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Matriarchal societies: their social, political, economic and cultural structure as the only solution in the destructive phase of patriarchy.

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INDEX

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

The modern world, with all its progresses and developments, is facing different challenges: at the same time social, political, economic and environmental ones.

Whereas the number of democratic countries in the world is growing, we experience a "*reduction in the satisfaction of citizens with the performances of 'really existing democracies'*"[1]. Citizens do not feel represented anymore by the delegates that they elect, and the elections are "*too rare to grant citizens sufficient power to control the elected. Additionally, elections offer only limited choices, leaving several themes out of the electoral debates and citizens' assessment. More and more, elections have been seen as manipulated, given the greater capacity of some candidates to attract financial support, licit or illicit, as well as to command privileged access to mass media*"[2]. Moreover, the decline in political participation may lead to the decline in the quality of decision-making. This leads to the understanding of the importance of the principle of consensus, which is being reinforced by many social movements. However, "*international institutions have developed procedures that contradict the consensus principle and the principle of non-intervention. Some international norms and rules create obligations for national governments to take measures even when they have not agreed to do so. Moreover, in some cases, decisions of international institutions even affect individuals directly*"[3]. In this context, international organizations and institutions are considered to be impersonal and too far away from the individuals, depriving them of the possibility to participate in the decision making process.

In such a context, most of the political decisions taken at the international level (but not only) are influenced by economic interests: this is the culture of the primacy of economics over politics, which poses the survival of democracy at risk. In fact, "*financial oligarchies can in effect pass judgements on national governments through the rating agencies. These have the power to "vote" against governments via capital transfers abroad or speculative attacks on interest rates. Citizens may vote and choose their government, but those elected too often obey the dictates of private interest groups not accountable to the people*"[4]. In such a way, the new ruling class has deprived people of their decision making power. In addition, according to Levi, the "*powerlessness of democratic institutions is rooted in the weakness of national governments and parliaments with regard to the global decision-making power of financial oligarchies*".

Globalization and the interconnected global market that derives from it, have proven to be vulnerable and to have significant weaknesses which can be very dangerous (as the global financial crisis revealed) and bring much of the Earth's population to economic distress. Moreover, the globalized system allows for the perpetuation of the exploitation of the developing countries. In

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[1] Della Porta, Donatella, *Can Democracy Be Saved? Participation, Deliberation and Social Movements*, 2013, pg.1

[2] Ibidem pg. 7

[3] Ibidem pg. 108

[4] Levi, Lucio, *Politics and Economics in the Globalization Era*, published in Year XXV, Number 3, November 2012

fact, this era in which colonialism[5] has supposedly ended, the colonialist system is perpetuated through capitalism and globalization. Such exploitation has reinforced (and is still reinforcing) former inequalities; this is typical of capitalism, which is an exploitative economy: everything is done in order to make profit. Profit and wealth have here become the ruling "values" of modern society.

Such a system has also perpetuated the inequality between men and women (what we call the "gender gap"[6]), not allowing the parity between the two sexes, with women being often subordinated to men, often even dependent on them. The gender gap (especially the gender wage gap) is caused both by cultural factors (for which women are paid less even when performing the exactly same job, with the exactly same competences, level of education,etc.), as well as by the social habit that segregates women in the house, doing the unpaid housework[7] as well as child care and even elderly care. In fact, the custom according to which women need to do the housework and look after the children does either prevent them from entering the job market or poses a great obstacle in performing full time jobs. Moreover, women are still the victims of many violences, sexual harassments and abuses and the patriarchal culture of domination and repression is not really helping to solve these problems at the root cause.

This same desire for domination and power that characterizes patriarchal societies, as well as economic interests, are the main causes of wars. In fact, wars are usually either caused by the greed for political power over a territory, or by the greed for the natural resources that are contained there [8](e.g.Afghanistan). Now more than ever, wars are so lethal that they can put an end to life on Earth, because of the proliferation of arms of mass destruction, of nuclear weapons[9] and for this it becomes a priority to find a solution to avoid them.

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[5] According to Genevieve Vaughan, colonialism can be seen as the *"take over of other economies, many of which were gift economies*; *Indigenous cultures had to be assimilated and eliminated in order to avoid proposing the gift economy model instead of the patriarchal capitalist model"*.
According to her,*"capitalist markets are markets infused with the competitive values of patriarchy which drive the exchangers to accumulate more gifts in order to leverage power over others. The ego-orientation of exchange fits with the ego-orientation of patriarchal men as each person competes with others and strives towards domination"*. (See Genevieve Vaughan, *matriarchy and the gift economy*, in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future*)

[6]According to Nick Jardine,*"achieving gender equality isn't just a moral issue – it makes economic sense. Equality between men and women in all aspects of life, from access to health and education to political power and earning potential, is fundamental to whether and how societies thrive"*. According to the Global Gender Gap Report, at current rates, we will not close the economy gap before 2133. (See Jardine, Nick, *The 10 Biggest Problems In The World According To The EU*, in the *business insider*, Oct. 7, 2011.

[7] According to Genevieve Vaughan, housework is a gift women are giving to the market economy; Moreover, according to her, everything that is profit is made up of gifts. (See Genevieve Vaughan, *matriarchy and the gift economy*, in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future*)

[8] As Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen points out,*"the economy itself is seen as a battlefield, an economy of competition"*.(See Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, *Matriarchal principles for economies and societies of today. What we can learn from Juchitan*, in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future*)

[9]Three percent of the EU considers the proliferation of nuclear weapons as the one thing that's going to bring the world to destruction. (See Jardine, Nick, *The 10 Biggest Problems In The World According To The EU*, in the business insider, Oct. 7, 2011)

The capitalist system, industrialization and anthropocentrism have led to the destruction of the environment, which has led (among other things) to global warming, which is considered to be one of the main threats to humanity. We have come to the point where the commodification of goods (even natural ones) has caused their scarcity, making of those that previously were abundant gifts of nature, scarce commodities (Genevieve Vaughan). This has allowed for the accumulation of wealth by the few at the expense of the many. An example of this are multinationals, which constantly expropriate indigenous peoples of their territories, and which often impose the acquisition of infertile seeds, making peasants dependent on multinationals' supply. These seeds are just an example of what GMOs are and how threatening to life they may be.

Socially, we are facing different other issues, such as depression, which is considered to be the illness of the third millennium. Depression, a part from being the consequence of internal biological factors, finds its root causes in the external context. Being lonely, suffering from alienation, the lack of genuine relationships[10] as well as the lack of the sense of belonging are major factors leading to such a state. Many (or even most of the) people do not feel connected anymore, neither with other people, nor with nature. This is the root cause of many illnesses. The decline of the nuclear family, as well as divorce and women entering the labour force are also leading to the loneliness of children as well as of the elderly, who feel to be abandoned and do not receive enough care.

All these issues, many of which are even life threatening, show us that the patriarchal, domination based system is not working; patriarchy has now reached its peak of destructiveness, posing both the Earth and humanity at risk. Therefore it becomes necessary to find a solution.

What I want to analyze in this thesis is how matriarchal social, political, economic and cultural structure, can solve these problems, which are the pure consequences of the patriarchal system.

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[10] According to Robert Waldinger (the responsible of a 80 years social study),"loneliness kills" and it is "as powerful as smoking or alcoholism). The study revealed that the quality of our relationships has a powerful influence on our health; that our close relationships, more than money or fame, are what keep people happy throughout their lives. Such ties protect people from life's discontents, help to delay mental and physical decline, and are better predictors of long and happy lives than social class, IQ, or even genes.
According to Waldinger,"*good relationships don't just protect our bodies; they protect our brains*". However, what is most important about these relationships is the feeling of to can really count on someone when going through difficulties.(See Mineo, Liz, *Good genes are nice, but joy is better. Harvard study, almost 80 years old, has proven that embracing community helps us live longer, and be happier*, in the Harvard gazette, April 11, 2017

2. TRADITIONAL VISION OF MATRIARCHY

The first researcher who studied matriarchal societies was Johann Jakob Bachofen. His theory is based on the anthropological studies of 1860s and 1870s and subsequently confirmed by John Ferguson McLennan e Lewis Henry Morgan, among others.

In his book Das Mutterrecht, Bachofen postulates an archaic mother right, based on a primordial matriarchal religion.

The author divides the cultural evolution of the human civilization into four different phases. The first one is defined as hetaerism, which is earth-centered and characterized by nomadism. This is a communistic and polyamorous phase, characterized by sexual promiscuity and whose deity is a earthy proto Aphrodite. The second period is matriarchal and lunar, based on agriculture, during which emerged chthonic mysteries, such as that of Demeter. The third phase is the Dionysian, which is considered to be a transitional phase where patriarchy started to emerge and earlier traditions were masculinized. The fourth and last phase is defined as the Apollonian one, the patriarchal 'solar' phase, in which all traces of the Matriarchal and Dionysian past were eradicated and modern civilization emerged.

Many academics, still today, consider the idea of gynaecocracy ("Gynäkokratie") suggested by Bachofen, not as a general characteristic of a culture of people but as a crucial phase of the cultural development, a state of historical transition from matriarchy to patriarchy. Its phases are hetaerism (non regulated matriarchy), amazons (an intermediate phase), matriarchy (where the mother is the principal parent, the heritage is matrilineal) and patriarchy (characterized by father right, hence legal patriarchy).

Bachofen analyses the hetaerist period pointing out that the promiscuity by which it is characterized excludes any certainty of paternity and it is for this reason that the descent can be reckoned only in the female line, according to mother-right. According to him this was originally the case amongst all the peoples of antiquity. Since women where the only parents known with certainty, they held a position of such high respect and honor that it led to gynaecocracy, the rule of women. Therefore the transition to monogamy, where the woman belonged to one man exclusively, involved a violation of a primitive religious law, of the traditional right of other men to this woman. Therefore, to expiate this violation or to purchase indulgence for it, the woman had to surrender herself for a limited period. In fact the idea of maternity corresponded to that of the Mother Goddess, from which derived matrilineality. Men would have prevailed over women only thanks to their physical superiority, while women would have partly resisted to this new social status. This resistance had to be done by forcing women's moral and religious qualities, recurring even to military means (hence the myth of the Amazons[11]). This led to monogamy, what Bachofen defines as the "golden age of the human race", whose protagonists were Era and Demeter, represented most of all in Lycia.

Much of Bachofen's considerations come from the analysis of myths, which he considers to be sources of historical knowledge: not a story which originates from imagination but an authentic historical evidence. Myths express the way in which people thought at the origins of civilization;

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[11] (See also Noble, Vicki, *How the Amazons got their name*, in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future*)

therefore they are authentic sources of history. This is because each historical period follows unconsciously, even in its poetical creations, the laws of its own existence. Therefore Bachofen believes that the myth and the religion of a people are essential in order to retrace its culture. As an example, he sees in Aeschylus' myth of Orestea the passage from matriarchy to patriarchy. Bachofen's view of pre-classic antiquity is characterized by the idea that women had a central role. The cult of Goddesses represents in itself the central role of women, since a society characterized by patriarchy could not worship a woman. As an example, he believes that the privilege of Laodamie may have not been invented under the influences of hellenic ideas, to which it is opposed. Moreover, according to Bachofen, known forms of familiar right are not those of the origins but consequences of more ancient phases. In fact, the roman system of paternity, with its rigor, recalls us another system, more ancient, that it had to fight and repress. He also believes that every stage of familiar right depends on religious ideas and when religion is subordinated to natural phenomena, also familiar structures have to follow that path. Therefore patriarchies are characterized by the cult of an abstract God, whereas matriarchies are characterized by the cult of a Goddess. The eternal struggle between matriarchy and patriarchy, which tries to impose itself on matriarchy is a clear evidence of the fact that the history of the human race is determined by the struggle of the sexes.

According to Bachofen, matriarchal rule is characterized by the social primacy of the mother; here the heritage goes to daughters only and women have the full right to choose autonomously their sexual partners. Matricide is the worst crime and religion is characterized by the cult of nature, the Earth Goddess (Gea). From an economic point of view, this society is agriculturally very developed, with agricultural tasks carried out by women and hunting reserved to men, which were often absent and far from the community. It is thanks to women that civilization settled and started to practice agriculture and to them we owe the birth of culture[12]. Politically, this society was characterized by universal equality and freedom. Women took on the power of head of the community and delegated some powers to men.

The first phase, that Bachofen situates in the East, was characterized by random hetaerism, the absence of private property and free mating; in such phase the concept of paternity was unknown and Bachofen describes the woman(Aphrodite, Elena) as the womb that is always ready, while the male principle is needed only for fecundation.

Matriarchal societies have a very deep bond with the Earth, nature, whereas patriarchal ones are emancipated from it; here the human reality goes beyond the law of material life. According to Bachofen the masculine principle is spiritual, while the feminine one is corporal. In his patriarchal view, he interprets the aforementioned four phases as a processes of evolution of the human race, from the less developed matriarchal period to the more developed patriarchal one. The victory of the'"Appolinischen", of the masculine apollinean/solar mind over feminine material nature, and of a transcendent celestial father God over the cult of the "Erdmütter" (Mother Earth) has represented a fundamental progress of civilization. According to Bachofen the transition to patriarchy represents the highest religious development of humanity. However, this development has not taken place

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[12] See also Joan Marler, *The iconography and social structure of old Europe. The archaeomythological research of Marija Gimbutas*, in *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies past, present and future.*

homogeneously and history is characterized by the struggle of these opposing principles. Therefore patriarchy has had to develop the social and legal structures in order to enforce the rights of men as fathers, as those of women that are always certain (through maternity).

The emergence of patriarchy (as well as its perpetuation) has therefore been characterized by violence and domination. Hence it is impossible to consider this transition as an evolution, it is rather an involution, since we have gone from peaceful matriarchal societies to war-like patriarchal ones. Bachofen simply thinks in the terms of the modern patriarchal man: the Apollonian religion, as opposite to the chthonian one is superior since it detaches itself from the world and looks at the sky, goes beyond the physical and turns to the intellectual. It is because of this looking at the sky and not at the Earth where we live that we have become so detached from the planet where we live till getting to the point that we are destroying it.

3. MODERN MATRIARCHAL STUDIES

Modern Matriarchal Studies emerge in 1970s, during the second wave of feminism, pioneered by Merlin Stone's When God Was a Woman. Heide Goettner-Abendroth has continued to publish on the topic into the 2000s, and has organized two World Congresses on Matriarchal Studies.

