Can the State Listen? Reading Spivak in Indonesia's Dark Protest 2025

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Abstract

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's classic question, "Can the subaltern speak?" challenges not only the silence produced by colonialism and patriarchy, but also the way modern academic discourse establishes representations of "the other" as a technique of knowledge governance. This article revisits Spivak's argument and the subsequent reflections compiled by Rosalind C. Morris, then integrates them with the contemporary Indonesian context, particularly in the "Indonesia Gelap 2025" demonstration. Using a Cultural Studies approach and a hermeneutic-deconstructive framework, this paper examines how subaltern voices, which often appear as traces, cracks, or performances, attempt to negotiate audibility amid established representational apparatus. The main arguments of this article are: (1) subalternity is not an essential category, but rather a position in power relations that closes access to audibility; (2) "speaking" is not merely a vocal action, but rather an event of recognition in a discursive field that is often curated by the dominant party; (3) in the context of "Indonesia Gelap 2025," various symbolic, performative, and curatorial strategies (ranging from slogans, mass choreography, to happening art) reveal the politics of hearing: who has the right to hear, interpret, and decide. In turn, this article proposes an ethics of listening that transforms the scheme of "giving voice" into a practice of reading-listening that is sensitive to the unspeakable, thus opening up the possibility for subaltern agents to "speak back" without being immediately co-opted by the dominant voice.

Keywords: subaltern, representation, epistemic violence, cultural studies, ethics of listening.

INTRODUCTION

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", has become a fundamental challenge to modern epistemology and a reflection of postcolonial societies (Spivak, 2010). This seemingly simple query critiques the Western knowledge system, which for centuries has defined who has the right to speak and who must remain silent. Spivak reveals that colonialism not only plundered land and labor but also suppressed local ways of knowing, replacing them with a Western logic that claims objectivity (Spivak, 2010, pp. 23-25). She calls this "epistemic violence," a form of violence that operates not with weapons, but with language, archives, and discourse (Spivak, 2010, pp. 26-28). In this framework, the subaltern are not only "the oppressed," but also "the unheard," because their voices are ignored by the colonial and patriarchal hearing system that still persists today.

Spivak's ideas resonate deeply in Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia, where epistemic colonialism continues to cast a long shadow (Mignolo, 2011, pp. 18–21). Since independence, the narrative of national development has often positioned the people, especially marginalized groups such as farmers, laborers, women, and students, as recipients of policy rather than subjects in policymaking. In this system, the state acts as a ventriloquist speaking on behalf of the people, reducing them to objects in the narrative of progress (Said, 1979, pp. 325–328). The media and academic institutions reinforce this pattern: the people are always "represented," but rarely allowed to represent themselves. Thus, Spivak's relevance lies not in her focus on India, but in her warning about the dangers of a discourse of liberation that unconsciously repeats colonial mechanisms through claims of representation (Morris, 2010, pp. 8-10).

This crisis of representation is clearly evident in the "Indonesia Gelap 2025" (Dark Indonesia 2025) protests. These actions are not merely spontaneous responses to government policies but symbols of resistance against communication structures that monopolize public meaning and information. The banners reading "We are dark because you turned off the lights" are performative statements about the loss of moral clarity and political transparency (Liputan6.com, 2025). The darkness referred to is not a literal absence of light but epistemic darkness, a condition in which the people no longer understand decisions affecting their lives because the language of policy has been disconnected from their lived experiences (Reuters, 2025). Here, Spivak's theory echoes: when the system refuses to recognize the language of the people, they create their own language through body language, symbols, candlelight, and collective silence. However, the subaltern's attempts to speak are not always recognized as a "voice." In Michel Foucault's framework, modern power operates by regulating public hearing, determining who is rational, who is emotional, who should be taught, and who has the right to be heard (Foucault, 1980, pp. 133-135). In the case of Indonesia Gelap 2025, major media outlets focused not on the substance of the demands but on the potential disruption to order (NU Online, 2025). It becomes clear that the subaltern are not silent, but rather rendered as noise within a system that only acknowledges certain sounds as "legitimate discourse" (Spivak, 2010, pp. 82-83). Spivak's question "Can the subaltern speak?" must therefore be turned back on us: Can we listen without dominating?

To understand this complexity, this article adopts the framework of Cultural Studies, a discipline that rejects the separation between politics and culture, placing signs, bodies, and affects as dynamic fields of ideological struggle (Storey, 2018; Fiske, 2011, pp. 98-100). From this perspective, the "Indonesia Gelap 2025" demonstration is not only a political event but also a cultural text that produces meaning through the performance and affect it carries. This action serves as a laboratory for what Stuart Hall calls "articulation," the practice of connecting signs in new ways to create meaningful forms of symbolic resistance (Hall, 1996, pp. 132-136). Therefore, reading this event through Spivak's lens is not just about applying global theory in a local context, but also about listening to national history through the marginalized voices of the subaltern.

This approach combines Spivak's theory with the practice of "soft-hand policing" that should be adopted by the Indonesian National Police in this post-truth era. Foucault discusses governmentality as a network of power that not only regulates people's behavior but also controls "the way of hearing" applied by the people themselves (Foucault, 2007, pp. 107-110). In this context, the Indonesian National Police acts not only as law enforcers but also as guardians of social resonance who must be sensitive to the dynamics occurring in society. How the police listen to the voices of the masses, interpret the emerging symbols, and respond to the collective affect determines whether the state acts as a protector of democracy or a silencer of its citizens' voices (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 72-75).

The epistemic silence that Spivak highlights can be understood as a manifestation of what Foucault calls "the politics of knowledge," where truth is never neutral but is a product of the struggle between discourse and power (Foucault, 1980). In Indonesia, political and moral truths are often constructed through official state narratives that demand uniform interpretations of what is considered to be the "public interest." When people attempt to voice experiences that contradict these official narratives, their voices are often seen as threats to stability. This phenomenon shows that what is silenced is not just speech but also all affective experiences that do not align with the dominant power structure. The term "dark" in the 2025 Indonesia Gelap demonstration is not just a metaphor but a social diagnosis of the loss of resonance between the state and its people—a situation in which communication loses its empathetic dimension and turns into a rigid administrative monologue.

