

The Question of Reclamation of “Ghost” Lives in J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe*

Mirza Muhammad Zubair Baig

Abstract

John Maxwell Coetzee’s *Foe* (1986) is a rewriting of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). In this rewriting, the woman, Susan Barton, has attempted at the excavation of the “ghost” lives from the canonical text. The fight for reclamation and recognition of the excluded other has been partially successful as major part of their life narratives remain inaccessible even in the retelling. This rewriting works on the other as “bearer” or “maker” of meaning moving to and fro from the world of silence to speech and vice versa. Susan’s resistant voice to patriarchy and colonial master interrogates the classic text but her presence in the narrative is directly confronted by the oppressive patriarchy to the effect that her partial story is delivered stillborn and larger part remains inaccessible for the readers.

Keywords: canon, rewriting/retelling, patriarchy, colonialism, silences

Introduction

This essay explores how far the rewritings of the Western canonical texts could “re-right” the absences stereotyped in the patriarchal and colonial cultures. I have, particularly, focused on the feminist and postcolonial themes of voice, identity and representation of the marginalized. The imperial and patriarchal Other standardize the “lesser beings” of women and the colonized. The normative structures of canonicity misrepresent and erase the objectified other to their advantage (Baig, 2012).

Robinson Crusoe’s story has been interrupted by Susan Barton’s narrative in *Foe* which is a rewriting of castaways, Susan Barton¹ and Friday; and challenges the representation of the other by the imperial Other. The narrative of heroic Crusoe has also been shared by a woman and Friday who reclaim their part of the adventure. At the same time, it is also the story of a kidnapped daughter and a missing mother.

Foe, the English writer, is shown in debt with diminished energies for writing. Susan faces a daughter looking for her missed mother and claims her (Susan) to be her mother who does not recognize the girl. It is revealed in the text that it is Foe’s move to interpolate a daughter looking for her lost mother in the plot of Susan’s story in order to make her story

palatable for the English readers. The mother-daughter relationship is in trouble and the mystery of missing mother-daughter remains unresolved. I analyse this intricate relationship under the heading “Madwoman looking for her missed mother: Susan Barton’s double” in the analysis.

Stereotyped Representation of Crusoe, Friday and a Woman

Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*² presents an Englishman, a farm owner in Brazil, as deliverer of a “cannibal” named Friday. In an attempt to make his career in slave trade, he sets sail to the Guinea Coast but is shipwrecked and left marooned on an island for 35 years. Crusoe considers his entrapment in island as punishment for his “*original sin*” (p. 214) of not listening to his father (God) who wished him to stay as a planter in Brazil. The chapter “I Find the Print of a Man’s Naked Foot” onwards represents Friday, an arbitrary name given by the colonial master for the only reason that he was “delivered” of the cannibals that day, “I let him know his name should be Friday, which was the day I saved his life” (p. 227). Crusoe, “banished from human society” and “condemned ... to silent life” (p. 174) was “exceedingly surprised with the print of a man’s naked foot on the shore” (p. 171) after spending eighteen years of his life of a recluse in the woods. This “print” generates anxiety in Crusoe’s mind. He is afraid of non-Englishness, “any human creature” (p. 181) who is not English. “Naked” alludes to the stereotyped nakedness and savagery of cannibalism—“horror of my mind” (p. 183). He imagines them in his English mind as inhuman, creating “the horror of the degeneracy of human nature,” full of “abominable and vitiated passions” (p. 189). He tries to understand how “the wise Governor of all things (God) should give up any of His creatures to such inhumanity; nay, to something so much below even brutality itself as to devour its own kind” (p. 217). He dreams of capturing a “savage” and taking him as his servant who had “kneeled down” (p. 219) to him:

I fancied myself able to manage one, nay, two or three savages, if I had them, so as to make them entirely slaves to me, to do whatever I should direct them, and to prevent their being able at any time to do me any hurt. (p. 220)

The othered human beings are first turned into savages in the gaze of the Other and later on, forced into bondage of slavery. Misrepresentation of the other as “savage” has been used as ruse to enslave a free human being. Crusoe acts as a demi-god—“governor” of the island—the name, the captain of the ship calls him by. Friday, a “savage” is an antithesis of Western misrepresentation of Indians even in the classic text—*Robinson Crusoe*. This is how Friday is described in Crusoe’s gaze:

He was a comely, handsome fellow, perfectly well made, with straight, strong limbs, not too large; tall, and well-

shaped; and, as I reckon, about twenty-six years of age. He had a very good countenance, not a fierce and surly aspect, but seemed to have something very manly in his face; and yet he had all the sweetness and softness of a European in his countenance, too, especially when he smiled ... The colour of his skin was not quite black ... that had in it something very agreeable, though not very easy to describe. His face was round and plump; his nose small, not flat, like the negroes; a very good mouth, thin lips, and his fine teeth well set, and as white as ivory. (p. 226)