Here we see a completely opposite view from that of Bachofen. He sees matriarchy as the exact opposite of patriarchy: a society where women rule. He interprets matriarchy in terms of domination, not understanding that matriarchies are not societies where women rule. On the contrary, matriarchies have existed over millennia, without hierarchies and without domination[13]. There are no evidence that in matriarchal societies women have the last word or that they rule over others. These prejudice reflects the assumption that matriarchal societies would be organized just like patriarchal ones, but with women, instead of men, holding central roles. It is interesting to analyze the etymology of the two terms. "Archy" derives from Greek "arché" which has two meanings: domination and beginning. According to Heide Goettner-Abendroth, patriarchy must be translated as domination of the fathers, while matriarchy means "in the beginning, the mothers." In fact, in terms of cultural history, matriarchies are much older than the later developing patriarchies; matriarchies are the origin of the history of cultures. Furthermore, in matriarchies there is the understanding of the fact that mothers are the origin, or beginning, of each living being. These cultures have transformed this natural fact into a cultural pattern.

Heide Goettner-Abendroth defines matriarchies as societies where war and armies are unknown[14]. In such societies violence against women and children is virtually unknown, whereas patriarchal societies worldwide are overwhelmed with it.

Heide Goettner-Abendroth believes that in this last globally destructive phase of patriarchy, we need to urgently consider non-patriarchal, basically egalitarian economic, social, political and cultural patterns which are characteristic of matriarchal societies.

Matriarchies are not utopian: they have been present for long periods of human history, even longer than those of the existence of patriarchy. These societies contain very concrete, detailed ways of organizing life in accordance with people's needs and their methods are non-violent, peaceful, "human".

Heide Goettner-Abendroth analyses deeply matriarchal societies in economic, social, political and cultural terms pointing out their main characteristics.

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[13] In matriarchal societies, the basis is cooperation, instead of domination. As an example, in the Minangkabau matriarchal society,"*matriarchy is not about "female rule", but about social principles and values rooted in maternal meanings in which both sexes work together to promote human well-being*". Their social philosophy is antithetic to the western one which stresses on competition and the survival of the fittest; here the "ruling" principle is that of nurture. (See Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Matriarchal values and world peace. The case of the Minangkabau.* in *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies past, present and future*)

[14] There are many different theories that explain the end of ancient matriarchal societies. Usually patriarchal warrior peoples invaded matriarchal peaceful ones (usually much more advanced in cultural terms) and either totally destroyed them or made them vanish through "inter-ratial" marriages. An example of this are the Arians which thousands of years of ago invaded the north of India, destroying the peaceful Dravidian civilization, which was very developed (e.g.Harappa).

3.1 MATRIARCHAL ECONOMY

Most of the traditional matriarchies are agrarian, but not exclusively so. They are characterized by subsistence economy[15], that allows local and regional self-reliance. Here private ownership of property and territorial claims are unknown and land and houses belong to the clan in the sense of usage rights. The concept of private property is here absent[16] because of the belief that "Mother Earth" cannot be owned or cut up into pieces. She bestows fruits and animals to all people, therefore they cannot be owned privately. Because of this belief, they have created an economy of balance characterized by the circulation of goods, thus preventing hoarding and accumulation. There are no exceptions: all goods are included in the circulation process, whether they are agricultural, handicrafts or traded merchandise. The accumulation principle, which is characteristic of the capitalist world, is here substituted by the principle of distribution. Several customs allow this distribution: for example, wealthy clans are obliged to invite the whole village to various seasonal festivals, whose costs are sustained by the inviting family. During these festivals, these families also offers gifts and in this way their wealth is reduced. Such generosity makes them gain honor in the village as wells as a high social reputation, which will help them in times of need.

Because of the perfectly balanced reciprocity that characterizes matriarchal societies, Heide Goettner-Abendroth defines them as societies of economic reciprocity, as economies of balance.

This prevents an economic disparity between rich and poor, providing a moderate prosperity for all. The opposite of the economy of balance is the economy of accumulation, typical of 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*"[17]. This is a real problem today, since we have arrived at the point 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*"[18].

Heide Goettner-Abendroth believes therefore that a way out of this situation is a new subsistence economy based on local and regional units, at the core of which we find the gift economy. The principle of working self-sufficiently and the resulting quality of life are more important than producing a great quantity of goods. Therefore regionalization can be a tool for a matriarchal economy.

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[15]Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen describes the subsistence economy of the indigenous people of Juchitán, saying that here subsistence corresponds to what "*everybody needs for everyday survival, including material and immaterial needs. The basis for subsistence production is self-sufficiency*". She points out that that of Juchitán is a "*moral self-sufficient economy which includes the needs of others in the community*". (see Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, *Matriarchal principles for economies and societies of today, what we can learn form Juchitán*, in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future*)

[16] We can find exceptions to this. However, there is nothing like capital accumulation: owned lands are just owned for the well being of the clan/community but without depriving none of the possibility of having its piece of land or access to natural resources.

[17]Goettner-Abendroth, Heide. *The Way into an Egalitarian Society. Principles and Practice of a Matriarchal Politics*, Edited by the "International Academy HAGIA", Winzer / Germany, 2007. pg.11

[18] Ibidem pg.4

3.1.1 INNER ECONOMY OF THE CLAN

All goods acquired by clan members are given to the women of the clan. Therefore women, and more specifically the eldest women of the clan (the matriarchs) hold all the goods in their hands. Matriarchs are the persons in whom the highest degree of trust is placed: they redistribute everything justly and equitably among members of the clan. They are responsible for the sustenance and the protection of all clan members and are as well the economic managers and administrators. They work the land themselves or organize how the work is to be done.

Traditionally, matriarchal communities existed without money, as there was no need for it; now we can find some matriarchal societies which utilize money for interaction with external communities.

Matriarchal societies organize the economy not according to the profit principle, which is ego-centered and where just an individual or a small group of people benefits, taking advantage of the majority of people. Instead, the motivation behind their action is motherliness. The principle of motherliness is the opposite: here altruism reigns and the well being of community members is the main concern. The principle of motherliness permeates all areas of a matriarchal society: for example a man who wants to become a representative of the clan to the outside world must be "like a good mother".

3.1.2 ECONOMY BETWEEN CLANS

Varying harvests and more or less successful outcomes in trading over the course of the year may be the cause of economic differences between the clans in any village or city. In such a 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. Goods circulate as gifts, rather than in exchange for profit, during festivals, which drive the economy of matriarchal societies. As an example, when a clan is able to reap a great harvest, it gives away its fortune at the first opportunity: during a festival organized by it and to which all members of the village are invited. Guests receive even cultural presents like music, dancing, processions and ritual settings, to which everybody participates.

The clan holds the festival, holding nothing back. This would be considered a suicidal behavior within a patriarchal society, by ruining the donor clan. On the contrary, matriarchal societies work according to the maxim: "Those who have shall give." For this reason, the better off have the responsibility for festivals.

Therefore, as we have seen, in such a system the accumulation of goods (either material or cultural), with a view to personal gain and enrichment, is not possible. On the contrary, everything is done with the aim of leveling the differences in living standards, for the joy of everybody participating together.

A generous clan doesn't win the right to claim goods in return: its "reward" is the honor it gains. Honor in matriarchy means that the altruism and pro-social action of a donor clan is greatly admired. Its generosity strengthens the relationships between clans, which are based on cooperation and human contact. Other clans will always support such a clan in case or need or during hard times. Reciprocity is also a question of honor.

"*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"[19].

3.2 MATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

At the social level, traditional matriarchal societies are based on the clan. People live together in large kinship groups that follow the principle of matriliny, which is the relatedness based on the mother's line. This is also the result of the fact that motherhood is always identifiable by virtue of birth, whereas paternity is not, especially in a system characterized by multiple love relationships.

Therefore, matriliny, which is the line of the mother, is a fundamental principle which is applied to everything. It is through this principle that the bloodline communities of the clans are established, building the social world in which matriarchal peoples move. The name of the clan, as well as all social honors and political titles, are inherited from mothers. A matri-clan consists of at least three generations of women plus the directly related men, who all live together in the large clan house. Its size can be from 10 to 100 individuals. Women live there permanently, never leaving their maternal home, while their spouses or lovers only stay over-night. This usage is called "visiting-marriages", which comes from matrilocality.

The clan is a self-sufficient economic unit. To achieve social cohesion between the clans of a village or city, marriage conventions have been developed in order to link them in mutually beneficial ways. An example of such a convention is that of mutual marriage between two clans. The aim of such an arrangement is to make all inhabitants of a village or city somehow related. This relationship based on kinship is a mutual support and aid system with specific rights and duties.

This enables the creation and perpetuation of a society without hierarchies, as it sees itself as an extended clan.

To perpetuate such a system, clans with the same name live in each village and town of a particular region. When a person of a specific clan journeys (be it for a pilgrimage, for trade purposes or just to visit 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 system of symbolic relatives, and the deriving mutual aid system, connects the whole region.

Therefore Heide Goettner-Abendroth defines matriarchies as non-hierarchical, horizontal societies of matrilineal kinship. Such societies are characterized by a high level of interconnectedness. This is the opposite of patriarchal societies, where individuals and groups are often strangers to each other and they fight one another because of their greed for power. This leads to the creation of ruling classes and lobby groups, which place the balance of the whole society in constant danger. In addition, in contemporary patriarchal society, the atomization of society is increasing, driving people deeper and deeper into desperation and loneliness, which are the grounds for violence and war. In order to stop this, it is necessary to create and support egalitarian groups and communities.

3.2.1 GENDER RELATIONSHIPS

The maternal clan house provides economic and social security, being one of the reasons why women never depart from it. This security gives women the freedom to choose a lover. Here women do not depend on a man as a provider (which is the case in the patriarchal nuclear family). Thanks

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[19] Ibidem pg.12

to this, women do not have to fear falling into poverty with their children or losing their home if they separate from their partner.

In matriarchal societies, each gender has its own sphere of action[20], as well as its own tasks and responsibilities, its special dignity or honor. There is no disparity and the division of tasks is based on the principle of balance, in such a way that it cannot result in power over others. Even the belief that women are sacred does not interfere with this balance. This is due to the fact that the object of such devotion is not the individual woman but women in general, especially elder women or "matriarchs", each of whom is considered to be the reincarnation of an ancestress who originated the bloodline and created society.

3.2.2 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Typical characteristics of patriarchal societies, such as the battle of the sexes and the generation gap are unknown in matriarchies. Here we see no uprising of the sons against the fathers, which is a consequence of the greed to seize the power, which is characteristic of patriarchy. Even the competition between mothers and daughters, which is based on competition for a few scraps of influence, is absent.

What is of most importance is the fact that in matriarchy there is no neglect of youth and no loneliness and exclusion of older people. This is due both to the fact that everybody lives together and takes care for each other and to the fact that each generation possesses its own dignity or honor. Children are holy since they are considered to be the reincarnated ancestors. Young women's dignity is love, creativity and motherhood. However, this does not mean that every woman has to become a mother: sisters practice common motherhood and raise their children together. Young men's dignity is also love and the protection of their sisters and their sisters' children. Elder women's dignity is to be the clan matriarchs, who care for and guide the clan. Older men's dignity is their function as elected representatives and speakers of the clans towards the outside world.

The eldest generation has the duty to honor the ancestors, protect traditions, teach and advise younger people.

3.3 MATRIARCHAL POLITICS

Matriarchies have very interesting characteristics also at the political level. Here, the decision-making process starts in the individual clan house. Matters concerning the clan house are decided by both women and men, in a consensus process. This means that the decision making process continues until unanimity is reached.

This consensual decision making process applies at every stage: clan, village, region. Therefore, when dealing with decisions that concern the whole village, clan delegates meet together in the village assembly (after seeking advice in the clan houses). These delegates do not make decisions themselves: they simply communicate the decisions that have been made in their clan houses. They

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[20] Shanshan Du, analyses different matriarchal societies where there are remarkable levels of gender equality, such as the Iroquois and the Andaman Islanders. She points out that four different types of frameworks empirically foster gender equality: maternal centrality, gender complementarity, gender triviality and gender unity. "*These frameworks all promote harmony and interdependence between men and women and they discourage the development of gender- based competition and hierarchy*" (See Shanshan Du, *Frameworks for societies in balance. A cross-cultural perspective on gender equality*, in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future*)

allow communication throughout the village, moving back and forth between the assembly and clan houses until the whole village reaches consensus.

The same applies at the regional level: delegates move between the village assembly and the regional assembly till reaching consensus.

Such system impedes the development of hierarchies or classes. Therefore, on the political level Heide Goettner-Abendroth defines matriarchies as egalitarian societies of consensus.

In contrast, patriarchies, even the democratic ones, are societies of domination, where *"minorities are voiceless, and the political will of the majority is reduced to ticking a box on the voting form"*[21].

Heide Goettner-Abendroth believes that the matriarchal consensus principle is of utmost importance for a truly egalitarian society. In fact, the consensus principle prevents individuals from dominating the group; it allows a balance between genders and between generations. Moreover,*"consensus is the genuine democratic principle, for it provides what formal democracy promises, but never actualizes"*[22].

In matriarchies, political life is not separate from everyday life. Here all decisions are taken by consensus, in the context of grass roots democracy. This is the opposite of formal democracies, where political parties, parliaments, senates, committees and governments act as if the citizens did not exist.

However, reaching consensus has a really structured process and requires size limitation. This limitation refers to the number of members in a matriarchal settlement, which does not exceed 3000 people; otherwise transparency would be lost and consensus would be unattainable. Heide Goettner-Abendroth defines each settlement as an autonomous village republic; regional tribal politics is based on the decisions made in villages which, in turn, take their decisions from the clan houses, involving everyone. In such a way, each person is included in the process of achieving consensus.

3.3.1 STRUCTURED CONSENSUS PROCESS

The core of matriarchal political practice is the clan council, which is the gathering of all adult members of a clan house. Since they reach the age of 13, teenagers are regarded as full members of the council, where political decisions are made. All decisions originate in the clan house and return there at the end of each consensus cycle.

