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Politics of Abjection: Analysing the Debasement of Female Bodies in Cross-Border Conflicts

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Abstract

Julia Kristeva in *Powers Of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) describes abjection as the ambivalent process of subject formation in which elements that the self cannot assimilate are expelled, disavowed and designated repugnant. Female bodies in cross-border feud have always been subjected to abjection for the greater religio-political need. The bodies of women have proved to be useful mediums to transfer symbolically messages of power, victory and supremacy. Violence perpetrated on these bodies not only metaphorically asserts male superiority, but also serves as an effective platform to terrorize people. Degrading the female bodies also signifies the extermination of a particular community, both by destroying the honour and impregnating them with the seeds of a foreign community. Reading Jean Franco's account of debasement of female bodies in the war across USA-Mexico border and the partition narratives based on the Indo-Pakistan front, as well as taking into account the contemporary scenario of Islamic terrorism, this paper aims to look at the ways in which women's bodies are violently debased, and analyse the symbolisms of such abjection against the backdrop of border-wars.

[**Keywords:** Border, partition narratives, Islamic terrorism, female bodies, abjection.]

Introduction

“...when the taboo against harming others is broken, there can be no limits, no social pact.” (Franco 1)

Franco in her 2013 book *Cruel Modernity* analyzes the various forms of cruelty that has begun to define modernity in Latin America. Though focused only on the discriminating atrocities committed across the USA-Mexico border, her reading is an echo of border politics all around the globe. Border exists, whether visible and physical or invisible and imaginary, because there is an 'other'. It differentiates race, religion, ethnicity, community, nationality, language and even gender. Franco's extensive research reveals that the only possible way modernity can negotiate with such varied borders is through an extreme form of violence which amounts to a complete dehumanization of both human body and psyche. The violence inflicted on human beings, in such cases, leads to a debasement of the human body and reduces it to an animalistic status. The human body, subjected to beatings, curses and other forms of humiliations, loses its subjectivity and becomes synonymous to a non-human existence. Franco examines the conditions under

which extreme forms of cruelty become “the instrument of armies, governments, and rogue groups” and seeks to answer the question, “Why, in Latin America, did the pressures of modernization and the lure of modernity lead states to kill?” (Franco 2) This is not to say that Franco considers cruelty as a newly emerging phenomenon. She is not blind to the fact that neither cruelty nor its exploitation is new. However, it is the lifting of the taboo against harming others that concerns her thesis. She explores how “the acceptance and justification of cruelty and the rationale for cruel acts” (Franco 2) has become a major feature of modernity. The scenario that she paints is a universal one – be it across the USA-Mexico border or the India-Pakistan border. The root cause of such barbarism across multiple forms of borders can be pinned down to the internalization of border in human psyche. Border denotes difference and difference is a natural phenomenon, since the world as it was created was not a homogeneous one. However, the differences of race, religion, ethnicity, language has led to an utmost intolerance towards the other calling for its cruel annihilation. The hatred towards the other has been nurtured to such an extent that human conscience no longer recognizes cruelty as an act amounting to crime. The involvement of state apparatuses in further endorsing this hatred and its participation in the game of brutality deprives humans of their rights in such a manner that “no act committed against them could appear any longer a crime” (Agamben, qtd. Franco 4).

