REFERENCES


Patriarchal Pressures on Women's Freedom, Sexuality, Reproductive Health & Women’s Co-optation into Their Own Subjugation

Aysan Sev‘er
University of Toronto

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Starting from the conceptualizations of patriarchal power, the present paper explores the destructive control of girls and women under classic patriarchies. Examples include female infanticide, Chinese foot-binding, dowry and bride-price systems, forced virginity tests, genital mutilation, honour killings and sati. Despite the myriad of its manifestations, it is argued that the uniting ingredient in all patriarchies is the obsessive control over women’s freedom, sexuality and reproduction. What is also noteworthy is that patriarchal systems often co-opt women, especially older women, to become enforcers of the rules that bind younger women and girls. Borrowing Kandiyoty’s term (1988), the co-optation is perceived as a “patriarchal bargain.” The paper ends by suggesting changes at the international, national, regional and local levels. It is argued that to end the patriarchal choke on women’s lives, a human rights approach which bends the signatory states is very helpful but not enough. Simultaneously, both women’s and men’s expectations, behaviour and standard of life ought to be addressed.

Social scientists often define ‘power as the ability to assert one’s own will on others, regardless of the will of the others (Crosbie, 1975; Homans, 1974). This definition of power emphasizes the relational aspect of the term. One cannot have power in a vacuum, without also having someone or something to have power over. The above definition also makes it clear that power is dormant; that means, it lies within the ‘ability’ of the power holder. He (sic) may act on this ability and translate it into action, at which time power becomes influence. He may force others to subjugate to his will disregarding all strong objections, at which time it becomes ‘coercive power.’ Nevertheless, it is often the case that the power holder does not need to translate his ability into action or force. Instead, the more perceived power the power-holder has, the less the need to turn it into

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action. Real and entrenched power is clearly known by all and very rarely challenged. Frequently, those who have no power of their own will go out of their way to appease the power holder, so that he does not act on his ominous ability to coerce, or even hurt them (physical power). It is also often the case that those who lack power themselves will become the foot soldiers of the powerful, enforcing the rules and regulations on their own kind and punishing the deviants. War-movies and psychological thrillers exploit these complex processes by showing prisoners taking on guard-like behaviours and concentration-camp victims personifying the most ruthless characteristics of their captors. Of course, these are extremes and women are neither prisoners of war nor concentration camp victims. Nevertheless, patriarchal cultures do limit women’s roles and choices to such an extent that, what little freedom is open to them can take shape only within the boundaries of roles that particular culture permits. Wifery, motherhood and mother-in-law often define the acceptable and expected roles for women.

**Patriarchal Power**

At the micro level, the abuse of power is frequent in interpersonal relations, as millions of children who are beaten or sexually molested by parents or guardians can testify (Janko, 1994; Steed, 1994). At the macro level, some of the most toxic examples of abuse of power can be traced to mass pillage, rape, slavery and genocide, especially in times of war. More often than not, sexuality permeates power differences. For example, McKinnon (1982) maintains that sexuality is a form of power, where oppression takes sexual forms and where sexuality becomes the very “linchpin of inequality” (p. 533). Indeed, gendered power differentiations have been historically quite perilous. Gendered power differences occur between individuals or groups and advantage men. When they occur at the social and cultural levels, what we have is patriarchal power.

Most social scientists admit that of all concepts generated by contemporary feminist theory, patriarchy is perhaps the most overused and in many respects, the most under-theorized (Fox, 1988). The term captures the amorphous nature of male power and domination in a given society, which is so ingrained, so unquestionable and so effective that it penetrates all other social realities and institutions. Ironically, this amorphous nature of the term is its weakness as well as its strength. When male power and domination is infused into the workings of a social system, it becomes so taken-for-granted, so much a part of the values, norms, behaviour and even part of the socio-religious outlook that one can hardly challenge that power without creating a major reaction and turbulence. On the other hand, trying to dissect patriarchal power into observable/definable pieces will indeed miss the all encompassing and suffocating nature and the consequences of that power. It is due to this catch-twenty-two situation that feminists, themselves, have struggled to come up with a definition of patriarchy that all can agree on. It is because of the same reasons that most men have been able to dismiss altogether how they benefit from the existence of patriarchal systems.

