



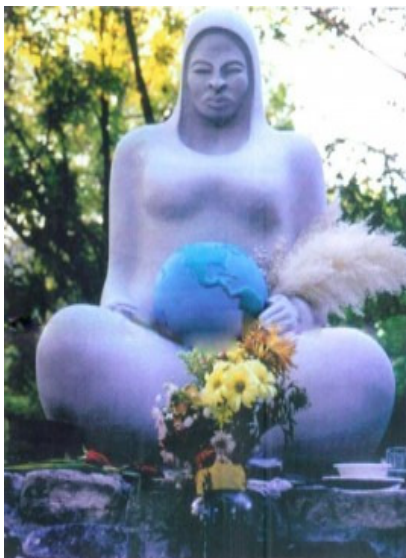
A (M)OTHERWORLD is possible

Conference October 23-25, 2009

York University, Toronto, Canada

Report by Dr. Annine van der Meer, PhD,
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www.AcademiePanSophia.nl



The program was announced on a poster as follows:

Panels and sessions with invited keynote speakers from all over the world, special guests, and presenters, including:

Prof. Barbara Mann (USA, Seneca), Prof. Wahu Kaara (Kenya, Africa), Prof. Pilwha Chang (Korea), Genevieve Vaughan (USA, Italy), Dr. Heide Goettner-Abendroth (Germany), Dr. Rauna Kuokkanen (Samiland), Mag. Marina Menses (Mexico, Juchitán), Prof. Valentina Pakyntein (India, Khasi), Sobonfu Somé (Burkina Faso, Africa), Agnes Williams (USA, Seneca).

Topics in the Gift Paradigm section include:

- Mothering and Gift Economy
- Gift or Exchange?
- Indigenous Peoples and the Gift Economy
- Generalizing Gift Giving
- Gift Economy and the Environment
- The Gift in Africa, Asia and the Arctic
- Gift Economy, Feminism, Anarchy
- Political significance of the Gift

Topics in the Matriarchal Studies section include:

- Matriarchies as Mother-centered Societies
- Mothers in Indigenous Matriarchal Societies: Iroquois in the USA, Berber-Kabyle in North Africa, Palau in Micronesia, Khasi in India, Juchitecas in Mexico
- Aspects of Matriarchal Spirituality: Andean Spirituality, Holy Birth in Ancient Greece, Mother and Daughter Star Constellations, World Icons of Mothers and Grandmothers
- What can we learn from Matriarchal Societies?
- Matriarchal Visions of a Future of Peace

The International Feminists for a Gift Economy is a network which promotes the gift economy as a maternal alternative to Patriarchal Capitalism. www.gift-economy.com

Akademie Hagia promotes the study of matriarchal patterns in indigenous societies past and present and proposes Matriarchal - not a mirror image of Patriarchal - Culture as the way to peace. www.AkademieHagia.com



It is my first international women's conference; but in retrospect I fervently hope that it won't be my last! An (M)Otherworld has opened up before me. The conference about mothering and mothers makes it clear that a growing awareness is manifesting itself of women who at last appear to begin standing by each other on a worldwide and global level and who are waking up and getting up.

I went there in a neutral state of mind: without any expectations and with a minimum of preparation, having been occupied till the very last moment by business at home.

Quite exhilarated with surprise and delight about a panoramic view of renewal on a global level and loaded with half a meter of books bought, of brochures, visiting-cards etc., I got on the plane back home on October 26. At that moment the summing up discussions were still going on. Here follows a report of my experiences.

The Venue: The conference is the 13th annual conference of the 'Association for the Research on Mothering' (ARM) and coincides with the 50th anniversary of York University (Toronto), the initiator and hostess. The conference is held on the vast campus in the McLaughlin College, a kind of labyrinth of dark gray low bunker-like buildings with intricate internal communication roads. After a stiff walk and persistent searching these appear to give entry to a roofed-over shopping center, a Walhalla of small restaurants, like my favorite salad bar, and Indian and Italian restaurants to which the participants of the congress hurry for lunch and dinner. In these "lobbies" old contacts are renewed, new contacts made and the lively debates hardly leave time to eat ...

There is a coming and going of taxis between hotel Travel Lodge North and the university. The hotel is situated at walking distance of the university yet cannot be reached by foot, due to the many highways that traverse Toronto. It is a huge city, with between 7 to 8 million people. At night and even on Sundays the noise of the traffic can still be heard in the hotel.

When I am fly back, I am deeply grateful for having been able to attend this cross-fertilizing and inspiring international meeting: my only regret is that I only saw on the campus a few small trees of all those Canadian trees covered in the most beautiful yellow and red autumnal colors.

Who are the initiators of this conference?

There are three of them:

1 The **Association for the research on Mothering (ARM)**.

ARM stands for the first international feminist research association which is specifically focused on and devoted to the research area of 'mothering-motherhood, with more than 500 participating members/organizations worldwide.

2 The **Gift-Economy**

According to the information this is a 'network that presents the 'gift-economy' as a maternal alternative for patriarchal capitalism.

The first gift that I receive the next morning at breakfast in the hotel is a ring with the Greek word 'dorein' (to give) engraved in it. During the conference, this is brought into practice by many from indigenous cultures, who, with a radiant smile and a loving embrace, give little gifts to each other. Behind each gift a (new) world is hidden. Which one?

I have read the information and summarized the documentation as follows: *In this time of world economic crisis it is more important than ever to find fundamental alternatives to an economic system that has proved itself to be dysfunctional and causes damage to the planet's health. In many woman directed and matriarchal societies a different system functions, which is based on need. The starting-point is -with a view to the general well being - to provide everybody with what they need, as best as possible. So the motto is giving to satisfy the need. These basic principles are known and practiced by women, especially mothers, who providing for their children's need, shape structures of caring that can be generalized.*

Mothering and caring are values based on evolutionary - biological principles and they can serving as a cultural model for organizing society as a whole. It has been done this way in the past and still exists in contemporary societies outside Europe. For in Europe they have become extinct, except for a single gypsies clan! These societies are egalitarian and don't have a system of domination. Values of caring and mothering are opposite to values as greed, dominance and exploitation, the latter causing the economic crisis. A system of caring for each others needs could be a positive alternative to the present market economy, which is based on exchange: giving in order to receive an equivalent in return (do ut des).

Patriarchal societies abuse the voluntary giving of many people. In this system women and especially mothers are turned into slaves. At this moment mothers of all countries are uniting and creating movements based on consciousness and solidarity.

