vis à vis established social structures, we can move forward. Attending to the genealogy of symbolic violence is vital. As Bourdieu writes in the section of *Pascalian Meditations* titled “Forgetting History” (Bourdieu 2000: 43–48), the remedy to unreflective engagement with the world is always “historicization.” This is a tool that historians can use upon themselves, one that should free up some autonomy in their teaching and research.

Spivak herself consistently pleads with Western scholars that they let subaltern voices speak above their own. The problems that historians like myself face, however, go

beyond recognizing and compensating for the deeply entrenched symbolic violence engrained in our training that skews research into the past—such as has been famously identified in quests for the “historical” Jesus where each individual scholar has “created Him in accordance with his own character” (Schweitzer 1911: 10). In addition, we need to learn how to assess different kinds of evidences related back to the past in order to account for biases that inform and fashion the sources upon which we rely in our historical reconstructions. In contrast to Graham Riach, who argues that the best way to read Spivak is not by emphasizing whether the subaltern can speak (Riach 2017: 10) but whether we can “hear” these voices, I admit to still being focused on the former query as well. Subaltern religious communities of the past have frequently been silenced—that is, their writings have either been burned, suppressed, altered or simply forgotten by those coming after them. And even when their voices have been supposedly preserved in writing, should these texts not be subject to critical historical examination? The good news for historians today is that on account of technological but also theoretical advances it is possible to evaluate evidences about the past that were previously inaccessible or simply uninteresting to investigators. It is certainly the case that the “voices” of subaltern groups have been regularly drowned out by others, not only in the present but in the past as well. Most of our textual witnesses to them, derived from rivals, are not unadulterated voices. For historians, however, the dilemmas faced when researching subaltern groups from the past are even more complicated. When texts supposedly originating from within subaltern communities have survived, can we trust the “intended” messages of these insiders?⁵ So often in our investigation of the past we are led astray by the existent written sources. Fortunately, today, historians are not simply left to regurgitate what the ancients have to say about themselves and their neighbors—much less those they have dominated and conquered. We have available to us to many different kinds evidences about these groups that historians even one hundred years ago never envisioned. In practice, we can go far beyond authorized narratives about the past derived from the past and the present. Working alongside textual critics, archaeologists, ritual studies specialists, and others prioritizing the examination of material culture in the study of the past, historians over the last several decades have developed a cluster of empirical strategies for circumventing narratives that are oftentimes best understood as “propaganda” or “wishful thinking.”

In my own work, I have been especially careful—to the point of earning the label “skeptic”—to analyze what we bring to our investigations of the past from the present as

well as doing critical assessments of ancient authors who are commonly described as sources for the study of subaltern religious communities. My first work that compared the material finds at Qumran with what ancient sources like Josephus had to say about Jewish “Essenes” identified with this site not only questioned Christianized accounts of the group(s) produced by mostly twentieth-century New Testament scholars but highlighted the dangers of taking these specific ancient written sources at face value (Hutt 1999). This progressed into additional work on forgotten and obscured ancient Jewish religious specialists (Hutt 2012; Hutt 2015; Hutt 2019b), as well as most recently perhaps the largest “subaltern” population in late antiquity—namely, women from various social groups (Hutt 2019a). Late antique Jewish rabbis and Christian priests, as well as contemporary religious leaders, may have downplayed the activity of their religious predecessors and additionally provided us idealized views of Jewish women during this time, but this doesn’t mean we have to take their testimonies as sacrosanct and authoritative. Where uncritical historians have taken ancient sources at face value, their work has increasingly come under question. Identifying what the agents of dominant cultural traditions bring with them to their accounts of the past—while vitally important and in constant need of refreshing—is only the starting point for discriminating historians.

