

PARADIGMS OF THE “OTHER” AS “OUTSIDER” AND COMPETITIVE PATRIARCHY: SELECTED TEXTS OF EDUARDO GALEANO AND SYAD WALIULLAH’S *LALSALU*

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Abstract

This paper explores the confusion regarding the intellectuals’ role in “representation” as the political and/or the staging of subaltern-as-subject through literature. Selected texts of Galeano and a Bengali novel by Syed Waliullah will be analysed in terms of representation of women across cultural boundaries. The current paper is an attempt to discuss the issue of essentialist representation of women as a position of ‘difference and alterity, of normality and normalisation’ in defining their identity and membership within the culture-scape that they share.

The subliminal presence of misogyny within the cultural practices across geographical boundaries result in violence practiced against women be it under the garb of female foeticide and *Sati* as practiced in India, or the trial of ‘witches’ or by symbolic muting of voices and right to be represented within the patriarchal canon. Some vignettes about women from classical, biblical, Latin American, Islamic and Hindu worlds from Galeano revoke memories of mythmaking by the Catholic Church and by the “descendents of Mohammed” in order to dilute God’s own words with those of patriarchy and its vested interests. Similar projections can be found in *Lalsalu* by Waliullah, a novel written in Bengali, in which the patriarchal paradigms impose religious, political and social order of its making onto the community. Any challenge to such order is mercilessly neutralized. Thus the protagonist of the novel in his clever religious role with aids from the patriarchal superstructures is able to create hegemony in *Mohabbatnagar*, while his wives continue their subalternity. As Spivack mentions, can a brown woman be “saved” from a brown man by a “white” man? The actual “reasons” here could translate into competitive patriarchy of a different order. The proposed paper seeks to address these issues raised above.

Key Words: Patriarchy, matriarchy, otherisation, subalternization, cultural muting, salvaging, contesting patriarchy, resistance, violence, female stereotype.

As argued by Spivack (1988) the confusion between representation as political (speaking for) and/or re-presentation as in art or philosophy which, the post-theorists block out ‘visibility’ becomes problematic¹. The positionalities of Galeano and Walilullah are articulated through their respective texts; wherein as litterateurs they juggle their roles between allowing the marginalized to speak “for themselves” thus rendering themselves transparent (as intellectuals) or as agents (very visible through their authority) who “package” their subjectivities into “neat knowledges of truths”. At the same time their texts constantly defy the hegemonic process of legitimization of history or the construction of cultural archive, and received notions of literature.²

The present paper will look at how the “outside” paradigm as gendered and religious articulates itself across cultures as shown in some texts of Galeano and Syed Waliullah’s *Lalsalu*.³ The “outside,” is constituted by usurping and destroying the pre-patriarchal societies since they exhausted all their natural resources and were wanting of new ones. However, unlike matriarchy, linked to the earth and the uterus which were both life giving, patriarchy could not by itself ‘produce’ life. Hence it invented a God as a life giver and the private property as a justification of looting and hoarding. Matriarchy was “accommodated” through essentially exploitative and violent means.⁴

Such accommodations were wrought with how “Otherized” subjectivities were conceived, controlled and constructed. It involved 1) founding of “nations” (conquest and immigration), 2) reckoning with peopled culture-scapes (colonization) and 3) “salvaging” gendered subjects from imagined or real situations of illegitimacy and repression (decolonization). The question of “salvaging” of gendered subjects, from imagined or real problems is what finally legitimizes and justifies the role of patriarchy as actionable. Conquest-colonization and decolonization are counter discourses yet premised on an epic nostalgia of a parochial chauvinism packaged into myths of salvations, humanisms and competitive patriarchy. Intellectual activism becomes problematic if it purports to “salvage” the “saved” without any patronizing role implicated thereby.⁵

In some vignettes, Galeano explores women’s stories from classical, biblical, Islamic and Hindu worlds. They revoke memories of mythmaking by the Catholic Church and by the “descendents of Mohammed” to dilute God’s own words with those of patriarchy and its vested interests. Galeano’s texts expose how women, both related to Jesus and Mohammed like Mary and Sukaina as well as intelligent

ones like Hypatia, Theodora, Urraca and Scheherazade had been trivialized or terminated by/for patriarchy.⁶

