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Goddess Politics

Pat Whiting

Since the women of the Matriarchy Study Group started publicizing and discussing their research and findings, the idea of matriarchy has been criticized as backward-looking and reactionary, not likely to produce any revolutionary social changes. doomed to elitist study by small groups of middle class women.

The Matriarchy Study Group has from the outset been founded on firm political base. All the women involved have been and still are politically active in the Women’s Movement and some have been active socialists. The study of the ancient matriarchal and matrilineal societies seems to answer questions about the rise of the present patriarchal social structures which do not seem to be answered by standard social theories.

1) Questions relating to female control of sexuality.
2) Political questions relating to male aggression and patriarchy.
3) Questions of Female Power.
4) Orthodox Marxism seems to concentrate on equal distribution of wealth, eradication of class differences, equal education and employment opportunities, backed up by state provision of services like creches, communal restaurants and laundries. All these goals could be met whilst leaving the patriarchal structure intact and leaving women still under the control of the patriarchal male with his vast potential for social aggression and the power to withdraw social amenities at any time. To understand why this is so we women must try to answer questions relating to the other three areas listed above:

Matriarchal Replies

1. Patriarchal Aggression

Our consumer oriented media glamorise male physical brutality, especially as it applies to women and female sexuality, yet studiously ignore the ultimate horror of the patriarchal violence – the potential for nuclear holocaust. The most “explosive” situation of all history is never made an election issue in any country. Both socialist and capitalist regimes are equally culpable. The so-called “super powers” claim to be able to destroy each other at least eight times over, yet each try to justify their arms expansion by arguments of “national defence”. Now and then, these “cold” facts leak out to the public, as during the recent SALT talks . . . Globally, more is spent on arms than education . . . The USA spends $10 billion per annum on armaments, or $1 million per minute . . . Three quarters of all Soviet aid goes on arms. Arms production in developing countries has gone up from 8% to 15% in the last few years and more is spent on arms than on health and education combined . . . The “super powers” have megaton warheads with a “lethality index” of 18 billion and America has the neutron bomb which kills people whilst leaving property intact – which might be seen as the ultimate in patriarchal capitalism.

And when these “cold facts leak out, their potential for human destructiveness is so horrifying that the majority either ignore them or else sink back into the compacency of hoping that the worst won’t happen.

But patriarchy has a habit of using the violent weaponry that it invents.

This potential for violence and extermination of those who do not agree with you has been inherent in the patriarchal system since the time of the Takeover of the Neolithic matriarchal societies – from roughly 3000 B.C. onwards. Wherever there were settled matriarchal civilizations throughout the Mediterranean area, the Near and Middle East, Asia and Europe, the northern aggressive warrior tribes from Russia, the Caucasus, and Denmark invaded them and eventually took them over. The invading tribes were called Indo-Europeans, Indo-Aryans, Aryans, Indo-Iranians . . . they brought with them racialism, a class system, notions of a supreme male god and priestly caste.

The matriarchal societies resisted the Takeover for many centuries, striving to preserve their ancient customs of matrilineal descent, Goddess worship and the sacred sexual practices of the temples. By the time of Christ they had been brutally suppressed by the Greeks, the Romans, the Hebrews and later by the Christians and Moslems. For the past two thousand years there has been little female power to temper the unprecedented rise of patriarchal power. The re-emergence of female power is essential if we are to survive as a species.

2. Male Control of Female Sexuality

Wherever patriarchal tribes took over matriarchal societies, from America to Asia, control of female sexuality was one of their goals. Father-right had to be established before the men could control the lands and property which the women passed on by matrilineal descent. The sexual practices of the Goddess worshiping peoples ensured that fathers were unknown or uncertain and that only mother-right prevailed.
Sacred Rite of the Sacred Temple Practices

Promiscuity and prostitution have become debased under patriarchy, to serve the needs of men alone, but under matriarchy they were holy practices of the temples and a crucial part of Goddess worship. Erotic love as well as reproduction and childbirth were all sacred to the Goddess and celebrated as such. Women defined their own sexuality and controlled childbirth and contraception. There is a lot of evidence to show that the matriarchal female and perhaps the male were bisexual. These practices survived well into patriarchal times. There are lesbian rites to Isis followed by heterosexual intercourse with a stranger recorded in patriarchal Rome. The Greeks and the Hebrews all rallied against the practices and eventually squashed them as they were the key to matrilineal descent patterns.

Under patriarchy sexuality became a more private affair controlled by individual men called ‘husbands’ through the institution of marriage. All the public occasions for orgiastic rites – the Solstices, Lammas, May Day etc., were gradually suppressed. May Day was about the last to go. Patriarchal societies introduced laws of “public decency” and of pre-marital virginity for women – laws which were unknown in matriarchal societies.

Women lost their ancient rights to protection against rape. In ancient Sumer, a man was put to death for rape. Contrast this with the Levite laws which said that a raped woman should be stoned to death if married or betrothed and if single, forced to marry the rapist.

The patriarch’s obsession with the control of female sexuality does not wane. It is inherent in the patriarchal system. Privately the patriarchal male’s ego is intimately linked to public expression of father-right through marital ownership of a woman and her children. The male establishment still mainly controls gynaecology, obstetrics, abortion and contraception – all areas of female sexual control. And this is equally true of socialist countries who provide or withdraw abortion or contraceptive facilities as the establishment thinks fit. The facilities are never in the hands of women themselves.

Female eroticism has been suppressed in patriarchal society – by the Church with its notion of female sexuality as “evil”, by clitoridectomy, by Freudian theories of “frigid” women and of course by individual men. Women have started to redefine our own sexuality, but we still have a long way to go.

3. Questions of Female Power

Historically female power was linked to mother-right and to female control over her own body which allowed matrilineal descent and property inheritance. The fact that women are unwilling or unable to discuss questions of female power in society shows what a good job men have done on us.

Throughout the Takeover period the invading tribes destroyed the temples of the Goddess – the core of female power. The temples were the storehouses of cultural and economic records; they owned much of the arable lands and herds and most importantly, they were centres for sexual rites, essential to Goddess worship.

The concept of marriage was known from the earliest written records – about 3000 B.C., but it was likely to be matrifocal, the man living in and serving the woman’s community and not vice versa. This was not strict monogamous marriage as it came to be under patriarchy. The women were free to come and go as they pleased as they were heads of household and owned the property. Both rich and poor women, married and single lived within the temple complexes for periods of time and had sex with strangers. The high priestess of the temple was not married but chose lovers and consorts annually. Daughters inherited land and property from their mothers and it was this practice which patriarchal tribes sought to stamp out by curtailing women’s sexual freedom and establishment of father-right.

What was Woman Power like?

There is evidence to suggest that women did not abuse their powers and that matriarchy was definitely not the converse of patriarchy. Women did not attempt to restrict male sexual freedom, except in the case of rape. Mesopotamian tablets indicate that the Goddess worshipping communities were governed by assemblies of both men and women and that groups of elderly women were associated with psychic, physical and spiritual healing. These latter arts have been repressed in women under patriarchy with its emphasis on hierarchical professionalism. Women of the temples also exercised oracular power, symbolised by the snake, which influenced the course of political events well into Greek and Roman times.

Children were “of the community” valued and cared for by the group. The concept of illegitimacy, like adultery, was unknown. Although biological motherhood was defied, it was not so restricting to the individual mother as patriarchy eventually made it.

There is no evidence to show that any of the matriarchal societies were territorial or warlike. On the contrary, they seem to have been artistic and peace-loving. “But we can’t go back,” our critics tell us – perhaps not, patriarchy has presented us with too many problems for an immediate return to small agrarian societies to be feasible. We have to start where we are at now. We can start by re-establishing our ancient rights to control our own bodies – mother-right and female sexual autonomy are not only preconditions for matriarchy, but for female power. We can also start a dialogue about female power and how it differs from male power. Without female power, a socialist revolution would just substitute one kind of male power for another. If we, as women, refuse to reassert the female principle in all societies what may face us all may be mass destruction by patriarchy.
Politics of Sisterhood

Ann Bliss

As a woman, I don't see why I shouldn't have a job, a full social life of my own and have kids. But what a problem! At the moment I have two young daughters, one under a year old. Most working class women at this stage would have given up work to look after the children, but I've got a really nice job as a social work assistant in Southwark and anyway I need the money. So after my maternity leave I returned to this job. In a way, everything has been working out well (even though I have been on strike for three months!) but of course the children have been the problem. It's not that they are any problem. I couldn't have asked for two better kids, but someone has to look after them while I am at work.

Basically my interest in the women's movement is a practical one. I want to look after my own children but I don't want to be isolated at home with them all day. In theory the answer is obvious: women (and men) should live together and help look after each other's children. But that's easier said than done. At the moment the nearest I've got to it is a very good relationship with a childminder and living near my mum and sister. I'm not complaining, but sometimes it all seems so complicated! "You can't have it both ways! Either you work or have children!", I often get told. How much easier it would be if I lived with people who took it for granted that we shared looking after each other's children!

Reactive male anthropologists have always felt sexually and politically threatened by the evidence that women in many tribal societies share out collectively the burdens of childrearing and other domestic tasks. This is what Bronislaw Malinowski, the man who dominated British anthropology for nearly forty years, had to say on the matter:

Marriage and the family are the foundations of our present society, as they were the foundations of all human societies. To maintain these foundations in good order is the duty of everyone. Each must contribute his individual share, while the social reformer and legislator must constantly watch over the institution as a whole.

I believe that the most disruptive element in the modern revolutionary tendencies is the idea that parenthood can be made collective. If once we came to the point of doing away with the individual family as the pivotal element of our society, we would be faced with a social catastrophe compared with which the political upheavals of the French Revolution and the economic changes of Bolshevism are insignificant. The question, therefore, as to whether group motherhood is an institution which ever existed, whether it is an arrangement which is compatible with human nature and social order, is of considerable practical interest.

It was because of such political considerations that Malinowski and his followers alleged that collective motherhood had never existed. They organised a deliberate conspiracy to prevent people from knowing that a degree of collective childcare has been the norm in all societies for the greater part of human history.

Group Motherhood

It is not possible to prove that "group motherhood" was the norm in an article this length. The important point, though, is that Malinowski asserted that it was simply impossible and incompatible with human nature. This position is easy to disprove. To this day the Pueblo Indians of Northern Arizona and New Mexico have maintained their "group motherhood" traditions. Here is Fred Eggan, a very "reputable" male anthropologist describing the situation amongst the Hopi:

The position of the mother's sister is practically identical with that of the mother. She normally lives in the same household and aids in the training of her daughter's daughter for adult life ... The strongest and most permanent tie is that between two sisters ... Their children are reared together and cared for as their own ... They co-operate in all the tasks of the household, grinding corn together, plastering the house, cooking and the like.³

Writing of a Hopi youth, Eggan writes that even

if his mother's sisters should live in separate households, their homes are equally his ... ³

This example doesn't prove anything about other societies of course, but at least it shows that collective parenthood isn't incompatible with so-called "human nature". In actual fact, in virtually all tribal societies without exception a child will call its mother's sisters, "mother". There is not even a word in the language by which a child can distinguish its biological mother from the various other women who act as "mothers" towards it. This linguistic custom has remained in force even in the many tribal societies in which sisters have become separated from each other in their daily lives. Out of all the tribal societies in the world only the !Kung bushmen and the Eskimos lack this system (the classificatory system) of naming relatives.

In our society mothers are probably more isolated from each other than they have ever been in the whole of human history. This is despite the fact that we all live close to each other in tower blocks, housing estates, terraced streets and so on. The spatial divisions between women — marked by hedges, walls, etc — are nearly absolute. My children are absolutely my children, my neighbour's are absolutely hers. The sexual and political pressures which produce these barriers are complex but it is because we are separated in this way that we feel so weak. The message from most of the women's movement to mothers and housewives is "Get out of the home!" Obviously with things as they are, this is the only form of escape! We can only discover forms of solidarity and collective strength by going to work, meeting people, joining a trade union and so on. All of us are in favour of this, and there can be no doubt that at present women are at their strongest where they are at work and organised in a trade union. Consequently at the moment the strongest lever for change which the women's movement possesses lies here. But leaving the home means that the home itself still remains a problem. Not all women
can leave the home. And in a way it doesn't make much sense to call for more and more of our time to be spent at work when the trade unions themselves are calling for a 35-hour week or even shorter hours as an answer to the unemployment which silicone chips and other technological developments are threatening. The more successful the trade unions are in winning a shorter working week, the more time will be spent by most people — men and women — at home. Obviously we must fight for the right to work and fight against unemployment on equal terms with men, but it is also important that the barriers between women at home are broken down. The places where people live must be made once again into real centres of community life and power. With technological progress, fewer and fewer people will need to be in factories and offices — which could even become very lonely places eventually, in comparison with the places where people live.

What I am trying to say is that to me it seems quite possible that in future the relationships between production and consumption, between work and home, and between so-called "men's work" and "women's work" could all be reversed. To me, socialism means production for need, not profit. That means that consumption should become primary. Things should be produced because the consuming units — families, children and people generally in the places where they live — want these things and demand that they are produced. But for these units to be strong, and to become the centre of gravity for the whole community, they have got to be quite different from what they are now. Instead of being fragmented, isolated and powerless, they have got to be bound together by tight links of solidarity.

Sexual Cutting Edge

As long as women's primary loyalties are to their individual husbands and children, such solidarity will remain out of the question. This is why the sisterhood of the women's movement must have a sexual cutting edge. We must be able to tell our husbands or male partners that we belong to ourselves first, and to them second. Individual pair-relationships are fine, but we can't afford to allow these kinds of bonds to break up our own solidarity as women.

What I am trying to say is that to me, there's nothing wrong with motherhood, nothing wrong with looking after children and even (dare I say it?) nothing wrong with centring life on the home. But not in our present social system. As long as home life and domestic work are (as at present) peripheral to the life of the community, we must escape as best we can. But to me, one of the main objectives of the socialist revolution and of the women's movement is to resolve this dilemma for women by revolutionising the home itself. Everything will be able to centre on the home once the places where people live are real centres of power at the heart of the whole social and economic system. Our communal living spaces should be the places where "everything happens" — where we enjoy ourselves socially, where we help with each other's children, where we organise production and so on. This is what happened in the earliest periods of human history, although, of course, on a different level and in a different way. Women were at home with the children, helped by their brothers. But it was in their homes (sometimes long-houses built of mammoth bones) that the real centres of power in their communities lay. To be away from home meant to be relatively isolated socially (which was more often the fate of men than women).

Despite all the differences of scale and conditions I don't think it is unrealistic to think of the future as promising a re-establishment on a higher level of some of the principles of social organisation of our distant kinship-based evolutionary past. Home life will be collective and will be the heart and centre of the economic and social system as a whole. Perhaps this thought can't help me much with my own immediate problems of combining work with looking after my children. But it gives me something to fight for and makes me feel stronger as a result.

References

3. Ibid. p.36.
Politics of Patriarchy

Anna Perenna

The realities of patriarachal living, if they ever existed, are lost in the mists of history, mythology and anthropology. Today we live in a patriarchal world. The lines of descent of blood and property and in cultural propagation are patrilineal, that is, they pass through the male line. We usually take our husbands’ names at marriage and pass his name on to our children — our world is defined by his. The husband (meaning manager or owner of the household), still tends to own household property, and wives rear their children in isolation from other women, from their mothers, grandmothers and sisters, in a ‘nuclear family’. A potentially unstable sexual pairing has become reinforced by ideology, religion and the economic dependence of the women, as the basis for the upbringing of children. This patriarchal society survives, reproduces itself and endures over time, by isolating women from each other, socially, emotionally, culturally, spatially, physically by walls and boundaries, and mentally. It also limits the free movement of women between their kinship and peer groups in time and space. It does this in a variety of ways and means which we must begin to analyse.

The social revolutions of urbanisation and industrialisation, together with the rise of capitalism, have split men and women to opposite poles of the economic spectrum, to the worlds of production and reproduction. This has emphasised a sexual division of labour which excludes women from the productive realm of exchange-value labour, into the ‘privatised’ sphere of the home, the domestic realm, where they ‘reproduce’ the next labour force, according to Marxist terminology. Within the home sphere, women are isolated and powerless. Their sexuality is appropriated by men, and their work in the home is appropriated by their husbands in the nature of a ‘gift’ economy. This means that the ‘payment’ for domestic labour and housework, is not recognised by society. It may be withdrawn at any time by the husband. Christine Delphy has detailed this point in The Main Enemy, suggesting that in this sense, women and men are different classes in their relationships to the productive and social relations of society. Women’s labour, which is as vital to the accumulation of surplus-value as men’s labour, is excluded from exchange-value labour, and moreover, any financial reward which a woman may earn, may be deducted from the ‘gift’ of housekeeping wages, from her husband. This situation must be contrasted with the productive role of women in primitive societies. Rosemary Ruether has expressed this most clearly.

Western women’s liberation has become associated with the right to work. This has produced a home work dichotomy and splits male and female to opposite sides of the economic spectrum: men have become associated with production, and women as managers of a consumer support system. Women, even in the professions, have found it difficult to compete with men. They are still regarded as managers of the domestic support system, and women’s work there is seen as invisible and unpaid. Women have not had wires.

This split of home and work, the separation of women away from exchange-value labour is characteristic of industrial society. It is not primordial. An African woman still manages a large part of the economy of the entire society at home. You would not ask her to ‘go out to work’. She participates in the handicrafts, agriculture, commands the transformatory processes turning the raw into the cooked, herbs into medicine, raw materials into clothing, baskets and pots, and is also involved in marketing.

The subject of women’s oppression is complicated by the dynamics of both class and sexual oppression. The theory of the Women’s Liberation Movement has not yet unravelled the complexities of each issue. Most work so far has been done on the economics of women’s oppression, and there are many differences in the use of the term ‘patriarchy’, in the movement. We would like to keep a broad historical perspective in our contribution to the debate as it stands today. We would like to define politics and power more exactly, and examine in more detail, the effects of the exclusion of politics and power from the domestic realm.

Some people may argue that there is always a ‘political’ relationship between two people – a personal politics. The lessons from anthropology are useful to examine this issue. For instance, in a primitive hunter-gatherer economy, where the produce is consumed as soon as it is collected, or within a very short space of time, there is often a relatively egalitarian society, such as the ! Kung Bushmen and the Mbuti pygmies. The produce is shared equally between all members of the band. There may be definitions of communal and personal property, but there is no concept of private property. There is no political struggle between different members of the band. Individuals are not dependent on each other, and social bonds which do exist between parent and child, brother and sister and husband and wife can be broken with ease. As the delay between production and consumption becomes longer, distribution systems develop which begin to create tensions and competition over the crucial assets. Social bonds become more institutionalised, they are less difficult to break and there is greater symbolic and ritualised weight given to them. In this sense, politics is already about access to ‘surplus-value’, even in very ‘simple’ societies. With agricultural or pastoral societies, there is even greater importance given to the distribution systems, as a collective harvest, or a herd of cattle, represent far greater surplus than a daily forage. This line of argument can be developed on through the rise in accumulation in surplus to the capitalist society of today. As patriarchal societies develop, women are excluded from access to surplus-value in a variety of ways and means. One form of the analysis may be expressed as:
i) exclusion from access over time
The hereditary structures of a patriarchy ensure that access to surplus is limited to men. This is done broadly, by the appropriation of the sexuality of women by individual men who have wealth. Patriarchal societies ensure by ideologies of pre-marital virginity and rigid laws about adultery, that women are sexually owned by their husbands. Paternity over each child can be defined exactly, and wealth can be passed on through the male line. Hereditary laws, kinship structures, class privilege and ancestor worship ensure that wealth is passed on in the same group over time. Abortion and contraception are closely controlled by men.

ii) reproduction of this pattern in each generation over time
'Under patriarchy, every mother betrays her child. Because the child must be indoctrinated by patriarchal institutions into the values of competitiveness and striving for meaningless goals, the child is alienated from the mother.' Patriarchy ensures the removal of all rites of passage from the women's sphere. The removal of learning and education of children from the home excludes women from participating in the learning processes of their children. Early selection procedures ensure that certain groups, generally male, receive the most privileged education and have the most chance to inherit the most important roles in society whether priestly, scribal, lawgiving, administrative or policing roles.

A bureaucratic elite of professionals, teachers and administrators, backed by the power of the State, ensure that this pattern is reproduced in generation after generation.

The rise of the industrial mode of production is accompanied by the rise of mass education by the State.

The organisational principles of this mode of production are used to regulate the productive and domestic realms, both of work places and living places.

iii) symbolic reproduction of the society over time
Patriarchy ensures that its values and ideology are reproduced and extended in space and time. Patriarchy is a warrior society, and will wage war in order to extend its power over the world. It controls the knowledge, the cosmologies and belief systems of society. The dominant ideology coincides with the economic objective of the patriarchy.

It controls the means of communication in society so that the patriarchal culture is continually reproduced. This includes control of the media, control of space and living patterns, control of language and speech, control of symbols of power including divine power. It includes control of time and the calendar, allowing the patriarchy to control women's periodicity and sexuality. It controls the aspirations of individuals and societies. It controls the instruments for construction of the objective world and denies the existence of the psychic or unconscious world. Threat of rape and violence allows the patriarchy to police space and women's movement in space.

iv) internalisation of values of the patriarchy
An extension of the control of symbolic power is the power of the patriarchy to make women internalise their oppression. Language, mythology, cultural definitions of sanity and madness, definitions of conduct and speech, definitions of male and female values, all seek to control and coerce the behaviour patterns of women. Women must internalise their anger individually and collectively so that they do not threaten patriarchal power.

v) exclusion of women from power by violence
The 'symbolic violence' expressing men's power over women exists continuously as the overt or internalised threat of rape and physical violence. In a patriarchy, women are excluded from power. This includes exclusion from political and military power and policing power. If also includes exclusion by education from participation in the choice and control of the forms of technology and energy used by society. Patriarchal power is expressed through release of energy as violence, at any time. All energy, both personal and State energy must be controlled by patriarchy.

Once we begin to understand the organising principles of patriarchy we may become 'mistresses of our destinies'. We may see patriarchy in perspective and be less seduced by its inevitability. A criticism of patriarchy and its world view must of course embody the class struggle, but it must go beyond defining the world in terms that are Western bourgeois, and rooted in a capitalist mode of production. Matriarchy is not the mirror image of patriarchy.

The passing on of caring values from generation to generation cannot be done in a patriarchal society. Political philosophies which speak of utopias and socialism, without feminism, suggest no way of removing bureaucracies and creating ways of reproducing caring values. Patriarchy is the 'main enemy'.

The first step to any discussion of solidarity should be the taking of a clear stand on patriarchy, or rather against it... The alliance between women and 'men' must involve this. It's up to them (men) to see if the alliance with women against capitalism is worth the high cost of abandoning the benefits of patriarchy, or whether they prefer to keep these benefits and to risk not being able to overthrow capitalism by themselves. Their decision will teach us a lot - their indecision has already taught us a lot.
We would like to widen the discussion about women's liberation to include bringing back power to the domestic realm. Supporters of the 'whole food' movement have been accused by feminists of 'breeding and breadmaking', of becoming 'Great Earth Mothers'. As we have shown, the patriarchy must necessarily remove these functions from the domestic realm in order to survive. One way of examining this issue is to see the productive realm as the 'men's huts' and the reproductive realm as the 'women's huts'. The 'women's huts' have lost all power and decision-making in our society. All the rites of passage have been removed to the 'men's huts' whether the office, factory, the school, the hospital, the pub or parliament. Here, men still have some degree of collectivity, while women have lost theirs. The rites of passage include all the important moments of life: giving birth, learning and initiation of children, caring and healing of the sick, working and celebrating, marriage and dying. In this context, many of the issues raised by the alternative society have been the same as those of the Women's Liberation Movement; although the emphasis may be different:

a) free schools and deschooling, bringing control of education to the local community.
b) radical midwives and natural childbirth in the home rather than the hospital.
c) wholefoods and self-sufficiency and intensive gardening.
d) soft technology and autonomy in energy systems, and the autonomous house.
e) street communes, action groups and local power bases.
f) community health schemes and radical district nurses and barefoot doctors.
g) day centres for women and children and men, in the local community.

