



Patriarchy and its colonies: Analyses of Systematic oppressing mechanisms

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Abstract

Patriarchy is an idea flourishing on abstract reality; invisible to human logic, but forced into anatomy through force. Colonization shares its bullying apparatus with patriarchy as cultural system. The paper explores cultural tyranny of secluding women to enclosed "zenanas" in comparison to similar De-humanization of colonized people.

KEYWORDS: Post-colonialism, Patriarchy

Colonization and its mechanisms to oppress the natives have been much discussed and debated by the post colonial writers. The governing apparatus of colonizers functions by forming the binaries of White men and the Natives, this mechanism states the white men to be “superior” and the Natives to be “inferior”. Similar apparatus is visible in various other dominating establishments which function by creating hierarchical binaries. Men and women have been the functioning binaries of the world, but are often framed in hierarchies to provide “Equilibrium” to the civilization. In this method Patriarchy and colonialism flourish on a similar foundation. While colonizers wish to create a civilization where the natives never question their ascribed “inferior” status, Patriarchy desires to create obedient women populous who accept the “superior” status of the men. The pseudo-objectives of the oppressors focus on protecting the oppressed and civilization from the potent injuries that could happen if the “oppressed” are left untamed with their ‘dangerous’ instincts intact. Sartre sees the truth and writes; “ In the colonies the truth stood naked, but the citizens of the mother country preferred it with clothes on; the natives had to love them, something in the way mothers are loved”¹ , The 'Church' Missionary society 'Niger mission' had as its aim the mission of God and colonizer's vision of creating “civilization”. They assume the role of 'mother' and hammer the changelings to fit the civilization without being threat to it. The colonizers teach the principles of brotherhood and humanity, only to make the natives defenseless handicaps, under the facade of nurturing. Patriarchy establishes Zenanas, patriarchal practice in Indian subcontinent of secluding the women and girls of the household in a particular allotted part of the house, to save the humanity from sinister and all-engulfing female sexuality. Nate Pyle recognizes the gulf between the idea of sinister-female-sexuality and patriarchal failure to teach males to accept, recognize and view female sexuality as a counterpart to their own. He in his article writes “We’ve been taught a woman's body will cause men to sin. We're told that if a woman shows off too much of her body men will do stupid things. Let's be clear: A woman's body is not dangerous to you. Her body will not cause you harm. It will not make you do stupid things. If you do stupid things, it is because you chose to do stupid things.”² Stereotyped by the religious and social ideas constructed by the oppressor, Natives and women have common history to

look back upon. This paper will try to explore similarities between the mechanism of Colonization and Patriarchy, employed to retain the oppressor's hegemony.

Post colonialists, in their writings, have brought to light various institutions like apartheid, which legitimize racism and construction of two exclusive spaces for the colonizers and the natives. Such spaces often co-exist and flourish by being constitutionally 'Legal' and by gaining acceptance as a social custom. Consequently, Physical separation produces strong normative gaze which views physical contact between the two groups unacceptable, dangerous and Para-normative. The colonizers cannot let "dirty ape paws" touch them, in friendship or in love, in contrast Purdah practicing society views physical contact between men and women intimidating for the social structure if it is founded on emotions of friendship and love. Fanon in his work writes; "The colonial world is a world divided into two compartments. It is probably unnecessary to recall the existence of native quarters and European quarters, of schools for natives and schools for Europeans; in the same way we need not recall Apartheid in South Africa. Yet, if we examine closely this system of compartments, we will at least be able to reveal the lines of force it implies."³ Espoused by belief that physical contact from the Natives could transfer deadly disease, such superstitions lead to various "White Constitutions" making laws against Inter-racial Sexual intercourse. The forced physical separation of the Europeans and Natives hints at the mental separation, seclusion and limitation on circulation of ideas. The mechanism of Patriarchy follows a similar procedure through establishment of well acknowledged social custom of "Purdah". Hanna Papanek in her essay "Purdah: Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter", describes Purdah as a "system of secluding women and enforcing high standards of female modesty in..." She further describes it as a procedure for limiting the interaction between women and men. The "Lines of *force*" drawn by the colonialists differ not much from the "*enforced* high standards of female modesty" mentioned by Papanek. But, both the systems are not simple sketches of dichotomized world. The two worlds are never at parity and function hierarchically with "Native's space" and "Zenana" operating as inferior space. The divided physical spaces facilitate the oppressor in controlling and

regulating the mental space of the secluded. Away from ideas developing in the “superior” space, the inhabitants of “inferior” space are fed on lies, myths and illusions to keep them from developing and questioning the legitimacy of superior world

