MOTHER'S PRIMACY IN ANTHROPOLOGY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

Michael A. Petrou⁶

Abstract: *The theory of matriarchy still enjoys wide popularity, even among psychoanalysts. Following Freud' ideas, they invoke the passage from matriarchy to patriarchy as a historical analogue to the individual psychosexual development.*

After a review of anthropological discussions, some hypotheses vis-a-vis this persistence are proposed: matriarchy is a secular cosmogonic myth, developed within the evolutionary paradigm; a fantasy of origin of mankind within the mother's primacy constellation, both defensive formations against underlying anxieties constitutive of societal institution.

Having recourse to Peirce's and Green's concept of thirdness, a critical approach of linearity is undertaken. Finally, a structural correlation between gynaecocracy and matriarchal theory is proposed.

Keywords: evolutionary paradigm, lineal approach, matriarchy, mother, psychosexual development, thirdness.

⁶ Hellenic Psychoanalytical Society; petrou.mic@gmail.com

*A logic of common sense, following a linear sequence (1, 2, 3...),
is inappropriate for the understanding of the human being...*

A. Green (2004: 129)

Introduction

The bipolar concept of matriarchy/patriarchy first appeared as late as the second half of the 19th century. It immediately had a tremendous impact on the scientists and scholars of the age, becoming widely popular in 20th century society. Psychoanalysts, following Freud's passionate certainty for the passage of society from matriarchy to patriarchy, were convinced that, in this evolutionary model, they found an equivalent to and a confirmation of their theories regarding the course of the primary relationship of the child, initially with the mother and, only later, with the father.

I thought it important to dedicate the large opening part of my work to a review of the usages of the terms matriarchy and gynaecocracy, and then systematically refer to the anthropological discussions related to matriarchy. In regard to the insistence on the matriarchal hypothesis, I shall take an anthropological and psychoanalytical stand. Through this critical approach, I shall question the prevailing standard of lineal psychosexual development, having recourse to the concept of thirdness. Finally, I shall propose a structural correlation between gynaecocracy and matriarchal theory.

Review of terms

The generalized impression that, in the dawn of civilization, authority was in the hands of women is deep-rooted in myths and scholarly texts. Its history has been sealed by strong debates, kindled mainly by conceptual misapprehensions and methodological shortcomings.

The term *matriarchy* was fashioned in Europe in the 1880s, based on Germany's *Mutterrecht* (Mother Right) of twenty years earlier. However, the word *Gynaecocracy* or *Gynecocracy*, *Gynaikokratie*, *Gynécocratie* etc. had already appeared in the early 17th century, having been adopted intact from Ancient Greek philology.

It is customary to turn to Aristotle when searching for the first inscription of the word gynaecocracy [γυναικοκρατία], although he does not mean any institutionalized form of female authority. This is because, before gynaecocracy was elevated to the theory of female governance

and became identified with matriarchy as a social system, it had only the meaning it retains to date – the dominance or prevalence of the female gender in a particular field or sector.

Indeed, Aristotle criticizes the weakness of Lycurgus towards women and warns against the danger for the State, which held honour in high regard, especially if the people «*are governed by women*» [γυναικοκρατούμενοι] (*Politics*, 2.1269b). He believes that «*dominance of women in the homes*», as well as, «*lack of discipline among the slaves*» constitute a digression from democracy towards tyranny (5.1313b).

A few centuries later, Plutarch defended the work of the Lacedaemonian lawgiver and praised the social position of Spartan women (*Lycurgus*, 14). Notwithstanding, in other works of his (*Antonios*, 10; *Agis and Cleomenis*, 54.1), he describes the weakness of powerful men by the use of the terms *womanish temper* [γυναικοκρασία]. And finally, in *Amatorius* (2.755c) he opines, referring to Lemnian women, that «*nature is transgressed when women govern*» [γυναικοκρατούμενη].

Diodorus Siculus, who rescued the work of the 4th century B.C. historian Ephorus of Cyme, speaks of a «*sovereign people among whom the women held the power*» [γυναικοκρατουμένου] (*Historical Library*, 2. 44-45). He is referring of course to the known legends of the Amazons by Herodotus (*Histories*, Melpomene, 110-117), who are first mentioned by Homer: *The Amazons, peers of men (or match for men)* [Ἀμαζόνες ἀντιάνειραι] (*Iliad*, 3. 189). Strabo also writes about the nuptial customs of the Cantabres in Siberia, which focus on women: «*it is the custom... for the daughters to be left as heirs, and the brothers to be married off by their sisters. The custom involves, in fact, a sort of woman-rule* [γυναικοκρατίαν]; *but this is not at all a mark of civilization*» (*Geographics*, 3.4.18).

Still in the 1st century A.D., Dio Chrysostom and also the Latin Cassius Dio of the 2nd century, make similar uses of the term. Indeed, the latter, speaking of the natural and mental feebleness of Claudius on account of his improper socializing with servants and women, concludes that the emperor «*was ruled by slaves and by women*» [ἐγυναικοκρατήθη] (*Roman History*, 60.2).

Such formulation cannot but recall to our minds the aforementioned one by Aristotle. It encapsulates the view of the ancients about gynaecocracy, as it was preserved until the 6th century at least, when the Byzantine historian Procopius wrote «*dominance of women*» [γυναικοκρατία], referring to one of the possible causes of the love, passion and infidelity of a certain man (*Secret History*, 5.26).

Initially in the form of *gynarchy*, the word acquires new meanings when it reappears during modern times in the writings of European authors: the 16th century gynaecocracy debate, about the novel, for the moral precepts of the age, the ascent to the English throne of Mary 1st and Elizabeth 2nd constitutes the most memorable usage of it (Scalingi, 1978; Caney, 2004).

