



# HERSTORY

— WOMANIFESTO —

*Jane Hardwicke Collings*



One day, any day, anywhere, a group of women gathered - daughters, maidens, mothers, magas, crones; sisters all. They gathered to explore the stories of their distant past as women. They gathered to reclaim feminine power through reconnection with the women's mysteries. They sat on the earth in a circle beneath a structure called Moonlodge. The sisters sat positioned around the circle dependent on their current position in their life and monthly fertility cycle.

They sat with a chosen talisman or symbol marking their position, their placement on the wheel of life. The women felt connected, to all things. I sat in the north-west of our circle, about to bleed, my symbol - a cup of red wine full to the brim balanced on the earth, almost overflowing, bursting at the seams - just how I felt...

So, re-claiming feminine power through reconnection with the women's mysteries.. Reclaiming implies something has been taken away from us. Reconnection implies that we have actually lost connection with something. Women's Mysteries - what are they?

I want to tell you a story. It's actually a combination of *His*story and *Her*story.

History is the story that is written by the victors and supports their actions. The her-story, is a story, that when I heard it, answered a lot of my unanswered and even unasked questions.

Knowing this Herstory helped me to understand a lot of things about how our culture works and what is behind the attitudes and beliefs that we share. I'm going to now give you a big sweep of our Herstory, taking us back in time to the Matriarchy, a time of great respect for Mother Nature, and then the journey of the last 3000 years as that was wiped out by the Patriarchal culture in which we now live...



40,000 years ago, just after the last Ice Age, there is evidence that people worshipped a female deity, personified in the symbolism of the Goddess.

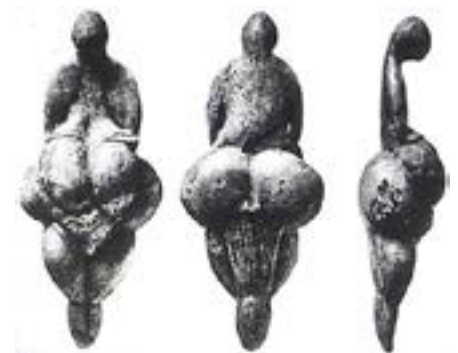
There are cave paintings dating back to 35,000 BC depicting the Goddess baring her wondrous vulva.

In prehistoric caves of Southern Europe there are descriptive carvings of the vulva, thought to be objects of worship.

Ice age people honoured the Goddess image in their sacred art, sculpting her image in clay and carving her out of bone, rock and ivory. These Goddess figures emphasised the breasts, belly and vulva.

Over the last hundred years archaeologists have unearthed thousands of these figurines across Europe and the East.

During these ancient times, the people perceived the Goddess as an organising principle of the universe who embodied all the forces of life, death and rebirth. Her dominion en-



compassed not only the human world but also the plant, and animal realms, the Earth, the Heavens, the seasonal and sky cycles. The Goddess was the life force that animated all of existence.

These beliefs became the foundation for the worship of the Great Goddess of Neolithic times which began around the 9000 BC. At this time the nomadic cultures settled the first permanent villages in the Fertile Crescent bordering the Mediterranean Sea. They developed a complex cosmic belief system that focused on the worship of the Triple Moon Goddess as Giver of Life, Wielder of Death and Regeneratrix.

This Neolithic Goddess embraced the constant and periodic renewal of life in which death was not separate from life. This religion and way of life displayed a deep respect for the cycles of women. The Male principle was honoured as the God who was the son, the lover and the consort of the Goddess. Together they participated in the rites of birth, death and renewal. The Great Goddess appeared in many different cultures through out the ancient world.

### ***She was the “Goddess of many faces and many names”***

**Near East** - Innana, Tiamat, Ishtar, Astarte.

**Egypt** - Isis, Hathor, Neith, Maat.

**Greece** - Demeter, Hera, Artemis, Aphrodite.

**Far East** - Shakti, Adati.

**India** - Durga

**Tibet** - Tara

**China and Japan** - Kwan Yin



*Tara*

The Goddess was inherent in all of Nature, she was nature. The people built shrines in her honour and to interact with her - at springs, groves, caves, mountain peaks, hearths and wells. In societies where She was worshipped, women held exalted roles as Priestesses, leaders, healers, midwives and diviners.