‘Cruel Modernity’ and the Female Body

Among other forms of brutality which constitute ‘cruel modernity’, the treatment of the female bodies in cross-border politics is the most grotesque and barbaric. The female body is a site of numerous conflicting and contesting claims. It is a site to assert male supremacy; it is simultaneously a site where the symbolic extermination of an entire community or race can be carried out; it is also a site which bears the burden of honour. This honour once again is not singularly of the woman’s. The honour of her family, the honour of the race and ethnicity to which she belongs are all manifested on her body. The female body, therefore, is a vulnerable site – a site whose violation can symbolically violate an entire community, and a site whose protection is mandatory to maintain the purity and integrity of the community, even if that protection comes at the cost of her life. This paper studies this complex reading of the female body and how it is used to manipulate cross-border politics. Through a comparative reading of instances of *abjection* of the female body from Franco’s *Cruel Modernity* and literary examples from the Indo-Pakistan border this paper attempts to show how two widely different border spectrums resort to a similar brutal treatment of the female body with an aim of turning it into an abject to assert various forms of male supremacy in their own individual ways. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines abject as “Brought low, miserable; craven, degraded, despicable, self abasing” and it describes abjection as a “state of misery or degradation.” While describing how abjection is expressed, Samantha Pentony in her article ‘How Kristeva’s theory of abjection works in relation to the fairy tale and post colonial novel: Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber*, and Keri Hulme’s *The Bone People*’ comments that

“[R]eligious abhorrence, incest, *women's bodies*, human sacrifice, bodily waste, death, cannibalism, murder, decay, and perversion are aspects of humanity that society considers abject” (Pentony 1; italics are mine).

This paper traces how women's bodies in being subjected to the politics of abjection become a means of proclaiming male supremacy in conflicts across all kinds of borders – whether geographical, political, racial, or most importantly, gender.

Julia Kristeva put forward her theory of abjection in *Powers Of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) where she identifies that we first experience abjection at the point of separation from the mother. This idea is drawn from Lacan's psychoanalytical theory which underpins her theory of abjection. She identifies that abjection represents a revolt against that which gave us our own existence or state of being. For Kristeva, the corporeal link between mother and child is the most fundamental abjection of all, initiating the logic upon which all other forms of abjection are predicated and paving the way for the child's entry into the symbolic. This, for Kristeva, is why language is a masculine preserve and why femininity – and particularly maternity – is tainted with the abject. According to her, abjection describes the ambivalent process of subject formation in which elements that the self cannot assimilate are expelled, disavowed and designated repugnant. Her model of the Abject outlines a conflict in gender between patriarchal signification and the female imaginary and explains female oppression as an inability to cast off the internalization of the mother. Taking her cue from Kristeva, Barbara Creed writes:

“The place of the abject is where meaning collapses, the place where I am not. *The abject threatens life, it must be radically excluded from the place of the living subject*, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self. (Creed 65; italics are mine)

Besides political, racial, communal, ethnic and linguistic borders, women have to confront what is probably the most unaccounted but the most diabolic border – the border of gender – where women are seen as men's 'other' and, thus, are separated out in heinous ways of all kinds.

Gender Borders: Raping and Honour Killing

Franco in her introduction to *Cruel Modernity* makes a brief distinction between the torture wrecked upon men and women in the combat across political and racial borders in Latin America. She writes:

“Debasement that included curses, beatings and all kinds of humiliation were practiced on both sexes, but in the case of women it was taken to extremes, as the victims were submitted to not only rape and even worse but were also insulted as whores. Moreover, rape was seldom the sexual act *tout court* but often involved the insertion of arms and sticks into the vagina.” (Franco 14)

