Rise and Decline of Patriarchal Systems (Verso, 2021).
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Chapter 6
Patriarchal Ascents

Although structures of collective power provide much of the scaffolding of human history, our understanding of their institutional construction remains seriously incomplete. Evolutionary reasoning suggests that hierarchies may emerge because they provide some advantages to the groups that create them, allowing them to eliminate, disable, out-compete, or gradually displace other groups. Speculative accounts of the origin of hierarchy typically dwell on the implications of productive technologies, comparing gatherer/hunter, pastoral, agricultural, and industrial societies. These distinctions elide important variations within these technological categories, minimizing the significance of the social institutions that govern collective violence, production, and reproduction.

Early research on the possible origins of patriarchal institutions initially had little impact outside feminist scholarship, but has gradually gained traction.[1] Some revisionist applications of Marxian historical materialism bring sexuality and reproduction front and center.[2] Likewise, some forays into the timespans of "big history" incorporate conflicts based on gender and age, noting their implications for social transitions over vast periods of time from the prehistoric to the present.[3] None of these approaches, however, provide a consistent theoretical framework for analysis of intersectional conflicts.

The historical record reveals multiple interactions among structures of collective power based on gender and other forms of socially assigned group membership. In the early stages of human history, patriarchal and other authoritarian institutions appear to

have co-evolved under the pressure of conflict and competition between groups. Despotism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and colonialism did not represent new stages of history, or even new pages replacing old ones. Rather, they created new layers of hierarchy that overlaid and sometimes altered the script of pre-existing inequalities.

Histories of the Patriarchal

Speculation on the links between social evolution and gender inequality has long animated feminist theorists eager to believe that history was on their side. The notion that traditional gender roles were anachronistic relics of an earlier era—a byproduct of economic circumstances and social institutions rather than divine design--found expression in nineteenth-century social science and historical research that helped set the stage for modern feminist theory. The more specific argument that patriarchal institutions were linked to war and other forms of collective conflict has particularly deep antecedents in the cultural history of Western Europe.

Gender and Evolution

Some early feminists welcomed Darwinian theory as a powerful rebuttal of religious doctrines of feminine responsibility for original sin and expulsion from the Garden of Eden.[4] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, author of the widely-read *Women and Economics,* published in 1898, argued that social norms encouraging women to specialize completely in family care were both unnatural and maladaptive.[5] While Darwin was no advocate of women's rights, his ideas regarding group selection provided an opening for feminist reasoning. The sociologist Leta Hollingworth anticipated some of the arguments in this chapter when she wrote, in 1916,

> The fact is that child-bearing is in many respects analogous to the work of soldiers: it is necessary for tribal or national existence; it means great

> sacrifice of personal advantage; it involves danger and suffering, and, in a certain percentage of cases, the actual loss of life. Thus we should expect that there would be a continuous social effort to insure the group-interest in respect to population, just as there is a continuous social effort to insure the defense of the nation in time of war. It is clear, indeed, that the social devices employed to get children born, and to get soldiers slain, are in many respects similar.[6]

Thinkers influenced by Friedrich Engels' *Origins of Family, Private Property and The State* have generally attributed gender inequality to the rise of private property in early class societies.[7] August Bebel's earlier work, *Woman and Socialism*, however, treated inequalities based on class and gender as parallel, rather than sequential phenomena, attributing both to the violent imposition of coercive laws and norms.[8] Engels' view prevailed partly because it seemed to offer more political optimism, particularly as archeological research revealed that hunting and gathering societies occupied by far the largest span of human history. If such societies were entirely cooperative and egalitarian, they set a powerful precedent for future socialism.

Some gatherer/hunter societies seem to fit this idealized picture, and the transition to private property may well have consolidated inequalities based on class and gender.[9] On the other hand, the claim that gatherer/hunter technology and the absence of private property and a state automatically guaranteed egalitarian outcomes seems far-fetched. Patriarchal institutions may well have preceded the emergence of private property in either land or livestock. Maria Mies argues that a "predatory mode of production" allowed men to seize surplus in the form of young women from other groups.[10] Riane Eisler describes Neolithic European societies based on partnership between the sexes that were overrun and overwhelmed by violent authoritarian marauders.[11]

All such arguments are handicapped by the difficulty of historically reconstructing

what were essentially prehistoric events. Yet evolutionary reasoning linking hierarchy to organized violence resonates with iconic episodes drawn from the ancient history of a profoundly patriarchal culture.

The Spoils of War

The much-studied history of Western Europe reveals potent associations between war and control over women. The *Iliad* begins with the theft of a wife and features a general who hopes to gain divine assistance by cutting his daughter Iphigenia's throat. The warriors who besiege and ultimately destroy Troy compete with one another for concubines. The Amazon Penthesilea wins Achilles' respect in hand-to-hand combat, but her defeat relegates women warriors to the past. In Aeschylus' classic drama, Iphigenia's mother kills her husband in revenge for her daughter's sacrifice, only to be killed in turn by her own son.

