

**WHAT IS PATRIARCHY AND
WHY IS IT THE MOST POWERFUL FORCE
IN THE WORLD TODAY?**

INTRODUCTION

This paper paints a broad picture of patriarchy, a worldwide system that predates recorded history and exists today as the world's most powerful force, trumping other ideologies or political systems or religious beliefs. By definition, it is rooted in the subjugation of women. Moreover, an argument is set forth here to show that the male violence necessary to control women is linked to the ability of elite patriarchs to wage war.

Exactly when this system established its pre-eminence is not yet known, but it is clear that for thousands of years, men have ruled tribes, clans, city-states, kingdoms, sheikdoms, and empires as well as the nation-states of the modern era. Patriarchal cultures uphold the privileges of men through social mores, religious practices, legal codes, and political organizations.

The system has experienced setbacks, regained some lost ground, reasserted control after resistance to it weakened, but in a relentless pursuit for world domination by one or another of its factions, its power remains unchallenged, partly because it is not explicitly recognized. The patriarchal code spans the artificial divisions of today's nations and, as their predecessors did for centuries, leaders like the G-8 confer, bargain, disagree, threaten one another, and engage in armed conflict.

“To the victor belong the spoils” is as true today as it was many millennia ago. In an unbroken line through recorded history, patriarchs have tried to take by force what does not belong to them whether it has been the territory of a rival power or of a weaker nation; they have fought over natural resources, for slave labor and for low-wage labor; and for economic, social, and political control of another’s turf.

In a *quid pro quo* arrangement lower-echelon men pledge allegiance to a nation as they once vowed loyalty to a tribe in return for a stake in a system that gives them not only privileges, but also the power to dominate women. This exchange is of extraordinary benefit to the elite patriarchs for it keeps the people of the world fighting one another rather than recognizing their common interests.

The very first step in developing strategies for achieving a non-violent world based on economic justice, social and political equality, and peace is to recognize the existence of this ruthless universal system.

PATRIARCHY, MEN, AND MALE CULTURE

Even though men are privileged under patriarchy, some men are more privileged than others. These differences vary according to the culture with its particular class subsystems and, of course, the castes based on physical characteristics like skin color and sex that cannot be changed or on religion or lineage. Women within the subsystems always occupy a lower status than their male counterparts. [A woman who is attached to an upper-class man may have a better life in a material sense than lower-class men and women, but she may be physically or emotionally abused. If she displeases her father or husband she can find herself relegated almost overnight to a life of poverty or prostitution.] In any case, it is male privilege in all its gradations that is the glue that keeps the patriarchal system intact.

A male’s privilege begins during his mother’s pregnancy when his family expresses the age-old preference for a boy, especially if the baby is to be the first. In some religions a pregnancy offers the family the possibility of giving the world a second messiah if the baby turns out to be a boy. In many cultures, if a man does not father a son his virility is questioned. In contrast, the patriarchal system makes a daughter a liability since it requires

that she be married, a status that normally affords her little possibility of economically benefiting her family of origin.

Male privilege also means that a male fetus stands little chance of being aborted or, if a male baby, of having his life snuffed out at birth, of being abandoned, of being given less than his share of the family's food or of receiving less medical attention or less education than his siblings. A United Nations report on the state of the world's population underscores this stark reality for girls: “At least 60 million girls who would otherwise be expected to be alive are ‘missing’ from various populations, mostly in Asia, as a result of sex-selected abortions, infanticide or neglect.”ⁱ

In the People's Republic of China, some couples have committed female infanticide in order to get around a strict ban limiting families to one child that was imposed by Chinese authorities in 1980 for the purpose of population control. Others tried to keep a second pregnancy a secret, or simply abandoned their daughters. Sons have long been regarded as a security program for parents' old age since daughters go to live with their husbands' families. Consequently, 95% of the children available for adoption in China are girls.ⁱⁱ

Female infanticide is also a problem in India. Midwives report that under intense pressure from families, they are often forced to end a newborn girl's life. Since the nineteen seventies the abortion rate has shot up when first the amniocentesis procedure and then ultrasound, both of which can reveal the sex of a fetus, became widely available. Even though legislation has been passed that outlaws these procedures for sex-selected abortions, the practice is still widespread.ⁱⁱⁱ

Actually, it *is* our reproductive function that sealed our fate. Rosalind Miles, author of *Who Cooked The Last Supper?*, is one of several feminist historians to offer evidence for the hypothesis that for thousands of years, long before the advent of record keeping, we women were revered, icons in our image worshipped, because it was thought that we *alone* performed the miracle of bringing forth new life. As incredible as it may seem, the ancients saw no connection between sexual intercourse and the birth of an infant. Throughout a long stretch of human life on earth, the goddess reigned supreme with men being seen as having no part in the perpetuation of the species.^{iv}

