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Rereading in the Subaltern: Language, Politics, Power

We Was Born Wid It, Innit.[1]

From my first reading of Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*, I felt connected to her arguments and confusions. She challenges the space that those representative of "oppressors" and "colonizers" take up in the lands of the colonized. She also talks about language, describing her people as orphans stripped of their tongues, asking, "isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime [of post-colonial existance] is the language of the criminal who committed the crime?"[2] Reading this line the first time, I thought, "How strange that I speak only English, the language of my colonizer" or that most desis[3] find ourselves more fluent in English than we do the many languages of our motherlands. But English so very much belongs to me – it is so much a part of how I exist and who I am.

Revisiting Kincaid's question, I find it flawed. She communicates the orphaning, rape, and oppression of her people in very real ways, but we are the aftermath of that and English is our language, too. It belongs to us and we own it; I own every word I speak. I want to tell her that one of the goals of our colonizers was to make us speechless and here we are, taking their language to new places, using it better than they do, rewriting their

[1] I write my first subtitle using words borrowed from Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani*, a text written completely in vernacular English. Responding to a comment to "go back where you came from," one character responds, "We ain't come here. We was fuckin' born here, innit." I make the same assertion in relation to my use of English. I was born with it.
[2] Kincaid, 31.
[3] *Desi*, which sounds like "they see," is a Hindi/Sanskrit word that roughly translates to "countryman." South Asians use this word inclusively, to refer to the South Asian community (as opposed to just the Indian American community or just the Pakistani American community, for example).

faulty histories in the tongue they claim to have invented. If that isn't revolutionary, what is?

In rereading Kincaid, I juxtapose her treatise with a few other texts, ones that – intentionally or not – mash together conversations about language, agency, citizenship, and the subaltern. None of the texts I've chosen tie these things up neatly, but let them sit unfettered, exposed, and waiting for our accusations. As an educated desi, and one who exited the womb with proper English sewn into her fingers and tongue, I am supposed to cringe at the non-Standard. And yet in rereading Dohra Ahmad's anthology *Rotten English*, I am reminded of the goodnesses of English, the rhythms that have come out of our (once colonized peoples') claiming ownership of what Chinua Achebe describes as "the world language which history has forced down our throats."[4] Kincaid talks about English as if it doesn't belong to us, but we have done things to it and made it our own and I want to be able to feel proud that it is mine. But pride can be so unattainable.

I've talked before about losing my accent and the code switching my brother and I did as children, using our Indian accents in the house and our American ones at school. I think my Indian accent still exists in me somewhere. Sometimes, it is the language of my deep inner thoughts. So why can't I speak it out loud? Am I shy or afraid or maybe ashamed? When I say words like "can't" out loud, I use my American accent, but I still hear the Indian version in my head. And sometimes, I feel the need to use my Indian mannerisms, but I leave them behind. I don't want to change – I am who I am and my language is what it is. My mannerisms and accent are complicated by my multiple identities and I'm okay with that uncertainty.

[4] Ahmad, 19.

I want to take Kincaid to another place. She writes as if speakers and writers of English are powerless because they are using a language that belonged to their oppressors, but ownership *can* mean power. Her writing is proof of that. Some of the best things I've ever read were written in English by people who inherited the language from their colonizers.

In this project, I'd like to talk about my rereadings of texts that tackle this same question, texts that don't make excuses, texts that are written in many Englishes, and texts that challenge the perceived, dominant notions of "Standard" English as all-powerful and other Englishes as subordinate. In this project, I rethink words like "oppressed" and juxtapose them with words like "subaltern;" I argue that while speakers and writers of "non-Standard" Englishes might function as subordinate in the lens of the dominant culture, their use and publication of the "non-Standard" and their recognition of many Englishes validate them and that this validation is politically significant; most importantly, I examine my own lens, my perception of reading as a political act, and my own situation within and around these texts and between the worlds they create.

Rereading in the Subaltern

When I had begun this project, I started by examining ideas of "oppression," "marginalization" and "othering" in Willis, Prashad, and Mohanty. Reading them against Kincaid, Ahmad, MIA, and Malkani has caused me to question the ways events, people, ideas, and groups are named. This project has also made me question the ways I envision the world. I find that certain words are usually used interchangeably with "subaltern" – most commonly, words like "oppressed" and "marginalized."