Marxist politics tends to organise power bases, creche facilities, leisure activities and discussion around the place of work and the trade unions. Although the productive realm is the realm of power and action at present, it is also the world of the 'men's huts' where men have power and control. We must be aware of the dangers of continuing to separate the productive and domestic realms, of seeing 'the emancipation of women through the collectivisation of alienated labour', to find which are merely expedient or reformist solutions, and which are truly revolutionary.

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Towards a Matriarchal Manifesto

Anna Perenna

We have begun to show in the article ‘Politics of Patriarchy’ the organising principles of a patriarchal society. As a tentative beginning, we would now like to suggest a framework for a ‘Politics of Matriarchy’, keeping in mind that ‘heresy is the first step to revolution’.

1. Women’s Collectivity

We have seen that a patriarchal society survives, reproduces itself and endures by isolating women from each other, from their peer groups and kinship groups. This is done in a variety of ways, the main ones being the institution of monogamy and the nuclear family, and the policing and structuring of space and social relationships.

We have already discussed the separation of men and women into the worlds of production and reproduction, into the ‘men’s huts’ and the ‘women’s huts’. Men still have a sense of collectivity in the pub, or office or factory and their interests are reinforced continually by the media and ideologies of our society. By contrast, women at home are isolated and divided, and ideologies work against them.

It is vital for women to re-establish their sense of collectivity if we want to be liberated. Of course a matriarchal society has a place for men and women together, but women must be free to explore every possibility to find their own collectivity first.

Chris Knight has written about the importance of the collective of women in early human societies. This collective of women would define their own emotional and spatial needs. The organisation of early societies revolved around the segregation and integration of the groups of women and men on a periodic basis. Mythologies, menstrual rituals and seasonal rituals brought the groups together or separated them in a regular cycle. There is evidence that women living closely together, menstruate collectively at the new moon and ovulate at the full moon. Their appetite for sex and their capacity for multiple orgasms varies according to the time in the menstrual cycle, which is related to the waxing and waning of the moon. The menstrual period was used for rest and contemplation by the group of women, separated in menstrual huts from the group of men. There are many examples of a taboo on sex with men at this time. It is the origin of the sabbath. The group of women was able to say ‘no’ collectively to unwanted sex or to rape. There were buildings and places in the landscape where women were separate from men, and were free to act as a group, and there were places where women and men came together.

The organisation of the home base was different. In a matrilineal society, a woman lives with her mother and sisters, and her sexual partner or husband visits the wives’ hut for sex, but eats with his own sisters and mother. The living spaces tend to be larger to contain all the women, there is communal cooking and a blurring of boundaries between inside and outside, between private and public domains. There tends to be a greater knowledge and awareness of natural phenomena, the external environment. Production and reproduction are carried out in the domestic realm. The rites of passage, giving birth, learning and initiation, healing and caring, and dying, happen at home. There is less privatisation of the individual. Spatial boundaries, where they do occur, are often less permanent; there are screens and hangings rather than walls and concrete. Children are reared collectively and individual women are free to come and go, and carry out their daily business and routines in the society.

We see knowledge of paternity at a particular moment in time as a ‘red herring’ historically and socially. When children are reared collectively by a group of women and men on a non-patriarchal basis, then paternity is not so important for passing on of ideologies and property rights. All women are called ‘mother’ by the children, in many primitive societies.

We must contrast these matriarchal ways of living with the modern patriarchal housing estate. Here, the ‘home’ has come to represent the territory of the idealised patriarchal nuclear family. Its boundaries are inviolate. Its contents are insured. Individuals are separated from each other by walls and partitions. The boundaries between inside and outside, between private and public are exactly defined. ‘The cumulative effect of architecture during the last two centuries has been like that of a general lobotomy performed on society at large, obliterating vast areas of social experience. It is employed more and more as a preventive measure, an agency for peace, security and segregation . . .’

In extreme cases like the battered wives’ hostels, the limitations of post industrial revolution housing have become immediately apparent, where out of sheer necessity, communal living has become essential. As more and more women become ‘patrons’ and seek feminist solutions to their everyday living environments, then the whole issue of living patterns is questioned. They will seek ‘an architecture that recognises passion, carnality and sociality’. The Parker Morris nuclear family house with a solar panel on the roof will not do!

Model socialist solutions to communal living in the past have still assumed the separation of the productive and reproductive spheres. They have still separated the individual ‘cell’ from the collective kitchen or dining hall. We see this division into individual and collective, as arising out of the same psychic base as the privatisation of the nuclear family. The women will still be isolated at ‘home’.

The capitalist consumer society of spectacle encourages the same introversion of women. It encourages glory in the home and display of the economic prowess of the husband. It is an alienating device causing madness for many women.
There are many possibilities before us to bring about a new women’s collectivity. Consciousness raising groups, for instance, help to re-establish peer groups for women. Involvement in jobs and membership of trade unions also help to do this. However, there must also be changes in social and legal structures which enable women (and men) to ‘stay at home’ to work. There must be creche facilities organised around the streets where we live. There must be day centres where people can go with children during the day. Anne Bliss has written about the new forms of technology such as silicone chips and micro-circuit technologies which will mean less need for clerical work and general office organisation. These functions can be carried on at home and save capitalist organisations the cost of commuter time. Women must define the nature of the domestic realm so that it does not become an extension of the cybernetic State.

As women become reintegrated into the productive realm, so men must share the responsibilities of the domestic realm; the emotions and realities of childcare. Dinnerstein has written of the importance of integrating the roles of father and mother between the sexes; of who initially ‘rocks the cradle’ and defines the expectations of each new child, socially, emotionally and psychologically.

2. Home Rule
We have discussed how patriarchy excludes the rites of passage from the domestic realm in order to control these experiences and make them subservient to the industrial mode of production. People must now ‘fight the System’ in order to carry out any of these processes at home; whether it is giving birth to children, teaching and learning, initiating children into different stages of life, caring and healing of the sick and dying, celebrating the year festivals, political and social discourse, decision-making about local political issues. Thousands of institutions with professionals and social workers have been developed by the patriarchy for this purpose. They have reached epidemic proportions and a state of ‘nemesis’ has arrived, where they are no longer able to do their jobs properly anyway. Life is no longer lived at a personal level. It is cushioned from the realities of the important moments of life, and we have become passive observers to doctor-induced births and deaths.

We demand the return of these moments to the household base. We support the struggles through the ‘civilised’ world of the radical midwives, the demands for ‘natural’ childbirth, the quest to deschool society, for abortion and contraception techniques which are readily available to groups of women, the barefoot doctors and lawyers and builders who work from a community base, the people who want to stay at home to die rather than in an impersonal hospital ward.

‘Ecology’ originally meant the discourse of the house. We demand an ecological politics that is aware of the household basis of its organisation, and an ‘economics’ that is centred on the real needs of the household.

3. A return to cyclical time
Industrial patriarchal time is continuous. It progresses like clockwork, in the same way as the mode of production. It is only broken by a strike or a bank holiday. Hannah Ahrendt has pointed to the moment of Jesus’ birth as the end of cyclical time, and the beginning of our era, the year of our Lord, where all time is referred back to that moment, and that moment only. The only conceptual solution to linear time is ‘re-volution’.

Patriarchal time refuses to face birth or death. It is sterile. It refuses to give time to sexuality or ecstasy. It is afraid of death, yet is death-centred.

Matriarchal time is cyclical and grounded in the periodicity of natural phenomena. It is life-centred. By renewing our understanding of the cyclical nature of life we may overcome death. We may rediscover the year drama and the seasonal feasts and festivals that marked the nodes of the year for people up to the industrial revolution. We may connect these dramas with the landscapes and the places where people came together to celebrate the turning points of the year, the death and rebirth of the sun and the moon, the life and death of the harvest and the seasons.

Give us back our May Day and our carnivals. Give us back our ‘places of free speech’ where public celebrations have happened for centuries.
4. The re-establishment of a lunar calendar

Patriarchy controls time by establishing a solar calendar controlled by a priestly caste, and a temple bureaucracy. It removes the threat of women's periodicity, their sexuality and collectivity.

Women can live in solar time but from the earliest times there was also an awareness of lunar rhythms. It has been suggested that the light of the full moon acts as a regulating device on the pineal gland, causing ovulation at the full moon and menstruation at the new moon (the dark of the moon). There are universal images of blood and sacrifice, of serpents and death at the dark of the moon.

The women's menstrual cycle seems to have been a major factor in understanding and articulating these rhythms for survival, for understanding when to seek game in hunts, and plant seeds in early forms of agriculture. It was a regulating device for human sexuality, for knowledge of contraception and the human gestation period which is almost exactly ten lunar months. Many women today are experimenting with lunaception as a form of natural birth control. Women may have been the first measurers of time, as many of the seemingly random markings on paleolithic artefacts (about 30,000 BC) are in fact lunar calendars.6

The words 'man' and 'civilisation' derive ultimately from 'moon experience' because of its intimate relationship with women's body. The polarity of the month into the full moon and the new moon defines the extremes of relationship between men and women. The full moon was a time of celebration, of energy and sexuality together. The new moon was a time of rest and separation of the groups.

Lunar and solar calendars were integrated into the built form in temples which often imitated the form of a woman's body. The megalithic cultures built huge stone clocks, and devoted enormous energies to manipulate landscapes to mark the most important nodes of the seasonal year.

The lunar calendar is different from the solar calendar. Its periodicity is defined by months rather than years, although there are approximately 13 lunar months in a solar year (unlucky 13!). Many cultures with ancient roots still use a lunar calendar. We demand the re-establishment of a lunar calendar to mark our awareness and empathy with nature rather than the destructive and life-denying patriarchal culture. Lunatics of the world unite!
5. Reintegration of consciousness and unconsciousness

Patriarchy must repress sexuality for the economic mode of production. Reich has said that 'Neuroses result from the patriarchal change of social order', and 'neuroses, sexual aberrations, and antisocial sexuality become permanent social phenomena' in a patriarchal culture. The individual in a patriarchy experiences pain and alienation from childbirth onwards, and builds up a character armouring which prevents spontaneous response to feelings, and negates sexuality. The conscious mind is separated from the unconscious mind to repress this pain, and to allow survival. This mind/body split arises historically when societies become patriarchal.

Janov believes that there may not have been the same split between intellect and emotions in early human societies. He suggests, from work on early artefacts and engravings, that there was not the same dominance of the left-hand side of the brain (which produces right-handedness and dominance of the intellect). Today, patients who have undergone primal therapy, regain a more balanced use of the two spheres of the brain. It is interesting too that Leboyer has found that children born with 'natural' childbirth techniques (taught to him by old French midwives) do not show a left-hand sphere predominance and are 100 per cent ambidextrous. They are generally well-balanced individuals.

Reich and others have shown that these psychological and social problems are unique to a patriarchal form of social organisation. In a matriarchal society there is no need to contain and repress sexuality and feelings. Sexuality is not subordinated to economic motivation. There are no pressures for lifelong monogamy, or repression of the sexual freedom of women, children and adolescents. He has used the term 'sex-economy' to express the natural self-regulation of sexuality, within the social structures and institutions of kinship and exogamous clan relationships which retain the global cohesion of the group.

Patriarchy controls sexuality at an ideological level by religious mysticism such as Judaeo-Christianity which denies and distorts sexuality and transfers it to the inverse of Christian values, to evil and sinfulness. (Sin, of course, was the Moon Goddess of the Sumerians, and Eve was the first woman, from the Hebrew word for life). Alternatively, ideologies of Fascism transfer sexuality to the 'other race', or to women, both of which are given inferior status. Both ideologies are only able to confine sexuality to the patriarchal nuclear family which is idealised.

We have noticed, in alternative cultures, the collectivity of emotional and cathartic experience. In a sense, consciousness-raising groups are allowing women to discuss and experience feelings collectively, rather than through an individualised therapy session.

We demand the overthrow of the nuclear family and the subordination of sexuality to economic subjugation. We demand the reintegration of mind with body, consciousness with unconsciousness, the integration of good and 'evil'.

6. The freedom of sexuality and the reawakening of serpent power

Sexual repression is a logical consequence of patriarchy. The compulsory regulation of sex life, and with it sexual repression, sets in at the beginning of social stratification. Compulsory marriage and family serve as safeguards of sex repression, and it is in connection with these institutions that the demand for premarital and extramarital chastity arises.
7. Women’s power

Women’s power is different from men’s power. The concepts of patriarchy and matriarchy as we see them are not about male rule versus female rule. We do not envisage matriarchy as the mirror image of patriarchy. As Bookchin has said, ‘the very essence of the matricentric world is that it vitiates rule as such’. Polarities cannot be found between matriarchy and patriarchy as two differing forms of rule. The comparison must be between rule and anarchy, between the presence and absence of domination. There is no way that women can oppress men sexually and economically, to assert maternity, for passing on property.

In societies with matrilineal and matrilocal social organisations, such as the Iroquois, the determinate unit of power is the matrilocal extended family in its longhouse. Leadership of the family ‘was vested in the oldest matron, who directed farm work, kept peace within, and appointed a man in the same maternal line to represent the group in council.’ The women of the clan elected the chief of the tribe and could depose him at any time. Women had equal status as ceremonial chiefs of the clan and frequently spoke at council meetings. This illustrates a concept of power which works from the family unit to the wider Iroquois national confederacy. It must be contrasted with the logical consequences of patriarchal power which works from a position of authority downwards, gradually denying power to the smaller unit as it becomes more centralised. The reproduction of the whole society with its mode of production becomes more important than the survival of local groups. The matriarchal society in contrast tends towards fragmentation of larger groups. ‘The tendency for matrility to split the supposedly basic building block of society — the nuclear family — can prove the essential precondition of reciprocity and interdependence between members of the wider community.’

In many of the examples of matrilineal social organisation in the Neolithic period, there are no signs of a social hierarchy. In Catal Huyuk in Anatolia, while, according to Meliaart, social inequality is suggested by the size of buildings, equipment and burial gifts, ‘this is never a glaring one.’ After old Catal Huyuk was deserted, Catal Huyuk West seems to ‘have been occupied for at least another 700 years until it also was deserted, without, however, any obvious sign of violence or deliberate destruction.’

Male power is identified with violence. Patriarchal power is often identified by a lack of institutionalised violence. Erich Fromm, Paul Goodman and others, have contrasted personal aggression with institutional aggression. Fromm has suggested that human aggression as an institution evolved during the Neolithic period, with the private appropriation of property and technology. In earlier societies, or in cases like the North American Indians ‘They come closer to William James’s Moral Equivalents of War.

The woman is most potent sexually at her time of ‘red energy’ when she has her menstrual period. Redgrove and Shuttle have suggested that women are most able to have multiple orgasms just before the onset of menstruation. The experience of ecstasy is represented by the awakening of the serpent ‘Kundalini’ who is curled asleep at the base of the spine. Sexual rituals involving the withholding of ejaculation by the men, bring about the awakening of Kundalini and a total orgasm for both partners. This must be contrasted with the sexuality of men in our culture where ejaculation and orgasm are seen as the same thing. It is only by surrendering again to the woman’s sexuality that men and women will experience ecstasy together.

There is evidence in many early cultures that women defined their own erotic natures and were free to relate sexually to men and to women. Bisexuality, although experienced by most people, is seen as a perversion in our culture. Many images of the Great Goddess express this bisexuality or androgeny.

Women were often able to control contraception and abortion, and the burning of the witches may represent the repression of this knowledge with the rise of industrialisation and the medical profession.

We are only just beginning to rediscover our erotic natures. The phallicentric patriarchy has removed all knowledge of vulvic art. In Minoan art forms we are struck by the representation of vulvas and the erotic nature of women, with clitoris enlarged. The women of Mithila in India today paint beautiful ‘kohbars’, erotic paintings with traditional Tantric scenes which they send to their lovers. This tradition has been passed down from mother to daughter for generations.

Michael Dames has pointed out that the Tantric tradition may have been known in England in Neolithic times. The huge stone avenues leading to the henge at Avebury, may represent a huge serpent across the landscape. (It is said that the huge moon clock at Carnac in Brittany is also a dragon extending for many miles.) Within the larger earthworks in the landscape, Kundalini is set at the base of the spine of a giant Goddess, waiting to be aroused from sleep.

The Great Goddess expresses the sexual power of women. It is the antithesis of the patriarchal sky god who denies sexuality and identifies it with demonic power.
They release aggressions harmlessly: they provide exercise, sport and amusement without destruction; and only mildly is there any imposition of desires by one party on the other. The bull leaping in Minoan Crete may be an expression of ritualised aggression, where violence and anger are expressed and contained within the communal bounds of play and pantomime. It is the debate between Marat and de Sade about the reality and passion of personal conflict contrasted with the alienation of the guillotine, the gas chamber and the nuclear bomb.

Women can be as violent as men can be. The patriarchy combines institutional violence and the expression of personal violence by men with the repression of women’s personal violence and anger. The violence of oppressed women’s anger is bottled up, festering and frustrated, and turns inwards towards self destruction and self hatred. It can only be expressed by angry words, in sarcasm, cynicism and irony. Women do not learn self defence, the martial arts, or participate in battles.

In traditions like the Celts and the Japanese, which still retained some elements of matriarchal traditions, women were often great warriors, who taught men the arts of warfare. They were trained physically to be the equals of men. In the earliest Olympic games, there were sports where men and women competed together. There are many accounts of the terror of the Roman legionaries when they saw naked Celtic women on horseback riding towards them, with a shield in one hand and babies in the other.

The aspect of the Great Goddess concerned with power is also concerned with love and battle. At a symbolic level, this unites sexuality with power and justice. Women’s power was often represented symbolically as the epiphany of the presence of the Great Goddess in a particular landscape. It was vested in the priestess or the queen and passed through the matrilineal line. Kingship was only possible by marriage to the Goddess, through sacred marriage with the priestess, or by marriage into the matrilineal line as the Pharaohs in dynastic Egypt, or among the Celts.

8. Women’s social control of rape

Women must be able to control rape. It is the continuous threat and presence of patriarchal power in society. It is a means of controlling and policing all space in a patriarchal state, so that women are not able to move and behave freely. The threat of rape and its lenient sentences are not universal. In ancient lawcodes, rape is often severely punished. It is also often unknown in strongly matrilineal and matrilocally societies, where the collectivity of women, and the presence of the brothers, together with the high social esteem of women, seem to deter rape. Susan Brownmiller in Against Our Will contrasts the behaviour of the Iroquois Indians, a strongly matrilineal tradition, with the ruthless behaviour towards women of the Sioux and Cheyenne.

9. Abolition of monogamy as a state institution

Lawton has argued that monogamous marriage not only created class society, but has been the ‘instrumental factor in its perpetuation ever since’ despite the major social changes from slavery, to feudalism, to capitalism or State communism. Lifelong monogamy is used by patriarchy for appropriation of women’s sexuality, to pass on property and capital from one generation to another. It is used to isolate women from each other and is enforced by religion and ideology as the only social milieu for the upbringing of children. Children born out of ‘wedlock’ are ‘illegitimate’, they are not legal. Divorces, although increasingly easier to obtain, still cause an enormous amount of agony for both partners as well as children involved. There are no social structures which can cushion the breakup of the nuclear family, or make it easier for women and men to rear children collectively.

We do not intend to imitate the structures of a matri- lineal clan organisation, but to enquire into its organising principles. In egalitarian societies we have shown (see ‘Politics of Patriarchy’) that neither husband nor wife has effective power over the other. Each makes their own decisions, and each can break the marriage. Marriage between individual couples still occurs as a personal relationship, but it is more flexible, and a potentially unstable sexual pairing is not seen as the ideal solution for the upbringing of children. Among the Iroquois, again, compared to the extended family, the nuclear family amounted to little. Although monogamy was the only form of marriage tolerated, the practice was highly elastic because of the high mortality of men in warfare and the ease with which a disgruntled wife could divorce a husband. The nuclear family was therefore unstable, and, aside from reproduction, performed no important functions that could not be more effectively handled by the extended family.

Individuals came and went, were born and died, but maternal lineage segments, which formed the core of the extended family, went on indefinitely.
We demand the end to monogamy as a State institution, and an end to the assumption that the father and husband is the ‘head of the household’.

10. The household as the determinate unit of production

In a society where the domestic mode of production is the dominant mode, or as important as production in other spheres, where society is organised around ‘reproduction’ as much as ‘production’, and respects the ‘reproductive factor’ glossed over by Marx and other economists, then technology would have a very different context. The libertarian world view has always emphasised the importance of the autonomous household and the ideas of ‘self-sufficiency’ and a simple technology. Sahlin has shown that ‘primitive’ economies too are based on fundamentally different values from those in a bourgeois capitalist economy. 19

(i) With the evolution of ‘Culture’, the amount of work per capita increases and the amount of leisure decreases.

(ii) In a primitive economy there is a disposition towards underproduction.

(iii) The production is geared to use-value rather than exchange-value.

(iv) The household represents the determinant mode of production with an appropriate technology and division of labour. Its own inner relations are the principal relations of production in society. How labour is to be expended, the terms and products of its activity are in the main domestic decisions. These decisions are taken primarily with a view towards domestic contentment.

(v) There is no accumulation of surplus value.

(vi) Production is for the benefit of the producers.

(vii) Co-operation for larger social or ritual activities tends to remain a technical fact, it does not compromise the autonomy of the household, the domestic management of labour power or the prevalence of domestic objectives across the social activities of work.

(viii) The technology has similar dimensions. The basic apparatus can usually be handled by household groups. Implements are homespun, thus simple enough to be widely available. This has many analogies with Illich’s ‘convivial’ technology and tools.

(ix) Productive processes are unitary rather than decomposed by an elaborate division of labour so that the same interested party can carry through the whole procedure from the extraction of the raw materials to the fabrication of the finished product.

It is important to see that the logical consequences of a patriarchal mode of production must rely on increased centralisation of capital and the production processes and the means of control over these processes. It must withdraw all economic and productive potential from the individual household into a regulated production process. The means of production will be owned by increasingly larger and more centralised multinational corporations or a large state bureaucracy. The authoritarian economy will increasingly remove power and resources from local bases ultimately on a worldwide network.

In a matrarchal society, by contrast, the means of production must be owned collectively, ultimately from the household units and extended family bases, from the bottom up. Units of production must be decentralised and rely on decentralised sources of power and technologies. The household will be the determinate unit of production.

11. A hearth-centred technology

It is important to understand that a technology is not comprehended by its physical properties alone. In use, tools are brought into a specific relationship with their users. In the wider context, this relationship and not the tool itself is the determinate historic quality of a technology. Tools, even good tools are pre-human, the great evolutionary divide is in the relationship of tool to user.

Different cultures have evolved quite different emphases in their technologies. For instance, the Tamil calendar makers of Southern India, are able to predict eclipses in astronomy to within minutes by a complex process of mental arithmetic, where Western cultures have developed megalithic clocks (which depended on a tradition of oral memory for knowledge of its mechanics) or modern computer technologies and atomic clocks. This choice of forms of technology is always available. It is the social and productive relations of a society which determine which one is chosen, and conditioned at the expense of the others.

Rather than a return to 19th century cottage industries, we already have the technology to make households a large part of the determinate units of production. There is more a choice ahead of us: of an extension of the patriarchal state into the privatised nuclear home, or a genuinely collective hearth-based technology.

We believe that the autonomous person in the autonomous household should be the main point of departure and return for an assessment of a technology. The decision-making process should enable us to refer from the wider social context, the mega-production units, back to the individual communities and households, if we are to achieve a balanced and human-centred technology. The re-volution is to come home.

As women have been removed from the ‘productive processes’ of life, so men have been removed from the realities and emotions of the ‘reproductive processes’ of birth and childhood. A household technology with men and women at home working on a collective basis would blur these divisions again. We are beginning to understand the technology of our houses, soft-technology energy resources, do-it-yourself insulation devices, intensive gardening, and midwifery and learning centred in the home. These are all a part of our struggle.

12. A classless system of reproduction

Patriarchy has been seen as men’s seizure of women’s reproductive potential. Women are reified as capital and used as units of exchange between men in order to reproduce the capitalist productive system. Men and women are different classes within both the productive and reproductive relations of society. Christine Delphy has shown that a husband and wife are therefore members of a different class, no matter to which social class the husband
may belong. On a broad front, the wife of the bourgeois spends more time expressing the economic prowess of her husband. If her husband divorces her, she is transferred back to her original social class. Oppression of women by class and by sex has become confused in theoretical analysis. Within a patriarchy, of course, the two will be synonymous. A sexual division of labor will become exaggerated over time to make the reproductive realm subservient to the productive realm. Social reproduction and the reproduction of the labour force, together with the biological or human reproductive spheres are transformed to ensure the continuance over time of the patriarchy.