Despite its conceptual difficulty, patriarchy has a life of its own. In its rigid manifestations, patriarchal power continues to exert dire consequences for women in different parts of the world. The type of patriarchy that has been particularly vicious is what Kandiyoti (1988) calls ‘classic patriarchy’ Classic patriarchies can be found in geographic areas that include most of North Africa, the Muslim Middle East (including non-secular Iran and parts of secular Turkey) and South and East Asia (most specifically, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and pre-revolutionary or rural China). As one can see from the above list, classic patriarchy spans geopolitical regions and crosses over religious boundaries (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Sikhism and some orthodox pockets of Christian and Jewish faiths). Given the variation, it will be grossly naive to argue that a particular religion gives rise to classic patriarchy. It is more likely that in strongly patriarchal cultures, the interpretation and practices of any religion come to reflect the existing male domination, privilege and control.

A commonality amongst strongly patriarchal societies is that almost all are agrarian (pre-industrialized societies with labour-intensive farming). The labour-intensivity of the subsistence pattern makes large family systems as well as male labour a necessity (Kagitcibasi, 1982; Lin, 1998). In such agrarian societies, the key elements to the reproduction and continuation of classic patriarchy are: patriarchal households where all decision-making power is vested in one man (often the patriarch, or his oldest son), patrilineal tracing of decent and inheritance (which manifest themselves as preference for male offspring produced in wedlock) and patrilocal extended households (where very young, sometimes child-brides are betrothed into the husbands’ extended household). Taken together, these three pillars of classic patriarchy reproduce the skewed gender relations and give unprecedented power to men over women and to older people over younger ones (Fernandez, 1997; Kandiyoti, 1988).

Walby (1989) theorizes patriarchy within six interrelated structures. These include the mode of production, relations in waged labour, the

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2 Since the focus of this paper is on men’s power over women, I will use the male pronoun “he,” unless, indicated otherwise.
state, male violence, relations in sexuality and culture. What is important in Walby’s conceptualization is the strong link between patriarchal cultures and relentless control of women’s freedom and sexuality. Violence becomes an overtly or covertly condoned tool of control. Men’s obsession over male offspring translates into an unabated domination over women who give birth to these sons. This domination is infused in cultural norms, values and rituals. Women’s worth is elevated through virginity before marriage and piety in motherhood. As Puri (1998) observes, the three statuses open for women are being some man’s virgin daughter, another man’s pious wife and the self-sacrificing mother of sons. Under such cultural constructs, even younger men hold power over women much older than themselves. Moreover, deviation from rules can trigger severe forms of violence against women and girls. Kate Millet (1970: 44-45) eloquently summarizes this vicious cycle of control and violence in the following words:

We are not accustomed to associate patriarchy with force. Soperfect is its system of socialization, so complete the general assent to its values, so long and so universally has it prevailed in human society, that it scarcely seems to require violent implementation... and yet... control in patriarchal societies would be imperfect, even inoperable, unless it had the rule of force to rely upon, both in emergencies and as an ever-present instrument of intimidation.

This paper reviews some of the extreme forms of violence within which patriarchy manifests itself. In the following pages, I will address female infanticide, foot-binding, dowry and bride-price systems, forced virginity tests and honour killings. Although patriarchal rules vastly differ from region to region, what is noteworthy is in no place on earth and in no time in human history, can we find cultural rituals and practices that have similarly enslaved boys/men on the basis of their gender. In this paper, I will also address how women themselves get co-opted into the patriarchal systems. The paper will end with suggestions for change from the international women’s rights perspective and through local initiatives.

**Female Infanticide**

Classic patriarchies victimize girls/women (Kandiyoti, 1988; McKinnon, 1982; Millet, 1970; Walby, 1988). Generally, girls are not wanted, shunned, maltreated, controlled and/or deprived of opportunities that their male siblings freely enjoy. Often, girls are commodified. Historically, female infanticide (killing or exposing female children to natural elements, see Gendercide Watch, 2003) was practiced within numerous classic patriarchies. Methods used to dispose of newborn girls include choking, suffocating, poisoning, starving, strangling and drowning (Hegde, 1999) and even injecting formaldehyde to the soft spot of infants’ heads (Hom, 2001, p. 139). The executioners are mothers or other closely related female relatives who interpret their action in altruistic terms as ‘freeing’ their newborn daughters from experiencing life-long rejection and pain (Hegde, 1999). Sadly, women who have few freedoms of their own have much to lose from giving birth to daughters rather than sons.

