

Patriarchy: A major obstacle to world peace

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Discussions on peace are central to humanity since they force us to deal with some fundamental issues regarding our human existence, its purpose and nature. As we all know world-peace is much more than just the state of 'absence of war'. The voluminous literature on 'just peace' and 'just war' testifies to this fact well. My purpose is not to engage with this literature directly but to offer some reflections on what I consider to be the major impediment to world peace today.

Today, we live in an incredibly interconnected world that one or two generations ago was simply unimaginable. Things we do and choices we make on a daily basis often can have significant impact, both positive and negative, on people who live on different continents, who come from different religious, cultural, ethnic or racial backgrounds and whom we will never meet in person. How our actions impact upon others are often not always easy to discern or to understand. Nevertheless, given our state of interconnectedness, it becomes ethically incumbent upon us to try our utmost to understand how our place in the world and things that we do (or not do) impact upon others no matter where they live or what their backgrounds are. This state of unprecedented interconnectedness offers to us a tremendous opportunity to do good.

However, it is also a potential burden for if we fail to take full advantage of this opportunity history and future generations will judge us harshly. Rightly so, I think.

So what are the main impediments to world-peace today? In this brief presentation I will discuss one that I consider to be the most prevalent and most damaging-patriarchy. Patriarchy is a major obstacle to world –peace because the underlying philosophy and worldview behind it permeates all other impediments I will mention in the course of this presentation.

Patriarchy is a dual system of domination of a small percentage of privileged men (mainly white, rich men living in the Global North) over other men, women and children. Patriarchy as a system of domination is based upon certain worldview that manifests itself in all aspects of human existence both at a level of society and at the level of the individual. It affects the way people think, behave and feel. Traditional hegemonic masculinity is its ultimate source of ‘values’ and norms. While we have been witnessing patriarchy ever since the rise of agricultural societies its current forms are much more lethal and insidious due to the nature of the contemporary world we live in.

Patriarchy, anchored in the ethos of traditional hegemonic masculinity that is upheld as an ideal and norm for and by both many men and women, strives on competition and creation of hierarchies largely devoid of (m)any ethical

considerations. It is a never-ending competition and a quest between elite men for economic, military, and political power. In a patriarchal world success is measured by an ever increasing need for larger profit margins, larger market shares, better stock market performance, increased military capability, more effective co-opting of “democratically elected” politicians or a number of attractive-looking women, crudely sexually objectified as they are, a man can ‘score’ (i.e. sleep with).

This patriarchal worldview, in turn, gives rise to a particular economical system whose gods are greed and ever greater profit margins, at almost every and any cost. The vast majority of banking systems in the world are, in one way or another, structurally implicated into perpetuation of this patriarchal economic system and worldview. Recent events surrounding America’s financial crises that, due to our state of interconnectedness, have more or less strongly reverberated in just about every other place on this planet, are a clear testimony to this truth.

Patriarchal interests and worldview has well and truly entered many political systems even in western liberal democracies. Money created through exploitative nature of patriarchal hierarchies is used in funding political campaigns and is a major source of corruptive and undemocratic practices in

the world. Hence, political systems whose survival depends on patriarchal interests are a major impediment to attaining of world-peace.

Hans Küng, a noted theologian, once famously asserted that without peace between religions there cannot be world-peace. Unfortunately, the dominant interpretations of religion have been wearing the garb of patriarchy for as long as patriarchy has been in existence. Patriarchy has not only been able to significantly dampen the original spirit of constant prophetic messages which empathized the need for and spoke in favor of social justice and protection of the weak and marginalized (and paving the way to their emancipation) but has often co-opted and perverted religious ideas to serve its selfish interests. What is important to keep in mind is that patriarchal interpretations of sacred texts are neither inevitable nor are they in line with the Prophetic spirit I just mentioned. Patriarchal values, norms and ethics disguised in religious idioms and slogans are not only betraying the original Prophetic spirit and message, they often co-exist very comfortably with the vested economic and political interests that patriarchal worldview defends and depends on. This is most unfortunate and causes much needless suffering in the world. Hence, patriarchal interpretations of religions are impediments to world-peace. What we need instead are theologies of peace and compassion that honor the original prophetic spirit of social justice and care for all.

Degradation and exploitation of the environment are also a major threat and impediment to peace. The patriarchal mindset of competition and creation of a *homo economicus*, a unique species of human whose worth is solely defined by material profits, detached from (m)any ethical constraints that views the world through the single conceptual lens of profit making is directly responsible for unprecedented and irreplaceable destruction of natural habitats which can have and are in fact having catastrophic consequences for survival of all life on earth including the human. This destruction of the environment can only worsen the prospect for world-peace by further increasing the competition for earth's finite resources.

Patriarchy, with traditional hegemonic masculinity as its source, does not just give rise to a certain view of economics, politics, religion and attitude to our mother earth. It is also based on certain personality traits. With its focus on competition and domination patriarchal personality traits are based on arrogance and greed, on eschewing of co-operation, disregard of and disrespect for meaningful dialogue, and generally on lack of empathy and the consideration of the needs and legitimate aspirations of others. The ideas of gratitude and of thankfulness are, indeed, completely strange to it.

Recent science tells us that the above described ethos of patriarchy is in actual fact an unnatural state of being for humans and is damaging to us psychologically at an individual level. Moreover, recent science as well as wisdom accumulated through humanities' rich and varied religious and cultural heritages, also inform us that we, humans, reap real psychological and emotional benefits when we act in cooperative manner, when we show empathy, gratitude and are thankful.

It is plainly evident that patriarchy by its very nature that I briefly described above is antithetical to peace and can only create exploitation, suffering and grief to human civilization at large and to our individual selves. As such is a great impediment and threat to peace. Every effort must be made to dismantle it.

Given our state of interconnectedness we as individuals have never been empowered as we are today to fight the forces of patriarchy. We can do so by choosing to buy and benefit from products and services which do not partake in perpetuation of patriarchy. If we are men, we can fight patriarchy by developing equitable relationships with our female counterparts in the context of family, marriage, friendships or work. If we are religiously observant we can embody, uphold and promote non-patriarchal interpretations of our religious scriptures and traditions. Finally, we can fight patriarchy by supporting,

financially or otherwise, individuals, organizations and institutions which do recognize patriarchy as a major threat to world peace.