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## **Principles of Sustainable Societies: Matriarchy as a Radical Alternative**

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### **Some words at the beginning**

Most of the discussions about sustainability are focused on a sustainable economy, called “ecology”. The question is not raised, what a sustainable society would look like? Instead it is ignored that the economy is not independent from its special form of society. However, in each society the most important factor are humans, for by their way of economy, they are changing the Earth to the greatest part, be it to the better or from bad to worse. It is thus crucial which model of society people have in mind.

Here, we can see the necessary connection between economy and research on cultures. Today, it is of utmost importance that we learn from sustainable societies, that means, the egalitarian-matriarchal form of society which is based on a sustainable economy. In matriarchal societies the basic group of life: mothers-children-Earth, is at the centre. This is valid in all existing Indigenous matriarchal societies, of which some still exist across the globe. They maintain the balance between the genders, the generations, and humans and Nature.

Let us have a closer look at this.

### **1. Part: Matriarchies as mother-centred societies**

Matriarchies are not just a reversal of patriarchy, with women ruling over men – as the usual misinterpretation would have it. Matriarchies are mother-centred societies, because they respect motherhood as the most important function in society. They are based on maternal values which have been taken from the behaviour of the prototypical mother: nurturing, care-taking, integrative attitude, mutual assistance, perfect balance, solving conflicts by negotiation, peace building. These values hold for everybody: for mothers and those who are not mothers, for women and men alike.

Matriarchal societies are consciously built upon these maternal values and motherly work, and this is why they are much more realistic than patriarchies.

They are, on principle, need-oriented. Their precepts aim to meet everyone's needs with the greatest benefit. Therefore, in matriarchies, motherhood – which originates as a biological fact – is transformed into a *cultural model*.

Maternal values pervade all areas of a matriarchal society what can be observed at the social level, the economic level, the political level, and the cultural level.

*At the social level*, matriarchal societies are based on the clan, which is led by the eldest clan mother. All clan members are her daughters and sons, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren; they live together in a large kinship group formed according to the principles of *matrilineality* and *matrilocality*. These principles put mothers at the center, and they guide their clans without ruling, by integrating the diversity of gender, age, abilities, and needs of the clan members.

In order to achieve social relationship among the clans of a village or town, complex marriage conventions have been developed that link them in mutually beneficial ways. This shapes a society where each community sees itself as a big clan, so that everybody is “mother” or “sister” or “brother” to everybody else. These relationships represent a mutual assistance system, where no-one granting help from above is needed. In that way a non-hierarchical, horizontal society of matrilineal kinship is created.

However, they understand this order not in terms of sociology, but of spirituality. This means, they understand maternal values as spiritual principles that humans take from nature. “Mother Nature is our teacher” – say the matriarchal Minangkabau people of Sumatra. Mother Nature cares for all her children: plants, animals, humans, however different they may be. The same applies for the prototypical mother: she cares for all her children, embracing their diversity.

This social arrangement is extremely stable and sustainable, because matriarchal societies are not just a fiction or a utopia, but lived through millennia, and some of them live up to the present time.

The social order based on motherhood includes far reaching consequences for *the economical level*. Matriarchal economy is a subsistence economy. There is no such thing as private property, and there are no territorial claims. The people simply have usage rights on the soil they till, or the pastures their animals graze. The spiritual idea behind this is that Mother Earth can not be owned or cut up in pieces. She gives the fruits of the fields and the young animals to all people as an unceasing flow of gifts.

It is interesting that the women have the power of disposition over goods and clan houses and clan land. All the goods are put in the hands of the clan mother, the matriarch: the harvest and herding products, the goods of the men's hunting and fishing, the goods of handicrafts, and special goods men acquire by trading. However, it is an economy of distribution, not of possession and accumulation,

and everybody trusts in the eldest mother that she – mother of all clan members – distributes the goods equally among her children and grand-children. She is responsible for the sustenance and protection of all clan members.