The brutal subjugation of women that spread across continents over a period of several centuries began at the point when men realized that they, too, played a part in procreation. This realization may have come about as tribes settled in one place for longer periods of time, living together in larger groups, planting crops, and domesticating animals. But it is clear that the proliferation of phallic symbols, some remarkable for their size, indicated the arrival in culture after culture of this critical bit of knowledge and signaled an end to the primacy of the female.^v

Miles quotes Jean Markdale: “When man began to assert that he was essential to fertilization, the old mental attitudes suddenly collapsed. This was a very important revolution in man’s history, and it is astonishing that it is not rated equally with the wheel, agriculture, and the use of metals . . . As the male had been cheated for centuries . . . equality was not enough. He now understood the full implications of his power, and was going to dominate.”^{vi}

Along with the discovery that he was “essential to fertilization,” man began to realize that by subjugating women he could control and profit from it. “This new mode of production, however, was made possible by two things: the monopoly of men over arms, and the long observation of the reproductive behaviours of animals. As men began to manipulate the reproductive behaviour of animals, they discovered their own generative functions. This led to a change in their relation to nature as well as a change in the sexual division of labour. For pastoral nomads, women are no longer very important as producers or gatherers of food, as is the case among hunters. They are needed as breeders of children, particularly of sons. Their productivity is now reduced to their ‘fertility’ which is appropriated and controlled by men (cf. Fisher, 1979: 248ff).”^{vii}

Consequently, over a span of hundreds of years, as Miles explains, a woman’s place in life on earth sank from the highest level to the lowest — from being glorified to being reviled. The idols that represented the old forms of worship were destroyed and replaced with new ones. Over time new monotheistic religions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — plus Buddhism and Confucianism replaced the old pantheon of gods and goddesses. These new beliefs all featured the male as the key figure. Some claimed that there was one God who had made man in His image, making a man superior to a woman. Judaism and Christianity claimed women’s sins were of such a magnitude that they could never be

expiated.^{viii} Men trumpeted the message, “We are in charge and don’t you forget it,” that has sounded down through the ages.

With the exception of menses, the complicated process of ovulation and conception are hidden from view and, therefore, were not part of the equation. Men began to market procreation in a novel way: the womb, men now claimed, was merely a vessel for the protection of their semen as it developed into new life or, put another way, a man planted his seed in the womb’s soil.^{ix} This concept prevailed until the nineteenth century when scientists discovered genes. Consequently, it was almost inevitable that the producer of the all-important seed would claim ownership of what came forth from the womb. [This is the backdrop for the present-day anti-abortion movement’s focus on the fetus with its lack of concern for the mother.]

Women, then, like slaves, became valuable property. Gerda Lerner in her seminal work, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, writes, “The ‘invention of slavery’ involves the development of techniques of permanent enslavement and of the concept, in the dominant as well as in the dominated, that permanent powerlessness on the one side and total power on the other are acceptable conditions of social interaction . . . Historical evidence suggests that this process of enslavement was at first developed and perfected upon female war captives; that it was reinforced by already known practices of marital exchange and concubinage. During long periods, perhaps centuries, while enemy males were being killed by their captors or severely mutilated or transported to isolated and distant areas, females and children were made captives and incorporated into the households and society of the captors.

“Since their male kin had been slaughtered, these captives could have no hope of rescue or escape. The process of dishonoring could in the case of women be combined with the final act of male dominance, the rape of captive women. If a woman had been captured with her children, she would submit to whatever conditions her captors imposed in order to secure the survival of her children. If she had no children her rape or sexual use would soon tend to make her pregnant, and experience would show the captors that women would endure enslavement and adapt to it in the hope of saving their children and eventually improving their lot.”^x

Can there be any doubt that this span of history saw the inextricable linkage of sex and power that survives in male culture to this day? And we see, as well, that rape, early on, was an act that asserted, and could be used to reassert, male dominance. One wonders whether the very first battles between tribes were, in fact, battles to gain possession of women even before men’s role in procreation was recognized. Even then, more women meant more warriors would be produced for the tribe. Women captives also meant more hands for all of the tasks that have been known down through the ages as “women’s work.”