Roman history also tells a gendered story of collective conflict. As Plutarch tells it, the men who founded the city of Rome were unable to find wives without resorting to trickery. They invited the neighboring Sabines to bring their families to a festival, ambushed them, drove the men away, seized the young women, and impregnated them. By the time the Sabine men regrouped and returned with allies, many of the women had given birth.[12] They threw themselves between the armies, begging their fathers and brothers not to fight the fathers of their newborn children. Their collective gesture was immortalized by some of the greatest artists in Europe,

including Nicolas Poussin, Jacques-Louis David, and Pablo Picasso.

The abduction of the Sabine women illustrates how maternal commitment could make rape an effective strategy for individual men (enhancing their reproductive success)

and for groups (effectively increasing their numbers). It also reveals how allegiances based on kinship could complicate, even reinforce group inequalities. Control over women's marriage decisions offered groups a means of building some alliances and effectively blocking others—a dynamic that later became central to caste systems, racial boundaries, and national identities.[13]

The Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, often placed rape and war under the same rubric as in "You may enjoy the spoil of your enemies."[14] Under the leadership of Moses, the Hebrew tribes vanquished the Midianites, seizing their goods and livestock, and killing all but the young women who had never had sexual intercourse (32,000 of them in all).[15] The text of Deuteronomy 21 specifies that women taken captive during war could be taken as wives after one month.[16] In the late nineteenth century Friedrich Nietzsche reiterated this ethos in terms that would later saturate Nazi ideology when he wrote "Man shall be trained for war, and woman for the recreation of the warrior."[17] In this context, recreation carries a double meaning.

Social Evolutions

Productive efficiency, reproductive fitness, and military power may all contribute to group success in variety of ways. Evolutionary psychologists and neoclassical economists tend to emphasize inherited behavioral propensities or preferences; feminist psychologists are more likely to emphasize social institutions.[18] These two approaches are not mutually exclusive, a point emphasized in human behavioral ecology, which points to the dual inheritances of genes and culture.[19] Social institutions mediate the expression of biological differences as well as their economic consequences.

Evolutionary success does not necessarily imply superior efficiency; it may result from physical violence rather than from productive or reproductive capabilities. Murder and theft can lower overall output but benefit their perpetrators. Moreover, as Tyrannosaurus rex and other fossilized relics of extinction attest, evolutionary success often proves temporary.[20] Human groups have grown rich not only by increasing their own productive capacity, but also by extracting resources from other groups, two strategies that have often proved complementary.

The Behavioral Ecology of Gender

The behavioral ecology of primates and monkeys reveals links between characteristics of the natural environment, group competition, social organization, and differences based on sex. For instance, among baboons, ground dwellers that often stand and fight, males are much larger and stronger than females; among arboreal monkeys, tree dwellers specialized in evasion and flight, males and females are physically quite similar. Behavioral variation is also great. Differences in dynamics between females and males are significant even among primates that inhabit only slightly different ecological niches, such as chimpanzees and bonobos.[21]

Evolutionary biology has traditionally emphasized the selection pressures at work on males, emphasizing their competition for females. A growing literature, however, emphasizes the selection pressures directly at work on females. Among species in which offspring are dependent on maternal nurturance and protection for a prolonged period, maternal intelligence, resourcefulness and strategic thinking enhance reproductive success.[22] If male success is affected by ability to manipulate and control females, the opposite is also true: female success is affected by ability to minimize the adverse effects of

such manipulation on their own reproductive fitness.[23] Female primates, for instance, often form coalitions designed to protect themselves and their offspring from male violence.[24]

Attention to sex-based forms of collective action among primates supports the claim that social institutions mediate the effects of gendered behavioral propensities. In human societies, memes are especially important relative to genes: the biological coevolution of male and female strategies is overlaid by the cultural coevolution of social institutions that can improve both reproductive success and economic advantage.

Before Sedentary Agriculture

In the gatherer/hunter societies long considered representative of the least hierarchical stage of human history, women tend to specialize in gathering or foraging, men in hunting. Most research on their social evolution focuses on the implications of these technologies of production, lumping all gatherer/hunter societies together. Recent research, however, shows considerable variation within this category.

Both gathering and hunting activities can contribute to caloric intake, complementing one another in terms of nutritional value and seasonality. Gains to cooperative hunting are often greater with large game (whether stags or whales) than with small game. Likewise, gains to cooperative gathering may be greater when forage possibilities are concentrated rather than scattered and diffuse.[25] The relative payoffs to cooperation in a Fruit Hunt game may parallel those in the stylized game known as Stag Hunt, with a payoff matrix that conveys the trade-offs between collaboration and going it alone.

