

Chapter 16

In The Penal Colony: The Body as the Discourse of the Other¹

The receptive ability of the great masses is very limited, their understanding is small. On the other hand their forgetfulness is great. All propaganda should be limited to a very few points. It has to confine itself to little and repeat this eternally. . . .

People in the overwhelming majority are so feminine in nature and attitude that their activities and thoughts are motivated less by sober considerations than by feeling and sentiment.

--Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (1924-26).

Quoted by Harold Ettliger in *The Axis on the Air* (1943)

Pacification.

[In one of his cross-cultural studies,] *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches*, published in 1974, Marvin Harris analyzes the dominant social relations of the Yanomamo, a South American Indian tribe of brutal and treacherous men who beat, torment, wound, mutilate (and sometimes) kill their several wives; who gang-rape women captured from other Yanomamo villages in their constant "internal" wars; and who spend most of their waking hours either arguing or fighting (usually over women), or lying about dripping snot in a men-only hallucinogenic haze (Cagnon, 1968).

A Yanomamo woman with a "kind" husband will judge the strength of her husband's love for her by the frequency and intensity of the beatings she receives.

(Note that, as unpleasant as they may be, Yanomamo warriors treat women no worse than English, French, American, Russian, German, Italian, Japanese, and other soldiers and bandits have done in this century.)

In the most violent of the villages Yanomamo men compete with each other in chest-pounding, side-slapping, rock-pounding, machete-slapping, and club-fighting duels of increasing violence, where first one then the other waits to receive the full force of his adversary's blow, and then returns it. A quarter to a third of Yanomamo men die in war.

Harris concludes that *if* sex is to be used to energize, control, and reward aggressive, vicious, and warlike behaviour, then both sexes cannot be equally brutalized to behave this way. (1974, p.106):

One or the other must be trained to be dominant. It cannot be both.
To brutalize both is to invite a literal war of the sexes. Among the Yanomamo this would mean armed struggle between men and women for control over each other as a reward for their battlefield exploits. In other words, to make sex a reward for bravery, one of the sexes has to be taught cowardice.

That's a very harsh judgment indeed. It takes far more than ordinary courage to live the life of a scapegoat and a victim day by day. It would be more reasonable and less unjust to say that if female infanticide, war, and male supremacy are to exist as a system of population control, then the women must be trained to accept their victimization by men as a status that is inevitable, natural, deserved, and even desired.

Victimization of this sort has another name: colonization. Male control over women and their bodies is the oldest form of private property; the division of productive labour by sex is the oldest form of class distinction; male monopolies of myth, ritual, and religion are the oldest forms of ideology; male supremacy is the oldest form of imperialism.

We know from the experience of millions upon millions of subjugated peoples—untouchables, Africans, blacks, Hispanics, Jamaicans, Filipinos, Catholic Irish, Indians, Chicanos, and others—that colonization cannot exist without the active (if only partly conscious) support of most of the colonized who suffer under it. Similarly, male supremacy cannot exist without the active (if only partly conscious) support of most of the women it oppresses.

Although the role of armed force and physical fear in colonization is not to be neglected, the secret of colonization does not lie simply in the physical power of the colonizer to force the colonized to accept the pain, humiliation, and degradation of their inferior position. Force alone is not enough; it must be supported by an ideology that proclaims the superiority of the colonizer over the colonized.

But again, it is not enough for the colonizers alone to believe the myth of their God-given, "natural," innate,

¹ This essay first appeared in Chapter 5 of *Man and Woman, War and Peace* (1987), by Anthony Wilden, pp. 206-228.

and hereditary superiority; the colonized must be taught to believe it too, and just as fervently, if not more so.

The reason is that if the colonized were not taught from birth to death to collaborate in their open oppression, physical force alone could not be guaranteed to quell the mutinies, revolts, and rebellions that would result.

The colonizer must control and conceal the strategy of colonization. The colonized must be taught to respond to this strategy, not by a countervailing strategy, but by a variety of tactical behaviour that serves to maintain and reinforce it.