As property, we women could easily be mistreated and abused, traded or given away, bought and sold, not only into marriage, but trafficked into prostitution. Even in the so-called enlightened or advanced societies, male culture finds it difficult to distinguish between rape and consensual sex because a man’s preferences under patriarchy carry so much weight and a woman’s so little. In most places in the world we are still forced to bear children whether or not our lives are endangered, whether or not we can feed them, and whether or not we want them. What men want remains the top priority. (Throughout history, a few women, usually upper-class women, have been able to escape this yoke, through the acquiescence of a father, husband, or son, and some have come to wield power, usually exercising it according to the patriarchal code.)

In many cultures, a close emotional tie between mother and son is frowned upon. Boys approaching puberty are pulled away from their mother’s influence for fear that they will emerge into adulthood too sensitive and empathic to be “real men.” Down through the ages, patriarchs have projected a masculine ideal, a desirable identity, that fits patriarchal objectives.

The authors of *Lives Together, Worlds Apart*, write, “Men’s attitudes and behaviours are strongly influenced by societal expectations about what it means to be a man:

“A ‘real man’ acts, he is not the object of action: he is demanding or aggressive in articulating his desires and striving toward his goals. His proper sphere of action is economic or political, not domestic or familial:

A ‘real man’ is the head of his family. He provides for his household, but he is entitled to use his resources as he chooses. He may choose personal pleasure above family expenses;

A ‘real man’ is strong. He does not recognize or admit uncertainty — a sign of weakness;

Emotion may also be a sign of weakness. A ‘real man’ therefore admits little concern for his partner’s wishes, pleasure or well-being. He does not readily attend to the emotional, as opposed to the instrumental, aspects of relationships.”^{xi}

A major problem, then, is that men “who — consciously or unconsciously — measure their lives against such stereotypes set themselves up for failure, difficulty in family relationships and unreasonable stress.”^{xii}

This view of being a “real man” can have an affect on male culture in an area like South America: “In Brazil, boys learn that being sexually active is an important part of being a man. A ‘man’ must be sexually active and financially secure. For most boys, becoming sexually active is easier than finding a job, so sexual conquests are one of the few ways that they can assert their masculinity. Boys learn about male norms from other males. Friends, uncles, male neighbours, even fathers tease and encourage boys to become sexually active and refer to them as homosexuals if they do not.”^{xiii}

In North America, the ideal is known as “the strong, silent type” that requires “suppression of a range of emotions, needs, and possibilities, such as pleasure in caring for others, receptivity, empathy, and compassion, which are experienced as inconsistent with masculine power. The emotions and needs do not disappear but are not allowed expression. The persistence of emotions and needs not associated with masculinity is in itself a great source of fear. Such hidden pain may be expressed in aggression against others or against themselves.”^{xiv}

Myriam Miedzian, in *Boys Will Be Boys*, summarizes the effect of this socialization: “Men who are guided by the values of the masculine mystique find it difficult to develop deep emotional bonds not only with their wives and children, but also with other men. *The hollow quality of their lives is then alleviated by the excitement and camaraderie of war.*”^{xv} [Italics mine]

Patriarchy and Women

The institution of marriage has been a key factor in the subordination of women. This institution effectively divides the world into two spheres: the private realm and the public arena. The overwhelming majority of the world's women live out their lives in this private realm where each husband reigns supreme in his own patriarchal fiefdom. Over the centuries women have been allowed on the fringes of the public arena in order to sell produce at a neighborhood market, to work as servants, or to labor in factories where they have been super-exploited or, additionally, in more recent times, to be teachers, nurses, secretaries or social workers under the careful supervision of men. Gains have been made in the latter part of the twentieth century at breaking down the barriers to male-dominated occupations, professions, and political office, but, by and large, the public arena has been posted with a Men Only sign.

By parceling out the services of one or more females to each man, marriage rewarded men early on for their allegiance to, and for their willingness to fight for, the patriarchy. Marriage also successfully settles disputes among men about who has the right to which woman. Fidelity is a primary obligation of wives because husbands want a guarantee concerning the paternity of their children. Male culture, however, allows men to enjoy a double standard. With the growing prevalence of the nuclear family as well as more mobile families, marriage isolates women from each other even more than in the past, a condition that distinguishes us in that respect from other oppressed groups.

The marriage ceremony serves as a mechanism for transferring property from one man to another. In some religious ceremonies, for example, the minister traditionally asks, “Who giveth this woman to this man?” and the bride's father responds, “I do.” English law, like the Bible, maintained that husband and wife were one, and that one was the husband who supposedly acted in the best interests of both, leaving the wife with no legal standing. Among wealthier males marriage has been a way to increase their assets. Along with patrimony, the practice of leaving everything to the oldest son, marriage helped create the wealth for the European aristocracies. “A man's home is his castle” is no idle adage because in most of the world, the husband is the dominant figure in the household.