The word also makes its appearance in French, in Rousseau's *Julie*: «*our Swiss ladies enjoy getting together... in this small gynécocratie* » (1761, 11.21).

Finally, in the misspelled form of Ginecocratie, the term is used in the first attempt at theorizing female governance as a social system by a pioneer of Ethnology: Joseph-Francois Lafitau (1724). He attempts a field investigation of the Iroquois tribe and its comparison with the peoples portrayed by the ancient writers.

However, those who associated their names with the development of the so-called theory of prehistoric or archaic matriarchy were three prominent lawyers of the second half of the 19th century: Bachofen, McLennan and Morgan.

The formulation of Matriarchal theory

Swiss scholar Johann Bachofen sought to match the Mother Right (Mutterrecht) with female authority during an assumed stage of origin, common to all societies: Gynaecocracy (Gynaikokratie). This stage was followed, always according to Bachofen, by the also assumed period of partnership, and preceded the patriarchy.

Primitive Marriage (1865) by J.F. McLennan is written in a similar vein. Even of greater interest are the works of the American Lewis Morgan. Based on his own field work surrounding the Iroquois, his knowledge of other peoples as well as on classical antiquity, this pioneer anthropologist expounds the first significant evolutionary theory of civilization in his *Ancient Society* (1877).

By using the notes of Marx on Morgan's work, Engels authored *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). He adopted the concept of maternal origin from the American anthropologist and, from Bachofen, «*for reasons of brevity*», *that of Mother Right*, making both the basic element of his theory for social evolution.

The long-term prevalence of Marx and Engels' theories contributed to the widespread diffusion of the theory of prehistoric matriarchy to a considerable degree.

Yet, matriarchy as a word was never penned by Bachofen, McLennan, Morgan, or even Engels. Bachofen uses the term Gynaecocracy, which he considers inseparable from Mother Right.

Nevertheless, the theory of female governance as a social system and evolutionary stage of humanity became universally known by its Greek-Latin term of matriarchy (mater+arche). The word was coined in Europe for this purpose in juxtaposition to the preceding biblical term – patriarchy.

The first to use the word matriarchy, according to the data I have been able to gather, is a Dutch colonial governor: G.A. Wilken (1884).

In any case, the choice of the word on the basis of the patriarchy/matriarchy juxtaposition was destined to complicate things further, rendering them vague and leading to various misconceptions.

Since then, ethnological as well as archaeological and historical research have rejected the matriarchal hypothesis, considering it to be mere speculation. The anthropologist and psychiatrist Rivers (1924, p. 96) confirms that the theory was already abandoned in America and England since the early years of the 20th century, while Bachofen's name is hardly quoted by anthropologists. In a synopsis of the debate, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines the relevant entry as follows:

The consensus among modern anthropologists and sociologists is that while many cultures bestow power preferentially to one sex or the other, matriarchal societies in this original, evolutionary sense have never existed.

The same position is upheld by anthropologist Graber even in the preface to the latest English translation of Bachofen's work (2007: iii):

There appears to be no definite evidence, either archaeological or ethnographic, for the existence of matriarchies, let alone for a matriarchal stage of cultural evolution.

The sole exceptions to the definite rejection of the matriarchal hypothesis are to be found in parts of the Marxist and feminist traditions (Gimbutas, 1997; Göttner-Abendroth, 2012; Sanday, 2002). The latter is strongly criticized by Eller, as is clearly shown by the subtitle of her book: *The myth of matriarchal prehistory: why an invented past won't give women a future* (2001).

In spite of its brief scientific lifespan, the theory enjoys high popularity to this day and continues to provide the inspiration for a huge number of works of universal thought, literature, theatre and cinema. The psychoanalytical community is no exception. Hundreds of psychoanalytical papers invoke the passage from matriarchy to patriarchy as the historical equivalent of the psychological development of the infant from the dual relationship with the mother to the triangular relationship characterized by the paternal authority. Burston (1986) showed how the matriarchal hypothesis has influenced psychoanalytical thought.

Freud himself, relying on the ethnological bibliography of his time, from *The Interpretation of Dreams* to *Moses and Monotheism*, accepts it earnestly. Indeed, in *Totem and Taboo* (p. 143) he refers to Bachofen by name, while in *Moses*, he considers matriarchy as the interim stage between the patricide of the primitive horde and the arrival of patriarchy (1939: 81-82, 112-113, 130-131).

Confusion between matriarchy and matrilineality

Tylor (1896), although the first English-speaking ethnologist to use the term matriarchy, as Radcliff-Brown (1924) also did some years later, was in fact describing the *matrilineal organization* of the studied societies.

Descent, as a social rather than a biological principle, is drawn, depending on the culture, either from both parents (bilineal or bilateral descent) – like ours – or from only one of them, hence unilineal or unilateral descent. The unilineal descent could be patrilineal, as in classic Athens (*Eumenides (Oresteia)*, 660), or matrilineal: Here the children did not belong to the family or the clan of the male parent. Herodotus –Bachofen’s source of information – was the first to describe the matrilineal descent (*Histories*, Kleio 173): (The Lycians) take the mother's and not the father's name... If a free woman marries a man who is a slave, their children are full citizens; but if a free man marries a foreign woman, or lives with a concubine, even though he is the first person in the State, the children forfeit all the rights of citizenship.

As is shown by the excerpt, besides the matronym, the noble or not noble descent was also bequeathed by matrilineality. The same may also hold for the property, titles or powers, as characteristically stated by Briffault (1927, vol. 1: 191).

