Men in Matriarchy:
Toward a World of Relational Integrity

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What does it mean to be a man in a matriarchal society? Are men unnecessary, unimportant, or excluded from important decisions? Are they bossed around and bullied by the women? Do the women think they're better than men? Is masculinity considered a negative trait?

These questions invariably surface in one form or another when the idea of "matriarchy" is introduced to an uninitiated audience.

In fact, the evidence-based field of Modern Matriarchal Studies reveals that quite the opposite is true. When elitist academic and colonial biases are peeled back, a honed lens on archeological, ethnographic, and indigenous research (by indigenous people) reveals that men and women are historically very capable of harmonious cooperation and mutual respect. Thus, if we can find the courage to turn our gaze and our energy away from the socially engineered habits of war-and-conquest and fake "democracy" (i.e., social-warfare-promoting majority-rule politics), we find that social, economic, political and cultural behaviors aligned with the art of maternal care render entire cultures of gender balance, mutual respect, and social coherence.

This essay is an invitation to women and men: Can we imagine together a world where both "patriarchy" and its fierce adversary, "feminism," are but distant, if haunting, whispers of a deeply fractured, painful, and antiquated epoch of time?

To what degree is it true that when we choose a team, we pick a fight?

In football, war, and politics the act of choosing a side effectively prepares a battlefield between would-be winners and losers. With many painful lessons having been learned, it is time to (re)construct a new playing field: a place of warmth and resonant ambiance around which we will gather in rituals of seeing, sensing, nourishing, giving, receiving, and co-creating a viable future. In the spirit of maternal care, we will afford ourselves the possibility to choose kinship over political identity; curiosity, compassion, and respect over class and sex warfare.

In this essay, I attempt to enhance our listening, sensing, and feeling into what is going on with men and boys in our culture, and around the world. I offer why I believe our social constructions are failing men and boys by exploiting their vulnerabilities as well as their strengths, and shaping them into loyal servants at best; addicts, abusers, and violent criminals at worst.

Proposing corrective action by means of 'matriarchy' may seem at first glance a slippery slope, running the risk of falling into the common trap of framing men and masculinity as the perpetrator-villain class and women and feminism as the benevolent heroine class. I will demonstrate that embracing maternal care as a societal anchor and value system enhances human capacity—that of men and women—for skillful social coherence as well as responsible ecological stewardship. As Brazilian matriarchal researcher André Mafra (whom

we will meet later in this essay) suggests, “We need to get past the binary thinking of male versus female. We need to think about taking care of people.” This is what matriarchy means, in theory and practice.[1]

The Implication of Patriarchy: Men are the Social Problem

"We are not blaming men, we simply named everything bad after them."
~Karen Straughan, men’s right’s activist, on “patriarchy.”[2]

“Boys who hurt, hurt us.”
~Warren Farrell, author of *The Boy Crisis*[3]

Boys and men are the partners, sons, brothers, friends, colleagues, and neighbors of girls and women. They build homes that give us shelter, drive trucks that remove trash from our neighborhoods, operate farms, nurture babies, invent useful technologies, fly airplanes, create beautiful art, fix things that are broken, and contribute to family and society in many more life-affirming roles. Yet, the language and politics of modernity directly lay the blame for patriarchal, capitalist, and colonizing phenomena on ***men***—all men. The implication, whether conscious or not, is that the entire half of our species that happens to be of male gender is responsible for all that’s wrong with society.

This contention—or perception—is problematic, at best. Notwithstanding the fact that society indeed suffers a state of excruciating imbalance, we must ask ourselves if our language and discourse are serving to heal our social problems, or to further confuse, divide, and insulate us from one another.

While the term “patriarchy” has become synonymous with “hierarchy,” “power over,” and historically observable patterns of domination through coercion, manipulation, and violence[4] [5], we would be remiss not to acknowledge that many men do not perceive themselves to be at the top of the food chain. Walking down many city streets in the United States and Europe, where the homeless and addicted occupy corners and entire camps, reveals the devastating reality for countless of our male kin. Further, many of the men living on the streets of American cities are veterans who served their country in good faith, and/or indigenous individuals who have narrowly survived centuries of persistent genocidal maneuvers by white colonizers.

In seeking to understand what’s going on with men who don’t seem to be in positions of power, I’ve gathered my own anecdotal evidence through direct inquiry. I’ve been moved in many instances to speak to men living rough in various parts of the world. Sometimes individuals are very open to sharing in conversation, when a listening ear is offered. If it felt alright to do so, I would ask questions like, “*How did this happen? How are you managing?”* Common replies sounded something like this:

“I’m a veteran.”

“This is how indigenous people live in this city.”

“Five of my friends have died of drug overdose or suicide in the past year.”

“I can’t return to my country, and they don’t want me here. I spend a lot of time in jail.”

“Older men invite me in for food and ask for a favor in return.”