It was my experience, together with fellow students investigating ancient Mediterranean religions at Brown University following Stanley Stowers and Ross Kraemer, that led me to read the work of Bourdieu and to adopt a more refined focus on practices (Hutt 2007; Hutt 2009). Previous experience as a researcher of Judaism and Christianities in antiquity had already taught me not to trust some kinds of “evidences.” What can be confirmed through examination of material culture, in my view, is more reliable than what was posited through examination of ancient authors’ intentions. This applies to appeal to everything from archaeological remains to the results of genetic testing. For example, the claims of textual critics should be taken to carry more weight on account of the nature of the evidence presented, generally speaking, than literary, interpretive analyses. Some kinds of inscriptions are more telling than others. By focusing on material evidences and actual practices, I have tried to bypass—with I believe some success—religious, political, and cultural “spin” that has origins in both the present and past. While I do not offer an extreme “practice *qua* practice” approach à la Bourdieu and others like Catherine Bell (Hutt 2009: 69), inspired by their work I have turned my efforts repeatedly to the investigation of similar historical practices—most specifically, in the analysis of

religious rituals. The usefulness of this general research strategy has been borne out in new work on ritualized animal sacrifice in ancient religious communities (Hutt: 2019b). Once again, most recently, I have employed a similar approach to researching the history of women in the religious communities of the ancient Mediterranean reaching out beyond the commonest representations of them in the literature of the period (Hutt 2019a). When ancient written sources have been utilized, it is with a judicious eye. While we can gain much knowledge about the past, even from ancient works of fiction, it is still critical to question an author's agenda—what biases and interests they bring with them to their descriptions of the past.

Spivak, who is usually not associated with contemporary ritual studies, has provided those of us working on these historical practices with an overlooked analysis of ritual in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In it, she not only expresses skepticism over our ability to let the subaltern speak but goes further into the analysis of the evolution of rituals over time. In her review of the actions taken by Bhubaneswari Bhaduri, she critically posits that ritual practice does not follow "*invariable* ritual prescription" (Spivak 1988., 301). The actions of this specific *sati* can only be understood in their historical, political context. In this seminal work of subaltern studies which contains a vigorous defense of social realism, she repeatedly warns against any "nostalgia for lost origins" (ibid., 307). The religious revivals of ritual performances in contemporary India, and where I work in Jerusalem, generally are legitimized through the portrayal of religious teachings as well as ritual practices as timeless, slow to change, and original (ibid: 298; Lubin 2001). This insight into the rhetoric commonly utilized by representatives and advocates of religious traditions once again applies to investigations into the past as well as the present. In spite of the commonplace attempts by religious propagandists, renewalists, and revivalists to present rituals as timeless practices securing authorized meanings based upon "original" exemplars, Spivak has shown us like Bourdieu that rituals and their cultural "meanings" clearly change. This is the case over long and short periods of time.

Whether we are analyzing the demographic makeup of pilgrims or the performance of sacrificial practices, it is obvious that what is popularly described as single, ageless rituals are in fact highly variable. Take, for example, the work of anthropologists like Eddy Plasquy in his detailed work on ritual framing related to twentieth century pilgrimage at the Romeria of El Rocio, Spain and Spanish migrants in Belgium (Plasquy 2012a; Plasquy 2012b; Plasquy 2016). Even transformations of emotions—often

characterized as ephemeral—can be outlined if energies are devoted to historical micro-analysis of ritual change. Ritual change is also clearly evident when tracing the transplacement of ritual practices from one site to another. This works in two different directions. Ritual practices established centuries ago in places like Jerusalem and other religious centers end up being performed in locations that their initiators could never have imagined. Conquerors and pilgrims return with these to their homelands where they are reformed, sometimes intentionally and other times by accident. In turn, the rituals of “outsiders” are often imposed on the conquered. Rituals are modified for the symbolic, political benefit of new rulers. Ritual change is to be expected and so-called longstanding rituals seldom retain their consistency over time. By attending to the spectacles surrounding these ritual performances, the hidden and not so hidden agendas forwarded through them become evident (Lubin 2001).

