



Patriarchal Hegemony and Women Resistance: A Foucauldian Reading of Hoshang Waziri's *The Takeover*

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Abstract

The archetypal image of patriarchy is a common theme in literary studies. It goes back to social, legal, political, and economic organization of various cultures. Domination of men over women is found even in the ancient civilizations all over the world. However, what is interesting about patriarchy is when the dominance of men over women is achieved by the dead. Waziri's *The Takeover* (2003) depicts the legacy of patriarchy and its consequences on the female society. The social microcosm of the play is a house with three residents. The house for them is the symbol of traditional values that they were brought up with and got used to. The fourth female character, the Friend, is the only character from outside this house who has different perspectives and wants to bring some changes to the place while the three residents disagree with her despite being unhappy with the current situation. The juxtaposition of tradition versus modernity and the transition is reflected even in the structure of the play as it is written in three scenes. The present paper is an attempt to shed light on the hegemonic power of the dead over the three female characters in the light of Foucauldian theory of power. His influence is clearly manifested in the behaviors of three women: the Old Woman, the Crazy Woman and the Maid.

Keywords: Hoshang Waziri, patriarchy, hegemony, foucauldian theory, resistance

Introduction

In an article entitled “Theorising Patriarchy,” Sylvia Walby (1989) points out that “The concept of patriarchy is an essential tool in the analysis of gender relations” (p. 213). This relation, which is always shrouded by intense conflict, has deep roots in patriarchal norms. However, to resist patriarchy is not an easy task to do as it is innate in a male-dominated culture. In such concerns, Ruby states that “Patriarchal culture is best analysed as a set of discourses which are institutionally-rooted, rather than as ideology which is either free-floating or economically-determined” (p. 227). To avoid the potential power of patriarchy needs to change certain norms which form an integral part of any society. In the same above article, Walby affirms that

I do not believe the decision to resist patriarchy has to be all or nothing. It is not a choice of either drop-out entirely or be co-opted by mainstream culture. It is more complicated than that. We are always situating ourselves vis-à-vis patriarchy by making decisions daily that are more or less resistant to male dominant culture. Patriarchal beliefs, training, habits, and culture are inside us as well as around us. Whether we live “on the land” or not, we are always resisting patriarchy by degrees. (p. 39)

Resisting patriarchy requires not only confronting men’s violence in household but also resisting the whole range of unjust cultural patterns which include: male centrism, male dominance, hierarchy, authoritarianism, capitalism, racism, heedless exploitation of the environment. Thus, resistances embrace a range of humanistic values which found expression in antiracism, feminism, anti-classism, tolerance of sexual minorities, peace, human rights, humanitarian aid, anti-capitalism. Historically, the concept of patriarchy entails men’s rule of the family within household. Weber (1947) used this concept “to refer to a system of government in which men ruled societies through their position as heads of households” (p. 214).

Being the heads of household, men use violence as a form of power over women. However, not all men actively need to use this potential power for it to have an impact on most women. It has a regular social form and, as a result of women’s well-founded expectations of its routine nature, has consequences for women's actions. It is established as “a set of various practices including: rape, wife- beating, father/daughter incest, flashing, sexual harassment at work, sexual assault” (Weber, 1947, p. 224). Accordingly, there are two main types of patriarchy: public and private patriarchy. To quote Walby again, she states that

Private patriarchy is based upon the relative exclusion of women from arenas of social life apart from the household, with a patriarch appropriating women’s services individually and directly in the apparently private sphere of the home. Public patriarchy does not exclude women from certain sites, but rather subordinates women in all of them. In this form the appropriation of women takes place more collectively than individually. (p. 228)

In both types of patriarchy, women cannot work individually. They subordinate on men. In other words, they move within the orbit of men. According to Naser and Midhin (2024) “Women’s voices have been too easily dismissed as repetitive and monotonous in always complaining about their situation – not taken as a social critique, but through a gendered lens as mere whining” (p. 6-7).

As a Kurdish playwright and author, Hoshang Waziri devoted his works to get deep knowledge of Middle East culture and the Arabic language towards understanding violence. His research in the front-lines of the conflict zones, most notably exploring the value structures and identities of Kurdish fighters, Iraqi Army soldiers, and Sunni tribal fighters made him aware of the potential power of men soldiers. His research centers on the Devoted Actor Model and the will to fight and die. Hoshang is published widely. His collection of political essays include 'Between Two Iraqs' (2014) and his play, 'Ishmael's Places', which won first prize in the Arab Theater Institute's 2015 competition.

