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Patriarchy from Margin to Center:  
Discipline, Territoriality, and Cruelty  
in the Apocalyptic Phase of Capital

### The History of the Public Sphere Is the History of Patriarchy

Colonial intervention in what I have called the village world (Segato 2015) has minoritized everything regarding women. The term *minoritization* refers to women's representation and collective position in social thought: minoritizing means treating women as lesser beings and relegating them to the realm of the intimate, the private, the particular, treating theirs as minority (and consequently minor) issues. The elements contributing to the minoritization of women are related to the transition from communal life to modern society and, in Latin America, of indigenous peoples living in national territories to colonial modernity. This transition was driven at first by the process of conquest and colonization led by the overseas metropolis and then later by the administration of the *Criollo*-elite-constructed state. Therefore, this process can also be described as *criollization*.

The transition to colonial-modernity—the current rapid expansion of the state-business-media-Christianity front—intrudes into the mode of existence of the village world and has a massive impact on interpersonal relationships and the organization of gender relations in societies that are still governed by communitarian and collectivist models of coexistence, or where a communitarian fabric can still be found that, if not unscathed, is at least recognizable and vital. In its wake, that transition integrates different peoples in the mass of the national “citizenry.” Considering transformations in the gender system, the history of the patriarchal structure is indispensable

for understanding the social shift introduced by modernity. Correctly reading what this transition has meant and how intervention has readjusted and eroded preexisting hierarchies allows us to understand a number of current phenomena that affect society as a whole, phenomena that cannot be expressed or contained by the term *the woman problem*.

I insist that feminisms, as well as all other fronts of the social movement, commit a great political and epistemological error—a theoretical-political mistake of inestimable negative consequences—by compartmentalizing women's issues into a separate analytical field. As I have argued elsewhere (Segato 2013), a subliminal or hidden structure comprising a relationship of positions marked by unequal prestige and power performs a kind of transvestism under the guise of gender. Such a hierarchical and explosive crystal transposes itself in the first scene of our life under the malleable forms of familial patriarchy, later transmuting into other unequal relationships, organizing them in its image and likeness: racial, colonial, metropolis-periphery relationships, among many others. In that sense, the first lesson of power and subordination is the family drama of gender relationships, but, as a structure, the relationship between its positions replicates *ad infinitum* and is revisited and rehearsed across a range of situations where inequality is found.

The village world into which the colonial front, and later the colonial-state front, intervenes and invades is a world in which the genders occupy two different spaces in social life. Thus, that world has a dual structure and is driven by an ironclad and binding reciprocity. The dual is one variant of the multiple, and there is movement between the terms of a duality, making it possible to switch positions. In the dual world, both terms are ontologically full and complete, although they can maintain a hierarchical relationship. There is no encompassing of one by the other: public space, inhabited by men and their tasks, politics and mediation, business and war, does not encompass or subsume domestic space, inhabited by women and families and their many types of tasks and shared activities.

In that collective and communitarian atmosphere, there is no all-encompassing Man, catapulted by modern-colonial humanism to the position of universal subject, nor are there statements of general value capable of representing everyone. There is no universal referent that defines what is human or a universal equivalent of value that allows the environment to be commodified or renders the territorial niche and its landscape marketable. Each nature is irreducible to the other. Yet people can move between the positions given as natures and transmute themselves. That world is *trans* in many ways.

That dual structure is captured and reformatted by the imposition of colonial binarism. Binary structure results from the modern capture of the village world's reciprocal, though hierarchical, duality. In the binary world of modernity, the other of the One is removed from its ontological fullness and reduced to fulfilling the function of alter or other regarding the One as a representative and referent of totality. This role of the—feminine, nonwhite, colonial, marginal, underdeveloped, deficient—other, as Edward Said and a generation of postcolonialist theorists have shown, represents the condition of possibility for the existence of the One: the universal subject, the generalizable Human. A tribute or gift of being that is exacted from the other flows to the center, the platform of the universal human subject, constructing and nurturing it.