At a first stage, women and men gather in separate meetings, reaching their separate consensus decisions on any given question. This custom reflects their different spheres of action, tasks and responsibilities. In this way, the different views of women and men can be preserved during the first round of consensus building. Following the separate meetings, women and men meet all together in the clan house in order to find a common consensus. Proceedings are led by the matriarch, who helps the clan to reach consensus. Although her advice is honored very highly and everyone trusts her, in the end she has only one voice, just like everyone else. When the decision concerns only the clan, the process ends here.

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[21] Ibidem pg.5

[22]Id.

3.3.2 CLAN COUNCIL, VILLAGE COUNCIL,TRIBAL COUNCIL

After all clan houses have reached consensus, they send delegates to the village council in order to communicate their decision. Both matriarchs and sachems (their most trusted brother) can be delegates, either together or individually. As we have already seen, delegates are simply spokespersons, not decision makers, unlike parliaments and governments in our democracies.

Village council meetings are public: in this way everyone can listen and control what delegates say. This means that delegates simply communicate decisions made in the clan houses. The decision making process finishes immediately if consensus is reached. On the contrary, if there is no consensus, the delegates go back to their own clan houses and report on the state of affairs. As a consequence, consultations start again, taking into account the information received from the village council. Once consensus is achieved again, delegates meet back at the village council to bring different decisions together. This consensual decision making system implies that delegates move between the clan council and the village council until the whole village reaches consensus.

This system works in the same way at all levels, also at the regional one. When the whole region will be affected by a given result, consultations start again in the clan houses, moving to the village level, until the village has reached consensus. Then villages elect delegates. It is interesting to notice that because of the fact that these delegates often have to travel for quite a long distance and therefore have to be absent from the village for longer periods, it is predominantly men who are elected to this position. This is due to the fact that women prefer not to leave the clan houses and land, as they are considered to be the most important centers for the whole community.

Subsequently, delegates from villages meet in the regional council. As it happens at the others stages of the process, here delegates are not decision makers: they simply communicate information about the consensus decisions reached in the different villages. When consensus is not reached at the regional level, delegates return to their home villages. First of all, they give a report to the village council on the subject matter. After this, clan delegates in the village council go back to their clan houses to report. At this point, the consultation begins again, in all the clan houses of all the villages in the region. Delegates of the villages move back and forth between the village councils and the tribal council, until consensus is reached among all clan houses and all villages of the region. Clan houses are the first and last to be consulted, at each round of the process. This is due to the fact that it is in the clan house that the political process finally reaches the real decision makers, that is, the individual.

Therefore matriarchal political practice is always consensus based, preventing the formation of any entrenched power structure. This system enables matriarchal societies to function as a grassroots democracy.

3.3.3 CONFLICT RESOLUTION

This consensus process is made in such a way as to prevent certain kinds of conflict from arising. However, conflicts may arise and for this, matriarchal societies have developed special ways of resolving them. As an example, when conflicts between individual clan members arise, the other clan members help to resolve the issue, not involving the whole village; when conflicts arise between clans, other clans mediate. The "council of the wise" also helps in conflict resolution. This

is a group formed (both at village and 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. For this reason, this council is also a kind of peace council. If insurmountable group conflicts arise, they 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, resuming rapidly friendly relations with its point of origin, with members visiting back and forth.

3.4 MATRIARCHAL CULTURE

On the spiritual and cultural level, traditional matriarchal societies do not have religions based on a God who is invisible, untouchable, incomprehensible, omnipotent, in contrast to whom the world is devalued as dead matter. In matriarchies divinity is immanent, the whole world is regarded as divine (as feminine divine). This comes from the concept of the universe as a Goddess who created everything, and that of Mother Earth, the mother of all things, from which everything originates. Therefore, everything is endowed with divinity: each woman, man, plant and animal, the smallest and the biggest thing. In this kind of culture everything is spiritual. During festivals, which follow the cycle of the seasons, they celebrate everything[23]: nature in all its expressions, different clans with their different abilities and tasks, different genders and generations. This comes from the principle that diversity is wealth. In such societies we do not find the separation between sacred and secular which has derived from the patriarchal breakthrough of military-strategic thinking, whose secularizing effect has brought to the split of the religious aspect of society from the secular side.

In patriarchies, nowadays, nothing is sacred anymore, while in matriarchal societies, everything is sacred. Therefore all everyday tasks (such as sowing, harvesting, cooking, weaving, building a house and making a journey) have the same ritual significance.

For these reasons, Heide Goettner-Abendroth, defines matriarchies, on the spiritual level, as sacred societies, as cultures of the Goddess or divine feminine.

This kind of cult is in complete opposition to that in patriarchies, where people use "*state religions to support those in power and the existing ruling systems*"[24].

y: nature in her manifold appearances and various living beings, as well as the great variety of human individuality, communities and cultures. This happens because the whole world is the Goddess.

Here we find no dogma and no teachings but rather the continuous celebration of life and the visible world. This is due to the fact that matriarchal tolerance implies that nobody has to believe anything.

3.4.1 A DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDING OF THE DIVINE

In traditional matriarchal societies, the divine is considered to be immanent in nature and culture. This is the reason why everything is considered sacred. The world itself is divine, in contrast to the

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[23] E.g. The Khoesan, show respect for all in relation to all: sky, earth, animals, plants and humans. Moreover, they are non violent (conflict resolution skills are advanced, justice is restorative and not punitive) and gender egalitarian: all are respected equally. (See Bernadette Muthien, *Beyond patriarchy and violence. The Khoesan and partnership*, in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future*)

[24] Goettner-Abendroth, Heide.*The Way into an Egalitarian Society. Principles and Practice of a Matriarchal Politics*, Edited by the "International Academy HAGIA", Winzer / Germany, 2007. pg.6

transcendent God, who is outside of the world. We find the proof of this belief in the two primordial Goddesses[25] cosmos and earth, whose cult was widespread in the Mediterranean area. An example is the Egyptian Nut, who gave birth to everything that exists. The earth (e.g.the hellenic Gaia, the Indian Prithivi and the Mediterranean Magna Mater) is considered to be the other primordial Goddess, the Great Mother of all living beings. 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 as light and darkness, summer and winter, movement and stillness, female and male. These polarities are regarded as complementary equivalences and the world is seen as a whole when all of the two polarities are in perfect balance.

3.4.2 EVERYDAY LIFE AND HOLY DAYS IN A SACRED WORLD

Since all elements and beings are of divine origin, everything is sacred. This means that 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 matriarchal societies every shared activity (from sowing to harvesting to cooking) is a ritual with deep significance and each everyday object has a symbolic meaning.

Work itself is meant to express the joy of life in all its aspects. As a consequence, in matriarchal societies, work is honored and performed as a ritual. This is the opposite of what happens in patriarchal societies, where work is narrowly focused on profit, becoming exhausting and alienating.

Ritualized everyday activities are highlighted during festivals, where they are turned into great ceremonies and sacred dramas to which the whole village or community participates. Everything that is celebrated is already present in daily life: people celebrate the real world in which they find themselves, rather than a transcendent God.

3.4.3 MATRIARCHAL FESTIVALS: MIRROR OF NATURE AND SOCIETY

As we have seen, matriarchal spiritual practice is nothing abstract. This means that also holy books, dogmas and theologies are unknown.

Festivals represent the cultural heart of each village, town, or ethnic community, exposing all facets of life. They reflect the social patterns between genders, generations and clans, as well as matriarchal economy, history and calendar. Festivals show the relationship humans have to the natural world, which is the embodiment of the Goddess. They are the occasion for celebrating the ever-changing appearance of nature, including the whole earth and cosmos.

In the cultural area of Europe/Near East/Mediterranean, nature appears as the threefold Goddess: in spring she is white, bringing new life, in summer she is red, bringing love and fertility, whereas in autumns she is black and takes life back into the depth of the earth. She is the transformer of life, bringing it back up again from the depths through rebirth. These different aspects of the Goddess symbolize the cycle of the year as well as the cycle of life, which revolve again and again.

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[25] See also Susan Gail Carter, *The patristic roots of Japan and the emergence of the Japanese Sun Goddess, Amaterasu-o-mi-kami.*
See also Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, *Dark mother, dark others, and a new world. The case of Sardinia.*
See also Michael Dames, *Footsteps of the Goddess in Britain and Ireland*
all in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future.*

People, genders, generations are expressions of the divine and as such are celebrated into respective festivals. Festivals of initiation are meant to celebrate children and the youth; those of marriage celebrate adults, symbolically joining all the polarities of the world (the sun with the moon, the Goddess with humans). Older people are celebrated in festivals of merits. We also find festivals for the ancestors, since those in the other world are still considered to be part of the clan and my be born again as new babies.

These festivals express the different qualities of generations and genders, and in such a way their specific dignity or honor becomes evident. Also the web of relationships between clans becomes evident, as different clans take responsibility for directing different seasonal festivals. This creates the spiritual connections that constitute the pattern for the whole town or village.

3.4.4 MATRIARCHAL FESTIVALS: CALENDAR AND HISTORICAL CHRONICLE

Through festivals, matriarchal economy becomes visible, in both practical and symbolic ways: festivals drive the matriarchal economy of gift giving and reciprocity; they represent as well the calendar of the agricultural economy. Great festivals of the seasons correspond to the celebration of sowing, of germination and growth, of harvest and decay. They represent the agrarian calendar, which is based on astronomical observations[26].

People in matriarchal societies do not need history books, for they can read their history and those of theirs founding clan ancestresses through their festivals. Events are here portrayed as symbolic scenes, in a colorful, dramatic, turbulent way, that is never boring. People can participate to the story of their own societal development. During these occasions, all kind of historical events are performed, even those that have threatened the existence of the community, such as patriarchal attacks. During festivals, history is not just concerned with the past: participants are making history as well.

Matriarchal spirituality is characterized by great tolerance. This is due to the fact that the primordial Goddess, the mother of all peoples, is "the one with the thousand faces" and therefore it becomes natural to honor her in a thousand different appearances. The Goddess is never abstract: she can be seen and touched, therefore there is no need for anyone to convert others to a specific understanding of the Goddess. For example, a mountain people would worship her in the shape of a mountain Goddess, whereas a people living by the sea would worship her as a sea Goddess. Although these diversities, which are considered to be a great wealth, the awareness of the primordial Goddess's unity is never lost.

Different peoples find it nonsense to try to convert others, and matriarchal tolerance is so expansive that it even integrates, sometimes, the gods of patriarchal religions. [27]

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[26] See also Kaarina Kailo, *The "Helka festival". Traces of a Finno-Ugric matriarchy and worldview?* in *Societies of peace: matriarchies past, present and future.*

[27] Everything that has been said until now are generalizations of the most important and striving patterns of matriarchal societies. However no matriarchal society is the same as the others and each one has its own peculiarities; many societies have changed some patterns because of the interference of patriarchal societies/ religion that have tried to impose themselves. As an example, we find the case of Minangkabau, which after some Islamic officials tried to purge them, incorporated the islamic religion, while maintaining their matriarchal spirituality based on "adat". (See Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Matriarchal values and world peace. The case of the Minangkabau.* in *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies past, present and future*)

4. HOW TO RECREATE MATRIARCHAL COMMUNITIES IN A PATRIARCHAL WORLD: SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

4.1 SOCIAL LEVEL

Heide Goettner-Abendroth believes that in order to turn the tide from societies based on patriarchal principles to those based on matriarchal ones, it is necessary to create and support egalitarian groups and communities. These communities may either be traditional ones, based on blood-relatedness, or alternative new ones, based on affinity. These new affinity communities need to be formed on the basis of spiritual-philosophical ties between members, rather than being just interest groups that can be easily disbanded. Community members should be siblings by choice, creating a symbolic clan. In fact, the creation of a clan implies much more commitment than that we can find in a mere interest group.

If these communities are created and led by women, they have the tendency to become matriarchal. This is because women's needs are different from those of men, who desire power and domination, who exclude and oppress women. On the contrary, women's needs are more centered on those of children, who are the future of humanity. In matri-clans men are fully integrated, but according to other values, such as mutual care and love.

The creation of such groups is very important in order to contrast the atomization of society, which is occurring throughout the world, most of all in the West, creating many problems. This phenomenon is causing extremes forms of individualism, loneliness and social neglect. The decay of family units based on blood relations require the development of new social patterns, based on choice rather than on blood. It is not by chance that connections based on intellectual, political and spiritual concerns are multiplying. They allow the freedom of choice, instead of binding people by duty just because of their birth. Being siblings by choice gives rise to mutual responsibilities to help one another: this is not an inherent duty but the consequence of a choice. However, the concept of siblings by choice itself is not sufficient and needs to be accompanied by an organizational structure that contains egalitarian matriarchal tendencies. This is what is achieved with the formation of a symbolic matri-clan. Here blood ties are not the basis, but the mother and child unit are. Without them there would neither be further generations, nor community, nor future. Women's care, which is not limited to the care for their own children, is the basis of clan building.

4.1.1 CREATION OF SYMBOLIC MATRI-CLANS

According to Heide Goettner-Abendroth, the first step in order to create a symbolic matri-clan is that one or two women with children choose their sisters (sisters by choice). These are women without children who want to raise the children together in a common motherhood. Therefore all women are called mothers by all children and, as a consequence, all children are their daughters and sons, allowing all women to have children. Shared childcare allows each woman to develop herself and her professional skills.

The group of sisters by choice can choose a name for their clan; in order to provide closeness and intimacy, the group of sisters by choice needs to be limited. Afterwards, women can decide whether or not to invite men into their clan. These men would not be lovers but rather brothers (by choice). They too provide care and work for the welfare of others, as a consequence women trust them.

Therefore, childcare is shared among sisters and brothers, as well as work, which is carried out in a cooperative way. The fact that all men have children as well creates mutual commitment. Everyone receives care as a child, and everyone, in turn, should also care for children. This leads to a principle of balance and a sort of ethical duty to share the service of childcare among all people, which are matriarchal principles.

The distinction with the nuclear family is striking. Here the whole responsibility of raising children rests on biological parents, becoming a burden. Moreover, in matriarchies we see the dissolution of the patriarchal gender division of assignments, where the woman has to provide, alone, care for everyone else. In fact, nowadays, in most societies,"*women are not only not honored for this service, but are despised because it is unpaid work*"[28]. In matri-clans, instead, motherhood and qualities associated to it are honored; nurturing behavior is the basis of society. Here women are not tied to supposedly feminine qualities: everyone is enabled to experience positive social and emotional development, as well as to develop professional skills and other interests. In such an environment, children are perfectly integrated into the group thanks to the connections with all care providers.

