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The Perversion of Maternal Gift-Giving

Initiating the Matrilinear Motherhood NOW Movement

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AT THE BEGINNING OF MY RESEARCH on motherhood—then a young mother in my twenties myself—I realized that there is something deeply wrong with family and motherhood and the way motherhood is presented in the media and in politics. The public discourse is dominated by two subjects. One is about work and family, that is, the economic view; the other is about procreation—birthrates and their political implications. Within both debates, mothers as such do not appear, and I realized that the descriptions in these discourses contrast considerably with my own experiences.

“Having it all” is supposedly the objective (e.g., Sandberg) for women who want both children and work. In Europe this debate is dominated by the social democratic viewpoint and its concept of freeing women by including them in the workforce and encouraging a career. Ostensibly, to create gender equality the European Union created the Gender Mainstreaming Program. In practice, this brings women under the rule of the European contracts¹ that aim to increase European economic strength. This economic discourse is based on the concept of liberal feminism’s understanding of equality (with men) without questioning neo-liberalism or its philosophy, rules, and practices.

The other subject on the daily agenda is the reproductive one—abortion legislation and practice, birthrate decline in Europe, and reproductive technologies. All these debates are dealt with in a moral and normative manner. Women’s bodies and procreative ability are objects of discussion, though not debated with women themselves. It is as if the second wave women’s movement did not leave any traces of their reclaiming women’s bodies.

The debates about abortion have turned out to be bloody battlefields: the threatening of pregnant women, the murdering of practising doctors and nurses, and ruthless political lobbying are all means to limit and

prohibit the procedure in medical institutions. More and more U.S. states and Eastern European countries are being targeted by proposed regulations.² Clearly, discussions since the 1970s are dated, and the liberal legislation introduced then did not bring an end to the anti-abortion campaigns as women had hoped. The backlash soon occurred through the use of new legal and technological means.

The low birthrates in Europe since the 1980s also brought a new incentive to accelerate population politics. The norm of the two-child family is constantly pursued and propagated in politics, media and—not the least—by the economic demands of a higher amount of human resources. Finally, the technologization of motherhood has introduced a completely new understanding of the maternal body, namely that it can be replaced any time by the artificial process of conceiving (in vitro fertilization) or carrying a child (such as surrogate mothers).

We thus realize that motherhood is central to political and economic debates, but not so for the mother herself with her needs, accomplishments, or constant giving. Maternal gift giving (Vaughan, “Introduction”; *The Gift*) is not labelled as such, and is thus non-existent in political and economic terms. Only when the first socialist feminist researchers started to label it as “family work” did politics face a kind of predicament. Now housework, childcare, and care for the elderly and the sick were labeled as unpaid work and identified as a basis of the market economy. But in spite of the demand for structural change, we are seeing a contrary development. Accelerating neo-liberalism is currently taking a comprehensive advantage of all the goods that are supposedly free: mothers’ and nature’s gift giving.

In this contribution, I refer to many of my own studies in the field of reproduction and politics (*Tazi-Preve, Der Muttermord; Presentation of Research*; “Die Vereinbarkeitslüge”; “Deconstructing Family”; *Motherhood in Patriarchy*), and other research, mostly in a European context. My work started on matricide, continued on motherhood in patriarchy, onto fatherhood (or rather the absence of fathers), and then to family and population policies. My research is influenced by both the networks on the critique of patriarchy, launched by Claudia von Werlhof, and the gift economy paradigm and its maternal roots, developed and organized by Genevieve Vaughan.

The paper will start with my thesis, an explanation of key terms, and the theoretical concept on which it is based. From a feminist point of view and through the lens of the Critical Theory of Patriarchy (CTP), my research shows the abuse and complete defeat of mothers, represented by the patriarchal mother. I will then describe how maternal gift giving

was perverted and how patriarchal technicians continue to create motherless life by substitution. I will conclude by pointing out what can be done to reject the patriarchal mother, and end with a call for action to initiate the Matrilinear Motherhood NOW Movement (MMNM).

