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## "Resistance is Futile? Enduring Hegemony Despite Ideological Challenge"

Tracy Lassiter

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# RESISTANCE IS FUTILE?

## ENDURING HEGEMONY DESPITE IDEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE

TRACY LASSITER

Hegemonic discourse often portrays as “normal” or desirable the use of fossil fuels, despite the devastation brought through accessing those fuels. Currently, some of the worst examples of this devastation result from the petroleum industry. However, efforts to challenge its practices—and its hegemonic power—in fact reinforce other forms of hegemonic power. This article examines some of those instances.

This article analyzes filmmaker Joe Berlinger’s 2009 documentary *Crude*. *Crude* features the lawsuit filed by 30,000 Ecuadorian people against Chevron. Ironically, *Crude* shows how Western upper-class privilege is invoked to solve the Ecuadorians’ problems. We can infer their resistance to one hegemonic power—i.e., a multinational petroleum corporation—is only possible through using other hegemonic power like white, male, upper-class privilege. This article draws upon Gayatri Spivak’s canonical text “Can the Subaltern Speak” and Louis Althusser’s concept of ideological apparatuses to support this claim.

Le discours hégémonique décrit l’usage des combustibles fossiles comme « normal » ou même souhaitable, malgré les effets dévastateurs de leur extraction. Actuellement les plus pires exemples proviennent de l’industrie pétrolière. Toutefois les efforts afin de défier ce discours et son pouvoir hégémonique suscitent en réalité d’autres formes d’hégémonie.

Cet article examine quelques-unes de ces instances à travers le documentaire Joe Berlinger, paru en 2009. *Crude* le procès intenté par quelques 30 000 Équatoriens contre Chevron. On peut associer le pouvoir hégémonique contre lequel ceux-ci luttent, c’est-à-dire celui de l’entreprise pétrolière multinationale, avec un autre pouvoir hégémonique : celui du blanc, de l’homme du privilège aristocratique. Ironiquement, le film montre comment les privilèges de l’aristocratie de l’Ouest sont mis de l’avant pour essayer de résoudre les problèmes des Équatoriens. Cet article s’inspire du texte canonique « Can the Subaltern Speak » de Gayatri Spivak, ainsi que du concept des appareils idéologiques de Louis Althusser, afin de soutenir son hypothèse.

Fans of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* will recognize this article title's allusion to the Borg. For those not familiar with the series or the characters, the Borg are a race of cybernetic beings who subsume the interstellar species they encounter into their vast collective mind. Most living organisms encountering the Borg are doomed; as the Borg forewarn prior to their organic takeover: "Resistance is futile; you will be assimilated."

I thought of the Borg while I watched filmmaker Joe Berlinger's 2009 documentary *Crude*, which portrays the circumstances surrounding one of the largest environmental lawsuits in the world. Thirty thousand Ecuadorans, largely those from indigenous populations, filed the suit *Aguinda vs. Chevron* against the oil giant. My mental leap from the documentary to the single-minded entity intent on domination reminded me of the petroleum industry itself, that vast multinational force whose world-wide omnipresence seems as diffuse as the Borgs' in the galaxy's Delta Quadrant.

That is, it seems almost impossible to believe a marginalized population could succeed against a global-capitalistic industry with billions of dollars at its disposal. Those oppressed by such power structures often have no choice but to participate in them, akin to being taken over through Borgian transformation. After all, as world-systems theorist Immanuel Wallerstein writes, "[historical capitalism] is that social system in which those who have operated by such rules [of endless accumulation] have had such great impact on the whole as to create conditions wherein the others have been forced to conform to the patterns or to suffer the consequences", an either/or scenario that all but guarantees capitalistic assimilation (Wallerstein 18). Further, as I watched events unfold throughout the film, it occurred to me that while the Ecuadorans fight petro-capitalism's hegemonic power, they often are forced to use—and thus reinforce—other hegemonic structures to do so. The question I then considered was whether true resistance to hegemonic power is ever possible for the subaltern figure.

