

*Can the Migrant Speak?
Voicing Myself, Voicing the Other*

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Abstract

Voices of immigrants heard in local academic spheres are largely mediated through those of academics or researchers whose representation of the other is necessarily interpreted and understood through their privileged and powerful veils. This paper will draw on Spivak's paper, "Can the subaltern speak?" that refers to the work of the Subaltern Studies group committed to the postcolonial challenging the power and knowledge of the Western academic in speaking for the subaltern. Spivak's discussion is particularly relevant to the increasing research interest in the local migrant. It calls for the epistemic responsibilities of researchers in persistently critiquing their textual representations of the migrant and the dangers of academic translation of migrants' subjugated knowledges. In doing so, it will discuss the problematic interrelatedness of the migrant and the academic and researcher referring to the work of theorists that have instigated sensitivity to the general disregard of migrant knowledge as non-knowledge. The voice of the migrant in this paper is heard through a local migrant's story that accentuates the need for a deconstructive approach to knowledge production in investigative research processes.

Introduction

This paper, as the title suggests, refers to the well known paper by Gayatri Spivak (1988) "Can the subaltern speak?" It explores possibilities for the researcher in making the migrant's voice heard or, as Nabhan's (2005) story, "The Mute," at the end of this paper suggests, in making the migrant speak. Spivak's paper problematises the speaking positions of the academic and the subaltern discussing the power, desire and interest (as Spivak's paper was originally entitled) in representing the marginalised and including the voices of "others" as knowing subjects in a community of knowledge production. Spivak's paper here is taken up as the main textual reference in problematising the possibilities for migrants as subaltern subjects, to speaking for themselves and enhancing the discussion about the role of academics, particularly of researchers who have the academic and theoretical privilege of "sustaining" culturally diverse others.

The abrupt rise of arrivals of undocumented sub-Saharan migrants by boat from North Africa since 2002 (Camilleri, 2007), makes Spivak's discussion highly relevant to the increasing Maltese researchers' interests in studying the migrant. Local socio-cultural, historical and economic contexts give particular shape to knowledge produced and disseminated about the migrant. The interests of various political groups is also very evident in their different representations of the migrants and narratives about their living in Malta. The challenge for the local academic as an intellectual is to be aware of the contexts and interests that mark this production of knowledge about the migrant. In critically reflecting on how local knowledge production creates the migrant, particularly through the question of who speaks, academic researchers cannot afford to preclude themselves and their situated knowledges from such critical scrutiny.

Researchers take the function of a "new type" of intellectuals as opposed to the traditional, universalist ones in recognizing "the authority and epistemic privileges for theoretical pronouncements" (Peters 1996, p. 61) gained through the power historically rooted in institutions such as the universities. In analyzing "the culture of power" (Marker, 2003) in which they are enmeshed, they become aware of the epistemic violence of speaking for others; but they also need to explore if and how non-Western cultural knowledge productions can be possible. This challenge can be translated into a simple question: "Is it possible to recover the authentic voices of unheard subaltern subjects?"

For Maltese researchers who take up their epistemic responsibilities in creating spaces for other to speak, this question is particularly relevant. Can the migrant speak? What are the political and ethical obligations of researchers to make the migrants' voices heard? Considering the Maltese socio-cultural contexts where generally the migrant is spoken for, the desire of researchers with emancipatory interests to have them speak for themselves is overwhelming as is their political correctness in presenting their yet unheard stories, alternatives to the ones imperialistically generated through local media.

If one flips through past newspaper articles, it is the journalist who describes migrants, the photographer who presents them crammed in a boat or a bus, silently moved to elsewhere, some after having spent hours in the sun munching *twisteets*,

others after being wrapped in white sheets. For an educational researcher, the images of migrants silently being moved to elsewhere instigates one's curiosity to know more about these people; maybe also to get a bit more known through these people. They must be saying something to themselves. Where did they come from? Where are they heading to? Why are they here? What do they want?

