



# The Legacy of Mothers

Matriarchies and the Gift Economy  
as Post-Capitalist Alternatives

EDITED BY ERELLA SHADMI

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as Post-Capitalist Alternatives

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**ERELLA SHADMI**



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Dedicated to my mother Ruth Shadmi (Roza Shlezing).  
May she rest in peace. Her love is with me until this very day.

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# Introduction: Motherhood—Between Chaos, Malfunction, Magic, and Vision

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ERELLA SHADMI

UNCERTAINTY, CHAOS, CONFLICTS, dilemmas, maternal thinking, unlimited giving, our mirrors, the source of life, the source of anger, the source of mental complications and pain, bliss, power—these are but a few of the common descriptions given to motherhood in the Western world. Motherhood awakens many moral and philosophical questions: what is life, what is creation, empowerment, responsibility, meaning of life, common sense and feeling, good and bad, morality and immorality? The mother figure is with us all our lives. Writers, poets, and artists tell about her, depict her, and fantasize about her. Satirists parade her conflicts and failures, philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, and doctors mould and interpret her with endless theories. Women share their experiences as mothers—but still, no one has ever managed to encompass the very complex definition of motherhood, and no one person has a proper answer to the question of the essence of motherhood and what is right and worthy motherhood. Finally, it remains a tangled mystery, a maze that moves between magic—the magic of mystery, creation, nurture, love, giving, the experience of togetherness and otherness—and the disillusion of magic—mothering, the failures, the guilt, the difficulties, the pain, its institutionalization, its nationalization. Motherhood is uncontrollable and indefinable. The secret of “proper” motherhood (how, for what purpose, for how long, etc.) remains and evokes the contemplation that maybe the search for proper motherhood is mistaken and reflects distrust in mothers themselves. This search and its hopelessness attest to the complexity and richness of motherhood and the impossibility

of fully grasping it (which is why there is no “bible” for mothers, despite the constant attempts of Dr. Spock and others). Thus it remains flexible, ever-changing, challenged and challenging—defiant, exceptional, and ordinary.

Nonetheless, many try to control motherhood and use it for their own purposes: patriarchy, capitalism, religion, the state, the welfare system, politics, medicine. Mothers are blamed for almost everything, especially their sons’ and daughters’ behaviour, i.e., almost any social misconduct. As a result, their sons and daughters tend to blame them as well and do their best to stay as far away from them as possible (an act that socially, culturally, and patriarchally is encouraged). All those who claim to know what motherhood is and how we, the mothers, are to be moulded create a disconnect between the mother and motherhood, distancing the mother from other mothers and of course from her children, undermining her confidence, cutting her off from her heritage and inclinations, and, in fact, leaving her alone in the face of giant institutions.

Despite everything, mothers usually do a good job; most of their children function well. Most mothers find their way through the maze of raising children and develop the necessary skills for the work of mothering—such as multi-tasking, maternal thinking, nurturing their children and themselves—despite all the attempts to control them. A woman is like nature—she simply learns from those surrounding her: her mother, her sisters, aunts, and friends. Mainly, however, she learns from her children by responding to their needs. Her road is strewn with trial and error, wonderment and learning, doubts and changing. Most mothers try to fulfill their children’s needs even if they feel trapped in their role or are ambivalent about it. Like other mature women who become mothers themselves, as time has passed, I admit that my mother did her best when raising me, despite mistakes she made. I wish I could be the mother and daughter I am today (to raise my daughter and regard my mother with my present understanding and wisdom). It is obviously not possible, but my motherhood and my mother’s motherhood were certainly not failures.

It is not surprising that mothers are usually invisible, and therefore few are the studies, if any, that directly examine their

success in raising their children—if any criterion for such a study may be formulated at all—except, perhaps, by comparisons, for example, between only children and children with siblings. In other words, offspring’s achievements in education, employment, social skills, and so on are often comparatively examined. However, these achievements are usually not framed as the mother’s success. On the other hand, the focus is turned on the mothers when failure is apparent, such as a juvenile delinquent—a youth who steals, murders, rapes, or one who commits suicide following the abuse of his or her peers. That is when we all look to the mother: “Who raised them to be such monsters?”<sup>1</sup> True, there are attempts to define and test parental efficacy, mainly by psychologists for the courts in cases of divorce or a child removed from the home. In fact, no society has developed tools for the assessment and measurement of parental efficacy in the general population—all the more so of mothers—when the assumption is that parental efficacy exists in every adult (Yagil). Furthermore, not only are these measures of parental efficacy doubtful (Almagor and Erlich), they are intertwined with problematic legal rhetoric (Barkay; Barkay and Mass) and bureaucratic violence (Hertzog). Therefore, the claim that parental efficacy—which includes the mother’s efficacy—is measurable seems like another way, albeit legal, to define motherhood and control it, and is usually applied to mothers coming from a specific ethnic or social background (and is not necessarily for the benefit of the child).

Instead, we should ask: What harms mothers? What impedes the mother from fulfilling her task of mothering? Is there a way to decrease these impediments, by, for example, a supportive rather than a scrutinizing welfare system? Perhaps the problem does not lie with mothering itself, but in the invalidation of their unique power?

In order to step out of the maze all mothers are trapped in—a trap that patriarchy (with all its institutions: the market, the family, religion, violence, the state, etc.) reinforces time and again—it is not enough to expose mothering’s cloak of mystery (as generations of women philosophers, artists, poets, and writers have been doing); it is not enough to listen to the experiences of mothers that modern feminism encourages, aiming to improve

mothering under patriarchy; it is not enough to deconstruct the institution of motherhood as initiated by Adrienne Rich—because as much as these have contributed to a more in-depth understanding of mothering, they have not yet deciphered the mystery. Moreover, such practices are still carried out within the patriarchal system, the only existing frame within which Western motherhood works.

What I suggest in this book is that only trust in the uniqueness and power of motherhood, together with the abandonment of the patriarchal framework—including socially controlled and structured motherhood, i.e., abandoning Western motherhood—can lead us to an alternative motherhood. In other words, I suggest liberation from patriarchy (and oppression in general) through motherhood.

For that purpose, I would like to introduce some of the difficulties I encounter with the prevailing feminist discourse regarding motherhood. As a feminist sociologist, I will focus on three main issues that occupy women, but not just women: the nuclear family, the meaning of urban life and loss of community, and the conflict between motherhood and career. I will discuss these issues to show their hopelessness, the dead end they lead us to, and the disrespect and contempt within motherhood—what I call “the catch of motherhood.” As I usually do, I will combine my own personal experience with some thoughts, difficulties, and theories so as to acknowledge the “symbolic order of the mother” suggested by the Italian feminist Luisa Muraro (cited by Scarparo “In the Name of the Mother”). This acknowledgement is the first step towards change—not only towards a new social and feminist outlook on motherhood, but also, and mainly so, towards a new and empowered understanding of mothers themselves. Through this examination, I will introduce and depict motherhood concepts that exist outside the patriarchal system (those will be introduced in the second and third parts of this book). These perceptions are not about the booby-trapped debate between the mother as an individual seeking self-fulfillment and the demands of society, family, and children. They do not aim to control the mother, to lay down a theory, dogma, or model of mothers or represent mothers. They are not trapped in the

debate over the essentialism apparently involved in motherhood or femininity. They emerge from a totally different starting point and therefore lead not only to a different mothering but also to a different existence altogether, a different society—a society of balance and peace.

### The Catch of Motherhood

For me, motherhood is the richest, most complex and meaningful experience I have ever had. However, since Simone de Beauvoir it has become a problem, maybe *the* problem of women.

Shulamith Firestone (*The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*) and Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*) saw in motherhood the root of oppression and encouraged free access to contraceptive methods. These methods became, together with abortion rights, the symbols of freedom and control over woman's own body; that is, according to this approach, a separation of womanhood from motherhood is necessary in order to change women's situation. All these are steps that rob women of their unique ability to give life. This logic that stands behind reproductive technology (Tazi-Preve *Motherhood in Patriarchy* 43) is also the logic behind enlightenment that encourages people to feel independent, encouraging their liberation from motherhood and nature, and mainly from their biological heritage, turning humankind into the only species detached from its biological components (Tazi-Preve *Motherhood in Patriarchy* 274).

That is how the home became the main site of oppression, while any other place outside it, especially the workplace, is perceived as an opportunity for liberation. This particular feminism, with new medical technologies of the artificial womb, joined patriarchy to work against motherhood, up to its gradual elimination. De Beauvoir's and others' preference for work over motherhood is especially difficult for me. Following many years of doubts and queries, while studying feminist texts and listening to other mothers, I have realized that motherhood is the best way to lead us out of patriarchy.

Quite a few feminist gatherings and writings dedicate time and space to the difficulties of motherhood: the pressure to become

a mother; the conflict between motherhood, work, and a career and the wish to fulfill oneself; the demographic race between Jews and Palestinians to become the majority in Israel; the nationalized womb; the withdrawal into our private space; the discrimination at work; the feelings of guilt; damage to children due to mothers' decisions or behaviour, etc., and they all have a valid point. But when I participate in women's spiritual festivals or meetings with Mizrahi women,<sup>2</sup> I hear other voices and I feel much more comfortable about my motherhood.

I celebrate my motherhood and risk being accused of essentialism and biologism, as Sara Ruddick (*Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*) and others before me have as well. But any human, woman or man, can realize maternal care, and it has nothing to do with biologism. I especially emphasize motherhood because motherhood that was silenced and deformed by generations of patriarchy, and probably by Western feminism as well, touches upon the deepest interface between patriarchy, capitalism, and the state. Mothers give unconditionally and for non-profitable purposes—giving that stands in contrast to the dominating market economy—because they respond to the child, the “other,” and not the selfish I, and they do not generate exploitation and hierarchy in the process. Touching motherhood, therefore, is looking at reality from the bottom, the bottom of the capitalist and patriarchal economy, and from there acknowledging the possibility of a different world. On the other hand, motherhood is an experience that bonds most women. It is also a meaningful experience, for better or for worse, in the lives of all women born, and in fact, all living creatures on earth. In most cultures, motherhood is a symbol of life, of the natural order of birth and growth. Apparently, motherhood is the oldest concept of a deity, since the ritual of the mother-goddess was known in pre-patriarchal societies and until today is revered by many who see in her the embodiment of love and power, as cited by Parameshwaran Shri, a scholar of Indian culture. That is the situation in all cultures except for Western cultures, which are belligerent in essence.

Feminist researchers running the disciplinary gamut, from genetic science and feminist researchers like psychologist and

genetic scientist Shelly Taylor (*The Tending Instinct: How Nurturing Is Essential to Who We Are and How We Live*) to Vicki Noble (“She Gives the Gift of Her Body”), who teaches arch-mythology at the California Institute of Integral Studies, suggest taking a new look at woman’s biology and life span, indicating new outlooks on woman’s nature. Furthermore, new research indicates that altruism and not egoism is humankind’s ancient defining feature (Benkler; Stein; Warneken and Tomasello). However, despite all of this, I will try to carefully tread around the issue of essentialism<sup>3</sup> to suggest we can find liberation from patriarchy through motherhood.

I find it imperative to emphasize that I support the feminist approaches that claim that motherhood is a personal choice that not all women must choose, as well as the claim that the love of a mother is not an instinct we are born with, so the concept of “natural motherhood”<sup>4</sup> does not exist. I also concur with the claim that within patriarchy, women are free (if they actually are free at all) to choose between work and career, leisure and idleness, motherhood and any choice that will enrich and satisfy them.

I do not ignore the problems that patriarchy creates for mothers, but as I will explain, I do not find release in the common prevailing feminist discourse on motherhood for five main reasons, at least: the politics of motherhood, the insistence on the nuclear family, the need for an alternative framework to raise children, the glorification of work, and the recognition of the magic and empowerment of mothering submerged in “the symbolical order of the mother.”

