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Introduction

Cesare Cuttica and Gaby Mahlberg

Patriarchalism is omnipresent in the West and it pervades the texts that have shaped its culture. From the creation story in the Bible and the religious prescriptions to be found in the Qur'an and Talmud to the ancient authors, from the Church fathers to the treatises of Enlightenment philosophers, right up to modern fiction, male authority over women, children and other dependants has informed the nature of human relationships and the discourses about these relationships. This concept of power, implying a fatherly male domination of society, has never gone uncontested. Yet, the debate is far from resolved.

Patriarchalism might be dead, but patriarchy is alive and well:¹ the economic recession affecting most western democracies has shown that women are bearing the brunt of it in terms of unemployment rates, economic hardship and social discrimination or marginalization.² Moreover, women are not less, but more objectified in our contemporary culture, especially through advertising, TV, the Internet and through a 'commodity is everything' attitude thriving in the media.³ Men's sexual exploitation of, and predatory attitudes towards, women are amply documented in news outlets.⁴ Certainly part and parcel of the everyday experience of many women, the situations described above do not explain the complexity of patriarchalism as an array of values and of patriarchy as an ideological scaffolding whose foundations are rooted historically in various domains of public and private life. Eschewing a linear account of these two phenomena, our volume nevertheless takes a chronological approach in an attempt to understand how certain ideas of gender and gender-based politics/policies, which are still afloat in our societies, originated, developed and changed over a long time span and how they did so in different contexts, and in a variety of media and genres.

This collection of short essays therefore offers fresh and novel readings of key texts in the history of patriarchalism as a concept of power⁵ as our contributors draw attention to moments of contestation or re-negotiation of patriarchal parameters and their reflection in the printed word. They also

provide a collage of patriarchal moments which defy traditional and widely accepted interpretative categories of what patriarchy and patriarchalism meant for the writers and texts here considered. Indeed, *Patriarchal Moments* often reveals unexpected sides to a thinker's standpoint on matters of family, politics and gender.

Nowadays, we might call ourselves 'feminist' or declare our support for the original agenda of feminism.⁶ It would be more controversial, however, for someone in a western society to define themselves as 'patriarchalist' or to state their steadfast adherence to patriarchy and its values. Nevertheless, what is today an improbable scenario was the norm not so long ago.⁷

While 'patriarchy' refers to a social, economic, political, cultural and ideological structure in which women are held to be inferior to men (fathers, husbands, older brothers) and are subjugated to them as holders of authority, prestige and access to wealth,⁸ patriarchalism – like absolutism, liberalism, etc. – entails a series of doctrines concerning power, liberty, the origins of political society, the method of government and so on. Therefore, it belongs to the field of political thought. 'Paternalism', meanwhile, represents 'an authoritarian and, at the same time, benevolent type of politics, a sort of charitable activity pursued from above and set out to help the people with purely administrative methods.'⁹ This care of those in power (the fathers) for those in their care (the people) has often been perceived as patronizing or condescending.

Denoting an important doctrine in the history of western society and thought, the term 'patriarchalism' is used in different ways and fields. It is traditionally employed in the theological sphere where references are made to the Judaeo-Christian notion of God the Father and to the biblical patriarchs. In this context the word 'patriarch' as attached to biblical personages comes from the Septuagint version, where it is adopted in a broad sense to describe both religious and civic officials (e.g. in *Chronicles*). In a more restricted sense it is applied to the antediluvian fathers of the human race, and more particularly to the three great progenitors of Israel: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In the New Testament the term is also extended to the sons of Jacob and to King David.

In social theory, 'patriarchalist' commonly refers to a pre-modern societal organization grounded on the absolute authority of the male landowner over a large familial unit, including his wife and children as well as live-in servants. In economic parlance, 'patriarchalism' describes a specific structure of production and distribution of goods and labour characterizing the household as an entity. Political theorists generally associate it with a form of oppressive, archaic and anti-modern fatherly power. This kind of personal and

personalized authority has generally been considered antithetical to a liberal, conventional and artificial conception of politics. Most importantly, feminist scholars depict patriarchalism as the quintessence of women's subjugation to men and their consequent oppression under a rigorous system centred on female obedience.

