

Adonis Mirror



4/17/2005

Amazons: The Contemporary Liberal Male Response

By Richard Leader

Stories of fierce Amazonian warriors are of the most enduring of male mythologies, as well as some of the most ambivalent. These bellicose women—so warlike that they draw their name from accounts that they removed their right breasts to better draw a bow—were penciled in at the margins of the known world, much like sea serpents millennia later, but served as a convenient object lesson closer to home. Amazon legends were continually emended to suit the politics of the times. They enjoyed a lofty beginning in the Athenian imagination, existing as rivals so deadly in Homer that they were bound to tales of the city's greatest heroes, whose epic struggle against the invading women sealed the independence of the Attic territory. Later, the Amazons would be increasingly feminized, the artistic counterparts of decadent despots in the East, the defeated Persians whose vulnerability was seen as innate and thus cast in a sexual light.

Modern scholarship on the subject is equally politicized, although most of it is of the armchair-historian variety: Respected Classicists are supposed to stake their careers on much more boring fare. Amazons present an interesting paradox when it comes to the much maligned Mother Goddess theory which posits the world was a matriarchal paradise before marauding Indo-Europeans swept through the countryside, brutally enforcing male domination; a conjecture that was much promoted and enjoyed by men, it should be noted, before women became much of a threat to their own power in the workplace or academia. At once the Amazons represent the height of potential female agency in a very physical and quantifiable sense, and yet the very possibility of their reality remains a dangerous proposition to many given the peaceful requirements into which tradition (generated by both men and women for disparate reasons) has pigeonholed the various Mother Goddess theories.

Thus 'Amazons' have been used by men to divide female archaeologists and set them against each other. Jeannine Davis-Kimball's 1997 discovery of the graves of women warriors on the plains of Eurasia was quickly turned about to further marginalize radical feminist scholars like Marija Gimbutas. Though her theories on prehistoric matriarchies were and will likely always remain left-of-center, exaggerated reporting—quite effective campaigns of defamation—has both diminished her contributions to the field and has served as a stern warning to those who would follow in her footsteps. Just as the ancient Greeks divided women into two groups, those deserving of praise and those of blame, modern men operate with the same tools: on the increasingly rare occasion when more staid female scholars approach the subject of Amazons or matriarchy, they do so with some amount of premeditation to divorce themselves from the likes of writers like Merlin Stone (*When God Was a Woman*) who have been able to garner some measure of celebrity and capture the popular imagination.

To a large degree such scholars ostensibly share their reasons for participating in this dynamic with their male peers, in as much as it is a deliberate recalibration against the dilettante roots of the discipline—a perhaps knee-jerk reaction that often demands an unattainable standard of propriety unheard of in other branches of the Liberal Arts. Still, their praise is dependant upon the blame of other women and Gimbutas is threatening in a way in which the many male goddess adherents of the past two centuries precisely were not. If, as most self-avowed 'rationalists' agree, it is thought that prehistory will perhaps forever live up to its name and remain pre-historic, and much will likely forever remain unknowable despite our most ardent attempts, the glee that many men experience in combating "The Myth of Matriarchy" seems rather sadistic given that they likewise have no way of proving their own imagination of the past—besides unsubtle embraces of the patriarchal-present.

This can be compared to the number of amateur linguists coming out of the woodwork to disprove theories that the word "squaw" was drawn from a source equivalent to female genitalia: while Native American activists have had only the slightest successes in disseminating the hypothesis in mainstream arenas, the backlash has been extreme, with white males claiming that bunk science is being used to justify 'Politically Correct' alterations to maps and road signs. Though they are likewise unable to ultimately prove their case that squaw has never meant "cunt"—indeed, in our own vernacular the word "woman" itself can be delivered in a manner that reflects that meaning, so there need not even be an indigenous precedent to make the same case for the white-usage of "squaw"—a significant portion of these men's own identity relies on their continued ability to draw upon the squaw mythos and project it cartographically, especially in the face of opposition.

Historically, like most male created and propagated narratives, tales and depictions of Amazons have revealed far more about men than they have about women, something that can still be witnessed today. Modern day 'Amazons' come in two varieties, aligned very much with male sanction or the lack thereof. Those worthy of praise are fetish objects, ranging the gamut from imagined comic book characters to the same form projected partially into reality through television (Diana Rigg as Emma Peel in *The Avengers* is frequently cited as a pivotal favorite by fetishists) and the cinema, to the women who fully prostitute themselves as dominatrices. The internet age has put its own spin on the scenario: men now download digitally altered images of Lilliputian men fawning over giantesses.

The classic, and perhaps facile, psychological reading of men who harbor such fantasies is that they live high-powered lives and momentarily escaping into a submissive role can be a welcome respite. While in some ways accurate, it is more of an excuse than an analysis as it both legitimizes the necessity of such roles and ignores the fact that such respite is a luxury that can be bought at the price

of another's freedom. Any power a dominatrix enjoys is short lived and subject to the whims of men; anything that is given over can be taken away. Such fantasies are used to comfortably escape personal responsibility for collusion with existing social norms as the disenfranchised are then equally to blame for the status quo; as such, even the 'good' sort of Amazons often receive harsh words and abuse from men—men who are still entirely happy for the existence of such women, both as sex objects and as a scapegoat for social ills.

Despite the relative infrequency of masochistic 'identities' in white males, it thus remains a fairly mainstream preoccupation, no matter the doubly incongruous fact (given the 'high powered' stereotype and the denial of belonging to a privileged class) that so many of its adherents often clamor for status as a bona fide 'sexual minority' deserving of special dispensation. And given their context as subcultures, even those men who enlist in superficially 'matriarchal' relationships or affinity groups that advocate it as a way of life are typically putting undue burdens on their wives, who are then locked into being both the primary wage earner as well as often taking on the bulk of the less entertaining aspects of childcare, the traditional Second-Shift, as their husbands go on to create websites on the natural superiority of the female sex and the lifestyle they currently enjoy.

Those Amazons without male sanction are separatists, often lesbians, who, rather than beat, subdue, or dominate men, simply attempt to withdraw their energy—whether spiritual, mental, or financial—from men, making the political decision to invest it in other women, as much as is feasible. It is interesting, and quite central, that this withdrawal of energy is far more threatening to men than the idea of women beating, subduing, or dominating them; three thoughts that regularly excite many men in their fantasy lives. Thus it is not matriarchy, as it is so often perceived, that frightens men but any social change that highlights how dependant men are on those they perceive as subordinates—something that some radical feminists such as Mary Daly would describe less charitably as

men's parasitism or necrophilia. It is these separatists who receive the bulk of men's blame, censure that reveals itself in surprising and often ludicrous ways.

This paper will present two case studies, one demonstrating how this sentiment is often encouraged in the liberal-male world that fancies itself at the forefront of progressive and anti-colonialist activism, the second turning back to look once again at academia and the peculiar standards applied to separatism in its various guises.

I

In late January of 2005, the Leftist newsletter *CounterPunch* published an essay titled, "Identity Crisis: Zionism and Other Marginal Thoughts" that directly compared lesbian separatists to Zionists, although the former were predictably left off the headline. The notion itself is an absurd one: the United States has never sold attack helicopters and warplanes to blocs of lesbians; indeed it cannot even bring itself to admit the long standing contributions of homosexuals in its own military. The article was penned by Gilad Atzmon whose biography at the end of the text both establishes his identity as an Israeli expatriate and serves as an advertisement for his novel, *A Guide to the Perplexed*, and his latest album, *Exile*, which was named the best jazz album of the year by the BBC.

Such product placements and plugs are common in Leftist media where there is often little enough money to go around. Here, they are perhaps relevant to the very inclusion of the article: Jeffrey St. Clair, cofounder of *CounterPunch*, is himself a jazz enthusiast who in 2001 wrote a scathing review of Ken Burns' documentary on the art form. It is of little surprise that St. Clair has formed an attachment to the musician (Atzmon has listed a *CounterPunch* based email address of his own after some articles), given their shared belief in their own ability to enjoy and perform jazz without being the baser white men who do so out of a colonialist mindset, a phe-

nomenon that requires constant finger pointing on their part. St. Clair even authored a review of Atzmon's novel, a topic which will be discussed below.

