



**Special seminar week on matriarchal societies at International Academy HAGIA  
on Modern Matriarchal Studies July 19 – 25, 2010**

*The International Academy HAGIA on Modern Matriarchal Studies announced a special seminar week on matriarchal societies. The seminar was open for women from all over the world who want to attend the teachings.*

A report by Annine van der Meer



**The teachings included the topics:**

matriarchal economic patterns; the Gift Economy; the lifestyle of matriarchal women and men; matriarchal education of children and youth; diverse traditional matriarchal political patterns; conflicts and conflict solving in matriarchal societies; diverse patterns of matriarchal spirituality; diversity of actual matriarchal societies; diverse patterns of resistance of matriarchal societies against patriarchal aggressions; matriarchal

elements in patriarchal cultures, especially in the Western ones.

**Theoretical topics:** methodology of modern Matriarchal Studies; relationship of Matriarchal Studies to Western theoretical concepts, like Marxism, Theory of Anarchy, Gender Studies, and others.

**Lecturers:** Dr. Heide Goettner-Abendroth, founding mother of matriarchal studies and Mrs. Genevieve Vaughan, founding mother of the Gift-Economy. Gen is an American feminist but for many years she lives in Italy. She is active in the international network of feminists for Gift-Economy en also in antiglobalisation- and peacemovements. Zij wrote *For-Giving, A Feminist Criticism of Exchange* (1997) en *Homo Donans* (2006). She edited two books with articles of international feminists and scientists on the Gift-Economy. She wrote two children books in 2006 en 2007. About her work Giving for Giving a film was made. See [www.gift-economy.com](http://www.gift-economy.com).



## Participants (17):

Lydia Ruyle(USA), Joan Cichon (USA),Letecia Leyson (USA-Philippines), Gudrun Frank-Wissmann (Germany), Kaarina Kailo (Finland), Bhanu Natarajan (India-Norway), Bernedette Muthien (South-Africa), Angela Miles (Canada), Linda Ruffmann (Canada), Erella Shadmi (Israel), Irene Tazi-Preve (Austria), Malika Grasshoff (North-Africa-Germany), Annine van der Meer (The Netherlands), Genevieve Vaughan (Italy-USA), Marguerite Rigoglioso (USA), Cecil Keller (Switzerland-Germany), Heide Göttner-Abenroth (Germany).

Three people had to cancel: Pilwha Chang (Malaysia), Vicky Noble (USA), Barbara Mann (USA)



## Report

**Am Frauendorf.** The participants of the conference of the international matriarchal study group are housed in a village called 'Frauendorf' in a hotel called 'am Frauenhof'. In the halls and rooms and even in the pool you find huge Venusstatutes; they are all over the place. We could only find one statue of a David, he was hiding himself behind a palm in the pool. In the neighborhood there was 'a Frauenhill' , 'a Frauental' and 'a Frauenmountain' and 'Frauenmountainchapel'. Close by the hotel you could pass seven small rivers over seven bridges to the chapel of Mary. In the Middle Ages it was a pilgrimage. People in the Middle Ages kept venerating die Fraue of the Lady. She represented Mother Nature and Mother Earth, who gave people life, life force and light. People felt her in the four elements: earth, water, light and fire. Nowadays Mary had the name of die Fraue of the Lady. The Lady of Central Europa once was called Frau Hulda or Frau Holle. So everything in our direct environment remembers us to her.



## Schedule

### Monday 19 July. The welcoming ritual.

***Tour around the Holy Mountain.*** On a bright Monday morning under a clear blue sky, Heide leads us around her holy green mountain. There is a quite magic, birds are singing and butterflies are flying around. In the 25 years she has lived here, she did not change anything in the landscape. In the middle of the lower ground you find a small lake surrounded by a green triangle of trees and reed. The two sloping hills of her mountain run down into this triangle; to Heide this is the vulva of her holy land.



Heide plays the drum and we follow her in a long row, rhythmically moving to the penetrating sound of the magical drum. We feel connected to the landscape and begin to feel at home.

She is relaxed and it is good to see how happy and strong she is in her own goddesses like environment. Her big green garden is really a small untouched paradise of Mother Earth.



***The opening ritual.*** The opening ritual takes place symbolically close to the house and around an apple tree high on one of the green hills. Red ribbons are used to make a circle around the tree and then a cross is made in the circle. Next the ancestors are invoked in the four wind directions, successively north, west, south and east, and they are invited to attend this week.