The fact that women are plagued and degraded further through acts which involved their genitalia clearly marks this border between genders. The female bodies are subjected to further debasement simply because they are of the opposite sex. This added sexual injury to the female bodies, which degrades them to an almost non-human existence, apart from the usual physical brutality meted out on men and women alike, is a global phenomenon in any kind of cross-border encounter. On a first reading, rape is seen as a crucial and symbolic masculine weapon to declare male supremacy, but there is more to that. Women, by virtue of their ability to procreate, ensure the progress and immortality of the community to which they belong. The female bodies, therefore, are sexually attacked to symbolically affect the entire community. Since women are the carriers and preservers of the question of 'honour' and 'purity' of a community, they become the easy target of the opposing group who want to degrade physically and psychologically the community on the other side of the border. The female bodies, as a result, become sites for a two-fold politics of annihilation and contamination. Raping and implanting the seed of a different community in a female body symbolizes an attempt to 'contaminate' the parent race of the woman, as the product of that act will be a 'hybrid' offspring of two racially different groups. If raping symbolizes the endeavour to destroy the purity of a race, the episodes of stakes thrust through female genitalia symbolizes the will to prevent a population's reproduction through complete sterilization. From this two-fold politics where the bodies of the women are used to ruin a particular race emerges another socio-political stance with the women as the focal point – the politics of 'honour killing'. If raping and abusing the sexual organs of women was a common occurrence in the genocidal wars in Peru and Guatemala, 'honour killing' was seen in its extreme form during the communal violence that accompanied the 1947 partition of the Indian sub-continent. The precise reason for which men sexually violated women of other communities, women were killed by the male members of their own families or community. Lest they are raped and, thus, destroy the purity of the community, women were killed to preserve both their honour and in turn the honour of their communities. The female bodies are, therefore, vital instruments in cross-border politics which could be used to either cause or prevent destruction. The next section of the paper deals with each of these politics of the female body through literary representations from the India-Pakistan border combat and through Franco's documentation from the USA-Mexico border.

Raping to Assert Male Supremacy

To begin with, female bodies are sites where men could easily assert their supremacy by forcing the former to a sexual subjection. While Franco shows instances where women were sexually debased by men of other communities, Saadat Hasan Manto shows women being mercilessly raped by men of both their own communities and other communities, thus, highlighting the gender border that exists between these two opposite sexes. A reading of the two stories 'Colder than Ice' and 'The Return' as companion pieces would further elucidate this. Set in the Indian side of the border during the communal violence of partition, the first story is about a Sikh named Ishwar Singh. Amidst the tumultuous

time of riots and violence, Ishwar Singh was busy looting the empty Muslim shops and homes. During one such loot he broke into a Muslim home where there were seven people, six of them men and one a woman. Ishwar Singh later recalls to his wife:

“...there were seven people in there, six of them men whom I killed with my kirpan one by one...and there was one girl...she was so beautiful...I didn't kill her...I took her away.” (Manto 19-20)

While the only ultimate violence that he inflicted on the men was death, the girl, who by this time appeared fainted, was taken away to be sexually violated before being killed. Ishwar Singh could have straight away “slashed her throat” (Manto 20) but he did not. This act of raping the girl is an additional form of violence that emerges from the border that exists between man and woman and, hence, something which men were exempted from. In the second story ‘The Return’, a Muslim girl Sakina gets detached from her father in the mass exodus across the newly created geo-political border that divides India from Pakistan. Her father requests the Pakistani military to rescue her. The Muslim army personnel promises rescue but with that promise of rescue repeatedly rapes her till she almost drops dead. Manto's sensitive treatment of the subject of brutality on women reveals that apart from communal and racial borders, women bore the brunt of gender border as well. Men seized the opportunity of a turbulent political time to devalue female bodies irrespective of their race or religion, and derived a masochistic pleasure in asserting their sexual supremacy over women. Both these stories are prominent reflection of the events in another part of the world at another time. The story ‘Colder than Ice’ bears strong resonance with the raping of dead that Franco talks about in her book. Franco brings up instances from the testimony of ‘El Brujo’ before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Peru where a woman was raped after her throat had been cut and she was next to dead and unable to satiate the sexual greed of the men. In Manto's story, Ishwar Singh rapes the fainted girl only to realize that she was dead. These two similar accounts reveal a horrific side of cross-border politics, where not only were female bodies seen as objects to be exploited but also as something which could be denied respect even in death. This denial of respect even in death is explicitly recorded in a number of partition novels: While Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956) describes events where train full of mutilated female corpses arrive to India from Pakistan, Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice-Candy Man* (1988) records episodes of sacks full of female breasts arriving to Pakistan from across the border. These passages show the utter abjection of the female bodies which “places the victim outside the bonds of the human” (Franco 77). Franco terms this “extreme masculinity” (Franco 78) which in effect is a “rage against the womb” (Franco 78). She goes on to write that “rape not only abolishes any claim by the victim to be in the same ‘human’ category as the rapist, who is confirmed in his supremacy, but also annihilates woman as the feared other” (Franco 78). This male supremacy is asserted not only across racial and communal borders but also across gender borders as is evident from the second story of Manto mentioned above. Sakina in ‘The Return’ is raped so many times that she internalizes the act of rape in her psyche. Later when the exhausted body of Sakina is brought into the camp hospital and the

