

The Way into an Egalitarian Society

Principles and Practice of a Matriarchal Politics

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Edited by the “International Academy HAGIA”
Winzer / Germany 2007

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Principles of a Matriarchal Politics

For the past 30 years I have been researching matriarchal societies – those that have existed in the past, and those that still exist. Modern matriarchal research is not some exotic, fringe exercise, but the very opposite. It brings to light a very relevant body of knowledge about non-patriarchal, basically egalitarian, *economic, social, political and cultural patterns* that we urgently need to consider, now in this last, globally destructive, phase of patriarchy.

Matriarchies, throughout history as well as in those that still exist today, are not societies where women rule – which is the common, misguided view; rather, matriarchies have managed to stay in existence over millennia, without hierarchies and without domination. They have maintained themselves without using war games; that is, without establishing armies for organized killing. Violence against women and children is virtually unknown to them, whereas patriarchal societies worldwide are overwhelmed with it.

These facts and insights have encouraged me to continue my work over these decades, in spite of the animosity that has constantly been directed towards me. The results of this research have prompted me to view the knowledge of matriarchal patterns as something of immense importance for us today, and for our future.

Matriarchies are not utopian. They have been present for long periods during our human history and they are lived-in, practical undertakings that belong to the indispensable cultural knowledge of humanity. These societies contain very concrete, detailed ways of organizing life in accordance with people's needs; these methods are non-violent, peaceful, and, in a word, *human*. These organising principles are by no means naïve or simplistically 'natural', but represent a conscious cultural creation. To make this clearer, I will give a short introduction to matriarchal organizational patterns – at the level of economics, society, politics, spirituality and culture.

The level of economics

Economically, most of the *traditional matriarchies* are agrarian, but not exclusively so. They practice a subsistence economy that achieves local and regional self-reliance. Land and houses belong to the clan in the sense of usage rights, while private ownership of property and territorial claims are unknown concepts.

There is a vivid circulation of goods along the lines of kinship and marriage customs. The system of circulation prevents the accumulation of goods by one individual or clan, as the ideal is distribution rather than accumulation. The advantages and disadvantages that ensue in this process of acquiring goods are kept in balance by social guidelines. For example, wealthy clans are obliged to invite the whole village to the various seasonal festivals, and in this way their wealth is reduced. For this generosity, they gain honour in the village, and a high social reputation, which will help them in times of need.

In economic terms, matriarchies are known for their perfectly balanced reciprocity. For that reason I define them as *societies of economic reciprocity*.

This is in contrast to *patriarchies*, which, throughout their comparatively brief history, have always managed to concentrate everybody's goods into the hands of the few. Economically, we have arrived at a position where it is no longer possible to further increase the amount of large-scale industrial production, and further inflate the Western standard of living, without running the risk of totally annihilating the biosphere of the earth.

A way out of this is a *new subsistence economy* (see Claudia von Werlhof, Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen), based on local and regional units, the core of which is *gift economy* (as Genevieve Vaughan has presented it). These communities go back to the practice of working self-sufficiently, and the resulting quality of life is more important than producing a great quantity of goods. In many traditional subsistence economies, women are the mainstays of these structures. And these structures need to be supported and helped to expand, so that the global market does not destroy them. In this way, regionalizing can be a tool for a matriarchal economy.

The level of society

Socially, *traditional matriarchal societies* are based on the clan. People live together in large kinship groups that follow the principle of matriliney, that is, relatedness based on the mother's line. The name of the clan, and all social honours and political titles, are inherited from the mothers. A matri-clan consists of at least three generations of women, plus the directly related men.

A matri-clan lives together in the large clan house. From 10 to 100 individuals, depending on the architectural style, might live in such a house. The women live there permanently: the daughters and granddaughters never leave their maternal home. Their spouses or lovers only stay over-night; they have what is called "visiting-marriages." This arrangement is called matrilocality.

The clan is a self-sufficient economic unit. In order to achieve social cohesion between the clans of a village or city, complex marriage conventions were developed to link them in mutually beneficial ways. One of these is the convention of mutual marriage between two clans. In addition, there is the convention of permitting free choice in the matter of marriage with other clans; the intentional effect is that all inhabitants of a village or city are somehow related. This relationship, based on kinship, is a mutual support and aid system with specific rights and duties. In this way, a society without hierarchies is shaped, one that sees itself as an extended clan.

Therefore, I define matriarchies as ***non-hierarchical, horizontal societies of matrilineal kinship***.

In contrast, *patriarchal societies* consist of individuals and groups who are often strangers to each other. They fight one another because they want power. Then, ruling classes and lobby groups are created, placing the balance of the whole society in constant danger.

Furthermore, the "atomisation" of society is increasing. It drives people deeper and deeper into desperation and loneliness, providing fertile ground for violence and war.

To stop this, it is necessary to create and support egalitarian groups and communities; they may be traditional communities based on blood-relatedness, or alternative new ones based on affinity. These *new affinity communities* cannot be just interest groups – interest groups are quickly created, but just as easily disbanded. The new affinity communities, rather, are formed on the basis of a spiritual-philosophical rapport between the members. Their members are "*siblings by choice*" and create a "*symbolic clan*". There is far more commitment than there is in a mere interest group.

The new symbolic clans have the tendency to become matriarchal, if they are initiated, created and lead by women. Because women's needs are the decisive factor for a new society, especially as these needs relate to children, who are the future of humanity; men's desires for

power and dominion are not the priority. These desires have led to patriarchal, dynastic families and political men's clubs and associations that exclude and oppress women. These new matri-clans do integrate men fully, but do so according to a different set of values, based on mutual care and love.

It should be a political aim to support the creation of such communities in every possible way.

The level of politics

On the political level, in *traditional matriarchal societies* the process of decision-making is also organised along kinship lines. The decision-making process starts in the individual clan house. Matters that concern the clan house are decided upon by the women and men in a consensus process; this means the process continues until they reach unanimity. The same applies to decisions concerning the whole village. After seeking advice in the clan houses, the clan delegates meet together in the village assembly. These delegates do not make decisions themselves; they simply communicate the decisions that have been made in their clan houses. They maintain the communication system of the village and move back and forth between the assembly and the clan houses until the whole village reaches consensus. The same applies at the regional level. The delegates move between the village assembly and the regional assembly until they reach consensus.

It is quite evident that such a society cannot develop hierarchies or classes, and neither can a power gap between the genders or generations develop. Therefore, on the political level I define matriarchies as *egalitarian societies of consensus*.

In contrast, *patriarchies* are societies of domination, even if they are democracies. Here, minorities are voiceless, and the political will of the majority is reduced to ticking a box on the voting form.

Thus, on the political level, the *matriarchal consensus principle* is of utmost importance for a truly egalitarian society. The consensus principle is the foundation for building new matriarchal communities. It prevents splinter groups, cliques, or individuals from dominating the group. It brings about a balance between the genders and between the generations. Furthermore, consensus is the genuine democratic principle, for it provides what formal democracy promises, but never actualises.

Following this principle, the small clan units of these new symbolic matri-clans are the true decision-makers, but this can only be put into practice as far as the regional level. According to the subsistence perspective, flourishing, self-sufficient regions are the political goal – not the big nation states, state unions and superpowers, which merely serve to increase the power of the powerful, reducing individuals to “human resources”.