3 The **Matriarchal Studies**

In the conference files and in the website texts which I have freely translated below, I read the following. It is based on the works of Dr. Heide Göttner-Abendroth, founder of the Matriarchal Studies.

From the beginning of this millennium on, interest in the new sociocultural science of Matriarchal Studies grows. Matriarchal societies are not simply the opposite of the patriarchal

ones, as that women dominate the society, but the matriarchal society is egalitarian. Natural differences between sexes and generations are respected and honored. All have a dignity of their own and - by each doing what they are good at - people complement and live in harmony with each other and their environment. There are multi-colored and multiple varieties that are kept in balance very carefully. This is achieved as a result of an understanding of what is the common interest and it is done in mutual respect. The principles of caring, nourishing and living together as a group, in harmony and balance, within the natural environment permeate the matriarchal society at all levels: economic, social, political and cultural/spiritual.

This type of society has been defined in various ways: matrifocal, matristic, matricentric or gylanic. Although academics have different opinions about the definition, they all agree about the underlying concept of a balanced society based on motherly values. The use of the word 'matriarchal' as denotation for 'the woman/mother being central' is important, since it rehabilitates the knowledge and wisdom of old and contemporary woman-directed societies. Linguistically, matriarchal means: the mother (mater) is in the beginning (archer). That's why the use of the matriarchal is preferable to other definitions. A matriarchal society is based on people's needs; it is non-violent and simply human.

Socially: matriarchal society is based on the clan and on the symbolic order of the Mother. Mother Nature looks after everyone, no matter the differences; and so do the clan mother and each individual member of the clan. This also holds for men. When a man is looking for status among his friends or even when he becomes a representative of the clan to the outside world, he has to behave 'like a good mother'. In matriarchal societies you don't have to be a biological mother to be acknowledged as a woman, because motherhood is put into practice together, in sisters' groups. An individual sister doesn't necessarily have to have children. Together they form the mothers of the children of the clan. This is possible, because in matriarchal cultures people live in extended families, where they receive their name and culture from the mother. The name of the clan, the social status and any possible political functions are passed on via the mother. Such matri-clans consist of at least **three generations of women**, who are together with their brothers, cousins and uncles from their mother's side. In the classical case they live together in a great clan house or great family house. This is called matrilocality. The husbands and lovers come at night; this is called the visitor's marriage. In the daytime they go back to their own matri-clan. In these kinds of societies each person can be a mother, sister or brother to each other. These are therefore non-hierarchical and horizontal societies, based on matrilineal kinship, with extended social networks consisting of family relations.

Economic. On the political level there is consensus of opinion; this requires unanimous decisions at every level. To reach a decision members of the clan gather in the clan house.. Each person has a vote and nobody is excluded. In case the votes are equally divided, the clan mother takes the final decision in the general interest and this is respected.

Clan representatives meet each other in the village house, where they discuss the decision of the clan house. They are walking up and down from clan house to village house, until the village has taken a decision. From the village house representatives travel to the regional council; they travel up and down again between the regional center and the village, until all

villages have taken a unanimous decision. These are egalitarian communities, based on consensus.

When one clan has a better harvest one year, it will invite other clans, that haven't done so well, to festivities with food, dancing and singing, while presenting their surplus goods to their neighbors. They don't get anything in return for this, except the honor. At another yearly festivity a different fortunate clan will do the same and will invite everyone in the neighborhood or the whole village. This general principle is called the 'gift-economy'. It is the economic manifestation of motherly values at an economic level. These are societies that satisfy their own needs and operate according to the principle of economic reciprocity, based on the circulation of goods.

Political. *On the political level there is consensus of opinion; this requires unanimous decisions at every level. When decisions have to be taken, this starts in the clan house. Each person has a vote and nobody is excluded. In case the votes are equally divided, the clan mother takes the final decision in the general interest and this is respected.*

Clan representatives meet each other in the village house, where they communicate the decision of the clan house to each other. They are walking up and down from clan house to village house, until the village has taken a decision. From the village house it goes to the regional council; they travel up and down again between the regional center and the village, until all villages have taken a unanimous decision. These are egalitarian communities, based on consensus.

Cultural and spiritual. *The divinity is present at an immanent level; the entire world is experienced as sacred and as regarded as being feminine-divine. The earth is experienced as a mother who keeps everyone alive. In the annual circle people celebrate the gifts of Nature. Everything is celebrated, all is sacred. There is no division between the mundane and the spiritual; each small daily task has a ritual meaning. Every human being, as a child of Mother Nature, is gifted by birth with sacredness and divinity. From a spiritual point of view they are sacred communities, honoring the divine feminine or the Goddess.*

Finally. During this conference matriarchal societies from the present and the past will be investigated in order to find new and better social and cultural models as an alternative and solution to the many present-day economic and social global problems. Several researchers: from indigenous cultures examine to what extent their own matriarchal society is functioning as a peaceful society in balance, under four central themes: economy (according to the principle of reciprocity), socially (according to matrilineality), politically (egalitarian societies based on consensus) and culturally (sacred societies and cultures of the divine feminine or the Goddess).

The Embedded conference. The last two organizations: 'The Gift-Economy', having Genevieve Vaghan as a driving-force and 'Matriarchal Studies', having Dr.Heide Göttner-Abendroth as founder and driving-power, organize a conference from Friday evening till Monday evening, which is embedded in the central conference 'Mothering and environment'. So it will be ARM who starts the conference on Thursday. First therefore the question:

Who/what is ARM?



ARM or '**The Association for the Research on Mothering**' is a forum for discussion about and distribution of the research results of 'mothering and 'motherhood', aimed at setting up an international community of individuals and institutions that will further investigate and develop mothering and motherhood.

Who is the initiator of ARM? The driving force behind this association, which was founded in 1998, with the significant militant abbreviation **ARM**, is Prof. Dr. Andrea O'Reilly.

According to the website ARM is the first internationally acknowledged and leading research center for mothering and motherhood. In 1991 Dr Andrea O'Reilly develops Canada's first university course on motherhood. Initially the 'caring' aspect was emphasized, but now that the time is ripe, the 'mothering' aspect is emphasized.

