

P E T E R L A N G

Matriarchal Societies

STUDIES ON INDIGENOUS CULTURES
ACROSS THE GLOBE

HEIDE GOETTNER-ABENDROTH

This book presents the results of Heide Goettner-Abendroth's pioneering research in the field of modern matriarchal studies, based on a new definition of "matriarchy" as true gender-egalitarian societies. Accordingly, matriarchal societies should not be regarded as mirror images of patriarchal ones, as they have never needed patriarchy's hierarchical structures of domination. On the contrary, matriarchal patterns are socially egalitarian, economically balanced, and politically based on consensus decisions. They have been created by women and are founded on maternal values. This new perspective on matriarchal societies is developed step by step by the analysis of extant indigenous cultures in Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

"For decades, Heide Goettner-Abendroth has been a serious scholar of the deep history and ongoing traditions of matriarchy in Europe. Her extensive research has taken her through strong historical matriarchies on several continents, drawing together the research of the most modern international scholars on matriarchy. Her book now brings to undeniable light the matriarchal alternatives available to humanity. Goettner-Abendroth should be on the reading list of every women's studies program."—*Barbara Alice Mann, Ohio Bear Clan Seneca, Assistant Professor in the Honors College of the University of Toledo, and Co-Director of the Native American Alliance of Ohio*

"If in the millenium of women, future generations look back to find the origin of their peaceful societies, they will find that the work of Heide Goettner-Abendroth opened the way. Modern matriarchal studies break through patriarchal capitalist ideology and provide the new/old models for viable ways of life of which our present globalizing market is only a destructive aberration."—*Genevieve Vaughan, Author of For-Giving: A Feminist Criticism of Exchange and Women and the Gift Economy: A Radically Different Worldview Is Possible, and Founder of International Feminists for a Gift Economy*

HEIDE GOETTNER-ABENDROTH is a German philosopher and researcher of culture and society who is focused on matriarchal studies. She taught at the University of Munich and was visiting professor at the University of Montreal, Canada and the University of Innsbruck, Austria. She organized and guided two World Congresses on Matriarchal Studies in 2003 and 2005. She was nominated as one of the "1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize" in 2005.

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR **Matriarchal Societies**

“With the publication of this important book, Heide Goettner-Abendroth’s brilliant critical conceptualization of the deep structures shared by matriarchal societies around the world becomes fully available in English. Her theory has developed, not abstractly but inductively, from the analytical investigation of numerous societies by non-indigenous and indigenous researchers. It provides the basis for a full-fledged interdisciplinary and cross-cultural field of matriarchal studies where previously only isolated studies were possible.

Matriarchal studies is a deeply political and liberatory field grounded in an understanding that the destructive patriarchal power structures pervasive today are a historically recent development. Scholars of matriarchy, some of whom are members of matriarchal societies, are uncovering and reclaiming cultures created mainly by women. Their research offers support for indigenous peoples’ struggles on every continent for land and cultural rights and brings hope to us all that we can build a better world.”—*Angela Miles, Professor of Adult Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, Canada*

“Heide Goettner-Abendroth has devoted her life to the study of matriarchal societies and the development of modern matriarchal studies. Her monumental work is presented in this book. As a Western feminist and peace activist this knowledge has transformed almost every facet of my thinking, theorizing, and activism as well as my daily life. My work on, motherhood, sexuality, racism, and above all peace and peace building has been significantly altered by Goettner-Abendroth’s scholarship. I believe her work offers Western feminists and other progressive scholars as well as social change activists a new, innovative vision of an alternative society—a society of peace and balance, insightful ways to heal the many harms Western civilization brought about, and groundbreaking passages of doing politics, peace building, and conflict resolution.”—*Erella Shadmi, Isha L’Isha feminist center, Israel, and former Head of Women’s Studies Program, Beit Berl College, Israel*

“In an ideal world this ground-breaking study would already be required reading in most disciplines from women’s and native studies to anthropology and, most importantly, economics, political science, and religious studies. I predict, however, that in this era of urgent survival studies following the moral, financial, ecological, and climate crises, Heide Goettner-Abendroth’s vital findings regarding past and present matriarchal gift economies and societies will finally be embraced. The English translation of this part of Dr. Goettner-Abendroth’s life work has been long overdue; the work—her magnum opus—is likely to become a classic among all those scholars who have the courage and ethics needed to resist the ethno- and androcentric legacy of white patriarchal Western science. No ‘paradigm shift’ parallels that which replaces the master discourses that have wreaked havoc on women, non-human species and other colonized objects of capitalist patriarchy. Goettner-Abendroth brings us the factual knowledge that allows us to adopt a radically alternative worldview, beyond establishment claims that matriarchies are reversals of patriarchies or never existed. This book establishes that academic colonialism not only blocks the truth, academic freedom and sustainability, but must now be stopped in the name of the planet’s

survival.”—*Kaarina Kailo, Assistant Professor (Docent), Oulu University, Finland, and former Professor of Women’s Studies and Director of Simone de Beauvoir Institute, Canada*

“Heide Goettner-Abendroth is one of the most insightful and important social thinkers of our time. With this long-awaited translation of her German work on matriarchy, she brings her penetrating understanding and synthetic analysis of ‘mother-centered’ and ‘mother-origin’ societies to the entire English-speaking world. There is no more articulate theorist about the true nature of such societies, no more thorough, respectful, and appreciative cataloguer of them. Dispelling stereotypes and misunderstandings about matriarchy, she unveils the riches of an ‘alternative’ social structure beneficial to humanity that has been with us for millennia and continues to function in many pockets around the globe. Hers is a work of tremendous scholarly activism. By showing us that peaceful ecological living based on mothering values is possible, and that warfare and economic imbalance are not natural and ‘given’ human conditions, her vision offers great hope for the future.”—*Marguerite Rigoglioso, Dominican University and the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, California, and Author of The Cult of Divine Birth in Ancient Greece and Virgin Mother Goddesses of Antiquity*

“Heide Goettner-Abendroth is one of the very few scholars who has delved into the wider meaning of the word ‘matriarchy’ as it is meant to be understood and not as a mirror-image of patriarchy. She has been unwavering in her commitment to enquire deeper into the social arrangements of matriarchal societies across the globe. This enquiry is critical in the twenty-first century if we have to reverse the rapid pace at which world economic, political, and financial systems, based largely on the patriarchal model, are collapsing one by one. This scholarship is one of a kind!

Seeing the world through the eyes of matriarchy requires adjusting the mind’s lenses and discarding past prejudices. Goettner-Abendroth has used all the scientific tools for intellectual and social enquiry even as she argues cogently about how matriarchies were relegated to a position of insignificance and how this egalitarian social system needs to reclaim itself from the hands of those who use patriarchy to promote an unsustainable global system.”—*Patricia Mukhim, Journalist and Editor of The Shillong Times, Shillong, India, and Director of the Indigenous Women’s Resource Center at Shillong, Meghalaya, India*

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PETER LANG

New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
Frankfurt • Berlin • Brussels • Vienna • Oxford

Heide Goettner-Abendroth

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Studies on Indigenous Cultures
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This book is dedicated primarily to the matriarchal peoples from whom I was privileged to learn. Without their wisdom, it could not have been accomplished.

It is also dedicated to all the matriarchal peoples that I have not named here; there are many more of them.

And it is dedicated to all the peoples who still practice certain matriarchal ways—of this there are innumerable examples throughout the world.

May all of them come to light in the course of future Matriarchal Studies!

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A Word on Matriarchy

The surge of popular and scholarly interest in non-patriarchal social patterns has inspired the formation of various new terms for them. Why insist on the sometimes problematic designation, “matriarchy”?

Reclaiming this term means to reclaim knowledge of societies that have been socially, economically, politically and culturally created by women. In the course of these cultures’ long histories, women and men have participated equally to sustain them and pass them on to future generations. For the moment, let this brief description serve as a guide. This book has been written with the aim of developing a long-term definition that I hope will be useful for navigating a sea of misunderstandings about the term “matriarchy” itself, and the cultures it describes.

Matriarchies are true gender-egalitarian societies; this applies to the social contribution of both sexes—and even though women are at the center, this principle governs the social functioning and freedom of both sexes. Matriarchal societies should emphatically not be regarded as mirror images of patriarchal ones—with dominating women instead of patriarchy’s dominating men—as they have never needed patriarchy’s hierarchical structures. Patriarchal domination, where a minority emerges from wars of conquest and takes over a whole culture, depends for its power on structures of enforcement, private ownership, colonial rule, and religious conversion. Such patriarchal power structures are a historically recent development,

not appearing until about 4000–3000 B.C.E. (and in many parts of the world even later) and increasing in strength throughout the further spread of patriarchy.

In light of this misunderstanding about the word “matriarchy,” its linguistic background needs to be looked at more carefully. We can challenge the current male-biased idea that matriarchy means “rule of women” or “domination by the mothers,” as these definitions are based on the assumption that matriarchy is parallel to patriarchy, except that a different gender is in charge. Because the words sound parallel, this fueled the notion that the social patterns must be parallel.

In fact, the Greek word “arché” means not only “domination,” but also “beginning”—the earlier sense of the word. The two meanings are distinct, and cannot be conflated. They are also clearly delineated in English: you would not translate “archetype” as “dominator-type,” nor would you understand “archaeology” to be “the teaching of domination.” People who believe in the myth of universal patriarchy present this relatively recent form of society as if it had existed all over the world since the beginning of human history. Hundreds of fictitious stories of this sort have been propagated by patriarchally-oriented theorists. First of all, they are unable to see matriarchy through any other lens except the dominator pattern. Based on this misunderstanding, they search high and low for evidence of a matriarchy based on domination; when they find no evidence of any culture that conforms to their patriarchally-oriented hypothesis of domination by women, they proceed to assert that matriarchies do not now and never have existed. They invent a phantom culture, and then go looking for an example of it; then, because they cannot find any, they smugly proclaim that it was just a phantom. This circular reasoning is not only illogical, it is a shameful waste of science.

Based on the older meaning of “arché,” matriarchy means “the mothers from the beginning.” This refers both to the biological fact that through giving birth, mothers engender the beginning of life, and to the cultural fact that they also created the beginnings of culture itself. Patriarchy could either be translated as “domination by the fathers,” or “the fathers from the beginning.” This claim leads to domination by the fathers, because—lacking any natural right to claim a role in “beginning”—they have been obliged, since the start of patriarchy, to insist on that role, and then to enforce it through domination. Contrary to this, by virtue of giving birth to the group, to the next generation, and therefore to society, mothers clearly *are* the beginning; in matriarchy they have no need to enforce it by domination.

General Introduction: Philosophy and Methodology of Modern Matriarchal Studies

This chapter addresses the foundation and development of modern Matriarchal Studies. This is not just another socio-cultural science, but a new, distinct field that transgresses existing disciplinary boundaries. After having outlined a theoretical framework for modern Matriarchal Studies, I further developed its philosophy and methodology, always in relationship with my practice-oriented research into matriarchal societies. This is a reciprocal process, which means that the new insights generated by my practice-oriented research could have only emerged in light of the theory, but without the research the theory would have remained sterile and empty.