This is the process by which what was associated with a public space or masculine domain in the communitarian world got transformed into the so-called public sphere or universal domain. As we can see, the history and constitution of the public sphere participates in and is intertwined with the history of patriarchy and its structural mutation beginning with the modern-colonial capture of the village world. Thus understood, the history of the public sphere or state sphere is nothing less than the history of gender. That public sphere, that state agora, thus becomes the locus of enunciation for all politically valued speech. In other words, it will hence hijack politics and hold a monopoly over all action and speech seeking to acquire the quality and the impact value of the political.

Because of its history, the natural subject of that public sphere, inherited and resulting from the colonial capture and transformation of indigenous men's communitarian political space, would be masculine due to its origin and genealogy. As the offspring of the colonial process, that subject would be white, in addition to its other qualities often highlighted by feminist critique: property owning, literate, and *paterfamilias* (describing it as heterosexual does not suffice, since we know very little about the patriarch's actual sexuality). Despite its very particular attributes, the statements of the subject of the public sphere are considered to be of general interest and possess universal value. This abruptly devalues the domestic space, until then crowded by a multiplicity of presences, the scene of women's activities and ruled by women. This latter space, previously subordinated in prestige but ontologically whole in itself, is now placed in the residual role of the public sphere's other: devoid of politicity because incapable of statements of universal value and general interest. The margin, limited to the other of public life, is immediately understood as private and intimate. Henceforth, women's public discourse and activity will require a form of drag, a transformation of self to fit the requirements of the public sphere's rules of etiquette

and masculine style. In the village world, in the community not yet fully intervened into or only partially invaded by the modern-colonial intrusion, domestic life is not intimate or private at all.

That modern colonial construction of the residual value of women's fate is what must be dismantled, opposed, and redirected because it is from this binary and minoritizing scheme that the evils presently affecting all of society are derived and expressed—because the wrongs suffered by women as a consequence of domestic abuse and contemporary informal forms of war constitute the diagnostic tool for assessing the effects of the historical transition of society as a whole. In that sense, we can reclaim and restore women's space's ontological fullness and capacity to speak to the general interest. We attempted this in the 1970s by saying “the personal is political,” the era's feminist slogan, which since then has led to struggles over laws and public policies without much success except for on paper. Perhaps this is because it was not the best idea, as Foucault noted early on, to struggle for a life under the panopticon's eye or to invite the courts into the bedroom, as became usual in North America. Perhaps, then, such a path was neither the most interesting nor the wisest, since gender's violent and expropriating structure did not recede anywhere.

Rather, what emerges as a promising path is rehearsing a mistrust of the public sphere for its barely concealed male lineage, and attempting to envisage a new transition capable of dismantling the universal One established by the public sphere so that a true plurality of spaces might emerge. This is so because the hijacking of all political statements by the structure of prestige based on the oneness of the public sphere, with its unique capability of broadcasting all that is to aspire to general interest and universal value, its maneuver of introducing the abstraction of centrality, generality, and universality, entrenched and imposed by the always self-referred embeddedness of its masculine subject, is none other than the route currently being taken by democracies on our continent moving dangerously toward a dictatorship of the majority. A democracy that does not uphold pluralism as its irreducible deontological ethics will not be democratic, even if it represents the majority's will. Why? Because it is driven by that sphere, designed by a binary structure where the variety of differentiated and minority subjects (women, youth, blacks, indigenous people, all those who practice nonnormative forms of sexuality, etc.) become others and anomalies of the One in the collective imagination and must perform a kind of drag to speak the language of politics, now hijacked by the state field—uncomfortable anomalies who embody “the impossible problem of the other,” which is and will always be the undigested problem of colonial modernity.

