

Beyond Patriarchy Series. No.1 Aug. 1977

Cover illustration from moon trees of
Babylon and Assyria

Beyond Patriarchy Publications
printed at Community Press.

2a, St. Paul's Rd. London N.1
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Is It Worthwhile Working In A Mixed Group?

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Is It Worthwhile Working In A Mixed Group? *

In this paper I want to discuss whether it is worth working against patriarchy in a mixed group. This is my strongest conflict at the moment and I believe it is of interest to others.

The question is, should I as a woman concentrate all my energy in a single sex group - working with and towards my sisters; is it a waste of time and a diversion of energy to battle away in the struggle with men? To sort out this problem I need first of all to try and describe what I believe are patriarchy's source and characteristics.

Source of Patriarchy

1. As part of the Matriarchy Study Group which was responsible for the production of the Goddess Shrew, I have become familiar with the concept of a pre-patriarchal era. Taking place from the beginnings of human history throughout the populated world women were responsible for power in society and the chief deity was a mother goddess.

While modern anthropologists differ from their 19th century predecessors in postulating a matriarchal society as such there is no contradiction of the idea of the female deity and indeed countless objects and symbols have been discovered and recorded. The burden of the Bible and in particularly the Old Testament is the fight of the patriarchal prophets and kings against the

"abominations" of the old religions based on the female. Sources can be found in the book list attached.

Matriarchy precedent

However, from about 5,000 BC in the Middle East through to the end of the Neolithic Age in Modern Europe and beyond (2,000 BC to 100 AD), this veneration of the female was superseded by the omnipotence of the male. A cult of physical strength emerged (eg Hercules taming the female principles, fathering countless children, etc) Apollo the Sun god conquering the Earth python - female version of earth divinity - and becomes himself the masculine version of the Sun Goddess Artemis - although it is of interest that right down into patriarchal times of the Heroic Greek Ages his words had to be interpreted by a woman, The Oracle of Delphi.

The takeover

However, this changeover in the sky reflected exactly the changeover on earth. As the patriarchal Hebrews conquered the women-led Canannites they put down their worship and customs with force. In the same way the patriarchal Myceneans from the mainland of Greece organised by warrior chieftans of whom the best known is Minos, conquered the women led and goddess worshipping island of Crete scattering her population.

Later (400 BC to 400 AD) the Romans imposed their entirely masculine-led society upon the Celtic people of Britain and North West Europe. Among the last in the "civilised world" to

continue a religion based on the female and to accept women into an entirely equal and occasionally superior social structure were the Bretons tucked away on the western side of Europe.

These sources, Hebrew and Greek-Roman led to Christianity which took the institution of patriarchy to its ultimate and which has been responsible for the conditioning of women and men into their "inferior and superior" roles.

At the same time in other parts of the world similar changeover took place. In Islam the most holy place is Mecca and the most holy stone, pilgrimage focus for the male pious, is in fact the Black Stone of the Mother Goddess. In Hinduism and the other Indo-European religions the take-over from the female worship was effective in a similar way.

Discussion about reasons for and methods of the change-over from female to male led society are out of place here although it is safe to say that common to all are economic motives based on the desire of the male to pass accumulation of goods to his undisputed male offspring and to acquire further goods and territory which historically had to be usurped from the female or acquired through her enslavement within marriage.

Characteristics of Patriarchy

- 2.i. Cult of Physical Strength and presence and possessions leading to use of force which in turn

leads to development of and methods of using superior force (better guns, etc).

ii. Following this, acceptance and possible enthusiasm for conflict with other males in order to add to consequence strength, force, power, possessions, etc. Consequently, need for aggressive and competitive traits to be emphasised (initiation ceremonies to reinforce these).

iii. Again following from (i) acceptance of "superiority" in terms of physical, emotional and psychic needs and the need continually to stress importance of such superiority in order to retain possessions and power leading to:

a sub-structure of class in which some males dominate other males, some races dominate other races and all males dominate females

It is worthwhile to state here that class thus is a result of patriarchy rather than a cause.

iv. Cult of force and plunder to obtain possessions includes (potentially) imperialism and exploitation of the Third World, the depletion of the Earth's resources, consumer ethic and waste. The Earth and the World's resources are here analogous to the female, they are there to serve male needs and can be plundered at will and are thought to be either replace-

able at will or eternally self-renewing.

