



Questions on the Impact of Social Sciences and Subaltern Representation in Third World Countries

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Abstract. Throughout Spivack’s work as a theory and using self-reflectivity as method, this article examines the representation of scholars’ problems from the developing country that studied the subalternity by proposing Indonesia’s case through the two figures. There are myself as a former researcher at human rights NGOs and Lian Gogali, who is working with the subaltern people, specifically the mothers and children that have been impacted by the religious conflict in Poso, Central Sulawesi, between Muslims and Christian in the period 1998–2001. Specifically, this article explores the complex structure of power relations between scholar/researcher and informant/subaltern compared to scholars working overseas, studying in the same field. The result of this research is the contribution of geographical imagination as the pivotal point to differentiate between “home scholars” staying in the country and a part of their research fieldwork and scholars working in the developed countries by fieldwork in the developing countries. In addition, both a locality and a strong engagement are essential points that have been embedded in these “home scholars”, causing them to choose the problematic options, specifically on the moral appeal of hutang budi (debt of gratitude) as a part of the discursive tradition.

Keywords: Spivack · Subaltern · Geographical Imagination · Fieldwork

1 Introduction

Spivack’s essay on *Can Subaltern Speak?* provokes the diverse fields of social science and humanities, and it causes debate among scholars, mainly those who are criticizing and the rest supporting by making re-interpretation of her fundamental points to support her argument [1]. For those criticizing, the critic of subaltern representation could not resolve the problem while they still face the oppressed condition of class, ideology, and ethnicity. The act of representation then definitely would bring into “the whole range of implication” [2]. Besides, her criticism is a part of “hyper-self-reflexivity” with limitations to employment [3]. In another work, Kapoor, for instance, shows that the subaltern could create themselves to be the agency through the subversive potential of mimicry and hybridity, and resistance. The Chipko Movement, for instance, is the subaltern organized works that create a trigger of the public debate on environmental

policy, challenging the state to intervene in the issue [4]. In anthropology and geography, collaborative projects are possible to articulate the subaltern voices in the public sphere, as Nagar and Ali examined [5]. Sarcastically, one scholar argues that if the subaltern can speak for themselves, there is no definitely the subaltern class anymore in which they can deliver a message, affecting what it is said and the possibility of their voices could be heard [6].

Nevertheless, Spivak's argument is a pivotal point to reflect on for those studying subaltern issues. Through the reflection of the fieldwork, Griffiths interprets the "radical alterity" of the Otherness from Spivak that it is advantageous to establish such kind of "ethical framework for engagement with subalternity." For him, Spivak's work is not aimed at making the subaltern's silencing, but it is a form of scholars' reflexivity to engage deeply with the local informant [7]. Also, Magio proposes Spivak's work with a new term, mainly "Can Subaltern Be Heard?" as a new interpretation to enlarge her reflection. Instead of explaining the term representation and representation as the problematic word dealing with the subaltern, Magio offers a term of translation to capture the subaltern's voices as a better understanding so that they could be heard [8]. Specifically, Zembylas emphasizes Spivak's work through Lauren Berlant's affect theory, causing the formation of the subaltern's subject to be touched by understanding their narratives and feelings [9]. Unlike those scholar in using the Spivack's concept, this article contributes on the problematic options on the home scholars [10] in establishing relationship with their informants who have the sense of the local involvement and strong engagement, specifically on the moral appeal.

2 Research Method

The above two arguments that strengthen Spivak's work are essential for self-reflection and ethical openness for those studying the subaltern and producing knowledge from their bitter narratives of oppression [11]. Through Spivak's work as the concept and qualitative method application, specifically by employing the self-reflectivity as method, I would like to examine the representation of scholars' problems from the developing country that studied the subalternity. In reflectivity, there is a practice of critical reflection by placing the self as the object of contemplation in research process by looking on how their practices, they establish identity, and they make positionality which can affect the influence between themselves as researchers and data that they collect [12]. In this sense, I propose Indonesia's case through self-reflectivity as the former researcher at human rights NGOs and my close friend, Lian Gogali, who is working with the subaltern people, specifically the mothers and children that have been impacted by the religious conflict in Poso, Central Sulawesi, between Muslim and Christian in the period of 1998–2001. I explore the complex structure of power relations between scholar/researcher and informant/subaltern compared to scholars working overseas, and studying in the same field.