Though there is no shortage of misogyny on the part of the male Left, it must usually be expressed with some other exigency (the oppression of Palestinians in this case) that would overwhelm potential critics of sexism, feminism being a perpetual backburner issue, who would then allow the misogyny to pass without comment for the perceived greater good. This technique is exceedingly effective and shows no sign of deteriorating; especially as patriarchal socialization continues to train women to put others before themselves, something male revolutionaries—not always distinct from oppressors—have forever used to their advantage. Men like Atzmon, who regularly comes off as more than a bit desperate to be taken seriously as an intellectual ("Identity Crisis" is littered with the name-dropping of philosophers and is written as to appear purposefully opaque), serve as willing patsies, rubes excited by opportunities for male bonding in the professional sphere, who are used to utter thoughts that the Leftist literati dare not say with their own voices.

Atzmon's article itself is almost interminable, although his thesis itself is fairly simple to follow: marginal politicians depend on their marginalization for their own personal power and thus fear the assimilation that their constituencies both desire and would undoubtedly find beneficial. To an American ear, or perhaps any, that is a profoundly conservative argument to be making; as is his common refrain of groups wallowing in a "victim mentality," a subject he has elaborated on in other articles for *CounterPunch* ("On Reason, Justice and the Victim Mentality") where he clumsily sets up a defense of rape:

In many cases the denial of Reason is fully understandable. For instance, a woman who has been violently raped might not find it interesting to learn about the person-

al difficulties that led the sex offender to force himself upon her. As a victim she might be willingly prepared to avoid Reason and to concentrate solely on dealing with her emotional and physical scars. This is perfectly understandable. Following the same pattern of thought, a family who lost their beloved son when a drunken lorry driver ran over him might not find it that crucially important to learn about the lorry driver's personal difficulties and the Reason that pushed him to excessive drinking.

Emotion and "Reason" are set up as diametric opposites and unsurprisingly the first example that comes to Atzmon's mind involves a female subject, a victim of a crime that specifically targets feminized subjects in his culture. Though her mental crisis might be "perfectly understandable," his equation of the deliberate crime of rape to that of an alcoholic's accident—using the rather trite euphemism of "personal difficulties" to justify whatever he assumes might motivate his hypothetical rapist besides misogyny—is both damning and relevant given other statements of Atzmon that will be discussed below. Its function as a slippery slope resulting in Zionist terror campaigns is particularly reprehensible. He does go on to say, "It is far more interesting to find clear indications of 'victim mentality' within the very core of the world dominating groups," something that makes his subsequent targeting of lesbian separatists in "Identity Crisis" seem all the more outlandish.

On separatism, in general, he states, "Separation is called for as soon as the marginal politician senses immanent danger of integration into mainstream society." This theory he applies to the feminist movement:

The case of lesbian separatism is very similar. In the 1970s, when women were closing social gaps and achieving greater equality, a radical militant feminist tendency developed. In her article 'The Way of All Separatists' (Blatant

Lesbianism, 1978 *Sydney Magazine*. P.10-13), Ludo McFingers writes: 'They hate men, see women as a sex class, support biological determinism, reject reformism and despise the left.'

His limited knowledge of feminism, and even the current basic liberal-assumptions about the reality of gender, was demonstrated earlier in the article when presenting dichotomies of alterity ("for the feminist politician it is femininity/masculinity") and here he misses the interplay of causality: separatist work by feminists completely uninterested in climbing the corporate ladder was still responsible for gains in such areas as well; his interpretation of history is similar to how differences between black leaders in the civil rights movement were exploited by whites who would retroactively decide who was of greatest value to the cause, the Malcolm Xs losing out to the Dr. King Jrs. Indeed, rather than quoting Shulamith Firestone or anyone of renown from the era, he chooses one Ludo McFingers as a puppet—borrowing *her* sexual class to lend authority to his tenuous argument against lesbian separatism. It is improbable that Atzmon ever read that issue of *Sydney Magazine*. Rather, he likely availed himself to a previous citation of the same quote by Julie McCrossin, now an Australian radio and television talk show host.

Her article, "Women, wimmin, womyn, womin, whippets - On Lesbian Separatism" was perhaps first published by *Girls Own*, a Sydney based feminist journal, although the text is now commonly available only at a Takver.com; a website by a man who has wholly adopted that pseudonym from an Ursula Le Guin novel. While Takver borrows feminist slogans such as "The Personal is Political" and adapts them as needed to his anarchist platform, he seems genuinely uncritical of male institutions such as the Freemasons that were instrumental in holding back women in the workplace during the past several decades (the extent of Atzmon's interest in feminism), crimes that are evidently forgivable because of the order's

associations with the general labor movement. In this light, an interesting stratigraphy of texts is evident: Atzmon is not so much using the words of one woman, found through an intermediary woman, but a woman's words only extant—ripped out of space and time and projected into a global medium she had not even envisioned when she wrote it—because another man wished it so, for his own reasons. In effect, we are thus hearing only what men have to say about lesbian separatism.

Ludo McFingers' quote, "They hate men, see women as a sex class, support biological determinism, reject reformism and despise the left [sic]," besides being startlingly similar in form to an ancient Greek historian's litany on Amazons (Hellanicus described them as a "a golden-shielded, silver-axed ... male infant killing host"), was once available only at Takver.com: now it can be found at almost a dozen websites. Besides the publishing of "Identity Crisis" at *CounterPunch* and his own personal website at gilad.co.uk, the article also appeared at: thehandstand.org (an anarchist journal where Atzmon has some involvement); margotbworldnews.com (a liberal news portal); serendipity.li (a libertarian website); amin.org (the Arabic Media Internet Network); bigo.sg ("Before I Get Old," a Singapore rock magazine that inexplicably had the most elaborate presentation of "Identity Crisis," complete with a photograph of Jewish lesbians, or imitators, embracing and the portions of the text relevant to lesbian separatism bolded in oversized blue letters); and was even translated into French at quibla.net and Spanish at rebellion.org. Whatever problems Ludo McFingers, if she ever existed, might have had with her lesbian community, men—myself included—have carried her statement far a field of her own capability or intent, a phenomenon that only separatist rhetoric even attempts to address.

Other than a short interview with the late Andrea Dworkin by *The Guardian*, Takver's reprinting of McCrossin is perhaps Atzmon's only resource on lesbian separatism for "Identity Crisis." Of her list of alleged separatist slogans ("men are mutants"; 'its [sic]

know [sic] use putting energy into men'; 'can heterosexual women be feminists'; 'porn is violence against women'; 'smash the sex shops'; 'castrate all rapists'; 'dead men don't rape'; 'kill them in their cots'"), Atzmon focused on but one:

The underlying premise of lesbian separatism is that men cannot or will not change. Consequently, women can only guarantee their own freedom by detaching themselves from men. Some separatist women suggest a need for violent confrontation with men to overthrow their power. Not surprisingly some of the most radical lesbian separatists would prefer to live in a world entirely free of men and some have gone so far as to state that 'Dead men don't rape'. One is reminded here of the equally devastating Zionist expression 'A good Arab is a dead Arab.'

Technically, the underlying premise of lesbian separatism is that women can elect to or at least attempt to live full, unfettered lives, regardless and irrespective of men's will or ability to change; men's agency being irrelevant to the goal at hand. It seems evident that McCrossin's list is more than a mere inventory but an attempt to impose some sort of overarching continuum to the slogans, growing more radical or outrageous from left to right. While her taxonomy might be faulty in some cases, it is worthy of attention that Atzmon actually chose an example that fell short of the far fringe: the blanket "kill them" statement being more equivalent to his "dead Arab" than the one he settled on. Instead, he chose one that included a reminder of men's historic and contemporary barbarity towards women. His focus on rape is of further interest given his preoccupation with the subject later in the article:

The case of radical feminists is similar. The astonishing labelling of the entire male gender [sic] as rapists can only be understood in terms of a severely troubled ethical sense.

More than often we come across a groundless story of a man who is blamed for sexual harassment. I am not trying to argue that sexual harassment doesn't exist; I am simply trying to illuminate the conditions that make such ungrounded accusations possible. I am trying to expose the structure of collective victimisation. I would argue that collective victimisation results from a surrender to the process of identification, a surrender which leads to an absence of empathic and moral sense.

While such words can be found in any number of antifeminist or Men's Rights screeds, often with less dripping irony concerning empathy and morality (although it seems doubtful that *CounterPunch* would likewise get away with publishing them without the Zionist issue ridding piggyback), another work of Atzmon can be considered to lend further context. His article "Women in Uniform," self-published at his personal website in May of 2004, and later reprinted by the BRussels Tribunal (an internet group focused on American war crimes in Iraq), allows him to be less guarded in his feelings on feminists: he argues, in an article approaching satire almost entirely by accident, "Toppling Saddam was just an excuse. From its very beginning, it was all about introducing the Arab people to the advance and beauty of American female domination and general S&M."