This elsewhere migrants are dislocated into is rendered more distant but all the more intriguing to the researcher. The images of angry crowds of migrants, their mouths articulating words that never fully get across, make it highly desirable for a researcher to make migrants speak, to understand them, to translate them.

These challenging theoretical and social situations have set me searching for what migrants have to say – beyond the usual research endeavours of an academic who tries to capture their spoken words. I have come to realize that familiar methods of research have proved to be ineffective. Sometimes migrants literally cannot speak my language and I cannot speak theirs. At other times their sense of gratitude in being accepted as migrants in a host country hinders them from articulating their positions and perspectives. Furthermore, migrants may simply refuse to speak. They have come to suspect the interview because they experienced and conceive it as a threatening tool that governs and controls them.

Like the migrant, I have come to suspect the interview. As an academic I have come to question its function as a knowledge producing tool that democratically turns to independent knowledgeable persons to have their say. As post-structuralist critics acknowledge, the interview is more of a self scrutinizing, confessional device through which individuals efficiently and effectively surveil themselves (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). The interview is a product of modernity, a technology of the self which, according to Foucault (2000), enhances people's sense of agency while at the same time governing and controlling them. The interview forms part of a regime of governmentality (Foucault) that effectively controls people through their "voluntary" articulation of their deepest thoughts and knowledge of their confessions.

These reflections have led me to a deeper search for the voices of migrants, "freely" expressed without the interventions of the researcher. Has a migrant ever publicly written something about himself freely as a migrant? I came across a story of Walid Nabhan (2005), which saved me from the embarrassing situation of not having a reference with a non-Western name (since Spivak is not so foreign in academic circles). Walid Nabhan immigrated to Malta after living in Jordan as a Palestinian refugee, and here his story is read in the light of his experience as a migrant. Nabhan has written the story in Maltese and the excerpts quoted here are my translation. It is not the aim of this paper to go into the politics of translation but what makes Nabhan's story particularly relevant to my discussion here is that it has educated me out of the frenzy to make the other speak, to investigate the other and, in particular, the muteness of the other. Moreover, it opened up an array of different questions. Should speech, and the empowering notion of voice be enforced on the other? Is the lack of voice always a symptom of oppressive conditions? Should the researcher abandon his epistemological, ethical and political stances and patiently wait for the migrant to say something of their own will?

In reflecting on the researchers' and the migrants' possibilities of speaking and not speaking, I shall first outline the arguments made by Spivak about the difficulties in having the subaltern speak. I have chosen Spivak for a number of reasons. She is a well known academic of Asian origin who has "made it" in/to the Western academic world; she is a feminist who is also very conscious that the issues of voice are particularly pertinent to women and to women of different cultures (Spivak, 1988c). But my focus on this paper has been particularly instigated by her critique of Foucault's notion of subjugated knowledges whose work I have used in my previous work (Galea, 2002, 2006) in arguing for resisting potential of subjugated knowledges; "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated; naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (Foucault, 1980, p. 82).

The protagonists of this paper are myself, Spivak, Walid Nabhan and other migrants whose faces are yet to be represented. Why I have chosen to speak about migrants and how they are represented is the product of my theoretical interrogations into my particular power/knowledge positions and academic locations.

Spivak and the researchers of the Subaltern.

