

Chapter 8

Women in the US military

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Introduction.

What does it mean for those of us who believe in freedom and justice to accept the challenges which patriarchal privilege and exclusion present? In my reflection on this question, I will use three key terms: Patriarchy, Hierarchy and Resistance.

By entering onto this terrain of discourse it is my hope that these brief comments might take us one step closer to a resolution of the century-old problems of women's inequality and oppression in the context of war and military discipline. I will first, refer to the notion of patriarchy as an ongoing context made up of historically recognizable forces that have repeatedly attempted to restructure the world in order to maintain hegemonic systems of exploitation and privilege.

Within the military women have suffered not only injustice from patriarchal and hierarchical structures, but also inequality and violence from the hands of illegitimate authorities. How U.S leaders continue to maneuver and manipulate female soldiers will be the first topic of discussion.

However, this is only one side of the patriarchal mind. We also need to explore another, often less recognized side, which can be seen in the way in which Iraqi women have been affected by the U.S occupation and the way they revolted against the injustice of the occupier. Finally, we will examine in what ways the Algerian women's experiences of resistance to the imperialist challenge can teach us to better understand the hierarchical systems in which we all live. It is in this context that I will attempt to locate some of what I think are the most pressing issues facing us as humans at the present moment.

Is the pyramid of command a key concept for an "illegitimate" hierarchy?

The essence of patriarchy is a desire by certain men to control and dominate all life and matter. Patriarchy has often made life miserable for many people over the centuries, and now it seems to be threatening the very existence of life on this planet. An obvious example is war, where aggressive males kill and abuse in order to dominate whole countries. Of course, guided by the capitalist economic system the objective of which is to maximise the power and profits of a few (mostly men), and to keep the rest (male and females) in subordinate positions. War --the ultimate form of domination-- expresses the essence of patriarchy in the military: to dominate and/or destroy.

"Respect the uniform, not necessarily the person wearing it," is an expression sometimes heard in the military. It means that you obey an order because you respect the rank of the person giving it, not necessarily the person himself. In the military, the hierarchical structure can be illustrated by the following concept; "The pyramid structure with power concentrated at the top, and a chain of command running down."¹ Nowadays most organizations, such as businesses and governments, are based on the military model of the pyramid structure and are codified by its principles. Thus, dominate/subordinate relationships are created.

U.S women soldiers.

The U.S military has almost three million people on its payroll. Over 1.4 million are serving on active duty, with a third of these normally deployed outside the United States. Another 867 000 serve in the active reserves and in the National Guard as weekend warriors. However, lately, because of the invasion of Iraq, 163 000 of these reservists are currently on active duty. Progressively, the number and roles of women in the armed forces have changed. As the largest branch of the military, the army has increased the number of women from 2% in 1973 to about 15%. Today over 229 000 women serve in the active duty in the military services of the department of Defense. In the army there are 86 000 active duty women.-About 33 000 served in the Gulf war.-²

¹ Tod Ensign, *America's Military Today: challenges for the Armed Forces in a time of War* (U.S: The new press, 2004), p. 5.

² Ensign, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

As far as the American women is concerned, Policies adopted by the army and the other services restrict women's roles. Within the U.S military, it has been argued that there is a connection between women's exclusion from combat and their exclusion from many opportunities in the military leading to positions of power and authority. Whether statutory or a matter of service policy, these prohibitions bar women in many career fields from being assigned to positions necessary or advantageous to advancement and promotion.

In fact, there are very few women in the top levels of policy and decision making. There is a sexual division of labour within the army which marginalize women (case of Condoleezza Rice and Madeleine Albright for racial interest to be discussed later) and still, the army continues to exclude women from serving in high rank responsibilities. Most women are in the military because of globalization, the restructuring of the labor force in the U.S, and their desire to get an education, or a job; socio-economical reasons. As an example Jessica Lynch- a veteran served at war in the Gulf-, had applied for a job at Wal-Mart and when she did not get it, she decided to enlist. Lori Piestewa and Sheshanna Johnson both who fought with Lynch were single mothers looking to get an education.³

What I can mention here is that women are enlisting into the army by necessity. (to earn a wage in order to satisfy their family needs, education, healthcare, housing...and later on a retirement pension.). Let me have your attention on the fact that in the U.S army currently in Iraq, half of the active duty women are black. Even though women's serve as soldiers, I can specify that the U.S military is a misogynist, hates women, is a homophobic institution that relies on patriarchal ideologies and relations to function. The U.S military indoctrinates the hierarchical values, it trains men to devalue, objectify and demean traits traditionally associated with women. It molds men into gender role of violent masculinity defined in opposition to femininity. By violent masculinity I mean a mode of operating that glorifies violence as a solution to tension and competition. So the U.S military teaches soldiers to maintain the ideological structure of patriarchy.

