

PARADIGMATIC SHIFTS IN THE THEORY ON PATRIARCHY: SUBJECTIFICATION OF 'WOMEN'*

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Abstract

The theory on patriarchy conceptualizes the position of women by oppression and regards women as objects of some exclusive form of hegemonic system. Accordingly women are manipulated and controlled. Such a paradigm that places women in the margins of economic, social and political life is questionable, for the experiences of women in patriarchy are not only constitutive of oppression but of reproduction, resistance and negotiation as well. In this sense, a paradigmatic shift on the theory of patriarchy is necessary by which women are subjectified with placement at the center. Subjectification refers to the treatment of women in patriarchy as active agents who are not totally powerless but have their own resources and spheres of power. How women manipulate the manipulation of themselves is central to this subjectification and so the paradigmatic shift.

Özet:

Patriyarka Kuramında Paradigma Oluşturan Değişimler: Kadının Özneleştirilmesi

Patriyarka üzerine geliştirilen teorik çerçeve kadınların durumunu ezilme ile kavramlaştırmakta ve kadınları salt hegemonyacı bir sistemin

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nesneleri olarak ele almaktadır. Buna göre kadınlar manipüle ve kontrol edilirler. Kadınları ekonomik, sosyal ve politik yaşamın kıyasına yerleştiren böyle bir paradigma, kadınların patriyarka içindeki deneyimlerinin sadece ezilme ile değil, yeniden üretme, direniş ve pazarlık ile de ilişkili olduğu gözönünde bulundurulularak sorgulanmalıdır. Bu bağlamda, patriyarka teorisinde kadınları merkez olarak özneleştiren bir paradigmatik deęişim gerekmektedir. Ataerkil sistemde kadınların durumunu deęerlendirilişte özneleştirme ile kastedilen, kadınları tünden güçsüz olarak değil fakat kendi güç kaynakları ve alanları olan aktif etkenler olarak ele alma gereklilięidir. Kadınların kendi manipölasyonlarını nasıl manipüle ettikleri, bu özneleştirme ve dolayısıyla paradigmatik deęişim çerçevesinde önemli bir konudur.

Although the concept of patriarchy has long been a concept used in anthropological and sociological studies to refer to the rule of the father in the household, the term, in feminist thought, has been projected to refer to the systematic organization of male supremacy and female subordination (Stacey 1993, p.53). Its appropriation as an analytic and political tool has been both essential and problematic (Acker 1989, p.235). To begin with, the concept is inadequate in reflecting the diversities in 'reality' due to lack of consistent sets of rules and characteristics in between and among cultures and throughout history (Brah 1991). Patriarchy is a system of power relations that is not linear on gender basis -that all men do not oppress women but some women oppress other women, too- but has dynamics of class, ethnic origin, nationality, race, age and religion. In addition, the insufficiencies of the existing paradigms in the theory on patriarchy -patriarchy as collective male dominance, patriarchy as a self-contained system and patriarchy as sex/gender system (Fox 1988, p.165) -display the necessity for the conceptualization of patriarchy as a mode of constructions and reproductions -that is production of human beings with a gendered subjectivity and ideology (Ibid. p.177) which eliminates the tautological explanation of the problem of a system without a purpose while retaining the notion of a separate system (Ibid.170). The categorical approach in the analysis of patriarchy with structures of paid work, housework, sexuality, culture, violence and the state in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women or with relational but discordant forms of public and private patriarchy -former functioning in the public sphere and latter in the household- (Walby 1989, p.214; Walby 1992, p.36) is critical in two points. First, instead of dissociating analytically

independent structures and reformulating a combinative pattern, patriarchy is to be conceptualized as a system of gender relations constituted through processes in which linkages are inbuilt in structures (Acker 1989, pp:238-239). Second, such an analytic scheme faces the problem of reproducing the conceptual dualisms which are defined to be constitutive of women's subordination.

Feminism had set out the political, economic and social inequalities between the sexes, and the oppression of women being the basic cause of their activism as a mass movement. However, the notions of inequality and oppression carry epistemological uneasiness. For instance, one fraction of feminism opposed the Anglo-Saxon tradition of the determination of the gender issue by inequality and focused on the 'difference' level and questioned even the category of 'woman' (Martin 1988, p.26). The issue was taken with regards to the difference of sexes, and even the differences among women (Brah 1991). On the other hand, the discourse on 'oppression' is problematic not because women are not oppressed but rather such a discourse objectifies women as passive victims of their destiny who are silent or denied voice of 'squashed ants', exploited around the rules of some discriminatory hegemonic system (Shaw 1994, p.14). Moreover it is questionable that beyond structures the individuals have no possibility to change the overall composition (Eves 1991, p.122). 'Woman' is portrayed as 'no matter how she behaves in the individual level she cannot impose on the structure' (Wearing 1990, p.37).

