

19. Luce Irigaray, "When Our Lips Speak Together," translated by Carolyn Burke, *Signs* 6 (Autumn 1980): 69-79.

20. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of Calif. Press, 1978). See also Marianne Hirsh, "A Mother's Discourse: Incorporation and Repetition in *La Princesse de Clèves*," *Yale French Studies*, No. 62 (1981), pp. 68-73.

21. For example, J. J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right*, Bollingen Series 84 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

22. de Beauvoir, "Sur quelques problèmes actuels," p. 10: "Je suis très méfiante par rapport à toutes ces histoires de matriarcat. J'ai quand même pas mal étudié la question pour le "Deuxième Sexe": il y a eu des sociétés où la femme avait certainement beaucoup plus de puissance, était beaucoup plus valorisée, et avait une place beaucoup plus grande, mais de matriarcat proprement dit, je ne crois pas qu'il y en ait jamais eu. Ceci dit, personnellement, je m'en moque. Ce qui est intéressant, c'est ce que nous allons devenir et non ce que nous avons été hier, et il n'y a pas à chercher les gages de notre avenir dans ce que nous avons pu être mythiquement."

23. Irigaray, "When the Goods Get Together," in *New French Feminisms*, edited by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, translated by Claudia Reeder (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), pp. 107-10.

24. de Beauvoir, "Sur quelques problèmes actuels," p. 12: "Ou bien la femme est mère célibataire et elle porte tout sur son dos, ou elle vit avec un homme, mariée ou pas, et alors, même si le père aide, ce mot même indique bien qu'il n'y a pas pris en charge réelle de sa part. Tant que tout repose ainsi sur les femmes, il est extrêmement difficile, sinon dangereux d'être une mère, une femme qui travaille, qui fait quelque chose et que lutte dans le féminisme."

25. "Le corps," p. 49.

26. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Eastern SWIP, Union College, Schenectady, New York, 14 November 1981; at The College of Our Lady of the Elms, Chicopee, Mass.; and at a Conference on Women and Power, SUNY, New Paltz, 24 April 1982. Thanks to those audiences and to Danielle Gualda, Lucie Lopez, Janet Farrell Smith, Mary Vetterling-Braggin, and Caroline Whitbeck for discussion. Parts of this argument are influenced by correspondence conducted during 1979 and 1980 by a group of members of Eastern SWIP discussing the ethics of roles, and by a paper by Caroline Whitbeck, "The New Erotics," delivered at Eastern SWIP, SUNY, Stony Brook, 29 April 1979. The argument is also influenced by Kathryn Pyne (Parsons) Adelson, "Nietzsche and Moral Change," in *Nietzsche* edited by Robert C. Solomon (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1973), pp. 169-93. But none of these people is responsible for the application of concepts of nurturance, the erotic, or moral change to Irigaray's work that I have attempted here.

The Answer Is Matriarchy

BARBARA LOVE and
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Just as we have been conditioned to feel negatively toward ourselves as women, as lesbians, and as mothers, we have been very effectively conditioned to feel negatively about matriarchy. When we hear the word "matriarchy," we are conditioned to a number of responses: that matriarchy refers to the past and that matriarchies have never existed; that matriarchy is a hopeless fantasy of female domination, of mothers dominating children, of women being cruel to men; or that matriarchists are reactionaries escaping from capitalist society into a romantic dream of goddesses and tribal life.

Conditioning us negatively to matriarchy is, of course, in the interests of patriarchs. We are made to feel that patriarchy is natural; we are less likely to question it, and less likely to direct our energies to ending it.

The struggle toward matriarchy has nevertheless been waged in the past century.¹ There is now a vital and conscious movement toward matriarchy.² We intend this article to be a theoretical contribution to that movement, and we are going to limit our discussion here to defining the word. What do we mean by *matriarchy*?

Toward a Definition of Matriarchy

By "*matriarchy*" we mean a nonalienated society: a society in which women, those who produce the next generation, define motherhood, determine the conditions of motherhood, and determine the environment in which the next generation is reared.³

¹This essay first appeared in *Our Right to Love*, edited by Ginny Vida (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978). Reprinted by permission of the authors.