The people were connected to nature, they were part of it.



*Kwan Yin*



*Artemis*

Their relationship and connection with the sun and the moon was clear and obvious. They knew that the phases of the moon resonated with a woman's menstrual cycle and the moon played a big role in the myths, religion and symbolism of the times. The ancients saw the moon display the ebb and flow of birth, life, and death and saw this cycle in everything else around them.

The energy of each phase of the moon was recognized and worked with. Menstrual blood was known for its magical qualities and was used in fertility rites. Sexual energy was sacred and celebrated as sensual, pleasure giving, erotic and healing.

The art, artifacts and early writing of these times document that the people were peaceful agriculturalist's, living harmoniously in matrilineal partnership societies.

The Matrilineal Clan system was followed almost everywhere.

Inheritance was passed from the mother rather than the father, probably because in prehistoric times the obvious relationship between Mother and child was the only one recognised.

It was a primitive belief that the life-magic inherent in women would make plants grow, and so it was the thing for women to do - grow plants.

Property was the possession of women because they were the first to farm the land, thereby establishing ownership of it.

In Egypt, property was passed from Mother to Daughter.

On the British Isles, matrilineal inheritance continued into the 9th century. In the later Roman Empire husbands had no claim of their wives land or possessions if she spent 3 consecutive nights away from the home each year.

A pre-Islamic Arab woman divorced her husband by shutting him out of the home for three consecutive nights.

In Greece, a parcel of land was called a Tenemos - land belonging to the moon i.e. woman. Chieftains ruled only through marriage with the resident Matriarch.

American Indians had matrilineal marriage and matrilineal ownership of the land was customary amongst many of the different tribes. Women were

the “Mistresses of the soil”. Women were the great power in the clans, and the original nomination of the chiefs always rested with them, as did the decision to go to war or not. When the Iroquois conveyed lands to the US Government the documents had to be marked by their women because in their tribes the marks of the men had no validity.

In Africa women owned the land and it was passed down to their daughters or their brother’s daughters.

Matrimony used to mean inheritance of property in the maternal line, the word later became synonymous with marriage because marriage was the only way for men to gain control of property.

Around 3000BC the Goddess Cultures began to decline.

It was the time of the Bronze and Iron Ages.

Waves of nomadic Indo-European tribes from Northern Europe and Central Asia descended into Western Europe, the Near East and India. They were nomadic warlike people who rode horses and fought with bronze weapons.

They worshipped a Father God who ruled from the heavens above, and yielded bolts of lightning.

Their enemies were the people of the Mother Goddess and they invaded, conquered and destroyed the indigenous Goddess cultures. They raped and slaughtered them, their homes were pillaged and burned and their values and beliefs suppressed.

Women were enslaved, exploited and exiled. Women were stripped of their positions of political authority and decision-making, taken from leadership roles and the role of the priestess was given no authority. Women were disempowered when expressing their sexuality, intelligence and self-sufficiency.

Archaeological evidence depicts



a time of large-scale destruction of the Neolithic cultures of Europe and the Near East with invasions and natural catastrophes. The Patriarchal Tribes rose quickly to power and imposed their ideologies on the people they conquered.

Priestesses of the Goddess were forced to marry the leaders of the patriarchal tribes to destroy the lineage through the Mother line. The Priestesses who refused to marry were isolated into enforced celibacy. They became the Nuns.

Patriarchal religious authorities everywhere changed ancient systems of matrilineal inheritance to put property in the hands of men. The early centuries of the Christian conquest of Europe were largely occupied with acquisition of lands from the pagan women.

The aim of European Christianity was acquisition of property, which meant overturning the pagan systems of matrilineal inheritance. By forcible seizure and warfare, the church managed to acquire a third of the properties on the continent by the early Middle Ages. Up to 1200AD, in some parts of Europe, women were still listed as the landowners and men identified themselves by their Mothers clan names.

The legal and ecclesiastic war on female property ownership continued century after century until by the end of the 19th century women could not administer their own property, if they had some, nor make a will disposing of it without their husbands consent. As late as 1930 in France, women were forbidden to do any business with a bank, not even a small deposit without their husband’s permission.