Although he partially succeeds in making at least one cogent point about the immateriality of gender, the text is so befuddled and sophomoric that it needs to be seen in its entirety to be believed; even selecting 'choice' quotes from it proves impossible. Feminism rather than patriarchy is the blame for various abuses: he forces Private Lyndie England to shoulder the entirety of the fault for Abu Ghraib, out of her own perverted desire to be a hypertrophied sort of man in the military (unmentioned is how she was later punished in every conceivable way for her biology, including her pregnant status), blame that is better deserved by her long chain of male superiors.

Atzmon takes it a step further, stating that the sexual humiliation that the few men at Abu Ghraib have endured at the hands of women is not just an anomaly in human history but the abject height of humiliation itself. The primary conceit of the essay is profoundly myopic: an adamant repetition that any abuse without photographic evidence never happened or is of less significance: "It is the male POWs who find themselves bare, naked, confronting relentless humiliation in the hands of those young enthusiastic armed ladies who entertain the joy of power beyond any recognised measure" and "We must admit that we have never seen a photographic image of a male soldier standing staring at a naked hooded woman, ridiculing the shape of her clitoris."

But it is his thoughts on rape that are of primary interest in this case:

Let's face it, Private England didn't invent the notion of sexual abuse. Abuse has been here since time began. More than one victorious army celebrated its triumphant moment raping the defeated nation. Usually it was women who were the first to pay the price. We all know about Nazi platoons who brutally raped Soviet women all the way to Stalingrad. Soviet soldiers were not different when arriving on German soil. American GIs did it in Nam, Serbs did it in Kosovo. Apparently war is a horny event. The confrontation with death and blood leads the active participants towards a vivid and extreme realisation of the notion of life. More than a few London grannies would enthusiastically share their hot juicy blitz tales. Apparently, the engagement with young fireman in action, as well as young off duty American pilots, turned WW2 Britain into an explosive libidinal setting. War, as it appears, has some positive erotic connotations.

But yet, 'strategic sexual humiliation' is very new to us all. Moreover, it seems to be a 'well orchestrated' new

American doctrine. The Americans have always proved to be innovative in introducing evil strategies and destructive weapons. If they do something they do it big. But yet, it is hard to realise how they got so far this time. Thinking about the subject in military terms leaves me pretty puzzled. The story of 20th century wars does not provide us with any sort of historical background relating to tactical sexual humiliation. I cannot recollect images of naked Soviet soldiers sexually abused, neither by sporadic female SS officers nor by male Panzer platoons. We can neither remember any form of such abuse conducted by any Allied soldiers. True, Jews were stripped of their clothes before they were pushed into gas chambers but again those scenes had nothing sexual, erotic or pornographic in them, just a devastating practice.

Like his abrupt transition from rape to traffic accidents in "On Reason, Justice and the Victim Mentality," here in "Women in Uniform" he again sets up an unfortunate sequence of ideas, moving from rape to consensual sex as if nothing material has changed between the two categories; it was purely libido that led to rapes in Bosnia, no different in impetus from the other scenarios he goes on to list. With his reliance on that premise, it is of no surprise that he remains oblivious to rape as a war crime (and the work of many feminists such as Susan Brownmiller), insisting that it is an act of aggressive abuse borne out of 'natural' inclinations, perhaps akin to alcoholism, rendering it just sex and not sexual humiliation. He also relies on his own ethnocentrism to a great degree. In her book *Women Who Become Men: Albanian Sworn Virgins*, Antonia Young writes: "although it was assumed that men naturally had sexual desires, they were not considered real men if they demonstrated interest in women" (p.22). And while Atzmon actually cracks a joke in the article about angry feminists coming to cut off his testicles in the night, his writing is again ignorant of the actual castrations that

took place in Serbia's detention camps. Even his knowledge of the Holocaust refuses any admission of sexual humiliation—which clearly existed both then and *now*, if one recalls the late Theo van Gogh's retort to Evelien Gans in *Folia Civitatis*, "I suspect that Ms. Gans gets wet dreams about being fucked by Dr Mengele"—all for the express purpose of presenting Private England's finger pointing as the zenith of social decay, where even his "beloved" women have fallen from grace.

While this foray into "Women in Uniform" might have the appearance of moving beyond the scope of lesbian separatism, it is necessary for two reasons: first, to demonstrate the extent of his rape-apologetics and to pose the question of how they were so easily allowed in a progressive journal like *CounterPunch*, as well as to touch once again on a prior point about Amazons: to Atzmon, the women who would remove their energy from men and begin their own communities are far more threatening than those who would beat, subdue, or dominate men, something that Atzmon at once pities and finds himself sexually excited by to a jealous degree. Indeed, he concludes "Women in Uniform" with "Private England is probably sorted, we shouldn't worry about her, for the type of services she gave in Iraq for free she can make a fortune in down town Manhattan."

Even after saying in May of 2004 that "Militant separatist feminists are no different at all. Like the Zionist they went too far in their demand for rights and equality," he reticently conceded then that, "Unlike Zionist they are yet to assassinate their opponents" and had earlier admitted in "On Reason, Justice and the Victim Mentality" that "victim mentality" was far less forgivable in groups without power and social sanction, Atzmon still went on to write "Identity Crisis" in January of 2005: the comparison still seeming a natural one in his mind, given his mental preoccupation with lesbians. His utter lack of empathy led him to employ a quote by Andrea Dworkin, perhaps an obvious choice since she alluded to a "Womenland" that would serve as a homeland for females, much in

the same way as Israel might for Jews, in a manner that would imply she has never uttered a critical word of Zionism—let alone written books such as 2000's *Scapegoat: The Jews, Israel, and Women's Liberation* that have addressed the issue far more maturely than his own attempts, regardless of how acclaimed they might be by his circle of male peers.

Atzmon's animosity towards her is not that of a Kindly Expatriate vs. Occupying Zionist or Matriarchist, as he publicly fantasized at *CounterPunch*, but because even though he might remain unaware of the details of her life's work, he at least recognizes on some level that it has forever been critical of men like him. In "Israel: Whose Country Is It Anyway?"—her 1990 contribution to *Ms. Magazine*—she wrote:

Unlike in the United States, pornography is not an industry. You find it in mainstream magazines and advertising. It is mostly about the Holocaust. In it, Jewish women are sexualized as Holocaust victims for Jewish men to masturbate over. The issue I saw had a front-page headline that read: ORGY AT YAD VASHEM. Yad Vashem is the memorial in Jerusalem to the victims of the Holocaust. Under the headline, there was a photograph of a man sexually entangled with several women.

As mentioned above, Atzmon is the author of a novel, *A Guide to the Perplexed*, which was reviewed in *CounterPunch* by Jeffery St. Clair. In short, he concludes, "Atzmon's novel then serves as a final wake-up call to other Israeli intellectuals who must come to terms with being aliens in another people's land. The stakes are incredibly high and the unsettling subject matter could've made for a very hard and somber reading experience. But Atzmon writes with verve and wit. It's a deliriously exhilarating [sic] read. Like the best satire and the most profound jazz, *A Guide to the Perplexed* is painful, but it goes down easy." Speaking of Atzmon biographically, St. Clair

perhaps carelessly writes, “He ended up in London, where he has flourished, as a leading writer on the plight of the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation”—a comma standing rather feebly between capitalist utility and his good deeds—although only about half of the quotes St. Clair selects from the text concern the plight of Palestinians. The rest, he believed, proved more pivotal and interesting to his potential readers at *CounterPunch*:

At one level, of course, the Gunther is simply a connoisseur of peep shows and there are plenty of sexual escapades to move things along in this novel. Gunther develops a particular fascination for German women because “they don’t compromise, they never give up on their libido.” He finds that German women are drawn to him, not because of any sexual mystique on his part, but simply because his family “survived the ovens.”

....

Naturally, he becomes a national hero, especially to Israeli “women of the Left, who have a poetic compassion for war casualties: it makes them horny as hell.”

....

Eventually, Gunther achieves a level of international fame as a peepologist. He even becomes something of a pop political advisor and dispenses advice to Clinton in his time of trauma. “Bill my old friend,” Gunther counsels the priapic prez. “Go on sliding cigars up arseholes. Without knowing it you have acquired a permanent place in the mythology of sexual relations. We understand where you’re at and we identify with your needs.”