The female, not the male, determines all the conditions of the animal family. Where the female can derive no benefit from association with the male, no such association takes place

Moreover, matrilineality may be combined, depending on the principle of residence prescribed by the given society, with matrilocality. Radcliffe-Brown writes (op. cit.), that the constituent principles of kinship may be combined with one another in various ways, so that even in the most strongly “matriarchal” society, some social importance is attached to kinship through the father; and vice-versa. Some manifestations of matrilineality can be seen in western societies: in the case of Jews it is religion, whilst in German and Scandinavian peoples the nationality is passed on by the mother.

Thus, the confusion between the matrilineal organization and matriarchy came about. The former, an undisputed ethnographic fact, is not concerned with the exercise of social authority. The latter, an assumption arising from the arbitrary generalization of the former, is not empirically confirmed. Indeed, ethnological observations along with historical and archaeological research as a whole do not support the view that a society has ever existed in which women held the institutional roles respectively held by men in the so-called patriarchal society. Schneider (1961: viii), writes, echoing Rivers’ views (1924): The generalized authority of women over men, imagined by Bachofen, was never observed in known matrilineal societies, but only recorded in legends and myths. Thus, the whole notion of matriarchy fell rapidly into disuse in anthropological work.

In each case, in matrilineal societies the mother enjoys a significant social position and the role of the father in the upbringing of children is taken over by the male brothers of the mother. These are the famous *avuncular societies*; *avunculus* being the maternal uncle in Latin. Furthermore, Radcliffe-Brown (1924, p. 48) demolishes the unfounded anthropological contention that patrilineality originated in matrilineality.

An extreme example of matrilineal societies with maternal residence is offered by the Moso (Southwest China): here, there is no marriage, or parental couple, and the words ‘spouse’ or ‘husband’ are absent from the vocabulary. Even so, in each household there is still power-sharing between the eldest mother and her eldest brother; as for sexual activity, it is freely exercised by anyone during the famous nocturnal visitations, as long as they do not belong to the same matrilineality. Even the slightest sexual reference or insinuation between members of the same matrilineality are strictly forbidden (Cai Hua, 1997).

On the contrary, other societies would assign the name of father to a woman, where no man is in a position to assume this role. Such is the case of the Nuer in Sudan (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 1951). The children address one of the two women of the parental couple as father. It is

also the case in the custom of Burrnesha in Albania (Grémaux, 1994; Young, 2000): The «*sworn virgins*» assume the position of father-leader of the wider family, when the adult men have been mutually annihilated by wars, vendettas etc.

However, whatever principle of origin a society may sanction, it is not the sex itself, but the political-religious institutions which prescribe the relations between members of the society. By filtering sexuality and the kinship system, they transform sexes into speaking genders and bodies into their ventriloquous instruments (Godelier, 2004, p. 428-434, 637). Although one of the matriarchy supporters, Sanday (1998), reaches the same conclusion: matriarchy, patriarchy, or diarchy is not a question about which sex rules, but how gender is represented in archetypal scenarios and reflected in social practices. The social field is an image of the cosmological order.

The arguments of Mother-Earth and of the Amazons

The second major argument in favor of matriarchy has been the widespread worship in prehistoric times of the Great Goddess or Mother Earth, who transcended the known boundaries of the ancient world, as shown by statuettes like the one of Venus of Willendorf (22000-24000 B.C.).

According to historian Wagner-Hasel (1991) and archaeologist Cauvin (1985), the social position of the prehistoric woman cannot be assessed only by the statuettes and wall paintings such as those of Knossos (Crete). Archaeology may easily slide towards the reflection of that which people wish to see, instead of teaching them about an unknown past (Gere, 2009).

The third argument is formed by the myths and, more generally, the traditions exalting woman: Pandora, Diotima, Amazons, the Lemnian women, Lysistrata, Ecclesiazusae, Athenian ceremonies (Arrhephoria, Thesmophoria etc.).

Many rigid patrilineal cultures reserve a special position for women, through exclusively female initiation rites of a healing nature, possibly resulting in the formation of socially acceptable female congregations of matrilineal organization. A characteristic example of this is found in the Boris possession ceremonies of the Hausa in the Niger (Monfouga-Nicolas, 1972): when a woman is taken ill, she seeks her initiation – possession by the tutelary genies of matrilineality. The initiated becomes a Boris, that is to say a messenger and the voice of the Boris deity, which seeks to restore the social and cosmic order disturbed by the negligence

of human beings towards the divine. This so to speak Pythia is not only a godly seer, but also a patient and henceforth a healer, member of the matrilineal Boris congregation. The *therapeutic triangle*, according to which the patient also becomes a therapist of the next patients, is characteristic of African Ethnomedicine (Pouillon, 1970).

This third argument lightly accepts that traditions are survivors of historical facts, something which, of course, does not convince either the anthropologists or the historians.

Therefore, one could wonder what might have led scholars and eminent scientists, through hasty compilations of religious and mythological data, ethnographical observations and archaeological finds, to formulate the theory of prehistoric matriarchy as the universal stage of the origin of civilization.

The seduction of the evolutionary paradigm

Although Social Anthropology is an offspring of the 19th century and is inspired by the Age of Enlightenment, it bears the seal of the romantic ideal of previous times: the praising of mystery and dream, the pursuit of escapism, in the exotic and the past, repeated by mediaeval and renaissance fictions. One of them, Arcadia, refers to a poetical place, where its virtuous inhabitants live in equality, enjoying bountiful natural splendor and harmony with nature.

Moreover, Social Anthropology evolves in the bosom of the scientific paradigm of the age, the Natural Sciences, dominated by the *evolutionary theories*. Older philosophical views deem to find in the Darwinian work the scientific guarantees, the conceptual and methodological tools that would elevate them to a social science: the idea of a society as an evolving organism was a biological analogy taken up by many anthropologists and sociologists and that persisted in some quarters even in the 20th century. In the dazzle of Darwinian seduction, nascent Anthropology represented mainly by Morgan and Tylor, as well as the Political Philosophy of Marx and Engels, fervently come out in support of unitary laws with universal validity, which determine the work of human history, in accordance with the *evolutionary paradigm* (Morgan, 1877, p. xxxi).