Spivak takes up the term subaltern as used by Gramsci in referring to the proletarian (Morton, 2003). Gramsci's subaltern refers to groups of rural peasants in southern Italy whose lack of group consciousness and predispositions to fascist ideologies make them predisposed to economic and social oppression so that possibilities of political upheaval from the group are very limited. The Subaltern Studies collective, a group of South Asian historians extended the meaning of the Gramscian term to the different subordinate manifestations of oppression in a South Asian Society related to class, caste, age, gender and office: "the subaltern classes or groups constituting the mass of labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country – that is the people" (Guha, 2000, p. 3). The Subaltern Studies group was particularly preoccupied by the fact that the histories of the peasantry in India were subordinately represented through the colonial interests of elite groups, including those elite indigenous groups who serve as "native informants for first world intellectuals interested in the voice of the Other" (Spivak, 1988, p. 284). Guha, who is the founding editor of the Subaltern Studies, explains that elitist historiography represents the indigenous elite as the main instigators of the people's transition to freedom from colonial subjugation. What is emphasized is "their role as promoters of the cause of the people rather than that as exploiters and oppressors, their altruism and self abnegation rather than their scramble for the modicum of power and privilege granted by the rulers" (Guha, 2000, p. 2). Guha retains that this elitist historiography is in need of subversion by alternative discourses that emerge from the politics of the people, the subaltern classes, whom he describes as "an autonomous domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter" (p. 3). The main aim of the subaltern collective is to search for the authentic stories of these people and possibly read instances of resistance in their stories of exploitation. The difficulties in finding documents and narratives of resistance by the people in their own voice and in their own terms have led the Subaltern Studies group to explore ways through which the subaltern could be represented as historical agents.

In her paper, "Can the Subaltern speak?" Spivak (1988) is skeptical of the possibilities of getting the "true" experiences of the subaltern. She doubts the articulation of "a pure form of consciousness," that is a voice free from and freely understood from the powerful hegemonic discourses. If anything the articulation of a subaltern voice and the identification of that voice to a subject reproduces her subaltern subjectivity. As Spivak explains, "the desire to give the hysteric a voice, for example, transforms her into a subject of hysteria" (Spivak, p. 296). This means that the allocation of a voice to a subaltern subject does not free the subject from ideological influences of being understood as such. In this sense the subjects' power to speak is always necessarily understood through an awareness of the effects of socio-historical discourse on the subaltern speech and the representation of their selves. One must also account for the times when the subjects' speech is misunderstood or "sublated" rather than translated (Spivak, p. 300).

This problem marks a turn in methods of investigation. According to Spivak, the search should not focus on what the subaltern have said; more on what they did not say. This would necessarily involve "calling the place of the investigator into question" and highlighting his or her presence in making the other present. Spivak argues for the unveiling of "an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West or the West as Subject" (p. 271). It is the concealment of Europe as subject in the constitution of the other that Spivak wants to reveal, just as much as she would want to question Western researchers' tendencies to remain invisible in giving space or voice to the subaltern and the culturally different migrant.

Spivak's problematisations of the complex positions of the representer and the represented, the knower and the known and the speaker and the spoken for, are to be understood as she herself suggests within larger networks of power. In questioning the researcher's political commitments in benevolently making space for the subaltern to speak, in representing their speech or in translating the experiences of others to academic worlds, one has to take critical account of the socio-economic contexts and ideological interest that instigate researching. For example, the increased local research on migrants and the desire to have them speak cannot overlook situations where such research is funded by European Union research funds, located within Western institutions and/or grounded in discourses of empowerment. All these, as Lyotard (1984) would have it, are means of reproducing grandnarratives of emancipation and educational enlightenment.

Spivak makes us suspiciously aware that the idea that the subaltern can speak is ideologically instilled by the very discourses subaltern speech is supposed to counter. Through the complex theoretical frameworks adopted by Spivak, the individualistic liberal notions of the subaltern that can actually articulate their own needs and desires are to be reviewed in the light of the Western powerful positions and political commitments of the generous academic who seeks to recover the voices of the unheard subaltern subjects. Considering "the European enclosure as the place for the production of theory" (Spivak, p. 294), academics need to recognise their participation in the imperialistic constitution of the other.

Spivak's effective unveiling of the ideological illusion that the subaltern can speak raises a number of important ethical and epistemological questions for the researcher. How is the other implicated in knowledge constructions? How can the

other be an active participant without being hijacked by the hegemonising discourses of the academy? How can the academic responsibly respond to this ethical challenge? What voices can academics develop when they become sensitive of their own powerful privileged and responsible positions that tend to assimilate the other?

