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Kashmir through Decolonizing Methodologies : An Approach to Knowledge

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This paper seeks to propose decolonizing methodologies as methodologies of choice when inquiring into the fields of Sociology of Knowledge and Sociology of Violence. Taking the case of Kashmir into account, while reflecting on the literature on knowledge, violence, and the impact of violence, the paper suggests that the use of decolonizing methodologies prevents the subjugation of knowledge. While making no definitive claims about the kind of knowledge structures that should emerge, the paper only seeks to enable reflexivity, where the researcher engages with his research subjects as participants and not as objects of research. This paper aims at building capacity for knowledge that can be used in inductive research through humanistic investigation.

[**Keywords :** Kashmir, Decolonizing Methodologies, Knowledge, Epistemic Violence]

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CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL SCIENCES, Vol. 32, No. 1 (January-March), 2023 Peer Reviewed, Indexed & Refereed International Research Journal

1. Introduction

What is Kashmir? Is this a place, a product, or a people? As for the people in the West, it is cashmere that they know better - goat's wool, which is transformed into a finished product. Clothes are the closest any product has been to humans ever since they were worn, so the people in the West can be excused for knowing cashmere better than Kashmir. But any etymological query on cashmere would have led them to Kashmir – a place, not as warm as cashmere, and certainly not as comfortable.

Far from wool, what is this place called Kashmir? It is a place, located in the midst of the Himalayas, surrounded by India, Pakistan, and China. It has been a place of conflict since 1947, claimed by both India and Pakistan, portions of which have also been annexed by China. Has Kashmir always been disputed? Has it always been sandwiched between nation-states as a piece of land awaiting its fate? A survey of literature suggests the opposite. Kashmir, as a civilization has old roots. Known for its splendid landscapes, the culture (both material and immaterial), Kashmir-the place, is a visitor's dream. But is this place without its people? As Kashmiris (the people of Kashmir) begin to be seen, the pulchritudinous picture begins to disintegrate, the fine pieces of which are blown away by the not-so-mild breeze, awakening the visitor to the reality. A reality where the idyllic culture has been superseded by what has now become the dominant culture of the place – the culture of mourning, and grief. It is a place where its people must be seen to discover Kashmir – the nation.

Kashmir is not a happy story to tell. It would not make a good lullaby. There is pain, torture, and blood — it is grotesque. Why would one want to look at it anyway? This does not make a good picture. It is a nation that has witnessed deceit, sufferings, carried coffins, and dug graves; a nation where mothers are waiting for their (dead) children to return, where mourning has been routinized, where death looms large, where the old bury their young. Zia and Bhat (2019) write, "The blinkers manufactured by India to hide this history are a great disservice not only to Kashmiris but also to the Indian masses" (16). Obscuring the history and masquerading the myths of integrity by 'historicizing' them must not prevent a critical reflection. Kashmir must not be viewed using the colonial gaze. It does not only distort the picture, it turns it into an occulted entity where Kashmir that exists is

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not seen, and the Kashmir that has not been becomes the normative. The discourse of establishing Kashmir as a sight of violence where the perpetrators of violence are exclusively the Kashmiri people must end in order to see the Kashmir that is, that exists, that has been unseen, one that lurks in the dark abyss of subjugated knowledge. Unless methodologically addressed, Kashmir will continue to remain integral to the impudence of subjugation of knowledge.

Before anything, any research on Kashmir should question the very understanding of Kashmir; as to how Kashmir is generally known. Kashmir is more than the beautiful landscapes, lofty mountains, majestic valleys, pristine lakes, and vast meadows. Kashmir is its people too. A deeper, saner refection is needed to find what Kashmir actually is. To understand Kashmir, one must first unlearn all what one has known about Kashmir, as most of what has been narrated about Kashmir may contribute to colonial mendacity. In order to arrive at the reality, a lot of bases have to be unsettled; a preliminary attempt has been made here.