However, despite the abandonment of *Social Evolutionism*, the theory of matriarchy is still immensely attractive. I shall support the hypothesis that, apart from historical motives, diachronic ones – I mean unconscious motives that develop on the imaginary level of myths – are apt to explain this persistence.

Mythical thought and the question of origin

The matriarchal hypothesis, contemporary to the birth of Anthropology and Psychoanalysis, brings forth a common interest in both disciplines, which is the question of origin: origin of man, origin of psychic life. Then scientific thought itself should be questioned, since it resorts to speculation and myth in order to fill in its voids.

Freud's preoccupation with *myth* begins with his auto-analysis (Anzieu, 2000) and reaches its apex with *Moses and Monotheism* (Chemouni, 1997). An extract from his letter of 12/12/1897 to Fliess presages the relationship he discerns between myth and psychic reality (Freud, p. 1950). In 1901 he wrote (p. 48) that childhood memories have the significance of screen memories and there is a remarkable analogy that a nation preserves in its store of legends and myths.

Anthropology and Psychoanalysis converge on the premise that myths are reliable and credible narrations that conceptualize the world and legalize society: «*tools for thinking about reality*» (Pouillon, 1980, p. 98). A. Green (1980) deems that «*myth, like the unconscious, is the witness of a prehistory, an ex post facto imaginary construction of a peoples' origin*» (p. 100) and that from many aspects it operates as a «*collective transitional object*» (p. 121). For Valabrega (1980) myths are by definition achronic and subversive of rational partitions.

It follows that myths do not narrate historical facts; however, they are not incoherent narrations full of awe either. In respect to the latter, Freud (1901, p. 259), in supporting that «*the obscure recognition (the endopsychic perception) of psychical factors and relations in the unconscious is mirrored (...) in the construction of a supernatural reality*», is right against his contemporary historians and philosophers. Even though the products of projection and compromise, «*distorted vestiges of the wishful phantasies... secular dreams of youthful humanity*» (1908, p. 152), myths when decoded «*reveal a true psychological insight*» (1900, p. 398). As to the former, that is, whether Freud believes myth reproduces historical events, it calls for closer examination.

Although he abandons his *neurotica* early on, that is to say the importance of external reality and the diachrony of history in favor of fantasy and the synchronization of psychical reality, he clings to the end of his life in some other way to the rock of the historical fact. And this way, from the *Three essays* to *Moses*, is none other than his insistence on the priority of phylogenesis over ontogenesis and the recapitulation of the former from the latter (1917, p. 354, 370).

Haeckel's theory of recapitulation is the cornerstone on which Freud has attempted to base his theory as a single edifice: the theory of neuroses together with the origin of the human species (Grubrich-Simitis, 1986; Balestriere, 1998; Duvernay-Bolens, 2001). For Freud, retracing evolution was the means of giving his theory total and universal application, in accordance with the evolutionary paradigm.

Fact and reality come back from the depth of time: the primitive man meets the neurotic and the child, and becomes the extension of Psychoanalysis to the study of mankind as a whole, as expected by Freud (1911, p. 81). The joint murder and swallowing up of the father of the primitive horde is a fact that has been recorded as a memory vestige inside our «*phylogenetic heritage*». The relation between phylogenesis and ontology is thus established (1918: 57-6, 95-97).

However, Anzieu and Green, like other analysts who wanted to maintain the dialogue with anthropologists, encourage psychoanalysts to abandon outdated models and unfounded assumptions, such as recapitulation (Anzieu, 2000, p. 63-64) and the murder of the father of the primitive horde as real prehistoric event: «*the transmission of fantasy of patricide and its non-realization must be sought neither in the actual nor in the conscious, but in the repressive cultural mediation*» (Green, 1999a: 219).

The way Freud chooses to connect the origin of psychical life to that of the species, namely through the heritage safeguarded in the primal fantasies, leads me to the hypothesis that the theory of prehistoric matriarchy, seen as part of the “*Ur*” predicament, has all the characteristics and the function of *primal fantasies*. It is an attempt at giving meaning to the origin of man, in the same way that the primal scene gives meaning to the origin of the subject. For Laplanche and Pontalis (1985), primal fantasies are fantasies of origin. It is in this sense that primal fantasies seek solutions to the enigma of the origin of the subject, sexuality and gender difference.

Correspondingly, from an anthropological aspect, the cosmogonical myth of every civilization provides the answer to the enigma of creation and to the archetypal model of each creative activity. Chthonic deities, woman and fertility constitute for many civilizations the indivisible elements of a primal hierophania, which, with the celestial-male, will accordingly perform the primal hierogamy, repeated ever since by gods and men incessantly through the narration of myth and the observance of rites (Eliade, 1987, p. 344-363).

Consequently, the narrations about matriarchy are a reply to the question of the human origin. Where individuality converges with collectivity, matriarchy unfolds as a *secularized cosmogonical mythical narrative* and a psychical production in the model of certain sexual theories of children, screen-memories and family romance; it is made of the ingredients of a fantasy of origin, a fantasy of a blissful plenitude belonging to a primal maternal universe, without the interference of any constraint from reality: a retrospective projection in a blissful earthly paradise of the past.

The discussion is not exhausted by the obvious defensive character of such a fantasy against diversity and complementarity of genders and generations that overshadows an important debate on which I shall embark immediately.