## The Politics of Motherhood

In her groundbreaking book, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich claims that in a patriarchal society, motherhood is perceived as a social institution. My friend Dr. Roni Halpern defines this social institution well, as “The way culture defines the ideal and desired image of a wife and a mother. The spectrum of emotions it attributes to her, the physical and spiritual outline it carves for her, the roles it attributes to her, and the various activities it imposes on her

(“Lo ovedet bishvil af ehad” [“Working for No One”]). In other words, there are social rules and strict instructions for how the mother and wife should act: the wife must be a mother; the mother does not care for herself but only for others; of course, she gives up a career and working outside the home, because for her motherhood is the main role, her natural need as a woman.

These rules that define the social institution are totally different from the rich and complex experience that is motherhood itself. The institution of motherhood is so outrageous to feminists that they suggest different ways to be free of this burden, for example, by pricing motherhood, working outside the home, or even test tube kids, as suggested by Shulamit Firestone. In comparison, Mary O’Brien (*The Politics of Reproduction*) sees motherhood as women’s source of power and she vehemently attacks Firestone’s suggestion. Together with other feminist researchers and activists, I would like to continue Mary O’Brien’s line of thinking, whose riveting theory has been overlooked by many feminists. Since motherhood is so central in my experience and my outlook on life, I search for an alternative understanding of motherhood, a theory that uses mothers’ points of view in order to fully understand patriarchal constructions and draw the outlines of an alternative world.

I continue my search with Adrienne Rich, who claims that being a mother is much more than what patriarchy defines for us. First and foremost, it is an experience, since the woman experiences motherhood in ways unaccounted for by patriarchy. It is also the work of mothering: a complex and difficult job that consumes much of the mother’s time and resources. According to Ruddick, at least in the Western world, motherhood has three basic aims: preservation, growth, and social acceptance, i.e., protecting children because of their vulnerability, nourishing their spiritual and intellectual growth, and guiding them on how to be accepted in the mother’s environment. Among ethnic and national minorities, the mother’s work is even more demanding. Andrea O’Reilly (*Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*) points to a suggestion made by Toni Morrison that speaks of an additional important role: the struggle against racism and sexism and resisting oppression, i.e., creating a safe

haven and a shelter from all possible oppressions, which means creating an alternative to oppression. O'Reilly calls it "politics of the heart," the subtitle of her book. Therefore, mothering is both political and social.

Unquestionably, not all mothers care for their children. In fact most mothers may both care and cause pain towards their children. In Morrison's books (see O'Reilly) and in our reality, women testify to how difficult motherhood and mothering are. According to O'Reilly, being aware of the pain and loss of both children who did not receive a mother's care and of mothers who hurt their children asserts the importance of motherhood and mothering. Ruddick emphasizes this position from another point of view, saying that women have many roles so they are mothers only if they are committed to the demands that define mothering. If I may add: in contrast to the principles of the institution of motherhood, there are women who do not wish to be mothers at all. Some of them do become mothers, but they regard it as a mistake they made due to social and family pressures. In other words, the reluctance to become mothers may accentuate harm done; thus, on the one hand, there is the complexity of mother work, and, on the other, its patriarchal institutionalization, which is a long way away from the wants and the experience of women. It is important to stress motherhood is a tough, demanding task in which it is possible to drown, not by definition, but due to its patriarchal context and environment, which does not embrace, but in fact rejects, the values of motherhood. Therefore, the problem is not within motherhood itself, nor the mothers, nor the mothering, but the constraints within which it operates—the institutionalization, the nuclear family, the loneliness, and lack of economic security of the mother.

In order to perform this complex task, mothering compels complex thinking. Ruddick called it "maternal thinking," the title of her book. As opposed to the conception of maternal work as routine, easy and simple, Ruddick claims that it entails developing security, care, and guidance strategies. Often, these strategies conflict and the mother has to contemplate the meaning and relevant importance of each goal.

A favourite example of mine is long- and short-term planning. Mothers, I suggest, prepare children for what they may encounter

in the next minutes or hours, and at the same time for what they may encounter after they turn eighteen and are independent. This planning is formed in conditions of great uncertainty, but it must be admitted that it is usually fulfilled successfully. It is a shame that until today scientists in schools of business and politics had not yet thought of studying and understanding, and also implementing, what every mother does daily.

Since through generations mothering was imposed almost exclusively on women, they have developed special abilities and characteristics. Feminists have developed interesting views regarding these characteristics. In her book *The First Sex*, anthropologist Helen Fisher claims that women have amazing mental abilities: verbal ability, an ability to read body language, emotional sensitivity, empathy, patience, multi-tasking, and more. She claims that some of our tendencies are embedded in our minds during fertilization, but, as she puts it, “women and men are [not] puppets dangling from strings of DNA” (19).

In her book *Integrative Feminism*, Angela Miles, a radical feminist from Toronto, also acknowledges the unique characteristics of women’s conduct, and she calls them “women’s specificity” (31). These are women’s experiences and perspectives of the world, a sense of common oppression and the feminine characteristics involved in it. According to Miles, different from Fisher, these characteristics stem from the unique experience of giving birth, mothering, and the gendered division of work. These sources form what Christine Delphy (*Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women’s Oppression*), one of the founding mothers of French Feminism, calls the material basis for a complete and advanced analysis of the world, which goes beyond the wish for equality and searches for a relevant universal politic. The experience of oppression and exclusion for generations, together with motherhood and care as well as the socialization process created around them, created different perceptions and ways of behaving among women.

Women in Black is a local example of the importance of women’s specificities. This peace movement developed three new and original ways of expression for the individual and the collective: the speaking body, the colour black, and the constant

presence in space and time. This choice was not randomly made or preplanned. It emanated from the way Israeli women in general and Women in Black specifically experience the social position of women, that is, from experiencing the prevalent perception of the woman as a political category, defined by its submission to the dominant group, in conjunction with the oppositional viewpoint of Women in Black that champions “women’s specificities” when confronting the dominant cultural institutions.

Whether we accept Fisher’s biological standpoint or Miles’s materialist approach or a mix of both—a mix which I admit to holding myself—we perceive an acceptance of the experience, characteristics, abilities, and values of giving, responding to others’ needs, care and responsibility, that many women today call “motherliness.” This acceptance of the unique characteristics and capabilities of women continues along the lines of cultural feminist thought, as presented by Carol Gilligan, whose contribution is worth emphasizing.

Motherliness is not centred on the ego or benefit for the individual. It is altruistic and the well-being of life is its centre, the best and healthy being of everyone (not due to feminine biology but to the needs of babies and infants). It is also a spiritual principle humans learned from nature: just as Mother Nature cares for her creatures despite their differences, so a good mother cares for all her children despite their differences. It is not a romantic notion, as patriarchy constantly tries to claim in order to decrease its value and make it invisible. Judaism further complicates the attitude towards mothers: on the one hand, the prayer “Woman of Valor” praises the Hebrew woman by describing the impossible tasks she has to perform, while the sentence “Wonder woman—her husband Pieter and decay in his bones—disgraceful” (Book of Proverbs 12:4) means a lazy woman is demeaning to her husband and a problem. On the other hand, King Solomon says: “Hear the instruction of thy father and forsake not the law of thy mother” (Book of Proverbs 1:8). What is the law of the mother?

The mother tends to the natural growth of the child—feeds, dresses, guides. That is how she maneuvers the child’s physical and personal growth. The mother and her actions that follow

the child in his or her growth become the mother's law. The mother's usefulness to the son is more meaningful than the father's teachings. This statement means that the actual, lived law taught by the mother's actions (i.e., by example) is much more important than the teachings by the father, as the latter are only heard. The mother leads and guides about how to act and how to respond to every situation. The mother instills a whole lifestyle that includes spiritual values and ways to conduct oneself in almost every possible situation known to humans. As opposed to 'the father's teachings,' which are taught both verbally and in texts, the mother's law forms the child's soul as putty in her hand.<sup>5</sup>

Although I reject the words of "Woman of Valor," I must emphasize that the term "your mother's law" is very similar to the term "motherliness" that I have presented and, in my opinion, they are both applicable to mothers and fathers alike.

The recognition of mothering and the motherliness principle allows us to perceive the role of the mother as a place of power and competence. Motherhood is power and motherliness is the tool of that power and involves standing against patriarchy, racism, and oppression. Together with empowering groups in the search for empowered motherhood and feminist motherhood—as impressively shown by O'Reilly—it is no less essential and, in my opinion even more so, to expose the power of motherliness and the ways it can change the face of society, if only we expose it to the public arena. Unlike many women, some of them feminists, who abandon motherhood as insufficient and go out in search of self-fulfillment in art, activism, or career, motherhood should be redefined as a place of meaning and power, as a place that will carry the wind of change to the public domain. More importantly: motherhood is a fact of nature and it is worthy of becoming a social principle, the basis of a social order as achieved by matriarchy, instead of narrowing it down, dismissing it as unimportant or trying to abolish it with technology.

I see in this old-new perception of motherhood three layers that allow transformation: a basis for the empowerment of mothers themselves, a valuable social principle, namely, a set of values

that suits the public and private domains including human relationships, the family, politics, society and economy, as well as an organizational principle for a new social and political order.

\* \* \*

If we acknowledge motherhood—our legacy of responsibility, care, giving, responsiveness to others, etc.—and if we respect it and see it as the basis of an alternative world order, we can use it also in the public sphere and not only towards our children, our partners, and our friends. We can transform it into the foundation of a different relationship with others and in the public sphere, for different politics and different theories. The idea that motherhood and politics, motherhood and public spheres, such as the public space, the political arena, our work and our career, are conflicting areas is, of course, erroneous. It is wrong not only because “the personal is political” as goes the well-known feminist saying, meaning that the power struggles between men and women that occur in the public and private arenas are intertwined, but also—and this is what I wish to stress here—because motherhood offers an alternative human logic and therefore it carries transformative meaning for the public space, to politics and society. I can care for myself as a mother at the same time that I am giving to my child. There is no conflict between caring for myself and caring for my daughter. This conflict is part of the social structure of positioning paid work outside the home in opposition to motherhood. Moreover, the care and nurture of my child is also a part of caring for my needs as a mother, as a woman, and as a human being. This supposed conflict is the product of social discourse, including the contributions of certain feminisms, and this conflict can be turned into a source of power. Motherhood can definitely be used as the focal point of their definition as equal citizens, and more importantly, as a basis for a different worldview.

Motherhood and politics are no longer viewed as two separate poles to choose between. Combining them reflects not only the fact that mothers are equal citizens who are entitled to take part in every public debate, but also points to the source of a unique

input to public debate, political culture, and social arrangements. This is a true attempt to extricate motherhood from its patriarchal definition and to redefine it in liberating terms that stem from women's experience and point of view: motherhood can be understood as a source of power for women and a resistance to patriarchal institutions. Motherhood is not to be perceived as the merciful, pure, and caring ideal that it is claimed to be by the social institution argument. Neither is it to be perceived as preserving the existing order, nor as a passive object of patriarchy and consequently an object of feminist criticism. Rather, motherhood is to be understood as an active agent of growth, responsibility, and empowerment; a critical standpoint towards the violence of the state and its social institutions, family and manhood, and most of all, as an alternative perception of humanness. Motherhood can be the basis for feminist transformative activism; mothers can create an alternative space for themselves within which they form practices of opposition that will expose the connection between manhood, political and economic violence, militarism and violence against women, constructing frameworks that enable empowerment of women and develop alternatives for peace.

In fact, Israel, being such a militaristic, occupation-based, religious, and patriarchal land can serve as an excellent place to test these new motherhood-based practices. In short: motherhood is a place of power and a tool of revolution.

