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Figure 1

Reproductive Power; Menstruation, Magic, and Taboo

A Thesis Presented by

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Supervisor: Barbara Bolt

Abstract

In Western culture menstruation is considered to be a curse, an illness, or at least an aspect of feminine "nature" best suppressed. In this thesis I argue that the menstrual taboo has been oppressive to women. Through a closely reading of Sigmund Freud's writing on femininity, I argue that Freud depicts a monstrous aspect of femininity, connected with the mother and female castration, which he believes must remain repressed. I propose that he is unable to detect a direct connection between female castration and menstruation, because he is himself unconscious of the operations of the menstrual taboo.

I draw on Freudian theorist Claude Dagmar Daly who critiques Freud's negligence regarding the menstrual taboo, and pinpoints a "menstrual complex" at the heart of Freud's Oedipus complex. In fleshing out the monstrous menstruating mother at the heart of the Oedipus complex I work with French feminist theorists Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous and trace this figure to the hysteric. Drawing on French feminist Catherine Clément's writing on the hysteric, I reveal a marginalised space of feminine Nature that opens up in the splitting of the hysteric from the sorceress. I argue that the figure of the sorceress presides over an extremely important aspect of feminine Nature associated with women's "blood magic."

I use the term "blood magic" to describe a periodic magical power that is an aspect of feminine Nature, which has been repressed in Western culture. The roots of the term "blood magic" are in anthropological accounts of menstrual rituals. My use of the term Nature denotes the possibility of the expression of a femininity by women, where as "nature" is evidence of the colonisation of femininity by the dominant phallocentric culture in the West. A sacred space of feminine Nature that resides on the borders of culture cannot be accessed and returned to culture until it has been dislodged from the patriarchal depiction of menstruation as a monstrous threat to civilization.

I find that the hysteric provides an historical instance of feminine disorder linked to the sorceress that allows me to explore the domain of the sorceress and what I have referred to as "blood magic." In order to develop this positive reconstruction of the menstrual

taboo I draw on several case studies in which women's menstrual cycles are ritualised for women's empowerment. It is in relation to this sacred ritual space of femininity that I call for women to write their own feminine imaginaries, in connection with their menstrual cycles. Moreover, I argue that this constitutes the expression of an authentic account of female sexuality by women, which is dually the writing of a menstrual dialectic. Authenticity in these terms refers to the expression of the menstrual aspect of female sexuality by women. It therefore requires that women recognise the value of articulating the menstrual aspect of female sexuality.

Declaration

This is to certify that the thesis comprises only my original work except where indicated. Due acknowledgment has been made in the text to all other materials used. The thesis is 34,718 words in length, inclusive of footnotes, but exclusive of abstract, tables, and bibliography. The thesis includes six reproductions of original artwork by the author, as well as two poems written by the author.

Natalie Rose Dyer

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Table of Figures

Table of Contents

Introduction: A call to re-think the menstrual taboo in the West

Figure 2

The name – of it – is “Autumn” –
The hue – of it – is Blood –
An artery – upon the Hill –
A Vein – along the Road –

Great Globules – in the Alleys –
And oh, the Shower of Stain –
When Winds – upset the Basin –
And spill the Scarlet Rain –
It sprinkles Bonnets – far below –

It gathers ruddy Pools –
Then – eddies like a Rose – away –
Upon Vermillion Wheels – [1]

In Western culture menstruation has historically been constructed as a negative periodic disturbance. "It is the 'curse' or, more fully, 'the curse of Eve': a part of God's punishment of women for Eve's role in the Biblical Fall."[2] A key indication that menstruation remains a curse in contemporary culture is shown through the rise in popularity of cycle-stopping birth control pills. The phenomenon of eradicating the menstrual period with cycle-stopping birth control pills like Lybrel seems to coincide with a view of menstruation as a curse, even an illness, or at least an aspect of feminine "nature" best suppressed. A female commentator on a women's health website explains that "Last year, the FDA approved Lybrel, a continuous-use birth control pill. Unlike all other birth control pills on the market, this pill does not have a placebo or 'off' period that would allow for menstruation. It is apparently intended, or at least safe for, long-term use and would eradicate the presence of menstruation entirely."[3] Elizabeth Kissling Professor of Communication and Women's Gender Studies at Eastern Washington University comments "that both pharmaceutical companies and the media are dubbing the menstruation process a disease that can be cured through the use of birth control."[4] In fact, the following daily newspaper article pedals the no period birth control pill Lybrel as a solution to menstruating, as though it were an illness that needs to be cured.

> … a woman's health expert says we do not need to have a monthly period. Well, thanks for finally sharing that gem. When did the medical profession realise women did not need to experience this

[1] Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth cite Emily Dickinson's Untitled Poem, in *The Curse; A Cultural History of Menstruation,* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 188-189.
[2] Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, "Chapter One: A Critical Appraisal of Theories of Menstrual Symbolism", in *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 32.
[3] Posted by Hayley, on a Women's Health Discussions Page, *Wego*, (July 2008), http://community.wegohealth.com/group/womenshealth/forum/topic/show?id=2028394%3ATopic%3A21476
Accessed July 2008.
[4] Ryan Lancaster, "Lybrel helps women escape the 'curse' of menstruation", *The Easterner*, no. 4, (June 2008), http://media.www.easterneronline.com/media/storage/paper916/news/2008/05/28/News/Lybrel.Helps.Women.Escape.The.curse.Of.Menstuation-3376350.shtml
Accessed July 2008

> pain and inconvenience every month from puberty to menopause? The experts were responding to news of a new birth-control pill called Lybrel that puts a stop to monthly periods indefinitely. Singer Britney Spears said this week if it had been around three years ago her life might have taken a turn for the better. She said she will be first in line for the drug. Ted Weaver, the chairman of the women's health committee at the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said: "There was not much harm that will happen to a woman if she is not having a monthly period." Sounds to good to be true, but bring on the Lybrel.[5]

Whilst we can acknowledge that the birth control pill has been an extraordinarily important scientific advancement in contraception that has aided women's sexual liberation, we need to be more aware of how the pill reinforces negative cultural attitudes to menstruation. The pill should not be used as a cure for the menstrual curse. However, the idea that menstruation is a curse is not a universal perspective. Some cultures take a positive view of menstruation whereby menstruation is considered sacred and integral to the cultures rhythms, whilst other cultures treat menstruation with ambivalence.

For the Maori of New Zealand, women's bodies are revered and protected within a positive understanding of taboo. Social anthropologist of birth Sheila Kitzinger explains:

> Among the Maori a woman's body is sacred, *tapu*, because it holds and gives life. In ideal terms, the female body imposes holy dread. The entrance to each *marae* is through the body of a woman and the carving above the entrance represents her genitals. Carved on the walls on a *marae* in Aotearoa, the spiritual centre of the Maori nation, are the words, 'He tapn te tinana O te wahine na te mea he whare tangata': 'The body of a woman is *tapu* because it is the house of humanity'.[6]

Women's genitals carved above the entrance of each Marae teaches the Maori people to respect women's bodies. Women's bodies are considered culturally sacred within a positive understanding of taboo. However, the sanctity of women's reproductive power is often not observed in Western culture. The menstrual taboo is most frequently imposed on women in the West in a negative sense to the extent that menstruation is often thought of as a curse.

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[5] Robyn Riley, "No More Periods," *Sunday Herald Sun*, May 27, 2007, general section of the newspaper, 25.
[6] Sheila Kitzinger, *Rediscovering Birth* (London: Little, Brown, and Company, 2000), 150.

The historical trajectory of menstruation in the West reveals how women's reproductive difference has made them the centre of medical enquiry, conducted by men. Medical "experts" in the West have historically defined menstruation as a reminder of female carnality, as a non-spiritual substance, a potential signifier of death, a waste product, a weakness, the cause of hysterical symptoms, as well as a source of vital energy in women. In the nineteen seventies, in their feminist text *The Curse,* authors Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth surveyed Western medical views of menstruation. According to their research, Aristotle argued in Fourth Century BC, in his text *On the Generation of Animals,* that women are aligned with the body and men with the soul.[7] Semen is assigned the outward active substance of spiritual tenacity, whilst woman's blood is degenerative, the very signification of death. This line of thinking is a philosophical attempt to de-spiritualise menstruation by assigning an authoritarian spiritual power to the masculine sexual substance. On the other hand, women's sexual substance is deemed exclusively carnal. This inherent female carnality infers that women's bodies are more sexual than men's because of their menstrual cycle and must be carefully guarded against. Indeed, this philosophical position informs later scientific views of the female body.

Earlier, in the Sixth Century BC, Pythagoras theorised menstruation as the need for the "evacuation" of excess blood. In the seventeenth century, Avicenna still held this view, stating that "the uterus is the weak point of the female and hence the outlet of menses."[8] He also called the woman's uterus the most "feeble" part of the body. Here women's reproductive organs are culturally constructed as the source of feminine weakness. John Freind in the Eighteenth Century linked excessive blood with hysteria. He argued that if men were to have as much blood as woman, they would become hysterical if it was not discharged.[9] Thus, women are aligned with psychic disorder on account of their menstruation.

In the Twentieth Century menstruation became the subject of debate for the psychoanalytical community. Fritz Wittels, a colleague of the founder of psychoanalysis

[7] Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth, *The Curse; A Cultural History of Menstruation* (New York: Dutton, 1976), 41.
[8] Ibid., 47
[9] Ibid., 47-48

Sigmund Freud, lectured to The Vienna Psychoanalytic Society on menstruation and the sexual inferiority of women, stating that "Menstruation is the most important difference between man and woman."[10] He was heavily criticized by the psychoanalytical community since menstruation was not deemed to be a meaningful event in human sexual development. Wilhelm Fliess disagreed with his peers and argued that "women's menstrual bleeding [expresses] …a process which affects both sexes and the beginning of which goes back beyond puberty…"[11] He felt that menstruation was an important aspect of human sexual development for both men and women. However, his colleague Freud, who attempted to theorise the development of human sexuality in the West, considered menstruation peripheral to the formation of the psyche.[12] He systematically denied the importance of menstruation throughout his career by neglecting to include menstruation in his theory of human sexuality, revealing through his neglect the existence of a negative taboo on menstruation in the West, which is oppressive to women. He essentially demarcates the space of the menstruation taboo in the West in his exploration of female sexuality.

Freud's writings on the "nature" of femininity reveal a monstrous space of women's bleeding in relation to female castration. Yet, Freud does not actually acknowledge this space of women's bleeding and so it remains repressed culturally. Second wave Freudian feminist Karen Horney challenged Freud's view of menstruation by arguing that a "universal negativity" was directed toward the menstrual process. She called attention to the cultural devaluing of women's sexual difference in order to safeguard man's power in the social domain, and thus keep women out. However, she problematically links menstruation with female masochism and puts forward the thesis of a female "wound."[13] It is outside the scope of this thesis to read female masochism. To return to Freud, his idea that menstruation is thought to be a monstrous episode best repressed is in evidence culturally. Women's menstrual experience is marginalised and contained within a negative concept of taboo in the West that is aligned with the Freudian unconscious.

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[10] Mary Jane Lupton, *Menstruation and Psychoanalysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1993), 4.
[11] Ernst Kris, Introduction to *Sigmund Freud, The Origins of Psycho-Analysis; Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887-1902*, ed. Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud, Ernst Kris, trans. Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey, (London: Imago, 1954), 7.
[12] Mary Jane Lupton, *Menstruation and Psychoanalysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1993), 5.
[13] Ibid., 171

In this thesis I theorise the space of the menstrual taboo in the West that has been culturally coded a site of feminine disorder, and which plays out in the discourse of Freudian psychoanalysis. I reveal that the notion of the menstrual taboo in Western culture is bound to the Freudian concept of the unconscious. In these terms feminine "nature" is considered to be potentially the site of neurosis that threatens to seep out of the cloisters of the unconscious. I aim to reconsider this space of feminine "nature" that has historically been constructed monstrous, and is consequently repressed, and subsumed into the figure of the hysteric. I find that the hysteric, who is closely related to the sorceress, presides over an extremely important aspect of femininity, a "wild zone." This "wild zone" demarcates women's blood magic that is a space of feminine Nature, which must be excavated, and articulated by women. Not everything that needs to be said about the menstrual taboo has yet been said.

Nature denotes the possibility of a more authentic expression of femininity by women whereas "nature" is merely evidence of the colonisation of femininity by a dominant phallocentric culture in the West. The space of feminine Nature that I explore in this thesis has been called by French critical theorist and writer Hélène Cixous, an archaic voice, "a voice of milk and blood, a voice silenced but savage" that must be newly born.[14] In my view, this vital aspect of feminine Nature cannot be successfully accessed and return to culture until it has been dislodged from the patriarchal depiction of menstruation as a monstrous threat to civilization. The cultural construct of menstruation as a monstrous threat is repressed and contained within a negative construct of taboo, which constrains women of the West. I argue that women need to discover and express a new positive concept of the menstrual taboo. It is by realigning with the power of the sorceress who presides over this aspect of feminine Nature that women will be able to revalue a concept of menstruation against the dominant patriarchal construct.

It is important to set out I more detail how I intend to think Nature/"nature". Western culture tends to try to make culture and nature oppositional, whereas feminist theorist

[14] Sandra. M Gilbert, Introduction to *The Newly Born Woman; Theory and History of Literature*, *Volume 24*, by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, trans. Betsy Wing, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), ix.

Donna Haraway constructs an escape route. In her essay *The Promise of Monsters; A Regenerative Politics of Inappropriate/d Others* (2004) she is concerned to point out the many pitfalls of re-appropriating the loaded concept "nature". She says:

> Nature for me, and I venture for many of us who are planetary fetuses gestating in the amniotic effluvia of terminal industrialism, one of those impossible things characterized by Gayatri Spivak as that which we cannot not desire. Excruciatingly conscious of nature's discursive constitution as 'other' in the histories of colonialism, racism, sexism, and class domination of many kinds, we nonetheless find this problematic, ethno-specific, long-lived, and mobile concept something we cannot do without, but we can never 'have.' We must find another relationship to nature besides reification and possession.[15]

Thus, Haraway sets out what nature is not. For her it is not a place, or essence, or hidden concept to be unveiled, or science, or other, or mother, or matrix, or "tool for the reproduction of man."[16] Her concept of nature reframed is a topic, a trope, through which public culture is rebuilt, towards a discourse on nature. Haraway therefore theorises nature as differentiated from rationalist models of science and technology, in order to re-circulate the term in relation to individuals.[17] My formulation of the term Nature exists in close proximity to Haraway. However, I formulate an "imagined elsewhere" of Nature that is articulated specifically by women since I am theorising an aspect of femininity in this thesis, which is menstruation.

I argue for a return of this aspect of feminine Nature to culture through the expression of a "feminine imaginary" by women. My use of the term "feminine imaginary" stems from French feminist thinker-poet Hélène Cixous' theoretical work in her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976) in which she responds to Sigmund Freud's essay *Medusa's Head* (1922), and his interpretation of Medusa as an absolute repulsion of male sexual desire. Culturally, the terror of Medusa's head is that it symbolises castration. Women are consequently culturally aligned with this act of bloody monstrous severing. Cixous advises that the task of women is to reclaim the Medusa as a symbol of female sexuality. Using the figure of Medusa, Cixous proposes going "within" the discourse of man and exploding it, arguing that women have been culturally assigned "within" the Medusa's

[15] Donna Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 64.
[16] Ibid., 65
[17] Ibid., 66

lair.[18] She calls for the return of the repressed femininity that has been dwelling in the dark, and has been identified as the "dark continent" by Freud. It is through writing femininity and recovering a feminine Nature authored by women that the immense resource of the repressed is excavated to the level of culture. Moreover, Medusa becomes a potent arbiter of female sorcery aligned with women's blood magic. The Medusa in history constitutes one feminine imaginary that needs to be revisited and retold by women. Yet, there are many other menstruating figures throughout history that need to be reinterpreted by women in the forging of a positive space of the menstrual taboo.

I take Cixous' concept of the feminine imaginary, which she theorises in relation to the Medusa, as a springboard for exploring the feminine imaginary specifically in relation to menstruation. Cixous advises that women must become Medusa-like and conceive of their own sexed texts against the dominant phallocentric view of femininity. Her opinion is that the Medusa is in fact a powerful wielder of an aspect of feminine Nature that must be liberated through a revolutionary act of women's writing. If women have been designated a space of repression aligned with the Medusa then she must explode the authority of the unconscious by deploying her own feminine imaginary. Her feminine imaginary will express her eroticisms, her flows, her desires, her reasons, all of her bodily functions. Moreover, the "feminine imaginary" that Cixous theorises is poetic. It is an "oral language", a speaking-writing, an act of transgression that breaches the symbolic sphere, the space reserved for men's writing. If, as Cixous suggests, this feminine imaginary is connected with the mother whose milk is "white ink" that nourishes the sexed feminine body, I suggest that it might also be possible to surmise a periodically "red ink." Whilst Cixous rallies against the cultural construct of the mother whose sexuality hasn't yet been adequately navigated culturally and cannot be reduced to her ability to bear children, I call for women to actively voice their menstrual selves, by writing their periodicity.

In Chapter One of this thesis I will examine how in the West we have inherited a construct of the menstrual taboo that is oppressive to women. I will do this by

[18] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," in *The Women and Language Debate; A Sourcebook*, ed. Camille Roman, Suzanne Juhasz, Christine Miller (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 87.

investigating how the menstrual taboo plays out in Freud's lecture *Femininity* (1933) where he maps out his Oedipal theory, in relation to female development. Through a close reading of this lecture, I will demonstrate how Freud depicts a monstrous aspect of femininity associated with the mother and female castration that he believes must be repressed. Freud does not recognise the connection between female castration and menstruation, and so it remains repressed culturally. I demonstrate that Freud is not able to connect female castration with menstrual bleeding precisely because he is working in the menstrual taboo. He falls victim to the very structures of taboo that he theorises in his text *Totem and Taboo* (1938). Freud's understanding of taboo is couched within a dualistic logic that characterises Western thought. Freud thinks that taboo is related to the concept of the unconscious, and as such is a mechanism of inuring neurosis.[19]

I draw on Freudian theorist Claude Dagmar Daly, who, in his essay, *The Role of Menstruation in Human Phylogenesis and Ontogenesis* (1943), castigates Freud for his professional negligence regarding the menstrual taboo. Daly identifies an aspect of taboo lodged in the unconscious relating to the mother that in fact reveals the category of the monstrous feminine operating in Freud's Oedipus complex, a potent threat to civilization, which he finds must consequently be repressed. Daly's findings here are extremely important to my thesis and my subsequent exploration of the monstrous feminine. However, to his detriment Daly ends up reiterating Freud's position since he finds that the primal mother of the Oedipus complex is animalistic, and indeed potentially monstrous on account of her menstrual bleeding. He calls for the primal mother to be excavated to the level of culture through a reading of cultural texts such as fairytales and myth. Yet, he finds that she is a phallic mother. Thus, his position ultimately denies the female genitals.

The French Feminist thinkers Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Hélène Cixous all provide valuable and different critiques of Freud's repression of female sexuality. In this chapter I draw on their writing to investigate the colonisation of women's reproductive power by the dominant phallocratic culture. I will read Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay On Abjection* (1980), Luce Irigaray's *Speculum; Of the Other Woman*

[19] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. A.A. Brill (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1938), 52.

(1974), and Hélène Cixous's *Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/ Ways Out/ Forays* (1986). By reading these feminist writers I critique Freud's position on female sexuality. However, I argue that none of these theorists directly engages with the question of menstruation in relation to female monstrousness. Irigaray shies away from identifying explicitly with the monstrous aspect of femininity, even as she advises that women must go back through the pages of history and look at gynocratic practices, to see what escapes discourse, and belongs specifically to women. Kristeva comes closer to identifying the monstrous aspect of femininity in her exploration of the abject mother. The mother is identified as periodically having an effect on the subject formation of her daughter through the excretion of her bodily substances. However, for Kristeva the mother's menstruation is ultimately categorised as a potentially horrific episode, which may impact the daughter's subjectivity development negatively. Whilst Cixous actually embraces feminine flow, yet doesn't label it a menstrual voice. The feminine monster, labelled a Medusa, must be revealed before we can understand the domain of feminine Nature that she presides over.

In Chapter Two of this thesis I will go on to examine a specific histo-cultural site of feminine repression and feminine disorder theorised by Freud in relation to the hysteric. I extrapolate Freud's idea that the sorceress is the remembrance of the hysteric. I work with French Feminist theorist Catherine Clément's essay *The Guilty One* (1986) to demonstrate how a marginalised space of femininity opens up in the splitting of the hysteric and the sorceress on the nature/culture divide, producing an "imaginary zone." Through Clément's writing, I argue that the sorceress must return to culture through the expression of a vivid feminine imaginary, which relays women's reproductive power, and which is conceived of as a magical trope of female sexuality. This mode of thought is central to the development of my argument that a space of sacred feminine Nature must be reclaimed and articulated at the level of culture, especially since it has historically threatened religious life.

In this chapter I reveal that the sorceress is the repressed counterpart of the hysteric. I adopt Freud's own methodology of abreaction that he theorised with his colleague Joseph Breuer in relation to hysteria, to excavate the feminine imaginary of the sorceress.

Abreaction occurs when the "foreign body" of material that lives in the hysteric is extracted by talking cure. This "foreign body" was considered to by Freud to be pathological. Freud did not recognise that this "foreign body," considered to be the sign of an illness, can also be considered to be shamanic, and potentially healing. Drawing on French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's theorisation of shamanism as counterpart of the psychoanalytical talking cure, I reveal an important aspect of feminine Nature previously unexpressed. I revisit a famous cases study of hysteria and discover the links to sorcery, or shamanism. I propose that Anna O a famous hysterical patient of Josef Breuer in fact became a sorceress through conducting her own talking cure. I argue that Anna O's apparently hysterical behaviour was in fact a shamanic call to power. Thus, bridging the gap between the hysteric and the sorceress. Finally, I explore the sorceress in Western history and build up a feminine imaginary about this mysterious woman. I find that it is the positioning of the sorceress as anomalous on the borders of culture that has made her the practitioner of magic. I draw on the work of French Anthropologist Marcel Mauss' text *A General Theory of Magic* (1902) to show that women occupy a magical space during their menstrual periods, menopause, pregnancy, and childbirth. Thus, I find that a sacred space of reproductive power exists at the outermost limits of culture, which actually leads me to re-think the space of the menstrual taboo for female empowerment.

Finally, in order to bring this symbolic feminine power back to culture, in Chapter Three I re-think the concept of the menstrual taboo in relation to case studies in *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation* (1988). I argue for a positive understanding of the menstrual taboo based on Indigenous menstrual rituals that are not always oppressive to women. I draw on Irigaray, who reveals to us the need to take a look at gynocratic practices for what they can reveal to us about what was left behind that is feminine in the staging of phallocentric culture. I find that the ritual practice of menstrual separation garners for women a sacred space in which to give positive meaning to their Natural cycle when women are in charge of this tabooed space. A positive dimension of menstrual seclusion is consequently unveiled towards the forging of a femininity that must be articulated by women at the level of culture. This constitutes the remembering of the feminine imaginary of the sorceress, insofar as all women become sorceress when they menstruate.

