

## Gendered Political Spaces in Pakistan - Benizar Bhutto and Fatima Bhutto

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Space or spatial categories, like Representations, can never completely be neutral or devoid of meaning. Any exploration of these spatial categories helps us take cognizance of the impossibility of a neutral representation. Representations are always tainted by the culture and society that produce them. It is a process through which meaning, associations and values are socially constructed by people in a shared culture. The politics of representation revolves around issues of power and control over one's own self and its representation. These realities about societies and cultures or about people inhabiting them are available in different forms, one of which is writing. These writings focus on people who have either influenced their society or have left an impact on their cultural or political thoughts. Since ancient times political leaders have sought to leave behind a trace of their lives by commemorating their deeds in order to make future generations aware of their accomplishments. Since the past can never be recovered or recollected in its totality, different forms of life writing facilitate our attempts at recollecting the past by providing a medium to represent it. The present paper focuses on life writings by women from a given location. It addresses the question why women choose to write and reveal their experiences in a form like memoir and how in turn the genre of memoir<sup>1</sup> itself acts as a proper medium to represent their experiences.<sup>2</sup>

Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak has made an important contribution to theories of representation by insisting that the concept, in a literary sense, must be reconsidered in connection with representation in politics. Spivak underlines how representations are intimately linked to gendered, cultural, geographic, socioeconomic, historical and institutional positioning. In other words, referring to Judith Butler's concept of "framing of the frame," one can say it is the "frame" which regulates the degree of perceivability of representations. Thus, it is important to understand the process of inclusion and exclusion which is at work when any form of representation is used. What a writer includes is always at the cost of excluding something. And, as I would like to propose in the present paper, certain spatial categories, especially their division into the public and the private space, influence the ways in which both a work is written and then received, specifically when we refer to narratives of women or written by women. The present paper also argues how gender stratification is both sustained and reinforced by separation of social, political and cultural spaces which then reduces the accessibility of socially and economically valued knowledge to women. The greater the spatial segregation basis gender, the greater are the possibilities to restrict not only women's mobility but also her status. Gendered spaces may depend on social, economic, ethnic or racial context, but the focus of the present paper is to problematise the experience of women differentiated from the kind

of power they exercise in society and nation at large. This Gendering of space can be problematised on both architectural and geographic scale. Segregation in the architectural space entails a physical segregation of space basis gender, wherein men and women are required to occupy separate and distant spaces under the same roof. For instance, in Pakistani Society 'zenana' can be seen as an example where women create their own sense of affiliation with each other, and where men's participation is restricted both in terms of physical movement and in discourse. On the other hand, geographic segregation can be understood in relation to clear division of space where men and women occupy separate spaces. For instance, women in Pakistani society were not allowed to move freely in public or were not allowed to participate/ work outside the 'chaar diwari', while men could take up any place in office or in discourse. At both levels, (geographic and architectural) women's accessibility to knowledge is jeopardised. Though some feminists argue that such a gendering of space helps these women to create alternate realities/worlds and in turn empower them, but at the same time one needs to be cognizant of the fact that such arrangements are mostly not available to these women as a matter of choice, but are ruled by necessity. This rather reinforces the same gender and socio-cultural hierarchies which at first it thought it would displace.

The present paper focuses on how memoirs by women emerge as gendered political spaces and allow us to create a parallel space to history. It implies that history may be seen as an evolutionary process formed with the help of facts and counter-facts stemming from the perspectives of people who are in power and who write it. In opposition to this, a memoirist's representation of events has been impacted in a major way by his/her involvement, direct or indirect, in the event in question. This stresses the importance of a form like memoir which gives an individual a chance to present his version of an event.<sup>3</sup>

The paper focuses on Benazir Bhutto's *Daughter of the East* (1988) and Fatima Bhutto's *Songs of Blood and Sword* (2011) and trace the representations of Pakistani society, politics, culture and gender as delineated in these narratives. Memoirs of Benazir Bhutto and Fatima Bhutto help deconstruct the history of the nation viz-a-viz- history of a family, thus foregrounding the interrelationship between the personal and the political space in the domain of writing. It also helps to explore how this recounting entails almost inevitably a recasting and a selective appropriation and re-appropriation of available facts for certain ends. These ends can be both personal and political.