This book constitutes an important element in this process of developing a theory of matriarchal societies. Step by step, it places examples derived from my practice-oriented research within the programmatic framework provided by the philosophy and methodology of modern Matriarchal Studies. Of course, this book could only have been achieved in conjunction with this philosophy, and cannot be fully understood outside of it. So this introduction will present the philosophy and methodology of modern Matriarchal Studies.

Later on I will spell out the precise relationships between theoretical points and the way they are corroborated and implemented by the research presented in this book. This process will also shed light on what modern Matriarchal Studies are, and what they encompass.

My intellectual-spiritual journey with modern Matriarchal Studies

What brought me into a field—some might say a minefield—of which the central concept is so maligned and misunderstood? While studying both traditional and modern philosophy, and during the writing of my dissertation in the field of Philosophy of Science, I kept coming up against the question of what, if anything, all this had to do with me—as a woman. Every philosophical system always referred to “man,” and though this term supposedly included women, it was clear that, in fact, only the male half of humanity was being addressed: man was the norm, the standard human being. The female half of humanity did not exist in these philosophical systems; “human being” and “man” were interchangeable in their European/western worldview and language. I felt like an alien, and suffered from a creeping loss of my identity as a woman. Setting out to discover a world, and a way of thinking, that included me as a woman, I was surprised to find it in the historical epoch that preceded European Greek and Roman civilization—an epoch that had not been influenced by patriarchy. This was the beginning of my research on matriarchal societies. I started with my own cultural background and investigated the social and mythological patterns of pre-patriarchal European, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern cultures. Combining this unofficial investigation with the obligatory official courses of study helped me to survive mentally and spiritually in the repressive institution of the university.

After ten years teaching modern philosophy at the university, I stood at a crossroads: should I continue to be a servant of patriarchal philosophy? Or should I dedicate myself completely to Matriarchal Studies—such a politically and socially relevant field, yet so ignored by the university? The way forward became clear through my active participation in the beginnings of the modern women’s movement and Women’s Studies which provided a platform where the new research on matriarchy could be seen and heard in public. At that point I turned away from a university career, left that institution and founded the independent “International Academy HAGIA for Modern Matriarchal Studies.” Ever since, I have taught and researched, as an independent scholar, in the context of feminism and other alternative movements. For me, this means having the chance to be as free as possible from the internalized patriarchal ideology that European/western philosophy and socio-cultural sciences indoctrinate their students and everybody else with. Of course, since then I have repeatedly been discriminated against and publicly denounced by the scientific establishment and by the general public.¹

From the start, development of modern Matriarchal Studies has required a radically critical analysis of patriarchy, since women are always aliens in the patriar-

chal system, always invisible, unheard; they are always “the other.” Though generally called “sexism,” this is actually *internal colonialism*, i.e., colonialism directed inside the society itself; in patriarchies this means exploitation of women in general, as well as most of the men—though the exploitation of women and men is different in many respects.²

Seeking a women-based worldview and culture in pre-patriarchal Europe, I soon came up against an insurmountable barrier to my study: early matriarchal cultures in Europe, the Mediterranean and the Middle East have long since been destroyed. Only fragments remain, distorted by thick layers of historically recent interpretation; these remnants are not enough to suggest the full picture of matriarchal societies. They could not be of further help to my investigation of how people in matriarchal societies live, act, celebrate and do politics. Not wishing to risk the substitution of fantasy for science, I had to leave the area of Europe.

To decide where to search next, I got acquainted with anthropological research on this topic. However, I encountered the same prejudice against matriarchal cultures, the same fragmentation and distortion in anthropological research as I had found in historical research. I knew their sources all too well—that is, the European/western philosophical tradition, and this led me to broaden my criticism of patriarchal ideology. This was now aimed against *external colonialism*, i.e., colonialism directed outside of society, this exploitative combination of imperialism, racism and sexism that made indigenous peoples on every continent into “the others”—unseen and unheard. This alienation was even worse for matriarchal peoples. Just as the female half of humanity does not exist in patriarchal western philosophy, matriarchally organized societies and cultures also do not exist in that ideology; they never have. Nevertheless, thanks to my method of criticism of patriarchal ideology—which I had developed in the meantime—I found abundant evidence for the existence of matriarchal societies. Little by little, a completely different perspective of society and history came to light: the *matriarchy paradigm*.

The matriarchy paradigm developed out of the modern women’s movement, ut goes beyond all the various western feminisms that tend to remain captive to the European/western way of thinking. It is not confined to the situation of women, and does not foster an essentialist antagonism between women-in-general and men-in-general. From the viewpoint of the matriarchy paradigm, such ahistorical generalizations are counterproductive; they overlook the broad diversity of societies and historical contexts in which gender questions are rooted. In contrast, modern Matriarchal Studies address the overall structure of the society of women and men, old and young, human and non-human nature. And they are not confined to the western world (as mainstream feminism often is), but rather are engaged with

non-patriarchal societies on every continent. The matriarchy paradigm also goes beyond currently fashionable Gender Studies, which are also stuck in the western worldview, and take account neither of history nor of indigenous peoples on other continents, despite some token studies or perspectives.³

The political relevance of modern Matriarchal Studies

Using critical analysis and cross-cultural studies, I gradually generated a more complete structural outline of matriarchal societies. My intellectual-spiritual journey led me to recognize my true teachers: the living matriarchal societies and cultures on several continents. I drew not only on western sources (which must be read in light of the criticism of patriarchal ideology), but also undertook a research trip to the matriarchal Mosuo in Southwest China. This visit, undertaken with a team of assistants, was in response to an invitation from the Mosuo. (I would never have wanted to show up uninvited, adding my own concerns to the many political problems already faced by indigenous peoples there.) The Mosuo specifically asked me to write about them, as they welcome every serious, open minded publication as a building block in their struggle for the recognition of their culture in present day China.⁴ The encounter with the Mosuo—and with other representatives of matriarchal cultures on other trips, in the western world as well—allowed my understanding to grow, and profoundly changed the way I think. Little by little, my new thinking also changed my life.

At this time I was also becoming increasingly aware of how little I, as an outsider, *could* know about their cultures. This prevented me from intending that my results should speak for indigenous peoples; nor would I ever pretend that my general analysis of the deep structure of matriarchal society could elucidate any one of these societies completely, or that it could be applied to every indigenous society. This task would take years of field work all over the world, and can best be done by indigenous researchers into their own societies. Fortunately, today more and more indigenous researchers are investigating their own societies, and levelling justified criticism of the fragmented and degrading way colonial and patriarchal science deals with their cultures. And they are making use of their knowledge to serve their struggle for self-determination, and for the promotion and protection of their rights as peoples.⁵

The work I want to do here is to construct a theoretical framework to help us recognize a matriarchal society when we meet one, and to be able to describe it adequately. Without the light of a theory we would remain blind, much as patriarchal socio-cultural science has been blind up till today in this respect. This special

form of society has been described as “matrilineal,” “matrifocal,” “matristic,” or “gylanic.” Instead of elaborating a clear definition of “matriarchal” (which is completely missing in the research on this topic, producing a lot of confusion), scholars tried to find substitute concepts—but these are rather weak, inadequate and arbitrary. These surrogate concepts do list certain elements present in this form of society, but they lack inner cohesion. Against this, I have set myself the task of discovering the deep structure of this form of society, and I am therefore obliged to understand the fundamentals of indigenous societies of this type. But it is not necessary—or possible, as a European—to know everything about those cultures, or to describe them completely.

This work is also politically relevant, intersecting with the political intentions of several alternative movements for self-determination. The *intersection of modern Matriarchal Studies with western feminism* is important in terms of its critique of patriarchy’s internal colonization of women, in which women are “the other”—simply objects. Feminism, on the other hand, sees women as acting subjects in society and history, and calls for their self-determination—a stand crucial to modern Matriarchal Studies.

But in addition to a western patriarchy of European/North American-style, there is also an eastern patriarchy exemplified by Islamic and Chinese cultures, as well as a southern patriarchy exemplified by cultures in India and Africa—and so on, worldwide. The range of forms taken by patriarchally-organized societies has led to the great diversity among international feminist struggles for women’s self-determination. But as various as the struggles may be, there are similar principles discernible in the ways women are being oppressed by patriarchal elites the world over. This similarity becomes more pronounced when dominant local elites are taken over or influenced—as they have been in recent history—by western, global patriarchy. Following from these circumstances, there are numerous *intersections between modern Matriarchal Studies and other, non-western forms of feminism* that exist on every continent—for modern Matriarchal Studies address not just the patriarchalization process of Europe, but of all other continents as well.

Investigating how these patriarchalization processes happened in other continents is a task that would best be undertaken by indigenous and non-indigenous researchers analyzing the histories of their own patriarchalized societies. The claims I make regarding the histories of peoples on other continents are meant simply to indicate that modern Matriarchal Studies also offers a framework for new, deep analysis of history. In my historical challenges I take the oral tradition (as much as I know about it) of a given people as seriously as I do written historical sources and archaeological evidence.

Today in western patriarchy it is not only women who are taking up the struggle against increasing violence and militarization of European and US American society, but many men as well. In repressive, exploitative patriarchal structures, women and children are affected, but so are most men—albeit in different ways. This is also true in the world's other patriarchies, in the east and in the south. In many international movements on every continent, men are also fighting for fundamental change and for a better society—although their struggles differ vastly from one another.

Insofar as they recognize that their fight is not just against colonialist and capitalist structures, but also against old or recent forms of patriarchy, there are also significant *intersections between men's alternative movements and modern Matriarchal Studies*. But if men, engaged in their alternative struggles, don't recognize this, they will leave out an important aspect of freedom, or will downgrade it to negligible triviality; then their struggle will fall apart because of gender questions—which has often occurred. On the other hand, if colonialism, wherever it is found, would be recognized as colonial patriarchy, and capitalism as capitalist patriarchy, and capitalist globalization as globalized patriarchy, then their fight would be socially and historically much more significant. Then it would take its place alongside feminist struggles for self-determination. Modern Matriarchal Studies would then be seen for what it is: a critical, liberating form of socio-cultural research by women—not only for women, but for all people.

Modern Matriarchal Studies can also be important for indigenous peoples' struggles for self-determination and rights to lands and cultural identity. Indigenous societies on every continent have been oppressed by the external colonialism of various dominant patriarchal elites, and in some cases are in danger of extinction. They struggle against colonialism's ongoing legacy; the success of their fight for self-determination also depends on recognizing that colonialism is a part of patriarchy. When it comes to the last extant matriarchal cultures, colonialism is revealed to be crudely allied with sexism, placing a double burden on these cultures. Just as in sexist patriarchies, women don't really exist, neither do matriarchal societies—such a thing can't possibly exist! Patriarchal colonisation of indigenous peoples thus has ignored and made invisible the significance of indigenous women in general; this had, and still has, especially disastrous effects in the case of indigenous matriarchal societies. In the case of indigenous societies with patriarchal patterns, it would therefore be necessary to develop a criticism not only of colonial sexism directed at it from the outside, but also a criticism that recognizes and suggests solutions to its own internal sexism.⁶

The crisis is even more acute for indigenous, matriarchally organized peoples. They often regard their society as a fabric woven from their own specific traditions, with its own local name. As these cultures are threatened with disappearance in our time, it could benefit them to develop an awareness of the matriarchal patterns that make them so extraordinary, and that connect them to matriarchal cultures worldwide, past and present—they have great significance for today’s patriarchal world.

