

# **The Paradigmatic and Theoretical Frameworks of Researching a Marxist Feminist, Matristic Society**

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## **Abstract**

This work discusses historical matristic perspectives on gender dynamics and their economic outcomes by looking at the work of many foundational scholars in the Modern Matriarchal Studies movement and in the field of economics. The paradigms and theories are discussed that guide the researcher and research to provide an alternative economic system that has not been previously economically analysed.

**Keywords:** Matrilineal, Matristic, Marxist Feminism, Decolonial, Feminist Economics

## **Introduction**

The United States is experiencing a societal upheaval, where many marginalised groups are feeling more oppressed and fearful than in previous years (IAFFE, 2018, p. 1). It is imperative to look to other cultures and societies to learn how these issues can be resolved. One solution could lie in the inner workings of matristic and matrilineal societies. These societies experienced more peace, well-being, and economic growth than societies that limited women's economic choices.

Per Gottner-Abendroth (2003):

The natural differences between the genders and the generations are respected and honoured in matriarchies, but they are never served to create hierarchies, as is common in patriarchy. The different genders and generations each have their own value and dignity, and through complementary areas of activity, they depend on each other (p. 1).

The cultures and societies that several scholars discuss, termed Old Europe, over generations of research and fieldwork have engrained gender balances which are, typically, not seen in the current global climate.

## **Matristic, Matrilineal, and Matriarchal Societies**

To reduce confusion about terms used throughout this paper, definitions of matriarchal, patriarchal, and matrilineal, and matrilocal will be provided. Matriarchal is an adjective relating to or denoting a form of social organization or government in which women are in control (Sociology Index, 2018, p. 1). Patriarchal is an adjective relating to or characteristic of a patriarch or relating to or characteristic of society of government controlled by men (Sociology Index, 2018, p. 1). Matrilineal is an adjective used to describe kinship, lineage, or inheritance based on the mother or female line (Sociology Index, 2018, p. 1). A matrilocal residence is the custom or practice of a new husband moving to his wife's village or household after marriage,

mostly found among matrilineal societies (Sociology Index, 2018, p. 1). Although some scholars mentioned in this paper use the term “matriarchal”, others state there have never been matriarchal societies, in which women controlled the actions and choices of men. These scholars say the societies were matrilineal and matrilineal in nature, and even in some of the current societies where women have more formal power, men still tend to have the most control over decisions related to family, community, and government. Other scholars say the term “matriarchy” is misconstrued from a patriarchal perspective, expecting dominance of one gender over another. However, those scholars’ work is very important, and their research will still be used, although there are differing opinions on the usage of the term “matriarchal”. The term matristic will be used to encompass various forms of female centred societies.

It is thought that matristic and matrilineal societies originated in East Asia and spread through waterways as agricultural societies: Some believe they spanned as far back as the Palaeolithic Age<sup>1</sup>. The abundance of matrilineal societies was diminished during the Iron Age (600 BCE to 1000 CE), when personal property was on the rise and patriarchal tribes took over. According to Christ (1997):

Women probably were the inventors of agriculture. Because women were the primary food gatherers and food preparers in Palaeolithic societies, they are most likely ones to have noticed the relation between dropped seeds and the green plants that come up. Because women had responsibility for the care of human babies, they may also have been the ones to feed and care for the abandoned young of wild animals and thus the first to domesticate animals (p. 53).