Until the 10th century Priests married to gain property, claiming that without their wives they “would succumb to hunger and nakedness”. Church laws revised the system and then from 1031-1051 by Papal decree, priests were ordered to abandon their wives and sell off their children to slavery. The property and monies acquired by the priests became, on their death, property of the Church.

The priests became a privileged class. They were rich, owned lots of property and were resented. Monasteries made themselves into wine shops and gambling houses, nunneries were private whorehouses for the clergy, and priests used confessionals to seduce female parishioners. People who spoke out against these practices were burned, would be reformers were silenced, splinter groups were named as heretics and exterminated. One of the centres of a Franciscan splinter group called the Fraticelli who spoke out about the Pope and the practises

of the church was leveled by order of the Pope and all the residents were slain.



*"In the Temple of Vesta" by C. Hölscher, 1902*

The Church built their places of worship on top of the Goddess shrines. They changed the stories from the divine feminine to the divine masculine. The Goddess was distorted from the image of compassionate Mother, the source and sustainer of all life into a symbol associated with the forces of darkness, evil and death. Women who were the earthly manifestation of the Goddess were considered impure, evil and guilty of original sin.

Women became the property of their Fathers and husbands. Women who had sexual relationships outside the patriarchal monogamous contract threatened the certainty of the patriarchal bloodline transmission and were ostracised and killed as whores and harlots. Their illegitimate children were deprived of all legal rights and social acceptance.

In Classical Greece, hailed as the birthplace of democracy, women were deprived of their citizenship, of their right to vote and the passing of their name

to their children. Ideal love was seen as the love between two men, especially an older and a younger man. Women were considered unworthy of meaningful emotional and intellectual relationships. Their only function was to bear legitimate children who could inherit the paternal property rights.

The early Roman Christians suppressed all information that did not originate from the Church. They closed down ancient Greek Academies and burned the books of the great classical poets, philosophers and scholars. The eternal flame of the Vestal Virgins in Rome was extinguished, the great initiatory temple of Eleusis in Greece was smashed and the rites prohibited. In the 5th century the great library of Alexandria in Egypt was burned down, destroying the last records of the wisdom of the ancients.

In the 5th century the concept of reincarnation and renewal was outlawed. The folk customs originating from the matriarchal culture, of relating to the natural world and ritually celebrating the change of the seasons was branded as witchcraft. All the old deities were denounced as heathen idols and the one supreme father God ruled. The three phase Goddess teaching of birth, death and renewal, the maiden, mother, crone, was replaced by the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost trinity.

The only aspects of the feminine that were retained were the virgin and the mother, preferably at once. The crone or the dark goddess aspect of the triple Goddess, the one who brings death and then rebirth (that aligned with the dark phase of the lutation cycle) and all of that realm such as old age, the dark, death, etc. was completely denied and left out of the religious teachings. Instead the Church offered salvation and ascension to heaven in return for complete allegiance and devotion to the church. With the dark aspect of the cycle denied it became despised and women and all things feminine suffered. The feminine became distorted and as everyone has the feminine aspect of themselves as very real parts of their make up, everyone suffered. When aspects aren't expressed they become distorted and then these become our inner demons, our complexes, our neurosis, our compulsions and our obsessions and may burst forth at vulnerable times, as they did and have and do.

This happens not just personally but culturally and can be seen as the basis for the misogynist beliefs, attitudes and practices of the patriarchal cultures.

Matriarchy and worship of the Goddess were pushed into dark prehistory and the realm of fanciful legend. Remnants of the matriarchal teachings can be

found in the mystery schools of the cults of Demeter in Greece, Isis in Egypt, Kali in India, Cybele in Asia Minor and the witches and fairies of old Europe.

The Church invested a lot in changing the way people thought, but it didn't always work. The public disgust in the church's greed for wealth grew as did a suspicion that the myths of the Garden of Eden, original sin, heaven and hell, the virgin birth etc. were untrue. The Church sought to keep the populace in ignorance, but people were seeing through it. Their effort to hold the wandering attention of the people was seen in the 12th century passion to build huge cathedrals, on the sites of the Goddess shrines.