In his speech about Kurdish art, Autumn Cockrell-Abdullah (2018) said "native scholars, artists and practitioners [...] resist colonial and postcolonial institutions of power and legacies that denied the means by which people would be able to have a voice in their society. They also reflect the idea of rooting in a common history in order to construct the present and future and that there must be active work to find those histories (p. 111). He adds that "Art, as an expressive cultural outlet, is both created and perceived within a system of power relationships that intersect at points of race, class, sexuality and economics" (p. 111). This is exactly what Waziri did in his play. He anticipates the psyche of men and women through the power relationships.

Waziri's *The Takeover*: Private and Internal Patriarchy

In *The Takeover*, the effect of patriarchal hegemony is felt from the very beginning of the play. The stage direction, lighting and the lack of movement suggests passivity of the residents and their struggles to break free from the hegemony of the dictatorship posed upon them through the 50 years of patriarchy. *The Takeover* illustrates the dysfunctional female bonding as they can be the agents of the patriarchy themselves and impose the same restrictions upon themselves. According to Foucauldian theory, anyone who opposes the dominant power and authority is regarded as mad who should be secluded from the society, as depicted through the character of the Crazy Woman who takes the role of resistance to the hegemonic power of the dead, representing by his alive agent, the Old . Here, the Old Woman truly reflects Foucauldian theory of power. She is considered a mad woman because she opposes the General who represents power. The Old Woman reflects the power of the dead as she is obsessed by his presence. The haunted house serves a mediator between life and death. The old woman sticks to this house which

means everything to [her]. it's the only thing he left. I have been wandering through its room and hallways for fifty years. I feel as if I was born here. (Talking to herself.) Everything should stay in its place. This painting here, that chair over there. The General's uniform should be dusted. It should be cleaned three times a day. After his death, nothing was left but the house, which protects me, and warms me, and allows me to feel his presence. His passion was organizing things. (Scene Two, p. 13)

Accordingly, three women are imprisoned within the four walls of the house which looks like "an old military fortress" (p. 14). Unlike the other two women, the old woman is obsessed by the presence of the General even in the small parts of the house. Being "an old military fortress," the house represents a traditional patriarchal power that women tried hard to resist or get rid of. While the old woman who is naïve accepts this power as a strength,

her friend who represents the new woman sees it blind obedience and lack of freedom. The old woman's friend reacts against the old woman: "And there lies its weakness, too, for every fortress has dozens of secret entryways (Wickedly.) Also, old books tell us that fortresses always represent authority, muddled thinking, and chaos" (p. 14). She adds that "Also, I don't know why it's said that old houses are haunted" (p. 14).

The old woman's desire to stay in the house and refuse to change it, as her friend suggests, justifies the patriarchy deep roots in women's consciousness. It is not easy to change it abruptly. Thus, woman's role in society depends entirely on men. This is exactly what she wants to tell the friend:

.... I have been living here for fifty years. Fifty years I have been fighting dust. Do you understand me? Fifty years is a long time. And you want to destroy everything in seconds. The General inherited this house from his grandfather. He used to boast about it. "I inherited this fortress from my grandfather, the old warrior. He built it according to the old plans, solid enough to endure the old wars." I am still strong. (p. 16)

The house as an inherited property refers to the inherited traditions of patriarchy which transmits from one generation to another. The driving force of the General over three women can be felt in scene three. The Maid reports that she cannot stay anymore in the house as "There are strange things happening. Horrifying things!" (p. 17). The gothic story she tells about the General's ghost increases the aura of fear. She tells the friend that

The General's ghost lurks in every corner of the house. I don't see him, but I can feel him walking in the entryway at night. I hear his footsteps, and his voice gives orders to the dead who fill the house. Every night the old woman talks to him and begs him to stay, so much that I can't sleep for all the screaming. (p. 17)

The General is responsible for the chaos in the house. All three women are victims of his domination. The Crazy Woman puts the responsibility for her husband death on the General who spent his life for adventurers of absurd wars. The Maid's conversation with the friend reveals how far the General controls her life. She wants to run the farthest point in the world to get rid of the General's haunted spirit. She is ready to do whatever the friend wants to escape her fearful situation:

Maid (enthusiastically) Yes. Tell me what to do! Why procrastinate? We share the same goal. I want to escape from this dark fortress by any means. I want to run away to the farthest place in the world. The crone's orders are killing me. I have to wipe up her dirt and endure her trivial chatter all day long, day after day. Oh, God, I hate this house. I'll do anything to escape. (p. 18)