MY THESIS AND THE CRITICAL THEORY OF PATRIARCHY

My thesis is that the idea of motherhood today—which I call “Patriarchal Motherhood” (Tazi-Preve, *Motherhood in Patriarchy*)—is based on the historical matricide (Tazi-Preve, *Der Muttermord*), which can be retraced in myth, psychology, science, medicine, law, politics, philosophy, and religion. The mother is still alive—as she is still required as breeder, caretaker and worker—but the conditions and the constraints in which she is living are the result of a violent transformation. I also realized that the second wave women’s movement was not able to bring about any essential change. In order to understand why the “women’s question” has not been solved, but indeed is worsening, the development of new analytical tools is necessary and urgent.

Most academic research contributes to a lack of appropriate critical questioning. Studies on motherhood in social sciences—mainly in sociology, political science, and psychology—describe the fate of mothers under the economic premises of family life and workforce (Rille-Pfeiffer and Kapella), or their psychological state (Klepp) during pregnancy, after birth, and while raising children. The approach is descriptive, from a single discipline, and apolitical.³⁴ I argue that the whole picture of manifold constraints mothers are living in—which I call violent—is completely left out of the picture. These analyses usually lack a comprehensive understanding of violence. Johann Galtung shows that violence not only exists in direct physical form, but also on the level of structure and culture.

The absence of appropriate answers in feminist and political theory led to the evolution of the Critical Theory of Patriarchy by the so-called Innsbruck School.⁴ It presents a systemic transdisciplinary meta-theory (von Werlhof, *Destruction*; Projektgruppe Zivilisationspolitik), but it is also more than that. It is an epistemological meta-theory understanding of civilization in all its dimensions. By using its tools it becomes clear that the final goal in politics, economy, and society is the enduring destruction of existing nature and human beings and their artificial—supposedly better—recreation. It explains furthermore that the delusional idea of an ostensibly better world can only be developed on the bases of “shock and awe” (Klein).

A key term here is *patriarchy*, which was used at the beginning of the second wave feminist movement, meaning a comprehensive system of domination of women. The Critical Theory of Patriarchy uses an etymological approach, and shows that the term consists of the Latin term *pater* (meaning father) and the Greek term *arche* (which can mean dominance or beginning [Gemoll]). It is the father who wants to replace the mother as the origin and creator. That is done in material form, but also by means of symbolism and myths, such as that of Zeus who “gives birth” to his daughter Athena out of his head. What the historically younger version of that myth conceals is that before supposedly giving birth, he had swallowed the goddess Metis who was pregnant with her daughter. Thus, like today, patriarchy depended on absorbing maternal potency to imitate the creation of life.

There are two trends building around the contemporary imagination of motherhood. One is the direction toward which feminist theory and practice is shifting. During the last decades, Michel Foucault’s postmodern approach and critical theory of modernity was applied to feminist theory and ousted feminist social science approaches. Judith Butler and others developed the theory of gender performativity, denying that there is anything natural in the female body, thus rendering it impossible to talk about women in a collective sense. Furthermore, this concept, widely accepted in academia, has caused a shift toward individualizing the “female problem,” and leaving a systemic view behind. In a “gender-neutral” world, the collective understanding of women is vanishing and political activism against structural injustice and violence is rendered impossible. By favouring an individualistic view and an “identity approach,” “womanhood” is reduced to a rhetorical problem and feminism is losing its transformative power. It may be speculation as to whether this was, in fact, the aim of the theory of gender performativity, but what we do know for sure is that this approach contributes to the patriarchal project of abolishing the mother.

The practical political discourse is dominated by liberal and social democratic feminism. According to the social democratic approach, employment is still considered to be the main source of freedom, and motherhood is a personal issue. The solutions presented are focused primarily on comprehensive childcare facilities. Nevertheless, ideas of liberal feminism underlie the measures of gender mainstreaming—that is, the legislation by the European Union that is meant to increase the Union’s wealth by incorporating women’s capacities as workers and mothers.

