
**“LIKE A BROKEN PEBBLE FROM THE PAVEMENT” — TWO READINGS ON
SUBALTERNITY AND THE WOMAN CONDITION IN SAADAT HASAN
MANTO'S “THE INSULT” (1948)**

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ABSTRACT

Manto's writings are hardly as controversial and ground-breaking as his series of short stories about Bombay's prostitutes and the world surrounding them. My paper aims to give at least two readings of the story of Saugandhi and “the insult” she receives when being rejected by a client. Her burst of pent-up rage, helpless but terrible, can be interpreted either as a positive act of realization of her own condition or as a reaffirmation of powerlessness in the face of the dominant. Using the tools of the canonic and original concept of the subaltern, with Gramsci (1916) and Spivak (1985) delimiting its oppressed (non)identity, Saugandhi's consciousness of herself becomes the voice which the subaltern cannot utter. Manto's essays (1955) show major concern with the desperate state of sexual workers, and it is through his feminism that this paper will discard the abstract notion of subalternity and highlight how gender makes “the woman who didn't have a father's shelter, had no education, ...a broken pebble from the pavement” (Manto, 2014: 204). The short story is not, as it may seem in abstract terms, empowering; it is a wretched cry that ends in silence —there is nothing to be done.

KEYWORDS: Body, Consciousness, Female empowerment, Feminism, Patriarchy, Prostitution, Subalternity.

RESUMEN: *Como una piedra rota en la calzada — Dos lecturas sobre la subalternidad y la situación de la mujer en “The Insult” (1948) de Saadat Hasan Manto*

La producción más controvertida y revolucionaria de Manto es sin lugar a dudas su serie de cuentos en torno a las prostitutas de Bombay y del mundo en el que viven. Mi ensayo pretende ofrecer dos lecturas de la historia de Saugandhi y de su reacción ante “el insulto” que recibe al ser rechazada por un cliente. Su enorme ira, desesperada y terrible, puede ser interpretada como una liberación, al reconocer su estatus, o como una reafirmación de su lugar de sumisión. La reacción airada de Saugandhi se convierte a través de la óptica de Gramsci (1916) y Spivak (1985) en la posible voz de la subalterna. La preocupación de Manto en sus ensayos (1955) en relación con el estado deplorable de las trabajadoras sexuales va a ser el catalizador para entender la experiencia de Saugandhi no como una victoria abstracta de cualquier subalterna/o sino como una víctima de su género, porque “la mujer que no tuvo la protección del padre, que no tuvo educación, es como una piedra rota en la calzada” (Manto, 2014a: 204). El cuento no es empoderador como inicialmente podría parecer, es un grito desesperado que muere en silencio; no hay nada que hacer.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cuerpo, Consciencia, Empoderamiento de la mujer, Feminismo, Patriarcado, Subalternidad.

Manto's stories are well-known for their fierce social criticism, but literary criticism has often only taken into consideration his writings on Partition. However, Manto's production in Bombay before the conflict was highly political. His views on the underworld of prostitution are radical and sharp, his style always being simple but fierce, with dozens of striking graphic images. The aim of this article is to analyze the story "The Insult" (originally published in 1948) and offer two readings of the protagonist's reaction to the insult that she receives by being rejected by a client. The "Yuhkk" of this client, a driver that inspects Saugandhi with a torch in the middle of a night, does not silence her. Instead, after feeling like an ugly, hopeless object, she revolts against the world she is living in and erupts "in bitter laughter. It rained from her lips like embers flying from a grindstone" (65). She does away with the pictures of the three men that rule over her by throwing them furiously out of the window of her apartment and literally kicks Madho (one of those three men who comes to take her money) out of her place with the words "Get out of here –or else!"(68). Considering that canonical affirmation that the subaltern cannot speak, after Spivak's reassessment of the figure of the subaltern by Guha and his colleagues (1982), it is quite remarkable to assess Saugandhi's reaction from the point of view of subalternity; without a doubt, her reaction is a threat to the elite that oppresses her. However, despite voicing her silence and thus opposing canonical definitions of the subaltern that relegate subalternity to voicelessness, Saugandhi's actions do not ultimately change her status as a woman and as a prostitute. Therefore, this paper will firstly point out the relations of dominance present in Manto's story to end up describing the subaltern in those original terms, using Gramsci's coinage and definition (2013; originally 1916) along with Chatterjee's (2000) and eventually Spivak's (2000; 2003). Finally, in the line of Spivak's remarks concerning feminism and subaltern studies (2000) added to Manto's statements on prostitution (2014b), I will offer a second reading of the text, in which Saugandhi does not succeed in breaking the shackles of domination, but has only become conscious of the chains that she will never be able to get rid of.