For all of the horror that Atzmon expressed over the pornographic aspects of war in his “Women in Uniform,” he has little

problem perpetuating it in his own work; nor does he convey any measure of concern over the more mainstream incarnations of pornography. In that essay he cites a fellow *CounterPunch* mainstay, Dr. Susan Block, and her article there, “Bush’s POW Porn,” as well as near-plagiarizing the joke from her about Private England’s future career opportunities as a dominatrix. Of course, Block, as a sex therapist (most of the “therapists” she employs seem to specialize in erotic phone lines) and an intellectually valuable skill for the American sex industry, points out that the paying customers in elaborate sadomasochism rituals have a different level of agency than political prisoners. That much is obviously true, save for the inconvenient fact that many practitioners of so-called alternative sexual practices believe them to be integral to their sense of identity—and thus claim to have no choice or agency when it comes to acting upon their fantasies, especially kink that is visibly sexist or regressive in nature and cannot be defended with more rational arguments.

Many feminist writers, encompassing a wide swath of individual political beliefs, saw the release and incessant publication of the Abu Ghraib photos as an opportunity to tie such scenes of domination to acts that happen closer to home, out of the same mindset, to the women in their own nation; acts that are equally fair game when it comes to the feminized men of others, similar to how the Athenian men once represented the defeated Persians as women in the form of Amazons, or at least used both groups for similar artistic purposes. For the most part, such essays worked to the detriment of feminists as pronouncements of agency were made: American pornography, other than ‘rare cases’ such as that of Linda Marchiano (whose story is still continuously called into question), features women who are paid to be in it and their acceptance of money is clear evidence of their desire to participate—the economic position that men have forced women into through men’s historic unfair advantage in the realm of capitalism not being enough to mitigate their agency as ‘spoiled’ women of the First World, even in the eyes of the male Left. As such, feminists were called out as racists, being

more concerned with their own special-interest issues than the greater emergency at hand, injustices against men.

Though flighty and riddled with the most puerile of puns, Block's essay is still one of the more effective of those covering Abu Ghraib. This is not because she is the most talented writer with the most salient points, but because men allowed her to be the best, hammering down her female counterparts with tyrannical zeal; the old standby of praise and blame. As she never threatened to take men's pornography away from them, she was at least allowed to speak of it: Bush's POW porn proves he's a pervert, too, just like the rest of us, only far more dangerous given the weapons at his disposal. Any talk of pornography or sexual politics fell under the auspices of mere spice or inconsequentiality—if the sanctity of pornography is held as a near absolute then humorous indictments of it are self-negating when it comes to presenting a moral appeal—though it did have enough semblance of meaning to capture the imagination of Atzmon and inspire him to write "Women in Uniform." But it was a lot of work (just over 7,000 words) for her merely to make the simple point that the war is wrong and should be stopped.

Many of Block's contributions to *CounterPunch* follow that model: while feminists routinely complain that male pundits and bloggers refuse to see women's efforts in those arenas as appropriately political, as the mere mention of the word "mommy" resigns one to the personal or the domestic sphere, Block is allowed to write reviews of books like Deborah Sundahl's *Female Ejaculation and the G-Spot*; in this case, the selection being randomly conducted, two years overdue. To perhaps make it more suitable for *CounterPunch*, Block adds a veneer of the political, in "Often, female ejaculation is even more profuse and forceful than the male variety. Thus, its importance is not only erotic, but political, as it is tangible—not to mention tasty—evidence of female sexual power" and "Squirt for joy! Squirt for peace. Flood the world with pleasure. Cover the earth in cum. At least, occasionally."

Just as St. Clair can use a fop like Atzmon against women,

adding a layer of insulation between him and the message he wishes to promulgate, women make convenient weapons against each other, too. When Dr. Chyng Sun wrote a critique of pornography at *CounterPunch*, equal time was given for a scathing rebuttal by Nina Hartley, possessing the strangely personal title, "Thus I Refute Chyng Sun: Feminists for Porn." Dr. Chyng Sun seems to derive less authority from her Ph.D. than Dr. Susan Block, who is seldom separated from that "Dr." marker by her male fans, it must be noted. While the argument is over agency—Hartley is defensive, believing her own is being called into question—the adversarial relationship is forced, a product of the praise and blame dynamic. Sheila Jeffreys, in her 1996 essay, "How Orgasm Politics Has Hijacked the Women's Movement," writes:

Sexual capitalism, which has found a way to commoditize nearly every imaginable act of sexual subordination, has even found a way to repackage and recycle some of its victims. As a result, a small number of women who have had lifetimes of abuse and learned their sexuality in the sex industry serving men are now able, often with backing from male sex industrialists, to promote themselves as sex educators in the lesbian and feminist communities. Some of these high-profile women—who are hardly representative of most victims of the sex industry—have managed to set up sex magazines such as *On Our Backs* (for practitioners of lesbian sadomasochism) and stripping and pornography businesses. Many women have mistakenly accepted these formerly prostituted women as "sex experts."

As such, liberal men rarely have to concoct their own defenses of the sex industry. And even those women placed on the pedestal are often precariously close to a fall: Block received her own measure of blame, far more surreal than most, after one of her liberal-male fans saw her on television selling penis enlargement pills in a

late-night infomercial. In “Dearest Dr. Rape,” a certain Kap Fulton makes Block pay in full for her borrowed use of that male honorific, doctor, an article that was placed first on his personal weblog (where he lists *CounterPunch* and its star writers like Mickey Z as prominent links) and was later published by *Dissident Voice*, an “internet newsletter dedicated to challenging the distortions and lies of the corporate press and the privileged classes it serves.” While perhaps not meaningful—or worth a conspiratorial tone—it seems worth mention that Sunil K. Sharma, the *Dissident Voice* editor who presumably found Fulton’s piece fit for inclusion, is a professional jazz musician who has himself written on Palestine for *CounterPunch*.

Fulton’s essay, like Atzmon’s “Women in Uniform,” defies rational belief and is assembled out of mental flotsam and jetsam, much of it incongruous with itself let alone reality. He at first charges that women have never been subjected to anything like the penis enlargement advertisements that might so devastate their self-esteem, that such a product could never exist in “the land of the liberal American who wants to save the whales and kill the terrorists”—never mind the statistics on media induced eating disorders or the simple fact that Bloussant, a product claiming to increase bust size, predated the wave of penis pills—before launching into a rage over the “aging blonde” doctor’s betrayal of him, Leftist politics, and young boys everywhere:

Fast forward six months when little Johnny’s self-treatment has shown no improvement. Johnny is very bitter. A hate for women and lying Yale graduates has developed. What will poor Johnny do? How can this young chap win the heart of all the platinum blondes in America? What’s next: Depression? Surgery? Rape?

Yet Fulton, after laying down such a threat—one unsubtly directed to Block herself—changes course, swerving into a short exposé on the horrors of circumcision, which he sees as directly rel-

evant given that “the doctor has knifed roughly 33% of Johnny’s penis straight off!” Thus he claims that boy children are “raped,” something that happens again in adulthood when they encounter such advertisements on television. He concludes:

They say rape is about power. With her sexual energy and long blonde hair Susan is a [sic] engaging seductress.

But Dr. Block, YOU are a rapist.

Despite his rancor, it is evident that Fulton sees Block as the ‘good’ sort of Amazon, the type that beats, subdues, and dominates men, the kind that men need to exist in order to abdicate their own responsibility. Pornography, the capitalist system and its medical establishment, circumcision, all of the ills he that names (and omits) are the invention of the sex and gender class to which he belongs; the authority of which he feels powerless to question. Amazons, possessing the semblance of authority, have no such power and exist as safe targets for male animosity. A woman was called a rapist in a Leftist magazine (with a stated goal of providing “ammunition in struggles for peace and social justice”) when Block is nothing of the sort: As an Amazon, among the most ambivalent of male mythologies, she stands with a golden shield to defend male institutions and a silver axe against those women who would topple them; but a woman she remains.

II

The backlash against feminism has many branches. Sexism once meant men ignoring women in the intellectual sphere; now it manifests itself in the confrontation of them. This is sometimes callow, especially in the case of the men who believe that they benefit the least among their peers from the existing patriarchal structures: they go on to participate in the Father's and Men's Rights organizations that are expressly antifeminist in nature. While such groups are receiving an increasing amount of tacit approval from men in general, their atmosphere of desperation requires them to be held at arms length. Real men need not involve themselves in such tomfoolery to maintain firm control of their women. Thus more subtle reactions are sometimes indicative of certain gradations of privilege among men—or at least the presumption of privilege or lack thereof, as rationality is not a necessary determinate for such feelings of superiority or marginalization.