2. Reviewing Literature : Towards a Sociology of Knowledge

There is inarguably a sea of literature to be explored in order to discuss the key themes of this research. In order to investigate into the key themes of this research, a fair bit of literature has been studied. To review is not to merely cite. To review is not to merely quote. Any engagement with literature must come from a conscious thought. Academic rigor must be invoked while reviewing literature. Criticality, as it is an essential component of the review of literature, needs to be employed to find gaps in the works studied. In order to make the review more convenient, this paper offers four sections, based on the four main themes. Each section highlights the core books and articles used to study that theme/concept.

2.1 On Violence

Reviewing literature on violence, in this research, has been pertinent in order to understand the employability of the said concept. In doing so, Fanon's ([1961] 1963), '*The Wretched of the Earth*' has been the most useful, given the context in which it was written. Notable mentions which do not make a part of this review but have been beneficial in understanding violence are : Benjamin ([1921] 2021), Arendt (1970), Sartre (2001), Dodd (2009), Agamben (1998), and Said (1979).

As one thinks of violence, the first thing that comes to mind is bodily harm. To someone like Collins (2008), for 'real' violence to exist, the component of physicality is a must. He out rightly rejects other forms of violence as rhetorical, and maintains they exist only theoretically. It is hard to disagree with Collins if one has not taken the field to look at the scale of violence, wherein physicality is only one of the components. To see beyond the physicality of violence, it is important to look at the possible forms of it. Collins (2008), however, offers us a challenge by arguing that sans real (physical) violence, other forms (e.g. symbolic violence) are merely theoretical and lack, what he calls "confrontational tension and fear... on which pivot all the features of violence when it does occur" (25). Do we then have other perspectives to look at violence? It is important to note that Collins is writing in 2008, and he is critical of Bourdieu's ([1972] 1977) categorization of symbolic violence. Bourdieu did not live long enough to respond to that criticism. For Bourdieu, there is a kind of 'euphemism' which enables symbolic violence to operate. This euphemism causes misrecognition to operate, which acts as a veil, and under which symbolic violence is let loose. He defines symbolic violence as "that form of domination...which is only exerted through the communication in which it is disguised" (237). Slavoj Zizek (2008) extends this concept further where he talks about the symbolically violent forms of representations in literature, drawings, or demonstrations. To Zizek, language itself is violent as it is reductionist in nature. Following the lines of Hegel, he writes, "Language simplifies the designated thing, reducing it to a single feature...It inserts the thing into the field of meaning which is external to it" (61). It is in the making of the other a subject of one's desire in which it (the other) is, through the use of language, vilified and an impermeability of values is maintained that causes symbolic violence to settle into a concrete shape. Resonance of similar viewpoints can be found in Said's (1979) Orientalism, albeit with contextual differences. Given that these forms of violence are operational within a society, and they are well beyond the realms of physicality, what is it that causes the reproduction of these forms of violence? Johan Galtung (1990) is of the view that the operation of physical violence is made to be seen or felt as right or, at the worst, a lesser wrong by having in place a scheme of violence, which he calls cultural violence. By dehumanizing the other, and reducing him/her to a 'dangerous it', it becomes convenient for direct violence to operate. It is in this dehumanization, and the reduction of the other into the category of a dangerous entity (non-person) that cultural violence works. Galtung defines it as, "those aspects of culture... exemplified by religion, ideology, language, art, empirical science, and formal science that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" (291).

Understandably, physical violence is not the only form of violence, at least not theoretically. Once situated in an empirical dimension, the theoretical spectrum changes into an existing one. These forms of violence could then be seen and felt. But is there any form of violence which refuses to fall within the visible spectrum? Zizek (2008) calls it systemic violence. To him, it is like the 'dark matter' – invisible. This is also similar to what Galtung (1969) called structural violence – one carried out indirectly, in absence of an actor. Systemic/structural violence is often unseen, and it is this invisibility of systemic violence that makes it difficult to resist or escape from.