His depiction is limited to physical aspects. Friday is measured from English imperialist standards which give him an identity distinct from Negroes. He describes Friday's rites of slavery through language of signs. Friday is shown signaling "subjection, servitude, and submission imaginable" (p. 227). Crusoe teaches him English civilization but is dissatisfied to perceive that he was "still a cannibal in his nature" (p. 228). This confession questions the assimilationist "civilizing mission" of the colonialist. He calls Friday "my man" (p. 233) and takes him as his material possession. He replaces his concept of "one Benamuckee, that lived beyond all" (p. 238) with the Christian concept of God "greater God than their Benamuckee" (p. 238), and problematizes his concept of life after death—"the pretence of their old men going up to the mountains to say O to their god Benamuckee was a cheat" (p. 239). He presents Friday, a willing and adamant slave, pleading, "What you send Friday away for? Take kill Friday, no send Friday away" (p. 249). He is happy over being "rich in subjects" on the island visualising himself "like a King" (p. 264) taking the island as his "property" and "an undoubted right of dominion" acting as an absolute "lord and lawgiver" to his three subjects having different religions. His man Friday was a convert "Protestant, his father was a Pagan and a cannibal, and the Spaniard was a Papist" (p. 264). Finally, rescued from the "enchanted island" (p. 291), he decides to settle down accompanied by Friday—the "most faithful servant upon all occasions" (p. 306).

Crusoe leaves his "effects in some safe hands" of his old "friend the widow, who I knew was honest, and would be just to me" (p. 314) and he finally goes back to England. He thinks of "the poor widow, whose husband had been my first benefactor; and she, while it was in her power, my faithful steward and instructor" (p. 314). Crusoe has no record of his sea and land journals: "As I have troubled you with none of my sea journals so I shall trouble you now with none of my land journals" (p. 318). Even the narrator in *Foe*, Susan, challenges his island journals by informing the readers that he never kept any journals in the first place.

Crusoe shares how poor Friday was “really frightened” at the sight of “the mountains all covered with snow, and felt cold weather, which he had never seen or felt before in his life” (p. 319). The Spaniards were his successors on the island, his “new colony” (p. 335). The two men left on the island work like colonial agents in the absence of the master. He sends provisions to his agents:

From thence I touched at the Brazils, from whence I sent a bark, which I bought there, with more people to the island; and in it, besides other supplies, I sent seven women, being such as I found proper for service, or for wives to such as would take them. As to the Englishmen, I promised to send them some women from England, with a good cargo of necessaries, if they would apply themselves to planting-which I afterwards could not perform. (p. 336)

Even *Foe* failed to excavate the story of seven women exported to Crusoe’s island. Susan is the only woman who has come up to claim her story. If there are women other than Susan, their erasures in *Foe* raise serious questions. In the normative text, they have no right to representational voice because they do not deserve an identity in the recognized structures while being “some women.” The women have been presented here as equivalent to other supplies and necessities. They could be applied to certain tasks if considered “proper for service” or wives to the Englishmen who could take them and leave them. The application of women to “planting” also refers to the age of slavery when the child born of a master from a slave woman was also a slave. Based on this historical fact, it can be assumed that these women were to give birth to “slaves” required for labor on the newly imperialized island. This servitude and disrespect parallel the indifference shown to the “savages.”

Theoretical Perspective

I test the point of contention found in the claims made by Homi K. Bhabha and Spivak regarding the recovery of voice. Bhabha claims that the native’s voice can be recovered unlike Spivak who thinks that the women as subaltern cannot speak in the colonized cultures and suffer more than their male counterparts because of their sex and gender. I understand that Bhabha and Spivak both take essentialist positions regarding the recovery of voice, identity and representation and I work in the in-between space existing between these two polemical views. In order to see if the rewritings have further caused erasure and absences, I take both Spivak’s and Bhabha’s positions side by side in my analysis to see if the voice has been recovered or remains in the “shadow” (Spivak 1988, p. 287). Spivak (1985a) notes that there is “absence of a text that can ‘answer one back’

after the planned epistemic violence of the imperialist project" (p. 251). She analyses postcolonialism in the context of gender, closely studies the place of women and finds them further marginalized by the subservient patriarchy in the colonized society and the postcolonial narratives.

Contrary to Spivak, Bhabha talks of collective resistance. I use Bhabha's concept of the "partial presence,"³ a way to subvert the colonial authority and imposed silence on the colonized in the presence of the colonial authority:

The voice of command is interrupted by questions that arise from these heterogeneous sites and circuits of power which, though momentarily "fixed" in the authoritative alignment of subjects, must continually be re-presented in the production of terror or fear. (1994, p. 116)

Bhabha (1994) understands that such interruptions and questions from within the colonialist discourse by the subaltern disrupt the "fixidity" and "authority" of the colonial masters. This leads to the reading "between the lines" and "seek to change the often coercive reality" (p. 121) of the master discourse. Bhabha's idea of "hybrid moment" is closely related to the art of rewriting which is produced as a result of the interaction between the absence in the world of canonicity and the colonial/patriarchal "presence" which caused their erasure.