### **The Nuclear Family**

Since I have been a single woman for many years, a bit of a tomboy, somewhat clumsy and wild, I certainly did not consider having a family. A family is most commonly understood to include a man, a woman, and children; there is hardly any deviation from this structure. A single woman is nothing more than a lonely being. I joined a lesbian group at the feminist centre Woman's Voice [Kol Ha'Isha] in Jerusalem while it was still in its early stages. We were radicals and wanted to revolutionize the world. We were critical of the violent institutionalized family and searched for alternatives for our existence as lesbian women. As soon as I became pregnant, I felt the group's alienation towards me. After

I gave birth, only two women out of the group that had become my family came to see me. It was a terrible blow for me. At the time, my motherhood was perceived as an act of defiance against the patriarchal society, which I did not wish to belong to, and at the same time it put lesbian womanhood in a new light. My lesbian friends were afraid to confront the new challenges that arose by my actions (as I was told by one of the group's leaders years later). On the other hand, society and many of the social institutions accepted me with a mix of reluctance and curiosity in light of the fact that unwed mothers were a rarity in those days and almost totally unknown amongst politically active lesbians living outside of the closet. To my dismay, motherhood turned me into a "normative" being, something I did not want to be: in exchange for my motherhood, society was willing to overlook my lesbian identity and radical feminism. I rejected this acceptance: in my opinion—and I have said so in my book *Thinking as a Woman*—being both a lesbian and a radical feminist expresses a revolutionary being, starting with the rejection of existing patriarchal social institutions, mainly the Western family and its goals, and aiming to overturn existing social, economic, and political structures.

Through the years, lesbian motherhood has become more common. Parenthood has become the main path for the gay community into the Israeli mainstream, a development I have never felt comfortable with. The organization New Family, for example, is active and aims to award legal and social rights to families supposedly outside of the consensus; in reality, however, those families adopt the basic heterosexual model. The organization The Alternative Parenting Center has a similar mandate. This organization acknowledges that a "partnership in parenthood does not necessarily entail a marriage or a sexual relationship" and that "the onus of parenting falls on two parents, including birth and caring for the child's physical, emotional, and economic needs" (Alternative Parenting Center). The work of these organizations is essential, of course, but reflects the acceptance of the patriarchal family institution as the model and the prototype.

Academic departments, too, such as Women's Studies and Family Studies, and other programs for family and educational therapy

and family mediation, deal mainly with the existing paradigms and the dilemmas they raise as a result of the patriarchal-capitalistic order. These departments and programs are all important and their input valuable. These studies aim to better understand the family institution and the dynamic between family and society, and they assist us in dealing better with its inherent conflicts. The basis of this point of view (following Nancy Chodorow) is that a change in the paradigm of parenting—especially a push for equal parenting and the development of parenting skills—and perhaps also an alteration in manhood, fatherhood, and the work environment will assist in achieving social equality and in raising children.

As a person in search of radically new social structures, my restlessness superseded the available alternatives. Despite pressure from my life-partner, I refused to perform a marriage ceremony or any other type of matrimonial partnership, in step with the Jewish American professors Martha Eckelsberg and Judith Plaskow, whose essay “Why We’re Not Getting Married” drew much criticism. For me, such a heteronormative ceremony means accepting reality as it is and does not constitute change.

Everything has already been said about family: it is violent, perpetuates the romantic myth of “endless love,” puts an unbearable burden on women, and ostracizes those who do not want to be mothers and single mothers. The ambivalent role of the father has also been discussed, along with the problematic Freudian family triangle.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever the case may be, most of us—men and women, gay men and lesbians, transgender people, Jews and Arabs, and others—are bound by the traditional institution of the family.

Motherhood itself is not the biggest problem for women and children in Western patriarchy; rather, it is the nuclear family (joined with the solitude of the mother and the institutionalization of motherhood). As the main component in the capitalistic economy, the nuclear family is the big prison that the capitalist patriarchy constructed. It is true that Orna Donath, who wrote about women who do not want children (“Not for Me”), and Amalia Ziv, who speaks of the queer family (“Queer Reproduction”), undermine the nuclear family that is indeed

changing: a new fatherhood, less violence in non-heterosexual couples, etc. However, such critique is not enough to undermine the capitalist patriarchy in general. Moreover, these critiques dangerously, though not intentionally, assist in the suppression of motherhood. They suggest a social change without the maternal logic, which I find problematic. Women and men deny the maternity within them and in this way they join patriarchy and the market that deny yet concurrently exploit the values of motherliness. After years of feminist activism and motherhood, I have learned that our identities are always defined according to our relation to the family unit. Regardless of gender, we are always also identified as unmarried, a single mother/father, or part of a nuclear family with two parents. My identity as a woman is always partly defined by whether or not I have a child or partner, or both. In that manner, the nuclear family always stands between myself as a unit, as an individual, and society. Despite our efforts to replace it, the heteronormative model is always there. That is how the alternative called lesbianism was expelled and the heterosexual model remained alone in the centre. I therefore arrived at a dead end.

Things become even more complicated because capitalism, the state, and mainstream feminism influence our lifestyle choices and our attitudes towards motherhood. These influences are put into practice by creating norms, values, and pressures that subjugate motherhood to the market economy and presume as a prerequisite a family of two breadwinners, where both parents give priority to work (Gilbert *A Mother's Work*). For example, regarding motherhood and feminism, it should be noted that empowerment and self-fulfillment are almost always oriented towards individual change and are fulfilled in the public sphere, and therefore are never connected to motherhood, since the self or the woman are positioned in contrast to motherhood and family and are more significant than them. As a result, mainstream feminism creates a division between me as a woman and me as a mother, all the while positioning motherhood as a problem. That is how it perpetuates the problem so efficiently created by patriarchy: separating between women and their experience, history, and legacy. The overemphasis on experience and personal

narrative that almost always occurs under patriarchy does not assist us in visualizing alternative ideas. This way, the sense of a dead end becomes even more complex.

Despite what the liberals and enlightened try to tell us, we are not free to choose our own way, not as long as we are trapped in a Western patriarchal society. Piggish capitalism, which is the present and the worst (so far) form of patriarchy, succeeds in dominating everything, which may be its main power: to confiscate every concept, to enslave any idea, and even to subject to its purposes the objections and criticism thereof. The totalitarianism of capitalism, as it was called by Herbert Marcuse in his book *The One Dimensional Man* and Barbara Ehrenreich in her famous paper on socialist feminism (“What Is Socialist Feminism?”), sees in capitalism a social and economic totality and not just the ownership of the means of productivity. We should not forget that the nuclear family is the main basis of capitalist patriarchy that will do everything to maintain itself (Werlhof *The Failure of Modern Civilization*).

### **Motherhood, Urbanism, and Community**

Let us assume that the nuclear family disintegrates or at the very least its disintegration is close. Only the lonely individual, seeking his or her way through a society that is detaching itself from any signs of solidarity, is left in such a reality. However, some people maintain that the new urbanism is the base of the new world. Increasingly, greater numbers of individuals are moving into cities, and as of 2008, for the first time in human history more people live in cities than in villages. The city is perceived as a never-ending source of culture and a basis for the evolution of civilization. It attracts people not only due to the opportunities of employment in it or around it but because of the fascinating street life, the multicultural variety of population living in it, the concentration of places for recreation, arts, and entertainment, and the direct encounter with people it enables. The city is so attractive that there is some talk of its victory as the central location (Glaeser *Triumph of the City*; see also Fraser *Toward a Philosophy of the Urban*; Kemp *Making America's Cities*).

Some see in urbanism a new identity, a cosmopolitan urbanism (the belief that different and separate cultures will become one harmonious community of cosmopolitan citizens) that bridges differences of nationality, religion, gender, and status.

On the other hand, city life involves more than employment, pleasure, and identity; it also carries many difficulties, such as poverty and social gaps that, despite the beliefs and wishful thinking of many, cosmopolitan urbanism does not help to bridge. Housing problems and homeless people, conflicts between sectors, traffic difficulties, and insecurity and anxiety are issues that lead to over-consumption of clothes, overcrowding, losing touch with nature, solitude, anonymity, and even harm to brain function. No wonder an agitated debate is being held regarding proper urban development planning and the city's many problems (Bukobza "Only to Get a Hug," "The Connection between Fashion and the Big City"; Gruber "In Search of a Fourth Urbanism"). As a criminologist I cannot ignore terror, lack of security and the harm to people that occur in city life (Smith *The New Urban Frontier*).

Such urbanism is a problem for mothers: city planning unresponsive to the needs of mothers and children, lack of sustainable housing, poverty, insecurity, insufficient public transportation, uncomfortable sidewalks for mothers with children and prams, difficult access to educational, occupational and entertainment institutions, parks and playgrounds, and most of all, detachment or very little communication with other mothers for advice and support. These issues create a reality where mothers live in solitude. It is no wonder that the term "women-friendly city" has become popular, and so are forums and blogs on the internet and private enterprises whose purpose is to strengthen mothers and supply them with advice and social life. The question remains: Does the city offer new ways to connect or does it still impose serious difficulties for too many of its citizens, especially the disadvantaged? Doesn't global urbanization create more difficulties for humankind, and can proper planning provide a solution?

It is not surprising that the 2011 protests around the world burst out in large cities, although they did expand to smaller cities and towns. Yet, what is important for our discussion is that,

especially for the younger generation, urbanism does not suffice as a source of identity. Many youngsters do not trust city life anymore and aspire to build within it alternatives in the form of shared life and local communities, much like the urban kibbutz (a collective urban settlement), cooperatives, urban gardening, “time bank” communities, and also ecological villages and matriarchal communities, like those in Colombia, Germany, and many more (see the third section hereafter). It appears that disappointment in individualism and anonymous urbanism along with the anxiety they involve has led these young people to understand that only together, within the framework of a community, can they support themselves and also support others. This is not a new phenomenon. Communities have been known to exist at different times in history and in different areas of the world; it is not incidental that a push towards community is reoccurring today. Communities today, despite being a new version of the long history of communal life, are unique in the sense that they centralize concurrently around communal sharing and sovereignty of the individual: “every individual is an independent spiritual being and does not annul his or her individual thought due to authoritative messages from the outside” (Regev *Sharing Sovereigns*). This tendency towards community, which is happening in Israel as well as other places in the world, is linked with critical views towards the state and capitalism, such as communitarianism (Bell “A Communitarian Critique”; Etzioni “Communitarianism”), utopianism (Critchley “Is Utopianism Dead?”; Goldman “Who’s Scared of Utopia?”), and anarchism (Gordon *Anarchism and Political Theory*). In Israel, these critiques are also concomitant with the main significance of the community in Jewish history (Gendler “Congregation”). Though there are quite a few disagreements between these theories, all of them are critical of the state and its main institutions and stress the importance of community along with values of giving, social responsibility, and social commitment.

This localized starting point may be a new opening for an original type of communal family or familial communities, living side by side within urbanism and enabling its members to overcome solitude, fight insecurity, allow human bonding, and

mostly, to construct a suitable framework for mothers and raising children. The desperate search for proper urban planning and the solutions proposed for urban problems, similar to cases of the nuclear family (discussed earlier) and work (discussed later), perhaps indicate acceptance of the dictates of capitalist patriarchy and an attempt to find a *modus vivendi* within it without changing it entirely.

Indeed, the Israeli attempt at a *kibbutz*—especially in view of the oppression of women and mothers in it—and the feminist discussion of the unbearable tension between local cultural values and the respect and freedom of women reveal the hidden dangers of the renewal of community life. Moreover, although many feminists criticize the idea of communities and are wary of women’s oppression, many of them still praise the alternative communities that they themselves have created (for example: *Isha Le’Isha* [Woman to Woman] in Haifa, the Jerusalem lesbian centre etc.), although the quality of their communal lives and their success at undermining patriarchy is unclear. The alternative models of society, community, and gender relations that this book offers can lead to a new kind of community that is not patriarchal at all.

## Motherhood and Work

Work: is it not the salt which preserves embalmed souls?  
—Charles Baudelaire, *Rockets*, 1867

Nowadays, the public and mainstream feminist discourses are searching for ways to achieve harmony between work and parenthood. The basic assumption is that such harmony is possible, and we are only required to apply a few changes to either parenthood or work. This type of rhetoric ignores the unbridgeable tension between two different, opposite rationales, two opposite sets of conduct, responsibility, and values (Tazi-Preve “Telling the Truth”). The capitalist-patriarchal framework has constructed these two rationales since the very beginning, not only as two separated spheres, but also so that one is exploited by the other and they differ in their conduct and values (cost-benefit factors, competitiveness, selfishness, individuality, power, and coercion).

on the one hand, and stability, care, generosity, responsibility, and empathy on the other). Mothers still bear the responsibility for family and fertility, which affects the extent of their participation in the labour market and their pension level. Compensation and pension payments are based mostly on work outside the home and ignore housework, while social policy and discourse keep pressing towards increasing the number of children. Therefore, the options available to women are: choose non-motherhood; be a housewife and depend on the partner; work a part-time job only, which does not provide a full livelihood; or, carry the triple burden of career, nuclear family, and extended family. I have yet to mention labour market inequalities and disparity. It is no wonder that it is so difficult, probably impossible, to bridge mothering and work within the capitalist-patriarchal rationale. I am afraid most of us are reluctant to acknowledge the deception inherent in this model of sociality, as if a balance between motherhood and career is truly possible. Most likely, equality in the labour market can only be achieved for childless women or women who employ other women full-time to raise their children.