This is where *indigenous researchers’ studies* on their own societies are of utmost importance; their investigations *intersect significantly with modern Matriarchal Studies*. Understanding the deep structure of matriarchal societies could illuminate the fact that this extraordinary form of society still exists on every continent, and has a long and worldwide history—much longer than the history of the patriarchal form of society. Far from existing only as isolated, “exotic,” special cases, this form of society was once the general rule. Recognizing this history would shed new light on the traditions of the diverse matriarchal societies, which then could be seen as more analogous to each other than they previously appeared to be. This insight could strengthen them in their awareness of cultural identity and significance, as well as in their efforts to build worldwide networks.

These multiple intersections demonstrate the various ways that modern Matriarchal Studies can be used. They form a critical and liberating research process with a respectful, healing and educational potential. And they are in a position to empower feminist women and alternative men in western societies, as well as indigenous peoples on every continent, to engage fully in effective political alliances against local and global patriarchal domination.

Nothing is so practical as a good theory.

Modern Matriarchal Studies began to appear during the past few decades, and are now advancing rapidly. As liberation-oriented research, they emphasize not just results, but also process. What follows is an attempt to give a sense of this process, along with the theoretical concepts that emerge from it. Clearly formulated, consistent theories are highly efficient intellectual tools, which can be used by all interested researchers. Nothing is so practical as a good theory!

My long years of preparatory work yielded a strong foundation for modern Matriarchal Studies, based on scientific principles that allow them to develop as a new socio-cultural science. This foundation consists of:

- first, the formulation of an increasingly precise definition of “matriarchy,” one that outlines the deep structure of this form of society;

- second, the development of a methodology capable of adequately presenting the area under investigation, in this case, matriarchal societies;
- third, the development of a theoretical framework that encompasses the vast historical and geographic extent of matriarchal social forms.

My first approach to modern Matriarchal Studies appeared in 1978, when I sketched an outline of a theoretical framework and a methodology for researching matriarchies; this included the criticism of patriarchal ideology as an important method.⁷ From the very beginning of my work, I recognized that the term “matriarchy” had to be re-defined, because there was no clarity about this concept. I intentionally didn’t choose a surrogate term. Philosophical and scientific re-definitions generally take common terms and re-define them. After that, scholars can work with those terms, yet remain in contact with people’s everyday speech. For example, the term “sustainable”: in everyday language it meant something that could keep going, endure. Now the socio-cultural science of ecology has elaborated it as a special term that covers many detailed conditions, taking into account a much greater worldview than it had before. In the case of the term “matriarchy,” I thought this re-definition would be a great advantage; especially because for women, reclaiming this term means to reclaim the knowledge about cultures that have been mainly created by women. Thus, at that early time, I also formulated a first, simplified definition of matriarchy, based on the social, political, economic and cultural patterns of the matriarchal form of society, and not just on one or another individual example.

In my first book on this subject, *Die Göttin und ihr Heros* (1980) I elaborated matriarchal patterns at the cultural level.⁸ Here I developed a comparative structural method of studying myths, which shed light on the distinct structure of matriarchal mythology and on the way it was transformed through various phases of patriarchalization. By doing this, I placed the myths back in their different phases of cultural historical context; this serves to give the structural method substance.

Next, in my multi-volume work on matriarchy (*Das Matriarchat*, 1988, 1991, 2000), I began to elaborate upon the structural patterns of matriarchal societies at the social, political and economic levels, extending them to the level of culture.⁹ Since it was not possible to do this solely through analysis of the myths, I turned to anthropology and found these patterns in existing matriarchal societies worldwide.

The detailed structures I have discerned at all levels of the matriarchal form of society yields an explicit, systematic definition of “matriarchy.” Its advantage is that it is not abstractly constructed and projected back into this field of research, but rather is inductively developed from analytical investigation of these societies. I call

it a “structural definition,” because it conveys the deep structure of the matriarchal form of society.

In brief, this structural definition says that matriarchal societies:

- at the economic level are societies creating a balanced economy, in which women distribute goods, always seeking economic mutuality; such an economy has characteristics in common with a “gift economy.”¹⁰ Therefore I defined them as *societies of economic mutuality, based on the circulation of gifts*.
- at the social level are societies based on matrilinear kinship, whose characteristics are matrilinearity and matrilocality within the framework of gender equality. Therefore I defined them as *non-hierarchical, horizontal societies of matrilinear kinship*.
- at the political level are societies based on consensus. The clan house is the basis of decision making, both locally and regionally, and is outwardly represented by an (often) male delegate; the politics of strict consensus processes give rise not only to gender equality, but to equality in the entire society. Therefore, I defined them as *egalitarian societies of consensus*.
- at the spiritual and cultural level these societies are based on an all-permeating spiritual attitude that regards the whole world as divine, originating in the Feminine Divine; this engenders a sacred culture. Therefore, I defined them as *sacred societies and cultures of the Feminine Divine*.

About the logic of defining

This systematic way of defining matriarchal society—that is, the two-step process using a basic and a structural definition—has never before been developed. Both these steps build upon each other, but they don’t necessarily have to be used together.¹¹

First, the basic definition:

A basic definition is at the core of any scientific theory; it delineates what the theory is actually investigating—in this case, matriarchy. For it to be a definition based on scientific principles, it must set forth the *necessary and sufficient conditions* of its subject. *Sufficient* conditions are understood to include characteristics that are more or less coincidental, and do not always need to be met. But *necessary* conditions must always be met, and their scope must be neither too narrow nor too broad. If it is too narrow, the theory cannot encompass everything that properly

belongs to it; if too broad, the theory will include more than it can really clarify, and becomes vague. In any case, adequate formulation of the *necessary* conditions must be provided by the theorists—otherwise, it is impossible to know exactly what is being investigated or discussed.

The necessary conditions of the definition of “matriarchy” are that mothers are at the center of society, as manifested by matrilinearity and by mothers’ (or women’s) power of economic distribution, both in the context of gender equality. If these conditions are fulfilled in an actual society, we can call it a “matriarchy.” Matrilinearity is essential because it not only structures the social relationships of the entire society, but also ensures these relationships via female inheritance and the political decision-making processes that follow from matrilinearity. The effects of matrilinearity put women at the center of the society. And a matrilineal genealogy—extending back through the female lineage to the first ancestress of the people—puts women at the spiritual center as well. Gender equality is also essential, as it ensures that in spite of women’s position at the center, matriarchal societies are not gender hierarchies: they foster a view of both sexes as equally valuable. Matriarchal societies are thus not mirror images of patriarchy. But matrilinearity and equality of the genders are still not enough to describe a matriarchy: in addition, the power of economic distribution must be held by women. This is essential because it is the basis of the matriarchal economy of mutuality. This kind of economy would not occur if the economy were in the hands of the men and the chiefs who accumulate goods, even if the society were matrilineal. Such societies do exist, but they are just matrilineal, not matriarchal.

It makes sense to include sufficient conditions in the definition as well, as their variability demonstrates the diversity of actual matriarchal societies. For example, matrilocality, or residence in the mother’s house, would be a sufficient condition; that is, matrilocality *can* be present, but doesn’t have to be. Actual matriarchies have various residence customs; these don’t affect their matriarchal character.

A well elaborated, basic definition is a very practical, intellectual tool for any researcher who cares to work with it. It took a long time to develop: I did not just project it onto this material. Rather, it emerged, piece by piece, through long years of systematic research. And it is meant to keep developing: the necessary conditions of the definition must continually be tested as to whether they are too narrow or too broad; and the sufficient conditions of the definition can be extended. This process of testing, extending, refining a definition—and a theory based on this definition—is an ongoing project, in which many researchers can participate.

Secondly, the structural definition:

Having defined matriarchy, I went a step further and formulated a structural

definition. Such a structural definition, while developed step by step out of the research results, must not be misunderstood as formulating an ideal type. Postulating an ideal type comes close to thinking in categories as closed systems; the abstraction is formulated *prior* to solid research. This is an antiquated way of proceeding that characterizes traditional philosophy. In modern Philosophy of Science, a structural definition deals with the area of investigation—here, the matriarchal form of society—in a different way: it starts after research and formulates the intrinsic interrelations that connect all the society's parts and make it a consistent whole. It is precisely these integrated, internal interconnections that constitute the *deep structure* of the area of investigation, here, the matriarchal form of society. For example, matrilocality, even though it is only a sufficient condition, nevertheless belongs to the inner logic, or deep structure, of a matriarchal society. Thus it is part of the structural definition. This kind of definition is not a closed system, but presents an open structure which can be elaborated during the ongoing process of research.

Methodologically it is important to note that matriarchal societies of today have gone through many changes. After a long history of struggling to defend their ancestral cultures, and now threatened by increasing pressure from their patriarchal surroundings, they have changed in many aspects. This is why it is so crucial to consult the histories of their cultures in order to obtain a more adequate understanding of their matriarchal character. Here a structural definition can be used in a carefully re-constructive process, which has several very effective scientific functions. First of all, matriarchal societies will be better understood on their own terms, according to their own patterns and values, rather than being looked at through the lens of theories that originate in the patriarchal worldview; this will result in more adequate descriptions of this form of society. In cases of uncertainty, they should generally be assumed to be matriarchal, and their patterns interpreted in a positive way. Secondly, a structural definition makes it possible to see the great diversity among individual matriarchal societies, and to describe it in a very distinctive way. Thirdly, the process of patriarchal deformation and distortion of matriarchal societies throughout long epochs of history can be recognized. All this can only be seen by practical application of this intellectual tool.

But again, it would be a grave error to confuse a structural definition with an abstract ideal type, or with irrefutable categories, which form a closed system, set in stone. Such a position would be completely obsolete today. Irrefutable categories and closed systems belong to traditional, patriarchally influenced philosophy and its imperialistic truth claims, but not to modern Philosophy of Science nor to modern Matriarchal Studies. This concerns practicality: it is about developing a refined,

appropriate tool for the scientific investigation of a highly complex area of study. This successive method of proceeding will be demonstrated in this book, in which a structural definition will be developed and—by my own research on specific societies—continually expanded. As this new socio-cultural science unfolds, the further development of the given structural definition becomes an open, creative process, one that has room for the participation of many researchers. The touchstone for the theory of matriarchy is the precise, sensitive and respectful understanding and description of the diversity of actual matriarchal societies, in the past and present. If it achieves this, it will have a strong and far reaching explanatory power.

Interdisciplinarity and the criticism of patriarchal ideology

In addition to the lack of an explicit and systematic definition, there was no dedicated methodology of the kind required by modern Matriarchal Studies until I approached it in 1978.¹² From the beginning, I showed that an appropriate methodology would have to be founded upon the dual pillars of interdisciplinarity and a radical criticism of patriarchal ideology.

When it comes to getting a grip on an entire form of society and its history, *interdisciplinarity* is absolutely required. The separation inherent in traditional disciplines results in a fragmentation of knowledge that makes broader interconnections invisible. Interdisciplinarity sheds light on those obscured interrelations. Instead of the traditional focus on specialization, the emphasis is on recognizing and integrating the societal and historical connections. The first chapter of this book, dealing with the history of research on matriarchy, clearly demonstrates how diverse branches of study must be brought to bear, in order to deal adequately with this subject. The interdisciplinarity required here encompasses nothing less than the entire spectrum of social sciences and the humanities, including cultural studies; it can also engage various branches of the natural sciences.