What follows is my attempt to address this question, demonstrated by the film's events and framed by petro-ideological structures currently in place. In the twenty-first century, it is difficult to name a topic that offers more pressing social, economic, and political concerns than energy. The oil and gas industry has been particularly implicated in matters of human rights, social justice and environmental exploitation in locations the world over. As noted by watch groups, NGOs, academics, and others, petroleum-based corporate power runs largely unchecked, aided by systemic infrastructure reinforcing its neo-liberal interests and agenda. For me, the term 'systemic infrastructures' initially calls to mind what Marxist theorist Louis Althusser described as 'state apparatuses' that reinforce ideology and hegemony.

Althusser builds upon Karl Marx's theory that for a social formation to survive, it must reproduce the conditions that allowed its production in the first place. Althusser argues this social formation survives through an ideology promoted through 'repressive apparatuses' such as the courts, police, and military, and through 'state apparatuses' that reinforce certain behaviors. Ideological state apparatuses include cultural productions like family structures, religious and educational institutions, and the media. Relative to the issue of petrocultures, the media message propounded by the energy industry touts hydrocarbon fuel-use as both desirable and available.<sup>1</sup> It usually downplays 'green energy' alternatives while claiming that its rampant exploitative actions are justifiable—as, for example Exxon Mobil claims, in the name of national security.

The localized consequences of such a hegemonic agenda in subaltern contexts frequently go unnoticed by the wealthier nations of the global North who benefit most from this system. For example, while the contaminated rainforest site was on Amazon Watch's list for years, Clean Up Ecuador advocate Leila Salazar says it is otherwise "virtually impossible for indigenous people in Ecuador to make the American public aware of the crimes committed by U.S. firms in their communities" (Juhasz 251). Petro-capitalism renders subaltern figures, like the plaintiffs in the Chevron suit, powerless in and

marginal to its structures. For instance, the indigenous plaintiffs claim that for thirty years Texaco (now Chevron since its 2001 merger) contaminated the air and land of the rainforest where they live.<sup>2</sup> The oil industry's effects on water may even be more critical than the claims already made about air and land, as the Ecuadorans use local waterways for canoe traveling, drinking, washing and bathing. The Amazonian area overall has experienced rates of cancer, miscarriages, skin diseases, and other ailments comparable to those experienced in the aftermath of Chernobyl. On January 4, 2011, an Ecuadoran appellate court upheld an \$18 billion judgment against Chevron, finding the company liable for the vast contamination it caused. However, this lawsuit remains unsettled and related cases, such as those filed against Joe Berlinger himself, have been brought by Chevron.

While the consequences of rampant petro-power to the global South subaltern often go unnoticed by the global northern viewer, they can come to his/her attention through alternative "image-derived realit[ies]" such as *Crude*. *Crude* and similar documentaries become a site of resistance to petro-ideology; hence, the image serves as an arena where "the real power relations that control society and the ideologies that prevent society from realizing social and political freedom" and those forces opposed to them do battle (Kul-Want and Piero 18). Cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek argues that understanding the existing power relations and ideologies means getting at 'the truth' that people are not free (Kul-Want and Piero 22). Given the limitations to social and political power created by these hegemonic structures, we can deduce that one limitation imposed on the subaltern figure is access to voice.

Gayatri Spivak, in her canonical essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", is critical of Foucaultian-Deleuzian analyses of power situations. Spivak argues that these analyses, as well as postcolonial critiques, often fail to fully explore such power imbalances, and she proposes that we ask the important question: "On the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside *and* outside the circuit of the epistemic

violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, *can the subaltern speak?*" (Spivak 283, original emphasis).

Spivak answers her rhetorical question with an emphatic negative. She states that all too frequently, the subaltern has no means of speaking for herself under colonial and other power structures. Furthermore, Spivak continues, that situation is not ameliorated even by members of the dominant class, like academics, who think they are helping and who believe "they know the 'other' and can place it in the context of the narrative of the oppressed" (Maggio 420). Spivak argues the postcolonial scholar/critic assumes a formed solidarity with the subalterns and, believing himself to be so allied with this population, speaks on their behalf instead of allowing them to speak for themselves. When this occurs, the subaltern remains subordinated and the critic maintains a privileged position.