We are asked to take our place in the wind directions quadrant and choose the quadrant where we belong. The four directions are praised for their specific qualities: north for the cold and the brightness, west for the moist winds, south for the light of the sun and the fertility, and east for the dawn.

We sing a song, followed by one tone humming and singing mm, and when we are asked to release our bottom jaw it ends in a collective Ma, the oldest word of mankind. Water is poured out and we say thanks.



***The closing ritual.*** During the closing ritual at the end of the week we repeated this ritual. Again everyone is asked to take her place in her own wind direction. Heide, holding in her hand the central candle, thanked everyone personally for their specific contributions.

***The rest of the week.*** On Monday and Tuesday afternoon, and Wednesday, Friday and Saturday all day, we are taught by Heide. She managed to lecture non-stop from 9.00 – 18.00 with a lunch break of two hours. We sit in a circle in the – sometimes sweltering - attic, the lecture room of the Hagia academy. Heide only uses a small notepad on which she regularly writes a keyword. During the lessons and discussions Heide never used an educational tool, like a drawing board, power point presentation or film. Not even notes of her own. She does not need this; she speaks fluently on both the theory and practice of matriarchal societies. Her international students may interrupt her and ask questions whenever they want, which makes the lessons lively and engaging





- ❖ **July 19, Monday afternoon:** first seminar led by Heide: the lifestyle of matriarchal women and men; matriarchal education of children and youth
- ❖ **July 20, Tuesday morning seminar:** the Gift Economy by Genevieve Vaughan (see 36 Steps Toward a Gift Economy)
- ❖ **July 20, Tuesday afternoon:** seminar on several matriarchal economic patterns lead by Heide Göttner-Abendroth.
- ❖ **July 21, Wednesday morning:** various traditional matriarchal political patterns; conflicts and conflict solving in matriarchal societies
- ❖ **July 21, Wednesday afternoon:** patterns of resistance of matriarchal societies against patriarchal aggressions

**July 22, Thursday, all day:** Excursion: matriarchal elements in patriarchal cultures, especially in the Western ones (example given: the Danube Valley)

Central question: how can you find matriarchal traces without seeing them in a landscape.



After three full days of lectures by Dr. Heide Göttner-Abendroth we are going on an excursion to the Danube valley in two cars and a big bus. The Danube is 2845 km long and the longest river in Europe after the Volga. This impressive river flows through eight countries and has been a lifeline for the inhabitants of Europe since antiquity. From 9.00 till 18.30, on a very hot day, we drive around to visit various sacred places in the landscape.

**First stop: view of the Valley of the Danube and the church of Mary Magdalene.** On the day of the feast day of St. Mary Magdalene on 22 July, our first stop gives us a view on a church dedicated to her. It is a round church built on a rise on top of a

stone circle. This Christian lady, spouse of the Jewish Jesus, has -apart of Mary- replaced the Neolithic lady. We commemorate her feast day.



Palaeolithic remains dating from 200.000 BC, and Neolithic settlements dating from 5000 BC, are found in the area of the Danube-valley. Through the Bronze Age, Celtic and Germanic times, the Roman Empire and the Christian Middle Ages we arrive at the present.

It is a remote area that was converted to Christianity rather late. When the Romans and later Christianity moved in, Bavaria was a Celtic-Germanic area, where the goddess still lived. She is called Lady Percht, the shining one, and she is internalized in the landscape. Most ancient settlements and sacred places are found on the low hills along the Danube, but all are either taken over or destroyed by Christianity.

**Aviation archaeology.** It has been discovered through aviation archaeology that almost every hill has a sacred place. During the winter photos of the landscape are made, that make it possible to distinguish structures beneath the surface of the earth, like mounds consisting of stones. Now the goddess is clearly identifiable below the Christian surface layer and the Christian exterior. In Passau on the banks of the Danube an observatory larger than Stonehenge was photographed. Unfortunately, the excavators in Passau are not interested in Neolithic bones; they are mainly concerned with the Christian history.

**Valley of the Danube:** In this first stop Heide lets the group get off at an impossible place, a highway; but the view is splendid. Under our feet we see the Danube valley, an undulating landscape of low hills with higher mountains in the background on both banks of the river. Heide shows us a map of Marija Gimbutas indicating the area of the Lengyel culture. The remains of this culture can be found in Hungary and, more to the west, in this area, the valley of the Danube in Southern Germany.

