

WOMEN AND HISTORY

Volume One: The Creation of Patriarchy

The Creation of Patriarchy

GERDA LERNER

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

New York Oxford

Oxford University Press

Oxford New York Toronto
Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi
Petaling Jaya Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo
Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town
Melbourne Auckland

and associated companies in
Beirut Berlin Ibadan Nicosia

Copyright © 1986 by Gerda Lerner

First published in 1986 by Oxford University Press, Inc.,
200 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

First issued as an Oxford University Press paperback, 1987

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Lerner, Gerda, 1920—

Women and history.

Bibliography: v. 1, p. Indices index.

Contents: v. 1. The creation of patriarchy—

1. Women—History. I. Title.

HQ1121.L47 1986 305.4'09 85-21578

ISBN 0-19-503996-3 (v. 1)

ISBN 0-19-505185-8 (pbk.)

For

Virginia Warner Brodine and Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich

*whose thought has challenged and confirmed mine
and whose friendship and love
have strengthened and supported me*

Printed in the United States of America
printing, last digit: 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12

The Creation of Patriarchy

PATRIARCHY IS A HISTORIC CREATION formed by men and women in a process which took nearly 2500 years to its completion. In its earliest form patriarchy appeared as the archaic state. The basic unit of its organization was the patriarchal family, which both expressed and constantly generated its rules and values. We have seen how integrally definitions of gender affected the formation of the state. Let us briefly review the way in which gender became created, defined, and established.

The roles and behavior deemed appropriate to the sexes were expressed in values, customs, laws, and social roles. They also, and very importantly, were expressed in leading metaphors, which became part of the cultural construct and explanatory system.

The sexuality of women, consisting of their sexual and their reproductive capacities and services, was commodified even prior to the creation of Western civilization. The development of agriculture in the Neolithic period fostered the inter-tribal "exchange of women," not only as a means of avoiding incessant warfare by the cementing of marriage alliances but also because societies with more women could produce more children. In contrast to the economic needs of hunting/gathering societies, agriculturists could use the labor of children to increase production and accumulate surpluses. Men-as-a-group had rights in women which women-as-a-group did not have in men. Women themselves became a resource, acquired by men, much as the land was acquired by men. Women were exchanged or

bought in marriages for the benefit of their families; later, they were conquered or bought in slavery, where their sexual services were part of their labor and where their children were the property of their masters. In every known society it was women of conquered tribes who were first enslaved, whereas men were killed. It was only after men had learned how to enslave the women of groups who could be defined as strangers, that they learned how to enslave men of those groups and, later, subordinates from within their own societies.

Thus, the enslavement of women, combining both racism and sexism, preceded the formation of classes and class oppression. Class differences were, at their very beginnings, expressed and constituted in terms of patriarchal relations. Class is not a separate construct from gender; rather, class is expressed in genderic terms.

By the second millennium B.C. in Mesopotamian societies, the daughters of the poor were sold into marriage or prostitution in order to advance the economic interests of their families. The daughters of men of property could command a bride price, paid by the family of the groom to the family of the bride, which frequently enabled the bride's family to secure more financially advantageous marriages for their sons, thus improving the family's economic position. If a husband or father could not pay his debt, his wife and children could be used as pawns, becoming debt slaves to the creditor. These conditions were so firmly established by 1750 B.C. that Hammurabic law made a decisive improvement in the lot of debt pawns by limiting their terms of service to three years, where earlier it had been for life.

The product of this commodification of women—bride price, sale price, and children—was appropriated by men. It may very well represent the first accumulation of private property. The enslavement of women of conquered tribes became not only a status symbol for nobles and warriors, but it actually enabled the conquerors to acquire tangible wealth through selling or trading the product of the slaves' labor and their reproductive product, slave children.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, to whom we owe the concept of "the exchange of women," speaks of the reification of women, which occurred as its consequence. But it is not women who are reified and commodified, it is women's sexuality and reproductive capacity which is so treated. The distinction is important. Women never became "things," nor were they so perceived. Women, no matter how exploited and abused, retained their power to act and to choose to the

same, often very limited extent, as men of their group. But women *always and to this day* lived in a relatively greater state of un-freedom than did men. Since their sexuality, an aspect of their body, was controlled by others, women were not only actually disadvantaged but psychologically restrained in a very special way. For women, as for men of subordinate and oppressed groups, history consisted of their struggle for emancipation and freedom from necessity. But women struggled against different forms of oppression and dominance than did men, and their struggle, up to this time, has lagged behind that of men.