Again, this is not understood as an economic idea, but a spiritual one. The matriarch acts just as Mother Nature does: Nature gives in abundance to all her beings, so the matriarch gives to all her children for a good life, she nurtures and cares for everybody according to needs, not according to merits.

These principles of sharing and giving are not reserved to the clan, but are extended to the whole community of village or town. At the seasonal festivals clans that are comparatively better off will invite all the inhabitants to be their guests and will give away their goods as gifts to their neighbours. This goes around in the village from one festival to the next. At these opportunities, the matriarchs appear in their most beautiful costumes and loaded with gifts, and perform lavish giveaways, and by re-distributing the wealth in this way no one stays poor. It is a mutual support system, well balanced by itself, but it is not just seen as a profane economic arrangement, but as a spiritual system. At these gift giving festivals, the matriarchs are seen as the daughters of Mother Earth, they are mothers themselves and act in the same way as the Earth does. Again, we can see that the economy, following Mother Nature, is also based on the model of mothers-children-Earth.

Since this is the general attitude, matriarchal economy can be called a “gift economy” in the true sense. It prevents development of competition and exploitation, which are typical of a patriarchal economy, which functions according to unequal exchange. It must not be emphasized that such an economy is perfectly sustainable.

Maternal values also permeate *the political level*. The patterns of this level follow the principle of consensus, which means unanimity regarding each decision. To manifest a principle like this in practice, a society must be specifically organized – and matriarchal societies are organized in a system of councils, which are intertwined in a sophisticated network. Matrilineal kinship lines are, once again, the starting point. The basis of each decision-making is the clan house, where the people related in the mother-line live: women and men, the elders and the youths. Here the real politics is made which influences the more comprehensive bodies: the village or town councils and the regional councils. These latter councils are meetings of delegates from the individual clan houses to communicate, discuss and co-ordinate matters, but not to take decisions on their own. Therefore, the origin of all politics is in the clan houses, and in this way, a true “grass roots democracy” is put into practice.

In such a political system, no hierarchies and classes and no rulers can develop, as well as no gender gap or generation gap. Instead, matriarchies are truly egalitarian. Minorities are not excluded by the majority, as it is common in our formal “democracies”. In matriarchies, new ideas, considerations, and cultural

inventions cannot be excluded as the “thinking of minorities”, but they can develop, because there no “minorities” and no dictatorship of a “majority” exist. The spiritual idea behind this is also learned from Mother Nature, who shows that diversity is the true wealth. Matriarchal people see it that way: diversity of ideas, knowledge, and contributions to the councils is wealth, and this attitude enables them to see the many aspects of a matter on which to decide. Their consensus finding is a very creative process in order to obtain a result that fits everybody. The ability to listen, to respect different opinions, and to integrate them, follows maternal values, as the prototypical mother is doing so; this ability is demonstrated by women and men equally in the councils. The aim is to solve problems and conflicts by talking and negotiating and to secure peace for mothers, children and Earth.

Of course, such a politics is much more sustainable than the politics of oppression from above and revolt from below, as it is typical for patriarchal societies. A lot of human abilities, knowledge and even lives are lost in that way.

We can see that, at every level, the matriarchal form of society is based on a deep and all-permeating spirituality. *At the cultural level*, this spiritual attitude and the maternal values which are at its core emerge very clearly.

Matriarchal societies do not have hierarchic religions based on an omnipotent male god and a degraded world, despised as “profane.” In matriarchies, divinity is immanent, for the whole world is regarded as divine: as feminine divine. There is no split between the sacred and the profane. This is evident in the widely held concept of the universe as the Great Goddess who brought forth everything by birth, and of the earth as the Great Mother who created all living beings. And everyone, and everything, is endowed with divinity by virtue of being a child of the Great Mother Nature.