Motherhood Movement. Besides ARM, Andrea O'Reilly founded Outlaw, a feminist group specializing in supporting mothers with branches all over the world. The aim is to 'empower' mothers in their motherhood, make them aware of their responsibility and especially make them strong. Her initiatives attract a lot of attention in the media. She regularly expresses her opinion on radio and TV about subjects like 'More to Live', 'Planet Parent', 'Sex TV' etc.

Accademic recognition. One morning, I unexpectedly have the opportunity to talk to Andrea personally. She confides to me –that all this media attention is making mother groups too strong to be permanently ignored and neglected by the academia.

She has been admitted to the academic circles. O'Reilly became Associate Professor at Women Studies at York University and is (co) author of 12 books about motherhood.

The first encyclopedia about mothering will be published under her general editorship by Sage Press in the spring of 2010.

I am dwelling a bit longer on the work of Andrea as the innovator of ARM and many other initiatives, to inform you of this brand-new research area, with many developments, which is being uncovered at the moment, without European women - either working at European universities or in any other way - being informed about this. Have you ever attended an academic conference where a complete panel - in several sessions - devotes its attention to pregnancy and breastfeeding? I haven't, but compared to former times this is a big step forward! That I am being allowed to experience this yet!

The journal and the publishing-firm: Andrea is the founder and editor-in-chief of the academic magazine with the name of: 'The Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering', a magazine that is flourishing and growing. Besides a publishing-firm of their own was founded in 2005, 'Demeter Press'. The feminist publishing-firm has since published four books, in cooperation with 'Inanna Press' and is planning to publish another 10.

International conferences. Besides international conferences are being organized in several fields, that each cover a specific aspect of the research area. For this almost never ending series of appeals for contributions or 'calls for papers' enter the world via the website arm@yorku.ca. Motherhood Studies - as a new research area, paying attention to the achievements of women and mothers through the ages - appears to satisfy long-felt needs.

The Motherhood Foundation (MFI). The Motherhood Foundation (**MFI**) was founded in 2006 and aims at presenting exactly those executive arts and many academic research results, that honor, nourish and support women of all races and social groups; this with a special emphasis on mothers.

The **MFI** and the **ARM** have drawn up a plan to set up an international **Museum of Motherhood (MoM)**. It wants to collect documentation about the historic journey of mothers through the ages and their role in the evolution of man. A strategic plan has been developed to:

1. Acquire a location with art-objects and documentation, mapping out 'herstory' instead of 'history'.
2. Organize a research section with - among other things - educational programs for students interested in women studies for advanced studies.
3. Develop places for supporting facilities and international agencies for mothers who need support in exercising tasks in performing arts, education, and science and work generally.

The threefold conference from Thursday 22 till Monday 26 October

Thursday October 22

We from 'Matriarchal Studies' and 'Gift-Economy' enlist and receive a conference file with a black bag with leaflets, magazines and books.



In the introduction of the conference file ARM writes the following:

This conference is especially concerned with the environment; this because there are many toxins and pollutions that threaten the health of mothers and children. It comes within the framework of Ecofeminism, which occupies itself with the consciousness of women in relation to Nature. Ecofeminism, which has arisen since 1970, points out that Mother Earth and Mother Nature are in great danger.

What is an issue in a large context is also an issue in a small one. In Canada and the US, people within and outside the academic world call attention to the fact that mothers bear the responsibility for their children's health, while they have few devices to guarantee a healthy living environment at a time that environment and food are getting polluted more and more.

The central lecture in the central university building with an impressive dome is given by the in the US well-known biologist/ecologist Dr. Sandra Steingraber, who was cured of cancer herself, then had her daughter Faith and wrote the well-known book 'Having Faith'.

Attention is paid to the power of the growing neoliberalism that ranks the rights of individual concerns, focused on profit and growth, above the interests of the human community and the environment with plants and animals. Mothers find that they end up in a stalemate: they are being held responsible for their children's health, while having little power to protect it.

A happy marriage. During the conference there are 7 keynote-speakers and 150 speakers divided over several smaller panels and sessions. All participants have handed in a short summary and a CV in advance for the congress volume. Participants from about 40 countries, from all parts of the world, contribute to the conference. Participants are exclusively women. Outside in the patio, a single, rather lost husband is waiting for one of the speakers, a Canadian psychologist connected to the Laurentian University, named Brenda LeFrancois. She is lecturing about 'Mothering in Rural New Brunswick: Young children and Environmental Toxins'. In the meantime he is mothering for quite a while over their two young children, under the dark red coloring ivy.

When I venture into the sessions on the environment, the number of mothers who are alarmed, because they find that their children are ill surprises me. Film shots follow of steaming factories, which pollute the water upstream, so that people downstream get sick. My bag with leaflets grows bigger and bigger. I find I have arrived in an industrious beehive of university graduates and activists. For both these groups of awakened and conscious women, some of whom call themselves feminists, have entered into a happy marriage, in America and the US. They need to stand by each other internationally, to know and to support each other.

One of these moments when this is brought home to me is happening during a dancing workshop by Danica Borkovich-Anderson. She is a Canadian trauma-expert and works among other things at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. In her work to help people recover from heavy war trauma, she uses a well-tryed and ancient woman's recipe: the kolo, a Serbian-Croatian circle dance of women. She tells us that during the last war, at the most dramatic moments of extreme danger and insecurity, the women used to dance together in the inner part of the besieged flats. When we dance the dance, we begin to understand why. Looking at each other with smiling faces and joining our hands on each other's backs, we support each other and form an unbreakable circle. To be strong together, dancing and laughing: the love for life will always win.



Thursday afternoon, from lunch to dinner - first outside, but when it starts raining, in a quiet amphitheatre annex lecture-room - I'm having a long, intimate and warm conversation with Heide Göttner-Abendroth. She tells me much about the German Academy Hagia and all kinds of foreign developments. She invites me to participate and be a student in her teaching program, starting March 2010. After coming home I quickly receive a kind postcard and invitation. What a powerful, amazing woman!

**Friday October 23, opening of the other conferences:
The Gift Economy and Matriarchal Studies.**

16.45-19.20

At the end of Friday afternoon, while we're enjoying some drinks and snacks, there follow 4 book presentations, in which the speakers briefly present their published books. Dr. Heide Göttner-Abendroth is the first speaker: she presents the English book 'Societies of peace. Matriarchies past, present and future'. It comprises a collection of articles from the first congress about Matriarchal Studies, in Luxemburg in 2003 and the second in Austen (2005); Inanna Press has now also published the collection in English, under her as a general editor. On the photo Heide is on the foreground, with behind her, from right to left, the publisher of Inanna Press from Canada and Vicki Noble and Eleanor Gadon, both from the US.