Fanon’s writing shows the extension of the divided physical space into the mental space. He writes in relation to the acceptance of “inferiority” by Natives; “Obedient to the rulers of pure Aristotelian logic, they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity.”⁴ a thought that also resides in the minds of women of Zenana. These aborted humans, whose faculty of reflex has been snapped, often fail to recognize their true enemy and blame fate, God or themselves for their victimization. Various thinkers and scholars have agreed that these secluded people fail to recognize themselves as victims of oppressive system. This is due to training and domestication practices followed by the oppressors. The methods to domesticate the natives range from structuring through Religion, Science to violence. *The East African Medical journal*(1943) scientifically asserts a “Negro” to be the link between monkey and man, of course, white man. Fanon recalls Sir Alan Burns’ experiment conclusion; “...the black man is inherently inferior to the white, or that he comes from a different stock...”⁵ it is not difficult to guess the effect of such fictitious assessments on the psyche of the natives. Lise Fortier sees the binaries created by Patriarchy through Freud; she says “For him, the world is divided between those who have it and those who don't, the developed and underdeveloped world....In “Femininity” he writes about “the boy's far superior equipment” the “girl's inferior clitoris” and her original sexual inferiority.”⁶ Such bizarre scientific conclusions are devoid of objective vision and only re-assert the oppressor’s ideas and penetrate the psyche of the oppressed ruthlessly.

Further, Missionaries from the ‘Mother country’ leave no stone unturned to de-structure and fragment the psyche of the native man, accusing native religion to be pagan, regressive and barbaric. They come with Bible, a source of “western Morality”⁷. The missionaries this way disillusion the concept of God for the natives. “Missionary education” trains the students to become “good Christians”⁸ to achieve God. The natives accept the figure of biased God presented to them along the “religiously” ascribed inferior status. Daughters of Eve have gone through a similar accusation for ages;

accused of being the reason for “man's fall” she has been labeled as sinister seductress never to be trusted. Patriarchy as a regulated oppressive system transcends to various religions beyond Christianity, Where Hinduism and Islam view women’s sexuality as ever changing due to monthly cycle of menstruation. Accused of “dangerous sexuality”⁹, the woman is best kept at home to save the society and her “fragile self” from upheavals of resultant consequences of untamed female sexuality. Papanek explores the false pretence of Patriarchy and its presentation of Zenana as a “symbolic shelter”¹⁰ for the well being of women. The promised salvation can be achieved by chaste and obedient women across various religious preaching’s. Born sexually inferior, the women and their sexuality has to be tamed by men, this establishes itself as a social custom and way of living, religion only serves as tool to mentally conquer the women and instill the belief of self-inferiority in their minds. Functioning of Zenanas is prevalent in Muslim and Hindu Households of India alike. Beyond the rupture of psychology, the oppressed section is also the victim of physical violence. Fanon marks that “Violence in the colonies does not only have for its aim the keeping of these enslaved men at arm's length; it seeks to dehumanize them”. Majorly beaten to materialize the pseudo-motive of 'civilizing' them, the natives are actually beaten to instill fear in their minds. Physical violence acts as a catalyst to cripple the humans of their sensory ability to defend, revolt and attack. The infamous common law of “rule of thumb” in England allowed the husbands to beat their wives with a stick no thicker than their thumb. The law's constitutional presence is still debated, but it was an acknowledged social law cited by husbands for their defense till 20th century. Enforced principles allowed no room for the oppressed section to think, while fear instilled due to physical violence could not stimulate them to act beyond the structured social norms, resulting in their “dehumanization”.

It is not simple to degenerate and de-humanize a human, this immobility is bought through the process of “training” and “domestication”, a process which erases individuality of humans and produces a group of homogenous controlled servants. These forced ideas of self- inferiority remain at odds with natural and spontaneous reflexes of human psychology. Curbing the physical reflexes to defend against the attacker, or to