The deletion of women as subjects also has a unique history in the civilizational agenda of Latin America. In Mexico, La Malinche has been understood as victim or traitor. The paintings of la Malinche as in the paintings of Clemente Orozco, Antonio Ruiz and the text of Octavio Paz are reflective of some confusions in their representational evaluations framed within discourses of patriarchy.⁷ Galeano's text on Malinche strips her of all paraphernalia and just about presents the bare facts.⁸ No wonder that Galeano here re-discovers her history of being sold by her mother to the Mayan Indians only to be subsequently offered to Hernan Cortes. La Malinche bears him a son and opens the doors of the New Empire to him. She accompanies him everywhere as his consort, interpreter and advisor. She is thus authorized to speak in the public domain, only articulating Cortes' agenda.⁹

Lalshalu by Syed Waliullah published in 1948, but actually written before Partition of India, portrays the socioeconomic, political and religious context of Bengali-Muslims.¹⁰ Indian history then was marked by troublesome upheavals of religious, ethnic and gendered conflicts. The cultural, moral and ethical agenda in Waliullah's text foregrounds the dubious nature of the pseudo-religious dogma grounded heavily on patriarchal assumptions and control. Like a parody of the Prophet, Majid, the middle-aged protagonist of *Lalsalu*, exiled in *Mohabbatnagar* [the city of love] pretends to be the 'bearer of the light' to show the 'rustic,' 'illiterate' 'non-believer' inhabitants, the 'right path.' However, Majid had actually migrated to *Mohabbatnagar* fleeing drought, famine and poverty, driven by a sheer need to survive and thereafter seeking a better life.

After settlement, Majid marries twice: first Rahima, the widow, who is 'widehipped, strong and beautiful'; and then, Jamila, the young, lively and curious one. In the post-Hijra period of his life the Prophet too married two women, viz. Sawda and Ayesha: the elderly Sawda was suitable to take care of the family and the younger Ayesha remained under their care. Rahima and Jamila invoke the memory of the prophet's two wives. However, such parallelism appears only to be the novelist's trope to highlight his critique of the political context in which religion was being used to force a 'partition' on people who were otherwise not bothered by differences. Majid's intention of offering 'spiritual' service to this community represents the agenda of re-appropriating the existing patriarchal religious hegemony to launch a counter-offensive, exemplifying competitive patriarchy. Those, already pushed first to a corner and subsequently marginalized, are not allowed to 'speak' but only be spoken for or be represented by.

Thereafter, *Mohabbatnagar* becomes a site of contesting patriarchal practices. Akkas is the representative of the postcolonial society endowed with modern

education, and urban polish whereas Majid is the representative of the patriarchal order of the pre-colonial society. Their interests clash around the debate over the conflicting proposals to build a secular English school (though there were two *maqtabas*¹¹) and a mosque for the spiritual upgradation in *Mohabbatnagar*. Majid procures better support among the villagers in favour of a mosque and defeats Akkas on grounds of faith. Women, however, remain irrelevant in this debate.

Notably, this incident takes place to diffuse the tragic overtone of the forced divorce between Khalek Byapari, the richest man in the village and his first wife Amina for her alleged 'infertility.' Actually Majid had begun to covet her and so he manipulated this divorce solely based on his unsolicited verdict. Majid declared her as 'fallen' and therefore unfit as Byapari's wife. Amina was forced to leave her own family. This event accelerated several cases of desertion of supposedly 'infertile' women by their husbands on grounds of their suspected 'chastity.'¹²

These manipulations were executed amidst formidable silence and with calculated precision. As a self-proclaimed religious leader, Majid had imposed certain codes of conduct onto the community. Yet, his second wife, Jamila seriously challenges this order and intimidates Majid so much that she is physically gagged and left to die. However even in her death she threatens Majid's authority - the feet of her dead body was poised desecrating the *sanctum sanctorum* of Majid's place of worship. Patriarchal violence seems to be at a loss and somewhat flustered when confronted with such silent yet visible defiance.