Next there is the opening of the 'embedded' conference. After all emphasis on environment, attention is now paid to the 'Gift-economy' and 'Matriarchal Studies'. The highlights for me follow below; the complete program you will find at the end of this document.

Friday evening October 23

19.20-22.00

Agnes Fay Williams of the Seneca tribe from the US opens with an impressive invocation or thanksgiving, directed at 13 energy groups. She starts with the earth and builds it up to the sky. All things and creatures are participating and there isn't anyone or anything being excluded. Among other things the ancestors, the elements, animals and plants are invoked and are asked to be involved with our gathering and are thanked. Later the speaker Barbara Mann explains that with a

thanksgiving the energy outside the circle is permitted to stream into the circle. That's how you build up a connection. www.indigenouswomen.org

After a short welcome from Andrea O'Reilly, the following speakers successively give keynote speeches: Genevieve Vaughan (US/Italy), Wahu Kaara (Kenia), Barbara Mann, (US, Seneca tribe) and Heide Göttner-Abendroth (Germany).

Genevieve Vaughan opens with a speech entitled: 'A Maternal Humanity and the Gift Paradigm'. She is active in the international network of feminists for Gift-economy and also in antiglobalisation and peace movements. In 1997 she wrote the book 'For-Giving, a Feminist Criticism of Exchange'. In 2006 her book 'Homo Donans' appeared. She edited two collections of articles by international women about the Gift-economy. 'A radically Different Worldview is possible', Inanna Press, 2007. She also wrote two children's books in 2002 and 2007. A film was made about her lifework 'Giving for Giving'. All her work is freely obtainable on her website www.gift-economy.com. In her speech she states that you give in order to satisfy needs. You give from abundance; the Western market principle is anti-giving, ego-oriented and thinks in terms of scarcity. It is parasitical. She draws our attention to all sorts of free functions: breathing, blood circulation, the blowing of the wind, the shining of the sun and moon, lots of modern internet services, etc.

Wahu Baara gives a speech: 'Feminist thinking in Context of African experience in the struggle for space, place and contribution to Human Prosperity'.

She is a social activist from Kenya, who is deeply convinced of the positive impact of women on world politics. In 2005 she was one of the 1000 women nominated for the Nobel Prize for Peace. She underscored her battle cry 'A woman's place is in the struggle' with many anecdotes that bear witness to her great faith in the power of female solidarity. She concluded with: 'The mother is Africa's only hope'.

Dr. Heide Göttner-Abendroth gives a clear speech with a clear PP-presentation, entitled: 'Matriarchies as Mother-centered Societies'.

She studied Philosophy and the Theory of Science and Methodology. She taught these subjects at the University of Munich between 1973 and 1983 for ten years.

She then quits her job and consciously decides to use her knowledge of methodology for the development of a new discipline: the modern Matriarchal Studies, to which she is going to devote the rest of her life.

Although this discipline was developed 140 years ago by pioneers like Johann Jakob Bachofen and Lewis Henry Morgan, the research has not been based on the necessary scientific foundations up to now. The researchers have remained burdened with negative patriarchal presuppositions with regard to non-patriarchal or matriarchal societies.

In order to fill up this gap, Heide has developed a new definition and methodology; for this she bases herself on research of her own on indigenous matriarchal societies. She writes several books and many articles about modern matriarchies and the transition to Patriarchy.

In 1986 she founds the International Academy Hagia, Academy for Matriarchal Studies and Matriarchal Spirituality, of which she has been the director since then. In 1986 and 1992 she fulfills professorates at the university of Montreal in Canada and Innsbruck in Austria. In 2003 she organizes the first world congress about Matriarchal Studies in Luxemburg and in 2005 she organizes the second one in Texas. In 2005 she is elected to one of the 1000 Peace Women Across the Globe. From this group she is nominated for the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2005. In her speech she gives a summary of what was mentioned about Matriarchal Studies above, under 3.

Dr. Barbara Mann gives a speech: 'Listen to your mother'.

And then answers lots of questions, - standing -, as can be seen on the photo on the left. Next to her you can see Heide sitting. Barbara is a scientist specialized in 'indigenous Women's Studies' She especially focuses on the alliance of Iroquois tribes and she is also a member of the Senecan tribe (Ohio). She wrote 8 books and many articles. She starts with a legendary pronouncement from her mother: 'If life is not fair, then make it fair'.



After having explained the concept of thanksgiving, she states: 'Exclusivism destroys community'. Harsh is her judgment about the 'white male desert God', who has precisely removed individuality by controlling everything and pretending to know everything. According to her, the idea of monotheism has originated from the traumatized child and is misogynous or hostile to women. She informs us that in - spite of four centuries of mission and state interference - women are the ones who keep defining the Iroquois culture; all over the continent the old values of the Native Americans are being restored.

Her radicalism causes me to question some of the things she has said. I therefore assemble my courage and - with my heart in my boots - I dare to tell her, in this large circle of radical feminists, about my recent visit to Prof. Keel in Switzerland. He is with his many brilliant students an expert in the inclusive monotheism of ancient Israel, which is based on partnership. The exclusive monotheism of the theology of the second temple is preceded by an inclusive and woman-friendly stage.

This remark does not go down well, neither with Barbara, nor with Heide, who is leading the forum. An Indian old lady, dressed in a pink sari, gets up and voices the feelings and knowledge of them all. She tells us that when the English colonized India, they sent the native women home, and wanted only to communicate with the men. Monotheism, capitalism and colonialism go hand in hand. They had to fight against it very hard and in that battle they lost many of their loved ones. They find it too terrible for words. I am sitting down again very quietly. I respect their point of view. They haven't recovered yet from their suffering. The anger is still there. And fortunately I haven't had to go through such collective pain ...

Saturday October 24

Culminating points in the morning program - in session 1: 'Giving and mothers' - are to me the next presentations, each lasting 20 minutes.

Nané Jordan (Canada) about the sacredness of the placenta.

