

CULTURE, CONFLICT, AND THE MONOPOLIISATION OF FEMALE ATTENTION

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All cultures come equipped with elaborate modes and methodologies of ingroup acquisition, distribution, and retention of feminine attention and affection. Cultural norms represent reliable and replicable rules and instructions for setting up the choice architecture for sexual selection and channeling female desire in ways considered beneficial for and by the cultural group as a whole.

Systems that ensure ingroup circulation and distribution of female attention are the same systems that are also involved in the overall distribution of power, authority, and responsibility within the cultural group. The task of regulation is inextricably tied in with the challenge of continued preservation and autonomy of the cultural group. It determines the overall patterns of cultural production and consumption within and between cultural groups. Even economic production and exchange, regardless of whether it is free or command-based, can be said to partake in this cultural enterprise by anchoring human desire in commoditised material objects, thus turning them into ritualistic offerings, as need be, in the global process of mate selection.

This permanent preoccupation with the regulation of female attention and desire in all cultural groups plays an important role in determining the structure of cultural contact. In fact, the nature and form of relations between any two cultures will hinge, to a much greater degree than is normally recognised, upon the relations between the sexes within and between those cultures.

The violence that is unleashed around cross-cultural mating decisions in some parts of the world indicates that two different cultures may continue to negotiate the phenomenon of cultural variance in essentially nonaggressive ways as long as men belonging to each culture enjoy a monopoly over the attention and affection of the women belonging to that culture. But one or many instances of women mating with men from outside their cultural group represents, for the gatekeepers of that culture, the failure or suspension of the system of

selection preferences designed to ensure ingroup regulation of feminine attention.

Cultural heterogeneity or difference, therefore, turns into cultural conflict precisely at the moment when men belonging to a given cultural group are no longer able to lay exclusive claim to female attention and affection in their own group. In other words, competition, hostility, suspiciousness, and aggressiveness between two different cultural groups are proportional to the levels of female desire in those groups for men outside their cultural groups.

Almost all social mores, moral traditions, and political doctrines in different cultures tend to evolve as strategies to ensure relative advantage in the primal quest to acquire and retain scarce survival resources. These resources cover material, physical, ideational, tangible, and intangible assets, the possession of which shall increase the relative chances of survival of a given cultural group.

A critical subset of survival resources is the reproductive resources understood here as the institutions, practices, and artifacts ensuring well-regulated, mutually acceptable, and widely practiced sexual relations between men and women of a given cultural group by means of the culturally and socially prevalent mode of cohabitation or marriage, however interpreted in and by that group. In this sense, high reproductive resources denote a state in which men of a cultural group succeed in retaining the attention and affections of the women of that group. Low reproductive resources indicate the obverse. Any depletion of its reproductive resources is liable to be defined by the group as a threat to its survival.

Since the ingroup male monopolisation of female attention assists the cultural group in its competition for scarce resources against other cultural groups through the greater concentration of capabilities vis-à-vis other groups, any threat to this monopoly is construed as a threat by the cultural group as a threat to its survival.

Cultural contact both frustrates and promotes the drive for monopolisation. Ceaseless interaction of men and women from different cultures, stretching over long periods of time and assuming political, economic, diplomatic, and amorous forms, provides the arena for one of the most intense forms of cultural exchange in which, men and women, unbeknownst to themselves, end up establishing the superiority of the modes of socialisation, social mobility, self-improvement, and standards of attractiveness of their respective cultures. Countless cross-cultural mating choices of innumerable men and women become at the wider level a process of validation or dominance establishment of one culture at the expense of the other.

The relations between the culture whose men lost the monopoly of affection of its women and the culture whose men gained it remain troubled for long historical periods. The winning culture usually tends to be the one that is technologically, militarily, and economically more advanced. One sign of cultural dominance is the increasing preference of the women of the losing culture for those men of their own cultural group who successfully assimilate and exhibit the cultural properties attached with the men of the dominant culture. In this context, it would not be too much of a mental strain to understand the reasons for the high value attached in urban South Asia to the archetype of westernised English-speaking masculinity. Like Marx said that men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please, we can say that people choose their own mates, but they do not choose them as they please. This choice is made in the predetermined crucible of dominant cultural preferences.

It may also happen that members of the more technologically advanced culture may not be able to establish their monopoly on the attention of the female members of their culture. Famous anthropologist and global public intellectual, the late Professor David Graeber, and his co-author, Professor David Wengrow, highlight in their wonderful book, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (2021), the more than occasional preference of European women, children, and men for the native American way of life in the early days of the settlement of North and South America. In other words, we can say that cultures that are not dominant in economic, political, and technological terms can still turn out to prove attractive in compassionate terms.

Rather than providing equivalent or better opportunities to its men for attaining higher physical, cognitive, emotional, material, and financial standards of attractiveness, the moral and political ideologues of the cultural group faced with what they perceive as the threat of appropriation of indigenous female attention by other cultural groups respond by trying to promulgate a coercive monopoly around the female desire in their culture using chiefly ideological means to denigrate cross-cultural mating choices and decisions. Not infrequently, though, brute force has also enforced such exclusionary ideologies as in the cases of old-school western colonialism and contemporary Hindutva.

At other times, philosophical theses like Professor Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" and comparisons like the equation, last year, of Europe with a "garden" and non-Europe with a "jungle" by Josep Borrell, EU's foreign policy czar – though he later apologised for his remarks – use mainly discursive and semantic regimes for the purposes of disapprobation, misrepresentation, segregation, and exclusionary compartmentalisation of the other. It is not too hard to see that such intellectual efforts spring from the age-old cultural anxiety, which is experienced by all cultures perennially and which is charged excessively with the fear of the conquest and the domination of indigenous femininity by hostile alien masculinities.

What is scary is that this fear, making up the major chunk of cultural xenophobia, may grow further as a consequence of the intensification of the 21st competition between global powers.

What needs to register powerfully with decision makers and citizens of the world is that habitable space like always will continue to be finite with diverse peoples and cultures continuing to live side by side. It is within the power of people and their leadership to make the outcomes of this immemorial spatial adjacency peaceful rather than allowing our collective paranoias to run scot-free to start new cold wars and campaigns of cultural demonisation of others at home and abroad. Similarly, attempts to colonise feelings are foredoomed. Humanity would be well-advised to leverage the incessant waves and cycles of cultural diffusion to promote cross-cultural collaboration and understanding. The trick perhaps is to use the awareness of our own ephemerality to help us see differences in habits of thinking and routines of doing and being as bridges that need to be crossed rather than insular ruts of uncomprehending cultural chauvinism.

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