Galeano's texts work through juxtaposition of contrary ideas, irony, retrieval of lost histories, dare articulation of offensive truths, all at the same time. They are not pedagogical in their agenda at all and dwell instead on the subversive. For example in "Marys" he invokes the two Marys, one a virgin redeeming the sin of Eve and the other, the Mary Magdalene, a prostitute before becoming a saint. The text ends with a comment about Mary Magdalene: "Believers humiliate her by offering forgiveness."¹³

In "Resurrection of Mary,"¹⁴ he recounts the story of her rebirth being announced by one Dominica Lopez while she was harvesting corn. This resurrected Mary urged her to build a chapel. However this provoked the wrath of the bishop who imprisoned them both.¹⁵ Though these characters, i.e. Mary and the Indigenous Mary from Chiapas, are not subalterns, they reflect how they have been contained and confined to the margins. Not even her virginity and her status as the God's mother can redeem her from humiliation imposed by the patriarchal authority of the Catholic Church. We could submit therefore that they too fall prey to the process of "subalterization" setting the tone for sacrifice of the female in order to constitute patriarchy. The case of the mortal humans can be well imagined. In

Waliullah the major characters, i.e. Majid, Rahima and Jamila, share some attributes of 'subalternity' in the sense that they belonged to the non-elite, economically backward, geographically unspecified spaces. Though initially living beyond the hegemonic power, Majid with the help of religion and aids from the patriarchal superstructures creates hegemony in *Mohabbatnagar* for himself whereas, the "saved ones", Rahima and Jamila retain their subalternity.

Finally in the case of the Hindu cultural practices, patriarchy is constituted through female foeticides. Galeano retrieves this unwritten "history" of the Hindu patriarchy in the vignette about how Mitra, a goddess, had arrived at India from Babylonia and Persia but was not welcome. Hence she had to become a god. However any human girl child were either poisoned or even drugged and then smothered. Patriarchy denies her the very right to be born. She is not safe even in her mother's womb! Modernity deploys sex determining machines to selectively terminate pregnancies carrying female foetuses. This is a reality even today as the sex ratio of males and females are not balanced. Female foeticides are justified by saying that prevention is better than cure.¹⁶ This unique cultural practice evades any categorizations. What it (patriarchy) seeks to "salvage" by female foeticides is unfathomable. Perhaps it reflects how today societal norms have rid itself of any burden of "saving" her as economic interests have overtaken everything else. In a sense this is reflective of a trend of "feminization" of masculinity of the Hindu man as a result of modernity.¹⁷

Patriarchy thus is constituted through trivialization or sacrifice of anyone who contests its authority and control. However, it also constructs itself along an image of a privileged savior which actually hides subliminal misogyny. Such "salvation" ensures a continuation of patriarchal dominance and control systems on which women become dependent.¹⁸ In the Hindu traditional code the need to protect the woman's body from an outsider was co-opted into the decolonization agenda. Both nation and woman eventually assumed the imagined figure of a mother, the most sacred and revered of all womanhood. Such an imagining was also a response to the British sneer at the status of the Hindu women who remained illiterate and were confined to home and hearth. Tanika Sarkar (2001) argues that as colonization did not allow for maleness to play out in the outer sphere of the society, the patriarchy chose the home, the only space where the authoritative maleness can be articulated. Hindu nationalism was premised on a need to protect this sacred space occupied by women.