Moreover, the action demonstrates that the subaltern do not just wait for the opportunity to speak but actively create that space. By lighting candles in the streets, the demonstrators form a counter-public sphere in Nancy Fraser's sense: an alternative space where citizens can express their right to speak without going through restrictive institutions (Fraser, 1990). They turn the streets into text, bodies into symbols, and silence into a powerful argument. In such a context, language is not merely a medium for self-expression but also becomes a political act that transcends the existing grammar of power. This "dark" action becomes light in Rancière's political aesthetic: when the "unseen" becomes visible, and the "unheard" becomes a voice that disrupts the sensible division of power (Rancière, 2004). This is the moment when the subaltern speak not only through words but also through gestures, symbols, and performativity, demanding the state to listen in a new and more sensitive way.

General approach: *hermeneutic-deconstructive* in *cultural studies*

This study uses a qualitative hermeneutic-deconstructive approach within cultural studies to examine how meaning is produced and received in socio-political contexts. As Storey (2018) notes, cultural studies views culture as a space where ideology, representation, and power intersect. Cultural actions, like demonstrations or silence, are read as social texts with specific meanings. Hermeneutics analyzes symbols and actions within their context to understand existence through language (Ricoeur, 1976). Combined with Derrida's deconstruction, this approach recognizes diverse, incomplete meanings. In this study, Spivak's theory and the "Indonesia Gelap 2025" demonstration are analyzed as cultural texts, supporting critical listening to marginalized voices within dominant discourses.

Analysis design: three layers of reading

This research uses three interconnected layers of analysis:

a. Theoretical text analysis (discursive level)
    The first layer involves a deep reading of Gayatri Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988/2010) and Rosalind C. Morris' introduction (2010). The analysis focuses on five key concepts:
    1. Epistemic violence,
    2. Representation vs. re-representation,
    3. Subaltern women and the body as an arena of discourse,
    4. Critique of Western universalism,
    5. The potential of the ethics of listening.
    This analysis describes the text and identifies gaps relevant to Indonesia, guiding the interpretation of cultural practices and state/media narratives.
b. Contextual-performative analysis (empirical-cultural level)
    The second layer involves analyzing the "Indonesia Gelap 2025" action as a performative practice. Media documentation and observations of symbols like "dark" and "turning off the lights" are analyzed using cultural semiotics and Judith Butler's concept of performativity. The action is seen as a "collective listening event," where public discourse is negotiated.
c. Reflective-ethical analysis (researcher position level)
    The third layer involves reflective analysis, where the researcher is aware of power dynamics and listens critically, not speaking for the subaltern (Spivak, 2010). This approach emphasizes ethical listening, as proposed by Nancy and Cavarero (2007), where researchers are "responsible listeners" rather than academic translators.

Data collection and analysis procedures

The research process followed four flexible stages:

a. **Inventory of Sources and Texts** – Collecting primary and secondary sources, including Spivak, Morris, Foucault, Butler, and Rancière's theories, along with media documentation related to "Indonesia Gelap 2025."
b. **Discourse Deconstruction** – Analyzing the relationship between dominant discourse (state, media) and counter-discourse (demonstrators), identifying power dynamics.
c. **Symbolic and Affective Interpretation** – Interpreting actions as non-verbal political expressions, with symbols as "sentences" in a new social grammar.

d.   **Ethical Reflections and the Position of Researchers** – Examining how interpretations avoid epistemic violence and ensuring the researcher does not "speak for" the subjects.

Operational framework and research ethics

The operational framework is based on the politics of listening and aesthetics of existence (Foucault, 1990). This framework is implemented through three principles:

a.   **Decolonization of Listening**: Shifting the paradigm from talking about to listening together, inviting police, academics, and media to recognize the power in listening (Mignolo, 2011).
b.   **Articulation and Resonance**: Interpreting how actions connect global issues to local discourse using Hall's theory (1996).
c.   **Reflection on the Apparatus of Power**: Viewing the Indonesian National Police as a tool for listening, not silencing, ensuring security measures maintain social resonance (Bourdieu, 1977).

These principles integrate relational ethics and guide the research's engagement with power, ensuring the methods align with an ethical approach to understanding the world.

Transition to empirical analysis

The methods serve as a foundation for analyzing Spivak's theory in the context of *Indonesia Gelap 2025*. The interpretation process uses slow reading and attentive listening, avoiding rushed judgments of public voices. This method bridges theory and data, affirming the ethical direction of the research: to participate in epistemic liberation and transform how we listen and understand marginalized voices.

This approach contributes to social change, ensuring marginalized voices are heard and contributing to the broader political landscape in Indonesia.

Spivak and the problem of representation in the postcolonial world

A close reading of Can the Subaltern Speak? shows that Spivak (2010) frames the postcolonial problem primarily as epistemic inequality—the unequal production, regulation, and distribution of knowledge—rather than only economic or political inequality. The subaltern is defined less by material deprivation than by a structurally marginal position in representation, lacking access to speak in the dominant language of power (Spivak, 2010, pp. 24–25).

Spivak distinguishes Vertretung (political representation) and Darstellung (symbolic/aesthetic representation) (Spivak, 2010, pp. 70–75). In colonial/postcolonial settings these often collapse into a paradox: elites claim to speak for "the people" while simultaneously staging them as cultural objects (Spivak, 2010, pp. 76–79). Without epistemic awareness, emancipation can reproduce a new representational colonization.

Morris (2010) clarifies that Spivak does not deny the subaltern's capacity to speak; she challenges the conditions of audibility—how institutions listen (Morris, 2010, pp. 8–9). The question thus becomes a call for epistemic humility, asking intellectuals and knowledge institutions to suspend quick judgments and recognize speech forms that do not fit modern grammar (Morris, 2010, p. 12). In Indonesia, colonial inheritances in bureaucracy, media, and academia often evaluate popular knowledge through technocratic standards (Said, 1994, pp. 20–22), treating anger, irony, and street expression as "irrational," even though these register affective knowledge and political insight (Mignolo, 2011, pp. 30–31). The implication is that marginal voices still carry epistemic validity for building a more inclusive narrative.

Bhubaneswari and the body as political text

Spivak's account of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri—an activist who died by suicide in 1926—illustrates how the body can "speak" politically yet be misheard (Spivak, 2010, pp. 92–94). Her family read the death as "suicide for love," but Spivak situates it in anti-colonial struggle; Bhubaneswari timed her death during menstruation to prevent moralistic interpretations and mark it as political statement (Spivak, 2010, p. 95). Patriarchal interpretation nevertheless "normalized" the act, converting her body into a moral tale of female weakness (Spivak, 2010, pp. 96–98). For Spivak, this is epistemic violence: a knowledge regime erases women's political agency because it recognizes only the dominant interpretive language (Spivak, 2010, pp. 99–100).

