

Matrix: a Journal for Matricultural Studies

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About *Matrix*

Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies (Matrix) is an open-access, peer-reviewed and refereed scholarly journal published by the International Network for Training, Education, and Research on Culture (Network on Culture), Canada. *Matrix* is published online twice yearly (Spring and Autumn).

Matrix is a new journal in the humanities and social sciences, founded to provide an interdisciplinary forum for those who are working from the theoretical stance of matriculture as a Geertzian cultural system. Matriculture refers to the cultural system that brings together all cultural aspects informing the lives of mothers, usually women, of a given society, and by extension, the lives of women. Talking about matricultural systems allows us to consider as primary the cultural context of a given society as perceived, constructed, and lived by its women.

Similar to other cultural systems such as art, religion, or mathematics, employing the heuristic of matriculture allows for, among other things: cross-cultural comparisons; fresh insights into the social roles of women, men, otherwise identified, children, and the entire community of humans, animals, and the environment; and/or renewed understandings of historically mis-labelled cultures. With Guédon's work in mind, then, and based on Geertzian principles, the concept of matriculture is both a model of reality by rendering the structure of matricultures apprehensible and a model for reality, where psychological relationships are organized under its guidance.

We encourage submissions from scholars around the world who are ready to take a new look at the ways in which people - historically and currently - have organized meaningful relationships amongst themselves and with the natural environment, the myths, customs, and laws which support these relationships, and the ways in which researchers have documented and perhaps mis-labeled the matricultures they have encountered.

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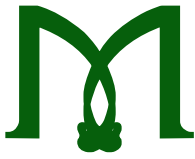
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Men and Masculinities from Matricultural Perspectives: An Introduction

PATRICK J. JUNG

Abstract

This special issue of Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies examines the lives of men from matricultural perspectives. Matriculture is a concept derived from the interpretive anthropology of Clifford Geertz, who developed his cultural systems theory based on an understanding of the symbolic elements that constitute human cultures. Marie-Françoise Guédon, Linnéa Rowlatt, and Angela Sumegi have further defined matriculture as those aspects of a cultural system unique to women. The articles, interviews, and book reviews in this special issue illustrate two trends that warrant further investigation. First, men play crucial roles in the creation, performance, and maintenance of matricultures. Second, the interviews published in this special issue indicate that women in Indigenous societies have historically played essential roles in preserving, revitalizing, and decolonizing their cultures. Moreover, women continue this vital work in today's world, regardless of whether they hail from societies that possess matrilineal, patrilineal, or bilateral kinship systems.

Key Words: Matriculture, masculinity, matrilineal, patrilineal, colonialism / decolonisation



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In the call for papers for this special issue of *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies*, the editorial team posed the question, “How are men and masculinity understood and portrayed from matricultural perspectives?” When I was invited to serve as the guest editor, I did not know how to respond to this question. Now, after serving in this capacity, neither I nor any other member of the team has a definitive answer to this query. To some, that may sound like an admission of defeat; a failure to accomplish the original goals the team announced when it devised the theme of this special issue. However, such an assessment would be premature. Posing the question was itself an important step towards opening a new line of inquiry into the growing body of literature concerning matriculture, an anthropological approach that has the potential to shift our thinking about the lives of both women and men in human societies.

Matriculture is both a concept and, to a significant degree, a methodology that emerges from the interpretive anthropology of Clifford Geertz, who asserted that culture consists of “an image of cosmic order—a world view—by means of a single set of symbols.”¹ Human societies organize such symbols into systems that perform two functions, according to Geertz. They provide “a model *for*” the organization of the nonsymbolic aspects of society; they also offer “a model *of*” social reality that allows for “the manipulation of symbol structures so as to bring them, more or less closely, into parallel with the pre-established nonsymbolic system.”² The methodology of matriculture originates in the analysis and understanding of those symbols that define a matriculture, or, in the words of Marie-Françoise Guédon, symbols that “designate that part or those components of culture that sustain, express, and welcome women’s participation in the socio-cultural fabric.”³ Matriculture, of course, is the subject upon which this journal is established. The growing recognition of matriculture as an anthropological approach is evident in a recent anthology of scholarly essays that examine matriculture in various societies: *Matriculture, Shamanism, and the Authority of Women: The Powers That Be*. Linnéa Rowlatt and Angela Sumegi, the editors of this volume, further refine our understanding of matriculture by noting that every society has a matriculture (and, likewise, a patriculture). They also argue that “every society—even the most severely patriarchal—must include a matricultural cultural system, or matriculture for short, because every society must conceptualize motherhood and the means of biological reproduction.”⁴

¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 118 (qtd. 118).

² Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 93 (qtd. 93).

³ Marie-Françoise Guédon, “Introduction,” *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies* 1(1) (May 2020): 5-6 (qtd. 5).

⁴ Linnéa Rowlatt and Angela Sumegi, “Introduction: Considering Women’s Power,” in *Matriculture, Shamanism, and the Authority of Women: The Powers That Be*, Linnéa Rowlatt and Angela Sumegi, eds. (Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2025), 1-7 (qtd. 1).

Guédon, Rowlatt, and Sumegi assert that matricultures vary considerably in their constitutions. Matrilineal, matriloal, and uxoriolal societies tend to have the strongest matricultures, as women play essential roles beyond motherhood, particularly within kinship systems and households. Guédon writes, "Matricultures are found in every single human culture in many different versions; they are sometimes weak and limiting, such as when patrilineal kinship systems and patrilocality prevent women from accessing, communicating, and transmitting their knowledge."⁵ On the other hand, Rowlatt and Sumegi describe "flourishing matricultures, where women exert authority equal to or greater than men," including the Kanien'kehà:ka (Mohawk) of North America and the Minangkabau of Indonesia, both of which are matrilineal and matriloal societies.⁶ The research articles, interviews, and reviews in this special issue highlight the lives of men in a variety of matricultural contexts. Moreover, the concept of matriculture is not static; it continues to evolve and mature. This is due, in part, to the fact that other anthropological concepts have informed the notion of matriculture. The authors who have contributed to this special issue have tempered their understandings of matriculture with a variety of other anthropological concepts, including intersectionality, matriarchy, and female genital power.⁷

Related to matriculture and patriculture are the cultural constructs of masculinity and femininity. Ethnographic studies of how masculinity is constructed and performed in cultures began in the 1990s. Since then, the subject has expanded significantly in the anthropological literature.⁸ Indeed, how men (and women) construct the cultural system of maleness and masculinity (and, likewise, femaleness and femininity) overlaps with the

⁵ Marie-Françoise Guédon, "Northern Athabaskan Dreaming: A Matricultural Viewpoint," in *Matriculture, Shamanism, and the Authority of Women*, 10-14 (qtd. 13).

⁶ Rowlatt and Sumegi, "Introduction," 2 (qtd. 2).

⁷ For the concept of intersectionality as cited by Mihye Shin, see Jerker Edström, Satish Kumar Singh, and Thea Shahrokh, "Intersectionality: A Key for Men to Break Out of the Patriarchal Prison?" *IDS Bulletin* 47 (November 2016): 57-74. For the concept of matriarchy as cited by Shin, see Ifi Amadiume, "Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa: Kinship Ideologies and Systems in Africa and Europe," in *African Gender Studies: A Reader*, Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 83-98; and Cheikh Anta Diop, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Matriarchy and Patriarchy in Classical Antiquity* (London: Karnak House, 1989). For the concept of female genital power as cited by Ayodeji Abiona, see Dianne M. Stewart, "Matri-archive: A New Portal to Knowledge Production in African Studies," *Journal of African Religions* 7 (2019): 310-315.

⁸ For the foundational work on masculinity studies, see David D. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). For literature reviews of significant ethnographic examinations of masculinity, see Matthew C. Gutmann, "Trafficking in Men: The Anthropology of Masculinity," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 385-409; and Matthew C. Gutmann, "Remarking the Unmarked: An Anthropology of Masculinity," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 52 (2023): 55-72.

study of men in matricultural societies. However, as the editorial team reviewed the submissions to this issue, it became clear that we were engaged in something unique and unprecedented. For me, as a guest editor, it was a profoundly engaging intellectual journey. The only disappointment was realizing we had only scratched the surface of this subject. My hope is that the work of the editors and authors in preparing this special issue will serve as the seed of a larger, more comprehensive effort across the various subdisciplines of anthropology and other disciplines, such as history. The contributions to this special issue have made at least two tentative conclusions clear. The first is that men in human societies play crucial roles in the creation, performance, and maintenance of matricultures. The second conclusion is that women have played—and continue to play—essential roles in the preservation, revitalization, and decolonization of colonized Indigenous societies.

The research articles by Ayodeji Abiona and Mihye Shin provide strong evidence for the first conclusion. Abiona examines the Èró festival practiced among the Yorùbá people in Ùṣò, Ondo State, Nigeria, a patrilineal society. While Abiona also characterizes the Yorùbá as patriarchal, he qualifies this conclusion with several important caveats. He writes that “patriarchy is practiced or exists relative to femininity, that is, there could be no notion of patriarchy without women’s active participation.”⁹ Among the Yorùbá, men move from various age groups during the course of their lives, the last of which is the *Ọmọlúṣò*. Men in this category are freed from the duties and responsibilities of younger men and released from daily labor. Held every nine years in December, men participating in the Èró festival don women’s clothing prepared for them by their daughters. As they make their procession through the streets during the festival, they wield brooms and sweep toward the younger men who will assume their duties. The Èró festival symbolizes the emasculation of the older men as they enter a new lifestyle characterized by rest. However, it does not carry any stigma or effeminization, according to Abiona, nor does this ostensible saturnalia violate the cultural importance of heteronormativity. He writes, “Cross dressing in this context is not an everyday practice but a spectacle in ritual context.”¹⁰ Thus, men’s participation in the Èró festival and women’s performances within it ultimately maintain and sustain the culturally defined roles of males and females.

The Akan society of Ghana, on the other hand, is matrilineal, but as Shin asserts, it is a “matrilineal patriarchy” without a patriarch.¹¹ Shin presents a complex portrait of Akan life

⁹ Ayodeji Abiona, “Inside Women’s Robes: Masculinity and Dress During Èró Festival,” *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies*, Special Issue: Men and Masculinities from Matricultural Perspectives, 4(2) (Autumn 2025): 62-82 (qtd. 64).

¹⁰ Abiona, “Inside Women’s Robes,” 77.

¹¹ Mihye Shin, “What Does It Mean To Be a Family Man in a Matrilineal Society? Masculinity and Women’s Empowerment in Akan, Ghana,” *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies*, Special Issue: Men and Masculinities from Matricultural Perspectives, 4(2) (Autumn 2025): 21-61 (qtd. 30).

in which women serve as household heads, with men largely absent. Patriarchy among the Akan stems from several sources, including historical and cultural factors such as the introduction of Christianity and inheritance practices that tend to favor men even within this matrilineal kinship system. Indeed, women's brothers tend to wield greater authority in a household than men who have married into it, and men transmit property and wealth to their sisters' sons, leaving women largely out of the line of inheritance. Marriages tend to be weak, and intimate unions are often little more than temporary, casual relationships. Therefore, men tend to have far less authority in their conjugal households (from which they are frequently absent) than in their natal households. Financial loss and poverty often prevent men from fulfilling their roles as breadwinners, producing what Shin calls "disempowered masculinity" in Akan society.¹² Women, as heads of household, can step into these absences to carve out their sphere of autonomy, even if this sphere is circumscribed by various patriarchal elements that exist within this matrilineal society. Women thus remain central to the management of their intergenerational households. Shin concludes that within Akan society, women are "in the centre of the family even if they are not at the centre of power."¹³ My own observations after reading Shin's research suggest that men and women among the Akan engage in an awkward dance, and male missteps create opportunities for women to fill the gaps left by men's shortcomings. Such "disempowered masculinity" thus weakens the ideal notion of patriarchy in Akan society, and in the process shapes and defines the roles of women, even if the mechanism is one of male absence rather than presence.

The interviews published in this special issue make another phenomenon abundantly evident: women in Indigenous and non-Western societies have played—and continue to play—essential roles in cultural revitalization and preservation among peoples who have experienced cultural loss due to colonialism. This is true regardless of whether the society has a matrilineal, patrilineal, or bilateral kinship system. As I listened to the interviewees' recordings, I reflected on a 1984 article by Michael Allen, who, after a comprehensive review of Melanesian societies, noted that matrilineal systems have "the greatest evolutionary potential." He also added that "it is worth repeating that despite numerous early prognoses to the contrary, the matrilineal areas of Melanesia have been among the most successful in adapting to the traumas of European contact."¹⁴ I have long believed that this conclusion warrants more in-depth research across a larger number of global regions. At the macro level, Allen's research suggests that societies with strong matrilineal cultures are better able to manage the stresses and strains of colonialism. The interviews in this special issue indicate the same is true at the micro level, and that women

¹² Shin, "What Does It Mean To Be a Family Man in a Matrilineal Society?", 43.

¹³ Shin, "What Does It Mean To Be a Family Man in a Matrilineal Society?", 38.

¹⁴ Michael Allen, "Elders, Chiefs, and Big Men: Authority Legitimation and Political Evolution in Melanesia," *American Ethnologist* 11 (February 1984): 20-41 (qtd. 37).

across the globe appear better able to cope than men when confronted with the vagaries of colonialism. They are also taking the lead in decolonizing efforts in the contemporary world.