Significantly, in colonial Latin America, the body of the indigenous woman became the site of contestation and conquest. She was the exact opposite of the Hindu classical women as the body served to "populate" the new world where

governing was synonymous with populating.¹⁹ In post colonial Latin America this body had to be controlled (saved?) to a different political end, that of nation building. She had to be “civilized” by a white man or completely “whitened” out by Northern European immigrants’ stock. In Mexico, however, the ghost of La Malinche prevailed and hence grows the importance of the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe. She was the mother figure which would serve to give legitimacy to the Mexican identity.²⁰

These texts also expose defiance to agendas of “being saved”. For example, the story of Sukaina is that of her refusal to wear any veil.²¹ Jamila in *Lalsalu* also refused to conform to patriarchal norms set for women.²² Her spontaneous outburst into the terrain of maleness, i.e. speech and loud laughter, disturbs the neatly crafted silence of Majid’s household near his ‘invented shrine.’²³ He realizes that the bubble of fear that he created in the village is about to burst. Jamila is forbidden to laugh aloud. Her laughter transforms suddenly into profuse tears expressing the plight of a helpless Bengali Muslim woman. She overcomes and resists the fear of punishment.

Jamila senses Majid’s agenda not only in the society that she shares as the macrocosm but also in her and Rahima’s personal lives as the microcosm. While this understanding empowers Jamila in her fight against patriarchy, her self-controlled restricted communication [or the lack of it] makes Majid insecure about his own agency.²⁴ The essential unknowability is what qualifies her as the ‘Other’ in the text. Her mind remains absolutely impenetrable to Majid. She neither submits to Majid’s agency nor changes her way. She does not fit into the patriarchal paradigm of control and hence needs to be either silenced or removed. She has to go through a prolonged process of domestication prescribed by her husband but of no desirable consequences. However, her resistance is muted by her sudden but predictable death bringing back the equilibrium of fear designed by Majid as the representative of Patriarchy.

Moving then to the other extreme, Galeano’s text narrates the case of Phoolan Devi.²⁵ She has become a legend constructed along the whore/goddess paradigm of patriarchy. Like la Malinche who transgresses the domain of prescribed gender roles, both in the Spanish as well as the Indigenous world through the prohibited spoken word, Phoolan Devi also breaks such code through vigilante justice that she executes. La Malinche’s occupancy of the male space is conspicuous for her silence as she accommodates herself into the world of the conquistadores. Similarly, Phoolan Devi’s taking on the male world actually is a continuation of a patriarchal agenda of caste wars. She has simply become more feminine through her seemingly “masculinity” and thus her muteness.²⁶

In all these cases patriarchy is motivated by an urge to conquer and control under the garb of “salvaging” the unknown and potentially dangerous. Thus, la Malinche’s negotiation with Cortes before setting out for the Honduran conquest assured her of “salvaging” her dignity and legitimacy through marriage to Alonso Jaramillo.²⁷ Similarly Phoolan’s surrender, stage managed by different political parties keen to claim responsibility for her “salvation” into Indian politics, delivered her into her “own saving”.²⁸ Submission into the ultimate patriarchal agenda also wrests from patriarchy the last challenges of these subjects as agents. However like Jamila they also will eventually die deceived.

Here we have shown how the female stereotypes in three dominant religious cultures are subject to an imposed outside/inside paradigm set by patriarchy on the one hand and how they also contest such an imposition, on the other, articulating what Spivak calls a contradictory constitutive subject. Spivak’s and our own contention with this situation articulates the confusion of the post-colonial woman intellectual as well caught between her own invisibility and/or her conscious presence amidst skeptics and philanthropist.

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Notes

¹ Spivack, 1988, p. 70

² This coincides with Spivak's own submission that even our subjectivities as representatives of the hegemonic privileged centre have to fall under the gaze of our role as the intellectual like a mirror effect which reflects to both parties. Otherwise our indulgence only strengthens further our centeredness. (Spivak, *The Death of a Discipline*, Columbia University Press, 2005).

The following lines from Galeano reflect significantly Spivak's position.

Mirrors are filled with people.

The invisible see us.

The forgotten recall us.

When we see ourselves, we see them.

When we turn away, do they? (Eduardo Galeano, *Vignettes: Stories of almost Everyone*, trans. Mark Fried (London: Portobello Books, 2009) p. 1

³ Syad Waliullah *Lalsalu*. Kolkata: Chirayata Prakashan. (1948) Seventh Edition, 2010.