She is a midwife with a working experience of 25 years. She sees the house where a woman gives birth as a sanctuary. And she very briefly points to the one-sidedness of the paternalistic and routine-procedures in hospitals. Her way of working is to show the alternative and to demonstrate how it can be done differently. She pictures the beauty of the sacred childbirth at home. She shows beautiful photos of childbirth. I'm seeing the beauty of this event as I have never seen it before. In this alternative way the placenta is honored, also because it reflects cosmic patterns that are typical of the relation mother- child. This spirals and - spiraling - it looks wonderful. I have to admit to myself that, as a mother of two sons, the eldest of whom had a very difficult delivery, I had never seen a placenta yet. I am marveling at an entirely new aspect of motherhood. Nané regards the placenta as a gift. It has two sides: the mother's side and the baby's side like the fruit on the tree (of life). Mammals eat their placenta and this also happens with people nowadays, as it is supposed to be very strengthening for the mother in childbed. We also see photos of this. In China a medicine is made of it in powder form. It is commercialized. The message is: be aware of the beauty of physical motherhood, which is centered in a cosmological framework via the placenta.

Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum (Italy/US) with: 'the future has an Ancient Mother: the African Legacy'.

She is a cultural historian and has published several books. She is Professor in a.o. Women's Spirituality at the Institute for Integral Studies in San Francisco, California.



This speech made me fall silent for quite some time. From the moment this archetypal mother is shuffling to the speaking-platform and is then holding on to it, during her speech, we are under her spell. Her very first words are so concentrated and intense, that we listen to her in breathless silence, as though she evokes a voice from a far and hidden past. What a mature wisdom, coupled to erudition and intelligence. What a kindness and sense of humor and lightness in a personal talk afterwards.

She begins with telling us about her Sicilian grandmother. After having been dismissed from a professorate at a (traditional) university, because of activism and solidarity with students, she gets time to think and to travel. She goes in search of her youth and her past on Sicily and finds not only her own roots there, but also the collective roots of humanity. She claims that African people - in

several migrations - not only brought with them their earliest values of caring and sharing, but also their black primeval mother: the Black Madonna. Sardinia is the living museum for Europe and European history. The Greeks and Romans haven't been here and the Church only arrived later. The old way of living in harmony with the universe was maintained here for a long time. Before the ice melted, Africa and Europe were connected to Sicily and Sardinia and to each other. After the African one, the Shardana, the Phoenician, the Christian and the Muslim culture arrived on the island. Just like elsewhere, 95 % of the 'idols' discovered on Sardinia from the Paleolithicum till the late Neolithicum, is female too. Lucia considers 'idols' (abstract figurines) to be a patriarchal term. To her these are 'Women Divinity' figures.

According to her, history shows an upwards-spiraling line. You have to take back two steps in the upward moving spiraling line and then you will come through dark areas. The divine mother has left as her oldest symbols the triangular vulva and the color red, symbol for menstruation and the blood of childbirth. All over the world these 'Signs on the wall' occur... Not till a later time does the Primeval Mother get a human shape and is she anthropomorphized. Then she manifests herself as the Black Madonna, who later has been whitewashed by the Church and time. Catholicism is full of symbols from mother-directed societies. But we must never forget that the woman-directed original culture emanated from the vulva as its source and therefore is centered on 'caring and sharing'. Then it gets light, after the dark.

Lydia Ruyle (US).

She is artist, author and graduated in Visual Art at the University of North-Colorado. This spirited, old/young lady of far in her seventies makes banners as icons of Mothers and Grandmothers. When her husband retired, she informed him she was going to retire too and that she was going to devote herself more to her art. Since 1995 she has been making fine silk banners with goddess-icons. Her collection now contains more than 250 icons of the divine feminine from all cultures. One of her latest creations is the Venus of Hohle Fels, who is displayed next to many others. From all over the world Lydia is asked to exhibit her banners and thus she also has an exhibition of Artemis in Efese. In 2002 a book of her work 'Goddess Icons Spirit Banners of the Divine Feminine' appeared. She thinks that mothers hand down/transmit and teach codes of behavior, attitudes to life and stories. Lydia gives a modern and perfect PP-presentation; her last picture is a family-photo, on which she and her husband form the shining center among 37 descendants.

The afternoon program of Saturday October 24 contains a number of highlights, especially session 3 about: 'Separate matriarchal cultures'.

Dr. Malika Grasshof (Germany/Algeria) about the Kabyle-Berbers in Northern Africa.

She grew up in a Berber village in the Kabyle Mountains in Algeria. For thirty years she has been researching the themes of mothering and motherhood from a feminine and mystical perspective. Berber women live in harmony with Nature, which they experience as feminine. Mothers have transmitted their knowledge to their daughters for many generations. They practice magic rituals,

in which partnership between women and men forms the central theme. The women see themselves as a symbol of the creative force of Nature itself, which they experience as feminine. They daily sing together in a chorus and express their spirituality and solidarity in earthwork, weaving and wall paintings. Symbols in the hand-painted or woven geometrical patterns contain a secret language of women, who are directly connected to womanhood, fertility and cosmic awareness.



Malika states in her charming mix-language - her English with a French pronunciation is interlarded with many French words, while she is making expressive gestures and pulling faces, speaking volumes, and full of humor - that the Kabyle men know that they are dependent on women to be born. A man needs a wife to continue his life via his children. The men support and defend the feminine. Women and men live in two separate areas of life. Children feel part of the female clan. The mother and her daughter and sons live together. There is no word for brother, - someone is his mother's son. If a girl were attacked, it would be her mother's son, and not the father, nor the wife, who would defend her honor as the family honor. Both have a strong bond, because they are together from birth. The grandmother chooses a husband for her daughter: her son -in-law. After childbirth the mother withdraws in the matri-house for 40 days: this period is

considered to be dangerous for mother and child. The bearing position is a sacred one, returning in women's art. The mothers are the source of culture and they also teach the children the Kabyle-language. The economy is based on the needs within the social network and on mutual responsibility. She thinks that in the West the lower part of the body, from the navel downwards, doesn't participate any more. That Western women are uprooted and as a result their men and children too. This is seen differently by ancient and present-day matriarchal cultures. The clear text presentation is enriched with splendid color-photos of the interior of Kabyle-houses. She has published two books under the pseudonym Makilam, at Peter Lang Publishing in New York.

Gudrun Frank-Wisman (Du) is filmmaker and designer.

At the beginning of the nineties she starts studying matriarchal societies and making films about it. She has lived for years with the Cunama in Northeast-Africa, for months with the Garon in Northeast-India and for months on the island Palau in the Pacific Ocean. She is co-founder of MatriaVal, an association for the support of matriarchal societies and the mediation of matriarchal values www.matriaval.de.