Then from the 12th century until the 17th century came the Inquisition, (1100's-1600's) a 500-year reign of organised terrorism, organised by the Roman Catholic Church. It is said that the Inquisition was invented primarily to force public acceptance of a church that the public didn't want, to win the war between the church and the disillusioned public. To eliminate all those who continued to remember, practice and pass on the information of the "old religion".

It was the most elaborate extortion racket ever devised to ensure power and build the Church's wealth. The purpose was to rid the population of heretics - those who didn't go along with the church's doctrine. People were arrested and their property was instantly confiscated. Accused persons were also expected to pay for their imprisonment and the costs of their torture. They were expected to pay for their food, so those without money, died. Sometimes, rarely, if someone was acquitted, they were held in jail until they paid for the expenses of their imprisonment. Property was seized from the dead, taken away from legal heirs and if someone committed suicide before the torturers got to him or her, their property was taken by the church. The Inquisition established the law of property seizure for suicides that stayed in rule for most European countries and England until 1870. Once a heretic was arrested all his debts were cancelled, his property seized by the church and his/her family left destitute. No body dared help others for fear of falling under suspicion of heresy. No creditor or purchaser could be sure of whether their transactions would be honoured. The entire financial network of European society was strained by its religious masters.

Heavy fines were also imposed in cases where people were overheard saying things verging on heresy. And there was an exchange of punishment of the body for punishment of the purse. Anyone who opposed this system was at once



*Inquisition tortures*

excommunicated for a year and then handed over to the 'secular arm' for burning without trial. No one was acquitted. The trials were a mockery, the accused had no lawyer, evidence was accepted from witnesses who could not legally testify in any other kind of trial, such as condemned criminals, other 'heretics', and children as young as two. They "valued child witnesses because at their tender age they could easily be persuaded or forced to inform." Torture was used, a spiked iron press that crushed the legs, binding and racking, branding, rape. They attacked women's breasts and genitals with pincers, pliers and red-hot irons. Sexual abuse was common in the prisons. Girls from nine and a half and boys from ten and a half were prosecuted and tortured. Torturers said they victims were laughing when their faces were contorted with pain, sleeping when they fainted and having been slain by the devil or committed suicide when they died under torture.

Finally, if they survived the torture, they were burned alive, in the presence of the village. Often the hair and beards of the accused would be set alight by the spectators as they waited for their turn on the stake.



Witch burnings

All the community had to watch the burnings; otherwise they would be suspected of heresy and arrested themselves. They also had to report witches to the Church, if they did not they too were convicted.

The people killed as Witches were the village healers, the midwives, diviners, Charmers, jugglers and wizards and the folk commonly called wise women and wise men. They were the women and men who spoke out about the church. Often a 'witch's'

only crime was to be a woman. Over the centuries the charge of witchcraft came to cover a multitude of sins ranging from political subversion and religious heresy to lewdness and blasphemy.

Written in 1484 by Reverends Kramer and Sprenger (the beloved sons of Pope Innocent VII) was the "Malleus Maleficarum" or "The Hammer of Witches". It was the unquestioned European authority on how to conduct a Witch Hunt, and for three centuries this sadistic book sat on the bench of every judge and every witch hunter.

The victims over that five and a half centuries were countless; some references go as high as nine million. The officially recorded burnings were just the beginning, there were also the disrupted starving families, the unrecorded suicides, unofficial lynching, hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions who died unnoticed in the papal crusades against heretical groups, and there were late-Renaissance witch hunts, that had no formal connection with the Inquisition but certainly took their impetus from it.

The chronicler of Treves, France, reported that in the year 1586, the entire female population of 2 villages, bar 2 women, was wiped out by the Inquisitors. Two other villages were destroyed completely and erased from the map. Germany in 1590 was almost entirely occupied with building fires to burn



RIGHT: Malleus Maleficarum

witches and Switzerland had been compelled to wipe out many of her villages because of the Witches. This also happened in France, Italy, and England, all of Christian Europe. A visitor to Wolfenbuttel in 1590 said that there were so many stakes in the ground for the burning of the witches that the place resembled a small forest. The executioner in Silesia, invented an oven in which over 9 years he had roasted 1000 people including children 2 to 4 years old.