Myth tells the truth. The thirdness

The second compound word of the term matriarchy, the noun *arche* [ἡ ἀρχή] has a multifarious meaning: beginning, origin; first cause, principle, place and power; rule; authority. The *arche* undoubtedly refers to what we define as archaic in psychoanalysis, which, as Green (1982) observes, is not only the starting point, the oldest, but also what stands out on account of its organizational significance. Therefore it covers both the reference to the Freudian *Ur* (*Urphantasien*), an answer to the questions of origin, and also to the power and authority attributed to the parental imagos.

Throughout psychosexual development the mother is the par excellence object of needs, desires and anxieties. As Potamianou (2014) wrote, certain manifestations attributed to the maternal imago of power are concerned with stemming the slide towards orality, passivity and dependence, homosexual tendencies and the threat of castration. As a phallic entity, that is to say as a fullness, absence of any want, not only does it dominate life and death, but it is also the space where instinctual drive tends to eliminate any order and opposition. Nevertheless, any modifications and any intermediation by third parties, the power of the “maternal”, as a uterus from which all of us have surfaced, as a female existence within man, as a glow of fertility or as the darkness of incorporation, will never cease to thrill the body and mind of the offsprings. Life-giver, seductress or restful, yet always a creator. How possible is it for mother as an authority, as a source of origin, to become a place of calm familiarity, one may wonder? A place where the phobogenic would not be idealized, would not be placated when worshipped, would not be removed by establishing itself on despotic thrones; or it would not be destroyed.

In line with the thought of Winnicott (*there is no such thing as an infant*), Green (1990) adopts the categories of Peirce in order to lay the foundation to his assertion of thirdness, by which he casts doubt on the prevailing lineal view of psychosexual development (2004, p. 101):

While it is obvious that the baby in the very beginning is related exclusively to the maternal object, this is no reason to conclude that the father has no existence whatsoever during that period... The matter at issue, and the one of utmost importance, is whether the actual partners in a relationship are only those physically present, or whether an absent party can play a role by virtue of being present in the mind of another member of the relationship.

Also (1999a: 215-220):

We have the tendency to accord privilege to the dual relationship, risking overlooking the father. It is a short-sighted perspective... To the contrary, we must insist on the fact that this archaic relationship is indirectly inclusive of the father... Since its birth, the child is registered within the symbolic Oedipal context... The Oedipal is structural to the measure in which itself is transgenerational... Therefore, there is no transition from a dual to a tertiary state, but a mutation of the imaginary status of the father.

And he continues: The massive presence, of an all-powerful mother, phallic, disastrously seductive, appears to banish and eliminate the father. The archaic fantasies urge the mother to kill him and incorporate his power. This makes her a dangerous monster for lack of a counter threat or mediator.

These, of course, occur on the unconscious level, for on the conscious level there is but praise for «*mother's exalted kind*» [μητέρος ἀγλαόν εἶδος]. These words are chosen as frontispiece by Bachofen for the cover of his book. I deem this to be a fragment of a phrase by the Neo-Platonic philosopher Porphyrius of the 3rd century A.D. (Porphyrii, 1856: 146-7). A profound classical scholar, Bachofen could not ignore the origin and possible dimensions of a philosopher's saying, whom he quotes several times in the pages of *Mother Right*.

Therefore, behind the maternal exaltation there appears the specter of the archaic ambisexual being, which offers both life and death, and which we usually call phallic mother, a *démon familier* (Stirn, 1987: 4). The pottery depiction accompanying the phrase «*mother's exalted kind*» on Bachofen's book cover, representing Thetis mourning her son Achilles, is enclosed in an oval outline, which may refer to the *egg of the Aristophanean cosmogony* (Birds, 694-6).

Freud, in his essay *The Theme of the Three Caskets* (1913: 301) concludes:

They are the three forms taken by the figure of the mother in the course of a man's life—the mother herself, the beloved one who is chosen after her pattern, and lastly the Mother Earth who receives him once more.

It follows that the mythical narrations about archaic matriarchy is a two-sided invention: the one of a happy and unimpeded, and the other of a threatening and catastrophic prospect, if power ever fell exclusively in the hands of women. The *fantasy of return* through death to the undifferentiated state of archaic fusion traces a perfect circle; it is yet another symbolism of the egg of creation.

The blood ties with the mother would be mortal ties as well if they were not mediated by a third party, even if such a one is the mother's brother, as usually happens in matrilineal societies. The conflict of the so-called maternal law with paternal law in the much-discussed Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, does not necessarily involve the victory of patriarchy over matriarchy and the marking of a historic transition of universal application.

The intrinsic value attributed to myth comes from the notion that these events which are supposed to have taken place at a given moment in time also have a permanent structure. This relates them simultaneously to the past, the present and the future.

If, Lévi-Strauss continues, moreover we accept that «*the object of myth is to provide a reasonable solution standard to a contradiction*» (1958, p. 231, 254), then I propose the hypothesis that the said conflict concerns the selection procedures between an obsolete number of structures, of those religious-political institutions, which will provide the foundation to the *mythical origin of the given society*.

However, obtaining option is never final. The perspective of a retrogressive movement between different structures is always possible, sometimes even threatening, as is lively demonstrated in the much-discussed Euripides' *Bacchae*.

Aristotle's apostrophe about the possible damage to the state if it is «*governed by women*», the legends of the Amazons, Lemnian (Herodotus, *Histories*, Erato, 138), and Medea, the cosmogonic myths of Hesiod (*Days and Works*, p. 90-94), the sneering at gynaeocracy and the derision by the Greeks of the supposed barbaric customs (Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, p. 339-340), like so many other «*excerpts from ancient literature demonstrate the latent fear of losing control over women*» (Keuls, 1985, p. 321).