“Five dollars will get me a room in a homeless shelter for a night.”

“I woke up with a rat on my neck.”

“I’ve been sleeping in the forest because single men receive aide after women and children, families, elders, and vulnerable cases. We have to fend for ourselves.”

“The police let me sleep on the floor because I was bullied and beaten up in the camp.”

“Every so often they come with a bus in the middle of the night to sweep up the street. Some of them you’ll never see again.”

“I just want to shoot myself in the head.”

For me, innumerable conversations like these demonstrated that our commonly held understanding of “patriarchy,” that *on its surface* implies sweeping male privilege, has some gaping holes with regard to the lived experience of many men in our socio-political reality. The staggering degree of social crisis for boys and men is evident in published statistics regarding male suicide[6], addiction in men[7], the rate at which young men are being trained and sent to kill and be killed in state-sponsored wars[8], men and homelessness[9], men who are incarcerated[10], men who are tortured in prisons[11], boys and men who are sexually abused[12], and boys and men suffering with preventable mental and physical illnesses[13].

A 2017 documentary, *The Work,*[14] further demonstrates the depth and breadth of a common and desperate social and spiritual crisis for men that traverses variability in age, ethnicity, and social station. The film brings the audience into California’s Folsom State Prison, a maximum security facility, to follow the progress of a transformative group therapy program. The inmates there have been convicted of very serious crimes. Non-inmates—middle-class men living “normal” lives outside of the prison—were invited to participate in the group therapeutic experience with the inmates.

The film documents a process through which the mens’ most tender and deeply guarded vulnerabilities are allowed untethered expression within a firmly held circle of brotherly support. Skilled facilitators guide the experience with equal parts unflinching spiritual backbone and badass physical brawn.

The “regular” guys may have been initially astonished to recognize that in many ways they lived parallel inner realities to the incarcerated hardened criminals: they could see themselves, and their own stories, in the experiences of the “other.” As most of the inmates had been engaged in therapy for several years, they offered gentle counsel and encouragement to the guys from the outside who were experiencing the program for the first time. The newbies to the program received the inmates’ encouragement initially with a bit of skepticism and judgement. Their attitudes shifted dramatically to humility and sincere appreciation for their incarcerated brothers by the end of the intensive four-day process.

Why is this relevant to a discussion about social reform and matriarchy?

What was revealed at the root of each man's story, inmates and "regular guys" alike, was a breakdown in their social support system, especially early in life. Consistent themes included family turmoil, absent or troubled fathers, and a shattered sense of worthiness, belonging, and safety. The *method* of revelation, however, is what delivered the truly critical insight.

The men were given permission to cry, scream, punch, kick, shout, and wail their feelings into the space, and physically into the bodies of their peers, who formed a circle around each man as he encountered the depth of his pain. Even witnessed from the safety of one's living room, the force and velocity of long-asphyxiated emotional energy erupting into the conscious awareness and caring arms of the therapy circle was both chilling and ecstatic. Each time a man stepped into the center of the circle, the physiological burden of long-held emotional agony, fears, and prejudices was cathartically ruptured. The calm after each storm left the men, and even distant observers, with a palpable sense of humility; relieved, softened, and perhaps even hopeful.

Like conventional child-rearing practices in the West insist that babies should "cry it out," that male children should "suck it up," and that squirmy little boys be confined in chairs to receive proper education, the emotional lives of boys and men are choked into the bowels of individual and collective human consciousness in Euro-American society. Thus, what is unspeakable and "unmanly" to express quietly antagonizes our male kin—and society at large—until they implode (health crises, heart attack, cancer), explode (violence), or choose a readily available method of self-medication (addiction).

It logically follows, and is demonstrated in pervasive societal unrest, that disillusioned, disempowered, economically, spiritually, and socially downtrodden men *are a threat to women, children, themselves, and their communities.* For this widely devastating symptom of our impending societal collapse, the social, cultural and spiritual intelligence of matriarchal social systems offers thorough and proven remedy.

Shifting the Paradigm:
Why Matriarchy is the Remedy, even (Especially) for Men

Healing the deeply felt yet oft unacknowledged social crisis for boys and men will require more than an individual or even group therapeutic approach. It will require a profoundly humane approach, and system-wide social transformations. Matriarchy, in this regard, represents a systemic model of care, compassion, and skillful cooperation that weaves all members of a society into a coherent social entity. Matriarchal social patterns are well adapted, and adaptable, for addressing the human needs and vulnerabilities of all members of a social group throughout their lifetime, and to prevent systemic patterns of trauma and abuse.

Another key objective for initiating research and dialogue specific to men in matriarchy is to dismantle and dispel the fear of a women-led nanny state that would systematically belittle, manipulate, and shame boys and men. In fact, as demonstrated above, it is the social system that we currently endure and collude with in our daily lives that does this.