Although on the decline, such ghastly practices are continuing in out-of-reach pockets of the developing world (Gendercide Watch, 2003; Janssen-Jurreit, 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 2001; Jones, 1999, Hom, 2001). In China, the one-child policy has inadvertently exacerbated the risk for female infants. In rural India, female infanticide remains a dark secret. However, female infanticide is increasingly replaced by a more humane (but equally gendered) way of sex selection and selective abortions through the (mis)use of reproductive technologies (Lin, 1998; Luthra, 1994; Miller, 2001; Plechner, 2000). In regions where patriarchy is unchecked, girl children are still considered as a burden and their health and life still remain at risk (Gendercide Watch, 2003; Hegde, 1999). Plechner (2000) argues that patriarchal states often collude with violence against women, either through acts of commission or through crimes of omission. The culling of the female unborn is an example to both patterns.

The low status of women in societies that practice infanticide has been extensively studied. However, what has often escaped analysis is the mental state of women who are socialized to devalue and despise their gender. How much worth and dignity can women attribute to themselves if they see their own infant daughters’ lives as worthless?

**Chinese Foot-binding**

Historically, one of the most disturbing examples of physical control of women is the ancient Chinese practice of foot-binding also known as ‘three-inch golden lotuses’ (Ko, 2001; Wang, 2000). Starting from age five on, female children’s feet were wrapped with strong bandages in such a way that the toes were curled in and the heel was increasingly pulled towards the toes. Thus, confined and deformed feet were never allowed to grow more than a few inches in size. Of course, the invasive process involved years of excruciating pain for the little girls, mutilation of two of their most important limbs, sacrifice of their mobility and in some cases, loss of numerous toes to continuous infection and even gangrene and
Dowry or Bride-price Systems & Their Consequences

Even when girl children are allowed to live, most are considered to be a burden on their families (competition to the inheritance of their male siblings) because of ‘dowry’ practices. Dowry systems are generally defended as important cultural practices. It is argued that dowry is a form of transmission of some wealth to the female offspring, since patrilineal inheritance rules often bar women from inheriting from their male kin. However, most women never directly benefit since most or all of their dowry gets absorbed into the patriarchal household. In India, dowry is now illegal, but the practice is rampant. There are many sayings that compare ‘raising a daughter’ to ‘watering a neighbour’s plant’ which signifies the perceived futility of the investment (Hegde, 1999). Moreover, dowry has taken on crushing proportions since many grooms’ families treat dowry as a life-long obligation (Puri, 1998). Women whose families are not willing or unable to fulfill these obligations are vulnerable to maltreatment: they are sent back to their families of origin (which is equivalent to becoming a social pariah), beaten or even killed (so called ‘kitchen fires’ or ‘dowry deaths’, see Mayell, 2002; Pratap, 1995; Sood, 1990; Shah, 1990; also see Anwary, 2003 for acid attacks). It is estimated that 15,000 dowry deaths happen in India every year. This estimate does not include murders which are successfully disguised as accidental deaths (UNIFEM, 2003b).

Other patriarchal societies practice ‘bride price’ or the lump sum payment of money/land/goods/livestock etc., required to acquire a wife. On the surface, the burden appears to be on the patriarchal and patrilocal households to pay brides’ families the socially acceptable amount for the marital rights over daughters. On the surface, one may erroneously think that this type of a system will raise women’s status. In its application, however, bride price system works similar to the dowry system where women are commodified. What they do, how they dress, where they go, whom they see, how they act, whom they marry... all become governed, controlled and oppressed aspects of their lives. After all, from birth on, girls are commodities that must be prepared for marital sale and the potential buyers (patriarchal households) do not want unruly, unclean, unmanageable, tarnished or used (read: sexually experienced) women. Men who have no means to pay for the women they want may end up forcefully kidnapping them. In the latter case, women become damaged goods and may become vulnerable to crimes of honour, as will be later discussed in this paper.