While referring to the art of rewriting and explaining Bhabha "hybrid moment," Parry (2004) writes that "[f]or in the 'hybrid moment' what the native rewrites is not a copy of the colonialist original, but a qualitatively different thing-in-itself, where "misreadings" and "incongruities" expose the uncertainties and ambivalences of the colonialist text and deny it an authorizing presence" (p. 25). Here the exposure of "misreading" and "incongruities" challenge the "authorizing presence" of the colonial presence of the colonial power. It is a resistance shown from within a text and narrative. However, the "misreadings" and "incongruities" also exist in the rewritings and, hence, also sometimes challenge the "authorizing presence" of the postcolonial and feminist narrator. The need arises to read the rewritings further and see if the native voice itself is interrupted by the questions from the internal audience of patriarchy/colonialism, and the other characters of women/the colonized.

Spivak (1985b) further claims that subalterns cannot speak as they have been "domesticated" (p. 253) by the process of imperialism. I understand that in the rewritings, re-righting is "partial" and character specific but the existence of characters in the "shadow" of the narration is a digression from its status as rewriting of the erasures. In the process of

historical excavation, there are characters which have been marginalized; they either don't find sufficient space in the text or are consciously left out as insignificant.

Spivak (1986) provides the post-colonial woman intellectual the leading role to give representation to subaltern women by using the resources of deconstruction "in the service of reading" to develop a strategy rather than a theory of reading that might be a critique of imperialism" (p. 230). Therefore, the deconstructive study of the rewritings helps in not only listening to the exclusions in the classic texts but also keeps us vigilant to those arising in the rewritings.

The rewritings are an effort to put the erased characters "in the position of the questioning subject" that challenge colonialism and phallogentrism and, to Spivak (1990), such positions are "very privileged positions" as compared to "the much larger female constituency" (p. 42) who rarely get a chance to respond or get the position of a speaking subject. In case of my study, it is contradictory as the privileged position of the speaking subjects in the rewriting is also limited by their stereotypes in the traditional texts. Spivak requires from the feminist rewriters as the speaking and constituting subject to learn about "the unlearning of one's privilege as loss" (MacLean & Donna, 2005, p. 5). Loss and lack has been historically associated with a woman. The women can take up this "loss," erasures, absences and silences reserved as of a woman's "privilege" and "unlearn" it by facing and confronting it. By submitting, learning and accepting this "loss" as "privilege" would silence them further so, in order to fight back, the rewriters are to challenge their misrepresentations. This "unlearning" enables a rewriter "to listen to that other constituency"—the rest of women to "recognize that the position of the speaking subject within theory can be an historically powerful position when it wants the other actually to be able to answer back" (Spivak, 1990, p. 42).

The subjects of narration are in privileged position than the other subjected characters but, if they are women or the colonized, they are equally confronted and resisted by the colonial and patriarchal voice. Moreover, the narrative voice in the rewritings would have to "unlearn" its "speaking subject" position in order to let the other women and the colonized to "answer back" and respond to their presentation in the text.

Susan Barton's Exclusion and Partial Presence in Rewriting

Susan Barton, the narrator of *Foe*, has been the "excluded other" (Spivak, 1987, p. 129) in *Robinson Crusoe*. She reclaims her erased self in Crusoe's story. As it happens in case of standardized sea adventures, she is on a voyage, cast away by the mutineers of a ship and drifted to an island. She recounts:

At last I could row no further ... A dark shadow fell upon me, not of a cloud but of a man with a dazzling halo about him. "Castaway," I said with my thick dry tongue. "I am cast away. I am all alone." And I held out my sore hands. (*Foe*, p. 5)

Susan is binary to Cruso⁴ and Friday at the island and rows "all alone" to the island, but it is paradoxical that the moment she is washed up by the sea, her loneliness is interrupted by Friday's presence and still, as a woman, she is "alone" on the "man"-rich island. Friday saves her life when Cruso makes her his subject. Though both Friday and Cruso are men, their reaction to Susan is quite differently contextualized by their master-salve relationship. As a "cast away" voyager, she is accepted only as a slave at the island. In the actual story, she has been an erasure and absence in Cruso's presence. With "dry tongue" and "sore hands," the castaway, this time, is a woman instead of a European man Cruso. "A dark shadow" and "dazzling halo" alludes to Cruso's Friday. Holding out "sore hands" invokes the image of crucifixion. The "sore hands" of the castaway woman are comparable to the "dark shadow" of enslaved Friday, and carry the mark of their varying experiences and identities.