The level of culture

On the spiritual and cultural level, *traditional matriarchal societies* do not have religions based on a God who is invisible, untouchable, and incomprehensible -- but omnipotent -- and in contrast to whom the world is devalued as “dead matter”. In matriarchy, divinity is immanent, for the whole world is regarded as divine – as feminine divine. This is evident in the concept of the universe as a Goddess who created everything, and as Mother Earth who brings forth everything living. And everything is endowed with divinity, each woman and man, each plant and animal, the smallest pebble and the biggest star.

In such a culture, everything is spiritual. In their festivals, following the cycle of the seasons, everything is celebrated: nature in its manifold expressions; the different clans with their different abilities and tasks; the different genders and the different generations, following the principle: Diversity is wealth. There is no separation between sacred and secular, therefore all

the everyday tasks – such as sowing and harvesting, cooking and weaving, building a house, and making a journey – have at the same time ritual significance.

On the spiritual level, I define matriarchies as *sacred societies as cultures of the Goddess or Divine Feminine*.

By comparison, in *patriarchies*, people's religious and spiritual abilities are misused in world and state religions to support those in power and the existing ruling systems.

Thus, on the cultural level, we have to abandon all hierarchical religions with a transcendent God and a claim to the total truth. They have led to the disregard of nature, and of humankind itself – particularly of its women. Instead, it is necessary to re-learn how to see the world as holy, to love and to protect it – because, according to matriarchal culture, everything in *the world is divine*.

This leads to everything being honoured and celebrated in a free and creative way – nature in her manifold appearances and various living beings, as well as the great variety of human individuality, communities and cultures. Because the whole world is the Goddess.

In this way, the *new matriarchal spirituality* can once again infuse everything and thus become an inherent part of everyday life. At the same time, what again becomes apparent is matriarchal tolerance, for nobody has to “believe” anything. There is no dogma and no teaching, but the continuous, manifold celebration of life and the visible world.

I hope it has become clear that the path to an egalitarian society has to combine matriarchal spirituality with politics, and with economy to create another kind of society. The purpose of all of it is to provide a good life for everybody; this common good can be assured through the organisational structures and conventions described above. In this sense, we can gain much stimulation and great insights from the patterns of traditional matriarchal societies, which – unlike theoretical utopias – have been lived over millennia.

So the vision of a new egalitarian society can only be holistic, without being vague. It has to be concrete, without getting lost in disconnected details. I call the vision that has all these integral characteristics, a “matriarchal model”. It can be at once a clear idea and a practical guideline to a better future.

Towards a Matriarchal Model

1. Matriarchal social structures

Non-patriarchal societies have different social structures than patriarchal ones; these structures are distinguished by certain characteristics that I call “matriarchal”. For those of us who have internalised patriarchal social structures as “second nature,” these distinguishing features are highly important. In no way are they evidence for the common misapprehension that women have the last word in matriarchies, or that they rule over others. Instead, these prejudices reflect the unexamined assumption that matriarchal societies would be organised just like patriarchal ones, but with women, instead of men, in the central roles. No serious researcher has ever suggested anything like this.

We, however, do not need to be reticent about the using the term “matri-archy”, for it is in no way equivalent to the term “patri-archy.” The word “archy” derives from Greek “arché” which has two meanings: “domination” and “beginning.” The meaning of “beginning” is obvious in such terms as “archangel,” “Noah’s ark”, or “archetype.”

For clarity sake, “patriarchy” must be translated as “domination of the fathers,” while “matriarchy” means “in the beginning, the mothers.” This is the heart of the matter! Because, in terms of cultural history, matriarchies are much older than the later-developing patriarchies; matriarchies are the origin of the history of cultures. Furthermore, matriarchies understand that mothers are the origin, or beginning, of each living being, and these cultures have transformed this natural fact into a cultural pattern.

Significance of the Mother’s line

It is a characteristic of *traditional matriarchal structures* that relationships among relatives are determined by the mother’s line. Because of multiple love relationships, specific paternity was not identifiable, while motherhood always is by virtue of the birth. Sometimes paternity was known, but it did not matter, because it was not the primary principle which gave society its shape.

The line of the mother, or matriliney, is a fundamental principle. In the sense of “the symbolic order of the mother” (Luisa Muraro), it is applied to everything. It is through matriliney that the bloodline communities of the clans are established, building the social world in which matriarchal peoples move. Not only the name of the extended family, but also all social honours and political titles are inherited through the mother’s line.

All inhabitants of a village or town are more or less closely related. This is intentional, and ensures that each locality represents a network of matrilineal relationships, which serve as a mutual aid system. In this way a society is created based on non-hierarchical, horizontal, and egalitarian relationships. It functions as an enlarged clan with the duty of mutual aid.

This is also carried out at the regional level, through the principle of symbolic matriliney. Intentionally, clans with the same name live in each village and town of a particular region. When a person of a specific clan journeys on a pilgrimage, or for trade purposes, or just to visit friends or trade journey or just visiting friends, and arrives in another village where a clan with the same name lives, the person is received as a brother or sister, even if there are no longer any blood ties. This connects the whole region through the system of symbolic relatives and the associated mutual aid system. In this way, the principle of matriliney shapes all of society.

Gender Relationships

Women never depart from their maternal clan house and the economic and social security it provides. Indeed, this very security is assured by the matrilineal clan, and permits freedom in choosing a lover. For the women do not depend on a man as provider, as in the bourgeois-patriarchal nuclear family. They do not have to fear falling into poverty with their children or losing their home if they separate from their partner. Marriages and love relationships can change, but one’s permanent home is always one’s own clan. Since all clan members care for the children, change of relationships does not mean they lose their primary carers.

Matriarchal men do not live with their spouses or lovers, but only stay during the night, in so called “visiting marriage.” Their home is the clan-house of their mother, in which they have all the rights and duties of a full member, for they live and work there. The children of the spouses and lovers belong to their mother’s clan-house, as they bear her clan-name. Men do not regard these children as “their” children, because they have a different clan-name. However, the men’s sisters’ children have the same clan-name as the men do; the latter regard their nephews and nieces as “their children,” whom they take care of and take collective

responsibility for raising. In that sense, the men have the role of “social fathers” for the children of their sisters.

Each gender has its own sphere of action, its own tasks and responsibilities, and its special “dignity” or “honour.” There is no disparagement of one over the other. In matriarchies, both genders have their own spheres of action, spheres that are comprised of different economic and spiritual elements. These spheres are reciprocally related, based on the principle of balance, so power over others cannot result. The general sense that women are sacred does not upset this balance at all. It is not the individual woman who is the object of such devotion, but women in general, especially the elder women or “matriarchs,” each of whom is the reincarnation of an ancestress who originated the bloodline and created society.

Relationships between Generations

Just as the “battle of the sexes” is unknown in matriarchal societies, so is the “generation gap.” There is no uprising of the sons against the fathers, for that is based on the seizure of power characteristic of patriarchy. There is also no competition between mothers and daughters, since this is based, in patriarchy, on competition for a few scraps of influence. Likewise, in matriarchy there is no neglect of youth, and no loneliness and exclusion of older people.

Each generation possesses its own “dignity” or “honour.” The children are considered to be the reincarnated female and male ancestors, and are therefore holy; this is their dignity. The dignity of the young women is love, creativity and motherhood. But not every woman has to become a mother; sisters practise common motherhood and raise their children together. The dignity of the younger men is also love, and protection of their sisters and their sisters’ children. The dignity of the older women is to be the clan matriarchs, to care for and guide the clan. The dignity of the older men is to function as elected representatives and speakers of the clans towards the outside world. In the eldest generation, it is the dignity of both women and men to honour the ancestors, to protect the traditions, and to teach the younger people. They also advise the matriarchs of the clan and form the council of the elders.