In an “unholy alliance” of liberal and gender approaches, subjects like intersectionality and identity theory dominate the academic and political discourses. Women’s Studies are replaced by Gender Studies and, since the last decade, also by the newly-developing Sexuality Studies that focus on sexual orientation. In this way, the academic and political focus, and thus the money that comes along with it, shift toward apolitical research of the “gender question.”⁵

The image of the mother is also heavily influenced by the new understanding of what was formerly called economy, the original Greek *oikos nomos* meaning providing people with necessary goods. Nowadays the destructive concept of neo-liberalism—“where national European governments are now defined as nothing else than money collectors for the banks and corporations” (von Werlhof, *The Failure* 28)—has caused the “mechanization” of human beings and the whole animate world (Gent). Any vitality is destroyed in favour of a world transformed into a “money-making-machine.” The financial market economy is based on women’s work as procreator and caregiver. In the neo-liberal world the mother is transformed into a cog in the family machine. In this way, it eradicates social cohesiveness, mutuality, solidarity, and a whole culture of social interaction.

WHAT IS PATRIARCHAL MOTHERHOOD?

Mothers create maternal culture. I am unable to even find a word that can describe the “constant weaving a net” that women provide on a daily basis. It contains the world of emotions in which mother and child are immersed from the day of birth; the sharing of time; the process of cooking and sharing meals; and the female and maternal network that comprises mothers and friends. Maternal culture is embodied by the whole sphere of artisanal and handcraft activity by sharing circles and creating spaces by its acts of production.

Seen from the perspective of the Critical Theory of Patriarchy, motherhood was historically split into physical (the womb), and caring functions (which were oppressed, ridiculed, and exploited). In developing the Critical Theory of Patriarchy, we also discovered that there is an ultimate goal, namely to get rid of the mother altogether. It is her body and her creative potency which has to be eradicated, at which time the male creation puts itself in her place, turning female creativity on its head. Her vividness is to be eradicated, and pregnancy is to be turned from a supposedly uncontrolled, wild, and unpredictable act to a calculable, controlled, and measureable one of modern technology. It

is a gradual process of substitution during which physical mothers are still needed and functioning as procreators and caregivers.

Understanding patriarchy as a comprehensive theory of civilization means seeing the purpose of modernity with new eyes. The goal is to create a new, supposedly better world through the patriarchal process of transformation. But the method is not one of improvement or mimetic assimilation to the existing natural conditions—like an Indigenous worldview—but one of a complete destruction⁶ of the (embodied) mother and the culture of motherhood. Thus “the mother must get lost” (quoting the headline in a series of articles on Mother’s Day⁷); she must be literally killed, eradicated. The existing mother represents merely a kind of intermediate step until the complete eradication of the mother, on the way to the “motherless world” (von Werlhof, *The Failure*).

Patriarchal motherhood must be understood as an institution, as the mother’s body, her work, and her creative potency are transformed into a kind of administrative unit. By providing food, housing, and care, the mother and housewife embodies economy in its true sense. This is the shadow economy upon which the official economy is based in a “parasitic way” (Vaughan, “Introduction”). Since the onset of modern times,⁸ the institutionalized mother has been supervised and regulated by pedagogy, medicine, psychology, and law. For example, regulations and recommendations on breastfeeding over the past decades have been constantly changing based on the state of research or popular opinion.⁹

The frame in which maternal life is permitted is the nuclear family (Tazi-Preve, *Das Versagen*),¹⁰ a concept created in the beginning of patriarchal times to impede woman’s free sexuality and pregnancies regardless of the father. Within marriage, procreation became transformed into a controlled and supervised duty. Since then, a non-married mother was considered to be a shame, and the married mother a blessing. The seizure of “illegitimate” children¹¹ was common throughout Europe until the 1970s. Over time and space, the family was normatively shaped in manifold ways, but its aim of preserving control over the reproductive process never altered.

Also the European/North American idea of motherhood and the nuclear family is an export good to non-western societies. It is communicated or violently imposed by means of religion (missionaries), economics (private property, creation of a new workforce), or political measures (introduction of paternal family name) on non-patriarchal societies—for example, the Khasis in Assam, India, or the Mosuo in South China.