Contrary to those who easily identify contemporary ritual performances with longstanding precedents, I assert that the past, even the nearer past, for the critical historian is often encountered “off the beaten track” (Hutt 2019a). Our religious forebears going by the same “names” were oftentimes far more heretical than it is good manners to admit. We are for many reasons noted above blind to the past. In one sense, this is inevitable. Without the right tools, distance and time magnify the impairment of our so-called historical “vision” or ability to “hear” bygone voices. Following John Dewey, who maintained that the “past is always the past of the present,” our historical reconstructions are invariably colored by our cultural perspectives and choices. Collective amnesias regularly occur, though some of these are more planned and orchestrated than others. Thankfully, our critical training as historians, grounded in a basic human trust in the product of inquiry, does enable the formulation of assertions about the historical past that are more justified than others. Unfortunately, historical blindness is also the result of active attempts to obscure and suppress, that we can sometimes link to specific individuals and groups. Obstacles can be intentionally put up to block the path of historical inquiry. The remains of the past are constantly at risk and are easily lost. The wanton destruction of the past is far more common than most imagine. Yes, this occurs as the result of unknowing actors and even without professional historians noticing it. Books can be burned by accident and tombs inadvertently paved over. But when these tragedies are abetted by propagandists and established traditions—whether advanced by politicians, priests, or others—the loss of the remains of the past can be accelerated hindering even the most modest retrievals. Frankly,

though people might claim to treasure the past, actual historical knowledge is quite rare. Such historical knowing, abetted by scientific methods, is not the same as memory or recollection. I agree with Yerushalmi and others, who argue that really only dribbles of the past remain (Yerushalmi 1982: 79). Thankfully, in the right hands, these dribbles may yield much more than is imagined as well.

ON THE RIGHT TO THE PAST

Many of my historian colleagues have asked me why I decided to help found the new Goldstein Center for Human Rights at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The quick answer is that I think the right to the historical past is closely connected to other basic human rights. Every human being, gifted with reason and conscience, deserves access to evidence concerning the past in order to secure true freedom and “equality of dignity and rights” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1). The right to reasoned knowledge of the past not only helps us to really understand ourselves and others, it has numerous practical applications including the service it potentially provides future inquirers. In addition to providing forewarning of potential pitfalls derived from historical lessons learned, access to evidence and thereby the past in the future is safeguarded. While slavery and servitude always has material consequences, it is invariably accompanied by as well as attained and preserved through the use of the epistemic/symbolic violence discussed above (Article 4). By my pragmatic reading, actual freedom of thought and education itself depends upon the degree to which individuals are not deluded about the world and their place in it (Article 18). Who owns access to the past? Whose narratives about it are to be privileged and promoted? Frankly, I never asked pointed questions like these before participating in a few highly-politicized heritage projects in Israel/Palestine. While most people exploring archaeological discoveries and sacred sites in places like Jerusalem exclusively hear stories about what allegedly occurred in the distant past, I began to attend to the proximate social context and the influence of recent events upon the historical narratives proliferated by political and religious leaders as well as tour guides. The physical as well as symbolic violence accompanying representations of the past immediately became evident. I came to understand, long before reading Yerushalmi, that historical blindness is rampant—and not just in Jerusalem.

Once again, as encountered in the work of Spivak and Bourdieu, we find a *riposté* to the epistemic/symbolic violence inherent in different forms of historical blindness and