It is remarkable in how many instances in the story prostitution is seen as an industry; the exchange of money is continuously highlighted, and also the dependence of all the characters on it, especially Saugandhi. Manto's opinions on prostitution were not

(only) provocative and “obscene”, as his stories were once deemed (seven of his stories were censored and brought to court for obscenity, both before and after Partition). His treatment of the profession as such is also extremely remarkable, because of the irony he employs and especially because he highlights how society should take responsibility for the state of prostitutes in a very straightforward manner. Consider, for instance, the following statements:

It’s possible that our office clerk, should he have no other option, might also turn to selling alcohol. We would not hate him for this, even if we don’t like those who drink. What reason could there be for such hatred to be shown only when a woman offers to sell what she has of value –her body? (Manto, 2014b: 204)

A woman who honestly puts her wares on display, and sells them without an intention to cheat, is such a woman not virtuous? (Manto, 2014b: 205)

On the one hand, he underlines the dignity of it, as with any other job, when posing the moral question “is such a woman not virtuous?”. On the other hand, he expresses his concern and solidarity for the women who are nothing but slaves of the patriarchal capitalist system (a woman who “offers to sell what she has of value [...] without an intention to cheat”), a system which is corrupted morally to such an extent that it condemns the most diligent worker to the label “whore”. This insistence on economy points to his affinity with the communist movement. From an early age, Manto was well aware of the European ideology, to the extent that “as he later wrote, he and his friends, walking the streets of Amritsar, would pretend that they were in Moscow launching a revolution” (Hasan, 2007: x); most significantly, he joined the Progressive Writers Association (founded in 1934), which was based on the principles of the socialist movement and anti-imperialism. As for the figure of Marx, Manto even wrote a radio play called “Karl Marx” which extolled him (Naeem, 2012). In his introduction to the Penguin *Selected Stories* of the author, Khalid Hasan points out how “Manto had great empathy with those on the outer fringes of society. He had a natural feeling of oneness with the poor and the despised. [...] He also had contempt for the hypocrisy and double standards of so-called ‘respectable’ society” (Hasan, 2007: xii). This might be the reason why the dignity of the “fallen woman” (Manto, 2014b: 203) is highlighted in his stories and justified as virtuous because it is done “without an intention to cheat” (Manto, 2014b: 205).

This defense of the hopeless, of the “poor and the despised”, as Hasan put it, and the act of writing their (hi)stories is exactly what Gramsci wanted when he coined the term subaltern in his *Prison Notebooks* (1929-1935) and envisioned their journey into having a voice, a history and a state. As Spivak points out (2003), the actual term “subaltern” might have been a way of avoiding censorship (as “proletariat” would not have been printed), and, as such, it took for granted the description of any idiosyncratic traits the subaltern might possess apart from its evident submission to the ruling class and its inability to unify and speak up to right their wrongs and write their history. However, this lack of information which Spivak would later criticize, especially because it is gender-blind, allowed the term to be more than a description of the Italian peasants and industrial workers under fascist rule, and suit any stratified society. This is the reason why it is pertinent to refer back to the subaltern having in mind the shady, competitive and business-centered Bombay, and Manto’s darkest portrayals of it. However, Saugandhi’s story of subalternity might be the most peculiar of them all, for it represents a woman who revolts against patriarchal capitalist rule and thus acquires a voice — something which Spivak (2003) resolved could not happen, for it is impossible for the subaltern to break her shackles. This uniqueness deserves to be studied, to decide on whether it is a genuine case of liberation or, yet again, the reaffirmation of Spivak’s conclusions. Nonetheless, why Saugandhi could be understood as a subaltern subject should be justified beforehand.