Overall, I have grown to find "oppressed" problematic and this work has made me reconsider using such a word. Often, those who are called "oppressed" would not categorize themselves as such. As I discuss later in this paper, both MIA and Malkani present subaltern spaces that dominant groups (peering in) would call "uneducated" or "unrefined," but both show these spaces as rich, varied, and powerful in their own right.

Willis begins *Reading Comprehension Research and Teaching in the U.S.* by using inclusive words like "subaltern," but finds herself relying on less inclusive words that more definitively reflect her research. Prashad, in *The Karma of Brown Folk*, uses "subaltern" to be specific about where Asian Americans (and specifically South Asian Americans) are situated in the larger scope of America. Mohanty, in *Feminism without Borders*, most commonly uses First World/Third World and One Thirds/ Two Thirds World to situate herself and her discussions, but implies that relationships and situations are complicated.

Standing in the periphery of privilege and subordination,[5] I have chosen to no longer use the word "oppressed" when referring to myself and others; I have also chosen to find new ways to talk about people who exist outside the dominant sphere. I find "oppressed" too action-oriented, deliberate, and exclusive. I prefer the implication of "subordination" because it seems to combine the deliberate with events and ideologies that are institutional, political, or existing in our social structure without blatant visibility. In considering this, I have chosen the more appropriate "subaltern," i.e. existing outside of the dominant.

[5] Mohanty, too, talks about having to negotiate the space in which she is situated depending on where she is and what she is doing. For example, she is relatively wealthy, would consider herself middle class, and is educated. Still, she is brown, South Asian, and Indian in America; black in the UK; a woman in India; and other things in other places. Being constantly on the border of many different labels and spaces means that she has to be conscious of how she classifies herself and in turn, how she does this to others.

Rereading Rotten English

The first time I read *Rotten English*, I thought it would be best to start somewhere in the middle. I skipped in and out of different poems and short stories, not reading the author bios Ahmad provides, which also function as explanations, ways in for unfamiliar readers. I felt lost in some of the poems. One, written by Scottish activist Mary McCabe and entitled "Comin Back Ower the Border" was so challenging that I didn't take the time to try to make sense of it.

This time, I begin with the intro and work my way through the book. In her introduction, Ahmad argues for the use of the term "vernacular" rather than "dialect" and talks about the implications of both. Using writers like Kamau Braithwaite and James Baldwin, she asserts the power and politics of language, emphasizing the important political power of the vernacular. Ahmad writes that all the texts in the anthology "exhibit an anti-institutional stance, a wicked sense of humor, a deep engagement with history, and a constant preoccupation with language."[6] This resonates with me as I continue to read her text, knowing that I will find the same to be true in reading Malkani's *Londonstani* and reading and listening to interviews and music by MIA. They, too, take an anti-institutional stance and are deeply engaged with the interactions between language, history, and those who exist in the subaltern.

Ahmad touches on Ken Saro-Wiwa's assertion that, in writing the novel *Sozaboy*, he wanted "to create a hybrid language that 'throbs vibrantly enough and communicates effectively.'"[7] I know, then, that Saro-Wiwa does not write for one homogenous audience, but many, those who can easily digest the vibrantly throbbing language in

[6] Ahmad, 26.
[7] Ahmad, 17.

which he writes, and those who will have to read it multiple times to feel its effectiveness.

Ahmad ends her introduction with a conversation about the ways that writers use the vernacular (and use language that is often oral and seldom written) to claim power and to defy preexisting rules. She writes that although these texts are written in Englishes considered "non-Standard," they very completely employ literary devices, tools like rhyme and sarcasm, commenting both on the topic at hand and on the larger issue of the dominant "Standard" English. The texts function as "weapons against cultural domination" and provide ways "of making an imposed language one's own."[8]

The writing and reading of vernacular literature, then, is a political act. Vernacular literature, just by existing, threatens the position and power of "Standard" English literature. It does not ask to be recognized, but becomes a recognized and powerful political force, threatening dominant notions of proper English and legitimizing itself and its speakers. Still, it exists in a separate sphere outside the dominant; vernacular literature exists in the subaltern, the space where it is written, read, and appreciated.