Emancipatory Research endeavours

The important questions that emerge out of Spivak's critique of the work of the Subaltern Studies group can be redirected to explore the issue of academics as researching subjects that investigate migrants, even though for the sake of finding subjugated resisting counter-narratives. The political understanding of the subaltern outlined above is here used to conceptualise the investigated migrants (particularly those who are subject/objects of research). Through this parallelism migrants are perceived as *subaltern migrants*, or perhaps more appropriately the *migrating subalterns*, to capture the fluidity of the notion of subalternity that the Subaltern Studies group wanted to convey. This means that subalterns migrate also through a myriad of positions, gendered, classed, embodied, cultural that they take in relation to the oppressive conditions. Furthermore the subaltern migrates also in relation to his or her becoming subject of knowledge. His or her position in becoming a known object and/or a knowledgeable subject is not a fixed one. Sometimes this might be dependent on the elite intellectual or researcher whose position is *antre* (in between the dominant and the oppressed) and yet also through affiliations and experiences of a lower gendered class. The migrant is conceived as a particular subaltern, described above to emphasize the difficulties in recovering their authentic voices yet at the same time retaining the emancipatory possibilities of recovering their insurgent voices for counter hegemonic purposes as the Subaltern Studies collective hoped for.

Spivak's paper critiques emancipatory endeavors as participating in the muting of the subaltern. This critique is particularly intriguing to anyone who engages with politics of liberation, particularly emancipatory research that intends to conscientise people of their moves of empowerment from object to subject or, as hooks (1989, p. 9) explains, "moving from silence to speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes life and new growth possible." It is also relevant to the developments in Maltese educational research during the last decade grounded in the emancipatory agenda to transform "othering" processes activated through formal and informal educational processes. Educational research about, for or with the culturally diverse other in Malta, has focused on issues of social class, gender and disability (see e.g., Sultana, 1997), inspired by emancipatory leftist politics and methodologies that seek to give voice to the silenced, to those who have not yet spoken. The presence of "illegal" immigrants provides a relatively new and unexplored research terrain through which the researcher could yet again draw on the existent tradition of emancipatory educational research.

As some papers in this edition point out, the enlightening impetus of such research is also necessary in that it enhances or at least it claims to increase understandings of the culturally diverse other and respond to the rampant racist responses to the increased presence of migrants of sub Saharan origin. Several research studies and proposals (George, 2005; Borg, 2007; Callus, 2007) related to the presence of migrants within such research areas, raise the researchers' commitments

in making the voices of others heard and their interest in benevolently speaking for this cause – an interest, Spivak argues, that needs to be continuously reminded rather than forgotten, or masked, or eradicated.

In these studies, the researcher is frequently committed to show his or her position - theoretical, political, or otherwise - so that claims for objectivity are always abandoned for a more politically aware and theoretically informed self location in a research process that “responds” to culturally diverse others. Yet this political correctness is to be questioned.

Spivak’s paper in fact makes us interrogate this “cosy” place that the researcher finds for himself or herself; and doubt the “caring” corner from where he or she speaks, and shake the stable ground from where others can be read. It is not enough for researchers to articulate their research theoretical paradigms, for this only accentuates their position as subject, as I shall explain soon.

Questioning the discourse of voice

Feminist, postcolonial, anti-racist and critical theorists throughout the last years have tackled their unquestioned emancipatory intents and thoroughly enquired into epistemological politics of voice and representation (see Ellsworth, 1989; Mohanty, 2003). These theoretical paradigms, coupled with the narrative turn in research and the Derridean claim that there is nothing outside the text, accentuate the responsibility of the researcher in producing the text and the difficulties in finding the authentic words of the subaltern and pure terms to describe them.

These theorists’ unveiling of their epistemic privilege, and even at times the epistemic violence of their culturally dominant position in benevolently speaking for the other, led to a critical rethinking of the notion of the voice in research. For example, the principle of giving a voice has been contested as, it has been argued, participants do have a voice. This has reinforced the idea that the researcher must all the more stay at the background and give more space, even textual space, for the participants to say more without the interruptive comments and analysis of the researcher. This debate has also led researchers to develop and create methodologies that are more tuned with awareness of their own epistemic privilege and responsibility in producing knowledge with others rather than for others (see e.g., Berger, Gluck & Patai, 1991; Gitlin, 1994; Griffiths, 1998).