doctor asks her father to open the window, the mere word 'open' forces the otherwise listless body to move and open her dress and expose itself for the rape:

"The doctor looked at the prostrate body and felt for the pulse. Then he said to the old man, pointing at the window, 'Open it.'

The young woman on the stretcher moved slightly. Her hands groped for the cord which kept her shalwar tied around her waist. With painful slowness, she unfastened it, pulled the garment down and opened her thighs." (Manto 41)

Her action shows the extreme cruelty to which male barbarism can subject a woman to. Sakina was of the same community as the military personnel. In spite of that she was treated as an abject female body. The only difference being that they did not kill her since, sharing the same religious belief, it was not necessary for the men to kill her as a symbolic extermination of her community. 'The Return' is a reflection of the way state apparatuses such as military wreck havoc on the female bodies without any fear of punishment. Franco records instances where the army is instructed to brutally wipe out the indigenous people "for women as bearers of tradition must be incapacitated or destroyed in the cause of creating a new Guatemala...without ethnic difference" (Franco 83-84). This is what Barbara Creed meant while stating that the abject 'other' is radically excluded since it threatens the 'self'. Franco's instance is an echo of Kelly Oliver in *Women as Weapons of War* (2007) where the latter says that "military practices...normalize violence, particularly in relation to women and sex" (Oliver 8). Armed with impunity, the state machinery such as the military has recurrently pushed down the women to the basest level treating their bodies as commodities to be destroyed. The involvement of the state apparatus deprives the victims of any legal help and leaves them with no other option but to be continually exploited and degraded. All these acts of denigration identify the women as inferior and, thus, recognize the triumph of male sovereignty.

Debased Female Bodies and Destruction of a Race

"Women have been associated with the downfall of man since Eve supposedly tempted Adam with forbidden fruit" (Oliver 9). In other words, female bodies can be used to indirectly inflict damage on their male counterparts. Raping the women is not merely an act denoting the exultation of male superiority over female inferiority. It is also emblematic of destructing the purity of a race. Due to the biological construct of their bodies, women have to bear the consequence of polluting their race or ethnicity. It is precisely because of this reason, that the fates of the women who survived cross-border rapes were tainted with shame and humiliation. Both in Franco's research on the Peru-Guatemala front and in those of Urbashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, Kamala Bhasin and others on the India-Pakistan front, there is an identical reproduction of the destiny of the raped women. Since the exploitation of their bodies contaminated their community, they were relegated to the fringes of the societies as outcast. Most of them were disowned by their families as well, since accepting them would outcast the entire family. Franco writes:

“For the victim who survived, the sexual act was transmuted into unbearable and unforgettable torment. Its devastating effect went beyond the individual, for it attacked the family as the very basis of society, inducing feelings of isolation and desperation. Women who survived wartime rape often suffered physical damage and were left isolated.” (Franco 78)