Throughout this article, I argue that even though subaltern cannot speak as Spivak's answer on her essay, he/she can intervene with scholar/researcher in some circumstances to primarily articulate their voices. Geographical imagination is the pivotal point to explain. Regarding this, the three questions propose; what are the differences between a

researcher in developing and developed countries dealing with the representation of subaltern issues? Is there any empirical example to propose it? What could be highlighted from Spivak's work on the representation of otherness? The paper argues that geographical imagination is the primary factor differentiating between scholars staying in the country and a part of their research fieldwork and scholars working in the developed countries by fieldwork in the developing countries. Both a locality and a strong engagement are essential points that have been embedded for these scholars, causing them to choose the problematic options, specifically on the moral appeal of hutang budi (debt of gratitude) as a part of the discursive tradition. Therefore, it can be possible to speak through the scholars' representation; the subaltern can intervene with scholars to be more engaged in the possible ways they can do.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Geographical Imagination

Geographical imagination is a crucial factor in understanding a position between researcher/scholar and informant/subaltern and establishing trust. It is also an essential point to understand how they deal with the informant on the one hand and how the informant is trying to establish the researcher's relationship regarding their cultural reference and a part of the citizen on the other hand. A part of the native speaker and nationality and an outsider researcher will consider what kind of geographical imagination they have [13]. This distinct structure of environment and position will determine the establishment of power relationships among them and their emotional factor to enforce such an intervention of critic to the dominant power structure, mainly both the government and their apparatus institutions. I realize that both international and local researchers have similarities, mainly ethical research and responsibility for researching their primary guidelines for taking fieldwork. Nevertheless, they have different degrees in the sense of locality and citizen relations. Not only digging information through the fieldwork, but the local researcher should have a moral obligation in order to change a condition, specifically for the subaltern people that are facing the problematic condition.

Most Indonesian scholars have experienced this moral appealing study on sensitive issues such as diverse conflicts, human rights violations, poverty, and marginalization of religious and ethnic groups and minorities. hutang budi (debt of gratitude) is one of these moral appeals causing them, to some extent, to involve the subalternity advocacy. This condition well-known in Talal Asad's term as a discursive tradition that "consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history [14]. Thus, taking their position as a pure scholar by putting the research as a part of academic-industry activity like in the developed countries is not enough. The engagement with some of the decree responsibilities should be received by most Indonesian scholars.

Meanwhile, in the subaltern level, even though they cannot speak to delivery their voices due to their level education, class, ethnicity and religions, they still can intervene researcher softly to explain their fate after some of the information have been gotten by them. A researcher could avoid this subaltern's question and locate this word as something useless. Nevertheless, due to the discursive tradition of hutang budi, the

researcher will feel guilty, and it haunts them for years. The subaltern's intervention then brings to another consequence, mainly the relevance context. Most of the subaltern problems raised by Indonesian scholars are still happening and becoming a part of society's unresolved problems. A combination of studying and living under this environment's structure forces them to think about how to change conditions in many ways.

Let me give several examples. Asvi Warman Adam, my colleague in the Indonesian Institute of Science (LIPI), is the study's expertise of the 1965–1966 event. Unlike the international scholars focusing on the tenure track through their publications as their goals, Adam has a mandatory to reveal the truth of violence for his nation to break the silence. Because of his entire activity in writings and active speaker, he has experienced both threat and slander. His testimony as historian and researcher invited by the Indonesian National Commission and Human Rights in the International People's Tribunal 1965 (IPT) held in The Hague in November 2015 was perceived as a traitor to the nation [15]. However, he repeatedly argues to fight against it. In the international publication, Adam's achievement as a scholar within this field is less than others. As well, his struggle to reveal the truth to the victims and their families 1965–1966 event is less reward from our institution. Because of this engagement, he must perceive negative images from the Indonesian public sphere largely.

Because researching the religious discrimination of the members of the Ahmadi People, it transforms Najib Burhani's position steeply from the pure scholar and writer to become a public intellectual, advocating their rights to insist the Indonesian government's responsibility that have been robbed by Islamic paramilitaries who are employing the name of majority Muslim. As a part of the circle of elite members of Muhammadiyah, it is uneasy for himself to take this position amidst the growth of conservative turn within Muhammadiyah's members. He is often to be perceived as a Liberalist Muslim (Islam Liberal), heretic person, and traitor people. Nevertheless, the scholarship responsibility that he has chosen bring him to combine both scholar and activist in four reasons; 1) as his commitment to advocating the Indonesian minorities group in the level academic and in the level of humanity; 2) coming from his psychological aspect experience; 3) as a part of establishing the concept of minority theology under the religious virtue and religious imperative; 4) as a part of a politic argument in order to establish an excellent democracy to avoid majority authoritarianism [16].