Reproductive priorities also come into play. Gathering and foraging are more complementary with care for dependents than are most hunting activities. When women

work together collecting and preparing food, they can easily share responsibility for the supervision of young children or the care of sick or frail adults. The relative costs of caring for dependents are affected by many factors, including the age at children can begin to care for themselves (or one another) and contribute to their own subsistence. For instance, hunting is a skill that requires years to develop, which implies that male children do not begin to contribute to adult consumption until a relatively late age.[26]

The demographic dynamics of gathering and hunting groups were probably distinct from those of groups that settled in place. The need to keep on the move without the assistance of domesticated animals probably made high dependency ratios costly. Young children must be carried, and an adult cannot easily carry more than one at a time. As a result, highly mobile groups were likely to limit their birth rates, encouraging lengthy breast-feeding (which reduces the probability of conception) and imposing restrictions on forms of sexual intercourse likely to lead to conception.[27] They may also have resorted to infanticide. Norms that encouraged the disabled or frail to leave the group—or be abandoned by it—could also have limited care burdens.[28]

Fighting and Stealing

The economic organization of many gatherer/hunter societies may have contributed to relatively egalitarian gender relations, but variations in weaponry and social institutions could lead to distinct outcomes, particularly in areas where intense inter-group conflict emerged. Fighting and stealing, rape and subjugation could affect both productive and reproductive success.

Marxian scholars such as Eleanor Leacock have often romanticized gatherer/hunter societies, arguing that their failure to generate a surplus meant they had little to quarrel

over.[29] But the archaeological record of early gatherer /hunter economies reveals a variegated pattern of altruism within groups combined with considerable fighting among groups, efforts to capture women, and many violent deaths.[30] Egalitarian groups hoping to avoid conflict may have proved vulnerable to invasion by aggressors who could both expand their territory and increase their own numbers by seizing women and children.[31] As the Hawk-Dove Game outlined in Chapter 5 suggests, aggressive groups are most successful when surrounded by groups who are conflict-averse. Jared Diamond's riveting account of the Maori extermination of the Moriori provides a memorable example.[32]

Male specialization in hunting and warfare could have had spillover effects on gender relations, increasing men's ability to dominate and physically abuse women. The most successful warriors are also the most able to threaten and dominate other group members, and they may parlay that advantage into the establishment of authoritarian institutions such as hereditary leadership.[33] Inter-group conflict indirectly promotes hierarchical institutions by making it difficult for individuals to survive on their own, reducing their exit options.

Early examples of warfare technology include archery and the use of domesticated animals, technologies that reached far beyond the Neolithic era.[34] In the Great Plains of the U.S. the expert management of horses by some Native American tribes such as the Comanche allowed them to prey on their sedentary neighbors.[35] Greek tales of Amazons may have been based on female Scythian warriors that often rode side-by-side with men; a woman on a horse armed with a bow is deadlier than a man standing with sword alone.[36] Perhaps in this respect Amazons foreshadowed the gendered implications of drone warfare today—women can click on virtual triggers just as fast as men.

The costs and benefits of war in prehistoric times were probably measured largely in demographic terms: the high mortality of young adult males versus the increased fertility that could be achieved through the capture of young adult females.[37] In such circumstances, young men faced a terrible tradeoff: the risk of injury or death was almost certainly greater than the likelihood of individual rewards. At the same time, the logic of group selection could have delivered significant advantages to groups in which young men were socialized to fight—whether or not they had a behavioral propensity to do so.[38]

The costs of war were also high for women. They were subject to murder, capture, and rape as well as economic vulnerability from the death of their partners.[39] A high incidence of warfare may also have reduced their collective bargaining power relative to men's. In addition to the reproductive costs from the loss of sons (higher for mothers than for fathers who could potentially sire more), both high male mortality and the capture of young fertile girls would have increased the overall supply of women relative to men, reducing their bargaining power and making it difficult for them to form monogamous partnerships. Once established, patriarchal control over women could contribute to demographic flexibility rather than expansion, enforcing female infanticide as a kind of safety valve.[40]

Pastoral economies based on privately-owned domesticated animals may also have facilitated the subordination of women. The economic incentives to organized theft were magnified by wealth on the hoof. Many pastoral societies engaged in constant raids, particularly during periods of economic stress such as drought.[41] Theft of large animals could easily have been extended to theft of young women, and seclusion of these women could have made it easier to control them. Domestication is a word easily applied to both

animals and women.[42] Indeed, in some pastoral societies, men obtain wives by paying a bride price in livestock.[43]

Frederick Engels noted that private property increased men's desire to ensure paternity of their children, motivating control over women's sexuality.[44] Modern evolutionary theory offers a more specific theory of male mate-guarding, based on levels of paternal investment that affect the patriarchal bargain. If fathers do not devote many resources to their biological children—whether as a result of rape, casual sexual encounters resulting in pregnancy and paternal abandonment, or community-level support for childrearing-- female partner fidelity may not significantly affect their reproductive success. If fathers devote substantial resources to children, however, they seek to ensure that those children are their own. Male control over private property ensures that the resulting terms of trade (support in return for fidelity) are favorable to them.

Both gatherer/hunter and pastoral societies that developed patriarchal control over women could have become more likely to fight, steal and raid than other groups.[45] They could also have achieved greater regulation of their population size. The most successful warriors could obtain more women, benefit from their productive and reproductive services, and further consolidate their authority.[46] If women and men ever lived in a Garden of Eden, it was not Eve's disobedience that forced them from it. Nor is there at sufficient evidence to conclude that private property was the original sin.