The Aleut (Unanga) are traditionally a patrilineal culture. Still, Carter Price, reflecting on his journey of reclaiming and learning more about being and becoming an Aleut man, credits the women in his life, particularly his maternal grandmother (nicknamed “Honey”), with anchoring him firmly in his culture. Like many Native people in the United States, his grandmother attended a government boarding school that sought to strip children of their natal cultures. Price inherited his tattoos from his mother’s family, and his female relatives have been eager to keep the craft of Aleut basketweaving alive. Price also credits his maternal uncle with teaching him the traditional subsistence activities of the Aleut people. Price, through the conventional avenue of academic research, has also endeavored to learn more about the Aleut people before the “colonial times” and “boarding school times” disrupted the flow of cultural knowledge between the generations. Nevertheless, his testimony makes clear that the strong women in his life (including his wife) have been essential to his personal journey of reclaiming his cultural heritage.¹⁵ Douglas Cardinal, who claims Blackfoot descent from his father’s family, tells a similar story. The Blackfoot possess a largely bilateral system of kinship with some patrilineal characteristics. Cardinal credits the women from his father’s family with ensuring that he remained connected to his Blackfoot heritage. He met his paternal grandmother at age five when she lived in a small cabin with her husband. She prayed with Cardinal over her husband’s medicine bundle and taught Cardinal about the “little souls” it contained, such as the objects carved from pipestone. She would go on to teach her young grandson the Blackfoot language.¹⁶

Geralt Cloete relates a similar story concerning his people, the Nama Khoe society of South Africa. Cloete was born in 1993 in the Richtersveld Municipality north of Cape Town. He learned Afrikaans as his first language, although his maternal and paternal grandparents spoke Nama, as did his parents. Cloete relates that Christian missionaries forbade the children of his parents’ generation from speaking the Nama language, calling it ‘demonic.’ Cloete realized as he learned the language that, “I’m sitting with a tongue that’s not my mother’s tongue [Nama]. I’m sitting with some other mother’s tongue [Afrikaans] in my mouth.”¹⁷ Cloete labels himself a ‘theatre maker’ who uses theatre as a mechanism of cultural preservation. He founded Nama Khoi Productions in 2022 to reclaim his culture

¹⁵ Carter Price, “Personal Reflections on Unanga (Aleut) Men and Matriculture,” *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies*, Special Issue: Men and Masculinities from Matricultural Perspectives, 4(2) (Autumn 2025): 15:45.

¹⁶ Douglas Cardinal, “Personal Reflections on Blackfoot Men and Matriculture,” *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies*, Special Issue: Men and Masculinities from Matricultural Perspectives, 4(2) (Autumn 2025): 10:54.

¹⁷ Geralt Cloete, “Personal Reflections on Nama Khoe Men and Matriculture,” *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies*, Special Issue: Men and Masculinities from Matricultural Perspectives, 4(2) (Autumn 2025): 04:30.

and heal the trauma left by colonialism in South Africa.¹⁸ Kai Monture has taken a similar tack among his people, the Tlingit. Monture says that the matrilineal nature of the society creates the core identity among his people. As in many matrilineal societies, a woman's sisters are also considered mothers to Tlingit children, who refer to them as 'little mothers.' While Tlingit children have relatively warm and loving relationships with their fathers (who come from different clans), children's relationships with their maternal uncles are more proper and formal. Maternal uncles are responsible for raising boys in the Tlingit warrior tradition, which includes respect for women. Colonialism among the Tlingit led to a breakdown of traditional Tlingit values rooted in matrilineality. Monture believes returning to that tradition is the key to reducing the gendered violence manifest among the Tlingit and other Native societies of Alaska. He has been active in reviving traditional warrior training in Tlingit communities as a means of ridding these communities of what he calls 'toxic masculinity' and returning to true masculinity informed by the matrilineal traditions of the Tlingit.¹⁹

Jeff Gray, a Texan of Muskogee descent, similarly discusses toxic masculinity and how reclaiming the matrilineal customs of his people has provided him with an avenue for a balanced and healthy way of life. Like other interviewees, Gray asserts that colonialism disrupted the generational transmission of Muskogee culture and, like Carter Price, much of what he has reclaimed has come through reading and research. From one of his female relations, he learned that he was a descendant of great Muskogee leader William Weatherford, also known as Red Eagle. Gray was particularly influenced by Dr. Martin Luther King, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s as a young teen, as were his sisters. Living in an environment that was four-sixths female—himself, his father, grandmother, mother, and two sisters—was particularly important. He eventually came to the realization, "What's good for the matriarchy is actually good for me."²⁰ Gray largely grew up at a distance from his Muskogee family in Oklahoma. Even though Xabi Otero, a Basque, now lives in the heart of his native Basque culture on the Iberian Peninsula, a Hispanic education system deprived him of his language. He grew up in Erratzu, in the Baztan Valley of Navarre and remembers as a young boy sitting by the fire listening to the stories of his *amatxi*, or grandmother, Maria. He learned of the *Basa Jaun* (the lord of the forest), the *Intxisus*, elves who lived in the thickest depths of the forest, and the *Lamiak*, women who reclined on the rocks of the

¹⁸ Cloete, "Personal Reflections," 06:30.

¹⁹ Kai Monture, "Personal Reflections on Tlingit Men and Matriculture," *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies*, Special Issue: Men and Masculinities from Matricultural Perspectives, 4(2) (Autumn 2025): 13:24, 20:15.

²⁰ Jeff Gray, "Personal Reflections on Muskogee Men and Matriculture," *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies*, Special Issue: Men and Masculinities from Matricultural Perspectives, 4(2) (Autumn 2025): 29:43.

streams, singing and combing their golden hair.²¹ He credits women today with maintaining the historical presence of Basque culture in Canada through the Jauzarrea Basque Culture Program at the Louisbourg National Historic Site. He notes:

Since we started this program in 2019, only women have been interested in it. We have only sent women, a couple of them each year, to fulfill their role as representatives of Basque culture. Not a single man, from 2019 to 2025.... It could be the updated example of what our *amatxis* (grandmothers) represented: there are no more fires in the houses, there is no opportunity to share those moments of knowledge transfer, but they, these young women of today, are doing it differently.... They are educating us in this society, adapting to the changing course of life, every day, every moment.²²

Otero's comments echo those of the Basque scholar Idoia Arana-Beobide, whose work on the office of the *serora* in *Euskalerrria* (the Basque Country) during the medieval and early modern periods highlights the role of the women who held this office as caretakers of churches, hermitages, and other religious sites. Arana-Beobide argues that the *seroras* were "valuable assets in Basque social and religious life."²³ Otero's observations indicate that these Basque women in Canada have inherited a role somewhat similar to that of their *serora* predecessors.

Thus, the interviews in this special issue provide a strong basis for undertaking what I believe is a rich and vital field of study: the role of Indigenous women in today's world in the reclamation of cultures disrupted and traumatized by colonialism. What particularly caught my attention was the fact that women have been so central to this process, regardless of the society's kinship system. Each of these societies has, traditionally, demonstrated various matricultural configurations, some of which were stronger and more clearly defined than others in the past. Of great interest to me is how, even in strongly patrilineal societies such as the Aleut, women have, since the advent of colonialism, assumed leadership roles in the reclamation, preservation, and continuation of their cultural heritages. Men have also played (and continue to play) a significant role in this process. However, women appear to be leading these efforts today and have been leading them for several generations. In the process, they have created stronger, more defined matricultures. The information presented in these interviews is, of course, tentative and

²¹ Gray, "Personal Reflections," 13:53; Xabi Otero, "Personal Reflections on Basque Men and Matriculture," *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies*, Special Issue: Men and Masculinities from Matricultural Perspectives, 4(2) (Autumn 2025): forthcoming.

²² Otero, "Personal Reflections," forthcoming.

²³ Idoia Arana-Beobide, "Seroren Buruz: The Challenge of *Serora* in *Euskalerrria*," in *Matriculture, Shamanism, and the Authority of Women*, 79-120 (qtd. 113).

anecdotal, but compelling. Just as important, interviews such as these provide an essential archive for future scholars. Those grounded in the discipline of history can attest to how much of the human experience has passed away with every generation, in every human society, over the breadth of time. Preserving the voices and experiences of individuals in the present is vital for future generations to understand us and, perhaps, for us to shape those who will follow.

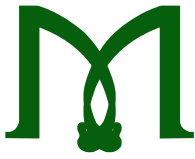
Book reviews constitute the final section of this special issue, and they are of two types. The first, by Marcel Blanc, reviews a recent work of scholarship, namely, a book by Heide Goettner-Abendroth on matriarchy, an anthropological concept to which Goettner-Abendroth has dedicated her career.²⁴ The other two works are review essays of landmark ethnographic works that have influenced generations of cultural anthropologists. Marie-Françoise Guédon examines *Son of Old Man Hat A Navaho Autobiography*, first published in 1938. Walter Dyk recorded the life story of the Navajo man Left Handed, the son of Old Man Hat, who recounted his life among his people. What emerges from its pages is the importance that Left Handed ascribed, without drama or flourish, to kinship and the various relationships this network created in his day-to-day life within this matrilineal society. Fathers and paternal aunts treated children with great affection and kindness. Mothers—the source of one’s clan identity—and maternal uncles had more formal and even authoritarian relationships with their children. Navajo women exhibited levels of “authority, independence, and power” that were unknown to their White counterparts in 1930s America.²⁵ My own original contribution to this special issue is a review essay that similarly examines two other well-known autobiographical works through the lens of matriculture. Both are considered classics within the corpus of American ethnographic literature: *The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian*, edited by Paul Radin, and *Mountain Wolf Woman*, edited by Nancy Oestreich Lurie. These works describe the lives of Sam Blowsnake and his sister, Mountain Wolf Woman, Ho-Chunks (Winnebagos), who lived in the changing socio-cultural landscape of Wisconsin as the settler-colonial regime was established. While the Ho-Chunks possessed a patrilineal society, they retained essential matrilineal elements from earlier in their history. What emerges from a reading of the two works is a matriculture in which men had to balance relationships with both their wives and their sisters, to whom they had obligations that often trumped those of their wives. A man could divorce his wife and find a new spouse, but his obligations to his sisters lasted for a lifetime.²⁶

²⁴ Marcel Blanc, Recension du livre: Heide Goettner-Abendroth, «Sociétés matriarcales du passé et émergence du patriarcat – Asie occidentale et Europe», *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies*, Special Issue: Men and Masculinities from Matricultural Perspectives, 4(2) (Autumn 2025): 83-95.

²⁵ Marie-Françoise Guédon, “Book Review: *Son of Old Man Hat: A Navaho Autobiography*, Recorded by Walter Dyk,” *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies*, Special Issue: Men and Masculinities from Matricultural Perspectives, 4(2) (Autumn 2025): 96-104.

²⁶ Patrick J. Jung, “Review essay: Men and Matriculture among the Ho-Chunks,” *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies*, Special Issue: Men and Masculinities from Matricultural Perspectives, 4(2) (Autumn-Winter 2025-2026): 105-111.

It has been a great honor to be an integral part of this special issue, and I have been enriched as an academic researcher by my association with the Network on Culture, the publisher of *Matrix*. Hopefully, the pieces published here will prompt further examination of this topic, and in the future, the journal can again explore the lives of men in societies with strong matrilineal cultures. Listening to the oral interviews, I was particularly struck by how essential women have been to the decolonization, preservation, and maintenance of Indigenous cultures, both in the past and the present. This topic also deserves additional consideration as we move forward into the twenty-first century. As I noted at the beginning of this essay, we are just starting to scratch the surface with matrilineality and its possibilities as both a cultural concept and a methodology. It is exciting to be part of a network of scholars who are sincerely endeavoring to make this a reality.



Hommes et masculinités dans une perspective matriculturelle : Introduction

PATRICK J. JUNG

Résumé :

Ce numéro spécial de Matrix : une revue d'études matriculturelles examine la vie des hommes sous différents angles matriculturels. La matriculture est un concept issu de l'anthropologie interprétative de Clifford Geertz, qui a développé sa théorie des systèmes culturels à partir de la compréhension des éléments symboliques constitutifs des cultures humaines. Marie-Françoise Guédon, Linnéa Rowlatt, et Angela Sumegi ont précisé la définition de la matriculture comme l'ensemble des aspects d'un système culturel propres aux femmes. Les articles, les entrevues et les recensions du livre de ce numéro spécial illustrent deux tendances qui méritent d'être approfondies. Premièrement, les hommes jouent un rôle crucial dans la création, la mise en œuvre et le maintien des matricultures. Deuxièmement, les entrevues publiées dans ce numéro spécial indiquent que les femmes des sociétés autochtones ont historiquement joué un rôle essentiel dans la préservation, la revitalisation et la décolonisation de leurs cultures. De plus, les femmes poursuivent ce travail essentiel dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, qu'elles soient issues de sociétés à système de parenté matrilineaire, patrilinéaire ou bilatéral.



Mots-clés : matriculture, masculinité, matrilineaire, patrilinéaire, colonialisme /
décolonisation

Dans l'appel de contributions pour ce numéro spécial de *Matrix : une revue d'études matriculturelles*, l'équipe éditoriale a posé la question suivante : « Comment les hommes et la masculinité sont-ils compris et représentés dans les perspective matriculturelles? » Quand j'ai été convié à en être le rédacteur invité, je ne savais pas comment répondre. Aujourd'hui, après avoir assumé cette fonction, ni moi ni aucun autre membre de l'équipe n'avons de réponse définitive. Pour certains, cela pourrait passer pour un aveu d'échec, un manquement aux objectifs initiaux annoncés par l'équipe lors de la définition du thème de ce numéro spécial. Cependant, une telle appréciation serait prématurée. Poser cette question constituait en soi une étape importante vers l'ouverture d'une nouvelle voie de recherche au sein du corpus croissant de travaux sur la matriculture, une approche anthropologique susceptible de transformer notre compréhension de la vie des femmes et des hommes dans les sociétés humaines.