While Gilad Atzmon argued in his *CounterPunch* article, "Identity Crisis," that separatists have taken women's liberation too far in the direction of matriarchy, a more reasonable prognosis would be that integrationists have slowed the movement's course and stopped short of its early goals; a reading that need not even have a value judgment enjoined as diminishing returns are a plain enough result in most human efforts. The following case demonstrates the dangers of integration, especially when that assimilation itself becomes invisible to participants engaged in reactive communication and scholarship.

Dr. Peter Walcot, a professor emeritus at the University of Wales (College of Cardiff) is hardly a malignant personality. Then he need not be: he is well studied and traveled, his Masters conducted at Yale, and is highly thought of amongst his peers, even in retirement. His track record with women, at least on paper, is equally shining, having co-edited the 1996 anthology *Women in Antiquity*. A paper he submitted to the journal *Classica et mediaevalia* (vol. 45) two

years prior to that on the "Separatism and the Alleged Conversation of Women," follows that model: he meticulously cites female scholars, relies upon feminist sounding tropes such as "male anxiety," and continuously reminds the reader that it is not so much women in ancient Greece—and their alleged sexual banter and gossip—that he is discussing but the unreliable male imagination of their private conversation. And yet a spectacular bathos is made:

Indeed the "good" women of antiquity appear (but see Sem. 7, 19 and 29-31?) to have practice the kind of strict separatism⁴ advocated today as an alternative to integration by radical black or feminist groups. It is ironic to remark how contemporary separatism, which, in its extreme form, means that at many American universities "blacks live separately and attend mainly African American Courses", ⁵ far from being an innovation, just repeats a pattern common in peasant societies throughout the region of the Mediterranean in times both ancient and modern: thus David. D. Gilmore, referring to the peasant today, claims that "a rigid special and behavioral segregation of the sexes and the consequent domestic division of labour is probably the most striking physical characteristic of Mediterranean community life."⁶ Certainly we must accept as a norm for ancient society that women constituted a distinct group separate from, but parallel to, a corresponding grouping of males, and we must also acknowledge as a promising possibility that our understanding of female separatism in antiquity may be deepened by the deployment of comparative evidence drawn from the contemporary world of the Mediterranean peasant, for this is what Gilmore's comment strongly implies.

⁴On the crucial distinction between separatism and seclusion see David Cohen in Paul Cartledge, Paul Millet and Stephen Todd (edd.) *Nomos: Essays in Athenian Law, Politics*

and Society (Cambridge 1990) 155ff. and *Law, Sexuality, and Society* (Cambridge 1991) 149ff. and 158ff.

⁵*The Times* 25/5/91, an article entitled “Blacks Who Demand Apartheid”.

Among many similarities to Atzmon’s statement on separatism, Walcot’s is utterly unaware of its own conservatism, especially when applied to an American context. Apart from wishful thinking among Western Europeans that they have particularly transcended the problems of race and gender (along with their talents for consuming alcohol in moderation and their healthy sexualities, unhindered by Puritan sensibilities; the latter a particularly important fantasy to Atzmon and the identity he constructs for himself) that so plague the Americas, it is equally incognizant of higher education in the States, where even the most Rightwing of Classicists finds himself sharing a certain amount of kinship with others involved in ‘regional studies,’ including those of radical Black Americana, due to their general debasement as unimportant by the culture at large. While the ancient legacies of patriarchal power in Greece and Rome continue to be mined by white males for their sustained advantage in contemporary society (thus it remains Classics and not Ancient Mediterranean Studies), graduate students and professors in America often find themselves teaching the simplest of lessons to potential law and medical students who stand to derive far more benefits than they themselves from that legacy—accurate knowledge of minutiae being unnecessary to the exploitation of the Classical namesake and iconography—standing as a constant reminder of the feminization of scholastics itself into a ‘pink ghetto.’ Walcot, on the other hand, exists in a world where his field can often be viewed as at least patriotic, if still trivial; his Cardiff University making a token effort at including touches of Cymric at every level.

Unlike Atzmon, Walcot is constrained in the amount of digression he is allowed, given his context as an academic and the

more stringent peer review to which he is subjected; although that factor must not be overstated given both the patriarchal and parochial aspects of ‘peer’ formulation. Though he was forced to quickly move back to his original topic after his excursion, he was still allowed ample opportunity to express his political views on modern separatism in a particularly partisan fashion. It seems fairly evident that Walcot knew he was being deliberately antagonistic: men often rely on a convolute turn of phrase (“It is ironic to remark how”) in such scenarios to slyly inject some measure of apologetic ambiguity. Even an editor undecided on the appropriateness or relevancy of his tangent might have found the statement worrisome in its potential anachronism, a charge that typically carries more weight in the field of Classics. If publishing—in its idealized form unsurprisingly held by those who find themselves quite successful at it—is a rather Darwinian system, that those few words of Walcot survived the process is a testament to reality functioning quite differently.

This is not to say that his words should have been censored in this instance (and knowing his position is beneficial in any case, allowing it to shape the reader’s impression of the rest of his polemic), as social conservatives rely on the fiction that their ‘Politically Incorrect’ notions are suppressed rather than commercial industries, but to illustrate how his own voice was protected institutionally. Just as Atzmon’s fascination with lesbian separatists was coddled by his peers over the course of several years, Walcot’s investment in those curious “blacks who demand Apartheid” (as per *The Times* article that fueled his imagination) endured for over a decade. In the 1984 edition (vol. 31) of *Greece and Rome*, Walcot made a similar pronouncement on separatism in his “Greek Attitudes Towards Women: The Mythological Evidence,” stating:

What is certain, however, is that the life of the Athenian woman was not quite as depressing as what has been outlined above might suggest, for the expectations of

women in antiquity were considerably more modest than those of their modern counterparts in the Western World today, and it is thwarted expectations which lead to frustration and resentment. What is no less significant is the fact that men and women in the Greek world led distinct and separate lives, not demanding, for example, that husband and wife share much in the way of pleasure together, so that the wives were excluded from symposia and males from a number of exclusively feminine festivals. In short, the Greeks anticipated the answer found by those black groups today whose members appear to have achieved self-fulfilling and happy lives by rejecting integration with white society in favour of a policy of separatism which stresses distinctively black qualities.

There he was a fair bit more genteel in his patronizing, compared to his recent attempt at the subject that specifically targeted the supposed "innovation" of both black and feminist separatism: he now finds it more threatening as a confrontational political response, compared to his prior reading of it as merely a sheltered bliss perched on a quaint ignorance; perhaps having in mind the etymology of our word "idiot" from the Greek for 'private person.' Walcot's desultory maneuver to his pet-issue is problematic on many fronts. While the absolute happiness of the Athenian woman, in quantitative terms, is a futile project, drama has much to say about what catastrophes might occur when women were permitted to indulge their expectations. It is therefore equally arguable that it was not "expectations" themselves that were an affront to the social order, as sympathetic words on the part of men can be found in the voices created for the doomed women of tragedy (their wishes and complaints against double standards seen as rational enough in any case; Clytemnestra's "expectant heart"), but the unfeminine exercising of such personal desires.

But it is the value-neutral reading of patriarchy that is most

disturbing, as is his willingness to extend that grace equally to racism and its consequences. It is unclear what Walcot proposes by the "anticipated answer" given the unknown question, or even the specific Greeks he was referring to for that matter. While the existence and process of patriarchy remain undisputed in his text (something that non academics like Atzmon are more free to question), the fact provokes no ethical or emotional response, making it rather simple to view the disparate spheres carved out by the oppressor and the oppressed as analogous in both agency and validity. Indeed, if it is the dashing of too-high expectations that leads to frustration and resentment, then the current animosity of white males as a class is highly understandable and perhaps even justified: a reading made more damning if one considers that "Greek Attitudes Towards Women: The Mythological Evidence" was originally a speech Walcot presented to the young boys and men at Eton College, perhaps one of the most horrific bastions of institutionalized elite male power extant today. Men such as him have ample opportunities for separatism or seclusion and the power leave it unnamed.