In a matriarchal society, reproduction is not subservient to production. The blurring of these realms within the extended matrilineal family ensures that both men and women are involved in both activities. In a sense, 'the sexual and reproductive roles of the males were absolutely necessary to biological and cultural survival, but one individual was readily replaced by another.' The position of the husband in the nuclear family is weak and men as husbands and sexual partners could be seen as 'the units of exchange between women' rather than the other way round. However, the husband is also a 'brother' in his own matrilineal kinship group where he has authority and permanence.

In the present, women must be the vanguard to form extended communities, which combine production and reproduction. They must also be able to control their own 'reproductive potential' through knowledge of their bodies, of contraception techniques and abortion techniques in the hands of women, with a technology readily available to groups of women. Men must come into these communities and help with childcare as equals. Nuclear families may still exist but be a part of wider extended networks.

13. Control of symbolic power

The rediscovery of the Great Goddess simultaneously all over the world has been seen as a retreat into religious mysticism and away from the political struggle. We do not see this rediscovery in a purely religious light. At a personal level, our searches for our matrilineal inheritance may open up the feeling and emotional side of our inheritance, rather than the more non-feeling father-line.

The control of symbolic power by patriarchy ensures that all images of power are male. Even within the divine realm, the Father God is supreme.

Merlin Stone has summed up the three elements of this rediscovery. Firstly,

The emerging interest in the history and prehistory of ancient cultures that worshipped a female deity ... has shown that ... far from the generally accepted idea that the Judeo-Christian religions rescued women from supposedly more barbarian and anti-woman societies, women have actually lost a great deal of status and physical and material autonomy ... Secondly, women have been able to use a feminist spirituality and identity with life, as a means of gaining strength and understanding that 'will help us to confront the many tangible and material inequalities of society as we know it today.'

Thirdly, a critical reading of the propaganda of the male religions enables us to question the so-called Divine Plan and to question the roots of our oppression in matters ... concerning economic survival, abortion, contraception, clitorectomy, infibulation, divorce, attitudes towards 'illegitimacy', lesbian rights, social pressure to marry and to have children, physical and psychological violence, attitudes towards women's bodies and the stereotypes of woman as follower rather than leader and sexual and reproductive being rather than as total human being.

The Triple Goddess is a potent symbol of the totality of women: as the young woman, as the mother or mature woman, and as the hag, or wise old woman. With the waxing full and waning of the moon which symbolises this transformation at a microcosmic level, we may begin to comprehend the eternal cycle of birth and rebirth, of life and death, and to see our roles on earth in true perspective.

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Patriarchal Takeover - Europe & the Middle East

Elizabeth Moore

Early Migrations

Starting perhaps some time during the sixth millennium BC, a trickle of nomadic people, water travellers with a patriarchal religion, began to wander south into the east Mediterranean basin. They encountered agriculturally-based urban settlements, inhabited by people with a matriarchal religion and matrilineal customs, who were the product of a culture which had developed beyond that of the northern hunter fisher some thousands of years earlier. The basis of this development was the discovery of food cultivation techniques, and the domestication of animals. When it became possible to store food, in terms of grain and livestock, against seasonal shortage, the people of the Near East and south eastern Europe were released from the age-old Paleolithic necessity to hunt and gather food; they had time to sit and think; they had shelter and security. The result was an explosion of creativity, in religion, in art, in architecture and domestic comfort; villages and towns grew up, amenities were shared, and trade developed. There were stone and bone, pottery and weaving industries; metals were beginning to be worked. Ideas were communicated; systems of co-operation grew more complex.

The newcomers from the north could not match them in skills; but in physical size, they were the larger. They were tall fair people; their culture was inherited from that of the Paleolithic hunter fishers on the north coast of Europe. They are known as Indo-Europeans, or Aryans. There were a god-worshipping, warfaring people; they must have seemed like barbaric giants to the smaller, darker people of the near east.

The Sixth Millennium

During the sixth millennium, the technique of ceramics spread through the Zagros mountains, to the north east of the Tigris and Euphrates valley, and gradually made its way down the Palestinian coast. This new skill was added to the old weaving, stone and bone techniques, plus the newer ones of food production and storage, the domestication of sheep, cattle, goats, pigs, dogs and cats, and advanced architectural methods. To the north-west, the towns of Catal Huyuk and Hacilar on the Anatolian plain developed pottery around 6,500 BC. There was a town at Byblos on the Palestinian coast, and another above it in the Lebanon, Ras Shamra. The Yarmukian people lived in the Jordan valley. There were the Hassuna people in Northern Mesopotamia between the two rivers; the Samarra people further south, and the people of the Halaf culture in North Syria. Further to the west, on the Greek mainland, the Sesklo culture was beginning; above it in Thrace the Karanovo people likewise were starting to build towns. In the central and northern Balkans the Starcevo and Dniester-Bug cultures were also beginning to develop.

The Halaf Culture

The Halaf people of North Syria added two crucial new skills to their repertoire: metallurgy, using copper and lead; and irrigation. They were also superb potters, evolving through naturalistic animal motifs, via elaborate geometric textile-like patterns, to polychromatic stylised rosettes and crosses—both of these being symbols for the Goddess. Her attributes were the horns and the double axe, and her animal was the bull. At Arpachiya she was associated with the snake, the dove and the double axe, and was worshipped in spacious tholoi shrines.

The towns were built with intersecting cobbled streets, and they may have invented the wheeled vehicle. They grew wheat, barley and flax, and wove fine cloth of wool and linen. Their trading routes took their influence, as well as their obsidian, jewellery, pots and agricultural produce, over an area that spread from the Persian Gulf to the shores of the Mediterranean.

The First Invasions

To the south of the Halaf culture, the Hajji Muhammad people settled around the area where the Tigris and the Euphrates merge before flowing into the Persian Gulf. There, around 5,000 BC, they built the town of Eridu. They developed into fine potters in the Halaf tradition, using elaborate geometrical patterns, with dark brown, dark violet, dark green and bright red glazes.

To the north-west, the peace and prosperity of the Palestinian coast was abruptly shattered, around 4,600 BC. A wave of Indo-European warriors, evidently organised for war, travelled south, destroying, looting and burning as they went. Ras Shamra took two hundred years to recover from the destruction wreaked upon it by the invaders; Byblos was ruined. Local matrilineal tradition was utterly disrupted by the patrilineal god-worshippers, and the culture suffered consequent impoverishment. The round houses were badly built, unlike previous well-constructed rectangular dwellings. Painted pottery ceased to be made at Byblos, and a new stone industry was substituted. For those who survived the invasions, living conditions regressed.

It seems as though the warriors were part of an invading army that came down from the north, across the Caspian Sea, and then, having travelled south-west via the rivers below the Caucasus, parted company; some going west to Palestine, and others travelling south down the Tigris, where they invaded the Hajji Muhammad people and settled in and around Eridu about 4,400 BC. They were known thereafter as the Ubaid people.

The Ubaid People

The invaders settled into their new territory, and appear to have adopted irrigation techniques from the conquered
local people. They built monumental temples to their gods, high up on mounds or platforms; these buildings contrast sharply with the domesticity of the shrines to the Goddess in the preceding period, integrated within the fabric of society instead of being placed apart from and above it. Around 4,000 BC, a temple was built at Eridu, on top of a mud-brick platform which prefigures the ziggurat; in it were found no images of the Goddess whatsoever, indicating the suppression of Goddess worship. The quality of the pottery was competent but dull, sparsely decorated and monochromatic.

The End of the Halaf Culture

Around 4,300 BC, another major offensive was launched, this time originating from the Ubaid area. Warriors travelled up the Tigris and Euphrates rivers with the intent to appropriate new land, and they sighted like locusts upon the Halaf culture. Arpachiya was totally destroyed, the people massacred. The vast domains of the culture were infiltrated and brought under subjection, as far as Mersin in Cilicia, and to the south-west, down to the Orontes. The story was the same as that of the Palestinian coast three hundred years earlier; a horrific one of death and slavery for the local people, whose land was raped and despoiled. In the following period, a regression of living standards again accompanied poverty and misery, together with a loss of skills.

Nippur and Kish

Towards the end of the fourth millennium, the Ubaid culture had developed into the beginnings of the Sumerian culture, the initial phase of which is known as the Uruk period, after the town of Uruk or Erech. The worship of the Goddess had proved impossible to eradicate, and women who were active in religious life were able to preserve some of their old autonomy; however in society at large the woman was expected to become the wife in a patrilineal mode of marriage, and was owned as a possession by her husband. She was deprived of civic rights, and her sexuality was controlled and proscribed by men. Slavery was an integral part of the economy; cuneiform writing began to develop as a method of recording and codifying information, and law began to be codified.

Around 3,300 BC, a new wave of newcomers arrived in Sumer; these newcomers were mountain people with skills in working stone. They initiated the Jemdet Nasr period. The cities of Nippur and Kish grew up, and temples were built for Enlil, the God of Air, also known as 'The Bright-eyed Great Mountain'. Enlil was believed to have entered the city of Nippur and raped the daughter of the Goddess Nunbarshegunu; whereupon Ninlil, the daughter, became his wife.

The Followers of Horus

At approximately the same time, around the close of the fourth millennium, Egypt was invaded. Again the Goddess, as the Cobra of the North, Au Set, and the Vulture of the South, Nekhebt, was reduced in importance, reflecting the foreboding separation of women from power.

The invaders may have been Ubaid people themselves in flight from the Jemdet Nasr invaders; there are tomb-paintings of Mesopotamian ships from this period, and Jemdet Nasr types of cylinder seals were in use. Or they may have been nomadic people coming directly from north Europe, as perhaps indicated by paintings of northern European types of basket-work fish-traps. In any case they seem to have been skilled seamen, and far larger physically than the Egyptians.

The God Shu, Lord of Air (as was Enlil), was introduced; he became the husband of the Goddess Nut. He was shown as a sun God riding in a boat; there are images of battles at sea. The God Hor was worshipped, and he also was portrayed as a sun God in a boat. The newcomers instituted a hierarchical class system with aristocratic rulers, what has been called a master race in dominion over all Egypt, and known as The Followers of Hor or Horus. There is evidence that the invaders successfully legitimised their position through enforced marriage with indigenous women rulers.

Around 3,000 BC, Narmer or Menes, who was also called Hor-Aha, invaded north Egypt from the south, and took control of the entire country, founding the first kingship of the first dynasty.

The Dravidians

The third millennium saw further Indo-European patriarchal invasions, extending increasingly far both to the east and the west. Around 3,000 BC, the matrilineal Goddess-worshipping Dravidian people in India, who had an advanced urban culture, and were in communication via trade routes with Elam and Sumer, were overthrown by Aryan invaders. The Goddess Danu, and her beasts the serpent and the cow, were opposed by the sun God Indra,
Lord of the Mountains. Women were subjugated and removed from power; the foundations of the caste system were laid, with the upper-class light-skinned Aryans forbidden by law to marry the darker Dravidians, the oppressed lower class. Racist attitudes about skin colour were re-infused by religious ideology involving ideas of light as goodness and power, and dark as evil and impotence as had happened in Palestine, Mesopotamia and Egypt.

The Hurrians

Indra was also worshipped by the Indo-European Mitannians. These people were a ruling caste who gained dominion over the Hurrian people, who were not themselves Indo-Europeans, but had moved down into the mountains of northern Assyria from the north in the second half of the third millennium, and had settled in the city of Urkish, and at Nuzi and Tell Brak. Kumarbi, known as the father of all Gods, was worshipped there.

Western Invasions

In Anatolia, around 2,300 BC, Indo-Europeans known as Luvians invaded the rich south-eastern Cilician plain, destroying towns and villages. Their God was Tarhunta, a Storm God. They were followed, around 2,200 BC, by Indo-European Hittites, who also entered Anatolia from the Caucasus region, invading and conquering the people of Hatti. The Hittites used horse-drawn chariots in warfare, with devastating results; they also had begun to work iron, using it to make weaponry, and jealously guarded the secrets of the technology involved.

They made their capital city at Hattusas, and worshipped Taru, the Storm God, who supplanted the earlier Hattian goddesses Hanna-Hanna, Hepat, Kubaba and the mighty Sun Goddess, Arinna. In Hatti the Goddess was also known simply as the Throne, as was Au Set or Isis in Egypt.

Around 2,200 BC, another army of Indo-European warriors, known as Achaeans, made their way round the northern Aegean and down to the Greek mainland, where they destroyed and burned settlements as they travelled, bringing impoverishment and misery, and enslaving the matrilineal people of Greece. The Achaean God was Zeus, Zeus.

The Changed Status of Women

So the matrilineal cultures of Palestine, Sumer, Egypt, India, Anatolia and Greece one by one fell to the predation of the northern patriarchs. In all cases Goddess worship re-emerged; it was an extremely ancient ideology, and could not be stamped out of existence, despite prolonged effort.

But the status of the Goddess had changed. Nut of Egypt was forced to marry Shu; in Anatolia the Sun Goddess was married to the Storm God; in Sumer, Ninil, the daughter of the mother Nunnarshegunu, was raped and wed by Enil. These Gods were the first in a long line of serpent-slaying authoritarian warrior husband deities.

The marriages that figure in the religion are reflections of the rape-based unions forced upon the women of these cultures. Suddenly confronted by men wielding violence as a method of persuasion, their only means of survival lay in submitting to the system of male kinship, brought by the invaders, which viewed women as property and incarcerated their sexuality in an institution of enforced monogamy, in order to ensure patrilineal descent.

References

Politics of Sexuality

Pauline Long

In the name of the Mother of Heaven, Mother of Earth, Creator of Life, Queen of the Sky, Queen of the Night, the Great Womb, the Throbbing Vulva, the Yoni, Most Gracious, Star Goddess, the Great Breast from which flows the milk of kindness, Goddess of Grains and Grasses, Fruitful Mother . . .

These are some of the titles of the Goddess remembered through the witches from earlier times. They have helped me to produce the most difficult essay I have ever written.

I have tried to sort out and put together my ideas on women's values about their sexuality. Freud is said to have asked: "What do women want?" Women know what they want. Their difficulty, which is mine, is to find words to describe, and to produce ideas acceptably. Not because we are "silly" but because words and ideas have grown over the last 5,000 years in a patriarchal setting, and describe what men want. Every word, sentence and set of ideas is painful to write, is open to misinterpretation, certainly by men. I write here to and for women, and ask them to hear and read what I am trying to say and link it with what they find echoing in their own beings.

I am going to try and write about our sexuality, its past, what happened to it in patriarchy, and what our future in a non-patriarchal world might be. In the section on the past, it is necessary to go over some ground that has been covered in our Group’s earlier publications, Goddess Shrew and Menstrual Taboos, but I refer people to these and to the book list for more information. I also take for granted that readers will not expect me here to "prove" that matriarchies or that goddess cultures existed. Again, the book list will indicate sources. Since our earlier publications there has been a proliferation of material on the subject.

The Past: Women as initiators, sexually independent, and the concept of the whole

"Bridegroom, let me caress you,
My precious caress is sweeter than honey;
In the bed-chamber, honey-filled
Let me enjoy your godly beauty."

Part of a poem written for a sacred marriage in Mesopotamia about 2,000 BC, well after the destruction of women-led cultures there, it could be thought that the woman is cajoling the man for her own purposes, or is hoaxing for his. But no: such a ritual bride inherits the powers and memories of goddess cultures, where the woman takes the initiative, where her active love-making is for her own pleasure and more - for an integral understanding of wholeness. She has to be pleased and she is independent. In Lost Gods, John Allegro describes such a sacred marriage:

A bridal bower was erected and decorated with foliage, there the union was consummated . . . it is the priestess who summons the king to her embrace, and who, representing the goddess, bestows on him through their intercourse, a divine but subservient status in the more creative process.

But even more: the divine union took place between the sacred pair; but this was the occasion of love feasts for the whole community: no doubt about all sorts of sexuality – no division between single sex and hetero, and certainly bi-sexuality. Even late records such as the Old Testament and the Babylonian epics and temple documents make the situation clear. "The Goddess Asherah was worshipped in Israel from the days of the first settlement in Canaan, the Hebrews taking over the cult of this great mother goddess from the Canaanites" says Rafael Patai in The Hebrew Goddess.

An inscription dedicated to Ashratum (another form of this name) in the First Dynasty of Babylon (about 1,500 BC) describes her as "mistress of sexual vigour and rejoicing". Becoming Ashthoreth and Astarte in the varying cultures of the Middle and Near East, and later the vengeful Anath, she is "everywhere the great female principle" and "the object of a sensuous nature-worship, attended by many licentious rites and wild orgies". She was the queen of heaven as well as the mother, and the opener of the womb. Upon her sexuality rested the renewing of the harvest. She is spouse and mother to the vegetation god, called many names of which Tammuz is possibly the most familiar; he becomes the Divine King who must die, as do the green plants, and must be recalled through this communion with the earth, the womb, from which he will be reborn.

The seasonal festivals celebrating the cycle of these events were times of sexual rejoicing as well as of sacred mystery. Still remembered as "Quarter Days" in the British Establishment calendar and in the countryside and through the earlier religions, and taken over by the Christians into religious festivals, they provide a link with women’s earliest past and powers. Love, sexuality, death and rebirth reflecting the seasonal rhythms of nature were seen as an entity, and predicated always on the sexual powers of women.

John Allegro suggests that the double axe, so potent a symbol throughout the ancient world, and symbol of royal power in Crete, is "a clear fertility symbol with sexual associations. The lower edges represent the woman’s opened thighs, the central shaft her vagina, and the shaft itself the penis." He suggests that there is independent philological evidence for this in all ancient languages. However women may reflect that the reading of the penis is a male one: we can see the depths of the vagina and the cervix: we know, as Freud did not, that the opening is not a hole on its own: that it leads somewhere. Shuttle and Redgrove in The Wise Wound give numerous examples of the whole female
reproductive system being used as a sacred symbol throughout the ancient world. Perhaps the most striking suggestion is that the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life are shown as the Fallopian tubes; the cervix is a vessel, the womb itself a chalice — perhaps the Holy Grail.

“I have drunk from the cymbal, I have borne the sacred vessel, I have entered the bridal chamber”

Recited by initiates into the worship of Cybele, Moon Goddess, these lines make the Mystery clear.

But, from The Bacchae of Euripides, Pentheus declaims:

“... I hear
Of strange and evil doings in the city,
Of women who have left their homes to join
Fabled mysteries... each stealing forth
This way and that, creeps to a lawless bed;
In pretext, holy sacrificing maenads,
But serving Aphrodit more than Bacchus...”

Threatening the women, he includes his mother,

“Ino, Agave, who to Echion bore me
Her too, Antonoee, Antaeus mother,
And fettering them all in iron bonds,
I’ll put an end to their mad wickedness.”

Pentheus was destroyed by those women, but his work was taken over in full and lives on. Western literature is full of descriptions of women’s “orgies”

They are the apologia for the holocaust of nine million women, labelled witches by European Christianity.

There are two other directions I want to take before leaving the past: some thoughts about menstruation and about what has been called “virginity”.

Menstruation: the blessing and the curse

Women’s acceptance of their period as “the curse” has been one of patriarchy’s most successful tortures. In Menstrual Taboos this group recorded how menstruation was a sacred source of power, and the origin of the Sabbath: since then, Shuttle and Redgrove have documented the extraordinary relationship women’s cycles have with science, religion and art, but always underground, and always denigrated. I want to mention here its direct linkage with our sexuality. Most of us experience increased sexual power just before the time of the flow, and most of us are entirely put down about it.

This links also with the concept, proposed by Esther Harding, that during menstruation and pre-menstrually we may find our inner life, and withdraw from a patriarchal world. The conflicts and “bitchiness” so well documented by Dr Katerina Dalton are likely because of the inability of our inner selves to have any possibility of recognition; while experimenting for ecstasy just at the time of the flow has not apparently been on anybody’s agenda (although perhaps lesbians could have something to say about this). There is immense potential in coming to terms with our cycle; certainly some of the Eastern religions have taken it over, and have subverted Kundalini and serpent power to male use. It is time that we take it back to ourselves, where it belongs.

There is another aspect: I believe that our monthly cycles, related time-wise as they always were to the moon’s movements, were the foundation of mathematical calculation. I believe that the counting up of menstrual rhythms led to the building of giant megalithic science observatories, and provide us with truly not concrete, but stone, examples of the relationship of the sexual with the intellectual, and are in themselves the expression of the totality of women’s sexual life. The possible relationship of menstruation to such gigantic intellectual and mechanical advance is only now becoming a matter of study. It is no coincidence that male power which took over the intellect found it so necessary to degrade an aspect of it so closely connected with women’s sexuality.
Virgins and Prostitutes

Patriarchal writers speak contemptuously of "temple harlots" throughout the early records. At the same time, the Mother of Jesus was and is revered as "virgin". They have also insisted that virginity meant without knowledge of or experience of sexual intercourse. Virgins were pure, even holy. Virgins were also the "sacred vessel", "uncontaminated", which men could violate for their own purposes, and proceed to own and enslave totally for life.

There is ample evidence that temple harlots are also temple virgins. That is, they are the wives of the sacred kings, and priestesses of the Goddess, putting their sexuality at the service of the community for its benefit. The meaning of "virgin", says Esther Harding (and others) was "one in herself", "not married", "sexually independent". Harding says: "The male worshipper sought for union with the Goddess ... the woman pledged to a religious life would not enter into secular marriage ... even women not so pledged were required to give themselves once in their lifetime in the temple". Herodotus called it "the worst Babylonian custom". But he commented: "after intercourse she made herself holy". Children born of these unions were children of the temple and of the community: often they were called "the sons of God". All children conceived by the temple virgins were the offspring of the sacred king, the divine son/lover of the Goddess.

Rafael Patai refers to the quedeshim, male sacred prostitutes, and suggests their function "in rites of imitative magic, was to ensure fruitfulness in nature, the coming of the autumn rains, the growth of the crops ..."

One more look at our past, to lead us into the present — and one very much based on our "cultural heritage".

The Song of Solomon, written about 200 BC and included in the Old Testament, is an overt description of sexuality and as such an embarrassment to the establishment. It need not be. In fact, it is one of our first and most easily available records of our put-down sexually.

Woman is cast as a sex object, and her natural feelings of love are disdained:

My beloved put his hand by the hole ['of the door', added by the translator] and my bowels were moved for him. I rose up to open up to my beloved ... I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had withdrawn himself and was gone ... I sought him but could not find him. I called him but he gave me no answer. The watchmen that went about the city found me. They smote me, they wounded me, the keepers of the wall took away my veil from me [euphemism for rape].

But the man is just not with her: we sense the difference in his love talk: 

"How fair is my sister, my spouse ... thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes ... how much better is thy love than wine, and the smell of thine ointment than all spices ... a garden enclosed is my sister, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed."

This brings us up through 2,000 years to:
The Present  

For all that time, we have been a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. How this horror happened cannot be chronicled here. A lamentation written after the destruction of the Moon City of Ur of the Chaldees is addressed to the Goddess — and describes our situation to this very day.

"Oh Queen, how can you stay alive  
After your city has been destroyed, how can you exist  
Your righteous house which has been given over to the pickaxe and you no longer inhabit it,  
Your people have been led to the slaughter and you are no longer their Queen."

Did we stay alive? Have we been mutated by oppression?  
Or have we fought an underground resistance, hidden even from ourselves and our sisters. For all of us who have gone down to the grave in grief and silence as well as in the utmost horror of rape and violence, there has, has there not, been a memory of inner integrity, of our sexuality — always disappointed — that we know is right. And linked with this our natural rhythm and its consequences.

Patriarchy and Women's Sexuality  

But, talking about natural rhythms gets us nowhere without getting down to our lives under patriarchy and its relationship to our sexuality.