A 2017 study, from researchers at The University of Cambridge, is the first to compare the bone strength in prehistoric women to those of living women. There is some data from living men, but there was no collected data on the bone structure of modern women to provide a comparative data set. This is important because men and women do not build bone in the same way in response to repeated physical strain and stress (Macintosh, et al., 2017, p. 3). When researchers look at living people and athletes, and their level of activity is known, they can link characteristics in their bones to those activities. The researchers compared the bones of prehistoric women to those of women who were on the Cambridge University rowing team since they wanted athletes from a sport that targeted the arm muscles and was very repetitive. After the

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<sup>1</sup> The Palaeolithic Age ranged from 2.6 million years ago to 10,000 BCE.

comparison, it was discovered that these Bronze Age (3,000 BCE to 600 BCE) women had arms that were nine percent to thirteen percent stronger than those of female rowers and thirty percent stronger than non-athletes of any gender (Macintosh, et al., 2017, p. 7). They believe processing grain and farming by hand is what caused this impressive muscle mass (Macintosh, et al., 2017, p. 7). There would not have been plows yet and they would have had limited tools to help alleviate the intensity of work.

Marija Gimbutas (1992) described the collective identity of Indo-European cultures in the Neolithic (10,200 BCE to 4,500 BCE) to Chalcolithic (4,500 BCE to 3,000 BCE) periods and termed them “Old Europe”. Between c. 7000 BCE and c. 3500 BCE, the inhabitants of this region developed a much more complex social organization than their western and northern neighbours involving craft specialization and the creation of religious and governmental institutions (Gimbutas, 1992, p. 17). Gimbutas found, restored, described, and photographed tens of thousands of relics from Old Europe over her lifetime of work. Although she focused on the religious and social meanings of these relics, her work is very important because she provides legitimacy to the history of matrilineal societies. In December, her work was validated using DNA testing. Gimbutas was able to conclude that these societies were matrilineal in nature and were able to prosper, far longer than the warring patriarchal tribes that followed, due to their cooperative and Earth-based social and spiritual practices.

The Mosuo culture in the Yunnan and Sichuan provinces of China, close to Tibet, is a matrilineal culture that practices “walking marriage” where the woman can be with a man for as long as she wants, and the culture does not tend to experience issues with rape or illegitimate children (Lugu Lake, 2006, p. 2). Women conduct most of the farming, business trade, and make household decisions in the Mosuo culture. The men usually live at home and go visit their children but raise the children of their mothers and sisters (Lugu Lake, 2006, p. 2). This culture is interesting because men are happier than in patriarchal societies; yet, they complete stereotypical female tasks.

A “matriarchy” is not a social structure in which women benefit at the expense of men. Rather, matriarchal cultures are characterised 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.

According to Gottner-Abendroth (2012):

The matriarchy paradigm, developed out of the modern women's movement, goes beyond all the various western feminisms that tend to remain captive to the European/western way of thinking. It is not confined to the situation of women, and does not foster an essentialist antagonism between women-in-general and men-in-general. From the viewpoint of the matriarchy paradigm, such ahistorical generalizations are counterproductive; they overlook the broad diversity of societies and historical contexts in which gender questions are rooted. In contrast, Modern Matriarchal Studies address the overall structure of the society of women and men, old and young, human and non-human nature (p. xix).

Since most of these societies are at least several thousand years old, it is important to recognise how indigenous culture, tradition, and inheritance come into play. Some of the societies have individuals that adopted post-modern conveniences, while others have kept traditional clothing, methods of cooking, agricultural practices, mating practices, and housing. These societies have all the tenants of Marxist Feminism and it is important to make these linkages to bridge the gaps between theory and practice.

### **Paradigmatic Frameworks**

Feminist epistemology emphasises the importance of ethical and political values in shaping epistemic practices and interpretations of evidence. Feminist epistemology studies show how gender influences our understanding of knowledge, justification, and theory of knowledge; it describes how knowledge and justification disadvantage women. Scientists of feminist epistemology claim that knowledge discriminates against women by: preventing them from inquiry and presenting women as an inferior, because these theories of knowledge satisfy only male interests, which strengthen gender hierarchies (Code, 2014, p. 11).

