



# THE GENDER VENDORS

*Sex and Lies from Abraham to Freud*

A. L. JONES

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LEXINGTON BOOKS  
Lanham • Boulder • New York • London



Published by Lexington Books  
An imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.  
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706  
www.rowman.com

16 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BT, United Kingdom

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Jones, A .L., 1949-

The gender vendors : sex and lies from Abraham to Freud / A. L. Jones.  
pages cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7391-9096-8 (cloth) -- ISBN 978-0-7391-9097-5 (electronic)

1. Sex role—Philosophy. 2. Biology—Social aspects—Philosophy. 3. Nature and nurture—Philosophy. 4. Feminist theory. I. Title.

HQ1075.J66 2014

305.4201--dc23

2014020792

™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

For Suzanne

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# Acknowledgments

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This book would not have come into being without the generosity and kindness of my family, friends, and colleagues who engendered and/or nurtured its writing and offered invaluable comment and criticism. My heartfelt thanks go to Suzanne Holly Jones, Kim Kingston, Liz MacFarlane, Nick Chare, Maree Pardy, Fran Martin, Nigel Abbott, Carol Middleton, Carol Goudie, Mitchell Kelly, Dennis Mazalin, David Green, Wasana Weeraratne Green, Mal Sweetnam, and Helen Glezer. My deep gratitude goes to an initially anonymous peer reviewer, who waived her anonymity to invite me to respond to her critical review and discuss aspects of the work in more depth; the book has benefited enormously as a result of Carol Delaney's rigorous criticism and generous assistance. I am particularly grateful to my editors Claire Duffy, Amy King, and Kelly Blackburn, for their unswerving encouragement, goodwill, and dedication to the work. It goes without saying that the book's shortcomings are entirely my responsibility. My deepest appreciation, as always, goes to my daughter and son.

# Introduction:

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## Sex and Lies, Seed and Soil

‘The mother of what is called her child is not the parent,’ says Aeschylus, ‘but the nurse of the newly-sown embryo. The one who mounts is the parent.’<sup>[1]</sup> Amid countless differences, what do the following have in common? Genesis, Hesiod, Aeschylus, Aristotle, chastity codes, honor crimes, the Catholic Church, the early modern witch hunts, female genital mutilation, sexual violence, the medicalization and criminalization of gender nonconformity, and campaigns against women’s suffrage. Neither the question nor the answer is new. Cumulative losses of historical insight since the 1970s, however, have arguably left twenty-first-century feminist theory ill-equipped to challenge neoliberal ideology. To my question about commonalities, the obvious answer is institutionalized sexism, but what do we know of its origins? Too often, the default response is ‘It’s just human nature.’ This book’s project is to deconstruct institutionalized sexism in order to contribute to its dismantling.

Among numerous tropes about male superiority, putatively the oldest and most potent is almost invisible in its apparent naturalness. My specific objective is to denaturalize this trope, to ‘estrangle’ this proto-theory of the gendered body and procreation, namely, ‘the seed and the soil,’ first critically discussed by cultural anthropologist Carol Delaney in 1977.<sup>[2]</sup>

As in Aeschylus, seed-and-soil is a figurative expression for a proto-theory of male monogenesis, namely, that the father is the sole generating parent; the mother is not an equal partner in procreation but rather acts as nurturing medium like soil, for the man’s seed-child. In other words, men give life; women merely give birth.<sup>[3]</sup>

Why does an enquiry into seed-and-soil matter for feminism? For one thing, the metaphor highlights several characteristics of gender stratification itself, including its durability, unconsciousness, and toxic power relations in the guise of innocuousness. And, as Delaney shows, the trope is older than Western thought itself and inseparable from its ancient cosmologies and creation myths. Seed-and-soil is embedded so apparently naturally as to have become invisible.<sup>[4]</sup> The metaphor permeates the ancient Hebrew, Greco-Roman, Christian, and Islamic histories that constitute the foundational narratives of Western culture;<sup>[5]</sup> hence, its story matters to everyone who cares about gender equality and why it is taking so long to achieve. By coming to grips with the historical processes and events that led to the construction of gender stratification, we are better equipped to ask: What will it take to dismantle institutionalized sexism in its myriad forms? Though the question appears simplistic, I see it as neither simple nor even necessarily solvable. My aim is to identify some promising directions for feminist politics, in particular, for moving beyond the dualisms that plague it: culture/biology, essentialism/anti-essentialism, difference-based versus equality-based feminism,



and the notion of woman-as-agent versus that of woman-as-victim. On the last binarism, ever since neoliberalism's self-reported global triumph,<sup>[6]</sup> the victors have been telling us that feminism, too, has won. To recalcitrant second-wave feminists, they say, 'You are tilting at windmills. Don't you realize your battle is over and your goals have been met? Why not just get on with enjoying the fruits of your labor?' The myth has proven seductive as well as generating much warranted criticism.<sup>[7]</sup> Suffice to say here is that, even if feminism looked no further than the interests of White, middle-class, heterosexual women, current statistics show that its goals are far from being met.<sup>[8]</sup>

As to my specific project, I build on Delaney's ethnographic study of seed-and-soil by examining some watersheds in the history of the trope, including case studies from the Hebrew Scriptures, ancient Greece, early Christianity, the medieval Church, the early modern witch hunts, and the campaigns of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries against women's suffrage. To clarify my stance on the contested issue of historical continuities, I do not claim that seed-and-soil constitutes a continuous narrative throughout history, but I have chosen to maintain the term throughout the book in order to draw attention to how entrenched interests often serve up old standards (e.g., the 'innate inferiority' of Woman) under new names (e.g., Woman as Eve, Woman as witch, or Woman as criminal deviant) to meet new political challenges (e.g., population decline). It goes without saying that, first, such historical continuities are chameleons on the shifting political landscape; second, their counter-narratives are of equal importance as objects of study; and third, the correlations outlined in this book are for the purpose of furthering scholarly enquiry. I make no claims of universal application and even less of causation. As my aim is to examine seed-and-soil at particular periods across millennia, of necessity I omit much of the detail, oversimplify the narratives, and leave stretches of history unsurveyed.