Women have the opportunity to forge links with an ancient line of sacred feminine knowledge during menstruation and express this feminine imaginary. I look at several Indigenous cultures in which women's menstrual cycles are ritualised for female empowerment. The negative coding of menstrual pollution has become an ethnographic truism on account of male ethnographic bias. I take as a case study the Yurok peoples of California where menstrual separation is considered a sacred time of accumulating spiritual energy in sync with the moon cycles. I draw from the experience of the Temne people of the Sierra Leone who ritualise their menstrual cycle in relation to moon cycles that seeks to connect women's bodies with nature and strengthen women's bodies. Lastly, I turn to the Alawa Aboriginals of Western Central Arnhem land in Australia who are guided and protected by the totemic power of the snake during menstruation. For them, the snake connotes a cyclical time of feminine flow that connects women with a wider cosmological principle. These case studies provide mostly positive menstrual rituals that Western women can benefit from.

What is at stake in Western culture is the acknowledgment and expression of a genuine space of feminine difference connected with women's Natural flow that is considered to be a positive aspect of femininity. As Nancy Mitford comments:

> There is something of unalterable value in woman's experience: the very cyclical motion of her body makes her life marked by upheaval, change and discharge. I am not willing to say that she is more vulnerable because of it, but that it is instead a source of potential strength; change need not stun her or threaten her, for she is in constant flux.[20]

Menstruation is an extremely valuable part of female sexuality that signifies women's strength, which has been neglected, covered over, repressed, made monstrous, and considered a curse in Western culture. Yet, the menstrual taboo still seems to be treated as though it is an aspect of femininity that is not particularly interesting and/or worthy of our attention. This is a dangerous oversight. Women need to become aware of menstrual experience within the contemporary post-industrial capitalist world setting because

[20] Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth, *The Curse; A Cultural History of Menstruation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 95.

menstruation has become merely inconvenient, certainly not something to even be mentioned, or considered integral to life's patterns. The reason for this is that women in the West have become frightened of being biologically determined, since there exists a patriarchal discourse, which seeks to align women with their biology, and consequently their ability to reproduce. In this thesis I explore the negative implications of merely identifying women with their reproductive abilities that seeks to make women potentially neurotic, monstrous, and animalistic on account of their menstrual cycle. The discourse of Freudian psychoanalysis that has played a significant role in mapping out ways of understanding human sexuality reveals a monstrous menstruating mother, who is still actively tabooed in the West. Freudian psychoanalysis depicts menstruation as a potentially neurotic episode, an aspect of feminine "nature" best suppressed. This plays out in Western culture where women are marginalised when they menstruate, through the judgments that are placed on their emotional stability at this time. Importantly, I draw out a positive dimension of reproductive power available to women with regards to the menstrual taboo. However, in order to re-evaluate the menstrual taboo for a positive and sacred femininity, it is necessary to firstly identify the incredibly negative aspects of the menstrual taboo that have functioned in the West.

Chapter One: Solving the riddle of the taboo on menstruation in the West; Freudian repression, French feminist thought, and the monstrous feminine

Figure 3

In the West we have inherited a configuration of the menstrual taboo that represses an authentic account of female sexuality. The machinations of the menstrual taboo are revealed in the discourse of Freudian psychoanalysis. Although Freud avoids analysing the menstrual taboo in his text *Totem and Taboo* (1938) he states that menstrual fluid is "dangerous, infected, powerful."[21] This Freudian statement on menstrual fluid prompts me to question why such a meaningful aspect of femininity remains unexplored by Freud. In fact, Freud does not engage directly with the menstrual taboo as it relates to the development of female sexuality in any of his writings. In this chapter I directly engage

[21] Mary Jane Lupton, *Menstruation and Psychoanalysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 93.

with the menstrual taboo by closely reading Freud's essay *Femininity* (1933) in order to reveal all that he conceals about menstruation. I find that Freud neglects to recognise female castration as an instance of feminine bleeding. I aim to show that he works within the menstrual taboo in his essay. Freud reveals, through his inability to identify the menstrual taboo, that menstruation is a veiled presence on the scene of female sexuality, which is culturally deemed monstrous. It is in these terms that menstruation is negatively coded and considered to be a mad, bad, and dangerous fluid, best repressed. Moreover, it is connected with the mother who, according to Freud's Oedipal theory, is prohibited in the course of subjectivity formation. For Freud, menstruation is ostracised, contained, and controlled at the periphery of culture. Furthermore, menstruation is related to the unconscious. Thus, menstruation is an aspect of femininity that is culturally unconscious.

Theorist Mary Jane Lupton points out in her book which investigates the taboo on menstruation in psychoanalysis that "Freudians, who tended to undervalue motherhood and reproduction, viewed menstruation as peripheral to the formation of the psyche…"[22] It is in relation to Oedipal development in girls, outlined by Freud in his essay *Femininity* (1933), that we are able to detect a menstrual aspect of femininity bound to the figure of the mother. This menstruating mother resides at the outer most limits of culture on the cusp of "nature." She is potentially monstrous because of her proximity to "nature" and the unconscious impulse. According to Freud, taboo is linked with the unconscious and the development of neurosis.[23] In fact, Freud thinks that taboo focuses on the study of the unconscious towards the elaboration and understanding of the concept of neurosis, which I will discuss in detail later in this chapter.

What becomes abundantly clear through investigating Freud's position on femininity is that he portrays a monstrous reproductive body that is completely colonised by male desire, and which has been repressed due to the mechanism of taboo. He does this by insisting on the lack of importance of the mother in the formation of female subjectivity. Moreover, he is adamant that the mother is castrated; and therefore she is defined against the male sex organ and denied her own sexual difference. The doubly perplexing aspect to Freud's depiction of the monstrous menstruating mother is that he himself is unaware

[22] Mary Jane Lupton, *Menstruation and Psychoanalysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1993), 5.
[23] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. A.A. Brill, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1938), 52.

of her. Freud seems to be unconscious of the fact that he is describing the menstrual taboo in Western culture, which still operates today.

In this chapter I investigate the role of Freudian psychoanalysis in maintaining the repression of female sexuality, through Freud's inability to understand his own blind spot on menstruation. I find that the reason for Freud's oversight is that he falls victim to the very structures of taboo, which he aims to understand. He therefore neglects to theorise menstruation as an important aspect of female sexuality. Freud, in fact, works within the menstrual taboo without realising it. He unwittingly demarcates the space of the menstrual taboo. In this sense what he describes in his Oedipal theory is extremely valuable for what it reveals about the menstrual taboo and feminine repression in Western culture.

It is my intention to explore the taboo on menstruation delineated by the figure of the monstrous mother who is castrated in Freud's lecture on *Femininity*. I will draw on Freudian theorist Claude Dagmar Daly's work in which he identifies a repressed aspect of taboo relating to menstruation and the cultural ambivalence directed toward the mother, in order to further reveal the psychoanalytical model of the monstrous feminine. Daly explores the Freudian castrated mother in his theory of the "menstrual complex". On the one hand Daly's findings are invaluable because he reveals that the tabooed primal mother resides at the very heart of the Oedipus complex. It is on this basis that he calls for a re-evaluation of menstruation as it relates to the mother. Yet, on the other hand Daly ends up depicting the primal mother as potentially monstrous on account of her animalistic "nature."

I will consider French Feminist theorist Julia Kristeva's work on abjection in order to further investigate the category of the monstrous feminine. Kristeva deftly examines Freud's patriarchal depiction of female sexuality, which I will use as a springboard for rupturing the category of the monstrous feminine. Whilst Kristeva provides an invaluable feminist critiques of Freudian psychoanalysis, I propose that she does not conduct an in depth exploration of the inherent value of menstruation to the domain of female sexuality. My aim is to argue that whilst it is repressed in Freudian psychoanalysis and other

discourses around female sexuality, menstruation provides a source of knowledge, a way of relating to the self as a woman, which reveals a reproductive body exiled from culture. I will show that this reproductive body cannot freely spring forth until it has been dislodged from the patriarchal cultural construct that depicts menstruation as a potentially monstrous threat to civilization, which must be repressed.

French feminist thinkers Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous both provide invaluable critiques of Freudian psychoanalysis. They will aid me to flesh out a concept of reproductive power that is positive for women. Whilst they both explore feminine flow it is my belief that these theorists neglect to explicitly theorise a space of menstruation, which reclaims this aspect of feminine Nature from monstrousness. It is my intention to write menstruation as a positive concept for women through an exploration of the feminine imaginary. Whilst the feminine imaginary has been critically pursued by both Irigaray and Cixous it has not been specifically applied to menstruation.

The sphinx, the castrated mother, and the repression of femininity

In *The Curse* (1976) feminist theorists Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth claim that menstruating women preside over a mysterious, disturbing, and powerful femininity that threatens masculinity. They aim to lift the "curse" on menstruation through an investigation of ethnographic case studies, in order to find the roots of negative Western attitudes towards menstruation. They are immensely concerned by what they perceive as a scourge on "menstrual consciousness" in the West. Delaney, Lupton, and Toth provide compelling evidence to suggest that masculinity in general is threatened by menstruation. They point out that the fear with which menstrual fluid is treated in Indigenous cultures seems to concur with its status as acutely feminine, magical, and tabooed. The very essence of femininity is to be found in menstrual fluid by some indigenous peoples, such as the Tinne Indians of the Yokon Territory. To be in contact with women at the time of menstruation threatens masculine virility.[24] Hence, women are subject to menstrual taboos that seek to ostracise them from cultural life.

[24]Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, Emily Toth, *The Curse; A Cultural History of Menstruation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 9.

Delaney, Lupton, and Toth give an account of cultural beliefs about the value of menstrual blood. "Menstrual blood has been known to cure leprosy, warts, birthmarks, gout, goiter, hemorrhoids, epilepsy, worms, and headache. It was effective as a love charm, could ward off river demons and other evil spirits, and was occasionally fit to be an honorific offering to god. The first napkin worn by a virgin was to be saved for use as a cure for the plague."[25] Yet, they argue that mostly menstruation threatens the social order. It is a dangerous pollutant that is revered and must be separated from "normal" cultural life. Consequently, menstruating women are frequently secluded in menstrual huts in Indigenous cultures. Delaney, Lupton, and Toth give an account of the reason for seclusion practice: "If the dangerous menstruating woman is removed to a place where she can neither see nor be seen by the tribe, they will be assured of freedom from her mana as long as she is so secluded."[26] They propose that menstruating bodies are potentially dangerous, contagious, and imbued with spiritual substance called "mana." It is this beatific "mana" that is bound to menstrual flow, which is feared by men the most. This mysterious power associated with menstruation is what Freud touches upon in his lecture *Femininity*. Thus, he comes to explore the very territory of this tabooed aspect of femininity that has been repressed in Western culture, due to the fact that menstruation is deemed monstrous, because it is so close to "nature."

Freud begins his lecture *Femininity* by positing the Sphinx like quality of the feminine, opening up the gap for what falls away from culture into a great chasm of feminine "nature"; a mysterious "otherness" associated with the figure of the mother. The Sphinx is a monstrous yet fascinating figure that emerges out of antiquity. She is a hybrid animal/woman composed of various animal and human parts, frequently with the head and breasts of a woman, the body of a lion or dog, and the great majestic wings of a phoenix, or an eagle. She challenges all of those who pass her by on their way to Thebes to answer a riddle. If they answer incorrectly she murders them.[27] The well-known founder of analytical psychology and former colleague of Freud's, Carl G. Jung, explores the image of the Sphinx in his work on symbols. He says:

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[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 10
[27] Jay. G. Williams, *The Riddle of the Sphinx; Thoughts About the Human Enigma* (Maryland: University Press of America, 1990), 1.

> The word 'sphinx' suggests 'riddle,' an enigmatic creature who propounds riddles, like the sphinx of Oedipus, and stands on the threshold of one's fate as though symbolically announcing the inevitable. The sphinx is a semi-theriomorphic representation of the mother-imago, or rather of the Terrible Mother, who has numerous traces in mythology.[28]

One of those mythological traces is the Medusa who I will discuss later in this chapter. Indeed, Jung's depiction of the Sphinx as a terrible mother, even a devouring mother, holds the key to Freud's subsequent exploration of the feminine "nature" in *Femininity*. Freud repeatedly refers to the "nature" of femininity as a "riddle" throughout this essay. He says: "Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity –"[29] He asserts that "In conforming with its particular nature, psycho-analysis does not try to describe what a woman is – that would be a task it could scarcely perform – but sets about enquiring how she comes into being, how a woman develops out of a child with a bisexual disposition."[30] He refers to male analysts "prejudices against what was feminine" that have been challenged by female analysts, inferring an ever-widening conceptual space for femininity within psychoanalysis.[31] Yet, it is through this Sphinx like image of the terrible mother that we see the "riddle" of feminine "nature" playing out for Freud, a particularly monstrous feminine "nature."

Freud conjures the image of the Sphinx by insisting on the "riddle" of femininity repeatedly, drawing our attention to a monstrous, though fascinating maternal presence on the scene of human sexuality. Freud adapts the figure of the Sphinx in the Oedipus myth to explain the development of female sexuality in his essay. The Sphinx stands at the gateway to Thebes, on the outer rim of culture, a magnificent beast, a warning of the great peril that lay beyond the borders of civilization. Freud views the unconscious as a wild beast that must be controlled in order for individuals to live in society. The unconscious is the mechanism by which human "nature" is held in check for Freud. It is because of a woman's reproductive role that she is so closely aligned with what is primal, animalistic, and thus closer to "nature" according to Freud. Her inner animalism must

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[28] Carl Gustav Jung, *Symbols of Transformation, Volume One, An Analysis of the Prelude to a Case of Schizophrenia*, trans. R.F.C Hull (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), 179.
[29] Sigmund Freud, *Freud on Women; A Reader*, ed. and with introduction by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990), 342.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 346

therefore be more carefully guarded against in order to uphold the very tenants of civilization. For Freud a woman's sexual instincts must be controlled, more so than man's. In fact, Freud seems to be voicing the general Western cultural attitude of the time that considered the woman's body to be "inherently pathological." French critical theorist Michel Foucault, asserts in *The History of Sexuality, Volume One* (1976), that the feminine body, having been found thoroughly sexual, was historically taken under control in the sphere of medicine for fear of its pathology.

As theorist and psychologist Jane M. Ussher explains the regulation of female sexuality by "medical experts" like Freud is undertaken "in order to manage the experience and expression of female sexuality."[32] Thus, containing and controlling the female body whose "monster/Medusa is within."[33] Ussher proposes another monstrous feminine figure in antiquity: Medusa. The Medusa whose serpentine locks are set against terrifying facial characteristics, whose look is said to turn men to stone, killing them immediately, whose power bestows death, and brings destruction down upon man, is highly comparable to the Sphinx. She too represents an animalistic and potentially monstrous instance of female sexuality that is shrouded in mystery. Indeed, the Medusa's terrifying decapitated and bleeding head is theorised as a representation of female castration by Freud in his essay *Medusa's Head* (1922). It is the Medusa, or Sphinx like aspect of the feminine that Freud eludes to, which essentially demarcates the very margins of feminine reproductive difference, and reveals the cultural taboo on both the maternal entity, and menstruation. I will thoroughly explore the theme of the Medusa later in this chapter in relation to female castration. Firstly, however it is necessary to reveal Freud's concept of female castration, outlined in his Oedipal theory, which he explains in *Femininity* in order to reveal how Freud thinks female sexuality.

In this lecture Freud ponders the mysterious feminine difference in relation to the culturally weightier, and more considerable cultural influence of the father in Oedipus development. Freud adapts his Oedipal theory for the development of little boys to the development of little girls. He views the Oedipal scenario playing out as an unavoidable

[32] Jane M. Ussher, *Managing the Monstrous Feminine; Regulating the Reproductive Body* (London: Routledge, 2006), 16.
[33] Ibid., 16-17

drama on the scene of human sexuality – "an inevitable fate."[34] Elsewhere, he says that, "…it is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father. Our dreams convince us that it is so…"[35] Freud therefore asserts Oedipus as a universal theme in the development of childhood sexuality which he gleans from the play by Sophocles entitled *The King of Oedipus*. According to Freud's biographer Peter L. Rudnytsky, Freud discovered a deeply personal realisation of his own love of his mother and jealousy of his father that he then rediscovered in his therapeutic practice.

In Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex the little boy takes his mother as love object at an early age. The mother is the "prototype" of object choice for the little boy. As the little boy's desire for the mother becomes more pronounced he views the father as an obstacle to the mother's affections. He wishes to do away with the father in order to possess the mother. This brings up feelings of ambivalence toward the father. The child must give up the mother in the dissolution of the Oedipus complex. This is achieved through the child's fear of castration that he develops upon sighting the female genitalia. The little boy becomes afraid that in satisfying his desire to possess the mother he will be castrated. Freud comments that, "…the acceptance of the possibility of castration, the recognition that women are castrated, makes an end to both the possibilities of satisfaction in the Oedipus-complex."[36] The Oedipus complex in the little boy is replaced by either identification with the mother or an intensified identification with the father. The later being more "normal" and serving to strengthen the boy's masculinity.[37] According to Freud, the transformation of the Oedipus complex into the super-ego gives birth to the unconscious in the child of both sexes via the act of repression. The super-ego is "a differentiation within the ego" that is formed in relation to cultural values and establishes what is allowable behaviour and what is not, and is based on the authority of the father.[38]

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[34] Sigmund Freud, "Lecture XIII, The Archaic Features and Infantilism of Dreams," in *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1964), 208.
[35] Peter L. Rudnytsky cites Freud from The Interpretation of Dreams, *Freud and Oedipus*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 6.
[36] Sigmund Freud, "The Passing of the Oedipus-Complex," in *Collected Papers, Volume II*, trans. Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1957), 272.
[37] Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, ed. James Strachey, trans. Joan Riviere (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), 21-22.
[38] Ibid., 18

It is an aspect of the ego at the remove from consciousness. When the developing subject is forced to give up the first sexual object, the mother, an alteration of the ego ensues. This is also a method of gaining control of the unconscious that later evolves into the concept of the id.

Yet, in Freud's adaption of the Oedipal theory for little girls a concept of femininity under the masculine type plays out. Freud says that "We are obliged to recognise that the little girl is a little man."[39] Marking the little girls entry into the "phallic phase."[40] The clitoris functioning like a small penis – as sensual organ. The clitoris then is the "penis-equivalent". In this scenario "the truly feminine vagina is still undiscovered by both sexes."[41] However, the clitoris is later usurped by the sensitivity of the vagina as "leading erogenous zone" in the little girl's development according to Freud. This diminishes the ongoing pleasure derived from the clitoris for girls in order to emphasise the importance of the vagina as receptacle of the penis.

Freud goes on to explain that the little girl must transfer her "erotogenic zone and her object" to the father, in replacement of the first love object, which is the mother.[42] Here a little girl passes from the masculine phase into the feminine phase, whilst the little girl's pre-Oedipal attachment to the mother is profoundly important for an understanding of women according to Freud. Consequently, Freud seeks to know "the nature of the girl's libidinal relations to her mother," which he finds are multiple. However, Freud does not actually end up pursuing this line of enquiry and it is here that a blind spot emerges. Instead, he focuses his attention on what brings the attachment to the mother to an end. He finds that the turning of the little girl from the mother to the father is the passage of her "fate", the ascribing of her "destiny," and furthermore coincides with a "hate" of the mother.[43] Here Freud describes a scission between the mother and daughter relation based on the fact that the little girl can no longer relate to her mother in a free and open way.

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[39] Sigmund Freud, *Freud on Women; A Reader*, ed. and with an introduction by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990), 346.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 350

Freud cites a number of reasons for this "scission." Firstly he suggest that this happens because the child becomes angry with the mother due to a lack of nourishment in the form of breast milk "which is construed against her lack of love."[44] He compares "primitive" children who are suckled longer than Western children, arguing that Western children get hardly enough breast milk. The second cause for anger is the coming of the second child who competes for this scarce resource. Thirdly, Freud asserts that a further cause for dissatisfaction with the mother is her admonishing "pleasure activity with the genitals" in little girls, or other libidinal related desires gone unsatisfied.[45] Consequently, when the mother attempts to limit the otherwise libertine inclinations of the child's desire for sexual pleasure, she becomes a figure of "ambivalence" for the child.[46] The mother is usurped by the little girls desire for the father's love. But there is another more profound reason for the ambivalence toward the mother. Freud argues that "girls hold their mother responsible for their lack of a penis and do not forgive her for their being thus put to a disadvantage."[47] Here Freud accounts for feminine difference as "lack" of the male sex organ. The mother therefore becomes the prohibited love object of the Oedipus complex due to her "lack," which the little girl apparently realises she her self suffers from.

Freud gives woman the "castration complex" with his diagnoses of her "lack" of the male sex organ. He asserts that little girls "envy the penis" which becomes a burden for women, "a severe expenditure of psychical energy."[48] According to Freud the little girl rallies in vain to get a penis, persisting for years, until finally the desire becomes unconscious. Indeed, Freud goes on to suggest that women in general have a greater jealousy and envy because of their lack of a penis, and indeed their lack of intellectual rigour is inferred. Freud argues:

> The discovery that she is castrated is a turning point in the girl's growth. Three possible lines of development start from it: one leads to sexual inhibition or to neurosis, the second to change of character in the sense of a masculine complex, the third, finally, to normal femininity.[49]

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[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 352
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., 353
[49] Ibid., 354

In the concept of castration superiority is attributed to the male sex organ that a little girl can't get. Her only hope for revaluing herself is to turn to her father by "instinctual impulses," so as to "normalise" her disposition. The "normal" femininity expresses "the wish of the penis," which her mother refused her, and must be gained through affection for the father.

Freud goes on to qualify this wish for a penis in little girls. "The feminine situation is only established, however, if the wish for the penis is replaced by one for a baby, if, that is, a baby takes the place of a penis in accordance with an ancient symbolic equivalence."[50] The turning toward the father therefore paves the way for a little girl's development culturally. Since the little girl wishes for a "penis-baby" the mother is firmly positioned as her rival for the father's affections. The Oedipus complex becomes a "haven," a place of refuge for the little girl.[51] Freud sets the scene for a girl's deeply held attachment to the father-object and her desire to linger in the safe haven of the father relation, which of course creates the mother as love object who must be abandoned because of her lack. Moreover, the girl's super-ego, which is achieved by repression of the Oedipus complex, is not held to be as "culturally significant" as a little boy's super-ego.

In Freud's Oedipal scenario the mother is arbiter of a tabooed aspect of femininity relating to her status as castrated. She is a monstrous menstruating woman who must be rejected by the daughter in the forging of her subjectivity. Any attempt by the daughter to re-examine what abyss culture has closed over, a supposedly dangerous chasm that contains the mother, is thought to be neurotic, and regressive in psychoanalysis. The terrain of the tabooed mother becomes a mysterious trope of feminine difference that is culturally forbidden. This prompts me to expose Freud's monstrous depiction of the menstrual aspect of femininity and to therefore explore the abyss of culture that envelops the mother. My starting point is to reveal Freud's inability to recognise that female castration is an instance of feminine bleeding aligned with the prohibited mother's body. In his Oedipus complex Freud does not even draw any connection between female castration and menstrual bleeding. Menstruation's status as repressed in psychoanalysis is

[50] Ibid., 356
[51] Ibid., 357

bound to the Western cultural understanding of taboo that must be challenged and subverted.

In *Totem and Taboo* Freud suggests that the concept taboo relates to "persons, localities, objects and temporary conditions" that are characteristically mysterious.[52] It is because of their mystery that they are prohibited, considered sacred, whilst dually deemed dangerous, and unclean. Freud defines taboo, first prefacing his definition by pointing out that taboo is a Polynesian word whose meaning challenges us because its central concept no longer resides within our knowledge base.