The patriarchal family, then, forms the basic unit for

maintaining social order, training and socializing children for the gender roles, unequal as they are, that they will have when grown. Many daughters learn at a young age to cope with emotional and physical abuse, and to perform the endless tasks involved in the care of a family. By emulating their mothers, they do not see it as out of the ordinary that when they, too, become wives and mothers, they are not paid for this work. Is it any wonder that both children and adults often harbor resentment, experience psychological problems, and endure severe stress from this unhealthy arrangement?

The stigma of homosexuality has been kept alive through the centuries because homosexual relationships undermine the subordination of women through the institution of marriage. In homosexual relationships one partner is not entitled by the patriarchal code to be dominant over the other; one partner is not confined to the private sphere while the other has access to the public arena. These relationships provide models that threaten the patriarchal paradigm.

The perception of women as property has been responsible for the most abhorrent practices of the patriarchy. Property, of course, is bought and sold, depending on factors of supply and demand. In some cultures, the bride's father offers a dowry to the family of the prospective son-in-law in order to save himself and his family from the social disgrace of an unmarried daughter and from the financial burden of her support. The Indian Ministry of Women and Child Development reports that in that country fourteen wives are murdered every day by their husbands' families — murders that are driven by economic desperation or by pure greed.^{xvi}

In other cultures, it is the prospective groom who pays, bargaining with the father until the two settle on a “bride's price.” This may be a cow or a couple of pigs. The younger the bride, the higher the price since male culture places a premium value on virginity. A woman who is not a virgin is considered to be “used goods” and that holds even if she has been raped. We may recall that this cult of virginity required that Princess Diana undergo a medical examination before her marriage to Prince Charles to assure the royal family that he would be the first. The virginity cult is being given new life in the United States by the “abstention until marriage” pledge. In some Caribbean cultures, men compete to be the first to have sex with a girl entering puberty. Often, before she is out of her teens, she has

become one of several women who have children by the same man who provides only a minimal existence for each family.

In the United States as well as elsewhere, men can order a bride through the mail from countries like the Philippines, Vietnam, the Ukraine and Russia. In India, poor men have devised a new money-making scheme — renting their wives through an agent for a monthly fee to higher-caste men who cannot find brides because of the gender selection practices that have been in place for thirty years.^{xvii}

“Women’s sexuality is often feared,” report the authors of *Lives Together, Worlds Apart*, “and is the subject of bizarre and ferocious myths . . .”^{xviii} Patriarchs have used religions to propagate myths, often to women who, as has been noted, tend to be uneducated. The most egregious example of such a myth is the practice of female genital mutilation that is practiced in sub-Saharan Africa, parts of the Middle East and the Far East and is being taken by its adherents into Europe and the United States. A female circumcisor in Kenya explained why it is done: “When you cut a girl, you know that she will remain pure until she gets married, and that after marriage, she will be faithful. But when you leave a girl uncut, she sleeps with any man in the community.”^{xix} This practice would end immediately, however, if prospective husbands stopped demanding it. Women have experienced the horror of the chastity belt of medieval Europe as well as the painful practice of foot binding in China that probably began in the tenth century and lasted for a thousand years because young women who had bound feet had better prospects for marriage than those who didn’t.

“Honor” killings are on the rise worldwide,” according to a United Nations report. “Throughout the world, perhaps as many as 5000 women and girls a year are murdered by members of their own families, many of them for the “dishonor” of having been raped, often as not by a member of their own extended family.”^{xx}

These assassinations have the same causes as domestic violence does here in the United States. An issue of Mother Jones magazine notes, “31 percent of women slain in this country are murdered by husbands, boyfriends, or exes — the majority killed after attempting to leave an abusive relationship.”^{xxi} More than one murderer has announced, “If I can’t have her then nobody will.” Around the world, men beat and murder women who either defy, or

are perceived as defying, their control. For lower-status men, in particular, the power to dominate a woman may be the only power they feel they have.

For at least four millennia, then, we women, like servants or slaves, have been dependent on the good will of our fathers, husbands, brothers, sons, and male in-laws since in most cultures we have few, if any, legal rights. Even in the self-proclaimed bastion of freedom and democracy women’s rights are still not guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. Where we women do have legal rights, they tend not to be enforced, because ingrained cultural beliefs are supported by the patriarchy.