To arrive at conclusions based on scientific principles, it is important to avoid the widespread tendency to eclecticism, which is just another form of fragmentation. It is therefore necessary to systematically bring each relevant branch of research one by one into relationship with the others. In this way, a systematic arrangement will emerge, but it will be different for each theoretical focus, as well as for the individual studies in a given theoretical context. In each case, the disciplines involved must be explicitly identified and the reasons be given for choosing each arrangement.

The criticism of patriarchal ideology also needs a method to keep it from getting caught up itself in an obfuscating ideology. In my first sketch, I outlined such a method, and by 1988 the details were worked out.¹³ Its application employed both negative and positive processes.

The negative process entails discovering the typical preconceptions that permeate the literature on the topic of matriarchy. Interdisciplinarity is a great advantage in this process; comparison of researchers' opinions from different disciplines (but also within a single discipline) brings the incomplete, one-sided and distorted accounts to light. I have compiled a list of these preconceptions; it is useful to keep them in mind while engaged in research, in order to see the material separately from the ideology.

The typical preconceptions are:

firstly, judging the relationship between the genders in matriarchal cultures according to patriarchal patterns and norms; these are the primary ideological preconceptions.

They give rise to factual preconceptions, which distort matters and often contradict the researcher's own results; which leads to logical contradictions in the argument. Such preconceptions are:

secondly, denying the existence of matriarchies in general, or denying their intrinsic structure and value system—which, because of the first preconceptions, cannot be recognized.

This engenders a characteristic blindness to the geographic and chronological spread of matriarchal forms of society, a blindness intensified by preconceptions such as:

thirdly, confining matriarchies to far away, exotic places and to historically vague transitional periods labelled as "primitive." But early patriarchies are not exiled like this; in fact, some are dated—in the absence of any evidence whatsoever to justify this—as contemporary with, or even earlier than, matriarchal cultures. The latter are then explained away as historical exceptions.

In this way the process of displacement, repression and fragmentation begins, leaving behind nothing more than isolated "elements" of matriarchal societies' intrinsic structures—totally denying their coherence and cultural significance.

This occurs by:

fourthly, denying the priority of cultural achievements of matriarchal societies, or attributing these achievements to (fictional) early patriarchies—bolstered by further denying that matriarchal cultures developed high culture. (Here "high culture" is misleadingly defined to include only patriarchal state- and empire building.)

The result is a lack of explanation for the origin of matriarchal societies, and for patriarchal societies as well. In fact, patriarchy is presented as the universal norm, interrupted only briefly, if at all, and only in remote areas, by the random deviation known as “matriarchy.” The untested assumption that patriarchy is eternal is accepted a matter of course, given the “superior” nature of man. This leads to: fifthly, denial of the matriarchal traditions that still exist today—whether in cultures marginal to patriarchy, or in subcultures within patriarchies. Indeed, since from this standpoint there is no way to recognize such traditions for what they are; they go unexplained or are classified wrongly—which makes them, in any case, invisible.

Thus, carrying out a thorough criticism of patriarchal ideological preconceptions—which is even harder to do with more recent theories, as the preconceptions are subtly hidden—opens up the way to the positive process of analyzing the factual material.

The Matriarchy Paradigm

Developing a theory and referring to it as a paradigmatic theory, or paradigm, is not the same as trying to set up a universal theory; this is an effort, rather, to inspire a complete change of perspective. Since the ongoing development of the theory of matriarchy certainly entails a complete change of perspective, I call it a “paradigm.” But it is not a universal theory, because it is not a closed system, and it does not set up universal assumptions—which means there are no assumptions about universal sameness of women, or of matriarchal cultures generally. Furthermore, it does not suggest a uniformity of patriarchal oppression in regard to the actual cases. Certainly, nearly everyone on earth is now oppressed by patriarchal elites, but there are differences, and different cultures respond very differently to this oppression.

Universal theories were characteristic of traditional, patriarchal philosophy, and usually had a normative function. When they were then elaborated as evolutionary historical or social theories, they carried patriarchal values with them; this warped the image of other societies and cultures. Their characteristic stance towards earlier cultures is arrogant, and towards contemporary cultures it is colonialist and racist.¹⁴

The theory of matriarchy formulated here is a theoretical framework that can be further developed by researchers for their own investigations. This dynamic is typical for a new paradigm. Although I discuss and analyze various existing matriarchal cultures around the world, the brevity afforded them in this theoretical framework is evidence enough that the investigation is not closed. The intention of my

analysis is to find out the basic structures in order to develop, step by step, the structural definition of the matriarchal form of society. However, far from completely filling in the theoretical framework, it opens up a host of further tasks. Development of a new socio-cultural science goes far beyond any individual researcher, and further research will bring to light the vast extent of this new area of knowledge. This is precisely how the dynamic of a new paradigm works, and how it yields results.

I also do not claim to have encompassed all the matriarchal societies in existence today. It is in the nature of paradigmatic theories that they must leave unfinished areas at the beginning. Paradigms are not lexicons. Their contribution is to offer, from a new, heretofore unknown perspective, a more comprehensive system of explanations.

The scope of the matriarchy paradigm is huge. It encompasses not only all of known history and—especially with its criticism of patriarchal ideology—also the various forms of society that exist today, but it also touches on the content of all cultural and social sciences. This has been presented in various articles of mine;¹⁵ it is outlined once again here:

In the first step toward developing the matriarchy paradigm, or theory of matriarchal societies, an overview of the previous research on matriarchy must be presented, and critically revised. By following the course this research has taken up till now, the lack of a clear and complete definition of “matriarchy” becomes obvious. Furthermore, most of the early and contemporary writings about matriarchy are riddled with patriarchal ideology.

In the second step, the complete structural definition of matriarchy must be formulated. To achieve this, the first place within the systematic arrangement of disciplines is that of anthropology, therefore I start with it in my book. The reason is that history of cultures will not, by itself, yield a complete definition of matriarchy: history deals only with the traces and fragments of former societies, which is not enough to form an overall picture. Though these fragments are unquestionably numerous, and may well be extremely important, they can give us only sketchy information. Historical research alone cannot reveal how matriarchal people thought or felt, or how they organized themselves socially and politically—how their society, as a whole, was structured.

In the third step, this structural definition of matriarchy can be used as a scientific tool to revise the cultural history of humankind. This history reaches back much further than the 5,000–6,000 years of patriarchy. During the longest periods of history, non-patriarchal cultures arose in which women created the institutions, practices and structures that constitute culture; they embodied the center of society, integrating all the other members. Extant matriarchal societies are the

most recent examples. Such an immense task obviously cannot be completed without a full structural definition of matriarchy; this is the only defense against anachronistic fantasy-projections still so common around this theme. In the absence of distortions wrought by patriarchal prejudice, a new interpretation of human history can unfold.

In the fourth step, the problem of the rise of patriarchy can be solved. Two important questions have to be answered: How could patriarchal patterns have developed in the first place? And how could they have spread all over the world? The answer to this latter problem is by no means obvious, and in my opinion, neither question has been sufficiently answered as yet. To explain the development of patriarchy, we must at first have clear knowledge about the form of society that existed before it arose—which was matriarchy. Secondly, a theory of patriarchy's origin and development must explain how and why patriarchal patterns emerged in different places, on different continents, at different times and under different conditions. The answers will be very different for the diverse regions of the world.

In the fifth step, a deep analysis of the history of patriarchy must be developed. Until now, this history has been recorded as one of domination: history from the perspective of the dominators at the top. But there is also the completely different perspective from the bottom. This is the history of women, of the lower classes, of indigenous peoples: the history of subcultures and marginalized cultures. The existence of this history shows that patriarchy did not succeed in destroying the ancient and long lasting matriarchal traditions on all continents. In the final analysis, the patriarchy lives, like a parasite, on these traditions. But we can recognize this only with the help of the structural definition of matriarchy. If we can follow the traces back through the history of patriarchy and to connect them, we will accomplish nothing less than regaining our heritage.

So the theory of matriarchal societies shows the scope of the matriarchy paradigm, and of modern Matriarchal Studies. Ongoing important research has been included in this framework and will continue to be in future. In this way, I hope that generations of researchers will work creatively with the matriarchy paradigm as long as it takes, until this new worldview becomes part of public consciousness.

About this Book

In a sense this book inaugurates the paradigmatic theory of matriarchal societies, or the matriarchy paradigm. It fulfills the first and second steps toward the devel-

opment of the theory of matriarchy, described above, and accordingly constitutes an important part of modern Matriarchal Studies.

A couple of chronological gaps demand a word of explanation. The original publication in three parts (1988, 1991 and 2000) of this work in German inaugurated modern Matriarchal Studies, but the opportunity to make it available in English has arisen only now. The second gap arises from the circumstance that the philosophy and methodology of modern Matriarchal Studies, which is the basis of this book, also was the basis of the two “World Congresses on Matriarchal Studies,” which I guided in Luxembourg 2003 and in Texas 2005. As this English version of my work was not available at these congresses, the coherence of both conceptions remained invisible; the latter (congresses) appeared before the former (book) did.

It might seem that this would be detrimental to this book. But I look at this situation as being positive, because it gave me the opportunity, to expand my own knowledge through the material presented by indigenous matriarchal researchers at the congresses. This material has been published in the book documentation *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future*.¹⁶ Now this book *Matriarchal Societies. Studies on Indigenous Cultures across the Globe* in a sense provides the philosophical and theoretical basis for this recent essay collection.

In regard to the *first step toward developing the matriarchy paradigm*: The first chapter outlines the history of research on matriarchy, in its various contexts and academic disciplines. It sheds new light on old theories, and re-evaluates newer theories in light of modern Matriarchal Studies. It constitutes a critical evaluation of what was achieved with this research before modern Matriarchal Studies emerged. It is “critical” in the sense that—in spite of appreciating the value of each of these works—the urgently needed criticism of patriarchal ideological preconceptions is accomplished.

This marks the difference, in terms of scientific principles, between modern Matriarchal Studies and traditional research on matriarchy. In spite of the richness of their knowledge, these older theories are characterized, firstly, by a lack of a clear, scientifically based definition of matriarchy, which has allowed the incursion of so many common preconceptions associated with this concept. The result is the illogical, emotionally-charged baggage that often hampers these theories and studies, limiting their significance. Secondly, development of research is also disadvantaged by lack of an explicit methodology, and this is why—in spite of the wealth of material—there has been no comprehensive account of matriarchy as a social form. The problem of fragmentation remains unchanged, and no deeper insights

emerge. Thirdly, there is no explicit theoretical framework. In the end, these theories and studies remain exotic, isolated phenomena; so any cross-cutting issues among them cannot come to light, and no insight into the vast scope of this realm of knowledge can develop.

For these reasons, most of the earlier research contributions on matriarchy have to be considered pre-scientific; only modern Matriarchal Studies is in a position to change this situation. Apart from that, this earlier research is politically blind and unreflective, as it usually has no liberating purpose, and instead—with very few exceptions—remains stuck in the mire of patriarchal thinking.