The colonized must come to believe that they are with few exceptions exactly what their colonizers say they are: stupid, lazy, inferior, deceitful, promiscuous, unfaithful, selfish, ignorant, greedy, dirty, “uncivilized,” savage, barbaric, violent, “primitive,” “animalistic,” and even the essence of evil itself.

In this way the colonizer not only controls the economic, social, and political life of the colonized, but he also controls their sense of identity as well –and with that, their self-esteem, the most important of personal values. The colonizer so convinces the colonized of their inferiority that they come to think, act, and live out their lives as if they really were inferior.

In *Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonization of Women in Austria* (1975, p.247), Anne Summers writes:

Divide and rule is the technique employed by the colonizing powers to ensure the allegiance of a strategic majority of the colonized, to convince them that colonization is beneficial to them, and to persuade them to collaborate in the task of pacifying or punishing the more recalcitrant of their sex who refuse to accede to the demands of the invaders.

By encouraging divisions among the colonized, and by allowing privileges to the favoured group of hated collaborators,

The colonizing power is able to prevent the colonized from forming a united opposition and from refusing to perform the labour required of them by the invaders.

The respective roles of the Damned Whores and God's Police in Austrian history are summed up in two quotations at the beginning of Summers' book.

On sighting the *Lady Juliana* coming into Sydney Harbour in June 1790 with over two hundred female convicts aboard, Lt Ralph Clark exclaimed:

No, no –surely not! My God –not more of those damned whores!
Never have I known worse women.

In 1847, in *Emigration and Transportation Relatively Considered*, Caroline Chisholm wrote:

If Her Majesty's Government be really desirous of seeing a well-conducted community spring up in these Colonies, the social wants of the people must be considered. . . . For all the clergy you can despatch, all the schoolmasters you can appoint, all the churches you can build, and all the books you can export, will never do much good, without what a gentleman in that Colony very appropriately called “God's police” –wives, and little children—good and virtuous women.

Once again the women's choice is either wickedness or virtue.

I argued in *The Imaginary Canadian* in 1980 that colonization is the common principle underlying most if not all kinds of oppression, and especially oppression by class, race, and sex. Summers, whose book I came across more recently, shows why colonization is such a useful explanatory principle in the case of the oppression and exploitation of women. She summarizes the “classic colonial situation” (p.198) as follow:

1. the invasion and conquest of a territory
2. the cultural domination of its inhabitants
3. the control of the territory's inhabitants by setting them at each others' throats (divide and rule)
4. the extraction of profits from the colonized territory

Colonization also requires the more or less violent destruction of the original inhabitants' culture and way of life, damping potential revolt and forcing or persuading them to believe that their culture is inferior and that they should adopt that of the colonizing power. Every ideological weapon is brought into play, whether it be associated with religion, health care, philanthropy, treaties, commercial exchanges, or the “civilizing mission” of the invaders as they

seek to pacify the colonized and convince them that their colonization is for their own good.

Using the term “colonization” to describe the situation of women ceases to be a metaphor, says Summers (p. 200), once it is recognized that in the case of women the conquered colonial territory is the body:

Women are colonized by being denied control over their own bodies.

We have already seen from Susan Brownmiller’s *Against Our Will* (1975) that over and over again in cases of rape – notably in the rape, mutilation, and murder of captured enemy women, but also in the assault and humiliation of women by the typical police blotter rapist—the woman’s body is being used as a message in the discourse of the Other.

We saw also from the young paratrooper’s account in *St Michael and the Dragon* (1961) that eclectic torture by the French in Algeria became the ultimate invasion of the body, the universal act of rape, the forcible entry of agony at every bodily orifice, at every nerve.