The following examples demonstrate why and how men benefit and enjoy great dignity within matriarchal societies—paradigms that hold their lives and their unique intelligences as precious, honorable, and sacred.

Motherly Values at the Beginning: Benefits of Evolved Nesting for Boys and Men

One of the primary social concerns that drew me to study matriarchal social systems is the problem of relatively isolated mothering, and the massive medical-industrial interventions around birthing and childrearing that I was subject to in the process of birthing and raising my children. In Euro-American cultures, in fact, married and unmarried women alike receive highly industrialized yet dangerously suboptimal—oftentimes harmful—"care" and support throughout their pregnancy and postnatal phases of birthing. One indicator of the dysfunction and distress caused by these birthing and early childhood practices is the astonishing mother and child mortality rates in the United States, a nation that considers itself "highly developed.[15]

In Western nations, childrearing throughout the highly formative early years is performed in relative isolation by mothers and/or parents who are typically stressed out, poorly nourished physically and emotionally, and exhausted. Where parents must struggle to meet their own needs, address economic needs for the family, and to participate in society at large, mothers' physical and mental health is predictably undermined. In the case of relative privilege, children and families are supported by institutional daycare centers or other professional caregivers while parents participate in society and "provide." This is in a best-case scenario. For many thousands of women and children, single motherhood presents much deeper challenges including poverty, homelessness, exploitative and/or low-paying work requiring the mother to take multiple jobs to make ends meet, and ultimately dependence on institutional structures that don't especially care about the quality of life for mothers or children.

The implications of this all-too-common scenario for infants and boys-who-become-men are well-demonstrated in the afore-mentioned documentary, and in the observable rate at which boys grow into men programed to struggle, fight, win, dominate, and bully to survive, and to prove that they are "real" men.

Trauma specialist and scholar Christine Forner proposes that this situation is at the root of misogynist patriarchal systems—systems that hate, or fear, not only women, but what women represent in society; care, nurturance, and human vulnerability. She further contends that societal manifestations of misogyny and patriarchy are trauma responses; self-perpetuating, psychopathic social mandates that condition and *require* us to be unemotional, individualistic, and willing to *fight* to get through life by dissociating from our own pain, as well as harm that is done to others. These character traits are commonly associated with "toxic masculinity." Be that as it may, these very traits accurately describe the mechanics of our entire social, economic, and political system.

A critical insight Forner emphasizes is with regard to the specific needs of infant boys. Science shows us, according to Forner, that the underdeveloped nervous systems of male infants are especially vulnerable to the risks associated with being cared for by chronically

stressed-out mothers—the norm in Western society. It is a fact that male infants are at a *normal* chemical disadvantage with regard to the ability to neuro-regulate as compared to female infants. This implies that they need *even more* nurturing attention from *balanced, well-regulated adults* than female infants do to achieve the same level of neurophysiological maturity, and to competently self-regulate their urges and emotions as they develop into boys and men. As a result, boys and men are rendered more vulnerable to psychopathy, developing anti-social behaviors, and responding to or coping with their circumstances with violence due to a perfect storm of gender-specific neurochemical factors and pervasive maladaptive social conditions.[16]

I must clarify here that the contention is not that male infants and boys need to be favored and over-coddled. This is also a profoundly dysfunctional pattern within patriarchal societies that values the future productive and competitive potential of (culturally defined) male characteristics over female. It also reflects immature behavior on the part of parents and communities alike, who adapt over lifetimes and generations to the overt and subtle demands of culture and economics that commodify life and starve *everyone* of love, nurturance, and even a basic sense of safety and belonging.

Moreover, in a society where it is fashionable to detest and blame one's mother for all that was painful and suboptimal in one's childhood, it must be reiterated that *mothers are not to blame.* They are themselves trapped in cultural constructs that simultaneously impose unrealistic expectations upon a lived reality of social, spiritual, and/or economic austerity. To be sure, women and mothers do not need more psychotherapy, antidepressants, government programs, or child-development experts to fix them where they are broken and deemed ill-equipped for the innately human intricacies of nurturing life.

To address patterns of chronic systemic violence then, common sense implores us to address the conditions within which the tender and critical phases of neurophysiological development lays the foundations for balanced and well-regulated human communities. What is necessary is a social and cultural environment in which mothers' neurophysiology is offered conditions where *she* can feel very safe, loved, wholistically nourished, and able to generously and spontaneously offer her gestating fetus and her small children her undivided, calm, and physiologically well-attuned attention.

Thus, because male infants are naturally, neurochemically more susceptible to the conditions of chronic stress experienced by the vast majority of modern mothers, the matriarchal practice of social mothering offers a logical, natural, and compelling remedy. The aspects of matrilineality (tracing the family through the mother's line) and matrilocality (adult offspring living in the mother's clan house) in matriarchal societies offer the framework for an entire community of carers for infants, children, elders, and others in need of a higher level of tending at various stages of life.