The central idea of feminist epistemology is that knowledge reflects the perspectives of the theory. The main interest of feminist philosophers is how gender stereotypes situate knowing subjects and they approach this interest from three different perspectives: feminist standpoint theory, feminist postmodernism, and feminist empiricism (Code, 2014, p 12-13). Standpoint theory defines a specific social perspective as epistemically privileged, feminist postmodernism emphasises the instability of the social identity explorers, and their representations, and

empiricism focuses on combining the main ideas of feminism and their observations to prove feministic theories through evidence (Code, 2014, p 12-13).

One might say that there are commonalities between Feminist and Feminist Economic epistemologies since Kovach (2012), states:

When considering tribal epistemologies, there are many entry points, one of which is commentary on its holistic quality... Tribal knowledge is pragmatic and ceremonial, physical and metaphysical... It is difficult to define, deconstruct, or compartmentalise the different aspects of knowing within an Indigenous context – reductionist tools seem to not work here (p. 56).

Although in Feminist Economics, the point is to come to conclusions through empirical research, there are many entry points of how data is collected and how these stories are told. Feminist Economists bring a human element to their work, which doesn't always happen in mainstream Economic research.

One of the paradigms that Chilisa (2012) discusses is the decolonial methodology. It critiques Western mainstream feminism for preventing the inclusion of communities of colour and calls for a decentring from Western standards. The decolonial methodology is necessary when studying matristic societies because there is much evidence to suggest we were, historically, gender balanced and egalitarian. It is through hostile patriarchal takeover that these matristic societies were destroyed and the ones that are left, are consistently in danger of being invaded by patriarchy. According to Chilisa (2012):

Decolonization is thus a practice of conducting research such a way that the worldviews of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and marginalization are given space to communicate from their frames of reference. It is a process that involves 'researching back' to question how the disciplines... through an ideology of Othering have described and theorised about the colonised Other, and refused to let the colonised Other name and know from their frame of reference (p. 14).

Academics and activists must engage in self-conscious discourse and activism which empowers the speaking of the oppressed, recognises their specific dynamics and histories, and creates conditions for their voices to be heard. Otherwise one risks engaging in what Chandra Talpade Mohanty refers to as "discursive colonization" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 34-36). Coloniality of design is a control and disciplining of our perception and interpretation of the world, of other human and nonhuman beings and things according to certain legitimised principles (Tlostanova, 2017, p. 3). It is a set of specific ontological, epistemic, and axiological notions imposed forcefully onto

the whole world, including its peripheral and semiperipheral spaces in which alternative versions of life, social structures, environmental models, or aesthetic principles have been invariably dismissed (Tlostanova, 2017, p. 3). Because of this, we must expand upon and design methodologies and methods that are still scientifically verifiable, at least in Feminist Economics, but that account for the colonising design of most previous paradigms and methods.

According to Tlostanova (2017):

Design in/by the Global South seen through a decolonial lens critically engages with issues of temporal-spatial coloniality and the corpo-political and geopolitical dimensions of knowledge, being and perception that form the concrete material, and biographical, historical and local/spatial conditions of subjectivity production or design of the self... Modernity/coloniality as an overall design remains reluctant to discuss its principles, preferring to present them as natural, given by god, or rational and therefore sacred. This clearly avoids addressing the gist of the problem, while concentrating on various applied and incidental details such as technological gadgets (p. 1-2).

This project is certainly not going to be an easy one; merging opposing axiologies, epistemologies, and methodologies.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Marxist Feminists believe that when capitalist structures fall, all other oppressions will fall, and society will adopt socialism, communism, or some other form of political economy that is more communal. In many of the societies that are matrilineal or matriarchal, the economic systems resemble something closer to socialism or communism since there are communal living spaces, children and elderly are taken care of by multiple family members, and resources are shared more than in capitalist societies. Many feminist writers, theorists, and activists adhere to the principal tenant of Marxist Feminism; however, there are those that say the methodology does not consider personal biases that are not, inherently, created by capitalism (Ferguson, et al., p. 4). It is difficult to gauge whether sexism was a product of capitalism, or if capitalism was a product of sexism. Never the less, capitalism encourages sexism, in addition to other forms of oppression, which is why it is necessary to look at feminist issues from an intersectional lens.