A form like memoir gains value as these narratives are born in intermediated spaces of the private and the public realm and they do initiate a dialogue between the narrator and his audience. Like gender, it is understood differently in different spatial categories, and accommodates the performative and spatial nature of gender hierarchies. It takes cognizance of the processes of subject formation into the process of writing. It addresses the ways in which a subject has transformed through its interaction with different spatial categories and how his/her changing self has had an impact on the narrative being told/ written.

In order to foreground the politics of gender in terms of space, one needs to take cognizance of family, education and one's social, economic and political status in society, which then helps to foreground the association between gendered spaces and status. It has been posited that "Societies where segregation of public and private spaces exist in the extreme are also the one's where women's status is at the lowest." (Rosaldo 1974) The spatial perspective thus reinforces the interdependency between status and space and lays emphasis on the role of socio-political institutions as maintaining gender (status) hierarchies/ differences. At the same time, it needs to be foregrounded that the public and private space are part of the same socio-cultural system. Spatial institutions rather than just having societal repercussions also operate at the level of the individual. This relationship between space and an individual is thus a bilateral one. On one hand where institutions are shaped by individuals, at the same time these institutions play a significant role in defining the choices made by the individual in socio-political domain. A case in point here is Benazir Bhutto's positioning in Pakistani politics as both a woman and a political leader. Being the first Muslim woman to be chosen as the head of a nation state, Benazir carried the baggage of women from her society who looked up to her as a harbinger of change. But her very decisions from the moment she donned the role of a political leader disappointed the women activists. Her decision to wear the burqa and be veiled is in contrast to her father's response, who dissociated the act of veiling as a statement on one's character.

Benazir Bhutto began her memoir on a very creative note: "I didn't choose my life, it chose me." (Benazir xi) On the very first page of her narrative, she claimed that she feels blessed that she could break the bastions of tradition by being the first elected woman prime minister and that the election was the tipping point in the debate raging in the Muslim world on the role of woman in Islam. Her education in egalitarian Islam is best exemplified in a childhood anecdote about when she reached the age where it became time for her to wear the *burqa* and be veiled. Her father's response to the veil was a powerful moment in cementing in her egalitarian and independent identity; as he declared and as recorded in Benazir's memoir - "She doesn't need to wear it," "The Prophet himself said that the best veil is the veil behind the eyes. Let her be judged by her character and her mind, not by her clothing." (Benazir Bhutto 36) It is interesting to see how there is a sharp contrast between her two images — the one that she had before entering into politics and the other she acquired after becoming a part and parcel of Pakistan's political life. Her donning of the scarf reinforces the necessity for a woman to follow certain accepted societal and cultural trajectories to be heard in public, and to be followed as a leader. Benazir is seen here as using culture as a trope for her own political benefit. By wearing *chadar*<sup>4</sup> and making frequent visits to Mecca and sufi shrines across Pakistan she had tried to present a very traditional and semi orthodox image. It shows how a woman manipulates the public space and readily, in fact willingly, chooses to follow the subservient cultural norms in order to access the power in the political space. Benazir, thus problematises the idea of women in public space as emancipatory. Combined with the fact that Benazir's political career was nominated by the legacy of her

father, it can, thus, be assumed how Benazir's positioning in the public space was just an extension, or even so a reflection, of her father, of how a woman is still incapable of being welcomed in the socio-public space on her own. In fact, her step to take marriage seriously was because she didn't want to upset the conservative norms of the very nation she was supposed to lead. Her memoir portrays how the binaries between the public and the private space can no longer be used to define the agency of a woman. Her incapability to address state enforced 'Hudood Ordinances'<sup>5</sup> (1979) and 'Law of Evidence'<sup>6</sup> (1984) portrayed her betrayal to women's movements. A case in point here is Amina Jalal's idea of "convenience of subservience" which helps us renew our understanding of 'discourses by women for women.'