the cultural domination which oftentimes accompanies it. After extending a couple of their distinctive tactical contributions, I want to use reflection on Spivak's famous question as a launching pad for a discussion about the protection of access to evidence about the past as an ethical imperative. First, in a move similar to Spivak's advocacy of "strategic essentialism"⁶ but once again more guided by Deweyan pragmatist justifications, I do think it is to a certain degree useful for strategic purposes to "essentialize" the past. In spite of understanding that the "past" is invariably and integrally a construction of "belief" in the present, out of common purpose, I happily ally contra Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (Spivak 1988: 274–75, 281) with positivist and scientific historiographers who insist like Leopold von Ranke that their goal is to unearth the past as it actually happened.⁷ The historical past in this way functions similarly to what Dewey titled "ends-in-view," so-called ideal ends that function as pragmatic goals—even though it is clear that we have no "unmediated" access to "really real" pasts that might ground justifiable beliefs about them. Similarly, as outlined below, I do not object to labeling human rights as "fundamental" and "universal" even though I reject, like Dewey, philosophical idealism (Hutt 2013a: 5–6, 26, 38). I am quite comfortable with my assertion that present and future access to evidence about the past, in principle for all, is required for real freedom of thought. After all, if your germane beliefs about some topic are inaccurate, perhaps the product of unjustified indoctrination, how free are your ruminations and inquiries? Mental slavery, which has clear social consequences, is too often secured on what Bourdieu describes as contested fields of cultural production by strategic deceit and misinformation.

Historical blindness, a phenomenon that Bourdieu discusses at length, encompasses a wide-range of different types of non-seeing. Research into this topic is preceded and paralleled by extensive contemporary work on the ethics of belief. Like Carlo Filice (1990), we need to ask questions about when our ignorance about "far away moral atrocities" is justified—not just concerning the present but the past as well. In addition to addressing culpability on the part of the uninformed, we must obviously consider the actions of agents engaged in obscuring the past. Sometimes obliviousness to what has occurred in the past is seemingly unassailable, like when people in a specific social setting simply do not have straightforward and reliable access to evidence about what has preceded them. This regularly occurs as a direct result of violence and domination, physical but also cultural. Colonizing and even genocidal force can be manifest in epistemic/symbolic violence that obscures the past for unwitting agents. Bourdieu specifically argues that

“individual self-deception is only possible because it is supported by a collective self-deception.” In many cases, it is apparent that individuals are blind through no fault of their own. Collective self-deception itself, according to Bourdieu, “is only possible because of the *repression* from which it arises is inscribed, as an *illusio*, at the foundation of the economy of symbolic goods” (Bourdieu 2000: 191–92). Bourdieu’s contribution, outlined more effectively in my view than Spivak’s, is his insistence that we turn to the examination of material culture and practices where the clues to what has been forgotten, misunderstood, and even suppressed about the past can still be found. When access to material evidence is denied, alternative understandings of the past are blocked and eliminated.

Unfortunately, historical blindness can also be a result of the culpable neglect of evidence, where it is readily possible to learn what happened in the past but one opts out from doing so. Blameworthy forms of historical blindness presume bad faith such as is evident in what Bourdieu refers to as the unquestioning acceptance of common misrecognitions—“a game in which everyone knows—and does not want to know—that everyone knows—and does not want to know—the true nature of the exchange” (ibid., 192). When people, especially educated academics, are readily able to inquire but are unwilling to do so it is a professional moral failing—like that of W.K. Clifford’s ship owner in his famous 1879 article who certifies his vessel as safe before sale without providing evidence for its physical state or even inspecting it (Clifford 1999). Even more culpable are those who knowingly throw up roadblocks in the path of inquiry—in the case most relevant for this paper, historical research. I refer here, specifically, to the architects of obfuscations about the past as well as those who knowingly engage in the use of and participate in cover-ups, obscuring and even erasing evidence of the past. What happened in the past of a property, language, or religious tradition is not a blank or palimpsestic canvas easily written over by partisan whim. This is particularly evident to those engaged in well-theorized, forensic-like, historical inquiry. Determining who has “murdered and inherited,” the legal grounds for punishment and reparations, is easier for trained historians than many non-specialists imagine. Bourdieu notes that “resistance to historicization is rooted not only in the habits of thought of a whole corporation, acquired and reinforced by the routine teaching and exercises of ritualized practice, but also in the interests attached to a social position” (Bourdieu 2000: 47). I am convinced, especially by Yerushalmi, that this second type of historical blindness—where blame can be assigned—increases in times

of economic, political, and cultural upheaval (for example, see Tupas 2008). According to Yerushalmi once again, contrary to those who insist that humans are obsessed with the remembrance of the past, “historical forgetting” today is at extremely elevated, even unprecedented levels (Hutt 2018; Yerushalmi 1982). We, the denizens of the twenty-first century, are enormously removed from our ancestral pasts.