The popular mother image is far from a reality. The German mother image especially is the product of a male fantasy, designed for centuries by clerics, jurists, psychologists, and political theoreticians. National socialism in Germany and Austria created a special form of motherhood, which was thoroughly implemented in the 1940s on each level of the mother's being (Weyrather), and which has left its traces up to now. This included marriage to an Aryan, the normative number of children, the way to raise them, the children's participation in the Hitler Youth, the selection of Aryan names, the amount of care, the amount of regulation in children's education, how to punish and not spoil the child, the fascist education system, and finally the sacrifice of the sons to the battlefields of war and the daughters to the martial services (nurses, etc.) or as mothers. The Aryan mother cult spawned the so-called *Lebensborn* (spring of life), where German blond and blue-eyed children were conceived and born. German mothers were awarded gold, silver, and bronze Crosses of Honour for bearing many children.

Today we still face a strictly regulated family life including the terms of the way reproduction is regulated from conception until the children's graduation. The amount of time mothers should spend with their toddlers is especially under constant scrutiny. Lieselotte Ahnert devoted her book *Wieviel Mutter braucht ein Kind (How Much Mother Does a Child Need?)* to the ongoing debate in Germany and Austria.

We are under the pressure of a rigorous neo-liberal economy with its deregulated labour laws, flexible working hours, a dramatic decrease in salaries, and an overwhelming amount of underpaid part-time work in meaningless professions in which the majority of women are employed. Facing these pressures to make a living, family life has turned into a family machine, where family members are deprived of space and freedom. School times, working times, the time regiment of public institutions and bureaucracy, and the supposed needs of children (social activities, sports, arts, etc.) keep mothers' lives on hold, at least for fifteen years. The process of patriarchalization has been absorbing the animated spirit of community and turning it into a hostile and stressful pathogenic machine.

A characteristic of mothers' lives in patriarchy is the constant state of being overworked and exhausted, not only when the mother is single, but also when she is in a relationship. Statistics prove time and time again that working mothers are usually subject to an imbalance of childcare and household work (Tazi-Preve, *Presentation of Research*). Today paid employment is an economic necessity to maintain the household; the leftist slogan of gaining freedom through employment

is and was never true. Female salaries are low and usually considered an add-on to the main income of the male, which is still considerably higher. Female employment was and is seldom self-realization, but simply a matter of survival. Thus mothers gain exhaustion instead of the promised freedom of economic independence.

Being the one with the primary or sole responsibility—in or out of a marriage or heterosexual relationship—mothers often shape an inescapable neurotic relationship with their children. As a recent Israeli study shows (Donath), mothers love their children without a doubt, but they hate the circumstances of motherhood. Overburdened and impatient mothers become the target of their children's frustration and aggression, and the constantly demanding children will drive mothers into despair and aggressive reactions. From a critical patriarchal view, personal life shows that motherhood and caring qualities have wide-reaching effects on humankind as a whole. The nuclear family is identified not only as the foundation of economics, but also as the origin of people's mental state. Due to the more or less sole responsibility of the mother, the nuclear family necessarily leaves basic needs unsatisfied—and the addicted personality of our times is the direct outcome. This creates the perfect consumer of an economy that produces goods in superfluous abundance.

In making the burden of the constant care, responsibility, management, and raising of each child the responsibility of an individual, society rids itself of any understanding of common sharing. The isolation of mothers in nuclear families is the result of promoting the separation of mothers and children on all levels. The so-called individual responsibility occurs because women are not only cut off from their mother's lineage and other women, but also mentally, because this way of life is supposed to be normal. Instead of sharing work with others, mothers perform their day-to-day tasks in "solitary confinement" (Rich) according to detailed instructions on carrying out motherhood. Maternal solidarity turned into a competition between women to be the best mothers ("mommy wars").

The individualization and isolation of mothers makes them extremely vulnerable and the perfect target for political and psychological intervention. The method of "divide and rule," of isolating mothers from each other and from society as a whole, renders them perfectly controllable. The constant accusation by the Catholic Church that the "individuality" and "materialism" of our time has supposedly caused the deterioration of the family is completely misleading; actually it is a kind of mockery. When she pursues employment, the isolated mother

also gets blamed for seeking her “own advantage” or “women’s self-realization.” Like a boomerang, each of her attempts to raise her children while developing an economic independent life causes serious accusations of failure and falls back on her.