It is here significant to draw a parallel with Fatima Bhutto whose understanding and portrayal of Pakistani politics presents a counter narrative to the account given by Benazir Bhutto. Articulating in hindsight, Benazir's niece traces the undemocratic trajectory of her aunt's political career. Fatima's incessant questioning of history and historical documents, both "written by hand and officially typed" (Fatima Bhutto 9) make us interrogate the politics which goes in the process of history making. One can clearly detect the power, influence, reach and impact of judicial and nationalist discourses. But to Fatima, every story she collected is valid "as an account of her father's planned murder (197)." While stitching these stories, she keeps their seams visible, and doesn't pass them as transparent representations. Fatima didn't fail to write an alternative narrative of the said event but her attempts to write an alternative account of history are not only self-consciously staged but at the same time also makes an attempt to accommodate the parallel narratives which she encounters. She thus respects the specificity, heterogeneity and singularity of the accounts related to the event and at the same time, foregrounds a refusal to privilege or marginalize any account by excluding that which may be otherwise dismissed as inconvenient and trivial.

Another point of comparison between the two Bhuttos is the way they negotiate their own representation within the public space. It is here significant to scrutinize Benazir's identity as signified by her wearing a white scarf, which can be contrasted to Fatima Bhutto, who perceives any form of segregation through *hijab*, or veil, as unnecessary and inconvenient. Benazir's donning of the scarf reinforces the necessity for a woman to follow certain accepted societal and cultural trajectories to be given value in public domain and to be followed as a leader. The common understanding of a veil or a scarf that it acts as a signal of women's assent to the codes of modesty and segregation between the sexes as prescribed by Islamic law, helped her brand herself as good rather than mark her as transgressive, and therefore bad. Benazir's scarf reestablishes her motives of mobility in different spaces, within the society but at the condition of subscribing to the given codes of conduct.

Keeping the above arguments in mind, it is therefore important to foreground the genre of memoir as an attempt to express the viewpoints of an individual as well as communities which are sometimes ill-represented by the hegemonic

discourses. This, in turn, initiates a personal association with the reader and helps in recreating or reshaping his views. Such personal association is important to women's memoirs as they make an attempt to include what has been excluded from the public discourse. It can thus be said that memoirs can be seen as "a socially located discursive practice" (Buss 7) as the narrators of the memoir address their readers directly. It attempts at creating a bond across women of different classes and generations. Memoir is a form which has the ability to encapsulate varied interpretations of personal recollections. It gives the self a certain space to play with the categories of private and public events and thus brings out different narratives enacted in the public-private and personal-political spaces. Memoirs thus act as devices for women to draw a precise connection between their culture and their lives. It also facilitates representation of contradictory voices. These voices represent alternative modes of thinking and help in the process of accommodating varied and diverse points of views. Hence the memoirist is able to negotiate with more than one identity. Memoirs, or for that matter any form of life writing, put at display the "performing self" (Buss 20) of the author. It shows how this self in the present moment reflects upon the moments of the past. Though the memoir writer desires authenticity in representing itself, he/she also recognizes that these representations of the self are temporary and ever-changing in nature. The recognition of the fact that "the self can never be fully pinned down" (20) is further dependant on the awareness that even the episodes of the memoir on which this self is dependant, also have a spatio-temporal nature and are thus prone to change.