The narrative voice explains Susan's experience as a "castaway" on a man's island. Like Friday, she succeeds a man (Cruso) on the island whose arrival at the island before her gives him the opportunity to declare himself a master. Being a successor, she becomes a subject washed up by sea on the island. Her incapacity to "row no further" shows her dissipated energies as a woman and castaway "all alone" without an escort, braving the ship wrecking waves of the sea and finally surviving them. Susan Barton has been a "castaway" specifically in the Western text when she could not get her place in Daniel Defoe's story of a eulogized European. This indicates how acts giving power to a woman remain untold in the stereotyped stories. This is how a patriarchal thinking pattern portrays a woman as weak, lacking the power to venture beyond on her own resources. As it is stereotypical in the adventure stories, she is also exposed to danger by a "dark shadow" of a man in a "strange island." The character of Susan is a missing link in the European story, and her presence in the rewriting connects the "island" of patriarchy and colonialism to feminism and postcolonialism.

Her depiction of Friday as "shadow" can be connected to Spivak's stand that "subaltern" are pushed in the "shadow" of the narrative⁵ and hence, cannot speak. In Spivak's context, Susan as a woman is an "object of colonialist historiography" and "subaltern." In her understanding, in the colonialist representation of the resistance (read "insurgency" from colonial angle) offered by the marginalized, the colonized part of

patriarchy further overshadows women because of “the ideological construction of gender” (Spivak, 1988, p. 287). Spivak’s “gender” specific argument carries weight as far as the representation of Susan in *Robinson Crusoe* is concerned. In *Foe*, though Susan is an agency to the narrative in the text, Friday, a colonized male, appears as a “shadow” and his gender is hardly of any advantage to him. Her image of crucifixion does not symbolize sacrifice, ending up or giving up but reflects her capacity to bear pain, face ordeals on her way, and foretells the life of trials awaiting.

Susan’s rowing to Cruso’s island is intentional and ordained by the structure of male writing. She could not find another island where she could survive on her own, and present to the world an island parallel and alternative to that of Cruso. Her story is fragmentary. It starts with Friday and Cruso somewhere from the middle of her life narrative — breaking her life apart where her voice prior to the island part goes unrecorded.

She stands up in the story to reclaim herself by speaking up to the patriarchy that had stricken the world of standardized writing. Susan’s inclusion in *Foe* justifies the cause of rewriting which is primarily focused on her. She is flanked by Friday. Macaskill and Colleran (1992) take the introduction of Susan in the narrative as a “maneuver”:

As a first demographic maneuver, Coetzee enlarges Robinson Crusoe’s kingdom by one, adding a castaway woman, Susan Barton, to the island’s only other subject, slave Friday; it is Susan Barton who elects to confess the story of the life and times of the island-empire’s last days. (p. 436)

To add to their understanding, I argue that Susan, being the only resident woman, not only “enlarges” Cruso’s kingdom but also the “kingdom” of normative writing. She does so by not being a receptive and passive woman character but being a dialectician who always has a question for Cruso, the *master* at the island, and Foe, the *master* of writing. She “elects to confess” her version of the island story, arbitrarily and by default, to Foe and again to patriarchy. She walks out of her ignominious life of erasure, absence and silence in *Robinson Crusoe* by standing up to Cruso at the island and Foe, the writer in the novella, back in England:

When I reflect on my story I seem to exist only as the one who longed to be gone: a being without substance, a ghost beside the true body of Cruso. Is that the fate of all storytellers? Yet I was as much a body as Cruso. I ate and drank, I woke and slept, I longed. The island was Cruso’s (yet by what right? By the law of islands? Is there such a

law?), but I lived there too ... Return to me the substance I have lost, Mr. Foe: that is my entreaty. (*Foe*, p. 51)

Susan portrays herself as binary to Cruso on the island. She as a “ghost” and an erased substantial body in *Robinson Crusoe* is compared with “the true body of Cruso” both in the writing and rewriting. Her erasure of the self in the classic text is visualized and termed as “ghost” presence in the retelling. She contradicts her earlier wish “to be gone” when she pleads the writer Foe to return her “the substance” which the canonical writing has denied to her. She only “seems to” be gone or a person without body but actually she is not. She is a living being who persists and resists patriarchal strategy to erase her being in the process of writing. Though she is challenging Cruso’s authority and presence, unconsciously she is defining herself in relation to him—“I was as much a body as Cruso.” She questions the epistemological basis of “all” male “storytellers” and their telling. She is skeptic of the patriarchal “law” (tradition) of writing where the island only belonged to Cruso and writing only documented his life and adventure when both Cruso and Susan “lived” there.

A woman *in comparison* with a man lacks her true representation in the present canonical writing. She becomes a “ghost” because of her absence as a writer of her own story. It is because of the difference between storytelling and story writing. The reason she loses her substance and becomes a “ghost” when Cruso retains his “true body” is directly related to Foe’s patriarchal and colonial bias shown in his writing. Though she is a “ghost” in the gaze of the hegemonic Other, she is a critiquing and arguing subject questioning the uncharted laws of colonialism, and seems to be regaining her voice. Spivak also points out the erasure of Cruso’s wife from the classic text:

... the nameless wife who was married and died in the conditional mode in one sentence so that Cruso could leave for the East Indies in the very year of the founding of the Bank of England. (1990, p. 7)

Spivak refers to the pertinent question about the identity of Cruso’s “nameless wife.” The “one sentence” crosses out the identity of his wife whose death is necessary to justify Cruso’s moving off the coast. She is presented redundant in the traditional plot. Her life prior to marriage, after marriage and till death gets no importance in the colonialist and patriarchal ambitious writing. We hardly know anything about her origin and the cause of her death. She has been passingly referred to in the classic text to jettison Cruso of his familial obligations and matrimonial bondage. Like Susan, the “nameless” wife’s story also requires a fair

retelling to regain the voice and identity lost amid the structures of patriarchy and colonialism.