Looking now at Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* (1961), p. 268 of the Grove Press translation by Constance Farrington, where Fanon (1925-1961), the black psychoanalyst and radical political philosopher from Martinique, recounts his obligation as a therapist to treat not only Algerians surviving torture during the war of independence (1954-62) he supported, but also the mental and emotional problems of the Frenchmen doing the torturing, we find the following account by a 30-year-old European police inspector who had begun to threaten people who crossed him and cruelly assaulted his wife and children in “fits of madness”:

The fact is that nowadays we have to work like troopers. . . . The thing that kills me most is the torture. You don’t know what that is, do you? Sometimes I torture people for ten hours as a stretch. . . . You may not realize, but it’s very tiring.

It is true, continues the inspector, that he and others take turns, but the question is to know when to let the next man have a go. No one wants to go to all the trouble of softening up a subject and then have him “come” in the hands of someone else, who would then get all the glory.

Our problem is as follows: are you able to make this fellow talk? It’s a question of personal success. You see, we’re competing with the others. In the end your fists are ruined. So you call in the Senegalese. But either they hit too hard and destroy the creature or else they don’t hit hard enough and it’s no good (p.269)

Torture is gang rape taken to its pathological conclusion. The torturers are competing with each other over who has control of the victims’ bodies and what they do with them. Here again someone’s body is being used as a medium of communication between men, as a channel of the discourse of the Other.

You have to be “intelligent” to make a success of this kind of work, explains the inspector, you have to have a flair for it. Above all, he explains,

what you mustn’t do is to give a chap the impression that he won’t get away alive from you. Because then he wonders what’s the use of talking if it won’t save his life. . . . He must go on hoping; hope’s the thing that’ll make him talk.

Once he talks, however, the French have no more use for him and usually kill him anyway.

The inspector could not see his way to stop torturing people –he would have to resign. So he asked Fanon straight out “to help him go on torturing Algerian patriots without any prickings of conscience, without any behaviour problems, and with complete equanimity” (pp.269-70).

It suddenly dawns on me, long after the event, that the theme of the body as the discourse of the Other is the theme of Franz Kafka’s parable *In the Penal Colony*, written in 1914 and published in 1919. Prisoners in the colony are slowly but to death by an apparatus whose vibrating needles write their sentence in the flesh over and over again and ever deeper: “Whatever commandment the prisoner has disobeyed is written upon his body by the Harrow. This prisoner, for instance” –the officer indicated the man—“will have written on his body: HONOR THY SUPERIORS!”

A gun is power. To some people carrying a gun constantly was like having a permanent hard on. It was a pure sexual trip every time you got to pull the trigger.
--Vietnam veteran quoted by Mark Baker in *Nam* (1981)

Baby-san.

“What you got there?” said the soldier. “Hey, you VC? What do you got?” It was a “baby-san” and a “papa-san”, a teenager of about fifteen or sixteen and her father, about forty, he told Mark Baker in *Nam* (1981, pp.169-70):

They had a can of pears! American pears in a big green can marked with a big U.S. on it in large print. We say,

“Isn’t this some shit. Here we are in the field; we don’t know what pears is. They got pears! And *we* don’t have pears.” I’ll never forget the guys’ faces in the unit from The GIs up to the captain. We are shit in the field, and the guys in the rear have given these gooks pears, man.

“The GIs gave you pears? Oh, yeah? For that, we’re going to screw your daughter.” So we went running, taking the daughter. She was crying. I think she was a virgin. We pulled her pant down and put a gun to her head.

Guys are taking turns screwing her. It was like an animal pack. “Hey, he’s taking too long to screw her.” Nobody was turning their back or nothing. We just stood on line and we screwed her.

I was taking her body by force. Guys were standing over her with rifles, while I was screwing her. She says, “why are you doing this to me? Why?” Some of the gooks could talk very good. “Hey, you’re black, why are you doing this to me?”

Baby-san, she was crying. So a guy just put a rifle to her head and pulled the trigger just to put her out of the picture. Then we started pumping her with rounds. After we got finished shooting her, we start kicking them and stomping on them. That’s what the hatred, the frustration was. After we raped her, took her cherry from her, after we shot her in the head, you understand what I’m saying, we literally start stomping her body.