Another method of transforming maternal life from maternal culture into misery is the blame game. Mothers are held responsible for their children’s criminality and failed school careers (which occur more often in males) and their eating disorders (which occur more often in females). The idea of the terrifying mother is a common component in a patient’s psychoanalysis. Patients usually lie on the analyst’s couch symbolically alongside their mothers. While in psychotherapy, the suffering caused by mothers is given priority, while the suffering of the mother herself is completely ignored. The sanctions against the so-called bad mothers are severe. The procedure of her exclusion and pillorying can be traced back to the methods of witch hunts where women were criminalized for midwifery, and giving advice on natural contraception and abortion.

Molly Ladd-Taylor writes of one case that is not unheard of: “T and P’s three-year-old daughter was found beaten to death at her home in Illinois and T’s live-in boyfriend admitted to the beating.... Although not present when the crime was committed she was charged with first-degree murder” (12). Mechthild Hart exposes the victimization, especially of women of color, and their quick arrests. The criminalization of motherhood fits into this scheme. A mother’s abilities and failures are constantly supervised (see “How We Criminalize”) and she must necessarily fail, either openly by treating her children violently, or privately by keeping the secrets behind the doors, while neurotic relationships between mothers and children evolve. Shame and fear of failure often keep mothers from seeking help.

Women go to tremendous lengths to avoid the accusation of being bad mothers. This implies the paradox that the mother is to be constantly present and bear all the responsibility for the child, while simultaneously taking care of all the children’s and mother’s economic and personal needs. Conversely, it is argued that a mother’s constant presence is psychologically detrimental, and that the symbiosis with the mother must be dissolved unconditionally to allow the development of individuality to take its proper course. This primarily concerns male children, who are expected to commit matricide (Jung), to reject the symbiosis and the attachment to their mothers forever, and then turn to their fathers who supposedly represent the true world. The Freudian model of triangulation claims that the family unity of father-mother-

child is a constellation dictated by nature. Feminist psychoanalysts (e.g., Moeller-Gambaroff) have since put a lot of work into questioning Freud's male-centred perspective and focusing on the development of identity in female children. Nevertheless, Freud's patriarchal concept of family continues to be reinforced by research and politics.

For women, Freud's model means that the male partner acts as an emotional surrogate for the lost mother. The result of this dependency, which is often also economic, is a result of having intersected the mother-daughter bond by eliminating matrilineality and replacing it with a husband. Separation from one's children is carried out very early.¹² This often leads to early marriage or partnerships, which are the only socially acceptable norm. Returning to one's mother—even temporarily—is considered to be emotionally infantile and/or a professional failure.

New technologies of reproduction have created completely new dimensions of female subordination and are aimed at creating a new kind of life. Procreation separated from the female body came into being in the 1980s, and takes place in three steps: the maternal body first gets split up into her functions—conceiving, pregnancy, giving birth, breastfeeding, and raising a child. Secondly, the “better” essence and idea in the shape of the most modern technology is added (by in-vitro-fertilization procedures, for example). The third step is the supposedly perfect new creation of human life (supervised by reproductive health specialists)—the ultimate goal of patriarchy.

The ideology underlying reproductive technologies is also applied to modern gynecological procedures. In the United States, caesarean sections have increased up to forty per cent. The use of epidural anesthesia has become more and more common. The emergence of male gynecologists is the long history of deprivation of the women's birth process and the aid of midwives (Federici). It also represents part of the destruction of female networks and the solidarity of going through this process together; it removed female care and comfort as an integral part of pregnancy and the birthing process. The patriarchal mother is only allowed to carry a child until she gets replaced by an artificial uterus, the primary and ultimate goal of reproductive technologies. This embodies the abolition of motherhood in favour of a supposedly genetically perfect procreation, in the name of aid for childless women and freedom of technological “progress.” Reproductive technologies divide motherhood in multiple forms, such as the genetic mother who provides the egg, the surrogate mother who gestates the fetus, and the social mother who raises the child.

