

Heide Goettner-Abendroth

Matriarchal Politics. The Vision of an Egalitarian Society

Matriarchies are not just a reversal of patriarchy, with women ruling over men – as the usual misinterpretation would have it. Matriarchies are mother-centered societies, they are based on *maternal values*: care-taking, nurturing, motherliness, mutual support, peace building by negotiation etc., which holds for everybody: for mothers and those who are not mothers, for women and men alike. Matriarchal societies are consciously built upon the maternal values and motherly work, and this is why they are much more realistic than patriarchies. They are, on principle, need-oriented and not power-oriented. Their precepts aim to meet everyone's needs with the greatest benefit. So, in matriarchies, motherhood – which originates as a biological fact – is transformed into a *cultural model*.¹

This is the subject of Modern Matriarchal Studies, which investigates and presents matriarchal societies in past and present found all over the world.² Contrary to common belief, none of these is a mere reversal of patriarchy. Rather, they are all gender-egalitarian societies, and most of them are fully egalitarian. This means they have no hierarchies, classes nor domination of one gender by the other. With matriarchal cultures, equality means more than just a levelling of differences. Natural differences between the genders and the generations are respected and honoured, but they never serve to create hierarchies, as is common in patriarchy.³ The different genders and generations have their own dignity, and through complementary areas of activity, they function in concert to one another. This can be observed on all levels of society: the social level, the economic level, the political level and the areas of their worldviews and faiths.

It is becoming increasingly clear that this radically different cultural model of matriarchy will have great significance for the future of women and mothers, and of humankind in general. Therefore, I would like to make suggestions for new mother-centered and egalitarian societies to explain what new matriarchal societies could look like. Of course, we cannot imitate traditional matriarchal societies, but we can gain much stimulation and insights from them, which – unlike abstract utopias –

¹ Heide Goettner-Abendroth: "Matriarchal Society: Definition and Theory", in: Genevieve Vaughan (ed.), *The Gift*, Rome, 2004, Meltemi (Athamor Books).

² Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Matriarchal Societies. Studies on Indigenous Cultures across the Globe*, New York 2012/2013, Peter Lang Publishing.

³ Heide Goettner-Abendroth (ed.): *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future (Selected papers of the First and Second World Congresses on Matriarchal Studies 2003 and 2005)*, Toronto 2009, Inanna Press, York University.

have been lived over millennia. For all, who are looking to implement new matriarchal patterns, my suggestions can be the starting point. It needs a clear vision which can give a clear guidance to make the subsequent practice lasting and powerful.

My suggestions refer to new matriarchal microstructures, matriarchal macrostructures, and matriarchal global structures.

1. Microstructures⁴

At the *social level*, the model of matriarchy means escaping the increasing fragmentation of society, which drags human beings down into a state of separation and loneliness, and renders them sick and destructive. Rather, it means developing structures that foster various types of *affinity, or intentional, communities*, such as communes, alliances of neighboring communities, and networks. Affinity communities, however, are not created from mere communities of interest – entities that rapidly come together and quickly fall apart. Rather, affinity communities arise from a spiritual-intellectual common ground, through which a symbolic clan develops, resulting in a group that is more deeply connected than a mere community of interest.

The matriarchal principle here is that such affinity groups are generally *initiated, supported and led by women*. The determining criteria are the needs of women and children, who are the future of humanity, rather than the power-and-virility aspirations of men. In the new matri-clans men will be fully integrated, but according to a different value system, that is, one based on reciprocal care and love, rather than on power.

It would be a political goal to support the development of such communities in every way. Many of them are already existing, as the new *Communities Movement* can show us.⁵ Affinity communities of different kind are spreading in Europe and the USA and at other places. Unfortunately, they are usually not led by women, the result of which is that the traditional gender-roles are not reflected and overcome, i.e. men as the givers of ideas and founders are still at the center. To overcome traditional gender-roles, the diverse new *Feminist Movements* and the *Matriarchal Movement* are of utmost importance. They dismantle the deeply rooted patriarchal sexism and create models to bring it to an end everywhere in society.

At the *economic level*, further increase in large-scale industry, in expanding military, and in so-called “standard of living” would not be possible, considering the danger of complete destruction of the biosphere, of the life on earth. Here the perspective of alternative, local and regional subsistence economy arises, for the subsistence perspective means economic independence of the people. Subsistence entities engage in self-sufficient and independent activities in which quality of life takes precedence over quantity.