This has led to the belief, similar to that of the Subaltern Studies group and to that of Foucault (Galea, 2006), that the more the narrative thread is untainted the more the perspective of the one telling the story is true and untouched. Educational research today, and especially research instigated by emancipatory endeavours, would suggest that good, responsible and ethically correct research has to include the voice of the other and sometimes, in the name of including the other, the researcher has to stand back and let the other speak (Tierney 1995). The problem with suggested solutions, such as having chunks of quoted subaltern words by the subaltern or whole books narrated by subjugated others, is that they do not reflect on the contexts through which the texts were produced. Researchers as investigating subjects frequently represent the researched as a participant in knowledge production. Yet again this strategy is

suspiciously uncritical of the presence of the researcher who is sometimes performatively or only symbolically removed from the texts.

Spivak (1985), for example, criticizes Foucault's studies and his attempts at representing the other such as Pierre Riviere through Riviere's marginal voice. She is critical of Foucault for representing himself as transparent and abdicating to represent the oppressed subject assuming that he could speak for himself.

Spivak is highly critical of Foucault and what, she claims, is the humanist utopian turn he has taken in attempting to let the subjugated speak on their own behalf. She is suspicious of the Western investigator's capability of producing spaces for the "disinterested" knowledge of the non-Western.

What we are asking for is that ... the holders of hegemonising discourse should dehegemonise their position and themselves learn how to occupy the subject position of the other rather than simply say, 'O.K., sorry, we are just very good white people; therefore we do not speak for the blacks.' That's the kind of breast beating that is left behind at the threshold and then business goes on as usual. (Spivak, 1988b, p. 121)

The insurrection of subjugated knowledges that Foucault (1980) considers a challenge to grandnarratives, is not free from the theoretical and political notions of voice so common to emancipatory research. According to Spivak, this is the paradoxical subject privileging of the highly politically committed groups, such as researchers who are not able to recognize the particular cultural and political manifestations of such an act. She uses the words of Foucault himself to question his taken for granted Westernised stance: "Are those who act and struggle **mute** (my emphasis) as opposed to those who act and speak? (FD 206)" (Spivak, 1988a, p. 275).

According to Spivak, the investigating subject can never recover the authentic voice of the subaltern because the very act of speech locates the subaltern with particular social discourses that equate action with voice. The subaltern is always necessarily constructed by the hegemony of the researcher even when they provide them with the space from which they can speak (Spivak, 1985). What remains unsaid, in "authentic" accounts of migrants, is the language within which their voice becomes meaningful and to which the participant's voice needs to be translated to be able to be heard.

According to Spivak, the benevolent missionary interventions of academics that promise redemption of subjugated subject by speaking for the subaltern are to be deconstructed.

Deconstructive possibilities for the researcher

Spivak's argumentations portray the conflicting and impossible situations of the politically committed researcher who cannot abandon the representation of the subaltern in the hands of "governmental" records and dominant perspectives of the media but at the same time cannot simply capture the words of the subaltern. She acknowledges endeavors that pursue the voicing of the oppressed but at the same time she contests the uncritical, powerful benevolent claims of researchers to use their

research tools and skills as simple recording devices that faithfully represent the authentic unheard voices.

Spivak herself acknowledges the popular beliefs and expectations of the listener to having the other speak for himself in a conference or seminar. Exclamations such as “there was no voice of the other because there were no blacks” are common (Spivak, 1988b, p. 121). At the same time she cannot but question one’s possible hegemonised location as a researcher, in spite of her emancipatory intentions, that mutes the subaltern voice.