### Discipline and the Pedagogy of Cruelty: High Intensity Modern-Colonial Patriarchy in the Apocalyptic Phase of Capital

The privatization, minoritization, and transformation of the lethal assaults on women into “special interest problems” and “minority issues” are the consequence of a transition from the communal world’s low-intensity patriarchy of masculine special domain to the high-intensity modern-colonial patriarchy of universal domain. The effect of this minoritization is shown by how femicides and homophobic crimes have a residual value, are deemed almost barely a spectacle, in Latin American legal practice and media standards. At the same time, feminists, in our struggles, yield by treating these crimes as isolated, ghettoized issues. This overlooks the fact that acts of violence against “minorities” are nothing other than the discipline imposed by patriarchal forces on all of us on the political margins. These acts of violence are crimes against everything that destabilizes the high-intensity colonial-modern patriarchy, everything that seems to conspire against it, everything that slides out from its control, including the various daily tactics and strategies many of us use on purpose or inadvertently to slip away from and disobey patriarchal vigilance. Thus, colonial-modern patriarchy purges everything that does not duly recognize its way of structuring and disciplining life, its form of enabling and naturalizing a path of progressive domination and asymmetries.

My main argument, however, is that if we observe and seek to understand the crimes against women that characterize the present moment and what those crimes express—what they say and what they cause—we will see their strong connection with society’s current historical phase. In the same way that understanding the history of patriarchy is to comprehend the history of the state and the public sphere, at the center of all questions, understanding the forms of gendered violence today is to understand transformations in society as a whole.

An apt pictorial allegory for advanced modernity would be the circus’s inverted pyramid constructed of acrobats, bodies barely overlapping, feet over heads, layer over layer, narrowing upon one woman’s body at its foundation giving it stability in equilibrium. I often imagine that structure because it seems to be the only one capable of explaining why it is still impossible to achieve something that at first glance appears simple, like removing women from their position of subordination where they are constrained, punished, subjugated, and assaulted, why it is so difficult to prevent them from being raped, trafficked and enslaved, objectified and dismembered by the media’s eye. It should not be difficult: a few actions, measures, or relatively simple interventions would suffice. But for some reason *it cannot be*

*done*. It appears impossible. There have never been more protective laws for women's rights, training sessions for security forces, more published literature in circulation about women's rights, more prizes and recognitions for accomplishments in the field of women's rights, and yet we women continue dying. Our bodies were never before so vulnerable to lethal aggression at home, and torture until death never existed as it does in contemporary informal wars. Our bodies never received more medical intervention seeking the shape of compulsory happiness or beauty, and we were never surveilled so closely regarding abortion as we are now.

Indeed, it is only logical to suspect that women's victimization supplies the platform upon which power settles its pact and displays its sovereignty, discretionary power, and arbitrariness. Something of great magnitude and importance, central to the whole edifice of power, must surely rely and depend on the constantly renewed destruction of women's bodies, upon the spectacle of her subjugation, on the showcasing of her subordination. Something essential and foundational for "the system" must depend on women not escaping that position, that role, and that function.

Dismantling the minoritization of women's issues means that, if we can understand current forms of misogynist cruelty, we will understand what is happening not only to women and those deemed feminine, dissident, and other by patriarchy but also to society as a whole. Many clues lead us to suspect that we are facing an edifice whose materials are made of the amalgam of corporations and the state's occupants at any moment and on any side of the political spectrum: alliances of every kind between corporate actors, licit and illicit or both at the same time, and governmental agents, invoking "reasons of state," which are, truly, "reasons of business." To be sure, in order to think what is happening to us, what victimizes us, we must take the "woman question" out of the ghetto and understand it as the basis and pedagogy for all other forms of power and subordination, be they racial, imperial, colonial, class-based, regional and center-periphery derived, or Eurocentric versus the rest of the world.

In a world in which approximately half of the wealth is concentrated in the hands of 1 percent of its inhabitants and the other half in the hands of the remaining 99 percent, sixty-two people own as much as the poorest half of the planet, 1 percent of the population of the United States owns all of the usable land in that immense country and only nine families own the entire length of the Chilean coastline, the counterpart of the financialization of capital is the most overwhelming form of ownership. This stockpiling, the concentration of land in few hands, neo-rentierism, and increasing patrimonialization of state management no longer speak merely of inequality as they did in the 1970s.

