THE POLITICS OF FEAR: REFLECTIONS ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF INNER AND OUTER FREEDOM IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This article sheds light on the relationship between inner and outer freedom in a rather repressive social system. In the search for individual agency, it contrasts theories of European liberalism - as impressively described by Michel Foucault - with the collective organisation of South Asian societies. With the aforementioned as well as Hannah Arendt and bell hooks, the question of the meaning and purpose of political action is raised. The subject as the origin and goal of political action is located differently in the opposing social systems described here. Nevertheless, the retreat of the political subject into the private sphere opens up the possibility of subverting the public relations of subordination and oppression, as Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau impressively demonstrated in *Hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a radical democratic politics*.

Keywords: common sense; democracy; feminism; governmentality; hegemony; individualization; radical subjectivity; security apparatus

SELF-LOCALIZATION

I am writing these lines not only as a social scientist, but also as a newcomer in Lahore, the capital of the Pakistani province of Punjab. As a European spoilt by every conceivable freedom, I have now lived here for ten months and want to stay for more. Of course, I am also writing these lines as a person who reads herself as female and as a feminist.

The culture shock that resulted from the social differences between my home continent and Punjabi realities has quietly manifested itself in my daily life in Lahore - and continues to be fuelled by a kind of small pinpricks. I would like to discuss two particularly salient aspects of this shock in the following: societal control over female bodies and the relationship of individuals of all genders to the state, especially its security apparatus.

In presenting these observations, I would like to express my doubts as to whether the question of freedom and security is really as easy to answer as we currently claim globally. My comments are based on the humble assumption that freedom is a more complex phenomenon than just the concept of the presence or absence of regulation. Principally critical of the way the perception of 'freedom' has been shaped in the discourses dominated by the Global North, I follow Placidus Bernhard Heider's question: "Is a world of factual agency an expression of freedom and self-determination, or precisely its deterministic opposite?"[34] (Heider, 2003, p. 8)

THE GAP BETWEEN FACTUAL AND PERCEIVED SAFETY IN LAHORE

Lahore is one of the safest cities in the world. 7,000 cameras for closed-circuit television (CCTV) put every corner of public life under the watchful eye of the security apparatus. This security apparatus invests immense sums in the social body, "its valorization, and the distributive management of its forces" (Foucault, 1978, p. 141). This should by no means come as a culture shock to a European woman, as this form of regulating life was invented in Europe in the 18th century (cf. Foucault, 1978, pp. 141-142).

However, it is striking that this way of completely controlling life does not contribute to an increased sense of security: fear is a dominant feeling in Lahore, a city of 15 million inhabitants. People seem to realize what Hannah Arendt so aptly described in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

> Since power is essentially only a means to an end a community based solely on power must decay in the calm of order and stability; its complete security reveals that it is built on sand. Only by acquiring more power can it guarantee the status quo (Arendt, 1962, p. 142).

This is why the state seems to crave this accumulation of power in its hands. Consequently, individuals are forced to hand over the care of their lives, of their biological existence, into the care of the state, thus allowing the state to incorporate social, daily life into the spheres of state practices (cf. Owens, 2009, p. 570). And this is - in Foucault's words - the ultimate goal of every state-representative form of government: "the task is to establish a continuity, in both an upwards and a downwards direction." (Foucault, 1991, p. 91)

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[34] This quote reads as follows in the German original: "Ist eine Welt faktischer Handlungsvollzüge Ausdruck von Freiheit und Selbstbestimmung, oder gerade deren deterministisches Gegenteil?" – translation: M. Geyer.

Against the background of my awareness that Foucault did not know Asia and would never have presumed to speak for Asian societies, I attempt in this article to interpret the directions in which this "governmentality" (Foucault, 1991, p. 102) infiltrates Punjabi society – and where this supposedly "unfree" society of the Punjab (we will see to what extent this Western projection is accurate) sets clear limits to governmentality, the categorization of individuals in the processes of governance. The application of Foucault's analyses to a South Asian society requires massive abstraction. However, as a mere scaffolding, as a theoretical framework in which observations about Lahore can be embedded, they do a great service.