We now live in a patriarchy. We mean by *patriarchy* a society ruled by fathers. Rule by father implies the expropriation of the child and the exploitation of women as mothers. Mothers bear children for nine months within their bodies, and labor—even at the risk of their lives—to give birth to their children. In patriarchy the child at birth becomes the property of the father. This expropriation of the child is carried out in historic patriarchies through a set of institutions.

Patriarchy, then, refers not only to male domination, but to a specific set of institutions that ensures the alienation of the child from the mother. While some aspects of these institutions change, the basic relationship between the father, the mother, and her child is fundamental to patriarchy.

The expropriation of the child from the mother was more easily recognized in the past. In the United States in the 19th century, for example, the law made the father the sole guardian of the mother's child. The father might apprentice the child, determine how and whether it was educated, and make all decisions relative to its well-being and health—in opposition to the preferences of the mother and the child. The father could will that at his death a total stranger to the mother become the guardian of her child.

Today, the alienation of the child from the mother persists. But now the alienation occurs less through the power of individual fathers and more through impersonal institutions. The mother is now permitted to be the legal guardian of her child, but that function no longer carries the decision-making power it used to have. The patriarchal state now decides when, where, and how her child will be employed. Institutions now dictate how her child will be socialized. Each child is conditioned daily through the public schools, the economic structures, the media, and religion so that her/his behavior and attitudes are regulated to serve the interests of the dominant patriarchs.

The mother must, for example, yield up her child at age five to “educational” institutions designed by fathers. She must by law send her child to be socialized in a competitive system that will stratify her child according to the interests of those in power. She must prepare her child to function in a warrior economy.⁴ She must resort to the idea of the father as the sole creator if she wishes her child to belong to any established religion; she must permit her child to be conditioned by corporate interests through television if she wishes her child to share a frame of reference with other children; to have a child “legitimately,” she must marry the father. She is then bound to give sexual and domestic service. She must also give the child the father's name as token of his proprietary interest. Typically, if her daughter decides to repeat this pattern, the father will be acknowledged as her owner and will give her away to the next possessor.

Therefore, through the institutions of patriarchy, the child is alienated from the mother. The child becomes the property of the father and institutions designed by him. These institutions have usurped the maternal function, and

then defined for women what a mother's role is to be. Patriarchal institutions make the mother the servant of patriarchy. Like any servant, the mother is directed in the tasks that she is to perform vis-à-vis the property of the owner. She is made the custodian of his child and told that her job is to help her child function in institutions designed by men. If she should permit any activity threatening to patriarchs, she can at any time be declared an unfit mother—for example, if she should allow her child to have a lesbian relationship or if she should allow her child to withdraw from public school.

Understanding our society as a patriarchy explains the special oppression of lesbian mothers. The lesbian commitment to women rather than to men is an act of independence improper for the mother's role as servant to patriarchy. While a single mother's child is considered “illegitimate,” the single heterosexual mother does not threaten the continuation of patriarchy to the degree that a lesbian mother does. For the lesbian relationship implies commitment to denial of male authority over the mother's own and her child's life. Therefore, the lesbian mother constitutes a threat to the continuation of patriarchal society.

It's a myth that lesbians aren't mothers. It's a myth that lesbians don't want to be mothers. What is frequently true is that lesbians don't want to pay the price to be mothers in patriarchy: to be reduced to the custodian of one's own child; to be a wife; to be isolated, financially dependent, and stigmatized. What is true is that lesbians don't want to be mothers as men have institutionalized motherhood, usurping the mother's power and rights. Sometimes, lesbians simply don't like being around children, but under different conditions, who knows?

It is in the interests of patriarchy to direct lesbians—a critical revolutionary force—away from bearing and rearing children. It is patriarchal manipulation to say that lesbians should not influence children—even their own children—and thus leave them vulnerable to be indoctrinated by fathers and their institutions into patriarchal ways.

Are we implying that every lesbian should be a mother to be a revolutionary? No. What we are saying is that our liberation as women and as lesbians will never be accomplished until we are liberated to be mothers. Until we have the power to define the conditions under which we exercise our biological potential, until we define for ourselves the role of motherhood to include the power to determine the conditions of motherhood and to determine the environment in which our children are reared, we have no real choice. And until we have choices, we are not free.