The other danger here, Spivak warns, is that the Western dominant figure frequently conceives of the subaltern as a homogeneous, or essentialized, group. The Subaltern Studies project, a group of historians led by Ranajit Guha, had the "explicit aim of expanding and enriching Gramsci's notion of the subaltern" by "conced[ing] on the diversity, heterogeneity and overlapping nature of subaltern groups" (Galfarsoro). My interest in raising Guha's inclusive definition here is that it serves as a way of framing instances of subaltern silencing in *Crude*. In these cases, the subaltern subject shifts. It may be an Ecuadoran or a European woman; it may be a child or an indigenous protester. In each, though, a countervailing hegemonic power is strengthened. After offering an analysis of this pattern in Berlinger's film, I return to my original question about whether the subaltern figure can ever speak to power without reinforcing its hegemony, and what socio-cultural structures could be required if that is to be possible.

### The Subaltern, Interrupted

*Crude* opens with a Cofán woman explaining what has befallen her people since Texaco's arrival in their region in the 1970s. In addition to discussing the loss of her



Fig. 1

brothers, she describes the erosion of Cofán cultural identity as the people became ashamed to wear their traditional dress and decorations around company employees. And, she says, most of the tribe's women no longer sing their traditional songs.

As a message to the film's viewers, she sings one of those songs. It is part lament and part plea. She asks, "What will happen to the children? What will become of my people?" Overall, she says, her point is "to tell the world so that the world can know what has been done" (*Crude*). The woman is not faceless to viewers, but she does remain nameless. As her song fades, the film cuts to a news clip from a San Francisco television channel. It features Ecuadoran lawyer Pablo Fajardo and his colleague Luis Yanza receiving the 2008 Goldman Environmental Prize.

According to Berlinger's "Director's Statement" once posted on the *Crude* website, Fajardo's rise from humble labourer in the oil fields to lead attorney in the lawsuit to internationally recognized activist made

him a "compelling central character" upon whom to hang the narrative arc. While the woman remains unidentified and her voice is replaced by that of a white, male, American media personality, Fajardo becomes the prominent face and voice of the movement due to his cultural heritage, his activism, and his legal education. Admittedly, logistics dictate that someone must speak on behalf of the 30,000 Ecuadorans—who call themselves *los afectados*, or 'the affected ones'—as it would be virtually impossible for each member to speak for himself or herself in every venue. Yet, like the Cofán woman, in myriad ways throughout the film the subaltern figure is rendered silent.

*Crude* frequently exemplifies this tendency even though Berlinger and Steven Donziger, the American environmental lawyer who takes up the Ecuadorans' cause in the U.S., may not intend this. For example, in his posted article entitled "Crude Realities," Berlinger says that by making the film he brings "a much-needed portrait of human suffering to a wider audience." Certainly he does this, and *Crude* won an impressive list

of awards as a result, including the National Board of Review's "Best Documentary of the Year" and Cinema for Peace's "International Green Film Award." *Crude* is a compelling film and it *is* able to bring "an audience into a world they probably have never seen before" ("Statement"). Furthermore, Berlinger explicitly raises Marxist and postcolonial theoretical issues, stating:

There are deeper, more nuanced and complex themes that resonate far beyond this particular case. What are the roles of corporate power, government, the media and big money in cases such as this, with a long history and potentially enormous consequences? What does it take to tackle an environmental and human rights problem of this magnitude? How has the white man's historically appalling treatment of indigenous people in the Americas over the past five centuries played a role in the history—and outcome—of this case? (ibid.)

Yet as Spivak points out, answering these sorts of questions becomes the subaltern's burden. Any audience that has not seen the South American context presented by *Crude* is provided a visual, Westernized narrative representation through which to access the Cofán, Secoya or Huaorani culture. Viewers learn of the subalterns' position as represented by a central figure (Fajardo) through the perspective of an outside figure who is white, male, elite, and American (Berlinger the filmmaker) and groomed for appearance in that society by another white male elite (Donziger, the lawyer). English subtitles not only eliminate the necessity for the Western viewer to speak A'ingae or Spanish (another colonial language) but the film also eradicates any need for Westerners to meet Ecuadoran subjects in their own context. The film not only translates language, but visually reinvents and transposes for a Western media-consuming public the Ecuadoran subject. The voice the audience eventually hears may be that of the subaltern, but only after it is first run through various hegemonic filters.