Forced Virginity Tests

Sexual or reproductive control of women is rampant in classic patriarchies and often is closely tied to rules of honour and rules of marriage. One of the most blatant forms of these expectations is the insistence on virginity before marriage. In classic patriarchies, the constant surveillance of women’s whereabouts, family curfews, complex chaperonage systems are the norm. Pre-marital girls are constantly guarded from participation in mixed-sex peer groups, at the cost of missing out on educational and/or work opportunities. Loss of virginity outside of marriage is considered a major catastrophe for the girl, her family, clan or tribe. Girls whose ‘honour’ becomes suspect can be subjected to ‘forced virginity tests.’ Grooms’ families may require ‘proof of virginity’ as a condition of marriage (sale). The required proof may be in terms of a written statement from a physician (almost always a male) who examines the intactness of the hymen. Proof may also involve submitting bloodied sheets at the end of the first night of marriage. The extended family (mostly women) keep vigil at the bedroom door throughout the

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3 In ancient China, only girls from elite classes were subjected to foot-binding. Working class and peasant girls’ feet were not bound since their labour power was much too valuable for the labour-intensive rice farming.

4 As food for thought, Dworkin (1974) pointedly asks us to consider the immobilizing and deforming effects of modern killer shoes with sharpened toes and ridiculous heels before expressing our aversion to the ancient Chinese practice. Of course, Dworkin’s goal is not to make light of the foot-binding practice, but to show the continuation of beauty myths that target women’s body, freedom and choice.
first night. Moreover, the bride’s body may be examined (again, by elder women) for fresh cuts in case she was not a virgin but tried to fool her examiners. These practices reinforce the cultural belief that women are not to be trusted. They also set women against women. Aside from the demeaning nature of these practices, more serious perils await girls/women who ‘fail’ such tests. They may be ostracised, sent back, replaced by a new wife, beaten or even killed (Cindoglu, 2000; Mernissi, 2000).

For those who have had the good fortune of being born in less oppressive cultures, it is quite difficult to imagine the stress young girls/women go through just prior to or during the first night of marriage. Even when they are virgins, it is possible that they may be subjected to false accusations, or due to the structure of their hymen, they may fail to bleed. Many young women attempt suicide, due to the heightened pressure during marriage. In societies where virginity at marriage is an obsession, there is a booming industry in hymen re-construction which exposes women to unnecessary surgical procedures. Such practices also engender dishonesty amongst marital partners.

Genital Mutilation

Another intrusive control on women’s sexuality/reproduction is the practice of infibulation or genital mutilation (Dorkenoo, 1995; Toubia, 1998; Williams & Sobieszczky, 1997; Wilson, 2002). Barstow (1999) claims that genital mutilation happens in 40 countries across the world. Starting from as young as one-week old infants, but more commonly during early puberty, girls are forced to go through a procedure which amputates a portion or the whole of their clitoris, labia minora and/or labia majora. It is often performed by midwives with no medical training, who use razors, kitchen knives, broken glass, sea-shells or even their teeth as cutting instruments (Barstow, 1999; Toubia, 1998). Often, the wounded flesh is sewn together with thorns and weeds, leaving a tiny opening for urination and menstrual discharge. Since most societies have passed laws against these dangerous procedures, people revert to dark-ally practitioners with no medical training. Often, unsterilized instruments are used to scoop out the genital flesh of the little girls. Even when severe infections and blood poisoning may be avoided, excruciating pain, difficulty with menstruation, painful intercourse and complications with childbirth are common (Al-Dawla, 2000; Toubia, 2000; Toubia & Sharif, 2003). When the original procedure leads to severe scarring, women may have to be surgically opened and get re-sewn for each childbirth.