⁴ See for more details of matriarchal microstructures: Heide Göttner-Abendroth: *Der Weg zu einer egalitären Gesellschaft. Prinzipien und Praxis der Matriarchatspolitik*, Klein Jasedow 2008, Drachen Verlag.

⁵ See for ex. on European communities: *Eurotopia*.

This does not only mean doing local gardening and agriculture, but also fostering regional communication, trade, technology and arts. Even producing high technology is possible on the regional level, if the monopolizing by the transnational corporations will be finished. These corporations try to make the peoples of the world dependent not only on their technologies, but also on the very basis of life, which is water and food. This must definitely come to an end!

Regionalization of agriculture, trade, etc. for the benefit of *women and their families or clans* is a matriarchal principle, because they are the basis of human life on earth.

In modern context, the diverse *Ecological Movements* are on the way to this goal.⁶ They are many and they are everywhere. They include the *Movements of Urban Gardening* and of *Transitions Towns*. These movements are complemented by the *Movements for Gift Giving*⁷ with their many gift giving circles, and the *Movement for Regional Currency*,⁸ at which the people of a region use their own interest-free currency to get rid of capitalist money and the manipulations of the international bank businesses.

At the *level of political decision-making*, the matriarchal consensus principle is basic for a truly egalitarian society. It can be practiced here and now, immediately and everywhere. It is the inspiring stimulus for creating any matriarchal community. It establishes a balance between women and men, and also between generations, as the elderly as well as the youth are able to have their say. In addition, it is really the basis of democracy, as it manifests what formal democracies promise but fail to deliver.

According to this principle, the small units of the new matri-clans are the actual decision makers. All the alternative movements mentioned above try to practice this principle more or less, and they have gained lots of experience in this way. To implement the consensus principle in future means to develop a system of councils, smaller and broader, which are all interconnected to make decisions on the communal, local and regional levels. The consensus principle cannot be practiced beyond the region, but in this vision independent, flourishing regions remain the political goal.

At the *spiritual-cultural level*, it is mandatory that all hierarchical religions with belief in transcendent divinities and claims of absolute truth – which have deeply debased the earth, humanity, and especially women – must be rejected. Rather, we are looking at a new *sacralization of the world*, consonant with the matriarchal perspective that the entire world and all what it includes is divine. This leads to freely and creatively honoring and celebrating life and the visible world. In this way, matriarchal spirituality pervades everyday life and becomes a normal part of it.

⁶ See for ex. Brian Dilani, *Designing the Green Economy*, Lanham/Boulder/New York 2000.

⁷ Genevieve Vaughan: *For-Giving, a Feminist Criticism of Exchange*, Austin 1997, Plain View and Anomaly Press; and G. Vaughan (ed.): *Women and the Gift Economy*, Toronto/Canada 2007, Inanna Publications, York University.

⁸ Kennedy Margret, *Geld ohne Zinsen und Inflation*, München 1991, Goldmann

Diverse movements are already on this way, such as the international *Goddess Movement* and the *Movement of Matriarchal Spirituality*, which developed within the Feminist Movements. Many women and some men began to celebrate the cycles of the earth and the cycles of life in many individual ways. There exist no hierarchical order or spiritual head among them, and of course, no missionizing.

One of the most important movements is the *Movement of Indigenous Peoples*, by which diverse indigenous peoples on every continent, starting from their own spiritual traditions which are central to them, claim the rights on their own land, language, and culture. Most of them still preserve matriarchal patterns or, at least, many matriarchal elements, and they continue with them, or re-organize them intentionally.⁹

Thus, maternal values and matriarchal elements are included in all of the mentioned alternative movements, and in many more which have not been mentioned here. But contrary to the Movement of Indigenous Peoples, they are not aware of it. Therefore, it is necessary to make it conscious to them and to bridge the differences between these movements so that they *would start to co-operate*. This co-operation is urgently needed, and the vision of a new matriarchal society, which is all-embracing, might create the bonds.

The fact is even more important that the vision of a new matriarchal society radically changes the perspective, because it does not give remedies to the patriarchal problems, but is transgressing this system.