At the same time as the Church was taking power, so too was the Medical profession. In the 13th century, sparked by contact with the Arab world, there was a revival in learning and Medical Schools appeared in universities. Universities were closed to women.

The Church imposed strict rules over the new University-trained Physicians, they were not allowed to practice without calling a Priest to aid and advise them or to treat a patient who refused confession. Along with the Church the male medical profession was actively engaged in getting rid of the female healers. First they worked to eradicate the literate women healers with whom they competed for the urban clientele. Then together with the Church, 'removed' the peasant women healers. The Doctors were often there as a medical expert to make judgements about whether certain women were witches. The Church completely legitimised doctors' professionalism, by saying non-professional healing (not doctors) was equivalent to heresy. "If a woman dare to cure without having studied she is a witch and must die". This also provided a handy excuse for a doctors failings in everyday practice, anything he couldn't cure was obviously the result of sorcery. The medicine that the university trained doctors were using was far less successful than the herbalism of the wise women healers. Bleeding was common practice, leeches were used and was treatment for a tooth ache -touching a needle to a caterpillar and then to the tooth.

The treatment for leprosy was a broth made of the flesh of a black snake caught in a dry land among stones.

The "Witches" were the ones who had developed extensive knowledge of herbs and anatomy. In fact in 1527, Paracelsus, the father of modern medicine, burned his text on pharmaceuticals, confessing that he had learned all he knew from a Sorceress. The disappearance of the Midwives in the 17-18thC, created an in road for the non-professional male practitioners -the "Barber Surgeons". They lead the way in England claiming technical superiority over midwives on the basis of their use of obstetric forceps, which were legally classified as a surgical

instrument and women were legally barred from surgical practice. This changed the neighbourly midwifery service into a lucrative business and was taken over by the Physicians in the 18th century. A similar story happened world wide and mostly remains the same.

Some countries have midwives providing a lot of the maternity care, such as The Netherlands and Scandinavia, but in others, such as parts of USA and Canada, midwifery has been and remains illegal. Medieval Christianity detested Midwives for their connection with the Pagan Matriarchy and Goddess worship. Churchmen viewed them as enemies of the Catholic faith. They said that Midwives offered the babies to the service of the devil. The real reason was that Midwives could help women control their fate -they taught birth control and procured abortions. Pagan women had considerable knowledge of such matters, it was women's own business and not subject to male authority. The Church however forbade Midwives to assist women in preventing conception, relieving them of unwanted pregnancies or easing their birth pains.

In 1591, Eufame Macalyne, a Scottish Noblewoman was burned alive for asking a midwife for herbs to ease her labour pains Witches were accused of every

conceivable sexual crime against men; quite simply they were accused of female sexuality. They thought that a woman's power was ultimately derived from her sexuality. Women were associated with sex, and all pleasure in sex was condemned. There were stories of witches copulating with the devil then infecting men. Lust in either man or wife was blamed on the woman. Witches were accused of making men impotent and making their penises disappear. Witches were also accused of being organised. They met locally in small groups and gatherings and traded herbal lore and news. They also came together in crowds

on festival days to mark the seasonal changes, that had previously been occasions of pagan worship. Many of the herbal remedies developed by the witches/wise women healers still have a place in modern pharmacology. The healers used trial and error and cause and effect in their healing, an approach that threatened the Church's desire for folk to have a passive faith. They used their senses rather than



*A Medieval healer.*



*Medieval doctor wearing a 'plague-proof' mask*

They were accused of giving contraceptive aid and of performing abortions.

After the witches were all dead and the peasants were left with no healers they came in scores, sick to the Church and were told "You have sinned and God is afflicting you". The Church was not against medical care, in fact the upper class had its physicians, who were men. It was the women healers of the peasants that they were against, they saw their attack on the peasant healers as an attack on magic not medicine. They believed that the women healers used the power of the devil (the dark) to help themselves and others, magic charms were actually thought by the Church to be as effective as praying, but the Church controlled prayer and not the magic charms and incantations. Their fear was that the peasants would be less dependent on God and the Church if they could heal themselves, and therefore be out of their control.