Patriarchalist theory has maintained the supremacy of monarchs, arguing that they derived their authority from Adam, to whom God had assigned indisputable power over all creatures. From the progenitor of humankind, power had passed to kings through the ancient patriarchs. On the whole, patriarchalism had a significant impact on the organization of politics, society and family in western history for it claimed that order and submission to higher authorities ought to be preserved in all human institutions. It followed that kings in the political realm, fathers in the family and masters in the household wielded the same authority over their subjects, wives, children and servants.

Historians such as Susan Amussen have shown that patriarchal doctrines and values were often conveyed through prescriptive 'household manuals',¹⁰ while Gordon Schochet has traced patriarchalism in the political language adopted by Plato, Aristotle, Bodin, Locke and other thinkers to identify the household as 'the organizational precursor of the political order'.¹¹ By and large, the historiographical mainstream has focused univocally on patriarchalism's historical and anthropological connotations, failing to see it in relation to cultural meanings, metaphorical references and gendered paradigms permeating the wider intellectual contexts in which various patriarchal moments developed.¹²

Instead of viewing patriarchalism exclusively as a societal or legal phenomenon, *Patriarchal Moments* explores how patriarchal political thought participated in the multifarious configurations of cultural, aesthetic, moral, philosophical, theological and literary meanings throughout history. In other words, we think that patriarchalism was more than the codification of archaic beliefs failing to succeed in the theatre of ideas when confronted by modern philosophy, empirical science and social change. Patriarchal ideas indicated the primacy of the emotionally, culturally and socially decisive sphere of the family, and shaped the ways in which not only conjugal, filial and sexual relationships were thought and acted out, but also the manner in which political, theoretical and fictional approaches to reality were conceived and enacted. The use of patriarchal vocabulary and imagery moulded the concepts of, among others, fatherhood and motherhood, marriage and obedience, and masculinity and virility.

Feminist theories have played a fundamental role in interpreting the notion and practice of 'patriarchy' with its specific focus on women's oppression and gendered violence in both the public and private domains. Feminists have underscored the socially constructed nature of the hierarchy existing between men and women in which the former aim to preserve power over the latter through control in conjunction with employment, sexuality, culture, family structure and the State. This apparatus of oppression is seen as intertwined with the hegemonic role the heterosexual family plays as a major institution whose mechanisms of functioning perpetuate inequality.¹³

Furthermore, as Mary Beard has recently elucidated, from classical Greece onwards women have been denied a public voice: they have not been heard because the Homeric ideal of '*muthos*' meant that authoritative public speech was the prerogative of aristocratic and superior male actors in the political arena.¹⁴ This principle of the Greek assembly also held true for the early Christian communities, as outlined by St Paul.¹⁵ A long and persistent list of practices and prejudices across the centuries has thus prevented women from debating political, social and intellectual issues or from simply expressing an opinion.¹⁶ Even when women have succeeded in speaking, their voices have been (and so often still *are*) described as 'loud cacophonous shrills', deprived of the authority-infused, deep and, therefore, respectable low-pitched voice of their male 'superiors'. Accused of emitting whining and whining sounds and considered to be up to mere trivial chatting and ghastly gossiping, women have been excluded not only from (positions of) authority, but also from the discourse of authority belonging to the male world. In light of these historical processes, our volume contributes – among other things – to expose what Beard has recently called 'the unresolved gender wars that lay just below the surface of ancient [and modern] public life and speaking'.¹⁷

Complementing *Feminist Moments* in the present series,¹⁸ which focuses primarily on gender relations, our volume integrates gender politics into a broader patriarchalist framework. It thus offers an aid to experts as much as students approaching patriarchalism-patriarchy for the first time to understand a significant portion of western civilization and its political culture. Drawing on a wide range of academic expertise, we have gathered contributions from international scholars of different methodological and intellectual traditions as well as institutional profiles, including historians, literary scholars, political scientists and theologians. In this respect, the following essays aim to illuminate a complex horizon of thought that is not only

