Colonialism is not just about conquest of geographical territories, but rather about subjectivation *à la* Foucault, whereby postcolonialism is not merely a reconstruction of the historical domination of ‘the Orient’ by ‘the West’ through economic and military force, but a critical analysis of the construction of ‘Europe’ and its ‘Other’ as an ‘effect’ of colonial discourses. Thus, the process of ‘Othering’ (the production of ‘the Orient’ as well ‘the Other’ of Europe within Europe) is inextricably linked to the self-representation of ‘Europe’. Furthermore, the diverse processes of colonialism were intimately related and interdependent, whereby the colonization of the ‘non-West’ is unthinkable without indigenous structures of power within the ‘non-West’ as well as the ‘domestic’ colonization of ‘the Other’ of Europe within Europe. This implies that the analysis of colonial workings of power in the non-West as well as within Europe are also deeply interconnected, so that there is scope for concept-tools employed in the analysis of one context to be transported and operationalized in other contexts.

At the heart of the working of colonial discourses is the politics of representation, whereby postcolonialism is not only critical theory, but an identity politics where the historical analysis of processes of colonisation and decolonisation must focus on questions of representation; namely, deal with who speaks for whom along with what is being said. To this end, my paper seeks to address the challenges of representation and the problematic role of the postcolonial feminist in recovering and representing the perspectives of those who have not been able to represent themselves in colonial structures of power (in the non-west as well as the west). As a participant in critical processes that seek to articulate the voices of the marginalized, the postcolonial feminist functions as an agent of resistance. She performs the skilled act of translation from one culture into the idiom of the other, thereby facilitating the process of interrogation of colonialism and its consequences. But the postcolonial feminist, who speaks in the name of the ‘silenced Other’ is susceptible to being ‘co-opted’, for even in the interrogation of ‘the dominant West’ she is situated within institutions that bind her to western locations and its ‘enabling constraints’. Spivak warns us of a certain kind of colonizing that necessarily implicates itself in any translatory venture and yet inspite all the dangers of reification, Spivak proposes that any representation of marginalized voices can only be heard through the necessary mediating role of the (female) intellectual.

According to me, there is somehow an intrinsic paradox in the relation between the representing postcolonial feminist and the represented ‘marginalized’ who ‘cannot’ perform the act of self-representation. The subject position of the postcolonial feminist is parasitic on the inability/prohibition of the ‘marginalized subject’s’ self-representation. And although the entire attempt of the postcolonial feminist is to erase/dissolve ‘subaltern space’, in doing so she entails forfeiture her own legitimacy as the representing intellectual. And exactly at the crossroads between the responsibility of representation and ‘permission to narrate’, namely, licence/honour of being the voice of the ‘victim’, is the politics of her praxis. The efforts to give marginalized perspectives a voice in history by the postcolonial feminist is open to dangers of essentialism or further of the representatives themselves becoming ‘token victims’ and thereby instruments of dominant structures that block processes of decolonisation. The postcolonial feminist is, thus, caught in a double bind as she inhabits ‘intimately’ the very structures that she seeks to critique, so that the critic-as-subject is herself complicit with the object of her critique. The solution is not a post-representationalist politics, but the persistent interrogation of one’s complicity in the re-colonisation of ‘counter-spaces’. Representation as an act of reading of silences is always fraught with dangers of producing anew regimes of truth and forms of violence. Counter-discourses themselves risk silencing those in whose name they claim to speak.

My paper seeks to explore the dynamics between speech, silence and power from a postcolonial, feminist perspective.