To sum up these patriarchal points, men have been conditioned to retain power and the benefits of oppression. One of the major traits must be their continuous assertion of strength and superiority and continuous downgrading of the "inferior" section of society.

Seen from the female point of view, patriarchy means:-

Continuous downgrading of personality, desires and expectations.

Continuous service in a male orientated world, subordination of psychic and other needs to those of the male including a service of solicitude, patience, etc.

Acceptance of unequal burdens in child rearing and domestic economy. Acceptance of drudgery with massive guilt feelings at all failure to achieve male imposed standards of perfection in these areas.

Regulation of own intuitive non linear feelings and concepts to inferior status.

Invalidation of female symbols passed on in history and female future aspirations as irrelevant.

On the class issue, the female in any economic class is the more oppressed since she carries both the weight of the class oppressor and that of male society. It has to be explained strongly that so called socialist and left-wing groupings and societies while paying lip

service to feminine goals, act out in fact patriarchal attitudes in every day life and at work.

Women's patriarchal values

Another aspect of patriarchy is its impact on women's own conditioning. There is an internalisation of the roles laid down by male power: women believe in the concept: caring is their job, that in particular child and man service does especially well is what is required of them; that somehow men's concerns are more important than women's.

This leads to the consideration that up-market male values are "better" - e.g. that traditional academic systems and disciplines, methods of discussion with typical judgement and values associated with them are a "superior" method of looking at life; where women are able to take their place in academic life, they too, too often, adapt and reproduce patriarchal values, denying their own resources. This does not mean that the rational disciplines are to be despised but rather that they should be used within wider values and given their places as useful tools within a bigger context.

Again, we find "patriarchal women" in politics, imitating male roles abjectly, but sometimes on the Left, and in the Women's Movement itself, where apeing men is certainly not unknown. Especially do patriarchal attitudes show themselves in women's defence of the nuclear family, and in their guilt about allowing others to care for their family (including the men). Once this is broken through, there is a revolutionary situation.

There is enough here to keep any woman busy in an all female group and indeed

the most rewarding and supported times are those spent getting together with women.

Working in a Mixed Group

Some advanced feminists consider that working in a mixed group is tantamount to becoming "agents" of the enemy or that at the very least a woman in a mixed group is motivated a-politically; that whether she understands herself or not she is actually there for some kind of ego or sexual reasons.

In any mixed sex situation, some of the following is true:

MEN are believed to
be stronger..... but bear less

are believed to
be supporters..... but are physic-
(of females) ally and emotion-
ally supported
throughout life

are believed to
"look after their
families" but are looked
after

are believed to
be less emotional..... but their emotion-
al needs are given
stronger weighting

WOMEN
are believed to
be more emotional..... but are called
hysterical, and
their emotions
considered less

important with
a "wait till its
over" element.

are believed to
be weaker.....

but work a 24
hour day at
double or treble
jobs many of them
demanding physical
as well as inte-
lectual and
emotional long
term strength.

WOMEN'S

attempts to
exercise equal
power.....

becomes 'scold',
'nagging',
'possessive',
'dragon'.

attempts to gain
equal economic
opportunity

downgraded into
'career girl',
guilt created
over child care,
lack of child
care facilities,
philosophical
pressure to
accept unequal
place through
child and man-care
duties.

WOMEN

attempt to gain
sexual equality.....

but becomes sex-
ually exploited,

there is a non-
care for emotions
distinct from
physical feelings.