As a consequence, all is regarded as interconnected with every else in the web of beings, nothing falls apart from it. Therefore, no being should be violated, because you will violate yourself in doing so and violate the divine web of the world. Above all Mother Earth should not be hurt, for she could stop to be fertile, then. When humans have to take their food from the plants and animals, and have to scratch the earth while sowing, all of these “violations” must be healed. Therefore, hunting and harvesting are inevitably followed by ceremonies of healing and reconciliation, by which humans give back goods of their culture such as songs, dances, poetry, as well as carvings and other kinds of artefacts. In this way, the balance is restored again.

In such a model, ideas of exploitation of the earth cannot develop, they are alien to matriarchal people. Matriarchal people are convinced that practices which damage and destroy nature will fall back on humanity – an idea which is perfectly true.

Contrary to this, in patriarchal societies, nature is regarded as “dead matter” and mere resource to be exploited, motherhood is made invisible to promote the

exploitation of women's bodies. The bond between mothers and children is disturbed and demolished, especially between mothers and daughters, and the bond between humans and earth is cut, so that most humans of today believe in the dualism of civilization versus nature, mind versus body, humans versus the rest of the world.

Of course, societies with such a destructive model of culture lack the ability to build a sustainable way of life. It is typical for them, that they treat ecology as a merely technical matter, in that way continuing just the same problem which they want to solve. They are blind for the challenging idea that sustainability is, at first, a social and cultural problem and must be treated in creating a completely different cultural model, one that puts the basic group of life: mothers-children-Earth, at the centre again.

## **2. Part: Matriarchal Politics, or: How to Get Rid of Patriarchy?**

Once we learn about matriarchal life forms, we start to look more and more critically through patriarchal patterns on each level of the society, we are trapped in. This leads to the urgent question: how we could change the given situation? In the way how patriarchal patterns evolved, it becomes evident that they are by no means natural, but rather historical, and can therefore be overcome. We call these considerations "Matriarchal Politics".

I would like to start my presentation of Matriarchal Politics with a shocking fact which is well known worldwide, but always obliterated. I quote from the "Women Watch Report of the United Nations", New York:

"The effects of long-term cumulative processes of discrimination are strikingly apparent in the present world profile of women: While they represent 50 per cent of the world adult population and one third of the official labor force, they perform nearly two thirds of all working hours, receive only one tenth of the world income, and have less than 1 per cent of world property. They represent 60% per cent of the poorest people worldwide."

This was the result of the Women Watch Report of the U.N. in 1980. It was the result of the Women Watch Report of the U.N. in 1990, in 2000, in 2010, and in 2020. The report is published continually and presents continually the same outrageous facts. But nothing changes.

So the question is: how can this situation be overcome? It is Matriarchal Politics, which can show the way out.

Matriarchal Politics is based on modern Matriarchal Studies; its intention is to create mother-centered, gender-egalitarian, peaceful societies on a local and global scale. How this goal can be achieved, is shown to us by still extant

matriarchal societies. Of course, traditional matriarchal societies cannot be imitated, but we can gain much stimulation and insights from them, which – unlike abstract utopias – existed over millennia.

On this basis, I would like to give some suggestions for new matriarchal societies. I refer 1. to microstructures, 2. to macrostructures, and 3. to global structures.

### *1. New matriarchal Microstructures*

At the *social level* this means escaping the increasing fragmentation of society – which drags humans down into separation and loneliness, and renders them sick and destructive. Humans are social beings, they need social connection and integration. That means developing structures that foster various types of intentional communities, such as house communities, neighboring communities, alliances, and networks. Intentional communities arise from a spiritual-intellectual common ground, through which a symbolic clan develops. The matriarchal principle here is, that such intentional groups are 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, women will fully integrate men, but according to a different value system, that is based on maternal values. In a community like this, men also live better than they do in patriarchy.