Indeed, the myth tells the truth; however, not that of the external world, but that of the internal world, «*of the desires and anxieties connected with it*» (Anzieu, 2000: 50). As usually happens with collective and individual productions in general, their meaning, distorted by the necessary compromises, is often delivered to us inverted: historians Pembroke (1967) and Vidal-Naquet (1970), in demonstrating the laws of interchange and inversion that dominate mythical thought – the rapport to the unconscious primary process is obvious – have shown that gynaecocracy in antiquity would be an inverted world. Vidal-Naquet (1981), in analyzing the complexities and multiple meanings of the Greek world, deems that the reason Aristotle associates women and slaves with tyranny is because the latter seeks its allies among those who are excluded by the City in time of democracy and therefore relates to women and slaves. Pembroke (op. cit.) referring to the notion of matriarchy as a perspective, insists on what he calls the *function of alternatives* in a normal rule.

I follow Pembroke when he upholds that gynaecocracy constitutes for the City a repulsive alternative to a political reversal and a logical reversal, as I think of the abhorrent and repulsive images – like the apotropaic “*Gorgon’s head*” on Athena’s shield – for the deterrence of evil. Gynaecocracy satisfies the characteristics of a cosmogonic mythical narrative of a repulsive nature.

The classicist Walcot takes a step further (1984: 42-44):

[The Amazons] are everything a woman ought not to be and they define the norm and the acceptable by setting that norm on its head; they illustrate the appalling consequence of woman usurping what is properly man's role and emphasize man's fear of any attempt at such a usurpation... [They] kill or mutilate the boys, a custom guaranteed to arouse castration anxieties in men ... It needed Achilles to vanquish the Amazon queen Penthesilea... It is, of course, heavily ironic that so superb a sexual athlete as Heracles should in the end be brought to the point of death by a loving wife, but the very innocence of Deianeira [Man destroyer] reminds us yet again of the perils posed by a woman and that woman need not be a Helen or her sister Clytemnestra.

In the case of gynaecocracy, anxieties caused by the difference of the two sexes – fusion, dependence, dominion, castration etc. – (Cornut, 2001) assume forms hardly concealable by the life-giving divinity; the sweetness of the nursing mother in a blissful paradise where it all began. The ominous specter of a world governed by women must be thwarted. One way of

doing this is by turning its content upside down – from a threat to felicity – in combination with its transposition in time – from the future to the past – the invention of archaic matriarchy.

The awe of gynaecocracy, the appeal of matriarchy: realizations of a logical antinomy

The unwanted prospect of gynaecocracy in Antiquity, like the appeal of prehistoric matriarchy in modern times, is an articulation of social representations of female authority narratives.

I shall lend my support to the anthropological hypothesis that the totally opposite, in regard to the position they reserve for woman, gynaecocracy and matriarchy are realizations of the same logical antinomy.

No civilization has a single model of social representations for a particular subject. For a certain period of time, the older model and the most recent one maintains either an alternating or a conflicting coexistence. In the case where the process of a model's transformation leads to its complete logical and semantic reversal, the basic terms of representation should at least have a dual meaning (Laplantine, 1986, p 46-52). Such terms in the case under examination are the sexes and authority.

The secure order of speech, the “*victory of intellectuality over sensuality*” (Freud, 1939, p 114), may at any moment be disturbed, overthrown under the pressure of the return of the repressed or the split part of instinctual demand.

Such is the case of the *Mother Right* itself. From its text that praises the female there flows the tangible, even by Bachofen himself, threat to the destabilization of rational thought by woman: «*Like Hegel, Bachofen dreams of the refinement and perfection of the human spirit*» (Bachofen, 1861 [2007]: xi: Translator's Introduction).

Certain civilizations choose the complete segregation of the sexes. However, the multiple meaning of the female, the double-mindedness and ambivalence towards it, is a psychic reality of possibly universal application.

Negation involves or indicates affirmation; and vice versa. The significance of a psychic content or of a social one becomes more complete in the measure to which the relations of positivity and negativity that make it up are demonstrable. The evident and the latent, the socially acceptable and unacceptable, the prevailing and the lacking obey a logic of interchange

and potential dialogue. For instance, what in a given period of a civilization is considered unacceptable or axiomatically negative, is not necessarily absent. It may be present or even acted upon as positive in certain expressions of the same civilization: in myths, feasts, constituent social groups etc. It may resurface at any moment.

Negation offers, as a defense mechanism from the psychoanalytical aspect and as a logical stratagem from an anthropological one, two supplementary means of understanding this order of cultural phenomena, where opposing social representations are dominant or hidden.

Negation is necessary for the structure of speech, as well as of any symbolic system, and therefore of civilization as such. It involves the obligation of a decision with a “yes” or a “no”, a judgment, that is. However, *«with the help of the symbol of negation, thinking frees itself from the restrictions of repression and enriches itself with material that is indispensable for its proper functioning»* (Freud, 1925, p. 236).

Splitting is not only an expression of pathology, but also itself *«the means to avoid confusion... It is a positive negation between a “Yes” and a “No”, that accepts their coexistence and for this reason it can be creative»* (Green, 1990:, p.162-3).

We can therefore support the view that civilization, as a total of transitional phenomena, separates, prohibits, excludes, and also allows more or less the successful coexistence and joint acceptance of the opposites, subject to certain terms, mainly through the spiritual creativity, art and mythical narratives. The conscious and the unconscious function *«as they were binoculars therefore capable of correlation and self-regard»* (Bion, 1962, p. 54).

Human thought leaves the natural and biological terms of succession (what Green calls confusion), in order to become organized in the form of binary oppositions systems (Lévi-Strauss, 1947, p. 157-158). The meaning becomes possible precisely thanks to the dialectic of these oppositions. Myth is the quintessential stratagem that converts an uncompromising binary opposition to a logically acceptable one, thus creating the illusion that the opposition has been resolved making mythical thought effective (1958, p 254, 231).

