

(Extract from an article by Victoria Sau)

PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy is a structure that is *unwritten yet tacit in society*; I repeat this as something of a catchphrase, but now I am going to put it down in writing, which is tantamount to putting patriarchy down in writing, and I am going to try to explain it to the best of my ability. The fact that patriarchy as a structure is unwritten is obvious; otherwise, it would work like a Statute, a Constitution or indeed the Ten Commandments of Christianity. We would have its text before us, subject to possible review, alteration or replacement with another. If patriarchy had been committed to writing, perhaps we would have got rid of it long ago and replaced it with another order of things, but this is not so; it is a floating institution, rather like smoke that envelops everything but cannot be grasped. This is why it is so important to analyse it, break it down, capture its every particular; in short, to get it down in writing. So that it can be read over and over again, discussed, criticised and disqualified to the point of extinction. It is not merely a case of “annotation” or “noting down”.

Patriarchy seeps into all the pores of society. It began a few thousand years ago – just a moment ago, historically speaking – before the advent of writing, and caught on here and there, as and when circumstances were favourable, and expanded by means of cultural diffusion until it eventually became universal.

Once the participation of males in the process of procreation had been discovered, men (on the whole, stronger and more powerful than women) had the excuse they needed to end the monopoly of motherhood, the point of reference around which the whole of society revolved, including the fertility of crops and livestock. What existed prior to this was not matriarchy, as this would have meant that women had intentionally taken power at some stage. Borneman (1975) calls the structure of this period *matrism*; human relationships and customs were mediated by women and motherhood, a natural phenomenon out of which emanated the governing principles that ruled human groups.

In order to do away with patriarchy, it is not enough for women to think that they are different as a sex but equal as human beings. In doing so, they simply use female

reasoning – which is the true one – but leave men with their reasoning, the false one, although paradoxically falsehood stands in a dominant position. Long ago, the male part of society established a strategy whereby the false premise – that we were not human beings to the same extent as they were – took the place of the true one, and the true one was put off for century upon century. Hence the accumulated falsehoods that continually cloud human dealings; the original lie is carried on through all other issues, as could not be otherwise. Women must therefore put themselves in the place of the other without ceasing to be themselves, to be able to understand how their philosophy of life works.

In order to dismantle something, first you have to know how it is built, the whereabouts of the screws, the hinges, the connections, in much the same way as a bunch of very intelligent bank robbers study how to deactivate all the alarm systems before they can get to the main safe. And patriarchal thought has become torn and frayed at the seams; it has holes, some little, some quite big, and they spell its undoing.

Patriarchy is made up of uses, customs, traditions, family rules and social habits. In order for them to be perpetuated, to continue to be current, generation after generation, the Law, the Law of the Father, was not enough: teachers, philosophers, educationalists, doctors, religious authorities, legal professionals and politicians were all necessary. A whole network of servers of the new system, sometimes even with the complicity of some women, who went by the saying that: “if you can’t beat ’em, join ’em”.

The world, which has always been one, is now also globalised. Thus, anything that happens anywhere on earth is visible everywhere; it is open to the gaze of all human beings, and furthermore concerns us. We have no excuse for shutting ourselves off from what is happening, no matter where it is happening. This is an advantage in that it shows us the full extension of patriarchy in its multiplicity of manifestations, as it enables us to pin it down, fence it into its own circle, objectify it once and for all.

The pillars

The world's great cultural diversity means that patriarchal phenomena are not exactly the same everywhere. Divorce is allowed here and banned there; women are forced to dress one way here and in another way there; the liberation of women is more advanced in some regions than in others; and so on. But for a system of things, an order, to keep going, it needs immutable pillars to prop it up definitively. And one of these pillars is prostitution.

Prostitution happens here, there and everywhere. It plays with the universal factor. It has the support of most men, even if on other issues they are all-out enemies. It lends credibility to patriarchy by presenting itself as a phenomenon that is so long-lasting over time that it is taken as natural. That is, it is seen as part of the very essence of society and as being impossible to change. This is what we mean by a pillar, and prostitution is the sturdiest of patriarchy's pillars. However, the same sophistries that serve to justify prostitution demonstrate that it is not natural but historical; otherwise no reasoning would be necessary, just as there is no need to justify eating, drinking and sleeping, for example. It has been said on occasions that prostitutes exist to safeguard the honesty of decent women – as if a “decent” woman does not run the risk of falling into prostitution under certain circumstances. On other occasions prostitution has been described as a necessary evil. And, especially, as the world's oldest profession. Perhaps the oldest of the patriarchal world.

Once women had been defeated historically and their state of submission had been achieved, it was necessary to keep the sword aloft, to leave no doubt about who was in charge and what women's place was in the world; a permanent humiliation, an ever open wound in women as a group.

War is another of the pillars on which patriarchy sits. Prostitution and war are intimately bound together. The former is the constant updating of matricide (the original crime against the mother). These women are supposed not to have children, but they have them in spite of everything, and these children occupy the lowest rung in society. Can anyone imagine the child of a prostitute as a bank manager, a mayor or a member of parliament? And then we come to war.

Once men had taken possession of women and their offspring and ensured their vassalage, the concept of “power” became established amongst men. They owned a huge group of people to be shared out amongst them – but not equally. Marx and Engels saw the ownership of land as the first step towards private property, but being male, they failed to perceive that the first possession that had taken place, and which had given rise to the need for that land in an organised form, was the possession of women by men, everything else coming as a subsequent addition.

Not all men received an equal share of women, or the corresponding land. The most aggressive, strong, violent and dominant men got most, and there were even some men who got none. And so we have the difference between winners and losers – and the confrontation between them.

By means of the procedure of hoarding women, many men had to do without them, while those who had many women enjoyed the privilege of engendering, in just a short period of between 12 and 20 years, an “army” of sons and plenty of daughters to keep up the supply. King Solomon had, according to the Bible, “seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines” (1 Kings 11:3). Those men who had most women and children held power over the others, and made them either into subjects or vassals, or into enemies. The possession of land and animals came on top of this.

Thus, prostitution and war are the two basic pillars of patriarchy. In the former, women are consigned barefacedly to the most ignominious position, and in the latter men are raised to the podium of maximum violence. War and manhood go hand in hand.

Male polygamy, properly known as polygyny (polyandry would be the phenomenon of a woman having more than one husband), unfortunately continues to be current in the world. Polygyny is a patriarchal remnant that is still too widespread in the world, and a very faithful reflection of the distribution of women taken as just another kind of livestock, in this case human livestock. It is the other extreme from prostitution,

and as almost always happens, extremes meet.

Epilogue

With a view to the abolition of patriarchy, it would be important, among other measures, to make a request to an international political forum, namely the United Nations Organisation (UNO), to the end that it should take the following action:

Five men, one from each of the world's continents, in representation of all the men of this planet, would read a document officially apologising to all women for the outrages to which they have been subjected during the course of patriarchy. One woman from each continent would be present and the ceremony would conclude with a handshake to seal the past era and open the door to a new one. This act and the corresponding document would serve to bear witness to the historicity of the patriarchal order and at the same time annul it.

Of course, a great many undesirable situations would undoubtedly still occur. A piece of paper, no matter how important, is not enough to put an end to a whole state of affairs, especially such a complex one. But these situations – sexist outrages of all kinds – would be penalised by law, and this would work for their reduction and eventual eradication.

May it be so.

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