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. Here the perspective of local and regional subsistence economy arises, for the subsistence perspective means: local economic independence of the people. Subsistence entities engage in self-sufficient activities in which quality of life takes precedence over quantity. This does not only mean doing just local gardening and agriculture, but also fostering regional trade, arts, communication, and technology. Getting rid of monopolies and establishing regionalization for the benefit of women and their communities is a matriarchal principle.

At the *level of political decision-making*, the matriarchal consensus principle is essential 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, and it constrains any domination by individuals or groups. It establishes a balance between women and men, and also between the generations.

According to this principle, the small units of the new matri-clans are the actual decision makers, but these politics can be implemented no farther than at the regional level. But flourishing, independent regions are the political goal of matriarchal politics, rather than ever-expanding larger entities like nations,

unions of states, and super-powers, which destroy step by step the remaining democratic principles.

At the *spiritual-cultural level*, it is mandatory that all hierarchical religions with claims of absolute truth – which have deeply debased the world, the earth, and women – must be rejected. Rather, we are looking at a new sacralization of the world, consonant with the matriarchal perspective that the entire world, with everything in it and on it, is divine. In this way, matriarchal spirituality can permeate everything and can become once again a part of everyday life.

## **2. *New matriarchal 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 states. But they must be big enough to safeguard their self-sufficiency and the diversity of their handiwork, technologies and arts. The ideal dimension is that of the region.

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

### *Culture and spirituality at the interregional level*

Regarding culture at the regional level, spirituality is the connecting power between all the aspects and functions in a traditional, as well as in a modern matriarchal society. Matriarchal spirituality is not institutionalized and is thus free, but it is not arbitrary. It has a binding foundation: Mother Earth and the flow of life.

Although a matriarchal society cannot be constituted beyond the region, it can create friendly alliances with other regions. These interregional associations are of a purely spiritual kind, and expressed symbolically. This means that people of neighboring regions might visit each other, giving gifts of friendship, 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 everywhere, and even worldwide via internet. It is completely distinct from today's centralist, hierarchal state structures. In this way, interregional associations among matriarchal communities, towns and regions will arise worldwide.

### 3. *New matriarchal Global structures*

#### *Global Council*

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 matriarchal societies; they are just more comprehensive.

National states and super powers 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; this is especially true regarding problems related to advanced destruction of the biosphere on earth.

So, a global structure with a purely executive status which has no state power is needed. 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. tries to form such a global council, but because of its patriarchal structure which excludes the issues of women, and the power plays of the super-powers on this level, fails to fulfil its ideals.

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.

#### *Distribution of national wealth*

The fundamental challenge is therefore to dissolve the financial wealth of the national state to the regions, and in the regions to the communities. This does never mean that the sharing of money goes to individuals or patriarchal institutions, rather it is only distributed to matriarchal communities and matriarchal co-operatives of all kinds, including women’s villages all over the world.

So it is not only the fundamental challenge, but also the initial challenge of today: women get 50% of the national wealth, for 50% of each nations’ wealth belongs to them, but is continuously stolen from them – what is clearly documented by the results of the Women Watch Report of the U.N. in every decade.

The current horrendous flow of money into male projects like the military, multinational corporations, monumental ego-architecture and sports stadiums, 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.

50% of the national wealth would enable women to stop begging for state aid for their projects – which for them is notoriously scanty anyway. And it would enable them to stop trying to make career in patriarchal institutions,



where they are and will continuously remain marginalized. With 50% of the national wealth, they can start to build their own matriarchal communities, their own co-operatives and endeavours of all kinds, their own economies, their own social and cultural institutions.

With this equal division of financial national wealth, women could establish new matriarchal infrastructures to fulfil social and cultural needs, with the result that social life, culture, and education would flourish. Women's creations and foundations will make them independent from male values and worldviews, so that they can start to form the units of new matriarchal societies.

And this will open the way to an egalitarian and peaceful matriarchal future!

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#### Websites:

[www.hagia.de](http://www.hagia.de)

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