If women
accept financial
dependence on the
male

they become a
'burden', lose
their 'attract-
iveness', are
less 'interesting'
than 'free'
females as sex
objects and pay
for their finan-
cial support in
lifelong service
of their total
personalities
without recognition.

It will be seen that patriarchy has caused
women to be judged in terms of men's concepts.
In a group it works like this:

WOMEN

are sensitive to put-down and do not
push their ideas, often say less, and
speak in lower voices
nurture the men
provide more of the group's resources
for less return (in everything from
cooking to concept)
care for each other and support
people also support the group as a
whole in a positive direction more
than the men, have a history of pain
and put-down, not acceptable to
'normal' group discussion, and
consequently usually avoided; are
expected to take part in an intellec-
tual rather than feeling manner;

are expected to accept male values of 'useful' 'positive' directions and procedures.

MEN

gain from contact with feminists:
new dimensions of political thought
and study new sexual opportunities
(in 'equal' setting) exercise emotional shiftlessness in appearing to 'care' for women's oppression, but side-step responsibility; judge women by patriarchal standards.

There is another dimension which breaks out in an advanced mixed group, aware of and on its guard against sexism.

Women speak out and challenge sexist assumptions or ideas,

promote activity, appear to move into leadership positions

treat men as equals, expect solidarity and understanding

take sexual initiative.

Men

feel oppressed, guilty about sexism,
do not speak out, do not take any lead, do not wish to "offend" or appear "patriarchal",

do not defend themselves if wrongly accused

swallow their feelings

tend to ape females; openly envy the female processes of birth and breast feeding, tend to devalue the female who is doing these things

go into child care and community

work but often try to work on female lines, denying a male role

do not offer common and equal solidarity and understanding to women. Distance themselves emotionally although usually ready to exploit sexual invitations.

On class and racist issues

Women's oppression is often collated with class and race forgetting that black working class women carry the multi-oppression; of colour and class, and total sex oppression; thus, solving the first two is not going to solve the third. Solving the third is more likely to solve the other two, since all are derived from male take-over and retention of power, and exploitation of nature. To solve the third: the sex oppression brings me back to the original theme of the article: is it worth working in a mixed group; is a mixed group the way, or one of the ways that patriarchy can be overcome?

Reasons for:

any woman (in the world) is likely to have sons, and thus be part of the male society

she is likely to have lovers/husbands

This is where most women are: those who are lesbian, bi-sexual and/or separatist are on world scale, in small numbers so far: they are possibly the most advanced liberation fighters, (in male terms, a commando) but in political terms, still far out from everyday women.

Since patriarchal attitudes have been

achieved through severe continuous environmental conditioning, (rather than being 'inborn'), it is possible to argue that counter-conditioning has to be developed: dialogue by committed people of both sexes who are fully aware and accept this need is one of the ways of achieving this. If such counter-conditioning becomes at all successful, it will have explosive spin-off politically.

* * * * *

Practice in the mixed group

I suggest that caring exercises should be developed: while initiation ceremonies and 'ordeals' of the past were trials of strength and physical endurance, in masculine terms, I believe we now need to develop trials of men's emotional fortitude, on the lines of those that women have to bear as part of everyday life.

I believe that women have to be aware of their needs and strengths, and need more support than they can get from a mixed group. I believe that men have to take the counter-conditioning seriously, not just as an exercise at meetings but throughout life; consequently they need other support and to work out matters that come up in a mixed group. So single sex consciousness raising and support groups are essential.

A mixed group needs to take seriously the female/male power relationships and the imperceptible slackening into patriarchal attitudes if there is not continuous vigilance.

My personal feelings are these: I do not

want to believe that I can have nothing to do with my fellow persons of the other sex, and in this I am like many of my sisters. I want to believe that men are, or at least could be, people like us (me and my sisters). I have seen some men who try and who appear to understand that there is a problem, others who are actually trying to work on it.