At a witch trial in 1593, the investigating jailer, himself a married man, discovered for the first time, a clitoris. he identified it as a Devil's teat, sure-proof of the witch's guilt. He identified the discovery as a little lump of flesh in a manner sticking out as if it were a teat, to the length of half an inch. Not keen to reveal it to others due to its closeness to a secret place that was not decent to be seen, he was going to keep it to himself, but in the end decided not to and in showing his discovery to the bystanders found that no-one else had ever seen

a blind faith, while the Church was profoundly distrustful of the senses, and completely negating of natural laws that governed physical phenomena. The Church believed that the Devil resided in and presided over the senses, he was colour, smell, sound, flavours, these were the Devil's playground and the way he lured men away from faith.

Witches were accused of having magical powers affecting health -of harming and healing, possessing and using medical and obstetrical skills (same thing happens today).



such a thing. The witch was convicted.

The Church taught that in intercourse the man deposited in the female a homunculus or “little person”, complete with soul, which was simply housed in the womb for nine months, without acquiring any attributes of the mother. The homunculus was not safe until it reached the hands of the man again, when the Priest baptised it, insuring salvation of its immortal soul. Some medieval religious thinkers thought that upon resurrection all human beings would be reborn as men.

The patriarchal cultures insisted on men’s control over women’s bodies. Wives were not to initiate sexual relations, but they were never to deny their husbands. The Catholic Church laid down the law that no wife could accuse her husband of rape even if he forced her with accompanying brutality. Sexual “release” was his conjugal right, not hers. The Churchmen saw birth control as working against God’s will, and this contributed to the witch-hunt of midwives because they passed on this knowledge. The Church professed that the only purpose of marital sex was conception and that if the woman received too much pleasure she would not be able to conceive.

Birth control or conception control was herstorically based around the needs of the mother and her children. The natural mammalian system of birth control, practiced by animals and “primitive” people is such that the female refuses sexual relations during pregnancy and lactation and then a period lasting from 2 to 6 years. This is still practiced in some parts of the world. (Hunza, Semai

of Malaya). Sexual intercourse takes place only when the female is receptive. When she is occupied with caring for her young - always her first priority - the female shows no sexual interest in the male, driving him away with bared teeth if necessary. In matriarchal societies it was unthinkable that male sexuality should take precedence over the needs of mothers and their children. The patriarchy everywhere sought to change this through religious sanction. Women were to serve mans



1925, Arab Woman Breastfeeding

sexual urges (as well as be blamed for them) even when preoccupied with mothering. This was the meaning of God’s announcement to Eve. “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be subject to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” The sorrow meant labour pains, and the harried life of a mother with children too close together, and the illnesses and injuries caused by spreading a mother too thin.

Women were taught that their children belonged not to them but to God, this eroded the instinctual maternal possessiveness that best fosters good childcare, and mothers often left their unwanted babies in God’s care. With so many unwanted children there was the advent of Foundling Hospitals where the nurses, nicknamed “killing nurses”, were expected to do the State’s dirty work and make sure the unwanted children did not long survive. The first Foundling hospital in London admitted 15,000 infants in four years 1756-60. In Europe, the death rate for infants in Foundling Hospitals was 80-90% in the first year of life.



Foundling Hospital

Female sexuality was feared and so the anatomy was kept “in the dark”. Growing girls and boys were kept ignorant of female sexuality. Even physicians came to believe that no clitoris would be found on a virtuous woman. From Medieval times onward virtuous women never showed themselves naked to any man, even their husband, so it is no surprise that men would remain ignorant of the female anatomy.

The Church viewed masturbation as a grave moral disorder. In the 19th century male circumcision was used to prevent masturbation. For girls at that time, masturbation was treated as a medical problem. The treatment was cautery (burning off) or amputation of their clitoris, sewing the vulva together to keep the clitoris out of reach, miniature chastity belts and even removal of the ovaries. The last recorded clitoridectomy for curing masturbation in the USA was in 1948 on a five year old girl. Male circumcision continues today but without the excuse to cure masturbation.

The Medical system that developed over the centuries came from a belief that

the body was made up of its parts, not the sum of its parts but separate unrelated systems. The male body was seen as the norm and subsequently the female was the abnormal. She was subject to unpredictable and rampaging hormones, female disorders that defied masculine experience. As the female experience was not understood and even negated, menstrual, sexual and birth disorders and problems developed.