Of greater concern are the instances where the elite figure replaces the subalterns' words with his own. Donziger does this a number of times throughout the

film. As an international lawyer, Donziger is captured on film moulding and coaching Ecuadoran subjects to represent themselves in conformity with Western legal conventions and cultural norms, a practice reproduced on the level of the film itself. For example, when preparing two Ecuadorans to testify before a Chevron shareholder meeting, Donziger listens while Emergildo Criollo rehearses in Spanish his brief speech. Criollo ends his discourse with the query, "I want to ask Chevron, are you ever going to clean up or offer compensation to the Amazon?" While Donziger tells Criollo in Spanish, "That was good," he separately in English tells his assistant, Kevin, "I don't think his speech was good." He rattles off a list of ideas and phrases he wants Criollo to present to the shareholders the next day. For example, Donziger anticipates the company will try to quash or interrupt Criollo's presentation; if that happens he wants Criollo prepared to say, "You spent twenty-eight years in my territory—I can spend three minutes in your territory." He also includes an appeal to Chevron's "ethical and moral obligations" to the people left within a few years the Cofán nation ceases to exist. Donziger tells Kevin, who will work with Criollo to learn these statements, "You have to control this guy and get him up to speed."

He also reminds Kevin that Criollo "is relying on you. He's in our land right now." Donziger's substitution of Criollo's words with his own in this instance makes a certain sense. After all, Criollo is confronting a Western hegemonic force on its own turf, and Donziger recognizes Criollo must wield the logic and rhetoric of Western hegemony in order to be effective against it. What makes this situation lamentable is that, as Spivak reminds us, it is incumbent upon the subaltern to speak to power in that power's language. In the act of resisting a given power, the oppressed must accommodate it, which reinforces that power's privileged position. At the same time, the hegemonic force itself feels no sense of obligation to hear the subaltern's voice on the subaltern's terms. Its power is so great it can dismiss or ignore any other paradigm or ideology.

This is why another instance of Donziger's assumption of subaltern voice rings as less forgivable. Within a

few hours of Rafael Correa's inauguration, Donziger strategizes. He says the group needs a plan to bring the new Ecuadoran president to the contaminated region to see it for himself. He, Luis Yanza, and Lupita de Heredia of the Amazon Defense Front argue about this upon leaving the inaugural events. De Heredia tells Donziger they have already contacted Correa's office to ask about having the president visit the sites. She says the office won't give them an appointment with Correa; they must go through his ministers. In order to reach the president directly, she tells him, "We need a very clear strategy." Donziger cannot understand why such a strategy is not already in place, noting Correa was president-elect for nearly two months before his inauguration. "Why don't you make a plan?" he asks with some exasperation. Yanza counters by saying, "I don't understand what 'a plan' is for the gringos. [...] Your plan is a list of things. Here in Ecuador that's not a plan. [...] For us a plan is where you discuss, analyze, put people in charge, and set dates, decide how it will be evaluated, the methodology. That's a plan." Donziger puts down Yanza's statement, saying what he describes isn't a plan but a "bureaucracy" that will allow months to pass with nothing happening. He tells them the time to act is now, and exhorts the others to agree with him, asking, "Am I right or no?" De Heredia answers him with an unequivocal "No." To his credit, Donziger backs off, asking less forcefully, "Am I a little right?" and de Heredia reluctantly admits he is. But on the whole this exchange demonstrates the clash that ensues from Western hegemony attempting to assert itself on another population. During this disagreement, Donziger at times talks over both Yanza and de Heredia, raising his voice in order to quiet theirs. Yanza tries to explain to him that Donziger's plan simply to contact Correa directly will not work, saying, "Steve, it's not like that" in Ecuador, and Donziger does not bother to ask them how it in fact *is*. Instead he devalues Yanza's knowledge by dismissing the Ecuadoran's explanation of what constitutes an action plan as "bureaucracy." The Ecuadoran point of view represents a *mélange* of cultural, social, legal and economic perspectives. These include, though not exclusively, Western practices and concepts. However, Donziger commits the hegemonic fault of essentializing his colleagues into one large 'non-

Western' category; he makes no concession for their cultural differences in his approach to problem solving and strategizing. Last, Donziger insists that he is right, which comports with an imperialist view that asserts its way is the best, and only, way in which to proceed.