It has been suggested recently that there should be a Dictatorship of Women and that in time patriarchal attitudes would wither away or would be eliminated by force. I do not believe in these concepts. I want to work towards androgyny, which I prefer to call gynandry.

Since these terms are not exact, I will say what I mean by them. They signify male and female characteristics in one organism and take on the further meaning of such two-sex characteristics being of equal importance.

Movement forward

I want to move towards gynandry (androgyny): we will get there when we have moved through our patriarchal conditioning. We do not have to ape the other sex. We can be what we are and be happy in whatever turn out to be the specific characteristics (if any) of our gender. We can find out indeed whether there are any such real differences which are not due to conditioning. We can share skills and strengths which may be different and give equal dignity to each other, however different. If women's bodies are able to achieve strengths in areas other than men's, if some people in vulnerable situations need extra care, this need no longer be a put down. If it is found that those in need of care

(infants children, the sick, etc) can call equally on both sexes and above all, if each person can get in touch with her/his true personality including the total of their emotions due to gender, conditioning, the lot, we will no longer have the oppressions we are now fighting.

Conclusion

I believe that it is only by working in a mixed group, supported by a single sex group that we can ever move towards this situation. Mixed groups are painful and it is my personal opinion that they are much more difficult and painful than people realise (and indeed are an excellent test of emotional fortitude in themselves).

It is necessary to re-emphasise that the problem is not female v male, but both against patriarchal conditioning. Although people who have not tried hard, tend to downgrade it as just another aspect of the general struggle, those who do tackle it seriously find otherwise. There is resistance to it because of its personal and political revolutionary implications and its extreme painfulness. But on a long term basis, I believe it is the only hope for both women and men.

Pauline

* We define a mixed group as people of both sexes meeting and working together with specific common aims. The mixed group is an alternative to both sexes only working separately in an attempt to achieve these aims.

Towards the Gynandrous Woman

I have been going to a mixed group for a year now. This paper is an attempt at an analysis of it. I have divided it into two halves; the first: 'Introduction: Patriarchy.' was written at a much earlier date. The second half shows how description of ideas turned into expression and the results.

INTRODUCTION: PATRIARCHY

I think that if I am to get anywhere in writing about Patriarchy in the way I want to I'm going to have to work through an enormous number of incomplete responses first.

The very hub of the meaning of Patriarchy to women is that it has suppressed the validity of what we think and feel, these are not regarded as important. How we might wish to say these things might also be denigrated.

Therefore anything I wish to say and the way/ways I choose to say them are bound to be held in low esteem. Am I being pedantic here, do you ruffle your feathers and say, "yes, yes, of course,"? But the extra circumstance which makes all this in fact very difficult for women is this:

Our civilisation is of a certain kind. It needn't be as it is. I think it is only a few die-hard Tories and religious freaks who would maintain that it is because that is how it must be. Almost all people would accept that it could be different if it so happened to be. People vary in how it could be different and in how changes will take place, if at all. But the belief is there, that our society

could, given the right conditions, alter.

The society we have grown up in is competitive, capitalist and male oriented, it is a man's world. These are attributes of our society. One of these attributes is so strongly accepted that it seems almost irrelevant, it is hardly felt to be an attribute, merely that this is how life is: it is a man's world. Those people, who in a more general sense might accept that the world is not an ordained, unchangeable habitat, often find it very hard to accept that man's role, the unquestioning phrases—Man and his world, Man's existence—might be equally subject to change. Man's position is not unalterable. He cannot assume that he occupies the roles and positions that he does because he has an ordained right, and that that is just how life is.

Women's place in society

A woman is expected, well hardly even expected, merely is, to fit in with this. I was going to say understand, that would be to imply that she knows there is something going on which she doesn't automatically fit in with. I think women do feel they have to 'understand' the situation; men, however, rarely accuse women of not understanding, it is just assumed that, if they object at all, that they don't know what they are talking about. The implication is that there is nothing to understand about a man's world, merely that it is there.