The Native American Iroquois, for example, as documented by Iroquoian researcher Barbara Alice Mann, left early Western researchers astonished with the extraordinary ease, fondness, and gentleness they exhibited in their birthing and child-rearing practices. "Because Iroquoian women were always active, athletic even, rather than shut up in airless rooms and tightly bound by organ-damaging stays, they gave birth with a naturalness that astounded early Europeans." Tended primarily by women in the early years before children reached the age of adolescence, Iroquoian youngsters were nurtured generously, allowed to explore freely, and never disciplined with "the rod." At adolescence, "men came into the picture, as

girls paired off with female mentors to assume their 'civil rights and home authority,' while boys went to male counselors (traditionally maternal uncles) for training in their new roles."[17]

Likewise, Lakota activist Pearl Means shared in an interview that "The first few years of a young male's life is surrounded by the mother, the aunties, the grandmother, so that they can feel and learn of the nurturing and love before they go off to become a boy and a young man."[18]

Similar patterns are extensively detailed in Dr. Heide Goettner-Abendroth's research on matriarchal societies around the world. Notably, the Khasi people of Northeast India, the Hopi and Iroquois (The League of the Haudenosaundee) of North America, The Trobriand Islanders of Melanasia, the Mosuo of Southwest China, and the Minangkabau of Indonesia practice social mothering in their matrilineal and matrilocal societies. Interestingly, Goettner-Abendroth reports that in Minangkabau culture, even the men's interactions with the children are expected to be "mild and friendly, patient, tolerant and dignified, he must be 'like a good mother.'"[19]

In matrilocal living, where a woman, child, and possibly the child's father all live with the woman's family, they are afforded access to 24/7 support from sisters and male family members, in particular the mother's brothers, who also assume a central role in child-rearing. The benefits of social mothering extend to all members of the society. Infants and small children are showered with a consistent sense of security and continuity of care from calm, well-regulated adults who are personally invested in their well-being. This assures the level of humane tending *required* for infants to reach neurophysiological maturity. Children are therefore able to be nurtured according to individual need into emotionally balanced, self-regulating, responsible and civic-minded adults.

In this way, children in matriarchal societies are "alloparented," or raised by an entire community of caring adults, to assure their needs are met consistently and holistically. This style of child-rearing is now backed by scientific research and known commonly as "evolved nesting." According to this modern revival of communal parenting methods, "The provision of basic needs for self-actualization, and how and when they are provided, are the rain, sun, and soil nurturance required for healthy infant development. Nestedness evolved for this very purpose—to provide the buffering for any set of genetic components to ensure optimal conditions for development."[20] For individuals living in patriarchal social systems, the fundamentals of this research-based parenting method is now taught online through a nonprofit initiative, The Evolved Nest: A Kindred World Educational Initiative.[21]

Natural Scientist and Author James DeMeo is yet another researcher that corroborates the benefits of what he calls "matrist" (maternally oriented) cultures for women, children, and male-female relations in his body of work entitled *Saharasia.*[22] His research findings trace the origins of "armored" versus "unarmored" societies, with the conviction that humans are not inherently violent, have not always been violent, and have demonstrated the capacity in history and various parts of the world to live peacefully. "Patrist groups" (paternally oriented) according to him, stand in "contrast in almost every manner with the peaceful matrist cultures, where child treatment and sexual relationships were of an entirely different character, being very gentle and pleasure oriented. Matrist cultures are also democratic, egalitarian, sex-positive, and possess very low levels of adult violence."

Though his theory of how patriarchy came about through a dramatic change in climate has been criticized by some feminist scholars for its oversimplicity,[23] [24] his lucid identification of "armored patrist" versus "unarmored matrist" social systems warrants a close look. Drawing upon Wilhelm Reich's psychoanalytical theory of human armoring, the features he identifies as "matrist" with regard to child-rearing practices align fairly consistently with the matriarchal patterns identified in Goettner-Abendroth's extensive research on matriarchal societies.

Specifically, DeMeo observed that "unarmored matrist" cultures exhibit more indulgence and physical affection with their young, and that infants are not systematically traumatized or subjected to painful initiations. This is a departure from the typical patterns identified in "armored patrist" cultures, which tend toward less indulgence and physical affection, as well as traumatizing infants in various ways including with painful initiations, such as circumcision.