The first gender-defined social role for women was to be those who were exchanged in marriage transactions. The obverse gender role for men was to be those who did the exchanging or who defined the terms of the exchanges.

Another gender-defined role for women was that of the "stand-in" wife, which became established and institutionalized for women of elite groups. This role gave such women considerable power and privileges, but it depended on their attachment to elite men and was based, minimally, on their satisfactory performance in rendering these men sexual and reproductive services. If a woman failed to meet these demands, she was quickly replaced and thereby lost all her privileges and standing.

The gender-defined role of warrior led men to acquire power over men and women of conquered tribes. Such war-induced conquest usually occurred over people already differentiated from the victors by race, ethnicity, or simple tribal difference. In its ultimate origin, "difference" as a distinguishing mark between the conquered and the conquerors was based on the first clearly observable difference, that between the sexes. Men had learned how to assert and exercise power over people slightly different from themselves in the primary exchange of women. In so doing, men acquired the knowledge necessary to elevate "difference" of whatever kind into a criterion for dominance.

From its inception in slavery, class dominance took different forms for enslaved men and women: men were primarily exploited as workers; women were always exploited as workers, as providers of sexual services, and as reproducers. The historical record of every slave society offers evidence for this generalization. The sexual exploitation of lower-class women by upper-class men can be shown in antiquity, under feudalism, in the bourgeois households of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, in the complex sex/race re-

lations between women of the colonized countries and their male colonizers—it is ubiquitous and pervasive. For women, sexual exploitation is the very mark of class exploitation.

At any given moment in history, each "class" is constituted of two distinct classes—men and women.

The class position of women became consolidated and actualized through their sexual relationships. It always was expressed within degrees of unfreedom on a spectrum ranging from the slave woman, whose sexual and reproductive capacity was commodified as she herself was; to the slave-concubine, whose sexual performance might elevate her own status or that of her children; then to the "free" wife, whose sexual and reproductive services to one man of the upper classes entitled her to property and legal rights. While each of these groups had vastly different obligations and privileges in regard to property, law, and economic resources, they shared the unfreedom of being sexually and reproductively controlled by men. We can best express the complexity of women's various levels of dependency and freedom by comparing each woman with her brother and considering how the sister's and brother's lives and opportunities would differ.

Class for men was and is based on their relationship to the means of production: those who owned the means of production could dominate those who did not. The owners of the means of production also acquired the commodity of female sexual services, both from women of their own class and from women of the subordinate classes. In Ancient Mesopotamia, in classical antiquity, and in slave societies, dominant males also acquired, as property, the product of the reproductive capacity of subordinate women—children, to be worked, traded, married off, or sold as slaves, as the case might be. For women, class is mediated through their sexual ties to a man. It is through the man that women have access to or are denied access to the means of production and to resources. It is through their sexual behavior that they gain access to class. "Respectable women" gain access to class through their fathers and husbands, but breaking the sexual rules can at once declass them. The gender definition of sexual "deviance" marks a woman as "not respectable," which in fact consigns her to the lowest class status possible. Women who withhold heterosexual services (such as single women, nuns, lesbians) are connected to the dominant man in their family of origin and through him gain access to resources. Or, alternatively, they are declassified. In some historical periods, convents and other enclaves for single women created some

sheltered space, in which such women could function and retain their respectability. But the vast majority of single women are, by definition, marginal and dependent on the protection of male kin. This is true throughout historical time up to the middle of the twentieth century in the Western world and still is true in most of the underdeveloped countries today. The group of independent, self-supporting women which exists in every society is small and usually highly vulnerable to economic disaster.

Economic oppression and exploitation are based as much on the commodification of female sexuality and the appropriation by men of women's labor power and her reproductive power as on the direct economic acquisition of resources and persons.