This analysis requires a strong simplification of the matter, which is why we will only look at two levels of community here: the individual and society in its formation within state boundaries. The other levels, such as peer groups or transnational communities are not negated here but are left out. This article moves along the theoretical transition from structuralism to post-structuralism: while Hannah Arendt's and Michel Foucault's thinking largely follows the structuralist tradition of thought, bell hooks' and Stuart Hall's theses slowly break with this tradition and develop it further in a post-structuralist manner. Both traditions inform the following remarks without my having to evaluate them. Instead, I take up Foucault's theses and observe their post-structuralist further development through the cultural studies of the 1980s and 1990s.

FEMALE BODIES AND THE NORM

Of course, it is not a purely Pakistani phenomenon that forms of public regulation are particularly visible on female bodies. We can observe this phenomenon globally. Nevertheless, I believe that its power is particularly evident in the Pakistani province of Punjab. The decisive factor for this seems to me to be the collective constitution of Punjabi society, which at first glance pays little attention to the individual. This is simply the effect of the modern art of surveillance and steady assessment, which measures a population, a collective, on the basis of specific, standardized phenomena instead of excessively monitoring individuals (cf. Foucault, 1977-1978, p. 94). And the instrument for this is the norm that seems to become even more influential as the status of the individual is marginalized. In the Punjab, norms of all kinds are particularly easy for the elites to implement because most elements of society do not think for themselves as individuals, if at all. "But then," writes Hannah Arendt about politics in general. "we are no longer dealing with individuals. [...] What had been decided *in foro conscientiae* has now become part of public opinion" (Arendt, 1972, p. 68).

With reference to female bodies, the decisions are clear and apparently inevitable: The virtuous appearance of the female body in the public space has become a *res publica*, subject to public interest and interference.[35] It is precisely the societal norm that removes the decision about the appearance of the 'female body' from the individual and transfers the responsibility for regulating it to society as such, to *public opinion*, as Arendt put it. This is particularly evident on female bodies in the Punjab in the form of the dupatta, the long, scarf-like piece of fabric worn by women in South Asia around the head, neck and shoulders. The virtue of wearing the dupatta has been elevated to a law by Punjabis, especially by men, who use it to express their dominance over the female body. What Stuart Hall observed for capitalist development in general is evident and wonderfully tangible in Punjab: the invention of the concept "of the juridical 'contract' between 'free persons'" (Hall, 1980, p. 330). In the eye of the attentive observer, there seems to be no compulsion in relation to the dupatta; on the contrary, its constant presence in the public space has become a social matter of course.

Capitalist development and its theoretical analysis, which came to a head in 19th century Europe, have unfolded at precisely this interface between the administration of individuals and state sovereignty. That is the point at which Foucault identifies the "introduction of the subject-population" (Foucault, 1977-1978, p. 107). This essay deals with this nexus from an Asian perspective.

REGULATION OF PUBLIC LIFE THROUGH *COMMON SENSE*

I am arguing here that the subversion of the regime of norms and their policies is made possible precisely *because the individual hardly appears in Pakistan*. In Europe, since the 18th century state theorists not only discovered the incorporation and standardization of the individual as an art of governance but they also focused on *the individual as the subject of every art of government*. We are, therefore, dealing with a double track: The individual and the norm equally constitute the political mandate for action. This means that the invention of the norm, the discovery of the individual and its simultaneous abstraction as part of the whole helped rulers to govern. Graham Burchell explains this phenomenon as follows:

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[35] To make it even more clear: One friend of mine, Punjabi by birth, and very liberal in her attitudes and dressing, this year received an unmistakable WhatsApp message from her male colleague: A meme showing a lady veiled in hijab and the slogan: "Veil is virtuous!" – This is not one isolated case of misbehaviour of a male fellow citizen, but one example for the structural violence affecting women in the Punjab throughout their daily lives. It would by far exceed the scope of this article if I listed all examples I know here.

"[B]ecause individuals attach a value to their 'self-image' they are most deeply affected by political power when it impinges on this relation they have to themselves" (Burchell, 1991, p. 119).