However, as mentioned, since Donziger is a member of the dominant class, he knows how to confront hegemonic power. Because he's adept at this, he is able to accomplish what Salazar says indigenous communities otherwise can't: make the American public aware of the crimes committed by U.S. firms in those communities. Specifically, Donziger uses the media—a key Althusserian ideological apparatus—to generate that awareness.

It begins with *Crude* itself. According to Berlinger, Donziger approached him in 2005 "looking for a filmmaker to be [the plaintiffs'] advocate with a very singular point of view" ("Realities"). Berlinger admits at first he was reluctant to pursue the project for a variety of reasons, including his artistic ethic of "explor[ing] a situation from all sides without overtly revealing" a particular viewpoint (*ibid.*). Yet upon taking Donziger's suggestion to travel to Ecuador and after seeing the "shocking ecological disaster" for himself, he decided to make *Crude*, which subsequently took three years to complete. As a film, television, and commercial director, Berlinger, like Donziger, recognizes media's power to shape culture. After his initial trip to the Amazon, he felt urged to "shine a light" on the situation. He maintains the film still presents both sides of the story fairly enough for viewers to draw their own conclusion regarding the issue. At the same time, he expresses surprise at the otherwise "scant press coverage this story received in the U.S."

That changes when the public relations firm Donziger uses tells him the Ecuadorans' struggle could be a key feature in a forthcoming special issue of *Vanity Fair* dedicated to the environment. Donziger says, "Through the years, we've gotten a fair amount of press but we have never broken through to the consciousness of the American people in a significant way" (*Crude*).

*Vanity Fair* does pursue the story, and the article entitled “Jungle Law” appears in its May 2007 issue. Journalist William Langewiesche nicely details the case’s complexity and addresses the “emotional battle in a makeshift jungle courtroom”. He focuses the story largely on Fajardo, and this triggers a sequence of events that propels Fajardo and the Amazonians’ cause into the international spotlight.

Fajardo becomes the film and lawsuit’s heroic figure for good reason. As the *Vanity Fair* article reports, he worked as a labourer for years, beginning at age fourteen clearing jungle growth with a machete. When he was seventeen, his parents separated and then left, leaving him in charge of caring for his many siblings. At that age, he also helped found a local human-rights group to fight corporate exploitation. Fajardo says the palm-grove company he had been working for sent spies after him, and he was fired as a subversive and labour unionist. He then went to work as a laborer for an oil company while completing his secondary education in night school and his law degree via correspondence. He was supported financially in part by friends and through scholarships arranged by local priests. He had only been a lawyer for a year when a team of settlers and indigenous leaders asked him to take over as their legal advocate for the class-action suit they had filed. It was his first trial (Langewiesche). As Berlinger says of Fajardo, “His humble beginnings and his love of his people—and the love he gets in return—stand in stark contrast to the label of ‘environmental con man’ bestowed upon him by Chevron’s PR department. This gaping chasm in perception in how he is seen by his people and how he is talked about by the oil giant seemed like the seeds of a great drama” (“Realities”). In this case, this discrepancy in perception becomes a key dramatic element of the cinematic narrative Berlinger constructs with *Crude*.

Perhaps it is Fajardo’s rags-to-riches story that makes him so appealing to Western audiences, especially Americans who like a good Horatio Alger-esque up-by-his-bootstraps figure. Or perhaps, as the film mentions several times, it is a “David and Goliath” story. It could also be that Fajardo comes across as genuinely sincere.

He lives humbly despite Chevron’s accusations that he is only in this lawsuit for the payout. He faces such accusations graciously, remarking in the film, “I have never felt inferior to any of the Texaco lawyers because when I say something, they have to think one thousand times to come up with a lie in order to counter my truth” (*Crude*). Even upon seeing the several-page spread in *Vanity Fair*, which features his picture several times, Fajardo is self-effacing. He wishes they would have focused less on him and more on “this one sick family” because “they are the very expression of the problem.”