And everybody was laughing about it. It’s like seeing the lions around a just-killed zebra. You see them in these animal pictures, *Wild Kingdom* or something. The whole pride comes around and they start feasting on the body. We kicked the face it, kicked in the ribs and everything else.

Then we start cutting ears off. We cut her nose off. The captain says, “Who’s going to get the ears? Who’s going to get the nose? So-and-so’s turn to get the ears.” A good friend of mine --a white guy from California—he flipped out in the Nam. The dude would fall down and cry, fall down and beg somebody to let him have the ears. Captain says, “Well, let Son-and-so get the ears this time. You had the last kill. Let him get it this time.” So we let this guy get the ears. We cut off one of her breasts and one guy got the breast. But the trophy was the ears. I had got a finger from the papa-san. That was about it, what I got from the incident. We let the bodies stay there mutilated.

It is by study of the many variations of bush warfare in different parts of the world that British officers, who are by nature endowed with jungle instincts beyond other European races, can ensure success.

--*Warfare Against an Uncivilized Enemy*:
Field Service Regulations, Part I, Operations, 1912

Basic training.

According to research principally by Eleanor Maccoby of Stanford University, Lisa Serbin of Concordia, and Jeanne Block of the University of California at Berkeley, summarized in the 1980 Nova television program, *The Pinks and the Blues* (WGBH, Boston), girls and boys are brought up from birth onwards in fundamentally different ways and fundamentally different results,

Mothers and fathers expect boys to be strong-willed, hard-working, intelligent, ambitious, and aggressive. Mothers and fathers expect girls to be kind, loving, well-mannered, obedient, attractive, unselfish, lady-like, not aggressive, and not assertive. Boys are expected to be noisy, rambunctious, and self-reliant; girls are expected to be quiet, polite, and dependent.

The education and training of the growing girl is likely to be more structured, supervised, circumscribed, restricted, and protected than that of the growing boy. The young girl tends to be imbedded in the family network and insulated from experience.

In contrast, the growing boy is less supervised, encouraged to be more spontaneous, given more freedom to explore, taught to improvise when faced with the unexpected, encouraged to solve problems on the spot, taught to develop an active understanding of experience and an ability to take advantage of opportunity.

Girls’ games tend to be “rule bound” so that deviations from the rules are really not permitted or expected. When a dispute arises girls are often unable to negotiate their differences. Rather than agreeing to modify the rules, they will stop playing altogether, or start another game.

Boys in contrast play more complex games which require more refereeing and negotiation about rules. Boys become more experienced in negotiating disputes than do girls.

Girls are generally provided with far fewer opportunities for spontaneous engagement, trial and error learning, or active experimentation.

When mothers help their daughters with a task they tend to inject unnecessary and interfering aid, even when their daughter is doing well. Such over solicitous aid tends to devalue the capabilities of the child, makes her doubt herself, and encourages her to believe that she could not have accomplished the task on her own.

In school boys will tend to attribute their successes to their own capacities; girls tend to attribute theirs to luck or some other impersonal factor. Conversely, boys tend to blame their failures on external circumstances (“the text was too hard,” “the questions were tricky”), whereas girls tend to blame their failures on themselves besides underestimating their actual successes.

Boys are taught to seek to master the external world, to take an instrumental approach to objects, and to see themselves as people with the power to make things happen, and to see themselves as people with the power to make things happen, to make a difference. Girls are not.

It should be emphasized that these differences are the result of persuasion, guiding, training, teaching, socialization, adult expectations, and conformity to social norms, much of it unconscious and unrecognized whether by the adult or the child. They are not the result of genes, innate tendencies, hormone balances, anatomy, brain differences, or “masculinity” or “femininity.”

The results of these radically different experiences of childhood can be summarized under several headings.

Aggression or assertiveness: Boys are more adventurous, more competitive, more likely to be anti-social or engage in violence than girls.

Activity: Boys “cant’ sit still”: they are more active and more interested in the outside world, engage in more activities and change them more often than girls.