The archaic state in the Ancient Near East emerged in the second millennium B.C. from the twin roots of men's sexual dominance over women and the exploitation by some men of others. From its inception, the archaic state was organized in such a way that the dependence of male family heads on the king or the state bureaucracy was compensated for by their dominance over their families. Male family heads allocated the resources of society to their families the way the state allocated the resources of society to them. The control of male family heads over their female kin and minor sons was as important to the existence of the state as was the control of the king over his soldiers. This is reflected in the various compilations of Mesopotamian laws, especially in the large number of laws dealing with the regulation of female sexuality.

From the second millennium B.C. forward control over the sexual behavior of citizens has been a major means of social control in every state society. Conversely, class hierarchy is constantly reconstituted in the family through sexual dominance. Regardless of the political or economic system, the kind of personality which can function in a hierarchical system is created and nurtured within the patriarchal family.

The patriarchal family has been amazingly resilient and varied in different times and places. Oriental patriarchy encompassed polygamy and female enclosure in harems. Patriarchy in classical antiquity and in its European development was based upon monogamy, but in all its forms a double sexual standard, which disadvantages women, was part of the system. In modern industrial states, such as in the United States, property relations within the family develop along more egalitarian lines than those in which the father holds absolute power, yet the economic and sexual power relations within

the family do not necessarily change. In some cases, sexual relations are more egalitarian, while economic relations remain patriarchal; in other cases the pattern is reversed. In all cases, however, such changes within the family do not alter the basic male dominance in the public realm, in institutions and in government.

The family not merely mirrors the order in the state and educates its children to follow it, it also creates and constantly reinforces that order.

It should be noted that when we speak of relative improvements in the status of women in a given society, this frequently means only that we are seeing improvements in the degree in which their situation affords them opportunities to exert some leverage within the system of patriarchy. Where women have relatively more economic power, they are able to have somewhat more control over their lives than in societies where they have no economic power. Similarly, the existence of women's groups, associations, or economic networks serves to increase the ability of women to counteract the dictates of their particular patriarchal system. Some anthropologists and historians have called this relative improvement women's "freedom." Such a designation is illusory and unwarranted. Reforms and legal changes, while ameliorating the condition of women and an essential part of the process of emancipating them, will not basically change patriarchy. Such reforms need to be integrated within a vast cultural revolution in order to transform patriarchy and thus abolish it.

The system of patriarchy can function only with the cooperation of women. This cooperation is secured by a variety of means: gender indoctrination; educational deprivation; the denial to women of knowledge of their history; the dividing of women, one from the other, by defining "respectability" and "deviance" according to women's sexual activities; by restraints and outright coercion; by discrimination in access to economic resources and political power; and by awarding class privileges to conforming women.

For nearly four thousand years women have shaped their lives and acted under the umbrella of patriarchy, specifically a form of patriarchy best described as paternalistic dominance. The term describes the relationship of a dominant group, considered superior, to a subordinate group, considered inferior, in which the dominance is mitigated by mutual obligations and reciprocal rights. The dominated exchange submission for protection, unpaid labor for maintenance. In the patriarchal family, responsibilities and obligations are

not equally distributed among those to be protected: the male children's subordination to the father's dominance is temporary; it lasts until they themselves become heads of households. The subordination of female children and of wives is lifelong. Daughters can escape it only if they place themselves as wives under the dominance/protection of another man. The basis of paternalism is an unwritten contract for exchange: economic support and protection given by the male for subordination in all matters, sexual service, and unpaid domestic service given by the female. Yet the relationship frequently continues in fact and in law, even when the male partner has defaulted on his obligation.

It was a rational choice for women, under conditions of public powerlessness and economic dependency, to choose strong protectors for themselves and their children. Women always shared the class privileges of men of their class *as long as they were under "the protection" of a man*. For women, other than those of the lower classes, the "reciprocal agreement" went like this: in exchange for your sexual, economic, political, and intellectual subordination to men you may share the power of men of your class to exploit men and women of the lower class. In class society it is difficult for people who themselves have some power, however limited and circumscribed, to see themselves also as deprived and subordinated. Class and racial privileges serve to undercut the ability of women to see themselves as part of a coherent group, which, in fact, they are not, since women uniquely of all oppressed groups occur in all strata of the society. The formation of a group consciousness of women must proceed along different lines. That is the reason why theoretical formulations, which have been appropriate to other oppressed groups, are so inadequate in explaining and conceptualizing the subordination of women.