A similar case of isolation was faced by the women who were raped amidst the communal violence induced by the partition. Kamala Bhasin and Ritu Menon in their book *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (1998) describe the bleak scenario post the passing of 'The Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act' in 1949. Among the enormous number of women who had been abducted and raped many were recovered either as pregnant or with the child of the rapists. Their families, who were more concerned both with their notion of honour and the fear of being treated as an outcast than with the fate of their women, refused to accept them. As a result these homeless women remained at the mercy of camps and other women development cells to arrange some sort of livelihood for them. To counter what was its symbolic contamination, the community, thus, out casted the so called 'bearer' of that impurity. In this attack and counter-attack of destruction and preservation of purity, the bodies that were wasted were those of the women. They suffered not only physical abjection but also psychological abjection. Not only were they debased to an animalistic existence by the physical tortures, but also suffered mental degradation by the treatment of the society. The women were not subjected to rape alone. The act of rape was often accompanied by mutilation and decimation of the female sexual organs. The female bodies, as said before, are sites which endorses multiple layers of politics. If through the acts of rape, they were used as a setting for the proclamation of male supremacy and defilement a community, they were also used as an area where the symbolic annihilation of a community was carried out. Franco records events where the abjection of women was maximized by forcing them to be on their hands and legs like animals and shooting them by placing the gun in the anus or vagina. Such defilement of the bodies was to ensure that the victims no longer resembled human beings. This politics of abjection was seen in a different way in the context of the partition of India where the breasts of female bodies were chopped off. *Train to Pakistan* as mentioned before records the gory details of trains coming to India from Pakistan with bodies of women whose breasts have been slashed. Set in the border village of Mano Majra during partition, Khushwant Singh's historical novel records how the otherwise peaceful village turns into a battlefield when a train from the other side of the border arrives carrying the bodies of dead Sikhs. While the male bodies were left aside after being murdered, the breasts of the female bodies were slashed after the women were killed. One finds description of similar episodes in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*, the difference being this time it is the Muslim women whose bodies have been mutilated. *Ice Candy Man* reports to his friends that a train from Gurdaspur has arrived in Lahore filled with murdered Muslims. He shouts, "Everyone in it is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslims. There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women's breasts" (Sidhwa 149). This act of violence against Muslim women spurs him to

inflict violence on Hindu and Sikh women. He exclaims, “I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women” (Sidhwa 156). He satiates his appetite for revenge by kidnapping Ayah and forcing her to prostitute her body. What is evident is that female bodies are the sole abject sites for carrying out attacks and revenges as if cross-border feud can only be successfully carried out by degrading the female bodies. Such acts of either mutilating the female bodies by cutting off particularly the breasts or destroying the genitalia are symbolic acts of terminating the very life-spring of a community. In Shauna Singh Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers* (1999) Bachan Singh beheads Kusum, his daughter-in-law, lest she is raped by the men of other communities. Her husband Jeevan, who is unaware that his father has beheaded his wife, is surprised that she has not been raped before being murdered:

“[T]o cut a woman apart without first raping – a waste, surely. Rape is one man’s message to another: ‘I took your pawn. Your move’” (Baldwin 576).

The bodies of the women are the sole medium through which men could pass on their message of supremacy to each other. Turning the female bodies as mediums to transfer messages of power and supremacy commoditize the female body on another level and further debases them by denying them their human subjectivity. A short while later Jeevan receives the ‘message’ that was intended for him.

“Kusum’s womb, the same from which his three sons came, had been delivered. Ripped out.

And the message, ‘We will stamp your kind, your very species of existence. This is no longer merely about izzat or land. This is a war against your quom, for all time. Leave. *We take the womb so there will be no Sikhs from it, we take the womb, leave its shell.*’” (Baldwin 576; italics are mine)

Kusum, therefore, faced double abjection. She was killed by her father-in-law lest “seeds of foreign religion” (Baldwin 586) were planted in her womb; and her womb was ripped apart as a symbolic act of exterminating the entire Sikh community. Like destroying the womb, episodes of shooting the vagina or thrusting objects through it, that Franco records, are symbolic acts of castration, which figuratively prevents a community’s reproduction and regeneration. Similarly, chopping of the breasts, which are the repository of nourishment for the babies, denotes depriving the future generation of the required nourishment for life. Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* analyzes one of his dreams where he saw a woman making dumplings in a kitchen. In his analysis his dream is one of wish fulfillment of the basic need for food and love, which he claims come together in the mother’s breast. The mutilation of female breasts, therefore, also signifies depriving the entire population of their basic requirement of food leading to their symbolic death. In the cross-border politics where the (baseless?) need arises to destroy a population, the female bodies become representational locales where symbolic extermination and defilement of a community can be carried out.