The first farmers, originating from Anatolia, followed the Danube from the delta in the Black Sea to the upper reaches of the river in Germany. Every year, the Danube floods leaving behind a layer of rich silt. To avoid wet feet, the early matriarchal farming communities built their villages on the low hills along the river. So they kept their feet dry, their hearts warm and their heads cool.

We get our first lesson in sacred geography. Sometimes you see a low hill in a plain. If you find Christian shrines on these high grounds, you can be sure that they are built on sacred pre Christian remains, since a church is normally built in the centre of the village and there has to be a reason to build a church outside the village. Moreover, places of culture are always directly connected to straight roads leading to it. Also, pay attention to the names of places. A lot of pre-Christian names are demonized. When you come across names with 'pagan' or 'devil', do know that there is an ancient layer underneath the Christian one. Get used to observe the landscape first, view old maps, etc., next, research the etymology and history of the names, and only then, you can examine what has been written about it.



**Passau**, In the city of Passau three rivers come together, forming two sacred triangles. The large current cathedral, filled with big baroque sculptures, stands on one of the peninsula/triangles. On the other one a castle. The three rivers represent the triple goddess.



**Mariahilf.** We go to an old pilgrimage centre, called **Mariahilf**, built on the high bank just before the place where the white Inn confluent with the green Danube and the black Ilz. For the ancients this was a sacred place where the triple goddess merges herself in three colours: white, green (stands for red), and black. Also in Innsbruck three rivers come together, venerated by the same Lengyel culture. They followed the river upstream to the source. But now something very special: in the Mariahilf church we find Maria in three colours. She is a white young girl on the panel in the side altar in the left aisle next to the central altar; she is the Madonna with child, dressed in a blood red robe, on the central altar, and, finally, she is the black older woman on the panel in the side altar in the right aisle.



The three rivers flowing together mirror the triple great mother, who is venerated here as Maria. Maria in Mariahilf helps with everything, with storms, diseases; she is small but effective.



You can see how Neolithic symbols survive in a Christian form to this day. In the side aisles you can find hundreds of votive or thanksgivings, like candles, wooden panels and paintings, to thank Maria for her help. A stone sculpture of Mother Anna with daughter Maria and grandson Jesus stands on the square next to the church. The mother as the centre of each matriarchal clan. Also in her you can see the triple goddess, the mother. In Germany the sculptures are called 'Anna selb tritt'. There are many baroque sculptures. Sometimes, the mother has two little daughters in her

arms, sometimes a daughter and a (grand)son.

In Christian myths women are always subordinate servants. And again we meet the triple mother, the triple goddess, both inside the church in Maria as outside in Anna, but also in the valley with the three rivers. Heide assures us that, in Southern Germany, you can meet her on every street corner with a statue of the mother, but especially everywhere in the landscape.



***In the woods of Bavaria you can find many sacred mountains;*** sometimes three together: a red, white and black one, like Rehel, Luse and Araba, respectively. In Anna you encounter the black earth and the dark mother. In the Danube valley both Palaeolithic and Neolithic finds have been discovered. The Schweigelberg is connected to the Frauenberg, close to our village, Frauendorf. Here are seven sources with seven bridges connected to the chapel of Maria, a centre of pilgrimage both in past and present. Often, you will find twin sites on both sides of the Danube.

***The Lady or die Fraue or the Mother is also called Holle or Hulda or Percht,*** a Bavarian name. Holle is the great goddess of Central Europe. She is a triple goddess, because she makes the connection between the underworld, the earth and the heaven. Percht is derived from Perachta, which means the 'bright shining one'. The underworld aspect shines. All kind of folk customs and festivals are connected to Percht. Percht is white. Processions are held to honour the white Percht. The people know that the underworld will open and that the spirits of the ancestors will come to give little and sweet souls to the young women who want to get pregnant. They accompany Percht and dance around her. A lot of straw is used. Percht keeps the souls under her dress. There are both sweet and wild versions of folk customs. The young men tease the women and ask them: 'would you become my mother?' They don't understand anymore what they actually ask. Percht, sitting on a throne, is the



centre of the dance. She wears many tiny coloured bells, this is her underworld aspect. However, in the folktale you read that she steals children, an example of demonization. In the past, she was the sweet old lady who protected the children. Men in another dance group wear belts with cowbells. This is a symbol of fertility. The clapper is a sexual symbol and can be compared with the phallus. The men clatter the bells and move the clapper back and forth as if it was their phallus. They start already in the winter. The great goddess has largely disappeared from Bavaria, but where she survived people don't disgrace or ridicule her. They respect the traditional elements of their culture. There is the good Percht with the pretty face, as beautiful as sunrise, but when she turns around, you see the ugly face of the wrinkled old Percht. These are the two aspects of the same lady: the light and the dark side, two aspects of one cosmos. Maria is an adopted goddess. In all places where the great mother used to be present, she has been replaced by Maria. Frau Holle brought snow; nowadays one speaks of 'Maria of the snow'.