Women have for millennia participated in the process of their own subordination because they have been psychologically shaped so as to internalize the idea of their own inferiority. The unawareness of their own history of struggle and achievement has been one of the major means of keeping women subordinate.

The connectedness of women to familial structures made any development of female solidarity and group cohesiveness extremely problematic. Each individual woman was linked to her male kin in her family of origin through ties which implied specific obligations. Her indoctrination, from early childhood on, emphasized her obligation not only to make an economic contribution to the kin and

household but also to accept a marriage partner in line with family interests. Another way of saying this is to say that sexual control of women was linked to paternalistic protection and that, in the various stages of her life, she exchanged male protectors, but she never outgrew the childlike state of being subordinate and under protection.

Other oppressed classes and groups were impelled toward group consciousness by the very conditions of their subordinate status. The slave could clearly mark a line between the interests and bonds to his/her own family and the ties of subservience/protection linking him/her with the master. In fact, protection by slave parents of their own family against the master was one of the most important causes of slave resistance. "Free" women, on the other hand, learned early that their kin would cast them out, should they ever rebel against their dominance. In traditional and peasant societies there are many recorded instances of female family members tolerating and even participating in the chastisement, torture, even death of a girl who had transgressed against the family "honor." In Biblical times, the entire community gathered to stone the adulteress to death. Similar practices prevailed in Sicily, Greece, and Albania into the twentieth century. Bangladesh fathers and husbands cast out their daughters and wives who had been raped by invading soldiers, consigning them to prostitution. Thus, women were often forced to flee from one "protector" to the other, their "freedom" frequently defined only by their ability to manipulate between these protectors.

Most significant of all the impediments toward developing group consciousness for women was the absence of a tradition which would reaffirm the independence and autonomy of women at any period in the past. There had never been any woman or group of women who had lived without male protection, as far as most women knew. There had never been any group of persons like them who had done anything significant for themselves. Women had no history—so they were told; so they believed. Thus, ultimately, it was men's hegemony over the symbol system which most decisively disadvantaged women.

MALE HEGEMONY OVER the symbol system took two forms: educational deprivation of women and male monopoly on definition. The former happened inadvertently, more the consequence of class dominance and the accession of military elites to power. Throughout historical times, there have always been large loopholes for women of the elite classes, whose access to education was one of the major

aspects of their class privilege. But male dominance over definition has been deliberate and pervasive, and the existence of individual highly educated and creative women has, for nearly four thousand years, left barely an imprint on it.

We have seen how men appropriated and then transformed the major symbols of female power: the power of the Mother-Goddess and the fertility-goddesses. We have seen how men constructed theologies based on the counterfactual metaphor of male procreancy and redefined female existence in a narrow and sexually dependent way. We have seen, finally, how the very metaphors for gender have expressed the male as norm and the female as deviant; the male as whole and powerful, the female as unfinished, mutilated, and lacking in autonomy. On the basis of such symbolic constructs, embedded in Greek philosophy, the Judeo-Christian theologies, and the legal tradition on which Western civilization is built, men have explained the world in their own terms and defined the important questions so as to make themselves the center of discourse.

By making the term "man" subsume "woman" and arrogate to itself the representation of all of humanity, men have built a conceptual error of vast proportion into all of their thought. By taking the half for the whole, they have not only missed the essence of whatever they are describing, but they have distorted it in such a fashion that they cannot see it correctly. As long as men believed the earth to be flat, they could not understand its reality, its function, and its actual relationship to other bodies in the universe. As long as men believe their experiences, their viewpoint, and their ideas represent all of human experience and all of human thought, they are not only unable to define correctly in the abstract, but they are unable to describe reality accurately.

The androcentric fallacy, which is built into all the mental constructs of Western civilization, cannot be rectified simply by "adding women." What it demands for rectification is a radical restructuring of thought and analysis which once and for all accepts the fact that humanity consists in equal parts of men and women and that the experiences, thoughts, and insights of both sexes must be represented in every generalization that is made about human beings.