Curiosity, exploration: Boys are more curious about “how things work,” take more chances, and are more likely to explore on their own than girls.

Impulsivity: Boys are more easily distracted, less successful in resisting temptation, and more likely to run into trouble or danger than girls.

Accident rate: At every age level, boys have more accidents and suffer more injuries than girls.

Anxiety: Girls tend to be more fearful and anxious than boys; they are more afraid of more things than boys.

Social relationships: Girls tend to be more compliant and obedient than boys, and much more concerned with « doing the right thing.” Girls are more torturing, more concerned with group welfare, more ready to co-operate and compromise, better able to put themselves in other people’s shoes, and more empathetic than boys.

Friendships: Boys tend to have more extensive networks of friends, but less intimate friendships, than girls. Girls tend to share their hopes and despairs more intensely with their friends than to boys. Interpersonal relationships remain more important to women throughout life than they do to men.

Self-esteem: Boys seem to view themselves as more powerful, with more control over events in the world, than girls. Boys act as more instrumental and more effective agents; they are more assertive, more confident that they will achieve their ambitions, and see themselves as able to “make things happen.” Girls do not appear to share these qualities to any similar degree.

Achievement: Boys expect to do better and entertain higher levels of aspiration for themselves than do girls. Girls are less confident and more likely to underestimate their performance even when they do well.

Or as Colette Dowling puts it in *The Cinderella Complex* (1981):

Women are not trained for freedom as all, but for its categorical opposite, dependency. Males, however are educated for independence from the day they are born. (pp.15-16)

Two remarks from the nineteenth century will put the foregoing into a representative context. The first is taken from the zoologist Carl Vogt’s *Lectures on Man* (1964), quoted by Stephen Jay Gould in *The Mismeasure of Man* (1981, p.103):

The grown-up Negro partakes, as regards his intellectual faculties, of the nature of the child, the female, and the senile white. . . . Some tribes have found states, possessing as peculiar organization, but as the rest, we may boldly assert that the whole race has, neither in the past nor the present, performed anything tending to the progress of humanity or worthy of preservation.

The second is from an article by the noted psychologist and student of mass behaviour Gustave Le Bon, published in the *Revue d’anthropologie* in 1879, also from Gould (p.105):

All psychologists who have studied the intelligence of women, as well as poets and novelists, recognize today that [women] represent the most inferior forms of human evolution and that they are closer to children and savages than to an adult, civilized man. They excel in fickleness, inconstancy, absence of

thought and logic, and incapacity to reason.

I am talking of millions of men who have been skilfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement.

--Aimé Césaire : *Discours sur le colonialisme*. Quoted by Franz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)

Who is speaking and to whom?

Colette Dowling asked three men, a financial reporter, a stockbroker, and an advertising executive, to give her their impressions of the way women look and act and sound when they do business:

Reporter: A few months ago I interviewed a woman with a big position on the New York Stock exchange. . . . AS she talked she would switch into and out of different styles. For a while she'd be very serious and confident-sounding. Then she'd back off for a second and kind of giggle, and give a little shoulder, or a little nod (pp.52-53).

The broker had also remarked on this kind of communication by women (without using these terms): the communication of "status-markers" were communication about relationship temporarily or erratically dominates the communication of content. The result is ambiguity, he said:

You get the schizy feeling, as if you don't know what person they're going to slip into next.

The reporter went on to say about the woman he had interviewed:

This woman's diction was super slow. She was very careful with her words, hyperconscious of how she was speaking, how she was coming across. Then she did this thing I've seen a lot of women in good jobs do. They finish their sentences by softening their words and nodding a little as they soften.

The broker and the adman agreed, the latter remarking that the nod is intended to get you to agree.

(Dominated by American capital and British traditions, English-speaking Canadians—noted for their lack of a sense of culture or national identity and their "inferiority complex" vis-à-vis other nationals—show the same kind of diffidence in ending their sentences with the distinctively Canadian "eh?".)