So, what about this dichotomy. Women from birth continually feel that there is much about life that they have to understand; they devote much of their time and energies working out how they fit into this man's world and coming to terms, or blocking off completely, what it means to them to play a part in a society where they don't hold any of the aces, barely anything above a two. Men, from birth, can accept life as it is, there is no need to think, they are accepted and acceptable.

Thus surely it is that women are dubbed naturally sympathetic and sensitive, and men are seen as the doers, the creators. Because of this they have the right to ignore emotions and personal relationships on an intense and personal level: they are too busy doing things. And not only for themselves of course, goodness, why, they have to provide for the weaker sex who are prey to such attacks of sensibility that they easily get hysterical or neurotic.

Let us examine these two responses, 'hysterical' and 'neurotic'. I believe they are used very readily to negate the 'abnormal' feelings women have, and feel they shouldn't have because it means effectively they aren't managing to fit into the man's world and which they are failing to understand. But surely anyone can see that if a person repeatedly fails to see the point of something, and when, every time, they are told that their 'failure' to understand is an inadequacy or irrelevant, they are going to react by screaming their heads off in an agony of frustration—'hysteria and neurosis'—these women! And think how deeply embedded this frustration is. When it is voiced, and for the reason quoted above, it is not even accepted that the frustration has a valid point of departure—how can you be frustrated at something which merely exists? What, for example, would be the point at wearing your life out to the raw bones at a table? A table is. So surely a woman whose heart is constantly gripped with pain and agony because what distresses her isn't even voiced as a discussable idea is bound to suffer the most terrible unhappiness. For her there is this nameless horror implicit in life which hangs over her, causing her never ending hardship but which no one will put a name to.

Meaning for women

Women are all ill, sick, sick to the heart with their own personal woe, this is Patriarchy and it

is an agony we have to carry with us always. We understand we have to fit in, our lives are a ceaseless effort to do it. It is an almost totally unrecognised and isolated battle in each of us.

You see, and this is the crux, men will not give it a name for they do not even see the specific problem. Women can give it a name, but it is of no account. How can women describe something, give it a name and meaning, when the most powerful half of the population deny its existence by saying that it is neurosis we suffer, inadequacy, an inability to cope with life.

Goddam it's pain we suffer, it's being inferior we have to suffer and it's the lack of equality and lack of scope to live life that we suffer.

As I write the pain and agony spread over me like gold paint spread over a green leaf: the paint will kill the leaf but it will last almost for ever, a living death.

I weep as I know that the words I write, based on the agonies I feel, will be accorded no importance. They aren't coherent, logical, rational. What's this hotchpotch of vague examples, theories, attitudes, metaphors, and all this emotion? Why you can't expect people to take you seriously if you can't even calm down, get your head together and be objective.

So you see what we're up against. This is only a beginning but when I think of Patriarchy I have to say first what it means to me. How can I button it up in dry definitions when the thought of it rips open the front of my heart and leaves it bleeding for all comers to dip in and say, "foolish woman, she always did talk such nonsense, and she shouldn't lay herself open to attack like this. Those who expose their feelings are bound to get hurt.

So what am I to do? As a woman in a man's world

I have forced myself to accept the way a man's mind works, as valid. If I were to succumb to the way I really wanted to express myself I would have been trampled on long ago. I have had a lot of education and have endeavoured to use my mind clearly and extensively. Thus it is that when I put ideas together and read other peoples I can understand what is meant, what men mean, what women in a men's world and on men's terms mean. I can kill myself sufficiently and read between the lines enough to adapt a 'he' to mean myself, to understand that when a man uses impersonal language he is being scientific, objective and that somewhere must be hidden the excitement he felt at his discovery and ability to form a new and clear train of thought. Men are very good at being impersonal and objective, it is their very life's blood. Our society believes that in order to be valid, this is the way ideas must be expressed. I believe this too, up to a point. I have had to believe it perforce till now and even when I no longer wished to I still do as it is the only way I can be understood by men and be taken notice of. The alternative would be to be ignored and have peoples belief reinforced that women don't think they just feel.