TODAY, HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT has for the first time created the necessary conditions by which large groups of women—finally, all women—can emancipate themselves from subordination. Since women's thought has been imprisoned in a confining and erroneous

patriarchal framework, the transforming of the consciousness of women about ourselves and our thought is a precondition for change.

We have opened this book with a discussion of the significance of history for human consciousness and psychic well-being. History gives meaning to human life and connects each life to immortality, but history has yet another function. In preserving the collective past and reinterpreting it to the present, human beings define their potential and explore the limits of their possibilities. We learn from the past not only what people before us did and thought and intended, but we also learn how they failed and erred. From the days of the Babylonian king-lists forward, the record of the past has been written and interpreted by men and has primarily focused on the deeds, actions, and intentions of males. With the advent of writing, human knowledge moved forward by tremendous leaps and at a much faster rate than ever before. While, as we have seen, women had participated in maintaining the oral tradition and religious and cultic functions in the preliterate period and for almost a millennium thereafter, their educational disadvantaging and their symbolic de-throning had a profound impact on their future development. The gap between the experience of those who could or might (in the case of lower-class males) participate in the creating of the symbol system and those who merely acted but did not interpret became increasingly greater.

In her brilliant work *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir focused on the historical end product of this development. She described man as autonomous and transcendent, woman as immanent. But her analysis ignored history. Explaining "why women lack concrete means for organizing themselves into a unit" in defense of their own interests, she stated flatly: "They [women] have no past, no history, no religion of their own."¹ De Beauvoir is right in her observation that woman has not "transcended," if by transcendence one means the definition and interpretation of human knowledge. But she was wrong in thinking that therefore woman has had no history. Two decades of Women's History scholarship have disproven this fallacy by unearthing an unending list of sources and uncovering and interpreting the hidden history of women. This process of creating a history of women is still ongoing and will need to continue for a long time. We are only beginning to understand its implications.

The myth that women are marginal to the creation of history and civilization has profoundly affected the psychology of women

and men. It has given men a skewed and essentially erroneous view of their place in human society and in the universe. For women, as shown in the case of Simone de Beauvoir, who surely is one of the best-educated women of her generation, history seemed for millennia to offer only negative lessons and no precedent for significant action, heroism, or liberating example. Most difficult of all was the seeming absence of a tradition which would reaffirm the independence and autonomy of women. It seemed that there had never been any woman or group of women who had lived without male protection. It is significant that all the important examples to the contrary were expressed in myth and fable: amazons, dragon-slayers, women with magic powers. But in real life, women had no history—so they were told and so they believed. And because they had no history they had no future alternatives.

In one sense, class struggle can be described as a struggle for the control of the symbol systems of a given society. The oppressed group, while it shares in and partakes of the leading symbols controlled by the dominant, also develops its own symbols. These become in time of revolutionary change, important forces in the creation of alternatives. Another way of saying this is that revolutionary ideas can be generated only when the oppressed have an alternative to the symbol and meaning system of those who dominate them. Thus, slaves living in an environment controlled by their masters and physically subject to the masters' total control, could maintain their humanity and at times set limits to the masters' power by holding on to their own "culture." Such a culture consisted of collective memories, carefully kept alive, of a prior state of freedom and of alternatives to the masters' ritual, symbols, and beliefs. What was decisive for the individual was the ability to identify him/herself with a state different from that of enslavement or subordination. Thus, all males, whether enslaved or economically or racially oppressed, could still identify with those like them—other males—who represented mastery over the symbol system. No matter how degraded, each male slave or peasant was like to the master in his relationship to God. This was not the case for women. Up to the time of the Protestant Reformation the vast majority of women could not confirm and strengthen their humanity by reference to other females in positions of intellectual authority and religious leadership. The few exceptional noblewomen and mystics, mostly cloistered nuns, were by their very rarity unlikely models for the ordinary woman.