La matriculture est à la fois un concept et, dans une large mesure, une méthodologie issue de l'anthropologie interprétative de Clifford Geertz, qui affirmait que la culture consiste en « une image de l'ordre cosmique – une vision du monde – au moyen d'un ensemble unique de symboles. »¹ Selon Geertz, les sociétés humaines organisent ces symboles en systèmes qui remplissent une double fonction : ils fournissent un modèle d'organisation des aspects non symboliques de la société et offrent un modèle de la réalité sociale permettant de manipuler les structures symboliques afin de les aligner plus ou moins étroitement avec le système non symbolique préétabli.² La méthodologie de la matriculture trouve son origine dans l'analyse et la compréhension des symboles qui définissent une matriculture, ou, selon les termes de Marie-Françoise Guédon, des symboles qui « désignent la ou les composantes d'une culture qui soutiennent, expriment et accueillent la participation des femmes au tissu socioculturel. »³ La matriculture est, bien entendu, le sujet fondateur de cette revue. La reconnaissance croissante de la matriculture comme approche anthropologique est manifeste dans une récente anthologie d'essais universitaires qui examinent la matriculture dans diverses sociétés : *Matriculture, Shamanism, and the Authority of Women : The Powers That Be*. Linnéa Rowlatt et Angela

1 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York : Basic Books, 1973), (cité p. 118).

2 Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (cité p. 93).

3 Marie-Françoise Guédon, « Introduction », *Matrix: une journal d'études matriculturelles* 1(1) (mai 2020), p. 8-13 (cité p. 12).

Sumegi, les éditrices de cet ouvrage, peaufinent notre compréhension de la matriculture en soulignant que chaque société possède une matriculture (et, de même, une patriculture). Elles affirment également que « toute société – même la plus patriarcale – doit comporter un système culturel matriculturel, ou une matriculture en abrégé, car toute société doit concevoir la maternité comme un moyen de reproduction biologique. »⁴

Guédon, Rowlatt, et Sumegi affirment que les matricultures présentent des constitutions très diverses. Les sociétés matrilineaires, matrilocales, et uxoriocales tendent à avoir les matricultures les plus fortes, les femmes y jouant des rôles essentiels au-delà de la maternité, notamment au sein des systèmes de parenté et des foyers. Guédon écrit : « On retrouve des matricultures dans toutes les cultures humaines, sous de multiples formes ; elles sont parfois faibles et restrictives, par exemple lorsque les systèmes de parenté patrilinéaires et la patrilocalité empêchent les femmes d'accéder à leurs connaissances, de les communiquer et de les transmettre. »⁵ À l'inverse, Rowlatt et Sumegi décrivent des « matricultures florissantes où les femmes exercent une autorité égale, voire supérieure, à celle des hommes », comme les Kanien'kehà:ka (Mohawks) d'Amérique du Nord et les Minangkabau d'Indonésie, deux sociétés matrilineaires et matrilocales.⁶ Les articles de recherche, les entrevues et les comptes rendus de ce numéro spécial mettent en lumière la vie des hommes dans divers contextes matriculturels. De plus, le concept de matriculture n'est pas figé ; il continue d'évoluer et de mûrir. Cela s'explique en partie par le fait que d'autres concepts anthropologiques ont enrichi la notion de matriculture. Les auteurs qui ont contribué à ce numéro spécial ont nuancé leur compréhension de la matriculture à l'aide d'autres concepts anthropologiques, tels que l'intersectionnalité, le matriarcat et le pouvoir génital féminin.⁷

4 Linnéa Rowlatt et Angela Sumegi, « Introduction: Considering Women's Power », dans *Matriculture, Shamanism, and the Authority of Women: The Powers that Be*, Linnéa Rowlatt et Angela Sumegi (dir.), (Newcastle upon Tyne, Royaume-Uni : Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2025), p. 1-7 (cité p. 1).

5 Marie-Françoise Guédon, « Northern Athabaskan Dreaming: A Matricultural Viewpoint », dans *Matriculture, Shamanism, and the Authority of Women*, p. 10-14 (cité p. 13).

6 Rowlatt et Sumegi, « Introduction », p. 2 (cité p. 2).

7 Pour le concept d'intersectionnalité tel que cité par Mihye Shin, voir Jerker Edström, Satish Kumar Singh et Thea Shahrokh, « Intersectionality: A Key for Men to Break Out of the Patriarchal Prison? », *IDS Bulletin* 47 (novembre 2016) : p. 57-74. Pour le concept de matriarcat tel que cité par Shin, voir Ifi Amadiume, « Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa: Kinship Ideologies and Systems in Africa and Europe », dans *African Gender Studies: A Reader*, Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí (dir.). (New York : Palgrave Macmillan), p. 83-98 ; et Cheikh Anta Diop, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Matriarchy and Patriarchy in Classical Antiquity* (Londres : Karnak House, 1989). Concernant le concept de pouvoir génital féminin tel que cité par Ayodeji Abiona, voir Dianne M. Stewart, « Matriarchive: A New Portal to Knowledge Production in African Studies », *Journal of African Religions* 7 (2019) : p. 310-315.

Liées à la matriculture et à la patriculture sont les constructions culturelles de la masculinité et de la féminité. Les études ethnographiques sur la construction et la performance de la masculinité dans les cultures ont débuté dans les années 1990. Depuis, le sujet connaît un essor considérable dans les travaux de recherche anthropologiques.⁸ En effet, la manière dont les hommes (et les femmes) construisent le système culturel de la masculinité (et, de même, de la féminité) recoupe l'étude des hommes dans les sociétés matriculturelles. Cependant, lors de l'examen des articles soumis à ce numéro, l'équipe éditoriale a constaté que nous nous engageons dans une démarche unique et inédite. Pour moi, en tant que rédacteur invité, ce fut un parcours intellectuel profondément enrichissant. Mon unique regret a été de réaliser qu'on n'avait fait qu'effleurer le sujet. J'espère que le travail des rédacteur(e)s et des auteur(e)s pour la préparation de ce numéro spécial posera les bases d'un effort plus vaste et plus complet, touchant les différentes sous-disciplines de l'anthropologie et d'autres disciplines, comme l'histoire. Les contributions à ce numéro spécial ont permis de dégager au moins deux conclusions préliminaires. Premièrement, les hommes jouent un rôle crucial dans la création, la mise en œuvre et le maintien des matricultures au sein des sociétés humaines. Deuxièmement, les femmes ont joué – et continuent de jouer – un rôle essentiel dans la préservation, la revitalisation et la décolonisation des sociétés autochtones colonisées.

Les articles de recherche d'Ayodeji Abiona et de Mihye Shin fournissent des preuves solides à l'appui de la première conclusion. Abiona examine le festival Èró pratiqué par le peuple Yoruba à Ùṣò, dans l'État d'Ondo, au Nigéria, une société patrilinéaire. Bien qu'Abiona qualifie également les Yoruba de patriarcaux, il nuance cette conclusion par plusieurs mises en garde importantes. Il écrit que « le patriarcat se pratique ou existe en relation avec la féminité, c'est-à-dire qu'il ne saurait y avoir de notion de patriarcat sans la participation active des femmes. »⁹ Chez les Yoruba, les hommes passent par différentes classes d'âge au cours de leur vie, la dernière étant celle des *Ọmọlúṣò*. Les hommes de cette catégorie sont libérés des devoirs et des responsabilités des jeunes hommes et dispensés des travaux quotidiens. Célébré tous les neuf ans en décembre, le festival Èró voit les hommes y participant revêtir des vêtements féminins préparés par leurs filles. Lors de leur procession dans les rues pendant le festival, les hommes, munis de balais, balaient la rue en direction des jeunes hommes qui prendront leur relève. Le festival Èró symbolise l'émasculatation des hommes âgés vers un nouveau mode de vie axé sur le repos.

8 Pour l'œuvre fondatrice des études sur la masculinité, voir David D. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1990). Pour des revues de littérature portant sur des études ethnographiques importantes de la masculinité, voir Matthew C. Gutmann, « Trafficking in Men: The Anthropology of Masculinity », *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997) : 385-409 ; et Matthew C. Gutmann, « Remarking the Unmarked: An Anthropology of Masculinity », *Annual Review of Anthropology* 52 (2023) : 55-72.

9 Ayodeji Abiona, « Inside Women's Robes: Masculinity and Dress During Èró Festival », *Matrix : une journal d'études matriculturelles*, 4(2) (automne 2025) : p. 62-82 (cité p. 64).

Cependant, selon Abiona, cette transition n'est en rien stigmatisante ni associée à l'efféminement, et ces prétendues saturnales ne remettent pas en question l'importance culturelle de l'hétéronormativité. Il écrit : « Le travestissement, dans ce contexte, n'est pas une pratique quotidienne, mais un spectacle rituel. »¹⁰ Ainsi, la participation des hommes au festival Èró et les performances des femmes qui s'y déroulent contribuent à maintenir et à perpétuer les rôles culturels traditionnels des hommes et des femmes.

La société Akan du Ghana, quant à elle, est matrilineaire, mais comme l'affirme Shin, il s'agit d'un « patriarcat matrilineaire » sans patriarche.¹¹ Shin dresse un portrait complexe de la vie Akan, où les femmes sont chefs de famille, les hommes étant largement absents. Le patriarcat chez les Akans trouve son origine dans des facteurs historiques et culturels, tels que l'introduction du christianisme et les pratiques de l'héritage qui ont tendance à favoriser les hommes même au sein de ce système matrilineaire. En effet, les frères des femmes exercent généralement une plus grande autorité au sein du foyer que les hommes qui y sont entrés par mariage, et les hommes transmettent les biens et le patrimoine aux fils de leurs sœurs, excluant ainsi largement les femmes de la lignée successorale. Les mariages sont souvent fragiles et les unions intimes se limitent d'ordinaire à des relations temporaires et occasionnelles. Par conséquent, les hommes ont généralement beaucoup moins d'autorité dans leur foyer conjugal (dont ils sont par ailleurs souvent absents) que dans leur foyer d'origine. Les difficultés financières et la pauvreté empêchent souvent les hommes d'assumer leur rôle de soutien de famille, engendrant ce que Shin appelle des « masculinités dépossédées de leur pouvoir » dans la société Akan.¹² Les femmes, en tant que chefs de famille, peuvent pallier ces absences pour se ménager une sphère d'autonomie, même si celle-ci est circonscrite par divers éléments patriarcaux propres à cette société matrilineaire. Les femmes demeurent ainsi au cœur de la gestion de leur foyer intergénérationnel. Shin conclut que, dans la société Akan, la femme est « au centre de la famille, même si elle n'est pas au centre du pouvoir ».¹³ Mes propres observations, suite à la lecture des travaux de Shin, suggèrent que les hommes et les femmes Akan se livrent à une danse maladroite, et que les faux pas masculins dans cette danse offrent aux femmes l'occasion de combler les lacunes des hommes. Cette « masculinité dépossédée de son pouvoir » fragilise donc l'idéal patriarcal dans la société Akan et, ce faisant, façonne et définit le rôle des femmes, même si ce mécanisme repose davantage sur l'absence que sur la présence masculine.

10 Abiona, « Inside Women's Robes », p. 77.

11 Mihye Shin, « What Does It Mean To Be a Family Man in a Matrilineal Society? Masculinity and Women's Empowerment in Akan, Ghana », *Matrix : une journal d'études matriculturelles*, 4(2) (automne 2025) : p. 21-61 (cité p. 30).

12 Shin, « What Does It Mean To Be a Family Man in a Matrilineal Society? », p. 43.

13 Shin, « What Does It Mean To Be a Family Man in a Matrilineal Society? », p. 38.

Les entrevues publiées dans ce numéro spécial mettent clairement en évidence un autre phénomène : les femmes des sociétés autochtones et non occidentales ont joué – et continuent de jouer – un rôle essentiel dans la revitalisation et la préservation culturelles des peuples ayant subi une perte culturelle due au colonialisme. Ceci est vrai quel que soit le système de parenté de la société (matrilinéaire, patrilinéaire ou bilatéral). En écoutant les enregistrements des personnes interviewées, j'ai repensé à un article de 1984 de Michael Allen qui, après une analyse approfondie des sociétés mélanésiennes, constatait que les systèmes matrilinéaires présentent « le plus grand potentiel évolutif ». Il ajoutait aussi : « Il convient de rappeler que, malgré de nombreuses prédictions initiales contraires, les régions matrilinéaires de Mélanésie ont été parmi les plus aptes à s'adapter aux traumatismes du contact avec les Européens. »¹⁴ Je suis convaincue depuis longtemps que cette conclusion justifie des recherches plus approfondies dans un plus grand nombre de régions du monde. À l'échelle macro, les recherches d'Allen suggèrent que les sociétés dotées d'une matriculture forte sont mieux à même de gérer les tensions et les contraintes du colonialisme. Les entrevues présentées dans ce numéro spécial indiquent que c'est aussi vrai à l'échelle micro, et que les femmes, partout dans le monde, semblent mieux outillées que les hommes pour faire face aux aléas du colonialisme. Elles jouent également un rôle de premier plan dans les efforts de décolonisation dans le monde contemporain.