However, the problem of motherhood and work is much more complex: mainstream feminist values, specifically the desire to attain equality in the labour market, demonstrate the acceptance of the capitalist-patriarchal rationale, because they imply that women will be at liberty to hold the same economic, professional, and political positions which have been held by men for generations. This way of thinking implicates the disturbing contrast between mothers' self-fulfillment and children's needs for love, care, and security. If this acceptance is not complete acceptance of the capitalist rationale, it is, at least, the appropriation of feminism by capitalism and neoliberalism (Eisenstein *Feminism Seduced*), an approach that Juliet Mitchell ("Reflections") warned against as early as 1986, to no avail.

Work does not offer independence, since it means increasing dependence on the market and capitalist culture. Such a rationale is the result of the social structuring of work and career, as well as the capitalist-patriarchal centring of work as a means to self-fulfillment. Most of our waking hours are spent at work and we are compelled to regard this expenditure as a significant part of

our lives. Changing perceptions of human activity as work and the value associated with them are subject to their time period and society. As feminists, entrusted with a critical position based on women's points of view, we should take time to deconstruct the discourse (just as we have largely managed to do with the discourse on motherhood), which positions work as extremely important and motherhood as a "natural" matter of lesser value; I propose to turn the tables.

In this historical moment, it is difficult to understand how work has become a virtue and a source of power. According to Jewish religious doctrine, we were expelled from Eden—a place of peace and fulfilled needs—to a world of hard, painful labour (in both its work and childbirth senses). In earlier times, work was considered a curse, avoided by respectable people, and only intended for slaves and the lower classes. Only with modernity has work become a source of happiness, even absent a financial necessity. This change in values came about during the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century when John Calvin, a leader of the Reformation, sanctified capitalism and believed work was a means to redemption. Protestantism, originating in the doctrine of Martin Luther (also a seminal figure in the Reformation), stated that the work of the Creator is expressed in everyday labour as well. The Protestant work ethic paved the way for a change of values regarding the place of work in an individual's life: first from a necessity, then to a valid means of expressing one's religious beliefs, and later, to a moral, desirable lifestyle in itself. That is to say, a lifestyle which includes work is not necessarily a burden, and the work of God is not solely performed by means of asceticism and the study of holy books. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, French Encyclopédistes mocked the elite and were fascinated by labourers. John Locke, one of the fathers of liberalism and democracy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, attacked hereditary privileges and advocated assets achieved through physical labour. Adam Smith, a pioneer of capitalist economy, coined labour as the foundation of his "Wealth of Nations." Work and its fruits became a religion in the industrial society.

In the generations since then, work has become a source not only of wealth but also of pride, despite Karl Marx's infamous

claim that the worker has nothing to lose but his/her chains. Interestingly, Marx himself also advocated work, terming it “the life which produces life,” implying that a human being is only a human being through work (Alain de Botton *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work*). Craft, which is beyond labour and is shared by the computer programmer, the physician, the artisan, and the parent, is also an expression of enlightenment that enables aware, informed citizenship. It is the basic human urge to perform any role properly, and in its best form it involves developing skills and focusing on work, rather than on the self (Sennet *The Craftsman*). In the early days of Zionism, people of the Second Aliyah praised work at a new level, akin to a new religion—“The Work Religion”—that offered salvation from all ailments of the body and soul and appealed not only to the personal but to the collective as well.

This perception persisted as long as society depended upon the production of factories and sweatshops. In our age of knowledge and information, however, work has turned into a career and the work of services and capital has replaced labour, which is outsourced to “developing” nations. Though the meaning of work in the Western world is changing, its centrality is not. On the contrary: under the boots of ecstatic capitalism (Hymowitz “Ecstatic Capitalism’s Brave New Work Ethic”)—that is, the new work ethic of long hours, mixed work and play, young energy and intensity, the two-faced emotion of community and individuality in a shattered world and more—work has evolved from a source of income to a main source of defining one’s significance and identity, a place for socializing and leisure; it is even perceived as a spiritual matter. In other words, the centrality and meaning attributed to work is the result of social structuring in the Western world. This structuring gains power at the expense of relationships, love, family, and leisure. It also deems woman’s work at home, and mothering in particular, worthless.

Western feminism also contributes to the discourse of work’s centrality (Hymowitz “Ecstatic Capitalism’s Brave New Work Ethic”), repeatedly emphasizing the value of work, politics, and the public sphere as main sources for women’s liberation. Usually Western feminism praises work and the economy as settings for

women's empowerment (Eisenstein *Feminism Seduced*). In my opinion, as I have argued in feminist forums more than once and earned my share of contempt, this is how feminism became a servant of capitalism, which is nothing but the long arm of patriarchy (Werlhof *The Failure of Modern Civilization*), just as since the 1970s, the gay liberation movement (and especially the control of hedonist, wealthy homosexual bachelors over the movement and its communications and progression towards the queer movement) made sexuality, which it strove to serve, a pawn in the hands of capitalism.

For example, Noya Rimalt's excellent essay, "Between Segregation and Integration: A Call for Renewed Feminist Thinking on Equality and Gender in the Labour Market," focuses on the question of the best method of women's struggle for integration in the labour market, without questioning the uncritical pursuit of work within the capitalist-patriarchal frame, which is itself established upon the oppression and exploitation of men and women alike. She says:

Feminist thinking must hold a constant process of examining the ideology guiding it, of recognizing the legal channels it aims for, and of recurrently assessing the extent of the feminist ideology and practice's suitability to the advancement of the relevant needs of the women they aim to serve.

The financial crisis of the late 2000s, the increasing unemployment rate and the automation moving in to replace man/womanpower and dramatically reduce the middle class (Brynjolfsson and McAfee *Race Against the Machine*)<sup>7</sup> have led to an understanding of work as a factor that causes the deterioration of social cohesiveness, the expanding recognition of the limitations of growth (Arendt *The Human Condition*), and the destruction of the planet through over-industrialization and -exploitation. There is also currently a growing awareness of the importance and significance of individual leisure and well-being, which raises the question: "Work: what is it good for?" (Gutting). Critical feminist discourse that recognizes the unbridgeable tension between housework and work outside

the home or motherhood and career, too, encourages critical thinking about the centrality of work in our lives, and imagines life without work or with reduced work hours.<sup>8</sup>

The transition to a post-industrial society is an opportunity to mould a post-capitalist society. The undermining of the concept of work along with a growing recognition of its cost to the individual, society, and the planet avail the public discourse to alternative possibilities of life. To me, one of the exciting options is related to something often regarded as exterior to the world of work, the public sphere, economy, and politics: motherhood. As this book proposes, in the footsteps of other scholars and philosophers, motherhood outlines an alternative human logic, which meets the needs of individuals and society alike and is capable of showing us a new path.

One of the problems that the capitalist labour market causes, as revealed by feminism in its very early days, is the sharp separation between salaried work and motherhood, between home and work. Many feminist researchers and activists have struggled mightily, not only for recognition of the economic value of motherhood but also, and especially, for the penetration of women into the world of politics and work, oftentimes by compromising motherhood or giving it up altogether. Fewer are those attempts, such as that of Ruddick (*Maternal Thinking*), which lay out the possibilities embedded in establishing motherhood as a central model of conduct in the public sphere.

The separation between family and employment, the private and the economic, family (and motherhood) and career, which is an inseparable part of the capitalist-patriarchal work landscape, has diminished motherhood to inner family relations, especially those between a mother and her offspring. This sequestration of motherly relations has naturally led to the depreciation of motherhood and its definition as a biological trait of women, which is especially ironic given the allegedly rich range of values and identities offered by the market. Therefore, no wonder the first sectors to see cutbacks in capitalist societies are health, education, and welfare—all realms that are concerned with the provision of care for wo/men, which is, as said before, the centre of motherhood. Budgets for wars, weaponry, police, and

penitentiaries are expanded to supervise wo/men, hurt them and kill them, instead of nurturing, empowering, and caring for them. This approach is underlined by an ideology that looks to decimate motherhood and motherliness, and which designs the economic rules and models (Eisler “Revisioning the Economic Rules”).

### **A Dead End? The Magic of Motherhood**

The feminist discussion of motherhood, the relative stability of the institution of family, the resilience of the institution of work and especially the consistent, stubborn search for alternatives to natural motherhood, such as surrogacy or artificial womb, all lead to the feeling of a dead end. I am uncomfortable with the feminist discourse of motherhood, let alone the patriarchal discourse, *inter alia* because I cannot find an echo of the marvelous experience I’ve been undergoing every day for over thirty years: the purest experience of loving and accepting the other, different from me yet the closest to me; the moment in which I lovingly give myself away for years, enable and encourage, forgivingly and without judgment, even if I am hurt or wounded. This is the moment when I learn about myself in the most refined and purified way possible. This is the moment in which society, nature, and I connect in magical harmony.

No, I do not ignore the aforementioned difficulties of motherhood, which will be demonstrated in Part One of the book, in Mariam Irene Tazi-Preve’s essay. Nor do I abandon myself in the process. I take as an example Margaret’s story of Pretzel, the infatuated dachshund whose object of unrequited affection, his beloved dachshund friend, falls into a deep hole. Before diving in to rescue her, Pretzel first ties his long tail with rope, making sure he wouldn’t fall in and disappear in the hole as well. In other words: caring for myself, as a mother, can occur at the same time as giving to a child. Caring for myself, as a mother, does not structurally contradict caring for my daughter. This alleged contradiction is part of the social construction of work as contrary to motherhood, the institutionalization of motherhood and isolation of the mother. Moreover, nourishing my daughter and caring for her are part of caring for my needs as a mother, a woman, and a human.

Listening to the experiences and narratives of mothers, my own included—a field of ethnography which has begun to blossom in Israel lately—is not liberating enough for me either, because this experience, wonderful, difficult, or bizarre as it is (see the essays of Ana Anonyma, Shula Keshet, and Honaida Ghanem in Part One), is always trapped in the capitalist-patriarchal world. In this world, the nuclear family still rules—as said, a particularly problematic political institution, which, until today, provides a focal point for most couples choosing to live together, so-called alternative families included.

The path towards change is rather to get into the “Symbolic Order of the Mother,” as termed by Italian philosopher Luisa Muraro, in order to find a maternal alternative for the existing. Muraro says: “If I position myself within the mother’s genealogy, if I measure myself in terms of a relationship with another woman, if I place maternal authority above established power—if I create a new symbolic—then it is another world, in the more practical and realistic sense. This is what many already practice” (Scarparo “In the Name of the Mother”).<sup>9</sup> Muraro is not interested in women’s penetration into politics, but rather in the moulding of another symbolic order and new scripts. An appropriate way of opposing the symbolic order of the father and creating a new symbolic order is to accord, within our relationships, true power upon our earliest relationship: the relationship with the mother, which has no image or form in a patriarchal society. Since every woman has had, through her mother, a first love and the first model, the attempt to recreate this relationship will again generate maternal authority in the symbolic sense (*ibid.*).

This is how Muraro positions the mother as the first authority for any human being, especially in language, since she is the first to mediate between the child and the world, and to inject some order into the chaos of the baby’s world, using language. Since maternal authority is not acceptable in the current social order, her behaviour is often seen as inappropriate, and the mother’s love and authority are methodically denied. In fact, the interpretation of the mother is not limited to symbolism, because she also marks the memory of the physical place of childhood, when the mother used to be the centre of our world. For Muraro,

maternal love is the benchmark to understanding the genesis of feminist knowledge.