> For us the meaning of taboo branches off into two opposite directions. On the one hand it means to us sacred, consecrated: but on the other hand it means, uncanny, dangerous, forbidden, and unclean. The opposite for taboo is designated in Polynesian by the word *noa* and signifies something ordinary and generally accessible. Thus something like the concept of reserve inheres in taboo; taboo expresses itself essentially in prohibitions and restrictions. Our combination of 'holy dread' would often express the meaning of taboo.[53]

Significantly, Freud goes on to argue that taboo designates a "fragment of psychic life which really is not comprehensible to us." He refers to the "riddle of taboo" and recalls for us his treatment of femininity as a "riddle", prompting us to connect taboo with femininity."[54] Importantly, Freud finds that taboo focuses on the study of the unconscious as a means of elaborating neurosis.[55]

Freud finds a connection between the Indigenous practice of observing taboos that he finds to be "primitive," which he links this to the "dark origins" of the mind of contemporary cultural actors, in so called "civilised" society. Freud makes this connection by using the studies of anthropologist W. Wundt who finds that taboo expresses the evolution of so called "primitive" people's belief in demonic forces, which became disconnected from the source of taboo, and remained a psychic power that is at the root of our customs, and laws in Western culture.[56] Freud refutes the notion of

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[52] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. A.A. Brill, (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1938), 47.
[53] Ibid., 41
[54] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. A.A. Brill, (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1938), 47.
[55] Ibid., 52-53
[56] Ibid., 50

demonic forces, but he believes that the problem of taboo relates to the unconscious part of the individual's psychic life, which he calls the "primitive," or uncivilised part of the mind. He thinks that individual's who observe taboos and prohibitions belong to the class of potential neurotics within the framework of psychoanalytical thought.

Interestingly, even whilst Freud makes a study of taboo in relation to the concept of the unconscious and neurosis, he doesn't seem to recognise that menstruation has been tabooed from his text on femininity. As I have already pointed out Freud is working within the menstrual taboo in his lecture on femininity. Unbeknownst to himself, he depicts menstruation as a prohibited feminine substance aligned with the monstrous mother that is unable to be expressed as a significant aspect of femininity because it is bound to the unconscious, forever fated to fall outside the structures of culture, in accordance with his understanding of taboo. However, menstruation and the monstrous mother threaten to return to culture periodically. At these times when women menstruate they are therefore considered to be closer to potentially neurotic behaviour. A "holy dread" is cast around menstruation, designating its presence as a kind of Medusa's head, or Sphinx in culture, a mysterious and monstrous presence/absence on the landscape of female sexuality, which potentially infers neurosis in women. Freud therefore creates a concept of menstruation that restates femininity as an instance of maternal prohibition, which is repressed, but which threatens to seep out, to return, to engulf, and pollute. In these terms Freud depicts menstruation as a substance that must be carefully guarded against because it is related to "primitive" behaviour, and possible female neurosis.

The menstrual complex

Claude Dagmar Daly, who was in fact a patient of Freud's, published several articles on his theory of the "menstrual complex." In these articles he called for modifications to the Oedipus complex to incorporate menstruation. His "menstrual complex" ends up elaborating the monstrous aspect of feminine bleeding that is repressed in Freud's lecture *Femininity*. Daly argued that Freud's lack of interest in the "blood taboo" constituted professional negligence on the subject of female sexuality.[57] He critiqued Freud's text

[57] Mary Jane Lupton, *Menstruation and Psychoanalysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1993), 122.

Totem and Taboo as male focused, merely hinting at the role of the mother goddess, which it could not account for. His "menstrual complex" claims that menstruation is a key aspect of female sexuality, which has been repressed "not only by patients and poets but also by the institution that Freud built."[58] It involves a search for the primal mother by forwarding the supposition that the "menstrual complex" forms the "nucleus" of the Oedipus complex.[59] Thus, Daly forwards the image of the tabooed primal mother of the Oedipus complex as the prototype of menstrual sexuality. He calls for the revaluing of menstruation as it relates to the mother, though which he ultimately depicts as a monstrous instance of femininity.

In the beginning of his essay *The Role of Menstruation in Human Phylogenesis and Ontogenesis* (1943) Daly pinpoints a problem with Freud's text *Totem and Taboo* that attempts to trace the origins of culture relative to a discourse of psychoanalysis. Daly argues that Freud recognised a lack of knowledge with regards to the "maternal deities," an admission that psychoanalysis has not been able to account for the mother's sexuality.[60] Daly points out that Freud was also aware of an ambivalence directed toward the mother at the level of culture. Freud states "We have so frequently had occasion to show the ambivalence of the emotions in its real sense, that is to say, the coincidence of love and hate towards the same object, at the root of important cultural formations."[61] Thus, Daly ponders the origin of this ambivalence toward the mother and points to the negligence of psychoanalysis for not investigating this ambivalence. Simultaneously Daly observes the marked lack of research in the area of the menstrual taboo and wonders what defence in the id has prevented it, as a means of figuring out the ambivalence toward the mother.

Daly echoes Freud in seeking to investigate the "riddle" of femininity. He aims to elaborate the "vicissitudes of the instincts" in women in order to understand the taboo on menstruation and the source of ambivalence toward the mother.[62] His emphasis is that

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[58] Ibid., 100
[59] Ibid., 114
[60] Claude Dagmar Daly, "The Role of Menstruation in Human Phylogenesis and Ontogenesis," The International Journal of Psychoanalysis, Volume XXIV (1943): 151-152.
[61] Ibid., 152. C.D. Daly cites Freud.
[62] Ibid.

there is still so much that we do not know about the origins of taboo, arguing that there is still an aspect of taboo lodged there in the unconscious, buried away. He calls for a deep surveying of unconscious material. Daly pinpoints an undisclosed menstrual phenomenon lodged in the unconscious, a tabooed space of femininity, relating to the mother. Daly's acknowledgement that there is an aspect of the menstrual taboo relating to the mother that must be excavated from the cloisters of the unconscious is important, though problematic in terms of the link to neurosis. Daly reinforces Freud's idea that neurosis is more likely to come on at menstruation, childbirth and menopause, which makes women potentially unstable because of their reproductive cycle. In *The Curse* theorists Delaney, Lupton, and Toth point out that Freud compares menstruation to menopause, commenting that "He views both events as internal (as opposed to external) crises in which the dammed-up libido, the source of psychic energy, can release disturbances ordinarily held in check."[63] Daly's observations reveal the tabooed menstrual aspect that is lodged in the unconscious, and is connected with the mother, yet he theorises this aspect of femininity in the same way that Freud does, as an instance of potential feminine disorder.

Daly goes on to discuss women's menses as an unending source of mysterious reproductive anomaly. He accounts for menstruation relative to the act of childbirth, "a kind of miniature childbirth, the abortion of a decidua," in accordance with the recommendations of British sexologists, physician, and social reformer Havelock Ellis (1899).[64] Daly attempts to compare women's cycles with animal heat cycles asserting the animal "nature" of the feminine.[65] He goes on to situate menstruation within a broader concept of women's cycle involving her ovulation phase, and engendering a fluxes of feminine experience, toward the eventual climax signified by the bleeding.[66] Women's sexual peak is fixed pre-menses and into the menses itself. Moreover, Daly cites in Ellis's findings a cultural "disinclination" to sex at the time of menstruation in women, whereby "many women have strong inclinations at the time but are inhibited from disclosing them as a result of the fear of arousing *social disapproval* and individual man's disgust."[67]

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[63] Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth, *The Curse; A Cultural History of Menstruation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 74.
[64] Claude Dagmar Daly, "The Role of Menstruation in Human Phylogenesis and Ontogenesis," The International Journal of Psychoanalysis, Volume XXIV (1943): 153.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.

According to Freud the "superstitious fear of blood" is a major factor for the prohibition of sex during female menstrual bleeding.[68]

Daly agrees with Freud and ponders what the "psychic origins of this superstitious dread of blood" might actually be?[69] He comments:

> In the menstruation trauma the visual evidence of the mother's bleeding occasions the deepest horror and loathing. The bleeding confirms the fear of castration and of being eaten, whilst the smell (here negative and repulsive), partly because of its association with putrefaction, also conveys the deeper idea of death to the unconscious. This negative odour is not to be confused with the positive, attractive, pre-menstruation and mid-cycle odours, but belongs to the repulsive attributes, of the complex and plays an important part in the formation of the incest barrier.[70]

Here Daly theorises man's defence against women's innate "primitive" quality associated with her monthly bloods, whereby menstrual fluid is demonised on account of its stench. Daly links its repulsive character to the horror of the female genitals, as well as diagnosing women's menstruation as the site of a wound, which conjures up the primal fear of being eaten. He therefore regards menstruation as casting an aura of death around things. This is all associated with the mother, engendering the formation of the incest barrier for Daly. Thus, he views menstruation as a trauma.

Daly finds that a breach in human sexual development has occurred whereby the sexual function is warded off in adolescent development, recalling an earlier breach, relative to the mother, and her menstruation as source of dread. A deep conjecture to menstruation in the unconscious is therefore theorised by Daly on account of women's inherent animal quality, placing her on the side of the unconscious impulse. Hence, an underlying repression is observed by Daly relating to menstruation, the site of the "menstrual complex," bound to the mother as source of nourishment. The mother is the architect of a forbidden frontier, a castrated sex that is tabooed, later remembered by the male "when he discovers that all adult women have a monthly period with which much mystery is

[68] Ibid., 156
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 160

associated."[71] The mother is therefore portrayed as a veiled monstrous presence on the scene of female sexuality, who is repressed and tabooed because of the horror attributed to her bleeding genitals. Daly therefore identifies an aspect of the menstrual taboo that is lodged in the unconscious and signals a monstrous reproductive power operating at the very limits of cultural life, which must be further investigated.

In this section I have pointed out that Daly called for modifications to the Oedipus complex to incorporate menstruation. He argues in his essay *The Role of Menstruation in Human Phylogenesis and Ontogenesis* (1943) that psychoanalysis has failed us with regards to adequately representing the mother's sexuality. Importantly, he points out that menstruation is a key aspect of female sexuality that has been terribly neglected by Freud. He sets about investigating the "menstrual complex" that he thinks forms the nucleus of the Oedipus complex, in a quest to uncover the reason for a cultural ambivalence directed toward the mother. His quest to uncover the "menstrual complex" becomes an investigation of the deep recesses of the unconscious for the menstruating mother. Like Freud, he too thinks that taboo is linked to the unconscious, and thus is potentially associated with neurosis. Daly finds a monstrous menstruating mother who is castrated in the dark recesses of the human mind. According to Daly the horror of her bleeding female genitals make the mother into a source of primal terror that must be repelled. Thus, Daly comes to touch upon the monstrous menstruating mother who lays buried in the Freudian unconscious, tabooed, and potentially a source of neurosis. Daly's detection of Freud's professional negligence in not theorising the menstrual taboo is very important, as well as his attempt to re-value menstruation as an intrinsic aspect of female sexuality. Yet, Daly ends up using Freud's understanding of taboo that he considers to be intrinsically linked to the unconscious and the potential for neurosis to keep the menstruating mother repressed on account of her monstrousness. The menstruating mother is problematically depicted by Daly as a potentially monstrous influence on the scene of female sexuality because of her primal qualities and her intrinsic animal-ness, as well as her association with neurotic behaviour. Daly's findings are therefore ultimately unhelpful and even damaging to women.

[71] Ibid., 163

Investigating the monstrous menstruating mother

The riddle, the mystery, the hysteria of monstrous femininity covers over a meaningful feminine power associated with menstruation. How can we articulate this speaking body? It is simply necessary to forge a path through taboo, to listen to the reminiscence of the other femininity locked out of culture, and reveal the so called monstrous mother of culture who is repressed. Femininity in these terms is a body of woman that must be explored by woman; each intricate and sensuous web of power that it weaves. Amidst a woman's fleshes, in league with her voice, an impregnable language is forging: a menstrual voice. It is a voice imbedded in the notion of female castration. As I have already discussed, female castration forges female sexuality for Freud. Female castration is the site of the daughters turning away from the mother, signifying the mother's sexual prohibition culturally. I have argued that castration reveals a tabooed aspect of female sexuality that is repressed in the dissolution of the Oedipus complex. As theorist Norman Brown points out we have the image of "The vagina as a devouring mouth, or vagina dentata; the jaws of the giant cannibalistic mother, a menstruating woman with the penis bitten off, a bleeding trophy."[72] It is by further investigating Freud's monstrous (re)productive body that I will lay hold of a trace of a womb that menstruates in exile.[73]

Feminist theorist Barbara Creed theorises the *Vagina Dentata* in relation to the horror film where castration is depicted both symbolically and physically. Creed gives the example of the vampire film with close up shots of women whose open mouths, often bloodied, reveal pointed fangs, which are representations of the *Vagina Dentata*. She argues that the notion of the *Vagina Dentata* challenges Freud's castrated female because it actually has the power to castrate, and thus sever male phallic power.[74] Furthermore, I would add that the *Vagina Dentata* has the power to menstruate, which is critical to my argument. This symbolises woman's flow, in and of itself a threat to masculinity in much

[72] Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth cite Norman O. Brown, *The Curse; A Cultural History of Menstruation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 76.
[73] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum; Of the Other Woman* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 18. Irigaray uses the term (re)production to denote the phallocentric expression of female reproduction that Freud outlines in his essay *Femininity*, which has the effect of making woman's womb into a means of male production.
[74] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine; Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), 106-108.

the same way. It is by fully encountering this monstrous depiction of female sexuality that a hidden reproductive power emerges.

Jane M. Ussher calls attention to the construction of the monstrous feminine that diagnoses the fecund woman's body as a site of potential danger, on account of its status as unclean. She explains: "Central to this positioning of the female body as monstrous or beneficent is ambivalence associated with the power and danger perceived to be inherent in woman's fecund flesh, her seeping, leaking, bleeding womb standing as the site of pollution and source of dread."[75] In Western culture the fecund woman's body has been symbolically coded dangerous, polluted, and monstrous by the dominant phallic order. Ussher argues that it is the location of the monstrous feminine at the limits of culture, which allows the patriarchal culture to colonise, and repress her fecundity. In this scenario the fecund woman is designated other to the "norm" and is sanctioned unacceptable to the patriarchal culture. She is intolerable and in need of rehabilitation. Ussher therefore finds that women who reside on the boundaries risk ill treatment. Ussher explores the fecund body of woman on the threshold of patriarchal society as abject, "deviant, or dangerous" woman. The inherent danger of such a body is contamination. Hence, she must be cleansed, controlled, and disciplined in order to be acceptable again into society. A frequently used example of Indigenous cultures' attempts to cleanse, control, and discipline female sexuality has been identified in the practice of menstrual seclusion.

By employing French Feminist Julia Kristeva's theory of the "abject" Ussher investigates the male horror of blood as a key arbiter of the monstrous feminine. Ussher reveals the positioning of the fecund body as abject, the "object of primal repression," endemic of all that is hidden, other, unknown, a source of fascination. In order to understand Ussher's position I need to elaborate Kristeva's thinking on abjection in her text *Powers of Horror: An Essay On Abjection* (1980). Firstly, I will very briefly define Kristeva's theory of abjection. Kristeva puts forward the idea that subject formation occurs when a being rejects what is other to itself, whereby a being becomes aware of him or herself separate to his or her own borders of self/other. It is over the course of a beings

[75] Jane M. Ussher, *Managing the Monstrous Feminine; Regulating the Reproductive Body* (London: Routledge, 2006), 1.

development that they develop these borders of "I", which a being is not born with in the first place. According to Kristeva the first thing to be abjected is the mother's body. I will go on to discuss abjection in relation to the mother's body, which Kristeva theorises in her text *Powers of Horror: An Essay On Abjection*.

In Kristeva's text she seeks to challenge the "dialectical negativity" that characterises Freud's conceptualisation of the unconscious.[76] Kristeva explains that Freud inherited this negative precept of the unconscious from the phallocentric history of philosophical discourse. It is through this restrictive duality of I/other, inside/outside that a theory of neurosis is forged in psychoanalysis. Kristeva is interested in positing the borderline subjectivity that disrupts the duality through her notion of the abject. Kristeva's abject reveals a primal repression, unhinged from the subject/object relation, before the ego formed, which "notifies us of the limits of the human universe".[77] Like a "symptom" the abject can be understood as a "strayed subject…huddled outside the paths of desire."[78] In other words, the abject is continually sublimated by the subject in order to avoid disorder. Yet, the abject is never too far away. The abject then is a haunting of the Other, without an object, perhaps a "maternal anguish" which can not be accommodated within its symbolic field.[79] Moreover, Kristeva views the abject as a foundation for the workings of the imagination, a burdensome spooling of archaic memory, relating to the maternal, a ceaseless confrontation that repels, and is intimate.[80]

Kristeva explains that the abject "confronts us" when we attempt to disengage ourselves from the "maternal entity."[81] Once the child is born the mother is theorised as harnessing a fecund power that is enticing, yet cloistering, and must be ultimately separated from. It is in this gap that her symbolic realm falls away. Whilst the child gains an aspect of her, it propels toward the father, whose energy is "robust". The child turns away from the mother. It is by way of the maternal abject that Kristeva seeks to elaborate the prohibited passage through the dread of incest with the mother, at the root of human meaning, a

[76] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjectio*n, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 7.
[77] Ibid., 11
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 12
[80] Ibid., 6
[81] Ibid., 13

poetic mimesis, or a logic of "phantasmic articulations."[82] The abject then reveals a kind of imaginary world to the subject which the subject may draw on through encountering the maternal abject, in a quest to touch upon the feminine, though which must ultimately be rejected. Kristeva therefore attempts to reveal the symbolic "confrontation with the feminine".[83] She intends to name the other "facet" of taboo that is a pre-verbal expression of pleasure and pain, a defilement that has a sacred function. "Defilement is what is jettisoned from the '*symbolic system*.' It is what escapes that social rationality, that logical order on which a social aggregate is based, which then becomes differentiated from a temporary agglomeration of individuals and, in short, constitutes a *classification system* or a *structure*."[84] The most culturally terrifying defilement that symbolises femininity is menstrual blood. Kristeva brings to light a kind of menstrual imaginary, a maternal entity of ritual defilement, which possibly "periodically" infringes on the subject as their sexuality is forged. However, for Kristeva the maternal abject must be held in check on account of it's potentially "negative" impact on the subject.

Kristeva interprets defilement as an aspect of taboo relating to the maternal abjection. She turns her attention to the work of British anthropologist Mary Douglas on defilement. Douglas theorises the female body as the site of an enumerated symbolic order of religious prohibitions on the border of society.[85] Kristeva draws on Douglas to survey anthropological data as Freud did – for "psycho-symbolic economy" – that deals directly with "matter out of place" – the filth that "represents the object jettisoned out of that boundary, its other side, a margin."[86] Here Kristeva demonstrates a keen adherence to Freudian methodology. Yet, she also seems to be on a mission to disrupt the patriarchal establishment founded by Freud, since she is going after the matter that emanates from the maternal body. She is doing what Freud would not do; that is, she is engaging with the maternal entity. She is seeking out the very secretions of femininity, the periodic release of menstrual blood, the blood that escapes through wounds, the milk secreted through the mother's, or the wet nurses breasts, the piss, the shit, the cathartic release of human tears…all that transgresses the boundaries of the body. Kristeva refers these

[82] Ibid., 30-31
[83] Ibid., 58-59
[84] Ibid., 65
[85] Ibid., 66
[86] Ibid., 69

aspects as "matter out of place," bodily substances that are considered unclean, and which are therefore safeguarded by "behavioural prohibitions," or ritual practice.[87] The implications of this engagement with the secretions of femininity are that we have a sense of the maternal entity as a body that exists and must be acknowledged.

Kristeva goes on to explain that these "behavioural prohibitions" grant "protection from defilement" specifically in relation to the importance of women, and the mother. Kristeva observes:

> In societies where it occurs, ritualisation of defilement is accompanied by a strong concern for the separation of the sexes, and this means giving men rights over women. The latter, apparently put in the position of passive objects, are none the less felt to be wily powers, 'baleful schemers' from whom rightful beneficiaries must protect themselves. It is as if, lacking a central authoritarian power that would settle the definitive supremacy of one sex – or lacking a legal establishment that would balance the prerogatives of both sexes – two powers attempted to share out society. One of them, the masculine, apparently victorious, confesses through its very relentlessness against the other, the feminine, that it is threatened by an asymmetrical, irrational, wily, uncontrollable power. Is this a survival of a matrilineal society or the specific particularity of a structure (without the incidence of diachrony)? The question of the origins of such a handling of sexual difference remains moot. But whether it be within the highly hierarchical society of India or the Lele in Africa it is always to be noticed that the attempt to establish a male phallic power is vigorously threatened by the no less virulent power of the other sex, which is oppressed (recently? Or not sufficiently of the survival needs of society?). The other sex, the feminine, becomes synonymous with a radical evil that is to be suppressed."[88]

Kristeva discusses menstrual seclusion here as an instance of ritual defilement that is oppressive to women. Whilst menstrual seclusion may function as a space of femininity that must be separated from the male dominated culture in order to control this most socially threatening aspect of female sexuality, the ritualisation of defilement is not always oppressive to women in Indigenous cultures. In *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation* (1988) anthropologists Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb point out that the menstrual taboo in Indigenous cultures might in fact be more restrictive to those who are not menstruating. They argue that it is the assigning of women a "lower status" in the social hierarchy of Indigenous communities by anthropologists that dictates the

[87] Ibid. Julia Kristeva cites Mary Douglas
[88] Ibid., 70

view that menstrual seclusion is universally oppressive to women. They also point out that the argument asserting that the menstrual taboo solely functions to oppress women seems to remove the menstrual taboo from its wider cosmological application in religious life, by assigning a purely behavioural role to menstrual taboos.[89] In the instance of menstrual seclusion, a feminine space controlled by the social regulation of ritual separation, and defilement may provide female sanctuary, a respite from daily life. Consequently, enabling the sharing of ritual knowledge amongst menstruating women, as well as providing a time to commune with the vegetable world, the animal world, and the cosmos, which doesn't align women with the monstrous.

Kristeva's understanding of the maternal abjection provides a critical juncture for taking stock of the dominant phallic power that suppresses femininity. This "matter out of place" most virulently recognised in menstrual blood, enumerates a psycho-symbolic order of religious prohibitions that occurs on the borders of culture. It delineates a confrontation with the other aspect of taboo relating to the maternal entity. Whilst Kristeva's delineation of the margins of abjection in which the subject strays into fields of the mother's imaginary is interesting, it is an imaginary field that is ultimately bound to the Freudian prohibition of the mother in the forging of subjectivity. The abject mother hovers at the periphery of consciousness threatening to intervene, to disrupt the borders of selfhood, because according to Kristeva the mother's influence on the daughter can have a very negative impact, and in fact can cause neurotic tendencies. The possibility of falling back into the maternal entity and losing ones own boundaries of selfhood is the horrific threat. Menstruation in these terms is matter out of place, bound to the mother whose sexuality is prohibited from culture. Menstruation must be repelled, even though it returns, hovers on the boundaries of culture. It cannot be embraced as a meaningful aspect in the shaping of female subjectivity. Yet, I would argue that menstruation is a meaningful aspect of female sexuality that shapes female subjectivity. The mother provides a valuable source of ritual menstrual knowledge that has been culturally repressed and must be communicated through a vivid feminine imaginary, which is considered positive to daughters everywhere. By feminine imaginary I mean a source of

[89] Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, "Chapter One: Critical Appraisal of Theories of Menstrual Symbolism", in *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation*, ed. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 8.

imaginary that women can draw from and express poetically in relation to their menstruation. Here I am drawing from French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's notion of the imaginary distilled through Irigaray's understanding of the concept, which she critiques, and reappropriates. I will discuss this in the following section.