So, when I read pieces in this text, I am unknowingly committing a political act. I read many things twice. Some poetry works best when I read it aloud in the quiet of my bedroom. Some works best when I share it with others. One poem, "No More Love Poems #1" by Ntozake Shange, is so potent; it evokes something different in me every time and deepens the pain/pleasure with each reading. When I finish reading it, I breathe deeply and my husband asks me to read it to him. In the beginning of her poem, Shange writes as if she is problem free, saying:

[8] Ahmad, 29.

ever since i realized there waz someone callt
a colored girl an evil woman a bitch or a nag
i been tryin not to be that & leave bitterness
in somebody else's cup/ come to somebody to love me

I think about the ways that others' perceptions of us influence the people we decide to be. I think about how amazing it must be to leave bitterness behind, how free she must feel. I almost forget that some pain is inevitable in life. In ending, Shange writes:

i used to joke abt when i waz messin round/ but a real dead
lovin is here for you now/ cuz i don't know anymore/ how
to avoid my own face wet wit my tears/ cuz i had convinced
myself colored girls had no right to sorrow/ & i lived
& loved that way & kept sorrow on the curb/ allegedly
for you/ but i know i did it for myself/
i cdnt stand it
i cdnt stand bein sorry & colored at the same time
it's so redundant in the modern world

Each time I read this, I can still feel the surprise, that feeling that sometimes you don't really know how deeply sad you are inside until it comes out of you and you can't hide it anymore. I think about her face wet with tears and about how hard it is to admit that sometimes, the world makes us angry and sorry.

Shange wrote this in the 1970s, but it feels like she could have written it last week. I type it up and email it to a few friends and then a few more. Shange's poem might end sad, but she also challenges others' ideas of what she should be.

Shange makes me revisit the question of writing in the subaltern. She begins by writing about her own ideas of dissent, questioning dominant notions of being "a colored girl" and working actively to defy those notions. She is able to reject the dominant ideology, but in the process, she recognizes that her space in the subaltern is inevitable.

It's just a part of her experience and regardless of how she acts, she will continue to live in that space.

Shange reminds me that existing in the subaltern can be imposed or intentional (or both). She reminds me that acts that are political and anti-institutional do not have to be large-scale. They can be as small as admitting that a social system does not account for one person. They can be as small as me reading a poem.

Rotten Form n Raal Right Writin'[9]

As I've discussed, this journey of rereading has made me rethink the idea of "the language of the oppressor." The texts in *Rotten English* invalidate the notion that "Standard" English is the only proper English. The writings in that book are rich, potent, and varied in their themes. Ahmad argues that the writings in her anthology are anti-institutional and I agree, but one of the ways she argues for their validity as vernacular texts is by talking about them in terms of form, i.e. their use of literary devices like sarcasm, humor, and wit and more technical tools like rhyme and stanza formats. Gautam Malkani, in *Londonstani*, and MIA, in her lyrics, music, and interviews, challenge "standard" English as well as standard form. They are interested in exploring the subaltern on many levels and their decisions to confront dominant ideologies in styles that are not traditional stretch the notion of anti-institutional writing and deepen my understandings of writing in the subaltern.

[9] "*Raal Right Writin'*" is a reference to Paul Lawrence Dunbar's poem "When Malindy Sings," in which Dunbar writes, "You ain't got de nachel o'gans/ Fu' to make de soun' come right,/ You ain't got de tu'ns an' twistin's/ Fu to make it sweet an' light./ Tell you one thing now, Miss Lucy,/ An' I'm tellin' you fu' true,/ When hit comes to raal right singin',/ 'T ain't no easy thing to do." Ahmad uses the phrase "Raal Right Singin'" as the title of the vernacular poetry section of her anthology. I use the title here to imply that "raal right writin'," though not easy to do, often involves having to take up the difficult task of breaking form and challenging dominant notions of "good" and "valid" writing.

I first read Malkani about a year and a half ago. I remember I had picked up the book and immediately liked the idea of it; of course, reading it was hard because it's written in what Malkani terms "slang" and defines more specifically as the English spoken by desi rudeboys in Hounslow, London. What I didn't know in my first reading was that Malkani actually conducted ethnographic research on Hounslow's desi rudeboys and planned to write his dissertation on findings from this study. To explain his decision to write in "slang" in *Londonstani*, he says:

> The slang used in the book is just an extension of my decision to write up the research as a novel rather than some ethnographic study - I wanted to write it in a way that people who know this scene would find engaging and so I basically had to write it in the language people use and understand. Whenever I tried switching to 'proper English' (whatever that's supposed to mean), it sounded stupid and just didn't work.[10]

At reading this, I'm excited. In the process of conducting critical research, Malkani seemingly internalized these connections to the vernacular and became tied to the community. In his writing, he was compelled to write in the voice of the community he had studied and to make the writing valid for and interesting to it.