Such diagnosis as hysteria developed from the idea that the womb (hyster) could mobilise itself and travel around the body causing havoc where ever it stopped, for example the brain. The patriarchy brought fear and loathing to woman's monthly cycle and she was rendered unclean and taboo. The ancients had held quite the opposite view. Women were known to be most in their feminine power when they bled. They would retreat together during that time to nurture each other, to dream, to rest and to return with new visions for the community. What was once a celebrated and honoured time, role and responsibility became a way to collective and self-loathing.

The sexual stages of a woman's life: menarche, menstruation, birth, mothering, and menopause have all basically been relegated to medicine and made into disorders that need fixing. Irregular menstrual cycles are treated as a disorder and many young women are prescribed the oral contraceptive pill (the 'Pill') to regulate their cycles. Natural birth is not trusted, reputed to be dangerous and caesarean section occurs in one third of births in some cities, and more in others.

Menopause is now a 'condition' that rather than be honoured, can be avoided. It is seen as a dangerous, unwelcome series of symptoms, not the realm of the highly valued wise woman from our Herstory.

Birth practises truly reflect the attitudes of the culture and have over the centuries been quite demeaning of women and completely disrespectful of both the mothers in labour and the process of birth. In the 1970's it was not uncommon to see women tranquillised against their wishes, confined to narrow high beds/tables, handcuffed, in stirrups and their babies taken away from them once they were born.

Today, in the modern world, birth occurs mostly in a hospital under the care of professionals. There are strict rules about what constitutes normal and abnormal. A doctor is usually in charge of 'the case' and it is managed according to risks. The individuals in charge, are the ones who command the technology. And this happens in the hospital labour ward where the labouring woman is transformed into a patient where she is "under" a doctor. In the very best scenario that money can buy, women are paralysed, connected to machines and their vital

signs, contractions, and the baby's heartbeat are monitored from a desk down the hall, or the process of labour and birth is bypassed and an elective caesarean section performed.

Birth in our modern cultures is treated as a medical event with a homogenisation of its practises motivated by a desire to control the birth process and have it best fit the hospital system set up to deal with it. There is a lack of time for and trust in a woman's individual way with her body and giving birth. There is a lack of understanding and respect for each woman's personal journey through pregnancy and birth and no acknowledgement of the sexuality of birth.

Episiotomy, the cutting of the vagina to speed up the birth of the baby, is unnecessarily done in most, if not all cases, with little consideration for the far reaching effects it can have on a woman's life.

Different forms of female genital mutilation (FGM) occur in countries around the world. The vast majority occurs in Africa (85%). The societies that practice FGM are strongly patriarchal. In many of the societies an important reason given for FGM is the belief is that it reduces a woman's desire for sex, therefore reducing the chance for sex outside the marriage. The woman is sewn up and opened only for her husband. The honour of the whole family depends on the woman being faithful to the husband. It is extremely difficult for an unmutated woman to marry in these cultures, she is considered unclean.

The last few hundred years of Herstory saw the Industrial Revolution and

*Australian Suffragettes 1908*

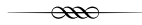


on to a scientific and technological revolution. Women's position in society has improved, even being given the vote in the last hundred years. With the rise of Feminism, came increased opportunities and possibilities for women. In many parts of the world, conditions are the best they've been for many thousands of years, in others, they are worse.

Today, we can gather together without fear of being seen doing so, and being caught and burned alive.

The predicament for our sisters in less fortunate situations is world news and their rights are something many of us fight for.

The edict or orders by the Church that established the Inquisition have never been revoked. They are officially still part of the Catholic faith and were used as justification for certain practises as recently as 1969. Disbelief in the Church's doctrine is still a moral offence and punishable as would be murder and robbery.



How do you feel when you hear all of this?

When I first heard this I felt very angry.

Learning this Herstory reveals a wound and uncovers suppressed pain and fear. "The wound reveals the cure".

Individual women and men may feel this wounding personally. It may explain underlying fears they have, even nightmares and extreme reactions to certain situations, e.g. one may feel rage at something that triggers these memories such as inequities between women and men.