We should welcome all the information retrieval in these silenced areas that is taking place in anthropology, political science, history and sociology. Yet the assumption and the construction of a consciousness or subject sustains such work and will, in the long run, cohere with the work of imperialist subject constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilisation. And the subaltern will be as mute as ever. (Spivak, 1988a. p. 295)

In this sense she depicts the researcher as having the burden of speaking and not speaking - both at the same time.

As argued earlier, the voice becomes a gift of the benevolent researcher that empowers and emancipates the migrant who has not yet spoken. For even in acknowledging their own subject and theoretical positions as researchers and knowledge producers, they do this in reinforcing their own dominant epistemic position. The emancipatory researcher who is suspicious of the educational commitment to speak for the other, and who reflects on himself as subject of inquiry, would still remain “the sovereign subject of investigation” (Spivak, 1988, p. 272). The vicious circle of attempts at pointing to and from the investigator’s self might lead one into a desperate acknowledgment of the impossibility of producing knowledge about or even by the other. Yet what Spivak (p. 293) wants to highlight is the Derridean continuous critique of European ethnocentrism in the constitution of the other and his investigation on how to keep the ethnocentric subject from establishing itself as a knowing subject by selectively defining the other and therefore constituting him/ her as “Other.” She follows Derrida in suggesting a critical self awareness as investigating subjects. Deconstruction problematises the positions of the subject of investigation, highlighting the paradoxes of one’s own practices as an academic, keeping in mind that the definition of the marginal reinforces their own prestige in relation to those of the subaltern.

To give the subaltern a voice is a risky business. Spivak suggests that the academic should be aware that in creating in her texts in dichotomous relations with the other, she has reinforced her identity in relation to the other (and generally this identity is that of the more knowing subject). This echoes Derrida’s critique of Claude Levi Stauss anthropological fieldwork with the Nambikwara that portrays non-Western subjects as mute objects (Derrida, 1998). For even if representation of the other as mute is intentionally a symbolic gesture of the limitations of Western knowledge, the non-Western subject is always presented in disparity to the Western speaking subject.

It is clear that the academic cannot do away with the language through which she has been made; the positions that nourish her becoming as such; but it is important that the academic can displace herself continuously through deconstructive practices

of her own positions in a dislocating process of learning and unlearning. In this way, as Spivak states (1988c), the academic must learn to learn from the others she encounters, to speak to them, to suspect her emancipatory theories and enlightened compassion. In that context, the feminist, the researcher, the academic must become migrants themselves and migrate to other worlds. Yet in migrating they must never assume of having knowledge of the other, the migrant. To do this they must perceive the subject position of the other as blank (or as migrating) so that it can never be pinned down. The other is an “inaccessible blankness” (Spivak 1988a, p. 294) that reveals the limits of Western knowledge and the “illegal” borderlines that researchers claim to have crossed.

Walid Nabhan – The Migrant and the Mute who speaks.

In the light of the discussion around the question, ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ this section takes up Spivak’s suggestion that attempts at making the migrant speak should continuously be deconstructed.

In a situation somewhat similar to that of the Subaltern Studies group, where my access of the migrants’, voices was limited, the necessity of hearing their “true” voices led me to the desperate search for a migrant who has managed to speak without my or some other researchers’ interventions as a subject of investigation. Walid Nabhan’s (2005) is a text of a “migrant” published as his own – his words were not mediated by either the careful, committed or disparaging language of the journalist, the photographer or the academic/researcher. Although the text is written in Maltese and not in the native language of Nabhan, I considered it a text free of the gaze of the photographer or the researcher; a text whose title, “The Mute,” could directly and positively answer my question “Can the migrant speak?”

I approached “The Mute” believing that at last I can know what the unknown other, the migrant, has to say. Yet what I found was the same problematic of the researcher who encounters the other who does not or will not speak. I consider Walid Nabhan’s story, “The Mute,” as a deconstructive exercise of the investigator who wants to know what the mute has to say. It is an example of what Spivak refers to as following “the itinerary of silencing” (Spivak, 1990, p. 31); a guerilla warfare strategy that unmask the way certain kinds of experience and knowledge are excluded. This contrasts with the act of ‘retrieving’ the migrant’s story. Deconstruction acts as a “gadfly” (Moore, 1997, p. 84) that shows that even acts of speaking can be subject to hegemonies that leave certain things unsaid.