In Freudian theory there is a scission created between mother and daughter on account of female castration. The monstrous abyss that the mother's prohibited reproductive body represents threatens the dominant patriarchal culture because it exemplifies a space of feminine Nature that man cannot enter. It is a space that resides on the nature/culture divide. Indeed, this space of periodic feminine experience may provide the source of a feminine imaginary that is related to the Natural world, but which does not align the mother with the unconscious. Moreover, it offers a space that is not a potentially negative threat to the subject formation of young women. In these terms menstruation is what remains unique to women and must be re-considered in relation to the concept of taboo for what it can reveal about a femininity, which plays out in the ritual communication between women.

In this section I have argued that like Daly, Kristeva identifies an aspect of the menstrual taboo that indicates a primal repression, yet for Kristeva taboo is differentiated from the unconscious. She founds the abject that challenges the concept of the unconscious. As I have explained her abject is a borderline subjectivity that disrupts the duality of Freud's unconscious. Kristeva relates the abject to a "maternal anguish" that must be separated from, and is therefore considered to be a defilement, and harmful to subjectivity development. The most horrific defilement is considered to be menstrual blood. Yet, Kristeva doesn't shy away from exploring the secretions of the maternal body, which constitutes the most direct engagement with menstrual fluid that I have encountered thus far. However, for Kristeva the maternal body is still considered to be potentially horrific and must ultimately be rejected in the forging of a healthy female subject. In my view the "so called" threat of the menstruating maternal body is unfounded. The abject mother who menstruates, who hovers at the periphery of subject development, who threatens to intervene, to cause trouble, to create mental disorder, is not really an horrific threat. Certainly the daughter needs to assert her independence from her mother and draw away

from her towards the shaping of her own sexuality. This does not mean a complete rejection of the mother is necessary. In my view the mother and her menstrual knowledge must be embraced and celebrated under a new concept of the menstrual taboo, which is controlled and regulated by women for the positive ritual development of female sexuality. The feminine imaginary relating to the mother is a fascinating area of enquiry that Kristeva touches on, yet she argues that this aspect must also ultimately be rejected by the daughter. A new positive space of the menstrual taboo should explore the feminine imaginary of the mother by revisiting myths like that of the Medusa and retelling them for female empowerment. This is what I intend to do in the following section.

Re-visioning Medusa

In this section I delve deeper into the masculine construct of female sexuality called the monstrous feminine, by examining the universally feared figure of history, the Medusa. French feminist and philosopher Luce Irigaray provides an invaluable reading of Freud's repressed female sexuality that will help me to uncover a feminine imaginary, which centres on the female reproductive function of menstruation, delineated by the mother, and indeed the Medusa. Irigaray argues that Freud pinpoints a specific patriarchal epoch invaluable for investigating the topography of human sexuality, in so far as psychoanalysis brings a certain truth to light, a discourse of sexuality within patriarchy. The discourse of female sexuality is that "the feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects."[90] There is only one recognised sex and that is the masculine type, and thus all modes of representation are geared towards man's libidinal economy. Hence, psychoanalysis reveals the phallic truth as body of logic, philosophy, value system, that represses the feminine sex. According to the discursive body of psychoanalysis there is only one logic that can account for women: "women don't know what they are saying."[91] Irigaray cites the noted Freudian and Saussurian theorist, Jacques Lacan, who suggests that a woman has no unconscious of her own, except the one that Freud gives her. According to Lacan the unconscious is structured like a language of the

[90] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 86.
[91] Ibid., 89

symbolic.[92] He believes that a woman is at the affect of man's teleological ideal, which is the unconscious, and which gives her symbolic economy.[93]

Irigaray points out that by Lacan's account a woman is made into the womb of man's unconscious. This, she argues, is totally untenable for a woman. Irigaray draws parallels here between what becomes unconscious culturally and what is feminine, depicting a kind of repository of all that is "other" in the staging of histories, which discursively demonstrates the authority of male symbolic systems over female sexuality. Irigaray therefore calls for "the womb of mimicry" towards an investigation of "…the something in woman that escapes discourse." She calls for women to encounter the womb of male production in order to overturn it. Irigaray's response to Lacan points to a potentially subversive cartography of female sexuality that must be realised through a kind of confrontation with Freud's (re)productive body of male symbolic power. There is a concept of femininity that is informed by patriarchy, which is controlled and ordered by men, and projected culturally onto women. It is profoundly damaging to women because it has constructed a monstrous femininity. I answer Irigaray's call by engaging directly with the category of the monstrous feminine encapsulated in the Medusa, who can be considered to be a womb of male production in so far as she is a masculine construct of female sexuality.

Importantly, Irigaray encourages women, not men, to investigate feminine difference. In her groundbreaking text *Speculum; Of the Other Woman* (1974) she critiques Freud's essay *Femininity*. Irigaray confronts the cultural "riddle" of female sexuality that in Freud's thinking has made women into a "problem." She asks: How can women take part in a discourse on female sexuality that doesn't actually "consult her?"[94] By taking on Freud, Irigaray portrays a feminine difference articulated by a woman. She confronts Freud's thinking on femininity and makes an important distinction between the "female

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[92] Judith Feher-Gurewich, Introduction to *Introduction to the Reading of Lacan; The Unconscious is Structured Like a Language*, by Joël Dor, ed. Judith Feher-Gurewich with Susan Fairfield (Northvale, New Jersey: J. Aronson, 1997), xvi-xvii.
In her introduction Feher-Gurewich explains that Lacan gives Freud's unconscious a new status in order to argue for its linguistic field of influence. He shows that dream work and the correlative formation of the unconscious exist in accordance with laws similar to the structure of language.
[93] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 89.
[94] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum; Of the Other Woman* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 13.

and maternal, between female sexuality and mothering" apparently not observed in culture.[95] Irigaray points to an abyss in Freud's text into which sexual difference cascades and the unconscious is mobilised in accordance with male desire. On these terms femininity can only be expressed in accordance with the logic of the phallus.

In Freud's Oedipus complex, woman's womb is the colonial text on which he writes the symbolic expressions of the unconscious. Here woman becomes "receptacle" of his "product."[96] For him her womb is:

> …matrix – womb, earth, factory, bank – to which the seed capital is entrusted so that it may germinate, produce, grow fruitful, without woman being able to lay claim to either capital or interest she has only submitted 'passively' to reproduction. Herself held receivership as a certified means of (re)production.[97]

The uncanny aspect of this abyss like womb of male production is its potential monstrousness. It is the maternal entity that demonstrates the terrifying reminder of castration, of a periodically menstruating womb, which repels masculine desire, and which according to Freud must therefore remain repressed.

In my view it is necessary to engage this horrific menstruating mother in order to ponder another economy of thought, of sexed language, that Freud is simply not aware of, by virtue of his "blind spot" on menstruation.[98] In fact, it is "within" the colonial womb of female (re)production that looms in Freud's text, it is "within" the image of the terrifying castrated mother that a real feminine desire pulsates, a flow, of feminine difference, which must be spoken from the mouth of a woman. It is beyond the threshold of male desire that an archaic mother resides who must go on forever nourishing feminine desire. She is the Medusa. This maternal entity, this Medusa, is not bound to any notion of the maternal that exists in culture, since she is subversive of Western patriarchal society. Irigaray doesn't explore this monstrous aspect of Freudian (re)production directly. She asks how a woman is to gain the knowledge implicit in her own womb, the reproductive

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[95] Ibid., 16
[96] Ibid., 18
[97] Ibid.
[98] A reference to the title of the section in *Speculum; Of the Other Woman* called "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry" where Irigaray critiques Freud's essay on femininity.

power of her self, no longer reduced to an amulet of male desire. She questions how a woman is to establish a female sexuality distinguished from the maternal, whereby she herself is the desiring being. It is necessary to make the Medusa speak again on behalf of women everywhere, in order to recover a reproductive power that belongs to women.

The threat of female blood, of menstruation, aligned with the figure of the mother in psychoanalysis, is a reproductive power that can overturn the authority of male symbolic economy. The terror of the mother's genitals that are compared by Freud to the horrifying decapitated head of Medusa in his essay *Medusa's Head* (1922) is the threat of castration.[99] In his essay Freud likens decapitation to castration. The terror of Medusa's head that he believes symbolises castration is linked to seeing. Freud applies his theory of the Medusa to the Oedipal situation of castration in little boys. The castration complex in little boys occurs when a little boy first sees female genitals, most likely an adults, and even more likely his mother's. For Freud, all sightings of female genitals will link back to his mother. Freud goes on to argue that upon viewing the female genitals that are like Medusa's head, the little boy becomes stiff. In the myth Medusa is able to turn anyone who looks upon her to stone, so gruesome is her appearance, since her face is surrounded by a swathe of terrifying serpents. Freud links this first sighting to the hardening of the penis, which reassures the little boy that he is still in possession of the penis, and does not therefore lack, like the female. However, the little boy is simultaneously terrified by what he sees. Hence, the Medusa's head is interpreted by Freud as an absolute repulsion of male sexual desire.

The Medusa's head is worn by Athene for this expressed purpose. She "displays the terrifying genitals of the Mother" on her shield in battle in order to ward off the enemy.[100] Freud doesn't make any connection between the castrated bleeding female genitals of the Medusa/mother and menstruation. In his essay *Medusa's Head* the castrated female genitals have the power to cause extreme terror in men. A terror that even the devil flees from according to Freud. He constructs the female genitals in relation to the male gaze as an instance of male desire and repulsion that shapes female difference culturally as

[99] Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head," (1922) in *The Medusa Reader*, ed. Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers, trans. James Strachey (New York: Routledge, 2003), 84-85.
[100] Ibid., 85

monstrous, and denies menstrual blood. Yet, the figure of Medusa offers women an access to a powerful feminine imaginary.

In her essay *Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/ Ways Out/ Forays* (1986) French feminist thinker-poet Hélène Cixous critiques Freud's essay on the Medusa, summoning this maligned figure of antiquity. For Cixous the Medusa embodies the subversive power of female sexuality. Cixous encourages women to cross the abyss that culture has created and embrace the Medusa, not as a representation of female castration, which is deplorable, but as a beautiful woman who laughs, who experiences sexual pleasure. It is precisely because femininity has been represented in accordance with the structures of male desire that it has been driven into the subterranean depths. Cixous calls for women to challenge the reductive binary couplings of Freudian psychoanalytical thought that construct women as a dark continent. In this reductive binary the male is paradigmatically the "outside" whilst the woman has been designated the "inside." If women have been designated the "inside" then let women go "within" the "enigma" of femininity that patriarchal culture has fostered, and subvert it. Cixous encourages women to go "within" in order to challenge the very structure of the unconscious.[101] She re-claims the figure of the Medusa as a maternal entity that must be explored.

Cixous wants women to express their own feminine imaginary by writing their own sexual beings. She envisages a feminine imaginary that does not preclude the mother by offering up some modicum of motherliness, as is the case in Freudian theory.[102] Cixous re-imagines the Medusa and calls for a feminine imaginary that has the power to explore the mother's fecundity. Unlike Kristeva, Cixous doesn't seem to think that the influence of the mother's sexuality has damaging effects on the daughter's developing sexuality. The mother's body of desire must be excavated from the shadow place, the lair of womankind, an abyss of culture. Yet, all of her substances, her bodily fluids, are yet to be expressed. Her threshold of the darks, a forest on the outskirts of the social sphere, a "dark continent," where the Medusa lives, is not a dead zone. There is nothing to fear there. Rather, there is something to be gained there for women, our sex as text, or what

[101] Hélène Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/ Ways Out/ Forays," in *The Newly Born Woman; Theory and History of Literature*, *Volume 24*, by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, trans. Betsy Wing, with an introduction by Sandra M. Gilbert (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 68.
[102] Ibid., 68-9

Cixous calls our "sexts."[103] This terrain of the mother's sexuality is also the terrain of the pagan witch woman, as well as the figure of the sorceress, who must now be rediscovered by women, and returned to culture, through a vivid feminine imaginary, which remembers an intrinsic aspect of feminine Nature. I will now write the menstrual aspects of the Medusa. By remembering the Medusa I hope to give new life to the menstrual aspect of femininity that has been deemed monstrous in Western culture, but which is an important source of reproductive power for women.

The Medusa has magical and sacred powers. She is a sorceress. In some accounts of the myth Medusa was hailed as beautiful and presides over magical powers that invoke the forces of Nature. In Apollodorus's telling of the myth *The Beauty of Medusa* (second century B.C.E) it is reflected upon as to whether Perseus killed the Gorgon for Athena's sake, on account of Medusa's phenomenal beauty because it rivalled Athena's.[104] In another version of the myth recounted by Ovid (C.43 B.C.E – 17 C.E) Perseus slays the Gorgon and flies away with the Gorgon's head, over the Libyan desert. As he flies the blood from the decapitated head of Medusa drops to the sand and materialises into "deadly serpents". The serpents in this instance do not signify a phallic power. Rather, they signify woman's flow. The serpent's coils are the many veins of woman whose blood rites embody a potent femininity that is sacred, and magical, and threatens male supremacy.

In the continuation of the story Perseus meets with Atlas, a giant of a man who rules over the land and the sea of the area. Perseus requests shelter from Atlas, but Atlas denies it to him because he fears an oracle that had earlier prophesied trouble. A battle ensues. Unequal to Atlas's strength Perseus holds up the Gorgon's head whose look transforms Atlas into all manner of Natural forms: his body becomes forest, mountains, and boulders. In this telling of the myth the power of the Gorgon's blood bestows a bounty of Nature. Perseus then sees Andromeda shackled to rocks by the sea. He is won over by her beauty and wishes to marry her, but she is watched over by a gruesome sea monster. Perseus kills the sea monster by stabbing him with his sword in a terrible struggle. Before

[103] Ibid., 69
[104] Apollodorus (second century B.C.E), "The Beauty of Medusa," in *The Medusa Reader,* ed. Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers, trans. James George Frazer (New York: Routledge, 2003), 23

entering into combat Perseus lays down the Gorgon's head on a bed of soft leaves and seaweed in an effort to protect his prized instrument of femininity. The Medusa's head magically alters the forms of Nature it touches such as seaweed and twigs. The sea nymphs observe that the Gorgon's blood creates fecundity in the sea. The Medusa's head has magical powers.[105] As women it is our task to remember the sacred and magical powers associated with our Gorgon's blood, our menstruation. We have the mother's sacred and magical power within us. However, we must lay claim to it. We must write our own feminine imaginaries relating to our menstruation, and indeed our reproductive power.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that we no longer value menstruation culturally because we have become "unconscious" of this significant aspect of female sexuality. This has transpired in accordance with the Freudian interpretation of taboo that links taboo with the unconscious, and potentially with neurosis. Consequently, menstruation is tabooed and considered to be potentially associated with female neurosis. I have shown that in his essay *Femininity* Freud depicts female sexuality as a mysterious and potentially monstrous presence on the scene of human sexuality. I have pointed out that Freud doesn't even acknowledge the menstrual presence in his text, even whilst the menstrual presence is evident in his theory of female castration, which is an obvious instance of feminine bleeding. I have shown that in Freud's Oedipus complex the prohibited mother falls into an abyss of culture and with her menstrual knowledge is also buried. I have argued that Freud's negligence in relation to the menstrual taboo shows us that there is a primal mother at the core of his writing on femininity who menstruates, and must be further investigated.

It is in light of these findings that I drew on Daly to demonstrate that this maternal feminine aspect must be reconsidered, which Daly outlines in his theory of the "menstrual complex," though unfortunately he finds this aspect of femininity is evidence

[105] Ovid from the Metamorphosis, (C.43 B.C.E – 17 C.E), "The Story of Perseus," in *The Medusa Reader*, ed. Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers, trans. by Rolfe Humphries (New York: Routledge, 2003), 30-38.

of women's monstrousness. Daly's position prompted me to seek out feminist critiques of the monstrous feminine in Western discourse in the hope of uncovering a menstrual connection. I turned to Kristeva whose work proved extremely valuable. Her examination of this tabooed aspect of femininity through an engagement with the monstrous maternal figure, whose body emanates menstrual fluid along with other bodily stuffs considered to be filthy culturally, brings to light a space of ritual defilement beyond the symbolic system. Kristeva theorises an abject maternal entity and proposes that the mother reveals an imaginary world on the borders of subjectivity, which is potentially threatening, and must be rejected, even though it returns to haunt the subject. The abject maternal figure is therefore considered to be a negative influence in some cases. I argued that Kristeva's work on the abject is extremely valuable, yet constitutes a potentially horrific maternal episode in the staging of feminist theory. I put forward the supposition that the menstruating mother does not threaten the subject formation of young women. Rather, she offers a feminine knowledge that has been repressed in Western culture. Moreover, her imaginary world does not pose the threat of mental disorder, but brings the possibility of a feminine discourse on menstruation.

In order to further uncover the monstrous feminine I turned to the work of Luce Irigaray. Irigaray calls for women to forge an authentic femininity since currently femininity is articulated along the lines of masculine desire. She finds that psychoanalysis in fact reveals that the feminine only exists within a masculine teleological framework. In this male dominated culture of the West women have no voice. Rather, the feminine and the maternal is aligned with the unconscious impulse on the side of potential animalisms, primitivism, and the libidinal drives of men. This Freudian concept of femininity becomes a womb, an abyss, a monstrous pit of male production. Consequently, Irigaray encourages women to distinguish their own sexuality from the maternal. However, I argue that it is within the terrifying depiction of the castrated mother, it is by grabbing hold of her, interrogating her, and exploding her violated womb that a genuine femininity is to be found. Therefore, in the final part of my investigation of the monstrous menstruating mother I sought to go deep within the Freudian womb, or monstrous pit of femininity, to see what other femininity lay buried beneath it. I found the Medusa.

I discovered that the Medusa in Western culture is arguably the most identifiable example of a terrifying castrated mother. Freud argues that the threat of the Medusa is the threat of castration. He doesn't recognise that the castrated female genitals of the Medusa might be considered to be a reference to menstruation. The Medusa in these terms becomes a potential voice of the menstrual aspect of femininity, even whilst she doubly exists as a voice of absolute male sexual repulsion. It is for the purpose of inuring a genuine menstrual voice that I enlisted the work of Hélène Cixous and her writing on the Medusa. Cixous challenges Freud's view of the Medusa by encouraging women to reclaim the Medusa as a beautiful and powerful figurehead of female sexuality, who disrupts the male symbolic system. I took up Cixous call to write the Medusa in the final part of this chapter. I constructed a feminine imaginary of the Medusa that draws out her sacred and magical menstrual powers. Moreover, I found that the Medusa is a menstruating mother who signals a frontier of genuine feminine difference. She is the menstrual presence in every woman. The mythology of the Medusa that I revisited and explored in this chapter, through a reimagining of the Medusa as an arbiter of menstruation, encourages women to reclaim their own menstrual voice.

Menstruation is a vital aspect of femininity that has been repressed, aligned with the mother, tabooed, made primitive, animalistic, and potentially hostile to civilization. The menstruating mother has become the monster of culture, the reviled one, who is mentally unstable, who should be protected against, and kept close to the periphery of the social sphere. It is in this dark and lonely despot of culture that the witch woman lives, otherwise known as the sorceress, who has been split off from the hysteric throughout history. Menstrual knowledge will never see the light of day while society continues to treat menstruation as a monstrous threat, an aspect of feminine "nature" best repressed. The way forward in my view is for women to uncover their own menstrual voice by exploding the myth of the monstrous feminine. This challenge constitutes a re-evaluation of feminine "nature" in the staging of the history of human sexuality. Thus, I propose an concept of feminine Nature that is empowering to women in the following chapter, which has historically been repressed.

Chapter Two: Remembering the sorceress; abreacting an imaginary zone of woman's menstruation

Figure 4

Freudian psychoanalysis reveals how menstruation is positioned on the very borders of society and has been historically aligned with a feminine "nature" that threatens to overwhelm, to become monstrous, and which is consequently repressed in Western culture. It is the mother who presides over this feminine "nature" that is tabooed. In this chapter I will argue for an aspect of feminine Nature that has been marginalised on account of its association with feminine "nature," and thus feminine disorder. I will pinpoint the specific histo-cultural site of feminine disorder in the West that Freud treated and theorised known as "hysteria." I will find that the figure of the sorceress is historically split off from the hysteric and is consequently largely forgotten. The figure of the sorceress in history portrays a feminine Nature of periodic magical power and thus

reproductive power. It is my intention to uncover this feminine Nature relating to women's menstruation that has historically been repressed.

It was Freud who first recognised the connection between hysteria and sorcery. Yet, his thinking in this area is not further developed due to a double male bias present in his work, whereby in addition to being a physician, he views women as subordinate to men. Freud subsumed women under the rubric of a male dominant culture on account of their (potentially neurotic, or disorderly) "nature," and therefore their potential pathology. It is my intention to reforge the link between hysteria and sorcery. I will read the case history of hysterical patient Anna O recorded by physician and colleague of Freud's, Joseph Breuer. I will argue that Anna O performs her own "talking cure" as shamanic healing journey. In my view she becomes a sorceress. A sorceress in these terms is a woman who is marginalised because of her knowledge of femininity, which is interpreted as illness.

French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss theorises shamanism as a therapeutic technique that is related to psychoanalysis, which similarly abreacts repressed memories as a methodology of cure. Abreaction is a technique of bringing up a foreign body of repressed meaning that is articulated by the "patient" according to Breuer and Freud in their book on hysteria titled *Studies in Hysteria* (1895). Shamanism is often referred to as sorcery and exists on a borderline of Western healing techniques, on a nature/culture divide. Shamanism or sorcery is related to psychoanalysis in the sense that both healing techniques attempt to liberate the "repressed" contents of the patient's mind, which is articulated by the "patient," for the purpose of cure. In this chapter I look specifically at the psychoanalytical category of the hysteric in relation to the shamanic technique of cure, or sorcery. I propose that Anna O exemplifies the connection between hysteria and shamanism, or sorcery, since she seems to use the therapeutic techniques of early psychoanalysis for the purpose of forging a shamanic healing journey.

Breuer treats Anna O's illness strictly as a female pathology, as well as symptomatic of the patriarchal culture in which she lives. He cannot account for her "illness" in terms of shamanic healing techniques, whereby the neophyte shaman undergoes illness in order to become healer them selves. Freud on the other hand finds that Anna O is an hysteric

despite the fact that she makes a full recovery from her hysteria, transforming her illness into positive and influential feminist, and social action. Moreover, she becomes a healer in the suffragette movement and the battle for social reform in her native Germany, specifically within the Jewish community. I find that Anna O's case study exemplifies the link between psychoanalysis and shamanism. Her case study reveals that hysteria is a symptom of feminine repression. Furthermore, it reveals how feminine "nature" has historically been equated with potential illness rather than potentially unknown knowledge. In Western culture functionaries such as the shaman, or sorcerer, are not recognised as legitimate practitioners, and therefore their knowledge is devalued.