The threat of death is certainly an intimidating factor in the lives of many women and rape, which is often a prelude to death, continues to be a powerful weapon in perpetuating our subjugation. Gerda Lerner clarifies the role that rape played early on, “The impact on the conquered of the rape of conquered women was twofold: it dishonored the women and by implication served as a symbolic castration of their men. Men in patriarchal societies who cannot protect the sexual purity of their wives, sisters, and children are truly impotent and dishonored. The practice of raping the women of a conquered group has remained a feature of warfare and conquest from the second millennium B.C. to the present. It is a social practice which, like the torture of prisoners, has been resistant to ‘progress,’ to humanitarian reforms, and to sophisticated moral and ethical considerations. I suggest that this is the case because it is a *practice built into and essential to the structure of patriarchal institutions and inseparable from them*. [Italics mine] It is at the beginning of the system, prior to class formation, that we can see this in its purest essence.”^{xxii}

Rape, then, is a way of humiliating enemies by defiling “their property.” The plight of black women in the Darfur region of southern Sudan typifies this use of rape. They are caught up in an on-going conflict there, suffering twice, first from being raped by the Janjaweed militia forces from the Arab north and by being shunned afterwards by their families. The children born as a result of these rapes will be stigmatized throughout their lives. One Darfurian woman reported that the lighter-skinned Arabs who gang-raped her arrogantly told her, “We want to change the color of your children.”^{xxiii} Unbelievable as it may seem, the United Nations is investigating accusations of rape against their international peacekeepers serving in countries such as Haiti and Congo.^{xxiv}

Rape is also used to punish a family when a tribal council orders that a daughter be raped, making her marriage impossible because she is no longer a virgin. In a widely-publicized case, a tribal council ordered Mukhtar Mai, a very courageous Pakistani woman, to be gang-raped in retribution for the alleged association of her younger brother with a girl from a tribe of a higher caste.

Rape has been the penalty that women pay for men’s behavior, criminal or otherwise, as we have seen in Mukhtar Mai’s case. She was raped to pay for her *brother’s* violation of the patriarchal code because his action cast doubt on the purity of the other family’s daughter. This practice of meting out an eye-for-an-eye justice by “damaging the goods” of another man can be traced back through the centuries to hundreds of years before the birth of Christ. The Hammurabic Code of that period also allowed a husband to indenture his wife and children in payment of a debt.^{xxv} Even today, in some countries like Romania, for instance, women are still forced by intense community pressure to marry their rapists, thereby absolving the rapist of any criminal activity.

Rape is also an outlet for some men’s aggressive attitudes of entitlement that are cultivated and prized by the patriarchy. Even within marriage rape is used to show who’s boss since most countries do not consider it a crime when a husband rapes his wife.

PATRIARCHY AND WAR

Many veterans consider the male bonding that occurred during military conflicts to have been the peak emotional experience of their lives. Men’s defenses against acknowledging deeply-felt needs are broken down in the thick of battle as fear forces them to realize that they must depend on one another to stay alive. In *Boys Will Be Boys*, Myriam Miedzian shares an insight into this phenomenon, “. . . according to J. Glenn Gray [a sociologist and World War II veteran] the intense feelings of power, excitement, delight in destruction, and camaraderie that many men experience in war are reactions to the boredom and lack of meaningful goals in their own lives.”^{xxvi}

However, as previously noted, the emotional side of men that would allow the establishment of “meaningful goals” and for the growth of loving bonds is crippled by the

male identity that is promoted, fostered, and rewarded by the patriarchy. In other words, the need of the patriarchy for a male population that can easily be trained to be violent, to fight, and to kill is in direct opposition to the need of us women and our children for compassionate, emotionally-healthy, socially-oriented men that reject and boycott war, recognizing it for the sociopathic behavior that it is.

The patriarchy diverts the emotional makeup of males away from familial needs. Early on in man's history, the patriarchal code demanded loyalty to the tribe. Now, the code can demand loyalty to one's country. This loyalty, which we call patriotism and which has the same Latin root as patriarchy, divides the world into “us” and “them,” infusing the “us” with a narrow-minded, nationalistic hubris, and blinding “us” to the horrors that we inflict on “them.” At a time when a population needs to be thinking about what would be in the best interests of both “us” and “them”, patriotism focuses attention on “us.”

The pennants that kings held aloft on battlefields of old have now become national flags. Just as Pavlov's dogs were trained to salivate at the ringing of a bell, the waving of the flag cues men to get juiced up for war. Nationalistic music like the Star-Spangled Banner, the anthem of the United States, which was actually written during a battle, is a paean to our flag, Old Glory.

Oaths, pledging loyalty to king and country, are still in force. For years children throughout the United States began their school day by reciting, “I pledge allegiance to our flag and to the Republic for which it stands...” Public ceremonies often begin with the pledge. At critical times, US patriarchs have required intellectuals such as academics, teachers, librarians, writers as well as civil servants, and public figures to sign an oath to assure the patriarchs of their loyalty.

