

## “WHO THEN IS THE WOUNDED BEAST?” – FOREWORD TO BIAS 28

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*“Who is the Beast?”\**

Having problems with women being single, seems to be a transcultural characteristic of patriarchal<sup>1</sup> societies. This cannot be a surprise at all, as the non-independence of women is the basic structure of patriarchy. Women are subordinated to men, they are less than men, less powerful, less important, less strong, less human even – this is the key concept of patriarchy as it is found already in Israel and other Ancient Near Eastern societies. Therefore, a woman’s place in the social world is defined by belonging to a man, to a lord. The first lord in a woman’s life usually is her father – at least if she is born as a legitimate daughter in his house. A woman – if she is a child or grown-up does not matter much – is seen as being unable to exist in society without a male lord,

\* Detail of Artemisia Gentileschi’s (1597-1654) impressive painting “Judith Slaying Holofernes”(cf. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judith\\_Slaying\\_Holofernes\\_\(Artemisia\\_Gentileschi,\\_Florence\)\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judith_Slaying_Holofernes_(Artemisia_Gentileschi,_Florence)))). Her art often focuses on the biblical tradition’s strong women among whom the widow Judith is the most prominent. The Judith figure is highly ambivalent. On the one hand she is the ever-praying holy woman trusting in God, living in perfect piety and chastity, while on the other hand she is a killer lady, using her sexual attractiveness to get access to the enemy, saving her people by slaying the evil man. In the eyes of patriarchal culture, she is a female saviour and hero, doing something manly for her people, at the same time she incorporates basic fears of masculine dominators. What if I would be Holofernes? What if I would be killed in a moment of weakness by an insidious beautiful woman who turns my bed from a place of pleasure into an execution site? In the life of many women, single or married, these fears are a normal part of their life as in patriarchal rape cultures (see below) the bed can always turn into a dangerous place of violence and death. Artemisia’s Judith seems to act coldblooded, killing the enemy in the same attitude as she would slaughter a chicken for lunch. In patriarchal cultures, the single woman often is seen as a dangerous ‘wounded beast’, threatening the patriarchal order. Yet, the ambivalence of the Judith figure can put the question of ‘who is the beast?’ in a new way. Who is perpetrator and who is victim? The killing single woman or the dominant man Holofernes being killed?

<sup>1</sup> Although I cherish the ground-breaking work of Schüssler Fiorenza I hesitate to follow her proposal of using the term “kyriarchy” instead of “patriarchy” (Schüssler Fiorenza 2011). Of course, it is true that the system of men dominating women goes far beyond the rule of the fathers and implies the rule of a lord /kyrios over persons that are not members of his family. Yet the father is the prototype of the masculine dominator and thus, in most societies the role of the “father” is the model for any masculine ruler, be it in church/religion or state. The power of Roman emperor Augustus found its best expression in the title “pater patriae” and even the pope, a man living in celibacy, is called “Holy Father” as he is head of the Catholic Church. Therefore, it makes sense to stay with the term “patriarchy”, I think.

therefore, the place of the father cannot be vacant. Thus, if the father is missing – be he dead or absent in another way – he must always be replaced by another man. If the woman is not married, the man taking her father's place as her lord may be a brother of her father, one of her brothers or any other man. If the woman is married, usually her lord is her husband. If the woman is enslaved, the slave-owner is her lord. The need of always having a lord over her, is the basic characteristic of a woman's life in patriarchal societies. Even if she is the daughter of a freeman, not kept in slavery, she will never be really free. If she would be "free", her freedom would be seen as loneliness, being helpless, not really existing in society.

Of course, this basic structure can be modified in many ways, but it is a common script linking all human cultures that focus on masculine domination, as Pierre Bourdieu (2001) called it.

In a sense, women never are really adult persons. Just like children they always need a man to guide them, protect them, speak for them, decide for them. That is why patriarchal societies tend to ignore or underestimate the problem of sexual abuse of children. The difference between a person being young enough to be called a child and a person old enough to be called a woman is not that big. The only factor that makes a difference is the ability of producing offspring. However, there is no age, that enables a child or woman to say 'no' to the sexual desires of her lord, be it the father or brother (cf. Stiebert 2016; Seifert 1997: 175 ff.), the husband, the pastor, the teacher, or the office head. It is always the lord's decision with whom and when and how he will have sex.<sup>2</sup> Only the rights and the power of other men can put restrictions on his sexual behaviour. Therefore, patriarchal cultures basically are *rape cultures* (cf. Stiebert 2020).<sup>3</sup> The powerful man manifests his power by sexual domination, and this is not just a side-effect of masculine domination. Just in the opposite, the close connection with sexuality and power constitutes the core of masculine domination, as Michel Foucault (1978) points out in his ground-breaking studies on the history of sexuality. As masculine domination is a cultural system of symbolic violence, it tends to manifest itself in bodily violence. Rape is