The chapter ends with a brief review of various feminist and indigenous approaches to matriarchy research. They differ fundamentally from traditional matriarchy research, both in their criticism of patriarchal ideology and their liberative context.

In regard to the *second step toward developing the matriarchy paradigm*: The anthropological chapters take their systematic place as described above, and supply the material for the complete structural definition of matriarchy.

Part 1 (chapters 2–10) presents existing matriarchal societies across the continent of Asia, with its immense diversity of people. These chapters are devoted to East India, Nepal, Tibet, China, and Korea, as well as the Pacific Islands, home to matriarchal societies in Japan, Indonesia, Melanesia and Polynesia. Certain hypotheses regarding cultural relationships and migrations of matriarchal peoples in these areas of the world will be presented and discussed.

When I speak of “existing” cultures, I don’t mean exclusively those that exist right here and now, but of the entire time frame during which anthropological studies of such cultures have been made—and this goes back to the 18th century. Although all these reports are patriarchally influenced and distorted by western—or eastern—ideologies, at least they are eye witnesses. In order to remove, as far as possible, ideological preconceptions from this material, I make use of the comparative, i. e. cross-cultural, method and criticism of ideology. I use these implicitly, because in the interests of readability, it doesn’t make sense to demonstrate it at every turn. Each of the short chapters represents the results of this complex process.

When I refer to “traditional” social and cultural patterns of matriarchal societies, I mean the time before contact with European or other colonial contact. Clearly, we can’t know for sure exactly how traditional these patterns really are, all the more since the sources must be subjected to criticism of patriarchal ideology. In addition, indigenous cultures do not represent a fixed, timeless social fabric, but have a history as long and as complex as our own. Prior to colonial contact, they developed in diverse ways, according to their own principles and problems. Since

it is so difficult to know these histories of cultures more precisely, I refer to the patterns they seemed to have at the time they were first described by outsiders as “traditional.” I also draw carefully on archaeology, where possible, and additionally use the structural definition with caution to try to shed light on their “traditional” patterns. Throughout, I remain aware of just how relative this term is.

Thematically, the focus of Part 1 is on the *microstructures* of matriarchal societies—the guidelines and customary practices that make up family and clan systems. Economy and politics combined with the family and clan systems are included, as well as cultural-spiritual forms that are also based on the clan system.

Part 2 (chapters 11–18) addresses existing matriarchal societies in the Americas, Africa and West India. The vast region of Western Asia was a challenge: careful research yielded no extant matriarchal societies there, but this reflects only the present state of the investigation.

The European continent does not appear, as no existing matriarchal societies have survived there, though it does have indigenous cultures with individual residual matriarchal characteristics. But my research is concentrated on societies that still have complete, or nearly complete, matriarchal patterns. If I had included every culture with residual matriarchal patterns, worldwide, the number would have been in the hundreds and the task well beyond the scope of this work.

Again in Part 2, I present some hypotheses about cultural relationships and migrations of matriarchal peoples on these continents, and try to justify them. While Part 1 focused on microstructures, Part 2 focuses on the *macrostructures* of matriarchal societies—the institutions that refer, beyond family and clan systems, to larger social structures. In certain chapters, these large-scale forms of social and political organization even refer beyond one single matriarchal people to encompass connections of several matriarchal tribes—although these large intertribal forms are highly diverse. They are examples of the way matriarchal societies, with their particular forms of politics, are able to create states—if one wants to call them that. In general I avoid the use of the term “state,” which has, from the beginning of written history till today, been understood as an institution of hierarchically organized domination. In this sense, matriarchal societies did not form states, they were stateless and free of domination—so the term “matriarchal state” is somehow self-contradictory.

But the “state” argument is often used as evidence that such societies were too primitive to effectively develop large-scale forms of social and political organization—that is, to create states. The contrary, however, is demonstrated by the complex political forms that include several societies and extend over a huge geographical area. The complexity of these large-scale matriarchal forms is even

vaster and more striking than those of patriarchal states; there, hierarchical pressure from above keeps everything—and everyone—in line, while matriarchal peoples base their largest forms on the equal value of every member. In this, and in their fundamentally peace-oriented politics, matriarchal societies serve as important models for future societies, beyond patriarchy, that are just and peaceful.

It is my fervent wish that the research begun here will reach many open-minded women and men in patriarchal societies. This work can support women in the feminist struggle by introducing them to better forms of society that profoundly value women and their creativity. And it can support men in their alternative movements, giving them another way of identifying as men by demonstrating that war and violence are not the innate heritage of mankind.

Above all I intend that this research will find its way back to the women and men of indigenous matriarchal cultures all over the world. Although I have made every effort to put my Eurocentric perspective behind me, I will surely have made mistakes, and for these I alone am responsible. Indigenous researchers will immediately recognize these. But I hope that in general my research will echo what many of them already know: that they possess an incredibly valuable heritage with a worldwide history. And I boldly hope that this recognition will be a source of strength in their political struggle for cultural identity and self-determination.

—Heide Goettner-Abendroth
January 2008

Notes

1. Autorinnengemeinschaft (eds.): *Die Diskriminierung der Matriarchatsforschung—Eine moderne Hexenjagd*, (Collective Authorship (eds.): *Discriminating against Matriarchal Studies—A Modern Witch Hunt*), Bern, 2003, Edition Amalia.
2. Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen / Maria Mies / Claudia von Werlhof: *Women, the Last Colony*, London, 1988, Zed Books.
3. To put it more precisely: Women's Studies have produced a complex multilevel analysis of sexism in its intersectional forms (with racism, ethnocentrism, classism, speciesism, etc.), see for example the excellent study from Angela Miles: *Integrative Feminism. Building Global Visions 1960s-1990s*, New York and London 1996, Routledge.
However, Women's Studies also have tended to replace "patriarchy" with "hegemonic masculinity" or "compulsory heteronormativity." I do not take on this debate but comment that the failure to know the pre-patriarchal history and modern matriarchies has limited this most recent feminist theory of power relations.
4. Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Matriarchat in Südchina. Eine Forschungsreise zu den Mosuo*, (*Matriarchy in Southern China: A Research Trip to the Mosuo People*), Stuttgart, 1998,

Kohlhammer-Verlag.

5. See Linda Tuhiwai Smith: *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, London, New York and Dunedin, 1999–2001, Zed Books and University of Ontago Press; and Rauna Kuokkanen: *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of Gift*, Vancouver, 2007, University of British Columbia Press.
6. See Joyce Green: *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, London 2007, Zed Books.
7. Heide Goettner-Abendroth: „Zur Methodologie der Frauenforschung am Beispiel einer Theorie des Matriarchats“ (“Towards a Methodology for Women’s Studies, exemplified by a Theory of Matriarchy”), in: Dokumentation der Tagung „Frauenforschung in den Sozialwissenschaften“, Munich, 1978, Deutsches Jugendinstitut (DJI).
8. Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *The Goddess and her Heros. Matriarchal Mythology*, Stow MA, 1995, Anthony Publishing Company (first edition, Munich 1980).
9. Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Das Matriarchat I. Geschichte seiner Erforschung (Matriarchy I. History of Research)*, Stuttgart, 1988–1995, Verlag Kohlhammer; and *Das Matriarchat II.1. Stammesgesellschaften in Ostasien, Indonesien, Ozeanien (Matriarchy II.1. Matriarchal Societies in Eastern Asia, Indonesia and Pacific Area)*, Stuttgart, 1991, 1999, Verlag Kohlhammer; and *Das Matriarchat II.2. Stammesgesellschaften in Amerika, Indien, Afrika (Matriarchy II.2. Matriarchal Societies in America, India, Africa)*, Stuttgart, 2000, Verlag Kohlhammer.
10. Genevieve Vaughan: *For-Giving, a Feminist Criticism of Exchange*, Austin, 1997, Plain View and Anomaly Press.
11. In her anthropological work, Peggy Reeves Sanday developed a definition of matriarchy from another perspective, which she presents in an implicit, non-systematic way (in: *Female Power and Male Dominance*, 1981, and *Women at the Center*, 2002). Her approach criticizes the idea of universal male dominance, suggesting that this is based on a false assumption: that is, it ascribes the wrong meaning to the concept of matriarchy by understanding it to mean “dominance by women”—a misinterpretation that has been eagerly and unquestioningly accepted since the 19th century. Anthropologists then go looking for societies in which women dominate (in the sense that men do); not finding any, they decide that male dominance is universal.
 This sort of reasoning violates scholarly norms, it is unscientific; furthermore, it blindly replicates the Western habit of conflating dominance with political leadership. Sanday demonstrates that, to the contrary, female authority displays different patterns: it is based on the economically and spiritually central role of women—which not only gives them power at the local level, but also gives them great influence over men’s activities. Female authority and male leadership are thus not unequal, but differ from one another. Sanday suggests for societies that evince these patterns to be called “matriarchies.”
 See: Peggy Reeves Sanday: *Female Power and Male Dominance. On the origins of sexual inequality*, Cambridge, 1981–1996, Cambridge University Press, pp. 113–118; and “Matriarchy as a Sociocultural Form. An Old Debate in a New Light,” Paper presented at the 16th Congress of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association, Melaka, Malaysia, July 1–7, 1998; and *Women at the Center. Life in a Modern Matriarchy*, Ithaca, New York, 2002, Cornell University Press, pp. 225–240.
12. Heide Goettner-Abendroth: „Zur Methodologie der Frauenforschung am Beispiel einer Theorie des Matriarchats“ (“Towards a Methodology for Women’s Studies, exemplified by a Theory of Matriarchy”), *ibidem*.

13. See Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Das Matriarchat I. Geschichte seiner Erforschung*, chapter I, *ibidem*.
14. Some remarks on Peggy Sanday's paper: "Matriarchy", in: *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, Oxford Digital Reference Shelf (short version) and *Oxford University Press Encyclopedia* (longer version): To begin with, Sanday provides a good overview of the history of the definition of the concept "matriarchy." Then she presents a new approach toward redefining matriarchy—her own definition—in which she asserts that "the attention must be shifted from forcible power to the persuasive power of tradition" which is rooted in "female responsibility." She cites, in addition to her own approach, the attempts of other anthropologists, who try to define matriarchy based on their own—always specialized and particularist—studies. Regrettably, the definition I developed is not mentioned, although Sanday is familiar with it. In addition, my theoretical framework is called "universalist and evolutionary," a judgement that crudely misrepresents my work.—To clarify: my work is to undertake cross-cultural studies to investigate patterns in the social, economic, political, and cultural levels of matriarchal societies and to uncover the deep structure of this type of society that can be presented this way. It makes it possible to offer a complex structural definition of "matriarchy"—which Sanday did not provide.

Combined with a methodology that combines different scientific branches, I develop the foundation for a new socio-cultural science, "Matriarchal Studies." Sanday's work serves to underscore the point that a foundation for a new socio-cultural science cannot be developed from a particularizing approach based on one particular science, but requires the level of theoretical reflection, based on philosophy of science. Presumably, her charge of „universalism“ alludes to this, but it includes a fundamental misunderstanding: the confusion of the philosophical-methodological level with that of an individual science.