If we understand the expression of power to mean that those whose actions produce an effect are powerful (cf. Menge, 2022, p. 773), then observations from the Punjab suggest that individuals are not important. Social structures are strictly unified by the constant presence of the security apparatus, and all activity of the state is subject to its surveillance. The standardization of female bodies in particular, their regulation and adaptation is a central, religious-political aspect of this surveillance. Feminist activist and social scientist Jules Falquet observes the legitimization of social systems, especially the military-industrial complex, "through increased control of media and new information and communication technologies" (Falquet, 2014, p. 5) on a global scale. She describes, subsequently, the penetration of a new *common sense* into our everyday world, which is beginning to influence our everyday behaviour, and she observes the conditioning and instrumentation of female bodies as a global phenomenon.

This *common sense* also means that at least some kind of *conditional voluntariness* is inherent in the submission to power relations. Here, Antonio Gramsci made a very illuminating contribution with his *prison notebooks* by working out the hidden labour of hegemonic power: Hegemony appears to people as the *common sense*, as that which is not only reasonable but also right, and leads to voluntary submission (cf. Stoddart, 2007, p. 201). Foucault has described this work of common sense on the body as *disciplinary power*. This power "guides actions by making specific dimensions of bodies available for normative assessment, [...] it often relies on the active involvement of subjects, who assess themselves and act in light of disciplinary standards" (Menge, 2022, p. 780). This disciplinary power cannot be thought of independently of its material manifestations. It is first and foremost the (social) space with its many built structures.

In Foucault's sense, prisons and health centres should be mentioned here above all: "These material spaces are normatively structured: they establish where an individual ought to be and how she is supposed to act, move her body, and interact with others" (Menge, 2022, p. 779). The great extent to which the public space with its "agencies of social control, such as community and family reinstate normative and collective values and traditional cultural expectations" has been sufficiently proven by sociology, especially with regard to South Asian societies (Zaidi/Couture-Carron/Maticka-Tyndale, 2016, p. 235). If we then understand the exercise of power, with Michel Foucault, as the "way in which certain actions modify others",

then the power relationship is "the result of a prior or permanent consensus, but it is not by nature the manifestation of a consensus" (Foucault, 1982, p. 788).

ON THE RELATION OF BIO-POWER AND NORMALIZATION

As aptly described by Michel Foucault in his historical analysis of theories of government in Europe, the deployment of power in a nation state is directly linked to the body (cf. Foucault, 1978, p. 151). In Foucault's terms, power is no longer exercised over an individual body, but it is rather bio-power that captures a diversity, a set of individuals in a certain space, which Foucault calls milieu.[36] So what is the defining characteristic of this bio-power? In contrast to feudal-monarchical forms of government, bio-power no longer encompasses a territory in the sense of an abstract concept within borders. Bio-power unfolds where the art of governance consists of exercising power by connecting the "natural" milieu, the environment, with the human species existing within it in such a way that good governance consists of moulding the natural, harsh world as survivable for humans, of creating a human milieu.

Foucault's theses thus describe - and this is of decisive importance for this essay - a *process of individualization* that began in 18th century Europe with the discovery of the liberal market economy. We are no longer dealing with anonymous masses, but with individuals pursuing their own interests, whose government is one "which depends upon the conduct of individuals who are parts of a population and subjects of particular, personal interests" (Burchell, 1991, p. 127). Bio-power therefore unfolds its power in an in-between, in a relationship between the environment and humans. These mechanisms require precise statistics, constant calculation of the conditions that make the milieu ideal, that is, knowledge-power. "Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, [...] It effects distributions around the norm" (Foucault, 1978, p. 144).

Citizens of the Pakistani Punjab are subject to constant surveillance. As I mentioned earlier, 7,000 CCTV cameras in the Punjab's capital Lahore alone along with a sophisticated Chinese technology for facial recognition enable the security apparatus to observe each and every step a citizen makes. Having said that, the stunning insight from daily life in Lahore goes even further: The atmosphere of surveillance has become the unquestioned *common sense*. That very fact makes ordinary citizens believe that they themselves are in a position to regulate, to *normalize* others. This

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[36] Foucault defines the milieu as "a certain number of combined, overall effects bearing on all who live in it." (Foucault, 1977-1978, p. 36)

power-position is primarily taken on by male citizens regulating female bodies, even those of strangers or unattached ladies.[37]