Scare tactics abound amongst the illiterate. Popular false myths are that if you leave the clitoris alone, it will grow into a penis or grow teeth (Walker & Parmar, 1993). Young women are also taught that their unaltered genitalia is ugly and repulsive. However, the real function of all such practices is to make women’s sexuality scrutinized, painful and devoid of pleasure. For men, mutilated women become a form of marital insurance against infidelity. Especially in Africa, this patriarchal practice is so common and so widespread that women defend it as their own. It is the mothers who insist that their daughters go through the procedure, it is the mothers/aunts who physically hold down the little girls and it is women midwives who do the cutting. Women conform to these practices fearing that doing otherwise will disadvantage their daughters in the marriage market.

Despite a global outrage against such practices, it is estimated that two-million girls are subjected to the invasive alteration of their genitals each year (Lax, 2000). Especially in Africa, the practice is widespread. On the surface, the practice is justified as a socio-religious right of passage and a necessary form of ‘cleanliness.’ Defenders of such practices also erroneously aliken genital mutilation to male circumcision. In fact, removing the clitoris, in part or in full, is more accurately comparable to removing part or the whole of the penis. Mutilated women invariably experience a loss in sexual pleasure and may experience serious health and reproductive complications. Barring a few accidents, circumcised men do not experience any of these health problems.

Honour Killings

Caputi (1989: 438) points out that systematic violence against women, including murder, should be seen as sexually political murders or a “form of murder rooted in a system of male supremacy in the same way that lynching is based in white supremacy.” Amongst all classic patriarchies, it is those that practice dowry or bride price that have developed the harshest rules to regulate girls/women’s bodies and sexuality. Women are often socialized/ajoled/forced to wear various garb that covers their bodies, limits their vision and interferes with movement. Most of the regulation stems from an elaborate conceptualization of ‘honour’ where women’s (especially young women’s) behaviour and even attitudes are subjected to relentless evaluation (Duzkan & Kocali, 2000; Kocturk, 1992; Maris & Saharso, 2001; Ruggi, 1998; Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001). Honour (or the behaviours that are deemed to tarnish it) becomes a major social and family preoccupation. Honour is seen as much too important to be left to self-monitoring by girls or younger women. Older men, older women and younger men (as potential purchasers) are all conscripted into controlling
girls/women, around the clock (Fernandez, 1997). Those who are deemed to behave in ways that tarnish their family honour may be locked-up, severely beaten or even induced to commit suicide or killed. Going to movies, dating, getting married to someone without parental consent, or even being a victim of rape or incestuous molestation may be considered as an act ofdishonour, punishable by death (UNIFEM, 2003a; Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001). Strong kin ties and social taboos about the privacy of patriarchal families deter witnesses from testifying even when murders take place in crowded public places.

In honour killings, usually the youngest son of the family is cajoled to carry out the gruesome deed. Usually, no one testifies, even though there may be numerous people who know about the crime. Most frequently, the murders are presented as accidental deaths or suicides and thus stay outside of the criminal justice system (Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001). Police and other branches of the criminal justice system may not be too eager to seek justice. In the unlikely event that a conviction ensues, the perpetrator’s young age will assure leniency and a drastically shortened sentence. He will also receive a hero’s welcome as the one who cleansed the family honour (Maris & Saharso, 2001; UNIFEM, 2003a).

**Sati**

Historically, some Indian women were expected to and actually burned themselves at the funeral pyre of their deceased husbands (Anand, 1989). Sati which literally means ‘a virtuous woman’ is intimately linked with the idea of pativrta according to the sacred Hindu scriptures (Narasimhan, 1994: 45-47). Basically, pativrta suggests that a wife’s duty is to be happy when her husband is happy, to be sad when her husband is sad and to be dead when her husband is dead (Narasimhan, 1994). Although starting from the late 19th century, laws in India forbid sati, it nevertheless remains in practice in some rural regions. Despite the cultural rhetoric of martyrdom that is bestowed on perfectly loyal wives (pativrta), the clear message this brutal practice reflects is that the society has no place/role for a woman who survives her husband. Rigid gender socialization coupled with deprivation from opportunities have forced many women to resign to a fiery death without much fuss. However, there have been recorded cases where women were drugged and physically dragged to the funeral pyres by their adult sons (Anand, 1989; Narasimhan, 1994).