From what previously said, Waziri's *The Takeover* can be read and interpreted in political, social, psychological and feminist approaches. The 21-page play is set in a house in a nowhere-land with unnamed characters. Having no names is ironic as this can be applied anywhere and to any nation. The name of the play is ironic as well since it suggests taking over the place and by the end of the play it is revealed that nothing has been taken over and therefore there is no sense of triumph or victory. In *Power/Knowledge*, Michel Foucault (1980) says: "Those who are in power today want to use against us-in order to bring us back under control-the dual pressure of enemies invading from abroad and those who threaten us at home" (p. 1). The General says: The world suffers from chaos, real chaos" (p. 15). Therefore, he wants to scare the residents so that he can control them. What General does in this play is to have the fear engrained in the characters so that they are frightened of anything external and internal. The characters accuse each other of betrayal, and everyone wants to

see the other one at fault so that they are all paying for their mistakes. The two sisters see each other as obstacles to happiness. The Maid sees the Old Woman and the General as responsible for the miseries. Both sisters accuse the Maid of betrayal as she talks to the postman or the Friend.

The General himself is described as a short and fat with pale face and trembling hand (p.15) which suggests that he is so old that he is unable to put things in order but to cause more chaos as he cannot even hold a glass in his hand (p.15). The role of this character in the play is significant as despite being dead, all the characters are suffering from the chaos he left for them. The presence of his absence is prevalent throughout the play. The present chaos is the legacy of the authoritarian and aristocratic policies of the former ruler. He has ruled over this house for fifty years. Half a century of his reign has caused the whole residents to distrust, sorrow and loss. The Crazy woman lost her husband and therefore, she is mourning the life she could have had with him. "Your damned brother-in-law deceived me. Oh, if you could only see how he behaves here! He behaves like a god. He curses and beats anyone he wants when he's angry" (p.16). The god-like General is the one who took over the house that belonged to the sisters' "great-grandfather" (p.10) and since then the residents of the house have become his slaves. The master and slave relationship among them is evident throughout the play. Although there is only the Maid who is a slave to the sisters, in reality all of the women are slaves to the General. Even after his death, the sisters either talk to his uniform or wear his uniform to practice masculine power.

When the idea of fear prevails in the house, they try to seek freedom from the outer world. Therefore, Friend is the one from the outside and the Maid is eager to help her so that she can find her way out of this dire situation. However, in the end when she is free to go, the Maid has no plans and there is no hope for her to control her life and take ownership. This is the legacy of the General and how he wanted to control all of the people in the house. The Maid symbolically represents the new generation of this ideology of the General and since she has been controlled throughout her life, she fails to think for and about herself. Throughout her life, she has been told what to do and for once at the end of the play when she does not have a master, she seems to be lost so she says: "What do we do now? Tell me" (p. 20). She is clearly waiting for another master to appear and in this situation, it can be the Friend to tell her what to do. The Maid is controlled mentally and physically by the General. In *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Foucault writes: "People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what they do does" (p. 187). Throughout her life, the Maid has learned that she should be told what to do and this has become part of her character and her existence. The moment when this is taken away from her, the audience realises that the Maid is incapable of having any control over her life since all she wants is to be told. This urge to be told has become part of the identity and therefore she, herself, wants to be told. This is an internalised personality of hers and when this is taken away from her she loses her sense of being and the purpose of life. Throughout her life, she would blame the Old woman and the General for all of her miseries and this has become her habit to an extent that she lost her own self in this situation.

In this play, there are four women in the house that was inherited from the sisters' great-grandfather. The Crazy woman believes that her grandfather was a great man and all that needs to be done is to put the "things in their right place". This is evident in the women's submission to a dead man and their yearning to restore 'the grandfather's spirit'. Perhaps this is why she was named a mad woman since she wants to restore the dead grandfather's spirit. However, this is not very far from what the Old woman wants. She cries over her dead husband and yearns for his return. The Old woman was twenty years old when she was

married. Twenty is a round number. She then says that she has been living in this house for fifty or sixty years (p.5). Later on, she says that “I will live another twenty-five years” (p.11). The total number that she wants to make is around one hundred years which is another round number. The Old woman is trying to carry this tradition, ideology and school of thought to a significant number of years and this is her ultimate goal. Similar to her sister, the Old Woman does not have a strong sense of self and all she wants to keep the old traditions since this is what she has been told and been brought up with. Throughout the centuries, from the grandfather until the present time there has never been a woman in power and with a strong sense of self. There is no sign of femininity in the house. Both sisters are dependent on their absent husbands or dead grandfathers.