⁴ Claudia von Werlhof. "Capitalist Patriarchy and the Struggle for a 'Deep' Alternative." International Conference on the Gift Economy Nov 12-14, 2004: Las Vegas, Nevada. Viewed 3.04.2011: emanzipationhumanum.de/downloads/LasVegas.pdf. and www.gifteconomyconference.com/pages/Claudia.html.

⁵ Spivack (1988) submits that the voice of the subaltern woman ought not to be presented in any plain and simple language as such ways espousing "simplicity" actually hides different forms of domination and controls. It is through these invisible spaces that patriarchy "surreptitiously" slithers in what Galeano's texts expose. A bunch of his vignettes can be used to understand the patterns of domination, control and normalization of the patriarchal discourse.

⁶ See Galeano's *Mirrors*, pp. 71-79.

⁷ (Messinger Cypess 14).

⁸ Galeano, *Memoria del fuego: Los nacimientos*. 89-90.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Interestingly the English translation of the book published in 1967 was entitled *Tree without Roots*. Trans Anne-Marie Thibaud - Jeffrey Gibian - Malik Khayyam - Qaisar Saeed. Chatto & Windus: UNESCO Culture Sector. 1967

¹¹ *Maqtabs* are elementary schools often attached to a mosque to impart Islamic education to children.

¹² Syad Waliullah, *Lalsalu*, p. 97

¹³ Galeano, *Mirrors*, 72.

¹⁴ Galeano, *Mirrors*, 72.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Galeano, *Mirrors*, p. 34.

¹⁷ Very significantly after this Galeano talks about Sati but with a quasi-nostalgic tone, "Tradition orders widows to throw themselves into the fire where the dead husband's body burns, but today few if any are willing to obey that command." The last lines are the punch lines as they ironically state, "In contrast, there is no instance ever in the whole history of India of a husband leaping into the pyre of his deceased wife." (Galeano, p. **Page number kothae?**)

¹⁸ The case of racial and ethnic cleansing proposed by the Bosnian Serbs using bodies of Muslim and Croat women in 1992 and then in 1993 deserves mention here. See Gearoid O Tuathail 260-275.

¹⁹ "poblar es gobernar."

²⁰ But there is more to patriarchy than sexual inequalities, and subordinates come in all forms and colors. The law of the Father upon which all other laws are based are primarily the laws of the white, heterosexual, land-owning Father. The Father, in other words, is inscribed with a sex, a race, a class and a sexuality --- all of which converge into the semiotic of patriarchy. (Gaspar de Alba 51).

²¹ She had however, married five times, and in each of her five marriage contracts she refused to pledge obedience to her husband (Galeano, *Mirrors*, 78).

²² "within a few days Jamila's real character in revealed. First she gets rid of her veil and then starts laughing hiding her face. Gradually words begin to sprout of her mouth. And once her words bloom it is found that she knows and can say several things – she just hid it under her veil so long." [*Lalsalu*, p. 103 translation Sen's]

²³ La Malinche's breaking in into the domain of speech, from this perspective, was a submission to the interest of the conquistador. Scheherazade's dwelling on speech helped her to control the public space/gaze into which she was thrown by postponing her death.

²⁴ *Lalsalu*, p. 105-106

²⁵ Phoolan Devi had the terrible idea to be born poor and female and a member of one of India's lowest caste. In 1974, at the age of eleven, her parents married her to a man from a caste not quite as low, and gave him a cow for dowry. Since Phoolan knew nothing of conjugal duties, her husband taught her by torture and rape Galeano, (*Mirrors* 317).

²⁶ Murty,

²⁷ Townsend 152-156).

²⁸ She did not trust the Uttar Pradesh Government and hence wanted to surrender to the Madhya Pradesh police. She also insisted on laying down her arms before the images of goddess Durga and Mahatma Gandhi. While she did so, there were more than ten thousand onlookers. Sunder Rajan, in her book where she writes about Phoolan Devi's surrender talks about the staging of the show. The media bore witness to the whole procedure. Different political parties wanted to become visible through the light of her salvaging. V.P Singh, the chief minister of the state had to resign, there was friction between UP Police and MP Police. Competitive patriarchy is at its prime manifestation in this surrender in post-colonial India.