It's remarkable to note that infant circumcision increasingly became standard medical practice in the United States beginning in the 1800s.[25] [26] Whereas most cultures that perform the rite do so as a religious ritual, the procedure was proclaimed necessary for various health reasons at various moments in time in the US, notably to discourage masturbation, and more recently for improved hygiene. DeMeo highlighted in his work that the practice of male genital mutilations (including circumcision) are positively correlated with patrist variables such as a high narcissism index, slavery, castes and/or class stratification, inheritance through the patrilineal line, bride price, painful female initiation rites, and patrilocality (women going to live with their husbands' families upon marriage).[27]

Thus, DeMeo's theory with regard to male circumcision warrants consideration. There is compelling reason to consider the wider social implications of routine infant circumcision, especially to the degree that it normalizes a state of physiological and emotional trauma in entire male populations, as well as its association with increased societal violence. The physical, emotional, sexual, medical, and psychic implications of this practice are increasingly a topic of rigorous attention and debate by activists. As circumcision intimately affects the well-being, dignity, and personal sovereignty of male infants, children, and men, it is reasonable and necessary to consider its implications for society at large in populations that are commonly circumcised for alleged medical, religious, or other reasons. Insofar as circumcision and related procedures are performed on infants and children who are not able to understand or consent to a genital-mutilating procedure, it is a human rights issue.

Women, Men, and Matriarchal Spirituality

"His Breasts Are Large and Give Much Milk"
~Standing Woodlands Metaphor[28]

According to Iroquoian scholar Barbara Alice Mann, to say that a man has enormous breasts is a very high complement in her culture. It is an expression of admiration and respect. It is not associated with the shameful condition of being "like a woman" or "like a girl," as it is in Western cultures. It implies that the man is exceedingly wise and generous, and that he goes to great lengths to assure the wellbeing of his people. Like the Earth herself gives generously from her own breasts (often visualized as mountains in matriarchal spirituality) to nurture and

take care of Her people, so too do the most responsible, and the strongest and wisest, members of human society care generously for others.

To suggest that a man can behave in such a way that emulates the Earth's abundant majesty, as well as the prototypical behavior of a mother suckling her infant child, beautifully illustrates a defining aspect of matriarchal culture and spiritual worldview. It also represents a profound ideological departure from Western standards of patriarchal thinking and capitalist behavior.

In the West, being called a "sissy" or doing something "like a girl" is a demeaning insult meant to suggest a boy or man isn't "man enough." Because behaviors ascribed to women—caring, sharing, nurturing, and being sensitive—are not valued in Western society, individuals who embody these qualities are shamed and ridiculed, and even considered "irrational." In matriarchal culture, however, behaving like a wise and generous mother is honorable and admirable, for men and women alike.

This does not mean that masculine qualities are undervalued or shamed like feminine qualities are in patriarchy and capitalism; quite the contrary is true. An indigenous ideological model that supports this is well demonstrated in the Iroquoian "Twinship" principle. This relates to the necessary harmonious balance continually negotiated by skillfully counterbalancing aspects of the universe, notably, the masculine and feminine aspects. In this model of cosmic understanding, one is not a whole number, but a fraction. Two represents a whole.[29]

As a Chinese medicine practitioner, it has been helpful for me to *begin* to comprehend this idea as perhaps similar to the cosmic counterbalancing principles of Yin and Yang inherent in the very ancient and elegant Chinese model of medical diagnosis and treatment. However, the Twinship principle is rooted in its own unique cultural context of cosmic understanding. The culture from which it was conceived has a mythical creation story that metaphorically delineates universal principles, transmitted through generations of observation, experience, and oral tradition through which its intricacies evolved it into a rich and sophisticated sociocultural entity. How the Twinship Principle came to be is told through the creation story of Sky Woman, her daughter Lynx, and her grandchildren Sapling and Flint, and how they arrived and seeded new life on Turtle Island (North America). The Sky Woman story, and its paramount significance to the worldview of Iroquois society, is shared in great detail in Barbara Alice Mann's book, *The Gantowisas*.[30]

The Iroquoian creation story is one example of infinitely diverse cultural expressions that delineate matriarchies as societies constructed upon a divine worldview—a worldview that reveres Nature's cycles of birth, death, and regeneration as sacred. Inherent in this wisdom is the assertion that the harmonizing elements of creation cannot be disregarded, disrespected, dismembered, or in perpetual conflict with one another without severe consequence.

In her book, *The Goddess and Her Heros*, Dr. Heide Goettner-Abendroth summarizes the matriarchal understanding of partnership between the Goddess and her Heros, which represents a spiritual metaphor for the divine relationship between the cosmos and humanity, as well as the aspects of feminine and masculine:

> *The Goddess and her Heros were not only both cosmic forces, but in the figures of the priestess and her king, the predominant social forces; last but not least,*

> *both forces resided in the psyche of each individual. The feminine principle was the divine in all dimensions in which the Goddess herself was also present; the integrative power of the entire cosmos, and the creative capacity in and of itself (integration). The masculine principle was the heroic: the power of devotion to life, and the capacity for perfect selflessness (integrity)….The ancient androgynous goddess, or the Goddess cradling her heros as a son in her arms, points the way toward this integration in each individual human being.*[31]

Thus, the Twinship principle, the Goddess and her Heros, the cosmos and humanity, and women and men can each be understood as paired spiritual counterparts, charged with cooperating to maintain wholeness. When one aspect is denied or shamed, as feminine qualities are in patriarchy, all of humanity loses, the Earth loses, and humans fail to fully develop into mature, integrated adults. The marriage of feminine and masculine elements in social dynamics characteristic of matriarchy, then, is the skillful cooperation among the integrative power of the cosmos (creative capacity) and the heroic power of devotion to life (integrity).