Not surprisingly though, Malkani's book received mixed reviews, including one that still stings me, not just because it was written by a desi, but because it was written by a desi who is stuck in old world notions of "proper," unable to free himself from its hold.[11] He writes:

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[10] From http://www.gautammalkani.com/about_londonstani.htm.

[11] As an aside, I want to take a little space to talk about the idea of the anglophile. As an undergrad, I spent a lot time with a Puerto Rican friend who shared a similar "proper" upbringing as mine. We found our mothers' fascinations with all things Anglo amusing, but were also disturbed to see these fascinations appear consistently in the value systems of our respective ethnic communities. When I read or hear desis argue for Western and Anglo values and customs, I can't help but cringe.
This is something that I was constantly reminded of in reading Kincaid's *A Small Place*. She reminded me of the difficult negotiations post-colonial people conduct in having to choose the Anglo practices that suit our values and the ones that don't. In picking and choosing, we often end up making poor choices, valuing Anglo practices because of the ways media and other mainstream channels portray those practices as better

> [Malkani] writes in an almost impenetrable gibberish... Where did Malkani encounter kids as wholly subnormal as these? The trash that inhabit this novel apparently suffer from an identity crisis, using a plethora of labels to make sense of themselves. Try this one, guys: retards.'[12]

I find this repulsive on so many levels. Dhaliwal turns out to not just insult Malkani for choosing to represent his participants and their lives in this way, but also insults the entire community of Hounslow desi rudeboys, their language, their way of being, and their values. Dhaliwal does not see value in choosing to write outside of academic norms or doing ethnographic research without the intention of writing for an academic audience. I end up feeling like Dhaliwal is threatened by Malkani's ability to write from the heart and from the space of the subaltern. As Malkani asserts, the text that could not have been written any other way and the text does not pretend to be something it isn't. It speaks to the desi rudeboy community and involves readers in the conversation.

Along with using vernacular English as a form of anti-institutional writing, Malkani's text also challenges more explicitly institutional values. He tests readers to recognize that the desi community is not homogenous – it contains many ethnic, cultural, and religious groups that are often at odds with one another. In addition, he closely studies desi social systems (one example is the separations between Sikhs and Muslims within the Hounslow desi community) and forces readers to confront seemingly absurd community rules that, for example, force the narrator to choose between his Muslim girlfriend and his Sikh friends. At the same time, Malkani fulfills many of his research

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than "ours." There is a whole discussion in here somewhere about the ridiculous practice of colorism and the reasons why in my culture, my lighter skin is considered more beautiful than my younger brother's very dark skin – many desi women (and women in South Asia) bleach their skin because of this silly value system.

[12] Nirpal Dhaliwal, Evening Standard, April 10th, 2006

goals and stays true to the rudeboy community. He even includes a glossary in his book, making desi rudeboy slang accessible to other readers.

I think for a while about the use of glossaries. Malkani has one; so does Ahmad; even Zora Neale Hurston's *Story in Harlem Slang*, included in Ahmad's anthology, has a "Glossary of Harlem Slang." What does a glossary suggest? To me, its first goal is accessibility. A glossary says, "You might not get this right away, but I'm here to help." I like it. Maybe an implied quality of language is that it follows certain rules and has words and phrases that are learnable and knowable. Flipping back and forth between Malkani's body text and his glossary makes his text much more accessible. Malkani acknowledges that this is an atypical reading, but he wants even outside readers to have a way in.

Reading MIA's interviews and re-listening to her music makes me wonder if I need to understand every word of a book. I began listening to MIA as a senior at Temple University – a friend of mine brought over two pirated CDs (one was MIA's original album, *Arular*, which we had heard was produced by the beloved Philly DJ Diplo; the second was a mixtape called *Piracy Funds Terrorism*[13] that MIA and Diplo had made together). I was quickly hooked and couldn't help but play her music at every party we threw. I even played it for my dad when I visited him – he's the guy who got me into Pink Floyd (hence my eventual love of metal), Boney M. (which led to my love of disco and dance parties), and Madonna (her first two albums still drive me crazy). Given my dad's varied and eclectic taste in music, I thought he would just love this stuff. I warned him that the first few times one listens to the album, it's too intense to make sense of and

[13] The title of this album should make me feel guilty that I'm listening to a pirated version of it, but in actuality, MIA and Diplo released it free to the public both online and at shows.

after that, it becomes the only music worth listening to. The same might be said for a book like *Londonstani*, where the first chapter is intriguing and a little too loud to be comfortable, but after that, it's easy to sink into the rhythm of the language and it begins to be beautiful.