Yet the light shining on Fajardo sometimes leaves others in the shadows. Luis Yanza shares the 2008 Goldman Environmental Prize with Fajardo because it was his organization that first filed suit against Texaco in 1993 (Goldman). However, Yanza appears only in a few scenes in *Crude*<sup>3</sup> and warrants only four sentences in the “Jungle Law” article. While it devotes several pages to Fajardo’s past and history of activism, no such detail emerges about Yanza. Early in the article, however, are some revealing clues as to the reasons for this elision. Langewiesche’s early mention of Fajardo describes him as a “mestizo,” while his first mention of Yanza points out his “features that are purely Inca”. Little is said of what he argues in the judge’s office except that he “bluntly challenged Chevron’s legal tactics”. The privileging of Fajardo’s discourse and role in the trial may represent racially encoded socio-cultural hierarchies linked to the history of colonialism. Thus, even though we have a great many words from the *mestizo* activist, we read none from the one who is explicitly indexed as classically (even paradigmatically), “purely” indigenous. At the end of this section of the article, Langewiesche paraphrases the judge before whom this heated exchange has occurred. He tells the reporter the lawsuit is a fight not just about oil companies in the jungle but about “500 years of South American history”. Unwittingly, and likely as a result of five hundred years of embedded ideology, the colonial mindset still permeates these media forms, silencing a subaltern because of his visible difference from the global northern viewer witnessing this story.<sup>4</sup>



Despite these colonial echoes, the *Vanity Fair* article does succeed in bringing the activists' cause to a broader international audience. Amazon Watch and Donziger organize a press conference on the steps of San Francisco's city hall about the lawsuit, bringing Fajardo and another Ecuadoran representative as guest speakers; they capitalize on the *Vanity Fair* article, telling local media outlets of the magazine's coverage and pitching the story to the local press as "jungle guy comes to big city". Later, back in Ecuador, President Correa does visit the contaminated sites for himself, and he carries the issue of *Vanity Fair* with him. Viewers are not sure if the organization was able to bring Correa through a successful plan it might have eventually worked out on its own or if the added attention by the magazine convinced him of the situation's severity. Nonetheless, upon his visit Correa states, "The world needs to know about this." After all, he rightly points out, this devastation is more damaging than the *Exxon Valdez* spill, yet the latter occurred in the U.S. "so this doesn't matter".

As Salazar earlier notes and Correa's comments reflect, it's difficult for the global South to make the global North aware of the damage in their area wrought by petroleum corporations. Donziger intends to make northern audiences aware of these injustices, and he intentionally seeks celebrity affiliation to do so. The film depicts him as he heads to London to meet Trudie Styler, wife of musician Sting and co-founder with him of the Rainforest Foundation. Donziger wants Styler to promote the Ecuadorans' cause and visit the contaminated sites in person; she agrees to do so.

In Ecuador, Styler attends a large meeting of the Cofán; they are trying to determine how much to demand in the lawsuit, although as Donziger admits it is difficult to put a price tag on what has been lost. As he reports, the Cofán population has dwindled in the thirty years since Texaco's arrival from 15,000 to just a few hundred people. Styler tells the meeting attendees she "stands in solidarity" with them and will take their message back to England and to the U.S. She says she considers their struggle "our fight as well." Here, Styler eerily epitomizes

Spivak's argument about the postcolonial figure's identification with the oppressed members' cause and subsequent appropriation of their voice.

Styler and Sting's Rainforest Foundation do provide local community members with large barrels so they can catch rainwater, which Styler acknowledges serves only as a temporary and insufficient solution to a larger problem. Aside from this practical assistance, she telephones Fajardo at his office to inform him she has been "telling [his] story to so many people." She invites him to New York City to attend the Live Earth concert where her husband will perform with his band. In perhaps the film's most telling moment of subaltern access to voice, Fajardo admits to one New York interviewer he has never heard of the rock band The Police before, yet says with a grin, "but now I'm with Sting."

### Truth to Power

In various ways—as depicted in *Crude* and through the conditions leading to the lawsuit itself—the subalterns' power is limited or appropriated. Through the Ecuadorans' efforts to resist petro-hegemonic power, they must tap other channels of hegemonic power. As the film portrays, this culminates in Fajardo's association with an internationally renowned, white, affluent Western male. It seems when they try to speak, the Ecuadorans are silenced by various structures that maintain their subordinate position.