Psychology being my field, while my project is interdisciplinary its focus is predominantly psychological. I approach the task of estranging this largely unconscious metaphor with the deconstructive and dialectical tools of contemporary depth psychology, particularly Luce Irigaray's deconstructive, psychoanalytic approach to the unconscious dynamics of texts.<sup>[9]</sup> Immediately, the question arises as to how I ought to draw the line on transgressing the boundaries of other disciplines. I tread lightly in the less familiar territory of philosophy, history, sociology, and anthropology and when it comes to highly specialized debates I acknowledge these but refrain from commenting further.

This chapter introduces some abiding themes germane to the deconstruction of seed-and-soil. These include the historical conditions that produced it; its embeddedness in ancient Western cosmologies; its place in Aristotelian biology; and its link to ideologies of conquest. The chapter includes a section on why history matters to feminism and the tensions thus produced. Another section introduces some key ideas in the psychology of gender stratification and constructions of Woman. As in contemporary sociology, I use the term 'gender stratification' to mean the degree to which different genders, 'otherwise social equals, are unequal in their access to the scarce and valued resources of their

society.’<sup>[10]</sup> In addition, while seed-and-soil probably pertains to some non-Western cultures, I have confined my study to the West because space is limited. Finally, on a minor technical point, all emphases within quotation marks throughout the book are as per the original works.

## THE SEED AND THE SOIL: HISTORICAL CONDITIONS

The prehistoric origins of seed-and-soil are lost in unrecorded time. For millions of years our human forager ancestors would have observed seeds growing in the soil and, for thousands more, our horticultural and agrarian ancestors grew and lived by seed. What, then, were the historical conditions that produced the notion that only men can engender life? Immediately, the perennial issue arises as to the existence of archaic matriarchal societies and patriarchal takeovers. Suffice to say here, all earlier claims about the existence of matriarchies have since been overturned. Yes, there were more or less egalitarian, matrifocal, matrilineal, or matrilocal cultures, but there is no evidence for matriarchy, that is, rule by women over everyone, including all men.<sup>[11]</sup> I return to this issue in chapter 1. Yet, even if matriarchy in the strict sense of the word has never existed, early humans clearly held Woman’s life-giving and nurturing capacities in high esteem. Forager communities associated Woman with Earth as parthenogenic creator of new life and perpetual all-giving nourisher of humankind. Why did this dynamic, high-status construction give way to the notion of Woman as passive soil awaiting insemination by the life-giving male—the idea of male supremacy in procreation?<sup>[12]</sup>

Presumably, ideas about paternity came first, probably via observation of domesticated animals.<sup>[13]</sup> Indeed, according to Gabrielle Rubin, although the construction of paternity cannot be dated, archaeological evidence in the form of cave art and figurines from around 17,000 BCE suggests that phallic symbolism was overtaking goddess iconography.<sup>[14]</sup> However, ideas about paternity—which might simply have offset prior beliefs about women’s primacy—do not equate to a theory of male monogenesis. In Delaney’s view, male monogenetic theory correlates with Abrahamic monotheism. As Genesis has it, says Delaney, God invests Adam with His divine seed to be transmitted down the patriline from father to son forever.<sup>[15]</sup> David Bakan, too, examines the way Genesis uses the term ‘seed’ for the male exudate—a way of thinking that attributes the embryo’s entire genetic endowment to the father and none to the mother.<sup>[16]</sup> Not only is seed-and-soil implicit in Hebrew texts that were compiled early in the first millennium BCE, the trope also appears in Greek poetry of the eighth century BCE.<sup>[17]</sup> Some scholars contest Delaney’s argument that male monogenetic theory correlates with Abrahamic monotheism, their point being that many ancient polytheistic creation myths reference male monogenesis.<sup>[18]</sup> I examine this debate in chapter 3.

In line with the biological and theological oneness of ancient perception, seed-and-soil is simultaneously biological and theological: Man is to Woman as God is to his creations. While God creates man in his image and invests him with the divine

and ensouling seed, he fashions Woman, man's helpmate, from a piece of bone and a handful of earth. Even worse than her bodily inferiority, however, is Woman's moral inferiority, in particular, her inability to resist Satan's seductions.

If that is the view from Genesis, what of the ancient Greeks? Classicist Page duBois maintains that a remarkable shift occurred in the Greek conceptualization of the feminine principle from its primeval origins as the all-giving Gaia, to—after the Neolithic revolution—the enclosed field.<sup>[19]</sup> duBois's thesis, however, is largely technoeconomic and pays less attention to the cultural factors in which Delaney, for example, is particularly interested. Moreover, extreme forms of male domination, even patriarchy, have existed in nonagrarian communities, among the ancient Hebrews, for example. A contemporary case is the Papua New Guinean highland subsistence community, the Sambia, whose cosmology has it that semen is divinely imbued with the capacity to enhance growth and strength. Sambia husbands believe that holding back from inseminating their spouses prevents the wives from becoming dominant. Conversely, the men ritually inseminate the boys of the tribe in order to grow them into warriors.<sup>[20]</sup> I examine the particular case of the Sambia in chapter 10.

To return to ancient Greece, the Homeric landscape has Gaia providing abundantly for all,<sup>[21]</sup> and Hesiod has mortal men living like gods, 'free from toil and grief,' and having 'all the good things; for the fruitful earth unforced bore them fruit abundantly and without stint.'<sup>[22]</sup> With the shift to agriculture, however, men began to appropriate, fence, plough, and seed the once-communal lands. According to Hesiod, it is Pandora, crafted by Zeus to punish men, who brings evil into men's once-idyllic lives, including forcing them into harsh, back-breaking labor in those fields. From the 'beautiful evil,' Pandora, springs an entirely new species—Woman—created for the express purpose of causing trouble for men. Hesiod has Woman always taking and never reciprocating; her desire to injure men is both cosmologically and biologically determined. It follows that Woman's malevolence, as divinely produced, is beyond her control. Hesiod constructs her as trapped in misogyny, able neither to escape nor be cured. Is it this particular aspect of the Woman myth that explains the sheer virulence of institutionalized misogyny? Such venom has never remotely been matched in any kind of organized misogyny.