This lens helps read contemporary Indonesia, where demonstrations are often reduced to "riots" or "emotion." Bodies marching, holding posters, or sitting in silence are not mere physical behavior but **semiotic acts** contesting state epistemic order and asserting audibility in the public sphere (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 44–46).

Indonesia Gelap 2025: action and the architecture of public hearing

Field reading of Indonesia Gelap 2025 indicates a shift from conventional protest to a performative event. Reuters (2025) describes thousands of students demanding transparency in education-budget governance, using symbols such as candles, black cloth, and the phrase, "We are dark because you turned off the lights." Semioticly, these signs disrupt modernity's association of "light" with progress and stability: "dark" functions not as ignorance but as a rhetorical reclaiming of truth, producing counter-illumination—a people's light rejecting the blinding brightness of power (Fiske, 2011, pp. 101–104).

The action combined singing, shouting, prayer, and coordinated silence. These gestures operate as "social statements" that do not require formal grammar; Butler's notion of performative assembly helps explain how gathered bodies generate political meaning through presence (Butler, 2025). Politics becomes an "art of listening," where resonance and silence matter as much as words. Yet Indonesia's listening regime often fails to recognize these frequencies: mainstream coverage frequently frames the event as "disturbing public order" rather than cultural articulation (Detik.com, 2025), echoing Spivak's point that subaltern speech is blocked less by lack of words than by regimes of audibility (Spivak, 2010, pp. 82–83).

Affect and solidarity: darkness as a network of political emotion

The action also produced collective affect beyond verbal discourse. Massumi defines affect as intensity preceding meaning (Massumi, 2002); here "darkness" became an affective medium aligning bodies in shared grief, loss, and moral disorientation. Candlelight and acoustic music in Yogyakarta/Bandung, and an interfaith prayer in Jakarta, indicate a shift toward emotion-rooted politics that is not irrational but a social rationality grounded in empathy and embodied experience (Ahmed, 2004). This extends Foucault's parrhesia: courage appears not only in speech but in presence and silence (Foucault, 2001, pp. 19–22). Silence becomes a refusal to circulate words already corrupted by power, enabling reflection and solidarity (Nancy, 2007, pp. 10–12).

Between voice and noise: the role of media in action

A major finding is the media's role as an arena where public meaning is stabilized. Coverage commonly frames Indonesia Gelap 2025 through "orderly/disorderly" rather than "fair/unfair" (NU Online, 2025), aligning with Foucault's account of disciplinary perception that trains publics to see/hear only certain aspects of reality (Foucault, 1977, pp. 200–204). Media normalization reduces political expression to numbers and traffic updates (Foucault, 1977, pp. 205–208), turning existential statements into marginal notes. Power works not only by muting voices but by managing what those voices mean (Spivak, 2010). Some spokesperson quotes are detached from context, emphasizing emotion while removing rational framing (Liputan6.com, 2025), converting aspiration into "noise." This operationalizes Spivak's subtle epistemic violence: sincere voices lose legitimacy when they do not match the syntax of power (Spivak, 2010).

The National Police as a state apparatus: maintaining resonance in handling the "Indonesia Gelap 2025" action

Polri holds a strategic but difficult position: maintaining security while mediating public communication crises. This requires understanding demonstrations as socio-cultural events with symbolic and affective content. In Foucault's terms, policing sits within a dispositif that produces compliance via norms, discourse, and surveillance (Foucault, 2007, pp. 23–25), and thus must guard social sensibility so political difference does not become symbolic violence (Foucault, 1977, pp. 205–208). Large protests place the police between disciplinary power and biopolitical concerns, demanding soft-hand policing oriented to empathy, dialogue, and de-escalation (Butler, 2015, pp. 23–27). Nonverbal signs—candles, songs, silence—should be read as political expression, not threat. Bourdieu's point that action is structured by habitus and symbolic meaning underscores that ignoring meaning is failing to understand society (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 52–54).

Success is measured not only by absence of violence but by resonance—reciprocity, openness, responsiveness (Rosa, 2019, pp. 289–293). Excessive discipline collapses resonance into control; sensitive listening

strengthens legitimacy and trust. Emerging dialogue-policing practices in Yogyakarta and Jakarta indicate a shift from command to relational communication (Magnis-Suseno, 1984, pp. 134–136). In this sense, Spivak's insight becomes operational: the state learns to listen, and policing becomes a medium preventing subaltern voices from dissolving into administrative noise (Spivak, 1988, pp. 294–298).

The relevance of Spivak to the Indonesian context
Spivak's subalternity functions as a dynamic lens for Indonesia's politics of knowledge. "Subaltern" includes farmers and laborers, but also students, artists, and digital communities outside official channels—epistemic subalterns with knowledge lacking recognized validation (Hall, 1990, pp. 222–225). Indonesia Gelap 2025 is therefore not only protest but a pedagogical event: knowledge emerges from bodies and affect, not only institutional podiums (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 57–59). The ethical choice for the state and Polri—as public hearing apparatuses—is whether to secure order by silencing critique or sustain democracy through listening to plural aspirations (Foucault, 2007, pp. 107–110). Spivak helps clarify that political language may appear as songs, graffiti, or meaningful silence (Spivak, 2010, p. 108); the central Indonesian challenge is less whether people can speak than whether the state can hear diverse forms of speech and grant them rightful recognition in democratic life.

DISCUSSION
From the politics of representation to the politics of listening
Since the colonial era, political discourse has assumed that those in power speak, while the ruled merely echo. Foucault calls this the "regime of truth," where speech reflects power and controls what is said, who can say it, and how it's recognized as truth (Foucault, 1977, pp. 195–208). Spivak's famous question, Can the Subaltern Speak?, asks if those without power can be heard in a system that dictates the language of speech (Spivak, 2010). For Spivak, the subaltern isn't mute from lack of speech, but because the system of hearing is structurally deaf. Their words are trapped in a language that isn't their own, heard only as an echo of power. This is epistemic violence, when knowledge systems refuse to listen to anything outside their own categories (Spivak, 2010, pp. 90–91).