Where there is no precedent, one cannot imagine alternatives to existing conditions. It is this feature of male hegemony which has been most damaging to women and has ensured their subordinate status for millennia. The denial to women of their history has reinforced their acceptance of the ideology of patriarchy and has undermined the individual woman's sense of self-worth. Men's version of history, legitimized as the "universal truth," has presented women as marginal to civilization and as the victim of historical process. To be so presented and to believe it is almost worse than being entirely forgotten. The picture is false, on both counts, as we now know, but women's progress through history has been marked by their struggle against this disabling distortion.

Moreover, for more than 2500 years women have been educationally disadvantaged and deprived of the conditions under which to develop abstract thought. Obviously thought is not based on sex; the capacity for thought is inherent in humanity; it can be fostered or discouraged, but it cannot ultimately be restrained. This is certainly true for thought generated by and concerned with daily living, the level of thought on which most men and women operate all their lives. But the generating of abstract thought and of new conceptual models—theory formation—is another matter. This activity depends on the individual thinker's education in the best of existing traditions and on the thinker's acceptance by a group of educated persons who, by criticism and interaction, provide "cultural prodding." It depends on having private time. Finally, it depends on the individual thinker being capable of absorbing such knowledge and then making a creative leap into a new ordering. Women, historically, have been unable to avail themselves of all of these necessary preconditions. Educational discrimination has disadvantaged them in access to knowledge; "cultural prodding," which is institutionalized in the upper reaches of the religious and academic establishments, has been unavailable to them. Universally, women of all classes had less leisure time than men, and, due to their child-rearing and family service function, what free time they had was generally not their own. The time of thinking men, their work and study time, has since the inception of Greek philosophy been respected as private. Like Aristotle's slaves, women "who with their bodies minister to the needs of life" have for more than 2500 years suffered the disadvantages of fragmented, constantly interrupted time. Finally, the kind of character development which makes for a mind capable of seeing new

connections and fashioning a new order of abstractions has been exactly the opposite of that required of women, trained to accept their subordinate and service-oriented position in society.

Yet there have always existed a tiny minority of privileged women, usually from the ruling elite, who had some access to the same kind of education as did their brothers. From the ranks of such women have come the intellectuals, the thinkers, the writers, the artists. It is such women, throughout history, who have been able to give us a female perspective, an alternative to androcentric thought. They have done so at a tremendous cost and with great difficulty.

Those women, who have been admitted to the center of intellectual activity of their day and especially in the past hundred years, academically trained women, have first had to learn "how to think like a man." In the process, many of them have so internalized that learning that they have lost the ability to conceive of alternatives. The way to think abstractly is to define precisely, to create models in the mind and generalize from them. Such thought, men have taught us, must be based on the exclusion of feelings. Women, like the poor, the subordinate, the marginals, have close knowledge of ambiguity, of feelings mixed with thought, of value judgments coloring abstractions. Women have always experienced the reality of self and community, known it, and shared it with each other. Yet, living in a world in which they are devalued, their experience bears the stigma of insignificance. Thus they have learned to mistrust their own experience and devalue it. What wisdom can there be in menses? What source of knowledge in the milk-filled breast? What food for abstraction in the daily routine of feeding and cleaning? Patriarchal thought has relegated such gender-defined experiences to the realm of the "natural," the non-transcendent. Women's knowledge becomes mere "intuition," women's talk becomes "gossip." Women deal with the irredeemably particular: they experience reality daily, hourly, in their service function (taking care of food and dirt); in their constantly interruptible time; their splintered attention. Can one generalize while the particular tugs at one's sleeve? He who makes symbols and explains the world and she who takes care of his bodily and psychic needs and of his children—the gulf between them is enormous.

Historically, thinking women have had to choose between living a woman's life, with its joys, dullness, and immediacy, and living a man's life in order to think. The choice for generations of educated women has been cruel and costly. Others have deliberately chosen an existence outside of the sex-gender system, by living alone or

with other women. Some of the most significant advances in women's thought were given us by such women, whose personal struggle for an alternative mode of living infused their thinking. But such women, for most of historical time, have been forced to live on the margins of society; they were considered "deviant" and as such found it difficult to generalize from their experience to others and to win influence and approval. Why no female system-builders? Because one cannot think universals when one's self is excluded from the generic.