Not Just Surplus

Sedentary agriculture increased the potential for generating surplus that could easily be stored and accumulated, providing a greater basis for wealth accumulation. Many institutionalist economists, as well as those more directly influenced by the Marxian

tradition, have emphasized causal links between agriculture and the emergence of extractive institutions.[47] Archaeological research suggests a more mixed picture, with variable levels of wealth inequality among hunter/gatherer societies.[48] Some early agricultural societies, such as the Neolithic community of Çatalhöyük in what is now Turkey, were apparently quite egalitarian.[49] The Çatalhöyük site also reveals relatively little economic differentiation between women and men.[50]

The potential to generate an agricultural surplus almost certainly promoted hierarchical institutions, but centralized systems of political control—i.e. "states" probably emerged from military victories when defeated groups unable to flee or relocate could not avoid subjugation.[51] Sedentary societies were often vulnerable to external attack. Recorded history provides some clues to prehistoric dynamics: The thirteenth-century Mongol leader Genghis Khan supposedly claimed that he knew no greater pleasure than to vanquish his enemies, steal their possessions, and impregnate their wives and daughters. A recent summary of his conquests describes genetic evidence that more than thirty-two million people in the world today are descended from him.[52] It did not take long for this roving bandit to discover the advantages of settling down. When the Mongol army conquered northern China in the 13th century, one Khan proposed extermination of the native population until a minister pointed out that taxing them all would be more profitable.[53]

Both economic productivity and military success were influenced by the organization of reproduction, with possible economies of scale for large populations in both domains. High birth rates may also have proved advantageous to groups as an impetus to both technological change and to territorial expansion.[54] Many economists still assume that population growth in the past was driven largely by changes in mortality, with

a constant level of "natural" or unrestricted fertility, but this Malthusian assumption has been undermined by evidence of variability in the birth rates of pre-industrial populations.[55]

The economic transition to sedentary agriculture probably encouraged increased fertility for a number of reasons: Infant mortality rates remained high (and may even have increased) because the advantages of increased caloric intake were counterbalanced by greater exposure to vectors of contagious disease. The need for mobility was reduced, and care of children could be combined with directly productive activities close to home, including hoe cultivation and care of small animals. Children could contribute to agricultural work such as watering and weeding at a relatively young age.

The microeconomic incentives built into agricultural technology were reinforced by patriarchal institutions. Property rights over land gave men economic leverage over their wives and children, increasing the likelihood of receiving substantial support in old age.[56] At the same time, restrictions on the economic alternatives available to women outside of marriage limited their agency within it. While both parents could benefit from increased control over children, mothers literally bore most of the costs of raising large families.

Coercive pronatalism and compulsory heterosexuality pressured men, as well as women, to raise as many children as possible.[57] The Book of Genesis in the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible exhorts all to "be fruitful and multiply." Other major world religions, including Christianity and Islam, uphold high fertility and homophobia, promising rewards in the afterlife in return for adherence to their doctrines. Such promises, encouraging submission to secular, as well as religious authority, have proved especially costly for women.

Hybrid Hierarchies

Could systematic forms of control over women have emerged in the absence of other forms of collective conflict? Simple hierarchies based on gender and age alone would likely have proved unstable, susceptible to continuous conflict and bargaining. More complex, intersecting hierarchies could not eliminate such costs, but they could reduce them, creating overlapping incentives for acquiescence. Despotic rulers with the greatest levels of political power typically enjoyed the greatest access to women's sexual and reproductive capabilities; women might comply for the sake of their future children.[58] Men subject to the authority of other men were, perhaps, partially consoled by their authority over women and children. Structures of collective power impose subtle and enduring forms of subordination.

Slavery and Patriarchy

As Gerda Lerner and others have observed, it seems likely that the enslavement of women both preceded and informed the enslavement of men.[59]

Slavery, defined as institutionalized control over another person's body and labor power, initially emerged in the aftermath of war as an alternative to extermination of the defeated. Most of the slaves referred to in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are women. In ancient Greece and Rome, enslavement of both women and men—often foreigners—was relatively widespread.

Though the extent of physical authority over slaves in Greece, Rome, and elsewhere varied, its abusive and exploitative character was never limited to mere forced labor on farms or in mines. Slave owners typically demanded sexual and reproductive services as well. In some areas, infibulation of female slaves—installation of a metal ring closing the

labia majora to prevent intercourse--was not uncommon.[60] Historical evidence suggests that female genital cutting in Northern Africa was originally devised to expedite an extensive slave trade in concubines whose virginity (and non-pregnancy) had to be guaranteed until their final sale. Descendants of groups involved in this early trade appear more likely than others to engage in such cutting today.[61] In his comparative study of sixty-six societies, Orlando Patterson argues that a distinctive feature of slavery was forced abnegation of family ties, resulting in "social death."[62] Couples could not form lasting relationships, and children were often separated from their parents.