As mentioned before, Manto’s style is abrupt, shockingly direct, and the images and analogies that he uses serve a very clear function, which is to raise the awareness of the reader to extremes which she had never thought of before. Saugandhi’s inescapable subservience to money is made explicit by constant reminders of her status as a prostitute. The very beginning of the story outlines extremely well her situation of submission:

The official from the city’s Sanitation Department whom she called “Boss” had just fucked her and left for home in a drunken stupor. (...) It seemed as if the coins were melting right into her blood! (Manto, 2014a: 46)

In the first paragraph, it is perfectly clear to what extent Saugandhi is oppressed, from having to call her client *boss* (a *mental* domination, so to speak) to feeling as if the warm coins on her skin, the small price for her body, melt right into her blood. It is noteworthy how, through this simple comparison, the reader learns that the only value she has is equivalent to her body. It is almost as if she herself was money and nothing else. “All this

trouble for seven and a half rupees” (Manto, 2014a: 55), she tells herself at one point. This brutal objectification of her as a body to be used is taken to the extreme by means of the following image: “She felt as though someone was pressing his thumb against her ribs, as you press your thumb into a sheep or goat to see if there is any meat beneath the hair”. (Manto, 2014a: 62)

This harsh remark is made after her potential client rejects her, after inspecting her with a torch. The expression of disgust that he utters, “Yukkh!” (Manto, 2014a: 57) obsesses her to such a degree that she assumes she might not even be a proper “sheep or goat” to be eaten for the cheap price of seven and a half rupees. The list of her reasonings which underline the extent to which she “falls” into submission is reinforced by these references to the body as being little more than meat, or blood, or animal-like, as in:

Her stomach had many stretch marks from the time she had given birth, and the first time she had seen those lines, they reminded her of the lines her mangy dog made in the ground, pawing out of frustration whenever a bitch passed, ignoring him as she worried over her puppy. (Manto, 2014a: 50)

This image is disturbing because of the feeling it reveals: frustration, both sexual and animal, and also because of the fact that these lines on her skin reminded her of how a bitch cared more for a puppy of hers than for sex. The implications are many: perhaps she is feeling incapable of taking care of the baby she gave birth to; perhaps she does not even feel like a dog (with all the connotations this animal, a *kutta*, has in her society, which are extremely derogatory) and therefore only earth. In both cases the bottom line is clear: she is treated like an animal and she also feels like one. This has to be the measure of her submission to men and her subservience to the system, obviously ruled by these “bosses” she has, both the ones who take the money from her and the ones who pay for her body.

It can be asserted thus far that Saugandhi is a subaltern subject. Gramsci’s only defining characteristics of the subaltern groups are two: submission to the dominant class and the inability to unify. As Buttigieg (2013) states:

A distinguishing characteristic that Gramsci identifies in subalterns as subaltern groups is their fragmentation. Not only are there multiple subaltern classes or groups, but they are also disconnected and quite different from one another. (Buttigieg, 2013: 36)

It makes sense to consider Manto’s approach to prostitutes in this light: by telling their stories (which can be taken as social portraits of Manto’s times) he, as a writer, is speaking

for a particular group, but, at the same time, the reader is perfectly aware that these women are completely on their own. The connection between them is their immediate boss, their pimp. This impossibility of giving a particular identity trait to the Subaltern is what makes Spivak affirm, in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (2003), that she (the subaltern) does not have “a voice that does not at the same time occupy many other possible speaking positions.” (Ashcroft, Tiffin, et al., 2007: 201). Guha (2000) in his famous “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India”, published in 1988, recognizes this fragmentation but indicates a common trait which the subaltern groups share: “In spite of such diversity, one of its invariant features was a notion of resistance to elite domination” (Guha, 2000: 4). Despite sounding self-evident, this resistance, which may be expressed in many ways, is interesting to consider in relation to this story and also the many others which Manto wrote.