Genesis, too, has it that Woman and her evil-doing force Man to live by the sweat of his brow. Both traditions agree that Woman is to blame for the perpetual toil men must endure to put bread on her table. As to the beautiful evil, the dualistic tradition accords Woman-as-evil her sacred, redemptive complement in Woman-as-angel, as in the Virgin Mary and Sarah, long-suffering wife of Abraham and Mother of Israel. The message to women is that, by following the example of the Virgin, they may partly atone for their diabolical nature. This damned-whores-versus-God's-police stereotype about women has been the subject of much feminist critique, particularly since the 1970s.<sup>[23]</sup> The good woman/bad woman binarism is embedded in each of the constructions of Woman examined in this book.

The ancient Hebrew and Greek traditions constructed and canonized Woman as not merely inferior to Man, but also, by her very nature, programmed with the desire to manipulate, deceive, use, betray, impoverish, and otherwise harm him. Furthermore, they said, Woman's malevolent desire is inseparable from her sexuality. While debate continues about the degree to which Hesiod's construction, for example, permeated the wider Greek culture,<sup>[24]</sup> the brute fact of the canon remains. Regardless of the complex mix of women's agency, victimhood and resistance in Greek society, the ancient patriarchal texts, Aristotle's in particular, became some of the most influential in the Western natural-philosophical canon and, hence, central to the construction of powerful male elites throughout millennia. The archaic notion that Woman's innate sexuality programs her to harm men was pivotal to the early modern central-European witch hunts and is still embedded in some exceptionally misogynous contemporary traditions. History, says historian Gerda Lerner, has always mattered to those in power. Narratives of the powerful both legitimize and maintain power by establishing the official version of events as the dominant version. For women in the past, not having a history has truly mattered.<sup>[25]</sup>

Greece's classical period saw the reinscription of seed-and-soil in Aristotelian and Hippocratic theories of procreation.<sup>[26]</sup> In Aristotle's view, the man contributes form, life, and soul to his offspring, while the woman contributes matter—'catamenia,' or menses.<sup>[27]</sup> God created the male in His image, says Aristotle, as active, spiritual, dry, warm, pure, and superior to the female, who is the inverse—passive, profane, damp, cold, and polluted. And only the male, he says, is the product of normal fetal development. The non-male fetus is a result of deformity due to one or more inauspicious variables—a chilly sou-wester blowing at the time of conception, for example. 'The female,' says Aristotle, 'is, as it were, a mutilated male.'<sup>[28]</sup>

Debate continues about the meaning and appropriateness of the categorization 'monogenetic' or 'single-seed' as applied to Aristotle's theory.<sup>[29]</sup> Of critical importance, however, is that, as a result of the revival of Aristotelian thought in thirteenth-century Europe, this dangerously wrong notion about procreation—that women merely provide base matter to be ensouled by men—entered the European natural-philosophical canon and remained there for five hundred years. Of course it is not that simple, and debate continues about how Aristotelian and Galeno-Hippocratic ideas ebbed, flowed, and intermingled over centuries.<sup>[30]</sup> I examine this issue in chapter 5.

Although scientific accounts of mammalian fertilization began in 1875,<sup>[31]</sup> only with the rediscovery of Mendelian genetics in 1900 was it understood that the ovum contributes 50 percent of the genetic material to the child.<sup>[32]</sup> However, says Delaney, that knowledge and its ramifications have not been widely propagated; nor have Westerners assimilated it symbolically, metaphorically, and linguistically.<sup>[33]</sup> Naturalized millennia ago, the Western analogy of semen with seed, while inaccurate, cannot properly be described as irrational, as there was no way of observing how sperm and ovum contribute equally to the formation of the

embryo.<sup>[34]</sup> To use the idea to assign inferior status to women, however, and hence to deny women full recognition as human beings and as parents, was ideological, not rational. Only by elaborating difference into a marker of inferiority, says Lerne, did proto-patriarchal cultures construct the handful of biological differences between women and men as socially significant, reinventing, for example, the hitherto sacred capacity of Woman to bear children as signifying weakness and deficiency. What makes Woman, that is, Woman under patriarchy, is not her biological difference but her historically created genderedness.<sup>[35]</sup>

Under what kinds of political conditions did seed-and-soil survive and, at times, thrive? Did it emerge and flourish at times when societal pressures, for example, to educate or enfranchise women, threatened to destabilize gender stratification? These are questions of history.

## DOES HISTORY MATTER FOR FEMINISM?

Historical insight is critical to building a feminist future.<sup>[36]</sup> Yet, among other things, the myth that feminism's goals have been met has seen the pursuit of historical continuities become an endangered species within feminist theory.<sup>[37]</sup> More specifically, that pursuit stands accused of privileging continuity over change, similarity over difference. But history-as-continuity, says historian Judith Bennett, does not exclude history-as-change.<sup>[38]</sup> Moreover, the achievement of a feminist world relies on well-informed knowledge of the past. Since the productive partnership of history and feminist theory in the 1970s, says Bennett, the two disciplines have grown so far apart that feminist theory has become remarkably uninformed by the historical insight on which a feminist future depends.<sup>[39]</sup>

What happened to all that historically informed activity? What brought about the myth that feminism had accomplished its goals? Why did some theorists label the scholarly investigation of patriarchy an essentializing and universalizing pursuit, which led to its near abandonment? Why does 75 percent or more of recent historical enquiry focus only on the last two hundred years?<sup>[40]</sup> Why, often, does social change gather momentum only to retreat? In Bennett's analyses of transformations in women's experiences over time, she notes a curious pattern of change and reversion, namely, that women's status compared to men's always reverts to a certain balance, which Bennett calls 'patriarchal equilibrium.'<sup>[41]</sup> Such equilibrium means, for example, that, proportionately, the wage gap between men and women is roughly the same today as it was in the Middle Ages. For children born into the same social circumstances today, girls, compared to boys, will face more constraints and restrictions.<sup>[42]</sup> Female disadvantage remains. Women as a group are never more advantaged than men as a group, says Joan Huber; what varies is the extent of women's disadvantage. This pattern, she says, justifies attention to possible causes.<sup>[43]</sup>