Patriarchy, however and whenever it happened, took women out of the community and put them to slave labour for a particular man who in return kept them alive in order to serve his needs and those of "his" children. This had an immediate economic effect: the reversal of women's power and independence in their own right, to become the creatures of particular men. It must always be remembered that in the ancient world, women and children formed part of the economic set-up; they supported themselves and each other through their labour; whether the male contribution was equal or not is a matter for investigation. It has been shown that as far back as the hunter-gatherers, women's labour brought in up to 80% of the food supplies on a regular basis. The Mabinogion chronicles the times of the ancient Celts before marriage subdued women showing them as strong and independent; from the Mabinogion, quoted in Island of the Mighty by Evangeline Walton:

In my youth, men and women desired each other and were joined, and parted when desire was over-pass. Nor was there argument or curiosity or lewd speculation regarding the origins of children, for these were the gifts with which the high gods blessed women, we had no disrespect for women in those days. Now all in Gwynedd know that Math and Don were born of the same mother, and the women still live who saw Don give birth to Gwydion. Our royal house is above a doubt.  
When you have seen them with your eyes, you know.

Jean Markale in Women of the Celts shows they were economically independent and equal; they were even able to take back their marriage dowries in the event of divorce, they owned property, and carried prominent social prestige.

With the coming of patriarchal power, women's economic situation plummeted. The economics are not difficult. For several thousand years men have owned women's bodies, their labour power, and claimed access to their sexuality on a twenty-four hour a day lifelong basis, from a slave master standpoint and with the women expected to comply, with nor rights whatever. Men's first economic power has been over women; they live on the labour of the woman, and cannot take their own part in economic society without the base structure of women's slavery. Added to this, their role as money-earner has given them sexual power. What woman has not had to "coax" sexually; what woman knows nothing about the fear of rejection or disapproval of the "master"; what woman has not put her own needs down in bed? What woman has not felt that she has no real rights at all to her sexuality, that she is abnormal, that there is no point in even trying. What woman has not been left sexually aroused, and given no care. Even today, in so-called "liberated" circles, if women have not come to orgasm by the time the man is "tired", she can be expected to masturbate, or to use a vibrator. What woman has not often faked an orgasm just to get the whole thing over, or to please the master, or to get some sleep before the children wake.

More: what woman has not become terrified if her period is late, if she is pregnant. Where are her hard won rights under patriarchy? Where is her career, her scholarship, her job, her interests, her independence? All in the control of a single man, to whom she has to yield her soul's light as well as her body's.

It seems silly to write about this, because we all know it, and how for the last hundred years or so women have won some few social and economic rights in the Western world — soon abrogated with pregnancy. Men have come to expect women's dependence as a normal state of affairs and usually resent any divergence, although they grumble about their roles as "breadwinner" etc. But a woman, when pregnant, has the choice of violating her body or accepting long term imprisonment with hard labour and no parole. Where are our natural rhythms now? Gone underground.

A recent survey called "Social Origins of Depression" by two sociologists found women's depression is brought about by "severe life events". Women most vulnerable to depression were those who had three or more children under 14 living at home; said the researchers: "Lack of an outside job lowers resistance to depression." The risk is practically halved when a woman has a job (even doing the tiring work of the job, at home, and the husband).

The researchers suggest that common to all the depression depression factors in women is a "lack of self esteem". Wife- and Motherhood are the cause of this: a "job", however trivial, gives a woman a sense of worth in society — as well as a wage for herself — making her into an object of "value".

When we become mothers, it looks for a short time as if we can find some inner independence, but our work is always not under valued, but non-valued. Eventually our sons grow up to call us an old boot; and our daughters to revile us. Motherhood is the means whereby we are divested of any kind of independence and made totally subject; but expected to continue to make our major contribution to society, with no help, no support, no recognition.

Society underpins our guilt always; everything is always our fault. If we escape from the man and become "single parents" usually our situation is execrable; privatisation of our predicament induces guilt of the worst sort — quite irrelevant, but there none the less; often giving our children powers of tyranny that distort their lives as well as ours; and where men are concerned, puts us in the unenviable position of having to try to "conform" to their ideas of sexuality, keeping the children out of the way. There is nothing for us there at all. Even in modern "alternative" frameworks, there is little or no acceptance of children as being of the community; always when the crunch comes, it is a case of "It's your child, deal with it yourself".


Dorothy Dinnerstein in her monumental *The Rocking of the Cradle and the Ruling of the World* post-dates the Freudian position on the mother. She links equality of child care between women and men as the means of freeing ourselves sexually from the misconceptions brought about by women’s necessity in patriarchy to be the single source of power in children’s lives. The mother becomes the ogre and the “witch” if she withholds anything; the son grows up with a drive to get the magical provider under his control; the daughter is torn between her need for male-style independence and her association with her mother; and further, she looks for “mothering” in the man—he is the one, surely, to nurture her, support her, care for her . . . what pain, what disappointment. Distorted sexual needs are born, suggests Dinnerstein, of this patriarchal relationship. Only when the “first parent” is equally female and male can a truer appreciation of our sexuality become open to us, she believes.

**Patriarchy and Sexuality**

The position that patriarchy has achieved for women’s sexuality today can adequately be summed up by a look at a recent issue of *Women’s International Network News* (WIN) published in the USA. Starting with female circumcision still taking place in 26 countries, WIN quotes from an “International Year of the Child” report:

Besides the psychological aspects, the effects of this genital excision results in severe health hazard both at the time of the operation and during the child-bearing years.

WIN quotes also from Nairobi magazine *Viva*:

Mwalimu Julius Nyerere’s speech inaugurating International Women’s Year 1975 singled out the customs of dowry and polygamy as incompatible with Africa’s cardinal struggle for the attainment and maintenance of human dignity.

Female circumcision, correctly known as clitoridectomy, is the removal of the clitoris—the female sex organ . . . another form of oppression which women are subjected to and perhaps the cruellest is infibulation. This is the closing up of the labia of a girl to ensure her virginity. The labia (lips of the vagina) are sewn shut at puberty and opened forcibly at marriage . . . this custom reduces woman to a mere tool for the man’s pleasure, with no rights over her own body.

Another quotation by WIN, this from *Middle East*, March 1978:

It is a common belief among the old women—a belief usually encouraged by midwives who make their living from these antiquated practices—that unless the introitus is tightened as much as possible by circumcision, the girl cannot be pleasing to a man.

That the other women encourage this practice is of course one of the saddest aspects of patriarchal conditioning.

Other sections of WIN deal with Women and Violence, listing family violence, wife battering and rape. Oppressions of women in the environment, in the media, in the home, divorce in the Moslem world are all chronicled. Who of us does not know of the indignity of walking in a street, sitting in a train, sitting on a park bench? We are unable to claim the basic human right of breathing fresh air or walking in the city. This is everywhere, in every so-called “civilised” place in the world. All of us know the sexual put-downs; all of us have had our sexual organs referred to as degraded parts of the human system; all of us know the fear of rape. All the put-down is something to do with our sexuality: and man’s fear of it. We have been made into sex objects, made “dirty”, we “appeal to the lower side of man’s nature”. We are a nothing, a no-one.

In the name of the Mother, the Despised, the Disdained, the Derided, the Raped, the Scorned, the Unenvied, the Neglected, the One of No Account . . .

I am attacked by a woman, now pregnant, who has been a strong activist in politics and resents the current heaviness and restriction of her life and fears for what is to come. She says she envies me my freedom (I am past child bearing now) and she hates the “wallowing in so-called femininity” that she believes the Goddess followers and matriarchal women advocate. She says: “You are so ambivalent, you praise matriarchy, but you know what motherhood’s like. It’s like death.” She talks about her cruel need to depend on the child’s father, and she adds: “Anyhow, you are not a true feminist because you go with men.”

What she says raises crucial questions for me.

The Matriarchy Study Group in its Manifesto elsewhere in this publication suggests different types of support for mothers and children in a communal and co-operative setting. In such circumstances, motherhood need not be like death, it may come into its own, as a pleasure and a delight.

I want to talk about her cry: you are not a true feminist because you go with men.
Patriarchy at the Immediate Present

Beatrice Campbell recently presented a history of women's sexuality since 1968, in a dynamic lecture (so far unpublished) launching Feminist Review. She showed how the 1968 liberation movement was liberation for men; exploitation of a new sort of women. Free sex on men's terms became pressure for unlimited sexual availability on women; news about women's possibility of multiple orgasm provided the need for this to be obtained at every meeting; if the man was unable to bring the woman to this (or to orgasm at all) it then became her duty to comfort him, to reassure him, and to assume the mother role. Her needs were seen as entirely complementary to his; she became an honorary man — except in "revolutionary" terms. There, he was still the boss (and remains so). Men were disinclined to view women's oppression as other than their own. Sexual oppression was seen in traditional class terms. They were not willing to see it as the primal oppression — which it is. Here I want, personally, to state what I call "Pauline's Law":

This is: Women and Men are Everywhere Oppressed, but wherever the man is oppressed, the woman is doubly or trebly oppressed. Her basic oppression starts, continues and never ends in bed.

Back to Bea Campbell: men's behaviour and women's disappointment at the failure of the freedom revolution led them, she suggests, to the political Lesbian alternative.

Now women found they were able to throw off male oppression completely, and to relate solely to each other, and felt strong enough to come out and do so. But, in spite of the close and loving relationships, where, she asked, were the supportive frameworks, the houses, the creches, the financial networks for mothers and children? So far everything was seen in privatised terms — though part of the essential framework of women's politics. But the loudest silence, she claimed, had been from the heterosexual women: Where were they, what had they to say, were women to be defeated again?

So this is where I want to make my own statement and to talk about

The Future

Changing consciousness is immensely painful and difficult. We women have to get out of our patriarchal thinking and responding; we have to suck up the poison we have ingested since birth. Researching our past puts confidence and strength into us, and particularly into our sexuality, which at the same time extends even to spiritual as well as to physical liberation. But there is more than that.

Anger and Justice

We have to get in touch with our anger.

Recalling the past leads us to a new vision of the future. But this future is held back by men. Reflecting in their sexual life with us their depersonalisation, their alienation from life, their emotional shiftlessness and irresponsibility, their lack of care and selfishness which so often leads us to madness and suicide. No Longer.

In the name of Kali the Destroyer, the Avenger, the Cleanser, in the name of Maeve and the Morrigan, in the Name of the Holder of the Scales of Justice . . .

We women have to call upon our anger. We have to reach for it and let it loose. Until our anger boils over, we will not be free people. So often we bury it, we "forgive", we turn it into pain, acceptably weep, wash up and smile again. No longer. There can be no future for us until we uncover the spring which is now a volcano, and let it go where it has to. We have to seek justice.

Revolution? Puny men have not started: all they achieve is an ecstasy of violence followed by punitive power. When we reach our anger and when they stand and face it and accept it, understanding that whatever comes they have deserved, then there might just be a future for our heterosexual, even for the human race.

Their patriarchal control of nature has run it on to a destruction course, there is almost no time left to reverse this. Their oppression of us has created a depersonalised world, they rape nature as they rape us, they demand continual replenishment of their own resources from ours. No longer.

Without our anger, nothing will change. We have no longer to be patient, to cope, to be sympathetic, to uphold their sky.

Men are less whole than we are, less able to heal themselves, unable to avoid venting their toxic distortions on us. I don't know if they will ever become whole people — or even want to do so. Certainly they will not, until they face their oppressive power and its consequences, and our anger and its consequences.

I see men today, aware of something of the past, now trying to learn caring mechanisms and taking responsibility for children. I see gay men learning and helping other men to learn about and nourish their emotions. I see men going into brotherhood groups to seek to understand their feelings better.

Very well. But I see no men coming to grips with their oppression of women. They back away continually, and will not come to judgement.

I see no future for our heterosexuality unless they can take this step forward. There is a historic necessity being forced on them. The wretched whom they have trodden into the earth for so long are rising up and calling for accounts to be taken.

If men are not able to understand this and adapt to the changes needed, then they will have run themselves into an evolutionary blind alley and eventually become extinct. If men ask themselves why they should bother to change themselves and confront women's anger; why even, they
should become "persons" rather than patriarchs, why they should give up their privileged life on slave labour, they might reflect on this: already patriarchal ways of living in the Western world have shortened their life-span significantly compared with women’s; soon, if they persist in their dinosaurus-tyrannosaurus-like behaviour, there will be no use for them whatever in the world, and they will go to the scrap heap.

Gynandry
But I don’t think this is a necessary or a welcome path.
A recent article by Andrea Dworkin in Peace News said:
There are two emerging feminist erotic models – Lesbianism and Androgyney. Lesbianism is the celebration of womanhood, the core erotic act in an emerging woman’s culture, Androgyney has to do with the obliteration of gender distinctions and sex roles and ultimately of gender itself.
Yes. But I am going to call androgyney something else, and hope it will be something else. This is gynandry.
Gynandry is more than androgyney. It is not a case of the obliteration of gender distinctions based on patriarchal conditioning. It might encourage personal distinctiveness and bring gender differences to ecstasy. It may even create new genders. Implicit in it is personhood for every person: each person will take part in communal care of all, and of each other.
While women need not forego the pleasures of female-ness and mothering, they will allow motherhood to other sexes too. There will be new technology which will bring the choice of having children in or out of the body.
We have to face this future with great care: in a person-run world, with women in command of what happens to them, such technology can relieve them of the slavery and drudgery associated with children and release the total joy that is so often stifled. Women who do not want to have their bodies for this purpose need not; those who do will have the choice of doing so without penalty. But in a patriarchal context, such technology is a vicious threat: more control of women’s bodies by men, and even genetic engineering to create supermonsters in their own image. Our matriarchal values are needed more urgently here than at any other point: caring and nurturing, freedom and loving have to be the core of such technology, otherwise it is true death to us all.
At the heart of such caring is communal support for those who need it, freedom to pursue our whole lives, and a complete destruction of patriarchy. I look at Marge Piercy’s Woman at the Edge of Time and Naomi Mitchison’s Memoirs of a Spacewoman for ideal pictures of what this situation could be like.
And now for some points about our sexuality now and in the future.

Clitoral and Vaginal Orgasm
I’m doubtful about the significance of the physical gap between the clitoris and the vagina. I wonder (with Elaine Morgan) whether there is a Natural Selection factor. Why should penetration of the penis into the vagina not give similar satisfaction to the woman as to the man? Some believe this can be achieved through sexual dexterity and through learning in children’s early play how to please oneself and others. But I go further.

Have women been physically neglected for so long that our body geography has changed? Statuette of Cretan women in the Heraklion Museum show them with clitoris much more enlarged than is usual today. Our capacity for multi-orgasm is much under-used. Can our clitoris have shrunk through lack of use? If so, how long and how much activity will it take to get them right again?
Another suggestion: Is our bodily make-up such that we need not one, but several partners? Sherley in her Nature and Evolution of Female Sexuality thought that we did, and that society put us down in order to create and retain "law and order". Suppose we are made so that when one partner gets tired, another takes over; or should we in fact enjoy our sexuality in common, single sex, bisexually, always, sometimes, not at all, or only at seasonal festivals?
More or Less Sex?

Paula Tree, in her *Liberating Sexuality*, a book of real love and care, suggests that in a future where people are more tender and caring of each other the needs of our sexuality would be lessened. In fact, instead of having sex without love, we might have love without sex. This could be a releasing thought, but I don’t go the whole way with it. With the message of the past before us I think we could get back to integrating our sexuality with spirituality. Sexuality will not just yield a pleasant pastime, but become a matter of sacred reverence and put us in touch with our wholeness. It will become more, not less important.

**Kundalini and Serpent Power**

As our sexual slavery disappears, we might relearn some of the older knowledge. It is not possible to deal here with the concept of Serpent Power, now taken over by male devotees. The serpent, symbol always of women’s wisdom, immortality and totality, stretches from our womb to our nipples, coiled round the tree of life inside us. Control of it must come back to us, and we may, if we choose, only then share it with male partners.

**Conclusion**

I find it necessary to repeat an all-important point made in this article. For gynandry to be more than a pious hope, it must have a social and economic framework. We have to conjecture a new kind of matriarchal situation on the basis of community responsibility. If anyone reading this, thinks such matters have nothing to do with her sexuality, let her imagine, when next fucking, how she would feel if that world were already in being.

Gynandry assumes the adulthood of humankind. Gender may become irrelevant — and whether it does so also becomes irrelevant. The more important questions of who has the power, who is the community, are touched upon (as far as we are able) in our Manifesto. (There is more work to be done here.) I believe that person-hood is connected with nurturing, but that no longer do we women have to nurture men. I repeat: we have nurtured so much that we now must have retribution. We cry out for justice, and we will obtain men: I repeat: we have nurtured so much that we now must have retribution, and we must have restitution. We cry out for justice, and we will obtain justice.

Am I not a true feminist because I go with men? This accusation caused me a lot of heart-searching and I have come to the conclusion I can’t answer it. But I want to say something important for me. For all the life-long disappointments (and they never stop), and the agony, I do not want to deny the joy that has happened to me. This joy has always been bound up with the natural world, the sea, the dark flowing river with flocks of birds overhead. This has been with a man. This joy has led to the knowledge of the concept of the Goddess and to my re-entering and understanding my magic powers and possibilities, to a knowledge of death and of re-birth.

To women who want to love men, to women who bear sons, women who are now sitting crying, disappointed, agonised, despairing: with you I weep constantly, with you I reach for my anger, with you I fight on, with you I dedicated myself again —

In the Name of the Mother . . .

**Acknowledgements and Booklist**

I would never have made it without the support and encouragement of the Group but there are some very special thank yous I need to say.

The first is to Lynn who posed the questions. The next to Pauline, who when I cried out in desperation, I can’t go forward, or back, she said “Well, get into it, then”. In this she reminded me of the midwife during the birth of my second child. I said then, “I’m stuck, I can’t go on”. And she said: “What is your alternative?”

Greetings and thanks to her, too.

To Helen, who said you don’t have always to know the answers, it’s OK to say you are confused.

To Dot, who as always, helped me find strength.

**Booklist**

- WALTON, Evangeline, *Island of the Mighty* (based on the Mabinogion).
- Revolutionary Feminist Conference 1978, papers.
- Dworkin, Andrea, *Feminism and the Radical Left*, *Peace News*, 1.12.78.
- Tree, Paula, *Liberating Sexuality*. 
The Kastellion Labyrinth

At the foot of Mount Ida in Crete, at Kastellion, in the Phaestos area, there is a vast underground labyrinth, tunnelling deep into the rock. Above the plateau which contains the labyrinth, one can see the Dictaean range, the Idaen range, Kedros, and the White Mountains; the snowy mountains of Crete together.

In 1702 a French botanist, Turnefort, visited the labyrinth and described it as follows:

Having wandered through a maze of underground passages, the explorers reached a long wide aisle, some 1,200 paces long, which ended in a sort of Council Chamber of great magnificence... The floor is level, with few uneven places. The walls are absolutely vertical and made of stone, which prevented our going further... but there are so many passages in all directions that one would undoubtedly get lost if proper precautions were not taken...

In 1867, the people of the surrounding area, in flight from Turkish invaders, took shelter in the labyrinth, and lived within it for three years. The Reverend Henry Fanshawe Tozer, writing about it in 1875, says:

Far, far within there was a large and lofty central hall, capable of holding five hundred people together, to which they gave the name of refectory; and that there they used to meet from time to time and dance, sing, enjoy themselves. They had brought a provision of bread to eat and oil for light; and water they obtained from a spring in the innermost part of the cavern, which appears to be the only one, for we saw no stalactites or dripping water in other parts.

During the last war, the invading Germans used the labyrinth as a storage depot for gold, and also for weapons and explosives. After the war, an attempt to seal the passages and discover the gold resulted in an explosion of gunpowder which blew a man some great distance through the tunnels as though he had been a bullet in the barrel of a gun. The labyrinth is presently sealed with concrete to prevent further explosions.


HALLOWE’EN NIGHT (OR PAINTED LADIES)

The skylark and the hawk, the spider and the cat,
The fish, the tiger and the toad,
And the small cat who likes the secret places of her own
Stood round the fire,

It was the dragon’s fire;
Its scales were yellow, blue, green and turquoise
Lighting up the darkness.

And the old man said Good Morning.
The fire answered: “Your time is nearly over”
As it spat fireflies into the night.
It gave strength to all the women,
Snakes and claws grew,
Wishes were made
And a hesitant visitor made a ninth companion.

A promise was made:
Embers would be gathered
By the oldest body of the Goddess,
But no stones were left
For this has no ending.

31 October 1978
This is a Group Poem
composed by all after the Hallowe’en Ceremony.

MY SISTER

With thorns in her veil of shadow beams
my sister came at night, one early winter
from the fog of a forest never seen...

And warmth was not again, nor light:
So icy!... the earth remained... so thick a moisty haze
from the wrath of her heart of marble ivy...

My sister has a crow wing in her lashes...
And all cloud in the sky on stormy seas...
Her flesh and her skin are silver ashes.

My sister gathers web, she likes to spin
together dust from the worlds, milk from stars
and the foam of the winds, so very thin...

I much fear to see: while fingers wheel
Throughout old fallen gravestones such a bloom,
comes from the spheres in the milky way.

Throughout frost, caves, and crystals, such a tune:
I much fear to listen!... So they say:...
That before a human being... she was the Moon.

Maria
POEM for the Dark Goddess, on the full moon.

The full moon
Fills the midnight street with dawn light
Like water
A silver night:
Dawn on a dead through terrace —
The women are mad.
Their hollow bones fill with ice and light.
They will kill and eat.
They have seen the smoke rising from their own bodies.
They have woken in the mixed flare
of moonlight and street glare
To the scream of their own bodies
burning.
They have said
We always knew —
We were betrayed
Our wombs were ripped
Promises were made to us
They were never kept —
We always knew
That the women were right
Right in our despair,
Right in our rage,
Right in our justice,
Right in our self-betrayal
And we are coming
On quiet hurrying feet
Our hands stretching
Our eyes staring
We are coming to claim our justice

Do not plead ignorance
Or goodwill
It will not save you
The women will rip you
Like the paper of your empty contract
And eat you.
Their bodies will fill up with peace
Like the swimming moon
They will sleep in the watery dark
And wake, calmed.
This will happen
Again and again.
Their rage will never be used up.
Neither will their justice.

Diana Scott
November 15 1978
New Moon in December.

TOWARDS THE SOLSTICE

This month the moonpath floats milkily,
It grips us more tightly than gravity.

We are two mooncraft docked, propelled
In formless, dark and unsigned posted space.

Who are you? You know me.
Are you here? Yes.

Is this light-line our body? Yes.

Moon, your month is moving in its cycle;
You are gliding into the place where all light is hidden.
You have dipped away into the blackness. The dark
extends, expands, encloses.

Moon, you have moved through your time.

Shall we go to the entrance? Yes. Through the tomb's door?
Yes.

Into nowhere, no place, into no known return? Yes, and
welcome.

Lying in your long barrow, we sample red flowers of
ecstasy.

Moon, you are whirling, contracting, tearing the birth film.
Your belly's waters break out to stain the sky.
Moon, you have pushed an iridescent pearl onto the
horizon.

Where is the moon? Inside us.
I swallowed you to make a new sun.

Pauline Long
9 December 1978.
Power of the Dark Goddess

Margaret Roy

I am the fourth, forgotten aspect. When they look at my
brightness, at the smooth round disc and the two slender
crescents, they forget that there is a time when my face is
dark. I am invisible but still my darkness looms over them
and in their fear they hide from me, not I from them. In
my darkness I am whole, complete, and I contain all. I am
4 and I am 3. I am 12 and thus I am 2. I am Binah, I am
Rhea, I am Ain Soph Aur. They call me Lilith, Mother of
Demons but Hecate and I are different, though sometimes
they say we are the same. I am the Gorgon. I am Tiamat.
I swallow all and spew them forth again as I rumble in my
guts. I am ugly, blacker than any chaos that I represent. But
I have no form because I am not born. Yet it is my blood
that is spilled out in life and I am scarlet. I am the Fire of
Life smouldering so deep within. The throbbing in your
veins is me. The stillest life is me, older than any time you
can know my child, older than any time. I am Time. In
the darkest, loneliest moment, in that timeless zone, you are
mine and I live in you because then you are yourself . . .
but I doubt if you have yet experienced that. They call it
death, but you don’t have to die. I am here now, always. In
the silent dark hour I wait for you. There is no hurry, they
all come in the end.

But there are those that come in life and embrace my
ugly face, brave the darkness of my fires. My good red
blood does not repulse them for they are my own, my very
own, and I love them with my fierceness that gave birth to
all the universe. They shine like stars in the heavens that are
my crown. In the oceans of primeval darkness I teach them
how to dance the birth of life, so the newborn crescent is
their symbol, my own ones. And so they set out again, new
life and more spilled blood! And so I wait, alone and torn.
My redness colours them. They are fierce and strong and
five in number – it is as 9 they will return. Bloody, bold
and full of life they go and I live in them.