In Indonesia, the "Indonesia Gelap 2025" movement reflects this logic. Protestors chose silence and darkness, not from lack of words, but because the state's political language couldn't accommodate their suffering. Silence becomes a way to speak amidst the noise of state discourse demanding "order and harmony." Darkness, in this context, serves as an epistemic metaphor, a space that the dominant language can no longer illuminate. Like Bhubaneswari in Spivak's story, the masses speak in a way unrecognized by power's grammar (Spivak, 2010, pp. 96–100).

Foucault teaches that power doesn't silence voices but directs their circulation, deciding who is a respectable citizen, who is a provocateur, and who is a statistic (Foucault, 1990, pp. 92–93). Spivak's "politics of representation" doesn't eliminate the subaltern, but renders them absent from the system of signs. Modern states claim openness but only listen to those who speak the language of power. Demonstrations that reject formal formats are labeled "rude" or "ineffective." To shift from the politics of representation to the politics of listening is to focus on "how and who listens" (Couldry, 2010, pp. 1–7). This shift is both epistemological and ethical: it moves from the production of speech to the relationship between speech and reception.

The "Indonesia Gelap 2025" action becomes a transformational moment, critiquing the entire infrastructure of audibility between the people, the media, and the state. Through silence and symbolism, the people force the state to listen without interpretation. This transformation can be seen as a decolonization of the sensorium, shifting the boundaries of what can be seen, heard, and felt (Rancière, 2004, pp. 12–14). The people's silence is a radical act of truth, reconfiguring collective hearing and forcing the world to adjust its frequency (Foucault, 2001, pp. 19–22).

The role of state institutions, especially the National Police, is no longer to suppress noise, but to act as architects of social hearing, ensuring public spaces remain open to diverse resonances (Tyler, 2006, pp. 163–170). The politics of listening requires new sensitivity in law enforcement, not just weighing right and wrong, but listening to why and how things are said or left unsaid. A "soft hand" is no longer just a security strategy, but a deep ethics of listening.

This shift demands an epistemic transformation in academia and media. Researchers and journalists often cover subaltern voices with "neutral" language, but as Spivak warns, "to speak for the subaltern is to silence them" (Spivak, 1999, pp. 308–310). Intellectuals must create an ecology of listening, allowing the subaltern to speak in their own way. The "Indonesia Gelap 2025" action challenges how we understand discourse, representation, and truth. The politics of listening seeks to build a world where truth is woven from the courage to listen to the weakest voices, not monopolized by the loudest. This transformation moves from surveillance to resonance, from controlling sound to listening to echoes (Ahmed, 2004, pp. 10–12). In such a landscape, democracy is not measured by how freely we speak, but by how deeply we listen.

The curatorial nature of power and the theater of representation

Modern power, as Foucault explains, operates not just through physical coercion but through the architecture of discourse, which regulates what can be expressed, who can speak, and how speech is interpreted. The social world functions as a curated gallery, where power determines the layout and what is seen and heard. Colonialism, according to Spivak, was the greatest curatorial project, subjugating territories while also controlling ways of thinking and producing images to reinforce power. In Bourdieu's terms, this is symbolic violence, operating through unconscious norms, and continues through narratives that use representation as a tool of domination.

In Indonesia, the state remains the curator of the "national stage," determining who is considered the ideal citizen. The official narratives of order, development, and nationalism form the backdrop for public expression. Anyone who deviates from this script is seen as a disturbance. The "Indonesia Gelap 2025" demonstrators, by choosing silence and candles, disrupted this staging. Morris notes that in every political representation, those in power cast themselves as directors, while the people are mere extras. However, the public always has the potential to improvise and create their own stage language. In "Indonesia Gelap 2025," this improvisation transformed public spaces into alternative theaters, where bodies became the script and silence the text.

The action rejected formal speeches in favor of symbolism—candlelight, upside-down flags, and silent movements—as a form of epistemic resistance, developing narratives outside the power structure. Spivak would call this counter-narration, where the subaltern rewrites the exposition of truth. Yet, as Morris reminds us, counter-spaces are vulnerable to co-optation. Media coverage can turn resistance into spectacle, turning expression into "content." This is the curatorial paradox: even alternative stages can be absorbed into the dominant system. Foucault's recapture of resistance shows how power uses the language of resistance for its own legitimization. Critical awareness is needed from state apparatus, including the National Police, to avoid becoming the sole directors of the social stage and instead ensure the stage remains open to improvisation.

In this framework, the National Police play a complex role, often acting within a script that demands "order," but true order in a mature democracy allows for improvisation without disrupting harmony. The police can help manage a humanistic social theater where power doesn't control the script but acts as a guardian of space. Rancière's view of politics as a struggle for visibility is relevant here: in "Indonesia Gelap 2025," the unheard demand their right to be heard. The power of the action lies in its refusal to follow the official script. In silence, the people show that meaning can emerge from below, from bodies that see and understand each other outside the state's structure.

If colonial politics of representation was built on who looks and who is looked at, postcolonial politics of listening seeks to reverse this logic: it's not about who watches the people, but how the state learns to listen. This shift moves from a government of vision to one of listening, from power that regulates images to power that nurtures meaning. Soft-hand policing becomes relevant in this context, focusing not just on "restraining violence" but on fostering a new ethic of managing the social stage. A democratic state is not one without curators, but one that invites people to become co-curators. The politics of listening seeks to build a stage that is open and reflective, allowing space for plural resonance, where everyone has the right to determine the lighting and hold the microphone.

The dominant public, subaltern counterpublics, and receptive space

Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere imagines it as an arena for rational discourse, where citizens deliberate freely and equally (Habermas, 1989, pp. 1–5). However, Nancy Fraser critiques this ideal as unrealistic, noting that access to the public sphere is structured by dominant groups who control discourse, leaving marginalized voices unheard (Fraser, 1990). In postcolonial Indonesia, the public sphere often reproduces inequality, with only those who master the language of power having a voice. Civil society groups seeking to speak out are forced to either conform to official discourse or be marginalized. This gives rise to what Fraser calls subaltern counterpublics, alternative spaces where marginalized groups create their own communication and solidarity.

The "Indonesia Gelap 2025" movement embodies such a counterpublic. Instead of making demands, the demonstrators used symbolic language: candles, silence, and bodily presence. In silence, they created a counter-public through shared witness, not debate, rejecting the formal logic of the dominant public that demands articulate, argumentative speech. This action exemplifies Judith Butler's concept of performative assembly, where bodies claim civic space without words (Butler, 2015, pp. 15–22). "Speaking" here means being present with the ethical awareness that the body itself is a political statement.