In spite of not having a voice in the history of the dominant elite and their discourse, which systematically monopolizes what is commonly assumed to be *the truth*, in his *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci outlines the way for the subaltern to break free from the oppression imposed by the elite (something which socialist culture offers):

[Socialist culture is] a coming to terms with one’s own personality; it is the attainment of a higher awareness, with the aid of which one succeeds in understanding one’s historical value, one’s own function in life, one’s own rights and obligations. (Gramsci qtd. in Buttigieg, 2013: 38)

The first reading of “The Insult” I am offering is based on this “higher awareness” of the self: Saugandhi experiments a change in herself which immediately makes her radically rethink her attitude towards life. After her act of consciousness, it is impossible for her to go back to being an invisible part of the Machine. She does not fit in the capitalist and patriarchal discourse of power anymore because she has taken the reins of her life, and, consequently, is empowered. This change comes after a period of reflection on the reasons why the insult of the potential customer offended her so much. She goes through several stages of rage and the narrator follows her thoughts from the initial violent impulse to the final sarcastic laugh. However successful her rebellion becomes, Saugandhi’s process of rejection of everything that imprisons her is admirable, precisely from the point of view of awareness of the self. Perhaps for the first time in her life she realizes the role she is playing in this corrupted society, and her potential to challenge it. Her dignity as a person, and as a woman, comes out strengthened. A perceptive Reader will notice relevant signs of this process, such as the following lines: “Saugandhi had to fight off a desire to do

something violent. She wanted to shout out, “Hey, you rich fuck, stop the car!”. She wanted to tear her sari apart and fling its scraps in the wind!” (Manto, 2014a: 57).

As previously stated when discussing money matters and the Marxist scope of the text, it is worthy of attention how this very first reaction of the prostitute against the oppressor is to highlight his “richness” as proof of his perversity. She could have chosen another term for the man, but she uses “rich fuck”, thus his most salient characteristic, because of his bad manners, is the class he presumably belongs to: the Rich. The second reaction, though, is an overpowering self-consciousness for having been rejected as a woman. At this point it is time to start considering whether Saugandhi should be considered as a subaltern in the non-gendered Gramscian definition or whether there is a need to approach the analysis of her character from an intersectional feminist point of view (a point which will be considered later on), paying attention, as Manto does, to her specific gendered condition:

She recalled how she had put on lipstick and powdered her cheeks to make herself more attractive, and now she felt so ashamed by this that she began sweating. She rationalized her feelings: “I didn’t dress up for that pig! It’s my habit —not just mine but everyone’s!” (Manto, 2014a: 57)

Her self-consciousness as a woman (now omitting her profession, for she makes no reference to it in her thoughts) and the following justification of her actions are a common departure in feminist readings. There is a lively open debate on whether women dress up for men or they choose to do it for themselves (to the extent that a tabloid very recently assumed that their female target readers would enjoy the article entitled “Two Sun writers debate whether women should ‘dress for their men’ — as Miranda Kerr reveals she ‘puts a nice dress on’ to cook for her billionaire husband”, 2017)¹. The fact that it is a prostitute who takes part in this debate in favour of herself, “I didn’t dress up for that pig!” (even though she did, because her pimp had forced her to), transcends the story. It stops being just a story of one woman to be powerful enough to be the story of *many oppressed women*. Thus, Saugandhi becomes a symbol, and Manto’s narrative, regardless of whether it is fictional or not, is then playing a function in rewriting history. The voice is

¹ “Two Sun writers debate whether women should ‘dress for their men’ — as Miranda Kerr reveals she ‘puts a nice dress on’ to cook for her billionaire Husband”. 14th September, 2017. (<https://www.thesun.co.uk/fabulous/4460268/writers-debate-whether-women-should-dress-for-their-men-as-miranda-kerr-reveals-she-puts-a-nice-dress-on-to-cook-for-her-husband-evan-spiegel/>)

not the subaltern's, but it is a subaltern story, and it is slowly building up to a narrative of far-reaching consequences.