Taking another example of continuity, this time in ancient Western ideas about sex and sexuality, within the constellation of similarities and differences among sexed bodies, as well as among philosophical approaches, the theme persists of



the female body as inferior to that of the male.<sup>[44]</sup> Our current relations of domination and our ideology about gender hierarchy, says duBois, have been embedded in culture since the initial sexual division of labor. Produced historically they endure through the 'recoding of difference in different terms in different historical moments.'<sup>[45]</sup>

As I track how debates about gender unfold in a variety of fields, the question of whether feminist scholars ought to privilege similarity or difference, continuity or change, women as agents or women as victims is a constant in itself. So, too, are assertions that this or that scholar is universalizing, totalizing, naturalizing, essentializing, anachronizing, and so forth. While such criticism sometimes hits the mark (and certainly did in targeting old trait-based theories), at other times it is so clearly inapt as to be puzzling. Its charges are familiar: to generalize about certain trends in a data set, no matter how tentatively, is inevitably to universalize; to track continuities is to dishonor change and difference; to use terms such as 'patriarchy' is to treat as monolithic what is in fact multifaceted, fragmented, and partial; to attend—in addition to discursive and other cultural factors—to biological factors in human behavior is inevitably to essentialize. To these transgressions—at least the first parts thereof—I plead guilty and here briefly state my case, which chapter 1 examines in more depth.

First, to generalize is not inevitably to universalize. Moreover, in addition to making fine distinctions, constructing careful and circumscribed generalizations is fundamental to scholarly practice. Second, tracking continuities and searching for differences are vital and complementary processes. Although scholars may find it impractical to pursue both at once, they can still acknowledge the mutually beneficial tension between big-picture studies and detailed, locally focused analyses. My project has an eye for continuity, a psychological slant, and a scope across millennia, and, as such, of necessity omits myriad details and debates of significance and interest. But just as to generalize is not inevitably to universalize nor ought it to be taken as dishonoring change and difference. Nor is the associated charge of anachronization always justified. Again, while the criticism is sometimes warranted, at other times it targets the legitimate deconstruction of antecedents of contemporary problems, which, far from suggesting that past societies are ignorant or blameworthy, aims to understand how past events—including accidents of history—have contributed to shaping the present. In chapter 7, apropos the early modern European witch hunts, I discuss claims such as John Bossy's that it is nonsense to say 'a whole culture or population was mistaken for what it customarily did.'<sup>[46]</sup>

Third is the question of treating as monolithic what is in fact multi-faceted. Over the past few decades, many scholars have claimed that the very use of the term 'patriarchy' assumes that the relationship between women and men is unchanging and universal.<sup>[47]</sup> So vexed is the issue of patriarchy-as-continuity that they reject the use of the term itself because of its allegedly totalizing baggage. But why criticize the term per se, thereby ignoring the distinction between the term and its usage? If the label 'patriarchy' signifies a single monolithic entity against which women have no agency and are purely victims, it follows that the

label 'Church' signifies a single monolithic entity of which atheists are merely victims. Or might such criticism amount to a conflation of the category with its membership, namely, actually existing patriarchal systems?

Taking a parallel case, the term 'monarchy' does not imply a monolith entity; to see one (Tongan, Bhutanese, English, and so forth) is not to have seen them all. The purpose of categorization is not to deny difference but to abstract what is common among members. Like 'oligarchy,' 'monarchy,' and other '-archies,' 'patriarchy' as category abstracts what is common to all patriarchies. While some scholars may read the category 'patriarchy' as positing 'an implausibly universal human nature,' says Michael McKeon, it can be historicized as 'a general continuity complicated by specific and divergent discontinuities.'<sup>[48]</sup> In the Indian context, for example, specifically brahminical, tribal, and dalit patriarchies, as well as regional and religious variations, are nonetheless patriarchies.<sup>[49]</sup> The conflation of the different ontological levels, the category and its membership, together with criticism of the term itself rather than of its inapt usage, has caused much confusion in the literature as well as establishing a form of academic 'groupthink.'<sup>[50]</sup>

Fourth, to attend to the biological factors in human behavior as well as to the cultural is not inevitably to essentialize. Take again the example of patriarchy, which, while entirely culturally constructed, is unlikely to have taken hold so implacably without the assistance of evolutionary factors such as women's capacity to bear children, the human infant's prolonged period of dependency, people's desire to win their group's acceptance, and their fear of outsiders.<sup>[51]</sup> Of course, the desire for belonging and the wariness of strangers, while biologically adaptive, are also culturally shaped, but that is my very point: the cultural and the biological are inextricable. Similarly, aspects of subjects' agency and victimhood are in constant dialectical tension, not in dualistic opposition.

In summary, patriarchy was and is temporally socially constructed and reconstructed in numerous specific forms, locations, and circumstances. There are multiple patriarchies with similarities to and differences from each other just as there are multiple resistances, agencies, and dialectical relationships among all of these.<sup>[52]</sup> Local, regional, and global patriarchal institutions invite or compel everyone to comply with their rules and norms and occasionally they co-opt the odd patriarchally inclined woman to help out at the top. In whichever of many changing forms it assumes, contemporary patriarchy is embedded globally.<sup>[53]</sup> Nowadays, to the old-style 'fathers' of the tribe add the global old boys, exemplars of, in R. W. Connell and Julian Wood's terms, 'transnational business masculinity.'<sup>[54]</sup>