**DISCUSSION**

So, the list of the dark faces of classic patriarchy goes on and on. One legitimate question is why do women who constitute approximately 50% of all societies submit to these practices? A more intriguing question is why do women, themselves, become enforcers of the patriarchal rules? As we have seen in the preceding discussion, it is women who sacrifice their infant daughters to infanticide. Women have bound their daughter’s feet in the past. Even today, women continue to mutilate their daughters’ genitals. It is women who police the virginity of their daughters and daughters-in-law, chaperone them and report the observations/rumours to men. Women inspect the bloodied sheets after the first marital intercourse. It is also women who remain silent or actively serve as shields to protect their sons or husbands who murder their daughters in the name of honour. Although increasingly rare, a few women, willingly or not-so-willingly, still walk to their husbands’ funeral pyres.

One answer to these puzzling observations lies in the relational aspect of all power relations (Crosbie, 1975; Homans, 1974). After all, those who lack power subscribe to the rules of the powerful and those who have power, try to hang on to it at all costs. However, a more insightful answer is found in what Kandiyoti (1988) calls ‘the patriarchal bargain.’ Patriarchal societies symbolically revere women’s reproductive role within legitimate marriages and promise them respect, some power and prestige in becoming mothers (of sons) and mothers-in-law (Brown, 1997). For women, there are few legitimate alternatives for security outside of marriage. However, marriage is not a fundamental right. Instead, marriage is contingent on elaborate conceptualizations of honour, many restrictions on the physical body, complete control of sexuality and severe limitations on social and personal freedoms. Since deviations from rules of honour unleash unbearable pain and harm, most women learn to ‘obey’ the patriarchal boundaries and look forward to the future rewards their docile compliance promises. Moreover, they learn to make sure that their daughters also play by the rules, if they too, are going to gather the fruits from attracting a husband and bearing legitimate sons. In ancient China, it was the mothers who wrapped their daughters’ feet in increasingly tightening loops. In Africa, it is the mothers who hold their daughters down when their genitals are being carved out. In the middle east and southwest Asia, mothers/mothers-in-law follow and chaperone every move of young girls and demand virginity tests. Mothers also participate, albeit indirectly, in decrees for honour killings and continue to protect their sons who carry out the execution (Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001). Women are the ones who seek selective abortions or snuff-out the life out of a female newborn, praying that the next pregnancy produces a son.
(Miller, 2001). In an ironic way, women collude with these practices in order to preserve the only life they know. To do otherwise, to change the rules in the middle of the game may mean that the suffering they, themselves, have endured may have been for nothing.

The above discussion should not be taken as blaming the victims. On the contrary, the intent is to show the extreme difficulty in breaking the chains of patriarchy which are so entrenched that only a few ever try. Dire consequences await those who dare to deviate. Patriarchal rules also make sure that women do not (can not) unite. They remain isolated in what appears to be individual struggles, while all women remain as the second class. Patriarchal rules set older women against the younger ones, rich women against the poor and women associated with the groom against women associated with the brides (Brown, 1997; Fernandez, 1997). Cast, class, race, religion further prevent women from seeking change as an indivisible group. Patriarchal practices even create unsurpassable chasms between mothers and daughters. Thus, like a mystical snake that devours its own tail, patriarchy re-produces itself within each generation.

What about the fathers, husbands, sons, brothers and the male kin? How is it that they do not rise up against the maltreatment and oppression of women whom they call mothers, sisters, wives and daughters? I think, the fact that they do not is yet another indication of the power of patriarchal rules. Even decent men are often silenced by the privileges the system bestows on them. They have a say in things, just by the fact that they are men. The exploitative balance works because even men at the bottom of the status pecking order can dominate some women, namely their wives and their daughters. Their gender brings men acceptance, recognition, support of other men and servitude of women. Yet, ascribed power has its own drawbacks: In patriarchal systems, men never get to experience fulfilling egalitarian relationships with women because the system feeds on inequality. Some are conditioned/accustomed to seek mutilated women rather than cherishing the natural beauty of their partners. In company of other men, they may also seek solutions particular to that unique manifestation of the problem. Since patriarchy is a global issue (despite the different faces it takes in different geographic locations or nation states), we must first seek its solutions at the global level. And since the different faces of patriarchy take on very unique forms, we must also seek solutions particular to that unique manifestation of the problem. The overall success lies in addressing multiple dimensions, not in truncated approach.