The advertising man added:

I've noticed in business that women never really swing, conversationally. You'll never hear them say, "Are you *crazy*?" or something like that. Very often you'll find that men in business really let their personalities fly and soar. That's how they do business. . . . They get into it. Women are polite and formalistic. They want the rules right out there in front.

The reporter said:

It's as if women are afraid to actually get behind the *force* of a statement. They'll be talking and really working up some force, and then suddenly it's as if they see themselves getting forceful and they have to back off. I think they're afraid of power.

We can translate these passages into Hegel's theory of human desire (as distinct from animal or biological need, such as hunger). "Human desire," he says, "is the desire of the Other." We desire recognition by the Other (the master or the ideal or the model) . . . ; or desires are mediated by the Other. (They are thus relations rather than forces or things.) The mediation of desire by the Other may or may not involve its alienation (literally "othering").

In alienated desire one desires to be the desire of the Other, one desires to be what (one imagines) the Other desires. It is precisely this alienated form of mediation that is manifest in the diction and body communication of the women being discussed.

Rather than speaking, they are being spoken.

Robin Lakoff finds the following characteristics to be consistent in women's speech:

- the use of empty, fluffy adjectives (marvellous, divine, terribly, etc.), which makes people take them less seriously
- the use of tag sentences after a declarative statement ("It's really hot today, don't you think?")
- the use of dipping or questioning intonation at the end of a statement, rendering it less forceful
- the use of hedging or modifying phrases giving their words a tentative, uncommitted quality
- the use of "hypercorrect" and excessively polite speech (p.55).

Sally Genet of Cornell calls these distinguishing marks the "diffident declarative." Mary Brown Parlee of *Psychology Today* notes that "speech may not only *reflect* power differences. It may help to *create* them."

Dowling quotes the psychologist Phyllis Chesler, author of *Women and Madness* (1974), who argues that women communicate these messages deliberately (if not always consciously). In *Women, Money and Power* (1976) Chesler says:

Women of all classes, within the home and in public, use a basic body language to communicate deference, inconsequentiality, helplessness . . . a stance which is supposed to put others at their ease, and men "on top."

This self-subordination to the discourse of the Other is the result of a learned dependency on other people, and notably on men—a deeply felt desire to be taken care of by others through which women come to sabotage their own creativity and individuality.

Studying adolescents at the University of Michigan, for example, the psychologist Elisabeth Douvan finds that,

up until the age of eighteen (and sometimes past that) girls show virtually no thrust toward independence, aren't interested in confronting authority with rebellion, and don't insist "on their rights to form and hold independent beliefs and controls."

In all these respects girls differ from boys. Girls are trained into dependency: boys are trained out of it. The evidence indicates that dependency in women increases as they grow older (p.101).

Independence does not of course mean "autonomy." Independence, like identity and like self-esteem, is a relationship to others.

The process of switching over to a more independent relationship to others and the world begins, in boys, at the age of 2. Most boys have developed their sense of distinction from others and their sense of self-esteem by the time they are 6. With girls, however, both passivity and a dependent orientation towards adults appear consistently all the way into adulthood. These two personality factors are the most stable and predictable of all female character traits (p.103).

Dowling asks:

Why, when we have the chance to move ahead, do we [women] tend to retreat? Because women are not used to confronting fear and going beyond it. We've been encouraged to avoid anything that scares us, taught from the time we were very young to do only those things which allow us to feel comfortable and secure (p. 15).

Men and boys in contrast are taught to experience and master fear and even to enjoy it. But for women, at least for white middle- and upper-class women:

Fear, irrational and capricious—fear that has no relation to capabilities or even to reality—is epidemic among women today (p. 58).