What are the ramifications for feminist scholarship? What does it mean to privilege continuity or change, similarity or difference, women as agents or women as victims? What would it mean to move beyond these dualities to engage with their dialectics in everyday realities? In their 2005 review of the notion of hegemonic masculinity, for example, Connell and Messerschmidt conclude that gender dominance involves numerous factors including the 'interplay of costs and

benefits'; the 'protest masculinities' of marginalized groups that challenge hegemonic masculinity; the appropriation of some aspects of hegemonic masculinity by bourgeois women in the construction of corporate careers; and the 'mutual conditioning' of men and women in gender and other social dynamics.<sup>[55]</sup> And doing masculinity (or femininity) in different relational situations involves forming compromises among conflicting demands and making complex cost-benefit analyses among different gender strategies. In addition, the authors convincingly refute a list of charges including that their concept of masculinity essentializes the character of men, imposes a false unity on reality, is heteronormative, and marginalizes and naturalizes the body.<sup>[56]</sup>

From a biocultural-dialectical perspective, it is essential to document the highly contextualized, complicated, transactional, and dialectical interweaving of agency and victimhood under patriarchy. Some scholars, however, press the self-evident proposition that 'Women are not merely victims' to the point where it pushes other complexities aside. Concomitantly, as broader complexities disappear from view, so, too, does the fact that not only women, but also the vast majority of men, albeit in different ways, suffer under patriarchy's Othering: its sexism, classism, racism, genderism, imperialism, and so forth. If we are to develop a potent political agenda, we must hold in mind simultaneously the extent of women's exclusion from public life, the ingrained misogyny and genderism of phallogocentric cultures, their attendant harms, and women's and others' agency and resistance. Hence, my stance is to read similarities and differences within human projects and relationships as in constant dialectical tension. For feminist scholars to keep track of hegemonic interests is not to deny or neglect women's agency and resistance within and outside fortress walls.

For women under patriarchy, as for gender-nonconforming men, safety has always meant appearing to conform. Invalidating environments enculturate a conscious or unconscious sense of personal and social inadequacy and shame even in the children of the privileged (no child can meet or escape from the impossible demands of the Father). The mechanism by which people internalize external invalidation, however, is far from what Freud called masochism.<sup>[57]</sup> On the contrary, women's participation in punitive power relations, for example, springs from a constellation of self-protective mechanisms, cost-benefit choices, lack of consciousness, and so forth, and such participation cannot properly be attributed to free and informed choice.<sup>[58]</sup> Contrary to Freud's assumption, women are not 'naturally' masochistic; patriarchal culture, however, tells them they must accept their subordination on pain of social condemnation, even death.<sup>[59]</sup>

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GENDER STRATIFICATION

Certain prejudices about Woman came to the fore during particular historical periods, beliefs that separately or together cast her as enclosed field awaiting the life-giving seed of the male; unwitting and helpless tool of the Devil; largely incapable of intellectual, moral, or spiritual development; polluted and polluting; and legitimate target of men's anxieties, envy, and hostility. Of course, these



constructions overlap and, to reiterate, embedded in them is the good woman/bad woman binarism that defines how women ought and ought not to behave. No doubt there also were more reasoned and even appreciative counter-narratives. The rest of this section focuses on the psychosocial underpinnings of the objectifications outlined above.

## **Woman's Power as Sacred and Taboo**

What are the psychosocial roots of anti-woman prejudice? The scenario begins with the prehistoric awe of women's reproductive capacities and apparent control over life and death. It proceeds through constellations of anxiety, love, envy, and ambivalence to the psychological defense mechanism of projecting disturbing affect onto the Other. This process of objectification constructs Woman's power as sacred and taboo, extraordinarily dangerous to men, and with her sexuality as its fountainhead.<sup>[60]</sup> Patriarchy, says Julia Kristeva, abjects women, femininity, and the maternal and, hence, oppresses, denigrates, and subordinates women.<sup>[61]</sup> The purpose of religious ritual, says Kristeva, is to ward off the fear of one's identity sinking irretrievably into the abjected mother.<sup>[62]</sup> And psychological displacement renders anxiety about an unspecific, potentially limitless phenomenon such as 'the feminine' less disturbing by attaching it to a specific, more manageable object such as women's sexual behavior.

Thus, the sacred and the taboo, purity and impurity, come together in the figure of Woman. The ancient Greeks perceived women as holding the power to give or to withdraw life. Women allegedly monitored passage into and out of mortal existence and, hence, presided over the transitional experiences of birth and dying, that is, the passages out of and into darkness.<sup>[63]</sup> In the archaic age, says Ruth Padel, the Greeks feared death with an increasing sharpness that spread to the very rites of burial and mourning, and they linked women's knowledge of darkness to that of making contact with what is polluting.<sup>[64]</sup> Greek society used and controlled women's supposed kinship with the dark side of divinity, setting women up to mediate between men and the potentially contaminating forces that attend, for example, childbirth, menstruation, babies, children, the old, the ill, and the dead.

What comes out of darkness—whether from the underworld or the female body—said the Greeks, was polluting to men, even a drop of nursing milk on a manly chest.<sup>[65]</sup> Ancient practices of barring women from entering sacred areas or touching sacred items often related to men's fear of contamination by menstrual fluid.<sup>[66]</sup> The early Christian fathers held that the mere presence of a woman acting as priest pollutes the sanctuary.<sup>[67]</sup> 'Nothing is more filthy, unclean than a menstruant; whatever she will have touched, she makes it unclean,' said Jerome.<sup>[68]</sup> And powerful menstrual taboos are still with us, a theme to which I return in the concluding chapter.

The dialectics of veil societies, including those of ancient Greece, have it that women embody a voracious sexuality that threatens not only men but the entire

social order.<sup>[69]</sup> The Greek concept of miasma or pollution acts as a social divider, science of division that marks higher from lower, and better from worse,<sup>[70]</sup> and it is the veil that confines the female miasma, particularly the pollution inherent in female sexuality.<sup>[71]</sup>

As a result of Woman's role as mediator between men and the forces of impurity, she became an even more potent source of contamination. To complicate matters, traditional male ideology enculturates men to experience surrender to the pleasure and intimacy associated with becoming close to another as a kind of psychological and moral weakening. In this, the psychological and the corporeal collapse into a pleasure-anxiety complex shot through with an ambivalence that can be felt as intolerable. Objectifying Woman (by idealizing, denigrating, or oscillating between the two) comprises an unconscious escape mechanism.<sup>[72]</sup> In the process of denigration, corporeal and psychological aspects of purity/impurity merge in framing the Other as physically and psychologically dangerous, confounding the corporeal with the moral, the thought with the action, and the idea of wanting to-harm with the actual infliction of injury.