THE STATE, SECURITY, AND THE SELF

No doubt, as elaborated earlier in this essay, the *voluntary* submission to power was invented in the so-called Global North. But who provides this prior consensus in the Western tradition of thought? The basic idea of "the West" is that of selfish individuals acting in a marketplace as according to (and in favour of) their own interests. Consequently, their government must be one "which depends upon the conduct of individuals" (Burchell, 1991, p. 127)

Foucault thus locates the beginning of liberalism in Europe at the point at which the *art of governance* is recognized as a *technique that acknowledges the heterogeneity of the principles of the multiplicity of subjects* acting in their own interests on the one hand and the all-encompassing unity of a legal-political sovereignty on the other (cf. Burchell, 1990, p. 137). After all, the political idea that the fundamental value of an identity lies in political (state) citizenship is a genuinely Western idea. Is this idea applicable to the Pakistani society? Eventually, the liberal idea is absolutely linked to the (re)discovery of the individual, indeed, it even develops "a very sophisticated structure, in which individuals can be integrated, under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form and submitted to a set of very specific patterns" (Foucault, 1982, p. 783).

At the same time, it is true for identities here and there that the subject is not the origin of the social relationship (cf. Laclau/Mouffe, 1985, p. 115). Rather, the subject is the result of its social embedding. This social embedding takes place in an almost infinite variety as people begin to divide themselves up into various networks of relationships. "Everything gains its perspective from her or him, presents itself in a special way."[38] Subsequently, however, everything returns to her as a kind of echo (Heider, 2003, p. 9).

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[37] A striking example of mob violence in Lahore against a lady from Saudi Arabia could be mentioned here as an example. In February 2024, several hundred men attacked a woman from Saudi Arabia at the Lahori Ichra Bazaar because they thought the Arabic letters on her shirt were verses from the Holy Quran, which later turned out to be false. The daily *Dawn*, among others, reported on the incident: https://www.dawn.com/news/1817188; accessed on July 26th 2024.

[38] This quote reads as follows in the German original: "Alles gewinnt von ihr oder ihm her seine Perspektive, stellt sich auf eine besondere Weise dar." – translation: M. Geyer

Hence, the basic prerequisite for every political relationship is the distinction between the political dimension of the state as an entity in the public sphere and the sphere of the home, the *oikos*, the private sphere. European states have succeeded in penetrating the latter in the course of their developmental history - through the vehicle of pastoral (and patriarchal) care for the individual (cf. Burchell, 1991, p. 121).

In this essay, I present the hypothesis that through the erasure of the individual from the public space, who ought to be nothing but a result and reaffirmation of various social norms – like the veil or dupatta hiding female bodies – the governmental apparatuses of South and South-East Asia lose access to the private sphere, which nations in the Global North have successfully conquered with the invention of liberalism, that is, the invention of the welfare state protecting the individual's rights.

I certainly don't want to disregard Chantal Mouffe's and Ernesto Laclau's warning here in a short-sighted way and construct the "essence of a subject" *a priori*. (Laclau/Mouffe, 1985, p. 153) However, I refer - also with Mouffe and Laclau - to "the impossibility of constituting relations of subordination as a closed system of differences" (ibid., p. 156): a banned and forcibly adapted subject in public space is and remains a *different one in private*. This is where the fruitful externalization of subordination arises that makes the democratic revolution possible in the first place. For if we asserted that '*women are subordinate to men*', this assertion would not in itself form an antagonistic structure. The antagonism only arises from the observation from outside that says: "*The same rights are inherent in every human being regardless of their gender.*" For only by means of the external articulation does the subordination become apparent and does its legitimacy become questionable.

In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Mouffe and Laclau impressively show how the French Revolution and the resulting Declaration of the Rights of Man first created the discursive conditions in Europe that made the naming of various forms of inequality possible. (cf. Laclau/Mouffe, 1985, p. 155) Accordingly, I argue here that the fact that the (political) subject is not visible in public space does not mean that it is not there. Rather, in a collectively organized society like that of Pakistan, it eludes the power/knowledge complex of the security apparatus. But it continues to shape and unfold in secret, behind an impenetrable front: "The less we are free to decide who we are or to live as we like, the more we try to put up a front, to hide the facts, and to play the roles" (Arendt, 1996, p. 115). It is precisely these roles that individuals play in the public sphere that

make the externalization of oppression, its articulation, - and ultimately its subversion - possible.