Even though I have deliberately highlighted those statements which transcend Saugandhi's own experience, Manto is able to be transcendental (in the sense that the story is not anecdotal) because of his deep sensitivity in portraying Saugandhi's feelings realistically. There are a series of sensations that she experiences that are reported to us without being judged by the narrator, which make a strikingly colourful train of thought. As commented above, her feelings of objectification are acute. Together with the aforementioned extreme example, other instances emphasize her reification:

Her body felt distant, and she felt as if her forehead didn't belong to her. (Manto, 2014a: 58)

Stars are beautiful, but you are ugly. Did you forget already how that man insulted you? (Manto, 2014a: 60)

She thought about why she wanted someone to praise her, as she had never before felt such a strong need for this. Why did she turn even to inanimate objects, asking them to confirm her worth? And why did she feel in her body such an overwhelming desire to give comfort? (Manto, 2014a: 61)

Her reaction ranges from the rejection of her own body, since it has been rejected, “it didn't belong to her” and “you're ugly”, to the overriding need to be praised, which goes beyond the body. The sensitivity of the narrator, which was previously pointed to, comes forth in this reference to her “overwhelming desire to give comfort”: it is through these details that Saugandhi is *made* a real woman by the narration, and not a simple symbol used for social criticism. The ambivalence of her feelings and the will of the narrator to report rather than evaluate, are particularly noteworthy.

These last quotes are representative of her last moment of despair, for everything changes and this “higher awareness”, and “coming to terms with one's own personality” appear, highlighted by Gramsci (qtd. in Buttigieg, 2013: 38) as the objective for every citizen (and particularly those of the lower classes). Her reaction towards the insult drastically changes from doubt to affirmation of the self:

Or tearing off my clothes right in front of him. I would ask: “This is what you came for, right? Here, take it for free —take it. But not even your father could buy what I have inside me!” (Manto, 2014a: 62)

This is a triumphant statement from many perspectives: firstly, from the point of view of overcoming objectification. The moment she takes on her profession and what the

customer exactly wanted, she frees herself from her chains: “not even your father could buy what I have inside me” (Manto, 2014a: 62). She recognizes that she is being treated like meat, and it is through this immoral abuse that she puts forth what she has inside her: her dignity. Secondly, it is worthy of attention that she, who as a subaltern has suffered more oppression than men — (as Spivak asserts in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”: “the subaltern as female is even more deeply in the shadow”, Spivak, 2003: 28), not only faces the “rich fuck” who looked down on her but also his father. This cannot be overlooked for it is a coup against patriarchy and the elite at one and the same time. She is also recognizing her position in society —for she knows what men want of her; the position of power that her customer has —a man with money to spend; and she even goes on to recognize that the customer’s father, therefore the system and its workings, would act in exactly the same deprecatory way as his son. Her words also underline how, regardless of her body and men using it for their own pleasure, nobody is able to reach her, her honor and her dignity. At this stage it is fair to consider Saugandhi’s reflections and reaction against this man who insulted her as a brilliant act of consciousness. Therefore, in a sense, she is successful in breaking a series of mental chains that the dominant class, powerful men, used to choke her.

The short story ends with the *physical* chains that she breaks, in the form of photographs. She throws the frames out of the window in the presence of one of the men in the pictures, whom she laughs at in a “cackling, sharp laugh” (Manto, 2014a: 65) or “bitter laughter” (Manto, 2014a: 65). This is the best expression of superiority that can be found, and embodies what Gramsci defined as the necessary “spirit of cleavage” (qtd. in Buttigieg, 2013: 37) that will eventually free the subaltern, the will to break society so as to eventually let light pass through the cracks. Her initial dependence on money and men disappears the moment that she realizes that there is more to her than just a body, which sums up the arguments that have brought me to consider her final laughter as a form of liberation. Her consciousness leads her to dismiss the symbols and actors of dominance from her life.