Why must we understand the spiritual worldview of matriarchal peoples as a preface to delineating the roles of men in matriarchy?

It is the underpinning worldview of matriarchal peoples that lends shape to the political, economic, and cultural elements that foster social stability, human self-actualization, and relational integrity. It makes clear why social living, honored gender roles, and active participation in civic affairs by all members of the community (who are able) are of paramount importance in building peaceful societies.

Lakota Elders and activists Russell and Pearl Means spoke with conviction about the importance of clear gender roles in American Indian cultures, a social expectation generally frowned upon (notably by many feminists) in modern patriarchal societies.

"Men get in rhythm by honoring the female."[32] According to their tradition, the responsibilities attributed to females include giving life, maintaining and sustaining life and the wellness of the community, nurturing children, preparing nutritious foods, and nurturing men. These are considered sacred responsibilities; integral to harmonious life, and highly respected within the community. Because of their lifetime of experience in fulfilling these responsibilities, women in menopause are celebrated and respected as "more critical thinkers." At the same time, their culture recognizes that males are very pragmatic, strategic, and inherent problem-solvers. For these qualities, men also hold a celebrated position in society. Nonetheless, according to Russell, in Lakota culture it is acknowledged that men need women to nurture them at the beginning of life, at the end of life, and also in the middle. "If men don't experience that, they never become fully mature men."[33]

Iroquoian scholar Barbara Alice Mann says of gender roles that "Matriarchal societies are gendered, but not hierarchical (gendered in terms of action, or labor, spheres)." One realm of work is not valued over the other. "One realm is not considered 'for sissies' and one for strong and intelligent people." Further, "Men have every bit as much responsibility for nurturing the children as women do." [34]

Surely these examples run the risk of being dismissed as primitive "essentialist" thinking, as arrogant patriarchal people have a tendency to do. However, while gender roles are a

consistent feature of matriarchal societies, the specific action spheres of women and men vary significantly from culture to culture.[35] What remains true, however, is that matriarchal societies recognize, honor, and respect the roles of both genders, and revere the principle of cosmic balance as natural law.

Nonetheless, within clearly defined gender roles, fluidity is completely acceptable: boys and men can contribute in what is considered the "female" realm if they desire, and women can fulfill "warrior" or other roles traditionally associated with males. Matriarchal peoples are free in this sense.

In matriarchy, therefore, gender is a much more comprehensive and flexible idea than in Western culture, where it is often construed to refer primarily to sex and sexuality.

Practical Stability and Balance for Men, Women, and Children

Practically speaking, within the social living conditions characteristic of matriarchal societies—as in clan houses or modern intentional communities—women and men benefit from the security of an entire communal unit working together to raise children, provide economic sustainability, and to cooperate and deliberate as a political entity.

In a clan-mother's household, generations of men and women share the responsibilities associated with raising the children in a way that fosters an innate sense of security and *belonging* for all members of the household. The idea that a child is "mine" is not recognized in matriarchy. A child is a member of the clan, like everyone else. Importantly, it is the mother's brothers and uncles who generally fulfill the role of providing male role modeling and care for the children. Husbands and partners may or may not live with the mother's clan; he oftentimes continues to live with his own clan to fulfill his duty to support his mother's household and his sisters' children.

This is a noteworthy arrangement for patriarchal peoples to consider in depth as a strategy to achieve a higher degree of social and economic stability for men, women, and children alike.

Another compelling benefit of matrilocal clan house living is that it takes the weight of the world off of the shoulders of intimate partners. When husbands and wives that become mothers and fathers are not left alone with all of the responsibilities associated with running a household, participating in society, and raising the children, their intimate and sensual relations are allowed time and space to flourish. This reflects the sense of sacredness and respect that matriarchal people have for unburdened, pleasure-filled relationships.

Once again, this stands in stark contrast to modern patriarchal social systems where husbands and wives divorce more than they stay together. This all-too-common pattern endemically causes legal, economic, and emotional turmoil for the adults, while creating traumatizing instability for the children.

With regard to economic concerns, women, and specifically clan mothers, bear the responsibility for distributing goods throughout the community in an equitable way. In alignment with the matriarchal spiritual worldview, her sacred responsibility is assuring that everyone is provided for according to need. For men's part, this system alleviates the burden they bear for being sole providers. It further protects them from the patriarchal legal

responsibility to maintain two or more households in the case of divorce and remarriage. In matriarchy, intimate relationships have more room to breathe and thrive. Still, if they don't endure for whatever reason, individual and communal stability, and the children's development, are not at risk. In this way, matriarchal societies effectively construct conditions that prevent situations of household conflict, poverty, and chronic stress.