She shows a film about the most sacred ritual of Palau: the initiation of the mother after the birth of her first child. While the small, refined and blond Gudrun is explaining the special film in her modest, quiet and soft manner, I operate the film projector. She explicitly asks me not to film the intimate scenes in which the young woman appears naked on the screen, during the washings and massages. It took her a long time to win the trust of the people on Palau, after which she was

allowed to make a film of this holy ritual. Just like she was doing at the first and second congress, Gudrun is making a film of this one too, which is going to be on the Internet. She knows that the people in Palau don't like the young woman to appear naked on the screen. The ritual was described in 1926 by a German professor in Tübingen, called Augustin Krämer. He wrote: 'The honoring of the young woman at the birth of her first child is amazing; it is the same respect as is shown to the gods'. This makes the ritual into a kind of Goddess-ritual.

Since ancient times and up to the present, a woman's children have belonged to her mother's clan. For the first months of her pregnancy the young woman returns to her mother's house. After childbirth a special room is built. There she is treated every day with several washings and oil massages. It is a sacred act and lasts for about 10 days.

We see the dark hut and the powerful woman, in her fullness, which lovingly makes an effort to nurture her baby and strengthen it. On the day of her coming outside, a sweating-hut is built. Fresh herbs, that are gathered the day before, are cooked in a big kettle. The young woman spends some time in the sweating-hut with her female relatives. She is rubbed with ointment with a special (Tumerian) oil and makes her appearance to the people with a brilliantly shining golden skin, beautifully dressed and with a belt around her middle. A carpet is laid out for her. On the most Southern island, named Angaur, a high staircase to the sky is erected. From this she is going to descend to earth, like a true goddess. She sits on a throne, like a true goddess. The child's father and his family come and bring money to the young woman. This is a sign of respect for the young woman who has given birth to her first child. These relatives dance around her, wave with the money and bless her, while making small triangles, vulva's, with their fingers. Unfortunately the American lifestyle has turned this ancient ritual into a kind of kitsch show, which Gudrun thinks is very regrettable.

Letecia Layson (US/Phil.) mentions the priestess Babaylan in the Philippines.

It is a tradition that has endured during the 333 years of colonization by Spain and the 50 years of the presence of the US. She cooperates with the center of Babaylan Studies in organizing an international conference in 2010. According to this priestess, who has been initiated into 3 traditions, the Babaylan has always served the people and has been the mouthpiece of the people. She dances a healing dance and communicates with spirits. She also advises you to behave like a child. In the traditional culture the boys look after the children. In this culture there is the custom that when people misbehave, their victims will start behaving like children. With the power and the beauty, the Babaylan also reawakens childhood in people again. There is no word for war in the language.

Dr. Marguerite Rigoglioso (US). After the tea break, in session 4: 'Aspects of Matriarchal Spirituality'.

She is in brilliant form. She studied philosophy, religion, women's studies and psychology. She works at the Dominican University of California, the Institute for Integral Studies and the Institute

for Transpersonal Psychology at that place. She has received several awards. She publishes a.o. the magazine 'Where to publish on Women's Studies, Feminist Religious Studies and Feminist/Woman's Topics'. Her search begins with the cult of Demeter and Persephone in Sicily. She is the author of many articles and has recently published 'The Cult of Divine Birth in Ancient Greece' (2009).

In her presentation 'Divine Motherhood: the case of Ancient Greece' she claims that the theme of the miraculous birth of a woman who bears the children of the gods, often occurs in the Mediterranean area. The female protagonists are women, virgins (parthenos). She defends the thesis - with a royal calm and dignity and without being interfered with from the public - that this shouldn't be understood in the purely mythical sense of the word.

This rite has also a physical side. It is said that in Ancient Greece - just like in Egypt - some special priestesses' councils are thought still to possess the ancient female power of conceiving and bearing a physical child, after having been in a deep shamanistic trance and without mediation of a man. That child is then regarded as the child of the heroes, half-gods or gods.

Divine motherhood is thought to have been of extreme importance in Greek society and to have brought forth some historic leaders.

Under the patriarchal Olympic religion the old religion gets corrupted. The speaker now distinguishes 3 stages. In the first stage virgin priestesses bear daughters; these are the mother's doubles. This is thought to go back to Paleolithic times. Then the priestesses' councils bear sons. To the degree that a culture becomes patriarchal, the women bear male gods, who are later - in a degenerated form - replaced by earthly men. The priestesses also apply themselves to the channeling of gods and oracles.

Nadine MacNeil (Jamaica). This beautiful, black and dynamic yoga teacher gives a practical instruction about bodywork and matriarchal spirituality. We have to wiggle our feet properly for a few moments, rub our hands, lay these on the eyes and then breathe deeply 3 times. After this the world looks really different.

Mary Louise Stone (US). She has lived for 12 years in indigenous communities around Lake Titicaca in Peru and Bolivia, after 'cross cultural' teaching and radio production work in New Mexico. She helped to develop workshops and universities, where teachers from the Andes came and gave their world-vision in rotation.

This world-vision has for a long time already predicted a reactivation of the female side of the balance. This vision is very old.

When in the Andes you ask who the Pacha Mama is, the answer is: 'she is all that is'. For thousands of years there have been sacred sites of the Andes Mother; the greatest yearly festivals are devoted to her. There isn't any daily activity that begins without a ritual for the Pacha

Mama. Everything is connected to her. She stands for abundance. Besides everything happens in partnership in the Andes; everything is looking for its complement. Women sow, weave and make articles. Men look after the public selling. They very strongly experience being part of a whole and they never come with empty hands. Theirs is a culture of giving and returning. There is mutual exchange and reciprocity. In the Andes maternal thinking creates an inclusive society.

Dr. Mariam Irene Tazi-Preve (Austria). She works as a senior-researcher at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the university of Vienna. (Austrian Institute for family Research and the Department for Political Science)

Her specialty is fertility, motherhood-fatherhood and family politics in a national and European perspective.

She gives a pithy speech: 'What can we learn from matriarchal societies?'

She begins with stating that feminism has a problem with the theme 'motherhood'. Feminists like Simone de Beauvoir wanted to free themselves from motherhood. It is difficult to introduce a theme like motherhood into feminism, because it gets easily labeled as a conservative subject.

