

# **The Psychology of Women under Patriarchy**

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# The Psychology of Women under Patriarchy

*Edited by Holly F. Mathews and Adriana M. Manago*

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## *Women of the World Unite*

MIGUEL DA COSTA FRIAS

My mother, Cheryl Braganza, was a Montreal artist and human rights activist. Her painting on the cover of this book, *Women of the World Unite* (2014), sends a message of empowerment to girls and women. It envisions a future where women of all cultures join hands to collectively enact positive change. In speaking about the painting, she said, “Power, especially the power to effect real and meaningful change, is rarely a solitary achievement. More often, power is born out of a deep connection with others and a sense of ourselves in the world.” The authors in this book bring to light the issues that confront women who live within patriarchal systems that often oppress and divide them. Yet as Ayesha Khurshid points out in her chapter on rural Pakistan, women are active participants in these patriarchal systems as they attempt strategically to claim their rights and navigate hierarchy through their connections to others. In so doing, these women often transcend boundaries, reshaping the opportunities open to them and the systems in which they live. My mother did just that in her lifetime, and her personal story as well as her artwork continue to inspire the hope that other women can as well.

Born in Bombay, India, and raised in Lahore, Pakistan, my mother grew up within the strictures of patriarchy. She was raised Catholic in a Muslim country and attended a convent school run by Belgian nuns. She reported that in school she was never asked to give her opinion about anything and that home was not that different. “No one asked for my opinion. I just obeyed. . . . Respect and family values were so important that even if I had different ideas on anything, I kept them to myself.” A gifted musician, my mother auditioned on piano at age 14 for a professor from the Julliard School of Music. She didn’t hear anything more until six months later when her piano teacher mentioned in passing that she had been accepted and offered a scholarship but that her parents had refused to let her go and had chosen not to tell her. They had decided for her. My mother later wrote about this experience: “I thought back to the traditional way South Asian

society regarded daughters. In a very general sense, we were considered burdens to families. . . . I couldn't help but feel the burden of an oppressive tradition. I was allowed to excel but just in the confines of a certain frame, within certain boundaries." She would later say that as a young woman she felt she had no voice.

In the 1960s, her family finally allowed her to go to college in London, where she discovered her talent for painting. In 1966, she made her way on her own to Montreal, Canada. The young girl from Pakistan who could never speak up began to communicate through her music, her writing, and especially through her art. Married with three young sons, she encountered racism in the suburbs of Montreal that caused her to doubt herself. Eventually, however, she found the courage to leave an unhappy marriage to a controlling man, and without any support, she went on to build a life and career for herself as an artist.

Her activism began when she was approached in the streets by a woman promoting a benefit for the women of Afghanistan. When she asked the woman why she should get involved, the woman answered, "Why not?" This simple answer struck a chord with my mother and motivated her to paint their suffering and their hopes. In 2008, she was named Montreal Woman of the Year by the Montreal Council of Women for using her art to fight for women's rights all over the world. In her acceptance speech, she noted that people are not, for the most part, moved to action by written information. Rather, they are moved by images that touch the common center, inspire, and provoke thought and understanding.

On her sixtieth birthday, my mother was diagnosed with a bone-related cancer. For the last decade of her life, she developed her painting talent with exponential speed noting, "I am in a race against time. I have so much to say and so much more to bring into the world." Confronting the reality of death enabled her to blossom with unlimited creativity, courage, and joy. She died peacefully in December of 2016, after seeing her three children. She once said, "When people look for hope, as in times like now, they turn to the arts, to the symbols and images that hold and heal." Her painting *Women of the World Unite* is one such symbol of hope and healing. It offers the promise that together women can overcome the restrictions of patriarchy and forge the relational connections needed to shape a more humane, caring, and enlightened society. She would wholeheartedly support the efforts of these authors to examine the psychological underpinnings of patriarchy in order to improve the lives of women and men around the world.