Through the thorough examination of the autochthony myth in relation to the status of the Athenian citizen, Loraux (1990, 1996) questions the dominant positions on identity between the mother and the Earth-Deity, as well as between the meanings of analogy, assimilation, metaphor and identification: *«for the woman in her conception and generation is but the imitation of the earth, and not the earth of the woman»* (Plato, *Menexenus*, 238a). These

positions, widely accepted by Bachofen, prove to be conceptually and methodologically erroneous, according to the French historian.

Loraux has also shown that, despite the absence of woman as a natural person, social representations of the female are but absent: the declared importance of the legal wife: «*the better partner you prove to me and the better housewife to our children, the greater will be the honour paid to you in our home*» (Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 7.42-3); the mother country that is represented as earth; the lament for its fallen defenders, uttered by the women, and so forth. The Athenian female is an organizer, “*a female operator*” that allows us to think of the male and the political.

A par excellence public, alongside the Ecclesia and the Agora, is undoubtedly that of the Theatre. Notwithstanding the fact that the actors and the chorus are played by men, the roles are quite often feminine.

I presume that the socially imposed absence of women from the tiers, in combination with their absence-presence in the orchestra, are an indication of otherness. It is a representation, a means of expressing the difference of the sexes and of the sections that the myths and the Polis – not always consensually – assign to each, as for example in Aristophanes’ *stasis* [rebellion] of women. As protagonists and as the chorus, women are the other voice, that of doubt, recollection and prudence; it is the echo of social conflicts and looming political reversals.

I assume that gynaecocracy in Antiquity, like matriarchy from modern times onwards, are mythical narratives; they are cultural and political objects of representations and affects; realisations of the same obvious or latent logical antinomy regarding the female. Woman is considered a threat to the founding of the Polis, probably of every civilization. Nevertheless, woman is a constituent element of its birth, establishment and continuation, as well as of its overthrow. The female is recast in dormant psychical and social representations right at the moment when it is suppressed or excluded from evident practices. The logic of exclusion is simplifying, one-dimensional and poor; the logic of (re-) casting is rich, multifaceted and manifold.

Conclusion

Matriarchy and the conceptions related to female authority preceded the theory of Bachofen and those of other scholars. Matriarchy has not been an evolutionary stage of civilization. Nevertheless, it exists. It exists as a mythical narrative, possibly diachronic and universal; it is a common fantasy of origin that endeavours to solve riddles and formulate answers, allay archaic anxieties, establish statutes of society, its organization and functioning.

The historian Hartmann (2004, p. 1920) writes:

Matriarchy serves as a projection screen, reflecting current ideas about the authority of the sexes... The term matriarchy is untested... Undoubtedly, however, the research of historians on the relations of the sexes remains a fascinating subject.

Matriarchal assumptions, at once seductive and abhorrent, activate social representations and psychical functions of the inner soul that spread to the disputed area between the individualistic and the collective, between fantasies, myths and scientific knowledge.

Paraphrasing 1914 Freud in regard to the immortality of the Ego, when he showed that the narcissism of the parents nestles in the love of their children, I shall say that our unconscious desires, in the form of fantasies and myths, sometimes find the safest refuge in the scientific theories that we create.

REFERENCES

All Ancient Greek and Latin texts are accessible on *Perseus Digital Library*, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper>, accessed September 9th 2017.

ANZIEU, D. (2000). *Psychanalyser*. Dunod, Paris, p. 50, 63-64.

BACHOFEN, J.J. (1861). *Das Mutterrecht: eine Untersuchung über die Gynaikokratie der alten Welt nach ihrer religiösen und rechtlichen Natur* [Mother'S Law: An Investigation into the Gynaecocracy of the old world according to its religious and legal nature]. Stuttgart: Verlag von Kraiss und Hoffmann, 1903, <http://pef.czu.cz/~kokaisl/bachofen-de.pdf>, accessed September 9th 2017.

BACHOFEN, J.J. (2007). *An English translation of Bachofen's Mutterrecht (Mother Right)*

1861, abridged and translated by D. Partenheimer. The Edwin Mellen Press, New York, p. iii, xi.

BALESTRIERE, L. (1998). *Freud et la question des origines*. [*Freud et la question des origines*]. De Boeck, Bruxelles, pp. 269-280.

BION, W.R. (1962). *Learning from Experience*. William Heinemann, London, Karnac Books, Reprinted London, 1991, p. 54.

BRIFFAULT, R.S. (1927). *The Mothers: A Study of the Origins of Sentiment and Institutions*. Macmillan, London, p. 191.

BURSTON, D. (1986). Myth Religion and Mother Right: Bachofen's Influence on Psychoanalytic Theory. *Contemp Psychoanal* **22**: 666-687.

CANEY, A.C. (2004). *Let He Who Objects Produce Sound Evidence: Lord Henry Howard and the Sixteenth Century Gynecocracy Debate*. Thesis, <http://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/etd/97>, accessed 9 September 2017.

CAUVIN, J. (1985). La question du «matriarcat préhistorique» et le rôle de la femme dans la préhistoire. [La question du «matriarcat préhistorique» et le rôle de la femme dans la préhistoire]. *Travaux de la Maison de l'Orient*, **10** (1): 7-18.

DUVERNAY-BOLENS, J. (2001). La théorie de la recapitulation de Haeckel à Freud. [Recapitulation theory from Haeckel to Freud]. *Topique*, **2** (75): 13-34.

ELIADE, M. (1987). *Traité d'histoire des religions*. Payot, Paris, pp. 344-363.

ELLER, C. (2001). *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future*. Boston, MA, Beacon Press,

Encyclopædia Britannica, <http://www.britannica.com>, accessed September 9th 2017.