How to shape new matriarchal social patterns?

Many problems of the Western world are based in the “atomising” of society, which leads people to adopt extreme forms of individualism, loneliness and social neglect. This way of life does not have a future. This is why it is becoming more and more important to develop new social patterns. These new groups and communities are not based on blood relations, but they are *siblings-by-choice*.

As the blood relation based family unit is in the process of decay, at least in much of the Western world, intentional connections between people are multiplying, and are determined by intellectual, political and/or spiritual concerns. These bonds are much more open than blood-ties – which are duty-bound from birth – and enable individual freedom of choice. But at the same time they are more committed than a partnership of convenience. *Siblings-by-choice* enjoy a lasting connection, one that includes mutual responsibilities to help one another, but at the same time the allowing freedom of *choice*.

However, “siblings by choice” is a very general term, and is not sufficient to portray new matriarchal social patterns or communities. There has to be an added feature of organisational structure, one that both anchors and contains the egalitarian, latent matriarchal tendencies.

This is achieved by the formation of a *symbolic matri-clan*. What kind of principles are needed to shape such a matri-clan, where blood-ties are not the basis?

The basis is the mother and child unit; this constitutes the basic element of the social group, and it is mothers and children who bring new life to these communities. Without them there would be no further generations in the group, community, or society as a whole, and therefore no future. Women with children do not simply care for their children, but also care for others, and this is the basis of clan building. They constitute the centre around which the matri-clan, based on siblings by choice, revolves.

Creation of a symbolic matri-clan

In creating such a clan, the first step is for one or two women with children to choose their “sisters,” meaning the women without children, who want to raise the children together in a common motherhood. For these children, all these women are called “mothers,” and for the mothers, all the children are their “daughters and sons.” This group of sisters by choice is limited, and, as such, provides closeness and intimacy for the children. This structure permits all women to “have” children. At the same time, because childcare is shared among them, each of the women, including the birth mothers, can develop themselves and their professional skills. This group of sisters by choice may also choose an appropriate name for their core-clan.

The next step is that this group of sisters by choice – or mothers by choice – can choose men to invite into their clan (or not). These men are “brothers” and not lovers. The women trust them, because they have shown well-developed social interaction skills, providing care and working for the welfare of others. They now share with their “sisters” the care of the children. In terms of work, ideally “brothers” and “sisters” would also be working co-operatively. In this way all men can also “have” children, and a mutual commitment is created.

Everyone has received some care as a child, therefore it is a principle of balance that all people, in turn, should also care for children. There is a kind of ethical duty to share this service among all people, and it is a matriarchal principle.

The nuclear family burdens individual biological mothers and fathers with the whole responsibility of raising the children; when the family structure disappears, this burden will disappear along with it. At the same time, there can be a general dissolution of the patriarchal role assignments in which it is the woman who has to provide care for everybody else. In many societies today, women are not only not honoured for this service, but are despised because it is unpaid work. Toddlers groups and pre-schools are only a band-aid for a situation that is actually haemorrhaging out of control.

In the model of the symbolic matri-clan, things look very different. Motherhood and qualities associated with it are honoured, for nurturing behaviour is the order of the day. This is why the foundation of the clan is based on the mothers. Even so, women are not tied down to these supposedly “feminine” qualities and stuck back into a niche. In the matri-clan greater justice can prevail, with all people involved in raising the children. All are thus enabled to experience positive social and emotional development. And everyone can have the opportunity to develop professional skills and other interests. At the same time the children can be wonderfully integrated into the group, because of the connections with all their different care providers.

Matri-clans and love relationships

Various matri-clans can come into being along these lines, and together they can form a community. A community doesn't mean everyone has to live together: they can also form a neighbourhood association encompassing different domiciles, or develop a regional network. Within such a structure, the members of the individual clans can have great trust in each other, and give each other support and security, just like "sisters" and "brothers" in matriarchy.

The love relationships, however, would happen not within the individual clans, but between them. For love retains its spontaneity and freedom when it is not burdened by duty. Starting a group in the midst of fluctuating emotions and changing relationships would make it hard to also provide security to the children.

The pattern of the matri-clan provides the solution for two basic human needs: the need for freedom in love and the need for shelter and security. Patriarchy has never provided any solutions to this issue, it has only repressed it. Shelter and security can be found within the symbolic clan, while the spontaneity of love is best expressed outside of it, in the interactions between the symbolic clans.

It could be imagined by some (steeped, as so many are, in the patriarchal social system) that this model might produce short-lived, superficial relationships: this, however, is not at all the case. Of course, the fact that the lovers do not belong to the same clan, and do not live and work together can ease separations greatly. But there is nothing that prevents relationships from enduring for a long time. Relationships can deepen greatly because they are not burdened with the duties of everyday life. So the lovers can devote themselves, unencumbered, to the beauty and the spirituality of eroticism.

Generations in the symbolic matri-clan

After the young mothers have chosen their "sisters" and "brothers," and have created a symbolic matri-clan that includes two generations, the next step would be to extend it to three or more generations. Now they can choose members of advanced age to be their own "mothers" and the "grandmothers of their children," or "mother's brothers" and "grandmother's brothers of their children." These older women and men have life experience, and are therefore important advisers and helpers for individuals and for the whole clan. Additionally, all clan members can choose one female "matriarch" and one male "sachem" (or keeper of peace) from among their group, elders who will represent their clan to the outside world.

Since these symbolic matri-clans are based on choice, their structure is not set in stone. Each choice can be replaced by a new choice; there is no pressure to stay with the same responsibility, or stay together at all. What has proved workable will remain, taking into account that individuals are going through changing life phases. Each new choice needs to be approached with the same seriousness as the original choices with which the clan was established; this will prevent arbitrariness and individual chaos from taking hold. It makes sense to stay together for a certain time, and to make a commitment for 3-4 years. In any case, every year the members of symbolic matri-clans will reflect upon their whole structure, and renew it appropriately.

2. Matriarchal Economy

At the level of the economy, traditional matriarchies are economies of balance. In this kind of economy an economic disparity between rich and poor is prevented, and a moderate prosperity for all is provided. The opposite of the economy of balance is the economy of accumulation that characterises patriarchal societies. Weaponry, money and economic structure have enabled a very small minority to keep the biggest part of the goods, which they have taken forcibly – directly or indirectly – from the majority of the people.

In traditional matriarchal societies private property and territorial claims are non-existent. In such cultures, people simply have usage rights on the soil they till, or the pastures grazed by their animals. In their view, “Mother Earth” cannot be owned or cut up into pieces. She bestows the fruits of the fields, and the young animals of the flock, to all people; therefore the harvest and the flocks cannot be owned privately. As a consequence of this idea, they have created an economy of balance by using the method of circulating goods, thus preventing hoarding and accumulation. There are no exceptions, for all acquired goods are included in this circulation process, whether they are agricultural, handicrafts, or traded merchandise.