attack back, also remain at odds with the human nature. However through continuous repetition the oppressed accept their position and stop fighting to find a way out. Sartre writes “Everything will be done to wipe out their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs and to destroy their culture ...sheer physical fatigue will stupefy them.”¹¹ This state of stupor handicaps a healthy human to a vegetative state. In their effort to appease the dominant ideas of the society, which are thoughts of the colonizers, the natives end up in limbo, where they have discarded their ‘pagan’ culture and have costumed themselves in preached dominant ideas. “Missionary education” served as “training house of lower level African employees for the colonial government”¹² The natives do not think to rebel but try to excel as 'servants' and slaves. Motivation for such excellence is derived from religious, political and social myths created by the oppressor which state that ascribed inferior will become “civilized” by adhering to the principles circulated by the oppressors. Sartre categorizes this category of “enslaved peoples” as “puppet bourgeoisie” who can only claim a “phony Independence”¹³. Fortier observes that “in every society the shaping of an individual masculine or feminine personality is based on what the dominant male group values in itself...intelligence, force, efficacy, in the male; ignorance, docility, virtue in the female.”¹⁴ Such training forces women of Zenana to cast away their sexuality in order to preserve the honour of the family and remain culturally chaste, accepting the “dominant male group idea” which only gives outlet to male sexuality. Women’s sexuality is subjugated to the whims of men of the house. The husband is permitted to visit his wife in Zenana as per his wish, but wife does not have this allowance. This rule silences the woman's sexuality and renders it permissible only when the husband wants. Pregnancy in such set ups is often the result of movement of man to Zenana, rather than a woman's movement out of it. Cutting off from sensory pleasures, patriarchy conquers the woman's womb and ability to procreate. While women, disciples of the patriarchal teachings about the gendered hierarchy, fail to fight to regain their individuality and indeed pride themselves on their sacred protected “chastity”. On the other hand the natives proudly parade in the donned costumes of the oppressors, and end only as obedient “civilized” servants. Controlled domestication devoid of sensory consciousness serves as an important tool, Sartre writes the oppressors believed in “...the domestication of the “inferior races” could only be done

by “conditioning of their reflexes”¹⁵. The controlled training and living under eternal fear results in their psychological wreck; “they are traumatized for life.”¹⁶

The paper has so far discussed the mechanisms employed to dehumanize the oppressed. The process begins by dissecting the society into two hierarchical spaces, creating bodily anatomical hierarchies and finally instilling these principles in the minds, once the physical and mental damage has been done, the oppressors move towards their primary objective; gaining material Profit through these trained slaves. The oppressors succeed in their aim to disintegrate a human and create an obedient human mass which does not retaliate. Sartre remarks the psyche of the colonizer “...when you domesticate a member of our own species you reduce his output, and however little you may give him, a farmyard man finishes by costing more than he brings in. For this reason the settlers have to stop halfway; the result, neither a man nor animal, is the native.”¹⁷ Similarly, in Fortier's description “Patriarchy defines a system of relationships in which the men ‘own’ the women and children and rule over them”.¹⁸ Well aware of their positions, the labourer only produces to serve the master. Fanon marks this imperialist commercialism and says “The settler makes history and is conscious of making it. And because he constantly refers to the history of his mother country, he clearly indicates that he himself is the extension of that mother country. Thus the history which he writes is not the history of the country which he plunders but the history of his own nation in regard to all that she skims off, all that she violates and starves.”¹⁹ The colonizer thus possesses the land, the people and events that take place on the land. Colonizer's possession of the land reduces the natives to servile position where they are only seen as workers employed to labour and bring the land's produce which ultimately belongs to the colonizers. Patriarchy on the other hand conquers the sexuality and womb of the woman. “While man's sexuality has functioned for his personal enjoyment and well being, woman's sexuality has been considered society's property to be used to further its aims.”²⁰ Subjugated female sexuality functions only to appease the man's sexuality, thereafter the creation of womb ultimately belongs to the Patriarch, adding to his possessions. Fertile colonized land's produce is only an assurance of profit for the

colonizer; his vision gives no importance to barren land. Similarly A woman's womb remains an important possession for the Patriarch; a fertile womb would assure addition the possessions of the man, while barren womb will only be a liability. Thus womb, which naturally is a woman's possession, is guarded with jealousy. Construction of Zenanas ensure that there is no physical mobility, which promises an exclusive “womb” only to be “utilized” by Patriarchal legitimized manner. The natives only function as labourers to extract wealth of the land and produce goods of commercial value. The colonizer’s empire stands on the labour of these natives, making history and profits for its own Mother country. Patriarchy stands on the bellies of the women, where women only serve as land producing resources for extension the Patriarchal Empire.

Opressor’s self assumed superior position and arbitrarily subjected inferiors functioned as initiation of systematic deconstruction of humans and establishment of cultural “empires”. Chaining of the slaves by colonizers or cramming the women of household in common allotted enclosed space of the house physically binds them, taking away their authority over their own bodies. The second phase of devised conquest aims the mind of the oppressed through twisted belief system and dominant cultural ideas. Once fooled and tricked the oppressed populous is left bereft of adequate reflexes for physical prowess and thinking faculty, they form a homogenous mass functioning as servants for the commanders. These above mentioned two segments complete the process of dehumanization, which is a core method for any oppressive system, regardless of its aims and objectives.

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