To say that we must end the expropriation of children by fathers implies the first real revolution known to history. For male “revolutions” have actually meant only a change in the class of men in power, leaving intact the fundamental exploitation of patriarchy—the alienation of the mother from her child. For regardless of which class has been in power in patriarchy—the

aristocracy, the middle or working class—the alienation between the mother and the child has persisted. The child has been expropriated by feudal lords, capitalist institutions, and the socialist state.

By “matriarchy” we mean a society in which the mode of childrearing is nurturant—that is, strengthens the unique will of each individual to form open, trusting, creative bonds with others.

The mode of childrearing in patriarchy is to control and dominate the child’s will. In capitalism the child’s will is directed toward serving the interests of corporations; in socialism it is directed toward serving the state. In patriarchy to nurture oneself is actually a revolutionary act.

Therefore, although women are told that they are the nurturers of the world, women in patriarchy do not have the power to nurture—if by nurturance we mean supporting the unique will of the child to grow into its full potential as a self-regulating individual. Capitalism and socialism, institutions of patriarchy which control the mother and child, both conflict with nurturance.

Under capitalism, mothers are faced with a dilemma. They can force their children to conform to a competitive economy, to a competitive educational system, to competitive games, to bourgeois codes of behavior, dress, and lovemaking. But if they do all this, they crush their children’s desire to live openly, creatively, trustfully, and safely with others. On the other hand, mothers can choose to nurture their children’s wills to form open, trusting bonds with others. But if they do this, they are permitting their children to risk exploitation, poverty, stigma, and isolation. Most of us are some amalgam of these two, always in conflict, struggling to find ourselves, to be able to maintain deep and steady contact with others of our choice.

Under socialism, a mother who attempted to nurture the unique will of her child would most likely be denounced or arrested. However, she has the compensation that the socialist patriarchs (at least under Mao) socialized her child to relate to others (and others to her child) in a supportive, noncompetitive way. But this support does not stem from strengthening of the unique being of each individual. Children are not socialized to think for themselves, and are therefore doomed to be prey to political manipulation. Since children have been dominated and indoctrinated instead of nurtured into positive relations with others, they will be dependent on the benevolence of dictators.

The matriarchal mode of childrearing in which each individual is nurtured rather than dominated from birth provides the rational basis for a genuinely healthy society, a society of self-regulating, positive individuals.³ Matriarchy, as we define it, then implies the elimination of every institution of patriarchy—its economic, political, sexual, social, and educational institutions. Each of these institutions defines how the next generation is to be reared.

Each of these institutions structures the mother’s role, reducing

motherhood to simple custodianship of what one has biologically produced. Just as the power of mothers to determine the socialization of their children is increased, in matriarchy the identification of who is a mother would also expand. With the breakdown of the nuclear patriarchal family, collective living arrangements have been emerging in which both women and men without children share the children of other members of the collective. The lesbian community has been developing an expanded sense of motherhood; for example, lovers frequently share children, and movement conferences show a consciousness of the need for sharing responsibility for all children. One need not be a biological mother in order to mother.

By “matriarchy” we mean a society in which all relationships are modeled on the nurturant relationship between a mother and her child.

As a consequence of our alienation from our mothers that is institutionalized in our patriarchal society, each of us has been denied to some degree the fundamental source of security. We have been denied that interaction between a nurturant person and ourselves throughout our early years. We have been denied that interaction that could have strengthened our capacity to be secure, to be open, to trust, to be ourselves, to realize our sensory, emotional, intellectual, energetic potential.

We become estranged from our real feelings. We learn to suppress, to deny; we project, we fragment. We squander our life’s energies in anxieties and angers. We are alienated from ourselves. Being alienated and fragmented, we lead defensive or programmed lives. We lose the capacity to live deeply in contact with ourselves, others, and nature. We lose the capacity to govern ourselves, to be self-regulated. Our alienation from our mothers has left us to some degree crippled for life.

We must go to psychiatrists to learn what it is to nurture ourselves. We spend years learning how to form a nurturant relationship with another person. For, being to some degree alienated from ourselves, and confronting other alienated people, we form alienated relationships.