We will all feel the wounding collectively, as the negative energy field of accumulated pain suffered by women through the ages. This Herstory is our heritage and the memories are laid down in our very DNA, this has and does affect us all.

It is important to acknowledge and feel our feelings, but not to get stuck in them, rather observe them and release attachment

to them.

"You can't heal what you can't feel" Let it be grist for your mill, food for your thoughts, compost for your gardens.

As they say... those who cannot remember their history are condemned to repeat it.

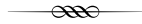
Using the wisdom inherent in the cycles we can view this Herstory as the story of humanity's developing and evolving relationship with the feminine principle. The lunation cycle (moon phases) is a way of seeing the full and recurring cycle of something - the birth, death and rebirth - as per the phases of the moon, new moon, waxing moon, full moon, waning moon, dark moon, new moon etc.

This lunation cycle of humanity's developing and evolving relationship with the feminine principle began at the end of the last Ice Age (new moon) with the Matriarchal culture growing, building (waxing) until its full expression (full moon) at around 9000BC with the creation of permanent villages and agriculture. This led on to the decline (the waning) from around 3000BC with the shift to the Patriarchal culture and the move through the dark phase (dark of the moon) that this Herstory speaks of, and to now, a time for rebirth (new moon again) See *Mysteries of the Dark Moon* by Demetra George for more info on this.

We see the effects of our dark Herstory most blatantly in our humanity's most disrespectful relationship with the Earth, in the rape and pillage of our Mother Earth, and in the willingness of some to see war as the answer in conflict, the 'power over' way.

And ... 'the times they are a changing' - people recycle now and care about the environment, alternative health care is a big part of many people's lives, midwives are around, and the wisdom and practices from traditional cultures are valued. When confronted with war, Peace is the chosen option for the majority of people. We are moving from the dark phase of the Lunation cycle to the new moon

phase, a time of new beginnings, referred to astrologically as the Age of Aquarius- a time when old ways are challenged and new ideas and ways come into being the - 'New Age'. And evolution works in the shape of the spiral, so at the point of change to newness, the previous cycle's wisdom is incorporated in the new cycle. We see this through many people in modern western civilisations reconnecting with the feminine principle. The healing is taking place.



## **BLESSED BE and BLESSED DO**

You may be thinking  
“well what can I do about this?”

First of all don't blame anyone for all this,  
its not an anti-men or anti-church situation, we co-created this, all of us,  
its the story of humanity's journey with the feminine.



**Share this,  
print it, post it,  
download it, email it,**

give it to a friend to read,  
talk about it together,  
it helps a lot of things in our  
modern culture make sense.

**Spread the  
word.**



**Reclaim your  
feminine power by  
reconnecting with  
the cycles.**

Learn about the interconnected-ness of  
your own cycle and the cycles of  
the Moon and the Earth by using the

**Spinning Wheels.**

You'll be amazed at  
what will unfold in you!

Visit  
[www.Moonsong.com.au](http://www.Moonsong.com.au)

for information on workshops and further learning.

## **Bibliography and reading list**

*Mysteries of the Dark Moon* by Demetra George

*Witches Midwives and Nurses* by Barbara Ehrenrich and Dierdre English

*Fire Burn* by Ken Radford

*Shakti Woman* by Vicki Noble

*The Spiral Dance* by Starhawk

*Hygiea - A Woman's Herbal* by Jeannine Parvati Baker

*Moon Magic* by Lori Reid

*The Women's Encyclopaedia of Myths and Secrets* by Barbara Walker

*The Wise Wound* by Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove

*The Wild Genie* by Alexandra Pope

*Secrets and Mysteries* by Denise Linn

*Conscious Conception* by Jeannine Parvati Baker and Frederick Baker

*Dragontime* by Luisa Francia

*Her Blood is Gold* by Lara Owen

*Women's Bodies Women's Wisdom* by Dr Christiane Northrup

*The Women's Wheel of Life* by Elizabeth Davis and Carol Leonard

*Natural Fertility* by Francesca Naish

*The Lunar Cycle* by Francesca Naish

*The Power of Myth* by Joseph Campbell

*Man and His Symbols* by Carl C Jung

*Song of Eve* by Manuela Dunn Mascetti

*The Sacred Tree* by Lotus Light



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