In this regard, women are not passive victims of patriarchy (Hart 1991, p.115) like all subordinates of other oppressive systems. Women are social actors who perceive and interpret social institutions and as a party to the dynamics of the gendered order, actively determine in every sphere (Shaw 1994, p.14) and initiate by reproducing, resisting or negotiating patriarchy.

By 1980s, a new approach is witnessed in feminist thought that has reflections on women's studies as well, which might be named 'dual view': regarding 'women' both as victims of male domination and as active agents (Thorne 1992, p.29; Akkent 1993). Feminists started to examine women as active agents in negotiation with male dominance in order to achieve a more tolerable life (Thorne 1992, pp:7-8). This

tendency is observable in women's studies in Turkey also (Sirman 1993, pp:249-250):

The issue of concern is not to reach the judgment that women under different social conditions are oppressed or not, but rather to understand how the position of womanhood is determined in specific conditions, which pressures they live under, which ways they resort to in order to overcome them ... to explain the position of womanhood not by merely structural factors like household/family forms or production but including the acting strategies of women themselves...In order to understand how patriarchy proceeds and how power relations are established, it is also necessary to look at how existing social relations and ideologies are perceived and utilized by individuals. If it is considered that each social structure enables individuals certain acting spheres, it is necessary to investigate the borders of the spheres disclosed for women, and what women do within these borders (maybe sometimes reversing these forces).

Within the above mentioned framework, a vital point of question lacks sufficient attention in the theorization of patriarchy, which is if patriarchy is such an oppressive system, how then can it continue to survive for so many centuries?

Adapting the structural-Marxist conceptualization of ideology and false consciousness onto patriarchal resolutions does not satisfy the question of why women continue to be oppressed and exploited (Eves 1991; Sawicki 1991, p.220). The theoretical argument that the consent given to the system of oppression by the victims de facto endures the system is not an adequate explanation for the power relations between men and women, since the withdrawal of consent would not change the dominant nature of the gender order (McGuinness 1993, p.113). If it is not consent or false consciousness but manipulation with different and cosmopolite nature, the task of trying to conceive women's stance vis-a-vis patriarchy without falling to the trap of functionalism and conservatism becomes highly crucial (Akkent 1993, p.10). When pursuing this task, one must take into consideration that experiences of the oppressed constitute different world views, rather than represent the margins of some dominant perspective (McGuinness 1993, p.113) with the reservations that experiences are not only confined to oppressions but implicate many emotional, psychological and social expressions as well,

and collective experience is not the mean derivative of individual experiences because perceptions regarding the experiences may vary (Brah 1991, pp:172-173).

By the same token, the question in relevance is how women initiate in their placement and replacement under male dominance? To understand the women's stance vis-a-vis patriarchy, consideration of patriarchy as a web of power relations with asymmetries between men and women and even among women clarifies many ambiguities. In this framework, the concern of power in which form and channel/agency men and women abstract and realize, may provide an understanding how patriarchy functions and continues to function despite the wide range of intensive and extensive forms of women's oppression.

The Weberian conceptualization of power is "the chance of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action" (Krips 1990, p.172). Power according to Giddens is more of a type based on action which has transformative character (Wearing 1990, p.42). Foucauldian sense of power refers to a diffuse pattern of actions (Krips 1990, p.173). Contrary to Weber's notion of power as 'having power' that the hold of power rests on certain individuals or groups, power, in Foucauldian terms, is a dispossesable practice (Krips 1990, p.176; Sawicki 1991, p.220). Power is not a means of the dominating groups but is a dynamic that develops in relations (McGuinness 1993, p.101; Sawicki 1991, p.220). Power in micro relations can form a trend that construes macro systems of dominance (Sawicki 1991, p.222).