<sup>2</sup> The biblical story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife tells that even if the man is a slave his status is higher than the wife of the slaveholder. Joseph puts the woman into her place: "'Look,' he said to his master's wife, 'with me here, my master does not concern himself with what happens in the house, having entrusted all his possessions to me. He himself wields no more authority in this house than I do. He has exempted nothing from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How could I do anything so wicked, and sin against God?'" (Gen 39:8-9 NJB). The male slave representing his lord stands over the woman trying to share into her lord's slaveholder-authority. Gender hierarchy beats slavery law: Joseph and the woman have the same lord. She cannot share into her lord's authority as she is his property not his representative. On the other side the male slave is appointed as a vicar of his master's property. Thus, he represents the masculine domination over all belongings of his master – only the wife is exempted from this. Therefore, Joseph is not allowed to have sex with her. Yet she has no authority to command him having sex with her as she is (female) property of her (male) lord not sharing into the masculine domination of her master. Cf. Kügler 2019a: 2-5.

<sup>3</sup> Seifert (1997: 185) rightly puts it: "Das, was wir aus feministischer Perspektive als sexuelle Gewalt gegen Mädchen und Frauen bezeichnen, beinhaltet für die Täter [...] ein intensives Erlebnis von Kontrolle, das Gefühl, Herr zu sein über Leben und Tod. Sexuelle Gewalt gegen die Tochter ist ein Kontroll- und Unterwerfungsritual, das Väter um des Machterlebnisses willen benutzen und mit dem Zweck, Macht zu spüren und Machtverhältnisse zu stabilisieren." Translation JK: *What we, from a feminist perspective, are calling sexual violence against girls and women, on the side of the perpetrators [...] is implying an intensive experience of control, the feeling of being lord over life and death. Sexual violence against the daughter is a ritual of control and submission which fathers use for sake of the experience of power, and with the purpose of feeling power and stabilising relationships of power.*

not an accident in this cultural construction but rather a kind of “sacrament”<sup>4</sup> to establish the symbolic order by inscribing the message “man dominates woman” into the bodies of the dominated ones again and again.

In relation to decision-making, independence, sexual and other human rights, a woman never is an adult person in patriarchal systems. Neither her age nor a mature character nor supreme intelligence or a brave heart qualify her to play the role of an adult person in society. Without a male guardian or custodian, a woman cannot act in a radically patriarchal society. Thus, being single is a real problem for women in such a society. Although this “idealtypische” structure of masculine domination knows a lot of variations and exceptions in detail – e.g. patriarchy in Germany is not the same in 2020 as it was in 1970<sup>5</sup> and the role of women in British monarchy is not the same now as it was in the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup> – the basic structures are necessary to understand the specific problems we are struggling with in many areas nowadays. One cannot understand why conservative US-Christians support a president known as an adulterer and grab-them-by-the-pussy-macho without understanding the tight connection between sexuality, power and religion constituted by the basic pattern of masculine domination which patriarchal theology will define as “God’s will” and “the divine order of creation”. The macho adulterer may be a sinner but definitely he is a real man, capable to dominate, qualified to reign. That is the same mechanism that leads female Christians in African churches to defend their churchleader even after he was found guilty of child abuse and rape (cf. Zimunya & Gwara 2019). Although most Christians, of course, would think that he “should not do that”, one cannot contest the power and divine legitimacy of the “man of God” by kicking him out of his job or sending him to jail. Patriarchy often does not have more than lifting an eyebrow on sexual violence, and the reason is quite simple. Abusers and rapers may have gone “too far” but they did not go in the wrong direction. The affirmative connection between sex, gender, power, and religion is the basic structure of masculine domination and therefore, acting along this guideline can never be completely wrong.