The link between hysteria and sorcery is examined by French feminist thinker Catherine Clément in her essay *The Guilty One* (1986). Here she seeks to explore the sorceress as the remembrance of the hysteric for the purpose of revealing the "tropes of the female condition." She exposes the spurious positioning of women in the West on a nature/culture split that constructs them as potentially disorderly beings. This space of feminine disorder that we are advised by Freud must be contained and controlled, is viewed by Clément as the site of women's anomalous reproductive power. It is a space associated with feminine sorcery, a "wild zone" that demarcates women's "blood magic," which has been silenced. Similarly, according to French feminist theorist Hélène Cixous, women's reproductive power exists as a liminal zone of feminine Nature on the cusp of culture: it is "a voice of milk and blood, a voice silenced but savage."[106] In fact, the concept of menstruation as disorder in the West seems to be congruent with some Indigenous beliefs about menstruation. Clément cites French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss in relation to Amerindian mythic patterns and makes further comment:

> 'Women's periods, their uncontrolled flow, too close to nature and therefore threatening,' are the stabilizing element through which runs the split between nature and culture: simultaneously the rule and the unruly (règle/règles). A natural and dangerous order, always open to the possibility of lasting, turning into a cataclysm; hence, perceived by culture, by men who take on its value, as disorder…[107]

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[106] Sandra M. Gilbert, Introduction to *The Newly Born Woman; Theory and History of Literature, Volume 24,* by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), ix.
[107] Catherine Clément," The Guilty One," in *The Newly Born Woman; Theory and History of Literature*, *Volume 24*, by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, trans. Betsy Wing, with an introduction by Sandra

Menstruation is an aspect of women's Nature that must be reclaimed as a site of reproductive power, through a remembering of the sorceress. Clément advises that we must try to remember the sorceress by tracing various mythologies that seek to inure her and draw out a feminine imaginary that touches on the very root of her "reproductive difference." It is a reproductive difference that offers women a magical and sacred power aligned with their menstruation, handed down to women via the sorceress, who is a maternal entity, and who offers a new perspective on the menstrual taboo for women.

Mauss's work that explores the association between magic and women is critical to the argument being mounted in this chapter. He theorised that women occupy a special place on the fringes of society based on their reproductive difference, that is, their ability to menstruate, to grow a child in their womb, to give birth, and to become menopausal. According to Mauss women are marginalised at these pivotal times during the course of their lives, which makes them the benefactors of magic. Mauss defines magic against occult practice. Magic is thought to be the special domain of women that threatens the dominant religion. This exclusionary zone of women's magic that the sorceress presides over comes to the very core of feminine reproductive difference. It offers up an imaginary zone of reproductive power to women.

Finally, I look at the mythical writing of the French author Jules Michelet who provides a bridge to this imaginary zone of reproductive power, which is the domain of the sorceress. Whilst his writings veer into an overly stereotypical account of the sorceress that is at times reductive, he also manages to provide a trace of the sorceress, which is highly valuable. Michelet provides a good departure point for remembering the reproductive power of the sorceress.

The sorceress

The sorceress is a maternal figure in exile and her terrain of feminine Nature has been construed a zone of feminine mental disorder, which is detectable through her daughter

M. Gilbert (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 28-29. First Clément cites Claude Lévi-Strauss in Mythologies and then a direct quote from Clément.

the hysteric. Clément's examination of the specific site of feminine disorder treated by Freud known as hysteria establishes the link with the sorceress in Western culture. Clément finds that "Freud, who applies psychoanalysis to and against hysteria (hence against femininity), traverses it with ears open but eyes shut."[108] He approaches the terrain of the hysteric through the subjectivity of a physician, as well as through the eyes of a patriarch, making him doubly bias in his thinking regarding hysteria. He can only think the hysteric in terms of their pathological "nature" that must be cured by hypnosis, or conscious recollection. The hysteric is made hysterical through the eyes of patriarchal culture. In fact, she is potentially a sorceress and her hysterical symptoms may also be read as a shamanic call to power. I will elaborate the concept of a shamanic call to power later in this chapter.

Clément seeks to elaborate the mythical stage on which femininity has been performed culturally by re-examining the hysteric. Her aim is to resurrect the historical figure of the sorceress and the mythology of feminine Nature that the sorceress presides over that has been silenced in the hysteric. She says:

> One must go through the audience of writers, psychiatrists, and judges to reconstitute the mythical stage on which women played their ambiguous role. The last figure, the hysteric, resumes and assumes the memories of the others: that was Michelet's hypothesis in The Sorceress; it was Freud's in Studies on Hysteria. Both thought that the repressed past survives in woman; woman, more than anyone else, is dedicated to reminiscence. The sorceress, who in the end is able to dream Nature and therefore conceive it, incarnates the re-inscription of the traces of paganism that triumphant Christianity repressed. The hysteric, whose body is transformed into a theatre of forgotten scenes, relives the past. Bearing witness to a lost childhood that survives in suffering.[109]

Clément points out that sorceresses are subversive because they perform healing rights against the churches protocol, and hence they exceed the prescribed, cleansed, sacred space of the church. The hysterics are subversive because their outbursts, uncontrollable and impassioned, shake up the systems, structures, and public spaces that would seek to control them. Yet, they both ultimately come under the control of the dominant phallocratic cultural milieu. Sorceresses are persecuted and eradicated and all that

[108] Ibid., 5
[109] Ibid.

remains of them in the pages of history are "mythical traces." Hysterics are suffocated by their families who close in around them and silence their symptoms.[110] These "wretched women" are segregated. They are pushed to the very boundaries of culture, eventually crossing to the other side, until they disappear. It is as though they have touched upon a "symbolic structure" that threatens their very existence. Of course, we remember the witch hunts in the medieval period where women were burnt at the stake by order of the Church.[111] We remember the horror of the nineteenth century asylum that disarticulated so many hysterical women.

Significantly, Freud found parallels between hysteria and witchcraft, or female sorcery. In fact, he read the famous Malleus Maleficarium (Witches' Hammer) for evidence of the connection between hysteria and witchcraft, or female sorcery. Clément explains that "At the time that he was passionately tending hysterics, Freud was interested in sorcery and spoke at length to fellow physician, and colleague Wilhelm Fliess about it. The year eighteen ninety seven is distinctive because of the parallel that Freud makes between what he finds in *Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Witches' Hammer*, a manual for inquisitors) and what he sees in the women he is treating."[112] Clément reveals how Freud watched over the spectacle of hysterical symptoms that recall the sorceress. "It is, above all, an audience of men: inquisitors, magistrates, doctors – the circle of doctors with their fascinated eyes, who surround the hysteric, their bodies tensed to see the tensed body of the possessed woman."[113] Thus, Clément describes a struggle occurring between patient and psychoanalyst in the treatment of hysteria, a struggle akin to the inquisitor's fights with demonic figures. However, in these instances the devils were the fathers, brothers, and close relatives.

Even though Freud opens up a doorway to re-thinking hysteria, when he compares it to sorcery or witchcraft, he leaves this area unexplored. I investigate this neglected link between hysteric and sorcery by reconsidering Anna O's case history. However, it is firstly important to explore just what constitutes hysteria according to Breuer and Freud in their text *Study on Hysteria* before reading Anna O's specific case history. In their

[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., 12
[113] Ibid., 9

study Breuer and Freud explain that they founded a "pathological phenomenon" in their patients whose symptoms were revealed in hypnosis. The memory of psychic trauma acted like a "foreign body" in the hysteric, which Breuer and Freud asserted must be held up as "an agent of the present."[114] "In other words: The hysteric suffers mostly from reminiscences."[115] According to Breuer and Freud, the hysteric actually conjures up a body of meaning from the spectre of the past, which is brought into the present, and must therefore be treated as a current phenomenon.

Breuer and Freud claimed that certain experiences from the past need to be abreacted to relieve the patient/hysteric. "For it was really shown that these memories correspond to traumas which were not sufficiently 'ab-reacted'…"[116] There are two reasons that Breuer and Freud gave as to why the trauma is blocked. The first is that social relations made a reaction impossible or were repressed by the subject who wished to forget the incident. The second type of trauma engenders a kind of mixing up of insignificant psychic states in the subject. In these cases hypnosis brings up the hysteria and hopefully resolves it. The hysteric begins to orate the abreaction. Speech becomes a device of recalling the emotion attached to the "foreign body" of meaning that has been repressed.[117]

Freud recognised that seemingly unrelated reminiscences from the patient's history, built up in the patient a kind of stream of consciousness that he called "free association", and which arose in accordance with a "definite psychic agency" in the patient. Freud noticed the patient's avoidance of exploring certain unpleasant ideas revealed an active repression in the patient. Hysteria then was considered to be fundamentally a blockage of memory that the physicians unblocked, by getting the patient to narrate this particular aspect of the past. "It now became crucial to discover whether any one particular object of memory, repressed and reactivated at a later stage, could be the originating cause of

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[114] Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*, trans. And with introduction by A.A. Brill (New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company, 1936), 3.
[115] Ibid., 4
[116] Ibid., 6
[117] Charles Bernheimer, Introduction to *In Dora's Case; Freud – Hysteria-Feminism*, ed. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (London: Virago Press, 1985), 9.
Freud later developed his own therapeutic technique. He found hypnotizing his patients challenging, mostly because he considered that "conscious recollection" on part of the patient produced longer lasting results. This was undertaken whilst Freud laid his hand on the patient's forehead. Thus, Freud abandoned hypnosis in his clinical practice over a period of time.

hysteria."[118] Freud argues that sexuality plays a key role in the pathology of hysteria, suggesting that it is in fact the root of repression. Freud proposed that sexual abuse committed against prepubescent children in the Victorian age was largely the cause of hysteria. A "foreign body" of unconscious material would later rise up in the pubertal or adult women predominantly when confronted by her sexual desire and her resistance to it. Although Freud does not actually pursue this line of enquiry in any great detail, he theorised a "foreign body" rising up in the hysteric similar to a possession, securing the link between hysteria and the sorcery. However, it seems as though the nature of this "foreign body" rising up in the "patient" is another "blind spot" in the discourse of female sexuality in the West, which remains unexplored. It is for this reason that I abreact the "foreign body" of the sorceress in the hysteric, by looking at the case study of Anna O.

Before I go on to look at Anno O's story, it is necessary to define what shamanism and/or sorcery actually is, and how it relates to psychoanalysis. In Lévi -Strauss's ethnographic study on the shaman, also known as a sorcerer/ess, he compares the shaman with the psychoanalyst, and realises that they are two sides of the same coin. They are in fact connected. He finds that whilst the psychoanalysts role is to listen in giving the "talking cure," the shaman's role is to speak.

> The Shaman provides the sick woman with a language, by means of which unexpressed, and otherwise inexpressible, psychic states can be immediately expressed. And it is this transition to this verbal expression – at the same time making it possible to undergo an ordered and intelligible form a real experience that would otherwise be chaotic and inexpressible – which induces the release of the physiological process, that is, the reorganization, in a favourable direction, of the process to which the sick woman is subjected.[119]

The shaman verbalises the "patient" or ill persons repressed material. Thus, Lévi-Strauss asserts that shamanism relates to psychoanalysis and indeed exists on a borderline of Western cultural healing techniques. He goes on to find a strong correlation between the two healing techniques arguing that they both aim at affecting a catharsis of repressed

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[118] Ibid., 11
[119] Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Shamans as Psychoanalysts (1949)," in *Shamans Through Time; 500 years on the Path to Knowledge*, eds. Francis Huxley and Jeremy Narby (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2001), 108-111.

psychological forces, by providing a language for the expression of those hitherto inexpressible memories. They each provoke an experience within a structural paradigm of meaning that is regulated psychically beyond the subject/patients apprehension.[120]

Shamanism relates to psychoanalysis in the sense that both the shaman and the psychoanalyst "establish a direct relationship with the patient's conscious and an indirect relationship with his unconscious," the shaman through oration, and the psychoanalyst through listening. The shaman like the psychoanalyst becomes the "object of transference" for the "representations induced in the patients mind."[121] Lévi-Strauss goes on to explain further that:

> Actually, the shamanic cure seems to be the exact counterpart to the psychoanalytic cure, but with an inversion of the elements. Both cures aim at inducing an experience, and both succeed by re-creating a myth which the patient has to live or relive. But in one case, the patient constructs an individual myth with elements drawn from his past; in the other case, the patient receives from the outside a social myth which does not correspond to a former personal state. To prepare for the abreaction, which then becomes an 'ad reaction', the psychoanalyst listens, whereas the shaman speaks.[122]

Thus, an invisible and largely unacknowledged bridge links psychoanalysis with shamanism, or sorcery.

Drawing on the work of Lévi-Strauss I would like to propose that it is possible that in some cases the hysteric talks their own cure, potentially abreacting the "foreign body" through themselves, as a healing journey, in order to become a healer them selves. The shaman, also known as the sorcerer/ess must overcome personal illness in their training to become a healer. It is for this reason that they are sometimes referred to as wounded healers. The "wounded healer" is a description that attempts to explain the inner journey that the shaman/sorcerer/ess takes during a life crisis. Joan Halifax writes about the initiation process through illness encountered by neophyte shamans or sorcerers/ess's that is a call to power:

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[120] Ibid., 109-110
[121] Ibid., 110
[122] Ibid., 110-111

> The call to power necessitates a separation from the mundane world: the neophyte turns away from the cellular life, either voluntarily, ritually, or spontaneously through sickness, and turns inward towards the unknown, the *mysterium*. This change of direction can be accomplished only through what Carl Jung has referred to as 'an obedience to awareness.' Only through the development of discipline will the shaman's habitual ways of seeing and behaving dissolve, and the visionary realms open. Thus, the initial call to power takes the shaman to the realm of chaos, the *limen* where power exists in a free and untransformed state.[123]

Australian anthropologist Michael Taussig explains that the potential shaman or neophyte first enters this other realm, which he calls the death-space, in order to self-heal, and to become a healer, contingent upon whether or not they have been able to successfully return from this terrifying terrain.

> The resolution of their [the potential shaman's] illness is to become a healer, and their pursuit of this calling is a more or less persistent battle with the forces of illness that lie within them as much as in their patients. It is as if serious illness were a sign of powers awakening and unfolding a new path for them to follow.[124]

Moreover, Taussig theorises that the Western appropriation of the shamanic journey to the death-space is bound to the desire for the therapeutic release of the subject. He sites journeys to the death-space such as Dante Calighari's *Divine Comedy*. In fact, the hysterics "illness" may indeed be a call to power through illness that facilitates their release from the category of subject under modern Western patriarchy. Hysteria may in fact engender an acute remembering of past traumas as a means of recalling the sorceress, facilitating an abreaction that engenders a healing journey for the "patient", who in fact gains power themselves in the course of their "treatment." In this way the psychoanalyst and the potential shaman, or sorceress, who displays symptoms of hysteria, work together, forge a kind of dialogue of healing. However, the hysteric ultimately talks their own cure and transforms their illness. This was definitely the case with Anna O.

Anna O, whose real name is Bertha Pappenheim, was the first and most famous case in the recorded history of hysteria. Her case history provides an invaluable account of

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[123] Joan Halifax, *Shaman; The Wounded Healer* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 6.
[124] Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, A Study in Colonialism, and Terror and the Wild Man Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 447.

shamanic awakening that has been read as purely hysterical. Clearly, Pappenheim's intellectual gifts were stifled as she was groomed to be a middle class Jewish lady of leisure in the Victorian period. She developed a love of daydreaming whilst tatting lace in order to curb her boredom. She called this day dreaming her "private theatre" and channelled the wellspring of her energy into it. She also did some charity work. These were the only outlets for her veracious intelligence and active imagination. Breuer remarks that Pappenheim was "markedly intelligent, with an astonishingly quick grasp of things and penetrating intuition…she had great poetic and imaginative gifts, which were under the control of a sharp and critical common sense."[125] Pappenheim therefore had a large reserve of mental energies that she channelled into daydreaming, which Breuer thought led to her hysteria. According to Freud "A psychic trauma would shock them [female daydreamers of the Victorian period who often engaged in needle work] into a state in which their fantasies became their partial or total reality."[126] In fact, Pappenheim's breakdown fully occurred after her father's death, whereby her predisposition to daydreaming degenerated into an hysterical condition according to Breuer.

After her father died she had a period of instability including hallucinations, anxiety, somnambulism, suicidal impulses, and sleeplessness. She entered into somnambulistic states in the afternoon and had nocturnal sleeping patterns. Her nocturnal recitations occurred in a state of somnambulism, and were poetic recitations, free form, which became accounts of her terrifying hallucinations. The narrations of these hallucinations freed her up. Breuer would go to her whilst she was in the somnambulistic or auto hypnotic state and he would listen to and record the phantasms that had built up in her mind since his last visit. She would be relieved temporarily and called it her "talking cure."[127] Pappenheim gradually began to get better. Her disease terminated July, 1882. Pappenheim was successfully able to remove her own hysteria by relating the

[125] Marion A. Kaplan, *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany; The Campaigns of the Jüdischer Frauenbund, 1904-1938*, *Contributions in Women's Studies Number 8* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979), 31.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*, trans. and introduction by A.A. Brill (New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company, 1936). 20.

disturbances and freeing herself of them through the technique of "talking cure," as Breuer him self attested.

I would argue that Pappenheim's case history bears resemblance to the shamanic journey of the "wounded healer." As I have previously related, before being able to become a healer a neophyte must free themselves of their illness, and they therefore become what Joan Halifax calls a "wounded healer". A life crisis precipitates a spiritual journey to self heal and become a shaman.

> The true attainment of the shaman's vocation as healer, seer, and visionary comes about through the experience of self-wounding, death and rebirth. Knowing ultimately and personally the realm of sickness, decrepitude, dying and death redies the shaman for his or her actual mission.[128]

Shamans, also known as sorcerers, go into hypnotic trances and somnambulistic states in order to free themselves from illness initially, and then in order to free their patients of their illness. A mythical imaginary is awakened in the neophyte during trances and becomes the means by which the shaman heals. Language is used to describe this mythical imaginary, providing a poetic communication of personal battles with diseased spirits for power, whereby a shaman's motivation is social, for the community, rather than personal. One way of affecting these trance states is through sleep deprivation, as was the case for Pappenheim.

The shamanic development of "mental imagery" is very important according to Richard Noll (1987). Noll gives an account of a neophytes training.

> Once the novice can experience vivid 'life-like' imagery, a second phase of training begins, aimed at increasing control over internal imagery. Shamans engage with and interact with visionary contents and learn to master spirits in this way.[129]

Thus, engaging with an imaginary realm is part of the shaman's experience of reality, and might even be considered to be a splitting of their consciousness, as was the case for

[128] Joan Halifax, *Shaman; The Wounded Healer* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 92.
[129] Richard Noll, "Shamans, 'Spirits', and Mental Imagery" (1987), in *Shamans Through Time; 500 years on the path to knowledge*, eds. Francis Huxley and Jeremy Narby (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2001), 248-250.

Pappenheim. Shamans always appropriate a metaphorical language to facilitate their foray into knowledge, and in order to relate their hallucinatory experiences.

I would like to propose that Pappenheim became shamanic, or gained a level of self-mastery, and personal knowledge that the sorceress is said to attain in their journey through personal illness, in order to become a healer. Pappenheim consciously abreacted her own feminine imaginary and gained control over it in response to Breuer's techniques, which weren't in fact psychoanalytic, but rather precursor to psychoanalysis. Breuer didn't actually analyse Pappenheim and we do not have an account of the content of her hallucinations. However, it is now acknowledged that Pappenheim founded the "talking cure." Thereafter, Pappenheim came to take up a position of feminist and social activist that freed her of her austere Jewish upbringing, and was indeed an attempt on her part to be released from the shackles of the Victorian patriarchal culture, in which she found herself. Pappenheim's experience is so relevant because she reveals the link between hysterical illness and shamanic cure. As I have already mentioned, it is a link that Freud had stumbled upon himself, but had not explored, and in fact didn't manage to detect in any of his case histories of hysteria.

Pappenheim's commitment to active social work began in the1890s. In 1902 Pappenheim founded the society "Care by Women" (Weibliche Fürsorge) where she "sought to apply the goals of German feminism to Jewish social work."[130] She then went on to call for a larger national Jewish social welfare organization run by women and with equal status to men's organizations. "She envisaged an organization that would protect Jewish girls, extend modern social work techniques, and most importantly, represent all Jewish women."[131] In 1904 she founded the Jüdischer Frauenbund with other Jewish activist women. She was immediately made president and held the position for twelve years. She also wrote many works of fiction including short stories and plays depicting Jewish social circumstances for women, in which she applied her own ethics of social consciousness. Moreover, she wrote many articles and essays towards an ethics of social feminist action.

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[130] Marion A. Kaplan, *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany; The Campaigns of the Jüdischer Frauenbund, 1904-1938*, *Contributions in Women's Studies Number 8* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979), 43.
[131] Ibid., 44

It is as though Pappenheim gained personal power through her "hysteria," specifically relating to her status as an oppressed Jewish woman. It is through the technique of talking cure that she excavated a "foreign body" of meaning, which is the sorceress. Pappenheim's feminism and social activism is an expression of her healing and abilities. It would be an interesting undertaking to analyse other case histories of hysteria for evidence of the sorceress. However, it is outside the scope of this chapter to do so. If other case histories of hysteria were read for a link to the sorceress it might be possible to uncover a feminine imaginary, which relates hitherto repressed menstrual experience. I would like to go on in the next section to read the sorceress or shaman in relation to menstruation. Given the fact that Breuer didn't actually analyse Pappenheim's hysteria, it is impossible to read her "illness" for menstrual signification.

Remembering the imaginary zone of women's menstruation

In this section I will explore the connection between the sorceress who is historically split off from the hysteric, and menstruation. It is with critical force that Clément uncovers the splitting of woman into hysteric/sorceress, an "imaginary zone" that we must try to remember because:

> What comes undone in both cases is woman's causality; she/it shifts, changes names at the same time the history of mentalities makes cultural norms evolve. But even if the split shifts, it does not disappear. Somewhere every culture has an imaginary zone for what it excludes, and it is that zone we must try to remember *today*.[132]

Clément posits the telling of myths of the sorceress in order to infiltrate the histo-cultural landscape, even by re-reading "the most feminine" myths authored by men, such as those written by Flaubert and Michelet.[133] She argues that the feminine imaginary, deriving from the sorceress's escapades on the side of Nature, must be remembered at the level of culture by employing a Lacanian understanding of the Imaginary. As I will find, it is a feminine imaginary that recalls menstruation.

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[132] Catherine Clément," The Guilty One," in *The Newly Born Woman; Theory and History of Literature*, *Volume 24*, by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, trans. Betsy Wing, with an introduction by Sandra M. Gilbert (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 5-6.
[133] Ibid.

Clément argues that the Imaginary must act on the Symbolic and the Real in order to assign women a space of value within history. In the glossary of the *Newly Born Woman* Betsy Wing gives a definition of the usage of the terms Imaginary, Real, and Symbolic in relation to the Lacanian terrain from which they derive. She explains that Lacan's Imaginary derives from the realm of hallucination and perception that centres on the fantastic. The Symbolic derives from the field of "discursive and symbolic action" which actually derails the sanctity and truthfulness of the symbolic. The Real, on the other hand, conjures that which is "unrepresentable."[134] Clément puts forward a feminine imaginary that is "fantasy full." It is an "oral history" which is really an anti-history, since it is not implicated in phallocentric discourse. Rather, it is a fissure in the body of history. Clément uses the concept of the Lacanian Imaginary then as a kind of springboard for contemplating a feminine imaginary that disrupts the authority of male symbolic power, and relays the mythology of the sorceress, who is split off historically from the hysteric.