The question today is that of ownership, that is, lordship. Lordship has here the precise sense of a small group of proprietors who are the owners of life and death on the planet. These proprietors are the discretionary and arbitrary subjects of a previously unknown magnitude of power, rendering fictional all ideals of democracy and the republic. The precise meaning of such lordship is that owners of wealth, by means of the very scale of their purchasing power and unconstrainable offshore circulation of their earnings, are immune to any attempt at institutional control of their entrepreneurial maneuvers. And this immunity appears to usher in an apocalyptic, thoroughly unruly phase of capital, a kind of Middle Ages in which a hitherto unprecedented level of feudal power is exerted over bodies as exemplar and spectacular cruelty, along the lines traced by Michel Foucault's periodization of forms of control. Lordship in Latin America manifests itself as a mafia-like management of business, politics, and justice, but which by any means should be understood as separate from a global and geopolitical order superimposed upon our internal issues. In this new world, the notion of a discursive order structured by the coloniality of power turns out to be nearly insufficient. From that pattern emerges, undisguised and crude, the practice of sweeping people away from their territories of traditional or ancestral occupation. So we may say that from coloniality there is a return to conquestality, with no rests or signs of arrests or limits, which (at least to some degree and in some cases) the presence of the Catholic Church imposed on colonial greed (Gott 2002). We may even add that for our continent, Latin America, the extreme forms of violence that are here spreading widely from Mexico, Central America, and Colombia southward—its dramatic, increasingly violent and disorderly atmosphere—could be attributed to the idea that in our landscapes, the conquest was never complete or fully successful but, rather, goes on and continues today.

For such a context, compassion, empathy, local and community roots, and all devotion to forms of the sacred capable of maintaining solid collective relationships operate as dysfunctional in relation to the historical project of capital, which uproots and globalizes markets, tears and frays communitarian fabrics where they still exist, becoming merciless with its resistant remnants, nullifies the spatial landmarks for cosmic contact with the sacred in territories traditionally occupied by originary peoples that hinder the conversion of land into merchandise, imposes the transformation into one global economy of the *oikonomia* proper of domestic production and local and regional market circuits, and introduces consumption as the foremost and truly antagonistic goal against the forms of happiness linked to communitarian life with its premium on ties of reciprocity. In that extreme context in which uprooting, seizing, and maximum exploitation comprise the path to accumulation, the major

end of capital's historical project, it becomes instrumental to reduce human empathy and train people to tolerate and perform acts of cruelty. In contemporary informal warfare, as is taking place in Latin America and the Middle East, profanation becomes a central strategy (Segato 2014; Kaldor 2012).

Chile and Qatar best model the tendencies of the current—apocalyptic—phase of capital's historical project. Chile exhibits this phase by dint of its orthodox application of Milton Friedman's recipe leading to a market-ruled societal regime. The sadness that permeates Chilean society is frequently considered to be an effect of the precariousness that this model imprints on life. Here, precariousness does not refer necessarily to poverty or lack, but points at the precariousness of relational life, after the destruction of the solidity and stability of the relationships that root, localize, and sediment affects and everyday life. The experience of exposure and vulnerability thus takes hold of a nation. Qatar, on the other hand, epitomizes the phenomenon of a government of owners, and the territorial extension of the nation is not distinguished from the idea of real estate. State abstraction does not exist, and the state is, literally, patrimonial: a state of owners. In Latin America, the constitutive patrimonialism of the Criollo republics runs a serious risk of Qatarization. The re-primarization of production, mega-mining, and extractivist agriculture are counterparts of the absolutist regime of the market and the fusion of political power with ownership, resulting in extreme aggression toward human beings and their environment, leaving behind only remains—the progressive exposure of life, merchandizing of everything, and reservation of exclusive security for property owners and controllers of the mechanisms of the state, and the radicalization of dispossession, ethnocide, genocide, and conquestality.