How well you fear me, you out there. No wonder you
pretend I am not here. Because you fear me, I am your
Death that haunts you to the end. But I am also your
unborn self and it is that you really fear. My fire in you
you smother, the unknown depths that deny the lesser self
and draw you forward into that great ocean of life which is
your only strength. Behold, I am the Guardian of your Soul,
I am your Initiator and your Guide. I am the only law that
ever was or ever will be. Your Destroyer and your Saviour.
From Chaos came forth all and in the end all returns.
Daughter, blood of my blood, dance for your Mother.

In these sad days, the fourth aspect needs considerable
exploration and this of necessity is only a note.

In a patriarchal world we are taught to fear death and
darkness. Through thousands of years this has created a
split in the female, into dark and light, and has also created
a light and dark separation within ourselves. The former
separation can be seen in the dual image of Woman as the
Mother and the Whore. The latter separation can be
seen in modern psychological terms as the Ego and its
Shadow. The “bad” is cast out. The “bad” is a relative and
subjective value. This is of course usually the least under-
stood and the most feared. In this case, it is also wisely
named “evil” and “malefic” as it undermines and destroys
“civilisation” and the culture of our society because the
fundaments of that society and civilisation, which are
patriarchal, are alien to life. Thus the women’s menstrual
blood is unclean and even evil. It is a symbol of a free
woman, not a wife and mother, and a free woman is an
active, free agent who does not fit into a patriarchal world.
The Triple Goddess of the last 3-5000 plus years can be
(and has been) made into a Good Woman and, without its
non-compromising, anti-material dark pole, she can be
tolerated in a patriarchal world, toothless but pretty. In
fact, in her usual form of Maiden, Mother and Crone, she is
contorted into a strange male linearity of the “ages of
woman” when those familiar with her archetype, in the
purer worlds beyond the astral and psychic, see her as
co-existing (synchronic!) in all her “phases” at once in all
her children but she is continual movement, changing all
the time, full of vitality and dynamism like her symbol the
flashing swastika.

Now, this is a strange crux of the matter . . . Without
her dark side, she cannot exist. Yet we have separated them
and this separation shows our strange separation from life
itself, a strange irrationality and an unwillingness to face
reality. The dark pole must be accepted. It is uncom-
promising. She is Justice and the Law of Manifestation of
all life. She is the Harmony and Balance of the Law and the
only final truth. To warp the basic Law of Nature is to deny
Life itself in a very final way. So she remains hidden
because, though we cannot face her, ultimately we cannot
deny her.
To accept her is to inject into Life the dynamism and vitality represented in her ancient symbols. Within this is an active phase of Woman who inspires the fear of death in men and in all who fear absolute reality. Thus in *The Wise Wound* it is linked with the menstrual pole of woman’s cycle because at that time, psychologically, she is very sensitive to her inner *female* world which has a different more ultimate reality that transcends the purely physical. It is the time when, in opening to herself, she gives birth to herself and when she is concerned with herself she has no time for mothering and caring for others, but only for pure existence as it is expressed in herself. This is the active Woman. Not active in terms of the outgoing “male” activism but dynamic in her own wholeness. An activism we need to explore!

**A little occult note**

The aspects of the fourth phase are often lumped together with the Crone as Hecate, etc. In serious occult work, however, it more than pays to know the difference. Often the fourth phase is denied as destroying the archaic term “Triple Goddess”. However, by the time we use this term we are already surrounded by patriarchy so that within the term is symbolised a splitting-off of the unacceptable fourth phase of the destroyer — and so the Devil is created! Hecate is the Old Woman with a foot in both worlds but belonging to neither. She is the facilitator of action but not herself action. Thus as the Old Crescent she stands between the poles of fullness and darkness. The Wise Old One is Protector of the Newborn and is conscious of the needs of the Mother but also she who faces the darkness knows that ultimately all women must face their own birth/death. So she is the Guardian of the Dark Portal and is present at Kore’s descent into the Underworld because, even in the patriarchal remnants of the myth, an initiation is involved.

Sometimes, in Witchcraft and other cults, this fourth active phase is taken from the female and given, for example, to a male Horned god as an aspect of maleness and so that this pole is controlled by men — with the Lady’s horns on his head and no doubt in female garb. This is opening a space for men who formerly were not allowed into the Goddess’s presence. It is also a contorted view of the active pole, a recognition of it but denying its nature.

A number of occult laws are invoked in this practice. The four is completed but stifled in its manifestation. Growth is projected horizontally towards maintaining the external polarities on the physical plane which then leads to a sexual act to regain the higher planes for magical working. Effective, but gross and infuriating, it denies woman her own active pole and demeans her positive pole vis a vis a male. The magic may have worked but the woman’s growth is subservient and stifled. We must assume our own True Self, become our own heroines and journey into the dark halls of the Mother ourselves. We do not need males to do it for us. The means & the end when each trial of the journey is a further revelation of Self and we are in the end no greater than what we are, the life we lead. The worship of the Goddess is a search to liberate the true female (not a reflection of the male anima) within ourselves. It is giving birth to ourselves, for which we ourselves need to act.
Eleusis - Politics of Mysteries

Mary Coghill

We live in a patriarchal civilisation. Patriarchy, however, has not always existed. There was a time when there were women-led cultures all over the world - a web of civilisation formed by powerful women.

Patriarchy need not always exist.

In patriarchy, women are denied positive images and definitions of themselves. Women are above all the carers and supporters, the emotional and more moral (yet deliberately less powerful) facets of an otherwise alienating, hierarchical, manipulative and competitive civilisation. Capitalism is one manifestation, and the most powerful one, of this attitude to the world; sexual politics, marriage, the family and the church, are the others.

Women are angry with frustration at this manipulative and imposed definition of ourselves, and the Women's Movement has grown to counteract this, to provide a base for discussion and action - a base round which women together can fight for their own definitions and put these into practice, establish a way of life beyond patriarchy.

Patriarchy sees women as silent, charming, caring, gentle, emotional, understanding, loving, adaptable, hiddable, receptive, compliant, indecisive, responsive, quiet, sensitive, preferably beautiful, alone (patriarchy allows no bond between women) and as a living support mechanism for men - their egos and their sexual needs.

Images

Images of women in patriarchy are therefore passive - she smiles, reposes, listens, echoes, reiterates, adorns herself, is seen as beautiful, is the mother, the carer, the wife, the sexually available, the person in the background. Any anger or desire for individual strength must be interpreted under patriarchy as a fault of the woman not able to adapt to patriarchal demands, she must change, get rid of her anger, her 'selfishness' and become happy, normal, supportive. A woman's fulfilment in patriarchy is through others.

Thus in patriarchy there are no images of women laughing together because of their own happiness (and not in order to please others), running, swimming, shouting, angry, negotiating, creating, enjoying the beauty of their own bodies (not as in patriarchy only 'enjoying' them as a receptacle for others), talking, meeting, thinking, resolving, deciding, doing . . .

Definitions

Such a lack goes a long way to reinforce women's patriarchally defined roles and must be changed, if women are to feel themselves able to express other aspects of themselves. A study of pre-patriarchal societies helps to do this.

Here we have women as rulers, poets, creative thinkers, mathematicians, priestesses. Here we have women who are fierce, strong, gentle, who create, design, organise, farm, paint, sculpt, pot, and build.

In women-led times these images were often interpreted through religion. The Goddess is a symbol of woman, and woman a symbol of the Goddess. In the patriarchal takeover, men destroyed the most powerful symbol of women's mystery and power, their religion, and replaced it - often by brute force - with their own male godheads, their symbols: Babylonian wargods, the Jewish Jahweh, the avenging God, late classical religions and warlike Nordic gods. They usurped the moon, on which women based their cyclical waxing and waning and understanding of life and replaced it with the sun which they admired and worshiped for its fierce constancy and unwavering sameness.

We, in the Matriarchy Study Group, use this early woman-defined imagery and symbolism to explore a new woman's defined sense of womanhood, sisterhood. Whilst we explore positively the women-led societies of pre-history, we are quite clear that in no sense do we want a return to the past. Our study of this past is a means to an end, a new beginning, not an end in itself.

The Eleusinian Mysteries

So where and how do we find these women's thoughts and images? Through looking at the Eleusinian Mysteries a number can be uncovered.

Mysteries are ancient pagan religious rituals. The Eleusinian Mysteries were the ones celebrated at Eleusis. Many mysteries were open only to women (see Griffault, The Mothers) or only certain parts were open to men. Mysteries are often described as mere fertility rites or orgiastic revelries, but the Eleusinian ones reveal that they were nothing so simple and in fact reflected highly abstract
ideas. They also reveal, in the evolution of the story which they celebrated, the development of the society: how eventually the patriarchal takeover, expressed through religion, put down the female psyche.

Elesus is now a small town near Athens. The names means advent, beginning, way, path, and is also connected with paradise (Elysium) and Eileithyia, the Goddess of Birth. The Rarian Plain behind Eleusis where ceremonial ploughing was done as part of the mysteries means womb (see Graves).

History

They were first celebrated around 1400-1100 BC (see Adrienne Rich) and then continuously up until 396 AD when the temple was destroyed by conquering Goths. They were tremendously important in the ancient world, but it is not until late in their history (500 BC onwards) that we have any record of the events that took place.

It was forbidden for centuries to reveal what actually happened; only the initiated should know. It is only when men were finally admitted, and the male element in the mystery quite strong, that there begin to be transgressions of this ruling. Even so, details are scarce.

I shall have to work backward through time and start with a brief description of the myth that the mysteries celebrated, as we know it today.

Pluto, God of the Underworld, abducted Persephone while she strayed from home to pick flowers. He forces her to lie with him, eat six pomegranate seeds to represent his power over her and thus he keeps her with him for six months of the year. These are the barren winter months when Demeter (Persephone’s mother) mourns the loss of her daughter.

Interpretations

Such a story does little for modern women other than reinforce the patriarchal weapon of — those young girls who stray far from home must expect what they get, and that the mother’s role is ever to mourn that she cannot have her children by her for ever. The emphasis is that Demeter has lost Persephone, not, for example, that Persephone has her own complex adulthood and after individual experience can share this with her mother on an equal footing. Her adulthood is not gained by her rape, or sexual initiation as several modern psychologists euphemistically call it (Neumann, Jung, Kerényi), but by her independent actions.

In the books which mention and study the Eleusinian Mysteries, sources quoted for details of events, times, importance etc. were originally a collection of classical historians, for example Herodotus. None of these sources goes further back than approximately 500 BC. There is also the Homeric Hymn to Demeter which is an invaluable source for a study of the mysteries, but it records nothing (as expected) of the ceremonies themselves.

The Eleusian Mysteries celebrated the growth cycle of the corn, it was a celebration of the cycle of life, endings leading to beginnings leading to endings and so on. This was interpreted through human beings, Goddesses and later, Gods too. This meant that it embodied a highly complex understanding of the psyches of women and later and less positively, men.

The ceremonies were a ritual celebration of the ‘death’ of the grain — i.e. when the corn was harvested and stored before being planted again — and of the birth of the grain when it had been planted and was beginning to grow. There seems to have been one ceremony (the lesser) for when the grain had been harvested and another for nine days in September and October (the greater) when the winter rains began in Greece and the corn sprouted.

It is a strange idea to us to mourn the harvest, but the ancient Greeks saw that part of the cycle as the time when the corn was inactive, when the corn (Persephone) was separated from the earth (Demeter) and then was the time of Demeter’s mourning.

The Ceremonies

The remains of the temple at Eleusis can still be seen today. The ceremonies in fact started in Athens with a huge torch-lit procession making its way to Eleusis, helping Demeter to search for Persephone. A statue of Dionysus was carried in the procession, Dionysus being the God of frenzy and the maenads (strong, fierce, terrifying women) and later merely of wine and drunkenness. On arrival at Eleusis a mass bathing and purification would take place and after at least twenty-four hours of fasting the initiated would be admitted to the temple for the final and most important rituals. At this point there was silence and an all-night vigil took place.

According to various sources a ritual marriage was enacted between Persephone and Pluto. In even later accounts a birth was also incorporated. A boy would be born (the product of Pluto’s rape of Persephone) and the crowd would let out a shout, “Bromos is born!” Other accounts speak of a phallic stone being moved symbolically in a basket, of two horns of water, the larger filling the smaller at a given moment to a shout of “Let it rain: conceive, be fruitful!” Late versions (second century AD) speak of a bullfight. The elements are diverse, though all are connected to original matriarchal imagery.

The latest accounts of the Mysteries show that a large amount of ribaldry and obscenity had replaced the former ‘mystery’ and dignity. Even so, we have remarks made by Cicero, Pindar and others describing the awefulness of the ceremony: “Happy he who having witnessed such things, goes under the earth: he knows life’s end and knows its Zeus-given beginning” (Pindar 5th century BC). Here the male takeover of the mysteries is complete. It is he who witnesses and it is the male god Zeus who gives. What has happened to the women, the myth, Demeter, Persephone (or Kore), Mother Earth and the Corn Goddess?
The Homeric Hymn

There is no female source describing the Eleusinian Mysteries. The Mysteries demanded silence and the women maintained this. We must search for clues and ideas in the Homeric Hymn and earlier.

The Homeric Hymn was written around the 6th century BC. The authorship ‘Homer’ is an indication of style and date rather than of specific writer. It evokes an earlier time of women’s power with its passing references to Demeter as the Dark-eyed, Dark-cloaked one, as one of the Erinyes — one of the furies, angry women who can drive the wrong doer to madness. The Hymn emerges much more as a story of Demeter than of Persephone (whom I shall now call Kore, her traditional name meaning the young woman or maiden, which is more symbolic).

It is significant that Kore’s abduction is not specifically seen as such in the Hymn. Kore goes to visit beautiful flowered meadows; there is one plant actually mentioned, the narcissus, the bulb of which is a narcotic. It is after her interest in this plant that the earth opens up and swallows Kore. It is as if the Hymn is recalling some earlier version of the story where there was no male plot of abduction, only an unfolding of those events which were bound to overcome Kore as representative of the corn and the growth cycle: after the winter sleep comes the union with the earth, after being dormant, life comes again. Demeter, of course, was originally the Queen of the Underworld as she is the Earth Mother but she became divorced from that aspect of herself very early on in the evolution of the myth (the dark aspect of the Goddess was one of the first aspects to be lost — see later). Thus what was originally a period of darkness and nothing — Kore going into the dark aspect — becomes a period of mourning where Mother Earth has lost semblance of life (her daughter). Such a development, in conjunction with the ever-increasing strength of the male principle makes the way easy for the arrival of a male king of the Underworld, and his abduction of youth, Kore.

Demeter

The emphasis of the Hymn is Demeter’s grief. Pluto forces Kore to eat seeds and she then returns to Demeter after Demeter and Zeus have a power struggle. Zeus’ allegiance lies with his brother rather than with his sister, Demeter (patriarchal comradeship emerging) and he only gives into Demeter when she forces his hand. She does this by making the world barren and dead. She is stronger than Zeus but not stronger than him and Pluto put together, thus she loses Kore for six months of the year.

In the Hymn, Demeter does not know where her daughter is, she has to find her. There is no suggestion of any understanding on Demeter’s part that her daughter is rightfully undertaking her part of the growth cycle, the women of the story have been reduced to very passive and non-initiatory roles.
**Women and the male aspect**

Demeter is the instigator of one very interesting episode in the Hymn. Typically it represents a male aspect. Whilst travelling she stops to rest at a queen’s palace. The queen, Metenaira, has a son, Demophon. At this time Demeter is represented as the old woman, the nurse, she is waning, her strength has been drained by her search. She offers to look after the boy and she secretly decides to confer immortality on him. She begins to bathe him in the fire of immortality but before the ceremony is completed, the boy’s mother rushes into the room to ‘save’ her son from apparent death.

If any attempt is to be made to interpret this incident I would suggest that Demeter as Corn Goddess, Mother Earth (if Demeter and Kore represent the growth cycle they cannot be split in the end), and woman, is at the heart of the growing cycle and knows therefore of her own immortality: she seeks to give this to men. The male poet of the Hymn and obviously his audience reject the fearful fire of immortality. The person who stops the process is the boy’s mother. Esther Harding in Women’s Mysteries has led me to an understanding of this. Mother and daughter, like as they are, often need no specific initiating into the adulthood of the child for autonomy of each to occur. A girl, in growing to be a woman, will easily accept that she too can and will care for others. Her mother in various ways has shown her how, and the mother can readily accept this for her daughter.

**Mother and son**

Mother and son need this initiation into adulthood: the mother needs to ‘Sacrifice the son’. A mother tends to sacrifice herself for her child (female or male) but the mother perceiving that the son will not be a mother as such can feel that he will never know how to be ‘more than himself’ either in the relationship of nurturer and child or in any other kind of relationship. Thus she may continue to sacrifice herself for the ‘good’ of her son and is only ‘pleased if he is happy’, her personal satisfaction is found through seeking his good.

Demeter was to ‘sacrifice’ Demophon for this reason, that he become separate from his mother, autonomous, self-creating instead of mother-created. The Hymn records Metenaira’s inability to support this, this is evidence of a time of transition. The society was no longer women-led enough for such mother-creation never to have occurred but it is not yet patriarchal enough for Demeter and the poets to abandon expression of older ways and ideas. Metenaira becomes an example of the new patriarchal definition of the function of motherhood. Demeter is the example of the matriarchal mother – the woman who restores herself as woman in her own right when the need for nurturing is no longer a priority.

**Sexuality**

To care for somebody need not mean to nurture them, especially if each person is an adult. This has especial meaning for women who wish to express heterosexuality but who also wish to have encouraged their own personal selves — their own sexuality, intellect, emotions. If the male partner continuously asks for support and nurture (for the willing listener, the ever-ready responder) then we women can only express the mothering aspect of ourselves within that relationship. We need also to express our autonomy, our growing, our wisdom, our anger, our power. This menas the male needs to be able to exist without support and to be supportive of another’s personal experiences; these will not always reflect his own.

The patriarchal takeover in the Eleusinian mysteries I think arose specifically because men failed to see how their immortality was represented by an all-female cycle and myth. Only with the introduction of a male principle in the myth — Pluto and Brimos — could they interpret their own immortality.

**Four Aspects**

In early mythology the great Goddess — Earth Mother — became split into four aspects to reflect a greater complexity of understanding. She reflects the four phases of the moon and four aspects of female psyche: the new moon, or dark aspect, the terrifying, unseen, never to be named and all-powerful aspect; the waxing moon, Kore, the maiden, the virgin (meaning a sexually expressive, unpossessed and autonomous woman); the full moon, the strong, the nurturer, the mother, Demeter; and the waning moon, the wise, the old, the magic, the witch, Hecate. The Hymn tells of Demeter, Kore and Hecate, though it is late enough to give a very small and inexplicable role to Hecate and not to mention the Dark Goddess at all. It certainly does not explore these aspects of womanhood, nor the relationships between the aspects.

**The Women**

Demeter as Earth Mother has a history of her own. First she is the mother of all, later theogonies (the family trees of deities) reveal that in one version of her life story she was abducted and raped by Poseidon, the God of the Sea, the result was Kore. The Kore abduction is a repeat of this cycle. It is important to remember that this is a late version of her history. The myth of Demeter, Kore and Hecate as a reflection of the growth cycle strongly embodies the older woman/mother/young woman grouping. Demeter is earth and nurturer, Kore is the grain and young corn and Hecate is the knowledge of the corn, a prime mover, it is she who understands and can therefore re-inspire the cycle. The dark aspect is the power which enables the cycle.
Originally Demeter mourned Pluto not Kore (cf. Isis and Osiris, Ishtar and Tammuz). In these stories the son is sacrificed as the honoured lover and bringer of fertility to the high priestess and the earth. An interesting link with later myth is Kore eating the pomegranate seeds in the underworld. There was an ancient taboo on red coloured food, i.e. it was sacred, and the pomegranate was supposed to have sprung from the blood of Tammuz. Hera, as an early death goddess, also held a pomegranate. The Demeter/Kore myth is therefore a development of the earlier mother/sacrificed son myth. It is as if the female principle took over from this more androgynous mixture and did so as the myth became a less general one of the cycle of all life to a more specific one celebrating the growth cycle of corn.

Later History

The latest version of the mysteries known to us have the birth of a male child as the climax of the ritual, as the revelation (this, instead of an ear of corn, or earlier, perhaps, that of the New Year King). Thus the female principle is destroyed completely, no longer can Demeter and Kore commune with each other as entire personifications of the growth cycle, even with Kore’s rape this was still possible. Now the great event is the birth of a male child. This, all the men can identify with; the Eleusinian Mysteries finally celebrate the birth of mankind! The women are relegated to wife and mother. Hecate as the wise woman has been forgotten, so too has the nameless Dark Goddess.

There is an obvious analogy with the story of Christ, whose birth was hailed as the birth of salvation: St. Anne as Mary’s mother (Demeter), Mary, the virgin mother (Kore, and remember that virgin means a woman who is sexually unpossessed though not without experience) and Jesus (Brimos), the male saviour. Thus we can see the development of religion as a general development which has a place and time in history, not as something which is absolute and containing all meaning and grace. It seems to me that the religion reflects the people’s psyche and that the Greeks at 500 BC with the birth of Brimos were the forerunners of the theme that Christianity picked up 500 years later.

One other character who joined the Eleusinian story at a later date was Triptolemus. There are several carvings and images where he is prominent, or given pride of place with Demeter and Kore on either side of him. Sometimes they are even depicted as serving him. He is either described as the boy Demeter tried to make immortal or as the boy that Demeter is said to have taught her mysteries to, i.e. to have taught the knowledge of the corn-growing cycle, how to grow the corn. Men probably saw their immortality being conferred on them in this way, that they could then always grow the harvest crop. But such a version of the story is another indication of the lessening of women’s control and power and the rise of the male’s.

Women speaking

How silent the women still are. No women’s voice describes herself in this story or gives us knowledge. I have had to search through the nooks and crannies of a large number of obscure books (see list) to find out as much as I did and even then only by reading copiously between the lines.

But we can begin with an understanding of the powerful bonding and sisterhood that would have been created between these women celebrating the mysteries together, celebrating the cycle of growth and life as they saw it, and also with our own interpretations of the four aspects at least and investigate something of mother/daughter and mother/son relationships from an understanding of the myth.

Now we have knowledge of Demeter’s indomitability, her caring, her misery and her anger, not only is her daughter threatened but her own dignity; of Kore’s autonomy, desire for exploration, her love for her mother; of Hecate’s wisdom, magic and silence, she knows but she does not reveal all, others must find out some things for themselves; of the power and strength of the Nameless, how she inspires actions of all kinds and fear. If we go back beyond that which the Hymn reveals we can perceive how Demeter, Kore, Hecate and the Dark aspect have complete empathy through their representation of the growth cycle, how all actions are seen as part of this. Thus Kore does indeed leave Demeter (the harvest) but after independence and at the right time, she can return. Demeter grows old (becoming the nurse/older woman) through losing Kore, but she is rejuvenated by their re-uniting (the young shoot of corn).

Women understanding

We can find too the beginnings of the understanding that women in all our aspects can make a whole, we can understand how Demeter and Kore did express their relationship and the immortality they found within it, we can understand the inter-relationship of the four of them and know that these can all be for and within each of us, and that their presence will only create a whole and not be negative as patriarchy would have us believe. This is particularly important as regards our anger, our dark aspect, which is our active expression of power.

We understand too how men could not find their immortality through this female-based myth, that at the beginning of patriarchy they could only find it through a story of the abduction and rape of a woman and the causing of misery to another. It was only that which they could celebrate; that and the reduction of all women to passive mothers, wives and rather casual daughters.
The earlier myth of the mother/son sacrifice more nearly expresses immortality for both sexes. It is an understanding of this that we must assimilate if we are to create a new gynandrous society.

Now we fight against rape and for our sexual autonomy; now I have come to the end of going back to the beginning, and my last words are for:

THE WOMEN OF THE CORN.

Triumph for all three of us and the whirlwind fourth who out of blackness, sways and breathes; ours is the swirling dance, ours the ripple circles in moonlight, ours the flash of lightning with thunder and terror; the Moon, She comes anew, growing, waxed, waning, pulling our waving dance to and fro and to until in faster frenzy we crackle, blast through the silence, the night and more, breaking bounds and gravity, reason and endings; flinging into a galaxy at all speed we send, from lit fragments, the sparkle of beginnings.