However, I contend that “dependence” is the key word. An abstract reading of the story might highlight her success, but there is more to it than laughter. Despite apparently freeing herself from the closest “bosses” she has by laughing in their faces, the story finishes with a, yet-again, disturbing image: “It seemed as though a train full of passengers had emptied station by station and now stood desolate beneath the last tin awning. It was a painful hollowness.” (Manto, 2014a: 68) Even considering Saugandhi

as a fully-conscious subject, this hollowness inside her together with her eventual decision to sleep do not encourage a positive reading of the text. It is dramatic that the escape from reality is through sleep. The narrator hints at her willingness to forget from the very beginning of the story, which, in a first reading, we may overlook. Saugandhi equates sex with sleep (both of which activities she relishes) because of the exhaustion that makes her forget: “the type of unconsciousness that wraps around you after being utterly wrung dry of your last ounce of energy —what pleasure!” (Manto, 2014a: 50). From the point of view of the story of not one woman but many, this feeling of hopelessness goes beyond the awareness of the self and the Gramscian approach to a subaltern which is probably male. As Sarkar points out: “the problem of universalism/Eurocentrism ... was inherent in Marxist thought” (Sarkar, 2000: 302).

In fact, there are details in the original definition of the subaltern and the later revisions of the term by Guha (2000), Chatterjee (2000) and Spivak (2003) that at least condition the liberation I defended earlier. The first point of opposition to the limits of her attained freedom comes from Gramsci, for he underlines that “Subaltern groups are always subject to the initiative of the dominant groups, even when they rise up and rebel” (as quoted in Buttigieg, 2013: 37). This bears a double significance for the case at hand: firstly, Saugandhi does not represent a group, but an individual subject. Her power, as an individual, poor woman is, therefore, nil. Secondly, it forces a reading of her actions under the “initiative” of the dominant —this laughter might just mirror the laughter of the elite and not be an expression of the self. In other words, her rebellion might just mimic the reaction of disgust from the customer at a greater level, and thus keep being a “passive” action of rebellion. In this connection, Chatterjee (2000) adds a distinctive trait of the subaltern class which might slightly contribute to such a reading of Saugandhi’s reaction: “We must grant that peasant consciousness has its own paradigmatic form, which is not only different from bourgeois consciousness but in fact its very other” (Chatterjee, 2000: 14). His comment is part of the studies on the Subaltern started by Guha with “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India” (1982) which focused on the subaltern’s history (what is commonly known as the “history from below”), coming from the Gramscian definition. Chatterjee’s affirmation in relation to Saugandhi would add to the argument that her laughter and her rebellion (again, taken as spontaneous, not organized but an individual response) *cannot* be seen in a bourgeois light of irony. Spivak’s contribution to Subaltern Studies is crucial to understanding to what extent a Gramscian analysis of Saugandhi’s reaction is naive. Already in the canonical “Can the Subaltern

Speak” (2003), Spivak referred to the shadow in which the female subaltern finds herself, for “the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant” (Spivak, 2003: 28). Later on, in “The New Subaltern” (2000), in her revision of the term and of its usefulness, she responds to Gramsci directly: “the subaltern is gendered [...] Gramsci’s project is not specifically gender-sensitive in its detail but can be made so” (Spivak, 2000: 324). In Spivak’s words there is a sharp but constructive criticism against the main texts of Subaltern Studies (Guha’s “patriarchal benevolence and critique”, Spivak, 2000: 325) because “Subaltern studies is not informed by feminist theory as such [...] Thus, Subaltern Studies, though not inimical to feminist politics, is not immediately useful for it” (Spivak, 2000: 325). The last, interesting comment on the canonical understanding of the Subaltern, is Sarkar’s (2000), evaluating Chatterjee’s treatment of gender in *The Nation and its Fragments* (2000): “There is not much interest in how women struggled with a patriarchal domination that was, after all, overwhelmingly indigenous in its structures. (Sarkar, 2000: 310)”