FREUD, S. (1900). The interpretation of dreams. *SE IV & V*. Hogarth Press, London, pp. ix 627

FREUD, S. (1901). The Psychopathology of Everyday Life. *SE VI*. Hogarth Press, London, pp. 1-296.

FREUD, S. (1908). Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming. *SE IX*. Hogarth Press, London, pp. 141-154.

FREUD, S. (1911). Psycho-analytic notes on an autobiographical account of a case of paranoia *SE XII*. Hogarth Press, London, pp. 1-82.

FREUD, S. (1914). On Narcissism: An Introduction. *SE XIV*. Hogarth Press, London, pp. 67-102.

FREUD, S. (1917). Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. *SE XVI*: Hogarth Press, London, pp. 241-463.

FREUD, S. (1918). From the History of an Infantile Neurosis. *SE XVII*: Hogarth Press, London, pp. 1-124.

FREUD, S. (1925). Negation. *SE XIX*: Hogarth Press, London, pp. 233-240.

FREUD, S. (1939). Moses and Monotheism. *SE XXIII*. Hogarth Press, London, pp. 1-138.

FREUD, S. (1973) *La naissance de la psychanalyse*. [The Origins of Psychoanalysis]. Paris, PUF, pp. 210-11

GODELIER, M. (2004). *Les métamorphose de la paternité*. [The Metamorphoses of Kinship]. Flammarion, Paris, 2010, pp. 428-434, p. 637

GREEN, A. (1980). Le mythe: un objet transitionnel collectif. *Le temps de la réflexion* 2: 99-131.

GREEN, A. (1982). Après-coup, l'archaïque. *NRP* 26: 195-216.

GREEN, A. (1990). De la tiercéité. In: *La pensée clinique*. [Clinical Thinking]. Odile Jacob, Paris, 2002, p. 202-242.

GREEN, A. (1999 a). Inceste et parricide en Anthropologie et en Psychanalyse. [Inceste et parricide en Anthropologie et en Psychanalyse]. In: Ph. Descola, J. Hamel et P. Lemonnier (editors), *La production du social. Autour de Maurice Godelier*. Colloque de Cerisy. [The production of the social. Around Maurice Godelier]. Fayard, Paris, pp. 215-220.

GREEN, A. (2004). Thirdness and Psychoanalytic Concepts. *Psychoanal Q* 73:99-135.

HARTMANN, E. (2004). Zur Geschichte der Matriarchatsidee. Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. <http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/humboldt-vl/133/hartmann-elke-3/PDF/hartmann.pdf>, accessed September 9th 2017.

KEULS, E. (1985) *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens*. Harper & Row, New York, p. 321

LAFITAU, J.F. (1724). *Mœurs des sauvages américains, comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps*. <http://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/details/52327/1982985>, accessed September 9th 2017.

LAPLANTINE, F. (1986). *Anthropologie de la maladie* [Anthropologie de la maladie]. Payot, Paris, p. 46-52

LEVI-STRAUSS, C. (1947). *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*, [The Elementary Structures of Kinship]. 2 ed. Mouton, Paris, p. 157-158

LEVI-STRAUSS, C. (1958). *Anthropologie structurale*. [Structural anthropology]. Plon, Paris, p. 231, 254

MORGAN, L. (1877). *Ancient Society: Or, Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery, Through Barbarism to Civilization*. New York, Henry Holt and Company, p. xxxi

LORAUX, N. (1996). *Né de la terre. Mythe et politique à Athènes*. Born of the Earth: Myth and Politics in Athens]. Paris, Seuil

Oxford Dictionaries, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>, accessed September 9th 2017.

PEMBROKE, S. (1967). Women in Charge: the Function of Alternatives in Early Greek Tradition and the Ancient Idea of Matriarchy, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* - **30**: 1-35.

PORPHYRII *De philosophia ex oraculis haurienda librorum reliquiae*, G. Wolff editor (1856). Berlin: Springeri, <http://www.hathitrust.org>, accessed September 9th 2017.

POTAMIANOU, A. (2014). Thoughts about the issue of matriarchy. *Oedipus* 11: 225-230 (in Greek).

POUILLON, J. (1980). La fonction mythique. [La fonction mythique]. *Le temps de la réflexion* - **1** : 83-98. +++ 1970

RADCLIFFE-BROWN, A.R. (1924). The mother's brother in South Africa. *South African Journal of Science* **21**: 542-55

SANDAY, P.R. (1998). Matriarchy as a sociocultural form. An old debate in a new light. *16th congress of the indo-pacific prehistory association*, Melaka, Malaysia, 1-7 July 1998, <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~psanday/matri.html>, accessed September 9th 2017.

SCALINGI, P.L. (1978). The Scepter or the Distaff: The Question of Female Sovereignty, 1516–1607. *The Historian* **41**(1): 59-75.

SCHNEIDER, D.M. (1961). Introduction: The distinctive features of matrilineal descent groups. In: Schneider D, Gough K editors. *Matrilineal Kinship*. University of California Press, Berkeley, pp. 1-29.

STIRN, F. (1987). Introduction et commentaire à S. Freud «L'inquiétante étrangeté». [Introduction et commentaire à S. Freud «L'inquiétante étrangeté»]. Grenoble, Philosophie, p. 4

TYLOR, E.B. (1896). The Matriarchal Family System. *Nineteenth Century* **40**:81-96

WAGNER–HASEL, B. (1991). Le matriarcat et la crise de la modernité [Matriarchy and the crisis of modernity]. *Mètis. Anthropologie des mondes grecs anciens* **6** (1-2): 43-61.

WALCOT, P. (1984). Greek Attitudes Towards Women: The Mythological Evidence. *Greece and Rome (Second Series)* **31**: 37-47.

WINNICOTT, D.W. (1960). The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship¹. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, **41** : 585-595