Following Ranke, the founder of modern scientific historiography, it is clear that good historical work is best accomplished within social and political contexts where minority rights are protected. It is no surprise that contemporary historical science emerged and flourished in Europe and the United States in an age of revolution against established political, mercantile, and religious interests. Extrapolating from this, I maintain that contemporary academic study of the past could only have occurred in the context of political developments like the British Magna Carta, the Act of Habeas Corpus, the American Declaration of Independence, the French Declaration of the Rights of the Man and of the Citizen, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UN Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, and legislation like the U.S. Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. While monarchic, theocratic, and the undemocratic pre-scientific authorized accounts of the past were supposedly replaced in Western academic settings, following Spivak and Bourdieu any smugness that Western scholars have about this needs to be suspended. While historians today have at their fingertips tools unrivaled in any age for investigating the past, aggressive measures securing subaltern pasts need to be advanced. This can be done through supporting and securing access to evidence about the past, not only for the sake of indigenous cultures and others under existential threat in the present but for future generations of inquirers as well. This is an imperative that we must adopt, as history is ever under pressure from dominating and reproducing interests in almost every known present. Our task as historians must therefore be not only to decolonize in the present, but to secure “universal” access to the voices of the long oppressed in the future.⁸ With help, I assert that the subaltern can speak today. We must work to secure this as a right for generations yet to come as well.

NOTES

1. Spivak famously writes at the conclusion of “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Spivak 1988: 313)—“The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with

‘woman’ as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish.”

2. See Bourdieu 2000: 164–205. For Bourdieu, “symbolic violence” is exhibited in what is explicitly pronounced but just as importantly by what is not uttered or declared at all. Symbolic violence manifests itself in our tacit understandings as well as the structure of our social relationships. It is habitualized in our practices. For this reason, it matches Spivak’s description of “epistemic violence” which is encountered beyond just the overt meanings of words.
3. See Hutt 2011; Hutt 2012; Hutt 2013b; Hutt 2015. Specifically, I refer to the editor of *ID: International Dialogue*, Dr. Rory J. Conces and to my colleagues in Religious Studies and the Goldstein Center for Human Rights at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.
4. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi 1982: 81. See the introduction to the 1996 edition of Harvey 1996: ix. Also, Hutt 2018: 232.
5. By placing “intended” in quotation marks, my purpose is to express distrust when evaluating the ascription of propositional attitudes—references to the “meanings,” “beliefs,” and “intentions” of agents in past—and the present as well. Advocating a restrained pragmatic anti-intentionalism, I am unwilling to completely reject the efficacy and utility of such ascription strategies. The reliability of all evidence accrues within a “holistic and self-supporting ‘web of beliefs’” which instinctively and optimally gives precedence to the results of inquiry (Hutt 2009: 69).
6. For an excellent review of Spivak’s notion of “strategic essentialism” and how it has developed over time, see Chakraborty 2010.
7. Ranke’s famous goal laid out in the 1824 preface of *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischeen Völker von 1494 bis 1514* was to depict the past “*Wie es eigentlich gewesen.*” This has been translated into English in several different ways from the literal “how it really was” to Georg G. Iggers’ “as it had actually occurred” (Ranke 1973: 137).
8. See Hutt 2011: 90–92. Once again, my use of the language of “universals” is functionalist. These “ideal ends” serve to secure real political rights in the near and distant future.

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