# **The Psychology of Women under Patriarchy**



*Introduction*Understanding Women's Psychological Responses  
to Various Forms of Patriarchy

HOLLY F. MATHEWS AND ADRIANA M. MANAGO

In her chapter in this volume, Adriana M. Manago analyzes interviews with first-generation Maya college students in Chiapas, Mexico. Susana commutes daily from her village to the city and tells how her world view and aspirations have changed due to education. When asked why she did not want to get married right away, Susana answered: "Because I want to study, I want other experiences, I don't know exactly. I'm free to go out at any time, to wake up at any time, late, early, I don't have a schedule, that is, I get phone calls, let's go, and well, there's nobody to ask permission to go out, just my parents, [I say] 'I'm going out.' . . . I have this freedom to do what I want." She seems to have embraced the individualistic goals that many feminist scholars argue accompany economic development and the spread of Western discourses. In contrast, contributor Ayesha Khurshid reports that many of her rural female Pakistani respondents, who were among the first to be educated and find jobs, still agree to traditional arranged marriages. In explaining why, one young teacher, Salma, said: "How could I refuse my father's wishes? He has educated us [the sisters] against the wishes of the family. He did everything for us. So I knew that I had to do this [accept the marriage proposal] for him. I proved [to the community] that my father was right in educating us." While Salma values education and the rights of women to work outside the home, her duty to uphold her family's honor by obeying her father's wishes remains central to her sense of self. How are we to understand these seemingly contradictory beliefs and behaviors? Are they simply the result of incomplete or uneven forces of modernization and the survival of archaic patriarchal value systems in isolated regions?

No country has modernized more rapidly than South Korea, which arguably has one of the world's most highly educated populations. Yet when contributor

Kelly Chong interviewed well-educated, middle-class Korean housewives, many of their views about marriage and gender roles appeared to echo traditional Confucian values. As one woman explained, “I really believe sincerely that for any woman, obedience is something she has to deal with and accept. . . . A wife obeying, raising her husband continuously and making him the leader, that is the most essential aspect of marriage.” Contributor Leta Hong Fincher questions why a new generation of highly educated, urban Chinese women continue an old custom of registering joint property solely in the husband’s name, compromising their marital power in the process. One of her respondents explained her agreement with the traditional custom by saying, “His family thinks I’m more capable than him. Even though I’m younger, the companies I worked for are better than his. So his mother thinks her son needs some kind of guarantee. . . . His mother started crying on the phone and I thought, forget it. . . . After all, she’s my elder [*zhangbei*]. Since she started crying, I knew that this issue was also really hurting her. So I thought, forget about it, whatever works is fine.”

Clearly, patriarchal beliefs and practices flourish even in modernized societies and among well-educated women. Deniz Kandiyoti (1987, 324) highlights the central paradox confronting feminist theorists seeking to understand and change gender oppression cross-culturally: what is the relationship, if any, between emancipation and liberation? She reports that while the formal emancipation of Turkish women was achieved through a series of legal reforms and the establishment of a secular republic, corporate kin control of female sexuality continued to reproduce a culturally specific experience of gender for many. Kandiyoti (1987, 324) concludes, “Insofar as subjective experiences of femininity and/or oppression have a direct bearing on the shaping of what we might imprecisely label a ‘feminist consciousness,’ they have to be taken seriously and analyzed in far greater detail than they have been.”

Contributors to this volume met for a week-long seminar at the School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in April 2015 to examine how women’s subjective experiences shape and are shaped by changing sociocultural and political conditions. Noting the need to move beyond a dichotomy of accommodation and resistance, the organizers brought together a group of feminist scholars with field research experience and in-depth qualitative data from different parts of the world in order to probe how patriarchy works psychologically and what constitutes agency in patriarchal systems. Embracing the feminist goals of intersectional and interdisciplinary analysis (Bolles 2016), participants sought to bridge preexisting divides between biopsychological,

sociological, and cultural perspectives and to begin explicating the ways that women's desires, goals, and identities interact with culturally situated systems of patriarchy (see Chong 2008). These scholars explored why and how patriarchy persists as a cultural model even as the material and social conditions supporting it are eroding worldwide. In other words, participants attempted to delineate the "sticky" parts of patriarchy in different cultural contexts and determine why these remain persuasive to women.

This work raises the issue of motivation, and the authors included here explore the innate human proclivities that are shaped in the course of child and adolescent socialization and show how these are affected by state policies, religion, local cultural beliefs and practices, and larger historical moments. The goals of this volume, therefore, are to stimulate the development of more complex theories about the psychological underpinnings of patriarchy and to potentially inform more socially progressive policies to improve the lives of women and men globally.