The cornerstone of male domination is sexism; denying women their full human rights and dignity. The patriarchal mind wants women to be objects, totally under the control of men, victims and hostage of this system.

Eventually, Male attitudes ingrained in the military culture are the institutional promotion of male dominance, hypermasculinity, the collective male imperative to disparage women in general and specifically women in the military. The U.S military culture is driven by a group dynamic centered around male perceptions and sensibilities, male psychology and power, male anxiety and the affirmation of masculinity.⁴ The collective forces at work in the military culture demand women's marginalization. Accepting women as military peers is anti-ethical to the hyper-masculine identity traditionally promoted by the institution and sought by many military men. Only by excluding women or denigrating them could men preserve their superiority and perpetuate the hierarchical mind.

Violence a landmark of this system.

There has been little exploration of the conditions facing female soldiers serving in the U.S army, as is the case; the situation in Iraq for female is very dangerous. Male violence and male abuse of power are undeniable fact. To look at male violence against women, we shall start with rape. Statistics of a recent study carried by Helen Benedict from Columbia University of earlier veterans of war indicates that 30% of women are sexually assaulted or raped.⁵

During the Iraqi war, there have been reports of rapes and other forms of sexual abuse committed by American. Women are not free from interference even from those who are in the same camps. Therefore, incidents and cases of women raped in internal U.S army can be cited to illustrate that women are attacked in Iraq and are targets to physical violence by men of the same country.

Here is Suzanne Swift's story, told in her own words:

I had a squad leader who literally singled me out to be the person that he was going to have sex with during the deployment. And, you know, I did. I was nineteen. I fell for it, and for months I was like his little sex slave. It was disgusting and it was horrible. Ultimately I stopped it. And he made my life hell. I mean, a squad leader in the army is basically-that's your boss. Everything that you do -eat, sleep, when you go to work- everything! They can tell you when to do it and how to do it. And he made my life miserable, because I would not have sex with him anymore.

Sergeant. Eli Painted Crom, who served in Iraq also gave testimony to this abuse of power over women in the U.S. military:

There was an actual rape case on the base that I was assigned to, and the way that they handled it was they moved the perpetrator to another site.

According to the same report, female soldiers decided to not urinate at night, in order not to be caught alone going to the latrines or the showers by male U.S. soldiers. This was not being told to the men. This was kept secret from the men, but

³ Amy Goodman, The private war of women soldiers: Female Vet, soldier speak out on rising sexual assault within US military, available at <http://www.Democracynow.org/article>.

⁴ Ensign, op. cit., p. 136.

⁵ Ensign, op. cit., p. 136.

because of their fear of going out at night, women were not drinking liquids after 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon, and at temperatures of 120 degree Fahrenheit, and because there was no air conditioning at most of the facilities, they were dying from dehydration in their sleep. Thus many women died from dehydration rather than drink water and risk going to the latrines at night just to be abused by male soldiers.

Obviously, What I saw through these testimonies epitomizes a lot of injustice and inequalities in terms of how female soldiers are treated. Nevertheless, we can identify a number of reasons for sexual violence against women. Rape is not merely a matter of chance, of victims being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Nor, is it a question of sex. It is rather a question of power and control which is structured by male soldiers. Notion of their masculine privilege, by the strength of the military's lines of command and by class and ethnic inequities among women.

The hierarchical command structure would remain the paradigm for harassment it had always been. Within this structure female soldiers are taught to be loyal to their boss. Most women didn't bother to report harassment at all. For them, by reporting a problem, they were raising trouble. Thus they, risked being written up by their superiors for the most minor infractions. In fact, the harassment of women would continue in the military culture as well as in the institutional gender discrimination that kept women as secondary players to men.⁶

Women are second class soldiers?

The Abu Ghraib scenes epitomize the idea that women need to be free and to have the same rights as men is actually, an insufficient strategy. The question that must be asked here, Is the Abu Ghraib a moment of imperial arrogance and sexual depravity of a gender equality?