It is different from Joshua Lincoln Oppenheimer's American filmmaker. There are the two Indonesian movie documentaries, recording on the 1965–1966 events, specifically from the perpetrators' eyes scene in the Act of Killing (2012) and the young of victim's family's scene in the Look of Silence (2014). These movies' documentation has brought him to obtain many awards and achievements. As a documentary movie product, he is an excellent filmmaker in making a film in a good quality level that consists of a content story and strong characters. These two movies were also becoming the past truth to illuminate what was happening during 1965–1966, while 500 hundred Indonesian people affiliated and related to the Indonesian communist party were killed, and the rest had prisoned without any trials [17]. During the authoritarian regime of Suharto's presidency, it had been banned by establishing the fiction of memory in the name of "G30S/PKI" [18, 19].

However, he has an ethical problem; a perpetrator's permit. As the primary actor within the Act of Film, Anwar Congo argues that Oppenheimer has manipulated him due to the movie that had been made and the previous one planned is different. Previously, he planned to make a documentary movie with the title of *Arsana and Aminah*. Sadly, Oppenheimer had used the innocent of Anwar Congo figure when they assigned the contract work in English letter that he did not know what it was written. He also never watches it as a part of the screening session before launching to the international public [20]. However, due to his geographical position, Oppenheimer does not need to prove his responsibility after extracting Anwar Congo's knowledge. Congo indeed should be blamed for what he was doing in the past on the criminal act, though it is obscene to obtain a substantial economic benefit from his innocence under the inferior mental complex experienced by most Indonesian people in front of Western culture. His position as the filmmaker is safe condition amidst emerging the right groups, mostly coming from Islamic paramilitary, which prohibits watching together in some of the Indonesian universities.

3.2 A Tale of the Two Different Actions

I want to tell the two stories that impact the two various actions within this section regarding subaltern representation and its intervention softly. The stories are coming from my close friend, Lian Gogali, and mine. She was in advance two years than me (2006) in studying. Both of us graduated from the Postgraduate of Religious and Cultural Studies, Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta. We also chose the same topic of violence and political memory by taking different fieldwork. While Gogali took the fieldwork in Poso, Central Sulawesi, focusing on both mothers' and children's memories of violence during the conflict of Poso (1998–2001), [21] I chose victims and their families memories in the post of Suharto presidency dealing with the case of *Islah* (Islamic reconciliation) as a pretext to forget the past as the perpetrators' seduction through the material things in North Jakarta [22]. This study brought us to the same mission; breaking the past through the truth revealed by working in the institution dealing with the issue.

Gogali then continued his job as both researcher and activist in *Dian Interfidei*, concerning interfaith dialogue activities with a strong emphasis on tolerance and multiculturalism issues. In my case, I then worked voluntarily in the two human rights NGOs (*Kontras/the Commission of for Disappeared and Victims of Violence* and *Syarikat/Muslim Community for Social Advocacy*) for two years (2008–2009). To explore this issue deeply, I continued to take another Master Degree in University for Peace, Costa Rica (2009–2010). I employed the *Black Thursday Silent Movement (Aksi Diam Kamisan)* case study organized by the diverse victims and their families of human rights violations in the front of the Indonesian presidential palace for many years as my project thesis. The issue also brought me to other opportunities, mainly obtaining the permanent job in the government research think tank, Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) as a young researcher in 2011 and achieving the research grant of *Asian Public Intellectual Fellowship* in the Philippines to conduct research *Remembering the legacies of Marcos's Dictatorship* in the period year of 2012–2013. During thesis writing at Sanata Dharma University, I obtained a fellowship program in *Asia Research Institute (ARI) NUS* for three months in 2007.