In Western Europe during the Middle Ages religious doctrine discouraged the enslavement of Christians but often justified the enslavement of infidels. As international trade expanded along with colonization, slaves came to be harvested, like other raw materials, from vulnerable societies. The demand for slave labor was fueled by the development of labor-intensive plantation-style agriculture in new European colonies, where workers could be closely supervised and disciplined by overseers. In this context, slave ownership became a source of significant capital accumulation, contributing to the emergence of new class differences as well as intense race-based exploitation.[63]

The enslavement of "others" reduced the threat that intense exploitation might otherwise pose to group solidarity. In the eighteenth century, the German naturalist Johann Blumenbach devised an influential racial classification system codifying a hierarchy of worth with Caucasians, named after his favorite European mountain range, at the top.[64] In the United States, race was legally determined by genealogy; evidence of any black ancestor, or, in more colloquial terms, a single drop of African blood, defined a person as Negro.[65] National origin and race were often conflated with race, as in the derogatory

designation of Irish immigrants to the U.S. as "blacks."[66]

The bounty that slavery offered a landed elite engaged in global commodity trade spawned a particularly vicious and enduring form of racism based on exploitation in reproduction and production. In French and English colonies slave owners wielded virtually complete control over their human chattel, guaranteeing a cheap supply of sexual services for their owners and demographic accumulation of labor power/human capital. In the U.S. South, slave children became a cash crop that became particularly lucrative after the international slave trade was banned, boosting domestic demand.[67]

White slave owners in the U.S. could sell their own progeny. Interviews with ex-slaves indicate that whites fathered children in about one out of every six mother-headed families.[68] Elsewhere, slave owners were subject to stricter regulation. In Spanish colonies, royal decrees influenced by Catholic doctrine stipulated that slaves could marry, that married couples could not be separated, and that individuals had the right to purchase their freedom. These legal constraints may have contributed to the relatively early decline of slavery there.[69]

Slave-based systems were often stabilized by complex overlay of hierarchies. White women tolerated patriarchal institutions not only because they perceived no alternatives, but also because class differences pitted them against one another in competition for alliances with powerful men. Racial privileges increased their stake in the status quo. Southerners defended slavery as a family-like institution, but whatever affective bonds developed between the masters and mistresses of the plantation and their chattel were tenuous at best. Ideological justifications took elaborate forms, often based on assumptions of natural inferiority.

Still, wherever slavery existed, collective resistance was sometimes fortified by intersectional dynamics. Ancient Greek history offers a parable of sorts. In the late eighth century B.C.E., the Spartans conquered their neighbors, the Messenians, taking control over their land and their labor. Because Messenian slaves were prone to revolt, control over them required the virtually permanent military mobilization of Spartan men. Spartan women, left largely on their own, took considerable responsibility for the administration and management of agricultural estates. Perhaps as a result, they gained far greater rights to property ownership than their counterparts elsewhere in Greece.[70]

Often separated from their husbands, they typically bore fewer children than other Greek women, reducing the growth rate of a population already lowered by war-related mortality. Over a period of more than two centuries, the relative decline of the Spartan population reduced the relative size of the Spartan fighting force, and the Messenians finally overthrew their masters. In the wake of the resulting military demobilization, the property rights of Spartan women were restricted, and gradually reverted to the Greek norm.[71]

The end of slavery in the U.S. was also inflected by intersectional dynamics. The Civil War broke out as a dispute over states' rights, not over the legitimacy of slavery itself. Economic differences between the North and the South pitted two very different wealth-owning classes against each another. In the North, popular outrage against the institution of slavery was fueled by Harriet Beecher Stowe's popular book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a tale of the forced separation of slave mothers and fathers from their children. The conduct of the war itself pushed President Lincoln to the then-controversial signing of an Emancipation Proclamation that resulted in a huge redistribution of wealth from slave owners to slaves

themselves.

Patriarchal Feudalism

European historians have long used the term feudalism to describe Western European hierarchies that relied heavily on forms of coercion that fell short of slavery but restricted the mobility of a rural peasantry.[72] Inherited property rights in land, forced labor, and military conscription allowed lords and ladies alike to prosper at the expense of those who grew their food and served their tables. Yet ladies had far less scope for individual choice than their lords, and peasant women, despite their important economic contributions, remained subject to male authority, violence, and harassment.[73]

Class hierarchy sometimes overrode gender hierarchy, as when lords laid claim to the brides of their subordinates. The English monarchy (unlike the French) allowed women to rule as queens in the absence of a male heir. In general, however, monarchs reinforced the authority of most men over most women and children in
return for obeisance to their own power as head of a metaphorical household-a patriarchal quid pro quo.