RADICAL SUBJECTIVITY WITHIN THE COLLECTIVE AS A STRATEGY OF SUBVERSION

The limited applicability of Foucault's theses to the societies of South Asia mentioned at the beginning takes a fruitful turn at this point: While Foucault identifies an individualization accompanying industrialization and the free market economy for the societies of Europe, which leads to a professional political technology that makes individuals work for the state, (cf. Burchell, 1991, p.124), in South Asia we encounter a pronounced collectivism in which the individual seems to have almost completely disappeared from the public sphere. Such collectivism transforms individuals into parts of a whole whose norms have become law for them.

But it is precisely here that I believe we can recognize the decisive break that allows for a pronounced inner freedom. The collective seems to protect the individual from the state's grasp and so radical subjectivity becomes possible. Two phenomena have contributed to strengthening this radical subjectivity in the 21st century. Firstly, the democratization of education and secondly, the availability of social media. Education makes a greater contribution here, for education and the subsequent broadening of one's own horizon enable self-reflexivity and the localization of the self in social space.

It is precisely from the ability to constitute the self in relation to others that the *inner freedom* arises that allows the subject to appear as antagonistic to the *hegemonic discourse*. In Pakistan, the public, hegemonic discourse says: 'Women are subordinate to men'. The necessary contradiction to this *arises from the individual subject's condition* as an educated and enlightened self who can demand 'equal rights for all people regardless of their gender'.

According to Mouffe and Laclau, this approach is radical since it demands the *generalization* of the equivalential-egalitarian logic, that is, *of fundamental rights*, for all groups of the society – while at the same time recognizing their diversity. (cf. Laclau/Mouffe, 1985, pp. 164-167) This is where social media comes into play, which, thanks to its - until a few years ago unimaginable - reach, has flushed the aforementioned equivalential-egalitarian logic into almost every household around the globe. The certainty that they are not alone in their opposition to the hegemonic regime can strengthen individuals and encourage them to join existing protests or

find their own forms of resistance. Extensive historiography on the subject has almost unanimously agreed on this. (cf. Hellmeier/Bernhard, 2023, pp. 1860 − 1861)

The smoldering conflict between inner freedom and curtailed outer freedom *de facto* 'only' needs the certainty of the secret solidarity of the many. The democratization of education and the global emergence of social media have made it a little easier for revolutionary sparks to fly among free and radically democratic subjects. Here, the subject no longer has an essentialist, predetermined form, but rather *constitutes itself individually as the intersection of various levels of ambiguities and antagonisms*. It is precisely this observation of *postcolonial agency* that leads bell hooks in *Yearning* to the hopeful conclusion:

> That space within oneself where resistance is possible remains. It is different then to talk about becoming subjects. That process [of becoming a subject and self-determined agent; note from the author] emerges as one comes to understand how structures of domination work in one's own life, as one develops critical thinking and critical consciousness, as one invents new, alternative habits of being, and resists from that marginal space of difference inwardly defined. (hooks, 2015, p. 15)

CONCLUSION

Clearly, I have not understood everything about the enchanting collectivism of Pakistani society. But I have observed that fear and the desire for security play a crucial role in the governance of this country. I think that it is this fear that makes individuals act in secret and I think that precisely here lies the possibility of subverting the regime, of renegotiating its terms.

What I wanted to do in this article, and what I hope I have done with the examples of the Pakistani security apparatus and the treatment of women's bodies, is to make a humble contribution to the global debate about how we want to live together. The answer seems to me to lie in the relationship between inner and outer freedom and I cherish the hope that inner freedom actually grows when limited outer freedom is limited.

The inspiration for this article was the courageous publication by Lieutenant Colonel Dr. Muhammad Ali Ehsan, who retired in 2010 after 29 years of service in the Pakistani military, entitled *2018-2020: Two years of democracy in Pakistan. Scholarly view on Pakistan's democracy.* In the introduction to the book, which is well worth reading, Ehsan wrote: *"My motivation of writing this book grows out of my clear and deep concern of what has happened to my country."* (Ehsan, 2021, p.

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2) My lines are also motivated by my deep concern about where we are heading as a global community. But this journey through recent human history gives us hope that radical subjectivity, which implies radical tolerance, will ultimately help democracy to triumph.

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