the subject of constant media scrutiny and political focus but that is also at the centre of attention within a growing public discourse. This collection cannot cover all cultures, periods and genres in equal measure, nor does it claim to reflect the entire history of patriarchy. Instead, it attempts to add new insights to the debate about patriarchy that is as old as humankind. Through its chronologically and contextually rich outlook, and its broad selection of key texts, *Patriarchal Moments* adopts historical depth to grasp continuity as well as change in, and explain their effects on, the development(s) of a patriarchal discourse across sundry strands of political, philosophical, literary and theological reflection in the West. Ultimately, this way of proceeding should enable us to show the impact notions of patriarchy and patriarchy have on society at large, not just there and then but also *here* and *now*. More specifically, *Patriarchal Moments* stimulates important reflections on the tangled relations between patriarchy and feminism. In fact, it endeavours to unfold the implications of patriarchy not just for subordinate women but for men too (e.g. sons, younger brothers). In so doing, the volume as a whole underscores how as a system of authority patriarchy needs to be interpreted with an eye to a more wide-ranging set of manifestations than those usually – and too simplistically – linking it to its gender implications.

Our patriarchal journey begins with the three great monotheistic world religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The contributions on these key religious texts all pay detailed attention to the context(s) in which they were composed as well as to the (allegedly) indisputable patriarchal values. The latter co-existed with counter-narratives opposing them, which reveals the vulnerability of patriarchy. As Sarra Lev, Deborah Rooke and Asma Barlas show, such a tension is well alive in rabbinic literature, in the biblical Genesis story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and in the much discussed and often misinterpreted text the Qur'an certainly is.

Taking into careful consideration both the context and the linguistic subtleties of key texts in the western philosophical tradition such as Aristotle's *Politics* (384–322 B.C.E.) and Augustine's *The City of God* (fifth-century A.D.), Edith Hall and Catherine Conybeare reach opposite conclusions on the two philosophers' views of women: while Aristotle has to be seen as 'the founding father of patriarchy in the field of political theory' (42), 'Augustine's vision of humans' is 'more dynamic and egalitarian' than assumed through 'a patriarchal reading' of his work (48). In tune with Conybeare's insistence on the affective bond characterizing interaction between men and women, Karen Harvey

focuses on William Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622) as a typical household manual revealing how patriarchy in the early modern period involved not just the family as a private unit, but also society and the commonwealth at large.

In her analysis of John Knox's *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), Anne McLaren addresses the important issue of misogyny in conjunction with political, moral and gender opinions thriving in the sixteenth century. If in the midst of Knox's tract we find queens, Protestantism, dynastic troubles and political theory, the notorious patriarchalist thinker Sir Robert Filmer, author of the much-criticized *Patriarcha* (published in 1680), serves Cesare Cuttica to depict patriarchalism as a specific *political* language deployed at a time of key theoretical and practical debates in early modern England. Driven by a contextualist approach to the study of past ideas, Cuttica's chapter sheds light on the unexpected interplay of patriarchal and patriotic moments in early modern political parlance.

From Filmer to his arch-critics, Algernon Sidney and John Locke, patriarchalism assumes very different connotations. Jonathan Scott positions Sidney's posthumously published *Discourses Concerning Government* (1698) in three different contexts where the political and the personal are intertwined in crucial ways. Regarding Locke, J. K. Numao concentrates on the philosopher's less-studied *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) rather than on the generally praised anti-Filmerian *Two Treatises of Government* (1689). In unpacking Locke's attitude towards patriarchalism, Numao expounds the vital links between fatherhood, adulthood and friendship in relation to issues of political obedience and human development. With Brett Wilson's essay, we encounter the first woman in our volume, Mary Astell (1666–1731), who was a proto-feminist as well as a 'significant political thinker' (90), applying ideas about passive obedience to both the political and the personal spheres, while also paving the way for later women thinkers with more radical approaches.

Moving on to the eighteenth century, Alexander Pope's ethical poem *An Essay on Man* (1734) is read by Paul Baines as a text rich in political meaning(s), steering a middle course between Filmer and Locke. Pope can be seen as a rather ambiguous character and one whose work engenders new reflections on irony, filial adoration of fathers and natural law. From Pope to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* (1762) another complex patriarchal moment develops. As Sandrine Parageau explains, politics, education, gender and metaphysical considerations all coalesce in Rousseau's analysis of what is both a 'love story' and a 'political

treatise' illustrating his idea of the family (108). Most importantly, the *philosophe* wrote at a historical juncture when political patriarchalism became increasingly the object of vehement criticism and systematic confutation in eighteenth-century France. In particular, paternal images of monarchs were being 'progressively replaced with ideas of "fraternity"' as the model of the good society (113).