One might surmise that the "irony" Walcot finds so troublesome is not so much the refusal of still-subordinated groups to integrate for their own benefit, but for the moral dilemma that their refusal of token efforts and largesse presents to those in power; the separatist response removing that palliative device from their arsenal. Apart from concerns over 'identity' (where both patriarchal and postmodernist theorists want to keep the debate centered) attempts at integration have often been disastrous on more pragmatic levels, from the bussing situation and white flight in the States, to gender equality in the United Kingdom. In her 1988 book, *Men Only*, Barbara Rogers details the effects of male institutions on the women of Britain, including a chapter largely about Eton itself. While many organizations that have previously excluded women are starting to admit them, dire financial situations have often had more to do with the impetus for change than a concern for fairness and justice.

After the Oxford and Cambridge Women's Club had merged

with the men's United University, women were relegated to the basement, had their orders at the bar forgotten, and even the indignity of a ransacked library where the men confiscated most of their books, only leaving them with an assortment of Victorian novels. When the Cowdray (the most prestigious of the women's club organizations) merged with the Naval and Military, a substantial financial windfall for the men of the latter, for their trouble the women found themselves barred from even using the front entrance to the building (p.195). Things proved worse academically, with the closing of girl's schools and women's colleges (p.150):

'The higher the status of the school the more likely that the school will be single sex.' Girls have been admitted, he suggests, on strictly regulated terms and only when there is a specific vacancy not taken up by a boy. So, for instance, the increase in the number of girls boarding at previously all-boys' schools is almost exactly the same as the decrease in the number of boys boarding. There was also a big advantage to be gained from taking some girls into the sixth form: preserving a large sixth form which could then offer a wider choice of A-level subjects (which the parents of boys were starting to demand; and the guarantee of a place in the prestigious HMC which bases its judgement largely on the size and quality of the sixth form.

Taking girls was also seen by many boys' schools as the lesser of two evils in keeping up numbers and revenue, especially in the hard times of the mid-1970s. The options were 'females or foreigners', girls being easier to deal with and already sharing the basic language and culture of the school. Girls could also be hived off legitimately to separate buildings, and not be integrated into the house structure used for the boys—something they could hardly try to do with 'foreigners'.

Walford sees the whole system as being one of a 'dual labour market': just as women are hired and fired to meet the employers' needs, so the schools take or reject girls according to the schools', not the girls', best interests. For example, girls are often admitted to boys' schools to study for particular subjects which are not sufficiently popular with the boys that year, but where a teacher is being provided and has to be paid for. If that teacher or subject is dropped, girls are then turned away. In several schools, also, girls are only accepted after the boys in the school's fifth form have made their choice of A-level subjects, so 'only girls whose choices "fit" are accepted'. Generally speaking, girls are admitted to the low-status subjects, often the traditionally 'feminine' ones like languages and the arts...

With such piecemeal integration, only done when it coincides neatly with the prevailing interests of white males (who remain free to again impose separation on their own terms when necessary), the case for radical self-determined separatism can be a strong one. While Walcott's criticism of such separatism was permitted by the editors of both *Classica et mediaevalia* and *Greece and Rome* without censorship, the academic system made direct challenges to his thinking—and the tacit agreement of such editors and peer reviewers—a difficult proposition, although some were made in the margins. In the 2001 *Making Silence Speak: Women's Voices in Greek Literature and Society*, Josine Blok takes Walcott to task in a footnote in her "Women's Speech in Classical Athens," writing:

Walcott (1994), though referring to anthropological material, misses the point by comparing the Mediterranean model (traditional, sociocultural separation sexes from each other, with hardly contested dominance of males over females) with the separation practiced by radical feminists and blacks in the 1970s (voluntary, politically motivated sep-

aration by one group from the other, aspiring to a reversal of social dominance).

It is unlikely that either of Walcot's statements on modern separatists (or those of Atzmon, for that matter) found a wide audience, or were even particularly influential to those specialists who did encounter the material; though they were certainly reflective of general trends in thinking. More problematic than even their inclusion, given the obvious fault of his comparison according to a variety of academic disciplines, is the male colonization of feminism that has led to the material utility (for contemporary men) of the debate he was entering into in the first place: the arguments over "seclusion" and "separatism" in the lives of ancient women.

Marilyn A. Katz took up this subject in her article "Ideology and 'the status of women' in ancient Greece" for the 1995 *Women in Antiquity: New Assessments*. In the important historiographic essay, she examines the political interests from the 19th century that often serve as the basis for the questions that historians continue to pose today. In brief, tradition has it that ancient women, Athenian in particular, lived in abject seclusion in the women's quarters of their households, reality perfectly mirroring the reported ideal broadcasted by selected male writers in the Classical era. This belief overlooked self-evident examples that proved otherwise as Western intellectuals had an agenda, principally racist, that required such seclusion. First, any improvement in the 'condition of women' was necessarily the result of the advent of Christianity. The seclusion itself was termed "Oriental seclusion," the Greeks having been thought to have borrowed the barbaric practice from their close neighbors in the Middle East. This conviction was held until fairly recently, the mid-1970s, when feminism at last filtered into the field with books such as Sarah B. Pomeroy's 1975 *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* taking issue with the prevailing opinion.

The "seclusion" model allowed men to ignore the presence of women in the ancient world: their freely acknowledged oppres-

sion led to a lack of available information which in turn justified the lack of scholarly interest, beyond occasional diagrams of "dresses and hairstyles," as Gillian Clark wrote in the *Women in Antiquity* volume edited by Walcot. Thus a new model was proposed, one that would point out the myriad of cracks in the ideal (held by ancient male writers themselves) of seclusion, opening up a wider variety of topics in the discussion of ancient women. Everything from female cults and ritual societies to the daily meeting of individual women at the local well—a common topic in Greek art that was ignored by the seclusion model—began to serve as evidence that women existed in their own sphere of influence and relation, one that was meaningful and worthy of study; hence the "separatist" distinction that exists today. It is my contention that this model has been co-opted by male scholars as well.

Walcot's citation in "Separatism and the Alleged Conversation of Women" of David Cohen in *Nomos* ("The social context of adultery at Athens") is perhaps a self-serving one, given Cohen's own reference of Walcot's earlier article in *Greece and Rome* and his contribution to *Women in Antiquity*, but the way it is phrased gives particular insight into this process:

On the crucial distinction between separatism and seclusion see David Cohen in Paul Cartledge, Paul Millet and Stephen Todd (edd.) *Nomos: Essays in Athenian Law, Politics and Society* (Cambridge 1990) 155ff. and *Law, Sexuality, and Society* (Cambridge 1991) 149ff. and 158ff.

Rather than an arbitrary distinction imposed by outsiders observing an incalculably complex spectrum of patriarchal history (and present for that matter), there is now a "crucial distinction" that renders the issue clearly in black and white. Though complexities are still acknowledged, this is done by the widening of the separatism category into virtual meaninglessness, adjusting the bar for nominal seclusion to be untenable, ever outside the realm of plausi-

bility. Thus anything short of a heel pressed into every woman's throat at every waking moment patently fails the test for "seclusion." Only actual heels will suffice, as the *threat* of such punishment or retaliation is often seen as comparatively inconsequential, balanced against the more easily understood 'prison' walls of the women's quarters, the *gynaikeion*, proposed by the traditional model; similar to the general lack of male response to a culture of rape today and the common refusal to recognize any social significance of rape in the lives of women (and their resulting opportunities and behavior) beyond the crimes of individuals. Examine Cohen's use of "utter" on page 155:

To begin with, there is a marked tendency to take the public/private dichotomy as an absolute ontological category and hence to confuse separation and seclusion. That is, it does not follow that because, generally speaking, the man's sphere is public/outside, and woman's is private/inside, women live their lives in total isolation from all but their slaves and their family. Separation of spheres of activity does not imply physical sequestration, and, consequently utter subjection, as does seclusion. While it is undeniable that women did not operate in the public and political spheres in the way that men did, it does not necessarily follow that they did not have public, social, and economic spheres of their own, nor that these categories were not fluid and manipulable as opposed to rigid and eternally fixed.

Despite impossibility of any authentic scenario ever living up to (or being allowed to live up to) the ideal of seclusion, everything thus belonging to the growing domain of separatism, "seclusion" as a concept is itself allowed to remain at the table as a boogeyman, required not for any epistemological reason (as per Katz), but to mitigate men's own discomfort with the horrors of patriarchy: as Walcott said, the women of antiquity had "modest expectations."