Nabhan, a migrant and his presentation of himself in the story, as an investigator, is a reflection of my own self as researcher - a subject of investigation. Like myself he is challenged by the silence of the migrant as the investigated other;

... a very common man, like hundreds of men we meet everyday in the street, but there was something that makes you stop and ask... Perhaps that long look into the unknown. Perhaps that heavy silence he shrouded himself into and that no one could unveil. Or that

cigarette dangling from his mouth all the time. Or... why don't I start the story at the very beginning? (Nabhan,2005,p.63).¹

His story narrates the investigator's preoccupation with the other. It also presents a body of knowledge about the other created through the usual mechanism of research. This reflects the researcher's similar and preoccupying curiosity in the other:

I am dying of curiosity - it is not voyeurism, I swear to you it isn't, but a curiosity that he sows into you. As soon as I saw that cute face, he hijacked me; the sad look in his eyes was magical. I felt bewitched like a lost small boy, wanting to run after the stranger with his mad flute. Every time I inquired about him I found the same answer, 'We have always known him like that'. (Nabhan , 2005, p. 64)²

And the researchers' obligations to reflect on the other, to follow him and observe him and gaze at the infinitesimal details of his movements:

I don't think that anybody else had become obsessed with him as I had. I always felt that I had no choice but to become obsessed with him, even when I found myself sitting behind him on the same bus; I did not know why I was doing it. When he got down, I followed him and suddenly I bumped into somebody that I knew. What are you doing in our village? A stupid question, it seemed, as if you could ask the river why it took its particular direction. (p.64)³

What I found in Nabhan's texts were the very same questions I had asked at the beginning of my search: "Can the migrant speak?", "How can I make him speak?" and other questions raised by Spivak (1988c, p. 150): "How am I naming her (the other)? How does she name me?"

Conclusion

Paradoxically it is Nabhan, a migrant herself/himself who suggests challenging ways to respond to the challenge of understanding silences between speech. Through his text, "The Mute," Nabhan (2005) migrates from his position as a migrant and mute to that of the investigator who speaks to highlight his/her places of privilege occupied by the researcher. Nabhan represents himself as migrant, as he is - a migrating subject. But in doing so he dislocates the migrant from his usual position as the person who is object of the gaze of the researcher. He deconstructs the idea of the investigator as the

¹ "... kien raġel komuni għall-aħħar, bħal mijiet ta' rġiel li niltaqgħu magħhom fit-triq kuljum, iżda kien hemm xi haġa li twaqqfek u gġagħlek tistaqsi... Forsi dik il-harsa twila fil-mhux magħruf. Forsi dak is-silenzju tqil li kien tgezwir fih u li hadd ma seta' jiksru. Jew dak is-sigarett imdendel minn fomm u l-ħin kollu. Jew... għalfejn ma nibdiex l-istorja mill-bidu?"

² "Ha tqattagħni l-kurzità- mhix kurzità li tilhaq salib in-nies, nahlef li mhix, iżda kurzità li jizragħha hu ġo fik. Malli rajt dak il-wiċċ gustuż ihħajgħakjani; dik il-harsa miksurra ta' għajnejh fiha maġija. Bdejt inħossni msahħar, qisni tifel žgħir mitluf, irrid niġri wara l-istrangier bil-flawt mignun tiegħu. Kull darba li staqsejt fuqu sibt l-istess risposta: "Minn dejjem hekk nafuh."