Toni Morrison's book *Beloved* also reached beyond the symbolic order of the father, thereby not only pointing at an alternative language based on maternal values, but also sketching a system that positions the subject in relation to other subjects. Sethe, the main character, acts within the "symbolic order" of her own presence and connection, while Denver, her survivor daughter, ends up finding a more inclusive order than Lacan's paternal-symbolic order. The order Denver discovers is one that blends verbal and linguistic indulgences, cherishes her with words, and teaches her that caring is what language does (Wyatt "Giving Body to the Word").

Another concept, perhaps more appropriate, especially because it is not contaminated by the limited and restrictive Western way of thinking, is rematriation (see Part Three of this book), which is about the reappropriation of the remnants, spirituality, culture, knowledge, and resources of the maternal legacy, rather than the embrace of patriarchal legacy. Rematriation was the term used by the Mohawk-born poet Susan Deer Cloud, in order to bequeath to her culture (or re-equip it with) concepts of matriarchal giving. Hence, rematriation contradicts, of course, the difficult separation from the mother Freud presents us with as the sole option for relation available to females. It also means reattaching ourselves to the mother, to attribute ourselves to the mother—the physical mother and symbolic mother alike—in order to reconnect to the symbolic mother, to all our mothers, and, of course, to Mother Earth, the primal mother of us all. This reconnection involves no essentialism, as Carol Christ ("Is It Essentialist?"), a researcher of women and religion, theology and spirituality, explains:

While I will never argue that all women must be mothers (I am not a mother), or that women can only be mothers (I, myself, am many other things), I do argue that the symbol of Mother Earth is of metaphoric power. None of us would have been here without a mother (natural or otherwise) who has carried us inside her body until we were ready to survive on our own. None of us would have known how to care

and nurture without having experienced care and nurture ourselves. For many of us, our earliest experiences of love and care were those of our mother's care. This does not mean that men and fathers are incapable of loving and caring. Indeed, I argue that they are capable and it is appropriate they do so. But fathers, however, do not grant unto us the gift of life, in the very intimate way mothers do. That is the reason why the symbol of Mother Earth earns such reverberation: this is the physicality of the gift of life. The symbol of Mother Earth reminds us all that life is a gift, and we all depend on one another in the great scheme of life.

It is important for me to explain why I do not see a possibility of liberation in the Western way of thinking, and why I feel the need to expand beyond it in order to find realistic alternatives. I indeed accept the officially declared values of Western society—usually amounting to principles of liberty, equality, and solidarity—which, on the face of things, the Western system strains to embrace. However, I am not content with the Western system: the internal contradictions, if not the entire ideological basis typical for Western thinking, that lead it to disasters and destruction, as well as to a partial, unequal, and aggressive realization of the values of liberty, equality, and solidarity. Fully settling these contradictions will necessarily lead to habits of life which are customary to the non-Western world,<sup>10</sup> and to the recognition of the “full” historical heritage of wo/mankind. Such “fullness” can only come about by looking through a “bigger telescope,” as suggested by Maria Mies (cited in Werlhof 11), which also includes societies built around women and matriarchal societies that existed in pre-patriarchal history and still exist. Certain non-Western, Indigenous societies, insofar as they were not disturbed by patriarchy or other destructive ideologies, have not simply named their adherence to values of liberty, equality, and solidarity, but have also fully realized these values. Indeed, the American Constitution itself was affected by, and even embraced, certain political principles of the Iroquois nation (see, inter alia, Johansen *Forgotten Founders*; Johansen, Mann, and Grinde *Debating Democracy*; Mann *Iroquoian Women*).

In a nutshell, I mention the criticism against Enlightenment principles: its promises of freedom of thought, freedom of individuals, the progress of knowledge and welfare, and the development of ethics have led to extremely destructive calamities. Yet, instead of rejecting Enlightenment as an impossible hope, there have been attempts to right its wrongs, just like there have been attempts to correct the free market's faults instead of rejecting them altogether.

The explanation for this failure derives from another place. Claudia von Werlhof's concept of the "failure of modern civilization" claims such a failure originates in several patriarchal practices. These practices include the housewifization and non-salaried employment of women as one basis for capitalist accumulation; the regard of Nature as a "dead thing" to be exploited; and the perception of man as compelled to search for and create better materials through science and technology, aiming to produce a better life, and even a "post-human" man. In other words, the failure of modern civilization consists in a utopic understanding of patriarchy as the deep structure behind modern civilization. Like Werlhof, Riane Eisler (*The Chalice and the Blade; Sacred Pleasure; The Real Wealth of Nations*) demonstrates how the choice of a Domination Society instead of a Care/Partnership Society—two well-known models in human history—leads us to the very dangerous situation we are in today. She also discusses the possibility of constructing a contemporary Care Society. It is no wonder, then, that her philosophy is widely esteemed by many, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, feminist leader Gloria Steinem, and others.

If we look deeply into the neoliberalization of society, which we ferociously oppose and which motivated the 2011 protests, we will find the holy trinity of capitalism, national state, and Western democracy at its foundation (indeed, this trinity is at the heart of many non-radical governance approaches, including social democracy).<sup>11</sup> The evolution of these societal arrangements in the last three centuries is intertwined.<sup>12</sup> For instance, the national state provided the necessary social conditions, such as a unified monetary system and legal system, for capitalism to rise; additionally, Western democracy made the individual and

freedom, with an emphasis on property (thereby land) rights, into the cornerstones of politics. Often, the national state could not stand in the way of destructive capitalism, going so far as to support it until its evolution into the contemporary corporate regime of today. Today capitalism tends to wield more power and influence than that of many countries, and in many cases dictates national politics through the implementation of crony capitalism and the influence of the media.

In the West, especially since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this trinity of capitalism, national state, and Western democracy has become almost indisputable, enabling nothing more than corrections and regulations at best. It seems that the growing dissatisfaction with neoliberalism (often described as piggish), its tendency to corruption, and the outrageous injustice it leads to has reached a boiling point. In the age of information and globalization, these shortcomings began to undermine the allegedly indisputable status of the national state, capitalism, and Western democracy. However, it is important to recognize that neoliberalism is a direct result of capitalism, supported by the state and liberalism. Debugging and restarting will not be enough; a whole new system is required, because the problem is in the system itself. Just as capitalism had failed in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is failing us today and will lead the whole planet into an abyss.

“Democracy” and “state” are not neutral, unambiguous concepts. There is a wealth of literature offering a wide range of definitions of democracy and democratic models familiar worldwide. Democracy receives severe criticisms; some even believe it is outdated (Treanor “Why Democracy Is Wrong”). No single democracy or state is good for everyone in a nation, and it might even be that the well-being of the few forever entails the worst conditions for the many. Therefore, the really important questions are: Who has the authority and the power to determine what democracy is? Who defines its rules? Who does democracy, or the state, benefit? Who does it threaten? Who is, indeed, free within it? Moreover, the success of democracy might be a result of the exploitation of resources belonging to the Indigenous, rather than the result of an allegedly free regime (Zinn *A People’s History*).

The collection of essays in this book attempts to expose the reader to theories of matriarchal societies (and gift economies), past and present, that testify to the claim that democracy, as we know it, is neither the best possible alternative, nor the best way to achieve a “people’s regime” and to ensure equality, social, and criminal justice and solidarity (Goettner-Abendroth *Matriarchal Societies*). Of course, we must keep in mind that throughout history, democracy, capitalism, and hegemony went hand-in-hand to lead to colonialism, imperialism, and a destructive exploitation of the earth’s resources.

So, democracy is perceived as appropriate not only because it represents liberty and equality (solidarity has long been conceded), but also because it represents the version of the world most preferred by those citizens of the West; those who purportedly enjoy relative freedom and prosperity while aiming to impose their formula worldwide, including on Indigenous peoples, who often know better what democracy is and how to really implement it.<sup>13</sup> But is the state a necessity not to be censured?

Adi Ophir (“Medina”) offers a fascinating account of the concept of the state and its management, including the way it creates “nationalism” as an instrument to unify the state:

The state, as a predefined, given entity is an image that simultaneously forces itself on the structure of reality in any area, while suppressing the ability to imagine the limits of the possible. The international order, like a material worried about void, subsumes every geographical area into the state system. This order holds that a state must not be divided, and if it is divided, its parts must be organized as whole states; the national sovereign regime must not be split should the state’s wholeness be undermined. The populated globe is covered by states, and no person is without a state. People—all people—belong to states (and no states belong to people). If a regime chooses to deport a person, does not provide them with proper living conditions, or does not enable them to live at all, then they may become refugees, since their ejection from one state does not necessarily entail their acceptance in another state. The state of refugeeism assumes the globe is

completely covered by states, and in order to exist, a person must be associated with a state. Yet refugees are deprived of such state recognition. Refugees are not citizens of the state in which they took temporary refuge, nor are they citizens of the state they were born in or lived most of their lives in. Instead, refugees are defined as non-citizens, or defenseless citizens, and as such are considered to live worthless lives. They are allowed to fantasize about the right to immigrate to another state, but if they insist on fantasizing about a world without states, or, at least, a world in which one is able to choose between belonging to a state and belonging to another political entity, they will surely be ignored. Whoever dares to dream about such a world, refugee or citizen alike, is perceived as an anarchist—as if the state is the only governance form possible—or, worse, infantile, naïve, or downright delusional. However, the division of the Old World into states was a project completed only in the nineteenth century, and it was only in the second half of the twentieth century—with the dissolution of the global colonialist order and the establishment of “national states” in Africa and Asia—that the whole globe was divided into states. Since then, there is no human settlement that is not associated with a state, and no wo/man is born into the world without being thrown into ‘his/her’ state (just as s/he is thrown into a family, a religion, a language). With the idea of a stateless world presented as childish, even delusional, the ideological role of the state’s image is revealed: in order for the state to be perceived as a real, inevitable fact, any attempt to dispute this realness must be regarded as a form of insanity.

A social democratic world is indeed considerably preferable to the current situation, but it is not sufficient. Along with questioning the morality and efficiency of capitalism, the limitations of the welfare state have to be recognized, specifically its instability (Moor “Towards the End of Capitalism”) and the oppression conducted in its name (like the oppression of Mizrahim during Israel’s early years, or the oppression of Palestinians and their expulsion from their land by Israel). However, the main problem

with the social-democratic approach is its unabashed exploitation of women and the Global South, as well as its embrace of a soft form of capitalism as a pillar of economy. Additionally, social democracy strengthens the state, which is, as mentioned above, a part of the problem and not its solution, and more than a few feminist researchers have uncovered ways in which it oppresses and discriminates against women and minorities. And I have yet to mention the realistic possibility that corporations would prevent the return of the welfare state, or otherwise limit its activity.

Capitalism and the state system create norms, values, and stress that enslave us to these very systems. This proves that “freedom of will is not a given,” and the so-called liberal enlightenment does not grant us the liberty it promises. The combination of capitalism, national state, and democracy, all creations of patriarchy, is what led us to a situation of a destructive, not productive, system, whose creation is based on two types of destruction (Werlhof 11–12): first, the demolition of matriarchal societies, followed by the conversion of everything natural or given into commodities and money and a prohibition against the opposite conversion of money into nature. It is thus no wonder that corporations are busy taking over land and resources, privatizing water, controlling medicinal herbs, and creating wars over territory. Resources are degraded everywhere. We do not have enough renewable resources, and the entire system faces annihilation. In other words: within the dominant Western approach, which is based on capitalism and its sanctification by the state and democracy, there is no solution to the crisis. Indeed, the only response is to adopt a completely different socioeconomic system that is not based on exploitation and destruction.<sup>14,15</sup>

To a large extent, journalists and researchers review and critique each of these three systems separately. Indeed, they uncover problems inherent to each of them individually; however, I suggest the importance of emphasizing the integration of the three—capitalism, national state, and democracy—and discussing them as one entity. This is not only because they evolved at the same time, becoming symbiotically linked, but because addressing each system separately does not resolve their faults and perhaps even enhances them, as attested to by Nelson Mandela’s South African

model: while Mandela succeeded in ending the apartheid regime and established a constitution of human and civil rights in South Africa, he failed to establish a system of social justice equipped to properly enforce the constitution and eradicate poverty among Black South Africans. According to Slavoj Žižek, an influential Slovenian cultural critic, such disappointment is not uncommon following the election of left-wing leaders. As a result, “liberating radical politics faces its greatest challenge: how to keep acting after the first wave of enthusiasm subsides, how to take the next step without giving in to the disastrous temptation of totalitarianism” (Žižek “Mandela Defeated Oppression”). Following this, I argue that matriarchal and Indigenous models of motherhood allow us to successfully heed the challenge Žižek notes.