Female Bodies as Sites of Honour

The female bodies are, thus, appropriate planes to assert male ascendancy as well as to carry out figuratively the violation and contamination of a community and its complete elimination. Such ends are achieved only through an abjection and dehumanization of the female bodies. However, they are also used to counter these very attempts of annihilation and defilement. The question of 'honour' as something sacred is embedded in the tradition of India. Honour, once again, works on multiple levels – individual honour, family honour, community honour, racial honour, ethnic honour etc. On women is bestowed the responsibility of preserving this honour. The violation of their bodies dishonours not only their individual self but their families as well as an entire community. Hence, in order to prevent any such loss of honour, the male sovereign heads took recourse to the killing off the women of their families. This act of killing the women of one's own family to save their honour and, in turn, the honour of the family, from being polluted by men of different communities gets the title of 'honour killing'. The pathos of this act is portrayed in Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* where to save the honour of Kusum from being violated at the hands of Muslims, her father-in-law beheads her with a kirpan. He does not kill Revati Bua or Gujri since both were old and passed child-bearing age so no man would feel dishonoured if they were raped. However, since Kusum's body still possessed the capability of extending the community, it should not be 'unjustly' used to pollute the community's purity. Urvashi Butalia's archival work *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (2000) narrated such true incidents where Sikh and Hindu men killed the women and female children of their families without any hesitation so as to save their 'honour' from the approaching mobs of a 'foreign religion'. 'Honour killing' is almost an oxymoron. The woman is left to choose from two options with similar consequences: either to be raped and face a literal death or a symbolic one through isolation; or to 'honourably' die at the hands of a male relative. Two significant politics is involved in this entire theory of killing for honour. First, the concept of 'honour killing' arose with the assumption of the female body as sites of honour, or as Baldwin's protagonist Roop observes "as bearers of blood, to do what women are for" (Baldwin 587). This doing is to prefer death to dishonour which is the characteristic of "good-good women" (Baldwin 587). This is in opposition to the consideration of female bodies as 'surplus' (that is, easily available in large number to be preyed upon), an argument reiterated by Franco as well as evident from the partition narratives discussed above. So there is a contradictory pull between female bodies as a storehouse of honour and the female bodies as 'wasted' and 'abject'. Strikingly, in both the stands what is common is the killing of the female bodies. Whether in the garb of 'honour killing' or in an attempt to eliminate a population, female bodies were seen as objects which could be, without inhibition, condemned to violent annihilation. Both in the act of destroying the purity of a race and preserving it, the female bodies, therefore, were at the receiving end of violence and abjection. Second, whether in the form of 'honourable' death or cruel abjection, female bodies are exterminated at the hands of the men. Thus, in both the forms of killing, it is an assertion of male dominance where the women either have no agency, or, their voices are deliberately stifled.

Contemporary Scenario: Islamic Terrorism

The debasement of female bodies for the above mentioned reasons is a potent weapon in the contemporary scenario of Islamic terrorism as well. The Islamic militant group ISIS has used sexual violence against women as a means of ethnic cleansing in its campaign against the Yazidi minority in northern Iraq. Since women symbolize culture and group, systematic rape and other forms sexual violence can serve the goal of ethnic cleaning by eroding the way of life of a community rather than displacing or killing all members of the group. The fabric of societies, communities, and families can be destroyed by sexually violating women and leaving them alive.