The realm of imagining the sorceress is a trope of anomalous femininity. The remembering of the sorceress engenders a return of the anomaly that does not fit in the symbolic order – goes between symbolic systems. Mauss advises that she is dangerous because "[she is] afflicted with what we call madness, anomaly, perversion, or whom we even label 'neurotics, ecstatics, outsiders, carnies, drifters, jugglers and acrobats'."[135] It is on the borders of culture that the anomalous are invited to perform "imaginary transitions" or rites of passage." And more than any others, women bizarrely embody this group of anomalies showing the cracks in an over-all system. Or rather, women, who are elsewhere bearers of the greatest norm, that of reproduction, embody *also* the anomaly."[136] It is female reproduction then that the sorceress has knowledge of because of her anomalous cultural status. It is this exclusionary "imaginary zone" presided over by the sorceress that touches upon the very root of feminine reproductive difference.

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[134] Betsy Wing,"Glossary," in *The Newly Born Woman; Theory and History of Literature, Volume 24*, by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, trans. Betsy Wing, with an introduction by Sandra M. Gilbert (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 164.
[135] Catherine Clément," The Guilty One," in *The Newly Born Woman; Theory and History of Literature*, *Volume 24*, by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, trans. Betsy Wing, with an introduction by Sandra M. Gilbert (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 7.
[136] Ibid., 7-8

Clément argues that the liminal position of the sorceress as well as an assortment of other anomalous people, such as "neurotics, ecstatics, drifters, hawkers, jugglers, tumblers…" does not actually exclude them from the social system at play. It is their very existence that "guarantees" the symbolic systems.[137] They are the ones to engage in imaginary transitions. The sorceress is governess of the loose ends of culture, divided from the church, and the state, going the way of "inhuman" things, such as plants, and animals, and cosmos. Clément goes on to draw on the work of Michelet. According to Michelet sorceresses are bearers of the past come back to challenge the powers that hold sway. "Freud sees the power of the repressed working in the same way: anachronism has a specific power, one of shifting, disturbing, and change, limited to imaginary displacements. Everything occurs as if past resistances persisted through signs and symptoms."[138] But how can this powerful feminine imaginary, brought back from in-between symbolic systems have a genuine impact on the Symbolic? Clément voices her concerns: "The heart of the story linking the figures of sorceress and hysteric lies in the subversive weight attributed to the return of the repressed, in the evaluation of the power of the archaic, and in the Imaginary's power or lack of it over the Symbolic…"[139] The production of these "real structural transformations" arising in the figure of the sorceress are not yet fully realised. Hence, Clément calls for the return of the repressed sorceress whose anomalous reproductive power engenders a re-telling of feminine Nature.

No other figure in history embodies the reproductive anomaly more so than the sorceress who "conceives Nature" according to Michelet. The sorceress delineates a passage of feminine Nature that cannot be "contained within culture."[140] Michelet's text *The Sorceress* navigates the histo-cultural battleground of the sorceress who portrays a feminine Nature of periodic magical power. Michelet aligns women with Nature by which she attains her magical powers, her "second sight," in accordance with her recurring periods. He says:

> 'Nature makes them Sorceresses,' – the genius peculiar to women and their temperament. She is born a creature of Enchantment. In virtue of her regular recurring periods of exaltation, she is a Sibyl; in virtue

[137] Ibid., 35 Clément cites Claude Levi-Strauss.
[138] Ibid., 9
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid., .8

> of love, a Magician. By the fires of her intuitions, the cunning of her wiles – often fantastic, often beneficent – she is a Witch, and casts Spells, at least and lo lulls pain to sleep and softens the blow of calamity.[141]

Her roots are in Greek Paganism enthuses Michelet. She is driven into the forest in the Middle Ages to do her work in secrecy during the Inquisition.

> …She who, from the throne of the Orient, taught mankind the virtues of plants and the motions of the stars, she who, seated on the Delphic tripod and, illuminated by the very god of light, gave oracles to a kneeling world, is the same that, a thousand years later, is hunted like a wild beast, chased from street to street, reviled, buffeted, stoned, scorched with red hot embers…[142]

Michelet relays the connection between women's Nature, her periodicity, and her sorcery in a highly idealised fashion. Moreover, he narrates the sorceress's fall from grace.

He goes on to reveal the persecution of women in the Middle Ages on account of their practice of sorcery, which was earlier celebrated as the source of women's oracular powers. In the Middle Ages the Church makes this "High-Priestess of Nature" into a "Satan of the future." According to Michelet she was once regarded as a "Wise Woman" consulted by men of the state such as Kings, wealthy statesmen, religious men, and doctors.[143] The sorceress is therefore imbued with evil in the Middle Ages. She is said to be in allegiance with the devil. She is brought to trial, found guilty of witchcraft, and burnt at the stake. Her special aptitude for Nature, her sacred, and magical relationship with Nature that is facilitated by her recurring periods, is deemed culturally unacceptable. She is driven into the forest undercover of night. She is isolated. She is a monstrous woman.[144] She is no longer able to practice her cure, since the Church forbids it, stating that "…if a woman dare to cure *without having studied*, she is a Witch and must die."[145] These women are "admitted into the Christian hierarchy" as demons. Hence, they are stripped of their old powers.

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[141] Jules Michelet, "*The Sorceress (La Sorcière)*," trans. Alfred Richard Allinson (U.S.A: Bibliobazaar, 2008), 9.
[142] Ibid., 10
[143] Ibid., 10-11
[144] Ibid., 15
[145] Ibid., 18

Delaney, Lupton, and Toth mount convincing evidence to suggest that the witch hunts in Medieval Europe and Colonial America during the Inquisition were undertaken to isolate, and persecute menstruating women. In the *Malleus Maleficarum,* "hammer of the witches", the church reveals attitudes towards women's bodies. "The Malleus urged Inquisitor's to look to a woman when witchcraft was suspected in a neighbourhood 'because she is more carnal than man as is clear from her many carnal abominations.' For 'carnal abominations', read menstrual blood."[146]

According to Michelet the Church saw woman's flesh as "radically impure", her carnal fluids were considered unclean, and even her pregnant belly was to be concealed by her clothing.[147] Within the medieval religious discourse of Christianity we see a link between women's ability to menstruate and her overt carnality that must be brought under control of the church. Furthermore, Delaney, Lupton, and Toth make an interesting comparison between the famous paragraph written by Roman naturalist Pliny and the castigation of witches in the 1455 *Bull* of Pope Innocent VIII that inspired the *Malleus,* in order to illustrate their point. They compare the following two paragraphs, for the supposed ill effects that menstruation bestows on the natural world, and "mankind" in general, as well as to reveal the connection between menstruation and witches.

Pliny's Natural History on menstruation reads:

> Contact with it turns new wine sour, crops touched by it become dried up, the fruit off trees falls off, the edge of steel and the gleam of ivory are dulled, hives of bees die, even bronze and iron are at once seized by rust, and a horrible smell fills the air; to taste it drives dogs mad and infects their bites with an incurable poison…Even that very tiny creature the ant is said to be sensitive to it and throws away grains of corn that taste of it and does not touch them.[148]

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[146] Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth, *The Curse; A Cultural History of Menstruation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 42.
[147] Jules Michelet, "*The Sorceress (La Sorcière)*," trans. Alfred Richard Allinson (U.S.A: Bibliobazaar, 2008), 95.
[148] Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth, *The Curse; A Cultural History of Menstruation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 9.

The 1455 Bull of Pope Innocent VIII on witches reads:

> [Witches] have slain infants yet in the mother's womb, as also the offspring cattle, have blasted the produce of the earth, the grapes of the vine, the fruits of trees, nay men and women, beasts of burden, herd-beasts, as well as animals of other kinds, vineyards, orchards, meadows, pastureland, corn, wheat and all other cereals; these wretches furthermore afflict and torment men and women, beasts of burden, herd-beasts, as well as animals of other kinds, with terrible and piteous pains and sore diseases, both internal and external; yet hinder men from performing the sexual act and men from conceiving, whence husbands cannot know their wives nor wives receive their husbands.[149]

It would seem that witches, also known as sorceresses, secrete carnal fluids that threaten culture. Certainly a menstrual scourge seems evident in these passages, whereby menstruation is the site of woman's accursed fecundity, as stated by the Church. By the churches account menstruations power is supernatural, is aligned with a feminine Nature that must be controlled, or annihilated. Sorceresses therefore retreat to the very borders of culture. In fact, all women are sorceresses potentially on account of their ability to menstruate.

In their text *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* French critical thinkers Gilles Deleuze and Fèlix Guattari theorise the concept of the anomalous in order to find what is outside and against the rules of culture. They find that the "sorcerer" embodies this position that is "a phenomenon of bordering."[150] The sorcerer always inhabits this position at the edge of the forests, haunting the very fringes of the society. The female incarnation of the sorcerer, the sorceress, similarly stands at the cusp of symbolic systems, a "subgroup" confounding normalcy. Clément draws on the role of the sorceress as the anomalous by arguing that the sorceress threatens to reverse "symbolic repressions" and create "symbolic disorder" because of her reproductive anomaly.[151] The anomalous status of women's reproductive function culturally is related to the regularity of women's menstrual periods, a "natural disturbance" on the cultural landscape, which embodies the potential for disorder. In this space of feminine Nature the horrific threat of

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[149] Ibid., 42
[150] Gilles Deleuze and Fèlix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. and foreword by Brian Massumi (New York: Continuum, 2004), 270.
[151] Catherine Clément," The Guilty One," in *The Newly Born Woman; Theory and History of Literature, Volume 24*, by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, trans. Betsy Wing, with an introduction by Sandra M. Gilbert (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 8.

sexual difference takes root with all that is "offside in the symbolic system." As Clément points out, according to Mauss, in his text *A General Theory of Magic,* the fact of women's reproductive anomaly gives them a "special" position culturally during the phases of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause. Mauss states that during these phases women's "magical virtues" are displayed.[152] Women's periods therefore display an acute regularity that threatens the authority of phallocentric culture.

Women forge a separate social group in a league with "the disabled, the ecstatic, the pedlars, hawkers, jugglers and neurotics" according to Mauss. They "possess magical powers not through their individual peculiarities but as a consequence of society's attitude toward them and their kind."[153] Mauss goes on to argue that:

> They [women] are everywhere recognised as being more prone to magic than men, not so much because of their physical characteristics, but because of the social attitudes these characteristics provoke. The critical periods of their life cycle lead to bemusement and apprehension, which place them in a special position. And it is precisely at periods such as puberty, menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth that a woman's attributes reach their greatest intensity. It is usually at such times that women are supposed to provide subjects or act as agents for magical action. Old women are witches; virgins are valuable auxiliaries; menstrual blood and other like products are common specifics. Moreover, it is true that women are particularly disposed to hysteria, and their nervous crisis makes them susceptible to superhuman forces, which endow them with special powers. However, even outside these critical periods, which occupy a not insignificant part of their life, women are the butt of superstitious and jural and religious taboos, which clearly mark them off as a separate class in society.[154]

Women who menstruate are the practitioners of magic and are outside the protocol of the dominant religion. They are considered dangerous because of their association with magic and therefore hysteria. The sorceress forges a separate and dangerous order, or class, on the borders of society that is associated with magic, and menstruation, or "blood magic," and which delineates a feminine Nature threatening to the dominant masculinity in Western culture. Of course, in Western culture the feminine is defined against the masculine in accordance with the binary mode of thought that dominates discursive

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[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid., 35
[154] Marcel Mauss, "*A General Theory of Magic*," trans. Robert Brain, with a forward by D.F. Pocock (London: Routledge, 2001), 35.

forms. Menstruation is an aspect of feminine Nature that challenges religious systems and the dominant masculine hierarchy on account of its association with magic. It is a power wielded at the very limits of culture because of its association with magic. The sorceresses' magical power threatens to destabilise religious life, and must therefore be brought under control by the dominant masculine power.

Women's menstrual fluid is thought to contain "mana" in many Indigenous cultures, which relates menstruation to magic in ritual life. As I have already mentioned in *The Curse,* Delaney, Lupton, and Toth identify that menstruation is thought to have "mana", a supernatural power, which can bestow magic as well as do harm to members of the tribe in Indigenous societies.[155] Mauss describes the concept of "mana" in Melanesian culture. Mana is a central concept in Melanesian culture, perhaps the most significant aspect of ritual life. It is all pervasive and important. Mauss cites anthropologist Robert Henry Codrington for a definition of mana:

> The word *mana* is common to all Melanesian languages proper and also to the majority of Polynesian languages. *Mana* is not simply a force, a being, it is also an action, a quality, a state. In other terms the word is a noun, an adjective and a verb. One says of an object that it is *mana*, in order to refer to this quality; in this case the word acts as a kind of adjective (it cannot be said of a man). People say that a being, a spirit, a man, a stone or a rite *has mana*, 'the *mana* to do such and such a thing.' The word *mana* is employed in many different conjugations – it can be used to mean 'to have mana', to give mana', etc.[156]

Codrington goes on to elaborate the connection between the concept of mana and magic. Moreover, he deals exclusively with the complexity of the term mana that encompasses a multitude of separate concepts relating to the magical in our understanding, yet which are actually to be understood as one unified concept of mana.

Mauss goes on to explain that mana is a complex concept that no longer resides within Western discourse. It is a concept at once "abstract," "general," and "concrete." To sum up his thoughts – mana engenders a quality of fluidity, a merging of power, with

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[155] Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth, *The Curse; A Cultural History of Menstruation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 7.
[156] Marcel Mauss cites Codrington, "*A General Theory of Magic*," trans. Robert Brain, with a forward by D.F. Pocock (London: Routledge, 2001), 133-134.

phenomena, as essence, or indeed a materialist principle, though the two are apparently not distinguishable in mana. Mana is brought into action during the course of a rite, or it is innate in things. It is characterised by contagion that is communicated. It is connected to spirit beings, yet it is not itself a spirit. It is a quality that ascribes value and status in society.[157] It seems to have a lot in common with menstruation.

It is mana's supreme aspect as a "magical force" that I am interested in, as well as its connection to menstrual flow, and taboo.[158] This invisible force known as mana is attached to menstruation and wielded as a magical power closely connected with taboo. Mauss explains that "This heterogeneity is always apparent and sometimes manifest in action…It is the object of reverence which may amount to a taboo. We might add that all taboo objects must contain *mana* and that many *mana* objects are taboo."[159] Mauss goes on to elaborate the connection between mana and taboo in relation to women who forge a separate subgroup within culture by virtue of their sexual difference.

> The quality of mana – and of the sacred – appertains to things which are given a very definite role in society, often to the extent of their being considered to exist outside the normal world and normal practices. These things play a very considerable role in magic; they provide, in fact, its living forces.[160]

Such as the separate social status attributed to women by virtue of their reproductive status.

> It is because they [women] have a special social status that they are though to play important magical roles, considered to be sorceresses, attributed with special powers. Female attributes are qualitatively different from men's and give them specific powers. Menstruation, the mysterious actions of sex, and childbirth are signs of those qualities ascribed to them.[161]

It is because of women's reproductive function that they play a magical role in society, connected with their ability to conceive life, and also with their ability to menstruate, which seems to be considered culturally to be the polar opposite of birth. It is in fact here

[157] Ibid., 135-136
[158] Ibid., 136
[159] Ibid., 137
[160] Ibid., 147
[161] Ibid., 147-148

emphasized that an ability to engender death. Yet, this magical role is marginalised and repressed because of its apparent conflict with religious life. According to Mauss women forge a separate "inferior" subgroup that has encouraged their interest in magic, which is not part of religious life. Hence, there exists at an outpost of human meaning, at the limits of society, an index of the Natural world, of phenomena, on the cusp of culture, ordered by taboo, a space of women's reproductive power.

In fact, magic is a kind of anti-religion practiced privately in seclusion. Mauss explains that magic is conducted in dark, private places, like woods, or domestic spheres. Where as religious rites are practiced in "public view" at the very helm of secular society.[162]

> Thus, as far as society is concerned, the magician is a being set apart and he prefers even more to retire to the depths of the forest. Among colleagues too he nearly always tries to keep himself to himself. In this way he is reserving his powers. Isolation and secrecy are two almost perfect signs of the intimate character of a magical rite.[163]

He goes on to explain that religious rites are occult they are "organized systems," whilst magical rites are generally considered "unauthorized, abnormal and not highly estimable." – Even whilst they are often *periodically* performed, and are often practiced for the purpose of cure.[164] Mauss defines a magic rite: "A magic rite is any rite which does not play a part in organized cults – it is private, secret, mysterious and approaches the limit of a prohibited rite."[165] Mauss might as well be describing the characteristics of menstrual seclusion practiced in many indigenous cultures where women are ritually separated from the rest of the tribe in order to menstruate. It is menstruation's status as a tabooed substance that connects it with magic. Furthermore, this situates it on the boundaries of culture going the way of Nature. This is indeed the domain of the sorceress. Yet, the narrations of the sorceress must return to culture, must be articulated at the level of culture, in order to encourage women to embrace this important aspect of their sexuality.

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[162] Ibid., 28-29
[163] Ibid., 29
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid., 30

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the sorceress is the remembrance of the hysteric, in order to reveal a liminal zone of feminine Nature, which has been repressed in Western culture because of its association with feminine "nature." Freud aligned feminine "nature" with the monstrous menstruating mother, who is confined to the cloistering chambers of the unconscious, and who is taboo in the West in a deeply negative sense. On the periphery of Western culture this potentially mad woman hovers and is often thought to be a witch. She has no voice, rather she is talked about, and intricate mythologies are woven around her mysterious presence/absence on the scene of culture. In this chapter I have argued that the sorceress embodies a periodic magical power that is an aspect of feminine Nature, which actually redefines the menstrual taboo for women. I have sought to create a positive dimension of the menstrual taboo by examining an instance of feminine disorder and tracing her hysteria to the forgotten powers, and abilities of the sorceress.

Clément advises that Freud doesn't adequately acknowledge the sorceress who rises up in the hysteric like a memory that can no longer be repressed, and which must be abreacted culturally. In fact, I have sought to abreact the memory of the sorceress in reading Anna O's story, finding that her "symptoms" may also be read as a shamanic call to power, especially in light of her achievements in adulthood. Anna O is a pivotal figure in the history of psychoanalytical "cure" because she exemplifies the close proximity of the hysteric and the sorceress. She shows us how our culture does not value such functionaries as the sorceress. Rather, these women have been historically labelled hysterical and institutionalised.

Clément calls for women to recount mythologies of the sorceress, in order to reclaim the domain of feminine Nature that she presides over. She advises women to write a feminine imaginary that utilises Lacan's notion of the imaginary, which is "fantasy full," in order to engage in a re-telling of the "most feminine" stories of the sorceress, which are largely authored by men like Michelet and Flaubert. In writing feminine Nature women reconnect with their sorcery. All women are sorceresses because women are considered

to be anomalous culturally on account of their reproductive difference. Reproductive difference is in fact the special domain of the sorceress who goes between symbolic systems. However, in my view it is possible for the sorceress to have an impact on the dominant male symbolic economy if and when women recount their escapades culturally. The sorceress wields a power of return: she is a repressed figure of history whose return is imminent and disruptive of phallocentrism. She lives in everywoman.

I have taken up the challenge of remembering an imaginary zone of women's reproductive difference that is associated with women's position on the borders of culture, as well as women's close connection with the figure of the sorceress and the hysteric. It is a precarious position because it can be interpreted as neurotic or as magical by the dominant culture, and in fact both interpretations amount to the same thing. I have sought to elaborate the connection between menstruation and magic, and I have claimed that it because of the historical scourge on menstruation that the sorceress has been marginalised. In fact, Mauss reveals that all women occupy this space of women's magic because of their "role" as reproducer of the species. They are pushed to the boundaries of culture because of their reproductive difference. Moreover, menstruation has historically been associated with mana in Indigenous cultures, which makes it sacred and tabooed. This gives women a "special" position, yet also marks her out for negative cultural coding, for potential punishment, and derogatory superstitious practices. Furthermore, it is menstruations association with magic that threatens the dominant religion often controlled by men, since magic is not an occult practice, rather it is a periodically performed ritual practice, fluent with women's cycles. This has meant that menstruation has been pitted against culture and marginalised on account of its threat of feminine difference. I have therefore called for women to re-connect with the magical and sacred power of their menstruation in order to re-claim a positive understanding of the menstrual taboo. Moreover, I have sought to question the linear notion of female periodicity and broaden the thinking on this topic to consider a cyclical concept of female periodicity.

Chapter Three: Re-claiming a sacred understanding of the menstrual taboo

Figure 5

In this chapter I investigate the menstrual taboo as an instance of femininity that provides a rich source of gynocratic traditions for women, in relation to their menstrual cycle, as found in certain Indigenous cultures. Whilst gynocratic traditions have sometimes been infiltrated, to varying degrees, by the dominant masculine power that attempts to control, degrade, or misappropriate women's ritual practice. It is by reading the actual lived experience of women who engage in menstrual seclusion that I come to argue for a positive dimension of the menstrual taboo. I reclaim the menstrual taboo as a sacred space of feminine Nature. I find that this aspect of ritual life is so carefully guarded against by the dominant masculine power because it threatens religious life. In her book *Je, tu, nous, Toward a Culture of Difference,* French Feminist Luce Irigaray ruminates on the notion of a space of value for female sexuality that challenges and transforms predominant socio-cultural values. She argues that we live almost exclusively in accordance with male genealogical systems and calls for women's entrance into "the between-men cultural world."[166] Most significantly Irigaray shows that the masculine line

[166] Lucy Irigaray, *Je, tu, nous, Toward a Culture of Difference*," trans. Alison Martin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 45.

of filiations obscures the mother-daughter relationship in society. She argues that man has taken the oracle and instituted himself as voice of God, effectively severing women "from their earthly and corporeal roots."[167] Women are therefore in exile from their own fidelity because of this de-spiritualisation, which in turn has created a scission between the sexes, and is today present in cultural exchange. It is for this reason that Irigaray pursues a feminine genealogy, towards the reclaiming of "a dimension of the divine" for women.[168] She calls for an investigation by women into a pre-patriarchal period in history when gynocratic traditions where in existence, in order for women to reclaim their spirituality, and reinstate an oracle of femininity culturally.

In this final chapter I will not be investigating the pre-patriarchal period in history. Rather, I uncover ritual practices in Indigenous cultures for the purpose of re-thinking women's periodicity. I propose that women in the West engage with certain menstrual rituals, in order to claim a space of separation from normal life in which to cultivate their energy, and express their emotional life in commune with their menstrual cycle, and in sync with the broader cosmos. This new/old way of relating to menstruation opens women to the sacred and magical power of their bodies. It will require women to re-claim an altered concept of the menstrual taboo that is positive for women, towards the expression of a vibrant feminine imaginary, or indeed a menstrual imaginary. It is historically the domain of the sorceress in which this sacred and magical knowledge of menstruation flows, and which is in fact the domain of all women. This means that women actually choose to not perform their normal daily tasks during part of, or all of their menstrual cycle. It calls for women to engage in activities of meditation to accumulate energy, to undertake to poetically expressing their emotional life, as well as to cultivate an awareness of the moon cycle during menstruation, which I will go on to explore in greater detail in this chapter.