Medals that recognize heroism in battle are often treasured, despite being meager compensation for the wounds of war, for emotional trauma, or for the loss of life itself that service to the patriarchy requires. Uniforms foster group cohesiveness and identify those who wear them for special attention. Today, even sports have become more militaristic as teams treat the other side, not as friendly competitors, but as the enemy.

Patriotism comes wrapped in an emotionally-appealing package of symbols, dress uniforms, rites and ceremonies, awards, privileges, honors, admiration, and even religious approbation that effectively lays the basis for a patriarchal appeal to go to war.

Rather than using holidays to bring people together to strategize about working for a peaceful world we in the United States, for example, use them to reinforce patriotism and militarism. On Memorial Day flags and wreaths commemorate past wars and those who died fighting in them. We celebrate Flag Day, Veterans Day, and Armed Forces Day. But we have no Peace Day. (The legislation that curbs our civil rights is called the Patriot Act.)

Patriotism primes lower-status men to be warriors, obligating them to carry out their end of their simple but devilish bargain: in exchange for the privilege of dominating women they will put their lives on the line for the patriarchy. Sometimes war upends that bargain. World War II vets found that they could not return to ruling the roost because their wives in their absence had grown accustomed to making decisions on their own. This is now happening to veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq. The result is more violence among military families.

Violence by military men is directed at both family members and female service members. The rates of violence in the military [are] two to five times higher than among civilians, depending on which study is consulted.^{xxvii} In domestic violence cases, “batterers in the military are typically ordered into anger-management classes . . . These anger-treatment models are not very successful because this is not an illness,” explains attorney Juley Fulcher. “It’s an attitude. It’s about people feeling like they’re entitled to do this to their wives. The day you start seeing these guys go after their commanding officer because they’re pissed off and they can’t control their anger, we’ll rethink our theory.”^{xxviii}

When one or another faction of the patriarchy wants another war, it has to know how to generate support for it. At the end of World War II, a British writer interviewed Hermann Göring, Hitler’s Field Marshall, in his prison cell. Göring noted a potential snag, “Why would some poor slob on a farm want to risk his life in a war when the best that he can get out of it is to come back to his farm in one piece?” Exactly. But the patriarchal code disallows “the poor slob” from asking this question. Göring continues, “Naturally the common people don’t want war, but after all, it is the leaders of a country who determine the policy, and it is

always a simple matter to drag people along whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship... voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. This is easy. All you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country.”^{xxix}

Claiming that Saddam Hussein was preparing to attack us, George W. Bush lied to the American people and to the rest of the world in order to frighten us and to attempt to legitimize his actions since under international law it is permissible for a nation to wage war if it is threatened with imminent attack. Bush tried to show that Saddam Hussein was planning to attack the United States, but the evidence was weak and proved to be false. Bush also pursued to no avail the only other avenue for legalizing his war: asking the United Nations to authorize a collective action.

George W. Bush, however, was not the first American president to lie about an attack. President Roosevelt knew that the Japanese fleet was on its way to Pearl Harbor, but was willing to let 2300 men and women die in order to jumpstart our entry into World War II. President Johnson manufactured the Gulf of Tonkin incident to pressure Congress into giving him the authority to do what he thought was necessary to “win” in Vietnam. President Reagan claimed that Nicaragua would invade the United States if Congress did not authorize funds to aid the counterrevolutionaries who were trying to restore patriachs to power in that poor beleaguered country.

Throughout the Cold War, US patriachs kept insisting, “The Russians are coming,” even when there was no credible evidence that this was the case. As late in the Cold War as 1986, the American Broadcasting Corporation put on a four-part television series that dramatized what life would be like if the Soviets occupied our country. These false charges proved useful in advancing the economic interests of corporate patriachs by scaring the American people into continuing a war economy, spending huge sums on manufacturing weapons, stationing troops abroad, paying for two wars in Asia, and funding covert interventions in other nations by the CIA.

In one study it was found that the leaders who took their countries to war, whether they ruled by divine right or were democratically elected, stayed in power longer than those who managed to keep the peace.^{xxx}

PATRIARCHY AND IMPERIALISM

With its mandatory income differentials, capitalism fit the iron hand of patriarchy with its class and race divisions like a velvet glove. Imperialism, the unavoidable extension of capitalism, easily melded with the objectives of the patriarchal elite.

The institution of marriage, in particular, has provided the capitalists with a cost-free means of caring for its labor force as well as with the means of replacing it. In addition, women, married or unmarried, have little opportunity to provide for more than a subsistence existence for their families. They make up a bottomless pool of unpaid as well as cheap labor. By 1997, the United Nations had estimated that women and their children perform two-thirds of the world's work, but receive a mere 5% of its income.^{xxxii} Obviously, the profit that results from this super exploitation is enormous.