However, this counterpublic presence is not always peacefully accepted. The state and media often view it through the lens of security and order rather than listening ethics. Foucault's disciplinary gaze objectifies citizens, regulating them as entities to be controlled (Foucault, 1977, pp. 195–208). In this context, the National Police face a dilemma: maintain order while respecting social expressions that reject the official language of order. A "receptive space" should be created, where authorities focus on the moral message rather than the form of the action (Couldry, 2010, pp. 5–7). In this space, the police act as guardians of resonance, not rulers of space, with power and listening becoming inseparable.

This shift to receptive spaces allows for participatory parity, where all voices are heard equally, not merely in formal terms, but through affective equality, where everyone feels listened to meaningfully (Fraser, 1995, pp. 68–93). In Indonesia, this ideal remains unfulfilled due to paternalistic state logic. Counterpublics like "Indonesia Gelap 2025" challenge this by forcing the state to listen, practice epistemic patience, and mature in democracy.

Receptive spaces are a new form of ethical practice in democracy. They respect silence as discourse and balance verbal and non-verbal communication, forming a social choreography that transcends power. For the Indonesian National Police, this means being a guardian of public discourse, ensuring it isn't stifled by administrative noise. In a world filled with noise, listening becomes the most radical act. "Indonesia Gelap 2025" shows that democracy thrives not by hearing fewer voices, but by retaining its capacity to listen. Civil society, the media, and the police must collaborate to build an architecture of listening, where the public sphere becomes not just an arena for words, but a space for the meeting of souls (Ahmed, 2004, pp. 10–12).

Body, silence, and performative tactics

Language has long been the arena for political struggle, but the body is the most ancient and honest theater. Colonial bodies served as mediums of knowledge, discipline, and resistance. Foucault explains that power subtly disciplines the body, regulating movement and public interaction (Foucault, 1977, pp. 135–142). Yet, the body also resists, rejecting the script written for it. Spivak's analysis of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri illustrates the tragedy of the body speaking beyond language, where society fails to understand the political message conveyed by her silent act of protest (Spivak, 2010, pp. 92–95). The subaltern speaks, but no one listens (Spivak, 2010, pp. 98–100).

This tragedy reappears in Indonesia Gelap 2025. Demonstrators, lighting candles and remaining silent, turned their bodies into political statements, rejecting the "orderly" language of power. Silence here is not absence but a rejection of the dominant sound system. Judith Butler's concept of performative assembly explains that bodies gathering in public assert their claim to citizenship without words (Butler, 2015, pp. 9–15). The people assert their right to appear, as Butler states, through their mere presence (Butler, 2015, pp. 21–25).

Rancière argues that politics begins when the excluded demand to be heard (Rancière, 2004, pp. 12–14). The bodies in the streets of "Indonesia Gelap 2025" are those long excluded from discourse. They are not just demanding policy change but recognition within the social structure of hearing. This action shifts the boundaries of what can be heard, seen, and understood as politics, transforming silence into a form of political expression.

In the Indonesian context, silence is often considered the highest form of knowledge in Javanese cosmology, seen as an ethical language that reconnects the self with nature (Hamengkubuwono IX, 1985, pp. 55–58). The "Indonesia Gelap 2025" action can be interpreted not just as protest, but as a spiritual practice to restore the moral balance of the public. In silence, the people pray for a nation lost in moral darkness.

However, silence is often misunderstood by those in power. Modern states view silence as disobedience or a threat. Security forces, particularly the National Police, may see peaceful actions as "security disturbances." To avoid this, the police must learn to see the counterpublic not as a threat but as a corrective mechanism for democracy. In a healthy democracy, the public sphere is plural, and all forms of speech must be heard, whether articulate or symbolic. Soft-hand policing becomes essential, not merely as a security strategy, but as a democratic practice of listening (Tyler, 2006, pp. 163–170).

In "Indonesia Gelap 2025," soft-hand practices create a receptive space where authorities focus on the intent rather than the form of the action (Couldry, 2010, pp. 5–7). This creates an ethical, non-hierarchical relationship between the people and the authorities. The police, as guardians of resonance, affirm that true power lies not in commanding, but in listening without defensiveness. Fraser's concept of participatory parity applies here: true democracy requires listening to all voices, with affective equality (Fraser, 1995, pp. 68–93).

In Indonesia, the public sphere remains paternalistic, with the state as the "parent" who knows best. Counterpublics like "Indonesia Gelap 2025" force the state to listen, helping democracy grow through epistemic patience. Receptive spaces are not only spaces for free speech, but places where silence is respected as discourse. In such spaces, verbal and non-verbal language coexist, forming a social choreography where power is not centered but shared. The police, in this context, must shift from controlling discourse to ensuring it is not stifled. Democracy thrives not by reducing voices, but by expanding the ability to listen. The "Indonesia Gelap 2025" action demonstrates that democracy will not collapse from too many voices, but from losing the ability to listen.

Affect, resonance, and the pedagogy of political emotion

Affect, as Brian Massumi describes, is a prelinguistic vibration that connects bodies with an intensity that precedes rational articulation (Massumi, 2002, pp. 25–27). In political contexts, affect unites the masses without the need for rational consensus. During the Indonesia Gelap 2025 movement, what circulated among protestors was not just an idea of justice, but an emotional resonance of loss, grief, and solidarity. Sara Ahmed asserts that emotions are social practices that shape the relationship between the body and the world, circulating and challenging power (Ahmed, 2004, pp. 8–12). In this action, grief was a shared feeling, creating an emotional pedagogy where people learned to understand the world through collective empathy.

Michel Foucault connects this phenomenon to "biopolitics," where the state regulates not only bodies but emotions and moods (Foucault, 1990, pp. 135–137). The state shapes public emotions through narratives and symbols, controlling when anger must be suppressed and when empathy is allowed. However, Spivak argues that the subaltern are often excluded from these emotional norms (Spivak, 2010, pp. 100–102). The Indonesia Gelap 2025 action was a demand for the right to feel—rejecting imposed happiness and affirming sadness as a form of resistance. This public sadness is not nihilism but emotional parrhesia, a courageous form of feeling in a regime that dismisses emotional honesty (Foucault, 2001, pp. 14–16). In silence, the people demonstrate that affective democracy functions when truth is felt together, not spoken.