THE ESSENCE OF PATRIARCHAL MOTHERHOOD
AND THE PERVERSION OF THE GIFT

Genevieve Vaughan (“Introduction”) has introduced us to the feminist gift economy concept on which she has been working since the 1980s, discovering that “in Capitalist Patriarchy the practice of the Gift Economy has been assigned especially to women though it has been misrecognized specifically under the names of ‘mothering,’ ‘nurturing’ and ‘care-giving’” (4). Maternal gift giving represents the paradigm of a new understanding of economics in the sense of nurturing and provision of vital goods. Capitalism exploits the abundance of free gifts of maternal culture and nature in the shape of oil, water, and precious metals, and turns everything into a commodity.

While the mother is still gift-giving, the act of giving itself is completely perverted in patriarchal motherhood. Deeply damaged by the patriarchal ideology, mothers’ souls are imprinted by this false image. We wonder what it means when the mother does not know better, when she has no alternative ideal, or when she believes that patriarchal motherhood is the only truth and her destiny. The mother is led to believe that she should not care about or prioritize her own needs, that neglecting herself is normal, and that her notion of constant failure and guilt is natural. The patriarchal mother is also unaware of the norms that make sure that she will never be able to keep up with expectations.

In this sense, the perverted mother shall follow an ideal of a heterosexual relationship¹³ that is supposedly the best place for her children and herself. It is presented as “natural,” as children are conceived by a man and a woman. In this “natural” pairing, men and women are kept together in a lifelong unit as a nuclear family. The patriarchal mother is made to believe that a lasting romantic relationship in marriage is the norm. The truth contradicts this all the while: the family is the most dangerous place for women and children because of sexual, physical, and psychological abuse, and danger of a violent death (Kapella *et al.*). A lifelong loving relationship is the exception while unhappy unions, divorces, and separations are the statistical norm.

Since the beginning of medical schools, the medical establishment has dealt with birth as an illness, with menstruation as a source of shame, and with the pain of labour as punishment for sexual intercourse (Martin). “The magical ability of the mother’s womb to conceive, house and produce human life” (Vaughan, *The Gift* 9) is turned upside down.

Although the mother's physical existence is still needed, motherhood remains precarious, under scrutiny, in danger, belittled, and mocked (see Glattauer 32).

The perverted mother has to be kept under control and under psychological, pedagogical, legal, and medical observance. She has to function within that framework and within the nuclear family. If she fails she is punished socially and legally. In other words, she represents the essential role of the family machine—a kind of family caricature, free of spontaneity and liveliness, an entity of constraints and of duty to society and nation. The world of the creative mother-child culture is belittled, devalued, supposedly old-fashioned, unnecessary, and undesirable. These efforts are vilified and reduced to providing fast food, getting the children ready for school in a militaristic manner, organizing and managing them, and turning them and the mother herself into factory inmates.

It is also the ultimate triumph of patriarchy for women themselves to want to get rid of their procreative abilities in favour of reproductive technicians creating supposedly better outcomes. She should wish to outsource—a practice spread in neo-liberal economics—pregnancy and birth to a surrogate mother. As Vaughan (*The Gift*) points out clearly, capitalist patriarchy has blocked in the consideration of mothering as economics. By “naturalizing the quality of mothering,” the ideology of capitalist patriarchy has created the following transformations: from the mutuality of sharing motherhood in the community to an isolated task and moreover to enmity among mothers; from the unconditional to a conditional act in a violent transformation of the unconditional gift giving between mother and child; from maternal love to a duty; and from solidarity among women—starting with the care by midwives for pregnant women, motherhood is being transformed into a duty for others, into an individual task of competitiveness between other mothers.

MATRIARCHAL MOTHERHOOD NOW

What can we do is the urgent question, or as a listener asked after my presentation in Rome, “What is the most important step we should take today?”¹⁴ First of all, we have to become aware of our own colonized mind. We have to stop believing that mothers ought to be in an isolated state. We have to give up the idea that individual motherhood is the norm. We also have to realize that the nuclear family is the worst place to live in peace and to raise a child.