Bell Hooks (2002) writes “female self-love begins with self-acceptance” (p. 107). The female characters of *Takeover* have not accepted themselves and therefore they want to negate each other in the hope of having a male dominance back. The reason why the Old Woman does not want to confront the friend is that she is a woman and all that the Old Woman cares about and gives value to is male hegemony. The friend is the only woman in the play who thinks for herself and wants to bring ‘buildings, markets and casinos’ (p. 15). She admits that she ‘will achieve her dreams in future’ (p. 15). However, she is shut down by the General asking if she had ever achieved any of her dreams (p. 15). She is the only woman in the play who pictures a future without a man and the emphasis on ‘I’ in “I will achieve them in the future, yes, I will achieve them in the future” (p. 15) shows that she has a stronger sense of self compared to the other women in this play. She is the only woman who wants to take control of her life and wants to help the other women to forget the traditional patriarchal ideas and welcome modernity. All of her ambitions are indeed just dreams but she managed to impose her dreams on the General’s condescending approach.

The dysfunctional female bonding in the play is the main obstacle to everyone’s freedom and happiness. The two sisters are the agents of patriarchy. The Old Woman wants to carry on the legacy of the General and the Crazy woman yearns for her dead husband’s revival. There are four women in the house, and they could shape a strong bond and work for their happiness. Instead, they are against each other and each one wants to take over from the other.

The Old woman’s wish to fulfil a hundred years of the General’s reign is a sign of her being the agent of patriarchy. She even says that “he left me alone. He left no child” (p. 6). The fact that she does not have a child shows the end of the brutal reign of the General and perhaps the end of the patriarchy. This foreshadows the death of the Old Woman as the agent of patriarchy. The use of language is of significance here as she says ‘he left no child’. Women are the symbol of birth-giving not men but the sentence attributes the birth-giving to the General, not the Old woman. It is also worth noting that the objective pronoun ‘me’ is absent in the sentence. She does not have any notion of selfhood otherwise she could have said ‘he left [me] no child’. The Old woman is so much drawn into the world of patriarchy that she does not see herself. Even if she had a child, she would possibly engrain the patriarchal thoughts in the new generation of the house. Their barrenness signifies the failure of these thoughts and foreshadows a new beginning or if seen pessimistically it may signify the death and destruction that this ideology has brought to the house.

The Old Woman shows no caring for anyone around her in the house. She is sceptical of anything and anyone in the house. This is one of the important features of patriarchal ideology. Power and control is the ultimate goal of this ideology as it is “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 1990,

p. 20). In order to impose their power they want to control anyone and to do so they accuse people of betrayal if they do not follow their instructions. According to Foucault, anyone who does not obey the power is labelled as mad. The Old woman's sister is regarded as mad since she goes against the General and his ideology. Therefore, a mad person should be kept separate. This technique is also seen in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* when he is regarded as mad by Claudius as Hamlet knows the truth. Claudius wants to send Hamlet into exile. Similarly, the Old Woman keeps the Crazy Woman in seclusion in her room. The maid as the agent of patriarchy should look after her and make sure that she does not sway from the rules. The mad woman in the attic in *Jane Eyre* is also in a similar situation. Since she is coloured and hence different from the white supremacist and patriarchal norm at the time she is kept separate from the rest of the people.

In Foucauldian reading, all of the organisations serve the main power such as schools, police stations, hospitals and mental health centres (asylum centres). In *The Takeover*, everything happens in a house so this house can be seen as a country and the residents as different sections in the system. Therefore, The Maid is seen as the agent of a government in a country that fulfils the desires of the government by keeping the Crazy Woman in the room and making sure that acts according to the norms of society. The Crazy woman was right about the General so as Hamlet about Claudius. However, her fault was seeking another man's love, a dead man's love. In this case, she is exactly like her older sister as the Old Woman is mourning her dead husband. For as long as the two sisters refuse to see each other and help each other, they act as agents of patriarchy.