At the global level, concern for human rights became a beacon for many nation states that did not want to live through the atrocities of the WWII. In December 10, 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights codified the principles of life, liberty, security and freedom from torture as indivisible and non-reducible rights for all people. Ironically, application of some of these fundamental rights to life conditions specific to women and girl children had to wait another 50 years (Bond & Phillips, 2001). Even then, some of the United Nations declarations such as CEDAW (1979) and DEVAW (1993) mostly remain as guidelines without any means for international enforcement. If the executioner, hoping that the legal system will be merciful on a child-killer. Yet, it is these young boys who will have to live with the nightmares of the evil they commit no matter what their patriarchal clan tells them. One day, they may have to force their own sons to duplicate their sins. Thus, classical patriarchy inflicts untold misery on women, but in a diabolical way, it also depraves its male benefactors.

CONCLUSIONS

What needs to be done to change the tide of patriarchal oppression which dates back thousands of years? What needs to change in order to break the cycle of women getting co-opted into the patriarchal rules? Of course, there is no easy answer to these questions. However, one thing which is clear to me is the necessity to see patriarchal violence against women as a continuum. If we fragment the perils women face by culture, by religion or by social or personal failures, we will lose our ability to see the destructive power of patriarchy in its amorphous and pandemic form. Fragmenting global forms of violence women face also leads to the undesirable outcome of seeing the problems as ‘us’ (whatever us may be) against ‘them’ (whoever they may be). It is true that classic patriarchy is unique to certain parts of the world, as amply discussed in this paper. However, patriarchy and its negative consequences are manifested even outside of classic patriarchies. Fragmenting these issues also fragments our ability and resolve to confront and change the patriarchal rules and expectations that give rise to the problems. Since patriarchy is a global issue, we must also seek solutions particular to that unique manifestation of the problem. The above discussion should not be taken as blaming the victims. On the contrary, the intent is to show the extreme difficulty in breaking the chains of patriarchy which are so entrenched that only a few ever try. Dire consequences await those who dare to deviate. Patriarchal rules also make sure that women do not (can not) unite. They remain isolated in what appears to be individual struggles, while all women remain as the second class. Patriarchal rules set older women against the younger ones, rich women against the poor and women associated with the groom against women associated with the brides (Brown, 1997; Fernandez, 1997). Cast, class, race, religion further prevent women from seeking change as an indivisible group. Patriarchal practices even create unsurpassable chasms between mothers and daughters. Thus, like a mystical snake that devours its own tail, patriarchy re-produces itself within each generation.

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At the global level, concern for human rights became a beacon for many nation states that did not want to live through the atrocities of the WWII. In December 10, 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights codified the principles of life, liberty, security and freedom from torture as indivisible and non-reducible rights for all people. Ironically, application of some of these fundamental rights to life conditions specific to women and girl children had to wait another 50 years (Bond & Phillips, 2001). Even then, some of the United Nations declarations such as CEDAW (1979) and DEVAW (1993) mostly remain as guidelines without any means for international enforcement. Even when patriarchal states become signatories to these women's rights protocols, violations of women's rights continue to be overlooked or written off as cultural prerequisites (Abramson, 2002). If women's life, liberty, freedom of choice, and freedom from torture are truly going to be protected as fundamental and indivisible human rights, the individual states where violations of these rights occur must be held accountable for taking all necessary means to protect the victims as well as to persecute the offenders. If the states systematically fail either in their protection of women/girls and/or
in the prosecution of the individual offenders of crimes against women, there should be an international body which strongly sanctions this failure. Sanctions should range from requests for specified changes, shaming, to political and economic sanctions. Notwithstanding the difficulty of developing internationally agreeable sanctions, what is important as a principle is that the states themselves must be made to feel moral, political, legal and economic pressure from the community of nations in order to protect their own citizens (especially women and children).