Then she comes to the point. Behind the family issue there is the question of the nuclear family. Against the background of a declining birthrate, (in Germany 1.4 child per woman), a so called family-friendly climate has developed in the German-speaking countries, that highly values the ideal nuclear family of father-mother-child (children) and wants to protect it.

Mariam observes that the practice of the nuclear family is different from what the ideal wants to make us believe. In spite of the emphasis on the values of the nuclear family and these being stimulated, the nuclear family is eroding more and more, as a result of high divorce rates, overburdened single and married women, declining birthrates and incest problems. Even in the difficult patriarchal situation, in which women are expected to be a mother, to run a household and to have a (preferably fulltime) job as well, women continue to want to have children.

The fathers' wish for children is declining however. The father role is fragile. The pater familias has failed and is - in the mean time - caught up with by a new myth: that of a lifelong partnership. This while research indicates that 90% of the partners don't remain lifelong partners to each other.

In spite of this enormous efforts are made by the state (and the Church), to keep the nuclear family going and to propagate the emotional and ideal value of it, while it isn't functioning properly. Behind this there is a selfish motive. The state gives more attention to children's day-care centers and the like, in order to get more women to the labor market. Behind the national and European concern for the family there is a snake in the grass: the issue at stake is not primarily the well being of women and children, but the growth of production and the improvement of the labor market position. Here it is a question of two contradictory systems with opposing interests: the labor market and the importance of the bond between mother and child. She arrives at the conclusion that society has been arranged and organized according to a wrong concept: the patriarchal nuclear family.

In the maternal or matriarchal situation, the maternal family is the social core and motherhood is highly esteemed. Matriarchal values and structures could mean a great step forward and lessen the suffering of people, in structures that diminish the liberty and well being of people (of children too), instead of increasing it.

On Saturday evening the next keynote speakers are speaking about the theme 'The Gift Economy':

Prof. Dr. Pilwha Chang (Korea) gives a speech about the Mosuo in China.

Pilwha works as a professor at the department of women's studies, as a director of the Asian center for women's studies, as director of the Korean Women's Institute and she is dean of the graduate department of the Ewha Women's University in Korea. She was president of the Korean Association for Women's Studies.

The Mosuo live round the extremely beautiful and highly situated Lugu Lake in Southwest China. The people are happy and the women have a high status and are the central figures. At the heart of everything is the fireplace, which is also the altar in the great family house that is run by the matriarch. Children can live with their mother, also after their marriage. A study in 1956 indicated that at that time there were: 45.3% families living matrilineal; 49.5% mixed families and 5.2% families living patrilineary. With the matrilineal living families the friends of the women of the house visit their lovers at night. 100 days after childbirth the biological father comes to visit and brings presents. 70-90% of the children know their biological father. Sexual contacts are lasting and not incidental. They are part of the strict privacy rules of the woman of the house and are regarded as her 'bedroom secret', which is nobody's business. The women also practice shamanism.

These cultures are thought to be in the tradition of the ancient women empires in East China.

At the moment there is a great increase of tourism to that area, also because the Mosuo women - completely unjustified - were reported to be supporters of free love and free sex. At the end of the presentation Pilwha shows a shocking short film 'Selling Yimi'. You can see how an ancestral great family house is sold to the Chinese by the son of the house for a lot of money and is loaded into Chinese trucks. The old, wrinkled and toothless matriarch watches, wailing and lamenting. The ancestral matriarchal house is demolished, tree-trunk-by-tree-trunk, up to the sacred fireplace/altar, to be rebuilt again in an open-air museum in China. There various cultures are exhibited, including this Mosuo house, which has to represent the Mosuo culture in this setting.

To the last the mother is begging her son to stop, because she doesn't know how she is going to live through the hard winter and doesn't know where she, her relatives and the animals should go. The demolition of a well-trieved social system that lasted for thousands of years appears to be going on. This makes you quiet and miserable.

Vicki Noble (US) is an artist, healer, wisdom teacher and author of eight books, including 'Mother peace', 'Shakti Woman' and 'The Double Goddess', which have been published internationally. She regards herself as a 'goddess- scholar'. Besides she confided to me that she has been looking after her disabled son since she was 19. When she leaves the house, there always has to be day-care. She teaches 'Women's Spirituality' in the Masters- program of the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto in California and receives clients for astrology and healing in her house in Santa Cruz in California.



There is a power on earth that connects and holds everything together. There is a psychophysical structure in life on earth, which is related to the moon. These transforming lunar cycles are most reflected and expressed in the woman's body. Per moon-year the moon traverses from left to right 8 phases or seasons. Across all cultures there are Mandela's that reflect this rhythm. Special moments in a woman's life are also connected to the fertility and the moon: they are the mysteries of the monthly bleeding or menstruation, pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding.

Vicki wants to reveal the biological basis of patriarchy and the Gift Economy in her presentation. She bases herself on the work of the late Marija Gimbutas and Dr. Shelley E. Taylor (The Tending Instinct). According to the latter a special hormone is released, when women are in a crisis situation, as a result of which they seek each other's

company and calm down. Women regulate their biology without knowing it. Research would have indicated that when strong bonds between women are lacking, men become aggressive.

As to Gimbutas: she is the founder of the archeomythology. In her youth alone she records 1000 Lithuanian folksongs and examines them as to their symbolism. Male scientists have neglected the work of Gimbutas, this while Marija has investigated 100.000 (fragments of) figurines and has found that, but for a 2 a 3% male ones, they are all female. As an archeologist Marija has succeeded in uncovering and reconstructing the ancient egalitarian society in Old-Europe.

Marina Meneses Velazquez

from Juchitán or the town of Women on Tehuantepec in South Mexico.

The Zapotekes live in Oaxaca in South Mexico and form a strong and independent people; with as a result powerful women and progressive politics but among other things also an unusual tolerance regarding bi-, homo- and transsexuals.



The first thing Marina - dressed in her colorful festive dress, especially for this occasion - confides to us via her interpreter, is that there is a matriarchy in Yuchitán: 'but none speaks about it. It is kept a secret because of Catholicism and colonialism. The population is older than 3000 years old; 50.000 people speak our language, she states. The town is relatively unknown, which is a good thing, according to Marina, for thus we are not threatened and can maintain our culture for a longer time.

Their culture is flexible and not rigid. Rituals around life and death call up resistance in Great- Britain, Spain and the US.