Would the assumption of 'systemic violence incorporating all other forms of violence' be appropriate to find the organizational structure of these forms of violence? Is symbolic violence, when Bourdieu talks about it, actually limitless? Does Zizek see how the use of words, if not language altogether, in its euphemism or objective diversion result in symbolic violence? Although Galtung sees the Israel-Palestine conflict as that of cultural violence, does he situate it in a setting where it is relational with the two other forms that he discusses (direct and structural violence)? Is there a commonality in these forms of violence? Do these forms of violence spring out of the same stream? Fanon ([1961] 1963) answers some of these questions by locating them in the structure of colonialism. For Fanon, the violence in colonies, in all its forms, is because of the colonial occupation. Fanon writes, "The colonial regime owes its legitimacy to force and at no time tries to hide this aspect of things" (66). For him, the violence in the colonies can only be responded with violence. In Fanon's writing one can see how violence is not only about causing physical injury, it is also in words, in humiliation, in denial, and in political subjugation. But how relevant is Fanon in present times? And is the colonial hegemony only the monopoly of the West?

One form of violence in which the physicality of violence, more or less, is an essential component, as discussed by Collins (2008) is that

of destruction of spaces. This, Sari Hanafi (2007) calls spaciocide. He analyzes the violent destruction of the Palestinian spaces by the Israeli regime as a part of its neocolonial project in Palestine. Hanafi (2012) believes that the neocolonial Israeli project in Palestine is predominantly of a spaciocidal character. To him, the killings of the Palestinians, which are in excess of one-hundred-thousand, are a consequence of the spaciocidal project. Can spaciocide occur by the ruthless demolition of spaces alone or are there subtle versions of spaciocide too? Is colonial occupation primarily spaciocidal? What are the possibilities of expanding the concept of spaciocide to analyze various forms of it?

2.2 On Knowledge

Knowledge and power share a relation among themselves; this could be absolute or relative. Bourdieu ([1979] 1984) offers an insightful realm of ideas wherein he discusses the role of legitimization of the knowledge of the powerful. Those who possess the 'cultural capital' and have, through 'legitimized' means, acquired knowledge gain a monopoly over the established knowledge. This legitimization of certain structures, of which school curriculum is one, does not just produce knowledge for the benefit of those possessing the cultural capital but it also reproduces the same structures responsible for such an arrangement. This production of knowledge and reproduction of the structures thereby causes to maintain the distinction between social classes and their attributes of 'taste'. Bourdieu writes, "all knowledge of the social world, is an act of construction implementing schemes of thought and expression..." (467). He believes that this classificatory system is more a means of power than it is of knowledge. This invites one to look critically at any knowledge system, primarily the one dominant in its times.

Michael F. D. Young (1971), in concurrence with the Bourdieusian framework, demonstrates through empirical evidences how certain members of the society get access to knowledge that is regarded as superior by those in power. He finds that the transmission of this 'high value' knowledge takes place through educational establishments only to a chosen few. Young (1971) makes a very powerful statement by writing :

"Those in positions of power will attempt to define what is to be taken as knowledge, how accessible to different groups any knowledge is, and what are the accepted relationships between different knowledge areas and between those who have access to them and make them available" (32).

This classificatory scheme of calling one form of knowledge as superior leads to, what he calls 'stratified knowledge', which in itself also problematizes the criteria of such stratification. Accrediting a superior status to some form of knowledge results in legitimization of a higher status to those possessing it. This accreditation also leads to creation and maintenance of dominant values, and of power structures.

The inseparability of power and knowledge was coherently dealt with by Foucault ([1975] 1977). He could not see a situation where power and knowledge are not in a direct and absolute relation with one another. This inseparability gives rise to a person becoming an object of knowledge upon which power is exercised. Knowledge production, as Foucault argues, is an act of power; this power is reproduced and maintained by the knowledge thus produced. The subjugation of human bodies as objects takes place when they are reduced to such a state to serve the power-knowledge matrix. What is considered true and right also comes from how, by the use of power, a systematic body of knowledge is created which serves the goal of developing objects out of humans upon whom power could be exercised. Foucault ([1975] 1977) writes :

"We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production" (194).