4.1.2 MATRI-CLANS AND LOVE RELATIONSHIPS

The creation of different symbolic matri-clans is followed by the creation of a community. The concept of community does not imply the fact that everyone has to live together: it can simply be a neighborhood association or a regional network. Within this structure, members of clans have great trust in each other and give each other support and security, as sisters and brothers do in matriarchies.

Love relationships do not happen within individual clans but rather 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*"[29]. This issue has never been properly addressed by patriarchies, finding no solution to the problem. Symbolic matri-clans provide shelter and security, whereas the spontaneity of love is best expressed outside of it, through the interactions between clans.

The patriarchal system would consider such a structure as one that would produce only short-lived superficial relationships; however, this is not the case. It is true that not living together can ease separations but this does not prevent relationships to be lasting. In fact,"*relationships can deepen greatly because they are not burdened with the duties of everyday life*"[30].

4.1.3 GENERATIONS IN SYMBOLIC MATRI-CLANS

Once young mothers have chosen sisters and brothers, creating a symbolic matri-clan including two generations, they extend it to three or more generations. It is the moment to choose people of

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[28] Goettner-Abendroth, Heide. *The Way into an Egalitarian Society. Principles and Practice of a Matriarchal Politics*, Edited by the "International Academy HAGIA", Winzer / Germany, 2007. pg.9

[29] Ibidem pg.10

[30] Id.

advanced age in order to be their mothers, the grandmothers' of their children. Older people as well are fundamental members of the clan because of their life experience which makes of them important advisers and helpers. Moreover, clan members can choose one matriarch or sachem among their group in order to represent the clan in the outside world. Being based on choice, symbolic matri-clans' structure is not set in stone: this means that everything can be changed. However, it is advisable to make commitments for 3-4 years, at the end of which, what has been proven workable will remain, the rest being reset. This is due to the fact that no one is forced neither to stay with the same responsibility, nor to stay together at all.

4.2 ECONOMIC LEVEL

4.2.1 INNER ECONOMY OF THE SYMBOLIC MATRI-CLAN

The inner economy of symbolic matri-clans would be as that of matriarchal societies in general: a gift economy.

People in symbolic matri-clans need to share a deep trust in one another, the opposite of what happens in patriarchy. In patriarchal societies, people are not used to think and act in affinity groups; on the contrary, they are in constant competition with one another, which impedes the creation of trust: nobody relies upon others.

In order to assure transparency and, as a consequence, trust, the size of the matri-clan needs to be limited (around 20-30 members). Clan members entrust their goods and money to the elected matriarch and sachem, which must be like a good mother. Therefore they become responsible for the distribution of goods among clan members. This distribution must be perfectly fair and equitable. This system characterized by unreserved giving enables love and benevolence to grow between clan members.

However, it is neither the matriarch nor the sachem to take decisions on how the clan's treasures will be put to use but it is the clan council (which is consisted by all clan members) to take such decisions. The matriarch and sachem are simply advisors to the clan council. This last one both decides on the utilization of everyday life goods, as well as it analyzes special expenditures on a case-by-case basis.

In such a system we find a very interesting pattern that is absent in patriarchal societies: it does not matter how much each member of the clan can contribute to the clan-treasury, either if it is too little or too much. As an example, a man who works outside in the patriarchal world may earn more and as consequence make a larger contribution: this would not be unfair and he would be honored for his gift giving attitude. Moreover, the contribution in terms of protection and love people provide to other members cannot be measured against any monetary gains. A woman with a small child that cannot temporarily contribute economically to the clan has given a present of much higher value: new life, which gives a future to the clan.

"*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.*"[31]

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[31] Ibidem pg.13

4.2.2 ECONOMY BETWEEN SYMBOLIC MATRI-CLANS

Extended groups of symbolic matri-clans should come to form communities, which can either be neighborhood associations or regional networks. These matri-clans should be mutual aid system that support each other both with goods and money. Here the same as in traditional matriarchies should apply: the whole system of festivals that follows the principle of balance, where who has more contributes more. This system allows the circulation of goods and money between clans, allowing an economic balance between communities.

According to Heide Goettner-Abendroth, the aim to achieve would be to do away with money as a means of exchange, replacing it, little by little, with the circulation of goods and services. In such a system, money would be necessary only to deal with the "outside" world. In order to do this, the community should establish a treasury, to be put into the hands of the council of the wise (made of older people chosen from among all the clans). The council, as for the case of the clan treasury, would only administer while the decisions about spendings 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*"[32].

However, it is clear that gift economy can only function in a closed environment. Nonetheless, the spread of matriarchal communities would cause the spread of gift economy, limiting the use of money to the most superfluous things.

4.3 POLITICAL LEVEL

The consensus principle that characterizes matriarchal societies must be as well the founding principle of new matriarchal communities. "*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"*"[33].

4.3.1 REACHING CONSENSUS IN SYMBOLIC MATRI-CLANS

In this system, new symbolic matri-clans can be viewed as clan houses, whereas new matriarchal communities as villages. Once such a structure has been recreated, the benefits of matriarchal political structure based on consensus become evident.

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[32] Ibidem pg.14

[33] Ibidem pg.5

As we have seen, in symbolic clans, where people feel like siblings, we find a strong sense of mutual trust. In such a contest, the consensus process[34] can be pursued,"*giving individuals a chance to openly speak their minds*", being "*quite different from the plenary sessions at which it is usually the good orators who hold sway*"[35].

The reduced number of members in clans allows efficiency also in terms of time when taking decisions. Matters stay at the level concerned, whether at clan, community or regional level.

4.3.2 COUNCIL OF SYMBOLIC MATRI-CLANS AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL

In symbolic matri-clans, as well, consensus is first reached separately by women's and men's groups. "*This is especially important now, as women's perspectives find little or no consideration in the surrounding society*"[36]. Here, women's council would be led by the elected matriarch, whereas the men's council would be led by the elected sachem. Subsequently, the two groups may meet in order to reach common consensus.

When the issue concerns the whole community, the delegates system may be used. However, according to Heide Goettner-Abendroth, gender based delegate groups would not be advisable, since this would reinforce old gender stereotypes. To avoid this, the matriarch and sachem together may represent their clan at the community council; they may also represent their community at the regional council, if elected as community representatives. This system is very important, as it would guarantee the representation of the different perspectives of both men and women.

During community councils only delegates speak; however, all members of the community are present in order to listen. The role of listeners is fundamental: they monitor delegates while exercising their function in order to make sure that delegates do their job of communication of information, without making any decision on their own.

This system is peculiar, differing from those in most societies today, where some people monopolize the decision making process while others abdicate their responsibility. On the contrary, in such a system, the council is a place to practice both the skill of reporting with accuracy and listening with attention.

Here, integration is fundamental: all opinions are taken into account. In fact, when the consultation process goes back to the clan, everyone is required to consider the opinion of all other clans and to integrate them.

4.3.3 SPECIAL COUNCILS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The council of the wise is indispensable for conflict resolution. This is made of elected men and women over 50 years old. Members of this council need to adhere to the principle of neutrality and to be truly independent in order to bring peace. In order to do so, they cannot serve at clan and

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[34] E.g. Among the Asante, the process of making political decisions is done by consensus. Here all adult members of the lineage meet in a council where domestic matters are discussed, until reaching consensus. The same is true for the entire village. (See also Wilhelmina J. Donkoh. *Female leadership among the Asante*, in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past present and future*)

[35] Goettner-Abendroth, Heide. *The Way into an Egalitarian Society. Principles and Practice of a Matriarchal Politics*, Edited by the "International Academy HAGIA", Winzer / Germany, 2007. pg.16

[36] Id.

community level, otherwise they may not act as a neutral third party to resolve conflicts between clans. Interaction between communities and different councils of the wise is needed in order to exchange experiences, to learn and teach one's experience of peacemaking. Heide Goettner-Abendroth suggests that members of these council may be invited by other communities to take part in their council of the wise in order to give a contribution in the conflict resolution there. In fact, contrarily to other councils, the council of the wise is not confined to its own community.

This characteristic has great value since it allows cooperation between communities/regions and allows the spread of ideas and innovations. This feature is kept also in men's and women's council, which are not confined to their own community, allowing ideas relative to gender specific situations to keep circulating. This allows new ideas to be passed along, patriarchal patterns to be identified more easily and new patterns being encouraged. According to Heide Goettner-Abendroth, "*this too makes for a society of peace*".

4.4 THOUGHTS ON A MODERN MATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

Till now we have discussed the patterns of matriarchal societies that can be applied as a microstructure in symbolic matri-clans, at the community level. However it is important to analyze how it could be applied as a macrostructure, at the level of society.

Nowadays,"*social coherence and cultures are being destroyed daily by capitalist globalization and ideological wars, and sustainable values are being lost; as a consequence, more and more people, especially women, are sinking into poverty*"[37].

4.4.1 A QUESTION OF SIZE: THE ROLE OF THE REGION

In the patriarchal context, the ruling concept of society includes individuals, lobby groups, institutions: "*strangers competing against one another for power in the state*"[38]. Society is often identified with state, with most of societies being the size of nations or even aggregations of nations. According to Heide Goettner-Abendroth, size is here admired because of the patriarchal concept of dominance, the craving of expansion, of a global empire.

On the other hand, in matriarchies, size has not value in itself, on the contrary,"*smaller units are preferred, as they allow for a more personal approach and more transparency*"[39]. When the social unit expands till the nation and superpower level, individuals becomes unable to understand its functioning, being unable to participate in the decision making process.

However, social units need to be large enough as to allow self sufficiency, as well as diversity of trade, technical skills and art. Considering all these aspects, it is clear that the region is the best size to facilitate real participation, self sufficiency and diversity. Regional boundaries are, contrarily to national ones, not arbitrary but determined by landscape and traditions. This means that a matriarchal region does not extend beyond its natural regional boundaries. Such a region is a network of villages and small towns which are equal, with no central government and no capital

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[37] Ibidem pg.22

[38] Id.

[39] Id.

cities. Each region is self-sufficient and politically autonomous, with each village or town composing it being a little independent republic.

Village/town republics are made of matri-clans and have nothing in common with metropolitan cities: here the size is limited, guaranteeing transparency. Instead, in metropolitan cities, made of millions of dwellers, people are strangers to each other, often even antagonistic towards each other. This kind of cities is made of accumulations of isolated individuals; "*there is no difference between the people, who are de-humanised into little units, like numbers*"[40]. In matriarchal towns instead, people know each other and relate to each other.

4.4.2 CONSENSUS POLITICS ON SOCIETAL LEVEL

From the consensus principle, as well, derives the need to limit the size of matriarchal societies to the regional level. This is due to the fact that consensus politics involve each individual in the decision making process, seeking for unanimous decisions. This system requires close proximity of individuals, as well as transparency. As we have seen all decisions are taken in matri-clans, coming back there until unanimity is reached at village or regional level. For these reasons, consensus politics cannot be achieved beyond the size of the region; the region being the largest political unit. Going beyond this size would exceed human scale. "*Such size de-humanises individuals and turns them into mere voiceless objects, as can be seen in our huge, centralized states. Humans 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 globalized capitalist market. But its expansion could be hindered in places where the small,human scale is re-established as the norm*"[41].

4.4.3 SUBSISTENCE ECONOMY

Also in economic terms, the region is the largest unit. Being a subsistence economy, matriarchal economy is based on the independence of local production: produce is grown in the surroundings of villages/towns and then brought to local markets. These markets are non-capitalists because of the fact that no can gain profit from them and they may even function without money.

Both villages and towns are agrarian settlements that depend on theirs surrounding farmlands. However, such farmland is limited, limiting the size of towns. In fact, matriarchal societies do not support huge cities that "*suck their country regions dry and degrade them to poor provinces*"[42].

Subsistence economy, which is especially practiced by women, is resistant to the "*commercialization 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*"[43]. Such a system is ecological, meaning that "*subsistence economy is the only form of economy that could put an end to the dominant unrestrained destruction of the planet*"[44].

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[40] Ibidem pg.22

[41] Ibidem pg.23

[42] Id.

[43] Id.

[44] Id.

The region, being the largest unit of supply, is a protection against local shortages of food supply. As we have seen, subsistence economy is based on gift economy since all goods are considered to be gifts from Mother Earth and therefore are given to the members of matri-clans as gifts. In fact, all goods that are earned at the markets are given away to the community[45] during festivals.

On the contrary, as Genevieve Vaughan points out, in capitalism, the overall market system exploits the hidden gift economy of unpaid and poorly paid work. Without this hidden gift economy, which allows for the accumulation of the few, capitalism could not succeed.

4.4.4 GENDER BALANCE

In matriarchies, we find a social structure that is characterized by complementary egalitarianism and perfect balance between the two genders[46]. This means that no gender can rule over the other or make it adhere to its own ideas. This is due to the fact that the dominance principle cannot take place under matriarchal consensus politics. Therefore, men and women are equally represented in all areas of society, at each level(clan, village, town, region): each office is doubly filled, both by a man and a woman. This happens because *"they can only act in unison, for they represent the"Double Face" of society"*[47]. Here, women elect female representatives, whereas men elect male representatives. This system guarantees equal representation of the two sexes, with no gender being underrepresented and without competition for any office.

As we have seen, matriarchal representatives are not decision makers, but just delegates. This means that each of them is selected on their abilities, especially those of conflict resolution, trust building and diversity integration. Representatives are widely known and elected directly. This means that the elected person is the most able for the specific job. As a consequence, here we find no rotation system; on the contrary, multiple re-elections are possible as long as the personal abilities of representatives continue to serve the good of the community. This is possible since *"the principle of election excludes the construction of hierarchies that enable individuals to enshrine their positions forever"*[48], impeding the creation of privileges.

4.4.5 MATRIARCHAL SPIRITUALITY AND TOLERANCE

According to Heide Goettner-Abendroth, matriarchal spirituality is the connecting energy between all parts and actions of a matriarchal society, whereas festivals (where its worldview and society are presented in rituals and ceremonies) are its expression.