Until the late 17th century, patriarchalism was a largely unchallenged tenet of European political thought.[74] The French philosopher Jean Bodin described fathers and kings in parallel terms.[75] Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha,* published in 1680, eloquently defended the divine right of inherited male authority.[76] It described men as children of a heavenly father ruled by his representatives in the flesh. Filmer purported to trace the lineage of the King of England to direct descent from Adam and attributed men's dominion over women and children to the first man's God-given dominion over Eve.[77]

Patriarchal feudalism created strong pronatalist pressures that almost certainly

contributed to high birth rates, and, when mortality subsided, population growth. In a labor-intensive economy based largely on cooperation among kin, more children meant more workers, and more workers meant more surplus. Religious doctrines restricted women's opportunities outside marriage, sanctified their subordination within it, and prohibited sexual practices unlikely to result in conception. Contrary to Malthusian reasoning, the resulting population growth did not necessarily lead to immiseration. On the contrary, it often stimulated technological change, including improvements in agriculture such as draining of swamp land and terracing of fields.[78]

High fertility also helped guarantee a large supply of labor, reducing the bargaining power of workers as a group. External demographic shocks tended to undermine hierarchical institutions. The devastating effects of plague known as the Black Death in 14th century Europe empowered peasants and weakened the grip of feudal elites.[79] Women, in particular, gained new access to property as daughters and widows of the deceased. Sylvia Federici argues convincingly that the intensified persecution of witches—primarily women—during this period represented a ruling class effort to reassert patriarchal—and pronatalist—control over women.

Oddly, however, Federici absolves men of any agency in this process, explaining their collusion as the result of "propaganda and terror."[80] She never explains why capitalism itself "demanded a genocidal attack on women," or which capitalists, exactly, she is referring to in a society dominated by feudal and semi-feudal relations of production.[81] Her riveting account of organized violence against women is more consistent with an intersectional approach in which the class interests of landholders and the gender interests of men overlapped in lethal ways.

The quantitative impact of plagues far overshadowed the demographic impact of witch hunts, and may have weakened patriarchal institutions in Europe relative to those in other regions of the world. Still, these institutions remained in force, and as population growth gradually regained its momentum, opportunities for expanding cultivation narrowed. In some areas, families found it difficult to provide adequate land to support the next generation, and fragmentation of land holdings contributed to the immiseration of the rural population.

Under these circumstances, the very institutions that allowed the elderly to recoup some of their investments in the younger generation by relying on them for support proved adaptive. By discouraging early marriage (and withholding the transfer of property or use-rights required to make it feasible) fathers increased the gap between generations and improved chances of future prosperity.[82] The Catholic Church provided a place for unmarried sons and daughters, enforcing their celibacy as monks and nuns, while institutionalized prostitution provided a carnal safety valve for men.

The very imbrications of patriarchal feudalism in Europe lent it resilience. Control over women's sexual and reproductive lives, never absolute, nonetheless reinforced class-based forms of economic and political power based on inheritance of property. The opposite was also true: class power, for the most part, enforced gender power. Yet despite these forms of exploitation—and perhaps partly because of the particular forms they took—Western Europe achieved gradual improvements in its collective military and economic capabilities that positioned it for later capitalist development and imperial domination.

Patriarchal Hybrids Outside Europe

The class-based hierarchies that emerged in many areas of the world outside Europe also perpetrated patriarchal authority over women and children, taking a variety of overlapping forms. While egalitarian arrangements sometimes survived in their interstices, Nonetheless, large-scale states seemed to deliver significant economies of scope and scale, allowing them to aggressively expand. The emergence of major world religions testified to homogenizing forces.

In China, Confucian principles dictated women's Three Subordinations: as daughters, to their fathers; as wives, to their husbands; as widows, to their eldest sons.[83] Male household heads enjoyed property rights over their children.[84]

Rapid demographic expansion in China between the 17th and 19th centuries (as in some other regions of the world) was curbed by female infanticide. A detailed study of demographic trends in one province between 1774 and 1873 reveals consistently tilted sex ratios that could not have been achieved by any other means.[85]

Confined to social roles that offered them no other path to prosperity, women sometimes took action that perpetuated their own collective subordination. The history of foot binding in China provides a case in point. A crippling practice initially encouraged by the nobility sometime between the 10th and 13th centuries, it gradually spread to other classes and other regions; by the early 19th century more than half of all Chinese women had suffered a permanent mutilation that caused excruciating pain, endangered their health and restricted their mobility. The resulting disability limited their ability to work outside the home and helped enforce their seclusion and fidelity.

Only the poorest families, most reliant on women's work in the fields, seemed willing to spare their daughters' feet. The custom of foot-binding persisted for centuries,

only to be abruptly undone in the early twentieth century when a group of influential men publicly announced they would never marry a woman with bound feet. Their actions tipped mothers toward the hope their daughters might actually fare better if they defied tradition.[86]

In India, the elaborate caste system of Brahminic Hinduism relied heavily on family control over marriages and female sexual behavior as way of simultaneously enforcing sub-group identities and bolstering male authority. In the early twentieth century B.R. Ambedkar insisted that patriarchal institutions such as sati (self-immolation of widows) and denial of property rights to women served the interests of privileged castes. Female compliance was achieved through a "combination of consent and coercion."[87] That caste rules regarding both endogamy and the division of labor have varied considerably over space and time is hardly surprising: these were institutions whose economic rewards were often contingent on specific circumstances.[88]

In the Middle East, Islamic doctrines with less explicit rules regarding gender helped unify otherwise disparate groups. The actual letter of religious texts such as the *Koran* had far less impact on family law than interpretations proffered by political and religious authorities.[89] While some economists argue that Islamic family law impeded economic development, hegemonic patriarchal institutions in other regions of the world did not cause long-term blockages .[90] Intersectional forces in the Middle East were distinctive: economies based largely on extraction of highly monopolized oil resources, combined with multiple forms of international interference, channeled a defensive ideological response into patriarchal practices that discouraged productive investment.[91]

The terms of patriarchal bargains vary enormously over time, but the basic

parameters for women are remarkably similar: submission to men and specialization in family care in return for a modicum of economic support. The stability of this bargain depends in large part on the viability of other options. While these options are circumscribed by the physical and technological environment, they are also influenced by the formation of coalitions capable of modifying interlocking structures of collective power.