Such was the case in Bosnia where Serb fighters committed systematic rape against tens of thousands Muslim women as a part of their strategy of ethnic cleansing, including forced pregnancies to produce children of the perpetrator's ethnicity. It was also the case during the genocide in Rwanda where Hutu militiamen employed rape, mutilation and other sexual violence to humiliate Tutsi women, transmit HIV, and prevent them from having Tutsi children. In a similar manner, ISIS employs sexual violence against Yazidi women as a significant part of their campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Yazidi community as a whole. The abjection of female bodies, however, does not merely manifest itself in violence of different kinds. The bodies of the women also serve as the sites on which extremist agendas are imposed. The ISIS militant group has a female brigade to teach women their proper place in the society. The very fact that women under the ISIS regime needs to cover up her entire body and cannot step out of the enclosed interiors of home show a different kind of debasement of the female bodies. This is, however, not new. Women at various points in Islamic history have been denied the freedom of the body. During the sectarian violence of 2008, when Iraq was under the US occupation, a graffiti on the walls in the city of Basra threatened, "Your makeup and your decision to forgo the headscarf will bring you death" (Susskind 2). In response to the repression imposed on them, Iraqi women mobilised in unprecedented ways. For instance, the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq (Owfi) "created a network of underground safe houses for women fleeing violence at home and in the streets" (Susskind 2). The women of Owfi also spoke out against policies that created sectarian divisions and fuelled gender-based violence. The ISIS militants are using rape and brutality to control women who have not stopped mobilising since the US occupation. Women living under ISIS control have been seized from their homes and raped. They have been ordered to cover themselves fully and stay in the house. These are systematic attempts to control the female body and, therefore, in turn, curb any kind of female independence. While in 2008 under US occupation women were not even safe at home, especially after 'honour killing' was endorsed as a religious duty for families to police women's behaviour, in the current scenario in communities occupied by Isis, fighters have kidnapped women from their homes, telling their families that these attacks are justified by a 'sexual jihad'.

If ISIS aims at using female bodies to optimize terror in the minds of civilians, another militant group, Boko Haram, (which originated in Nigeria and literally means

‘against western education’) aims at using women to establish a complete Islamic authority. Girls and women abducted by the Nigerian Islamist group Boko Haram have described life in captivity which includes forced marriage and labour, rape, torture, psychological abuse and coerced religious conversion. More than 500 women and girls have been seized and held in militant camps since 2009. The single biggest abduction was of 276 girls from a school in Chibok in April. The majority of abductions by Boko Haram were of Christian women and girls, threatened with death or violence if they refused to convert to Islam. Religious conversion of the women, who are the fountain head from which new life springs, signifies the complete extermination of a particular religious community. Raping them and forcefully marrying them serves both the purposes of terrorising the non-Islamic civilians who would be threatened by such acts to evict the state, and of symbolically annihilating the non-Islamic communities by depriving them of the women who are the carriers of new generations. The degradation of female bodies, therefore, is an outcome of multiple layers of political and religious conflicts where the women could be effectively used as pawns to acquire the desired results.

Conclusion

The UN Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women (VAW) states that “violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women” and that “violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men”. Some examples of VAW include rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, female infanticide, prenatal sex selection, honor killings, dowry violence, female genital mutilation, and forced marriage. Apart from fulfilling the purpose of subordination, female bodies are also degraded to achieve other greater goals. Whether death without any other forms of physical torture, or death preceded by abject humiliation, female bodies are used as abject commodities to assert various forms of supremacies across different forms of borders. Across the gender border they are sites to proclaim male sovereignty, either through rape or through honour killing. Across racial and communal borders they are used to achieve two ends - to defile and pollute an entire community by implanting within the female bodies the seed of the rape, and to symbolically restrain a population from further reproduction by the violent destruction of the female sexual organs. And within a community the female bodies are sentenced to death for the larger cause of maintaining the honour of the family and the community. Whether it is Guatemala and Peru, or India and Pakistan, or the contemporary context of Islamic terrorism in Iraq and Nigeria, abjection of female bodies in various patterns is the major means of negotiating cross-border encounters. The bodies of women endorse multiple layers of politics to either help in achieving male superiority, or to aid the triumph of one race over the other in the combat across racial and communal borders through their abjection.

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