2. Macrostructures

Regionalism

In a new matriarchal society, “bigger” is not necessarily “better”. The smaller units of society, responsible for engendering person-to-person and transparent politics, are given preference. They must not become so big that people cannot see through them, and cannot participate in their decisions, as is the case in so many of today’s national states and super-powers. But they must be big enough to safeguard their self-sufficiency by a subsistence economy, and the diversity of their handiwork, technologies and arts. The ideal dimension is that of the *region*.

The borders of a region are not random, like national borders are; rather they have developed out of the conditions of the landscape and out of cultural traditions. Regional borders are formed by the decisions of the people themselves who want to live together on the basis of common cultural and spiritual traditions; this avoids any war of culture or of religion. Often the landscape corresponds to these cultural borders, because natural borders can be formed by mountain ranges, rivers, big lakes, or the sea which bound people into their regional places.

A new matriarchal society does not extend beyond its own region; it is a network of communities in villages and of neighborhoods in towns. These are

⁹ See for ex. the Seneca-Iroquois Barbara Mann, *Iroquoian Women. The Gantowisas*, New York 2002, 2004, Peter Lang Publishing

mutually independent village republics and town republics, and as such, the principle of consensus limits the size of towns and cities.

These ideas are formulated in the modern *Movement for Regionalism*, which has been created out of the Communities Movement.

The two faces of society

Humanity is made up of two – men and women. All traditional matriarchal societies have taken this basic fact into account, in that they maintain a social order based on *complementary gender equality* and *perfect balance between the sexes*. A modern matriarchal society will also be set up this way.

This means that in every realm of society women and men are equally represented. In matriarchal politics it is always a woman and a man together, as the chosen speakers for the clan, who represent it in the outside world. That is also true at the levels of village, town, and region: here too, the speakers for the village, town or the whole region are always a woman and a man. They act together, representing the double face of society.

This is true not only in politics, but for every aspect society: for economic functions just as for spiritual offices, as well as for special groups and guilds such as handicraft workers, technicians, artists and scientists. Each post is simultaneously represented by a woman and a man, and so, doubly filled. The female speakers are chosen solely by the women of the clan, the village, the town, the guild, and the male speakers are chosen solely by the men.

Culture and spirituality at the interregional level

Regarding culture at the interregional level, spirituality again is the connecting power. Matriarchal spirituality is not institutionalized and is thus free, but it is not arbitrary. It has a binding foundation for all humankind: Mother Earth and the flow of life.

Although a matriarchal society, as a structure, cannot be constituted beyond the regional level, it can create friendly alliances with other regions. These *interregional associations* are of a purely spiritual kind, and are expressed symbolically. This means that people of neighboring regions might visit each other, giving gifts of friendship, sharing their cultures, and celebrating festivals together in order to learn from each other, without any manipulation to convince the other from one's own way of life. In this way a free, horizontal network of *sister regions* can be created, completely distinct from today's centralist, hierarchal state structures.

In the age of modern communications technologies, especially internet, these cultural and spiritual alliances are not limited to neighboring regions, but can link to other countries and even to other continents. In that way, a sister region in Europe can be associated with a sister region in South America or Africa or the Middle East, and they can share communication and cultural gifts via internet. In this way, interregional associations among matriarchal communities, towns and regions could arise worldwide.

3. Global structures

To solve global problems, these steps from below must nevertheless be supplemented with more comprehensive structures. These are not „above,“ as there is no „above“ in this sense in matriarchal societies; they are simple more comprehensive.

National states no longer fit the bill: they are too big for humane, transparent political processes. At the same time, they are too small to solve global problems that the current patriarchy creates and leaves behind for posterity; this is especially true regarding problems related to advanced destruction of the biosphere on earth. It is no longer possible for national governments, or even regional ones, to solve these problems. They affect all of humanity, so global strategies are needed to solve them.

No more national states

Existing national governments must be dissolved in two directions: on one hand, in the direction of the autonomous regions, which are the basis for life; on the other hand, in the direction of a global structure with a purely executive status which has no state power. Such a structure could be a Global Council, which will be formed by the two halves of a *Women's Global Council* and a *Men's Global Council*. Today, the U.N.O. tries to form such a global council, but because of its patriarchal structure which excludes the issues of women and of many peoples, and because of the power plays of the super-powers on this level, fails to fulfill its ideals. They just continue the patriarchal status quo.