Judith Butler expands this idea, suggesting true politics occurs when people are moved by something greater than themselves (Butler, 2009, pp. 39–43). Affective politics challenges liberal individualism, recognizing emotions as communal forces. In the silent crowd, emotions like fear, loss, and anger transform into solidarity, courage, and prayer. These silent bodies create what Butler calls affective commons—communities formed

not by shared ideology but by ethical vibrations. In Javanese tradition, rasa tunggal refers to harmony in difference, a resonance amidst diversity (Magnis-Suseno, 1999, pp. 82–85). In "Indonesia Gelap 2025," diverse groups, including police officers, were united by a shared desire to uphold human dignity. When the police lowered their shields and allowed the candles to remain lit, they participated in this collective affect, rejecting violence.

The Indonesian National Police can view itself not just as an enforcement agency but as a manager of social resonance. In affective politics, control involves guiding emotional energy, not suppression. This requires emotional pedagogy, the ability to interpret public emotional expressions and channel them constructively (Tyler, 2013, pp. 10–12). Affective sensitivity in policing becomes a form of security intelligence— intelligence that feels, not spies. An affectively aware police force understands that every crowd represents a map of resonance, not a threat. They know when to step back, be present, or simply listen. In "Indonesia Gelap 2025," affective sensitivity becomes a new form of intelligence, returning emotion to the heart of politics.

This pedagogy of feeling focuses not on logic, but on the resonance of love. In a world dominated by opinions and algorithms, the path to healing democracy lies in learning to feel again. Affective politics invites society, officials, and the state to build a world not based on fear, but on the shared resonance of love and understanding. It is not about who speaks the loudest, but who listens most sincerely to the vibrations of others.

Media, spectacle, and the production of public opinion

In contemporary society, political reality is shaped not only by power institutions but also by media-driven visual and affective mechanisms. Guy Debord's La Société du Spectacle argues that modern society has shifted from one that "experiences" to one that "watches" (Debord, 1994, pp. 12–14). Political reality becomes spectacle—a series of images competing for dominance in public view. Baudrillard further explains that in the hypermodern world, images don't just represent reality; they create it, making "violence" or "order" the narrative effects of media framing (Baudrillard, 1994, pp. 1–6). Media operates as a visual panopticon, controlling who is watched, feared, and pitied.

In the "Indonesia Gelap 2025" movement, this spectacle battle unfolded. On one side, official media framed the event as a security threat; on the other, citizen-generated content, like videos of silent protest, offered a counter-spectacle. This battle is about who successfully shapes public perception. In Foucault's terms, public perception is an instrument of power, where individuals not only monitor each other but are also monitored (Foucault, 1980). In the digital era, this process is amplified, turning every social action into data and every gesture into content. The sincerity of the resistance in Indonesia Gelap 2025 ironically fuels the spectacle's algorithms.

What's significant, however, is the public's intervention in this logic. By avoiding slogans and loud speeches, the demonstrators refused to be commodified by the media. They offered ambiguity as an ethical strategy: silent, dark, and trembling (Mirzoeff, 2011, pp. 16–19). Silence becomes an anti-image, resisting the aesthetics of power that demands expression. This action critiques the regime of vision, creating a perceptible redistribution of what can be seen and heard (Rancière, 2004, pp. 12–16). By sitting in silence, the demonstrators transform public space into an open arena for interpretation, refusing to be objects of coverage and instead becoming subjects of aesthetics.

This shift presents an ethical challenge for the Indonesian National Police. In an era of instant media, authorities are also performative actors in the digital public sphere (Tyler, 2006, pp. 180–183). Every gesture can be interpreted by the public. Therefore, image governance becomes an ethical practice: how to be present without dominating the frame. The police's role is not to guard the stage but to protect the public visual space, ensuring it remains humane rather than intimidating. This requires high visual sensitivity—understanding not only what is visible but also what is hidden by the language of images (Mulvey, 1975, pp. 6–8).

A sensitive officer knows when to let silence communicate empathy, stepping back when the image itself speaks. A police officer lowering their shield in a crowd of candles might not speak, but in a world saturated with images, that gesture communicates: humanity has not been extinguished.

The digital panopticon and the genealogy of new power

When Jeremy Bentham proposed the panopticon in the 18th century, he could not have anticipated its transformation into a wireless network spanning the planet. Foucault used the panopticon to describe disciplinary society, where individuals internalize surveillance without direct coercion (Foucault, 1977). Yet, as Deleuze argues, discipline has mutated into a society of control (Deleuze, 1992): the digital panopticon functions without walls, operating through algorithms, data, and platform architectures embedded in everyday life. Zuboff terms this surveillance capitalism—an economic model that treats human behavior as raw material for commercial and political gain (Zuboff, 2019). Data is not neutral; it can be used to predict and shape behavior, with surveillance increasingly shared between states and technology corporations.

In Indonesia, this dynamic is intensified by participatory surveillance through social media. Individuals become watchdogs, and demonstrations are recorded, broadcast, and rapidly reinterpreted by competing viewpoints. Indonesia Gelap 2025 reveals a paradox: when people speak through silence, algorithmic systems can accelerate discourses that silence them. Silence is captured, converted into hashtags, and evaluated through commercial metrics—so even silence becomes monitored, curated, and commodified (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). Han calls this a shift from coercive to voluntary surveillance, where people are tempted to display themselves and power becomes "soft," operating through self-exposure (Han, 2015).

These conditions blur the boundary between "security" and "surveillance," with serious implications for civil liberties. In Foucault's biopolitical logic, power regulates life at a granular level—habits, preferences, even the rhythms of feeling (Foucault, 2007). Security institutions must therefore redefine their role: not as guardians of truth, but as guardians of balance between visibility and dignity. For the Indonesian National Police, the challenge is no longer only physical unrest, but also "data riots": distortions, framings, and algorithmic pressures on public perception. A soft-hand approach here means not only limiting physical force, but managing transparency wisely—knowing when to be visible and when restraint reduces escalation (Tyler, 2013).

In Indonesia Gelap 2025, cameras are not merely evidentiary tools but instruments of interpretation: the gaze can deepen wounds or open empathy depending on how it is used. Police thus become actors—and potential curators—within a visual ecology, requiring genealogical awareness of how authority is produced and perceived. Foucault frames ethics not as rejecting power, but transforming it from domination into practices of freedom (Foucault, 1990). Soft-hand policing, then, involves building a trust architecture grounded in empathetic transparency rather than surveillance transparency: data as dialogue, cameras as reminders that the state listens rather than judges (Steyerl, 2016). In line with Spivak's warning, power remains sustainable only if listening does not become another technique of control—because subaltern voices are audible only where listening is made fair.