The global protests of 2011 and ensuing political actions demonstrated the worldwide dispute of this holy trinity. For example, in September 2012, 641 representatives of 100 countries gathered to discuss proposals for a new social contract between governments, citizens, and other entities. Among their conclusions, the organizers determined that

there must be no turning back (to pre-2011, when the protests broke out). It was also determined that current governance structures involving interactions between citizens, the state, and other powerful players, including the market and the institutionalized sector of society itself, are inadequate. When states and global government institutions fail to fulfill their basic commitments to the masses, it is time to revisit the assumptions. The idea of a social contract, and with it rules of engagement between citizens, state, and other powerful institutions, which define and restrict citizenship, are now open for renegotiation. In many places, interactions between citizens and institutions have now been redefined; however, only powerful institutions have been vested with the authority to enact these definitions, and thus seek to place new constraints on civil actions as a response to crisis. It is time to set the balance right. It is time for people to act better than institutions, to insist on heading the negotiations themselves and defining a new overall social contract. To

respond to such calls, the World Assembly of 2011 attempted to define a new social contract.<sup>16</sup>

As mentioned, disputes of the common political structure and efforts to formulate alternative models began recently and reached one of its peaks in the mass protests of 2011. I have briefly explicated arguments for alternative models put forward by Claudia von Werlhof and Riane Eisler. The final argument I will review is John Fonte's position concerning transnational progress as an alternative to liberal democracy ("Ideological War").

For Fonte, the Durban conference exemplifies a new challenge to liberal democracy and its traditional home, the liberal democratic national state:

Liberal democracy has always been characterized by a self-governing representative system comprised of individual citizens who enjoy freedom and equality under the law and who together form a people within a democratic nation-state. Thus, liberal democracy means individual rights, democratic representation (with some form of majority rule) and national citizenship. Yet, as the Durban conference demonstrated, all of these principles, along with the very idea of a liberal democratic nation-state, are contested today in the West. Evidently, we are quite far from Francis Fukuyama's ideological "end of history." The activities of the various NGOs suggest that there is already an alternative ideology to liberal democracy within the West that has been steadily, and almost imperceptibly, evolving for decades.

Further in his essay, Fonte introduces a new ideology he calls "transnational progressivism." This ideology comprises several components. For example, in "transnational progressivism," the group, as the main political unit, takes precedence over the individual. Additionally, equality is replaced by preferences for victimized groups, proportionate representation of groups is the goal of "fairness," nationality becomes obsolete as a result of immigration and demographical changes, and democracy is redefined as power sharing among ethnic groups. Furthermore,

transnational progressivism promotes the concept of post-national citizenship, while separating the concepts of citizenship and nation-state, which challenges traditional understandings of belonging. Finally, this position holds that a nation should be considered a “community of communities,” and understands transnationalism as the next stage of multi-culture and global governance (*ibid.*).

### **Motherliness/Mothering as a Human Rationale and Principle for Societal Order**

Following the recognition of the motherhood catch and the magic of motherhood, but, also, following the recognition of the limitations of discourse about family, work and feminism, I urge us all to step outside the capitalist-patriarchal Eurocentric prison of the nuclear family and the chains of the world of work. My encounters with some of the authors in this book have inspired and greatly changed my understanding, thinking, and political approach. I take to the strategy of positioning motherhood at the centre of philosophical, linguistic, moral, sociological, and economic discussions. To conceptualize and generalize motherliness/mothering as a significant human practice, an all-human logic reflected and realized everywhere, though often unrecognized as such, is typical to the capitalist patriarchy confining us all. Hence, the way out is exactly where I step outside capitalism, outside patriarchy and the Eurocentric sphere, and it was there where I have indeed found this wisdom: scholars and activists like Barbara Alice Mann of the North American Iroquois nation, Ifi Amadium from Nigeria and the United States, Heide Goettner-Abendroth from Germany, and the feminist researcher and activist Bernedette Muthien of the Khoisan peoples in South Africa—from whom I have learned about family models, societies, and economies and, in fact, about another humanity. This information has been recognized by some feminist researchers like Nancy Chodorow, and also laid out in accessible books, such as that of Peggy Reeves Sanday, of the University of Pennsylvania Department of Anthropology, or Riane Eisler, a well-known figure worldwide for her writing

about the Care Society. However, this knowledge is still largely ignored and is rarely included in gender studies, sociology, or history studies.

During my search for the kind of liberating discourse proposed by these thinkers, I have come upon two exciting and intertwined topics: the gift economy and Modern Matriarchal Studies (these have led me to the rich knowledge of Indigenous studies). The primary importance of these fields of study is that they break through the moral discussion of good or bad, biological or social motherhood to uncover motherhood as a human, social, political, and economic principle. These fields understand motherhood as an alternative culture of values and practices, offering an integrated, and therefore transformative, collection of customs, skills, and knowledge. Motherhood is not a thing to believe in, but rather a thing to do (mothering); it is a way of life. Moreover, they state that though patriarchal oppression disintegrates maternal conduct, the remnants of this conduct are everywhere and can be revived and turned into a main model of economy, society, and humanity.

The concept of the gift economy has been discussed in academia for years: from Marcel Mauss in the 1920s to Lewis Hyde, Jacques Godbout, Alain Caille, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Marion, and others. This discussion constituted the inspiration for several social movements that aspire to propose an alternative to capitalism; however, none of them—not even feminist and other equality movements—recognize motherhood as the foundation of gift giving, or patriarchal capitalism as the parasitic system that operates by capturing the gift economy and controlling it.

Genevieve Vaughan, an independent, original researcher and thinker, argues that mothering is a way to distribute products and services according to needs. She starts by examining Western capitalism to uncover the radical alternative hidden within it—an alternative that also signals a return to the matriarchal heritage. In her essay in this book, Vaughan states that mothering is free—it must be free, because little children cannot provide an equivalent compensation in exchange for what they receive. Thus, giving that responds to the other's needs is the most prominent feature of mothering. The mother gives to her children not out of an

essentialist motherly instinct, but because these are the needs of a woman's newborn, without which s/he cannot survive. The mother provides her child with love and food, clothing, and also language (mother tongue). This perception transforms the concept of "economy" to include not only the exchange economy of the market, but also free giving. Expanding the economic category this way allows us to identify an alternative economic rationale, one which is unappreciated in our society. Many of the most common gender-based conflicts occur because one gender is identified with one type of economy (exchange economy) and expected to operate within it, while the other gender is expected to operate within another, completely undefined economy (gift economy).

This motherly principle—giving in response to need—occurs in many aspects of our lives in the Western world: from gifts of nature (sun, light, air, water, resources) and human gifts of ideas, knowledge, and friendship, to other communal gifts such as the Time Bank, blood banks, organ transplantation, aspects of the internet, Wikipedia, and others. In other words, alongside the market's exchange economy, the gift economy is continuously operating. These two economies are contrary, but they can coexist. However, the gift economy is silenced, denied, and exploited by the patriarchal-capitalist market, even though the market economy is contingent and dependent on it.

What are matriarchal societies? These are societies of peace, partnership, balance, and equality in existence today (such as the Chinese Mosou or Indonesian Minangkabau) and dating back to pre-patriarchal eras. In matriarchies, though mothers are the centre of the culture, their aim is not to control all other community members. The goal is not to obtain power over people and nature, but to nurture and care for nature, society, and culture on the basis of mutual respect. This is a non-violent society, founded upon partnership and balance among its various components (inter-gender balance, intergenerational balance, balance between humans and nature, balance between heaven and earth). In other words, a matriarchal society values linking over ranking; it also values spirituality and the gift economy over accumulation in everyday life.

In our society, mothers are, for the most part, victims who are required to serve all. In matriarchy, they are in possession of a power granted to them by Nature—the power to create new life, to create the future. They are the ones who keep society together and they create not only children, but the entire societal structure. Each woman can choose whether she wants to be a mother and give birth, or be a symbolic mother, or not be a mother at all.

Violence and maternal rage exist in matriarchy, too, except that matriarchy is capable of coping with them; on the one hand, by using spiritual mechanisms, and on the other hand, by mitigating the stress and grinding that create rage and violence by taking a communal approach to child care, sharing the task among mothers and symbolic fathers. It is no wonder statistics show crimes such as rape to be almost nonexistent in matriarchal societies, in which the mother's brother, who, of course, has no sexual relationship with the mother, is the main male figure.

The matriarchal legacy is echoed in African feminist theory, especially in the concept of motherism. Catherine Acholonu's essay in this book discusses motherism, which emphasizes the centrality of the mother in African culture and values, as well as the basis for Black people's survival and unity throughout time.<sup>17</sup> Native American heritage also reserves a central place for mothering, as shown by Native American Barbara Alice Mann in her essay included here, as does European heritage, as shown by the writings of Marija Gimbutas.

The system based on patriarchy and capitalism has deprived us of knowledge of the maternal principle and has enforced social and economic practices that contradict it. This system forces gifts upwards, routing their flow from the many towards the few, all the while emptying the environment and harming the fragile care of species. Not only does this system hinder progress towards a higher level, but it also deprives future generations of what they need for a full maternal humanity.

### **Towards an Alternative Future**

Throughout my years of feminist research and activism, I have not been able to find a way to balance feminist criticism and my

experiences as a mother. The gift economy and the matriarchal model (alongside subsistence economy and the spiritual matriarchal heritage) have allowed me this balance for the first time. No, I do not live in a matriarchal society of giving, although its signs are showing. These signs have shown me that not only do I not have to give up my motherhood to be freed of patriarchy, but also that making the maternal economy a model for the entire society may liberate us all, men and women alike. This doesn't imply that all women will be mothers. The heart of the matriarchal society is that it is equal, free, and cohesive in ways our democracy can only envy.

Of course, this immediately raises the argument of utopia: such a matriarchal giving society is an interesting utopia, but it cannot be implemented. I strongly reject such arguments: first, it can be implemented, as shown in some of the examples of Part Three.<sup>18</sup> Second, matriarchal companies exist alongside us despite relentless patriarchal and capitalist pressure (Goettner-Abendroth *Matriarchal Societies*), and the gift economy is a foundation of capitalism, especially during crisis (see Genevieve Vaughan's essay in Part Two). Third, even if we are currently incapable of embracing matriarchy entirely, we can implement its primary principles (motherliness, community life, localness, the gift economy, subsistence economy, spirituality, and others) in our lives and our activities for the protection and salvation of women.<sup>19</sup>

And, fourth, utopianism—following “ideology”—indeed earned its share of criticism due to the horrors of Fascism, Nazism, and Communism, but it has begun to reemerge in discourse. “Is Utopianism Dead?” asks renowned philosopher Simon Critchley, when referring to communal life experiments of the 1960s. According to him, communal utopianism is alive, not only in art, but also—and mainly—in political action: “perhaps we witnessed another communal experiment with the events in France surrounding the arrest and detention of the so-called ‘Tarnac Nine’<sup>20</sup> on 11 November 2008 and the work of groups that go under different names: Tikkun, The Invisible Committee, The Imaginary Party.”

Utopia has a very important role: “Utopia delineates (sometimes

schematically, sometimes in detail) the image of a society completely different from the one we know. It does not settle for criticizing the current society, nor for proposing rectifications which remain within the reigning social order: it shows the orders of the good society, which, indeed, does not exist (hence u-topia = ‘no place’), but it definitely may exist!, particularly as a ‘concrete utopia’, which is a realistic possibility, the conditions for its realization visible” (Goldman).