Foucauldian sense of power which had expanded the theoretical discussion on power, and had wide influences on the agenda of political sciences can be reviewed in three levels. Firstly, the power matrix that surrounds every individual is not static and lineal but complex, diverse and specific (Wearing 1990, p.40). There are multiple forms of power, each working simultaneously in concert and at cross purposes (Abu-Lughod 1990, p.48). Secondly, power is both repressive and productive that it forms knowledge, discourse and subjectivities (Wearing 1990, p.40; Weedon 1987, pp: 111-113). To grasp power only with its repressive nature does not illuminate why the oppressed ones continue to have a purely repressive and coercive form of power (Sawicki 1991, p.221).

Thirdly, power is mode of action upon the action of others in an arena of free subjects, so there arises the issue of resistance to power since the subjects are free to counter -act (Wearing 1990, p.40, Sawicki 1991, p.223). Power, also, is not a zero sum game in which there is a loser and a winner. There are resistances, concessions, manipulations, transformations, negotiations and renegotiations (Wearing 1990, pp:37,42).

In Foucauldian framework resistance inherently exists where there is an exercise of power (Krips 1990, p. 177; Sawicki 1991, p.223). This is of paradoxical nature since an act may be a strategy of both resistance and of power (Krips 1990, p.178). The limitation that the resistance brings upon power effects the outcome of power relation (Barbalet 1985, p.531). One of the methods in sorting out how power is exerted on is through picking out the various dimensions of the resistance directed against that specific form of power (Wearing 1990, p.42; Abu-Lughod 1990, p.47).

Foucauldian premise that where there is power there is resistance is important, not only in the sense that it calls paradigm shifts in grand, abstract meta-theories of power and dominance to particular situations, but also such a position enables scholars and feminists a different formulation of power, by which points and methods of application and location of power, are captured through the resistances exerted upon a specific form of power, and gives clues about how people get caught in them (Abu-Lughod 1990, p.42).¹ Conceiving the nature of power and how it works through resistance would enable an important means in the struggle against oppressions, and so can inform about the possible ways for other women in how to resist (Wearing 1990, p.38; McGuinness 1993, p.101).

People who are oppressed may not react only by mass movements, riots or revolutionary social struggles. There are other strategies and methods that the oppressed perform such as resistances or deviant acts pursued on the individual and practical level in daily life (Okely 1991). There may be covert and unorganized forms of resistance to be of theoretical concern (Abu-Lughod 1990, p.41; Gutmann 1993).² Furthermore, not only deeds and actions but silent voices- which are overlooked, ignored or assumed to be inexistent- should be objects of

study (Hart 1991, p.115). Okely, when pointing to this essential task of making defiant moments visible, summarizes her own attempt as (Okely 1991, p.8): "In looking at resistance I am interested in something other than organized protest or sustained mass movements viewed over time. Instead, I focus on the forms in which it may be fragmented and therefore less visible, namely moments where resistance crystallizes in isolated individual acts or gestures. They may be subtly woven into daily practice."

Literature on women's resistance and inherently power, covers many aspects of women's lives whose experiences are different from each other. Wenona Giles points out to the significance of the impact of political struggles in the arena of work onto the relations with the husbands as well as to the manipulative appropriation of the wage earned by a female domestic worker in the household. The threats of quitting the job, refusing to make love or make visits to the husband's relatives and friends, and provoking quarrels are a few resistance strategies (Bolak 1993). Betsy Wearing defines leisure as a form of resistance of mothers. To draw out a 'room of their own', women use strategies like refusal to do housework and cooking, recruitment of fathers in child care, and alternate baby care with other mothers. When not doing these, women adopt a consciousness of rights contrary to the victim mentality enforced by the dominant ideology on motherhood (Wearing 1990).

Lale Yalçın-Heckman exemplifies women's leaving their homes for their father's in cases of crises in the marriage as a strategy of resistance within a broad and complex relational web where women maximize power by utilizing the kin's group's (aşiret) traditions and norms (Yalçın-Heckman 1993). Similarly Nükhet Sirman in her anthropological research on Tuz village of the Aegean Region sets out the relational web which women establish as a means of empowerment (Sirman 1993). About Moroccan women, Bourqia claims that the politics deployed on the women's bodies as a site of social control is in cases counterused by women like expressing desires in cases of illness and pregnancy (Bourqia 1990). Body being a site of power is valid for Western women also. Helen Cixous and Catherine Clement claim that certain psychological disturbances among women like anorexia, hysteria and agoraphobia signal protest against the confinement of women's bodies (Bordo 1990, p.13).