Woman, of course, is not the only Other constructed as potentially polluting and incapable of self-control. Throughout history, cultures have constructed other genders, ethnicities, classes, and so forth as dirty, lazy, and disease-ridden, that is, as dangerous sources of physical, mental, and moral pollution.<sup>[73]</sup> They have also characterized the Other as weak and womanly; Woman, it appears, is the prototype for all Othering.<sup>[74]</sup>

Associating the Other with disease is a particularly potent weapon, given that human beings have evolved to fear polluting themselves by coming into contact with disease-related phenomena such as putrifying food, bodily excreta, illness and its products, dead bodies, and rotting corpses.<sup>[75]</sup> Primarily, patriarchy makes abject and, hence, subject to taboo, all threats that cannot be excluded.<sup>[76]</sup>

Over time, the invalidation of marginalized groups often worsens as subsequent generations conflate the effects of the discrimination practiced on the targeted group with the cause or reason for instituting the discriminatory practice in the first place. And prior explicit justificatory narratives for unjust restrictions become implicit social norms;<sup>[77]</sup> no one remembers the original story; people simply ascribe the targeted group's behavior to its so-called innate inferiority, laziness, lack of intelligence, and so forth. In this way, societies' taken-for-granted assumptions contribute to the maintenance of discriminatory cycles that can last indefinitely.<sup>[78]</sup> Throughout Western history, for example, virtually all women were excluded from education and concomitant employment, and the intellectual accomplishments of family- or nunnery-educated women were not necessarily documented.

## **Woman as Enclosed Field**

Turning to the work of a much documented scholar, Aristotle's version of seed and-soil was deeply implicated in the creation of powerful male elites throughout

the European medieval and modern periods. How did these elites view the Woman question? In other words, what were men to do—particularly those who wished to beget progeny—in the face of the purportedly divinely constructed evil: female sexuality? If only Woman's sexuality could be curtailed, she may gain some hold on herself. What were the methods of choice? Various forms of 'female enclosure' included clitoridectomy, infibulation, veiling, seclusion, early marriage, psychological conditioning, harem and eunuch guards, and even murder.<sup>[79]</sup> It goes without saying that much of this required constant surveillance. From the ancient Egyptians, Arabs, Romans, and dozens of African, Middle Eastern, Asian, and Indigenous Australian peoples, including to the present day, the procedure of choice for permanently curbing woman's sexual desire was and is genital mutilation.<sup>[80]</sup> Herodotus reported the existence of female genital mutilation in ancient Egypt in the fifth century BCE.<sup>[81]</sup>

This is not to suggest that most cultures felt the need to control women's sexuality by covering or cutting them; after all, modern Western cultures are highly successful at constructing self-disciplining and self-invalidating subjects. Around the globe, however, 2 million women each year undergo forced genital surgery.<sup>[82]</sup> Read in a Hesiodian light, perhaps its key purpose is to obliterate the capacity of women's sexuality to harm men. In some countries, more than 90 percent of the women have been cut and in the contemporary Egyptian countryside, says David Gollaher, for a woman to remain uncut 'is to risk becoming an outcast.'<sup>[83]</sup>

Sections of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western medicine, too, reiterated the need for men to control women's dangerous sexuality. On the eve of the twentieth century, David Gilliam, later honorary fellow of the American Gynecological and Obstetrical Society, called for the increased use of oophorectomy (ovary removal) for moral purposes: 'Why do we alter our colts and calves? That we may make them tractable and trustworthy, that we may convert them into faithful, well disposed servants.' Those physicians who have acted on their convictions, says Gilliam, 'tell us that castration pays; that the moral sense of the patient is elevated, that she becomes tractable, orderly, industrious, and cleanly.'<sup>[84]</sup> Husbands who thought their wives oversexed brought them to gynecological surgeons for clitoral surgery, which, decades into the twentieth century, was still publicly advocated and practiced in the United States and beyond.<sup>[85]</sup> 'Many women need circumcision,' said S. I. Kistler,<sup>[86]</sup> following the infamous advocate-obstetrician Isaac Baker Brown. Of course, while clitoridectomy may enable a woman to perform as an adequately orderly wife and mother, there was no bringing her allegedly inferior mental and moral capacities up to the level required by civic duty. Chapter 9 takes up these issues in more detail.

The trope of seed-and-soil associates Woman with the less appealing aspects of soil, that is, as dark, damp, cold, passive, and polluting, and, hence, perpetuates the Aristotelian illusion embodied as scientific theory more than two millennia ago. The polysemous nature of the term 'passive' (receptive, inert, latent, enduring without resistance, and so forth) has inevitably made for some confused ideas

about what it means to be female. The quality of receptivity, for example, whether in a sexual partner or a party host, is neither passive nor inert. And close to a century of scientific research has shown that the so-called passive ovum is active in several senses during conception, including actively engulfing and drawing in the spermatozoon to initiate fertilization: 'The first visible response to sperm contact is the engulfment of the sperm by a protrusion of cytoplasm, the fertilization cone.'<sup>[87]</sup> Since the late nineteenth century, scientists have recognized the ovum's active, participatory role in fertilization. The ovum, says Paul Gross, cannot be described as 'passive' 'in any scientifically meaningful way.'<sup>[88]</sup>

With its construction of women as innately morally inferior, the legacy of seed-and-soil still haunts contemporary debates about sexual ethics, particularly apropos sexual harassment and assault. 'What can we do?' chorus leaders of church and state. 'It's just human nature.'<sup>[89]</sup> This is no surprise given that several still-prominent relationships-guidance institutions originated in the cross-over between clergy and eugenicists, and the Church is still a remarkably influential lobbyist in such secular debates.<sup>[90]</sup> As an aside, eugenicists, in spite of their awareness of existing evidence that all sex hormones are present in all sexes, promoted sex-hormone experimentation and misused it to promulgate the essentialist case.<sup>[91]</sup>

## SEED-AND-SOIL IN HISTORY

Allusions to seed-and-soil proliferate throughout Judaic, Greek, Roman, and Christian texts in which procreative, pedagogical, and proselytizing references merge.