As a woman, Susan asserts her right of equity. Susan challenges the “law” which divides the human being along the line of the colonizer and the colonized. The same applies to the law of “writing” which accepts a colonizer and a man as “a true body” while denies “substance” to the body of a woman and a subject making them merely “ghost(s)” in the colonial/patriarchal writings. Brink (1998) observes that “woman as a presence (has been) largely excluded from official South African discourses; and history as canon” (p. 23). To look for Susan’s identical in other texts is a fruitful effort to understand her character but it is again structuralist approach which inherently bears the danger of identity fixation as David Block (2006) observes that structuralism looks to “establish universal laws of psychology or social structure to explain individuals’ fixed identities” (p. 34). Macaskill and Jeanne Colleran (1992) relate about Susan, a woman who is trying to write down her story:

As a result of what Hegel would call her “fight for recognition,” Susan at least seems to have overcome the phallogocentric insistence on woman as bearer rather than maker of meaning. (p. 441)

Hegel interprets the process of recognition of an individual in relation to another. On the basis of “fight for recognition” in the realm of self-consciousness, the consequent relationship of the master and slave is defined where “the lord achieves his recognition through another consciousness (that is of slave)” (Hegel, 1998, p. 116) and not vice versa. The “phallogocentric” approach makes a woman subservient to a man and in relation to Hegelian concept of “recognition,” she has not to be recognized as being “inferior” in the “fight for recognition.” So the master, Foe or Cruso theoretically has to make Susan as “bearer” of meaning rather than a “maker.” Macaskill and Jeanne Colleran have consciously avoided using a definite statement instead of a linking verb “seems” which, however, makes Susan’s bondage in the patriarchal and colonial structure relatively less intensive or slavish. She has momentarily overcome the “insistence” by not being accomplice to Foe’s fabricated stories. However, her “fight for recognition” does not win her equity or justice in the text, and she cannot “overcome” the patriarchal suppression and domination. The readers still await a story authored by her, taking on the “phallogocentric” mode of signification. The “phallogocentric” repression is based on Susan’s self-consciousness. She is the originator of information and source of knowledge for the writer Foe but her telling has been colonized by the patriarchal mode of writing which becomes an extension of “phallogocentric” — male centric power:

That is part of the magic of words. Through the medium of words I have given Mr. Foe the particulars of you and Mr. Cruso and of my year on the island and the years you and Mr. Cruso spent there alone, as far as I can supply them; and all these particulars Mr. Foe is weaving into a story which will make us famous throughout the land, and rich too. (*Foe*, p. 58)

The “magic” or “medium” of (spoken and written) words becomes site of inclusion as well as exclusion of a being, consciousness or self. Susan gives partial meanings to “words.” They are not just spoken words. They include written too. Here, she means only *spoken*. Here, the expectation of being “famous” and “rich” is quite ironical as nothing such happens till the end of the story. In whatsoever faithful manner, Susan, being the sole witness to Friday’s part of life at Cruso’s island, might be revealing to the writer with adequate “supply” of “words.” However, she cannot contend the exclusions arising in the patriarchal and colonial writing mode till she is empowered by the skill of writing. To Susan’s disadvantage, she has no say in the medium of writing which is controlled and directed by patriarchy. Weaving, an art and handicraft traditionally associated with women, has been taken up by the writer Mr. Foe in case of story writing. It is matter of concern that, even in rewriting, Susan cannot weave her own story. She has to give the “particulars” of her experiences as a woman, mother and subject to Cruso and to Foe. The canonical story makes Friday “famous” for nothing else but an epitome of a faithful and willing slave, and both Susan and Friday as “us” are passive objects of the story.

Susan loses her “recognition” in the realm of being-written by Foe. She cannot uphold herself as “maker” of meaning in the colonialist and patriarchal mode of writing which becomes a source of her erasure. From the world of speech to the realm of writing, she is morphed into “bearer” of meaning from its “maker” in comparison with Friday who is from the world of silence and hence, remains an erasure both in the world of speech as well as writing.