In most cultural systems religion was and is playing a crucial role as an important ideological tool of masculine domination. Patriarchal religion defines a hierarchy where power runs down from god/the gods as the supreme power(s) to the man as the representative of divine power and the woman as the object of this power. This kind of religious world is found in the canonical texts of Ancient societies (e.g. the Hebrew Bible for Judaism or Homer for Greek antiquity) but it is also found in most of religion-determined societies nowadays. Of course, for the history of Christianity the scriptures of the New Testament are of highest importance. There we find the Apostle Paul writing:

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<sup>4</sup> “Sacrament” here is defined as a performative sign which effects an embodiment of a symbolic order. Sexual violence, in this sense, has a sacramental quality as it not only is indicating the symbolic order of masculine domination but enacts this order and thus strengthens it.

<sup>5</sup> For example, in the year 1970, a wife needed the permission of her husband if she wanted to sign a contract for a job, which is not the case anymore.

<sup>6</sup> For Elizabeth I it was impossible to marry without losing her right to reign. Only the absence of a husband made it possible that she was ruling as (a “virgin”) Queen. Some centuries later, Elizabeth II could marry. However, her husband was not allowed to bear the title “King”. In order to make it possible that his wife is a reigning Queen he had to be a mere “Prince”. If he would be King, she would not be head of state, not a reigning Queen, but a Queen in the sense of a king’s wife, a royal “first lady” as was her mother.

But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman the man, head of Christ God. (1. Cor 11:3)

Θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ὅτι παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἡ κεφαλὴ ὁ Χριστὸς ἐστίν, κεφαλὴ δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ, κεφαλὴ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ θεός.

Paul's Jewish-Christian concept (cf. Kügler 2019), of course, is different from pagan versions of this hierarchy as the Apostle knows only one God and he introduces Christ as a intermediate power between God and man. However, these variations do not affect the woman's place in this concept of world order. Her place always is the least one, the place of submission and being dominated. Woman is the one who has no one under her for whom she could be head. This conceives her as the counterpart of the other end of the pyramid; God has no one above him who could be his head. The dominated non-dominating is the opposite of the non-dominated dominator. Thus, 'woman' is most far away from 'God'. Being a woman is not only defined by being powerless, non-masculine, and dominated, but also by being non-divine, while the patriarchal religion defines 'God' as a masculine, powerful, dominating non-woman. In this kind of religious world order the woman is the perfect place for sin, associated with everything that is distant from God or against him.

Yet, the biblical tradition offers many examples of cracking and even transcending patriarchal patterns of thinking and believing. Biblical religion is not simply a reproduction of patriarchy. The same Apostle who wrote the above quoted verse also wrote,

<sup>26</sup> Πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

<sup>26</sup> For you are all sons of God by the faith in Jesus Christ;

<sup>27</sup> ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε.

<sup>27</sup> for every one of you having been baptized into Christ, Christ did you put on;

<sup>28</sup> οὐκ ἐνὶ Ἰουδαίῳ οὐδὲ Ἑλλήνι, οὐκ ἐνὶ δοῦλῳ οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερῳ, οὐκ ἐν ἄρσεν καὶ θήλῃ· πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

<sup>28</sup> Neither is there Jew nor Hellene, neither is there slave nor free, not is there male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

This program of a non-gender structure of Christian church and full equality of all members through redemption is a true gender revolution in the patriarchal framework of the Ancient world. Far too radical for most of the Christian communities until nowadays.

Yet it shows the ambivalence of gender-revolutions in the iron cage of patriarchal culture. If Paul wanted to declare Christian women as equal to their brothers in Christ, he had to declare them as somehow masculine. According to patriarchal tradition only brothers could be fully equal to each other, while sisters had to subordinate to their brothers who represented by virtue of their masculinity the authority of the father. Thus, Paul had to call Christian women "sons of God" to declare them as fully redeemed in Christ, having the same rights and duties in the church as the Christian men. When Paul uses a masculine word to say that Christian women and men are "one" (V.28) in Christ this is not only a tribute to the fact that the church as the embodiment of the Messiah's body is a male body as Jesus was a man. It is also a tribute to Hellenistic-Roman mainline culture which is unable to think of femininity as something positive,

<sup>7</sup> It is widely accepted that Paul, in this passage, uses an ancient creed, which he adopted from his mother-congregation in Antioch. Most likely this text was spoken or sung in the context of the ceremony of baptism, interpreting dogmatically what just had happened in the rite of initiation. The precise differentiation between the pre-Pauline credo and the Pauline frame text, however, is disputed.