As we have seen, matriarchal spirituality is not institutionalized: it is neither a religion nor a theology, with no churches, temples.. Here we find no holy books and none has to believe in

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[45]The Zapotecs of Oaxaca, practice community service; this means that they share responsibility for serving their communities, a responsibility that applies both to men and women. They all work together, hand in hand on any project that is taken for the benefit of the community. (SeeDoña Enriqueta Contreras, *Matriarchal values with the Sierra Juarez Zapotecs of Oaxaca*, in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future)*

[46] See the peculiar Samoan gender arrangements in *Restoring liberate elements of Samoan cultural gender arrangements* by Taimalieutu Kiwi Tamasese, in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future*.

[47] Goettner-Abendroth, Heide. *The Way into an Egalitarian Society. Principles and Practice of a Matriarchal Politics*, Edited by the "International Academy HAGIA", Winzer / Germany, 2007. pg.24

[48]Id.

anything that does not make sense to them. This kind of spirituality is the continuous celebration of world and of life, which does not demand blind faith since it is the celebration of something tangible: the visible world, the expression of the thousand faces of the great Goddess.

The fact that the Goddess herself has thousands of faces, automatically leads to tolerance, in all senses. This feature is of vital importance and it is starting to rise in the modern world, where people have abandoned religions that claim an exclusive access to the truth. For these people, traditional patriarchal religions have "*lost spiritual credibility because of their close links to secular rulers and governments*"[49].

Nowadays, matriarchal spirituality would be a useful tool to develop matriarchal tolerance, at all levels. It would allow to celebrate the existence of many different visions, different political and spiritual paths. This is of fundamental importance in these times in which we are experiencing the rise of new nationalists movements.

Clan or community history is fundamental for the identity of individual members. This is why it is so important to celebrate it in visual images and dramatic scenes, during festivals. In such a way, children, newcomers and outsiders are better able to understand the clan or the community itself. In this way, cultures cannot be consumed since everybody is actively involved in creating them.

In matriarchal societies, the "*spiritual world penetrates all of society: The veneration of the Goddess Earth shapes the economy; the honoring of human diversity creates the politics*"[50].

4.4.6 BEYOND THE REGION

All the aforementioned values extend beyond the boundaries of a matriarchal society, which means beyond the region. In fact, even if the region is the largest unit, regions have very friendly connections with each other. These connections have a spiritual character: they relate to each other symbolically, becoming sister-regions. Mutual visits and interregional festival strengthen these connections, creating a horizontal network of regions, which is completely different from the centralized, hierarchical patriarchal state.

Nowadays, thanks to electronic communication, we find no boundaries for such connections: they can cross countries and continents, not being limited to neighboring regions. It is then possible to create a worldwide network between regions. However, this would be just a network, which would have nothing to do with the notion of state.

Therefore, matriarchal societies appear to be well functioning and well ordered societal systems which can extend all over the world, being completely devoid of a state.

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[49] Ibidem pg.20

[50] Ibidem pg.24

5. THE MOSUOS: AN INSIGHT OF A MODERN MATRIARCAL SOCIETY

The book "*el reino de las mujeres: el ultimo matriarcado*" is the report of the stay of the journalist Ricardo Coler among the Mosuo people, one of the last matriarchal societies still existing, in China. This book shows us that many conceptions that we consider to be a matter of fact regarding society, gender, family, sex, etc., are not innate in human nature (ex. jealousy), but the result of a social context. The author himself, at the beginning of the book, affirms that the costumes of this people call into question everything that till that moment had seemed logical to him, the natural order of things.

5.1 ANOTHER CONCEPTION OF THE SEXES

5.1.1 "THE WEAK SEX"

The famous concept of "the weak sex", with whom we define women, and which is taken as a given in our society, is inexistent among the Mosuos. The author himself, when seeing women walking and carrying baskets full of wood, comments it by saying that they do it "*as if carrying charges was part of the female nature*". There is no weak sex: women are strong, independent, here they are not at the mercy of a man without whom their life does not make sense.

Ricardo Coler stresses on the fact that in this village nothing corresponds to the idea that we have in the West about matriarchies. In fact, while in the West we might think that in matriarchies the familiar and social structure are the opposite of those in patriarchies (e.g.men doing the housework, caring after babies,etc), it is not the case. Although being the heads of the family and being the ones to "hold power"(not in the patriarchal sense), Mosuo women do the housework as Western women do. Even if Mosuo women are very strict while distributing work to men, it is women who serve men during meals, to take care of hosts. In fact, here women reserve to themselves all the housework, as well as many other tasks; it is women to do most of the job. A Mosuo woman, when talking about housework during an interview, says "*it is us women to do all the job, we prefer to deal with it ourselves; in this way it gets done faster and better*"[51]. During the meal, while staying at home, men only need to look after children. Women distribute the tasks, give orders to their brothers and supervise others' work, but at the same time they take care of the house, work in the fields, manage family's wealth… They are responsible of everything that concerns the family. When a Mosuo men is asked whether he would like to be the head of the family, he answers that women do it better than men[52].

However, it is a man to be the head of the village, the one to take care of the affairs of the village. The head of the village is elected by the inhabitants and his activity is voluntary; however, he wants to carry it out as long as possible because he wants to work for the harmony and peace of his citizens. In fact, the head of the village is an intermediary between the inhabitants of the village: people call on him to exercise his authority before a dispute arises. He organizes feasts and meetings, administers the finances of the community and is responsible for the relationships with neighboring villages. Men are charged of what a woman of the village defines as "the big decisions", such as the acquisition of territory, the building of a house. However, this same woman

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[51] Coler, Ricardo, *Le royaume des femmes: voyage au coeur du matriarcat*, 2011, paraphrase of pg. 41

[52] Ibidem pg.116

continues saying that these "big decisions" are not really important, that men can choose in this respect, offloading women of some problems. This means that women let men take the kind of resolutions that are not important to them, even if they are big decisions.

5.1.2 MEN AND "VIRILITY"

Men's life in the Mosuo community is not heavy at all: they spend a lot of their time just playing cards or mah-jong, while women work. Coler describes how Mosuo men spend their lives playing, while women know that they need to work and that they are the most competent to do it. The author has the impression that men are treated like children in this society, that women work as responsible adults, taking seriously what they have to do; whereas, men receive "orders" and admonishments from women, while being able to lounge as much as they want to. They spent a lot of time with their friends and do not feel responsible for anything, changing lover at their wish and living with their mother till the end of their life. Because of this, Ricardo Coler has the impression that in the Mosuo village there exist two different forms of time: the time of women, that flies away, that is always limited; and the time of men, that loiters, that is always plethoric[53].

"*It may happen that a condescending patriarch looks down from the height of his throne on the domain that surrounds him; the matriarch instead is permanently at the center of the action. We will never see a woman asking for a glass of water to a man*"[54] in a matriarchal society.

What is considered to be a quality in patriarchal societies (such as courage, virility, fighting spirit even in sports), is unacceptable in matriarchies: matriarchal people have shame of it. Ricardo Coler points out that this is a characteristic that he has noticed in all matriarchal societies that he has visited: all violent reaction, most of all the use of physical force, are frowned upon; aggressive behavior is considered to be dishonoring, violence is always condemned.

Mosuo men are seduced by hard working women, they consider this characteristic to be the first criteria for seduction; they are seduced by women's ability and willingness to cares after family and by the fact that they never leave it. Mosuo men do not feel their virility threatened by the independence and strength of women, contrarily to what many western man do.

5.2 ANOTHER CONCEPTION OF MARRIAGE

5.2.1 MATRINEALITY AND VISITING MARRIAGE

As matriarchies in general, also the Mosuo matriarchal society is based on matrilineality (the tracing of descent trough the female line) and of matrilocality (children live with their mother, even if they are adults and they also have children).

In this context, men live in common rooms at their mother's home. On the contrary, adult women (older than 13 years old), have their own room, where they can stay and receive their lovers. Only those who have the permission can enter a woman's room. From all this originates the concept of "visiting marriage": men visit women only during night, while everyone continues to live at one's own home, in the house of the matriarch of one own's clan. Overnight meetings need to be done with extreme discretion: the other members of the family are not supposed to know about it; none talks about the sexual life of a woman.

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[53] Ibidem pg.122

[54] Ibidem pg.102

As we have seen, women receive theirs lovers: men have to go visit them, the contrary is a taboo. This system of visiting marriage is free of constraints: a man and a woman can spend a night together with no obligation to continue to have interactions. Here, none asks for exclusivity. However, a Mosuo woman believes that having just one lover is better than having several partners, because it means that she is "*enough a woman to be liked by a same man along the years, and this is worth it*"[55]. A Mosuo man, when asked whether he gets annoyed by the fact to change partner all the time, answers that when a man really likes a woman, it is normal to want to spend more time with her; that when someone loves a woman, it is normal to want to be only with her and to stop going with other women[56]. Therefore, differently from what we might imagine in the West, this sexual liberty is not unbridled and does not impede the creation of lasting relationships; this simply allows people to have their own liberty without taboos or repression. Here, none puts pressure on the other and jealousy is forbidden.

5.2.2 A PERSON WITH DIFFERENT BLOOD: A "FOREIGNER" IN ONE'S OWN FAMILY

Has we have seen, the Mosuos consider as direct relatives those who live in their same house, the same clan who has the same matriarch at its head. A Mosuo man states that men have their family and that they do not have the need to share their life with someone external to it; they would never think that a woman of another family may be part of their own family. One's family is made of one's own mother, sisters, brothers and the children.

Here children are very respectful of their mothers. A Mosuo mother explains that when his sons do not listen to her/obey her, she menaces them to make them get married: she says that she will find them a woman to marry, and that scares them. When asked what is so scaring about marriage, she answers that they would be obliged to live with a "foreigner" and always the same woman. At the same time, in such a situation, they should work and make a living by themselves.

There exists only one situation that leads a man that has no blood relation with the clan to go living in another family: when there are no men in that family (neither brothers nor cousins). This is due to the fact that in the farm they need the help of a man. In such a situation, the matriarch looks for a distant relative, such as the son of her cousin. When this is not possible, she looks for a "foreigner", such as the father of the children. When Coler speaks with a man in this situation, this last one says that he feels to be a prisoner of the circumstances, that he was not destined to that life. He says that when he was in his own family(that of her mother), he had a beautiful life, with no worries. He misses the life he conduced there[57].

5.2.3 PATERNITY

Among the Mosuos, the concept of paternity has no meaning: there is no place for the father figure. Most of the times, the father of the children is unknown: when a woman finds out that she is

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[55] Ibidem pg.85

[56] Ibidem pg. 58,59

[57] Ibidem pg.116

pregnant, she does not even try to get to know who is the father, this is not important to her. In fact, as Ricardo Coler points out, the father exists only in virtue of a mother that gives him that power[58].

In this context of "free sexual life", we find nonetheless formal and informal rules in order to avoid incest: there is a law that forbids sexual relations between a mother and a son, as well as between members of the same brotherhood and of the relatives of the mother. However, the father being unknown, there are no formal laws that ban the incest between a father and his daughter; therefore, in order to avoid incest, lovers are always almost the same age.

When faced with this paternity issue, Ricardo Coler thinks about what the father figure means to him: someone to whom we owe respect. A father may be a tyrant, a violent and choleric person. He may be the great missing person in one's life; someone that we may want to emulate or rather someone from whom we would like to move apart, a reference point.

The absence of the father figure in this society leads to the necessity to reconsider the Oedipus complex; as Ricardo Coler points out, in matriarchal societies there is no rivalry of the children against the father, who competes against him for the love of the mother. Here, the closest male relative is the uncle, who, however, is part of the family; someone who has not been chosen and that has nothing to do with the sexuality of the mother.

5.3 THE INSTABILITY OF LOVE IN OPPOSITION TO THE STABILITY OF FAMILY

5.3.1 LOVE AND FAMILY: TWO INCOMPATIBLE CONCEPTS

Ricardo Coler interviews a Mosuo girl, who's name is Rugeshi Ana, who studies journalism in the central university for nationalities in Pekin: this is very interesting because it allows us to see the point of view of a matriarchal person living in the patriarchal context. Rugeshi Ana does not understand how her university female friends want to be independent and married at the same time. She feels independent while knowing that she can count on the support of her family. She believes that love and common life do not go well together: for her, the only thing that can bound her to a man is love and nothing else. Her culture allows her to do it, without having to take into consideration other matters. She does not understand how her friends can renounce this liberty and think the way they do. They get married because they want to have a family, whereas Rugeshi Ana believes that the best way to have a family is by not getting married. She explains that in matriarchy family and marriage are incompatible, since all members of a family have the same blood. She believes that sexuality and the loving feeling, though they may bring a lot of joy to a person, lead to instability and cannot end in the formation of a family. The Mosuos believe that this system allows them to not lose at the same time love and family in the event of the conclusion of the love relation. In fact, from their point of view, love is the exact opposite of engagement, it is a feeling that cannot be controlled by the artifice of marriage[59]. In such a context, people do not worry about being dumped or staying lonely.

5.3.2 CHILDREN AND THE ELDERLY

Children and elderly are neither abandoned nor neglected in matriarchal societies, differently from what happens in patriarchal ones. In fact, in the Mosuo matriarchal society, the problem of child and

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[58] Ibidem pg.71

[59] Ibidem pg.62

elderly care seem to have been resolved: every member of the same family live together and each individual cares about everyone else. Children play under the surveillance of mothers, grand-mothers, aunts and uncles. When a woman has a child, she stays with him/her for almost a year and then goes back to work, leaving the grand-mother/aunts to care for the child. In this way, the mother can go back to her usual life and the child continues to stay at home, under the care of his/her own relatives. In such a context, mothers do not have to complain about the fact that they cannot reach self realization because their partner does not help them. Here, women know that they have the responsibility for the well being of their clan and for this they rapidly go back to work. However, since all member of the family live together, with all generations mixed, the question of child care is resolved: women do not need a man, neither for the practical organization nor for the education of children. In this context of family care, women do not have the traditional western problem of not wanting to separate from their child; as a Mosuo woman explains: she does not have this problem, since she knows that the child is in good hands, inside the family. It is as if she looked after the baby by herself[60].

Here, although not being the fathers, men show a lot of tenderness towards children. They are often carrying them, playing with them and talking to them, showing a lot of attention. Ricardo Coler believes that this proximity develops naturally since it is completely free of responsibility and obligations[61]. In fact, Mosuo men love to play with children, care after them and teach them different things; however, they are not responsible for their education.