Inner Economy of the Clan

All goods acquired by clan members are given to the women of the clan. So the women, and specifically the eldest women of the clan -- *the matriarchs* -- *hold all the goods in their hands*; they are responsible for the sustenance and the protection of all clan members. The women either work the land themselves or organise how the work is to be done; the fruits of the fields, and the milk of the flocks as well, are given to them. Even money, which is earned nowadays by matriarchal men who work as casual labourers outside their home communities, is given to the matriarchs. But this is a recent development; traditionally, matriarchal communities existed without money, as there was no need for it. The matriarchs, as the persons in whom the highest degree of trust is placed, redistribute everything justly and equitably among the members of the clan. They are the economic managers and administrators.

They organise the economy not according to the profit principle, where an individual or a small group of people benefits; rather, the motivation behind their action is *motherliness*. The profit principle is an ego-centred principle, where individuals or a small minority take advantage of the majority of people. The principle of motherliness is the opposite, where altruism reigns and the well being of all is at the heart of the system.

At the same time, it is a spiritual principle that humans take from Mother Earth. For motherliness as an ethical principle pervades all areas of a matriarchal society, and this holds true for men as well. If a man from a matriarchal society desires to acquire status among his peers, or even to become a representative of the clan to the outside world, the criterion is that “He must be like a good mother.” (Minangkabau, Sumatra)

Economy Between Clans

Due to varying harvests and more or less successful outcomes in trading over the course of the year, economic differences may arise between the clans in any village or city. In this situation the clans follow the principle of *circulation of all goods* and surpluses within the village, in order to prevent accumulation at any given point.

The goods, as well as the nurturing, care, and cultural creativity in ritual events, all circulate as gifts. This takes place in the festivals, which are at the core of these cultures and which drive their economies. They celebrate the festivals of the agricultural year, along with the lifecycle festivals of the individual clans, which are celebrated together with the whole village or town. During all these festivals the goods, the nurturing, care, and cultural presentations are being “moved around”-- not in the sense of exchange for profit, but as gifts.

For example, it is usual that when a clan has had a bumper crop and is able to reap a great harvest, they that clan will give this fortune away at the first opportunity. At the next festival, this fortunate clan will overextend itself by inviting everybody in the village or town or district, and will lavish them with hospitality, caring for every aspect of their well-being. The guests will also receive cultural presents like music, dancing, processions, and ritual settings, in which everybody participates in according to their religious traditions. The clan will hold the festival, holding nothing back. Within a patriarchal society this would be suicidal behaviour, and would ruin the donor clan. But matriarchal societies work according to the maxim: “Those who have shall give.”

And at the next big festival another clan – one that is, by comparison, better off than the rest of the community – will take on this role. The others are invited and gifts are lavished upon them. So round and round it goes in the community, and it is always the well-off clans who have the responsibility for the festivals.

It is clear that in this system an accumulation of material or cultural goods, with a view to personal gain and enrichment, is not possible. To the contrary: economic and cultural actions are geared towards a levelling of the differences in living standards, and towards the joy of everybody participating together in the cultural performances.

A generous clan doesn't win the right to claim either material or cultural goods in return; its “reward” is the honour it gains. “Honour” in matriarchy means that the altruism and pro-social action of a donor clan is greatly admired, and that its generosity validates and strengthens the relationships between the clans. Honour means the incalculable value of human contact and co-operation. The other clans will always support such a clan, should it have need of anything or fall on hard times. This reciprocity is also a question of honour.

So gift giving is not just a coincidental, arbitrary act in such cultures, and it is not something confined to the private sphere; rather, it is the central feature of their society. This shows that the gift economy is not merely an incidental practice, but can function as a solid foundation for an entire society. (see Genevieve Vaughan: Gift Economy)

Inner Economy of the Symbolic Matri-Clan

At this point, we can address the question of how to shape a *new matriarchal economy* – which means a new gift economy – in the proposed symbolic matri-clans.

In these groups of siblings-by-choice, the members, having succeeded in shaping new, symbolic matri-clans, would share a deep trust in one another. This means the first priority is to form these new relationships, because in patriarchy people are not accustomed to think and act in affinity groups. In the context of patriarchy, individuals have to promote themselves in tough competition, so that nobody trusts in, or relies upon, others. This is a major obstacle, but as soon as it can be overcome, the matriarchal economy of a symbolic clan can develop quickly.

The most manageable size for such a group would be 20 to 30 members. This assures that the economic situation of the group can remain transparent. The clan has already elected, from among the elder members, a “matriarch” and (if the matri-clan includes men) a “sachem,” or

keeper of the peace. Both of them must be “like a good mother.” The clan members entrust their goods and money into their hands. This represents a personal honour for the matriarch and the sachem, who are personally responsible for distributing the necessary goods to sustain all clan members in a perfectly fair and equitable way. This personal responsibility in handling goods is important, and affects people in a specific way. It can free the most honourable human feelings such as unreserved giving, true devotion, benevolence and friendship: it enables love to grow between the clan members.

However, the basic decisions on how the clan’s treasures will be put to use does not lie with the matriarch and sachem, but with the clan council, a body that consists of all clan members. As with traditional matriarchies, this council would make an annual decision regarding how the goods for everyday life can be used; it would also consider special expenditures on a case-by-case basis. The matriarch and sachem would act as advisors to the clan council, but in the decision making process they would have just one vote each, like all other clan members.

Issues that would commonly be subject to intense debate in the world at large do not play a major role in council discussions. For example, a clan-man who works outside in the patriarchal world might then make a much larger contribution to the clan’s treasury than other members do – would this be unfair to him? No, for he is greatly honoured for showing such a profound gift giving attitude. And in any case, the protection and love of his “sisters” and “brothers” in the clan cannot be measured against any monetary gains.

Another patriarchal problem that would simply dissolve is the idea of giving too little: It would not matter if a woman with small children could contribute to the clan-treasury for some time. This is so because she gives a present of much higher value, that of new life; through her the whole clan has children, and therefore has a future. In this way the injustice of men’s work being paid exorbitantly highly, and women’s work being paid badly or not at all for raising children, can be redressed and dissolved. It puts things right side up again.

Economy Between Symbolic Matri-Clans

It is possible that an extended group of several matri-clans forming a community, neighbourhood association or regional network, has already come into being. Such matri-clans can support each other with goods and money, since they are a mutual aid system just as a matriarchal community is. During shared enterprises and shared festivals the matriarchal economy of balance can be put into practice. Individual clans can sponsor festivals or enterprises according to their economic ability. The guiding principle is: those who have more will also contribute more. When clans who have given more in the past become economically strained, the other clans can take turns in providing more support. This is meant to ensure the circulation of goods and money between the clans, and to foster an economic balance among them. Every clan would have the task of seeing to it that this balance is promoted continuously. This can be a very exciting enterprise, challenging everyone’s creativity and providing the chance to constitute and shape the broader community.

It is a desirable aim within such a matriarchal community to do away with money, as a means of exchange, altogether. Little by little, it can be completely replaced by the circulation of goods and services. Money is only important for dealings with the “outside” world; that is, for matters concerning outside payments of the community. For this purpose a community treasury would be established in the same way as a clan treasury would be. This treasury can then be put into the hands of the “Council of the Wise,” which is a group of older men and women chosen from among all the clans. But, as is the case for the clan treasury, they would

simply be administering the community's treasury, while the actual decisions about spending the money would be made by the community council.

This way of dealing with wealth creates lasting emotional bonds, for it implies a commitment to the welfare of the whole community. All the goods that have been given away will be given back to the donor clans in the long run, but this is not the point. The real point is the cheerful heart from which the gift is given, for gifts can never be taken for granted. In the end this attitude of unconditional giving would demonstrate that for these new communities, the greatest ethical value is motherliness.