This series of remarks may well be applied to the previous non-gender-focused reading of Saugandhi as a rebellious worker under capitalist oppression. Instead of considering her suffering and later actions as a part of a process into awareness, maybe a better reading might be to consider them as a part of a silenced, *constant* struggle against patriarchy, which is partially suggested in Sarkar’s comment. In relation to Spivak’s statements, the one which fundamentally questions an interpretation lacking a consideration of gender is Spivak’s assertion that the approach to the experience of a subaltern woman has to be made from feminist theory, and Subaltern Studies “is not immediately useful for it”.

Manto did not portray a case of full liberation. There is a will in the story to transcend the mere anecdote and, thus, this ending in which the protagonist chooses forgetfulness instead of consciousness (despite having become aware of herself, a fact that cannot be questioned), is paradigmatic. Manto’s Marxism is here gendered, without any doubt, for she is suffering more because she is a woman and an exploited male worker would not be struggling as she is. Therefore, as Spivak (2000) states, the usefulness of an exclusively class-focused reading of Saugandhi’s rebellion, which might be deemed successful, is incomplete. Her being a woman weighs more than her being an oppressed but conscious subject. Colonial power is not as important as an agent of dominance as the “overwhelmingly indigenous” patriarchy (Sarkar, 2000: 310) for there are no clear instances of colonialism in the text.

To contextualise Manto's interest in the woman condition, it is interesting to go back to the essay “Sarif Aurtein aur Filmi Duniya” (2014b) where he makes explicit statements such as the following: “A man remains a man no matter his conduct. [...] Society closes on her doors it leaves ajar for a man stained by the same ink. If both are equal, why are our barbs reserved for the woman?” (Manto, 2014b: 205).

This affirmation is of great importance in considering Manto's political ideas. Not only is he sensitive enough to perceive the state in which women live, but he also defends the rights of prostitutes, who have to fight against even more social prejudice. The last quote which can describe Saugandhi's fate and unwanted consciousness (for she chooses sleep) is: “The woman who didn't have a father's shelter, had no education, who had to feed herself with her own devices, such a woman is like a broken pebble from a pavement” (Manto, 2014b: 204). His approach, though, does not condemn patriarchy, although he is highly aware of its weight. Without a “father's shelter” a woman is unprotected. To sum up, in “The Insult” not only does Manto portray the struggle of its protagonist when she consciously realizes her role in society and the level of oppression she is suffering from, he also manages to transcend this setting. Thus, the story has implications not only in the India of 1948 but is also relevant today, and, without a doubt, reaches beyond frontiers.

The first reading of the text offered in my analysis aimed at a positive understanding of Saugandhi's revelation as being the “cleavage” and “coming to terms with one's own personality”, described by Gramsci in relation to the subaltern and her freedom (as quoted in Buttigieg, 2013: 38). Nevertheless, despite this awakening of her consciousness and her rebellion against the men who dominate her, she finally decides to sleep and forget. This hopelessness in fighting patriarchy is a possible second reading of the text, which is not positive at all. Largely by recourse to Spivak, this article has aimed at pointing out how useless the original idea of the subaltern is when describing women's struggles. In his story, Manto reports how the gendered subaltern cannot speak, and the few opportunities that women have to rebel against patriarchal capitalist systems. Nevertheless, and although she resorts to sleep, Saugandhi does wake up to consciousness and dignity. So even if she is a broken pebble from a pavement, as many other women in those days were and continue to be, the first step in their struggle for freedom or equality has to be through critical thought. It could be affirmed that Saugandhi was never the same woman after that night, and neither is the reader after the story's end. Just as Saugandhi

becomes conscious of herself, so does the reader; and while Saugandhi goes to sleep the readers are left to face reality, but surely with different eyes, rebellious eyes.

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