A Mosuo men, when describing the neighboring Han village explains that when they get married, they quit their parents' house for ever and when they get hold, they are alone, none cares for them (as it often happens in the West). He explains that among the Mosuo it is completely different: their grand-mothers, uncles and aunts, when they get old, live with the younger members of the family; being blood relatives, they are well integrated in the daily life of the family. As we have seen, their younger generations do not leave the mother's house in order to get married, as the Han do; they do not get married at all.

5.4 WESTERN WOMEN AND MOSUO WOMEN

5.4.1 LOOKING FOR "THE RIGHT ONE"

Ricardo Coler questions himself by asking whether the differences between Mosuo women and western women are really that significant: nowadays there are a lot of women in the West that work, sustain themselves and their children or have a social life without having a husband. However, he finds a fundamental difference: because of the life they lead, Mosuo women have the perception to be in their place. Contrarily to many western women, Mosuo's goal is not to find a husband; they do not look for "the man of their life", the person who will completely change their life and make it perfect. Instead, in our society, we look for an ideal being, someone made exactly for us; we believe that such a person exists somewhere. This is a consequence of the social structure that we have created, as well as of the famous "happy ending" to which we have been accustomed by cinema and tales; these are the same fairy tales that have reinforced Western gender stereotypes.

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[60] Ibidem pg.73

[61] Ibidem pg.74

A Mosuo woman does necessarily aspire to find a man with whom she could converse as if she was talking to a female friend; she does not look for a man who understands her, which is often a condition sine qua non posed by western women, who go from failure to failure. Mosuo women know that it is useless to ask a man something that he cannot give them. This understanding preserves them from disillusion. It seems that Mosuo women take men as they are, they do not have high expectations; they know how to be content[62], contrarily to western women.

5.4.2 THE END OF A LOVE RELATIONSHIP

As for the duration of the relationship, among the Mosuos, also the beginning and the end of a relation between a man and a woman are different from what we are accustomed to. Among the Mosuos, while women practice the art of seduction as everywhere else, it is them to invite a man for a date, even in a quasi virile way: by a shake of hand.

However, what is most stunning here is the way in which a relationship ends. The Mosuos end their relationships without quarrels or complaints, they do not blame anyone for the end of the relationship. Although they may suffer at the end of a relationship, the disillusion and the suffering may be less painful and not as long as in a situation where one aspires to a durable love relationship, with the desire to have children, security and a joint future. The Mosuo relationship system allows them to forget much faster and to not get stuck in suffering[63].

Mosuo men perceive the great difference that there is between them and Han men (men of a neighboring village): Mosuo men live a lot better; when they do not want to be anymore with their partner, they "split up" very easily, finding another woman. In fact, Mosuo women do not make a scene when a relationship ends, contrarily to what usually happens elsewhere. A Mosuo woman, astonished, tells about a Han woman that has chased her husband for kilometers because he had cheated on her; nothing like this happens among the Mosuos. The woman explains how women there do not feel desperate when a man puts an end to the relationship, since for a Mosuo woman, the world does not end when a lover breaks up with her. Although she may not be happy about it, she still has many things in her life; a man is not everything she has[64].

When the Mosuos are in an occasional relationship, meaning that a woman does not receive only one man, there is no need to end it; however, when a woman opens her door only to one man, but he goes to visit also other women, she does not accept it: she ends the relationship, but without quarrels. She continues to greet him but he has no more access to her room[65] since infidelity inevitably leads to rupture.

Since Mosuo women do not see the man as the one who will "preserve her from solitude", the least important quarrel may put an end to the relationship. Whenever a man is too possessive towards his lover, other men have fun of his egoism, jealousy and stupidity: in such a situation, the woman often ends the relationship.

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[62] Ibidem pg.132

[63] Ibidem pg.134

[64] Ibidem pg. 75,76

[65] Ibidem pg. 135

5.4.3 RELATIONSHIPS AMONG WOMEN

Mosuo women do not know neither jealousy nor envy. Ricardo Coler reports that he has never listened a Mosuo woman talking badly about another one and that he has never perceived any sort of rivalry among them, even when their conversations are about men. During feast nights, women who are not in a stable relationship make a list of all potential candidates, evaluating their pros and cons; during such evaluations, those women who have already been with a specific man, give detailed clues about what to expect when going out with that man, sharing as much information as possible in order to help their friends to make a good choice. Such a behavior is almost unimaginable elsewhere. Matriarchal people do not understand jealousy and Rugeshi Ana reports how she is horrified when she sees her university female friends quarrel for a man. In fact, she believes that men and women have the right to change partner as much as they wish to.

Among Mosuo women, female friends are special, it is as if they were part of one's own family. They are very tender towards one another; Ricardo Coler even states that he has been surprised by the warmth that characterized the relationships of the women of the village: they walk hand in hand, fix each other's hair, laugh and make jokes. He observes a very cordial and tender friendship among women.

5.5 OTHER MATRIARCHAL PECULIARITIES

5.5.1 THE MATRIARCH

A Mosuo matriarch interviewed by Ricardo Coler states that being a matriarch is very difficult, since they do not have any rest at any time. What is most interesting is the fact that where men rule, they make women work; whereas where women "rule", men rest[66].

Riccardo Coler describes how the hands of the matriarch are those of someone who is always working; however, she does not complain, she only describes her life. She says that women are much more efficient and capable of men, it is for this reason that they take care of everything.

She explains that she adapts her behavior to the occasion: she is not the same person when she leads the house and when she meets her lover. In fact, Ricardo Coler describes how Mosuo women are at the same time energetic and assertive but also caring and loving. Everybody knows that the matriarch only cares about the well being of everyone[67].

When the author asks the matriarch whether she would like to earn a lot of money, she answers that she wants to earn money, but not to get rich, just because she cares about her family. This has nothing to do with the desire to accumulate wealth.

5.5.2 WEALTH

In the Mosuo community, everyone gives the money to the matriarch. This allows them to have a much higher living standard than that of their neighbors, the Hans, who are forced to split their goods and properties among their children. In addition, this habit of splitting family goods leads to a lot of conflicts, which is not the case for the Mosuos. In fact, among the Mosuos, as everybody works and goods are never divided for the heritage, goods increase instead of diminishing; here, no member of the family has to start a new life back from zero.

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[66] Ibidem pg.150

[67] Ibidem pg.83

In the West we think about wealth and money as parameters of well being; we think about fortune, social status and appearances. However, all these things have no value in matriarchies such as the Mosuo society. Their cultural differences, as well as historical and political circumstances have an impact on their view of the world. As Ricardo Coler says, the Mosuos not only think differently, they feel differently. To them, wealth is not a social value: they are not attired by money and consequently, this does not prevent them to sleep at night[68]. This is one of the reasons why Ricardo Coler describes the Mosuos as friendly, hospitable and, most of all, joyful[69]. He says that all the matriarchal societies that he has visited have one point in common: the gaiety of their members.

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[68] Ibidem pg.151

[69] Also Lamu Gatusa describes that love and marriage are truly free for Mosuo and that"*Mosuo men and women are regarded as happy people who know how to love. In fact, Mosuo women are gentle, kind, uncomplicated*". (See Lamu Gatusa, *Matriarchal marriage patterns of the Mosuo people of China,* in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future)*

[70] "*Some scholars hold that Mosuo communities are free of six problem which face modern society: 1)the problematic social status of the two genders; 2) the situation of the elderly, often left alone or ill-treated; 3) family conflicts and domestic violence; 4) crime, such as sexual harassment, theft, murder, and arson; 5) estrangement of family members and humans in general from one another, leading to possible civil wars; and 6) environmental problems*". Lamu Gatusa, *Matriarchal marriage patterns of the Mosuo people of China,* in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future.*

[71] For details on other matriarchal societies, see Goettner-Abendroth, Heide, *Matriarchal Societies. Studies on Indigenous Cultures across the Globe*, New York 2012, Peter Lang.

6. THE CULT OF THE GODDESS AND ENVIRONMENT
6.1. WESTERN CULTURE AS THE ROOT OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS
6.1.1 CHRISTIANITY AND THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

"*Many anthropologists and historians now agree that conceptions of nature are socially constructed, that they vary according to cultural and historical determinations, and that, therefore, our own dualistic view of the universe should not be projected as an ontological paradigm onto the many cultures where it does not apply*"[72]. Therefore, different ways of thinking about nature have a great impact on the way we interact with it. The anthropocentric view, which poses its origins in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is considered by many as the root cause of the ecological crisis that we are experiencing nowadays. In fact, from the Bible, in the Genesis, we derive the anthropocentric view: man is created after all other animals have already been created, and it is created in God's image. According to the Bible, God made the world for mankind and "*nature has no reason for existence save to serve humans*"[73]. This introduces a hierarchy between men and animals/nature, since according to this view, these last ones are meant to satisfy human needs. According to White, "*Christianity not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends*"[74]. This means that judaeo-christianity, a part from being the most anthropocentric religion, is the main cause of dualism between man and nature, causing the domination of man over this last one. From this comes the exploitative attitude of man towards nature, which is common in all Western world.

According to many, like White, the emergence of Christianity marked the moment humans broke away from previously common held beliefs that all beings, all forms of life (including plants) had spirits/souls. In past times, religious believes such as the pagan animism acted as protective barriers for the safeguard of nature. This was due to the fact that men thought that in every animal, plant or river there was a spirit. As a consequence of this belief, men made accurate considerations before doing anything that would affect nature. Therefore, eliminating paganism, Christianity allowed man to exploit nature with indifference, leading to the contemporary mass destruction of nature.

6.1.2 PATRIARCHY, CAPITALISM AND THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

The idea of a Creator male God has led man to want to become a creator as well. However, men's creations need to be artificial, since they cannot be natural creations as those of women, who "create" new beings when giving birth. Patriarchy and Christianity together have considered the chthonian world as the lower, wrong and sinful world. This has led men to want to "*realize the utopia of a "better" world by a "creation" that consists of the plunder of existing supposedly evil world, and by the "creation" of the supposed "good", metaphysical world, the world of the*

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[72] Descola, Philippe, Gísli Pálsson, *Nature and society: anthropological perspectives*, 1996 pg.82

[73]White, Lynn Townsend, Jr., *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,* Science 155, 10 March 1967. However, nowadays, in the catholic environment, many relevant figures are postulating the incorrectness (in strictly christian terms) of the idea that man is the master of nature and that it can use it at his will. Nonetheless, the idea that man is the master of nature and can use it at his will has been perpetuated throughout the centuries and has become part of the Christian culture (which has nothing to do with the religion anymore), the Western culture and it is difficult to eradicate it.

[74] Id.

"higher" and "holy" creation"[75]. This desire for creation has led to the development of alchemy: alchemists' aim is to become the first concrete utopian father. In alchemical creation, in fact, there is no need of a mother. It is interesting to see that the first step in the alchemical process is called "mortification", which means bringing death to living matter. The alchemist, which in some sense is the modern man, is someone who wants to create, but not in the same way as women and nature do. "*He sees himself as helping nature to become supposedly better, higher life, and to get there faster than it would by natural evolution. He believes that nature and matter want to be improved and agree with being sacrificed for patriarchal development* "[76]. Such a man does not see himself as destructive, since this violence is needed for creation (a "higher" creation). According to him, the sacrifice he is demanding from matter, women and nature is needed for progress.

According to Claudia Von Werlhof, patriarchal alchemy helped change the view of nature and women: the alchemist does not respect the forms that nature brings into existence, he works making violence against nature. In this context, women became the first living machine, "*equipped with a form of labour power without value, price or wage*", "*a natural resource that can freely be appropriated*"[77]. In capitalist economy, all things, including people and nature become commodities, in order to make profit. "*Commodities, therefore, are not just dead, but dead forever. This is a completely new situation on earth, because natural death is normally followed by new life. On the contrary, the systematic artificial death we are confronted with in modernity is not followed by life because this possibility is systematically excluded by "alchemical" destruction of the natural life-death cycle.With this type of death, life does not go on anymore*"[78]. We see it with waste, for example, which cannot be recycled within natural environment, because it turned into poison. According to Von Werlhof, another mortal combination are GMOs(living commodities with no genealogy, no natural history, no mother…), which are dangerous or even lethal to other plants or animals; in addition, most of them are purposely infertile. These new life forms have killed the old ones while dying out themselves. "*Instead of getting life and death under control, patriarchal creation is causing a new kind of life and death that are completely out of control*"[79].

As Lynn White points out, the human capacity to wreak damage and destruction upon the environment grows out of Western technological and scientific advances made since the Medieval period. These advances have occurred in a social context informed by the Judeo-Christian tradition, which are typical patriarchal conceptions.

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[75] Von Werlhof, Claudia, *The utopia of a motherless world- patriarchy as was system*, in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future*, pg.31

[76] Ibidem, pg. 34

[77] Ibidem, pg.35

[78] Ibidem, pg.35,36

[79] Ibidem, pg.36

6.2 MATRIARCHAL CONCEPTION AS THE SOLUTION TO THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

According to Lynn White, we will not solve the ecological crisis with more science or technology; instead, we need to work on our relation with nature. In fact, our behavior towards it, is the consequence of the idea that we have about the relation between man and nature. In order to do this, we should abandon the conceptions that come from the judaeo-christian culture and go back to "religious" conceptions that are closer to nature, as matriarchal ones. We need to go from an anthropocentric view to an ecocentric one, from atomism to a holistic view. This would lead us to see all living organisms in the same hierarchical level of human beings, abandoning ontological distinction.

As we have seen, in matriarchal societies, there is no dualism between man and nature, with this last one been venerated and respected, instead of being not destroyed. As Doña Enriqueta Contreras, member of the Sierra Juárez Zapotecs of Oaxaca matriarchal society, points out: "*our people respect Mother Nature and care for her, because she is one and the same with Mother Earth. There is no separation between humans and Mother Nature*"[80]. In the same way, Mosuo people underline the importance that nature has for them, that they care for the environment, pointing out how their lake is bright as cristal and it has to stay remain in that way.