Here, we find that *Robinson Crusoe* is part of the story prior to the arrival of Susan Barton who weaves only half of the story in fiction, and makes Robinson Crusoe famous contrary to the expectations of Susan Barton. As a privileged English writer and patriarch, Foe is not interested in Susan’s misfortunes or troubles. The traditional concept of “weaving” yarn by women has been utilized by patriarchy in writing to marginalize them. His bias is reflected in his weaving. The feminist and postcolonial challenge is to subvert “the West as culture of reference” (Parry, 1998, p. 151) by offering an alternative worldview. In this novel, Coetzee makes (Robinson) Cruso, (De)Foe and an English woman Susan as point/culture of reference

even in rewriting. In comparison with the story of an English woman, Friday's story, voice and identity remained minimalized and inaccessible. The rewriting may have been more subversive if the West could have been displaced as "culture of reference." Susan may have been related to a marginalized ethnicity looking for her lost tribe or its members. She might have had access to the art of writing in the rewriting where she may have fulfilled the lost "substance" of herself at least, and, also, have traced the identity and voice of her lost daughter whose post-abduction story has lost its traces in the rewriting. Though an English woman, she has been a victim to the process of colonialism and slave trade. At this point, Susan has been partly successful in questioning the absence of women from the adventure story.

She dissociates herself from Friday in the following dialogue with Foe. Susan and Friday are no longer objects ("us") of Foe's gaze. She shows "partial presence" here unlike Friday. She differs as a "being" from Friday who is marked out as passive silence in the text, and defers the meaning of the word "silence" which is not always suppression; it can be intentional and empowering:

You err most tellingly in failing to distinguish between my silences and the silences of a being such as Friday ... What is the truth of Friday? You will respond: he is neither cannibal nor laundryman, these are mere names, they do not touch his essence, he is a substantial body, he is himself, Friday is Friday. But that is not so ... what he is to the world is what I make of him. Therefore the silence of Friday is a helpless silence. He is the child of his silence, a child unborn, a child waiting to be born. (*Foe*, pp. 121-22)

The "silences" of Susan are in opposition to the "silences" of Friday. The cause of opposition and binarism between Susan and Friday is the presence and absence of voice. "Cannibal" and "laundryman" are not "mere names"—they fix Friday's identity as the word "cannibal" stereotyped Friday's identity in the classic text. Though he is a "substantial body," as Susan claims in the narrative, however, his inner self and "essence" remains untouched and irretrievable in the rewriting. She tries to "make" something out of the part of Friday's life she has been witness to, but she could not situate him in his unknown biography and cut-off history. In his "helpless silence", Susan is also helpless to represent him and even her own self in writing. Susan contends that Friday cannot be defined by "mere names" or labels like "cannibal" or "laundryman" which are inconclusive to the "truth" of Friday. She particularizes Friday's silence as "helpless silence." The metaphors used for Friday "the child of his

silence," "a child unborn," "a child waiting to be born"— make Friday something abstract.

Friday, "the child of his silence," "a child unborn," and "a child waiting to be born" makes a comparison of the world of silence with the word of speech. As a child is nursed carefully in the womb of a mother in silence, and is delivered thumping into the world of speech so Friday has to be released from the silencing and oppressive womb of colonial world into the world of self-consciousness such that his voice might be audible and interpretable. The meanings of "silence" have been deferred in the text. Susan is in control of her speech unlike Friday who gets identity in the gaze of others. His identity cannot be explained in words. His "substantial" body is his identity, being and self. Except his "body," he is silence incarnate. She, here, differentiates between "to represent" and "being represented." But unlike the impression given in the text that she is at an advantageous point than Friday, her voice fails to convince Foe to write her true story, and she remains a bereaved mother unable to write her own story. In the absence of speech and inaccessibility to inner self, Friday becomes "a child unborn," having no identity, voice, presentation and living prior to the development of self-consciousness in the world of speech and writing.

Susan Barton's Story and Unresolved Case of a Missing Daughter

Susan tells "my story," and owns her story. It is her story. She shares with the readers about her abducted daughter. The English patriarchy shows indifference towards her loss and does not offer any help. However, she resists the English officers by not letting go of her search venture. She tells the story of crew mutiny, and gives the reason of "hate for it":

Two years ago my only daughter was abducted and conveyed to the New World by an Englishman, a factor and agent in the carrying trade. I followed in search of her. Arriving in Bahia, I was met with denials and, when I persisted, with rudeness and threats. The officers of the Crown afforded me no aid, saying it was a matter between the English. (*Foe*, p. 10)

The Englishman as an "agent in the carrying trade" or an "officer of the Crown" is the cause of injustice for the Englishwomen. Instead of being served with justice and "aid," Susan faces "denials." Here, patriarchy stands in opposition to the "abducted" daughter and the bereaved mother. The daughter has been erased, two years ago, by the "carrying

trade” and, now, the mother is being made to internalize silence and injustice. The “carrying trade” of Englishmen has deprived this Englishwoman of her daughter. Her tools of persistence, “rudeness and threats” to persuade “the officers of the Crown” could not convince the English Patriarchy that it was a matter of human concern. Here the phrase “between the English” is contradictory and political that has deprived a mother of her daughter.