But there is no gender equality to be seen here, just gender depravity, or at best a reformed equality that no one wishes for, and this point, not even the women said to be equal.

What is really scary and horrendous in Abu Ghraib is this hyper –imperialist masculinity, and the perfect fabrication. Females are present to cover over the harms of building empire. So I think what transpires from all this is that, these very women themselves, have been militarized, manipulated, and exploited. They were and are still hurt by imperialism. Here is a real connection between war and patriarchy. The impact of violence against women cannot be separated from racial and economic hierarchy. In fact, women are victims and hostages of this environment, incapable of neither acting nor behaving positively.

Iraqi women and the occupation.

While the previous part focused on the domestic impact of U.S militarism (impact on women), the scale of violence against Iraqi women requires our attention. Men and women must oppose the hierarchy that glorifies the rapists and murderers in U.S uniform and that ignores the systematic forces producing them. Discussing this aspect comes in two parts. In part one, I discuss the U.S invasion and occupation of Iraq have not brought liberation to Iraqi women- but rather, resulted in the worsening of living conditions along gendered lines. In part two, I elaborate on my own critique and view of the French occupation of Algeria and women's struggle to liberate and free themselves from the hierarchy and the patriarchal structure since imperialism operates to perpetuate it.

Iraqi women have played important roles throughout Iraq's history, they were widely considered to be among the most educated and professional women in the Arab world. Thus while Iraqi women were making gains in civil lifes, they were also suffering the effects of armed conflict on the wider society politically and economically speaking.

he U.S occupation has caused enormous violence and economic devastation. Military action had resulted in the excess deaths of at least 100 000 Iraqis. In a country where 55 to 65% of the current population is female, of course women are the most affected by these terrible new conditions.⁷ Altogether, the occupation has reinforced with endemic patriarchy to worsen the situation of Iraqi women. Its gendered effects have been to intensify the harms of patriarchy in Iraq, adding new levels of violence and deprivation. If Iraqi men are perpetuating the kidnappings and rapes of women, they do so in the context of the occupying authorities carelessness and inability to provide security.

Jennifer Fasulo a co-founder of solidarity with organization of women's freedom in Iraq, in one of her reports about Iraqi women's situation reminds us of the specific historical and geopolitical context of the occupation, pointing out that the conflict has intensified the growing religious fundamentalist movement in Iraq that systematically perpetrate violence and harassment of women.⁸

In addition to the killing of the innocent women, the occupation forces and the local police have also been engaged in other forms of violence against women. There have been numerous physical assaults at checkpoints, and during house searches. (Typical to what happened during the Algerian war, and the terrorist war of 1990 and I can cite my own experience) It is evident let alone the violence related to the arrests, detainees women suffered not just physical assaults and torture but also rape.

And the case of Abu Ghraib is an example. What happened at Abu Ghraib prison was a scandal, men and women were victims of unhuman practices including torture, sexual abuse and rape. Nearly all female detainees were subjected to sexual

⁶ Ensign, op. cit., p. 167.

⁷ Hassan Ghali, Colonial violence against women in Iraq, available at <http://www.countercurrents.org/> p.1.

⁸ Ghali, op. cit., p. 2.

abuses by American soldiers. Through the illegitimate power created and maintained by violence the American and the fundamentalists aimed to marginalize women and inactivate their wishes to struggle for their liberty.

Furthermore, here I focus on the origins of resistance, that is when and why anti-colonial resistance began. It goes without saying that resistance movements have often used armed struggle to force the occupiers to change course. Iraq is not different; Iraqi resistance to imperialist aggression is often violent.

Women have not been absent from participating in this armed struggle resistance, even if they are a minority of combatants. In July 2004, the press reported over 150 women in the rebel cleric Mukhtada al Sadr's Mahdi army, trained as weapons experts, and intelligence agents. Women in Iraq took the initiative to fight along side men during uprising against U.S forces in April 2004, and hundreds have marched in demonstrations.⁹

Iraqi women are participating within autonomous and independent women's movement, an Iraqi women's struggle that involves not only separating oneself from patriarchal imperialism, but also in confronting, opposing and waging war against it by all means necessary. Unlike the U.S female soldiers, in practical terms Iraqi women were trying to use a various means against the imperialist. Challenged by the uncomfortable environment, Iraqi women started to change their environment. Their consciousness and awareness as an independent actor is behind their action and struggle. This concept, this act of overthrowing an imperialist power is supported by a legitimate right and will to seek freedom and equality, just like in the French Algerian War of Liberation.