Abu-Lughod in her anthropological research on Bedouins found out that the significance of sexual difference itself is a source of power (Abu-Lughod 1990). The Bedouin women use the segregation of the gender specific spheres as an arena of resistance. By pursuing the inviolability of their own spheres, they extract strong figures- men- and defuse the imposition of power on them. They have certain micro domains where they feel invulnerable and powerful which are achieved as a result of resistances and negotiations.³ Another form of resistance among Bedouin women appears in marriages which are organized by the respectfully old. In addition, women develop a 'sexually irreverent discourse' that mocks at the male sexuality and masculinity but praises the potency of female sexuality. The folklore lyrics and poetry are means of oral literature, where sentiments of resistance like anger are denounced and channeled (Abu-Lughod 1990).

Women may refuse to make love, to cook and be unresponsive to the husbands' other demands and responses to the level of loud quarrel in front of others like neighbors and relatives manipulating the masculine honor code. They may cast spells on their husbands ensuring that their husbands witness such an act, which is another manipulation of the spiritual beliefs. Their resistance may take forms of killings, infanticide and even suicide (Eves 1991; p.121).

Gillian Hart in her research on peasants' resistance in Muda region of Malaysia found out that women's styles of doing politics had been very different from that of men. Women were attempting more direct (Hart 1991). Joann Martin's study on women's culture of politics in a Mexican village confirm the significance of the difference in between men's and women's discourse and practice in politics. The women of the community develop their own style of politics woven around community interest excluding self interest which, in contrast to the 'sacrificing mother' image, empowers women (Martin 1990). In a parallel line of thought, Kaplan points out to the difference of style of resistance between women and men and argues that women have their own political culture and notion of politics (Kaplan 1990). Women resist in cause of family, children, husband, for the welfare of the traditional life. Martin refers to the same issue and argues that women develop a different notion of politics that rise on family and community interest excluding self interest (Martin 1990). Hacı Boiak discusses the less direct resistance and negotiation

strategies of women who are the primary wage earners within the household (Bolak 1993).

In the portrayal of women's stance vis-a-vis patriarchy with reference to above points of power and resistance, certain analytic dilemmas arise (Abu-Lughod 1990, p.47) as follows:

1)How to credit resistance without attributing to feminist awareness without devaluing such a resistance?

2)How to credit resistance without attributing false consciousness or attribute women as cynical manipulators?

3)How to evaluate resistance without claiming that the forms of resistance are merely cultural, or safety valves for the continuation of patriarchy?

To deal these issues, the paradigmatic shift described previously has to consider the position of women by placing women at the center of the theoretical framework as active agents. Furthermore, it has to be set forth that studies on women and gender have to regard the polarity in the dynamics of gender relations which can best be achieved by the subjectification of women in theoretical as well as political grounds.

Endnotes

¹ Male-stream history has overlooked women in history or presumed them unimportant subjects. Feminists, in their attempt to make women visible, outlined history of societies as a history of the subordination of women by men (Balbus 1987, p.111). Accordingly, there was a system or collection of men subordinating women, and women were consciously left out of history. The contribution of Foucault has enabled a different stance that history is more than a history of constructions or of victimization (Balbus 1987; Sawicki 1991, p.224).

² Matthew C. Gutmann criticizes the tendency in academia that focuses on resistances rather than appraisals and rebellions, and states that this is of conservative nature and is well adapted to the prerequisites of the new world order. He argues that the studies on resistances flourishing in a certain period is no coincidence regarding the ideology dominant in 1980s -the end of ideologies and the collective desire to change the world for the better (Gutmann 1993). Gutmann, when reviewing the "Rituals of Resistance-Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance" by James C. Scott, makes a comparison of the

use of power by peasants and women and claims that "Just as women in certain societies may exercise real if not formal power, similarly, peasantry finds tactically more efficient to leave the formal order intact, and concentrate on political ends that are not accorded formal recognition." (Gutmann 1993, p. 79).

³ This form of resistance is mentioned by Stirling in research on a Turkish village (Kağıtçıbaşı 1981, p.35.). The interesting issue of concern is that Stirling interprets the confinement of women to domesticity twofold: as subordination of women and as a sphere of women that facilitates women's forbearance of oppression. By the same token, Bell and Ribbens declare that women may experience their local settings as both offering them opportunities for control and one which controls them, their activities and values (Bell and Ribbens 1994, p.234.)

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