New Moon 29 December 1978.

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Introduction

The mythology of pre-Christian Ireland is full of images of strong, powerful women; as goddesses, warrior-queens, or personifications of the land, the sea and the rivers. In this article we shall look at some of the best-known figures, the different kinds of power and authority they represented, and how they have survived in Christian chronicles and folk memory. Then by discussing the mythological women in the light of semi-legendary accounts of the settlement of Ireland, and the archaeological evidence available, we shall pose the question of whether they are an image of a pre-Celtic matriarchal culture.

Sources

We have three kinds of sources for studying the goddesses of pre-Christian Ireland. Firstly, compilations of myths and legends made by monks in the early Medieval period; secondly, collections of folklore and Gaelic placenames largely made by male academics in the last century; and thirdly, the archaeological remains, especially the Boyne Valley tombs and the dry-stone forts of the far west.

The Goddesses themselves

Anu/Danu was called the “Mother of the gods” and seems to have roots in the remote past, in Britain she was worshipped as Don. Most students of Irish mythology will know of her from the name “Tuatha De Danann” meaning “Goddess Danu’s Tribe”, referring either to the pre-Celtic rulers of Ireland or to the Gaelic pantheon of gods and goddesses. She was the goddess of Munster, the south west province, and was probably worshipped on the twin peaks near Killarney still known as the “Paps of Anu”.

Domnun was the largest of the pre-Celtic tribes, the Fir Dommann (Domnun’s Men), who comprised three kingdoms in Connacht, North and South Munster. According to Squires in Celtic Myth and Legend, Domnun was the evil counterpart of Danu/Anu and in the war between the gods of light and darkness commonly found in Indo-European mythology. The name Domnun means “abyss” or “deep sea”; her children were called the Fomors, from a Gaelic word meaning “undersea”. Squires writes:

The waste of water seems to have always impressed the Celts with a sense of primaeval ancientness; it was connected in their minds with vastness, darkness and monstrous birth, ... The Fomors were held to be more ancient than the gods, before whom, however, they were destined to fall in the end.

It looks as though Domnun originally represented the sea as the origin of life, the primaeval chaos before the land, and the force that destroys and transforms in order to recreate the Fomors were said to live along the west coast and on the western islands, and to be in continual conflict with each wave of settlers. Although the Fomor leader, Balor, was a male figure, he was said to have an all-powerful eye like the eyes of the megalithic tomb goddess which could kill at a glance. The “evil eye” was called “the eye of Balor” in Ireland until recently.

Maeve/Medb. Her name means “She Who Intoxicates”; she was a goddess of war, of pride and anger, of sexual desire and power over men. She was sometimes linked with the goddesses who personified the sovereignty of Ireland, but in most sources she is called Queen of Connacht, the great western province. In the “Tain Bo Cualnge” she is a warrior queen, implacable foe of the Ulster hero Cú Chulainn in the war between the two provinces which she provoked by her greed.

While there is evidence for a major war between Connacht and Ulster in the first centuries AD, so that Maeve may have been an Irish Boudicca, her frequent occurrence in the myths suggest that she was more than that. Maeve is depicted as evil and destructive like Domnun; the war-goddesses the Morrigan, her side against the Ulstermen; and the king and warriors of Ulster are prevented from fighting for much of the time because they have been cursed with the pains of childbirth! The war ends with a symbolic fight to the death between the brown bull of Ulster and the white bull of Connacht.

As Connacht was the province left to the natives, whom we will call for convenience the Iberians, after their defeat by the Gaels, it is hardly surprising to find the province ruled by a woman of Maeve’s stature, while the other provinces had kings. It is possible that Maeve was the goddess of the west, each succeeding queen taking her name and her attributes and being married to a series of divine kings who were ritually killed to restore the fertility of the land. According to one tradition about Cuchulainn, Maeve’s palace or capital, a “maidens’ was woed there every Samhain (1st November) by the men of her subject tribes, and when some of them died mysteriously no compensation could be claimed or vengeance carried out. Ailell, Maeve’s consort in the Tain Bo Cualinge, is shown as less powerful than his wife although trying to compete with her in wealth.
The Morrigan/Morrigu. Her name means the “Great Queen” and she was the goddess of war, blood and death. In the Gaelic pantheon she was wife of the Dagda, the “Good God” (not morally good, but good at providing food, drink and good cheer for the other gods and his worshippers). The Morrigan is portrayed in the literature in crow or raven form, flying over the battlefield during or after the slaughter, and her memory lives on in the popular aversion to these birds in Ireland and Scotland. In the Tain she appears riding in a chariot and holding two spears, with a red cloak and red eyebrows, confronting Cu Chulainn. Her battle cry was said to have the volume of ten thousand men shouting at once.

In another legend, the Dagda meets her at a ford washing the bloody heads of those about to be killed in battle. Unlike Maevé, she never takes part in the actual fighting; her weapons are magic and the terror she inspires. In her role as destroyer and forerunner of calamity and death she has been equated with the Hindu goddess Kali. She possibly inspired the sinister figure of Morgan La Fee in the Arthurian legends, and lives on in the form of the “banshie”, the “tomb woman” said to appear to members of old Irish families to warn them of an impending death.

Around the Morrigan are ranged one of the triads found in Celtic mythology; the war-goddess in three aspects called jointly The Morríona (The Morrigans). First comes the Great Queen; then Bodb Catha, the Crow of Battle, sometimes translated as the “fury”; and thirdly Nemain, “panic” or “venom” whose bloodcurdling scream before battle made a hundred warriors drop dead with fright.

An old poem on the battle of Magh Rath has the goddess inciting a warrior:

“Over his head is shrieking
A lean hag, quickly hopping
Over the points of the weapons and shields;
She is the grey-haired Morrigu.”

Macha. In some sources Macha replaces Némain as the third member of the Morrigons, and heads cut off as trophies after battle were called “Macha’s acorn crop”. In the Gaelic pantheon she is the wife of Nuada, king of the Tuatha Dé Danaan, and was killed by Balor in the battle with the Fomors. In most myths she has horse associations, and was probably an Indo-European mare-goddess brought by the Celts from the steppes, and worshipped in Gaul as Epona and in Britain as Rhiannon. She is a goddess of Ulster, the ancient settlements of Armagh and Emain Macha (now Navan Fort) being named after her.

One interpretation of “Emain” is the twins, children born to a supernatural woman immediately after she had been forced by the king of Ulster to race against his horses. However, there is a matriarchal version of the origin of Emain Macha, according to which “Emain” means brooch pin, and the fort was built on the orders of Queen Macha of the Red Tresses, using her defeated rivals for the throne, the Five Sons of Dithorba, as slave labour for the purpose. This suggests a former divine queen of the north, similar to Māev in the west and taking the name of the goddess, and a struggle ending in her overthrow by the invading Gaels.

Brigid — Goddess into Saint?

Bríg. She was the goddess of fire, iron smithery, knowledge, healing, music and divination, and at one time her worship was so widespread in Ireland that the word “Brígit” came to stand for “goddess”. The word is cognate with the Sanskrit “Bṛhati”, meaning the “Exalted One” and the British placenames Brigantia and Brent are believed to be connected with her worship. Hers was the eastern province of Leinster and she was honoured at the festival of Imbolc, held to celebrate the birth of lambs around the beginning of February. In the pantheon she was the daughter of the Dagda, mother of the minor gods Brian, Luchar and Lucharba, and wife of Bress, king of the Fomors — perhaps symbolising the union of two elements, fire and water. She was called “Brigit of the Ashless Fire” and “Mother of Poets” and was also depicted as a triad of goddesses; one concerned especially with healing, one with divination and prophecy, and one with fire and iron making.

St. Brigid of Kildare, one of the most popular saints in Ireland after St Patrick, is believed to be either a Christianised survival of the goddess, or to have attracted, and perhaps exploited, many of the beliefs and tales about her namesake. The saint is said to have had a Druid foster-father who kept a holy fire, and while a child, she is said to have survived a house fire unharmed. She saw in a vision fires blazing from all the hills in Ireland, gradually dying down until rekindled by a flame in the north, and on a more mundane level, she is said to have dried her wet cloak by hanging it on the rays of the sun. Brigid is probably most famous for her eternal fire at Kildare, tended by 19 nuns in an enclosure from which men were excluded. The fire was said to leave no ashes, miracles were performed in the enclosure, and it remained a centre of pilgrimage and healing until it was extinguished in the Reformation of Henry VIII. Other legends relate how Brigid restored sight to a blind nun, and enabled some princes to play the harp and sing like trained bards merely by blessing their hands.
Minor or Local Goddesses

These comprise a whole host of shadowy figures, alluded to only in passing in the myths, or associated with a single district or feature in the landscape. Some of them may have been real women who have been given supernatural attributes in folk memory.

Ethniu was the daughter of Balor and mother of Lugh, Celtic god of light and divine kingship.

Flidias: a woodland goddess similar to Diana; deer were sacred to her.

Fea the “hateful” and Buanann “mother of heroes” were war goddesses.

Seathach and Aoife were war goddesses or Amazons; they were rivals, but both were defeated by the Ulster hero Cú Chulainn. Seathach then taught Cú Chulainn the skills of war, and Aoife slept with him and gave birth to his son, who later killed him. Both women are associated with the Picts or the Western Isles, and it could be that they were war queens of the matriarchal Picts, or goddesses of islands recently settled by invaders from Ulster.

Carmen and Taltiu were local goddesses of the earth and fertility; the harvest festival Lughnasadh was held on hilltops said to be their burial places.

Boann was the goddess of the River Boyne, wife of the Dagda and mother Angus mac Og the god of youth. She and Sinnan, goddess of the River Shannon, feature in almost identical myths about the origin of these rivers. Formerly at the source of each river were wells shaded by hazel trees whose nuts contained the secret of universal knowledge. Only the salmon in the wells were allowed to eat these nuts, but Boann and Sinnan, “with the proverbial woman’s curiosity”, smirks patriarchal Squires, dared to disobey. As they neared the wells, the waters rose up and overflowed, forming the rivers Boyne and Shannon. Apart from interesting parallels with the story of Eve as a warning for questioning and rebellious women, the myths look like an attempt by patriarchal newcomers to explain why rivers have been named after women (a common feature throughout western Europe).

Bui or Boi was the goddess of the megalithic tomb of Knowth in the Boyne Valley; in the Gaelic pantheon she becomes the wife of Lugh.

The Caillech Bherri or Hag of Berre is said in some sources to be synonymous with Boi, but in most she is localised in south west Munster. She is said to have moved islands, built the Munster mountain ranges, and scattered the burial mounds as stones from her apron. She appears in three forms, as maiden, mother of many children, and old hag, and is said to have lived through seven incarnations. A curious eighth century poem has her become a nun towards the end of her life, and she contrasts her present poverty and old age with her glorious youth:

“I have had my day with kings
Drinking mead and wine;
Today I drink whey and water
Among shrivelled old hags.”

A striking picture of the Great Goddess dethroned and demoted to the menacing old hag of peasant folklore.
The Goddess as the Sovereignty of Ireland

Another triad of goddesses, Banba, Fotla and Eriu, personify Ireland and its sovereignty. The Gaels are said to have met each of these goddesses in turn when they set foot in Ireland, and promised each of them that they would name the island after her, only keeping their promise to Eriu (Erin).

The Indo-European theme of the divine king mated to the earth goddess who represented the sovereignty of the kingdom was re-enacted at Tara, where the High King’s coronation ritual was called his “wedding feast”. The goddess was present in the form of the hill of Tara, as a mare or a fawn, as a young girl on a throne, or an old woman who turns into a young maiden after being united with the king, just as the new king was believed to restore youth and vigour to the land.

In the legend of Niall of the Nine Hostages, Niall goes hunting with his four brothers and they lose their way in the forest. In searching for water, each of them finds a well guarded by an ugly old crane, who will give them water only in exchange for a kiss. All refuse except Niall, who kisses her and has sex with her too, whereupon she is transformed into a beautiful young girl. The girl tells him she is the sovereignty of Ireland, and prophesies the long dynasty of the Ul Neill kings, Niall’s descendants.

The idea of Ireland as a woman waiting for the right man to take up her cause has been a persistent one in Irish history and literature, right up to the present century and the plays of Yeats, especially _Cathleen Ni Houilhan_. At the end of the play a mysterious old woman has just left the house. “Did you see an old woman going down the path?” Peter Gillane asks his son. The boy replies “I did not, but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen.”

Banshees and Fairy Women

One of the names of the Irish Hades was “The Land of Women”; in some myths it was a land of peace and plenty ruled by women, while in others only part of it was ruled, and solely inhabited, by women. Sometimes it was a subterranean land entered through the sidhe or burial mounds; sometimes it was synonymous with “The Isles of the Blessed” far across the Atlantic, while in other accounts it lay parallel to this world yet invisible, like another time continuum in a modern science fiction story. Nearly all accounts of the other world tell of powerful women either enticing mortal men into their supernatural realm, or welcoming travellers and preventing them from leaving again.

Prince Conna of the Golden Hair was enticed away from his court by a “banshee” (fairy woman) whom he alone could see and hear. She promised him an idyllic life inside the sidhe free from death, old age, illness and violence and, significantly, from druids.

In the account of Maeldun’s Voyage westward across the Atlantic, he came to an island of women ruled by a queen. They stayed on the island as her guests and found it an earthly paradise, but they had great difficulty in returning to their ship without the queen’s permission.

Although the gods and goddesses declined to the status of the banshees and fairy folk in Christian times, they kept their association with burial mounds and other prehistoric remains. It has been suggested that the name Mab for queen of the fairies may derive from Maeve, and this is not so incongruous if we think not of the tiny winged creatures of English literature, but of the powerful and sinister figure in the Scots ballad _Tam Lin_:

“Out then spak the queen o’ fairies
And an angry queen was she;
Shame betide her ill-fared face!
And an ill death may she die!
But had I known, Tam Lin, she says,
What now this night I see,
I wad hae ta’en out they twa grey eën
And put in twa eën o’ tree.”

When did Irish Women fall from power?

At the moment we can only give several tentative answers because of the vast amount of excavation, dating and interpretation still to be carried out on Irish sites, and because most of the work so far, both on archaeology and literature has been done by men concerned with very different problems.

The twelfth century compilers of the _Lebor Gabhala_ (the Book of Invasions), clearly amended the oral tradition to make Irish pre-history coincide with Old Testament chronology; they are very likely to have edited out any direct references to matriarchy at the same time. According to the _Lebor_, there were six “invasions” of Ireland of which only the first was led by a woman, Cessair, or by the goddess Banba. Her people and the two following peoples are said to have been wiped out by plague and flood; it is the three later invaders, the Fir Bolg, Tuatha De Danann, and Milesians that we know most about. The Fir Bolg were said to be fleeing slavery in Greece; they were ruled by a series of kings, and after their defeat by the Tuatha and/or the Milesians, they retreated west into Connacht and the Aran Islands. The Tuatha De Danann were said to have come from the sky or from the otherworld; they had magical powers and defeated the Fomors and Fir Bolg, but were in turn defeated by the Milesians, and disappeared, some going into the sidhe, and the rest across the sea to Hy Brasil, the mythical land in the west. The Milesians, or Sons of Mil, were the ancestors of the Gaels and by a process of wars and inter-marriage gradually took over the whole island.

It is no longer possible to relate the _Lebor Gabhala_ directly to the archaeological record and see, for example, the Fir Bolg as the Bronze Age people being exterminated by the Iron Age Celts. Irish pre-history grows more complicated with each new excavation, C-14 date, and survey. We can no longer think in terms of invasion and genocide on the scale of the European settlement of North America or even of the Roman Empire, but of a slow process of immigration by small numbers of people belonging to different ethnic groups from north and south west Europe.

The survival of many traces of matriarchy into early historical times was probably due to Ireland’s location on the far west of the migration routes, allowing new arrivals to be absorbed by the ancient culture, and producing amalgams of old and new in social organisation as well as in material culture.

Realm of the Great Goddess

The three early peoples of the _Lebor_ may well be the first nomadic Paleolithic and Mesolithic tribes, who may have worshipped a “landscape” goddess such as Anu.

The identity of the Fir Bolg remains controversial, but most scholars would see them as Iberians of the late Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods, around 25,000-2,000 BC. They brought Ireland into what Cles-Reden calls “The Realm of the Great Goddess”, the tomb goddess of death and rebirth, and built the megalithic tombs of Mayo and the Boyne valley with their abstract symbols of the goddess in spirals, chevrons, rings and cup-marks. We saw above how goddesses and the banshees of folklore were linked with
these tombs and with burial mounds in general, and it is just possible that the Tuatha De Danann were a small highly skilled and wealthy group of megalith-builders from Europe, who so impressed the Iberians that they were deified in folk memory.

The Takeover Period

The sudden proliferation of finds of weapons and rich grave-goods from the late Bronze Age indicates a period of warfare and class division which we could interpret as the arrival of patriarchal groups in Ireland. Some archaeologists have already suggested that the first Celts reached Ireland in the Bronze Age, and that the Celts are part of the Indo-European patriarchal cultural complex. I am suggesting that the period from the end of the Bronze Age to the emergence of early Christian Ireland, circa 900 BC–500 AD was the era of a slow patriarchal takeover, and that the social struggles were reflected in the concepts of warrior-goddesses, Maeve, Macha and the Morrigan, who were perhaps originally seen as the “dark side” of the Great Goddess. This would be the era of the construction of the massive dry-stone fortresses of the Aran Islands (one of which is called Fort of the Women) and the west coast as the strongholds of the People of the Goddess; Macha’s struggle for the throne of Ulster, and the later war between Cu Chulainn of Ulster and Maeve of Connacht.

Evolution of the Goddess

Although we cannot assume that all goddess-worshipping societies were matriarchies, the way the goddesses were pictured in each era can be assumed to reflect the power of women in the communities and their images of themselves as well as the images of womanhood in men’s minds. The women of Irish mythology embody this changing ideology, from the all-embracing mother and provider through the warrior queen, the conquered maiden symbolising male power over the land, to the withered old hag or sinister banshee, evil and threatening but no longer part of daily life or the official religion.

But the victory of patriarchy was not complete until Ireland was subjected to the “modernising” influence of the Anglo-Norman conquest. Until then, Irish women retained rights unknown elsewhere in Christian Europe, including divorce, property inheritance, and the right to rule as queens, to fight, and to celebrate the mass of the Celtic church. The older Goddesses had been incorporated into the Celtic pantheon, and the Indo-European goddesses Macha (the raven) and Brigit, and later Saint Brigid and her nuns, caught the imagination of Irish women and provided them with models of power and success in every field of life.

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Menstrual Benefits

Shiela Redmond

Blood is a red-coloured, sweet and slightly salty-tasting fluid. If you leave it in a glass, a straw-coloured fluid forms at the top because all the red cells have dropped to the bottom. These red cells have only one function, to pick up oxygen from the lungs and carry it to every living cell in our body.

Measuring the thickness, or more correctly viscosity, of blood is a rather complicated and expensive business and has only been attempted recently. It is interesting to note that the equipment used called a viscometer is an off-shoot of the guided missile business that the Swiss do so well.

Because nearly all of us live in a polluted atmosphere, the efficiency of our red cells is decreased by 10 per cent because our red cells mistakenly pick up carbon monoxide instead of oxygen. Depending on the amount of cigarettes smoked, this habit will also account for a further 10 per cent reduction of efficiency by red cells. It is very easy to understand the fatigue of a pregnant woman, suffering from anaemia, living in a polluted city and perhaps smoking a pack of cigarettes daily. It can be lethal for her and the child, since at the birth at least one pint of blood is lost and that may tip the scales, as she may scarcely have had enough red cells functioning in the first place. Fortunately, antenatal care is reasonably effective in picking up anaemia and treating it with iron and in very bad cases actual blood transfusions are given.

Many women now take one of the many varieties of the contraceptive pill, and it is generally agreed that it is dangerous to do so after the age of 30. The risk being that the incidence of a stroke or heart attack is three times greater in this group, due to the action of the pill thickening up the blood and rendering it more liable to clot, thus a greater effort needed to force it through the arteries.

One mechanism the body uses to combat the onslaught wrought by smoking is to make more red cells and these are pushed out into circulation to make up for those red cells mistakenly carrying carbon monoxide. The bone marrow makes blood cells and as soon as they are ripe they enter the circulation. This arrangement would be fine but for the fact that the blood becomes thicker when more and more red cells are circulating. It should be remembered also that red cells live for 100 days so even if smoking and the pill are given up, it will take a while to return to normal living.

The consequences, therefore, of a woman over 30, smoking and living in a polluted city, plus taking the contraceptive pill are almost too dire to contemplate. This mixture of events is virtually lethal for the one simple reason her periods have stopped. True, with the pill there is a token bleed. With the menstrual bleed every month thousands of unwanted red cells are expelled. This keeps the blood gloriously thin and freely flowing through the blood vessels. Thick blood has difficulty getting through blood vessels especially in the head where a low blood flow is one of the causes of depression. If a blood clot forms here, a stroke will occur. Another dangerous area is the heart and the arteries leading directly from it, are very susceptible to hold-ups by thick blood.

The condition of thick blood is called polycythaemia and mostly men suffer from it because they do not menstruate. The cure is simple. Remove excess red cells by drawing off half-pints of blood every few days until the level of cells and the plasma is corrected. Naturally, smoking is a decisive factor and bleeding is a waste of time if a patient refuses to stop since the bone marrow will continue to pump out more and more red cells.

Other factors affecting the thickness of the blood are anxiety and eating huge platefuls of red meat.

It cannot be emphasised strongly enough how beneficial thin blood is, so please come off the pill and allow your body a wholesome bleed every month. Stop smoking. Eat less red meat and consider donating a pint of your blood once or twice a year. In short, take care of your arteries and they will take care of all of you.

... and try not to worry so much ...
Politics of Women’s Power

Margaret Roy

Power is a patriarchal concept... or so it might seem! In our strange unbalanced world, it is closely tied to prestige and status, and is a manly virtue. It is gathered and possessed as an appendix to the extent that its possession gives being — someone with power is someone. Birth is therefore separated from woman so that her giving of birth is irrelevant as the child is not yet Someone. Woman is thus demeaned.

Through prestige and status, Someone separates itself out from the mass and, in so doing, is like the god who in speaking his name creates himself — in patriarchal systems male gods usually create in this way. This self-made man is a strange case. An egoist by any other name, he is usually seen as a dynamic personality, a born leader whose words weigh very heavy indeed. In fact he (or even she) may frequently be self-centred, unable to delegate and unable to co-operate whilst having lack of vision to see from others’ point of view. He is also intolerant to other than his own scheme of things so that he is unable to credit, or even give space, to others. This is not maturity but a warp in our concept of ‘whole’ humans. Ideally, magnanimity and fatherliness to inferiors are added as great virtue. In this last, the generosity is selective and supportive only of those who agree with his values and schemes. It is a self-perpetuating process in one sense, and justifies and gratifies his ego and its values in another sense. A paradox arises because these values in a great leader with altruistic principles may be seen as honourable at the same time as the same virtues are seen as immaturity in a friend’s dearly beloved.

Power is quite a confusing subject. Essentially it is subjective, the way we see it, and its only objective reality is in our own formalised and institutionalised attitudes to it. Seen as such, it is a profound psychological mystery whose understanding will gain us much personal liberty. In order to free ourselves, we must see ourselves as the architects of our own illusion, from which greater knowledge and sensitivity will free us to create a firmer structure based on reality.

Patriarchy/Matriarchy

The question of power sooner or later enters every group and we all belong to groups as this is an inherent characteristic of our humanness. In a group, each person wishes to receive reinforcement of their worth as a person. Through this reinforcement they receive justification for their existence (food for the ego perhaps!) and an external Other which creates within themselves an energy for growth and a direction for growth of the personality. The needs which the individual brings to the group are those of a social animal, the need to grow and to express our growing companionship. It is an external interplay that the personality develops primarily.

The group is not composed of polyglot beings but differentiates depending on personalities and individual function in the group. An overt power structure is likely to be represented in the group by the type of leadership in the group, one or many, and by the decision-making process.