The questions one might ask include: what are the production houses for such knowledge which aim to serve the powerful? How can we understand the tendency to not know? What kind of knowledge overrides another kind of knowledge, and why? How can one understand the complex design of power and knowledge in a neocolonial setting where the vastness of the discourse might suggest it being legitimate? An extension of Foucauldian, Bourdieusian, and Young's analyses of knowledge and power is required in answering these questions.

2.3 On Kashmir

In discussing Kashmir, there is a plethora of literature to be cited and reviewed, part of which deals with its historicity, and a part of which deals with the violence taking place. Because it would make a lengthy review to cite all the works, this section shall deal with only a select few to look at the historicity of the Kashmir conflict, and the trajectory of violence in Kashmir. Of the literature that has been looked at includes Lamb (1991, 1994), Schofield (1996), Korbel (1954), Biscoe (1922), Lawrence (1895), Khan (2014), Bazaz (1954), Duschinski, et al. (2018), Roy, et al. (2011), and numerous other reports by APDP (Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons), JKCCS (Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Societies), Amnesty Internaional, Human Rights Watch, and the United Nations.

Snedden (2015) provides a fairly elaborate account of Kashmir's modern history. He begins by discussing what he means by Kashmiris, and Kashmir. In discussing Kashmir, Snedden cites the historical colonial expansion, and how Kashmir was left to act as a buffer between the two (British and Russian) powerful colonial establishments. He also discusses the rule of the Sikh and Dogra emperors over Kashmir. The historical fallacy of attributing Kashmir's accession to India because of the invasion of the 'raiders' from outside has also been discussed at fair length. Snedden refers to three events that have been subjected to historical erasure which make it clear that it was historically an indigenous movement for independence. These three events occurred between August 15 to October 26, 1947, and they were the "anti-Maharaja uprising in Poonch; inter-religious violence in Jammu province; and the creation of Azad Kashmir" (165). Snedden, towards the end of his work, writes about the possible solution to the Kashmir dispute.

To write about the violence in Kashmir, and to place it appropriately in the context in which it takes place is a challenge, given the nature of the state violence. Yet scholars from within Kashmir, and outside it have produced literature that looks at the unpleasant, lived realities of Kashmir—of violence and fear. In an anthology, complied by Zia and Bhat (2019), various essays reflect the state terror, and the monumental scale of violence spread over Kashmir. From dealing with the deceitful leader—Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, who wronged his own people for generations to come, to questioning the legality of the accession of Kashmir to India, this anthology reflects a side of Kashmir that is not like its tourism advertisement. There is pain in it, there is a reflection of violence and terror. It talks about the accounts of ex-militants, of the violence their families face, the scars of torture that refuse to go (205-223). It reflects on how a young boy could see through the state's meta-narrative and become politically conscious of his own existence (255-267). There is also the poetry of resistance, of hope and pain.

Another anthology, edited by Sanjay Kak (2011), is more about allowing an Indian to see a Kashmir that he/she has not known – the Kashmir that exists. It also has poetry and songs of dissent and resistance. Of particular significance is Natasha Kaul's essay (189-212) that looks at the narratives of the Indian state, beginning from the cartographic falsehood to the demeaning reflection of an average Kashmir in the Indian media. Kaul also discusses how the state, by using the services of Jagmohan (appointed as the governor of Jammu and Kashmir for the second time in 1990) managed to orchestrate what would be known as the 'Pandit exodus' (198-205). The anthology also features other essays highlighting the design of malicious occupation and violence in Kashmir.