At the same time, the idea of the "performing self" can also be related to gender as performance, as the female gendered self is built when certain scripts of gender are endlessly performed. It is here that the importance of the memoir as a form of life writing can be realized and asserted. It is only the recognition of the individual stories and experiences, either of the trauma sufferers, or of sexual victims, or of people who face bias in their lives, or of those whose stories are negated or suppressed by the hegemonic narrative, or narratives available in the public-political domain that brings in the possibility of revising history. Since memoirs represent a performative self, they become an important mode in re-writing historical, social, and cultural narratives of a given situation or place at a particular point of time in history. Their close associations with the material circumstances of a given situation make them act as witness to the intricate details of actual lives of its protagonist. It, thus, desires to lay bare the truth which was earlier restricted to the private realm. Since women have been at the receiving end of subjugation, the memoirs of women are an attempt to inscribe their autonomy. What is most important, however, is to foreground and contextualize these stories and narratives in cultural, historical and political terms which in turn are dictated by processes of gendering. Since memoirs are a direct product of the times and the lives lived in those times, they inevitably becomes a gendered performance of the self. (Buss 14) One may thus posit that the memoirs by women do not just attempt to recollect past events in order to present a personal or public history, they also revisit the opinion and reactions

of their own selves and of the significant others who are involved in the event. Their narratives attempt to strike a balance between these diverse spaces and create a third space which presents an intense and gendered analysis of the situation.

Memoirs have not only led to varied processes of identity formation among women of different classes and clans but they have also provided them a space through which they can voice out and celebrate their singularity of experience and a sense of individuality. They are also grounded in the desire to reclaim, or question ones acts of subversion and resistance, as mostly women's memoirs project themselves as acts of counter-resistance to society, culture and individuals who make attempts to erase their voice and identity. These memoirs, thus, attempt to conquer the socio-cultural and religious fear of claiming the agency to reveal their lives.

Feminists' interests in the form of autobiographical writings like memoir can be traced within its concern to re-link the political with the personal and to stress upon the experiences of women as important resources towards creating women's knowledge. The relationship between knowledge and space is a crucial one and has an impact on how gender politics is enacted in a social and political space. This in turn can be problematised to understand the culturally and socially lower status of women in societies. The spatial perspective regards the influence of social, economic, religious and cultural factors as important contributors in establishing the status of women, but at the same time it also acknowledges the physical separation in terms of space as reinforcing and perpetuating gender stratification. The gendered spaces determine the positioning of women in terms of power and rank in society, as the spatial segregation facilitates exchange or reproduction of knowledge within spaces from which women are already and always outcasted/ segregated.

The memoirs of Benazir and Fatima Bhutto present historical records but take liberty in modifying them depending on their personal experiences and knowledge. They delineate the important political arguments dealt with in their careers and attempt to make an arguable case in presenting the reasons for why they did what they did.

The appeal of memoir to politicians lies in their curiosity to understand and mend the judgments being made on their political outlook. The relationship of the political author with his past influences the delineations of these events and circumstances when compared with other impersonal forms of historiography.

Memoir cannot be categorized in strict terms as being essentially political, social, or cultural since they draw upon and amalgamate various strands of experiences, thoughts and observations. Overlapping between these aspects is a part of its formation. This is amply borne out by the memoirs under consideration here as they represent the social, cultural and political contexts of Pakistan in intimate terms.

To conclude, these memoirs break and problematise the boundaries between the public and the private space. They attempt to foreground issues which have been suppressed or deliberately ignored in the hegemonic space. They present

the violence which they face while traversing through different spaces in life and thus bring to focus the need to create an alternative space in the genre of memoir to initiate a process of re-telling of alternate narratives. These narratives problematise the act of transgression of spaces and entails how transgressing of spatial boundaries does not necessarily dissolve hierarchies and stratifications. They make an attempt to appropriate their personal-political identities as shaped by the political condition of the state, since Pakistan is a country where the socio-political culture is greatly influenced by the person in power and is subject to his/her whims and fancies. Their memoirs delineate how the relationship between space, knowledge and power should be problematised and renegotiated.

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