By means of the World Trade Organization, corporate behemoths are rapidly usurping the sovereignty of nations to govern their own affairs such as making trade agreements on their own terms. Leaders of the largest consortia, corporations, and banks direct the finances of the world, particularly those of the underdeveloped countries through entities like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The results have been of little benefit to the peoples who inhabit this planet.

Yet, as Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith point out, these leaders are advocating for the same “economic theories, strategies, and policies that have proven to be spectacularly unsuccessful over the past decades wherever they've been applied. In fact, these are the very ideas that have brought us to the grim situation of the moment: the spreading disintegration of the social order and the increase of poverty, landlessness, homelessness, violence, alienation, and, deep within the hearts of many people, extreme anxiety about the future. Equally important, these are the practices that have led us to the near breakdown of the natural world, as evidenced by such symptoms as global climate

change, ozone depletion, massive species loss, and near maximum levels of air, soil, and water pollution.

“We are now being asked to believe that the development processes that have further impoverished people and devastated the planet will lead to diametrically different and highly beneficial outcomes, if only they can be accelerated and applied everywhere, freely, without restriction, that is, when they are *globalized*.”^{xxxii}

PATRIARCHY AND RELIGION

Over the past several decades, researchers have worked at uncovering our past, putting together the bits and pieces to make women’s history whole, revealing the enormity of our subjugation that globalization now demands we view in a worldwide context. Today’s feminists search religious texts to find and interpret passages to show that the founders of the major male-centered religions were not misogynists, but that their ideas were ignored, distorted, or revised in order to conform to the patriarchal code.

Initially, Rosalind Miles claims, many women had hoped that the new religions would accord them better treatment than they were receiving under patriarchy. Mills notes, “Now the individual mattered, to a god who cared about her and her potential: ‘I am thy God,’ declared Jehovah, ‘walk before me and be thou perfect.’ And for the believer — but *only* for the believer — the reward was nothing less than paradise.”^{xxxiii}

“Equally important, though, to India and China respectively, were Buddhism and Confucianism, both of which arose with the birth of their human founders and spread far and fast from these deceptively modest origins. Neither Buddha nor Confucius ever claimed to be divine, and their teachings are properly understood as value systems rather than as religions proper. But the foundations of their beliefs were uncompromisingly patriarchal; the founders themselves have been worshipped as gods by their followers throughout history; and the ideologies of both these systems have had a remarkably similar impact on women’s lives to that of religions organized around a central concept of a Father God.”^{xxxiv}

Karen Armstrong affirms this development within Islam. In regard to the women of the first *ummah* in Medina, she writes, “They did not seem to have experienced Islam as an

oppressive religion, though later, as happened in Christianity, men would hijack the faith and bring it into line with the prevailing patriarchy.”^{xxxv}

Thus the patriarchs anointed themselves as the interpreters of “the Word.” Centuries later, in colonial New England, for example, Puritan fathers persecuted and then exiled Anne Hutchinson for her belief that *any* person is capable of having a direct one-on-one relationship with God.

After injecting their codes into religious doctrines, patriarchs then claimed that the Almighty had ordained them. However, the use of females, for instance, to pay for sexual crimes of tribal males extends back to the time when the Hammurabic Code had been inscribed in stone, hundreds of years before the establishment of Islam by the Prophet Mohammed. Neither Jesus nor the Prophet ever preached that a woman was man’s inferior or that “she” had sinned, yet that has been part and parcel of the way in which these theocracies have been practiced. Who mandated that the orthodox Jew must thank God in his daily prayer that he was not born a woman?

Under patriarchy there is no need for women to be educated for our role is biological, not intellectual. Patriarchs claimed that education would be so stressful for women that our fertility would be affected. In any case, only men, the patriarchy decided, could truly grasp the word of God and properly worship him, receiving his blessing in return. Women would receive knowledge of his word from their fathers and husbands.

As some women became literate, they began to object to this treatment. A Declaration that emerged from the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention that launched the Women’s Rights Movement in the United States stated: “. . . woman has too long rested satisfied in the circumscribed limits which corrupt customs and a perverted application of the Scriptures have marked out for her, and that it is time she should move in the enlarged sphere which her great Creator has assigned her.” Yet even as recently as the nineteen nineties, the Southern Baptist Convention of the United States passed a resolution recommending that wives be subservient to their husbands.