Les Aléoutes (Unangaġ) forment traditionnellement une culture patrilinéaire. Pourtant, Carter Price, en repensant à son parcours de reconnexion et d'approfondissement de son identité aléoute, reconnaît le rôle essentiel des femmes de sa vie, notamment sa grand-mère maternelle (surnommée « Honey »), qui l'ont profondément enraciné dans sa culture. Comme beaucoup d'Amérindiens aux États-Unis, sa grand-mère a fréquenté un pensionnat gouvernemental qui visait à déraciner les enfants de leur culture d'origine. Price a hérité ses tatouages de la famille de sa mère, et ses parentes ont toujours eu à cœur de perpétuer l'art du tressage de paniers aléoute. Price remercie aussi son oncle maternel de lui avoir transmis les savoir-faire traditionnels de subsistance des Aléoutes. Price a également utilisé la voie classique de la recherche universitaire pour en apprendre davantage sur le peuple aléoute à l'époque où la transmission du savoir culturel entre les générations n'était pas encore interrompue par « l'époque coloniale » et « l'époque des pensionnats ». Néanmoins, son témoignage révèle clairement que les femmes fortes de sa vie (dont son épouse) ont joué un rôle essentiel dans son parcours personnel de reconnexion avec son héritage culturel.¹⁵ Douglas Cardinal, qui revendique une ascendance pied-noir (Blackfoot) du côté de son père, raconte une histoire similaire. Les Pieds-Noirs possèdent un système de parenté principalement bilatéral, avec quelques caractéristiques

14 Michael Allen, « Elders, Chiefs, and Big Men: Authority Legitimation and Political Evolution in Melanesia », *American Ethnologist*, Volume 11, numéro 1 (février 1984) : p. 21-42 (cité p. 38).

15 Carter Price, , « Personal Reflections on Unangaġ (Aleut) Men and Matriculture », *Matrix : une journal d'études matriculturelles*, 4(2) (automne 2025) : 15:45.

patrilinéaires. Cardinal attribue aux femmes de la famille de son père le mérite de lui avoir permis de rester connecté à son héritage pied-noir. Il a rencontré sa grand-mère paternelle à l'âge de cinq ans, alors qu'elle vivait dans une petite cabane avec son mari. Elle a prié avec Cardinal devant le paquet de médecine de son mari et lui a parlé des « petites âmes » qu'il contenait, comme les objets sculptés dans la pierre à pipe. Elle enseignera plus tard la langue pied-noir à son jeune petit-fils.¹⁶

Geralte Cloete raconte une histoire similaire concernant son peuple, la société Nama Khoe d'Afrique du Sud. Né en 1993 dans la municipalité de Richtersveld, au nord du Cap, Cloete a appris l'afrikaans comme langue maternelle, bien que ses grands-parents maternels et paternels, ainsi que ses parents, parlaient nama. Cloete raconte que les missionnaires chrétiens interdisaient aux enfants de la génération de ses parents de parler le nama, le qualifiant de « démoniaque ». En apprenant la langue, Cloete a réalisé : « J'ai dans ma bouche une langue qui n'est pas celle de ma mère [le nama]. J'ai dans ma bouche une autre langue maternelle [l'afrikaans]. »¹⁷ Cloete se définit comme un « créateur de théâtre » qui utilise le théâtre comme outil de préservation culturelle. Il a fondé Nama Khoi Productions en 2022 afin de se réapproprier sa culture et de panser les traumatismes laissés par le colonialisme en Afrique du Sud.¹⁸ Kai Monture a adopté une démarche similaire auprès de son peuple, les Tlingit. Monture affirme que la nature matrilineaire de la société façonne l'identité fondamentale de son peuple. Comme dans de nombreuses sociétés matrilineaires, les sœurs d'une femme sont considérées comme des mères pour les enfants tlingit, qui les appellent « petites mères ». Si les enfants tlingit entretiennent des relations relativement chaleureuses et affectueuses avec leurs pères (issus de clans différents), leurs relations avec leurs oncles maternels sont plus correctes et formelles. Les oncles maternels sont responsables de l'éducation des garçons selon la tradition guerrière tlingit, qui inclut le respect des femmes. Le colonialisme chez les Tlingit a entraîné une rupture avec les valeurs traditionnelles tlingit ancrées dans la matrilinearité. Monture est convaincu que le retour à cette tradition est essentiel pour réduire les violences sexistes qui se manifestent chez les Tlingit et dans d'autres sociétés autochtones d'Alaska. Il s'est activement employé à faire revivre l'entraînement traditionnel des guerriers dans les communautés tlingit, afin de débarrasser ces communautés de ce qu'il appelle la « masculinité toxique » et de revenir à une « véritable masculinité » imprégnée des traditions matrilineaires des tlingit.¹⁹

16 Douglas Cardinal, « Personal Reflections on Blackfoot Men and Matriculture », *Matrix : une journal d'études matriculturelles*, 4(2) (automne 2025) : 10:54.

17 Geralte Cloete, « Personal Reflections on Nama Khoe Men and Matriculture », *Matrix : une journal d'études matriculturelles*, 4(2) (automne 2025) : 04:30.

18 Cloete, « Personal Reflections on Nama Khoe Men and Matriculture », 06:30.

19 Kai Monture, « Personal Reflections on Tlingit Men and Matriculture », *Matrix : une journal d'études matriculturelles*, 4(2) (automne 2025) : 13:24, 20:15.

Jeff Gray, un Texan d'origine Muskogee, aborde lui aussi la question de la masculinité toxique et explique comment la redécouverte des coutumes matrilineaires de son peuple lui a permis de mener une vie équilibrée et saine. À l'instar d'autres personnes interviewées, Gray affirme que le colonialisme a interrompu la transmission intergénérationnelle de la culture Muskogee et, comme Carter Price, il a en grande partie redécouvert cet héritage grâce à ses lectures et ses recherches. C'est d'une de ses parentes qu'il a appris qu'il descendait du grand chef Muskogee William Weatherford, aussi connu sous le nom de Red Eagle. Adolescent, Gray a été particulièrement marqué par Martin Luther King, le mouvement des droits civiques et le mouvement féministe des années 1960 et 1970, tout comme ses sœurs. Grandir dans un environnement majoritairement féminin – lui-même, son père, sa grand-mère, sa mère et ses deux sœurs – a été essentiel pour lui. Il a fini par comprendre : « Ce qui est bon pour la matriarchie est en réalité bon pour moi. »²⁰ Gray a grandi en grande partie loin de sa famille Muskogee, qui vivait en Oklahoma. Bien que Xabi Otero, un Basque, vive désormais au cœur de sa culture basque natale sur la péninsule Ibérique, un système éducatif hispanique l'a privé de sa langue. Il a grandi à Erratzu, dans la vallée de Baztan en Navarre et il se souvient, enfant, assis près du feu, d'écouter les histoires de son *amatxi*, sa grand-mère Maria. Il découvrait le *Basa Jaun* (le seigneur de la forêt), les *Intxisus*, des elfes vivant au plus profond de la forêt, et les *Lamiak*, des femmes allongées sur les rochers des ruisseaux, chantant et se coiffant leurs cheveux d'or.²¹ Il reconnaît que les femmes d'aujourd'hui perpétuent la présence historique de la culture basque au Canada grâce au Programme de culture basque Jauzarrea, au lieu historique national de Louisbourg. Il souligne :

Depuis le lancement de ce programme en 2019, seules des femmes s'y sont intéressées. Nous n'avons envoyé que des femmes, quelques-unes chaque année, pour remplir leur rôle de représentantes de la culture basque. Pas un seul homme, de 2019 à 2025... On pourrait y voir une version moderne de ce que représentaient nos *amatxis* (grands-mères) : il n'y a plus de feux de cheminée, plus d'occasions de partager ces moments de transmission du savoir, mais elles, ces jeunes femmes d'aujourd'hui, le font autrement... Elles nous éduquent dans cette société, s'adaptant au cours changeant de la vie, chaque jour, à chaque instant.²²

Les propos d'Otero font écho à ceux de l'universitaire basque Idoia Arana-Beobide, dont les travaux sur la fonction de *serora* au Pays basque (*Euskalerrria*) durant les périodes

20 Jeffrey Gray, « Personal Reflections on Muskogee Men and Matrilinearity », *Matrix : une journal d'études matriculturelles*, 4(2) (automne 2025) : 29:43.

21 Gray, « Personal Reflections on Muskogee Men and Matrilinearity », 13:53; Xabi Otero, « Personal Reflections on Basque Men and Matrilinearity », *Matrix : une journal d'études matriculturelles*, 4(2) (automne 2025) : à paraître.

22 Otero, « Personal Reflections », à paraître.

médiévale et moderne mettent en lumière le rôle des femmes qui occupaient cette fonction en tant que gardiennes d'églises, d'ermitages et d'autres lieux de culte. Arana-Beobide affirme que les seroras étaient « des atouts précieux dans la vie sociale et religieuse basque. »²³ Les observations d'Otero indiquent que ces femmes basques au Canada ont hérité d'un rôle assez semblable à celui de leurs prédécesseures *seroras*.

Ainsi, les entrevues de ce numéro spécial constituent une base solide pour aborder ce que je considère comme un champ d'étude riche et essentiel : le rôle des femmes autochtones dans la récupération des cultures perturbées et traumatisées par le colonialisme. Ce qui a particulièrement retenu mon attention, c'est le rôle central que les femmes ont joué dans ce processus, indépendamment du système de parenté de la société. Traditionnellement, chacune de ces sociétés a présenté diverses configurations matriculturelles, certaines plus fortes et mieux définies que d'autres. Il est fascinant de constater comment, même dans des sociétés fortement patrilineaires comme celle des Aléoutes, les femmes ont, depuis l'avènement du colonialisme, assumé des rôles de premier plan dans la récupération, la préservation et la transmission de leur patrimoine culturel. Les hommes ont aussi joué (et continuent de jouer) un rôle important dans ce processus. Cependant, il semble que ce soient les femmes qui mènent ces efforts aujourd'hui, et ce depuis plusieurs générations. Ce faisant, elles ont créé des structures matriculturelles plus solides et mieux définies. Les informations présentées dans ces entrevues sont, bien sûr, provisoires et anecdotiques, mais convaincantes. Tout aussi important, de tels entretiens constituent une archive essentielle pour les chercheurs de demain. Les historiens peuvent témoigner de la disparition graduelle de l'expérience humaine à chaque génération, dans chaque société, au fil du temps. Préserver les témoignages et les expériences des individus d'aujourd'hui est essentiel pour que les générations futures nous comprennent et, peut-être, pour que nous puissions, à notre tour, influencer celles qui nous succéderont.

Les recensions de livres constituent la dernière section de ce numéro spécial et sont de deux types. Le premier écrit, signé Marcel Blanc, analyse un ouvrage récent, à savoir un livre de Heide Goettner-Abendroth sur le matriarcat, un concept anthropologique auquel Goettner-Abendroth a consacré sa carrière.²⁴ Les deux autres articles sont des comptes rendus d'ouvrages ethnographiques majeurs qui ont influencé des générations d'anthropologues culturels. Marie-Françoise Guédon examine *Son of Old Man Hat A Navaho Autobiography*, publié pour la première fois en 1938. Walter Dyk y retrace la vie de Left Handed, un Navajo, fils de Old Man Hat, qui raconte son existence au sein de son

23 Idoia Arana-Beobide, « *Seroren Buruz: The Challenge of Serora in Euskalerrria* », dans *Matriculture, Shamanism, and the Authority of Women*, p. 79-120 (cité p. 113).

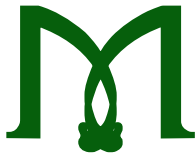
24 Marcel Blanc, recension du livre de Heide Goettner-Abendroth, « Sociétés matriarcales du passé et émergence du patriarcat – Asie occidentale et Europe », *Matrix : une journal d'études matriculturelles*, 4(2) (automne 2025) : 83-95.

peuple. Ce qui ressort de ces pages, c'est l'importance que Left Handed accordait, sans sans drame ni fioritures, à la parenté et aux diverses relations que ce réseau tissait dans son quotidien au sein de cette société matrilineaire. Les pères et les tantes paternelles témoignaient aux enfants une grande affection et beaucoup de bienveillance. Les mères – source de l'identité clanique – et les oncles maternels entretenaient des relations plus formelles, voire autoritaires, avec leurs enfants. Les femmes navajos affichaient des niveaux d'« autorité, d'indépendance et de pouvoir » inconnus de leurs homologues blanches dans l'Amérique des années 1930. »²⁵ Ma contribution originale à ce numéro spécial est un essai critique qui examine, de la même manière, deux autres œuvres autobiographiques célèbres à travers le prisme de la matriculture. Ces deux ouvrages sont considérés comme des classiques de la littérature ethnographique américaine : *The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian*, édité par Paul Radin, et *Mountain Wolf Woman*, édité par Nancy Oestreich Lurie. Ces œuvres décrivent la vie de Sam Blowsnake et de sa sœur, Mountain Wolf Woman, Ho-Chunks (Winnebagos), qui vivaient dans le contexte socioculturel changeant du Wisconsin, au moment de l'établissement du régime colonial. Bien que les Ho-Chunks vivaient dans une société patrilinéaire, ils ont conservé des éléments matrilineaires essentiels hérités de leurs origines. Ce qui ressort de la lecture de ces deux œuvres, c'est une matriculture dans laquelle les hommes devaient concilier leurs relations avec leurs épouses et leurs sœurs (envers lesquelles ils avaient des obligations qui primaient souvent sur celles de leurs épouses). Un homme pouvait divorcer et se remarier, mais ses obligations envers ses sœurs duraient toute sa vie.²⁶

Ce fut un grand honneur pour moi de participer à ce numéro spécial, et mon association avec le Network on Culture, éditeur de Matrix, a été un enrichissement pour ma recherche universitaire. J'espère que les articles publiés ici encourageront l'approfondissement de ce sujet et que, dans le futur, la revue pourra de nouveau explorer la vie des hommes dans les sociétés à forte matriculture. En écoutant les entrevues orales, j'ai été particulièrement impressionné par le rôle essentiel des femmes dans la décolonisation, la préservation et le maintien des cultures autochtones, hier comme aujourd'hui. Ce sujet mérite également une attention accrue à mesure que le XXI^e siècle avance. Comme je l'ai souligné en introduction, on commence à peine à explorer la matriculture et ses potentialités, tant comme concept culturel que comme méthodologie. C'est stimulant de faire partie d'un réseau de chercheuses et de chercheurs qui s'efforcent sincèrement de réaliser cette vision.