Michelle Faubert's essay on Mary Wollstonecraft's *Mary, A Fiction* (1788) meanwhile explores 'the relationship between women and the patriarchal laws and customs surrounding property and ownership in Romantic-era England' (123). Bringing together at the centre of our journey different patriarchal moments of fiction, property, class, identity and the "legal prostitution" of marriage (124), Faubert portrays Mary herself as a 'property to be traded' (124). Jordan Pascoe, on her part, engages with Immanuel Kant's perceived 'intellectual immaturity' of women (116): while highlighting the possibility of reading Kant's essay *What is Enlightenment?* (1784) as a feminist moment, Pascoe nevertheless concludes that Kant was 'sexist' (121) as he in essence still supported a patriarchal political order. The question as to what extent the followers of Henri de Saint-Simon might have been contributing to either the liberation or suppression of women is also an issue in Daniel Laqua's essay on Prosper Enfantin. In his address to the family of Saint-Simonians of 1831, Enfantin called for the liberation of women. Yet, his idea of liberation does not involve women's equality within the Saint-Simonian family. Thus, as Laqua demonstrates, Saint-Simonism was – confirming a major theme of *Patriarchal Moments* – at the same time 'patriarchal and anti-patriarchal', conservative and progressive (132).

Yet, as Charlotte Alston's essay on *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) points out, not all progressive ideas were equally well received by the public. Tolstoy's work is discussed as 'a frank critique of the state of late nineteenth-century marriage and the relationship between the sexes', which 'fed into and fuelled' debate in Russia, Europe as well as America (140). Despite criticizing men's sexual exploitation of women, Tolstoy denied an equal sexual freedom for women. Instead, he (controversially) advocated chastity as the highest ideal of purity. With Arnold Weinstein's reading of Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (1890), we enter a world of bourgeois submission of women to their stifling male-run environment where love and passion are frustrated, and tragic consequences are common: Hedda Gabler chooses suicide as her way to say no to patriarchal norms. Ibsen's famous play thus constitutes a significant patriarchal moment with its variegated spectrum of motifs including

‘subjectivity’, motherhood, political gestures, intellectual authorship and ‘revenge’ (151).

Our long journey concludes with three important works of the twentieth century. Oliver Jahraus considers Franz Kafka’s *Letter to his Father* (1919) as the key literary document of a son’s struggle against paternal power and his attempt to create and assert his own individuality against this higher authority, while Federico Bonaddio studies Federico Garcia Lorca’s *Blood Wedding* (written in 1932) as an exposition of patriarchy’s ‘own tragic flaws’ (165). Combining marriage, inheritance, virility, economic interests and matriarchal values, Lorca’s play points to the ‘tragic potential’ inherent in patriarchy, as a result of which tragedy (death) strikes (165). Finally, Ruth Charnock shows how Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) questions patriarchal power by way of castration, sterility and emasculation. However, patriarchy is not the only target of Carter’s provocative novel: French feminists of the 1970s are in for a piercing attack, too. In substance, both patriarchy and its strenuous opponents fall prey to Carter’s searing criticism.

Such a move can well be read as an invitation to be always openly critical and to be so in all directions. Critique of patriarchy goes hand in hand with critiquing its critics. These are two indispensable *moments* that guide our study of this historically contentious and socially relevant subject. Perhaps, we can say that this double-edged approach to patriarchalism (recognition of its strong sociopolitical foundations and persistence alongside multiple examples of resistance) entails the subversive dimension of interpreting such a complex *-ism*.¹⁹ More generally, from the Bible and the Qur’an to Angela Carter, *Patriarchal Moments* invites readers to consider the important question of whether and when authoritative texts are open to more than one interpretation, a theme which runs through the volume and through the *Textual Moments* series as a whole. We always need to understand the circumstances in which the reading of texts may be said to shape ideology as well as the conditions under which ideology affects the reading of texts. The essays here presented therefore underline the essential role of context in the reading of texts as well as suggesting how reading and critiquing can be pursued in original and unexpected ways.