Power, language, and the politics of knowledge

Language is never merely communication; it is a medium of power. Foucault argues that discourse determines what can be said, who may say it, and under what conditions something counts as true (Foucault, 1972). Language therefore does not only reflect reality—it produces it. When the state labels an event a "disturbance of order," the phrase is not descriptive but performative, shifting an act's moral and legal status. In "Indonesia Gelap 2025," the struggle is not only on the streets but within language itself.

Spivak's question—Can the Subaltern Speak?—targets epistemic audibility rather than vocal ability (Spivak, 2010). The subaltern can speak, yet their voice is routinely translated, filtered, or misread by dominant knowledge structures. Under colonialism, indigenous voices became "exotic evidence" or research objects; today, public voices are often reduced to "aspirations," "complaints," or "ignorance" (Spivak, 2010). Spivak warns that representation without fair listening becomes epistemic violence.

Said extends this critique by showing how the West constructed the East through discourse, portraying it as strange or irrational (Said, 1978). In Indonesia, paternalistic phrases—"for security," "for stability," "for the public interest"—appear neutral while concealing power relations that position citizens as objects of control. Bourdieu adds that language carries symbolic capital: officials are believed not simply because their words are true, but because their positions grant legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1991). Ordinary people are ignored not

necessarily because they are wrong, but because they lack this capital. Indonesia Gelap 2025 disrupts that hierarchy: through silence, people refuse the demand to speak in the authorized syntax. Silence becomes an "anti-discourse," exposing what official grammar cannot contain.

Because power and knowledge presuppose each other (Foucault, 1980), institutions that enforce order also shape social truth. This makes the National Police crucial and ethically tested: how to defend order without suppressing dissent, and enforce law without monopolizing justice's meaning. A way forward is a shift from knowledge enforcement to knowledge empathy—listening to other truths and to how regulations are experienced by citizens (Tyler, 2006). In this sense, legal language should function as a bridge of empathy, and soft-hand policing becomes a practice of protecting language from turning into symbolic violence. Good policing includes the capacity to remain silent with wisdom, not only to speak with authority.

Foucault's parrhesia is the courage to speak truth against power (Foucault, 2001), but in postcolonial settings it also implies the courage of the state to listen. A state that cannot listen has no stable claim to truth; anxiety toward dissent reveals fear of plural meanings, even though democracy depends on that plurality. Indonesia Gelap 2025 offered a lesson in this ethic: meaningful silence taught that knowledge is born not from domination but from encounter. If the National Police can act as guardians of encounter rather than guardians of words, they become not merely disciplinary apparatuses but living institutions that sustain social conversation—because behind every public silence, there is a story waiting to be heard.

The Indonesian National Police and the ethics of the "soft hand": from discipline to sensitivity
Foucault describes modern state apparatuses as disciplinary mechanisms that regulate bodies and spaces to secure order and productivity (Foucault, 1977). In postcolonial Indonesia, however, security forces face an expanded task: not only regulating bodies, but also managing social resonance—the emotional, symbolic, and moral vibrations circulating in communities. This points to an "apparatus of listening," where institutions do not merely monitor but genuinely listen. In this framework, the soft hand is not simply the absence of violence or the opposite of the hard hand, but institutional sensitivity: the moral-affective capacity to read social rhythms and respond with emotional intelligence. It aims to transform conflict into dialogue and tension into resonance. In Indonesia Gelap 2025, where candles and silence became political language, soft hand policing means being present not to suppress the formation, but to keep the silence meaningful.

Such presence requires a shift from harsh law enforcement to attentive law enforcement—care enforcement (Couldry, 2010). Law should be treated less as a command system and more as a moral space that protects the right to speak without fear. Soft hand ethics operates between discipline and compassion, firmness and gentleness, power and care (Ahmed, 2004). This aligns with Tyler's procedural justice: legitimacy is built not by outcomes alone, but by how power is exercised (Tyler, 2006). When people feel respected, listened to, and treated fairly, compliance follows without coercion. Legitimacy then comes not from uniforms or weapons, but from being a trusted listener—an authority grounded in moral maturity, especially in symbolic, affect-laden actions like Indonesia Gelap 2025.

Listening here is not passive; it is reflective practice. Emotions shape social meaning, and police presence amid grief or anger functions as mediation between state and citizens, order and freedom. Soft hand policing therefore presupposes restraint and reflective presence: officers do not always need to command; sometimes they "stand between," acting as calm witnesses to public unrest (Butler, 2015). Even institutional silence can communicate self-control, respect for public space, and recognition that power has ethical limits. In Foucault's sense, ethics is an aesthetic of existence—how one governs oneself before others (Foucault, 1990). Soft hand becomes the art of presence within the field of power.

This approach reframes policing as participation in building civilized public space. In polarized situations, restraint gives time for public voice to take form. This is not weakness, but resonant authority: authority that adapts to society's moral frequency. Rancière's idea of redistributing the sensible applies here—opening space for the unheard to appear and be recognized (Rancière, 2004). A disciplinary apparatus focuses on bodies and movement; a listening apparatus focuses on meaning and relationships, treating society as a moral community rather than an anonymous mass. Soft hand thus becomes civic empathy—a bridge between law and humanity—and an opportunity to rebuild trust eroded by structural violence and biased representation.

Evidence-based policing also supports this orientation: effective security is not simply swift or harsh, but grounded in understanding social context and public emotion (Sherman, 2002). Soft hand policing turns officers into reflective field readers, acting as moral mediators. Small gestures—offering water, calming tension, listening to grievances—can carry greater political weight than force deployment. Soft Polri does not mean weak Polri, but a Polri that knows when to be silent and when to speak, when to reprimand and when to embrace: guardians not only of state order, but of social vibrations and public dignity.

Finally, soft hand ethics intersects with parrhesia—the courage to speak truth without violence (Foucault, 2001). Here it becomes institutional parrhesia: the state "speaks" through empathy rather than intimidation. When officers lower shields, remove helmets, or meet citizens' eyes without fear, they signal a radical truth—that state and people need not be enemies, but co-seekers of justice. In Indonesia's plural context, soft hand policing can become a culturally grounded ethic, resonating with nguwongke wong (humanizing humans) and rahmatan lil 'alamin—care that embraces all. In this sense, soft hand is not only a security strategy but a cultural one: sustaining order through trust rather than fear.