*Crude* therefore is a valuable cultural text because it points out instances where global Northerners reify their hegemonic power even when their purported intention is to do otherwise. They may do so unwittingly, which means that changing these power dynamics requires raising awareness of instances of subaltern quieting. In fact, I must apply such awareness to this very article. That is, while critiquing the forms of subaltern silencing *Crude* depicts, am I in fact speaking for the subalterns? Do they even *want* to speak? Is my defending their voice a form of *meta*-appropriation? Even Spivak admits fault in this regard, saying, "I think it is important to acknowledge our complicity in the muting,

in order precisely to be more effective in the long run” (qtd. in Maggio 428). From this theoretical position, we can begin to question the structures reinforcing the subalterns’ silence and consider some solutions.

We can take a cue from Marx about how next to proceed. Just as he tried to get workers to think of themselves as agents of production and as not victims of capitalism, we should reconsider the subaltern as agent of hegemonic change and not as victim of corporate exploitation. Such a perspective frames the subaltern with *activity*, not *passivity*. Seeing the subaltern as active agents in their own right means letting go of our hegemonic impulse to speak on their behalf.

Yet I am left with more questions than answers. What are we to make, for example, of the Amazon tribes’ successfully using hegemonic structures to win their lawsuit? That they were successful even though silenced? What is the difference between being able to speak and being heard? How can we balance the world’s need to know, the subalterns’ desire to speak, and the hegemon’s duty to listen? Last, how can we benefit from working outside our paradigm? What could we gain by doing so?

Through cultural formations like *Crude* and *Star Trek*, we can see the positive results of being free from paradigmatic structures. In the *Star Trek* series *The Next Generation* and *Voyager*, two Borg figures, Hugh and Seven of Nine respectively, at some point leave the collective mind. Once free of the Borgian mind, these characters realize their individual consciousness. Through it, they discover they have the ability to ask questions and make choices. Hugh chooses to return to the Borg in order to keep his *Next Generation* friends safe, but after he does so the sense of individuality he acquired spreads to others in the collective. As Hugh, Seven of Nine, and other rogue Borgian figures symbolize, resistance to hegemonic structure is possible. And though the Amazonian subalterns reinforced certain forms of hegemonic power while fighting another (petro-capitalism), in the end they claimed an unprecedented \$18 billion victory against multinational power. If all these figures—real and invented—proved successful in their fight against

power structures, then perhaps resistance isn’t utterly futile after all.

### Image Notes

Fig. 1 “Crude—Song of the Amazon.” Web. August 31, 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcfftXZmDBs>>

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#### (Endnotes)

1. See, for example, Shell’s “Let’s Go – 2012” and Exxon Mobil’s “Oil Sands: A Resource for Energy Security and Economic Growth” television commercials, both available on YouTube.

2. These include the Secoya, Siona, Cofan, Huaorani, and Quichua as well as other “colonial settlers” (*Crude*).

3. One of the longer scenes in which Yanza appears features him participating in a “media blitz” day where he appears on various radio stations and television talk shows. As Spivak might say, he speaks in solidarity with other members who are aware of their oppressed condition.

4. Ironically, when Donziger first sees the *Vanity Fair* article while visiting the PR firm’s offices, he calls the pages “paradigm-shifting” (*Crude*).

**Lassiter, Tracy:** Tracy Lassiter is an ABD English student in Indiana University of Pennsylvania’s Literature and Criticism program. She received her Master’s Degree in Comparative Literature from Indiana University and subsequently taught English for five years at Eastern Arizona College before entering IUP’s PhD program. Currently, she is writing a dissertation on petrofiction.

**Lassiter, Tracy :** Tracy Lassiter est doctorante en anglais à l’Université de l’Indiana en Pennsylvanie dans le cadre du programme de littérature et critique. Elle a obtenu sa maîtrise en littérature comparée de l’Université de l’Indiana, puis elle a enseigné l’anglais pendant cinq ans au Collège de l’Eastern Arizona avant d’y commencer son doctorat qui porte sur la « pétrofiction ».

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