While in patriarchal religions there is a God who invisible, untouchable, incomprehensible, omnipotent, in contrast to whom the world is devalued as dead matter; in matriarchal societies divinity is immanent and the whole world is regarded as divine (feminine divine). This comes from the concept of the universe as a Goddess who created everything, and that of Mother Earth, the mother of all things, from which everything originates. As a consequence, everything is endowed with divinity (each woman, man, plant and animal…) and everything is respected as something sacred.

According to Heide Goettner-Abendroth, hierarchical religions with a transcendent God and a claim to the total truth "*have led to the disregard of nature, and of humankind itself- particularly of its women*"[81]. For these reasons we have to abandon them and to re-learn how to see the world as holy, to love and to protect it. This can be done by assuming the matriarchal belief that everything in the world(and the world itself) is divine/sacred, in contrast to the idea of a transcendent God who is outside the world.

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[80]Doña Enriqueta Contreras, *Matriarchal values with the Sierra Juarez Zapotecs of Oaxaca*, in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future*, pg.77
This is a spread characteristic of matriarchal societies. As an example, the Akan people considers that "*one's welfare and the welfare of the family and clan is intrinsically woven into harmonious existence with the natural world. Respect and even reverence for the environment is therefore obligatory. As a result, the desire to conquer the natural world or dominate it is not eminent among the Akan*" (See Gad Agyako Osafo, *Akana healing heritage*, in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future*)

[81]Goettner-Abendroth, Heide.*The Way into an Egalitarian Society. Principles and Practice of a Matriarchal Politics*, Edited by the "International Academy HAGIA", Winzer / Germany, 2007. pg.6

7. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, matriarchies have a different functioning system from that of patriarchy: in matriarchal societies we experience the lack of hierarchies and domination[82]. In fact, as Heide Goettner-Abendroth defines them, matriarchies are non hierarchical, horizontal societies of matrilineal kinship[83]. In such societies war and armies are unknown, as well as violence[84] against women and children. All these characteristics come from two basic principle: those of motherliness and of the Goddess.

As Heide Goettner-Abendroth describes them, matriarchies are sacred societies, cultures of the Goddess or the Divine feminine. The fact that the Goddess herself has thousands of faces, automatically leads to tolerance and respect: everything is endowed with divinity. This leads to the acceptance of diversity and even its celebration; in fact, according to matriarchal people, diversity is wealth. Therefore all living creatures (humans, animals and nature) are respected and reciprocal equality is practiced regardless of sex and age. In such a context we find neither battle of the sexes, nor generations gap.

The principle of motherliness instead is the opposite of egoism, of egocentrism. It is all about caring about the others: altruism reigns and the well being of other members of the community is the main concern. All aspects of matriarchal societies are based on motherliness, the economy as well. Here the main concern is not at all profit (which benefits just an individual or a small group of people who take advantage of the majority, creating great inequalities) but motherliness. This means that, contrarily to domination oriented patriarchal societies, matriarchies are needs oriented and inclusive. From this comes the principle of economic reciprocity and therefore the gift economy, which is a peculiar characteristic of matriarchal societies. For this reason Heide Goettner-Abendroth defines matriarchal societies as societies of economic reciprocity, societies in balance. As we have seen, the opposite of the economy of balance is the economy of accumulation[85], typical of patriarchal societies. *"Weaponry, money and economic structure have enabled a very small minority*

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[82] According to Riane Eisler, there are two possibilities for structuring social systems: either the domination model or the partnership model. The author suggests that shifts from one model to the other are possible in times of extreme social and technological disequilibrium. In fact, there are strong evidences of such a shift during prehistory. She believes that in this moment of massive technological and social dislocation, another fundamental shift is possible: we can go back to the partnership model and leave the domination one. (See Riane Eisler, the battle over human possibilities: women, men and cultural transformation, in Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future)

[83] As we have seen, despite women's strong position in these societies, matriarchies are not women's autocracies. In fact, in matriarchies, women's power is counterbalanced by men's power, so that neither gender dominates the other, leading to gender equality. Here the governing principle is balance rather than domination.

[84] According to Bernadette Muthien (from the Khoisan, in south Africa), violence and inequity are inextricably tied to patriarchy and the dominator system. Though prevalent now, cultural systems of patriarchy and domination are not inevitable (the Khoisan and other pre patriarchal societies are in fact examples of harmonious, gender continuous, non violent lifestyles) (See Bernadette Muthien, *Beyond patriarchy and violence: the Khoisan and partnership*, in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future*)

[85] It is interesting to remind that often in matriarchies the concept of private property is even inexistent, and when it exists it does never lead to the accumulation of property by some people at the expenses of others.

to keep the biggest part of the goods, which they have taken forcibly – directly or indirectly – from the majority of the people"[86]. In fact, as we have seen, in patriarchy there is a collusion of politics and economics: interest groups, lobbies and multinationals often have more influence on governments than citizens do. Instead, in matriarchies decision making really rests on citizens.

In addition, all the economic interests that are at stake in Western society are a real problem since we have arrived at the point 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*"[87]. Genevieve Vaughan indicates the matriarchal society as an alternative to the market based society. She points out that a mode of distribution based on mothering principles and satisfying needs directly is more functional for everyone than a market economy based on self interest. Heide Goettner-Abendroth believes that a way out of this situation is a new subsistence economy[88] based on local and regional units, typical of matriarchal societies. In this context, self sufficiency and the resulting quality of life are more important than producing a great quantity of goods.

At the political level, Heide Goettner-Abendroth defines matriarchies as egalitarian societies of consensus. In fact, in matriarchies all decisions are taken in the context of grass roots democracy. As Donatella Della Porta points out,"*saving democracy would mean going beyond its liberal model, broadening reflection on participation and deliberation inside and outside institutions*". As we have seen, in matriarchies all citizens take part to the political process and they actively deliberate, till reaching unanimity. It is interesting to notice that at the first stage of decision making, women and men gather in separate meetings, so that the different views of man and women can be preserved. The consensual decision making process takes place at all levels (clan, community and regional) and requires unanimity for each decision taken. In this context, we find political delegates. However, as we have seen, these delegates are just spokespersons, not decision makers like parliamentarians and politicians in our democracies. Moreover, village council meetings are public so that everyone can listen and control what delegates say.

However, the basic condition for reaching consensus is size limitation (both the number of members of a matriarchal settlement and the limitation to the regional scale). In fact, if there is no size limitation, transparency is lost and consensus becomes unattainable.

From this comes the idea of regionalization, both of economy and of politics[89]. In order to make each individual be an active participant during the decision making process and to get consensus we

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[86]Goettner-Abendroth, Heide. *The Way into an Egalitarian Society. Principles and Practice of a Matriarchal Politics*, Edited by the "International Academy HAGIA", Winzer / Germany, 2007. pg.11

[87] Ibidem pg.4

[88] We can see subsistence economy as the opposite of capitalism. According to Genevieve Vaughan, the "combination of patriarchy and capitalism is what is bringing our planet to immanent disaster".
Capitalism and globalization are inextricably related: although the benefits that come from globalization, it may be advisable to limit the size of the market in order to reduce the problems generated by it.

[89]The examinations made by Wilhelmina J. Donkoh (from Akan, West Africa) reveal that the action of female leaders (as diplomats or political heads) have fostered greater social cohesion. (See Wilhelmina J. Donkoh, *Female leadership among the Asante*, in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future*)

can put this system into practice only as far as the regional level. In fact, "*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""*[90].

As Lynn White points out, the judea-christian conception, which is so deeply rooted in the western culture, with its anthropocentrism have led to the ecological crisis that we are experiencing nowadays. According to Heide Goettner-Abendroth, hierarchical religions with a transcendent God and a claim to the total truth "*have led to the disregard of nature, and of humankind itself- particularly of its women*". For these reasons we have to abandon this vision and to re-learn how to see the world as holy, to love and protect it. This can be done by assuming the matriarchal belief that everything in the world is divine: as a consequence, everything gets to be honored and celebrated.

As we have seen, thanks to the peculiar familiar structure of matriarchal societies (which appears to be more solid than ours), children and elderly are neither abandoned nor neglected, differently from what happens in patriarchy. In fact, in matriarchies every member of the same family (blood related) lives together and each individual cares about everyone else. Women can work without having to worry about their children feeling abandoned and left with some unknown person. At the same time the needy elderly are not left alone. This familiar structure allows people to feel that they have someone they can rely on and they feel connected to their relatives and community; this also enhances the mental and emotional health of the individuals, avoiding illnesses such as depression, which are so common in the atomized western world, where people feel isolated.

International matriarchal politics stand in opposition to white supremacist patriarchal capitalist homogenization and the globalization of misery; it stands for egalitarianism, diversity and the economics of the heart.

What we need to create in order to make the world a better place is a sustainable society. According to green political thought, the four pillars for a sustainable society are sustainability, non violence, democracy and social justice: all these are features that we find in matriarchal societies, which are able to create equilibrium and peace at every level (between sexes, generations and different social groups).

Although patriarchy has imposed itself almost everywhere in the world, past and present matriarchal societies have shown the validity of the matriarchal system, which may be the solution to the major problems of the western society. These egalitarian societies based on consensus, with their socially balanced economic system, are sustainable with regard to nature and its resources; they are societies that respect life on earth.

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[90] Goettner-Abendroth, Heide.*The Way into an Egalitarian Society. Principles and Practice of a Matriarchal Politics*, Edited by the "International Academy HAGIA", Winzer / Germany, 2007. pg.5

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RIASSUNTO TESI IN ITALIANO

Il mondo moderno si trova davanti a diverse sfide, al tempo stesso sociali, politiche, economiche ed ambientali e risulta necessario trovare delle soluzioni.

Nonostante il numero di paesi democratici nel mondo sia in aumento, i cittadini sono sempre meno soddisfatti del funzionamento delle democrazie esistenti. I cittadini infatti, non si sentono più rappresentati dai delegati da essi eletti e allo stesso tempo, le elezioni sono troppo sporadiche per garantire ai cittadini una sufficiente capacità di controllare i loro rappresentanti. Inoltre, le elezioni offrono solo un numero limitato di scelte, lasciando fuori dal dibattito politico numerosi temi. Le elezioni appaiono sempre più manipolate per via della capacità di taluni candidati di ottenere un supporto economico (lecito o illecito) e di avere un accesso privilegiato ai mass media. Inoltre, la riduzione della partecipazione alla vita politica potrebbe causare il declino della qualità del processo decisionale. In tale contesto, risulta di fondamentale importanza attuare il principio del consenso, che è sovente supportato dai movimenti sociali. Nonostante ciò, le istituzioni internazionali hanno sviluppato procedure che contraddicono tale principio. Infatti, diverse norme internazionali creano obblighi verso i governi nazionali senza il bisogno del consenso di questi ultimi. Per tale motivo, le organizzazioni ed istituzioni internazionali sono considerate troppo lontane dai singoli individui, che vengono privati della possibilità di partecipare al processo decisionale[91].

In tale contesto, la maggior parte delle decisioni politiche prese sono influenzate da interessi economici: si tratta della cultura del primato dell'economia sulla politica, che mette a rischio la sopravvivenza della democrazia. Di fatto, le oligarchie finanziarie sono in grado di influenzare i governi nazionali attraverso le agenzie di rating. Pertanto, nonostante i cittadini possano votare e scegliere i propri governi, questi ultimi sono troppo spesso influenzati dai gruppi di interesse, che non devono rendere conto ai cittadini. In questo modo, la nuova classe dirigente ha privato il popolo della propria capacità decisionale[92].

Allo stesso tempo, la globalizzazione e il mercato globale che ne deriva si sono rivelati vulnerabili, causando diverse crisi economiche. In aggiunta, questo sistema globalizzato ha permesso la perpetrazione dello sfruttamento dei paesi in via di sviluppo, in un sistema post colonialista[93] perpetuato attraverso il capitalismo e la globalizzazione. Tale sistema di sfruttamento (da parte del "nord" nei confronti del "sud", dell'uomo verso la donna) ha rafforzato le disuguaglianze, e continua a farlo tuttora. Ciò è tipico del capitalismo, una economia di sfruttamento: ogni cosa è fatta al fine di trarre profitto. Difatti, il profitto e la ricchezza sono diventati i "valori" dominanti della società contemporanea.

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[91] Vedi Della Porta, Donatella, Can democracy be saved? Participation, deliberation and social movements, 2013

[92] Vedi Levi, Lucio, *Politics and Economics in the Globalization Era*, published in Year XXV, Number 3, November 2012

[93] Secondo Genevieve Vaughan, il colonialismo ha consistito nell'eliminare l'economia del dono ("gift economy") e rimpiazzarla con il modello patriarcale capitalista. Secondo l'autrice, infatti, il mercato capitalista è impregnato dei valori competitivi tipici del patriarcato. In tale contesto la massima aspirazione è l'accumulazione di beni, necessaria per acquisire il potere, il tutto all'interno di un sistema basato sulla dominazione. (Vedi Genevieve Vaughan, *matriarchy and the gift economy*, in *Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future*)

Tale sistema ha anche perpetrato la disuguaglianza tra uomo e donna (ciò che viene definito come *gender gap*), subordinando quest'ultima all'uomo, rendendola perfino dipendente da quest'ultimo. Questa disuguaglianza, tra le altre cose, è dovuta alla struttura sociale che relega le donne in casa a badare ai figli e a svolgere i lavori casalinghi, non remunerati. Tale contesto infatti, fa sì che per le donne sia più difficile accedere al mercato del lavoro o fare avanzamenti di carriera. Oltre a tutto ciò, le donne sono spesso vittime di molte violenze ed abusi, che sono una chiara conseguenza del sistema di dominazione patriarcale.

Questo stesso desiderio di dominazione e potere che caratterizza la società patriarcale e gli interessi economici legati ad esso, sono le principali cause di conflitti e guerre. Infatti, solitamente le guerre sono causate o dalla brama di potere politico o dal desiderio di impossessarsi delle risorse naturali contenute in un determinato territorio (ne è un esempio l'Afghanistan). Ora più che mai, le guerre sono così letali da poter mettere fine alla vita sulla terra e per tale motivo urge trovare una soluzione per evitarle.