Power enters right at the start when value judgements are made about the character of the personality and the nature of the individual’s function in the group. This gives prestige to certain qualities and discourages others — not everything can be accepted in context of the group’s functioning as appropriate and there is always a definite value system. But any value isolated will create a prestige system of some sort.

In talking of matriarchy, or any other future society a women’s movement will work for, we assume that one fundamend of it will be necessarily the non-exploitiveness of men and women in sex roles! — which is a wider fundamend than it appears. The separation out or differentiation of any particular quality cannot be seen as essentially exploitative in itself — to be oneself, unique, must be seen as healthy. There is however an ethos in the usual separation out in a ‘patriarchal’ setting which defines a quality as distinct over and against another in a way that is not just being different from others. This ethos can be labelled “competitive”. It is the status and prestige and this ethos leads to which is often seen as power itself, but we must watch our step here as this is only one system or one way in which power is used.

The ‘competitive’ ethos is a characteristic of the use of power in patriarchal societies and comes out in a hierarchical class structure, in domination of one group over against another and therefore war and conflict. It drives the individual to achieve — in the recent past that meant materially but previously it was more often in some form of moral behaviour which ensured survival in the afterlife (where the god keeps him in his company as one of the chosen and saves him from the mother’s death!) These specific characteristics are interesting as showing also a kind of progression or linearity (the cause and effect mentality of current ‘science’) which puts tremendous pressure on the individual to achieve, and to prove worth over and against, and therefore in dominion of, others. Although this is only one system, it is the source of some of the basic nasties that cause us to despise power in others and which we must seek to eradicate and avoid in our own model. The need to compete is based on the deep-rooted insecurity of being a nobody and must become unnecessary when the woman’s birth is not debased and we see ourselves as siblings each dependent on the other and working together, all of woman born and therefore ‘holy’. Life must once more be sanctified, as it is in a Goddess world. An alternative model must have a ‘co-operative’ ethos. What will we find in matriarchy?
Matriarchy is usually defined as a culture in which women hold the higher status in such a way that they are the dominant group. Thus the existence of matriarchy is often challenged as unproved. In few cases it is proved that women held the ‘power’ in the same way men do today. But there is no reason whatsoever, despite the Oxford Dictionary, to believe that a matriarchy is just the opposite, a reverse, of present day values—that is the polar thinking of the ‘Man of Middle Intelect’ and is the reason why most people today cannot grasp what matriarchy means. The character of power in a matriarchy must be approached from quite a different direction. The supreme importance of women-derived and woman’s values (by which matriarchy must be defined!) is seen in terms of a society ordered around the phenomenon of Woman who must be seen here in her archetype and not as an individual. The Supreme Mother can be seen in Mother Nature who is more than pretty flowers. She is the harmony and balance of the natural order, and the ebb and flow, growth and decay, of Life itself (see article on the Fourth Aspect). Woman is honoured in such a society because, within her own body, in her own nature, she reflects the cyclic nature of the universe. She is the only true microcosm in this! Her cycle, the lunar month, was the first measure of time and is a first instance of the cyclic nature of life with its birth, growth, decay and death. The same cyclic nature was seen in the yearly rhythm of the seasons which brought eventually new grain and a replenishing of the meat supply—hence the reason fertility and motherhood come across as paramount values of matriarchal societies and ‘primitive’ cultures. In this same society, death is not set outside life as evil or unnatural but healthily co-exists. No one need fear the Mother and the Souls of the Dead are as the Unborn. The society is a whole and is not split into poles or separated in itself. Thus matriarchy is characterised by a cyclic recurrent nature (as represented by the circle and the spiral) and there is a unifying closeness with the Mother, and with Nature, leading to a basis of co-operation through being part of the world and not over and against it. These characteristics are expressed in the communal participation and organisation of work and decision-making, in a caring and cherishing of human potential and in a communal search to explore the meaning of life—probably through ritual celebration. The communal organisation of society is necessary to maintain the equal worth of all in the social structure. By communal organisation is meant the openness of the decision-making structure to participation by all adults to the extent that each and any can call for justice to be implemented. It is also the responsibility of each to maintain the harmony and order of the system. It expresses itself in the communal participation in work like ploughing, sowing, harvesting, building houses etc., and usually carried on to the communal ownership of land with various methods of dividing it. It may be communal childrearing or living in the one building, more usually it is a village structure. The economy however is based in the home and the old and the young have a place in it, Women are people in it.

The upsurge of reaction against this powerlessness in terms of alternative life-styles is fascinating. Communal living is a top priority today, sharing our lives and our work, organising in co-operatives and smaller-scale working units. Old kinship ties become ties of sisterhood. Sexual freedom is contrary to possession which is part of the insecurity of nonexistence.

Another healthy trend is for wholesome food, organically grown and preferably vegetarian. This takes people back to the land and closer to nature. Along with the growth of interest in alternative and natural medicine, this shows a great greater regard for life. All these are part of a rebalancing of our world in which the women’s movement is the only true ‘left’.

So we are exploring the co-operation ethos and we are conscious of the need to look closer at human potential. Still, we do not seem to have reached the stage of generally seeking to express our spiritual nature which is somewhere lost. In earlier times such an expression may have been in the form of a Harvest Festival, tied closely to the land. In the Celtic festivals of Beltane, Lammas (Lugnasud), Hallowe’en and Bridget’s Eve however . . . there is a vitality which is more urgently human. In the Scottish Hallowe’en, for example, the door between the worlds is open and there is continual traffic on that night between the living and the dead worlds. Everything in the living world is turned upside down and inside out and faces are blackened so the living are unrecognisable. Great mischief is done as our Other side (Death?) is given free rein and recognised. Today, we have nothing to compare with this communal search to explore human experience. In our alienated world we have lost touch with the complete ‘human’. No? Well, in the next section . . .

OUR POWER

In the introduction, I stated power was a subjective phenomenon which gained objective reality only through our own attitudes, formalised and institutionalised. These attitudes are a response learned in a social situation and since the society is generally patriarchal they reflect such values. We must therefore readapt and relearn attitudes to power if we wish to cope with a different type of society. Ultimately, we could say, this must be a change in group functioning and ideals.

In applying this to what I have said regarding a ‘matriarchal’ society, it would appear at first that the only kind of power is/could be ‘shared’ power, equal decision-making opportunity for all. On the surface, this is what it seems. In reality it involves each individual accepting responsibility as an active agent towards change in society, and in the functioning and maintaining of the society. An absence of this in present-day patriarchal society leads to apathy, feelings of powerlessness and to alienation with ‘destructive’ subcultures, i.e an us-and-them mentality. Power in a co-operative society manifests as shared responsibility, shared decision-making and, most important as a basic attitude, the acceptance of individual difference and value.
There is a need to express the individual. But this means establishing the existence of an individual consciousness beyond the level of a collection of social learning and life experiences. At any other time, I would probably call this Soul but since such a term has so many definitions perhaps the Jungian concept of individuality would serve better for illustration. Anyway . . . I would see this ‘Beyond’ as a recognition of the ever-present now, functioning in a worship of life itself that has its centre outside the linearity of past and future relativity. The level of consciousness is heightened but this is not merely psychic since the logic system is different — we have a long way to go to even recognise a fraction of our potentiality! However, whilst stretching our horizons, let’s not split ourselves up. There is within each of us something very positive, yet strangely other-worldly, which is a core or centre of our being. When expressed or functioned through in a patriarchal world this may be called charisma, or in a more saintly world it would be called ‘holiness’. I prefer to call it wholeness because it is completely natural, a more complete expression of self within the reach of each one of us. This is what makes people stand out as individuals. I shall spend the rest of the essay explaining this as the personal basis of power. But first it’s easier to ask how it works!

An Aborigine finds a stone which he collates with his guardian spirit. Each day he goes to look at it and as long as it is all right so is he, and if not he’s doomed to ill-fortune. He has externalised something which has given the strong ‘power’ over him i.e. future events concerning himself seem to be decided by events centred on the stone. Similarly, we give a talisman, or an amulet, energy (faith) to protect us and it does protect us and keep us from harm because we’ve given it the ‘power’ to do so. Thus also a hypnotist or a spiritual healer tells us to tell our body to heal itself. Why do we need to tell someone else to tell us to do something we want to do anyway? Why do we give the stone power that is ours to start with? We have split ourselves and thrown something out to create an external active centre (pole) to act on our ‘passive’ state. Why can we not use the power ourselves directly? This would require a control and a knowledge of the process of actively creating a state within ourselves (it would require an act of will to ‘connect’ the active and passive within ourselves). It would mean a knowledge of the process and incredible sensitivity to our ‘inner states’. The raising of consciousness involved is the purpose of true magic and genuine religions and is a freeing of the individual in a most ultimate sense to take charge of themselves and their future. We generally fail to gain this kind of freedom because of lack of knowledge on the one hand and, on the other hand, horror and a point blank refusal to face what’s involved — effort to wake up and stay awake. Until recently the subject was taboo, social norms making outcasts of those who sought to be individuals.

Reasons for this may be fear of the unknown, fear of the female (see article on the Fourth Aspect) and the patriarchal nature of power. More recently people like Jung have given us ‘permission’ to seek the integration of self (individuation) through a reconciliation of the ‘opposites’ within ourselves. The taboos are still in place though, even amongst those who seek a more personal world. But the co-operative group structure we are speaking of will not work properly until we have learned to cross this barrier and freed ourselves from roles and stereotypes. We must seek the “person” beyond the ego.

Quakers express this at a social level by saying we must seek that of Christ in everyone, meaning to look for the creative individual expression of soul in everyone, to look for the unique good in every life . . . and then meet it! When we meet people we face a persona and exchange a whole series of social rituals. Continually we escape from ourselves and others on anything other than a superficial level. In a matriarchy, facing reality in the form of the fourth aspect or in our menses (as suggested in The Wise Wound) we must take the bull by the horns by taking responsibility and blame for our own destiny. This is to realise our full human potential.

It means tracing ‘power’ back to where each of us has control of it and where we can see our part in it. For example, to look from another direction, we were once told that with a little bit of faith the size of a grain of mustard seed, we could move mountains. Given the knowledge mentioned above, if we accept the mustard seed theory, then we have a very interesting ability. We have a tremendous creative potential which goes beyond ourselves to alter our surroundings ourselves. And we are more than just active agents, we are very dangerous people! And why don’t we use our potential? We are far from powerless, rather suffering illusion which is a sickness in ourselves and in our society. We’ve been told that we don’t exist through the mother’s birth alone but must turn from reality to create an artificial state in which we are blinkered to our true nature. One of the most basic occult laws is that, if you have knowledge (power) and fail to use it (positively and constructively of course) then it will destroy you because you have committed the unforgivable sin against the Holy Ghost by stifling your own development. Actually the ‘destroy’ is yet another patriarchal myth. When something is capable of conscious expression, it is more fully expressed thus. When such an outlet is stifled expression becomes unconscious and is seen as destructive only because it appears to have a life of its own — because it is unconscious and we have no control over it! This is the fearful and ugly dark goddess who rears as the gorgon from the depths. Patriarchy fears our dark side and can only rule us split which is why we are divided. As women we are less separate from Nature and anyway we are an integrated part of the “male” world, being shut up in wifedom, so we are a grave threat. Liberating our feminine essence is therefore a force which will overturn patriarchal society.

Thus we must become aware of our “true nature” and we must search through our life-styles to find and expel those attitudes and expectations that alienate us from ourselves. We must dispel our own illusion. We must see ourselves as real, have faith in ourselves, and refuse to give up our “power” to invest Some other with authority over us. The choice is ours! The journey is very dark. It is difficult to understand and to make sense of the darkness, which is not empty, and there is much pain. But the miracle of a new birth shines before us to give us hope, like a bright star rising above the dark waters. The newborn child is our Self.

Suggested Reading:

Politics of Beauty
Magenta Wise

For several thousand years we have been ruled by the Masculine Principle, Patriarchy, and so our lives have been dominated by this consciousness, at the severe expense of the Feminine in us. In schools children of both sexes are bulldozed into this system, while all traces of the Feminine Principle are methodically and thoroughly suppressed. Science and competitiveness are held up as worthy and desirable, whilst the Arts and the Imagination of the Soul take a poor second place.

To me, the most vitally important happening in the world today is the growing awareness in us women of what is actually going on, and our concern and determination to do something about it by re-introducing Matriarchal values in order to redress the balance before we are all destroyed.

In the women's movement there has been, quite rightly, a strong reaction against women being used as "sex objects". Our beauty has been exploited, we have been reduced to mere accessories to be attached to a man's arm. We have been disrespected as "one night stands", treated to a quick "leg-over job" and then abandoned as they strut their way, cock in hand, to the next "conquest". Under these circumstances, they'd do us all a favour if they'd stick to wanking! Okay, we've had enough of being treated like a hole in the wall, so put it away big boy.

I don't think that either sex in power is by any means ideal, a perfect balance would be when both sexes truly loved and adored each other's essential natures, working towards fulfilling everybody's deeper needs. But this cannot be achieved until we rise again as real women.

In all this reaction against the "sex object" issue, I feel there is some degree of danger that we may over-react, and in so doing, weaken our position. Just because men like us to be beautiful is no reason for doing away with our beauty altogether! For in so doing we end up thinking like, behaving like, and even looking like men. Winning the right to be masculine in a man's world is no victory, rather we are playing right into their hands, for we ourselves are suppressing part of our femininity.

Feminine beauty is not a male invention that has been forced upon us, it is a real female characteristic. What is wrong is that men have used our beauty against us. What we must do is to claim our beauty back and make it work for us. I take the stand that beauty is a power, and a female power at that. The Earth is a female planet and is indeed beautiful. Her soft curves, lush greenery, sweet and intoxicating fragrances, her breathtaking views and gentle slopes excite us, fill us with succour and energy. In space she shines like a jewel in the sky, dazzling, she is Mother Nature, Star Goddess, silvery moonlight, sweet earth, deep watery mystery. This is the Goddess in all her finery. She is the Macrocosm, we women the Microcosm. We cannot bring her back until we really personify her in all her wisdom and beauty.

The warm, deep, sincere, sisterly communication that can flow between women as they dress each other's hair, exchange beauty tips and secrets etc, is a very supportive and uniting experience, not to be undervalued.

Although men allow us to look pretty, so they can use us as status symbols, they suppress our female powers, conning us into believing that power lies in the male. And so we have had to compete with each other to get a man with some of this power. I believe this is why we have been bitchy, catty, vain and insecure in each other's presence. It suits men that we see each other as a threat, for we shall so remain divided. But now we know that we have our own power, and in making ourselves beautiful for ourselves and each other, we will come together as an organic whole and go from strength to strength.

I am directly opposed to modern fashions which we are expected to wear whether they suit us or not, for this is a suppression of each woman's individual beauty. But again, let us not over-react and end up looking all identical! Rather let this be our protest — let all us women see ourselves as works of art and seek to express ever more the unique aspect of the Goddess within us, our higher motive to bring her more alive in us that we may restore her to her rightful place upon Earth. There is much more to this beauty thing than we realise, let us not be conned into neglecting it.

We live in very hard, harsh, cruel, decidedly unbeautiful times, everything jarring on our eyes, ears, emotions, souls, everything fast and functional and mechanised. How can we possibly remain sane? Let us bring back beauty, for beauty creates harmony and balance. Lovely works of art are soothing in their influence. In these days of increasing warfare and violence we desperately need beauty to calm the bitter hatred in people's hearts. Beauty is subtle, but powerful. I know we have a long way to go, but every little bit adds up. Let us help beauty to make her contribution, for there is healing power in beauty.

We need no longer wear beauty as a mask to satisfy male egos, but rather as the positive personification of the Goddess within us, our beauty increasing with the birth of more of our powers. We speak of the Goddess of Love, not the God of Love. It is in us women to draw more and more love out of the male. In Lesbianism also, what is wrong with beauty? The world sure could do with it. In Witchcraft, it is the female who plays the lead, her beauty and power causing the male to worship adoringly at the altar of the Goddess, her vulva. This is probably the last surviving remnant of Matriarchy, and it's amazing that it does survive considering the persecution we have suffered.

So let us make this fantastic, intelligent, wise, witty, wonderful women's movement a really beautiful one too! May the Goddess fill us all with Beauty.
Matriarchal Values in Maori Culture

Pauline Henderson

Maori society presents an alternative structure which has persisted in the midst of a prevailing Western culture, retaining major differences in basic concepts about life and society, about relationships to people and to land, and in the values placed on these. I believe the differences are due to the preservation of strong links with an earlier matriarchal culture.

The ‘Female’ Element

The concept of ‘kotahitanga’ – wholeness, unity and harmony, is key to a Maori way of being. This idea overrides all the others and contains them. For the Maori, there is no division of private and public life. Whatever a person does in one sphere has implications for and is affected by the other. This does not mean that diversity is not allowed, or swallowed up by an overwhelming pressure to conform. There is a pressure of responsibility to the group, and public opinion is an important factor, but there is room for individual diversity and movement within it.

The Family

Traditionally the political unit of Maori society was the ‘iwi’ or tribe. Membership was based on descent from the ancestor who was founder of that tribe, and could be traced through male or female links.

The ‘iwi’ was divided into ‘hapu’ which were responsible for specified areas of tribal land. This was the functioning community and all its members, even those absent, had a claim to the resources and their share of the land. Yet, presence was important and membership was usually taken from the group that an individual spent most time with, whether the mother’s or the father’s side.

Property used or produced by the group belonged to the community as a whole.

Some of the food produced by group co-operation went into communal storehouses but the rest was shared out among all households according to need with a bonus to those who contributed most in equipment, skill and energy. (Metge)

Noble families held valuable heirlooms and ornaments, but, like land, could not pass them on without general consent. Some things like clothing, weapons, tools and utensils were individually owned and could be borrowed only when the owner was not using them. Things directly associated with the body like combs were tapu and could not be borrowed.

After death, an estate was divided fairly equally between male and female inheritors, though seniority was important, and some goods were transmitted from father to son – e.g. rights to birding trees, and hunting and fishing equipment, or from mother to daughter e.g. rat-runs, cooking utensils and calabashes.

Marriage was made out of the ‘hapu’ and when the latter grew too large to function efficiently, a group would break away, maintaining continuity by naming one of the chief’s sons as its leader. On the East Coast, women also became chiefs and were prized for their oratory, a skill proscribed to women in other areas, though everywhere, women were elders along with the men, and noble women were held in great respect.

The ‘whanau’ was the basic social unit. This is the extended family, and even now that many individual families are moving to live in the cities, they keep regular contact with, or host, relatives and friends. Joan Metge records how “Their homes should be open to each other at all times; in theory, at least, they are entitled to enter without knocking and to make themselves at home, even in the owner’s absence.”

It is not unusual for children to be brought up by grandparents or aunts and uncles, sometimes because the latter have no children of their own, sometimes to help out an already large family, at others, simply for companionship. “Where Pakehas emphasize the uniqueness and independence of the nuclear family, Maoris emphasize its continuity and interdependence with others.” (Metge)

Records indicate that male and female children had a similar upbringing for their first seven years or so, at which stage they began to learn their respective tasks. Male or female, they were treated with a great amount of affection by both parents, and kept entertained with stories of their ancestors by their grandparents. However, there is evidence that only male children were welcomed with rituals at birth.

Descent was bilineal, though in practice, the male line was usually followed. If the mother was higher in rank, it was more likely that descent was traced through her, and on marriage, although a woman usually joined her husband’s family, it was not obligatory. According to Metge,

The Maori kinship system placed major emphasis on generation level and seniority of descent, minimised the importance of genealogical distance and made no distinctions at all between father’s kin and mother’s.

Cosmography. For the Maori, the ‘World of People’, and what it contains have a physical and a spiritual reality, beyond the limits of time, space and perception, yet forever operating and affecting them. This gives an extra force and value to their relationships to the land, to their family their tribe and to their ancestors who, though physically dead, are still regarded as living and present in the tribe. In people, the body and soul are in separably linked so that what happens in the one affects the other. In sleep the ‘wairua’ (soul/spirit) leaves the body to move in the spiritual realm. Dreams are the messages it brings back.
On death, the body returns to ‘Te-Kopu-o-Papa-tua-muka’ (Mother Earth) while the spirit stays several days to be farewelled before travelling to join its ancestors in Te Po, one of two spiritual realms. Te Po is the realm of darkness, and its Queen, Hine-Nui-te-Po, receives and weeps over the spirits of the dead. Unlike the biblical Hell, Te Po is not a place of judgment and punishment, though often wrongly associated with evil and destruction. Hine-Nui-te-Po is also the Goddess of Conception and Childbirth; she is the beginning and the end, the womb which transforms death into new life. Though many Maoris have now adopted Christianity, the idea of darkness as the source and continuity of life prevails over the eternal torments of the Christian Hell. The other realm Te Tangi, the realm of light and day, and Rangi is the Sky father.

These two stand in a relationship of complementarity unlike the division of Heaven and Hell. Just as light is under understood in terms of darkness, the two define and complete each other. The dead are often farewelled to both.

There is some reference to another realm, ‘Te Ao-Marama’, which seems to be a state of knowledge and enlightenment. It can be glimpsed in this world, but is fulfilled only in death.

In contrast to these three, the ‘World of People’ is measured and finite. Here, light and darkness co-exist, sometimes in conflict, sometimes in harmony, one sliding into the other. Alongside mourning and death there is continuity and the regeneration of life. This balance of seeming opposites, the complementary nature of things, permeates Maori attitudes, linking with the notions of harmony and unity. It is seen in the concepts of ‘tapu’ and ‘noa’ which may have a positive or a negative implication, according to the context. These are terms which describe things in the World of People in relation to each other and to the spiritual realms. ‘Tapu’ can mean sacred, as in reference to a carving or a burial ground, or it may mean defiled as when it describes some place where a tragedy has occurred. Its complement, ‘noa’, usually translated as ‘common’, ‘ordinary’, can also mean ‘free from restriction’, ‘without limitation or conditions’. These terms do not stand in an absolute relationship to things, which may be tapu on some occasions and not on another. For example, men as a group are tapu in relation to women as a group who are noa, yet all women are tapu during menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth. At such times, there are restrictions placed on what she can and cannot do. Also, noble women are tapu in relation to most men and other women.

The complementary and interdependent relationship between tapu and noa is indicative of the Maori view of men and women and how they relate to each other.

The Marae is the focus and symbol of Maori life and community. It is an open space for Maori assembly, usually surrounded by a group of buildings, one of which is the meeting house. This is the place where funerals and festivals are held, where important guests are welcomed, other groups received, grievances aired and where the tribe re-unites. Nowadays, the buildings also function as recreation and cultural centres open to Pakehas (anyone not a Maori) as well as Maoris.
Noblesse Oblige  Amongst the Maori, the emphasis on group unity and harmony checked autocratic rule by chiefs and required a different standard. Leaders were expected to feed their needy tribesmen/women, to repay gifts with others of greater value, and were responsible for providing hospitality for guests, and allies in wartime or on building projects. Their standing or mana was based on their generosity, and their hospitality. High ranking women and men were also expected to set an example in the work of the tribe.

Land.  The Maoris have a direct, personal relationship with the land, and landforms are endowed with personalities and emotions, revealed by their physical form. On a practical level, knowledge of the land and seasons was essential as Maori economic life was based on year-round food gathering and all activities centred on this. Furthermore, because of its connections with their ancestors, the land became an expression of family and tribal identity. To lose it, or see it defiled, was the ultimate personal injury.

Similarly, the meeting house was, and still is, the physical symbol of the ancestor. The roof is his/her head and water from this is not used, but drained back into the earth. The ridgepole is the backbone, the carved face is at the centre of the two barge boards which are the arms, the front window is the eye, and the door leads into the chest enclosed by the rafters which are the ribs. The central pillar which supports the backbone or ridgepole, is known as the heartpost. Thus, the building takes on a living personal form.

Reciprocity is still an important part of Maori life, and a large portion of any successful crop, or fishing expedition, or of a win at the races, is given away to friends and relatives, with the assurance that the gesture will be returned sometimes in some form or other. Now that money is frequently given as a gift, Maoris are careful not to specify a sum, nor to pay it back exactly, which for them would transform it into a business transaction. Children living at home do not pay a fixed board for the same reason, but give what they want to.