25 Marie-Françoise Guédon, recension du livre *Son of Old Man Hat: A Navajo Autobiography*, enregistré par Walter Dyk », *Matrix : une journal d'études matriculturelles*, 4(2) (automne 2025) : 96-104.

26 Patrick J. Jung, « Essai recension: Men and Matriculture among the Ho-Chunks », *Matrix : une journal d'études matriculturelles*, 4(2) (automne 2025) : 105-111.



What Does It Mean To Be a Family Man in a Matrilineal Society? Masculinity and Women’s Empowerment in Akan, Ghana

MIHYE SHIN, MA

Abstract

The definition of ideal (hegemonic) masculinity has shifted over time and across social contexts. This study explores narratives of the lives and experiences of the Akan people in Ghana through an ethnographic lens for their changing understanding of masculinity. Akan communities are matrilineal in structure but embedded with patriarchal values. Focusing on concepts and practices of masculinity across generations within this context of matrilineal patriarchy, the research examines how people perceive changes in ideal masculinity and the relation of these evolving ideals to gendered power relations within the family and to women’s empowerment. In Akan matrilineal society, traditional fatherhood and motherhood remain central to gendered identities and as institutions that sustain patriarchy. To capture multiple social dimensions that reinforce and reproduce patriarchal power, this study adopts an intersectional framework. Through an ethnographic journey, the research provides a realistic account of masculinities and everyday life in Agogo, Ghana.



While some findings may appear critical of Akan men, they reflect the lived realities of matrilineal communities as another expression of patriarchal society.

Keywords: matrilineal society, masculinity, women's empowerment, intersectionality, Ghana

Résumé

La définition des masculinités idéales (hégémoniques) a évolué au fil du temps et selon les contextes sociaux. Cette étude explore le récit des vies et des expériences du peuple Akan au Ghana à travers une perspective ethnographique. Les communautés Akan ont une structure matrilineaire, mais des valeurs patriarcales y sont ancrées. En se concentrant sur les pratiques et les notions de masculinité à travers les générations dans ce contexte du patriarcat matrilineaire, la recherche examine comment les gens perçoivent les changements dans les masculinités idéales et leur relation au pouvoir genré au sein de la famille et à l'autonomisation des femmes. Dans la société matrilineaire, la paternité et la maternité traditionnelles demeurent centrales en tant qu'identités genrées et en tant qu'institutions qui soutiennent le patriarcat. Pour saisir plusieurs dimensions sociales qui renforcent et reproduisent le pouvoir patriarcal, cette étude adopte un cadre intersectionnel. À travers un parcours ethnographique, la recherche offre un récit réaliste des masculinités et de la vie quotidienne à Agogo, au Ghana. Bien que certaines conclusions puissent sembler critiques envers les hommes Akan, elles reflètent la réalité vécue des communautés matrilineaires comme une autre expression de la société patriarcale.

Mots-clés : société matrilineaire, masculinité, autonomisation des femmes, intersectionnalité, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

Ideal (hegemonic) masculinity depends on social context and shifts across generations. This research focuses on the matrilineal Akan people of Ghana, examining how notions and practices of masculinity are constructed within families and how they change over time for both men and women. Using an ethnographic approach, the study investigates the factors that influence these changes and their impact on everyday social life, including power relations within families and women's (dis)empowerment.

The largest ethnic group in Ghana, Akan society is structured around a matrilineal kinship system and

is sometimes incorrectly described as matriarchal. In general, matriarchy refers to female dominated societies based on matrilineal family systems - the inverse of patriarchy. There is also a widespread assumption that matrilineal and matriarchal societies empower women at the expense of men. However, societies with matrilineal kinship systems should not be confused with matriarchy, and women's empowerment is not necessarily a feature of matrilineal societies (Diop 1989, Awusabo-Asare 1990, Amadiume 2005).

Akan families are matrilineal. By customary law, traditional property succession passes through the mother's line, but inheritance prioritizes male relatives (from the same mother) and nephews before women are considered. Although Akan inheritance is matrilineal, it does not privilege women as heirs; rather, it privileges men within the mother's lineage. Daughters belong to the lineage and transmit it, but they rarely inherit because customary law prioritizes male authority for managing lineage property. When daughters become mothers, their sons automatically belong to their maternal lineage, making them the next generation of eligible male heirs. In this way, women sustain the lineage biologically, while property rights remain vested in their sons, brothers, and maternal nephews, ensuring that inheritance stays within the matrilineal line even though women themselves are typically bypassed. Women are the last resort if there are no possible inheritable males. Although there are state laws regarding succession and inheritance, most Ghanaian families still follow customary laws and cultural practices. In this regard, there are many female-headed households and widows who experience economic hardship and poverty (Awusabo-Asare 1990). Matriliney, then, while sometimes interpreted as enhancing women's authority, in this instance often reproduces women's subordination, marginalization, and dependence on men. In this sense, Akan society remains patriarchal despite its matrilineal basis.

This contradiction is striking. Matrilineality does not have the same effect on women's status as patrilineality has on men's. While men in patrilineal societies typically consolidate authority through descent and inheritance, Akan women do not enjoy equivalent advantages under matriliney. Instead, matriliney structures both kinship and gender relations in complex ways: it influences inheritance rights, bloodline membership, and the organization of everyday family life. As a central cultural factor in kin relations, matriliney also shapes identities and gender roles for both men and women.

Although masculinity is often assumed to be uniform across patriarchal societies, this research begins from the premise that different dynamics of masculinity emerge in matrilineal contexts. That is, in Akan society, men must navigate responsibilities divided between their conjugal families and their natal, matrilineal kin. This division can generate tensions and conflicts, particularly between husbands and their wives' matrilineal relatives, over control of children and resources (Adinkrah 2012).

My own interest in masculinity in matrilineal societies was sparked by conversations with women in rural Ghana during a project on maternal health, a long time ago. Many women complained that the matrilineal system, rather than empowering women, enabled men to evade responsibility for their conjugal families. For instance, 'runaway men' (men who father children outside of marriage) often abandon the women involved, leaving them to raise children alone without legal support. At the same

time, men themselves argued that matriliney imposed heavy burdens. They were expected to provide not only for their own children but also for their sisters' children. These divergent perceptions reveal that women and men in Akan families and society hold contrasting understandings of manhood, fatherhood, and male responsibility, areas central to the Akan notion of masculinity. Not only do women and men perceive masculinity differently, these perceptions shape women's everyday experiences in significant ways.

Although I lived and worked in Ghana for about four years, I remained an outsider. While I regarded the matrilineal system as distinctive, Ghanaians themselves saw it as ordinary, and some found it unusual that I attempted to deconstruct their traditions and culture. To better understand these practices and meanings as they are embodied in society, I employed an ethnographic approach which combined participant observation with interviews. This allowed me to engage closely with people's daily lives and to situate my interpretations within their own cultural context. I hope this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the processes of gender construction in a specific social setting, as well as across different contexts.

Research Questions

What are the ideals and practices of (hegemonic) masculinity in matrilineal Akan families, and how do they shape gendered power relations and women's empowerment? These questions lead to several sub-questions:

1) What does it mean to be a family man and a father to Akan people?

This question explores how fatherhood and masculinity are perceived within Akan matrilineal families. Being a 'family man' is not only about being a father; more especially in matrilineal society, it includes the roles of uncle and brother, each carrying distinct responsibilities and burdens. Through ethnographic research with two nuclear and two extended families, I examined the norms, expectations, and ideals associated with these roles, as well as men's and women's perceptions of masculinity in the family.

2) How do men and women experience and perceive changes in roles, relationship, and expectations of men across generations within the family?

This question investigates how generational shifts and social conditions shape roles, relationships, and ideals of masculinity. Moreover, it also addresses how notions of masculinity and its practice in reality are different. Life-history and conversational interviews focused on men in intergenerational contexts — fathers, sons, brothers, and uncles — to see whether notions of hegemonic masculinity are shared across generations. Observations and interviews with three generations within extended families helped to capture both continuities and transformations in these ideals.

3) How do notions and practices of masculinity in matrilineal family impact on female-male power relationships in the family and women's (dis)empowerment?

This question address the consequences of masculinity within matrilineal families,

particularly its relationship to women's (dis)empowerment and its reproduction over generations. Interviews probed how men and women evaluate matrilineality, whether it advantages women, what empowerment means in practice, and how men and women perceive changes in power relations within the family.

The aim of my research is to explore the meaning of a variety of ideal masculinities through investigating men's and women's lives in matrilineal Akan society and how different social categories and contexts intersect through their power relations. An ethnographic approach allowed me to engage closely with daily life in Agogo, moving beyond description to interpretation. Rather than simply interrogating participants as an interviewer, I observed what was happening, asked about meanings, listened carefully, and sought to empathize. Through this orientation, I aimed to understand the significance of people's routines and experiences within their cultural context, and how these meanings have shifted over time. Alongside participant observation, I also conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with family members. Since there is relatively little recent ethnographic research on gender relations in Ghanaian matrilineal societies, this study contributes to addressing that gap by offering further insights into the complexities of gender in a particular context and underscoring the need for continued research on matrilineal societies.

I conducted fieldwork in Agogo, a small town in the eastern Ashanti Region of Ghana with a population of about 100,000, where agriculture is the main source of livelihood. I stayed there for one month (July–August, 2017), followed by ten days in Accra. A Ghanaian friend, Asamoah, introduced me to his cousin, Mr. Okyere, who initially hosted me. However, because his household lacked reliable water and electricity and was often empty during the day, I later moved to a hostel associated with a Presbyterian church, arranged with his help. Through Mr. Okyere and his wife, I was introduced to three families: his own family, which included his mother-in-law; his wife's cousin Mabena and her children; and another woman, Salome, and her household. Later, I also met Ernest, who volunteered to participate. These individuals and families became the focus of my ethnographic work.

During the first two weeks, I spent my days with them—sharing meals, observing routines, and practicing Twi, which I had studied beforehand. Although English is the official language of Ghana, many people in Agogo, especially women and the older generation, spoke little English. Initially I arranged for a translator, but I realized participants were uncomfortable discussing family matters in front of someone from their own community. Instead, I worked with younger family members who could speak English and assist with translation.

In the first week, I explained my research and asked each family to draw a family tree. Most began with themselves, then listed their mother's relatives. When asked about their father's family, many admitted they did not know names or details, especially when relations were strained. This underscored the strong orientation toward maternal kin.

After spending several days with the families, I noticed that fathers and husbands were largely absent, except in Mr. Okyere's household. Surprisingly, this absence was rarely commented upon, as though it

were normal. Initially cautious, I found participants willing to share stories of strained relationships, abandonment, or hardship. Being an outsider unfamiliar with their traditions gave me both distance and access: people were willing to befriend me, perhaps because they did not expect judgment.

I also reflected on small acts of reciprocity. I brought cookies as tokens of appreciation, worried that people might ask for money, but no one ever did. Instead, they offered me food and fruit, and sometimes confided their financial struggles. This created an ethical dilemma: I felt the responsibility of privilege and questioned whether I should do more, though participants never raised such expectations directly.

From the third week onward, I conducted formal interviews. In total, I carried out 20 individual interviews (14 men and 6 women) and one unplanned group discussion with eight men at a local bar. Younger men and women were usually interviewed at the *abusua fie* (family house), while I often met with older men in churches, workplaces, bars, or while traveling¹. Although I used guiding questions,² most conversations were open-ended and conversational, shaped by participants' own responses. This flexible approach enabled me to capture intergenerational perspectives on masculinity, fatherhood, and family life.

My Positionality and Ethics: Being an Obron

Acknowledging positionality is an important step in the beginning of ethnographic research, as it shapes both fieldwork and interpretation and even identifies power dynamics between researcher and participants (Crossa 2012:115). In Ghana, I was defined as *obroni*, meaning 'white person' in Twi (Akan language). Being *obroni* in Ghana is privileged. Although I do not define myself as a 'white person' in other contexts, such as in the Netherlands, in Ghana my relative 'whiteness' conferred both privilege and visibility. Rather than granting authority, this positioned me as a naive and curious outsider, someone forgiven for asking personal or unusual questions, since I was not expected to judge by local standards. Sometimes I had subtle feelings that I should do something for them as compensation because they might have expected it.

On the other hand, my identities intersected in complex ways. As a woman researching gender, I was sometimes perceived as an insider among women, though still marked as an outsider because of race and cultural difference. For men, I was more clearly an outsider, but still distinct from 'their' women, which created a different dynamic of openness. These overlapping positions shaped the ways participants engaged with me, positioning me simultaneously as both familiar and foreign. Thus, I, myself, am still a stranger; as Agal (1996) said, being an ethnographer is being a 'professional stranger.'

The issue of my positionality concerns ethical dilemmas as well, but these dilemmas came while

¹ In 20 individual interviews, I interviewed 6 married men and 8 unmarried men out of 14 male participant. For female participants, all 6 participants were married. Their accurate age is included in narration of interview. In one group interview, all 8 men were married and in middle age.