The other charge—that of "evolutionism"—demonstrates a similar misunderstanding of my approach. This book makes it clear that I criticize, and repudiate as colonialist and racist, any and every socio-cultural evolutionary theory. Again, Sanday confuses the different levels of scientific work. I demonstrate that discovered social structures can be observed for a particular time span, and their transformations noted; in a second step, I show that the factors and rules of these transformation can be investigated and, possibly, discovered. This is quite a complex method, which again is developed at the philosophical-methodological level. In contrast, evolutionist theories are based on value judgements, and most of them privilege the prevailing Eurocentrism while devaluing other cultures.

15. See to its scope: Heide Goettner-Abendroth: "Matriarchal Society: Definition and Theory," in: Genevieve Vaughan (ed.), *The Gift*, Rome 2004, Meltemi (Athanon Books).
16. 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.

A Critical History of Perspectives on Matriarchy

The history of research on matriarchy since the 18th century is not so much a story as it is a series of starts and stops whose repeated “beginnings” keep disappearing into the shadows of history. The thread of this history keeps breaking off, pieces of the narrative seem to go nowhere, lines of argument are not followed up—or are, in western science, eliminated completely.

Nevertheless an undercurrent of knowledge about matriarchal forms of society exists, incorporating work from various scientific branches. But the existence of more than 150 years of research and discussion on the subject of matriarchy is not generally known about, and when it does make a rare appearance, is quickly silenced with contempt or ridicule.

These unusual circumstances raise the question of what is actually at work here. It appears that researchers—at least the traditional ones—must have discovered something terrible, something that threatens to breach their patriarchal worldview. If they were to follow the logical consequences of their discoveries, they would have to abandon this worldview. And in the patriarchally-influenced „scientific community“ their prestige would be on the line, they would become isolated and possibly even lose their jobs, if they stood by their discoveries. So they rescind their findings, invalidating their results by reframing them

in theoretical constructs designed to save the patriarchal paradigm of society and history—an undertaking that naturally produces countless logical and factual contradictions.

The patriarchal system has a large investment in making sure the findings of matriarchal social forms stay invisible, and this becomes particularly clear when a researcher breaks out of the self-censorship and stands by his or her findings—which has been happening fairly often recently. These scholars are promptly demonized, their work defamed in every way possible, by their colleagues as well as by the general public. Such is the ideological power of today's patriarchal system, and the pressure is being intensified more and more, as knowledge of matriarchal social forms is less and less willing to be restrained.

In this chapter, my task is therefore to find the broken ends of the thread and tie it back together. I will follow the obscured lines and make the undercurrent of research on matriarchy visible again—and thereby offer an introduction to the historical development of the idea, or concept, of matriarchal societies. In fact, the idea that there was a form of society clearly distinct from patriarchy did not arise until the 18th and 19th centuries with the pioneering work of J. J. Bachofen and others. Matriarchal societies had existed long before this, as had reports about them, but the idea of matriarchy as an independent social form did not exist, nor did the term “matriarchy.” What can't be named can't be discerned.

This is why I am trying to put these fragments back together, as a mosaic is made from its scattered individual stones. The guiding questions are: what do these researchers contribute to the knowledge about matriarchal societies, and what do they then do with their findings? Or, what becomes of their findings in patriarchal socio-cultural sciences and in the general public? These questions serve to critique ideologies, and will uncover the limited—and limiting—way this fascinating socio-political subject has been dealt with up to now. This will lead us to the situation today—which is highly charged, as the patriarchal paradigm is beginning to crumble.

At the same time, this chapter will make visible the contributions made by various branches of socio-cultural sciences to the awareness of a matriarchal form of society, as well as the key role of an interdisciplinary methodology in developing an adequate understanding of it. Rather than offering an exhaustive listing of every source pertaining to research on matriarchy, I will refer to a few exemplary works in the most important research branches. My questions will shed new light on old theories, and on more recent ones as well. That older theorists did not have the benefit of critical and feminist studies should not be a reason to ignore the findings they produced—after all, at that time, they were the only ones addressing the

matriarchal patterns uncovered by their various disciplines. Things have changed a lot since then, but—as we will see—not always for the better within academia. Patriarchal ideology, which in the case of earlier researchers was passed on subconsciously rather than explicitly, has now, in the more recent research, become intentional and aggressive. This survey of researchers is therefore meant to acknowledge their fundamental contributions, and also to critique them. Finally, I will illuminate the change that modern Matriarchal Studies bring to the field.¹

1.1 The pioneers

Johann Jakob Bachofen should be seen as the founder of research on matriarchy as it is usually meant, and with *Das Mutterrecht (Mother Right)* (1861) he initiated discussion in this field.² He had at least one predecessor, Jesuit missionary *Joseph-Francois Lafitau* (1724), who, describing the daily life of Iroquois he stayed with in Canada, compares American Indian customs with those of early European history, and does so in detail—particularly concerning the significant role of women.³ Although constrained by the limited perspective of the time, his report is valuable because Iroquoian society had not yet been so degraded by white oppression as it later was. Even so, his observations lead him to make comparisons between Iroquoian matriarchal society and certain customs he knew about from authors of classical antiquity. But as a missionary Lafitau unfortunately was not driven by interest in scientific knowledge; his book, though an important source of data, failed to present the idea and the concept of matriarchy.

It was Bachofen who intentionally opened up the new research area, which he called “Mutterrecht” (mother right), with reference to matrilinear descent and its associated social patterns. He also employed the term “Gynaikokratie” (gynocracy), which is problematic since it means “domination by women,” and in none of Bachofen’s investigations is there evidence for interpreting such societies as being dominated by women. His more or less interchangeable use of “mother right” and “gynocracy” is the source of the misunderstanding and prejudice that still hampers research on matriarchy today.

His investigations formed the foundation of the cultural-historical branch of research on matriarchy, and his significant contribution opened up new understanding of the development of human culture. Drawing on historians of classical antiquity, he made it absolutely clear (contrary to the prevailing view of the time) that mother right was not just an exotic South-Asian oddity, but was widespread in India, Persia, and Egypt, as well as in the eastern Mediterranean, including Greece—and served in each place as the foundation for later cultural development. He suc-

cessfully demonstrated that the phenomenon was not just a trivial exception to a larger cultural destiny, but rather that it constituted a perfect social system in itself, one that did not apply only to certain discrete peoples, but was shared across the entirety of an earlier cultural era.

Bachofen also provided detailed information on his methods of investigation, which consist of analyzing myth and comparing it, insofar as possible, with historical evidence. This approach not only interprets the myths, but creates a comparative cultural-historical framework that allows him to discover surprising similarities across broad time spans; it supports the conclusion that myths can generally be understood as witnesses to history, speaking in images instead words. He took myth seriously as an expression of past historical circumstances and worldviews.

Even with his successful methodology, Bachofen's theoretical conclusions and interpretations throughout his vast, wide-ranging work are problematic. His theory is a romanticized, ideological view of matriarchy not supported by his own sources. His perspective is skewed by his concept of woman—a reflection of patriarchal values of his time; based on this hypothetical gender called “women,” he attempts to explain the history of mother right in three stages. First, there was a general sexual free-for-all, a stage of promiscuity, in which women were urged to have sex with anyone who came along. Though this so-called “Promiscuity Stage” is a completely unproven assumption, Bachofen suggests that mother right developed in reaction to this kind of life, and that women's resistance took the form of what he called the “Demeter Principle”: chastity and monogamy—yet another instance of projecting middle class Christian values backwards onto an earlier time. But following Bachofen's theory, the virtuous “Demeter Stage” of matriarchy died out with the advent and demise of the Amazons and their wild ways. (The attribution of “wildness” is required by the patriarchal gaze to modify the Amazons, who were neither monogamous nor man-friendly.) Now, after this chaotic “Amazonian stage,” patriarchy established itself even faster, building upon the ruins of what was left of the previous epoch. This was seen as proceeding just as it should, that is, in accordance with the (equally hypothetical) male character. So a man's killing and war-making were seen as his innate qualities and praised as “heroic,” and men were seen as naturally destined to ascend the ranks of power, and ultimately to be identified with the “omnipotent maker”—and all this was valued positively and estimated as superior to the female character. This understanding of maleness was undergirded by a belief in immortality and transcendence based on the intellectual “Appolonian Principle” in which the god “has completely freed himself of any connection whatsoever with the female.”⁴ These are the basic ideas of patriarchy in a nutshell!

We wouldn't have to be bothered any further by such unhistorical fantasizing, except for the crippling effect it had on public consciousness of matriarchal and patriarchal cultures. Though the clichés popularised by Bachofen were based on figments of his imagination, they stubbornly persisted, contributing much to patriarchy's reputation as the vastly superior form of society.

Henry Lewis Morgan founded the social science of anthropology with his work on the Iroquois League in North America⁵ (1851)—a matriarchal society, though he didn't call it that. As a fellow scholar, Bachofen was in contact with Morgan because he saw his own cultural-historical work validated by Morgan's anthropological work. The Iroquois study seemed to make possible, for the first time, an outside look into the world of a highly developed matriarchal culture of that time. But his study remains highly problematic because—just as with Bachofen—Morgan's research failed to lead him to hermeneutic self-reflection and to a critical analysis of his own patriarchally influenced assumptions. Instead, he used his findings to construct a stages-of-history theory, or theory of unilinear evolution, in regard to human family, in which development moves forward in a straight path, its progressive improvements culminating in patriarchy—along the same lines as Bachofen.⁶

He constructs the three-stage evolutionary progression of “savagery, barbarism, and civilization”—all obviously biased, if not racist, terms. Loose family bonds with indiscriminate sexual intercourse and multiple marriage (polygamy) characterize the first, or “stage of savagery”: concepts of blood kinship did not yet exist. In the second, or “barbarism stage,” more restricted marriage relationships lead to the tribal society. Based on the Iroquois example he concludes that tribal groups of this type of society are not founded on families—unknown in Neolithic times—but rather on clans originally founded in the female line of descent, and only much later based on the male line. Several clans form a tribe according to definite marriage rules, and then several tribes come together to form a people. In such a society, political decision making follows the lines of relationship, and is never independent from them. It is this sense of identity between the lines of descent and political decision making that makes the tribal society homogenous. It is also one of the oldest and most widespread human forms of organization. Morgan calls it the “universal basis of ancient Asiatic, European, African, American and Australian society,”⁷ and it was the mortar that held early communities together without needing to engage in political domination.

These are far-ranging insights in themselves, pointing to the relatively late, historically verifiable origin of patriarchy. But Morgan has his own way of taking his enlightening insights and casting them back into darkness. As his theory of unilinear evolution might lead one to expect, this matriarchal kinship society final-

ly comes to an end at the dawn of “civilization.” Here Morgan gives us a taste of how indigenous matriarchal societies will be treated by patriarchy (and this still holds today): important findings are obscured by racist theories. For Morgan, “civilization” came into being when private property and land ownership, developed among men, caused a transformation of matriarchal into patriarchal clans. Irresistibly, and apparently without a struggle, humanity hurried to embrace this type of “civilization,” and with it monogamy (not to mention monotheism) of the Christian type. The high value Morgan assigns to this “civilization stage” comes from his claim that in monogamy only, both partners enjoy the same status and the same rights—a deceptive idea that has come to full fruition in western middle class society. But this contradicts his earlier assertion that monogamy occurred as a consequence of men getting control of private property, and that this worked, and stills works, to women’s disadvantage—which he, however, excuses by saying that women must make this sacrifice for the good of humankind. Morgan’s ideology of historical stages is thus unmasked as reflecting—besides racism—a crude vein of sexism in his ideology of fatherhood, typical of the late-bourgeois nuclear family.