Also pay attention to the inflections of the names; 'Hilgart' is derived from 'heal' or 'healing', an aspect of the underworld of the goddess. Gart means 'garden' or 'Garten'.



**Hilgartsberg.** Everywhere you see a doubling. Opposite a Neolithic settlement with an earth wall with large stones one sees across the Danube a high mountain of black rock, which is unique in this area. Later a castle was built on this mountain, presently called the Hilgartsberg. Nowadays, the local guides call it a mountain ruin.



After our visit to the city of Passau, we visit the strengthened castle. Standing high on the mountain, we enjoy the great panoramic view on the Danube that winds like a snake around the rock. This is what the ancients observed. For them, the landscape was sacred; the rock was seen as the body of

the (black) Lady, the river as the snake or dragon nestling at her feet and making her fertile. Also Mont St. Michel in France was built on a rock.

This is the place to worship to goddess of the underworld; a place to heal yourself. At the Hilgartsberg stands a chapel of St. George, known as the dragon slayer. The dragon is an old goddess symbol. He kills the dragon, just like to old goddess was killed. The same happens at Mont St. Michiel in France. But Margaretha, representing the underworld, keeps the dragon on a rope, and the dragon lies at her feet. She caresses the dragon instead of killing him. In the name 'Olga' you find: 'Heel-Ga', again the combination of 'healing' and 'garten' or garden. This name also appears in Finland and there they drink milk with three different colours.

***Mountains are often seen as the breasts of the goddess.*** Elements of the goddess can also be recognised in the naming of a place. If 'pagan' or 'devil' appears in a name, it is a demonization or reversal of that what was sacred and holy in the past. The mother has been denied and destroyed everywhere.

**Bogenberg** The tour continues to Bogenberg, the oldest pilgrimage centre in Germany. Old pre-Christian customs lived on here in a Christian form. The Danube touches the foot of the mountain. Across the Danube is the great plain, that was often flooded by the river, making the land very fertile. Today, this plain is still considered as the granary of Bavaria. In the plain, in the city of Strauburg stands a statue of a Madonna of the Grain, a replacement of the old grain mother.



The hill is a cultic site for the whole region. The river makes a bend for the mountain, that's why the place is called Bogenberg. In the church on the top you find a pregnant Maria. She stands in a heart or vulva in a small, dark crypt high on the mountain.



But how does she get pregnant? Every year, a group of young men from the village of Holzkirchen, 70 km away, go to her, carrying during many days a lying candle of 13 meters long. Is a Venus number meaning fertility and love or happiness. One of the men lifts up the candle and carries it into the church; like a phallus symbol. The love of the young men makes her pregnant. Here you see the goddess of fertility and her heroes. This is the oldest pilgrimage site and

here you see the 'hieros gamos' between the feminine and the masculine. It gives



life to the land, because its birth is caused by the ancestors. It has to do with cosmic polarity, the connection in polarity.

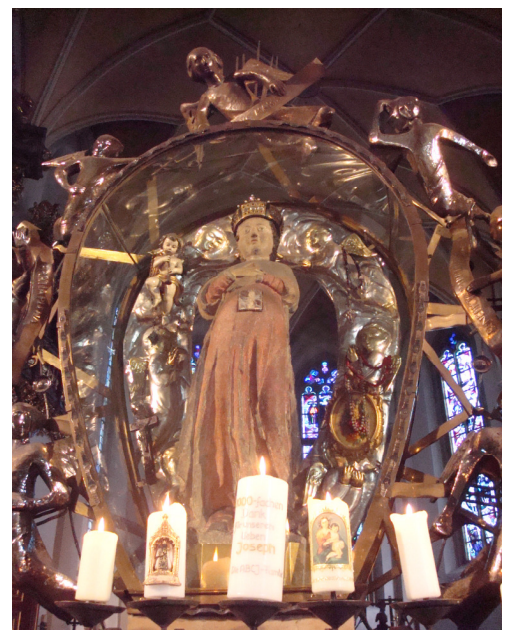
The mountain of the red goddess with her heroes: you can see the Neolithic symbols. Actually, the birth of the child is a form of parthenogenetic reproduction; she is mother earth or Gaia. The green leaves on the candle symbolize the fertility of the red goddess. The same symbol can be seen in the dancing around the maypole in May, also meant to fertilize the land. The green top of the maypole symbolizes the male fertility. The same theme is reflected in the Venus mountain. The opera *Tannhäuser* by Richard Wagner is a Christianized version of an old folktale, in which the hero Tannhäuser is baptized by the pope. However, there is an older version by the minstrels. He is with Venus and he feels guilty and ashamed. He goes to the pope, who tells him that he committed a sin by making love to Venus. His skin would dry out and he would not find a place anymore to rest under the heaven. Tannhäuser returns to Venus and then his skin gets green leaves, thus restoring the balance in fertility. The pre-Christian version was very popular among minstrels in the Middle-Ages.