The festivals have to do with the moon-cycle. In the culture and economy there is the principle of solidarity and reciprocity. On the streets people are presented with gifts. The houses of grandmothers, mothers and daughters are next to each other. Everybody goes there to trade. When there is a marriage, the boy's parents pay for the wedding. With or without a man: women are always supported by a group of women. The matriarchs or grandmothers are called: 'major domas'. They enjoy a great respect. The son will sooner listen to his grandmother than to his mother.

There are an average of 600 festivities a year. Sometimes there are between 200 and 300 of them and sometimes there are 1000! A very important festivity is that of the birth of the grandmother. When the catholic priest leaves the town, the women take over the priesthood from him. The grandmother or major domas indicates her grave herself and says exactly how she would like her funeral to be and how and where she wants to be buried. There is then a great festivity celebrated on her birthday, for her death, during which there is a lot of beer drinking and dancing. These festivities are not related to the catholic calendar of the Church year. Life is a cycle; the dead pass on to a different life situation. People are not very interested in the Church. A synthesis has grown between the Zapotekes's own, original religion and the Christian one.

In order to be able to pay for these festivities, everyone works hard for the whole community: people cook, make music, dress up and give each other presents. Life is beautiful and they enjoy it together. Women value the work of men and the other way round too. Men work as fishermen or farmers. Women transform food in order to sell it. Men have to bring in the money they have earned and are only allowed to keep money for cigarettes. They save in the form of gold and jewels.

The Zapotekes believe in a universal breath and in Ranja or the Mother. There is a female experience of Nature and the earth with trees and plants. (On a cosmological level my notes are failing me a little; the English of the interpreter from Columbia was sometimes difficult to follow). Colonial institutions have tried to make the matriarchy disappear. But until now they haven't succeeded!

Dr. Valentina Pakyntein (Khasi, India) is a member of the Khasi-community.

As an anthropologist she investigates the social matriarchal structures of her people, by means of fieldwork, including interviews in the town Shillong. She has also been an assistant professor of Anthropology for 15 years, at the North Eastern Hill University in Shillong, Meghalaya in India. Meghalaya is a province that is situated in the most out-of-the-way corner of so-called Northeast India. She investigates the matrilineal society in Meghalaya and has published a number of articles.



The Khasi form a matrilineal society, Valentina states. But: 'the more you profess this, the more you move to patriarchy'. When Capitalism creeps in, people cannot satisfy their own needs any more. They have to adapt or else they will perish. The Khasi society has had to undergo a series of changes. British rule, the introduction of an educational system, modern health care, changes after the Independence from the English, globalization, etc. has caused changes in society. Women don't play an official part any more, nor do they speak in public any longer. Change is universal and just inherent to human society. Tradition has to be questioned too for its added value to a new future, she states soberly and neutrally.

The basic unity is the clan. This goes back to a common ancestor. The names are known and remain so, however long ago. A Khasi man doesn't marry; a Khasi woman founds a new clan. When the mother is Khasi, the child is so too. At this moment 70% of the Khasi bear the clan name of the mother; 10% takes the name of the father. 1.3% takes both names. No reason for joy, for those 10% patrimony (named after the father) may increase very much and usher in the beginning of change. The Khasi have the highest birthrate in India and the family's number 6 to 16 children. The Khasi belong to the clan during their whole life.

The land is important and belongs to the community and the clan. The Khasi have no writing. In 1884 missionaries come to teach the people to write. Coming from a patriarchal 'mindset', they push the matriarchal order aside. The English too want only to communicate with men. Many Khasi have become Christian. After that you don't practice the rituals any more. The youngest daughter then isn't the person any longer who takes over the leadership from the matriarch.

The first studies of the Khasi don't give a good description of the Khasi. The researchers think that the maternal uncle is the head of the family. But that is (up to that moment) still the youngest daughter, she is the heiress. The matriarch leads the discussion and aims at consensus. The mother is 'the king' and the one who manages everything. The mother or the sister practices priesthood. There is a great difference between private life and the public domain. The Khasi are surrounded by patriarchal societies. Yet after 200 years of turbulent changes Valentina finally concludes that the matrilineality of the large majority of the Khasi is still intact.

Sunday October 25

On the Sunday morning there are again several lectures. The closing ceremony is held on the Sunday afternoon.

Finally the reports need to be mentioned about the ecovillages that are spreading across the world at the moment. Lauren Shaw (Ithaca ecovillage in the state New York, US) and Angela Dolmetsch (Nashira ecovillage in Colombia) report about this.

Monday October 26



In a room in the hotel the groups of the 'gift-economy' and 'matriarchal studies' spend the day on evaluating the conference. Besides the course is determined for the coming conferences.

A discussion develops about the relation academia and activism. Heide Göttner-Abendroth saves the situation by saying: the matriarchal academy is a holistic academy, in which both cooperate and aim at unity.



European congress

Finally it remains for me to mention an international goddess-congress from 28 to 30 May in the Hambacher Schloss near Karlsruhe in Germany. This congress is organized by Alma Mater Akademie:

www.alma-mater-akademie.de

www.internationalergoddesskongress2010.de

www.internationalergoddesskongress2010.com

In conclusion

It was a great privilege for me to meet female spiritual leaders from all parts of the world, who stand for their native practice- directed wisdom and who open up and transmit their tested society models to an international network. Women who stand - in a chain of many generations - for the protection of Life itself. It was an eye-opener to meet - within an academic setting - feminists from all parts of the world, who couple the theoretical knowledge of the head/mind to the practical wisdom and life-experience of the heart; who respectfully exchange knowledge at all sorts of levels.

I am glad and happy that the Dutch sister-organization Academie PanSophia forms a part of these overlapping international networks. All of them devote themselves to Consciousness rising and the Empowerment of women and they're nearest relations, on the one hand within their old native traditions, and on the other hand within all kinds of new initiatives. That Other and Better World suddenly doesn't seem to be an unattainable ideal any more. Via a worldwide cooperation and solidarity of the Mothers and all those who mother from their heads, hearts and hands a (M) Other world becomes possible.

Look for the video report of the Toronto-conference "a (M) Otherworld is possible" on: www.gifteconomy.org (video-reports)

Dr. Annine van der Meer, PhD,
founder and chairperson of Academie PanSophia,
Knowledge Center of Matriarchy and Consciousness of Oneness,
based in The Netherlands, Europe.



Lydia Ruyle, Annine van der Meer and Vicki Noble | with in the background a banner with Russian matroesjka's