² See Appendix 1: Interview Guideline Questions.

analysing the data after field work. That is, employing an ethnographic approach enabled me to have the privilege of looking into participant's lives in great detail. However, as a researcher, I have to be very prudent with disseminating the data (Kaiser 2009:1633). During field work in Agogo, I confirmed consent multiple times, including with my Ghanaian contacts, and chose to use real names only after reconfirmation. Even then, I excluded highly personal details that participants wished to keep private. This reflexive awareness guided my decisions throughout, as I sought to balance ethnographic depth with respect for confidentiality and the dignity of those who entrusted me with their stories.

Theoretical Approaches: Intersectionality

Intersectionality plays everywhere and always. The term intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, allow us to understand the complexity of differences and samenesses within social groups based on the "multidimensionality of marginalized subjects" (Crenshaw 1989:139). Thus, employing intersectionality provides a way of understanding how gender is shaped by multiple dimensions of social categories and showing how systems of oppression operate through those categories (McCall 2005:1772). Edström argued that intersectionality is the key for recognizing how patriarchal gender inequality operates because patriarchy is a strong fundamental element in most social systems that are built in inequality (Edström 2016).

Intersectional approaches offer both conceptual and methodological tools to analyse the complexities of multiple intersecting systems and power relations within a social group, for instance, by distinguishing differences between men's lives and women's lives. Although they share the same notion of masculinity in their matrilineal system, the different Akan experiences and identities creates varying degrees of inclusion, marginalization, and discrimination within them. As a methodological tool, intersectionality can be associated with the researcher's positionality as well. As I mentioned above, I situated myself as a female researcher but during the field research in Agogo, I was situated as a 'white lady' by local people. This process helped me grasp the double standard of patriarchal ideology towards gender and, also, affected the reflexivity of information.

Aside from intersectionality as an overall conceptual and methodological approach, I employed a few more conceptual frameworks to analyse and support my research findings. While I weave those theoretical frameworks with the findings and analysis below, I introduce here some of important ones.

Theoretical approaches: Patriarchy and Matrilineal systems

As mentioned above, matrilineal societies tend to be confused with matriarchy. Although there is a 'myth of matriarchy' about them, the Akan matrilineal system does not correspond to matriarchy but rather shows the researcher an image of patriarchy. Patriarchy is generally defined as a male-dominating social system based on the subordination of women (Christ 2016:215). Male headship, moreover, is fundamental to ideas of masculinity and the role of patriarch given by the Christian Bible. Thus, patriarchal notions of masculinity and the subordination of woman are reinforced by Christianity, which also reproduces heteronormative gender roles (Klinken 2011, Ruether 1983).

According to Richard (1950), men in matrilineal societies occupy an ambiguous position between their conjugal family and natal family. As endemic cultural systems, matrilineal systems inherit their particular meanings of family and power relationships between gender and family.

Theoretical Approaches: (Hegemonic) Masculinity

The male role as the breadwinner of the family is a core part of hegemonic masculinity, especially in patriarchal ideology (Connell 1995;1998;2005). Although women's employment has increased, as has their support of their family, being a breadwinner has remained important to male identity (Thebaud 2010, Springer 2010). This can lead to men's disempowered masculinity because the position and title of male breadwinner is not only associated with his economic status, but also with his social status in his community (Wilott and Griffin 2004). Although men in Akan matrilineal society give less affection to their offspring due to their absence from the mother's household, their role in that household is more narrowly instrumental than in patrilineal society. Since they are not involved in daily care or emotional presence, their contribution is defined through what they provide, material support and resources. Therefore, boys in matrilineal societies tend to learn 'proper masculinity' not from the presence of their fathers, but rather from their relationship to their mother (Chodorow 1979). Although this hegemonic masculinity can be constructed, it does not correspond with the lives of actual men but, instead, idealized men (Connell 2005:841).

Theoretical Approaches: Motherhood and Women's Empowerment

Mothering is defined as a "socially constructed set of activities and relationships involved in nurturing and caring for people." Also, it is regarded as the main vehicle through which people form their own identities and learn about their society (Phoenix and Woollett. 1991:357). Universally, mothering is associated with women because as a rule, it is women who do the mothering in families. Thus, mothering has been conjectured as women's main identity. Motherhood is often employed as emblematic of femininity and this reinforces the activities and relationships of mothering as central to women's identities (Chodorow 1979). This is seen more explicitly in patriarchal societies because men and women's roles and spheres are dichotomized into public and domestic based on male-dominant patriarchy.

In this section, I used Chodorow's psychological analysis and discussion of how motherhood is reproduced in relationships between mothers, daughters, and patriarchal ideology to describe how motherhood reinforces the notion of femininity in matrilineal societies and its relationship with women's empowerment. Also, I explored its relation to women's empowerment using Adrienne Rich's (1977) perspective of empowered motherhood.

Contribution of My Own Study to the Field

Most previous research either focuses on Akan women's status or their subordination regarding property and succession through customary law. Most traditional studies used secondary data, even though there are several recent studies about multiple masculinities in Ghana using ethnographical qualitative method and anthropological approaches. However, there is not much research about masculinity in the matrilineal context that relates masculinity and fatherhood to power and the

(dis)empowerment of women. My research is an ethnographic study with qualitative interviews of several generations of women and men in extended families. I aim to explore notions and practices of masculinity in matrilineal families regarding ideal (hegemonic) masculinity and its relation to women's empowerment.

Moreover, I want to bring new questions and arguments to the study of gender construction processes within matrilineal families and family discourse in Ghana. Few recent studies explore matrilineal society as a concept for understanding contemporary gender issues or masculinity in different social contexts in Ghana; most research on gender relations still tends to be about women's lives. It is important to analyse men's lives to address structural gender inequalities and transformation through social change. This research aims at improving the understanding of gendered power dynamics and relations through an analysis of masculinity in different social contexts and family systems.

Masculinity in matrilineal societies is a topic that deserves more attention as men in matrilineal societies have interesting positions in the family and society and the topic also relates to women's status. More generally, it is also interesting to consider the possible relationship between women's empowerment and changes in masculine roles and practices through generations of women and men living in the same matrilineal families.

Structure of the Paper

Beside this introductory section, this research article has four more sections. More precisely, sections two, three, and four are like three different but entwined essays. Each section has its own theoretical discussion with relevant literature, while the last section weaves them into a single narrative.

In section two, I discuss the contextual background of my study of matrilineal systems and its patriarchal characteristics among the Akan in Ghana. There, I address how Christianity contributes to maintaining patriarchy and reinforcing heteronormative gender roles with practical descriptions of individual family systems provided by ethnographic observation. Exploring the male position in matrilineal societies on the ground, in section three, I describe the different masculinities of Akan men as classified by their age and generation: idealized hegemonic masculinity, disempowered masculinity, and young boys' masculinity. In the subsequent section, I depict and analyse motherhood and its relation to women's empowerment in this matrilineal society. Lastly, I review my overall discussions and derive a conclusion.

MATRILINEAL SOCIETY, PATRIARCHAL REALITY

Contextualizing the Matrilineal Kinship System

Since the 19th century, there have been debates on the concept of patriarchy as a system of social structure. In the beginning, most the studies equated patriarchy with matrilineality, and both were theorized based on patriarchy by Eurocentric scholars such as Henry Maine (1861), J. M. McLennan

(1865) and J. H. Morgan (1871). The western definition of matriarchy was, essentially, 'female rule' - a mirror image of patriarchy. They simplified kinship systems into a dichotomized choice between patriarchy and matriarchy, imposing an evolutionary hierarchy in which matriarchy was framed as primordial, and patriarchy as the more advanced or "highest" form of civilization.

From the 20th century on, an Afrocentric perspective by some scholars (W. James 1978, Diop 1989; 1991) postulated Africa as the cradle of matriarchy in which women ruled kin networks. Diop (1991) defines matriarchy and matrilineal society as female rule and female transmission of property and descent. As an ideological unit, Diop describes matriarchy as an "ensemble of institutions favorable to womanhood and to mankind in general" (1989: xviii), not just a 'female version of patriarchy.' He did not make a distinction between matriarchy and matrilineality, but, rather, defined matrilineality as a characteristic of matriarchy. However, the idea was largely dismissed as invented history, a myth created by the European invasion and colonization of Africa and its imposition of white patriarchal history.

Although matriarchy is seen as a social structure where power lies in the hands of women, matrilineality is not the same as matriarchy. James (1978) describes 'matrilineality' as a specific form of inheritance in which property is transmitted through female descent lineage. She dismisses the idea of power and authority for women in matrilineality and suggested an alternative view of matrilineality focused on ideas of citizenship and identity, status and social ties, rather than structures of power and social conflicts (Adinkrah 2012). I accept and work with James' definition of matrilineality.

In Akan, Ghana, matrilineality is not only a matter of property and inheritance in the family, but identifies a complex kinship network and social structure that gives security and identity to its members, while also creating conflict and insecurity. Mikell and Manuh (1997) describe how Akan women and children are subordinated by matrilineal customary law in succession and family. Specifically, although women in matrilineal systems can own land and other property, and they do not belong to the male's family (father, husband), women's property is regularly smaller than that of males because men tend to be given priority in the inheritance of property. Women, therefore, have difficulty generating their own resources to exercise any rights to property ownership and agency they may have.

As a consequence, I reiterate that matrilineal society should not be confused with matriarchy. Rather, in practice, it is a specific form of kinship systems that may still have many patriarchal traits and power relations. Akan society is no exception: it has matrilineal family structures with patriarchal values. In this chapter, I will describe traditional and contemporary matrilineal family system and power among Akan families in Agogo, Ghana. Then, I will discuss the influence of religious belief on ideas about women and on gender institutions.

Matrilineal Patriarchy Without the Patriarch

Aside from the Akan, Ghana is a fully patriarchal society. Patriarchy is often defined as a system of male dominance within family and society. However, I do not want to address the question of *what is patriarchy* and consider reasons why Akan society is patriarchal. It was not difficult to realize and feel

patriarchy in Ghana during my four years of work experience in Accra and the field work for my research in Agogo.

For example, one day, when I still appeared to be a clumsy young researcher, Mr. Okyere asked me if I was married. I said 'No, but I have a boyfriend.' Then he asked me another question with a mysterious smile, 'Then are you virgin?' I was stunned for a second and, in that second, I agonized as to whether I should answer as myself at the risk of seeming rude or as a researcher, politely and with the aim of inducing more conversation. However, I was not yet completely in the researcher role. I did not answer his question but rather asked him, 'What do you mean by virgin? Does it matter to you that an unmarried woman should be a virgin?' He did not read my sarcasm in that question, because he still kept on smiling mysteriously and said 'It is important. You have to take care of your body because you are a lady.' He did not tell me why he was curious about my virginity and I closed the conversation with an awkward smile because I did not want to argue with him anymore. But soon he added 'I am just telling you because you are like my daughter.'

Virginity, particularly women's virginity, is a patriarchal social construct that oppresses women's body and sexuality. Fatima Mernissi (1982) in her fascinating work *Virginity and Patriarchy*, states that "Curiously, virginity is a matter between men, in which women merely play the role of silent intermediaries. . . Like honour, virginity is the manifestation of a purely male preoccupation in societies where inequality, scarcity, and the degrading subjection of some people to others deprive the community as a whole of the only true human strength: self-confidence" (ibid:183). Patriarchal control over women's bodies reproduces women's subordination to men and suppression in society because their subordination and suppression correlates to men's honour and power in society (both as husbands and fathers). Therefore, the family controls women's bodies. I did not overjudge Mr. Okyere as if he was trying to control my body, but his curiosity and question tells me how women's bodies and sexualities are considered as public and as an object of interest to men. Hence, patriarchy should be seen as a socially constructed system of male dominance within the family and society, wherein suppressing females' bodies and sexualities are a very significant aspect.

So, yes. Ghana is a patriarchal society. I do not find patriarchy in this matrilineal context to be unique, because it was apparent to me that women's lives in the Akan matrilineal family were as harsh as anywhere else in patriarchal society. Like in other patriarchal societies, Akan men are 'supposed' to head the household and society, and women are 'supposed' to submit to husbands and men. When I asked people about a widespread assumption concerning the matrilineal family system - that it gives women in the house more authority - most respondents said that the matrilineal system is a just kinship system that follows the mother side lineage, where offspring belong to their mother's family and not their father's, because they obtain their 'blood' from their mothers and only 'flesh' from their father (Awusabo-Asare 1990). However, this kinship system has nothing to do with women's power within the family because Ghana is based on patriarchal social structures.

Before further discussion of matrilineal patriarchy, it is worth noting that Akan households and families actively unsettled the Eurocentric nuclear family standard (Hanson 2004). As formerly, it is still

common among the Akan for married couples to live in different houses, with children living only with their mother or mother's relatives. Spatial separation in marriage and a corresponding paternal absence in the family are very common. There are even children without parents, raised by close or distant maternal relatives related by either marriage or blood ties. Therefore, Hanson says, their "boundaries of domestic groups" are blurred and flexible, and the structure of family is not always hierarchical by generation, unlike general western ideas of the standard family picture (ibid:29-33). However, these family arrangements still have not lessened the grip of patriarchy on the family and the community. So it remains a mysterious puzzle for me: why cannot matriliney be matriarchy, whereas patriliney is a crucial element of patriarchy? Why are men more powerful within families even when they are not present at all? And, by the way, where are they?