We have been taught to base our personal relationships on the warrior mode of competition—beating and conquering our friends and associates in games, in business, and in politics. Our relationships throughout society—our work relationships, movement relationships, love relationships—can really be understood only in terms of how in those situations we deal with our alienation. Genuine contact that persists, genuine openness and trust that is steady, is very rare, and is constantly threatened by patriarchal habits of competition.

In matriarchy this basic alienation (as well as the alienation of labor) is eliminated. Institutions do not usurp the mother’s right to determine that the environment, both social and natural, be nurturant to her child. The conditions of motherhood, having been defined by women, support the mother and her interest in the child’s growth into a self-regulating, trusting individual. The

conditions of socialization—the economic, educational, and governmental institutions—reinforce and support the bonds of nurturance.

In matriarchy no institutions conflict with the nurturance of each individual to form open, trusting bonds with others; in addition, each individual is nurtured deeply in a secure relationship with her/his mother. The consequences of deep nurturance and nurturant social structures are that individuals would be capable of relating to others in open, trusting, and supportive ways. In addition, the energies generated and released under these conditions promise creativity and productivity unimaginable within patriarchy. This is what we mean when we say that in matriarchy all relationships would be modeled on the nurturant relation of the mother and the child: each of us would learn how to be nurturant to ourselves and to others.

Matriarchy, then, provides the only reasonable basis for a genuinely harmonious society, a society of self-regulating, positive individuals.

By indicating that women, as the bearers of the next generation, should have the power to nurture, we are obviously expanding popular concepts of the scope of nurturance. Nurturing includes not only feeding and clothing and cleaning a child, but strengthening the child's unique will. Inasmuch as the child is not reared in a vacuum, the bearers of the next generation in order to be nurturant must have the power to determine that the economic, political, educational, and social environment in which the next generation is socialized is nurturant. We are therefore saying that in order to be nurturant, women must determine the social structures of society.

By "matriarchy" we mean a society in which the maternal principle, the nurturance of life, informs all social structures; this implies the elimination of all patriarchal institutions: economic, political, sexual, and educational.

Each institution of patriarchy has an exploitative function. The elimination of every exploitative structure would be necessary in order to create social structures that support the nurturance of the unique will of each individual to trusting, open relationships with others.

Matriarchy, in fact, provides, through the liberation of the maternal function from subservience to warrior institutions, the basis for the elimination of the patriarchal state. Only through the nurturance of each individual to self-regulation can one expect to eliminate the need for a dominating government or state.

We mean by "matriarchy" a society in which production serves the interests of reproduction; that is, the production of goods is regulated to support the nurturance of life.

In both capitalist and socialist states, the production of things that produce wealth and military power dominates and determines the quality of life in the society. The way in which the next generation is conceived, born, and reared—that is, the mode of reproduction—is dictated by the interests of production.

We mean by matriarchy a society in which the production of things is not to accumulate wealth, to defend or wage war, but to strengthen each individual's capacity to live openly in trust with others. It is not rational to expect a person to live in trust with another so long as one can survive only through the destruction of the other or the exploitation of the other. Therefore, matriarchy implies a worldwide socialist economic base, but a liberation of reproduction from subordination to the socialist state.

Matriarchy, as we have defined it, is the solution to a number of problems that concern many of us deeply. Men have questioned how to eliminate exploitation, war, racism, classism, sexism, and they have devised innumerable answers to these problems. These answers have proven inadequate. They have been inadequate because men have refused to eliminate patriarchy. The question is how to create a nurturant society. The answer is matriarchy.

If the creation of matriarchy seems an impossible dream, it is because we are among the first to overcome the myth of the inevitability of patriarchy and to realize the possibility of matriarchy. If the vision of uniting nurturance with economic transactions and political organizations appears a hopeless fantasy, it is because it requires our gaining power that men tell us we have never had. If we are torn in facing up to the need for matriarchy, it is because we are paid by patriarchs to support them. If linking motherhood to economic and political power seems to be vain imagining, it is because patriarchs have conditioned us to link motherhood with powerlessness and to think of mothering as trivial. If matriarchy seems irrelevant to lesbian liberation, it is because every institution in this society so controls us that we are directed away from examining the total system.