In the Jewish work commonly known as Pseudo-Philo, God tells the people he 'will bless their seed and the earth will quickly yield its fruit.'<sup>[92]</sup> As in Deuteronomy, the reference is not only to agriculture but also to 'abundant human progeny.' 'Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body and the fruit of thy ground.'<sup>[93]</sup> And the Testament of Solomon is laced with generic references to sexual transgression as 'sowing seed other than in one's own field.'<sup>[94]</sup>

The first-century Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo Judaeus describes the man sowing seed into the womb as into a field. During the woman's menses, Philo says, the man behaves 'like a good husbandman . . . while the field is still inundated he will keep back the seed.'<sup>[95]</sup>

The Quran, too, employs seed-and-soil, describing those 'seeking bounty from Allah' as 'sown corn that sendeth forth its shoot and strengtheneth it and riseth firm upon its stalk, delighting the sowers.'<sup>[96]</sup> It speaks of 'the seed of Adam and of those whom We carried (in the ship) with Noah, and of the seed of Abraham and Israel.'<sup>[97]</sup>

The poets and playwrights of ancient Greece took seed-and-soil for granted as procreative metaphor:<sup>[98]</sup>

Hesiod: 'No younger man will be better than he at scattering the seed and avoiding double-sowing; for a man less staid gets disturbed, hankering after his fellows.'

Pindar: 'On that eventful day or in the nights of love the seed of your greatness fell in foreign furrows: for then it was that Euphamos' race was sown to endure forever.'

Aeschylus has Apollo proclaim in Eumenides: 'The mother of what is called her child is not the parent, but the nurse of the newly-sown embryo. The one who mounts is the parent.'

Sophocles has Antigone's sister ask of Kreon: 'But will you kill your own son's promised bride?' and Kreon's response: 'Oh, there are other furrows for his plough.'

And Oedipus: 'Give me a sword, I say, to find this wife no wife, this mother's womb, this field of double sowing whence I sprang and where I sowed my children.'

Euripides: 'None other was your father: you are the seed of that divine spirit of Heracles' and 'Telamon was my father / He planted my seed in Salamis / the land that reared me.'

Scholars favored pedagogical as well as procreative allusions.<sup>[99]</sup>

Ezra: 'Give us a seed for our heart and cultivation of our understanding so that fruit may be produced.'

Hippocrates: 'For our natural disposition is, as it were, the soil; the tenets of our teacher are, as it were, the seed; instruction in youth is like the planting of the seed in the ground at the proper season.'

Aristotle: 'The soil must have been previously tilled if it is to foster the seed; the mind of the pupil must have been prepared.'

Third-century Greek biographer Diogenes Laertes describes the Stoic view of philosophy as 'a fertile field: Logic being the encircling fence, Ethics the crop.'

Aristotle calls on men to attend to the training of their wives, which 'should be the object of a man's unstinting care': 'For the tiller of the soil spares no pains to sow his seed in the most fertile and best cultivated land. . . . Surely every care should be taken on behalf of our own children's mother and nurse, in whom is implanted the seed from which there springs a living soul.'

Good doctrines are sown as seed, says Plutarch, and women's minds must not be left unsown:

It is said that no woman ever produced a child without the cooperation of a man, yet there are misshapen, fleshlike uterine growths. . . . Great care must be taken that this sort of thing does not take place in women's minds. For if they do not receive the seed of good doctrines and share with their husbands' intellectual advancement, they, left to themselves, conceive many untoward ideas and low designs and emotions.<sup>[100]</sup>

Even when the passive soil-partner is male (the sower is always male), the



analogy still holds. Like Philo and Plato, second-century Clement of Alexandria depicts intercourse in terms of the penetration model, that is, as asymmetrical pairings in which one partner is active (the plowing and sowing farmer) and the other is passive, regardless of the gender of the passive partner.<sup>[101]</sup> Within the seed-soil binarism, passive male partners can be figured as barren ground as well as traitors to their kind and their seed line. The fathers of Christianity, following in the Greco-Roman tradition, had it that passivity implies femininity and, hence, inferiority. The Quran, too, records the divinely ordained inferiority of women: 'Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other. . . . So good women are the obedient. . . . As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them.'<sup>[102]</sup>

For early Christianity, which was outlawed under Roman imperial rule until 313, metaphors of procreation and kinship, says Denise Buell, function polemically in its multiple competing discourses of self-identity. Even the procreative term 'begat'—as in 'Clement begat Origen and Origen begat Gregory'—is used to establish the 'intellectual patriline' stretching back to the disciples and apostles of Jesus.<sup>[103]</sup> Seed-and-soil imagery abounds in Christian teachings; always the male farmer sows seed into the passively waiting ground:

John 1.35: 'What is said settles in the mind with difficulty, because the ground is very hard . . . and there are many which lay plots, and carry away the seed.'

Clement of Rome: 'As land neglected . . . produces thorns and thistles, . . . there is need now of much care in cultivating the field of your mind . . . lest a noxious growth choke the good seed of the word.'

'The earth seems to take the place of the womb, into which the seed being cast is both formed and nourished.'

'The body takes its beginning from the seed of a man . . . which is conveyed into the womb as into soil.'<sup>[104]</sup>

St. Leo: 'The seed of the Word . . . ought to grow in the soil of your heart.'