This research attempts to make real-world linkages to Marxist Feminism through the analysis of current and historical matristic societies. When Marija Gimbutas began to focus her work on matristic societies, there was a huge backlash. Anthropologists did not want to acknowledge that

women had more power than they currently do in a global patriarchal structure. This backlash is apparent in the work of Carolyn Fluer-Lobban, who was an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Rhode Island College. She wrote *A Marxist Reappraisal of the Matriarchate* (1979) and stated that the resurgence of the study of matriarchies was “an idealist thought” (p. 341). Per Fluer-Lobban (1979):

Evolutionary anthropologists generally accept a model of societal development that is based on the socioeconomic formation characteristic of a given stage. These include hunter-gatherer societies, horticultural and pastoral societies, archaic states based on agriculture, and industrial states (Sahlins and Service 1960, Fried 1967). Prior to the state level, it is generally agreed, society is characterised by communal, egalitarian, classless social relations. The rise of the state is simultaneous with the rise of classes in society. There is increasing articulation of the position that the status of women became denigrated with the rise of classes and of the state, as was suggested by Engels (Leacock 1978, Gough 1977). This line of thinking counters the suggestion of the universality of male dominance irrespective of the presence or absence of classes (Ortner 1974). That the position of women declined with the emergence of class society does not necessarily suggest that women were leaders or rulers in pre-class society, but only perhaps that relative equality was replaced with formal inequality (p. 346).

Fluer-Lobban does not address the matrilineal societies that continue to exist, despite the rise of patriarchy. She, also, assumes humans are static in their behaviour and that spiritual practices do not have an impact on social order. Marxism, as a philosophy of human nature, stresses the centrality of work in the creation of human nature itself and human self-understanding. Both the changing historical relations between human work and nature, and the relations of humans to each other in the production and distribution of goods to meet material needs construct human nature differently in different historical periods: nomadic humans are different than agrarian or industrial humans.

According to Engels’s famous analysis of women’s situation in the history of different economic modes production in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), women are originally equal to, if not more powerful than, men in communal forms of production with matrilineal family organizations. He pointed out that the family was a historical phenomenon; that is, it was created when the force of production was developed to a certain level and would eventually disappear, together with other institutions such as marriage and the state, when the force of production was finally developed (Shih, 2010, p. 8). Women lose power when private

property comes into existence as a mode of production. Men's control of private property, and the ability thereby to generate a surplus, changes the family form to a patriarchal one where women, and often slaves, become the property of the father and husband.

Fluer-Lobban disagrees with one of the fundamentals of Marxism, and the positionality of her beliefs are not coming from a place of true inquiry and completing a breadth of research.

Recently, there has been DNA evidence that Marija Gimbutas' suppositions about the societies she terms Old Europe are correct. With this new information, and from the perspective of decolonial and transnational feminism, there is room to re-examine Fluer-Lobban's work on Marxism and the Matriarchate through a Marxist Feminist theoretical framework.

## **Conclusions**

There are very few scholars that are approaching economic liberation in the way this research does. In fact, the only journal articles that have been like this research on Marxism and matristic societies were written by a handful of people in the 1970s and 1980s. There is an abundance of information on matristic societies, but there is not in-depth economic analysis that has been conducted by someone with a foundation in economics. There is much opportunity for exploration and analysis through transnational and decolonial feminist lenses. This research offers an alternative economic system to replace capitalism when it fails. It is the hope of the author to lay the foundational research, so these models can be created. Once they are created, more people will shift their communities, and eventually governments, to this socio-economic system. Anti-globalization and anti-capitalism are central components of this decentring, decolonising project.

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 DOI: 10.1080/14487136.2017.1301017

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Katharine I. Ransom, 2018

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