The triple Maria is also in this church: on the right Maria in white, in the middle the pregnant red Maria and on the left Maria in black as Pieta with the suffering Christ. This trinity can



be found throughout Europe, the Mediterranean world and North-Africa. Other parts of the world have different symbols.

The long interesting day ends with a pleasant dinner at the banks of the Danube at the Kohlbachmühle. There is Bavarian music, and many Bavarians in traditional costume, people drink and laugh and are happy. On the Danube, large cruise ships are sailing along. It is getting dark but it is a long warm night, this feast day of Mary Magdalene, 22 July 2010.



**July 23, Friday morning seminar:** several patterns of matriarchal spirituality; diversity of actual matriarchal societies.

**July 23, Friday afternoon seminar:** methodology of modern Matriarchal Studies.

**July 24, Saturday morning seminar:** relationship of Matriarchal Studies to Western theoretical concepts, like Marxism, Theory of Anarchy, Gender Studies, and others.

The group shares compliments about the wonderful book title: *Societies in peace. The way into an egalitarian society*. See [www.gift@economy](http://www.gift@economy).

**July 24, Saturday afternoon seminar:** matriarchal studies and Marxism and gender studies.

Closing ritual as described on top.

**Sunday 25 July Sunday, all day:** Round table meeting.



**On Sunday night**, the last evening of the week of seminars, we go out for dinner and celebrate my birthday. Next to a lot of cordiality, Gen offers me the dinner and as desert I get a piece of cake with a candle. Heide gives me a compliment, although I am a newcomer, I am fully included in this international group that meets already for many years. The group is part of a matriarchate study group of 120 members, who live around the world and form a digitally connected network. We say goodbye and we will meet again at the international congress in Sankt Gallen in May 2011. See the information below.





We are greatly indebted to the women who organized this week: Akademie Hagia with Heide Göttner-Abenroth and Cécile Keller and Genevieve Vaughan of the Gift Economy, who donated us the stay at the hotel. This enabled us to give a more generous gift to the Akademie for the unique teachings we received.

Report Dr Annine van der Meer

*President Academy PanSophia, Holland.*

The Academy PanSophia is a knowledge centre for matriarchy and oneness consciousness, whose focus includes the rediscovery of the female side of God, female values and the contribution of women in ancient and contemporary cultures. [www.academiepansophia.nl](http://www.academiepansophia.nl) and [www.anninevandermeer.nl](http://www.anninevandermeer.nl)

## **PS 1 List of international conferences**

### **2010:**

**October** - Japan – Kaarina Kailo

**November 6-8** Shillong in India – Bernedette Muthien

Embracing Peace Education: Empowering the Individual, Institution and Communities (special focus on India). Will be a matriarchal societies panel. Jointly organized by Peace Studies Dept, MLCU, Centre for Peace Education (CFPEM) and Institute of Global Education (IGE)

### **2011:**

**April/May** - USA – Joan Cichon

The Association for the Study of Women & Mythology

<http://womenandmythology.wordpress.com/>

**May 12-15: Switzerland – Heide Göttner-Abendroth**

**International Congress – The Time is ripe. We go into a society where Life is worth Living.**

Insights from Matriarchal studies

Perspectives in Matriarchal Politics

Grand Opening of the MatriArchiv and Library

Celebration of 25 years Akademie Hagia and the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of Heide.

<http://kongress-matriarchatspolitik.ch>.