Women preside over a reproductive power that threatens the stability of male symbolic economy and is tabooed accordingly. In her text *Purity and Danger; An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966), British anthropologist Mary Douglas argues that pollutants such as menstrual blood that are given meaning within religious systems

[167] Ibid., 17
[168] Ibid., 18

bespeak the socio-symbolic logic of religion, on which basis they are tabooed. Certainly menstruation marks women's bodies as different and restates her difference through the regulations of menstrual taboos. However, in the West menstrual taboos have been interpreted as a marking of the body in terms of phallocentric thought, which reveals an inherent fear on part of males relative to menstruation. In fact, taboo can infer a commonality of shared cultural experience amongst women specifically in relation to their bodies. The act of openly menstruating can destabilise patriarchal culture because of its association with magic. Yet, it also threatens to be engulfed itself by the phallic ideal. As Buckley and Gottlieb point out in their text *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation* (1988):

> Menstrual blood is seen as polluting when it symbolically encodes an underlying social-structural ambiguity regarding women and things female. On the one hand a society may have a consciously developed an *ideology* of male superiority but, on the other, it may also permit women access to at least some kinds of power, thereby in a sense undermining its own ideology of male dominance. The common fact of menstruation among all women challenges the social order of a male-dominated society and defines and bounds a female subgroup within the society, thereby creating a new separate and dangerous order.[169]

It is therefore important to re-think the relationship of menstruation to taboo, in order to reveal a space of femininity left behind in the staging of phallocentrism, which provides women an access to their own gynocratic power. The sacred rituals shared by women through menstruation take place at the very limits of culture, and give menstruation its magical quality, and indeed its commonality. Thus, I would like to read several case studies in *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation,* in order to reveal that women need to engage in ritual practices relating to their menstrual cycles, to facilitate the expression of their own "menstrual imaginary." I will read three case studies, the first an account of Yurok women of California, the second on the Temne women of the Sierra Leone, West Africa, and the third on the Alawa Aboriginals of Western-Central Arnhem Land, Australia, in order to draw out a largely positive concept of the menstrual taboo, based on more balanced ethnographic accounts of the menstrual taboo, which I have

[169] Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, "Chapter One: Critical Appraisal of Theories of Menstrual Symbolism," in *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation*, eds. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 28-29.

uncovered in *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation*. However, it is my intention to point out patriarchal interference in the practice of menstrual taboos where I detect it, and which may infer both physical and mental harm to women's bodies. By reading these case studies I seek a genuinely feminine account of how the menstrual taboo might function as a sacred domain of female empowerment and development.

As Buckley and Gottlieb ponder: what is the "lived experience" of women in seclusion huts? What are their activities and their practices? Indeed, this is an area of ethnographic research that is generally neglected, and is targeted by *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation*. According to Buckley and Gottlieb menstrual huts are the first features of Indigenous life to vanish coinciding with the influence of Westerners.[170] The anthropological data recorded in *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation* indicates a variety of female sentiment towards seclusion ranging from mild resentment to enjoyment based on relief from daily chores.[171] It may be possible that seclusion serves as a respite from cultural life on the borders of the society, into a liminal cohabitation with women, or indeed into an isolated space that men cannot enter. Thus, seclusion may denote a space on the threshold of culture and Nature that is off limits to men. It may well be that women chose long ago to protect their needs and interests in such a space of women's time, and as a means of elaborating a wider cosmological connection to the Natural world.[172] It may also be that this space of seclusion is not always a physical room, or hut, but rather a metaphorical space of ritual separation, delineated by the women's flow, connected with the cosmos.

In chapter one I defined taboo in accordance with Freud's understanding of taboo. For Freud taboo conjures up an aspect of "psychic life" that is actually incomprehensible to us on account of its relationship to the unconscious. He argues that taboo signifies a prohibition or restriction that engenders the dualistic idea of the sacred and profane, and casts an aura of "holy dread" around its subjects, and objects. I would now like to propose a different interpretation of taboo, in order to re-think menstruations relationship to taboo. Buckley and Gottlieb give a definition of taboo:

[170] Ibid., 12
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid., 13

> Probing the semantic sphere of the Polynesian word *tabu* and its variants (compare Durkheim), Steiner observed that the Polynesian root *ta* means 'to mark' and that *pu* is an adverb of intensity, and he translated *tabu* (*tapu*) as 'marked thoroughly'. This etymology shows a lack of unilateral stress on either negative or positive dimensions, and Steiner accordingly suggested that concepts of 'holy' and 'forbidden' are inseparable in the many Polynesian languages. There is no polarity of meaning inherent in the term *tabu*, which, on the contrary, implies a fusion of two concepts that Western views tend to distinguish. Furthermore, the logical opposite of 'tabu' is neither 'sacred' nor 'defiled' (both of which are encompassed within 'tabu') but 'profane,' in the sense of 'common' (Steiner).[173]

When applied to menstruation, taboo may be said to imply a marking of the textual interface of the female body, within a specific cultural domain, generating its own unique and varying imaginary phenomena, at the crux of spiritual life. Moreover, delineating a commonality of experience amongst women as communal sub-group, separate to men, on the borders of culture, which may or may not be dominated by an authoritarian masculine power. I would now like to give an account of menstrual rituals in Indigenous cultures that enrich women's spiritual lives, and provide women in the West a guide for cultivating their own menstrual rituals. It is my intention to reveal that menstrual rituals can provide a valuable space of sacred femininity in which women can actively voice their own menstrual imaginary.

In Indigenous cultures around the world menstrual taboos are observed. Yet, they are not always oppressive to women. In fact, we can learn a lot in the West about how other cultures have ritualised their menstrual cycle. In many ethnographic accounts a "double male bias" distorts the actual truth of the ritual practice of menstruation for women. This trend seems to have evolved due to the fact that the male view has traditionally been sought by male ethnographers and has been regarded above the female view.[174] For example Buckley reveals that a negative ethnographic account of Yurok women's menstruation as a pollutant, depicting menstrual women as the bearers of dangerous energies, which could have a catastrophic impact on men, is a "gender specific view" of

[173] Ibid., 7-8
[174] Thomas Buckley, "Chapter Eight: Menstruation and the Power of Yurok Women," in *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation*, eds. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 192.

menstruation held by Yurok men. Indeed, menstrual pollution is a negative coding of women's menstruation that has become an ethnographic truism. A Yurok woman living in California gives a different account of menstruation in traditional Yurok culture. She was brought up in foster homes in the West where she was taught that menstruation is "bad and shameful", and that through the curse of menstruation "women are being punished." However, upon her return to traditional Yurok culture she was taught a very different view of menstruation by her aunts and grandmother. She reports:

> A menstruating woman should isolate herself because this is the time when she is at the height of her powers. Thus the time should not be wasted in mundane tasks and social distractions, nor should one's concentration be broken by concerns with the opposite sex. Rather, all of one's energies should be applied in concentrated meditation 'to find out the purpose of your life,' and towards the 'accumulation' of spiritual energy. The menstrual shelter, or room, is 'like the men's sweathouse,' a place where you 'go into yourself and make yourself stronger'. As in traditional male sweathouse practice, or 'training' (hohkep-), there are physical as well as mental aspects of 'accumulation'. The blood that flows serves to 'purify' the woman, preparing her for spiritual accomplishment…There is, in the mountains above the old Yurok village of Meri.p, a 'sacred moontime pond' where in the old days menstruating women went to bathe and to perform rituals that brought spiritual benefits. Practitioners brought special firewood back from this place for use in the menstrual shelter. Many girls performed these rites only at the time of their first menstruation, but aristocratic women went to the pond every month until menopause. Through such practice women came to 'see that the earth has her own moontime,' a recognition that made one both 'stronger' and 'proud' of one's menstrual cycle…Finally the young woman said that in old-time village life all of a household's fertile women who were not pregnant menstruated at the same time, a time dictated by the moon; that these women practiced the bathing rituals together at this time; and that men associated with the household used this time to 'train hard' in the household's sweathouse. If a woman got out of synchronization with the moon and with other women of the household, she would 'get back in by sitting in the moonlight and talking to the moon, asking it to balance [her].[175]

This woman's account reveals the value inherent in conducting menstruation rituals. In paralleling the men's sweathouse practice the women are engaged in the spiritual activity of making their medicine stronger during menstruation, whilst in seclusion. The medicine accumulated through menstruation is the power to conceive and make babies. It is fertility magic. Whilst menstrual blood is considered a pollutant in some contexts, it is

[175] Thomas Buckley, "Chapter Eight: Menstruation and the Power of Yurok Women," in *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation*, eds. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 189-191.

also regarded as pure by Yurok women, especially in relation to the cosmos, whereby it is imbued with great value, or wealth.[176] The interruption of daily life by Yurok women, in order to facilitate a periodic spiritual experience separate from the menfolk, seems to provide an extremely valuable space for fostering an important aspect of feminine Nature, which has historically been taken over by men, and repressed in Western culture. Moreover, the observance of the moon cycles in relation to menstruation seems particularly important in the fostering of a feminine cycle in sync with the cosmos. According to Buckley the women typically menstruated in sync with the new moon or dark moon as it is dually called. Research shows that ovulation can be manipulated by the exposure of women's bodies to light such as the light given off by the full moon. Furthermore, research in the 1970s revealed that menstruation can be brought on in response to "the exposure of ovulating women to light during sleep."[177] Indeed, exposure to the full moon would affect the timing of ovulation and subsequently menstruation.

The fact that Yurok women observe menstruation as a time for ritually gathering energy, as well as facilitating a spiritual connection with the wider cosmos, may be extremely beneficial for women in the West. The Yurok women's observation of the moon in relation to their cycle gives women in the West a definite external cosmological compass that allows them to chart their own menstruation. This practice enables women to connect with themselves on a deep level in sync with Nature. It provides a time for women to experience and articulate their emotional life in direct relation to their menstrual cycle, which allows a time of ritual catharsis. It also provides women with a social identity relating to their periodicity that can be expressed at the level of culture.

In the West, the concept of premenstrual tension as well as menstruation itself is synonymous with women's monthly madness, badness, and general threat to society. Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) comes from the German term "Die Premenstruellen Verstimmungen." It was invented in 1931 by Karen Horney, who claimed that it arose from the denial of the wish to be pregnant. In *The Curse* Delaney, Lupton, and Toth give another point of view with regards to the PMS "epidemic" in Western culture. They cite Karen Paige's argument that PMS arises in response to a "failure to establish a 'feminine

[176] Ibid., 198
[177] Ibid., 203 Buckley cites Dewan, Menkin, and Rock (1978).

identity'."[178] Delaney, Lupton, and Toth reveal the cultural construction of PMS sufferers in the West as a threat to society, the perpetual re-creators of "Eve's curse."[179]

Thinkers Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove argue in their text *The Wise Wound; Menstruation and Everywoman* (1976), the need for women to recognise the "mental-creative powers" that they come into during menstruation, pointing out that women in the West have been exiled from "participation in the menstrual rhythm" of their own bodies, due to "male certitudes," which can account for the build up of emotional upset in women. Shuttle and Redgrove mount evidence to suggest that the first menstruation is a time of inward opening, of possible prophetic vision, closely aligned with shamanic powers, in which the values of menstruation are expressed. They argue that during menstruation:

> …the imaginative and interpretive energies are released in body language and symbolic form. In a healthy situation, these become art and magic, even insight and healing perhaps; in an unhealthy one, madness.[180]

There is something primary inaugurated at the first period "– the vivid, concrete, imagistic, prelogical thought process shared by dreams and poetry."[181] Menstruation must be acknowledged in the West as a powerful site of feminine sexuality and emotional life that has historically been repressed, and functioned as a site of feminine disorder, but which is potentially an important site of women's blood magic that must be expressed culturally.

In a second case study male anthropologist Frederick Lamp surveys the practice of "Bondo," the name given to female initiates at their coming out among the Temne people of the Sierra Leone, West Africa. Lamp's male ethnography is contextualised by the expressed desire of the editors of the text *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation* to source the feminine account of menstrual rituals, as well as to provide a

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[178] Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth, *The Curse; A Cultural History of Menstruation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 87.
[179] Ibid., 90
[180] Peter Redgrove and Penelope Shuttle, *The Wise Wound: Menstruation and Everywoman* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1978), 78-79.
[181] Ibid., 90. Redgrove and Shuttle cite Elizabeth Douvain.

counter argument to the idea of menstruation solely as a pollutant. The practice of Bondo is controlled by women. However, it is not necessarily free of male influence. At Bondo's commencement, which lasts for one year, girls are taken into the forest for a genital operation ranging from "labial scarification to clitorechtomy."[182] This ritual practice is conducted in secret and is an eradication of women's pleasure that is deeply concerning for many women in the West.

We now have accounts by women who have been circumcised. Waris Dirie is a Somalian woman who wrote about her experience of being circumcised as a young girl in her book *Desert Flower* (2006). She explains that the reason for the practice of female circumcision is that there are parts of a woman's genitalia that are considered culturally "unclean". She goes on to explain that according to local custom "These things need to be removed – the clitoris, labia minora, and most of the labia majora are cut off, then the wound is stitched shut, leaving only a scar where our genitals had been."[183] After a girl has been circumcised she enters into the marriage market, since no man would consider marrying a woman who is considered culturally unclean. Dirie goes on to reveal the absolute brutality of the practice when she gives a personal account of her chlitorechtomy at age five. An elder woman from the community visited her and used a broken, and unsantised razor blade to cut her. She explains that the feeling of having her genitals cut away was agonising since no anaesthetic was used. Her mother simply asked her to bite down on a root from a tree as she lay on the sand, holding onto her mother for support, whilst the elder woman performed the ritual. The pain was so great that Dirie passed out. When she awoke the worst pain was to come. She was about to be sown up. The barbaric practice of female circumcision makes urinating and menstruating almost impossible, since a tiny hole the circumference of a matchstick is the space through which the fluids must pass.[184] Indeed, the presence of partial or total clitorechtomy during the Bondo ritual reveals an extremely negative male influence in women's gynocratic practice.

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[182] Frederick Lamp, "Chapter Nine: Heavenly Bodies: Menses, Moon, and Rituals of License Amongst the Temne of Sierra Leone," in *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation*, eds. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 215.
[183] Waris Dirie and Cathleen Miller, *Desert Flower; The Extraordinary Journey of a Desert Nomad* (New York: Virago, 2006), 63.
[184] Ibid., 69-73

Lamp goes on to explain that through the practice of Bondo the human body is constructed in relation to the heavenly bodies, whereby the human body is a microcosm of a wider universal principle of "universal balance."[185] "…the body may be used to re-create the structure and the movement of the cosmos and thereby, in ritual, become one with its universe, including that universe's temporal dimension."[186] The Temne in fact run ritual life in accordance with an ancient lunar calendar. The solar cycle is of little significance to them. Bondo seems predominantly to begin "at the first quarter moon, or within two and a half days before; or at the third quarter moon, or within three and a half days after."[187] In fact, the moon is considered female and hence it is allocated specific importance in relation to women's ritual practice.

The association with the moon and the butterfly is extremely important in relation to Bondo. The butterflies "life cycle duration is equivalent to the moon…the butterfly is also referred to as female, and…is paramount in female initiation symbolism. Its metamorphosis, in four stages, parallels both the lunar cycle and the four-stage initiation of Bondo girls."[188] The butterfly chrysalis also appears on Bondo official's facemasks, and it is Lamp's interpretation that it must surely be "a metaphor for the transformation of immature and sexless human beings into beautiful, powerful women."[189] There is a direct correlation observed between the moon and menses in Temne culture. Lamp gives multiple accounts that suggest menstruation commences collectively on the new moon, when the women abstain from work and do not engage in coitus. It is Lamp's belief that the compatibility of women's bodies with Natural phenomena is facilitated through the ritual of Bondo, which gives women incredible control over their bodies.[190] In fact, the significance of Bondo is viewed as a more auspicious emergence into womanhood than the marriage bond. Women become bound to one another and simultaneously enter into a cosmological connection with the universe, which regulates the female body from then on. Thus, through the cultural practice of Bondo the female body becomes "a functional

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[185] Frederick Lamp, "Chapter Nine: Heavenly Bodies: Menses, Moon, and Rituals of License Amongst the Temne of Sierra Leone," in *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation*, eds. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 211.
[186] Ibid., 212
[187] Ibid., 217
[188] Ibid., 219-220
[189] Ibid., 220
[190] Ibid., 231

effect of cosmological thought."[191] Furthermore, Bondo cannot be contravened by men, and if they were to try to prohibit such activities the women folk would punish them in a show of authority. This reveals the elevated cultural status of women in relation to these ritual affairs of Bondo.

The Temne's practice of Bondo shows Western women the importance of menstrual initiation. It facilitates a relationship between young women and other women in the community of all ages, at an extremely important time in a young girls life when she is developing attitudes about her own sexuality, as well as her place in culture. Menstrual initiation provides young women with guidance in their spiritual journey to become a woman by placing value on their femininity, and their connection with the Natural world, as well as their connection with other women. Young women forge a relationship with the wider cosmos and gain a sense of their own internal rhythms by menstruating in sync with the moon cycle (which can be achieved through regular exposure to the light of full moon). Moreover, adopting animal totems like the butterfly to express the metamorphosis that young women encounter at their first menstruation is extremely important, in terms of facilitating a positive attitude toward menstruation. It expresses the awakening of adolescent sexuality that is usually repressed in Western culture. Menstruation comes to be thought of as an auspicious rite of passage into womanhood when celebrated through initiation. Young women are welcomed into a commonality of shared feminine wisdom. A sense of belonging to a community is fostered, whereby young women are protected and supported by other women.

In a third case study male anthropologist Chris Knight surveys the Australian Aboriginal rituals surrounding menstruation, and reveals that they seem to be commonly associated with the return to a symbolic womb, and are associated with the snake. The Alawa Aboriginals of Western-Central Arnhem Land say that certain mythic females called "Murgamunga girls" become submerged in the identity of their "mother" called "Kadjari" when they go into the water.[192] The girls enter the waterhole and are swallowed by the snake during menstruation, which is going to the other side, that is, "the side of the

[191] Ibid.
[192] Chris Knight, "Chapter Ten: Menstrual Synchronicity and the Australian Rainbow Snake," in *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation*, eds. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 238.

great ancestral 'Mother'. Becoming 'at one' with 'The Mother' in the water, whose all-swallowing uterus is the 'inside' of 'the Snake.'"[193] The merging identity of the snake and the Mother is common in this region, asserts Knight. Certainly, the snake seems to symbolise women's flow and women's connection to a greater whole, that is, a wider cosmological principle presided over by the Mother. Knight goes on to explain that "Another myth – from the Kimberley's – makes clear that to try to detach a woman from 'the snake' is an attempt to sever bonds symbolized not only by water but above all by the presence of *blood*."[194] Being wet and menstruating is to be under guardianship of the serpent.

Menstrual flow and the snake are one and the same in many Aboriginal menstrual tales. Knight finds that the snake in fact encompasses a cosmological principle that cannot be reduced to either a solely masculine, or feminine sexual symbol. Knight argues that the snake is a bisexual principle. Knight proposes that the serpent is a complex concept. He thinks that it points toward the "structural basis of human culture".[195] He speculates, otherwise "Why should snakes and rainbows be used to conceptualise the force behind the changing of the seasons, the movements of the celestial bodies, the breeding times of animals and plants, and the cycles of life, death, and afterlife?"[196] Thus, Knight asserts that the snake connotes a cyclical time and is a metaphor for female periodicity, which connects women's menstrual flow to a wider cosmological principle, as well as their masculine side, as a shared ritual experience amongst women. Romanian historian Mercia Eliade writes that the Rainbow Serpent is able to relate 'to women's mysteries, to sex and blood and after-death existence' because 'this structure has permitted the Rainbow Serpent to unite the opposites."[197]

Lastly, Knight reveals that men's subincision practices mimic women's blood rites and are conducted in order to gain "ritual power." During men's subincision practices the young men go through a ritual re-birth and are symbolically brought through a "collective

[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid., 240
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid., 244
[197] Ibid., 243

womb."[198] "The original womb is depicted to the uninitiated as having been a monstrous, cannibalistic Mother or Snake, always thirsty for blood."[199] Interestingly, when the men adapt these rituals for their own purposes the womb becomes an horrific threat that must be overcome, or conquered. Knight reports that, according to the Yolngu men, all dreaming belongs to women, and the men had to trick the women to learn the dreamings. Thus, we have here a direct representation of the distortion of women's blood rites when taken into the hands of men, whereby the womb becomes a fearful entity, a serpentine Mother hungry for blood, reminiscent of the Medusa.

The Australian Aboriginal practice of menstrual rituals, relating to the return to a symbolic womb, can be extremely helpful to women in the West, in terms of reconnecting them with a sense of the divine mother represented by the snake. By engaging in actual physical ritual practices of entering water as a group and connecting with the totemic power of the snake, women gain a stronger sense of their femininity. In this context the snake represents the divine mother and thus menstrual knowledge and power, as well as women's connection with the opposite in themselves, a bisexual principle, and indeed the wider cosmos. In fact, it might be useful to engage in various other menstrual rituals that provide a connection with the divine Mother, through a symbolic connection with other elemental powers such earth, air, and fire. These rituals would necessarily be conducted on the borders of culture in the company of women exclusively. They would serve to enrich women's spirituality through shared ritual experience, as well as women's connection with Nature. Of course, other anthropological accounts of women's menstrual rituals must be researched. Moreover, fieldwork with various groups of women who participate in menstrual rituals needs to be carried out in order to learn gynocratic traditions that facilitate a spiritual connection between women, Nature, and culture, which is positive for women.

Through reading the three case studies in *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation* I have sought to uncover a positive dimension of the menstrual taboo that represents a female view of menstrual rituals in Indigenous cultures, and which proves extremely valuable to women in the West. Traditional Yurok culture revealed that

[198] Ibid., 250
[199] Ibid.

menstruation is potentially a time of female power that should be focused in meditation for the accumulation of spiritual energy, rather than being allowed to remain undirected into useful, or important tasks. The monthly ritual of accumulating spiritual energy over the course of time serves to strengthen women and fosters a positive identification with their bodies, and Nature, as well as creating group bonds between women. Moreover, I have suggested that the expression of women's connection to their menstrual cycle and Nature using artistic and poetic mediums is extremely important, towards the forging of positive depictions of female sexuality in Western culture. Furthermore, such practices might help end the current epidemic of PMS that treats menstruation as an illness, and women as potentially neurotic.