The Algerian women's experience.

Similar to what is happening today in Iraq, happened during the Algerian War of liberation, about fifty years prior to the 9/11 attacks. Women played central roles in fighting against French colonialism. Algerian women took the role of fire carriers, and also used their veils to conceal and hide explosives, among other risky and hasardeous responsibilities that resulted in torture, rape and murder by the French. During this war, the Algerian women became conscious and aware of the role they had to play in order to liberate themselves and operate beside men. In that crucial moment veil became an important symbolic marker for her struggle. The French were on a crusade to unveil the Algerian women, because they understood correctly that it represented an expression of liberation from the French colonisation.

In some of his writings concerning the Algerian war, Frantz Fanon indicates that the veil was a pivotal point in the power relations between the Algerians and the French. Wearing the veil became a symbol of resistance and a means to achieve a change of the situation.¹⁰

In fact, using their illegitimate power as an agressor, during the Algerian war the French insisted on unveiling Algerian women, both to liberate Algerian women from the veil and to destroy the structure of Algerian society and its authentic values.

According to Fanon, the French operated on the following formulae: "Let's win over the woman and the rest will follow. If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity of resistance, we must first conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hid themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out off sight."¹¹

Similar to the current Iraqi context, this tactic emerged from a colonial patriarchy in order to dehumanize and objectify women. It is ironic that, though in Algeria the French wanted to win over women, they used brutal tactics in order to terrorize them into submission. Rape, public unveilings, murder and other tortures were used on women who engaged in revolutionary activities. The Algerian women during specific war symbolized the honour of the FLN. When the French raped a woman by forcing her to remove her veil, they were simultaneously raping the FLN and the Algerian nation. In fact, the role women played in the revolution led us to believe that a colonized nation would also bring about a liberated woman with a newly empowered role.

The Algerian women participated in the struggle in three capacities. Rural women either joined the army of liberation or provided food, provisions, and havens for the guerrillas (Moudjahidines,) about 80% of the women who actively participated resided in the countryside. In cities they joined the FLN or served in support capacities.¹² The Urban women who participated in the nationalist struggle were often young; middle class graduates of French Lycées, for example Hassiba BEN BOUALI, Djamila BOUHIRED and Djamila BOUBACHA. They were particularly prominent figures in the Algerian revolution war.

Thus all the unhuman abuses and the colonial restrictions were to be challenged by the national liberation struggle. Consequently, this unveiled Algerian woman, who assumed an increasing place in revolutionary action, developed their personality, discovered the exalting realm of responsibility. The Algerian woman ceased to be a complement for man, she literally forged a new place for herself by her sheer strength. The algerian women's anti-colonial struggle was a moment where they imposed themselves above the men and sometimes took the lead to action. She challenged the hierarchical structure as well as the imperialist mind.

In practical terms, this war depicted the great role of women in the revolution and the need for an autonomous independent role for women. The FLN called for an end to colonialism and the restoration of national independence and women within this context liberated themselves and forged an independent status.

⁹ Ghali, op. cit., p. 1.

¹⁰ Samya, El Machat, *La France et l'Algérie* (France: l'Harmattan, 1996), p. 156.

¹¹ El Machat, op.cit., p. 178.

¹² El Machat, op.cit., p. 211.

Conclusion.

To conclude, we can say that the ideology and agenda of controlling women is today connected to U.S imperialist activities. How the U.S military perpetuates the sexual abuses toward both U.S and Islamist women, to manage and motivate male workforce is the outcome of this economic capitalistic system, which traditionally subordinate women to male. The routine indoctrination of male supremacy in the workforce, devaluing and minimizing female status that is the substance of patriarchy that can be seen within the U.S military. A gender inequality, a recognition of the connections between imperialism and patriarchy drastically widens the harms of people and especially women. Not only does the war perpetuate sexist inequalities, but also it augments patriarchal injustices.

I believe we can and must heal the splits that patriarchy has caused. The main splits are between man and woman, mind and body, spirit and matter, and between culture and nature. We can begin by healing these splits within ourselves and in our lives. Thus I advocate the socialist movements to work for women's dignity and liberty. Using democratic actions in order to find better strategies that can promote self-defense against imperialist and capitalist aggressions. Hiding behind a curtain is not going to solve the problem, nor will it bring any significant change in the quest for women's freedom and equality.

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