I was wondering about all these things while I was in Agogo, and especially where all the men had gone. I did not notice men's absence in the beginning because I thought that it was likely they were at work. I did not notice any empty spaces left for them in houses that I visited. It was at the moment when I tried to draw family trees with each participating family that I realized the fathers were not present in the house. I told my respondents to start drawing the tree with themselves at the centre and to extend it as far as their family boundaries. One of the participant families held seventeen family members in one house, a family that extended through four living generations. However, that drawing included no senior men like husbands or fathers - but there were seven mothers.³ The respondents said that their 'real' family men (sons and brothers) left for their conjugal family, and their husbands left for many reasons, such as death, divorce, their own *abusua fie* (mother's family house), or different wives. While looking at the respondents' family tree drawings, I realized that there were not many men and, also, that there would be many branches on the family tree if we wanted to include everyone in the family house.

As requested, when drawing these family trees, individual respondents started from themselves and added siblings and then their mother's family. They generally did not know the family members on their father's side, and they did not include their father if he did not live in the same house. The Akan family trees were complicated horizontal structures, like spiderwebs, because of many siblings; the family trees were not hierarchical generational trees, like what I used to draw when I was in school, and which is a feature of western family trees. For example, the youngest boy in Amoako's family, Obeng, was the great-grandchild of Amoako's mother's mother's sister. Because of this distant matrilineal connection, it seemed meaningless to him to think about their exact relationship and closeness within the family, even though they lives together. Obeng does not live with his mother or father but other women look after him and he calls them 'auntie'

Actual fathers and husbands are invisible in the matrilineal families of Akan. However, they still exist as a symbolic presence within the patriarchal institution of the family, deeply embedded in society. Tabitha Freeman (2008) addresses these patriarchal paradoxes when she notes that there is tension between the symbolic presence and substantive absence of fathers. She argues that patriarchal

³ See Appendix 2 : Family tree of Salome and Amoako's family.

theory reproduces the fundamental paradoxes of patriarchy by “giving central place to the father as a symbolic figure of authority while eclipsing men’s relationships with their children under the shadow of the omnipresent nurturing mother (ibid:115).” In this light, patriarchy can allocate power to men while subordinating women and stressing their motherhood.

Basically, because of matrilineal system that we have, men are wicked. Because they know that all of things they have will be given to their children and the children belong to their mother. So men, they don’t take care of their family and wives suffer... I was second wife when I got married to my husband. He did not even come to my house often and when he earned money he brought it to his mother’s family or maybe his first wife’s family, but nothing to me and my children. So, I had to work very hard to raise my children while he never paid for my children’s school.

(Nana Mansa, 75, Female, Mother-in-law of Mr. Okyere)

Usually, women cannot own family property such as land and buildings. So, only men possess money and women have to be dependent on men, like husband or brother. And because most of property will be inherited by men they tend not to work hard as women do not support their own family... I can’t just sit back and watch the children suffering like my husband does. I think it is something that is instituted in their mind not only because of the system. Men think: when the child grow, they will only buy a towel for their dad but they will build very nice house building for mother. So men have the perception that nothing will return to them from the children when they grow up, that children will forget what fathers did for them. I remember one of my uncle said that I don’t care about my children as I was enjoying my life and they just came out. So I think men have their own mindset. They think they are not the one who brought them into this world, as if the children just appeared on their own, without anybody’s intention or contribution.

(Mabena, 49, Female, Mother of five children, divorced)

Although Akan women have bargaining power with access to property, such as land and housing (Hanson 2004:34), in reality, most property is inherited by men. Therefore, women have less access to capital resources but must work to feed their children whether they have a husband or not. Perhaps, patriarchy in matrilineal societies is the best condition to maintain the patriarchal system with the least effort for the men involved. While symbolic patriarchy reinforces supremacy of men through the absent authority of fatherhood, women are supposed to play the role of parents as both mother and father, because they are seen as the ones who brought the child into the world, not the men. It is patriarchy without the patriarch.

Christianity's Contribution to Patriarchy

*The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.
I will make a helper suitable for him (Genesis 2:18).*

It was my second night in Agogo, I was staying at a hostel run by a Presbyterian church, and I was having a difficult time getting to sleep thanks to loud prayers coming from the church. It was cheap but there was reason for that: since my arrival, every weekend night from Friday to Sunday, I had sleepless nights due to the all-night praying and chanting to God. Even though Agogo is a small town, there were more than seven churches around my hostel and a number of Christian institutions, such as the hospital and schools.

Christianity is deeply embedded in the lives and culture of the community, beyond just religious belief; two-thirds of the population in Ghana is Christian (Ghana Statistical Service 2012). When I first met people, they usually asked me which church I was attending; they did not even ask first if I was religious. This is the extent to which Christianity is a crucial social identity in Ghana. As an agnostic, I automatically became a target whose soul had to be salvaged. Everyone wanted to take me to their church and I went to the church that kept me up all night reluctantly. At a glance, there were many more women than men in the church service, and all the women wore colourful and crispy ironed dresses with polished shoes as a way of showing respect to God and the church. Then they worshipped and prayed as if they were about to cry.

In fact, Christianity was not initially part of my interest in the research. However, during the fieldwork it turned out to be a critical element of patriarchal notions of gender. Moreover, a number of participants said Christianity actually brought big changes in the perceptions of marriage and family systems as well. Yet African Christian history, like western history, has been written from a masculine perspective that portrays women as 'helpers' or as absent from development of African Christianity. Further, research about Christianity has been locked into an androcentric perspective with no attention to women with gender differences (Mwaura 2005:414).

All of my participants were Christian. Not all the men went to church every Sunday but all the women did. In fact, African churches carry out paradoxical roles for women's rights and empowerment (Oyěwùmì 1997). The churches offer women a space to organize various activities and cooperate on most aspects for their lives, such as micro-financing, vocational training programs, and even moral support. Thus, the churches give women both physical and spiritual supportive space (Bawa 2017:8). Nevertheless, the churches' role in empowering women in practice does not obstruct the fact that they still inform and uphold social expectations that women be submissive to men and that they perform the reproductive role in family and society. According to the Bible, a principal instructional guidebook of the church, woman is subordinate to man and possesses lower status than do men in family (ibid.:3). In many societies, religion has been used to explain gender inequality and, more specifically, the social dominance of men; gender and religion have a mutually reinforcing relation that is rooted in cultural and philosophical heritage. Thus, religious beliefs and practices are formulated and perceived from the perspective of gender.

However, despite this power imbalance, women are more devoted to prayers and following the 'sword of the spirit.' How come the Bible gives women nothing, but gives men all the moral authority over women? It is not only men who believe that men should head households and females should

submit to men; women also believe and justify these ideas because they appear in the Bible. Through a male-centric understanding of the Bible, women subordinate themselves due to the idea that they are inferior to men (Ruether 1985:114). In fact, most women I interviewed had no complaints about the notion that men should have headship in households and superiority over women, even though there were many women who played the role of head of household. Whatever it is that makes Akan women think 'men are wicked' implies that only rarely are there Akan men who show 'biblical manhood.'

M.S.: But who gave the men the authority to dominate the family?

O: Bible. Like woman came after man was created by God. So, at least woman should show respect to man because woman came after man and for the man and because of man.

M.S.: But then what about before the Christianity? Before there was Bible?

O: Hahaha (laughs)... before the Bible?? Um... But still the same thing happened. It was more about responsibilities.

M.S.: But I think women believe in Christianity more sincerely than men, right?

O: Yes, hahaha (laughs). But the one thing that I can say about woman is that they very easily accept and adapt to new things. But man takes more time because they have harden heart.

(Okyere, 56, Male)

The Bible tells us, God established the planet and he brought up animals of all kinds and each of them were two male-female. However, the first human kind, Adam, had no female human kind or helper. So God created Eve to support Adam.

(Mabena, 49, female)

Good woman, they listen to husband and follow husband's decision. They know how to cook, how to wash, how to take care of children and respect husband. It's written in the Bible.

(man at the bar, middle-age)

These statements tell us that people do not really question the notions of male headship within the family. Rather they take it for granted, under the name of God. In fact, the Bible does not speak explicitly about male headship as superiority over women but, rather, implies men's responsibilities as heads of household. Akan men seem to interpret scripture to mean that men are the bosses while women are the servants, but Akan women think that men do not consider the boss's responsibilities. As I mentioned before, many participants said that Christianity brought changes in traditional family system. However, in my opinion, Christianity's influence today is mostly found in changes of people's perceptions of the patriarchal family system, because there is not much actual change in people's lives. Religion provides a plausible pretext to maintain the patriarchy.

P: The Bible says man is head of family and head of family means that the head contains brain which is the most vital part of body, without brain nothing will work...Rest of the family is other lower parts of the body. We, the man, think about the future and look forward to the right ways with our vision. Brain will coordinate other parts of body and organs. So that we will move forward. And that's the role of the head.

M.S.: Does it also talk about women?

P: Yes. Let me bring the Bible... Here we are. The Proverbs. Chapter 31:10, The wife of Noble Character...

(Peter Junior, 18, Male, Second son of Mabena)

The Bible and Christianity legitimize androcentric male authority over women as they are interpreted by men from a patriarchal perspective and exclude women's presence and perspectives (Ruether 1983;1985, Thistlewaite 1985, Klinken 2011). Although Christianity brought changes in marriage customs from traditional polygamous to monogamous to the Akan people, it still reinforces power relationships between men and women in the family with patriarchal notions of gender. So, in the end, nothing much changed in women's lives; indeed, as one of the female participants noted:

Christianity with the Bible says that man and woman should meet and form their own family. However, Christianity did not make actual change or improvement to woman's life in matrilineal family system. It just brought idea that husband and wife should live together in the same house. But anyway that's still not easy while husband's and wife's roles and responsibilities are still the same. The system has been implemented in Akan since the beginning so it's hard to go away with it.

(Mabena, 49, female)

As I witnessed in Agogo, this 'misunderstanding' of male headship in households as male superiority over women is often linked to their misbehavior or failure in fulfilling their responsibilities. Thus, it causes problems in marriages and family relationships. But it was common for Akan people to take men's misunderstanding and misbehavior as part of men's nature. So, Christianity reproduces patriarchal notions of masculinity and contributes to a fixed understanding of gender hierarchies as female submission and male domination (Klinken 2011:120).

When Peter Junior, above, came back with the Bible he started reading Proverbs 31:10 out loud: "A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies... She gets up while it is still night, she provides food for her family...She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night..." Peter Junior is the second son of Mabena. While I was listening to his monologue, I was looking at Mabena cutting beef surrounded by flies, preparing food for the night. I had mixed feelings because the 'she' in the Proverbs overlapped with Mabena's behaviour, but at that moment it seemed to me it was only in terms of women's sacrifice.

Matrilineal Patriarchal Family Relations

In the end, there is no matriarchy here that brings power to women; rather, patriarchy prevails in Akan society. When I asked my research participants about general ideas of the matrilineal system, they paused and tried to find appropriate words to describe their routine as they never wondered about their practice of it. Interestingly, most of the men linked the matrilineal system with inheritance and men's position within the family while women stressed their relationship with their children. Poewe notes that male power is dependent on control over the sphere of economics and female power is based on the generative ability to reproduce (Poewe 1981). In most patriarchies based on patrilineality, only men, not women, have generative power and authority. The principle of men's power and authority is therefore compatible with patrilineality: tracing descent through the male line.

In Agogo, although patriarchy is the dominant ideology in family and society, a woman definitely has authority over her children because the children belong to her family group, not her husband's. During my field work in Agogo, I noticed a number of men described their having a child with the term 'giving birth,' as if, while women give birth to their husband's family in a patrilineal society, men give birth to their wife's family in a matrilineal society. It is notable that Akan women's loyalty is not to their husband but to their maternal family and this leads to a weak bond between wife and husband, explored further below. The marriage is often more brittle in matrilineal societies than in patrilineal societies, as described below. However, that does not mean that women have more power than men. The fact is that men exercise authority in both matrilineal and patrilineal societies (Holy 1996:103).

As mentioned, one unexpected observation from my fieldwork was that the tie between husband and wife was weak, generally, and that there were a number of broken families in Agogo. When I asked participants about the typical family in Akan society, they said 'married couples (men and women) with children in the same place.' That is, a heteronormative nuclear family based on western standards. However, I think that is more of an ideal type of family for Akan people because while everyone described this general type, it was not common and I rarely observed it in practice. Among the four extended families participating in my research, only one family was even close to this idealized norm. The other families were a combination of multi-generational, extended, divorced, or female-headed families. No matter which type of family people lived in, though, they defined the essential ingredients of family as 'marriage' and 'sharing space (house).'

Although people spoke of marriage as an essential ingredient of family, marriage did not provide a strong foundation for the families I observed in this matrilineal society. Husbands and wives still lived in their own *abusua fie* (family house) after marriage, demonstrating that, in reality, family was something they were born into, not something they created. This was because marriage in Agogo was still based on customary marriage patterns, which are different from western marriage patterns. In contemporary western societies, marriage is defined by and based on legal status, with recognized corresponding rights and obligations. Although this style is increasing visible in Ghanaian urban centres, most Akan marriages take place after the woman becomes pregnant; when men then acknowledge their relationship and her pregnancy, the marriage can be conducted. In this light, the decision to marry is in men's hands, rather than being an essential element of creating families.

'Sharing space' was reported as another key component of families. Respondents also reported that in their matrilineal kinship system, there were no illegitimate children because mothers never left their children. For example, one female participant, Salome, had three children, one son and two daughters, but her husband was never around. She said she was never actually married. Her son, Evans, was the result of a rainy night with her first boyfriend and her small daughters were from 'the guy' (she never described him as her husband). Salome also was raising one more girl from 'the guy;' although she was not her biological daughter, she accepted responsibility for her as such.

Emmanuel, Mabena's son, also has an elder brother who has a different father. When I first heard that I thought automatically that he would feel excluded among the brothers. However, they said since they have the same mother, they are 'blood brothers.'