A scene as such is conditioned to the exercise of and indifference to cruelty, both rehearsed and engrained with fearless and unpunished ruthlessness in the bodies of women and youth, as was recently done in Ayotzinapa, bodies that do not represent the antagonists in the war scene, subjects who do not correspond to the soldier of the inimical armed corporation. The state terror of dictatorships in Latin America has given way to the installation of diffuse terror in society. I have written of new forms of war that, on our Latin-American continent, we should think of as repressive or mafia wars, or perhaps, more accurately, a mix of both, as a coup that comes from elsewhere, from a "second reality" (Segato 2014). I think it is also possible to speak of a new form of terror associated with what I have here called exposure and that would not be anything other than a limbo of the law, an uncontrollable expansion of parastate forms of control of life falling over growing masses of people, particularly those in conditions of vulnerability living in



the niches of exclusion. This terror is the confirmation, for many people, that state control and protection, as well as republican laws, have always been a fiction, “a system of beliefs,” a faith supplying a stable grammar for social interaction. Perhaps the dictatorships ended when they had already prepared the terrain for new forms of terror, no longer a State terror, but a training that brings about an existence insensitive to the neighbor’s suffering, without empathy, without compassion, by means of the encapsulation of the consumer, amid the productivist and competitive individualism of societies that are definitively no longer relational.

I used to defend the distinction between intimate femicides and public, warlike femicides. Today, the lessons of informal, parastate war in its various forms have entered into households, and the threshold of empathetic suffering has receded. In Guatemala, the war left behind a trail of ultraviolent indigenous and campesino homes. Sexual violence and femicide did not originate at those homes and pass into the war, as certain Eurocentric feminist perspective would argue; it was, rather, the other way around. In the present day, as evidenced by a series of cases around the continent, intimate crimes begin to have the same characteristics as war crimes: laying victims outdoors, in ditches, landfills, and sewers, and the spectacular nature of murders, which have started to be perpetrated in public spaces. That diffuse terror is also spoken of by the summary extrajudicial executions perpetrated by police forces, which are dramatically increasing today in Latin America without explanation, attacking the logic and stabilized grammar of relationships.

Therefore, we can venture that, if each age has an associated personality, functional to its phase of economic relations—hysteria for the industrial revolution, schizophrenia and its delusions in the artistic expression of modernism—psychopathology is today’s modal personality. Psychopathic personality would seem to be the best equipped personality structure to functionally operate in the order of the apocalyptic phase of capital. The profile of the psychopath, with its inability to transform hormonal outpourings into emotion and affection, its need to constantly increase stimuli to achieve an emotional state, its definitive non-relational, non-bonding structure, its insensitivity to others’ pain and feelings, its alienation and encapsulation, its uprooting from its own landscapes and collective bonds, its instrumental and reifying relations with others, seems to be indispensable to function adequately in an economy relying on dehumanization and a limitless capacity for bodies and territories to be preyed upon and reduced to remains. Thus, a pedagogy of cruelty is the breeding ground of the psychopathic personality structure prized by the contemporary zeitgeist, functional and adjusted to this apocalyptic phase of capital.

The strange fate of the 1971 film *A Clockwork Orange*, based on the eponymous novel by Anthony Burgess (and inspired by the rape of the author's wife by American soldiers in London during World War II) seems to support my thesis of the abrupt and functional reduction of empathy today. *A Clockwork Orange*, directed by Stanley Kubrick and featuring Malcolm McDowell in the unforgettable role of Alex, was the most censored film in history in a variety of countries including the United Kingdom, where it was conceived and shot. The film is full of scenes of beatings, rapes, murders, and a femicide. Alex begins the story as a murderer completely lacking in empathy and is transformed into a victim who becomes sensitive and vulnerable to others' suffering through an experimental psychiatric treatment. There is no intermediate position between the murderer's and victim's personalities, before and after the experiment. Astonishingly enough, forty years after its release, as McDowell (2009) has noted, the horror with which audiences initially received the film has stunningly disappeared to let way for laughing at some of the earlier, more horrific scenes. According to McDowell's, today's acceptance of the film without horror is a clear indication of the way in which violence—especially toward women, in the central sequence of the film—and the psychopathic personality have become naturalized.

This is an undeniable sign of the reduction in ethical sensitivity and life standards promoted by late capitalism. In this era, suffering and aggression imposed on women's bodies, as well as the spectacularization, banalization, and naturalization of such violence, measures the decay of empathy and stands arguably as functional and instrumental to the epochal mode of exploitation.

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