[info@kongress-matriarchatspolitik](mailto:info@kongress-matriarchatspolitik)

**July 3-7:** Ottawa, Canada Women's World Conference Linda Ruffman and Angela Miles

<http://www.womensworlds.ca/>

International Feminists for a Gift Economy Panel - Contact Gen <[Genvau@aol.com](mailto:Genvau@aol.com)> if you are interested in participating in the panel.

**September/October:** Columbia - Angela Dolmetsch Nashira Ecovillage

Possible visit to Nashira Ecovillage, a women-run community. [http://www.nashira-ecoaldea.org/Ciudadela\\_ecologica\\_Nashira.html](http://www.nashira-ecoaldea.org/Ciudadela_ecologica_Nashira.html)

**October/November:** Norway Annual Regional Social Forum – Bhanu Natarajan Plans in the works for a panel on "features of a peaceful (i.e., matriarchal) society."

**April:** Cape town South Africa – Bernedette Muthien. Conference on Matriarchal Studies

## PS 2 After the conference: list of keywords sent by email:

Heide: Another point was that you wanted me to send you a list of key words on matriarchy. As I do not know which key words you will need I just start with some of them:

- ❖ **matriarchal economics** (modes of production and distribution): balanced economy with perfect mutuality, based on subsistence production (independent production) and on gift giving distribution;  
no private property, no territorial claims; only usage rights on the soil which is worked;  
the basic goods and the distribution are in the hands of women (i. e. the matriarchs).
- ❖ **matriarchal social order**: based on the clans; non-hierarchical, horizontal order of matrilineal kinship (matrilinearity):  
residence very often in a big clan-house, house of the mother (matrilocality);  
common motherhood of sisters; the result is that every woman is a “mother”;  
the brothers are the supporters of women, not the lovers or husbands;  
brothers are regarded as the closest relatives to the sisters’ children (“social fathers”);  
lovers and spouses either as guests over night (“walking/visiting marriage”) or during a short period, their home is their mother’s houses;  
each generation has its own “honour/dignity” i.e. its own powers and tasks;  
children are regarded as reborn female and male ancestors.
- ❖ **matriarchal politics**: decision-making by a complex system of councils (organized along the matrilineal kinship lines): clan councils, village councils, regional councils and, in some cases, inter-regional councils;  
all decisions are clan-based and are made by consensus throughout the system of councils;  
the result: egalitarian societies of consensus.
- ❖ **matriarchal culture and worldview**: no organized, hierarchical religion with power centres, instead tradition-based spirituality (comes from “spirits”);  
spirituality is performed by a great variety of ceremonies and rituals, these are not static, but dynamic;  
no transcendence beyond the world, the world (Earth and Universe) is regarded as divine, i.e. divinity is immanent;  
the result is: all is divine, all beings are equal, no hierarchy among all that exists; “diversity is wealth”;  
everything/everybody is interconnected with all that exists;  
cyclical concept of time and life; ever-lasting cycles of life and death and rebirth;  
sacred societies/cultures, or cultures of the “Divine Feminine”.

## PS 3 Marguerite Rigoglioso sent her syllabus she uses in fall 2010 in the Dominican University in California with following definition:

*A “matriarchy” is not a social structure in which women benefit at the expense of men. Rather, matriarchal cultures are characterized by shared leadership between men and women that results in political harmony, social balance, and emotional well-being. In matriarchal societies, the mother is the central figure, nurturing is a primary value, and the earth is seen as sacred. What can we learn from matriarchies that might help us create a more peaceful and environmentally friendly world? This course will explore the fascinating ins and outs of contemporary matriarchies such as the Mosuo of China, the Minangkabau of Sumatra, the Tuareg and Berber of North Africa; the Akan of Ghana, the Juchitán of Mexico, and others. Drawing on the instructor’s own research in North Africa, we will also examine historical accounts and legends regarding rebellious African and Asian Amazons — women-ruled warrior tribes — and we will consider to what extent such stories have any basis in fact. We will look at evidence of matriarchy as humanity’s oldest social structure, as well.*

*This colloquium involves an interdisciplinary approach (social and cultural studies, religion, and history) to the study of historical and contemporary women’s political and spiritual leadership. We will explore how women have negotiated and maintained power in patriarchal society, and we will examine women’s participation in matriarchal society. The goal is to for students to understand how they may apply lessons learned about women-centered leadership to their own lives and careers, and how they may apply a revitalized feminist consciousness to help solve the world’s problems and challenges.*