In comparison with Cruso, the purpose of Susan’s voyage was retrieval of her abducted daughter instead of any slave trade. Susan is a marginal self in the story. To Spivak (1990), “marginal in the narrow sense is the victims of the best-known history of centralization” (p. 5). In rewriting, an attempt has been made to shift the focus of narration from the center to the margins. It also highlights that English families were also suffering from the slave trade. Susan Barton is a particular case in this text. Spivak (1990) shows her reservation on the rewriting *Foe*, “We could fault Coetzee for not letting a woman have free access to both authorship and motherhood”(p. 11). It is pertinent to note here that Coetzee’s text is more about the reasons behind the anxiety of authorship and influence than the ways to overpower them.

Madwoman Looking for her Missed Mother: Susan Barton’s Double

In the plot of searching mother and missing daughter, Foe interpolates the character of a fictional daughter having the same name as that of the mother. The imposter daughter named Susan is a binary to Susan, the mother. This stereotyped art of doubling and parallelism explains how the element of “probability” is used by the canonical writers to fictionalize the main plot of the story and create “doubt” about the authenticity, reliability and truth of the original story. Foe, knowing that Susan is searching for her lost daughter, sends to her a girl with the same name:

“My name is Susan Barton,” she whispered; by which I knew I was conversing with a madwoman ... “Your name is Susan Barton too” ... “I have followed you everywhere,” said the girl ... “Did you follow me across the ocean?” said I. “I know of the island,” said she. It was as if she had struck me in the face. “You know nothing of the island,” I retorted. “I know of Bahia too. I know you were scouring Bahia for me.” (*Foe*, pp. 73-74)

In this dialogue, two women have been subsumed under the same name “Susan Barton.” The girl as spokesperson of the writer Foe becomes

imposter for Susan's lost daughter. Here, an unnamed girl has been used as an agent by patriarchy and in the place of an abducted girl against a bereaved mother. Here, a woman is used against a woman and becomes a binary to another woman. "My name" and "your name" are the same "Susan Barton" but claiming Susan's name as hers, the girl displaces Susan Barton the mother from the center of her story. Her claim that she has followed the mother "everywhere" is fabrication of Susan Barton's true story. The girl partakes of Susan's adventure of the "island" and Foe tries to hijack Susan's story right from "Bahia" through his ploy. The impersonate Susan is Foe's accomplice.

Foe has interpolated a new character Susan Barton the girl as daughter and parallel to the mother, Susan Barton's story. Susan Barton meets a girl who keeps standing outside her house staring constantly at the building. Susan Barton, the claimant daughter, is binary to Susan Barton the mother. She is a fictional character introduced by Foe, the writer, in the mother's story of an abducted daughter. The real Susan Barton's story is overshadowed by the story of doomed character Friday because of his speechlessness and lost origin, and displaced by Foe's Susan Barton looking for her lost mother. Here is another untold story of a girl child. Susan finds a parcel in the ditch:

So I went on and unwrapped the body, stillborn or perhaps stifled, all bloody with the afterbirth, of a little girl, perfectly formed, her hands clenched up by her ears, her features peaceful, barely an hour or two in the world. Whose child was she? ... I must go back to where the child was hid before the crows got to her, the crows and the rats. (Foe, p. 105)

A little girl's "bloody" body shows that she is an undesirable child, forsaken, discarded and thrown away. It is paradoxical that her "perfectly formed" body has been exposed but her story remains hidden. Susan unwraps "partially" what someone unknown has wrapped up. It is undecided in the text if the baby is "stillborn" or has been "stifled" for the unknown reasons. There is another missed story of a missed mother "whose child" was recovered by Susan. The "crows" and "rats" can scavenge its body and erase the evidence of its existence. Here crows and rats are binaries and comparable to the canonical writers who are equally threatening to the existence of othered characters in the story.

The story of the missing mother and still born child re-enacts Susan's story and her *taken away daughter* in a patriarchal/colonial world of violence and injustice. She is determined to recover the child from the world of anonymity but it remains "hid(den)" in the text. The story a child

stillborn found by Susan goes missing further in the text. Like Friday, the “little” girl has lost her origin. As Friday is mute so is she “stifled” perhaps. In comparison with Friday, she is a stillborn who lost her voice prior to her birth. Though Friday is born and has a substantial body, he is also a “stillborn” in the world of speech and *tongue*. His body has not been delivered into the world of speech where existence and identity is preserved by using *spoken* or written words. The story of the baby girl is inaccessible and demands rewriting of her story to redeem her of the representational oblivion.

Conclusion

Friday’s indefinite silence, irretrievable voice and his self “waiting to be born” vis-a-vis Susan’s (conscious) loss of speech in view of patriarchy’s evident misrepresentation of her has limited the role and effectiveness of rewriting. Susan’s self-imposed silence and her selective or fractional representation by Foe can be interpreted as only “partial presence” to patriarchy, colonialists, the inner audience and the readers.