Geelani (2019) in a quest to find reasons for the rage in Kashmir attempts to look at Kashmir through a journalist's prism. He looks at the resistance groups of Kashmir, the emerging voices of dissent and rebellion. He is critical of the projection of Kashmiris in the mainstream Indian media. He cites Chomsky (1988) and writes that the manipulative Indian media has projected a side of Kashmir that does not exist. Devadas (2018 : 177-188), an Indian journalist uses his partially Indian prism to look at Kashmir. He does see violence and 'a few bad apples' but he is suggestive of silencing the voices of dissent by pacification. While he does acknowledge that there has been violence on part of the state machinery, he gets sucked into (or chooses to sink into) the Indian way of looking at Kashmir, which fundamentally sees Kashmir as integral to it. Suhail (2018:156) looks at the occupation of land by the NHPC (National Hydroelectric Power Corporation) and the displacement caused by it. This occupation, he believes has caused economic de-development in the region alongside causing irreparable damage to the ecology. NHPC is one of the largest hydroelectric power corporations in India, and its establishment in Kashmir is one of economic loot of the resources. Suhail cites a report which figures the profit that the corporation made between 2001-2015 at over 194 billion rupees (2.7 billion dollars).

These works look at aspects of violence that are visible and manifest. But are there not forms of violence in Kashmir that are deeply embedded in the structure, making it difficult to observe? Is violence just an occurrence of a conflict, or a land dispute between India and Pakistan, or is there more to it? Is India fighting the militants in Kashmir or are the rebels fighting for the right to be free?

2.4 On the Impact of Violence on Families

An ex-militant in an interview said, "Our families are not allowed a normal life. We are not issued any passports, nor given any government jobs..." (Qanungo, 2019 : 218). A mother whose son was killed by the government-sponsored gunmen would wake up at night, carry a shovel in her hand, and walk towards the graveyard. When intercepted, she said, "Leave me. I want to see my son's face" (Zahir u din, 2019 : 66).

Bowlby (1983) suggests that a family requires homeostatic adjustments once a death in a family has taken place. Of these homeostatic adjustments are enmeshment, obsessive paranoia, idealization, infantilization, pathology, and restructuring. These adjustments could be defined either by religion or culture. Fazili (2016) suggests that there is a role reversal at the time of grieving in Kashmir, causing a gendered restructuring. The impact of violence does not just affect the one directly affected by violence, but all those who relate to him as it hampers the family functioning and increases the likelihood of manifestation of psychological disorders among the members of the family (Krenawi and Graham, 2012). Families affected by violence undergo many changes, which include lack of interaction (Barber, 1999). Weingarten (2004 : 14) writes that through silence, trauma could enter other members of the family. "Silence can communicate a wealth of meanings. It is its own map : Don't go there; don't say that; don't touch; too much; too little; this hurts; this doesn't". She further mentions that even warning children about not doing something which might cause them harm can inversely terrify them. In a family where the loss is common, it could at times result in, what Volkan (2001) calls, chosen trauma, which is transgenerational. But one might ask what violence does it take for the families to be negatively impacted? Is it only the death or the killing of a family member that reinforces enmeshment?

3. Decolonizing Methodologies : A Humanistic Inquiry

When it comes to the selection of methodology/methodologies, there are a few things that occupy a pivotal position in determining the most appropriate methodology. First and foremost, the type of research that the researcher has taken up. The research question determines the complexities of the research, its nature, and the kind of methods required to gather the essential data. It, in a way, is suggestive of a particular methodology or a set of methodologies. A research question, at times, dismisses the operation of certain methodologies, for example, if a researcher intends to study the students' perspective of the structure of the university, wherein he/she aims to study the pattern of the interaction as well; in such a case, the positivist methodology would not be a great prism to have. The knowledge of positivism, however, can enhance the study, but to solely rest the research on a positivist methodology would not allow the researcher to find the intricacies of the research problem. Not only does a methodology offer a prism through which we see our research problem and approach it, but it also helps us in understanding that problem by offering a systematic design to study it.