In the belief that the mere presence of women would be a distraction for the men, patriarchs have mandated the separation of the sexes in places of worship. In the colonial period of the United States, Christian denominations with the exception of the Quakers did

not allow women to sit alongside men at church services. Orthodox Jews must have a quorum of ten men in order to conduct morning services. In many synagogues and most mosques women must sit behind a curtain or wall or in a separate room. Men who are worshipping together at mosques or temples or churches are unquestionably participating in religious services, but they are also engaged in male bonding, re-enforcing the patriarchy.

The extent to which a religious denomination falls into the fundamentalist category is determined by the extent to which it conforms to the patriarchal code of its particular culture.

The institutional church has been a partner to the patriarchy, helping it accomplish its twin goals: the subjugation of women and the accumulation of wealth and power through armed force even though those objectives fly in the face of the peace and harmony that was promulgated by their founders, causing the contradictions in these religions that we experience to this day.

SUMMARY

In this new century high-speed communication technology enables us women to exchange information quickly and to see more clearly that the patriarchy's subjugation of us is only a matter of degree and that we are all strands in the same piece of cloth. Indeed, as we women marshal our evidence, we can only conclude that there is an ongoing, continual war being waged against us in contrast to the intermittent armed conflicts between groups of men.

One challenge is insuring that the relationships of men and women who are living together, whether within the institution of marriage or outside of it, are ones in which women are treated with respect and as equals and in which both partners are committed to providing a nurturing and healthy incubator for the fragile young. Without this transformation within the family, women's ability to participate in the public arena will not develop strong roots.

Under patriarchy men and women are socialized to view themselves and the world through different lenses. While patriarchy severely oppresses women, men have been given a stake in the system, but may not recognize the price they pay for it. In trying to eradicate patriarchy, men must start from a place that is quite different from women's. Their challenge

is raising the consciousness of other men in regard to the trade-off that patriarchy requires of them and organizing to oppose it.

While individual men may opt out of the system by rejecting the patriarchal model of dominance/submission in personal relationships and/or by refusing to go to war the system needs to be confronted consciously and collectively.

Of paramount importance is countering and dismantling the imperialism that has been the catalyst for impoverishing millions, the vast majority of whom are women and their children, and to head off the devastation to the planet caused by corporate recklessness.

In the final analysis, neither men nor women, acting alone, can achieve the kind of world that all peace-loving people so deeply desire.

ENDNOTES

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ⁱⁱⁱ Sarita Sarvate, *Woman: India's New Endangered Species?*, India Currents, 8 March 2006 [magazine on-line] available from <http://www.indiacurrents.com> or from www.saritasarvate.com, accessed 30 September 2006

^{iv} Rosalind Miles, *Who Cooked The Last Supper?* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), 37.

^v *Ibid.*, 55-63 passim.

^{vi} *Ibid.*, 57.

^{vii} Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1998), 63.

^{viii} Miles, 79-95 passim.

^{ix} *Ibid.*, 62.

^x Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 78-9.

^{xi} *Lives Together, Worlds Apart*, 31.

^{xii} *Ibid.*, 31.

^{xiii} *Ibid.*, 19.

^{xiv} *Ibid.*, 32-3.

^{xv} Myriam Miedzian, *Boys Will Be Boys* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002), 97.

^{xvi} *Lives Together, Worlds Apart*, 57.

^{xvii} Times News Network, *Rent Wife for Rs 8000 A Month In Gujarat*, 18 June 2006, available from www.aids-india@yahoogroups.com, Message 6001, accessed on 22 October 2006.

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^{xix} Integrated Regional Information Network, *Broken Bodies, Broken Dreams* (Kenya: United Nations Office at Nairobi, 2005) 54.

^{xx} *Lives Together, Worlds Apart*, 29.

^{xxi} Sara Catania, *The Counselor*, *Mother Jones* (July-August 2005) 46.

^{xxii} Lerner, 80.

^{xxiii} *Meteor Blades*, 27 November 2004

^{xxiv} *New York Times*, 24 February 2005

^{xxv} Lerner, 112-16.

^{xxvi} Myriam Miedzian, 97.

^{xxvii} Karen Houppert, *Base Lines*, *Mother Jones* (July-August 2005) 47.

^{xxviii} *Ibid.*

^{xxix} Gustave Gilbert, *Nuremberg Diary* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Co., 1947), 278-9.

³⁰ Arnold M. Ludwig, *King of the Mountain* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 354-377.

³¹ William Thomas, *When Women Count*, 14 February 2005, available from www.willthomas.net/Convergence/Weekly/women/htm, accessed on 25 October 2006

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³³ Miles, 82.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 80-1.

³⁵ Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History* (New York: Modern Library, 2000). 16.