This fatuous idea that you can't have one without the other or one after the other. Take both and glory in both, use them for different purposes, use your whole body and mind, learn to think with your heart and feel with your head.

But my training has been so good that even now I feel I ramble, and perhaps I do. There is no justification for inaccuracy, be it feeling or thought, and looseness is creeping in.

So if I am to talk about the meaning of Patriarchy how am I to do it? It makes no sense to talk about it as being the oppression of one half of the world's population by the other half. Such a bare, cold statement means nothing as it doesn't describe the pain we go through. To say that Patriarchy is

a slow suffocating death inflicted on one half of the population by the other insensitive half would mean more. But most people would say that that didn't make sense, seeing it only as an emotional response.

Meaning for men

But Patriarchy does mean much more. When discussing it we unconsciously discussed it using men's terms and we tended to talk more about what it meant to men not women. But in fact to describe it in the way we did uncovers an all revealing attitude. In discussing what it meant to us, we made a list of definitions and categories and then a summary of points discussed. In other words we had ended up deciding, that when using men's terms, it meant these disembodied, curt phrases. What it means to men, I, and we, still don't know. Their description and understanding of it has completely left out any emotional response whatever. They did not weep to see themselves regarded as oppressors. I can only say that I think their lack of emotional response means that they don't understand what it means to them. It's just yet another idea to toy with. At best they understand with their heads.

Perhaps only when they begin to feel their prerogatives and assumed rights fall away, one by one, will they feel the pain. But, O shame, I feel, horribly, that they will still only feel the pain of bereavement and not the pain that they have caused us.

So now I am grappling with the meanings of language. What is it when something has meaning?

It seems to me that what Patriarchy 'means' to women is something that men can only understand if they investigate analogies. I think I have pointed out some here. For a man, imagine having one interest in life which absorbed and interested you and which no woman ever admitted existed, and for which there was no name. So that even you, as a man-person, could never, with confidence, point to what you really

wanted to do and were interested in. Does not a man suffer when he is constantly expected to rise competently to every occasion. This is Patriarchy. This is one facet of his side of the coin, of his exploitation and oppression.

Men will understand what Patriarchy means only when they can comprehend, enjoy and ascribe importance to the idea that thought is validly discussed only when it has involved an investigation of both intellectual and emotional responses and has combined the two. Then they will begin to discover what Patriarchy, or anything, means.

I fear that I have produced too strict a dichotomy between intellectual and emotional thought processes, ascribing one to women and one to men, one as good and the other as bad.

But how can I write without intellectual thought going on? This is only a first draft but as I go through to clarify, put in order, expand, weigh up which words to use in order to express my thoughts accurately, is this not intellectual thought? The difference will be that the emotion will remain too. I glory in using my mind and therein lies great happiness for me. It can hardly be said that I am being merely intellectual or merely emotional. I have combined the two.

PATRIARCHY: A WAY OF LIFE?

When I joined the mixed group I had no notion that we would spend a lot of time talking about Patriarchy. Neither did I realise that our discussion of it would take the course it did. The outcome of the path it did take has been a shock.

I joined the group not realising what Patriarchy meant to me. The introduction is an account of how my first awareness of it hit me. It has been very little changed since the words first poured out of

me, but it is only a beginning. There is much to be built on this foundation.

Women coping with Patriarchy

Women suffer Patriarchy in everything they think, feel and do. Our oppression within it can be split up into those things and people that actively deny us our freedom of expression, e.g. lack of education in science, men needing no invitation to express their sexuality; those things within us women that, through conditioning, oppress us, e.g. our reluctance to make decisions, awkwardness in handling responsibility (especially when not connected to caring for other people), and lastly, it oppresses us in that it would appear to be up to us women to break our prison.