I continue this line of thought to argue that with “the end of ideology” (Bell) and the great fear of any ideology after Nazism, Fascism, and Communism, the utopian way of thinking reemerges, especially through the concept of vision. If ideologies have reached their end, if the meta-narratives have been discarded to history’s garbage bin, then a vision arrives to provide us with meaning and a compass. Vision evolves out of resistance to the neoliberal age of consumerism, globalization, and cultural disruption, and especially because it is neither an ideology nor a moral, privatized, and individualized vacuum, but can still respond to our difficult contemporary reality.<sup>21</sup> Vision delineates an alternative, not necessarily perfect, society so we can begin to design the reality of our lives today even in small, preliminary, hesitant steps. In fact, we can realize something of the future image of a better society now. The claim to fulfillment implies an attempt to embrace new rules of engagement within existing harsh and strict frameworks. Of course, such an attempt requires a lot of acceptance, tolerance, compromise, and wisdom. Probably, such a vision and acceptance of such values—including an alternative set of spiritual values—is what grounded the localized communities who protested in 2011.<sup>22</sup>

The gift economy and the matriarchal model also enable us to imagine and create a new type of motherhood, parenthood, and familial relations. For example, in matriarchal societies, the eldest woman is considered “The First Mother” and is the head of the family and a source of advice for the entire family and community. The women of the community raise the children together, and the children address each of them as “Mother.” Mothering is a principle applied by all women who are blood-related and is not the obligation of one woman only. Thereby

they avoid burdening one woman with excessive responsibility, and they protect children from mothers whose conduct or personality are problematic. Family is multi-generational, which ensures care for disabled people and the old (Tazi-Preve “Deconstructing Family”).

These principles and values can be adjusted to suit Western societies. For instance, instead of “blood relations” as an organizing factor, communities can be formed on the basis of affinity, identity, or a shared interest (for instance, a community of lesbians, a community around a shared idea, and others). They attest to the fact that everything is open before us. Moreover, this book does not present a utopia, but a possible process for a different evolution of the world, completely different from common directions in the West today; the gift economy and subsistence economy in lieu of capitalism; Nature and all its creatures in lieu of post/trans humanism (which lead to the new wo/man, combining human and technology all the way to creating completely synthetic entities); respect for Nature and environment in lieu of the destruction of the planet, and humanity along with it; community, acceptance, inclusion, empathy, and altruism in lieu of “the selfie” (the speak of individualism); equality, balance, and responsibility in lieu of power relations; community life and localism in lieu of state; spirituality in lieu of monotheism.

The early signs of this evolution are already evident, in the renewal of communes and urban nuclei, cooperatives which spring up like mushrooms after the rain, on physical and virtual sites such as Time Bank or give and take markets, in psychological research finding empathy and altruism among babies, in the growing sensitivity towards nature and the environment, and in ecofeminism. Indeed, power, resources, and communication are all in the hands of those exalting the post-human, aggressive, individualist direction that I find terrifying. Yet the winds blowing from below, from the needs of women and men, community and nature, are strong and can grow stronger still. Even now, there is a natural connection (which needs to be strengthened and established) between movements for social change. Especially if academia joins them and expands its research in fields such as, to name but a few, the gift economy and alternative economies, criticism of the concept of growth and the

implications of local currency, then this connection will uncover the alternative, less well-known camps which operate worldwide and draw on the feasibility of a different society. For me, this is where hope for a different humane world lies, one serving all creatures on our planet.

The approach proposed in this book, adjusted to suit Western reality, allows us to break through the gendered patriarchal point of view of the Western family to create a transformation in thinking and activism in this field and to lead to a comprehensive social change. Through experience, I have learned the implications of the African expression that “It takes a village to raise a child.” My experience as a mother has taught me that raising children in an urban Western society requires establishing a support network. I couldn’t raise my daughter without my friends’ help: sometimes, when I was delayed at work, they picked her up from kindergarten; in the afternoons we spent time with them and their children. When we encountered problems and dilemmas I sought their advice, and they were the ones to accompany me to the Emergency Room in the middle of the night. This is how I have created an extended family of sorts, of mutual help and shared parenting. I do not see why I have to accept the burden of a nuclear family, whose failures surpass its successes, while we are led through it towards a dead end by capitalist patriarchy. Ecological villages in the United States and urban communities in Israel already prove the creation of a familial community or a communal family is possible. I think that these are indicators of true transformative activism. The revival of the kibbutz in a new form may also indicate new possibilities.

Academia can also assist in pursuing this goal in various ways: one is through research and teaching of matriarchal societies, especially by uncovering local matriarchal heritage and its remnants in contemporary culture. Another one is through observation and research of new familial communities and assessing the options of adopting matriarchal models by Western society. Thus, it may expand the Western concept of family to include non-Western families, families known to us from other periods in history and new definitions of motherhood and fatherhood. This book and the approaches it conveys attempt to contribute to this discourse by rethinking motherhood.

The liberation of motherliness (the wide range of values, capabilities, and behavioural patterns) from the chains of the private sphere and its realization in the public sphere will allow us to recognize it as an alternative social, political, and economic rationale to the capitalist market economy. As an alternative rationale, motherliness enables us to liberate mothers—or, in fact, all women—from the chains of capitalist patriarchy.

The distinction between the private sphere and the political, economic sphere can be erased or bridged if we acknowledge the maternal gift economy as an alternative economy, which is already operative, granting gifts to the barter economy and subsidizing it. What such a bridging takes is rather the liberation of the maternal economy from the barter economy and the gradual questioning of the market and its elimination, not the implementation of gift economy and gift-givers into the market. For this reason, salaries to housewives are not the appropriate answer to the oppression of women working at home. Similarly, micro financing is not the appropriate long-term answer to poverty. We must completely eliminate the market and establish in its wake a general maternal gift economy. Even thinking about it and initial actions towards it will begin to crack the monolith and validate gift values instead of barter values (Vaughan).

Of course, the politics of motherhood in Israel cannot be overlooked: motherhood as an institution, the obligation to be a mother, the “demographic race,” the “national uterus”—these are some of the main terms in Israeli discourse regarding motherhood, which constitutes the background for much of the anti-oppression resistance to the concept of motherhood in Israel. Motherhood (the obligation to be a mother) became the definition of femininity and citizenship for women in Israel (Berkovitch “A Woman of Valor”). The demographic race against Palestinians—who shall be the first people to establish a majority and thereby rule the area between the sea and the Jordan River—is a constant factor in discussing majority-minority relations, war, and peace (Soffer and Bystrov *Yisrael 2007–2020*). Nationalism has appropriated motherhood and defined the state a “national uterus,” whereby the woman’s identity and aspirations are subjugated to the alleged needs of the nation, as defined by patriarchal nationalism (Yuval-

Davis “The Jewish Collectivity and National Reproduction”).

The struggle to liberate motherhood from its chains and society from the burden of capitalist patriarchy is indeed difficult and complex, even more so, as it turns out, in the Israeli context. Feminist criticism in Israel against the institutionalization of motherhood and the rendering of the woman as national uterus is completely just. I support the choice of not being a mother by those who do not find it suits them. However, I oppose the rejection of the mother, as I do find in motherhood alternative moral, social, and economic models. Motherhood, mothering, and motherliness are options open to all—including men and women who choose non-motherhood—and the maternal logic is suited to any human collective. The idea that it is rather the way of mothers which can lead to liberation—like the matriarchal discourse and the gift economy—requires an alternative paradigm, thinking, and politics. First and foremost, it requires a new awareness—a revolution in the way we perceive ourselves and think of our world, and a new thinking of motherhood altogether. Of course, capitalist patriarchy does, as it will always do, everything in its power to block the mother’s way. There is no reason for women, especially feminist activists, to cooperate with this obstruction. Will we refrain from respecting motherhood and using motherliness because of the common discourse on motherhood and the patriarchal control over the body of the woman-mother, or should we design a new language, a new paradigm, a new world? We are the ones called to change our perception, to reject the dominant public discourse and to lead the creation of a different conduct and discourse. Our task is to re-appropriate motherhood according to our understanding as women, mothers, and feminists.

It is difficult to imagine another world, especially when we are trapped by capitalist patriarchy, which constantly attempts to control us and appropriate our ideas. Moreover, under patriarchy, women face a real conflict: we need financial independence, a job to provide for our children and ourselves with no dependency on men or the state. Therefore, many women take to the model presented by Facebook’s COO, who believes she knows how women can achieve senior positions (Sandberg *Lean In*). On the

other hand, there are many women who choose motherhood as the main component of their lives, many of whom are well aware of the occupational compromise this choice entails. The conflict between motherhood and work cannot be fully settled within capitalist patriarchy.

I admit, in light of these conflicts, it is hard to imagine another world where motherhood is a positive value that stands on its own. Images of sleepless nights, dishwashing and floor polishing, making beds every day, hurrying to meet the relatively early closing time of kindergartens, endless quarrels with adolescent children and other routine, at times boring, daily errands immediately emerge. When I have asked students to imagine another world, a world without power relations, or at least situations without the power relations they are familiar with, most of them cannot imagine it. The few who did spoke of relations between the mother and her children: the mother, who is responsible for the baby, shows them the way, teaches them the language and the way of the world and eventually sets them on their independent path.

Therefore, motherhood is the power that does not involve control. Mothers do not seek surrender, defeat, or unquestioning obedience from the child. To the contrary, mothers typically think of their role as fully preparing the child for life as they grow older, staying by their side until they are independent and go on their way (Tazi-Preve *Motherhood in Patriarchy* 277). Yes, I am well aware of another type of motherhood that is aggressive, controlling, violent, and inattentive to the child; however, I believe this motherhood to be a result of patriarchy and the pressure it puts women under, which not all women are capable of handling. Recognizing motherhood as power without control or domination is the model and the foundation not only for a different society, but also for the empowerment and liberation of mothers.

Such recognition is the ultimate path, walked by many. Adrienne Rich was maybe the first to see motherhood not only as an institution, but also as an experience. Luce Irigaray, who expertly uncovered the elimination of a feminine genealogy in the history of Western thought, revealed the importance of differences between genders and mother-daughter relations

(*Sexes and Genealogies*). Others include Sara Ruddick and her concept of “Maternal Thinking,” Carol Gilligan who shows us women’s set of values (and, to my dismay, did not manage to understand its connection to the motherly way), Andrea O’Reilly who recognizes the need to create a distinguished field for the interdisciplinary research of motherhood, and Marija Mies who sees motherhood as a social action. Finally, Luisa Muraro who develops the idea of the symbolic order of the mother, Claudia von Werlhof who writes eloquently on a political movement of matriarchal mothers, and, of course, the authors featured in this book, commencing with my friends and mentors Genevieve Vaughan and Heide Goettner-Abendroth. I refuse to see these authors as just another stream of feminism.

I recognize motherhood as power without domination, motherliness as a core social and political value, and mothering as a human logic and foundation for an alternative society. Motherhood, motherliness, and mothering articulate feminism at its best, its utmost fulfillment as a truly revolutionary and transformative movement. According to these authors I have mentioned (and others), mothering is, perhaps, the most complex, difficult, fascinating, magical, and significant experience known to us. Mothering involves powerful emotions, dilemmas, conflicts, difficulties, and doubts; it involves intelligent thinking and wonder. Patriarchy makes us question all of these, distance ourselves from motherhood and choose work in which, under patriarchy, most women are trapped, a sphere whose many parts are routine, boring, and oppressive to women.

Of course, such a paradigmatic and conscious change in feminism, society, and women in general is not an easy task. I will not elaborate here, but I have learned from history that non-violent social changes occur in small, local steps over many years that together create a change in discourse, awareness, and reality. Let me only remark that the change has already begun: women today are not scared of choosing motherhood, or feminine spirituality and goddess worship. There are many mothers’ movements around the globe and the academic discourse regarding motherhood keeps expanding and opening up to new voices. This movement is reflected in the welcome work of the MIRCI

organization in Toronto, Canada, under the exciting leadership of Professor Andrea O'Reilly. It is also reflected in the Mother Centers, opened first in Germany and then spread to various countries, in the increased, yet insufficient, listening among Western feminists to the centrality of motherhood in African feminist movements, and, at last, in the growing camp of wo/men, organizations and movements, which together establish a moral and institutional alternative to reigning capitalist patriarchy.