The dysfunctional female bonding between the two sisters has its roots from a long time ago when they were children. As she tells the Old Woman: "Sister, why do you always imagine that all things always belong to you? As I remember, you were always like that. Even when we were children, you imagined our mother was only yours" (p. 8). This is the first time that their mother is mentioned in the play. It shows how insignificant and therefore dysfunctional their mother-daughter relationship was even in the past. The Mother-daughter relationship is the first female bonding of any female. The mother of the two sisters could not have a functional relationship with them both so as a result, they did not and do not have a peaceful relationship with each other. The competition between the two girls as children to have their mother's attention exists even in adulthood but is in a different shape and form. The Old Woman thinks that she is the sole owner of the house. The house can be seen as their land where they belong to. The house can represent their motherland. A place they both come from. The only connection between them. Their mother had a similar role. The competition to own the mother in their childhood is reflected in competition of controlling the house. A house which is old, dark and gloomy. A house which represents death rather than life. And by the end of the play, it is the younger sister who takes her revenge. The Old Woman wants to control everything in the house and gives absolutely no rights to her sister. The internal conflict between them allows the outsider, the Friend, to interfere and accelerate the destruction of the house. If the sisters did not have this rivalry, they could have brought life and light to the house. According to Alice Walker (1983), women should be outrageous, audacious, courageous or wilful (p. xi). What is lacking in this relationship is joy, love, happiness, womanhood and livelihood. They have sacrificed their female bonding for submission to their male partners. The partners are dead and they are seeking them. In another word, they are seeking death and destruction and in the end, they achieve it. The Crazy Woman sees her sister as the source of all of her miseries and blames her for all of the shortcomings she has in her life. The Crazy Woman, however, is right as it is the Old Woman and her husband who control the household. It is the General who sends the husband of the

Crazy woman to the war. The Crazy Woman says: “[The General] seduced [my husband] with medals and honor, with manhood and its difficult tasks. (she laughs)” (p. 8). It is the patriarchal values that brought death to the husband of the Crazy Woman. Her name is ironic as she is the only person who sees the truth and challenges the rotten patriarchal ideologies of the house. Significantly she laughs at the end of this sentence as it shows how ridiculous this untrue ideology seems to her. The General could not bear another man in the house so he seduced him with false ambitions and dragged him to death. This way he would be the only man in the house so that he could be the only oppressive power in the motherland. One of the destructive beliefs of patriarchy is that they see each other as rivals and they want to take over any other man in their territory. What the General does is get rid of the only rival so he can easily control the other female residents as “he came back with more medals and honor than ever” (p. 9). After his death, the legacy of patriarchy remains with the women and they continue to act as the agents of patriarchy in different ways. The reason for the confusion of the Crazy Woman is the lies of the patriarchy and patriarchal values. She says: “You have been lying to me for years, but I always believe you, so much that I don’t understand what is going on in this house” (p. 8). This shows that the Crazy woman is more aware of the lies and false values but she does not have the power to take over and turn the situation around since she is labelled as mad and therefore must not be trusted by the people.

Conclusion

The power play in *The Takeover* is so cleverly shown with only a limited number of characters who represent different sectors of a supremacist society. The small society depicted in the play serves as a microcosm of a bigger society where the members of the society suffer from the legacy of the patriarchy and therefore they aim towards destruction. The internal conflict of this society leads to foreign intervention which again leads to further death. This is ironic that the residence of this society consists of all females who are the symbol of fertility but they do not have any children and their infertility is significant as it shows the futility of the patriarchal rules. The patriarchal ideology never brought any peace, joy, happiness or success to any members of this house including the men.

The male characters of the play are dead and despite their absence, the female characters cannot cherish their liberty since they act as the agents of patriarchy. The internalised values of the patriarchy prevent the female characters from having a functional bond with each other. They see each other as rivals and therefore want to get rid of each other. This is evident in the relationship of the two sisters. They have their differences from childhood and because of not having a functional mother-daughter relationship, they suffer throughout their lives. Throughout the play, they mourn for their dead husband rather than celebrate the life that they have. The Maid, on the other hand, is another female character who has been deprived of any choice in her life and she has always been taking orders from others. At the end of the play where she is liberated, the internalised patriarchy within her prevents her from celebrating her freedom and instead seeks another master to take order from. The Friend, however, is the only character who could perhaps bring some light to the darkness that prevailed in the house. Her ambitions and dreams have been looked down upon by the General and his agents; therefore, due to the internal conflict of the members of this house, there is no light brought to this place. The friend might not have had the intention to

take over but by the end of the play, she is the only character left and there is no other choice for her other than become the new leader of the house. This is emphasised by the fact that the Maid is seeking another master at the end.

Consequently, the internal conflict of a household brings no success to the place and the only outcome is destruction and death. The Old woman as a direct representation of patriarchy is killed at the end of the play. Waziri left us perplexed if her death is a sign of victory over the power of men.

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