MIA makes music from a subaltern space; she aims to make music that is political, in terms of its representations of underserved groups and its focus on life in and music of the "third world," and in terms of its goals of challenging dominant notions of music in the dance, club, and hip hop scenes. MIA grew up in London, Sri Lanka, and India, at times living as a refugee, on welfare, and often as a fugitive. Her music is at all times political, personal, and powerful. It is also incredibly threatening and it is not uncommon to hear her music referred to as unintelligible (i.e. "That's not English"), unmusical, and unimportant. Others argue that she is one of the most important artists of our generation.

In studying her music alone, one can easily see how it fits within Ahmad's descriptions of vernacular language. MIA sings solely in the vernacular and her words are powerful; they throb vibrantly and communicate effectively. Plus, MIA is strongly anti-institutional (as explained before, I mean this both in terms of Western institutional notions of power, capitalism, and othering, and in terms of the institutional power and place of popular hip hop), deeply engaged with third world histories, constantly preoccupied with language (both in terms of using her own language expressively and effectively, and in using literary devices), and wickedly humorous (MIA playfully and ironically depicts experiences of people in poverty, young prostitutes, and child soldiers,

for example – she pushes them deep into her listeners' minds and also attempts to bring them to the surface of popular discourse).

While I had read MIA's early interviews and been fascinated with discussions of her history, as well as her political and artistic/musical intentions, it is not until I read later interviews with her that I realize how problematic media portrayals of MIA are. For starters, many magazines have credited (and continue to credit) Diplo for producing MIA's first album. Even I had thought this to be true – it was all I had ever heard. In an August 2007 interview with *Pitchfork*, MIA asserts that Diplo never made either of her albums and that *Pitchfork* (and other magazines) need to stop making the claim. She adds, "I just find it a bit upsetting and kind of insulting that I can't have any ideas on my own because I'm a female or that people from undeveloped countries can't have ideas of their own unless it's backed up by someone who's blond-haired and blue-eyed."[14][15] In this conversation, MIA points out the media's inability to credit her for her own music, asking why the fact that she is a brown woman makes it difficult for the US media to see her as powerful, creative, and autonomous.

In the interview, MIA also questions why Diplo's focus on Brazil is so well received while her work in India and Liberia is not. She observes that the big difference between the two is that he is the spokesperson for his projects; in other words, he doesn't necessarily use Brazilian voices to talk about issues in Brazil. She, on the other hand, includes actual voices of Liberians, Indians, etc in her work – she says, "And that's what this album is about. It's filling in the bridge and the gap so that somebody in Liberia can

[14] This is an obvious reference to the blond-haired and blue-eyed Diplo, who according to the interviewer, "seemed to think he had a bit to do with both of the these records."
[15] Written by Paul Thompson for Pitchfork Media, August 2007; http://www.pitchforkmedia.com/article/news/44529-mia-confronts-the-haters.

articulate exactly what they want to say without having this middle-man person who has to be from the first world [say it for them.]"[16] In this conversation, MIA points to an issue relevant to Mohanty's discussions about first world feminist writing that objectifies third world women's experiences. MIA rejects the notion that a "first world person" should speak for issues of the third world and gives agency to "third world peoples" with whom she has worked, made music, and lived.

Like Malkani, who disrupts the formats and notions of ethnographic research and writing, MIA's music disrupts the comfortable capitalism of American hip hop. In making her second album, she was given the opportunity to work with producer Timbaland and artists like Three 6 Mafia. Before getting to the states, MIA faced visa problems[17], which influenced her to continue traveling around the world. She visited Liberia, India, and the Caribbean, and was excited to bring the music she had heard there back to the states. When the US lifted its visa restrictions, she continued plans to work with American hip hop artists. Timbaland found the music she brought from developing countries too rustic and unrefined/ underproduced. Three 6 Mafia especially found her too anti-capitalist. Both had trouble working with her "progressive" and atypical style.[18] In a few blog posts from this same time, MIA asks why new artists are expected to follow the "old boy format" of hip hop, which she describes as focusing on money and sex, noting that dissenting artists are always asked to change their format to fit the system. She asks why the system can't alter itself to make space for new forms and progressive