Ultimately, the issue at the core of the book, though perhaps not explicit and obvious, but which expresses the purpose of political activity in general and feminist activity in particular, is: What is a life worth living? Today, this issue is at the centre of public and academic discourse that revisits in depth the questions of meaning, personal enrichments, self-fulfillment, well-being and happiness as expressing the optimal functioning of human beings. The ever-expanding discussion of these issues is evident in a variety of research and applied fields, including positive psychology, the transpersonal approach, logo therapy (developed by Viktor Frankl), and the Buddhist way of mindfulness. All these are today considered part of what is called the "Eudemonic" approach, which dates back to Aristotle and Socrates and states that human flourishing, or eudemonic well-being, flows from the development of one's capabilities, rather than from the simple fulfilment of basic needs. Today it is growing in relevance perhaps due to growing disappointment with capitalism, state politics, and liberalism, which have failed to eradicate oppression in all its forms (based on gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, Indigeneity, age, and disability). However, this disappointment is also probably directed towards the field of psychology that, despite its achievements, can do nothing to prevent the surge of depression.

As expected, patriarchal capitalism already attempts to subjugate this transformative approach to its needs, for instance, by including the happiness index (that does not test which country is the happiest, but rather the environmental efficiency to support the well-being of people in a country) within national and economic valuation indices, or by utilizing the principles of kindness and free giving to increase financial productivity. For

example, the work of Adam Grant of the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania seeks, like much other research in organizational psychology, to motivate employees in order to increase the owner's profit. Grant claims the greatest source of motivation, which has yet to be put to use, is the sense of service to others (Dominus "Is Giving the Secret to Getting Ahead?"). Obviously, the place of the mother, for whom giving in response to the other's needs is the essence of her work, is not mentioned at all in these applications.

Mostly, the book in your hands suggests that the life worth living is within reach, if we generate a change in the economic and social rationale according to which we organize our world, and if we convert our egotistic orientation to an orientation to others, as in giving. It is obvious that another paradigm and a scientific, conscious revolution of our way of thinking is needed. Motherliness in general and the concept of giving oriented towards the needs of others in particular are the way to get there. To be liberated we have to start dreaming.

### About the Book

Originally, I tried to put together a book about feminist visions. This attempt was an almost natural sequel to my previous book, *Lahshov isha: nashim ufeminism be'yisrael* [*Thinking as a Woman: Women and Feminism in Israel*], in which I suggested feminists go beyond a focus on pressing matters—despite their importance and centrality in the feminist struggle—and begin delineating a feminist vision as well. Vision is not an unobtainable utopia; it outlines the reality to which we aspire, as designated by my friend, Hanna Beit Halachmi. What will the world of work and creation look like in a feminist society? How will we do politics? That is, how will we decide on our priorities and resolve conflicts? How will we rear future generations? What will technology's place be? How will the public sphere be managed? How will we achieve a world of peace?

My attempts have failed. I have felt that Israeli feminists are so wholly involved in pressing current matters that their attention cannot be steered beyond them. Tending to current matters has

pushed the dream, without which we cannot be freed, aside. However, an understanding has occurred within me that all answers are to be discovered around a different understanding of motherhood, history, and spirituality, which I have acquired and absorbed mostly in the past decade. This understanding had already influenced both my thinking as a criminologist and my book *Eretz mevtahat* [*The Fortified Land*], where I propose the alternative of “restorative policing” and demonstrate the conduct of a society of peace.

Part One begins with a concise review of motherhood and all its difficulties under patriarchy (Mariam Irene Tazi-Preve) and continues with a powerful look at the problematics of motherhood through, perhaps, the most difficult point—a mother’s sexual abuse of her daughter (Ana Anonyma). These essays represent the labyrinth we, men and women alike, have been positioned in by patriarchy, but they also propose a change to the basic concepts and rethinking them. Ana Anonyma emerges from her most difficult experience to a new way of viewing her mother, as well as concepts such as consensual intercourse and the politics of sexuality. The book continues with the search for alternatives within patriarchy through the experiences of Israeli women (the essays of Honaida Ghanem and Shula Keshet). Ghanem presents a view that unwittingly contradicts the focal view of this book, without undermining patriarchy, and perceives motherhood as a process of constant, eternal becoming, and certainly not “endless giving” or “Nature which women were born in its image.” For her, motherhood is a social practice that entails rituals, behaviours, declarations, bodily expressions, and speech patterns that are repeatedly recycled and highlighted on various occasions. Shula Keshet uncovers the magic of motherhood, particularly solidarity among mothers. For Keshet, this is a magic that cannot undermine capitalist patriarchy, but that seeps beyond the exclusive individual experience. At the end of Part One, the historian Barbara Alice Mann, a descendent of the Ohio Bear Clan, Seneca Iroquois, lays out the sins of the West and Western feminism, and delineates the path back to the heritage of the mother, which is indeed the centre of all the essays in Part Two and Part Three.

Part Two introduces alternatives to the patriarchal framework. Genevieve Vaughan proposes the gift economy as an economic model and a human principle, the same maternal giving ignored by the current discussion of the gift economy. Heide Goettner-Abendroth, who developed the field of “Modern Matriarchal Studies,” sketches the principles of an equality-based, free, balanced society, which positions motherhood at its centre. Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen presents a perspective that is beyond an economic model and is based on subsistence instead of accumulation and profit. Catherine Acholonu coins the term “motherism” on the foundation of cultural African heritage that awards the mother central importance. Annine van der Meer summarizes thousands of years of Venus art in which the mother is a prominent cultural and spiritual icon. These essays perceive motherhood as a human, social, economic, and spiritual principle, a view that dismisses the need to escape mother or motherhood (for instance, towards a career).

Part Three presents some possible implications of and applications for this new paradigm of motherhood, mothering, and motherliness. Heide Goettner-Abendroth sketches the image of another world that can be developed using the inspiration of a matriarchal heritage. Angela Dolmetsch presents a matriarchal community established more than ten years ago at the outskirts of Cali, Colombia. Lin Daniels summarizes two decades of living in the Pagoda community in the United States, which was established and conducted according to matriarchal rules. My essay, based on the application of the humane, economic, and social principles detailed in this book, offers an alternative political order between the sea and the Jordan River as a foundation for peace, balance, equality, and liberty between Israel and Palestine. Finally, Susan Deer Cloud, a Native American poet and thinker, concludes the book by showing us all how rematriation can lead us towards the envisioned new world.

It will be evident that the efforts of this book are not only concerned with developing a different paradigm, but also encouraging a change of mind: to look at the possibilities of revolution and a reformed world from another point of view, one to which we are unaccustomed. It is sure to initially earn

some nods, perhaps contempt, or even be disregarded as naïve. However, I hope it will open the door to another type of discourse and new possibilities. Not much is required for such a change: listening, open hearts, willingness.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Thanks to Dr. Orna Donath for assisting me in clarifying this point.
- <sup>2</sup> A word meaning Jews from Arab countries.
- <sup>3</sup> I, however, recommend reading about essentialism from the point of view of feminist spiritual and theological scholars. Specifically, Professor Carol Christ, one of the founding mothers of feminist spiritualism, and Max Dashu, an independent researcher whose knowledge is all-embracing, offer excellent starting points. See Christ “Is It Essentialist?” and Dashu “The Meaning of Goddess” Parts 1–3.
- <sup>4</sup> To the contrary: I embrace the concept “motherer” that I learned from Genevieve Vaughan, which represents motherhood as open to all, while retaining the original concept of “mother.” Another option is to distinguish between biological and social mothers and fathers.
- <sup>5</sup> <http://arachim.org/ArticleDetail.asp?ArticleID=94>. Accessed 7 October 2014. I am grateful to my friend and mentor Lea Shakdiel for assisting me to understand this Jewish discourse.
- <sup>6</sup> For a good and comprehensive review of the criticism of the nuclear family, see Tazi-Preve, *Motherhood in Patriarchy*.
- <sup>7</sup> For a concise discussion, see <http://www.themarket.com/marker-week/1.2154726>.
- <sup>8</sup> For a concise review of the discussion on the centrality of work and its alternatives, see <http://www.calcalist.co.il/Ext/Comp/ArticleLayout/CdaArticlePrintPreview/1,2506,L-3586412,00.html>.
- <sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, an English translation of Luisa Muraro’s philosophy cannot be found. Therefore, I have relied upon English essays that refer to her philosophy, and to conversations with Italian and Austrian peers. See “Luisa Muraro, ‘La Politica Delle Donne,’” *Via Doga* 1 (1991): 2.
- <sup>10</sup> For one example addressing the source of Western “knowledge” in the practices of the Global South, see Lalobaloca “Reclaiming

- Abuelita Knowledge as a Brown Ecofeminista.” *Autostraddle*. <https://www.autostraddle.com/reclaiming-abuelita-knowledge-as-a-brown-ecofeminista-213880/>. Accessed 16 February 2021.
- <sup>11</sup> Democracy, as in the government of the people or community and the maintenance of freedom, equality, and solidarity, is a model of governance commonly practised throughout history by Indigenous and matriarchal communities. Based on this historical evidence, proposals have been raised for the establishment of another democracy; some will be laid out in Part Two of the book. Therefore, the Western formulation of democracy, which involves a national state and capitalism, is only one suggested model and, in my opinion, it is not the best one.
- <sup>12</sup> For example, see Bennholdt-Thompson “Subsistence”; Eisenstein “A Circle of Gifts”; Graeber “The New Anarchists”; Holloway “Today’s March”; Kennedy *Interest and Inflation-free Money*; Leahy “Options for a Sustainable Future”; Nelson and Timmerman *Life Without Money*; Richards “An Ethical Alternative”; Richards et al. “Zero Unemployment”; Vaughan *For-giving*.
- <sup>13</sup> In this context, let me briefly mention the alternative suggested by the Mexican Zapatistas: they organize from the bottom up to create direct democracy, which leads to a social organization that preserves a connection to wo/men while emphasizing subsistence, rather than money and power.
- <sup>14</sup> I am grateful to Claudia von Werlhof, whose critical, original, and courageous writing affected me and assisted me in formulating this argument.
- <sup>15</sup> Though space does not permit me to delve into this matter, I will briefly mention that another serious problem of both the current structure and social democracy is their detachment from spirituality.
- <sup>16</sup> For the gathering and its results, see CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, “State of Civil Society 2011.” *Civicus*. Web. April 2012. [https://www.civicus.org/downloads/2011StateOfCivilSocietyReport/State\\_of\\_civil\\_society\\_2011-web.pdf](https://www.civicus.org/downloads/2011StateOfCivilSocietyReport/State_of_civil_society_2011-web.pdf). Accessed 16 February 2021.
- <sup>17</sup> For Africa’s matriarchal heritage, see also Amadium *Re-Inventing Africa* and *Male Daughters, Female Sons*.
- <sup>18</sup> See the work of Rauna Kuokkanen for fascinating examples of the Scandinavian Sámi people and their matriarchal societies. See also her essay, “What Is Hospitality in the Academy?” for her proposal of an Indigenous gift economy for Western academia.
- <sup>19</sup> For instance, rather than foregrounding individual “economic empowerment,” these days I assist disadvantaged women within an

- economic network and a social community.
- <sup>20</sup> A small group of Tikkun activists, who had bought a small farm in a rural area of France, were accused of pre-terrorist activities and forcibly removed by the national anti-terrorism unit.
- <sup>21</sup> For example, see Parijs *Real Freedom for All*, Cox “Civil Society at the Turn of the Millenium,” Bhavnani et al. *Feminist Futures*, Costanza “Visions of Alternative (Unpredictable) Futures,” Vaughan *Women and the Gift Economy*, Bennholdt-Thomsen et al. *There Is an Alternative*.
- <sup>22</sup> A personal note: I keep hearing the utopia argument from multiple directions. Of all arguments raised against me, this is the most outrageous one, especially when coming from philosophers or theoreticians who repeatedly try to save people from piggish capitalism or from enlightenment—two patriarchal projects in which failure is embedded from their very beginning. In fact, the charge of utopianism is always a way to avoid confronting the alternative vision, and to remain in the swamp of familiar life.

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