Time.  Where our society tends to regard time as an absolute that marches inexorably on, measured by minutes, hours and days, for the Maori, time centres on events and the sequence of activities. Therefore, where a European might stipulate a meeting at ‘5 o’clock’, a Maori is more likely to say “once the relatives leave”, or “after tea”, or “before the cinema starts”, thus giving a lot more weight to the relativity and subjectivity of time, and taking away the stress of commitment to minutes and hours. Maori time sets a priority on Maori values, so that if a group arrives at a gathering when a meal or ceremony is about to begin, this is delayed while the customary welcome is carried out. In this way, nothing essential is ever overlooked, and things flow easily into one another. Time is secondary to the events. In wider terms, Maoris sense the continuity and wholeness of time. For them, the past is always part of the present and future.

Emotional Life and Inbuilt Therapy.  Maori culture allows for the recognition and open expression of emotion. Underlying community commitment and unity is the concept of ‘aroha’, literally ‘love for kin’ which extends to all feelings of empathy between people, stressing the link above and below the divisions. While confidence and selfhood are encouraged in children humility (whakaitihit) is valued over whakahititi — putting oneself above others. Another word, whakama, expressed ‘guilty’ or ‘ashamed’, or it can mean ‘feelings of inferiority and inadequacy’. In a Maori setting, it is recognised, linked to its cause and then responded to. If it is due to feelings of failure or inadequacy, the person is encouraged and built up by the elders. If it is due to a sense of guilt over some action, it is talked about and tackled in some appropriate way. This therapeutic counselling dimension is built in to Maoritanga, and its absence in the wider community can produce considerable misunderstanding on both sides.

A funeral is a crucial event to a Maori and is carried out over several days. It may mean travelling some distance, and adults take time off work and children off school. At death, the body is laid out for several days for people to look at and address. Old grievances can be brought up by individuals against the deceased, or regrets, apologies, and love can be expressed, and the air cleared. The whole family is involved, women wail and tears flow freely.

On the Marae too, the emphasis is on speaking openly rather than politeness. Conflicts and disagreements are expected to be aired and discussed before any decisions are made. In this way, issues are confronted and resolved, not avoided, and the community, individually and as a group, is strengthened.

Language and Arts

Maori culture is steeped in oral tradition, and skill in rhetoric and oratory are accorded great value. The language is beautifully adapted to an oral medium with its lifting, lyrical tone and strong pictorial nature, qualities which come through even in translation. For example, the Maori expression meaning “a successful marriage” was one
“thoroughly discussed on the wide-wefted sleeping mat”, and “hoa-riri”, translated into English as ‘enemy’, literally means “angry friend”. The subtler meanings behind the apparent simplicity are often overlooked yet probably account for the readiness with which strong emotions can be expressed without sounding trite or maudlin.

Maoris are known for the fineness of their carving. This and weaving centred on the embellishment of the Marae. Early cave drawings have also been discovered.

Today, Maoris are prominent in all visual, musical and literary arts, and in the artistic medium of ‘Kotahi-tanga’, artists are valued as a necessary part of the community rather than detached or alienated from it.

Mythology

The Maori Creation myths are similar to those of Matriarchal cultures. In the beginning was darkness, Te Po, the female element, and this darkness continued through aeons of time. It was the dark womb in which the first forms of life began to take shape. It existed before the light (the male element), and within it, the sun and moon, the light-givers, gradually dawned. There are variations in the stages of creation from darkness, and the divisions of Te Po. One version links the embryo earth with the waxing moon, and with death and the spirit-world. Another view is that there were two periods, each containing six stages. The first period led up to the birth of Pap-pua-nuku, the Earth Mother, and the second period led up to her nights of labour. There seems to be no explicit mention of the Sky Father. Papa’s successive stages of labour are recorded in detail. There is the unseen Po, the changing Po, the grooping Po, then the ‘Night of the narrow passage by which man enters the world’, followed by the turning or the movement, and finally ‘Te Po-tahuri-mai-ki-taiao’ — the movement through the narrow passage into the world. Every woman in labour is thus united with the Earth Mother and the era of the first Po. (A.W. Reed)

There are many versions of how the world as it was eventually emerged. Rangi (Sky Father) and Papa (Earth Mother) are considered the primal parents. It is noteworthy that Rangi was the son of an earlier Rangi and of Kewa, while Papa was the daughter of the goddess Matua-te-Kore, the parentless, recalling the virgin birth and the self-regenerating, self-procreative nature of the Mother Goddess. After the mating of Rangi and Papa, accounts of the world are suddenly peopled with almost exclusively male gods, like the Titans. Though again there are a number of variations, it seems generally held that initially Rangi and Papa lived in a close loving embrace. As their children emerged and grew they were forced to move in the cramped darkness of the embrace. However, after plotting, the children finally forced their parents apart, and allowed light into the world.

Traditional icons and motifs call up images basic to Matriarchy and Goddess cults. The sea monster (taniwha) and lizard recall the serpent and the dragon. Augustus Earle in 1832 records that “One of their favourite subjects (in carving) is a lizard taking hold of a man’s head: their tradition being that this was the origin of man.”

The eyes are a prominent feature in Maori carving and sculpture, and are usually set in a fixed owl-like stare. Although the head is often reported to be the most important part of the body to the Maroï, A.W. Reed writes that:

The teaching of the old house of learning was that the eyes were of most importance (as receivers of knowledge), next came the heart in order that the knowledge gained by the eyes might be retained: then the head, the body and the limbs.

This view is more concordant with Maori values and priorities.

The Spiral may feature independently, but on the head and body is usually associated with joints and points of movement like thighs, shoulders, knees, elbows and cheeks.

In conjunction with crescent forms they seem to map the body’s energy lines, and are particularly striking on some faces.

The ‘tiki’, a human/spirit figure, is a frequent motif. In early carvings, these sometimes displayed prominent sexual organs, many of which were later removed. This form often has a smaller figure between its legs, recalling the crouching goddess giving birth. Although there are no obvious genitalia, for some reason the ‘parent’ form is usually assumed to be a male ancestor, rather than a female or goddess. Similarly, many of the ‘godsticks’ (carved batons used in ritual) could well be male or female images.

However, accounts of how Maori society functioned, while according women more value than in many other societies, do not support a matriarchal or even egalitarian view. The Maori male seemed overtly to have held a more favoured position, associated with concepts of tapu and external power and leadership, while women were identified with noa, weakness and disaster.

There were certain tasks forbidden to women as their presence might be destructive. They were not allowed to carve or tattoo, or to help in the building of a canoe or a meeting house. On the other hand, there were things which only women could do, such as preparing and handling all cooked food, and carrying water and firewood.

In work requiring large numbers, women might help the men, as in hauling huge logs for house-building (though they were not allowed to help haul one for a canoe).

According to Berys Heuer:

Women were as proficient as men in paddling canoes and frequently followed warriors at sea, bringing with them the cooked food which could not be transported in the sacred war canoes.

Plaiting and weaving were done mainly by women though there was no disapproval if a male wanted to learn these skills. While the priests (tohunga) were men, women were physical healers, with a wide knowledge of local plants, berries, leaves and barks, and their healing properties. It is recorded that firemaking was shared by a male and a female.

Both men and women enjoyed sexual freedom until marriage. According to Heuer,

No premium was normally placed upon virginity, and marriage itself was frequently not recognized until a couple had been living together for some time.

Women often initiated liaisons and marriage was seen as a contract that could be terminated once it ceased to function. There were arranged marriages for political ends where neither the male nor female party had much say, and polygamy was practised by chiefs to produce children — males to become warriors and females to contract political alliances. It is significant that hospitality, in which women had a key role, was of great importance to the Maori, and skill as a hostess was valued, not demeaning as it so often becomes in our culture. The chief’s wife organised all the gathering and preparation of food and the entertainment.
All women would gather on the marae to call ‘Haere mai’ to the visitors before the welcoming speeches were made. At Maori gatherings today, hospitality continues to play a major part and the meal itself is important in setting a seal on the welcome.

Joan Metge points out with regard to the ‘tapu’ and ‘noa’ concepts, the Maoris did not see ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ in an absolute relation to anything, but rather, as complementary attributes of everything. Many accounts of Maori life and of attitudes to male and female are probably overlaid with a Western prejudice. Certainly, there is confusion and inconsistency in the descriptions of women and female associations. For example, while a woman is identified with what is weak and ordinary, a female peace, ‘rongo a whare’ was seen as reliable and permanent, in contrast to a male peace which threatened deceit and trouble. Further, the vagina and reproductive organs are referred to as ‘whare o aitu’a’ or house of misfortune and disaster (similar to the medieval biblical image of the vagina as the entrance to hell) while childbearing and children are valued by the Maori, and sexuality seems to have been enjoyed. In fact, in the Tapu/Noa relation, woman paradoxically emerges with considerable independent power.

She is called on to break the tapu after the building of a canoe or meeting house. She has to feed the tohunga after he has officiated at a burial. She steps over a man who has lost his will before a battle. Maning described the difficulties of a group of chiefs who were unable to provision their canoe without the help of women to carry food and water. This power is linked with her sexuality. There are stories of women dancing seductively so that warriors lost their will to fight, and the majority of Maori wars seem to have been caused directly or indirectly by women or insults to them.

Women’s power seems to have been real enough, and for the most part, not treated lightly, but with awe, which may account for the number of negative and even fearsome interpretations. And, in the end, the ‘male’ quality of fighting and conflict always gave way to the ‘female’ values of peace and harmony.

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An Avebury Experience

Monica Sjöö

LIFE, DEATH AND REBIRTH AT AVEBURY
ON 6th FEBRUARY 1978

Four days after Candelmas — season of the Winter Goddess, the waning Moon. We arrived on a beautiful winter day at Avebury village . . . parked the old post office van and ate our mushroom salad. The village is built within the stone circle, is contained within it. Amazing colossal stones . . . square, wrought, squat . . . seeming like human bodies and gigantic heads. Here one feels is the centre of the Mother Goddess. What would it be like living in this village, part of Her living body? The earth around the stone circle shaped and moulded in ridges and ditches. Many of the stones are mutilated . . . like half a head chopped off . . . painful to see. Many of the stones are gone and ugly looking small triangle-shaped stones (looking like the gravestones they really are) have been positioned to mark where they originally fell and were buried. There still remains a great power and beauty and great mystery in this whole space and its stones. We follow the earth-works around the entire circle and then slowly follow what remains of West Kennet stone avenue that winds its way across the fields.

The mushrooms have not taken effect . . . I long and long to arrive at Silbury mound . . . the pregnant Earth womb of the Mother. We have seen Her in the distance from the road and from the village. I clutch a stone in my hand for safety and we plod across ploughed, muddy fields . . . having to cross eternally barbed-wire fences. Gripped by panic, unable to either remain or to cross over the ugly, and now seeming so offensive, fences. Wanting to find comfort and refuge with the Breast/Eye/womb belly rising out of the landscape so naked and so vulnerable. We scramble through what seems like marsheland wilderness . . . I feel as if transported thousands of years back in time. We come closer to Her womb and discover that on the road by Her side there is parked a square bright red lorry with the name Peter Lord written on its side . . . Lord . . . oh no . . . is there nowhere, not even in Her presence when one is allowed to forget the Patriarchy and its deadly godhead. Nearer Her mound we discover notices that say “The monument is closed due to erosion” . . . Her womb surrounded by water is everywhere shut off by treble-layers of barbed-wire fences. Feeling stunned . . . the earth around the mound appears to move and flicker . . . some swans are frozen motionless . . . I feel caught in eternity . . . Some teenagers scramble past us up the Hill. We follow them slowly hoping they won’t speak with us . . . we who are from another century. Feeling of fear at daring to trample on Her belly, the grass matted and unkempt. A man shouts from the road, “Get down from there!” We sit down on the side of the mound in the direction away from the road . . . the teenagers disappear out of sight and hearing. I am overtaken with sudden enormous grief . . . the Mother . . . the entire mound cries through me . . . I am at one with Her, grieving at our lost women-cultures . . . the pollution and death of Her land all around us. What have they done to you, Mother, what have they done . . . what have they done . . . Man shouts from the road. I feel overwhelming fear . . . am a hunted female animal . . . got to flee . . . got to get down from Her womb away from the road, away. The road appears to stand for everything alien and evil . . . motors . . . men of patriarchal authority. Shots heard regularly in the distance . . . aeroplanes continuously overhead . . . evil, evil, danger . . . Almost run, slide down Her side . . . walk slowly . . . great effort, fear . . . tracing our way around the water-moat, back into the fields from where we came. Feeling of victory, we avoided the road . . . we are safe . . . we are still in Her Nature, with Her. I look at Her mound . . . so exposed . . . like veins on a breast streaking Her sides . . . again overwhelmed with tears and sorrow. I now understand what Mother Earth means . . . something so enormous, powerful . . . also so painful in my own woman’s body which is like Hers . . . violent but gentle . . . powerful but vulnerable . . .

Slowly we follow the river, feeling myself floating within Her . . . flowing with the wonderful water formations . . . dancing along with her rhythms. Sudden, sharp halt at the sight of the pollution of the water and the rubbish accumulated there . . . anger, anger. More barbedwire fences . . .

We follow the direction leading to West Kennet long barrow and walk up a long mud track. We see the long barrow at the summit and the enormous stones covering the entrance. We walk around the stones and suddenly . . . we see the stark black darkness from the entrance of the cunt/mouth into Her underground womb. Sudden fear at being swallowed up by the intense darkness . . . but I overcome the fear and enter . . . totally another world in there . . . of mystery . . . of power . . . of peace. Sounds are amplified in here and the stone chambers appear for a timeless moment to breathe . . . I feel like gyrating . . . I feel like a Spiral . . . then feel a great urge to sleep on the floor in the uterus-room at the end of the passage . . . great stillness in Her living darkness. Feeling infinitely “higher” within the tomb/temple than when re-entering the world outside. Strange and powerful vibrations . . . here no feeling of sorrow and vulnerability . . . this is the place of the Winter/Death Goddess and we are here in Her season, and within her realism. We are welcome . . .

We walk back down the mud track . . . feeling an enormous tiredness and exhaustion . . . just want to sleep . . . to sleep. We trace our way back to Avebury across the fields and the public footpaths . . . We retrace our way around the stone circle and arrive six hours later back at our van and drive off.
Mathilda had lived in the cave for a very long time. She could, if she chose, dimly remember her childhood in the stone cottage in the cozy village. But she did not often choose to remember beginning — she was timeless, all knowing, all seeing, the servant of the triple Goddess.

After her initiation, she had cut herself free from worldly ties in order to serve the Mother better. She had never belonged to a husband and she had used her magic to prevent her from bearing children though some say she had a daughter in her later years. In the beginning she had practised the heiros gamos, but the men changed their attitude and abused her whilst the women grew jealous and hated her. People were moving away from the old ways and the practice of a woman giving her body in the service of the Goddess was not understood. She could handle the men and their lack of respect but the women’s hatred cut her to the core.

There was always fresh water in the cave and she kept a few animals and grew vegetables for herself and herbs for the magic potions. The village people would leave her some food in return for her prophecies and her remedies, and she grew the rest herself.

The cave was the Mother’s Womb. Like the Sybil at Delphi, she spoke and prophesied with the voice of the Mother. She had the gift of second sight and she knew of the changes to come and that she would be one of the last to serve the Mother for many centuries. This knowledge weakened her. She knew also the remedies that herbs and plants give. The villagers would come with their troubles and she would help them. Joanna was such a villager.

Joanna did not want a child. Her parents had married her against her will to a yeoman farmer named Adrian. He was prosperous and would provide well for her. Maybe he would even provide for her parents when they were too old to work their few acres. Joanna’s family were poorer than most and Adrian was richer than most. It seemed a good match. But Joanna did not like Adrian. He was arrogant and brutal and he frightened her. She would not lie with him. After a few months, his friends began to suspect that Joanna would not be a wife to him and they taunted him. Adrian could bear it no longer and took her by force. And again and again, until a child started to grow inside her. The child was conceived against its mother’s will, and the mother had only one remedy open to her. She remembered Mathilda and the stories told about her so Joanna took the overgrown path that led from the village to the cave and asked Mathilda for a potion to drive the child away before it was fully formed. When Mathilda gave her the potion she made Joanna vow to tell no-one of their meeting, for she knew that ill would come from it. Yet she could not refuse Joanna the potion, as the mother must choose when to bear a child. Anything else is a violation of the old ways.

In the night, after swallowing the herbs, Joanna bore a dead uniformed child. The villagers had seen Joanna sneak away from the village along the overgrown path that led to the cave and they told Adrian. All knew that Mathilda, the witch, could make potions which would cause an abortion and all knew that Joanna had lost a child. There was shouting and screaming and Adrian hit Joanna several times with a broom handle, whilst she was still weak from the dead child. He had wanted a male child to inherit his fields and his animals, and Joanna, his wife, his chattel, had refused to bear him a son. He wanted justice.

Although ordinarily the villagers did not like Adrian very much, they supported him in his grief and anger and everyone blamed Mathilda. The witch had exerted her evil influence too long and here was a chance to teach her a lesson. If they all banded together, surely she would not withstand them? She had interfered once too often. A man should be secure in his fatherhood. How dare Mathilda challenge this?

At dawn the villagers went in procession to the cave. Two boys slaughtered Mathilda’s goats who were grazing nearby. The mob stood outside the cave and taunted the witch. They intended to burn her. The villagers waited and Mathilda waited. They shuffled their feet and grew bored and angrier. Mathilda had foreseen their coming and had made her preparations. At dusk there was a thunderstorm.
The witch came out of her cave, possessed by the spirit of the Mother. She spoke of the truth of the Ancient Religion and reminded the villagers of all the Mother had meant to them in their lives. She warned them of the dark deeds that would come when the Mother's influence had finally waned and the Fathers fully waxed. She warned them of the enmity between men and women and of how it would be fueled into hatred and poison people's lives. Village life would break up and machines, not people, would till the land and the old would die unrespected and despised. The villagers did not understand what she said but they understood the righteousness within her and they knew she served the Mother. Her gaze was too steadfast and her voice too firm for them to act against her. One by one they slipped away, down the path and back to the village. The united mob had become shamefaced individuals.

About that time, there was in the neighbourhood a young monk from Glastonbury, named Anselm. The Abbey of Glastonbury was built on a very ancient holy place and the druids taught there before ever the Christians, with their worship of sky gods and adulation of the Father, arrived in these islands. Anselm himself had witnessed the building of St Michael's chapel on Glastonbury Tor. The chapel was built to commemorate the final victory of Christianity over paganism and was named for St Michael who in legend slew dragons on high places such as the Tor. The dragon is the consort of the Great Goddess and would have lived on the Tor in earlier times. The dragon's death symbolises Christian victory over the ancient ways and the neutralising of earlier powers. The monks had finally claimed for their own the great tor under which dwelt Anwyn King of the underworld and of departed spirits. Anselm was personally very excited by the building of the chapel and all that it symbolised and had rejoiced when the last stone was laid.

Anselm lodged in the inn and talked to the villagers. They told him of Mathilda and her evil ways and how they could do nothing against her. Anselm was outraged and saw his own personal chance to win fame in the great fight against the forces of evil. He would win where the villagers had failed. Accordingly he sent to the Abbot for his blessing and prepared himself for his self-appointed task. He spent a week in fasting and prayer. He had his whole head shaved, not just the tonsure. Then he went up the path to the cave, swinging the incense burners and carrying the cross. The villagers followed a few steps behind, curious to see whether an outsider would win where they had failed. Although they hated Mathilda, they thought this young monk a bit too self-righteous and wondered how the contest would end. Whoever lost, they would not be displeased. Anselm held the cross high. 'In the name of the Father come out, my daughter, and be healed', he said.

'I know only the Mother', said Mathilda from the mouth of the cave, but she was weak from lack of food. The villagers had destroyed her vegetable garden and no longer left food in return for prophecies. 'It is her whom I serve! All hail Ashthoreth!'

'Be gone Beelzebub! Be caste out into the flames of Hell and serve your time in chains and eternal darkness!"

'The Mother turns her back on no-one. She will preserve me in the cycle of life and death and be with me in my next incarnation.'

Anselm approached the cave entrance and chanted several Hail Mary's. Mary as a representative of the triple Goddess had been absorbed into the Church, as a concession to the feelings of the people. 'Hail Mary, Mother of God ...' Anselm raised the cross above his head, dropped the incense burner and ran in righteous anger towards Mathilda. He was confident the villagers would follow him in the attack, but they did not. Anselm's fury burned within him and Mathilda was weak from hunger. She retreated into the cave and he followed.

Into the first cave, deep and dark with stalactites and stalagmites, she ran. Mathilda knew the caves and the underground river and she was surefooted in the gloom. Anselm was more uncertain but he was very determined. Several times he lost his footing on the slippery rock and fell. He called on Christ the Son of God to help him in his need. He called on all the saints and the blessed Virgin. By the entrance to the third cave Mathilda waited and summoned her strength. Anselm caught her, raised the cross and pushed her violently. She lost her footing and fell headlong down the steep slope and into the icy water of the third cave. She drowned.

When Anselm staggered out of the cave the sky was dark and the ground heaved. The villagers had sunk away in terror. But their houses were no safer than the ground near the cave entrance. The forces of Nature were mourning the passing of Mathilda. The balance between the male and female forces had been disturbed once again and the female had been crushed. All that night the wind howled and Anselm huddled in a barn, for the villagers blamed him for the storm and would not give him shelter. Many trees and houses fell as the ground shook. Several days later the villagers learnt that they were not at the centre of the earthquake. The centre had been at Glastonbury Tor. The nave and chancel of St Michael's chapel had fallen leaving only the tower. The tower still stands as a gigantic phallus on the mound of the Earth Mother, visible across the marshes for miles around. Anwyn, the Celtic King of the dead, still holds his court underneath the Tor, but what of Mathilda's prophecies? Were they true, or was Mathilda really an evil witch? Only the reader knows.
THE DIRTY GODDESS

The Lamia

The Lamia was one of three classes of female monsters in Greek folklore. Lamiae inhabit the deserts, and live in caves. They take dragons and serpents to be their mates, and they have the feet of animals. They possess great wealth.

Lamiae devour human babies. Their genitals stink. They are known to be dirty, greedy and stupid. They are fat; they are slutish domestically. They are stupid, also, in that they are completely honest. Their serpent mates endow them with wealth, but through honesty, they stupidly lose it.

There was a very rich Lamia who lived in Athens; she was in the habit of walking out at night, and, upon finding a man, she would seize and crush him until he roared like a bull. However, if he proved himself able to snatch her head-dress from her, she would set him free, and make him rich. She had a reputation for being lustful, and was believed to be a cannibal.

LAWSON, J.C., Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion, Cambridge University Press, 1910.

Sheffield Matriarchy Study Group

We've marked solsticial and other matriarchal festivals with meetings of our own or by celebrating them with our families or in the street. People spontaneously respond to invitations to participate in traditional rituals – at Lammas, All Souls (Hallow'en) etc.

We've been exploring and experiencing the megalithic sites in Derbyshire. Recently some of us have been visiting the stone circles on Barbrook Moor. There are five (not all complete) in a relatively small area and mark all solar and lunar happenings.

It's a powerful site with a river, spring, cairn and many burial mounds all around.

There's a special mystery and power to the place which we've all experienced in different ways. The main circle on Barbrook aligns directly, through an outlier, with Arbor Low at Midsummer, a place we shared with the London Matriarchy Group last summer.

We ebb and flow and move on – talking now about rituals, tentatively and with some anxiety – talking of matriarchal values, projects; talking of menstruation, rhythms, magic.

There's space to stay if people want to visit.

Helen
Matriarchy Study Group
General Booklist –

This is a general booklist only. If you would like particular information, please send details of your special interests. The group does not necessarily agree with the information in all the following books, but each covers some aspect of Matriarchal studies.


SJOO, Monica. The Ancient Religion of the Great Cosmic Mother of All. Sjo 1976.


A RIDDLE

My first are the Shining Sisters
My second is the thrice immortal fruit.
My third is my fourth
My fourth also.
My fifth grows with my second.
My sixth and my seventh were feared and adored by men.
My whole is our whole.
Who am I?

A RIDDLE

I am and I am not
I am light and dark
I am the beginning and the end
I flow as in river
I am steady as in stone
I am round and a triangle
My horns wax and wane
And I go on forever.
Who am I?

A RIDDLE

My first is full
Rises and never flies
Bleeds and never dies
My last is my first
Who am I?

Sister Groups

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BLESSED BE

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