My study has established that “new text” which is rewriting here is a partial “correction” of silence and has set up itself against the authorized version of colonial and patriarchal oppression. Writing back to canon is not only prompting new writings and readings but also questioning them for having or furthering silences. The “responsibility” of the reader remains an abstract idea till his/her narrative leads to some substantial changes in the writing mode and the “world” it, subsequently, “interrogates” and constitutes. In this novel, Friday, the daughter and the girl child are without voices and mute and Susan fails to write a quite different story violating the writing protocols and standards set by the colonial and patriarchal representational mode upheld by Foe, the English author. Susan’s agency to write her own story remains stillborn in *Foe* and, hence, creates anxiety in the feminist writers with the challenge to deliver her true story to the readers.

Contextualizing Susan’s experience we can safely say that “the field of practice is a broken and uneven place” (Spivak, 1990, p. 20) which has marked many women like Susan and mutilated subjects like Friday as erasures in the Eurocentric history of colonial era. The meaning of silence, writing and authority has been questioned and deferred in the text. The incarnate silence has shown “embodied” presence in the text. The erasures and absences in the form of stereotypes and myths can be recuperated “partially” in history. Their faithful representation is always hard because of the “epistemic violence” of colonialism and the lack of substantial evidence erased and unrecorded by the machinery of colonialism and patriarchy. Her “partial” presence adds to the successes of

the feminist discourse which is to remain alert to the excesses of patriarchal and structuralist discourse. This “partial” re-righting of her character and self is somewhat corrective which needs to be acknowledged in order to explore more evidence lying in the deep sea of canonical writings by diving into the “wreck” caused by the history of colonial and patriarchal excesses.

Notes

¹ I, henceforth, use the name Susan in my analysis instead of Susan Barton because Barton is her corrupted surname which inherits the danger of erasure of her independent identity and individuality under the weight of patronomy.

² This section has been, singularly, derived from Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. I have only used page numbers without the text book name to avoid jarring repetition.

³ Bhabha (1994) explains the concept of “mimicry” as a tool of resistance which can be used by the colonized to challenge the colonial derision by showing their “partial presence”:

Bhabha persuades that “colonial mimicry” is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite. (p. 86)

⁴ J.M. Coetzee has dropped ‘e’ of the name Crusoe and spelled it as C-R-U-S-O in *Foe*.

⁵ Though Spivak contextualizes the experience of women in her essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, in case of the present rewriting, Friday is “deeply in shadow” in comparison with Susan:

It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (1988, p. 287)

References

- Baig, Z. (2012). *Rewritings: A feminist/postcolonial study of absences in western canonical texts*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). Signs taken for wonders questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817. In H. K. Bhabha (Ed.), *The location of culture* (pp. 102-122). London: Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse. In H. K. Bhabha (Ed.), *The location of culture* (pp. 85–92). London: Routledge.
- Block, D. (2006). Identity in applied linguistics. In T. Omoniyi & G. White (Eds.), *The sociolinguistics of identity*. London: Continuum.
- Brink, A. (1998). Interrogating silence: New possibilities faced by South African literature. In D. Attridge & R. Jolly (Eds.), *Writing South Africa: Literature, apartheid and democracy, 1970–1995* (pp. 14-28). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coetzee, J. M. (1987). *Foe*. New York: Penguin.
- Defoe, D. (2005). *Robinson Crusoe*. New Delhi: Peacock Books.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1998). *Phenomenology of spirit*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publications.
- Macaskill, B., & Jeanne C. (1992, Autumn). Reading history, writing heresy: The resistance of representation and the representation of resistance in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*. *Contemporary Literature*, 33 (3), 432-457.
- MacLean, G. M., & Donna L. (2005). *The Spivak reader: Selected works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. New York: Routledge.
- Parry, B. (1998). Speech and silence in the fictions of J.M.Coetzee. In D. Attridgeand & R. Jolly (Eds.), *Writing South Africa: Literature, apartheid and democracy, 1970–1995* (pp. 149-165). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Parry, B. (2004). Problems in current theories of colonial discourse. *Postcolonial Studies: A materialist critique* (pp. 13-36). London: Routledge.
- Spivak, G. C. (1985a) . The Rani of Sirmur: An essay in reading the archives. *History and Theory*, 24(3), 247-272.
- Spivak, G. C. (1985b). Three women's texts and a critique of imperialism.

Critical Inquiry, 12(1), 243-261.

Spivak, G. C. (1986). Imperialism and sexual difference. *Oxford Literary Review*, 8(1), 225-240.

Spivak, G. C. (1987). *In other worlds: Essays in cultural politics*. In Methuen & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271-313). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271-313). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Spivak, G. C. (1990, Oct.). Theory in the margin: Coetzee's Foe reading Defoe's *Crusoe/Roxana*. *English in Africa*, 17(2), 1-23.

Spivak, G. C., John, H., Scott, M., & Nikos, P. (1990). Strategy, identity, writing. In Spivak, G. C., & Sarah, H. (Eds.), *The Post-colonial critic: Interviews, strategies, dialogues* (pp. 35-49). New York: Routledge.