The task of ending patriarchy and creating matriarchy is not so awesome as it might first appear. We will be summoning up energies that are suppressed now; we will be releasing our creative energies, our own buried needs and desires. And we will be aligned with the struggle for life that strongly asserts itself in each new generation as it battles with patriarchal institutions that seek to dominate and subjugate it. We will be aligned with the struggle for life in each oppressed person, and the oppressed are many.

Innumerable men, women, and children have not yet become political, but are dissatisfied with the current system. Many of these people have not become political because they have realized that the patriarchal political movements that promised a classless society, for example, provided no hope of producing people who were capable of a classless society. Matriarchy will.

We believe that the matriarchal movement will find support among people of both sexes and of all classes, races, and ages. The cry for a more nurturant society has manifested itself in the black movement, the labor movement, the Native American movement, the Third World movement, the environmental movement, the consumer movement, the radical education movement, the radical medicine and psychology movements, and the children's liberation movement, as well as the mother's movement, the gay movement, the lesbian

movement, and the women's movement.

Every movement for liberation is, we think, an unconscious movement toward matriarchy. Therefore, we have potential allies who are now struggling, unawakened to the fact that patriarchy is the problem—that under patriarchy we can never create a nurturant society. These various movements have often felt some common denominator with one another. That common denominator is the need for matriarchy.

Whereas women's liberation and lesbian liberation have been largely founded around the concepts of freeing ourselves from domination, matriarchal theory provides the rational basis for women to restructure and guide the institutions in society. As the bearers of life, it is our right and responsibility to determine that life is nurtured.

Notes

1. We need herstories of the matriarchal movement. To date none has been published. Some indication of the movement in the 19th century can be found in Elizabeth Shanklin's paper, "Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Our Revolutionary Mother," presented at CUNY Women's Conference, 1976. Stanton proposed matriarchy as the ultimate goal of women's liberation. Drawing upon Bachofen and Morgan, who did not advocate matriarchy but who lifted the curtain on the past, Stanton drew her own conclusions. Engels has been a major contributor to the movement. Such a herstory would surely include the contributions of Helen Diner and Robert Briffault. The reception given Briffault's *The Mothers*, a three-volume work explicitly delineating the need for matriarchy, and the way in which his work is ignored today or discredited by "scholars," would be stimulating material for herstorical analysis.

2. Indications include: the publication of "scholarly" articles by anthropologists and historians stridently "proving" that there never was a matriarchy because they don't admit or have the evidence that there was; the publication of *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*; communities across the country which identify themselves as matriarchal; conferences across the country devoted to matriarchy or containing workshops on matriarchy; courses in the politics of motherhood; the day-care movement demanding that mothers control their own centers; the interest in matriarchal ritual and matriarchies of the past; but publication of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*.

3. Our set of assumptions includes the following:

a. That whether or not there has ever been a matriarchy like the one we need will not determine whether there will or will not be one in the future.

b. That human nature is malleable in the following ways: if people are surrounded by nurturant institutions, i.e., institutions that are nurturant to people and that reward people for being nurturant, then people will tend to become nurturant; if people are surrounded by institutions that are exploitative, i.e., if people are exploited and rewarded for exploiting others, then people will tend to become exploitative.

c. That a woman who chooses to bear a child is interested in its growing to its full potential into a self-regulating, whole person, and that any distortion of that nurturant bond between a mother and her child will have been caused by the environment in which they have lived and/or continue to live.

d. As long as the design of a society is based on exploitative structures, the genuine liberation of lesbians—or any other group—cannot be achieved.

4. We use the term "warrior economy" to refer to the economies of patriarchy. We use the term as Veblen used it in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Marx has many descriptions of the warrior character of presocialist economies. The warrior aspect of socialist society, we assert, resides not in its economic base, but persists in its mode of reproduction, i.e., the taking of the child from the person who produced it. A simple definition of a warrior might be a person who survives by taking what others have or have produced.

5. The ability to nurture oneself and to nurture others is developed through the experience of having been nurtured. The discipline of psychology clearly indicates that our early childhood years are the most influential in establishing character.