The methodological questions, while dealing with a research project that involves complexities in the manner of how it must be viewed, become important, more so because such projects are often susceptible to be branded as nonobjective. Undertaking a research on Kashmir and attempting to study violence would need a methodological rigor unless the research has to only be an opinionated summary. The primary question here is that how is Kashmir seen in this research work. In socio/anthropological work, the essence (if that is the correct word to use) of the research lies in how the universe of study is seen by the researcher. Often, as have colonial anthropologists done best, researches are made a means to serve a greater motive of classifying people, and cementing the dominant narrative. The 'normative' that is thus established must be looked at critically, for there has been a very sketchy process that has gone into the making of this normative. When it comes to understanding Kashmir-the place, a researcher must be wary of the dominant narratives that have caused to form, what is now, the mainstream knowledge on Kashmir. It becomes pertinent to desist from following the same path, and engaging in an exercise that leads to further subjugation of knowledge.

The challenge of undertaking a research work on Kashmir starts with not falling prey to the dominant discourses-which are coalesced with the historical misunderstanding of Kashmir. To not do that involves an extensive study of literature. Kashmir, to understand it correctly, involves seeing it in its actual location. To view Kashmir with any preconceived notion is to engage in a practice of colonial knowledge production. To choose to wear that lens and study Kashmir is to serve the interests of colonial anthropology, and prove scholars like Linda Thuwai Smith ([1999] 2021), Marianna Torgovnick (1990), Haunani Kay Trask (1993), and others right, who suggest that the disciplines such as anthropology/sociology have often served to further the colonial expansion. The mainstream narrative on Kashmir is one of historical amnesia. Abiding by that narrative would result in further foreclosure of the Kashmiri people. To quote Smith ([1999] 2021 : 67), "The history of the colonies, from the perspective of the colonizers, has effectively denied other views of what happened and what the significance of historical 'facts' may be to the colonized".

Linda Thuwai Smith's 'Decolonizing Methodologies' becomes very helpful in understanding the context in which it becomes essential to decolonize methodologies and the techniques of data collection while studying a place like Kashmir. To decolonize methodologies is to understand theory and research from the point of view of the native. Smith ([1999] 2021) is referring to the indigenous people of New Zealand-the Maori, who have been studied as the objects of research wherein they are seen as those who cannot contribute to the research. As Smith ([1999] 2021 : 61) writes, "it is simply impossible, ridiculous even, to suggest that the object of research can contribute to anything. An object has no life force, no humanity, no spirit of its own, so therefore 'it' cannot make an active contribution". This worldview has to change, more so when the subjects of research are the colonized people who have been rendered voiceless over decades of brutal oppression. In Kashmir, this issue gets compounded because it is not a place that had been colonized in the past and is now independent, and needs to counter those narratives of the colonial period; Kashmir is a place that is embedded in a neocolonial web wherein the indigenous production of knowledge about Kashmir and its people has been subjugated. It continues to remain a challenge to produce literature on Kashmir that represents the voices of the people of Kashmir. With appropriate methodologies, which are decolonized in the manner as Smith ([1999] 2021) suggests, one can engage in research on Kashmir that represents Kashmiris not as objects of research, rendered as such by the colonial gaze of an anthropologist, but as active participants who contribute to the making of the research.

4. Conclusion

This paper attempts to offer a methodological position that researchers can employ in order to engage in sociological/ anthropological work that does not foreclose the people under investigation. In doing so, a researcher will avoid succumbing to forces of epistemic violence (Spivak, 1999). It highlights how the lack of exposure to decolonizing methodologies can shift the focus of violence in which the victim can become the perpetrator. Undertaking an investigation which uses decolonizing methodologies prevents the researcher from reducing his/her respondents to merely objects of study. This paper does not lay claim on any definitive findings, and only suggests an approach that is situationally appropriate to studying sociology of violence and sociology of knowledge. It makes a researcher aware of the context in which the research is being undertaken. It also helps a researcher to not fall prey to the already existing narratives that could have emerged out of epistemically violent modes of knowledge formation. While engaging in research that employs decolonizing methodologies, one can also come close to addressing Fanon's ([1961] 1963) anguish, which he expressed when he wrote, "For the native, objectivity is always directed against him" (61).

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