[16] Written by Paul Thompson for Pitchfork Media, August 2007; http://www.pitchforkmedia.com/article/news/44529-mia-confronts-the-haters.
[17] In many interviews, MIA has discussed the visa problems she faced. In short, the US saw her as a political and terrorist threat and denied her access into the states. This meant she could not access her own personal belongings, which were already in New York, and that she had to put a hold on her musical projects with American hip hop artists and producers.
[18] http://www.artistdirect.com/nad/news/article/0,,4387698,00.html

artists.[19] Although the media have been known to poke fun at MIA's blog postings, a close reading shows that her writing is deeply political, that it questions mainstream views of the world, and that it recognizes the inherent power of the subaltern.

It is especially interesting to note how relatively well received MIA's albums and Malkani's book are, but only within certain genres. If MIA were to call her music straight hip hop or if she were to call it American, she would be once again denied access into a world that has clear-cut borders. Similarly, if Malkani's text were marketed as an ethnography, rather than a piece of fiction, his work would suffer much harsher criticisms from academic critiques (as opposed to popular ones). This implies that subaltern work often has to be defined in the space of the subaltern for it to be recognized as valid. Malkani and MIA use language powerfully, but while their stances reveal their strong anti-institutional and political voices, their art survives because its implied stance is much more subtle. It begs the question: is the reading of vernacular literature a political act if the literature is disguised to appeal to popular audiences? Who reads this stuff and how do they position it?

Who Am I to Reread in the Subaltern?

In beginning this project, I intended to visit texts I'd read with a new lens. Maybe in my first reading, I was more of a popular audience? I liked that MIA's music was so new and different in its format; it was easy to dance to and it spoke to me. I also liked that she focuses on issues that are important to my politics. Reading Malkani, I hadn't been aware of the larger political implications of his work. I read it because it was about a guy who (like me) doesn't fit into the desi community and because Malkani employs a non-Standard English and a non-Standard form. I chose Ahmad for the same reasons. I

[19] www.myspace.com/mia

think it's possible that most readers choose to interact with these texts purely for the pleasure of reading things outside of the standard. If this is the case, then even the popular audience has chosen to read in the subaltern, a decision that is political, whether it recognizes this or not.

My current lens, then, takes on a deepened politics and is aware of these political choices – it seeks to read in the subaltern with a consideration for theorists like Willis, who asserts that the subaltern exists because of a dominant ideology; Mohanty, who reminds me that I am constantly to negotiate my space within and outside many borders, and that these texts do the same; and Prashad, who uses the history of South Asians in America to illuminate my understandings of the sociocultural, political, and institutional practices that have kept South Asians in the subaltern. In other words, my new lens employs a knowledge of the longer history of existing outside of the dominant and hence, a deeper sense of the histories behind these writings and the power and courage of these writers.

I earlier read these texts without a sense of my own situation within these spaces and borders. I situate myself as a subaltern writer, rather than someone in the mish mash of Mohanty's One Third/Two Third dichotomy because as she explains, I am different every place I land and in every space I read and write. This is why rereading Malkani and MIA has been so significant – both choose to talk about othering within subaltern communities and I think that's something that is personal to me, as well as significant to our larger scope of understanding.

What does it mean that Malkani's narrator is situated on the outskirts of a subaltern community or that the end of the book leaves the narrator without any real

community? And why is it that MIA can't classify her music (she admittedly doesn't want to, but if she tried, she still couldn't), that it's not simply from London or from the states or from Liberia, but from all these places all the time? To me, it shows that while "subaltern" suggests a space of subordination, it also implies a space that is uncertain, moving, and full of possibilities. It is much more useful to think of these texts, then, as existing in the undefined and moving space of the subaltern, a space that continues to grow and allows for more radical political choice and action than the implied space of the dominant. In other words, situating these texts, these writers, and myself as decidedly subaltern does not make us unknown or weak, but makes us a powerful political force and a force that is constantly changing.

As I earlier concluded, the writing of subaltern literature is political; subaltern literature challenges notions of the dominant and makes spaces of the subaltern visible. So, is reading in the subaltern a political act if the reader doesn't know it? I would argue yes; it is the act of engagement, not the act of intent, that makes reading in the subaltern political.

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