The fear of independence and individuality differs greatly in its intensity and effects, of course, depending on individual experience, and it is expressed in many different ways: in low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, underestimation of one's actual abilities and achievements, a narrowed stretch of the imagination, a choice of goals far below one's capacities, antagonistic competition with other women (producing and reproducing insecurity), prejudice against them (and often against oneself), self-deprecation and sometimes self-hatred, attraction to the source of one's fears (dominating and alienating Others), ignorance of one's own culture, history, and traditions (often coupled with a lack of respect for them), fear of being too competent (for a man), fear of not being enough (with a man), fear of being subordinate, fear of being dominant, fear of being the same, fear of being different, fear of being with a man, fear of being without one, fear of failure, fear of success—and at its worst fear of movement, discovery, change, innovation, imagination, the unfamiliar, the unknown, and above all, normal aggressivity and assertiveness.

The result is an unwillingness to take charge of one's own life accompanied by a real inability to do so. "Men are active," says Dowling, "women are reactive." "Men are stretchers, women are shrinkers."

The Cinderella Complex teaches one to act inferior and believe it to be true. It is not simply a mistaken view of this and that aspect of reality. It is rather a strategic disability that, like a self-fulfilling prophecy, ensures that so long as it remains unrecognized most women will continue to accept and support the domination of men, and teach male supremacy to their children as well.

The result of this strategic disability is the loss to a world society in crisis of most of the diversity and creative capacity of over half the world population. Here too male supremacy is a counter-adaptive response to the need for adaptive change. If our society is to survive in a human form—if it is successfully to undergo the necessary adaptation of a revolution in structure, values, and goals—we all need all the help we can get.

In this disability however women are not alone, for the Cinderella Complex is the psychological paradigm of every other kind of colonization.

*It is not easy to escape mentally from a concrete situation,
to refuse its ideology while continuing to live with its actual
relationships.*

--Albert Memmi: *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957)

And babies?

Ellen Hale shows in a recent article that there is a relationship between cases of multiple personality and violence. Multiple personalities are now believed to be much more common than previously supposed, many perhaps being wrongly diagnosed as “hysterical, depressed, neurotic, borderline schizophrenic, epileptic or as abusers of drugs or alcohol” (Vancouver Sun, April 23, 1983). Dr. Frank Putnam Jr. of the National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda, Maryland is one of several psychiatrists researching the subject. Natasha is one of his patients.

From the time she was two until she turned sixteen, she said, she was continually raped by her father, a well-known Oklahoma banker and farmer. Until she was twelve the rapes took place with her mother’s passive compliance and often with her active participation.

At 12 when Natasha began to develop physically, her mother ordered a stop to the abuse. But, under the guise of teaching his daughter the banking business, this man took her to his office on Saturday mornings and raped her on his desk. At 16 she became pregnant by her father. For sixteen years her father controlled her body; for sixteen years Natasha managed to control her mind. She claims to have 127 different personalities or personality fragments.

The work of family therapists like R.D. Laing and colleagues in Britain and Gregory Bateson and colleagues in the United States taught us that madness is very often an adaptive response to a pathological situation, a response with survival value for the victim. Or as Harry Stack Sullivan said many years before, the process of going mad is the beginning of the cure.

Multiple personalities fit this pattern. As Putnam explains, they are one of the most ingenious and intricate processes of psychological self-defense. “It develops, apparently, in early childhood, as a result of brutal and continual physical and mental abuse by parents, relatives or close friends.” Some 100 psychiatrists surveyed by Putman reported that more than 90 per cent of the patients they had treated for multiple personality had been severely abused physically or sexually for long periods in childhood.

Child-abuse is a great deal more common than generally realized. But since only a few of the abused children develop multiple personalities, it appears that those that manage to do so have an unusual capacity to disassociate or hypnotize themselves in self-defense. They learn to escape mentally and emotionally from the inexplicable brutality of those who supposedly love them by developing separate personalities to deal with the torments they suffer.

Eighty-five per cent of the patients with multiple personalities are women.

*Human nature has been conditioned very largely
by those who said it could never be changed.*

--M.J. Bernard Davy,

in *Air Power and Civilization* (1941)

Male Supremacy: The Struggle for Extinction.