Nevertheless, Morgan is celebrated as the „father of anthropology“—which is really not surprising, as this branch of science, in its Western form, even now is shackled with racist and sexist attitudes.

1.2 The Marxist discussion

Marxist discussions based on Bachofen’s and Morgan’s research were particularly concerned with establishing the origin of patriarchy, and this is especially true for *Friedrich Engels* (1884).⁸ Following Marx, Engels tackled the two main questions left unanswered by Morgan: first, whether bourgeois monogamy is the ideal institution for equality between the sexes; and second, how it happened that private property wound up being controlled by men.

He answers the first question unambiguously by asserting that the overthrow of mother right signalled the worldwide defeat of women. Men not only pushed them out of public life, but lorded over them in the home as well. Women were debased, made the household servants and sexual slaves of the men, and were employed as mere tools for childbearing. Little by little this abject position of women was glossed over or cloaked in a somewhat more benign guise, but it was never abolished.⁹

According to Marx and Engels, control over private property enabled men to

overthrow matriarchy and establish domination over the home. For them, monogamy also has an economic basis, rooted in the patriarchal victory of private property of individual men over matriarchal communal property. So monogamy does not constitute a reconciliation of men and women, as Morgan would have it; instead it simply keeps the struggle going on both sides, with monogamy being enforced for women, but not men. The recognition of biological fatherhood, highly valued by men, does not contribute at all to a balance between the sexes, but rather serves to preserve inheritance of private property within the father's line—that means, passing exclusively from father to son. Engels' thinking dispenses with Morgan's sexist view of the virtues of monogamy. He makes it clear that monogamy, which came into being by force, cannot be a sign of progress.

As to the second question—how private property ended up in the hands of men—what is striking in Engels' explanation is that he sees this major revolution as progressing quietly, at a measured pace, without any cataclysmic rupture in history. He sees increasing division of labor, and the concomitant increase in productivity, as the driving force behind patriarchal control. Of course, this could definitely be a positive development for whoever controlled the profit derived from increased productivity, but it could be very bad for the others. This is why social tensions and contradictions arise between classes, with all the problems they bring.

But the tensions and contradictions between matriarchal and patriarchal forms of society were not completely thought through by Engels, and several issues remain unsolved. First of all, holding property communally does not necessarily mean there is a lack of division of labor. For example, urban matriarchal cultures demonstrate a high degree of labor specialization and productivity, even where no individual men hold private property. Increased division of labor does not automatically generate class differences between rich and poor. This is a fallacy in Engels' thinking, and it is why, with his equally simplistic theory of unilinear evolution, he cannot satisfactorily deal with matriarchal societies. For him, they are frozen at the stage of good (i.e., communist), if ultimately primitive, matrilinear tribal cultures.

Engels formulates it better when he says that what changed history is private property, acquired when the means of production are in the hands of individuals, taking profit for themselves. And since these individuals are, historically speaking, always *men*, the Marxist definition of class society only applies to developed patriarchal societies. The theorists Marx and Engels understand very well that private property in the hands of some men is an instrument of patriarchal domination. But if this is so, private property can only have been introduced *after* patriarchal domination was established. And that happens in certain historical situations when

matriarchal societies are attacked and subjugated *from the outside*, and then are dominated by foreign male rulers. This perspective is not compatible with a unilinear evolution theory in which private property quietly arose through some immanent mechanism. Rather, what is needed here is an explanation that covers the rise of war—by which matriarchal societies were overthrown—and domination as organized violence, which together constitute the prerequisites of private property in the hands of men.

On the other hand, the Marxist definition of the state is all the more relevant: the state, sorely needed in every existing class society, is there to keep insoluble economic tensions and contradictions from leading to outbreaks of revolt. This requires laws and punishment, taxes and civil servants, police and prisons: in fact, institutionalised violence. This is patriarchal state and nation building. But Engels assumes that the patriarchal state was *necessary* at a certain stage of economic development—as if evolution, capricious and sneaky as it can be, led us there of itself. This explains nothing. It makes it seem as if the evolution of private property came first; later on, the state had to be invented in order to protect it. But what if it happened the other way around: the state, born out of conquest, came first; later on, the rulers confiscated the people's property in order to consolidate the new order: a class society of rulers and subjects?

Marxist *August Bebel*, who based his work (1913) on Bachofen and Engels, gets straight to this point.¹⁰ While Engels saw the transition from mother right to father right as being quite painless—achieved by simple acclamation of the clans—Bebel holds a different opinion. Referring to the legends of Amazons as an interesting example, he takes seriously all the fighting and struggle undertaken by women against the new order. He turns away from unilinear evolutionist theories and their untenable premises, calling the upheaval from matriarchy to patriarchy the first great revolution in human history. He rightly notes that this development did not happen everywhere at the same time, nor did it always unfold in the same way—and definitely not from one single cause.

We agree, and would put it more strongly yet: it was not only the first chronologically, but was also the *fundamental* revolution in human history. The transition—from simple or complex peaceful matriarchal societies to the organized violence, war, domination, and private property of the patriarchal states—amounts to such a rank upheaval in the inner and outer lives of humanity, that we are obliged to speak of the deepest and most revolutionary break ever to occur in the history of humankind. Nevertheless, Bebel does not address the question of how this revolution could have happened, and in any case his findings were not followed up.

A recent Marxist thesis about the origin of patriarchy is presented in *Christian*

Sigrist's work (1979).¹¹ He takes up the question (left unanswered by Engels) of the rise of domination, and points the way to a solution. On the basis of his anthropological research, he suggests that tribal societies free of domination still exist; they live this way not out of ignorant naiveté, but based on a consciously developed set of social principles. This makes it clear that it is not private property that generates domination by the masters, but the other way around: as soon as domination is established, it develops private property to consolidate its power.

Sigrist bases his work on tribal cultures in Africa with economies that revolve around their animal herds. Though they are patrilinear, they are not patriarchally organized. He points out their lack of patriarchal power structure on the one hand, and their common-good based social structure on the other, rejecting the widespread assumption that societies without domination belong to the realm of fantasy writers. At the same time, he rejects the theory of primitivism associated with Engels' evolutionist theory, that is, the idea that early tribal cultures were without domination only because there was no differentiation between the various aspects and roles of community life. Sigrist shows that in the light of modern anthropology, this theory is untenable. These domination-free tribal societies exhibit such a great variety of social relationships and structures that the practice of labelling them "naive" must be abandoned.

For Sigrist, the basis of these peoples' ability to govern without domination is their exercise of natural authority. During their journeys abroad with their herds, heads of tribal groups are not in a position to control the group. Since decision making requires the whole group reaching consensus, leaders have no special rights to decide. A tribal head is recognized only as a speaker for the people, not as decision maker. He is respected, but has no staff to enforce his will. This lack of an enforcement staff (warriors, police, controlling institutions) is the criterion for a domination-free society.

Societies without domination maintain their internal structures through self organization. For example, self organization comes into play when someone violates the mutually agreed upon social rules, and is passively excluded from the communality of the group. Or it is engaged when the group goes into action to insist that someone fulfils his duty to share with the community or risks attack on his property or his person. This makes it clear that equality among members of this society is not a naively unconscious habit, but is deliberately maintained through these social techniques. Whereas *conscious maintenance of equality* as a significant regulating factor is lacking in Engels' social analysis.

For Sigrist the first appearance of domination and hierarchy, in the sense of forming a body of followers and an enforcement staff through a charismatic leader,

does not grow organically out of the normal life of a tribal society. It happens not through an internal process, but always occurs in response to outside pressure—which can have various causes. He points to such developments in the recent situations of some African peoples, where domination developed in response to the pressure that colonial powers exerted on them from outside. The forms of domination then included militant men’s societies; these were set up to fight the enemy outside, but also started to control their own people within the society.

These insights are interesting, but there is a blind spot in Sigris’s work where women, and women-centered societies, are concerned. Nowhere does he mention women in accounts of the patrilinear nomad societies he investigated, nor does he address whether the freedom from domination also applied to women (this is very doubtful). He investigates only the absence of domination among men, missing out on the much more interesting area of freedom from domination in matriarchal societies, where it applied to both sexes. This negligence became a conscious disdain when he encountered modern Matriarchal Studies in Germany—and behaved just like every other patriarchally-influenced anthropologist.

Though we certainly have the Marxist discussion to thank for first giving the problem of patriarchy a name, and for identifying some of its patterns, this changed nothing in terms of the disdain in which matriarchal societies and research on matriarchies were held. Although the idea and concept of matriarchy had appeared in traditional versions of this discussion, they disappeared completely from the modern version—indeed, even in the traditional version they were only employed to shore up Marxist theoretical superstructure. The political consequence of this is that in socialist states—true to Engel’s unilinear evolutionist theory—matriarchal societies are in fact considered to exist (and to have existed), but are looked on as “backward.” Therefore, the existing matriarchal societies that happened to be included into modern socialist states are subordinated to inappropriate concepts and measures of “development” that take no account of their distinct identities and traditional knowledge; these cultures are thus being destroyed.

1.3 The anthropological-ethnological branch

For an understanding of matriarchal economy, social and political organization, and worldview, research in the anthropological-ethnological branch has the great advantage of being based on societies where these matriarchal traits are still practiced.

Matrilinearity and its wide-ranging consequences are described by anthropologist *Bronislaw Malinowski* in his imposing study of the Trobriand Islanders of

Melanesia (1926).¹² Significantly, his study is largely devoted to Trobriand Islanders' relationships between the sexes; this means that women are not just relegated to a sub-chapter or a passing remark. According to Malinowski, women have a large role in community life, and take the lead in several areas. They have a deciding role in the culture of human relationships and erotic life, which Malinowski indicates is much more elaborated and developed in Trobriander society than in so-called "civilized" societies. Compared to the social and erotic culture of the Trobriand Islanders, the customs of so-called civilization are demonstrably less sophisticated, even "barbarous." This is a bold statement, and Malinowski makes clear that higher levels of human relationships are not necessarily produced by higher levels of economic and technical expertise.

For Malinowski, Trobriand Islanders' matrilinearity conforms to a social and cultural pattern in which descent, kinship, and social relationships are exclusively determined by the mother. The mother alone is considered to be related to her children; biological fatherhood is unknown. Pregnancy is the deciding, formative stage of life. Children come not from a man, but rather from ancestral clan spirits, beings who lived in the clan before and are re-embodied in the womb of the pregnant woman. This suggests that lack of knowledge about men's role in conception must have resulted not from ignorance, but from the way conception is valued: the cause of pregnancy is a sacred, rather than a profane, event. Here it can be seen that matrilinearity is directly connected to belief in rebirth, where each male or female ancestor comes back to life in the community through a woman of his or her own clan.

In this matrilinear system, brothers are seen as the nearest relatives of their sister's children. Brothers not only carry the same clan names as the children do, but belong to the same clans as the ancestral spirits, who re-enter the clan as babies. Because of this, brothers not only care for their sisters, producing their sustenance in the Trobriander gardens, they also take on the role of "social fathers," who are honor-bound to see to the well-being of their sisters and their sisters' children.