If we are ever to understand Patriarchy in a context and see our way beyond it we have to make a leap of the imagination and envisage our lives without it. This, I think, involves coming to terms with, and expressing our own needs. This is perhaps the hardest thing for a woman to do. It involves not only a secure notion of self and identity- things which are alien to most of us anyway- but an actual positive expression of these two things. Not only have we to be aware of them, we must use them. Patriarchy is a way of life, it permeates everything in us and about us. Gynandry is a way of life, it means the creation of a consciousness which excludes Patriarchy. Ultimately we must not only recognise the Patriarchy around and within us, we must create a life around and within us that excludes it. We all have to find a new way of life.

So not only does every woman suffer Patriarchy she has the task of establishing a basis for life without it. The question I ask is this: does she have to undertake this consciousness-raising and task alone or with other women, or should she look for support from men, both in helping her to understand herself and to create the new vision of Gynandry- a society which must involve men? This brings me back to the group.

I think women who have felt Patriarchy, discussed it amongst themselves, cited examples of it, all know that a woman's group, meeting to discuss this, is supportive. Amongst women this oppression of Patriarchy is the silent and often un-named bond between us all. This is what we all have in common. Whilst describing, defining, illustrating Patriarchy amongst ourselves we gain an enormous amount of reassurance, an understanding of how each of us only feels that we fight alone because Patriarchy has told us that women should work for the men and not for each other. Is the next step then, to work with men too? If men are the oppressors within Patriarchy (and are oppressed too, it denies the validity of their emotions) then surely women are never going to get anywhere in getting rid of it unless the men understand the nature of it, the part it plays in women's lives (and their own) and how it conditions all our reactions.

Men and understanding

As became clear in the mixed group, men do not feel the pain of Patriarchy, they are not the oppressed. How are they to fully understand Patriarchy if they do not have some inkling of the strength of this pain and if it is not made clear to them? It was for this reason that I originally wrote the introduction "Patriarchy". But it was not enough that they saw the pain, an analogy had to be found. The men must somehow realise the extent of the pain or they are not truly aware of exactly what Patriarchy means.

An analogy was found in the men imagining themselves as soldiers fighting a war where there was no hope of ever being anything but a soldier, no hope of an end to the war, no end to the complete brutalisation of the emotions brought about by being a soldier. The brutalisation comes from the soldier himself in his desire to protect his sanity, from his officers whom he must obey without personal response or question and from the actual horror of the killing

he must do.

It was felt by the group that the men, appreciating this abnegation of emotions, understood a little, the deprivation of self that a woman constantly feels under Patriarchy. Thus the mixed group struggled not only to describe Patriarchy in words and theories but to grasp what it meant to us all.

Mutual development

To us women we felt extra pain at describing it but we believed it was necessary pain and therefore reasonable, essential for a full understanding of Patriarchy in us and in the men. Up to this point the discussion was two way, descriptive and supportive, illuminating to us all. For me, it validated working in a mixed group because I expressed a new understanding of my life as I lived it and gained support for it from the sex who, up till then, had been seen as the 'opposition' and whom I now felt, with their new knowledge and experience of my understanding and pain, could be more akin to me.

Throughout the group's existence the men had talked of the purposelessness of men's groups, how unsatisfactory they were, how issues in them were never deeply discussed. There seemed to be some mysterious point beyond which they could not go and were therefore not effective and not supportive. I accepted this at the time rather as a fact of life, well if they had been tried and hadn't worked, that was that.

With our new understanding of Patriarchy, the group, unbeknownst to itself I think, went forward to the next hurdle- what to do with this new-found knowledge. Here the group floundered, and any mixed group formed on the same basis as this one will, I think, do the same. The women had felt the need for extra support in a woman's group in order to be happy in the mixed group. This group hadn't materialised.

In fact, the women in the mixed group began to feel able to express a more gynandrous approach, to feel more confident, to feel themselves more important. If this development were to be at all successful it needed an equal development from the men: for them to assume more supportive and less leading roles without feeling their own identities and emotions threatened.