In *Making of Mankind* (1981) –humankind—Richard Leakey remarks that the common idea that violence is innate in human beings is ‘one of the most dangerous and destructive ideas that mankind has ever had’ (p.21). It is

dangerous precisely because of the decisive influence of culture and learning on human values and behaviour. Unlike animals, what we do or do not do is never independent of what we have learned to believe is possible or impossible, right or wrong, pleasurable or offensive, useful or useless, good or bad –alternatives that are arrayed in level upon level in the complexity of the human world.

The 'death instinct' view of warfare is dangerous also because it denies our responsibility to others for our words and deeds. It is dangerous because by making violence appear genetic and thus inevitable, it replaces ethics by defeatism, and reinforces the ideology of genetic determinism: the social Darwinism of the 'survival of the fittest' that explains away oppression on the grounds that the oppressed are oppressed because they don't have what it takes to do better. It is dangerous above all because it masks the fundamental counter-adaptivity of the beliefs and behaviour of men.

Against the idea of a genetic 'killer instinct' Leakey quoted the prehistorian Bernard Campbell (p.242):

Anthropology teaches us clearly that Man lived at one with nature until, with the beginnings of agriculture [about 12,000 years ago], he began to tamper with the ecosystem: and expansion of his population followed.

It was not until about 5000 years ago, says Campbell, with the development of the temple towns, that 'we find evidence of inflicted death and warfare':

This is too recent an event to have had any influence on the evolution of human nature Man is not programmed to kill and make war, nor even to hunt: his ability to do so is learned from his elders and his peers when his society demands it.

Warfare, in other words, is learned, and not genetically programmed behaviour.

Speaking of the Yanomamo in *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches* (1974, p.87), Harris argues that male supremacy depends on the self-reinforcement and self-amplification of positive feedback:

The fiercer the males, the greater the amount of warfare, the more sexually aggressive they become, the more exploited are the females, and the higher the incidence of polygyny –control over several wives by one man. Polygyny in turn intensifies the shortage of women, raised the level of frustration among junior males, and increases the motivation for going to war. The amplification builds to an excruciating climax: females are held in contempt and killed in infancy, making it necessary for men to go to war to capture wives in order to rear additional numbers of aggressive men.

This relationship of competitive symmetry is no different from the positive feedback –the mutual amplification—of the arms race between the superpowers, with no negative feedback –the control of escalation—in sight.

There have been three major escalations of the arms race since 1945: that initiated by Democratic President Truman after the United States blundered into the Korean War in 1950; that initiated by Democratic President Kennedy after the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1961; and that initiated by Republican President Reagan in 1980.

The arms race has taken a new turn. If we are to judge from Defense Secretary Caspar Weinsberger's annual report to Congress for the 1984 fiscal year, American strategic superiority is no longer enough. Superiority must be absolute, the technology invulnerable, the defense impregnable, and the system of strategic communications and electronic countermeasures (CECM) immune from attack. The desire for the possible and the probable has been replaced by the desire for the absolute.

America, President Reagan told the National Association of Evangelicals in 1983, is engaged in a 'struggle between right and wrong' against the 'aggressive impulses of an evil empire'. The source of America's strength, he said, 'is not material but spiritual, and because it knows no limitation, it must terrify and ultimately triumph'. Absolute good thus faces absolute evil, and paranoia replaces politics.

If we look back to the beginnings of warfare thousands of years ago, and follow its increasing severity, brutality, and destructiveness as it became the monopoly of the state, and later the instrument of empire, the pattern we see is that a continually escalating symmetrical competition between men –as arms race stretching backward to the beginning of history and forward to the end of the world.

The whole ghastly pathology brings us right back to the relations between women and men. For as long as we are unable to recognize the simple truth that men and women are above all brothers and sisters, and as long as we are unable to put an end to male supremacy –the most massive system of organized bullying ever to arise on earth— and thus end the war between the sexes, then it is certain we will never be able to put an end to the wars between the nations, much less end the wars between people divided by race and class.

And without an end to war the radical and democratic dream of the right to life, liberty, equality, and the pursuit of happiness must ever remain beyond our reach.