In this ancient matriarchal tribal law, basic matriarchal structure consists of mothers and daughters, and sisters and brothers; the whole society is constructed upon this foundation. At the time Malinowski was in the islands, this tradition was still so strong that all arts, including the very important art of magic, along with all honors and titles, including that of chief, were inherited exclusively through the female line. In each generation women propagated their clans, inheriting the title of head, while a man—her brother—represented the clan in outside matters. As delegate of his mother's and sisters' clan, his honor was subordinate to theirs.

Malinowski also describes the tension-laden paradox of marriage customs in Trobriand Islanders' society, which were patrilocal and monogamous (these prevailed despite frequent switching of partners, especially by women). This means that brothers not only provided for their sisters and sisters' children, but also for their sisters' husbands. In regard to the chief, this had a negative effect on the otherwise egalitarian system: the chief alone is married to more than one woman, with each clan giving him one wife, so that he ends up with several. Since he also collects the produce from the gardens of each of his wives' brothers, he can accumulate goods, storing them in large storehouses. But since he also has to stage the great feasts and equip the long distance ocean voyages, he never accumulates much wealth. Nevertheless, this situation elevates his status and supports his hierarchical position. He manages to keep this position, in part, because of the fixed, monogamous marriages with his wives, who are the most disenfranchised people in the society, and because it is an impossibility to topple the chief.

Malinowski describes here with precision and delicacy a completely unique form of society, he demonstrates its basic structures and internal tensions. But the question is whether he realizes it. Unfortunately this cannot be affirmed, for his work suffers from the lack of inclusion of diachronic examination, which means that these social structures, with their internal tensions, are presented as having existed since time immemorial, with no process of adaptation or modification. This approach shifts a society into an a-historical suspension, as if indigenous societies were unvarying frozen tableaux. From this point of view it is irrelevant to ask how this hierarchical chieftdom came to be, or how the unique relationship between matrilinearity and patrilocality (the woman lives in the house and village of her spouse) developed. Both these customs substantially weaken the influence of the mother, for a daughter must leave her mother's house, and a son must work for a spouse from an outside clan—especially if he is a chief.

Trapped in his a-historical perspective, Malinowski gets side-tracked by secondary reflections. He is preoccupied with the emotional conflict a man experiences as a spouse in a matrilinear society, where because of his obligations to his sister's children he is unable to live out his "fatherly love" and to give preferential treatment to his "own" children. But it is likely that this one-sided flood of compassion has more to do with the western, sexist fatherhood ideology than with the Trobriand Islands society.¹³

At the same time, the researcher's hidden racism rears its head—even if he does not express it directly—when he downgrades indigenous societies as being too rigid and affected with insoluble tensions, apparently in contrast to western societies. As a consequence, Malinowski is unable to discern the characteristic quality of the soci-

ety he is looking at, he has no idea of this peculiar societal form and no concept to name it. It is characteristic of this a-historical perspective, considered “empirical,” that any notion of a matriarchal form of society that existed in the past and that exists in the present is extinguished. With this eradication of history, anthropology ends up at the other extreme, which is considered the cure for the old theory of unilinear evolution. But both extremes reflect only the patriarchal worldview.

Of significance in this context is the work of feminist anthropologist *Annette Weiner* (1976), which offers a fundamental revision of the way Trobriand Islands society is understood.¹⁴ She asserts that anthropology has uncritically defined “power” from the perspective of western patriarchal society: as secular economic-political power. The viewpoint and self-definition of Trobriand Islander women remains completely excluded from this definition. Therefore, it is not surprising that this constricting definition leads to the idea that women’s position is universally inferior to men’s.

Weiner’s study shows that for Trobriand Islanders, „power“ is seen much more from the perspective of the sacred. In this sense, women there possess great power at both the cosmological and the socio-political levels, and this is publicly acknowledged in their culture.

This conclusion is of paramount importance for the study of matriarchal societies that are based on the sacred. Weiner doesn’t mention this, but stays trapped in the same a-historical, so-called empirical, perspective by which a great deal of modern anthropology is characterized.

Theories of the origins of human social structures abound in anthropology, and elsewhere. Two classic positions offer diametrically opposed answers to the question of whether it was men’s—or women’s—social instincts that gave rise to society.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1973) takes the radical stance that it was men’s.¹⁵ His theory of “exchange of women” is based on the assumption that women live in society not as subjects, but solely as objects of exchange between men. He presents the core structure of kinship as consisting of man, woman, and child—plus the male person who gave the woman to the man. Giving a woman to a man is accompanied by a considerable transfer of goods, the marriage goods. This mutual, contractual use of women as exchange goods between men is what Lévi-Strauss means by “exchange of women”; he considers it to be a universal kinship pattern.

This patriarchal-anthropological perspective obviously lacks any history whatsoever. Denial of history is of course a dogma of structural anthropology, in which empirical findings on other societies are replaced with constructions of “binary oppositions,” i.e., rigid schemes into which all the facts about other societies are

inserted. However, his abhorrence of history does not hinder Lévi-Strauss from speculating on prehistory—which he offers in the absence of any appropriate Palaeolithic and Neolithic investigation, and in the absence of any of the available data on ancient societies. This shows the absurdity of denying history: it leads directly to wild historical constructions. The result is that understanding of ancient societies is set back to before Bachofen, who at least based his conclusions on culture-historical data.

And so, Lévi-Strauss trots out the old theory of enemy hordes attacking and vanquishing each other, stealing the women, who finally make agreements sanctioning what had otherwise been accomplished violently: this marked the introduction of “exchange of women” and goods. Accordingly, it appears that fighting and killing under the leadership of men has existed since the beginning of history and that stable human community life on a large scale came into being only through wars and treaties. This abstract and contradictory construction allows Lévi-Strauss to establish the origin of the first great social institution—the tribe—as deriving from men’s social instincts. Thus, even though warmongering, selfish accumulation of goods, and violence against women only arose much later, Lévi-Strauss (and he was not alone in this) came to accept these characteristics as the original male behavior. Obviously, this is a question not of social, but of a-social, instincts. Nevertheless, these late, twisted male urges were projected backwards into prehistory as the origin of society. In this way, patriarchal behavior was established as being universal and eternal—and this means that violence and war are permanently glorified.

The opposite answer to the question of human social origins was given by *Robert Briffault* (1927). In his study of the basic patterns of social behavior he soon discovered, to his surprise, that they all could be traced back to the instinctual behavior characteristic of female, rather than male. That the consciousness of women could have had such a fundamental influence in historically patriarchal societies was incomprehensible, so he concluded that early development of larger-scale social institutions must be considered in light of theory of matriarchy.

He pursued this conviction in his comprehensive work, *The Mothers*,¹⁶ where no less than 60 small-print pages are devoted to a list of every tribe and people, on every continent, who were matrilineally and matrilocally organized. In these societies, it becomes clear that the authority of the mother holds the female clan together and guides the sons, in their outside marriages, to form ties with other clans. The exogamy rule (marriage outside the clan)—formerly always attributed to men as acting subjects of history—proceeds from women, and in this way they wove the matriarchal society peacefully together. Briffault asserts this unambigu-

ously, calling on a wealth of ethnographic and historical examples that establish the mothers as the foundation—and the acting subjects—of the social order ever since the dawn of time, no matter how diversely these social orders might have developed.

But Briffault's work was not recognized for the revolution that it suggested in the dominant world view. It was suppressed, suffering the fate shared by all researchers who contradict the ideological dogma that man is the eternal first sex. How else is it possible that Lévi-Strauss could come up with his speculation on patriarchal prehistory in the 1970's, nearly five decades after Briffault published his decisive work? The answer is obvious, as Lévi-Strauss' theory of violence and war from the beginning of time is propounded not only in western science, but also in the general public, stifling any thought of a peaceable society founded by mothers.

1.4 The prehistory branch

Widely differing disciplines can contribute to prehistory research, among them palaeolinguistics, speleology, and socio-biology. It becomes quite interesting when researchers from these different areas get together and co-operate, as they did in 1979. The findings of this group validate Briffault's conclusions from various perspectives.

The prehistorian and speleologist *Marie Koenig* (1954, 1973) devoted herself to decoding Ice Age symbolic systems in both residential and ritual caves in Europe.¹⁷ Recognition of her discoveries made it necessary to let go of the notion of Ice Age "Man the Hunter," that is, the assumption that it was the hunting men who created prehistoric culture and determined its course. She succeeded in unravelling the meaning of the abstract signs—similar to script—which occur next to, or combined with, cliff drawings and cave paintings, and interpreted the amazing world view of Palaeolithic people.

In Marie Koenig's interpretation, Paleolithic peoples used—at least 100,000 years ago—a system of practical orientation in space and time, and possessed a comprehensive religious worldview, expressed with high intelligence and artistic ability. In the heart of France, on the Île de France, she investigated an entire cultural region with over 2000 ritual caves, and compared them with other ritual caves in Europe. The epoch she looked at was long before the small sculptures of women appeared, but those statues did not come out of nowhere—they were preceded by this system of symbolic signs and drawings made on the walls of the caves.

Two abstract systems came to light: the system of the four (square, rhomb, cir-

cle divided into quadrants), which Koenig ascribes to orientation in space, and the system of the three (three lines, triangle), which hints at the visible phases of the moon that were used as the earliest measure of time. This lunar symbolism is associated with drawings of women, one with a crescent moon in her hand, others as a trinity, which suggests a connection between women and the moon. Neither are animal images meant for “hunting magic”; they are rather, by virtue of the abstract and non-naturalistic rendering of the horns, also associated with the moon as a measure of time. This points to the most ancient religion, one that grapples with the problem of life and death, and solves it through the concept of rebirth. In this religion women were central. The images of women are not associated with a “fertility cult”—a reductive notion that refuses to die—but instead are indicative of the centrality of women: because of their ability to give *rebirth*, women were at the center of the culture and were the bearers of this primordial religion. It was only later that the small female sculptures appeared, covered with the same abstract symbolic signs; so Koenig sees them as bearers of the space and time systems, and therefore powerful symbolic figures.

Marie Koenig’s research is supported by the paleolinguistic work of *Richard Fester* (1962, 1974), who demonstrates that in most of the world’s languages the same root syllables and root words directly indicate the female and feminine, or the effects that come from them.¹⁸ He discovered no comparable examples of root words indicating the male and masculine. There must be a reason for this.

For Fester the most reliable criterion for applying the category of human being—along with walking upright and using tools—is language. In his view language arose not from shouting during the hunt—which he finds highly improbable since hunters don’t want to scare the game away by talking and yelling. His view, like Marie Koenig’s, is that language originated from the voiced intimacy of mother and child, from which articulated speech and meaning developed. This would explain the overwhelming number of female-associated root words. Meanwhile socio-biologists have discovered that the language abilities of women and girls are—after millions of years of human development—still measurably higher than that of men and boys.

In addition, Fester sees the earliest use of tools not with man as hunter, but with mothers looking after their children. To get food into a form suited to the baby, smashing fruits and roots by simple tools would have emerged early. Support for this are the words for “hand” and “holding,” and the names for the earliest tools, which in many languages are derived from root words that signify the feminine, as Fester affirms. According to him it was the mothers who laid the groundwork for every subsequent technology. They are the origin of human society through giv-