It is obvious that this economy of gift giving can only function in a strictly defined, closed environment. But as more and more symbolic matri-clans and new matriarchal communities are created, the gift economy will spread, reducing money to the most superfluous thing.

3. Matriarchal Political Practice

The matriarchal gift economy depends on the matriarchal decision making process—that is, on matriarchal political practice.

In *traditional matriarchal societies* political life is not separate from everyday life. Unlike other societies, where political parties, parliaments, senates, committees and governments act as if the citizens don't exist (formal democracy), matriarchies decide everything in the contexts of "grass roots democracy." This is based on reaching consensus, and applies to the matri-clan of a single clan house, as well as to the local village community or to the tribal community in a local region.

There are two basic conditions for reaching consensus: *size limitation*, and *structured process*. The limitation of size refers to the number of members in a matriarchal settlement—no more than 3,000 people. Otherwise transparency is lost and consensus unattainable. Each settlement is an autonomous "village republic." Regional tribal politics is based on the decisions made in the villages. And the villages in turn, take their decisions from the clan houses where everyone is involved. In this way each person is included in the process of achieving consensus.

Structured Consensus Process

The basis of matriarchal political practice is the *clan council*, the gathering of all adult members of a clan house. Starting with their 13th birthday, teenagers are regarded as full members of the council. In this council, binding political decisions are made. Every decision originates in the clan house and returns to the clan house at the end of each consensus cycle. At the beginning, women and men gather in separate meetings, reaching their separate consensus decisions on any given question. This arrangement reflects their different spheres of action, tasks and responsibilities. This way the different perspectives of the women and the men can be preserved during this first round of consensus building.

After the separate meetings, women and men get together in the clan house to find their common consensus. The matriarch leads the proceedings and helps the clan to reach

consensus. Her advice is honoured very highly, and everyone trusts her, but in the end she has only one voice, just like everyone else. If the decision concerns only the clan, then the process ends here.

Clan Council, Village Council, Tribal Council

After the different clan houses have reached consensus, they send delegates to the *village council* to communicate their decision. These *delegates* might be the matriarch and the sachem (her most trusted brother) --together or individually. These delegates are simply spokespersons for their clan; they are *not decision-makers*, as is the case with parliaments and governments in our democracies.

The village council meetings are public. Everyone can listen to and control what the delegates are saying. The delegates simply communicate information about the decisions made in the clan houses. If consensus is reached, then the process is finished. If there is no consensus, the delegates go back to their own clan houses and report on the state of affairs. Consultations then start afresh, taking into account the information received from the village council. After a second consensus is achieved, the delegates meet back at the village council to bring the different decisions together. The delegates move between the clan council and the village council until the whole village is reaches consensus.

The system works exactly the same way at the regional level.. In a case where the whole region will affected by a given result, consultations start again in the clan houses, then on to the village level, until the village has reached consensus. Then the different villages elect delegates. (Since these delegates often have to travel quite a long distance, it is predominantly men who are elected to this position. Women prefer not leave the clan houses and land, as women are considered to be the most important centres for the whole community.)

The delegates from the villages then meet in the *regional council*. Here again, they are not decision makers; rather, they simply communicate information about the consensus decisions reached in the different villages. If no consensus is reached at the regional level, the delegates will return to their home villages and, first of all, give a report to the village council on how the matter stands. The clan delegates in the village council then go back to their clan houses to report. And now the consultation -- in all the clan houses of all the villages in the region -- begins again. The delegates of the villages move between the village councils and the tribal council -- back and forth, until consensus is reached among all clan houses and all villages of the region. In each round of this process, the clan houses are the first and the last to be consulted, for there, the political process finally reaches the real decision makers, each individual person.

This structured consensus process enables matriarchal societies to function as a grass roots democracy. Matriarchal political practice is always consensus based, it prevents the formation of any entrenched power structures.

Conflict Resolution

This consensus process prevents certain kinds of conflict from arising in the first place. Of course, people living in matriarchal societies do experience conflict; like everyone else, they are just human, with human weaknesses. But they have special ways of resolving these conflicts. For example, when conflicts between individual clan members arise, the other clan members help to resolve the issue -- it does not have to concern the whole village. When conflicts arise between clans, other clans mediate. Help comes also though "*The Council of*

the Wise.” This is a group formed (at both the village and the regional level) of older men and women who mediate in conflict situations and remind the community of the ethical values that guide their lives together. This is why the Council of the Wise is also a kind of Peace Council. Insurmountable group conflicts do not result in civil war, as in patriarchal societies. The clan wishing to live differently simply moves out of the village, settling in a different area of the region. The dissenting clan lives in the new location according to its own ideas, and will soon resume friendly relations with its point of origin, with members visiting back and forth.

Reaching Consensus in Symbolic Matri-Clans

New symbolic matri-clans can be viewed as “clan-houses” and *new matriarchal communities* as “villages.” Where this structure has been created, the benefits of matriarchal political practice become evident. Decisions are made with the help of the structured consensus process.

It starts with the symbolic clans, in which people feel and act as siblings-by-choice. Founding these clans gives the members a strong sense of mutual trust. With this atmosphere the consensus process can be pursued, giving individuals a chance to openly speak their minds – and quite different from the plenary sessions at which it is usually the good orators who hold sway. The small number of members in the clan groups is also efficient in terms of time. But of course not all conflicts concern everyone. Personal and clan matters stay within the symbolic clan, and community or “village” matters stay in the “village.” On a broader scale, there is also interaction at the regional level, in terms of the relationship that different “villages” or communities have with each other.

Council of Symbolic Matri-Clans and Community Council

At the level of the symbolic clans, consensus is first reached separately by the women’s and the men’s groups. This is especially important now, as women’s perspectives find little or no consideration in the surrounding society.

The elected matriarch might lead the women’s council and the elected sachem might lead the men’s council. Then the two groups can meet to seek common consensus, with the help of matriarch and sachem.

If the issue is of concern to the whole community or “village,” (or even to a network of different “villages” in a region), then the delegates system can be used. It would not be advisable to use gender based delegate groups, as this would only serve to reinforce old gender stereotypes. The best option would be for matriarch and sachem together to represent their clan at the community council, or to represent their “village” at the regional council if they have been elected as community representatives. This would guarantee that the different perspectives of men and women in the clans and communities are represented.

During a community council, only the delegates speak, but all are listening. The listeners have an important function: they monitor the political practice of the delegates, and make sure that they keep to their jobs of simply communicating information on their group’s decisions, without making any decisions on their own. This system is very rare in most societies today, as many people are only too willing to abdicate responsibility, while others insist on monopolising the decision making process. But the community or “village” council can be a place to practice the twin skills of reporting with accuracy and listening with attention.

At the same time, the integration of all opinions is put into practice. When the consultation process comes back to the clan, each person would be requested to consider the opinions of all the other clans and to integrate them, which invites a very creative process.

Special Councils for Conflict Resolution

In resolving conflicts between clans in new communities, “*The Council of the Wise*” would be indispensable. Elected from among the eldest women and men (over 50 years old), these council members may not serve at the levels of clan and community at the same time; this means they can act as a neutral third party for resolving conflicts between clans. Only if these council members adhere to the principle of neutrality can they be truly independent and bring peace to difficult conflict situations between symbolic matri-clans. Furthermore the idea is that they remain in contact with similar councils from other communities, and so can learn from others’ experience of peacemaking, as well as also passing on their own knowledge to others. They can also be invited by other communities to take part in their “Council of the Wise,” in order to be able to contribute to the conflict resolution there.