The social cost of having excluded women from the human enterprise of constructing abstract thought has never been reckoned. We can begin to understand the cost of it to thinking women when we accurately name what was done to us and describe, no matter how painful it may be, the ways in which we have participated in the enterprise. We have long known that rape has been a way of terrorizing us and keeping us in subjection. Now we also know that we have participated, although unwittingly, in the rape of our minds.

Creative women, writers and artists, have similarly struggled against a distorting reality. A literary canon, which defined itself by the Bible, the Greek classics, and Milton, would necessarily bury the significance and the meaning of women's literary work, as historians buried the activities of women. The effort to resurrect this meaning and to re-evaluate women's literary and artistic work is recent. Feminist literary criticism and poetics have introduced us to a reading of women's literature, which finds a hidden, deliberately "slant," yet powerful world-view. Through the reinterpretations of feminist literary critics we are uncovering among women writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a female language of metaphors, symbols, and myths. Their themes often are profoundly subversive of the male tradition. They feature criticism of the Biblical interpretation of Adam's fall; rejection of the goddess/witch dichotomy; projection or fear of the split self. The powerful aspect of woman's creativity becomes symbolized in heroines endowed with magical powers of goodness or in strong women who are banished to cellars or to live as "the madwoman in the attic." Others write in metaphors upgrading the confined domestic space, making it serve, symbolically as the world.²

For centuries, we find in the works of literary women a pathetic, almost desperate search for Women's History, long before historical studies as such exist. Nineteenth-century female writers avidly read the work of eighteenth-century female novelists; over and over again

they read the "lives" of queens, abbesses, poets, learned women. Early "compilers" searched the Bible and all historical sources to which they had access to create weighty tomes with female heroines.

Women's literary voices, successfully marginalized and trivialized by the dominant male establishment, nevertheless survived. The voices of anonymous women were present as a steady undercurrent in the oral tradition, in folksong and nursery rhymes, tales of powerful witches and good fairies. In stitchery, embroidery, and quilting women's artistic creativity expressed an alternate vision. In letters, diaries, prayers, and song the symbol-making force of women's creativity pulsed and persisted.

All of this work will be the subject of our inquiry in the next volume. How did women manage to survive under male cultural hegemony; what was their influence and impact on the patriarchal symbol system; how and under what conditions did they come to create an alternate, feminist world-view? These are the questions we will examine in order to chart the rise of feminist consciousness as a historical phenomenon.

Women and men have entered historical process under different conditions and have passed through it at different rates of speed. If recording, defining, and interpreting the past marks man's entry into history, this occurred for males in the third millennium B.C. It occurred for women (and only some of them) with a few notable exceptions in the nineteenth century. Until then, all History was for women pre-History.

Women's lack of knowledge of our own history of struggle and achievement has been one of the major means of keeping us subordinate. But even those of us already defining ourselves as feminist thinkers and engaged in the process of critiquing traditional systems of ideas are still held back by unacknowledged restraints embedded deeply within our psyches. Emergent woman faces a challenge to her very definition of self. How can her daring thought—naming the hitherto unnamed, asking the questions defined by all authorities as "non-existent"—how can such thought coexist with her life as woman? In stepping out of the constructs of patriarchal thought, she faces, as Mary Daly put it, "existential nothingness." And more immediately, she fears the threat of loss of communication with, approval by, and love from the man (or the men) in her life. Withdrawal of love and the designation of thinking women as "deviant" have historically been the means of discouraging women's intellec-

tual work. In the past, and now, many emergent women have turned to other women as love objects and reinforcers of self. Heterosexual feminists, too, have throughout the ages drawn strength from their friendships with women, from chosen celibacy, or from the separation of sex from love. No thinking man has ever been threatened in his self-definition and his love life as the price for his thinking. We should not underestimate the significance of that aspect of gender control as a force restraining women from full participation in the process of creating thought systems. Fortunately, for this generation of educated women, liberation has meant the breaking of this emotional hold and the conscious reinforcement of our selves through the support of other women.