Patriarchal Colonialisms

Between the 16th and 19th centuries. European countries converted their geographic and economic advantages into military capabilities that often, in turn, reinforced their economic success.[92] The record of collective aggrandizement by force and violence, including enslavement, belies cheerful accounts of the "rise of the West" based largely on entrepreneurial innovation.[93] Historical accounts of the impact of the slave trade on European capital accumulation prefigured the emergence of post-colonial scholarship that documents both the material and ideological legacies of colonialism.[94]

It is difficult to determine what portion of the extracted surplus fed the process of capital accumulation. Colonization sometimes poisoned its perpetrators, as when vast appropriations of silver and gold from the Incas led to crippling inflation in Spain.[95] Imperial power also funneled vast riches into the maws of corrupt monarchs.[96] Yet in many instances, colonization empowered an emerging class of traders, investors, and entrepreneurs capable of generating significant ongoing economic gains. Colonial powers often brandished the potential benefits of global power to their subaltern populations, promising them ample compensation for their subordination. Their portrayals of the putative benefits of modernity enhanced their ability to divide, conquer, and control entire countries.[97]

Colonial Fatherhood

Conquest alone was never sufficient to establish institutional control over vast new geographies. Colonization required strategic political administration and ideological justification as well as military power. European gender ideologies were often grafted onto preexisting roots and cultivated on a trellis of intersectional tensions. Colonists sometimes sought to destabilize the patriarchal institutions they encountered in order to assert their moral authority and impose their own favored forms of hierarchical control.

In a profound illustration of divide-and-conquer strategy, the Spanish conquest of Mexico was advanced by alliances with ethnic groups chafing under Aztec imperial domination and by female defection. After one of his early military victories Hernan Cortes received a tribute of twenty female slaves, including a woman who became his lover, the mother of his son, his interpreter and his advisor. Known as La Malinche, she became a symbol, to Mexicans, of treason against her own people. The definition of "her own people," in this instance, apparently refers to those who sold her into slavery for use as military tribute.

While colonization typically generated disproportionate benefits for those at the top of intersecting hierarchies of nation, race, and class (including many wives and daughters), it was typically regulated in ways that reinforced patriarchal authority over women. For instance, the ruling elites of Spain and Portugal, fearing a loss of population, severely restricted female immigration to the New World. As a result, in sixteenth-century Latin America, European men outnumbered European women by more than ten to one.[98] Native populations were devastated by the combined effect of military subordination and immunological vulnerability; European men enjoyed virtually unrestricted access to the

women who survived, resulting in the growth of a mestizo population.

The explicit rules of Catholic marriage, however, were held in abeyance. As early as 1549, the Spanish Crown passed a law excluding persons with any Indian ancestry from inheritance of land grants, or *encomiendas*, regardless of the legitimacy of their birth.[99] In one historian's words, the mestizo race was born of the "intercourse of white men and Indian women outside the pale of matrimony."[100] The term "mestizo" itself came to be virtually synonymous with "illegitimate." Paternal contributions to the support of their children were entirely voluntary and probably unreliable.

In similarly sexualized colonial encounters, some European companies in charge of overseas enterprises in the Pacific, such as the Dutch East Indies Company, hired only single men. While encouraging concubinage, they discouraged marriage by prohibiting European men with native wives and children from return to Holland.[101] By one estimate, unmarried men living with Asian women represented almost half of the European male population of the Indies in the 1880s. Children born of these unions had no legal claims on their fathers' income, and European feminists expressed both outrage and concern over their plight.[102] Giacomo Puccini's famous opera, *Madame Butterfly*, which premiered in Europe in 1904, dramatized the vulnerability of Japanese women deceived by false promises of commitment.

The so-called Eurasian population became a problem in India in the late 18th century, when posts within the East India Company became increasingly attractive to British applicants. A policy adopted in 1791 discouraged ethnic mixing by banning Eurasians from higher grades of the army and civil service, claiming that Indians themselves looked down on those of mixed blood and would not take orders from them.[103]

Even when such official obstacles were lowered, the British managed to keep Eurasians, not to mention Indians themselves, on the lowest levels of the occupational hierarchy.

In 1810 the colonial government's Medical Board recommended giving soldiers easy access to prostitutes and encouraging them to "attach themselves individually to individual women."[104] High-level company administrators and major landowners, on the other hand, conformed to British upper-class conventions. They could consort with whom they pleased, but they avoided both attachments with and commitments to those beneath them.