Compared to other councils, this one is not confined to its own community. This is of great value in guiding the process of co-operation between communities on a regional level in terms of communicating new ideas and implementing innovations. This is the place for making suggestions and launching initiatives to resolve regional conflicts that may arise between communities.

In addition, it is important for each community or “village” to create gender separate councils, in order to retain the different ways that the women and men perceive the world. In the women’s or men’s council, community members meet with their own gender to consider viewpoints, engage in mutual self-reflection, collectively appraise of ideas, contemporary issues, philosophies and principles. Here they receive reinforcement for their special perception of the world. These councils, like the Council of the Wise, have no decision-making power, but they do give input in the form of ideas and initiatives, and in this their special viewpoints enter into the decision making process in the clan council.

Like the Council of the Wise, these women’s - and men’s councils are not confined to their own community, but visit other communities and are visited in turn. In this way, ideas relative to gender specific situations keep circulating. New ideas are be born and passed along, while patriarchal patterns can be identified more easily and new patterns encouraged. This too makes for a society of peace.

4. Matriarchal Spirituality

It is neither the economy, nor political practice by itself, but rather the idea of a better world that makes people set out to explore new communities and leave behind old patterns and relationships. This idea has always had deep spiritual roots, and can only be actualised through spiritual energies.

Traditional matriarchal societies are particularly significant on the level of spirituality, because they have always been sacred societies, in contrast to the later patriarchal societies.

After the first breakthrough of military-strategic thinking, which had a secularising effect, the process of splitting off the religious aspect of society from the secular side has continued to characterise patriarchal societies until today. Nowadays “nothing is sacred anymore,” while in matriarchal societies, everything is sacred -- in the literal sense. Without knowledge the matriarchal spirituality practiced in these societies, neither their social nor their economic and political patterns can be understood properly.

A Different Understanding of the Divine

In *traditional matriarchal cultures*, the divine is understood to be immanent in nature and culture; this is the reason everything is considered sacred. There is no transcendent God outside of the world, but the world itself is divine, which means: feminine divine. There is proof for this idea in the belief – widespread in the Europe/Mediterranean/Near East area-- in the two primordial Goddesses, cosmos and earth. The cosmic primordial Goddess is the creatrix, as she is found in the Egyptian Nut, who alone gave birth to everything in existence. The earth is considered to be the other primordial Goddess; she is the Great Mother of all living beings. She is, for example, the pre-Hellenic Gaia, the Indian Prithivi, the Mediterranean Magna Mater. These primordial Goddesses mirror the matriarchal perception that the feminine is the all-encompassing.

Out of this all-encompassing feminine principle everything else develops in dynamic polarity. Such polar pairs are, for example, light and darkness, summer and winter, movement and stillness, the female and male. In matriarchy this complementary equivalence is not evaluated in any way – as has happened later, in patriarchal philosophies. In fact, the world is seen as “whole” when all of the two polarities are in perfect balance.

Everyday Life and Holy-days in a “Sacred World”

Since all elements and beings are of divine origin, everything is, therefore, also sacred. What does this mean for everyday life? There is no strict separation between “everyday life” when one is working, and “holy-days” when one is engaged in devotional practice and is not working. In matriarchy, every shared activity -- such as tilling, sowing, harvesting, cooking, weaving, building a house -- is a ritual with deep significance, and each everyday object -- such as a plough, a spindle, a storage jar, a hearth-- has also symbolic meaning. Work itself is not just narrowly focused on profit --which makes it exhausting and alienated in patriarchal cultures – but is meant to express the joy of life in all its aspects. Therefore, work is honoured and performed as a ritual.

These ritualised everyday activities are highlighted during the numerous festivals, when they are turned into great ceremonies and sacred dramas in which the whole village or community participates. Here again, everything that is celebrated is already present in daily life. Matriarchal people do not celebrate transcendent gods, hierarchies of unseen spiritual beings, or saints elevated high above normal human beings. They celebrate the diversity of the real world in which they find themselves. They celebrate what surrounds them, who they are and what they do. Therefore their spiritual activity is part of their everyday lives as much as it is part of their holy-days (the days of the great festivals).

Matriarchal Festivals: Mirror of Nature and Society

Thus the matriarchal spiritual practice is nothing abstract: holy books, dogmas and theologies are unknown. Matriarchal spirituality lives in the great matriarchal festivals, and its entire meaning can be read in those festivals. The feasts have great spiritual richness, demonstrating

enormous complexity in their rituals and ceremonies. They represent the cultural heart of each village, town, or ethnic community, and present a gestalt that includes all facets of life. They reflect the social patterns between the genders, the generations, and the clans. Furthermore, they resonate with matriarchal economy, history, and calendar and, most fundamentally, with the relationship humans have to the natural world. For them, the natural world is the embodiment of the Goddess.

The cyclical seasonal festivals are the basis for celebrating the ever-changing appearance of nature, which is understood to include the whole earth and the cosmos, and not just the immediate surroundings. In the cultural area of Europe/Near East/Mediterranean, nature appears as the threefold Goddess: In spring she appears as the young White Goddess, the Queen of the Heavens, bringing light and new life. In summer she appears as the Red Goddess in full blossom, the Mistress of the Earth, who brings love and fertility. In autumn she appears as the Black Goddess, the wise Crone, the Queen of the Other World, and takes life back into the depth of the earth or the waters. She is also the transformer of life during winter and brings it back up again from the depths through rebirth. These different aspects of the Great Goddess symbolise the cycle of the year and the cycle of life, which revolves again and again. The world is seen as being threefold: heaven, earth and underworld.

Matriarchal peoples also celebrate themselves, the genders, and the generations, all of which are expressions of the divine. Children and youth are celebrated in festivals of initiation. The adults are celebrated in festivals of the sacred marriage, a ceremony that symbolically joins all the polarities of the world: heaven and earth, the sun and the moon, the Goddess and the humans. The older people, especially the elder women as clan mothers, are celebrated in festivals of merit; and following these are the great festivals for the ancestors, especially the female ancestors. Those in the other world also belong to the clan, and may be born again as new babies. In this way, the different qualities of the generations and genders are expressed, and the specific dignity or honour of each becomes evident.

At the same time, the web of relationships between the clans becomes evident, as different clans take responsibility for directing the different seasonal festivals in a matriarchal society. This creates the spiritual connections that constitute the spiritual pattern for the whole town or village.

Matriarchal Festivals: Calendar and Historical Chronicle

Matriarchal economy becomes visible through the festivals, in both practical and symbolic ways. On the practical level they drive the matriarchal economy of gift giving and reciprocating (as described above); on the symbolic level they represent the calendar of the agricultural economy. The great festivals of the seasons are at the same time festivals of sowing, of germination and growth, of harvest and decay. They represent an agrarian calendar that is based on astronomical observations.

Matriarchal people do not need history books, for they can read their history and those of their founding clan mothers, the ancestress of each clan, through their festivals. These events are portrayed as symbolic scenes, as the story of their own societal development. This way of conveying history is enlivening, not boring: it is colourful, dramatic, and turbulent -- and participation is allowed. History, therefore, is not just concerned with the past; but is a process that is being worked on in the present through participation in the rituals. Even historical events that at one time threatened a matriarchal community are acted out; for example, the patriarchal attacks that fortunately, in some cases, could be resolved by political compromise.