New distribution of national wealth

An initial and fundamental challenge is therefore to dissolve the financial wealth of each national state, first to the regions, and in the regions to the communities. Of course, it does not mean that the money goes to individuals or patriarchal institutions, rather it is only distributed for *matriarchal communities*. Exactly half of this wealth, that is 50 %, must go to women and the other half, that is 50 %, must go to the men of the communities, and not more to the men, as it is common in patriarchy. In that way, each sex can develop their respective area of the society and region. As there is already a double-occupancy of every agency in a new matriarchal society, this can be independently accomplished by each sex.

However, this money is not a paying for motherhood and women's work – which in fact cannot be paid –, but it belongs to them as half of humanity. It is their modest share for all what women had done for free through long periods of time. This equitable division of wealth would enable women to stop begging for state aid, which for them is notoriously scanty anyway. And it should start just now for women's communal and cultural projects!

The constant social and economic unbalance in which all of today's national states find themselves would come to an end. The current horrendous flow of money into male projects – the military, multinational corporations, monumental prestige-buildings and ego-architecture, huge sports stadiums and events costing hundreds of millions of dollars – means that there is nothing left but pitifully small amounts for social services, as women are expected to provide these for free. It is the usual situation of exploiting women. With the equal division of financial national wealth, women would probably establish infrastructures to fulfil social needs, with the likely result that communities, healthcare, culture and education would flourish. And

women would establish their own schools and universities, because their knowledge is never respected in patriarchal societies. But even men are not free to do what they want with their share of money, for the projects of women and men in the communities and regions would be agreed upon by the local and regional consensus councils, according to maternal values.

Global structures for global problems

The other direction in which the public wealth of national states should be dissolved would be the structures of the Women's Global Council and the Men's Global Council. An agreed-upon percentage of women's and men's wealth from all the regions would go to these two halves of the Global Council, conducted by delegates of both sexes. The Global Council's assets would be used exclusively to solve the global problems of the polluted air and water and soil and the damaged life on earth, that means, to clean up the technology-caused legacy of pollution by military powers and industrial corporations.

Members of the Women's Global Council and the Men's Global Council are always elected delegates from each region, and are responsible to their region; they have no power to make decisions independently of their region's determinations. They moderate and coordinate the decisions of all regions of the world in precisely the same sense that a regional or local council coordinates the decisions of the matri-clans.

With these structures, what we call a "state" dissolves, regardless of whether it is a monarchy, an autocracy, a so-called democratic national state, an empire or a super-power. The concept and image of the hierarchical "state," no matter how constituted, have become redundant. Patriarchal history of established domination began with the formation of "states" every time. With the development of new matriarchal societies, which are free of domination, a new, humane history of cultures could begin.

(Translation by Karen Smith)

Biographical Notes

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born in Thuringia, Germany, in 1941, is a mother and a grandmother. She earned her Ph.D. in philosophy and theory of science at the

University of Munich, where she taught philosophy for ten years (1973-1983).

She has published extensively on matriarchal society and culture, and through her lifelong research on matriarchal societies has become the founder of modern Matriarchal Studies. She lectured in Europe and abroad, and her main work **Matriarchal Societies. Studies on Indigenous Cultures across the Globe** (Peter Lang, New York 2013) has been published in German, English, Italian, Spanish, and French.

She has been visiting professor at the University of Montreal in Canada, and at the University of Innsbruck in Austria.

In 1986, she founded the “**International Academy HAGIA** for Modern Matriarchal Studies and Matriarchal Spirituality” in Germany, and since then has been its director. There, she is doing her research and teachings, and since the beginning of the academy, she is celebrating and teaching the festivals of matriarchal spirituality.

In 2003, she organized and guided the “1st World Congress on Matriarchal Studies” in Luxembourg; in 2005, the “2nd World Congress on Matriarchal Studies” in Texas/USA (together with G. Vaughan); in 2011, the “World Congress on Matriarchal Politics” in Switzerland (together with the women-representatives of the Academy HAGIA).

In 2005, she was elected by the international initiative “1000 Peace Women Across the Globe” as a nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 2012, she received the Saga-award for her scholarship from “The Association for the Study of Women & Mythology” in San Francisco.

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