We also have to consider the next generation and not fall into the trap of raising our children with the wrong pictures of the holy and sane family that are portrayed in the media and popular culture. We have to sustain them in finding their autonomous ways to a satisfying life, raising children in community and having a healthy personal sexual life and romantic relationships that may vary over the course of time.

What should be our model for this new understanding of a freed personal life? In fact, the solution is old and the models are still in place. The answer is matrilinearity, which has been in practice since the beginning of civilization all over the world, and in some (mostly remote) areas of the world still exists, although the attempts to patriarchalize these societies are increasing. For the Americas, Africa, and Asia, these societies are well documented, like the Mosuo in South China (Danshilacuo and He), the Khasi in Northeast India (Mukhim), the Minagkabau in Indonesia (Sanday) and many more.

Starting to live by way of matrilinearity means:

- Understanding motherhood as a collective caring principle carried out by many—thus the opposite of an idealized isolated mother image. Motherhood itself, from the time of pregnancy, is to be understood and respected as the embodiment of connectedness.

- Family and kinship is defined through the maternal line, not by marriage. Like Russian nesting dolls, the offspring of the maternal body form a linear tradition that can never be denied. Family is about belonging to and sharing with a specific group or clan. When the father tried to make himself symbolically and in reality the head of the family,¹⁵ he turned the logic of matrilinearity completely on its head.

- The maternal brother is the social father of his sister's children. He is the support of all the mothers in the family. So the maternal line also includes men, but not husbands or lovers. Sexual relationships are considered a private, very personal matter, and thus not an integral part of the familial community system. Love within the family has a completely different character and importance than the desire for a lover. For the Mosuo, who practice visiting marriages, the idea of building a life on mutual sexual attraction seems completely incomprehensible and irresponsible.

- Housing in a close vicinity is an important factor for the interdependence of the community and family. By forming a net of relationships, mutual support can help children grow up safely in an enduring community.

- Contrary to the Western concept of ego, which can only be

developed by matricide, there is no need of a violent act in order to be an independent person. The idea of the “mature ego” is usually equated with an attitude in which the objective reality is thought of as being radically separated from the subject. Instead of “cutting the cord” as is demanded in European and North American cultures (or else risk the accusation of having failed in “adult life” if you return to your parents’ house), adult children and grandchildren in matrilinear families are still connected to their maternal home by a movement of back and forth, continually leaving and returning.

ENDNOTES

¹Such as the Treaty of Lisbon which shaped an accelerating neo-liberal agenda.

²For example, Americans United for Life, an anti-abortion legal group, proposed more than three hundred regulations in forty-five states within the first five months of 2015.

³In my view it is also a betrayal of the origins of social and women’s sciences, and the goal of critically analyzing society starting from the suffering and injustice in the world, thus devoting scientific work to the improvement of society.

⁴New approaches to patriarchy were developed at the Department of Political Studies at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, primarily by Claudia von Werlhof (“A Sojourn”); Renate Genth; Simone Wörner; Ursula Scheiber (Projektgruppe); and Tazi-Preve (*Der Muttermord; Motherhood in Patriarchy*).

⁵For example, marriage for gay couples.

⁶Claudia von Werlhof (“A Sojourn”) calls it “mortification.”

⁷The German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, 7 May 2015. Thirteen articles written on the occasion of Mother’s Day exclusively by young male authors, five of them openly hostile (Fuchs).

⁸Since the seventeenth century.

⁹A few years ago breastfeeding was considered to be dangerous because mother’s milk was thought to be contaminated with dioxins; today prolonged breastfeeding is encouraged.

¹⁰The “family cell” truly a word borrowed from the terminology of punishment.

¹¹This occurred especially if the mother was young and without the support of her parents.

¹²In the United States teenagers often move to distant colleges, which is supposedly the right step to develop independence.

¹³There is much more to add to the narrative of heterosexuality, which I plan to do in the future.

¹⁴See my presentation, “The Perversion of Motherhood,” given at The Maternal Roots of the Gift Economy Conference, Rome, Italy, 25 April 2015. Lecture available on YouTube.

¹⁵This was accomplished by family law, custody law, and the right to give the child the paternal name.

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