The most remarkable attribute of matriarchal spirituality is its great tolerance. As the primordial Goddess Earth, the mother of all peoples, is the “The One with the Thousand Faces,” it is only natural that she will also be honoured in a thousand different specific appearances. For example, a mountain people will worship her in the shape of a Mountain Goddess, and people living by the sea will worship her as a Sea Goddess. In spite of this diversity, which is considered to be a great wealth, the awareness of the primordial Goddess’s unity is never lost. But she is never an abstract unity; she is a Goddess one can see and touch, therefore there is no need for anyone to convert others to a specific understanding of the Goddess. The mountain dweller would consider it sheer nonsense to try to convert people living by the sea to their Mountain Goddess. This matriarchal tolerance is so expansive that it even integrates, in some cases, the gods of patriarchal religion, such as Jesus and Mary, because the missionaries “liked it that way.” Christian exclusivity was lost, however, for matriarchal people have no concept of it.

Matriarchal Tolerance today

Matriarchal tolerance is given great value and can teach us a lot in the modern world. It is already on the way – even if it is not called by this term – in many contemporary movements people have abandoned religions that claim to have exclusive access to God or to the “truth,” or an exclusive route to holiness. For them, traditional patriarchal religions have also lost spiritual credibility because of their close links to secular rulers and governments.

Matriarchal spirituality is not a “religion” or a “theology,” it is not a “church,” a “temple,” a “synagogue,” or a “mosque.” It has no “holy books” to which the truth is confined. No one has to “believe” something that makes no sense to them. Matriarchal spirituality is the continuous celebration of this world and of life. In order to express this, a language of symbols has developed over millennia; this is a language that has served as the foundation for similar religions symbolic systems across the globe. This symbolic language or “language of the Goddess” (Marija Gimbutas) does not demand blind faith, because the images are self-explanatory as images of cosmos and earth.

Matriarchal spirituality would be a suitable way to express matriarchal tolerance *in symbolic matri-clans of siblings-by-choice, in new communities, in networks of new communities, in the society as a whole*. It has the power to heal the society and the world. Why shouldn’t we celebrate the existence of the many different visions, and myriad political and spiritual paths that are being followed today by people with similar ideals? This constitutes a spiritual treasure, and is much needed in these times. The only unwelcome attitude would be intolerance and missionary zeal.

The Festivals as the new Center of Life

I am convinced that many people, especially women, practice matriarchal spirituality in their everyday life and celebrate wonderful festivals. They already use matriarchal symbolic language in different ways. This free and creative worship of the Goddess could drive the formation of spiritual affinity groups, symbolic matri-clans, new communities, and the whole system of new matriarchal units. And through matriarchal symbolic language, it would be possible to depict the complexity of life’s interconnectedness and social relationships in these new matriarchal units. This would turn the festivals into great spiritual events, which would function as regenerating centres for groups, clans, and communities.

As people begin to see each other in this spiritual context, their specific roles and qualities as different individuals, genders, and generations can be seen in the light of a Goddess gift or

even Goddess shape and can take healing and integrating effect in everyday life. Accordingly, the whole fabric of clan or community life becomes manifest. The clan or community structure itself can also be represented and celebrated this way. The results can be very enlightening, and can initiate a process that helps clarify the structures themselves.

We also have to find an overall image for the structure of the clan or community—again a Goddess gift or shape that can be expressed in celebration. Such an overall image or gestalt, as matriarchal symbolism conceives of it, tends to be integrative. Through creative work on this overall image, an integrating dynamic could be initiated in a clan or community. This is brought about not through theoretical moralistic discussion, but by creative play.

The Special History and the Local “Face of Mother Earth”

The very special and unique history of each new matriarchal clan or community is so important for the identity of the individual members that it should always be celebrated in visual images and dramatic scenes. Newcomers, children and outsiders will be better able understand the clan or community if it is presented in illustrated scenes. In this process, it is particularly the founding mothers who are honoured, whether they are still alive or are already with the ancestors.

Furthermore, the economy is thoroughly represented in the great festivals, as for example the form of the harvest being praised as a great gift, or the various symbolic depictions of individual trade skills and professions that are celebrated.

The cosmos and the earth in general, as well as the specific place where the clan or community lives—the local “Face of Mother Earth” -- are worthy of the most elaborate festivals. For we can hardly connect with the earth in spirit, soul and body if we don't celebrate her with depictions of her changing seasonal face, as matriarchal peoples do. We touch her lovingly by portraying her, and we enhance her beauty with our own beautiful festive appearance, as well as with the festivals themselves. Because we are a part of her, a part of earth, she becomes visible to herself, through our eyes, and comes into her own consciousness when we enjoy her beauty.. For, through us, nature beholds her own beauty (according to the philosopher Schelling).

This is the dialogue with the Goddess inside us and around us. To conduct this dialogue results in a re-enchantment of the world, which is just another expression for making the world sacred again.

5. Thoughts on a Modern Matriarchal Society

In the sections above, I have introduced the subject of social structures, economy and political practice, and spirituality of matriarchal societies. I have described how these patterns can be applied as a microstructure to symbolic clans of siblings-by-choice, and to new creative communities. Now I would like to enlarge these thoughts, taking them from the level of community to the level of society as the macrostructure. This is a draft of a new design for society.

This draft also takes into account the problems and hardships of the current social situation our society faces. Social coherence and cultures are being destroyed daily by capitalist globalisation and ideological wars, and sustainable values are being lost; as a consequence, more and more people, especially women, are sinking into poverty.

A Question of Size: The Role of the Region

When we think about a matriarchal society, we have to let go of the ruling concepts of society. For many of us, society means a collection of different individuals, lobby groups and institutions: strangers competing against one another for power in the state. Often “society” is identified with “state,” and many societies today are the size of large nations, or even aggregations of nations, or superpowers. The fact that size is admired in this context has to do with patriarchal ideology of dominance, expansion and building of a (global) empire.

In a matriarchal design, size does not have a value in and of itself. Smaller units are preferred, as they allow for a more personal approach and more transparency. The units ought to expand to the point-- as is the currently the case with nations and superpowers -- that the individual is unable to understand its functioning and cannot participate in the decision making processes.

On the other hand the social units must be large enough to ensure self-sufficient maintenance and diversity of trade, technical skills, and art. *The region is the best size to facilitate this.* The boundaries of a region are not arbitrary, as those of a nation state are, but are determined by the landscape, along with traditions deeply rooted in the culture. A matriarchal region does not extend beyond its own natural regional boundaries; it is a network of villages and small towns. There is no ranking order among villages and towns, no central government, and no capital cities. Each village is its own little independent republic, and each region, as a network of villages and towns, operates self-sufficiently and is politically autonomous. Such a village republic consists of one or more matri-clans (traditional) or symbolic matri-clans (modern) which function according to the patterns described above. A town republic consists of several neighbourhoods, which in turn work like a “village,” for they also consist of a small number of traditional or modern matri-clans. This limits the size of the town and guarantees transparency.

These “village-towns” have nothing in common with our monstrous metropolitan cities in which millions of uprooted individuals, who are strangers to each other and often antagonistic towards each other, must spend their lives. These cities are mere accumulations of mostly isolated individuals, and there is no difference between the people, who are de-humanised into little units, like numbers. In comparison, a matriarchal town is a well-ordered structure, for it is not only the traditional or modern matri-clans of the town neighbourhoods, which relate to each other on political terms, but also the neighbourhoods themselves.