Furthermore, matriarchal economy is primarily administered through procedures of gifting; gestures of care and generosity that foster friendly relations and ensure security for everyone. While women oversee equitable distribution throughout the clan by means of organized gifting rituals and celebrations, men are responsible for conferring gifts regionally and along trade routes. Characteristically, matriarchal societies frown upon behaviors of hoarding and accumulation. Economy to them is based on subsistence; taking only what is needed and sharing the rest. This represents a social security measure against illogical accumulations of wealth and the manipulative abuses that typically plague capitalist patriarchies.

With regard to political life, men play prestigious roles in matriarchal social systems by representing the clan in regional matters. While the decentralized civic activities of matriarchies are overseen by clan mothers and centered within clan houses and other communal spaces, men typically assume distinguished roles as delegates charged with participating in regional affairs on behalf of the clan or community. A delegate's sacred role is to assure that the will of the people—having been painstakingly negotiated through procedures of consensus—is represented and communicated with the utmost integrity.

In some cases, matriarchal societies have women's and men's councils that act as political counterparts, such as the Clan Mother's Council and the Men's Grand Council of the Iroquois. Each council typically deliberates issues among themselves, and they assign representatives to confer among councils. While the Clan Mothers generally initiate and have the final word on important deliberations, the councils regard one another with great respect. Negotiations are navigated in alignment with the closely held spiritual convictions that permeate every aspect of individual and communal life.

With this level of skillfully integrated cooperation, matriarchal societies exemplify a model of decentralized sociopolitical responsibility, particularly in clan house, local, and regional affairs. For self-determined peoples, the typical patriarchal model of "governance" from above is considered the "plaything of aristocracy."[36] As self-determined peoples skilled in the arts of nurturance and cooperation, matriarchal men and women enjoy an admirable degree of personal freedom.

Interview with André Mafra: "For me, it's the perfect life for men."[37]

André Mafra is a matriarchal researcher from Brazil who has studied matriarchal societies both academically and by traveling to interview and spend time with peoples who still live in matrilineal and matrilocal systems. He and his partner and fellow researcher, Mara Carneiro, have spent time with the Khasi people of Northeast India, the Mosuo in Southwest China, The Zapotec of the Juchitán region of Mexico, and the Khinu people of Estonia (who are popularly known as a matriarchy but whose social structures do not fully meet the research-based definition of matriarchy).

Mafra and I spoke candidly in an interview in which he shared with me what was most compelling for him in observing *men's* roles in matriarchal societies. "Most importantly," he said, "men are part of something that is bigger than themselves. Before being a man, he is a son of a woman, and a member of a clan."

Division of labor in the social function of matriarchies is "very important," according to Mafra. It is what keeps the society in balance.

When visiting the Khasi and Mosuo peoples, for example, he learned that interacting with foreigners is an important responsibility traditionally assumed by men. "He is the guide that opens the door to the society for people from the outside." Men are charged with hosting visitors, determining the level of access they are allowed, and in this way protecting the society. Mafra observed that it was men that showed them the village and introduced them to the family. Similarly, in regional affairs, it is the men who represent the clan and speak for the interests of the clan outside the village.

With regard to gender roles, the Zapotec people also demonstrated a clear distinction in gender roles, while maintaining flexibility within them. "Mothers prepare food to sell at market. However, if a man wants to participate according to division of labor with women, he can live and participate in society as a woman would. It's no problem. In the same way, if a woman wants to go fishing with the men, she can do this with no judgements being cast upon her." This demonstrated that while there is clarity of roles, flexibility is possible and commonly allowed.

Among the Khinu culture of Estonia, Mafra noted that women are charged with preserving the culture. "The men go off fishing for long periods of time. Women are very strong and take care of everything at home."

And among the Khasi people, men have their own private meetings. This affords them opportunities to be with other men. "It is fluid for them to spend time with other men, and also for them to spend time with other women."

Asked if he observed signs of abuse or poverty, he explained "They don't understand how we can allow children on the streets, or elders on the street. We don't know how to manage (intergenerational relations and the needs of vulnerable groups)."

With regard to domestic abuse, he explained that "the (matrilineal and matrilocal) social pattern avoids this kind of problem. In the case of matrilocal living, if the family sees that the man is not good for the woman, or that he is not ready for this type of relationship, they can send him back to his mother." Mafra also observed that "the man doesn't suffer with a woman's family like a woman suffers when she is sent to live with the man's family." This is in contrast to patriarchal societies where typically a woman leaves her own family to live with her in-laws, or to live in a private residence with her husband. In these circumstances, patterns of abuse can begin and continue for years undetected. He emphasized that the matrilocal family unit is a key feature of matriarchy that effectively prevents patterns of abuse or economic distress from emerging and causing stress on family life. "This is a very important point."