Male dominance is again an uncontested fact, but neither is it a worrisome one as the separatist model allows for the concentration on the more happy aspects of women's lives, painting patriarchy into a background oblivion hardly worthy of mention. When male scholars do remind each other of the historiography of the debate over seclusion, it is to safely locate sexism in the past, providing a negative example—those "other" men—to which they themselves can be compared favorably. As Cohen does earlier on page 150 of *Nomos*, eagerly pointing out the sex of those in error:

Anthropologists, predominantly male, had long formulated a view of Mediterranean women as secluded, powerless, and isolated from the life of their society. A later generation of researchers, however, challenged this widely accepted thesis. Clark, for example, in her social anthropological study of a modern Greek village, acutely formulates the contrast between these different interpretations of the role of women in traditional Mediterranean societies:

When we began our field study at Methana it was soon evident that characterisations of Greek women in some of the ethnographic accounts did not fit the women we were encountering. While we had read about powerless, submissive females who considered themselves morally inferior to men, we found physically and socially strong women who had a great deal to say about what took place in the village. The social and economic affairs of several households were actually dominated by older women, including the house of village officials.

Even as modern peasant life in the Mediterranean is often appealed to in these discussions, where "strong"—but not quite Amazonian—women abound, anthropological examples closer to

home are ignored: many Western antifeminists who have discovered that they cannot completely explain away the differential in wages across the sexes have moved on to blaming heterosexually partnered women for *spending* a greater share of the couple's total income (though men still enjoy the use of the lion's share of *disposable* income for expensive masculine hobbies that often benefit only themselves; compared to women's required purchasing of victuals with common funds), stating that it is thus men who are at the disadvantage. The Second-Shift then becomes a weapon against men, rather than a result of their oppressive acts against women. While this is not directly relevant to the lives of women in ancient Greece, outside of the continuous pattern of patriarchal blaming, it is a solid testimony against the naïve acceptance of such anthropological evidence—especially when it is offered against “seclusion” which, by their own admission, exists only as a straw man.

Women's historical response to repression, and its intelligence and creativity in the navigation of such boundaries, is both explained away and denied (Cohen declaring the spheres women were relegated to as “fluid and manipulable as opposed to rigid and eternally fixed”) by the rhetorical softening of patriarchy in academia, and then sometimes turned against women themselves. “Separate” itself is a rather kind word, not necessary implying a subject-verb-object arrangement (in the classic feminist sense) as “secluded” does, allowing for a peculiar sort of neutrality: if the sphere of females in antiquity is increasingly seen as analogous in form and meaning to that of the males (Walcot as quoted above: “women constituted a distinct group separate from, but parallel to, a corresponding grouping of males”), then the system of domination can be safely omitted from the conversation (Walcot's simple equation of the male symposium and female festivals such as the Thesmophoria), or even inverted.

The forced participation of women in upholding patriarchal norms and institutions therefore renders them *equally* complicit in the system and thus responsible for injustices against men as well;

something the separatist model seems to encourage. Thus the classic example from Plutarch's *Moralia* of Spartan women exhorting their sons to show courage in battle, “come back with your shield or upon it,” becomes evidence of women's comparative advantage or the oppression of men. The patriarchal system dictated by the state that would result in a woman potentially starving to death if her male relatives were found out as deserters becomes background static in the unbridled search for female agency, a pseudo-feminist preoccupation, one as eager to paint the Spartan mother as a cruel matriarch as Aristotle was to consider Sparta a “gynaecocracy” (see Pomeroy's treatment on page 160 of her *Spartan Women*).

Modern women themselves are similarly setup to take the fall and are often put in positions to accept more than their fair share of responsibility. This extends even to the interpretation of the past. Shannon E. French, a professor of philosophy at the U.S. Naval Academy, delivered a speech on “The Warrior's Code” at the National Conference of Military Ethics at Oslo in 2002, one that was later adapted for an article in the March 21, 2003 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. She was required, as a feminine agent in masculine space (although one might suspect that she would bristle at the questioning of her agency), to rationalize the “timeless” story of the Spartan mother and the shield:

The warriors' mothers who spoke this line were not heartless—far from it. It was spoken from great love. They wanted their children to return with their sense of self-respect intact, feeling justifiably proud of how they had performed under pressure, not tortured and destroyed by guilt and shame. To come back with their shields was to come back still feeling like warriors, not like cowards or murderers.

While an unfounded opinion worth little to specialists in ancient history, French's statement (in which the plight of the moth-

ers themselves is of no interest) and the necessity of her finding that specific solution to the problem—that is, the care-giving requirement of femininity—posed by the story of the shield, has much to say about misogyny both antique and current. Compare, for example, Gilad Atzmon’s words in his anti-Zionist political novel, *A Guide to the Perplexed*, where it is Jewish women and their libido which is seen as the impetus for the men’s acts of aggression against the Palestinians: “[the Israeli] women of the Left, who have a poetic compassion for war causalities: it makes them horny as hell.” Modern social requirements have forced women to take an equal share in the responsibility for military violence (despite lesser rewards), even projecting the same on their ancient counterparts, while men have taken this as an excuse for further campaigns of blame.

The search for women’s agency has been fraught with such dangers, in as much as the investigation has appealed to both women and men alike for disparate reasons, just as popular ‘Amazonian’ icons (such as *The Avengers’* Emma Peel) have attracted both feminists and male fetishists alike. Men have been most adept at defending the agency of women when it comes to the ‘choice’ to submit to male institutions such as the sex industry: many feminists have pointed out that it was precisely at the height of universal disinterest in labor unions (seen as an unnecessary relic of the past during the mid 1990s) that a strong cultural program, ostensibly Leftist in nature, was created to herald unionization as the great legitimizer of peep shows, strip clubs, and brothels. At the same time, women have been conscripted in undermining their own ability to organize together as women to fight against patriarchal oppression.

Just as the separatist model for diagramming the experiences of women in the ancient world was effectively colonized by men, so have the ontological experiments of feminist historians. In beginning her “Ideology and ‘the status of women’ in ancient Greece,” Katz invokes such work, by a series of French feminists and the British writer Denise Riley, asking “Is a ‘history of women’ possible?

Does Woman exist?” She points out later that Pomeroy’s *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* fails equally to call into question the historiographic validity of the category “woman”:

The notion that texts authored by men represent a ‘male’ point of view is widely shared. This idea, however, not only introduces an artificial distinction between text and culture, but also implicitly relegates women to an entirely passive role in patriarchal society—a view which could hardly be substantiated with reference to our own culture, and which is furthermore easily discredited through the comparative study of women in contemporary traditional, patriarchal, societies.²⁷

²⁷Cf. Nicole-Claude Matthieu’s critique of the anthropologist Edwin Ardener’s notion of women as a ‘muted group’ (Ardener 1975a (1972)), and of the biological essentialism implied by the concept: ‘there is no “autonomous female way of seeing”’; there is no woman’s way of seeing on the one hand and a man’s way of seeing on the other, there is only that of the society as a whole’: Matthieu 1973: citation p. 112. Both Just and Gould draw freely on Ardener in constructing their own analytic paradigms.

This contemporary fear of presenting women as “entirely passive” is a pervasive one amongst feminists (often making it easier for pro-feminist men to adopt some of the more radical and hard-line positions), although that itself is an artificial distinction; one imposed similarly to that of the “utter seclusion” model that has been kept around past its relevance to make the unassailable fact of women’s “separateness” under patriarchy more palatable. “Passivity” is an incorrect euphemism for oppression but one that is often forced by the quest for agency, for the sake of both those

ancient women and those who today investigate them, defensive of their own standing in society: women's lack of total passivity is then taken to mean a lack of genuine oppression. Towards her own position, Katz does admit that Pomeroy did criticize the propensity of scholars to "treat women as an undifferentiated mass," rather than the whores, wives, slaves, and various other substantial categories: many of which importantly might be shared in some respect with males.

While such distinctions are indeed highly relevant and deserving of study, the social impetus today pushing towards that answer is a dangerous one from a feminist perspective, as it clearly calls into question the relevance of the movement itself (given the then untenable category of "woman"): once again it is a case of males relying upon the prescribed care-giving responsibilities of women, who nevertheless exist despite the rulings of theorists, and conscripting them in their own efforts to further the goals of men. The effect of this intellectual exercise in creating a variegated tapestry of oppression and agency, where only "woman plus" some other attribute is allowed to be of interest, can be compared to various historical examples of women losing out when they 'share' a category with men. Many black women in the civil rights movement faced fierce misogyny from their male peers in the struggle, just as lesbians who attended to gay men at the height of the AIDS epidemic found their own interests abandoned; even the general antiwar movement in the Vietnam era shows men quickly forgetting women's assistance of them once their male crisis had abated.

