

Tariq Jazeel and Stephen Legg's edited volume, *Subaltern Geographies* is a theoretically rich collection of ten essays which reinvigorates the field of geography from a subaltern perspective. In their wide-ranging introduction, the editors critically map the debates and questions within subaltern studies collective (henceforth, SSC) and the few but growing number of geographers contributing to this tradition. Drawing mainly on the works of the SSC, the contributions invoke concepts of space, territory, scale and representation – making the book 'geographical' in its focus and scope. The book explores the relationship between geography and subalternity and its conceptual and disciplinary implications. The volume re-considers the two fundamental questions of subaltern studies, as identified by Jazeel and Legg, from the perspective of critical geographical thought -- "How should we question and critique the limits of Western thought and representation? And what can be known about the experiences of...the subaltern?" (p. 2). While the contributions trace the myriad concepts of 'subalternity', subaltern subjects and subaltern political ontology, two themes stand out in our reading of the volume -- urban studies and theory, and geopolitics of knowledge production.

For some time now, there has been a thrust towards 'provincializing' urban theory made evident from works in comparative and subaltern urbanism. This book takes this quest further, with several contributions centred around urban issues. David Arnold, for instance, urges us to shift the focus of subaltern studies towards the undertheorized subject of the 'urban subaltern' by demonstrating the city street under British rule as an example of subaltern spatiality. However, he is careful not to valorise it only as a space of opportunity and solidarity but also as a place of violence, surveillance, and caste-based divisions.

Arnold's call to pay attention to different kinds of urban subalterns and the spaces they occupy is exemplified in Gidwani and Kumar's contribution on the waste economies of Delhi.

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Their detailed account of waste pickers and scrap dealers as urban subalterns seeks to understand the ‘ethical-political question of the subaltern’ and the relationship between caste, bodies and space. Borrowing from Dalit scholarship to plug gaps within both subaltern and urban studies, they argue that the ontological conjoining of the Dalit body and supposedly defiling matter reinstates caste in cities. This intertwining has important implications for space as it determines spatial and temporal mobility of both Dalit and non-Dalit waste pickers. In doing so, the authors go beyond dominant urban theory and knowledge, a task which McFarlane champions in his chapter. McFarlane calls attention to the conceptual and empirical ‘fragment’, a marginalized category, space or group which is not yet taken seriously from a ‘subaltern studies imagination’. A fragment, explains McFarlane, may or may not be subaltern, but provides an epistemic and methodological nudge to think in new directions which can potentially ruffle the feathers of a supposedly unified urban theory and knowledge. What informs McFarlane’s approach is that urban studies is inherently plural and generative. Urban fragments can then provide new cues for theory making and for understanding multiplicity and plurality of urban practices. This chapter reiterates McFarlane’s (2010) commitment towards studying cities otherwise relegated to the periphery and south-south comparisons to develop more situated accounts and rethink urban theory-making.

While the book heavily relies on well-known works by SSC scholars like Spivak, Chatterjee, Guha, and Chakravarty, Kumar and Roy’s chapter stands out for exploring the pre-histories of subaltern studies. Through a close reading of Ranajit Guha’s text which preceded the SSC’s canonical volumes, they argue that Guha’s engagement with the ‘epistemology of property’ and historical difference is important not only for postcolonial historiography but also for urban geography and planning which are implicated in land and property relations. While an

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epistemic genealogy of property can unpack spatial politics of city planning, postcolonial state's governance of property, and its relationship with subaltern subject/citizen, it would have been interesting to see the authors tease out these connections further.

Another theme that emerges from the volume is the geopolitics of knowledge production. Chapters by Radcliffe, Laing, and Sharp go beyond the well-established historiographical focus and South Asian context of the SSC and intersect with other intellectual traditions such as decolonial thought and subaltern geopolitics. Radcliffe, in her decolonial reading of the subaltern geographies of Pachamama (an indigenous non-human entity) in Ecuador, brings into conversation South Asian subaltern literature with Latin American scholarship. By tracing the roles and actions of Pachamama and subaltern subjects, she explores the dynamics between indigenous politics, consolidation of identity, nation-state, and practices of decoloniality. In the process, she also cleverly moves subaltern intellectuals outside of academia by focusing on local socio-environment knowledges and indigenous protests, thereby theorizing subalternity from subaltern experience in the Latin American context. Another contribution on Latin America by Laing shows how the supposedly decolonial and plurinational project of Bolivia failed to realize indigenous communities' need for politico-territorial autonomy, leading to multiple subaltern resistances for self-determined governance.

Through these variously calibrated engagements with postcolonial and decolonial thought and existing subaltern studies scholarship, the book makes a welcome contribution to the discipline of geography. A productive outcome of this conceptual rigour is that it has led to a spatial re-thinking of subaltern studies and subalternity. However, we would have liked to see a more concerted dialogue with methodological questions and how to 'do' subaltern geography. Further, while the volume incorporates contributions from feminist geographers along with an

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acknowledgement of feminist underpinnings of Spivak's celebratory essay, a more thorough engagement with feminist geographies and themes that reorient concepts of race, gender, class and caste within subaltern scholarship would have lent the volume an additional critical edge. Nonetheless, the book does successfully deal with some of the contemporary synergies and critical tensions that undergird subaltern scholarship with respect to geographical and decolonial Latin American scholarship and invites scholars to engage with subalternity within and beyond the discipline of geography.

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References

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