Consensus Politics on Societal Level

The pattern of matriarchal consensus politics involves each individual in the decision-making process and aims for *unanimous decisions*. The consensus principle determines the limit to the size of a matriarchal society, as well as the structure of village and town republics in both the traditional and the modern case. Consensus politics is based on close proximity of individuals, and on transparency.

All actual political processes are carried out within the traditional or modern matri-clans. In modern matri-clans people live together as siblings-by-choice and not as competing strangers. All decision-making processes take place in the traditional or modern matri-clans, and all

consultation processes keep coming back there, until unanimity is reached at the extended level of village or town or network of towns (that is, the region, as described above).

It is obvious that consensus politics is not possible beyond the size of the region. This is the reason why the region is the largest political unit. Anything beyond that size would exceed human scale. Such size de-humanises individuals and turns them into mere voiceless objects, as can be seen in our huge, centralised states. Human scale is limited and relatively small; that's just how it is. The ruling megalomania relentlessly aims to create larger and larger entities in the globalised capitalist market. But its expansion could be hindered in places where the small, human scale is re-established as the norm.

The Basis: Subsistence Economy

The region is also the largest economic unit. A matriarchal economy is a subsistence economy, based on the independence of local production. Produce is grown on farmland surrounding the villages and small towns, and then brought to the local markets that guarantee the food supply. These local markets are non-capitalist; because no one can gain profit from them, and to some extent they can even function without money. They are embedded in the matriarchal society's comprehensive gift economy, implemented during the festivals.

Not only do the villages, as agrarian settlements, provide food, but the agrarian towns are also dependent on their surrounding farmland. The adjoining farmland is limited; this constitutes the limiting factor for the size of towns. In regard to economics, too, a matriarchal society cannot support the huge cities that suck their country regions dry and degrade them to poor provinces.

On a global scale, millions of people, especially women, work as gardeners, farmers, and traders; even today, it is women who practise subsistence economy to feed their families. This form of economy is resistant to the commercialisation of agriculture, which is driven by the global agro-business and food corporations that are devastating whole landscapes. Subsistence economy works on a small scale, it works intensively and promotes agricultural practices on a human –not machine – scale. This makes great sense ecologically. Thus subsistence economy is the only form of economy that could put an end to the dominant unrestrained destruction of the planet.

But this does not mean that each woman has to be a gardener and each man a farmer; the various trades and professions are still practised, especially in the towns. The region is the largest unit of supply; it contains several towns and villages and so can offer not only all types of crafted merchandise and specialised products and services, but can also serve as protection against local shortages of food supply.

The ethical core of the subsistence economy is the gift economy, for all goods are considered as gifts from Mother Earth, and are given to the members of the matri-clans as gifts. The local and regional markets function as administrative centres only. They are embedded in the overall gift economy, which is demonstrated at the great festivals where all the goods earned at the markets are given away to the community. Contrary to this, in capitalism the hidden gift economy of unpaid and poorly paid work is exploited by the overall market system, including taxation, personal debt, and accumulation of interest. This hidden gift economy constitutes the basis for accumulation of the few, and without it, capitalism could not succeed (Genevieve Vaughan).

The two Genders: the “Double Face” of Society

Traditional matriarchal society recognises that humanity consists of two sexes, male and female. It accommodates this by creating a social structure characterised by complementary egalitarianism and perfect balance between the two genders. A modern matriarchal society is constructed in the same way. No one gender can rule over the other, or make it adhere to its own ideas, and there are no male or female bosses to take away the individual’s personal decision-making process. Matriarchal consensus politics does not allow for such dominance.

In all areas of society men and woman are equally represented. Matriarchal politics necessitates the coexistence of both women and men as elected delegates on each societal level: clan, village, town, and region. They can only act in unison, for they represent the “Double Face” of society. This not only applies to the political sphere, but to all areas of society, including specialised economic groups such as guilds and trade bodies, specialised groups in the arts and sciences, and the various spiritual honours and titles. Each office is always doubly filled, both by a woman and a man. The representatives interact like sisters and brothers, in the sense of “siblings by choice in the office.”

The women of a village, town or region elect the female representatives; likewise the men elect the male representatives. This guarantees that women and men are represented equally everywhere.

In this model one gender is never underrepresented, nor is there competition for any of the offices.

Matriarchal representatives are simply delegates, but not decision makers, as becomes evident here. They are selected on the basis of their ability to resolve conflict, to build trust and to integrate diversity. All representatives are widely known, and are elected directly. By the same token, gender balance is always directly monitored.

The principle of election excludes the construction of hierarchies that enable individuals to enshrine their positions forever. Neither is the rotation system used; it is nothing but the flipside of discrimination, created out of the fear of hierarchy. Electing the most able person for any job allows for multiple re-elections of able candidates, as long as their personal abilities continue to serve the good of the community. The ongoing demonstration of their abilities is the proof of this process, since privileges do not exist.

Spirituality on the Level of Society

Matriarchal spirituality – in the sense described above – is the connecting energy between all parts and actions of a traditional or modern matriarchal society. Its vibrant expressions are the festivals, where the whole worldview and practice of the society is presented in exceedingly beautiful rituals and ceremonies. The matriarchal worldview is not institutionalised, it is free - -but it is not arbitrary. It binds everyone through the earth, which carries everything, and the life stream, which permeates everything.

The visible world itself is sacred: the Great Goddess with her thousand faces. Besides the seasonal festivals celebrated by everyone, each matri-clan, as well as each village and town, will have its own specific ceremonies, developed from its own particular traditions. This makes for a rich mosaic of local cultures. Culture like this cannot be consumed, since everybody is actively involved in creating it.

The spiritual world penetrates all of society: The veneration of the Goddess Earth shapes the economy; the honouring of human diversity creates the politics. These values extend beyond the boundaries of a matriarchal society, this means beyond the reaches of the region.

Although the region is the largest unit for such a society, the regions have very friendly connections with each other. These connections are purely spiritual and would be articulated symbolically. For example, if a region in the Northern Hemisphere would create such a connection in the four directions of the earth, they could call themselves “Region of the Rising Sun” (East), “Region of the Midday Sun” (South), “Region of the Setting Sun” (West) and “Region of the Eternal Star” (North). In this way they relate to each other symbolically, they are now “sister-regions.” The connection is strengthened by mutual visits, and by inter-regional festivals that depict the symbolic order. At these festivals gifts will be exchanged; these may be specific products or pieces of art of the region. In this way a horizontal network of the regions is established, one which can be changed and re-shaped and is totally different from our centralised, hierarchical state run system.

In these times of electronic communication, spiritual connections do not have to be limited to neighbouring regions, but can cross countries and continents. Why should it not be possible for a matriarchal region in the Americas to have one “sister-region” in Asia, one in Europe, and one in Africa? There are no boundaries for such connections. The “visits” will be more likely conducted via the Internet. To prepare for a festival in common will necessitate long journeys, which will make such occasions rather infrequent. In this way, a worldwide network can be created between the regions. Could such an alliance be considered a “matriarchal state,” or can terms and concepts like “nation” and “state” and “united states” be dispensed with? For a modern matriarchal society they can indeed, for it appears that there can be a well ordered, and well functioning, societal system, which extends all over the world and which is completely devoid of a state.