The anthology *Making Silence Speak: Women's Voices in Greek Literature and Society* at once falls into this trap of 'agency' (the book jacket advertises that "Rather than confirming the old model of binary oppositions in which women's speech was viewed as insignificant and subordinate to male discourse, these essays reveal a dynamic and potentially explosive interrelation between women's speech and the realm of literary production, religion, and oratory," a line cribbed nearly directly from Laura McClure's introduction) as well

as it attempts to navigate it in an effort to reconstruct women's voices out of a tradition of silence. It is therefore interesting that the only chapter, out of thirteen, to make a substantial endeavor at postmodernist 'deconstruction' is written by a man, Mark Griffith with his "Antigone and Her Sister(s): Embodying Women in Greek Tragedy."

In his work on the subject, he was unable to find any substantially 'authentic' female voice in Greek tragedy, from how the words were spoken (tone and enunciation, intentionally disregarding costume and gesture in this instance for sensible enough reasons) to often what those very words were; although in drama there were some specific patterns to feminine speech. Indeed, those very patterns, when occasionally transferred to male characters for heightened effect, or the reverse in the case those unfortunate 'masculine women,' only serve to explicate how social gender is distinct from biology, concluding:

Certainly, no neatly defined portrait of "woman" emerges (from this play, or from any other—or from Greek tragedy overall): no comfortable confirmation of preexisting distinctions of gender, of predictable mannerisms of speech, or of the natural divisions between male and female. For the term "woman" is too clumsy an umbrella for too many separate categories (daughter, sister, virgin, bride, wife, mother, princess, captive, etc.), whose several duties and expectations cannot be expected to cohere tidily—nor to separate themselves out conveniently and invariably (essentially) from those of son, brother, youth, husband, and father. The urge (within some of the play's characters, and perhaps within many members of Sophocles' audience, as with some readers in our own day) to find and maintain distinctions, to listen for the authentic voice of "woman," and to seize on particular formulations and enunciations as proof of inherent difference (whether inferiority, or superiority, or mysterious complementarity) is found to lead in circles: women do

not all speak alike (any more than men do); and they do not always speak as “women” — though sometimes their words will be misheard, or heard in a particular way, or not heard at all, precisely because all that is heard, or noticed, is a “woman’s” voice.

While in many respects quite correct regarding the immateriality of gender, Griffith’s implication that there is only one possible interest in seeking out the specificities of “woman” is problematic, equating the patriarchal search (or presumably matriarchal as well; the statements of both Atzmon and Walcot inspiring a more cynical reading of the historically unnecessary inclusion of “superiority” to his list) for “inherent difference” to that of feminists attempting to come to terms with both their own lives and that of their foremothers. This is quite similar in effect — though his intent is uncertain — to less competent complaints by men that feminism itself is sexist, no matter its marginal status compared to patriarchal power structures, and should be abandoned as a project in favor of some general humanist platform that would benefit such men equally, no threat to the current advantages they enjoy vis-à-vis women.

It is no accident that it was at precisely the same moment in which the people historically determined (by male authority) to be women attained some measure of true agency by organizing together *as* women, that the same male authority finally allowed the category of “woman” to be deconstructed. This is justified by perfunctory and quite ineffective attempts to do the same to “man” as a class (Eva Stehle on page 11 of her *Performance and Gender in Ancient Greece* cites Maud Gleason in that “masculinity in the ancient world was an achieved state, radically underdetermined by anatomical sex.”), as even when the evidence is compelling it is still readily co-opted by men who refuse to come to terms with their own privilege.

Just as Griffith cites Judith Butler liberally — she perhaps read an earlier draft of his essay; though it is her previous writing on “gender performativity” and not her keen interest in his subject, as

she wrote *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, that so piqued Griffith — it has been males, whether they personally consider themselves to be men or women, who have been rewarded the most by appropriating Butler’s work or by associating themselves with her in some way. Ironically, this phenomenon functions rather similarly to how Classical materials are exploited. The denseness of both Butler’s ideas on gender and the notorious way in which she presents them make them particularly suited to this: male social power and authority often allows them both the access and the audacity to use it towards their own ends without the requirement that they possess any true comprehension of it, while women tend to be hesitant even with such understanding.

As “woman” as a category is increasingly seen as a suspect anachronism, even if the subjugation of those with the capacity to bear children has not diminished (radical feminists have pointed out it is the existence of specifically those female elements that cannot be ‘performed’ by males seeking to change gender that must be denied, even and especially by females themselves, given the male-driven campaign urging them to view the general fact as biological essentialism or determination), the allegedly more-unified presence of Queer Theory is growing. Predictably, straight white males, though they typically profess to live as lesbian women of a sort, have been summoned to the forefront of the movement. Less intuitive has been their inroad to feminism itself: working to the detriment of the largest extant separatist gathering, the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, can be a claim to fame and catapult one into the feminist limelight as a celebrity.

Even as many young lesbians assert that denying festival entry to women who had once socially defaulted to men, their being male, is biological essentialism — and thus females are again rendered as the oppressors of males — their care-giving efforts are ultimately of no use to the transsexual or transgendered individuals they work on behalf of so diligently. Indeed, many such males have been flouting the rules of the separatist space for years, some quite

publicly (taking advantage of their unwilling host's disinclination towards confrontation, one borne both out of the feminine conditioning they received from patriarchal culture and the intentional pacifism of most feminist philosophy) and the entry of those previously barred would diminish the festival as the ultimate test of 'passing,' proving themselves more authentic women than other males who make the attempt at transitioning. Even those who find passing as their desired gender difficult in general life and are forced to take on the specific identity of 'trans' (there are exceptions, of course, those who find both traditional gender-identities to be undesirable; although it should be said that 'post-gender' status is typically only afforded under Queer Theory to males who have already undergone sexual reassignment surgery to become women before souring on the designation) also require the banishment of other males along the gendered spectrum from some spaces to reinforce their own identities, for altogether different purposes than those of feminist separatists: their identity as women was enforced by patriarchal culture, not Gnostic predilections about their true nature.

The current argument over seclusion and separatism in the field of Classics is therefore an important one, underpinned historiographically by forces both historic and in progress, with wide ranging effects for both those within the discipline and without. While my reading of Peter Walcot (and David Cohen and Mark Griffith for that matter) was admittedly a hostile one, a fair degree of cynicism seems prudent given how neatly many of his thoughts on modern separatists intersect with those of male society at large. His statements can be equally applied to an examination of those of Gilad Atzmon: the latter's inability to see rape as a war crime or sexual humiliation in "Women in Uniform" is more understandable when viewed with "It is among one's peers, among other women in the case of a wife, that one is made to feel personal humiliation most keenly" from "Separatism and the Alleged Conversation of Women" (p.47). Both, given their privileged outlook, have misapplied the

judgment of *Brown vs. Board of Education*: rather than targeting what Barbara Rogers would describe as "mirror-image" organizations (women's Soroptimists as a direct response to the influence of the men-only Rotary club) as being inherently unequal, they direct both brutal and patronizing attacks towards those women who would propose a new paradigm.

Men have a profound need to indict women as equal co-conspirators in patriarchy in order to mitigate their own sense of responsibility; a practice that women have joined given the pseudo-feminist quest for female agency currently at play in society. Indeed, to focus on the unending historical brutalization of women is wearying and that most would prefer to 'move on' from that and tease out more interesting facts, more curious scenarios, is within comprehension. That is, after all, the same methodology utilized by courtroom dramas on television. If the crimes reflected the statistics generated by real life, there would be little suspense in who the victim and perpetrator might be: hence the need to generate both spurned housewives and crazed dominatrices out for blood. Hollywood and academia have different responsibilities, however.

The difference between seclusion and separatism is one of scale, not of kind—there is no "crucial distinction"—and yet it has been treated almost as if that nominal line between them is the difference between patriarchy and matriarchy. It seems fitting to end with Walcot's own thoughts ("Greek Attitudes Towards Women") on Amazons: "The Amazons exist outside the range of normal human experience and it is, in my opinion, crass folly to attempt an identification with actual people, be it Hittites, Scythians, or 'bow-toting mongoloids'. The Amazons are fantasy creatures, the type of predatory woman or domina; they are everything a woman ought not to be and they define the norm and the acceptable by setting that norm on its head; they illustrate the appalling consequence of woman usurping what is properly man's role and emphasize man's fear of any attempt at such a usurpation." Only they need not be.