As the men were out of touch with their emotions (a condition of Patriarchy) they hadn't discussed these in a men's group or anywhere particularly. Women use women's groups to get in touch with their feelings and to validate them. Cannot men do the same? The men, as their step forward, did begin to be more in touch with their emotions and began to feel more confident in expressing them. But they expressed them to the women in the group, not to each other. This placed an impossible burden on the women in the group. At the time when they were learning to value more highly their own selves and self expression the men began to ask for increased attention to be paid to their needs.

Triple burden

We women in the group not only felt the burden of Patriarchy as we live it every day, we had the further burden of the men asking us to cope with their repressed emotions. Also, they said they needed the women to tell the men what they (the women) wanted beyond Patriarchy. The men were unable to work this out for themselves. I suggest that this is simply because they had never explored their emotions and those parts of their imaginations and perceptions that goes with them. They couldn't see what to do next, they had nothing to see with. To expect the women to do the seeing for them is quite wrong. It is self-defeating. No one can develop your own methods of using your own perceptions except yourself, for that is yourself. Women cannot create men, nor should they. Under Patriarchy and beyond we have a lifetime's work to create ourselves.

Not having described and expressed their own emotions the men were now stuck. They had tried to miss out a step. They insisted they had to express themselves through us women, a position we could not possibly accept. How could they understand what such a demand meant to us when they still hadn't felt their own emotions? How could they be supportive of the women, with their now triple burden when emotions still had no real meaning for them?

Way forward for men

They were beginning to express their emotions, but it had taken the caring of the women to set this going. With such a beginning the men expected the women to carry on providing the impetus. How could they, at this time when, within the group, the women were becoming more and more attuned to the knowledge that they could express themselves? The men decided to form a men's group. The women withdrew from the mixed group unable to cope with their triple burden.

The men, by and large, have not supported the women through this painful departure. They saw the women's rejection of their expression of their emotions as an attack on themselves. Rising above Patriarchy in all of us involves this sort of pain and rejection. For the men it means they must accept a decrease of their sense of importance to women and must learn to look to each other for support.

Way forward for women

For women it means the pain of projecting your own self and needs at what is seemingly the expense and decrease of caring for others. But this is not in fact a complete understanding of the increase of a woman's knowledge of her self importance. She is expressing herself in a new way: as a gynandrous woman. She is no longer to be the great carer for men, children, and women too but is to be a person in her own right and accept that, as such, she will and should command respect and an important place in soc-

iety. She has to learn that, in stopping caring for others through a sacrifice of herself, she is not degrading standards of life but is probably beginning to care for others through a pride of herself. That the caring and the self are one thing and inextricably mingled, not opposed.

This is a very painful thing for a woman to grasp, let alone put into action. It seems to contradict, invalidate, all that makes a woman a woman. She has the even harder task of putting something new in its place and this is something she must do for herself and amongst other women. Only we can define and re-define ourselves. She will certainly never be able to do it in a mixed group unless both sexes have their own groups for support. Ultimately it must be possible to work in a mixed group and must happen. Gynandry isn't possible without equal involvement. But neither is it possible without equal support and sharing.

I am stopping to take stock for a while but write this in the hopes that others (men and women) will express themselves more easily if I explain this that I have experienced and learnt.

Yours, in sisterhood.

Mary

Booklist:

- "The Mothers" Robert Briffault 1927
"The First Sex" E. Gould Davis 1971
"Women's Mysteries" Esther Harding 1971
"The Goddesses" Matriarchy Study Group 1977
"Alternative Socialism" Keith Paton original publication 1976
"Woman's Evolution" Evelyn Reed 1975
"Daughter of Earth" Agnes Smedley 1929
"The Paradise Papers" Merlin Stone 1976
"A Room of One's Own" Virginia Woolf 1928

Way forward for women

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Beyond Patriarchy Publications,
31, Dalmeny Road, London, N.7.