equal to masculinity. While the true man is the perfect version of *mankind*, the woman is a defective version of it. Therefore, everyone and everything that is female/feminine shows a certain deficit and is inferior to everything and everybody who is male/masculine. And so, in his time Paul had no option to express women's equality in Christ than to call them "sons of God". Granting them a masculine status was the only way then to promote women to the status of independent and honourable congregation members, fully equipped with the same rights as the masculine members. Will we nowadays find a way to gender equality without telling women they should become less feminine? How do we define male/masculine and female/feminine without saying that one is inferior to the other?<sup>8</sup>

This book on the status of single women in Zimbabwe manages to make clearly visible the precarious ambivalences of modern gender debates, together with all the sharp conflicts linked to the two competing functions of religion. Prof Biri goes deep into the details of different biographical situations and experiences of single women as well as into the many facets of socio-religious discourse about their status. Although it is a book on single women's situation in one after-colonial African society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many of the problems, attitudes and arguments in this discourse are repeating religious and cultural patterns of thought that are typical for patriarchal conflicts in many other cultural settings, nowadays as well as in former times. This is true even if some elements of tradition changed their function and meaning.

In the history of religion, the concept that a single woman, i.e. a woman lacking a male lord to guard and guide her, could opt for a divine lord as a substitute for an earthly guardian, usually functioned as a religious tool of liberation. Women could find consolation in this concept and gain spiritual strength which they needed to survive in a toxic environment. Single women could even use the idea of being bride or wife of a divine lord as a powerful means to escape or avoid the iron cage of patriarchal marriage. If a woman belongs exclusively to God like the Hellenistic-biblical widow<sup>9</sup> Judith, or if single women had the divine *logos* as their husband-*kyrios* (as did the 'old virgins' in the Therapeutic Jewish community of Alexandria), or if young Christian women promised themselves as spouse to the Messiah Jesus (as did the young 'widows' opposed by the Deutero-Pauline author in 1. Tim 5) – all these women used a religious concept from the reservoir of patriarchal tradition to avoid the submission to a human lord and lead a respected, self-controlled life. Nowadays, this empowering function seems not completely lost (cf. Beck 2020) but the bride-of-Christ-concept sometimes seems to be more an instrument of submitting single women to the pastoral control of the "men of God" (cf. Biri 2013).

As, in the cultural setting of patriarchy, sexuality is the most bodily manifestation of masculine domination, all single women like Judith, the "old virgins" or the "young

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<sup>8</sup> Parts of the spiritual tradition of Western Christianity may offer interesting insights in the "broken masculinity" of God and his "motherly" Christ. Even if it will not help to copy them, they can give an important space of freedom to think beyond the traditional gender stereotypes (cf. Kügler 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Beck (2020: 17) correctly points out that many societies make no difference between widows and other single women. Thus, the words which usually are translated with "widow" (i.e. a woman who lost her husband) were used by the languages of biblical times, like Hebrew ('almanah), Greek (chēra) and Latin (vidua), to define any woman lacking a masculine lord. Etymologically these words have to do with "emptiness", "lacking something". The general use of these words for any woman without man make us find young "widows" in early Christianity, women who never were married but declared themselves "widows" and "promised to Christ".



widows” were forced to abstain from having sex with a man – at least officially.<sup>10</sup> That is why this kind of women’s liberation – well-known in Christian history through many centuries<sup>11</sup> – hardly will be accepted as a role-model by the majority of single women nowadays.<sup>12</sup> Claiming for their right of having a fulfilling life in all dimensions of human needs, they challenge traditional Christian concepts of sexuality. The more their voices are heard the more they can push their churches and the societies they are living in towards the development of sexual theory and practice beyond submission, violence, and reproduction. Only if Christian communities manage to develop a concept of sexuality as a manifestation of love between free and equal partners, they will find a way of honouring the single women among their members.

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<sup>10</sup> We do not know how much secret sexual activity the strict control of family, church and society ever allowed.

<sup>11</sup> Powerful women like Hildegard of Bingen, Teresa of Avila and many others more could play their important role in Christian history only by avoiding being submitted to an earthly husband. Only as a bride of Christ they could find the freedom of studying, teaching, preaching, travelling and so on. Although churchmen always tried to put them under their control, these active and influential women could do much more than any wife depending on a human husband.

<sup>12</sup> Of course, the celibatarian way of life is highly estimated in religious tradition of the Catholic and Orthodox churches but the number of women who find it attractive to live a nun’s bride-of-Christ life is not too high, neither in Europe nor in Africa.

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