Il sistema capitalista, l'industrializzazione e l'antropocentrismo hanno portato alla distruzione dell'ambiente che, tra le altre cose, ha portato al surriscaldamento globale, il quale è considerato una delle più grandi minacce per l'umanità. Siamo arrivati al punto in cui la mercificazione dei beni, ivi compresi quelli naturali, ne ha causato la scarsità: ciò che prima erano abbondanti doni della natura, sono divenuti beni rari. Ciò ha permesso la concentrazione della ricchezza nelle mani di pochi a spese della maggioranza. Un esempio di ciò sono le multinazionali, che espropriano in continuazione i territori delle popolazioni indigene, imponendo l'acquisizione di semi sterili in modo tale da rendere i contadini dipendenti dalle forniture delle multinazionali. Queste sementi sono un esempio di quanto gli OGM siano rischiosi per la vita.

A livello sociale, ci troviamo a dover fronteggiare diverse altre questioni, tra cui la depressione, che è considerata la malattia del terzo millennio. Messi da parte i fattori biologici che la causano, l'alienazione e la mancanza di relazioni genuine e del senso di appartenenza sono le principali cause di tale malattia. Infatti, oggigiorno, la maggior parte delle persone non si sente connesso, né con gli altri essere umani, né con la natura. Tutto ciò è la causa di svariate malattie. Inoltre, il declino della famiglia mononucleare, così come l'aumento del tasso di divorzi e il fatto che le donne stiano entrando sempre di più nel mondo del lavoro, stanno causando la solitudine dei bambini e delle persone anziane, che si sentono abbandonate e non ricevono le attenzioni necessarie.

Tutte queste questioni, molte delle quali mettono a rischio la vita dell'umanità, dimostrano che il sistema patriarcale, basato sul dominio non funziona. Il patriarcato ha infatti raggiunto l'apice della distruzione, mettendo a rischio sia l'umanità che la Terra. Risulta dunque necessario trovare una soluzione e il sistema sociale, politico, economico e culturale caratteristico delle società matriarcali sembra essere l'unica soluzione valida per risolvere i problemi contemporanei.

Le società matriarcali sono esistite sin dagli albori dell'umanità; con il tempo tuttavia quasi tutte sono state soppiantate o meglio, distrutte, dalle società patriarcali. Secondo taluni autori, quali Bachofen, la prima fase della storia umana, quella matriarcale era caratterizzata da un forte legame con la natura, mentre in quella patriarcale si va oltre la vita materiale terrena. Difatti, secondo la visione patriarcale di Bachofen, il principio mascolino è spirituale mentre quello femminile è

corporale e il passaggio dal matriarcato al patriarcato rappresenta un processo di evoluzione della razza umana. A suo parere, infatti, la vittoria del principio mascolino apollineo sul principio femminile della natura materiale ha rappresentato un progresso fondamentale per la civilizzazione, il "più alto sviluppo religioso dell'umanità". Tale processo di passaggio dal matriarcato al patriarcato è stato accompagnato da violenza e dominazione. Pertanto risulta impossibile ritenere questo cambiamento come un'evoluzione; essa è piuttosto una involuzione: il passaggio da pacifiche società matriarcali a società patriarcali guerriere, bellicose. Il pensiero di Bachofen è tipico dell'uomo patriarcale: la religione apollinea, come opposta a quella terrena, è superiore poiché riesce a distaccarsi dal mondo e guardare al cielo, a passare dal fisico all'intelletto. È proprio a causa di questo volgere lo sguardo al cielo e non alla terra che ci ha portato a distaccarci talmente tanto dal nostro pianeta fino ad arrivare al punto di distruggerla.

Risulta interessante notare che Bachofen interpreta il matriarcato come l'esatto opposto del patriarcato: una società in cui le donne governano. Questa visione è completamente errata: seppure le donne rivestano un ruolo centrale nelle società matriarcali, in esse non troviamo alcuna forma di dominazione, né tantomeno di gerarchia. In queste società infatti, entrambi i sessi collaborano al fine di promuovere il benessere umano, senza che nessuno domini sull'altro; tali società sono infatti caratterizzate dall'uguaglianza di genere. Heide Goettner-Abendroth definisce i matriarcati come società orizzontali non gerarchiche, matrilineari. In queste società la guerra e gli eserciti sono sconosciuti, così come la violenza nei confronti di donne e bambini, che invece sono senza dubbio fattori caratterizzanti delle società patriarcali. Tutte queste caratteristiche trovano la loro origine in due principi fondamentali: il senso materno e il culto della Dea.

Heide Goettner-Abendroth definisce i matriarcati come società sacre, culture della Dea o divino femminile. La divinità matriarcale[94] è immanente e si manifesta in mille forme diverse, ognuna delle quali viene rispettata ed onorata: ogni donna, uomo, pianta, animale, ecc.. Questa concezione porta all'accettazione della diversità e persino alla sua celebrazione; infatti, in queste società, la diversità è considerata una forma di ricchezza. Ciò fa sì che tutte le creature viventi (umani, animali e la natura stessa) vengano rispettate e che venga attuato il rispetto reciproco indifferentemente da sesso o età. In tale contesto non esistono né la lotta tra sessi né gap generazionale. Inoltre, vedere il mondo come divino e sacro genera rispetto per il pianeta e la natura.

Diversi autori, come Lynn White, ritengono che sia stata la concezione antropocentrica tipica della cultura giudaico-cristiana, patriarcale, così radicata nella cultura occidentale, a portare alla crisi ecologica odierna. Infatti, secondo Heide Goettner-Abendroth, le religioni gerarchiche con un Dio trascendente hanno portato a disprezzare, trascurare la natura. È per tale motivo che, per risolvere la crisi ecologica, risulta necessario imparare a vedere il mondo come sacro, amarlo e proteggerlo. Ciò può essere fatto assumendo il pensiero matriarcale secondo cui tutto ciò che c'è nel mondo è divino e deve pertanto essere onorato e celebrato, non sfruttato.

La struttura familiare delle società matriarcali è molto interessante: essa si basa sulla matrilinearità, ossia la parentela in relazione alla discendenza materna; ciò deriva dal fatto che la maternità è

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[94] La divinità matriarcale è antitetica al Dio patriarcale apollineo, onnipotente, invisibile, davanti al quale il mondo terreno è svilito.

sempre identificabile, mentre la paternità non lo è, soprattutto in un sistema non monogamico. In tale contesto troviamo diversi clan materni, formati da almeno tre generazioni di donne e di uomini loro consanguinei: tutti vivono insieme nella stessa casa. Nessuno lascia la casa materna per formare un proprio nucleo familiare, come invece accade nel mondo occidentale. Da ciò deriva l'usanza dei matrimoni di passaggio, secondo la quale il marito/ amante trascorre solamente la notte presso l'abitazione privata della donna. Il clan materno fornisce sicurezza economica e sociale: in tale contesto le donne non devono dipendere dall'uomo per la loro sopravvivenza, né avere paura di cadere in povertà o perdere la casa in caso di separazione. In tale contesto, i figli restano con la madre e sono considerati parenti solamente quelli del lato materno, che hanno lo stesso nome del clan. Ad avere il loro stesso nome sono dunque i fratelli della madre e non il padre biologico del bambino; i nipoti sono come dei figli per gli zii. Questo sistema è strutturato in base alla consapevolezza del fatto che il matrimonio e le relazioni amorose sono instabili e possono cambiare. Infatti, in questo modo, la fine di una relazione sentimentale non porta alla perdita di un punto di riferimento. Inoltre, vivendo sotto lo stesso tetto, tutte le generazioni interagiscono tra di loro; le persone anziane non vengono abbandonate a loro stesse e allo stesso tempo si occupano dei bambini mentre gli altri lavorano[95]. In tal modo né i bambini né le persone anziane si sentono trascurate, abbandonate, cosa che invece accade nelle società patriarcali, in cui regna il sistema familiare di tipo nucleare. Infatti, nei matriarcati, tutti i membri della stessa famiglia (consanguinei) vivono insieme e ognuno si prende cura degli altri. Tale struttura familiare fa sì che le persone sentano di avere qualcuno su cui poter sempre contare e che si sentano connesse ai parenti e alla comunità a cui appartengono. Questo incrementa la salute mentale ed emotiva delle persone, ostacolando malattie quali la depressione, tipica della società occidentale, atomistica, in cui le persone si sentono isolate.

Il senso materno che caratterizza le società matriarcali, è l'opposto dell'egoismo, dell'egocentrismo. In tale contesto, l'altruismo regna sovrano, ciò che è più importante è interessarsi e occuparsi degli altri: il benessere degli altri membri della comunità è la principale preoccupazione.

Tutti gli aspetti delle società matriarcali si basano sul senso materno, ivi compresa l'economia. Difatti, in queste società, non è il profitto[96] (che avvantaggia solo un individuo o un piccolo gruppo di persone che si approfittano della maggioranza) ad essere di maggiore interesse per le persone, bensì il senso materno. Ciò significa che, contrariamente alle società patriarcali basate sulla dominazione, le società matriarcali sono inclusive e basate sulle esigenze degli individui. Da qui si origina il principio della reciprocità economica e dell'economia del dono, che sono caratteristiche specifiche delle società matriarcali. In tali società troviamo infatti un sistema di distribuzione dei

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[95] Pertanto le donne possono lavorare tranquillamente senza la preoccupazione di dover abbandonare i propri figli a degli sconosciuti, senza che i bambini si sentano abbandonati.

[96] È in nome del profitto che siamo arrivati al punto in cui "*non si può più aumentare la quantità di produzione industriale in larga scala e aumentare il tenore di vita occidentale, senza correre il rischio di distruggere totalmente la biosfera della Terra*" (Vedi Heide Goettner-Abendroth).

beni caratterizzata dalla circolazione di questi ultimi in modo tale da prevenire l'accumulazione[97] della ricchezza nelle mani di pochi individui, cosa che invece accade nelle società patriarcali, capitalistiche. Diverse tradizioni permettono tale distribuzione. Ad esempio, in occasione dei festival stagionali, i clan più benestanti si occupano di tutte le spese e offrono doni, in modo tale da ridurre la propria ricchezza. Questa generosità permette di guadagnare onore nel villaggio e un'alta reputazione sociale, che possono rivelarsi utili in caso di necessità. Per tutti questi motivi, Heide Goettner-Abendroth definisce le società matriarcali come società di reciprocità economica, società in equilibrio. In tale contesto, non esiste la collusione tra politica ed economia tipica del mondo moderno, in cui i gruppi di interessi, le lobby e le multinazionali hanno spesso molta più influenza sui governi di quanto non ne abbiano i cittadini stessi. Nelle società matriarcali invece, i cittadini partecipano attivamente al processo decisionale.

Genevieve Vaughan suggerisce la società matriarcale come un'alternativa alla società basata sul mercato. L'autrice infatti ritiene che il modo di distribuzione basato sul principio del senso materno e del soddisfare i bisogni direttamente è molto più funzionale di quanto non lo sia l'economia di mercato, basata sull'interesse personale. Come conseguenza dell'interesse di soddisfare i bisogni anziché di trarre profitto, le società matriarcali sono delle società basate su un'economia di sussistenza, tipicamente regionale. In questo contesto, l'autosufficienza e la qualità di vita che ne risulta sono più importanti che produrre una grande quantità di beni.

Dal punto di vista politico, Heide Goettner-Abendroth definisce i matriarcati come delle società egalitarie, basate sul consenso. Infatti, nei matriarcati, tutte le decisioni vengono prese nel contesto della democrazia grassroots. Tutti i cittadini prendono parte al processo politico e deliberano attivamente. Il processo decisionale ha inizio nelle singole case-clan: ogni tematica viene discussa fino al raggiungimento dell'unanimità. Questo sistema è applicato a tutti i livelli: clan, villaggio, regione. Quando la decisione concerne l'intero villaggio, i delegati dei vari clan (dopo che l'unanimità è stata raggiunta all'interno del clan) si incontrano nell'assemblea del villaggio, che è pubblica in modo tale da garantire la trasparenza. Qui i delegati non prendono decisioni (come invece fanno i politici nelle nostre democrazie): essi semplicemente comunicano le decisioni prese all'interno dei vari clan e facilitano la comunicazione tra questi ultimi; i delegati fanno avanti e indietro tra l'assemblea ed i clan fino a che non viene raggiunto il consenso tra tutti i clan del villaggio. Ciò accade anche al livello regionale: i delegati fanno avanti e indietro tra l'assemblea del villaggio e quella regionale sino al raggiungimento del consenso. Tutte le decisioni hanno origine nei clan e vi ritornano alla fine del processo decisionale. Ora più che mai i cittadini occidentali si sentono esclusi dal processo decisionale e questo sistema di consenso risulta indispensabile al fine di salvare la democrazia. Tuttavia tale sistema richiede dei limiti dimensionali a favore della trasparenza. Nei matriarcati infatti, per far sì che ogni individuo partecipi realmente ed attivamente al processo decisionale, i villaggi non possono essere troppo grandi e le decisioni non possono essere prese oltre il livello regionale. Secondo Heide Goettner-Abendroth, infatti, le regioni

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[97]L'economia dell'equilibrio è l'opposto dell'economia dell'accumulazione, tipica delle società patriarcali. Le armi, il denaro e la struttura economica tipici delle società patriarcali hanno permesso a una piccola minoranza di accumulare la maggior parte dei beni, a discapito della minoranza. Tale appropriazione è stata fatta col forza, che sia in modo diretto o indiretto. (Vedi Heide Goettner-Abendroth)

autosufficienti devono essere l'obiettivo politico e non i grandi stati-nazioni, unioni di stati, superpotenze, che aumentano il potere dei potenti e riducono gli individui a "risorse umane".

In conclusione, per rendere il mondo un posto migliore, se non addirittura per evitare la catastrofe, risulta necessario creare una società sostenibile. Secondo il pensiero politico verde, i quattro pilastri di una società sostenibile sono la sostenibilità, la non violenza, la democrazia e la giustizia sociale. Queste sono tutte caratteristiche che troviamo nelle società matriarcali, che sono equilibrate e pacifiche ad ogni livello.

Le società matriarcali sono dunque società egalitarie, basate sul consenso, con un sistema economico socialmente bilanciato e sostenibili per quanto riguarda la natura e le sue risorse; esse sono società che rispettano la vita sulla terra, in tutte le sue forme.

Pertanto, la combinazione delle concezioni politiche, economiche, sociali e culturali tipiche delle società matriarcali, risulta essere l'unica soluzione ai problemi odierni, causati dal patriarcato.