Theophila: 'He who sows in a strange soil by unlawful embraces.'<sup>[105]</sup>

Seed-and-soil has been and remains an organizing metaphor for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and, hence, modern Western culture. How did it come so far? As outlined in this chapter, from naturalized trope in the literature of the ancient Hebrews and Greeks, Aristotle elevated seed-and-soil to the status of science. Then, in the thirteenth century, Europe's love affair with Aristotle carried the Aristotelian version of seed-and-soil into the natural-philosophical canon. And the Church backed its demand for priestly celibacy by driving home Aristotle's construction of Woman as damp and cold: women seduced men, said the Church, not only to harm them but also to 'steal' their heat. Political and religious elites used seed-and-soil as a tool of oppression not only during the early modern witch hunts but also in subsequent reactionary movements against women's suffrage. And, as Irigaray meticulously demonstrates, there is little, if any, doubt that Aristotelian assumptions underpinned Freud's construction of Woman.<sup>[106]</sup> The

gender politics of orthodox psychoanalytic theory (currently, the Anna-Freudian school) may be differentiated from the culturally oriented and gender-inclusive work of neo-Freudians such as Karen Horney and Erich Fromm. Orthodox Freudian theory has yet to adequately deconstruct its notions of women and their mental health. That deconstruction would entail an acknowledgement of the power dynamics that operate both within and outside the consulting room. And with thousands of Freud's papers still under orthodox embargo, some for decades to come, I question the possibility of an adequate overhaul in the near future.<sup>[107]</sup>

Part I of the book lays the philosophical and conceptual groundwork for the rest. Chapter 1 argues for a feminist re-recognition of the importance of women's history and of the category 'patriarchy' as signifying a complex, omnidirectional, and multifaceted phenomenon by which to focus feminist strategy and study. The chapter examines the historical conditions of the construction of patriarchy and enquires into the debate around identity and identity politics. It also tackles some key debates in feminist politics, namely, biology/culture, essentialism/anti-essentialism, difference-based versus equality-based feminism, and the notion of woman-as-agent versus that of woman-as-victim, as well as the typically dualistic style of these debates. The chapter highlights Lerner's crucial point that difference does not necessitate hierarchy; it is the cultural elaboration of biological difference into a marker of inferiority that constructs gender and social stratification.<sup>[108]</sup>

Within the parameters of the book, chapter 2 theorizes the construction of gender and genderism and shows how seed-and-soil engenders a taboo against male femininity, which in turn produces femiphobia—the fear of being feminine or feminized.

Part II of the book considers the origins and import of the doctrine of male monogenesis and its primary metaphor—seed-and-soil—during certain periods of history from Genesis to Freud. Chapter 3 (on Genesis) and chapter 4 (on honor codes) reference Delaney's work in particular. At the heart of chapter 3 is the story of Abraham. Who begat whom—the patriline that stems from God—is central to Genesis, no more so than to the patriarchal narratives, which celebrate the founding of Abrahamic monotheism with its assumption of male monogenesis, institutionalization of Father right, and requirement for conquest. Chapter 4 examines seed-and-soil in the context of honor and shame codes in some Middle-Eastern and Mediterranean cultures. As among the ancient Hebrews and Greeks, seed-and-soil is embedded in culture-specific societal codes for the bestowal and withdrawal of honor. Male honor depends, among other things, on the ability to control the sexual behavior of female relatives. Under honor codes, men have reproductive control, Woman is a factory for making men, and men lose honor if they cannot protect the boundaries of their women. Hence, central to honor codes are chastity codes that govern the way in which women must demonstrate sexual unavailability so as to avoid bringing shame on themselves and their families; the mere perception that a woman has behaved in a way that 'dishonors' her family or community can trigger an attack on her life. The chapter draws on anthropological and sociological studies of ancient and modern honor societies.

Chapter 5 investigates how Aristotle constructed seed-and-soil as science,

which, with the reintroduction of the Aristotelian corpus to Europe in the thirteenth century, entered the natural-philosophical canon and remained there for five hundred years. The chapter draws out some of the continuities in Aristotle's theory of procreation, the notion of gender hierarchy, for example.

Chapter 6 considers the legacy of seed-and-soil in the medieval Church. In order to forge bonds among the brotherhood and to warn it off women, the Christian fathers amplified existing constructions of Woman as cold-blooded, evil temptress. In addition, the chapter compares and contrasts Galeno-Hippocratic and Aristotelian theories of procreation, and examines the medieval Church's connection to a particularly misogynous clerical manual, *Women's Secrets*, on how priests were to advise women about their 'infirmities' and devise appropriate penances.

Chapter 7 examines how seed-and-soil underpinned the early modern witch hunts. Whereas the medieval witch hunts had been sporadic rather than methodical, the accusations more likely to be of heresy than witchcraft, and the prosecuted just as likely to be men as women, all that changed in the early modern period. After several hundred years of sporadic activity, why did witch hunting become widespread, systematized, and gendered? Why did the Church, from the thirteenth century onward, begin to take seriously a phenomenon they had previously decreed nonexistent? Why did the case types (heresy versus witchcraft) reverse in prevalence and the witch become, in the main, female? Was a certain type of woman targeted and, if so, what role did the Christian canon play in that targeting? The chapter concludes that the inquisitors did hunt down a certain type of so-called deviant woman and that the canon was crucial in the cultural production of that deviance. The early modern construction of the witch as female opened up a new era that criminalized gender nonconformity in both women and men as so-called perversion.

Chapter 8 argues that the nineteenth- and twentieth-century construction of Woman as ineducable, hysterical, and deviant rested on Aristotelian assumptions about Woman as the inferior inverse of Man. The Academy held that too much learning would masculinize women and endanger their wellbeing to the point of producing 'a puny, enfeebled, and sickly race.'<sup>[109]</sup> The same Aristotelian assumptions underpinned the Academy's case for the medicalization (as Freud's hysteria) and criminalization (as perversion) of gender nonconformity. As the fathers of modern medicine and social science saw it, the most dangerous threat of their time was the feminization of men (through absence of war) and the masculinization of women (through education). Hence these men's focus was more about preventing women's suffrage than advancing scientific knowledge.

Chapter nine enquires into Freud's theories in the light of femiphobia. Women, says Freud, are highly prone to neurosis, particularly hysteria; hence, for the good of their mental health they must transfer their sexual pleasure from the 'masculine clitoris to the 'feminine' vagina and convert their penis-envy into the wish for a baby and a husband (as possessor of a penis). Such Freudian notions are pivotal to the transmission of Aristotelian notions of gender well into the twentieth century. Historically, Freud's construction of Woman—as caught between hysteria and



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