³ "Ma jidhirlix li xi hadd iehor kien iffissa fuqu kif ġrali jien. Dejjem hassejt li ma kellix għażla oħra hlief li niffissa, anki meta darba sibt ruhi riekeb warajh f'tal-linja, ma kellix spjegazzjoni għalfejn ridt nagħmel hekk. Kif nizel, inzilt warajh u f'daqqa wahda sibt ma wiċċi lil xi hadd li nafu. X'qed tagħmel fir-raħal tagħna? Għall-bidu l-mistoqsija dehrtili stupida, bħal meta tistaqsi lix-xmara għaliex hadet iddirezzjoni li hadet." (p.64)

knowledgeable subject, to highlight the investigator's lack of understanding of the "mute" - ironically at the point in time when the investigator feels that he has "captured" and "conquered" the other:

And who am I? Invisible. A void. I do not exist for him. I got out disappointed and shaken. And suddenly I concluded – deaf. This man is surely deaf; and generally, whoever is deaf is also mute. (Nabhan, 2005, p. 66)⁴

The story could have ended at that point. But it did not. Once, the mute came to me in the staff room at the end of the day. The others had left. He had an unlit cigarette and he seemed eager and impatient. He came straight to me and from the way he walked I knew he wanted to light his cigarette. I felt that I had the golden opportunity to lift my head out of the sand and look straight into his eyes. I felt I had the chance to conquer him and enslave him to break his long look into nowhere...

..... I looked at where he was looking to try to discover something but there was nothing except the ground. I nodded so that I could show him that I know what it feels to be "dumb" and, to end the scene and get rid of the uneasiness, I turned to the locker and began to close it slowly so that I could give that dumb man the time to go away. But when I turned, he was still there, his face full of tears. He looked at me and told me she died. (Nabhan, 2005, 66-67)⁵

This reversal of positions, of the mute who speaks (at last) and the investigator that remains lost for words at the mute's act of speech, subverts the binary – can speak/ cannot speak. It also questions the researchers' presumptuous certainties of understanding. This is done to reveal their power and at the same time hindering the reproduction of research values that have the interest of perpetuating the image of the researcher as the all knowing subject. This destabilizes research acts as truth producing processes.

Nabhan's deconstructive text suggests that acts of migration are to be mimicked by the academic. Academics and researchers who courageously migrate away from their usual and comfortable zones in searching for the different other find that they become different to themselves; to their usual understanding of themselves as researchers. Rather than solely concentrate on the difference of the other and seeking knowledge of it, the investigator should look upon the ways that the encounter with the other has made him different. The difference of a deconstructive research is that it is not obsessed with getting to know the truth but to highlight epistemological and ethical inadequacies in the attempt to know the other.

⁴ "U jien min jien? Invizibbli. Baħħ. Għalih ma neżistix. Hriġt iddiżappuntat u miksur. U f'daqqa waħda wasalt għal konklużjoni – trux. Dan ir-raġel bil-fors trux; u ġeneralment, min ikun trux, ikun mutu wkoll."

⁵ "L-istorja setgħet waqfet hemm. Izda ma waqfitx. Darba l-mutu daħal fuqi fl-*istaff room* wara li spiċċat il-ġurnata. L-oħrajn kolha kienu telqu. Kellu sigarett mhux imqabbad u kien jidher imhegġeġ u bla sabar. Baqa' ġej fuqi u mil-lingwa tal-mixja tiegħu indunjat li ried iqabbad is-sigarett. Hassejt li ġieni ċans tad-deheb biex nohroġ rasi mir-ramel u nħares dritt f'għajnejh. Hassejt li ġieni ċ-ċans biex injassru, biex nassedjah halli nikser dik il-harsa twila tiegħu fix-xejn....

.....Bdejt inħares fejn kien qed iħares biex forsi niskopri xi haġa izda ma kien hemm xejn hliet l-art. Għamilt żewġ mossi b'rasi biex nurih li naf xi jħoss "mutu" u biex nagħlaq dik ix-xena u neħles minn dik l-għafsa li bdejt inħoss, dort lejn il-*locker* u bdejt nagħlqu bil-mod halli lil dak il-mutu intih ċans jitleq, Meta dort, sibtu għadu hemm, b'wiċċu kollu dmugh. Hares lejja u b'vuċi mriegħda qalli mietet."

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