Nor is this the end of our difficulties. In line with our historic gender-conditioning, women have aimed to please and have sought to avoid disapproval. This is poor preparation for making the leap into the unknown required of those who fashion new systems. Moreover, each emergent woman has been schooled in patriarchal thought. We each hold at least one great man in our heads. The lack of knowledge of the female past has deprived us of female heroines, a fact which is only recently being corrected through the development of Women's History. So, for a long time, thinking women have refurbished the idea systems created by men, engaging in a dialogue with the great male minds in their heads. Elizabeth Cady Stanton took on the Bible, the Church fathers, the founders of the American republic. Kate Millet argued with Freud, Norman Mailer, and the liberal literary establishment; Simone de Beauvoir with Sartre, Marx, and Camus; all Marxist-feminists are in a dialogue with Marx and Engels and some also with Freud. In this dialogue woman intends merely to accept whatever she finds useful to her in the great man's system. But in these systems woman—as a concept, a collective entity, an individual—is marginal or subsumed.

In accepting such dialogue, thinking woman stays far longer than is useful within the boundaries or the question-setting defined by the "great men." And just as long as she does, the source of new insight is closed to her.

Revolutionary thought has always been based on upgrading the experience of the oppressed. The peasant had to learn to trust in the significance of his life experience before he could dare to challenge the feudal lords. The industrial worker had to become "class-conscious," the Black "race-conscious" before liberating thought could

develop into revolutionary theory. The oppressed have acted and learned simultaneously—the process of becoming the newly conscious person or group is in itself liberating. So with women.

The shift in consciousness we must make occurs in two steps: we must, at least for a time, be woman-centered. We must, as far as possible, leave patriarchal thought behind.

TO BE WOMAN-CENTERED MEANS: asking if women were central to this argument, how would it be defined? It means ignoring all evidence of women's marginality, because, even where women appear to be marginal, this is the result of patriarchal intervention; frequently also it is merely an appearance. The basic assumption should be that it is inconceivable for anything ever to have taken place in the world in which women were not involved, except if they were prevented from participation through coercion and repression.

When using methods and concepts from traditional systems of thought, it means using them from the vantage point of the centrality of women. Women cannot be put into the empty spaces of patriarchal thought and systems—in moving to the center, they transform the system.

TO STEP OUTSIDE OF PATRIARCHAL THOUGHT MEANS: Being skeptical toward every known system of thought; being critical of all assumptions, ordering values and definitions.

Testing one's statement by trusting our own, the female experience. Since such experience has usually been trivialized or ignored, it means overcoming the deep-seated resistance within ourselves toward accepting ourselves and our knowledge as valid. It means getting rid of the great men in our heads and substituting for them ourselves, our sisters, our anonymous foremothers.

Being critical toward our own thought, which is, after all, thought trained in the patriarchal tradition. Finally, it means developing intellectual courage, the courage to stand alone, the courage to reach farther than our grasp, the courage to risk failure. Perhaps the greatest challenge to thinking women is the challenge to move from the desire for safety and approval to the most "unfeminine" quality of all—that of intellectual arrogance, the supreme hubris which asserts to itself the right to reorder the world. The hubris of the god-makers, the hubris of the male system-builders.

The system of patriarchy is a historic construct; it has a beginning; it will have an end. Its time seems to have nearly run its

course—it no longer serves the needs of men or women and in its inextricable linkage to militarism, hierarchy, and racism it threatens the very existence of life on earth.

What will come after, what kind of structure will be the foundation for alternate forms of social organization we cannot yet know. We are living in an age of unprecedented transformation. We are in the process of becoming. But we already know that woman's mind, at last unfettered after so many millennia, will have its share in providing vision, ordering, solutions. Women at long last are demanding, as men did in the Renaissance, the right to explain, the right to define. Women, in thinking themselves out of patriarchy add transforming insights to the process of redefinition.

As long as both men and women regard the subordination of half the human race to the other as "natural," it is impossible to envision a society in which differences do not connote either dominance or subordination. The feminist critique of the patriarchal edifice of knowledge is laying the groundwork for a correct analysis of reality, one which at the very least can distinguish the whole from a part. Women's History, the essential tool in creating feminist consciousness in women, is providing the body of experience against which new theory can be tested and the ground on which women of vision can stand.

A feminist world-view will enable women and men to free their minds from patriarchal thought and practice and at last to build a world free of dominance and hierarchy, a world that is truly human.