I have argued that Temne culture reveals the danger of negative masculine influence in women's menstrual rituals, given that as part of Bondo adolescent girls are expected to go through partial, or total chlitorechtomy. This initiation practice is totally unacceptable for females. However, as I have revealed there are positive aspects of Bondo that connects women's menstruation to lunar cycles, which is also observed in Yurok culture. The notion of forging female solidarity through ritual menstrual practices is also demonstrated through Bondo. Moreover, when women congregate together through shared sacred practice they become more powerful through positive group action, and come to relate to their bodies as a source of sacred power. Finally, I have shown that the Australian Alawa Aboriginal's reiterate the cosmological connection forged through periodicity. The use of animal totems that symbolise women's sexual transformation such as the snake serves to further relate women's menstrual cycles to the Natural world in a positive way. I have revealed that with the Alawa peoples we see the building up of female ritual power through the observance of menstrual rituals. Surely women in the West need to take stock of these menstrual taboos that on the whole honour, protect, and nurture women's menstrual cycle, as well as foster a beautiful connection to the Natural world, and the divine Mother. Whilst it seems obvious to point out that women must be wary of adopting any menstrual taboos, such as chlitorechtomy that is a completely brutalisation of women. A positive interpretation of the menstrual taboo in the West free of male influence would engender a direct line of filiations between mother and daughter, which reinstitutes a sacred oracle of femininity to culture.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have surveyed several Indigenous cultures that bear traces of gynocratic traditions, which may have been, certainly in the case of Bondo, infiltrated by the dominant phallic power, through which nevertheless provide invaluable insight into menstrual rituals. I uncover mostly positive ritual practices surrounding women's periodicity that engenders a sacred connection to the Natural world, and which has historically been the domain of the sorceress. I have warned against the perils of allowing menstrual rituals that are harmful to women. It has been my intention to resuscitate a concept of feminine Nature that has been repressed in the West, and to reclaim a concept of the menstrual taboo in positive terms, whereby it denotes a commonality of experience amongst women who share menstrual experience, as well as facilitate women's connection to the cosmos, and invigorate female spirituality. I have attempted to build up a template of menstrual rituals conducted by Indigenous women, in order to provide directions for women in the West. Indeed, I have sought to encourage women in the West to write their premenstrual and menstrual selves and open up to their emotional life through the observance of menstrual rituals. I hope that women will engage with this practice and share it culturally with other women. This will have the effect of changing negative attitudes to women's menstruation in the West.

Conclusion: “The blood jet is poetry, there is no stopping it.”

Figure 6

an errant meaning

emitted from the pages of history

a currency born in blood work

a tongue of woman

made from deluge monologue

arrived from the inside

from under the fleshes of woman

her fleshes are unfurling

swollen emissions

she is a libation flowing

from an ancient blood room

her sacred mantra spills

a soft wet membrane

a sweet wet pain fruit

like a slippery sun

her monthly resurrection

flies up from seminal depths

is a primordial flow

made of portent sea lava

made of animal conjugation

made of volcanic rock haunting

her lightness clings to the earth

is an ingrained meter

of poetic things

her purer vein of unnamed

gleans sustenance from silence

her women's silent past

is an immense psychic discharge

a thorough human compendium

of woman love[200]

[200] Natalie Rose Dyer, Untitled poem, Unpublished, 2010.

This thesis has been an exploration of an aspect of femininity that is not a closed book. Currently in academia, as in the broader community, menstruation tends to be quite taboo; an unpopular topic for discussion. I have called for a re-investigation of the menstrual taboo based on the fact that menstruation has been constructed culturally as a curse, and it is in these terms that the menstrual taboo functions, to the detriment of women who it impacts. The cultural manifestation of menstruation as a curse seems to have arisen from the view that menstruation is a threat to masculinity and the dominant patriarchy of the West. Moreover, this plays out in the discourse of Freudian psychoanalysis that tells us the story of menstrual repression in the West through the idea of female castration, whereby women are potentially a monstrous threat to society.

In chapter one of this thesis I provided a close reading of Freud's text on femininity to reveal Freud's view of menstruating women as potential castrators, who are themselves castrated. I showed that Freud is unaware of the menstrual presence in his text on femininity, since he doesn't connect castration with feminine bleeding. I uncovered that Freud is victim to the mechanism of taboo. A mechanism that he thinks is firmly linked to the unconscious. The implications of placing women on the side of the unconscious impulse alongside all that is primitive, animalistic, and consequently a threat to civilization, because of their monthly bloods means that menstruation remains attached to this psychoanalytical understanding of taboo. I found that under these circumstances menstruation is an unconscious process closely related to neurosis. I argued that this concept of menstruation is damaging to women, which is my major reason for reopening the investigation into the menstrual taboo in this thesis. Women who menstruate must not be considered potentially neurotic because it is damaging to their sense of self, and is therefore extremely disempowering. Moreover, it seemed important to me to expose the damaging construct of feminine "nature" that Freud puts forward in his discourse on psychoanalysis, which has been forged in accordance with the dominant phallocentric culture. Aligning the feminine with "nature" is damaging because women's reproductive processes are pushed to the boundaries of culture, marginalised, and controlled by the dominant patriarchy. Thus, I have argued for a positive rethinking of the menstrual taboo towards the rebuilding of a feminine Nature, which is empowering for women, is articulated by women, and is controlled by women.

Through my investigation of Freud's Oedipus complex I found that he views women as perplexing, Sphinx like creatures, whose sexual difference is so unfathomable that it has been buried in the "vaginal cave" of culture, where it must remain. Theorist Jane Lupton points out that menstruation has been hidden culturally to such an extent that it has become a "red wound" at the very centre of female sexuality.[201] Lupton finds that menstruation has been pushed to the very boundaries of cultural life in the West, and is generally disguised, or not mentioned at all, in the course of social life. If "man" is never fully civilized, as Freud would have us believe, then women's menstrual processes are a constant reminder of the primal urge, the "other" hemisphere of human meaning, the inhospitable "nature" that must be contained, in order to safeguard the male dominated society in which we live. This elaborate construction of femininity as "other" marginalises women and makes women out to be potentially monstrous. Thus, I have argued that Freud's Oedipal scenario has a "menstrual complex" at its very heart, which I have attempted to further investigate, in order to subvert the notion of the monstrous feminine.[202] Uncovering the primal menstruating mother of the Oedipus complex has therefore been my focal point of enquiry in this thesis.

I went on to point out that the concept of the menstrual complex comes from Freudian theorist Claude Dagmar Daly. Daly's extremely valuable identification of Freud's neglect of the menstrual taboo and apparent lack of interest in the ambivalence directed towards the mother culturally, provided me with a direct link to the monstrous feminine. For Daly the primal mother of the Oedipus complex remains buried in the unconscious because of her monstrousness, her potential animalisms, her primal qualities, which all relates to her horrific bleeding genitals. Lupton comments that Daly theorises the Hindu Goddess Kali as a bleeding mother and as a "psychoanalytical symbol for menstruating women."[203] Unfortunately, Daly interpreted Kali as a phallic mother as Lupton points out, which is an obvious attempt to deny the female genitals.[204] Moreover, according to Daly Kali is a castrating mother. Thus, the menstruating mother becomes an incarnation of the "vagina

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[201] Mary Jane Lupton, *Menstruation and Psychoanalysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1993), 10.
[202] Freudian theorist Claude Dagmar Daly invented the concept of the menstrual complex. He considered the figure of the menstruating mother to be the tabooed primal mother of the Oedipus complex, yet he also considered her to be potentially monstrous in line with Freud's view. Moreover, he theorised her as a phallic mother.
[203] Mary Jane Lupton, *Menstruation and Psychoanalysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1993), 8.
[204] Ibid., 117

dentata." [205] Despite his problematic depiction of the phallic menstruating mother who castrates men, Daly supports my argument that menstrual experience will be discovered in any number of myths, fairytales, films, and literary sources. An example would be to conduct an in depth reading of the Grimm fairytales. This opens the way for cultural stories to be read for menstrual significance. Indeed, I chose to read the cultural story of Freudian psychoanalysis in this thesis in order to flesh out the monstrous menstruating mother.

It has been for the purpose of further uncovering and critiquing the phenomenon of the monstrous menstruating mother, as well as to forge a positive interpretation of the menstruating mother through the creation of a feminine imaginary, that I sought out the writings of French feminist theorists Julia Kristeva, Lucy Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous. These theorists have critiqued Freud's neglect of female sexuality in his discourse on psychoanalysis. Kristeva's work on abjection provided an entry point into re-thinking the monstrous maternal figure. She reveals that menstrual fluids, alongside other bodily fluids considered to be filthy culturally, can be theorised as an instance of ritual defilement, which occurs beyond the symbolic system. Whilst Kristeva explores the menstruating mother and her imaginary transitions through the concept of the abject, she also believes that the menstruating mother is a negative influence to the subject formation of young women. To counter Kristeva's argument, I put forward my view that the menstruating mother offers a potentially positive and sacred feminine knowledge, which has been repressed in Western culture, and which must be expressed through the writing of a feminine imaginary. Therefore I found that the mother's imaginary world does not pose the threat of neurosis, or mental disorder. Rather, she brings the hope of a feminine discourse on menstruation.

I then turned to the work of Irigaray to further critique the monstrous menstruating mother. She reveals that within the discourse of psychoanalysis the feminine exists purely inside of a masculine teleological framework. She gives further evidence that the feminine resides on the side of the unconscious, alongside all that is primal, animalistic, and potentially a monstrous threat to civilisation. In Freudian terms femininity is a

[205] Ibid., 111

monstrous pit of culture that can only function within what is ostensibly a discourse of male sexuality, which masquerades as a theory of human sexuality. Irigaray calls for women to define their own sexuality against such negative psychoanalytical interpretation of femininity. Irigaray doesn't directly identify the monstrous menstruating mother of the Oedipus complex as a deeply problematic depiction of an aspect of female sexuality. I argued that Irigaray is reluctant to delve into the maternal, since she argues that women must distinguish their own sexuality from the maternal. Certainly, Irigaray's position is important, yet I pointed out that it is within the terrifying depiction of the castrated mother, within this reductive matrixial concept of the monstrous feminine, that another femininity is to be found. It is the story of the menstruating mother. Thus, I sought to journey right into the "so called" abyss of the feminine to find a depiction of the menstruating mother that is positive for women. In this undertaking I adopted the figure of the Medusa to get me there.

Cixous helped me to re-think the space of feminine "nature" that has been thought a potentially monstrous space of femininity, mythically enshrined in the escapades of the Medusa, who has the power to castrate men. Through Cixous' critique of Freud's reading of the Medusa I argued that menstruation is a valuable feminine experience, not a threat to female subjectivity. The menstruation that Freud defines through absentia, deemed peripheral to the formation of the psyche, turns out to be of great importance to female consciousness, and hence human consciousness. Freud sees the Medusa as a castrator of men who is castrated, though he doesn't recognise her bleeding genitals to be a reference to menstruation. Against Freud's view I argued that Medusa becomes a voice of women's menstruation, even whilst she doubly exists as the absolute epitome of male sexual repulsion. Thus, I took up Cixous call to challenge Freud's view and reappropriate the Medusa as a beautiful arbiter of female sexuality, who has the power to disrupt the male symbolic system through writing. Whilst Cixous doesn't connect the Medusa and menstruation explicitly, she does connect the Medusa with the menstrual metaphor of female flow.

I put forward the view that menstruation is the act of becoming a woman, which women perform monthly, and in doing so orchestrate their sexual difference. Women menstruate

in order to gain access to a source of feminine vitality and flow. I suggested that this must be articulated at the level of culture if women are to express the full gamut of their human experience. The writing of the feminine imaginary by women in relation to menstruation constitutes a positive space of taboo controlled by women, which is sacred. The importance of drawing out a feminine imaginary in poetry, literature, and myth, in order to glean menstrual phenomena, constitutes the possibility of expressing an authentic female sexuality. This is how I came to re-appropriate the figure of the Medusa in accordance with Cixous's understanding of the Medusa as beautiful, rather than monstrous. I looked at various retellings of the Medusa myth, in order to reconstruct the myth of the Medusa as a positive maternal figure who menstruates. I showed that the Gorgons head possess sacred and magical powers that women must reappropriate and write about. In fact, I uncovered that the Medusa is a sorceress who can invoke the forces of Nature, which led me to delve deeper into the concept of the sorceress.

In further pursuit of the monstrous menstruating mother in Western culture I sought to read the hysteric, located within the discourse of Freudian psychoanalysis in the second chapter of this thesis. I found evidence to support my claim that the hysteric has been historically split off from the sorceress. The sorceress presides over an important aspect of feminine Nature relating to women's reproductive power, and specifically menstruation, which has been considered to be an aspect of feminine "nature" associated with mental disorder, and specifically hysteria, in the West. Thus, I sought to re-examine the hysteric in psychoanalysis for links to the sorceress, in order to uncover a feminine Nature that is empowering to women, and to forge a positive space of the menstrual taboo. I showed that Freud first uncovered links between the hysteric and the sorceress, but it is the French feminist theorist Catherine Clément who actually pursues and makes transparent this connection. She finds that the sorceress has been associated with a space of potential feminine disorder, on the fringes of society, which is dually the site of women's anomalous reproductive power. I took Clément's research further by firstly investigating the link between the hysteric and the sorceress, and secondly by examining the space of anomalous reproductive power that the sorceress presides over.

I defined the hysteric in relation to Freudian psychoanalysis and found that a "foreign body" that is also referred to by Feud as a possession, rises up in the hysteric during their "illness," which directly relates hysteria to sorcery. I sought to define what constitutes this "foreign body" that rises up in the hysteric in relation to shamanism, which is also called sorcery, by reading the case study of Anna O, whose real name is Bertha Pappenheim. I argued that Pappenheim's "illness" can also be read as a shamanic call to power, that is undertaken by the wounded healer in order to become them selves a shaman, or sorcerer. I argued this in light of Pappenheim's total recovery and key role as feminist activist in her native Germany. I pointed out that it is impossible to read Pappenheim's case history for menstrual signification, since her physician Joseph Breuer did not record the content of her actually hallucinations. However, my focus was to intimately connect the hysteric with the sorceress, in order to build on Clément's research, and to further relate the sorceress to an anomalous female reproductive power, which I then went on to elaborate.

I used the work of French anthropologist Marcel Mauss to argue that it is precisely because women are marginalised during pivotal times in their sexual development such as at menstruation, during pregnancy, at childbirth, and during menopause, which makes them the practitioners of magic. I found that the ritual gathering of women in secrecy on the borders of society, which occurs during the observation of menstrual rituals, is classified as the practice of magic. Consequently, women who gather during menstruation are potentially sorceresses, and thus all potentially labelled neurotics, and/or hysterics. I argued that the ritual magic associated with menstruation threatens the dominant religion, which has historically been dominated by Christianity in the West. I called for women to re-identify themselves with the sorceress and articulate their reproductive power specifically in relation to menstruation. Moreover, I encouraged women to investigate the sorceress throughout history and re-tell her story, for the purpose of elaborating a positive, and empowering concept of feminine Nature. Thus, I used French writer Jules Michelet's writings on the sorceress to elaborate an aspect of feminine Nature, relating to women's reoccurring periods of magical power, which threaten the dominant religion. I further related this re-telling of the sorceress to the castigation of witches during the Middle Ages.

Finally, I looked to ethnographies of Indigenous cultures that observe menstrual taboos recorded in more recent times, frequently by women, in order to gain a more accurate account of menstrual rituals, as well as for the purpose of reclaiming a positive dimension of this aspect of feminine Nature, and the menstrual taboo for women. I researched accounts of menstrual seclusion rituals taken from *Blood Magic; The Anthropology of Menstruation* because the text largely represents a female view of menstrual seclusion practices. Thus, I sought to obtain a positive concept of the menstrual taboo that offers women a rich source of gynocratic tradition on which to build, and through which women can articulate their own menstrual imaginaries. However, I did warn of the oppressive nature of some menstrual seclusion practices that indicates patriarchal influence in some cases of the menstrual taboo, which is totally unacceptable to women.

I found that the menstrual ritual of menstrual seclusion observed in the Indigenous cultures of the Yurok of California, the Temne of the Sierra Leone, and the Alawa Aboriginals of Western-Central Arnhem Land in Australia, are extremely useful to women in the West for the purpose of forging a positive dimension of the menstrual taboo, which distinguishes a sacred space of feminine knowledge. To draw together my findings in a brief summary I found that meditating to accumulate spiritual power during menstruation is extremely beneficial, since it serves to strengthen women's connection to their own bodies, the Natural world, as well as with other women. Moreover, I suggested that the expression of menstrual flow through poetic mediums can be practiced at this time, in order to articulate this important aspect of female sexuality, which has been neglected, at the level of culture. In my view this would help counteract the phenomenon of PMS that links menstruation to potential illness. By way of concluding this thesis I would like to elaborate on the idea of women articulating their menstrual flow at the level of culture, which opens up to future directions for my research. However, it seems important to firstly point out the arrogance of Western discourse that has treated Indigenous cultures as objects of study, as opposed to treating Indigenous cultures as models of difference, which are potentially extremely helpful to the world in general.

Call for a menstrual dialectic:

What is needed is to assign "value" to women's menstruation at the level of culture, since the assertion of a genuine space of feminine Nature is at stake. In *The Curse* Delaney, Lupton, and Toth refer to a "menstrual dialectic" at work through women's rhythms. They call for women to become aware of these rhythms in the quest for self-knowledge.[206] In support of this position I have called for the forging of a sacred space where women are able to menstruate, and cathartically release an emotional stream of consciousness in poetic writing, essentially recovering women's blood jet, which builds a bridge between feminine Nature and culture. In her poem *Kindness*, taken from her book *Aerial* (1965), Sylvia Plath famously states that "The blood jet is poetry, there is no stopping it."[207] I have argued in this thesis that by writing periodicity in poetic language a concept of feminine Nature, no longer enclosed within the binary construct of the Freudian consciousness that seeks to align women with what is unconscious, and indeed potentially animalistic, dangerous, and contagious, is made available. In fact, we must not limit poetic expression to the act of writing. It is certainly possible for women to use other poetic modes of artistic expression that represent their menstrual experience, such as the plastic arts, and music.

The concept of a menstrual dialectic can also be considered in relation to the writing of Judy Grahn who investigates "the female origins of the power of blood" in her text *Blood, Bread and Roses; How Menstruation Created the World* (1993). She argues that "women's logic must lie at the base of menstrual rites" such as seclusion practices and other initiation practices of the pre-patriarchal epoch.[208] It is the development of patriarchal power relations that obfuscates a menstrual logic, and seeks to reconstruct this vital aspect of female sexuality as a negative periodic episode, which is related to taboo. As I have already argued, taboo has been attached to menstruation in a negative sense in the West as a means of repressing this vital feminine experience. Grahn reveals that menstrual rituals give rise to a feminine imaginary that has the power to "switch" our

[206] Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth, *The Curse; A Cultural History of Menstruation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 94-5.
[207] Sylvia Plath, *Ariel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 83.
[208] Judy Grahn, *Blood, Bread and Roses; How Menstruation Created the World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 4.

minds back to the pre-patriarchal epoch when menstrual rituals were valued. She therefore reclaims the concept of the menstrual taboo for the purpose of feminine empowerment. Grahn calls for a new "dia logos" based on the belief that menstruation is the original measurement which entrains poetic metaphor.[209]

In my view a dialectic of menstrual experience based on this idea of a menstrual logic enables a pathway of thought undeniably linked to the shamanic.

> Miriam Van Waters, among others, shows that if a woman becomes a shaman or a priestess in a culture that recognizes such functionaries, she is able to do so because she has developed a special relationship with the 'spirits' of menstruation.[210]

Women in the West largely don't have the opportunity to develop their shamanic abilities, or witchiness. Menstruation offers a language of femininity, an imagistic, erotic language relating to "prelogical thought" that is related to the language of dreams and poetry.[211] Certainly, it appears that a lot of young women are not really interested in cultivating this awareness. The reason for their lack of interest is that women are actually unaware of the personal power and self-knowledge, which is available to them through menstruating. Instead, menstrual knowledge is repressed and associated with neurosis.

In addition to the writing of one's own menstrual experience a dialectic of menstrual experience can be forged through reading cultural materials as I have done in relation to Freudian psychoanalysis. In *The Curse*, Delaney, Lupton, and Toth look for the expression of menstruation in literature, poetry, and fairytales in which they find an extensive representation of menstruation. They explore the Brothers Grimm tales of witches as castrating mothers, revealing that menstrual themes are often channelled through witchy mother figures, to the "pubertal trials" of young maidens.[212] Other descriptions of menstruation include:

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[209] Ibid., 278
[210] Peter Redgrove and Penelope Shuttle, *The Wise Wound; Menstruation and Everywoman*, Revised Edition (London: Collins Publishing Group,1976), 94.
[211] Ibid., 99
[212] Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth, *The Curse; A Cultural History of Menstruation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 186-199.

> …sickness, mud, volcanoes, the arrival of a visitor, bathing, dumping garbage, falling from a high place, odors, leakages, stains, clocks, swamps, rags, tamps, tidal rhythms, and the colours red, pink, and purple. But the most universal images are flowers, fluid, witches and the moon.[213]

They ask women to "embrace the blood" by enunciating it.[214] Thus, our attention is re-drawn to the red matter that flows in accordance with the lunar cycle, which offers a profound connection to the Natural world, and which must be expressed by women culturally. Further research on the menstrual taboo should therefore attempt to build a dialectic of menstrual experience by reading cultural materials for menstrual signification.

In closing I would like to reiterate that there is a culture that is uniquely feminine and it exists in close proximity to a threshold of Nature, which women need to claim. It is not a space of biological determinism. It is a body of woman that women are free to inhabit, to identify with in a physical sense, and/or a theoretical sense, which is how I have engaged with this body of woman in this thesis. I have sought to re-circulate the concept of Nature in proximity to women as cultural actors free to perform their own femininity. I have focused on menstruation as an important aspect of femininity that can be re-thought in proximity to a concept of Nature, not as source of the "other," or as mode of male reproduction, and so on, as Haraway has pointed out to us. Women have been scared of identifying with their Natural cycle because of the interests of phallocentrism, which have attempted to value women merely in terms of their reproductive abilities. This thesis has been an exploration of the negative implications of aligning women with a discourse of reproductive power that makes women into potentially neurotic, animalistic, and potentially monstrous people on account of their menstrual cycle. I have argued that there is a useful dimension of reproductive power available to women associated with a positive interpretation of the menstrual taboo, which seeks to provide women with a sacred space of femininity, in which to articulate their emotional life, to cultivate their own power, to connect with a wider cosmological principle of creation, as well as provide bonds with other women. Of course, in order to reclaim this positive dimension of the menstrual taboo women must be highly critical of any negative menstrual taboos that

[213] Ibid., 187
[214] Ibid., 282

exist in the West. I will end this thesis with one of my poems, which is an attempt on my part to forge a menstrual dialectic, in response to my own Natural cycle.

I am the carcass eater

caressing the crescent

my moon syntagm

I sit in a dark room

spinning Ariadne threads

my loom is archaic

I am wet with vast

decidua shedding

calling on women's legend

I am a soldier of truncated depths

weaving into the unknown

words like psyche strands

these unknown poetries of woman

that quilt the cosmos

are unmarked territories

of becoming a woman
unravelling now

a bold truth

splitting on the earth

making fruitful

dirt and bone song

a prayer

of diaphanous woman

annihilating all tawdry thought

all machination of human otherness

having become other in the truer sense

not other of man

rather a siren of song

sucking on the ether

with my iris tongue

sucking into sound

the first words spoken

on my blood tip

a red oration of womankind

a fluid time

my jocular truths cut

underground

a watery wet

a tender body

grown dark

around my throat

like a bravery chalice

my artery of anomaly

is the precious flood

my daily resurrection

I am a practitioner of inner dictum

my moon wisdom swells like meaning

my lament is a cacophony of woman's lost prisms

inside my cavernous walls

my blood song is in full swing

is midwife of creation

my human trope

is in accord with an unmade nature

a not order of things

a figuration

an emerging sound

slithering up the channels of sound

my choral moans

my feeling words

my ancient bloodline

a riverbed twisting and turning for catharsis

a mountain gleaning archaic winds

a whip smart tree that spawns exegesis

my blood belt is pure

is singing and pouring out

an elderly woman

a dark canalisation of mind

a fevered thought

a bridge to the sacred

through the divination channels

up the psyche

a galloping horse[215]

[215] Natalie Rose Dyer, Untitled poem, Unpublished, 2010.

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