In LIPI, I continued this research topic until I met up with the two victims' families, which had altered my perspective and research interest in 2014. When I interviewed Mdm Sumarsih (the victims' family of Wawan, who was killed in the Semanggi tragedy in 1998), he was surprised with my new performance that was cooler than before. The same perception of me was happening with Mdm Yekti as the victims' family of Tanjung Priok tragedy (1984) by saying such a dark joke, "You are taking an interview me a lot obtain many opportunities, making you a look great currently. Look at me now, the first time we met, I have been still an ordinary woman without any changing of good appearance. Their words were spontaneous, though it had impacted my memory due to such kind of moral appeal as a part of hutang budi. I attained many opportunities for this topic, though those of human rights violations have been unresolved until now amidst the strong cultural impunity for all perpetrators. It causes both the victims and their families' suffering due to their trauma of losing their father and children and experiencing difficult life to fulfill their economic to survive in daily life.

This moral appealing is happening to Gogali after doing the fieldwork in Poso. One statement that remained in her memory was a mother's question from the refugee camp in Silanca, Lage District in one of the part regions in Poso in Central Sulawesi, "if you will have done for this research and then have published about us into a book, what is going to change about our fate?". Her question was not a form of chit-chat. It was an act of protest for those scholars who were studying the conflict of Poso and taking them an interview, but there was no feedback for themselves as the object of the informant. Undoubtedly, this mother's question haunts her while she went back to Yogyakarta and working enjoyable as both researcher and activist in Dian Interfidei [23]. It was compared to other researchers, Gogali also a part of the native people in Poso. Her prominent families had impacted with the conflict Poso, while some of her relatives had passed away within it. In other words, her geographical position had a strong emotional involvement due to a part of communal solidarity. Because of this, Gogali then went back to Poso in 2009. She wanted to pay back her debt from the mother's voices that brought her to graduate from postgraduate religious and cultural studies, Sanata Dharma University. Not only organized mothers from Muslim and Cristian backgrounds to empower themselves into many programs and activities, but she also establishes the Institute of Mosintuwu as their movement to build a peace road that is started from the grassroots to break the hatred narratives under the dominant of the patriarchal structure [24].

Unlike Gogali, in my case, I escaped from this topic and changed with another one that had no big responsibility, mainly Islam and Popular Culture. I had no feeling to receive the enormous responsibility within this field as before, forcing me to pay a debt with the informant. It eased me to develop my researcher career achievement. Also, as a father with two children, I push myself to become a pure researcher without thinking hard about social involvement activities that could harm my enjoyable position. Nevertheless, taking this innocent position is uneasy amidst the injustice problems condition, though it is an option for every scholar to choose to involved or not in it. Sadly, when the injustice condition impacted my close people, it was very irritating to leave as if something had not happened. It was specifically for the lowest class I met up with every day in the office, mainly Mdm Rahmah, as an office assistant to clean and service my elementary

needs. She had worked for 15 years in LIPI, but she must have been fired due to LIPI's regulation to erase the honorary workers [25].

In the beginning, I confirmed not to be involved myself in a case that could be dangerous on my job as a part of LIPI's researcher. The bank debt to pay the credit monthly for the house I also bought one primary reason not to join it. Again, it brought me a moral dilemma. The more I fought against not involving, the more I felt guilty about my previous achievements on the subalternity issues. Internally my heart and my rational choice had confronted one and another. Moreover, I had the skill to write and represent them that could broadly articulate their voices. Without thinking deeply about the further risk, I then joined the rally, insisting on articulating their voices by making several short articles by publishing in social media and online media to primarily influence the public sphere.

I also engaged with the honorary workers in the act of demonstration in front of LIPI's leader's office. My engagement definitely could not change the regulation on them; most of them were finally jobless. Nonetheless, as the scholar obtaining the considerable advantages to represent the subaltern many times, I could still mediate their voices [26]. In my opinion, it was indeed not to make the lowest of the honorary worker to speak up, but it was to develop my moral appeal as both scholar and public intellectual in the third world countries as one combination that could not be separated one and another.

4 Conclusion

This paper examines that even though subaltern is impossible to speak on the scholar's representation as Spivak argues in her essay, they have softly intervention to ask on their fate. Geographical imagination determines how every scholar responds to it. Those scholars working in first-world countries, even though they are initially from third-world countries, have various moral appeals that are binding emotionally with the subaltern. This moral appeal that I propose as *hutang budi*, such as Indonesian discursive tradition, is imprinted within most Indonesian scholars, taking their position as a person to mediate the subaltern's voices in whatever ways they can. Because of this, it is possible for the subaltern intervening in their problems to be considered strongly. The two stories I explain, for instance, strengthen it. Thus, even though the subaltern's problems could not be resolved, it gives them hope with the presence of scholar's engagement.

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