Parrhesia, humanity, and the ethical responsibility of state apparatus

Foucault places parrhesia—the courage to speak truth—at the core of ancient political ethics, now lost in modern society (Foucault, 2001). He describes parrhesiastes as individuals who speak not because of power, but because they hold the truth capable of correcting power. Parrhesia is a risky moral act, where the speaker risks themselves for the public good. In a world where political language is often strategic, the courage to reveal truth has become subversive. Yet Foucault reminds us that parrhesia also requires the courage to listen (Foucault, 2005). Truth comes not only from speech but also from ears willing to accept risks—the risk of changing one's views and being touched by others' suffering. This ethics of listening transforms the state from a soulless machine to a political entity. Indonesia Gelap 2025 invites the state to relearn how to listen to its citizens.

Spivak adds a postcolonial layer to parrhesia, emphasizing the need to consider who speaks and to whom (Spivak, 2010). Subaltern voices are at risk not only of being silenced but absorbed, sterilized, or turned into decorative rhetoric. This makes the ethics of listening crucial: not to justify, but to allow space for others to remain "others." In a world where everyone wants to speak, the revolutionary act may be silence and listening. For the Indonesian National Police, parrhesia demands a shift from law enforcement to truth accompaniment—walking alongside the people, not above them (Tyler, 2006). Police become moral mediators between law and justice. Soft hand policing is not weakness but institutional parrhesia: enforcing law with empathy, revealing truth without destroying others' feelings.

Rancière writes that true politics happens when "the invisible becomes visible, and the inaudible becomes audible" (Rancière, 1999). In the Indonesia Gelap 2025 action, the people spoke the truth with their bodies through silence. The state was tested: did it still have ears to hear? A soft hand response, rooted in empathy, practices the parrhesia of listening—a deeper truth than words alone. This ethics of parrhesia also implies responsibility. State officials must not hide people's suffering behind statistics or silence criticism with stability jargon (Foucault, 2010). They must also admit mistakes, a form of care for the government's soul (Foucault, 2010). A country that reflects on itself is morally healthy.

In Indonesia, these ideas align with local values like eling lan waspada (remember and be alert) and ngerti, ngrasa, nglakoni (understand, feel, and act) (Magnis-Suseno, 1999). These values emphasize restraint and inner balance—key to Javanese leadership ethics. Soft hand policing can be seen as spiritual statecraft: maintaining order through awareness of the interconnectedness of souls. Indonesia Gelap 2025 is not just a protest but a moment of ethical enlightenment. It forces us to ask: Does the state still have the courage to hear uncomfortable truths? Soft hand is the courage not to oppress others' speech. Both parrhesia and soft hand policing are not techniques but attitudes of the soul, born out of respect for life.

The Indonesian National Police now has an opportunity to become a parrhesiastic institution—a guardian of truth that is gentle yet firm, humane yet disciplined, rational yet compassionate. It can be a guardian of resonance amid political noise, a mediator of conversation amid algorithms, and a beacon of light amid

distrust. This is not an easy task, but as Foucault wrote, "truth is never the privilege of those in power; it is the lifelong work of those who dare to love humanity" (Foucault, 2011). In a humane democracy, the state and people walk side by side, under a dim but sufficient light, showing the way toward humanity.

CONCLUSION

The analysis and discussion above highlight the profound relevance of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in the context of the "Indonesia Gelap 2025" demonstration. This question not only addresses whether marginalized groups have a voice but also critically examines how social, political, and epistemic systems in Indonesia listen. Mass actions born from a crisis of confidence in the state's narrative show that silence, symbols, and performance are legitimate forms of political articulation. Spivak's theory emphasizes that such actions are not meaningless cries, but "alternative languages" that seek to bridge the gap between official discourse and the lived experiences of the people. The subaltern's voice in this context does not seek to replace the state's language but to challenge and reconfigure the power relations that inhibit equal dialogue.

The study further reveals how Indonesia Gelap 2025 marks a shift in Indonesia's public space from one of representation to one of resonance. Here, the people do not wait for permission to be heard but create their own form of communication through collective symbols, visual expressions, and performative actions. This resonates with Jacques Rancière's idea of politics as a "sensitive redistribution," an attempt to redefine what is seen, heard, and understood in social order. Thus, demonstrations like Indonesia Gelap 2025 are not merely protests, but also acts of knowledge production and social awareness that challenge the epistemic dominance of the state. The people speak not by mimicking the elite's language but by creating a new language that arises from their own life experiences and collective struggles.

Regarding institutional roles, the Indonesian National Police (Polri) faces a significant challenge in navigating these new forms of political communication. Polri's function must evolve from merely enforcing order to becoming the guardians of social resonance. This means the police must shift from a disciplinary apparatus to a dialogical one—from security enforcers to democracy facilitators. The "soft-hand" policing approach based on empathy and dialogue is not just an operational strategy, but also an ethical reflection of a more humane governmentality, as understood in Michel Foucault's framework. In this new role, the police not only enforce the law but also uphold humanity by listening, interpreting symbols, and maintaining an affective balance between the state and the people.

The research confirms that subaltern resistance does not always take confrontational forms but often emerges through affective and aesthetic strategies. Indonesia Gelap 2025 demonstrates how political action can manifest as happening art, where the body, light, and silence become transformative tools. The Cultural Studies approach uncovers this dimension by viewing politics not just as power but also as meaning, feeling, and representation. Here, aesthetics and ethics intertwine: the manner in which the people express their suffering is a way of restoring their dignity. Thus, the subaltern's struggle is not only to speak but to reclaim their ability to create meaning in a world that often refuses to listen.

Ultimately, these findings point to a new epistemic awareness: listening is a political act. Spivak's question extends beyond "Can the subaltern speak?" to ask, "Can we listen without dominating?" This is the essence of postcolonial ethics—an ethic that does not treat knowledge as an instrument of power, but as a bridge of empathy. In this vision, the state, society, and institutions like the National Police must rebuild a collective paradigm of listening—open, reflective, and resonant. If the state learns to listen with its heart and not just with the law, democracy will no longer be a procedural system but a shared space where truth can grow from the grassroots.

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