Colonizers may have deceived themselves, as well as their subject populations, by racist doctrines and religious allegiances that disguised the realpolitik known as "might makes right." Patriarchal ideology proved remarkably malleable, suggesting, for instance, that native populations, like children, needed calm and capable elders to rescue them from paganism and barbarism.[105] The English political economist James Mill famously argued that English women did not need the vote because their fathers, brothers, and husbands would represent their interests. He offered a perfectly parallel explanation of paternalistic British rule in India.[106] The French added maternal solicitude to the picture, carried to laughable extremes in William Adolphe Bouguereau's 1883 painting, *Motherland*, in which Marianne, the symbol of France, embraces an assortment of children with skin and hair of different shades.

Dispossession and Segregation

The gendered consequences of colonization differed when European migration was family-based. Settler colonialism created distinctive structures of collective power.[107] In South Africa, Kenya, Rhodesia, and Zambia, class differences among white settlers were less pronounced than elsewhere, and sanctions against intermarriage with Africans were

severe. As a result, little racial mixing took place. Government policies such as poll taxes were designed to drive African men into wage employment, providing a cheap source of agricultural labor.[108] African women were largely limited to employment in domestic service or prostitution.[109]

Ethnographic accounts of the relative position of women among indigenous African tribes have often proved unreliable, based on observations over a period of rapid adjustment to new conditions, including, obviously, external threat.[110] In general, European authorities in the colonial era seemed willing to challenge aspects of traditional tribal authority that gave elder men control over the marriages of their children, but were reluctant to encourage actions that might otherwise empower women.[111] In early Tanganyika, colonial policies toward the Maasai, based on the presumption that only men owned cattle, almost certainly diminished women's economic opportunities.[112] Like settler governments in South Africa, the Rhodesian government in what is now Zimbabwe adopted policies that made it difficult for women to migrate to urban areas, leaving many confined to native reserves.[113] Such policies of spatial gender segregation had long-lasting and disruptive effects on African family life.[114]

In Australia, the ratio of available land to people was quite high, and aboriginal populations were commonly driven into the periphery where they engaged in sporadic employment combined with subsistence foraging. In the U.S. and Canada, the process of dispossessing Native Americans (or First Peoples, as the Canadians put it) was more complex, involving military mobilization and state policies designed for relocation and confinement. The threat of war forced tribes into a weak negotiating position, leading to their confinement and immiseration on reservations.[115]

With the exception of Palestine, politically dismantled by the creation and territorial expansion of Israel, many countries of the Middle East experienced a form of colonization motivated primarily by strategic military concerns and access to a wealth of fossil fuels. For the most part, colonial powers focused on the co-optation and manipulation of existing elites, often taking advantage of tribal and religious divisions and reinforcing patriarchal and feudal institutions. Economic development, based primarily on rents for natural resources, did little to encourage changes in the social relations of production.

Description of these circumstances motivated Deniz Kandiyoti's concept of a patriarchal bargain, or what Suad Joseph terms a gentleman's agreement to convert religious laws into state laws, reinforcing traditional forms of authority.[116] Women's participation in this bargain was shaped not only by their lack of viable alternatives, but also by a larger sense of vulnerability to external control and outside attack. The political and cultural condescension of the West helps explain a political slogan that embeds intersectionality in metaphors of kinship: "My Arab brother before my Western sister."[117]

Challenges to male authority were seldom strategically viable when entire groups were under attack. As a result, female resistance to colonization itself has been interpreted as a "kind of subterranean, unrecognized form of feminism," because it represented a form of collective resistance to external control.[118]

Expansion and Globalization

As evolutionary biologists observe, isolated ecosystems buffered from outside competition often develop in divergent but similar ways. Many of the famous literary utopias of the West, including Plato's *Atlantis* and Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, flourished on islands.[119] The shipwrecks of two great heroes of early eighteenth-century English

literature, Robinson Crusoe and Lemuel Gulliver, thrust them into environments entirely different from their own. One man became an icon of rational economic man, easily able to survive on his own. The other became an icon of ethnographic curiosity, comparing the morals of Lilliputians to Brobdingnagians.

Both these fictional characters distracted attention from the larger drama. Colonization was an extension of earlier processes of inter-group competition and conflict in which gender also played a central part. As the many literal and figurative islands of the world came into greater contact with each other through trade, many began to bargain over the terms of their engagement. The biggest share of the gains was not captured by the most rational or the most productive, but by the most powerful. Their power derived not only from military prowess and accumulated wealth, but also from interlocking structures of collective power that relied heavily on patriarchal institutions.

Colonization delivered economic advantages that were as much cause as consequence of capitalist development.[120] The resulting fruits were distributed quite unequally, but often in effectively co-optive ways, trickling down from top to bottom in ways that dampened resistance to authority. The promise of just-enough prosperity, even if only intermittently fulfilled, often seemed to justify subordination. If the resulting tensions remained in check, they also remained poorly understood and largely unresolved.

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