Demonstration of affection between the adults and children, in particular the fathers and children, was also remarkable. "This was very, very special. The demonstration of affection

between them was very touching to me. The children were not locked in their rooms on devices."

A Mosou man admitted to Mafra that Mosuo men can be seen as "lazy men." "But they are very ethical men. He takes care of his mother and his clan, so there is no violence. He's not so ambitious, but he's very ethical. I think we need more men like this, like the Mosuo man."

A distinguishing feature of matriarchies in theory and practice is that the economy is in the hands of women. Mafra observed that this didn't trouble or oppress the men.

Mafra believes that men in matriarchal societies "live in a perfect world:"

> "These men are so comfortable. They live with their mother's family…in our societies men are looking for their mothers. Who is going to take care of him? It's the best place for men to live. This arrangement can bring out the best version of the men, whereas our society brings out the worst in men, and in women. When he's in his own clan, he has a sense of belonging. He's not left to his own devices to fight, win, and achieve for guaranteed subsistence. Sexual life also has a reason to thrive. This position of these men is very comfortable, because he doesn't need to be the chief, he doesn't need to be the leader. (Nonetheless) he has many important things to do for that society, giving him an innate sense of purpose, dignity, and prestige within the society. He doesn't have to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders. You can see in the men's eyes; you can see that they are comfortable, they are okay."

"For me," Mafra concluded, "it's the perfect life for a man. It allows him to be human."

Summary/Conclusions

The world urgently needs a profound social renaissance. Divisive politics, economic tensions, rigid social norms, media abuses, and even logical and genuine "feminism" distorted into political soundbites and offensive slurs, have driven painful wedges between women and men. It begins very early on when we are just boys and girls. Restructuring our sociopolitical paradigm and the infrastructure that holds it in place is an ambitious task. It can begin at the family and community levels by way of the sovereign will of the people.

It couldn't be more urgent to recognize that women and men are spiritual and energetic counterparts in an animated world; allies and *co-creators* of the social, spiritual, and moral constructions in which we live. If we are to viably challenge the inhumane agenda rapidly unfolding for an AI universe populated with biotech babies, who will be fed "impossible burgers," and "educated" in a virtual reality game, the time to wholeheartedly engage in a renaissance of social and ecological healing is now.

We can't go back to another time or deny issues and technologies driving our current reality. Nor can we or should we try to appropriate a culture that doesn't belong to us. It wouldn't work anyway; we don't have the sensibilities or the psychic infrastructure for it. At least we have the sensibility to recognize that human behavior has gone off the rails—that something is terribly wrong. This is a sign of viability.

For Europeans, our own matriarchal past has been erased from our memories, our lives now rife with plastic conveniences, control "from above," and cultural disintegration. And yet we have archeological evidence, scholarly work, and indigenous models to help us remember something that made sense. This is precious, and these gifts shouldn't be taken for granted.

As for the process of social reconstruction, I believe it is on us to pull our sludge boots on, get in the trenches, and figure it out. Through the folly and pain inherent in slogging through the treachery and confusion of our current reality to discover what relational integrity is and could mean for our future, we will *earn* the skills and sensibilities for sophisticated communal living and responsible ecological stewardship.

I believe the capacity to care for one another in a meaningful way will require ambient space to grow. Though fast food and point-and-click food delivery have rendered our hearths obsolete and virtually non-existent, a movement toward hearth revival in every household and community will create inviting space for human-to-human coherence to be rekindled. I don't believe we will get where we want and need to go via shouting rants on social media, or even writing papers on historical fact and visionary possibility. Around the warmth of a communal hearth, with full bellies and warm hearts, and the 360-degree view that sitting in a circle affords us,[38] perhaps the relational momentum for a real social breakthrough can emerge.

Afterword: Men's Council on Matriarchy Project

During the writing of this thesis, I conceived an initiative called the Men's Council on Matriarchy. The intention is to invite men of various ages, ethnicities, professions, and cultural backgrounds to listen to a lecture or read an essay about matriarchy, and to engage in a conversation with me about what they learned. Inspired by the council system through which Native American societies negotiate decision-making, notably through women's and men's councils that act as counterparts, I feel it is essential to engage our brothers, fathers, sons, and male friends in a sincere dialogue about re-visioning a fair, vital, and sustainable future. Through several interviews already I've accumulated a wealth of relevant insights on how men experience patriarchal society and feminism, and how they relate to the research-based idea of matriarchy. Through this process, I hope to seed the beginnings of some relational good will, and to enhance my ability to care like a matriarch about the experiences and needs of "the other." The findings so far are relevant, although beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, the men's insights and concerns did inform my approach to the topic of "Men in Matriarchy." The initiative will continue with the intention of building bridges and generating momentum toward cooperative social reform.

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