Within the local levels, especially in classic patriarchal regions, top down, direct foreign interventions do not work because traditional societies are suspicious of the ideas and ideals associated with the west. Given the deep-rooted suspicions, the existence of either national or international laws/treaties/agreements are not, by themselves, sufficient to eliminate the dark patriarchal practices. On the contrary, in an effort to preserve the religo-cultural identities within an increasingly westernizing world, orthodox patriarchies may even respond with rigidification of their practices (comparable to resurgence in religious extremism). Thus, although international interventions are absolutely necessary at the state level, they are useless or even counter-productive at local levels. Within the latter, solutions may involve working within the positive aspects of the individual cultures. The aim will be to allow and encourage the positive aspects to strip down the legitimacy attributed to violent practices. For example, in patriarchal societies, the concept of ‘honour’ and its link to women is so entrenched that it will be futile to attempt to dismantle it. Instead, the importance of honour can be reconceptualized as honour in not hurting women and children, and the honour of forgiving perceived misdeeds. Elders should be able to see a role for themselves and find face-saving mechanisms for discontinuing historically binding rituals (i.e., honour killings). Another example would be in terms of a culture that is transfixed on dowry. Maybe, expectations about elaborate gifts to flow from the bride's to the groom's side can be altered slightly, by seeing, for example, the formal educational attainment of the brides to substitute for dowry. This transformation in thinking may work by making the brides more independent and in a stronger position to productively contribute to the finances of their household while at the same time, gaining economic self-sufficiency and bargaining power. This will preserve the system of investment, without enslaving women.

I also believe that education and job opportunities, better standards of living for all (including men/women of all ages), incremental replacement of the need for only male labour with need for male and female workers through technological development will go a long way in breaking down patriarchal walls. The states also must invest into the future of their citizens through reform of inheritance and land-ownership laws. Perhaps more than any other dependency, economic dependence is the one which increases vulnerability. States must also be beckoned to invest in health-care and educational programs to curb high birth rates. Women who have no control or say about their own reproductive capabilities are more saddled by the traditional views which define them exclusively in their reproductive roles. Without dismantling the reverence for the motherhood role, creating alternate pathways for respectability for women will be a key in breaking the patriarchal choke on their lives. In this transformation, it is crucial to enlist the help and authority of the local elders (both men and women) into the process of social change where change will come along with them rather than despite them. Without eliciting the help and cooperation of the elders, the age-based patriarchal systems will sabotage any and all efforts to create positive change.

As a final point, while doing our best to understand and change the tortured lives of our eastern and southern sisters, should we not also critically question the gender-based inequalities in our own lives? The challenge in creating more egalitarian gender relations partially lies in changing both women's and men's expectations, behaviours and roles across the world.

5 CEDAW (1979) is the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women and DEVAW (1993) is the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Information about their protocols can be accessed through http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw.
REFERENCES

Abramson, A.T. 2002. Nation States are responsible under international law to take measures against domestic violence. Paper presented at Halifax, Nova Scotia for the HSSFC Congress Meetings (June 1, 2003).


Using a representative sample of 7,141 Canadian women living either in renter- or owner-occupied housing, this investigation assessed the extent of women’s elevated risk for violence in rental housing relative to owner-occupied housing as well as potential explanations for this relationship. Canadian women living in rental housing were twice as likely as their counterparts in owner-occupied housing to experience violence. Explanations examined included family life course (age, marital status, duration of union), male control and domination (sexual jealousy, sexual possessiveness, patriarchal domination), socioeconomic indicators (woman’s and partner’s employment, woman’s and partner’s education), and control variables (place of origin, Aboriginal status, urban/rural residence, dwelling type). Results showed that family life course as well as male control and domination are important for understanding the elevated risk of violence against women in rental housing. Thus, the classic housing policy stance, to simply encourage homeownership, will not adequately address this women’s health issue.

For centuries researchers have associated homeownership with social benefits, including psychological and physical health (Green, 2001; Hubbard & Davis, 2002). However, despite increasing recognition of the need for gender specific research on health (e.g., Russo, 1990), the relationship between homeownership and women’s health does not appear to be a focus in the housing literature. The objective of this study is to examine, in the Canadian context, the relationship between homeownership status and an important women’s health issue: partner violence. The extant housing research begs the question of whether living in an occupant-owned dwelling decreases women’s risk for violence by an intimate partner. In other words, does living in a renter-occupied dwelling increase a woman’s risk of experiencing violence? An