After my time with these families, I reached the conclusion that women are in the centre of the family even if they are not at the centre of power. During the fieldwork, I sometimes felt as though I were a marriage consultant, even though I am not married. When I agreed enthusiastically with the women, the men started complaining. I always had to remind myself that I was not there to judge, nor to record the misbehaviour of Akan men before every interview. Sometimes I felt that, once men became 'old enough,' they seemed to lack their own space to show their honest emotions including sadness, frustration, and weakness.

I think women have more power than men in matrilineal system. Because women have children when they get old. But nobody cares for old man in the house. They will just come to me when they need money.

(Man at the bar, middle-age, farmer)

Audrey Richards (1950) highlighted the male ambiguity of the masculine position in matriliney. She coined the term 'matrilineal puzzle' to describe the complexity of known matrilineal societies; with it, she describes confusion over men's position in families and tension between a man's natal family and the wife's matrilineal descent group as a function of brothers and husbands having to share authority. She argued that there is difficulty in splitting men's loyalty between his own natal family (as brother and uncle) and those of his wife and children (as husband and father). In practice, male participants said living with the wife's family (uxorilocal residence) was the worst case of marriage and family shape, even ridiculous. For example:

That is impossible. That is not going to happen. It can't be happening. Even society is against that. Akan, we don't do that. Men never come to women's house to sleep. It's not possible more than not common. It's man who is getting married to the woman, not woman to the man. So he needs to figure out their accommodation by himself.

(Amoako, 25, male)

In fact, Mr. Okyere had experience living with his in-law's family at the beginning of his marriage, due

to his mother-in-law's request. He could not stand more than two years and finally built a house for his conjugal family.

In the beginning, it was just me, my wife and mother-in-law. But later brother-in-law also came. So, normally what we do is that I give my money to my wife and she cooks for everyone. So, everyone enjoy my money and food. I was taking care of the whole house and that's traditional Akan family thing. But there was conflict after sometime. The brother who came to join us, he gossips about me and my wife with mother-in-law. They were sniffing around for gossip and my money.

(Okyere, 56, Male)

Mr.Okoyere said that if a man stays in his in-law's house, the community will think the man is useless and that an in-law family member, usually the brother of his wife, wields their power over him. In the end, the matrilineal puzzle has an underlying assumption that male roles are central in the family and society, and dominate the economic and social spheres. Under matrilineal descent, property typically passes from a woman's brother to her son. Thus, there was no space for women's power in Akan matrilineal families even from the beginning. However, whether seen as good or not, most people said that the matrilineal kinship custom is fading away because of westernization, modernization, and a shift toward western patriarchy, enforced (as noted above) by Christianity.

MASCULINITY AND FATHERHOOD

Introduction: Theorizing Men and Masculinity

"Masculinity [is] an institution, we call patriarchy" (Banner 1989:708). Over the past decades, many studies have been conducted on multiple masculinities and the redefinition of the concept across and within societies. Connell (1995) argued that masculinity is constructed and embodied in society, and that there are plural and hierarchical masculinities in every society at any given time. Masculinities are not the opposite of femininities but, rather, are embedded in gender configurations and practices of specific power relations in each society within hierarchies and domination structures. He introduced the term 'hegemonic masculinities,' that is, ideal typical and normative forms of masculinity embodied in society by practices, social norms, ideals, and ideologies which generate dominance over women and marginalization of various social groups of men.

Fatherhood is associated with masculinity closely as 'performing masculinity,' especially within the family context, because parental masculinity and manhood are constructed and reconstructed in a mutual way (Enderstein, A.M. and F. Boonzaier 2015, Pleck 2010). Thus, the intersection of fatherhood and masculinity can be a definition and performance of gender identity and affects the practice of fatherhood (Pleck 2010).

A hegemonic masculinity will be not only practiced by men but also by women; the term 'hegemonic' also relates to power relationships between genders (Connell 1995, Connell and Messerschmidt

2005). Therefore, the study of masculinity is not only the 'study about men' but, rather, a study of gender including both masculinity and femininity, along with the power dynamic between them through different social contexts.

In this section, I will explore the narratives of multiple masculinities among the generations of Akan matrilineal families by introducing the ideal hegemonic masculinity and the actual practices of fatherhood found in the families participating in my field research. 'What makes a man?' was fundamental question for all participants and 'being a father/family man' became a main ingredient for every conversation.

Being and Becoming a Man; The Idealized Husband

During the long journey from Accra to Agogo, my old friend Asamoah and I had an interesting discussion about the matrilineal system. When I asked him about general ideas about the matrilineal system he said,

How can we men be so sure if these are our children? What if they are from between my wife and a different man? It is obviously easy to know who is a child's biological mother because there is eyewitnesses, but not easy to be certain about the father because nobody knows.

(Asamoah, 32, Male)

I was stunned. How come he can give me such a clear reason for practicing matriliney? I was lost for words and wondered what evidence of and concerns with fatherhood are present in the patrilineal system. Besides, from his interpretation of matriliney, it implied that women have no choice about being a mother when they are pregnant while men have an option to negate being a father. Before and after being a father, men always have superiority over women.

It is not hard to realize that Akan communities are male dominant. There is a general cultural expectation that women will respect and submit to men, especially their husbands. The sexual division of responsibilities and work in the house is clear: husbands are considered main providers even when the wife has a higher income, while wives are responsible for household duties, including cooking and childcare. Although most women increasingly work outside the home, women's first responsibility is still the domestic role and if they do not carry out the traditional role of mother, nobody will praise them (Ampofo and Boateng 2007, Adinkrah 2012).

Moreover, Akan men tend to show a sexual double standard before marriage and even after. Although polygamy cases have decreased, there are still many, especially in rural areas, and a number of men believe that having multiple wives shows a man's power and prestige (Adinkrah 2012:475). During my field work, it was common in Agogo for men have more than two wives and a number of children even though they did not marry officially. Virility is also crucial for ideal masculinity; thus, the ability to perform sexually and have children is the ultimate proof of masculinity (ibid:475). Therefore, in Akan society and according to Akan men, successful masculinity is still measured by filling both the

provider role and sexual performance as measured in the numbers of wives and children:

He said he wants wife from Korea. I asked him whether he is married, then he said yes. Then I asked him why he wants another wife from Korea. He didn't even smile at it. He said that Muslims can have four wives and asked me if I know the reason. He then said a man needs "a white lady, a dark lady, a skinny lady and a fat lady" so he doesn't have to cheat (if he has only one wife)

(fieldnotes; 4 August, 2017)

Akan women also perceive Akan men's 'womanizing and boozing' as second nature to them and that they overlook men's breaking of moral codes (as prescribed by religion and church) is common. Even though women are unhappy with men's common misbehaviour, they reluctantly comply with men and the situation because they believe they are obliged to submit to men (as prescribed by religion and church).

Men's perception of their superiority over women can be seen among younger generations as well. One of the young participants said that he will not marry a woman who has a higher education than him because once a woman is educated and gets to know her rights, she will start making demands for these rights. Although he acknowledged the importance of women's empowerment at the beginning of the interview, his view was that this situation would lead to the woman challenging the man's power and bringing family trouble.

The Akan ideal man is represented as a Christian man, implying responsibility to his family in terms of economics and loyalty. As ideal woman is considered to be a Christian woman, mainly meaning being submissive to men.

We, the Akan men, don't like wife to challenge us. Two wise men cannot be in the same place. One must be a fool and that should be a woman. That's what we think. We always think woman should be down and men should be on the top but it's not dominating. It's more like compromising.

(Ernest, 28, male)

If you are commanding and authoritative to family while you are providing, there's nothing wrong actually. But the key things is that if you as a man fail to do your responsibility, for example you can't pay for children's school fee, then, you can't be seen as a man. You can complain men's responsibility is too much, meanwhile you are not doing it. However, a man cannot do that anymore. And you know, if a father does not provide while a mother does, the children will see the mother to be a father as well and not respect the father. You can't command while doing nothing. And wife will not respect her husband, neither will the family, the community and the society.

(Amoako, 25, male)

Ideals of masculinity are also embedded in the ways men perceive the relationship between women and themselves. As mentioned in a previous section, men usually feel disempowered by doing housework because it is seen as women's responsibility. Even though both men and women acknowledge the change of women's status with education and employment, women still have more barriers to higher education than men due to the social expectation that 'ladies will end up in the kitchen.' However, contemporary expectations of woman as future wives seem to be higher than they used to be: many men of marriageable age said that they want wives who have a regular income source or professional job, but that they still expect them to 'fulfill their duty' as a mother and wife.

For the younger men who experienced the 'traditional' manhood/fatherhood of their fathers in matrilineal families, with absence as the dominant feature of fatherhood, ideas about family and marriage seem to have changed when compared to the older generation. They prefer Christian marriage rather than customary marriage and one of them said marriage is about 'business,' not only about love. And they prefer patriarchal gender relations, hoping that they might fulfill the ideal of male provider (while being resigned to the fact that this might not happen).

I first met Ernest at Salome's place. I was doing an interview with Salome and he came to the house to fix the cable TV. While Salome was talking (more accurately, backbiting her husband and Akan men), he chimed in to our conversation and said:

Sorry to interrupt you but don't make all the men bad. They might have their own struggles. But I am sure 90 percent of men are willing to help their family. It's only because they don't have enough money. And they know that they won't get any benefit from their children when they get old.

The language he chose - 'willing,' 'help,' and 'benefit' - tells how a number of men perceive their position in the family: as a combination of a calculated task performed when affordable and convenient, and a sense of abandonment and exclusion because they cannot compete with the centrality of mother's role. The boundary between men and women as providers in the family becomes blurred for various reasons. Men cannot remain in the position of single breadwinner because the economic situation has changed compared to previous generations: jobs are scarce, incomes are low, and men struggle to get employment. However, this blurred 'breadwinner' boundary does not mean more horizontal or more equal relations between men and women, nor does it mean changes in men's perceptions of ideal marriage, ideal manhood, or ideal womanhood.

Younger men of marriageable age in Agogo are struggling to 'be a man.' For example, Ernest left Agogo for higher education but had to come back because he couldn't afford city life without a proper job and initial capital. He said he had to decide between doing something that he did not want to do in the city or coming back to his family. Compared to older generations, at his age he should have already been 'a man' with wives and children. However, along with Ernest, other marriage-aged men said they do not want to marry until they have a proper job and enough money to rent a place for

their future wives.

During interviews, when I asked younger men how they felt about being a man, they told me that being a man is privileged in Akan because they have power over women and children. However, they also expressed their concerns and challenges of living up to the ideals they described above. They appreciated the changes provided by more education opportunities or the possibility of not being a farmer that their fathers could not enjoy. But, they also said that they feared failing to be 'a man' as defined by their fathers' lives, because being a man is not enough to maintain authority anymore.

Women and society demand more than performative identity from men. As Judith Butler (1988:519) wrote, gender is "no way a stable identity or locus agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time - an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts." So even though younger men still have perceptions of men as material providers for a family they control, they realize things are not like in 'olden times.' Akan men struggle to sustain evidence of their superiority over women in the house and in the community. They cannot just become a man in the same manner of their fathers: by making a woman pregnant. Now, they have to show what it means to be a man by proving themselves on all counts: providing, protecting and performing manhood in and outside the house. All of these in a socio-economic context which is not conducive to fulfilling such dreams.

Disempowered Masculinity

Mr. Okyere is a busy man: he introduced himself as the head of his whole family and head of his church when I first met him. According to Asamoah, he is recognized as a good man in his family and the community. Whenever I walked with him in the community, people recognized him and greeted with a salute, a manner of Ghanaian men's greeting, or a bow. Sometimes people asked him about his family and church. He also seemed to enjoy being recognized by people in the community. He said people often came to consult with him when they had problems, especially with family issues. It may be that Mr. Okyere was a rare example of the ideal masculinity known as 'Presbyterian masculinity.' The term was introduced in 2005 by Stephan F. Meischer; following Connell's concept of multiple masculinities, Meischer focused especially on Akan men in Kwahu in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, among whom he identified three traditional notions of masculinity: adult masculinity as signified by marriage; senior masculinity (elderly men); and the status of being a 'big man,' as an uncle.

In this matrilineal society, a man's paternal responsibilities extend to the well-being of the children in his own matrilineal family, such as nieces and nephews. However, according to Meischer, the 'Presbyterian masculinity' that was promoted by the Basel (Swiss/German) missionaries embodied such ideals of masculinity and fatherhood as hard work, moderation, law-abiding behaviour, and monogamous marriage, with a man's primary allegiance due to his wife, children and church, and only secondarily to his matrilineal lineage. The missionaries spurned local notions of masculinity that prevailed through the Akan matrilineal family system. As a result, Miescher identified changes in the Akan construction of religious and social masculinities.

It's important to note that masculinity is not only defined by the men themselves. It can be defined or qualified by society and community within certain social contexts. Including Mr. Okyere, all participants - regardless of gender and generation - agreed that an ideal man should be responsible for himself and his family, and that financial ability was the bottom line proof of whether or not he was fulfilling his responsibilities as a man. However, unfortunately, it was very hard to find such a man in real life. Perhaps this is not surprising, as it is an ideal. Mr. Okyere, who appeared to fulfill that ideal, seemed to enjoy being recognized as a good man in the community.

However, appearances are deceiving. Mr. Okyere's enjoyment came at a high cost to himself and his wife, Abena. Technically, his wealth came from his wife's family. Although he owned his own family house and his three children were all in well-known universities in Accra, he said that he could not pay for it all without his wife's 'help.' He often spoke about his suffering due to his children's school fees; his job (a teacher at a public secondary school in Agogo) did not pay good money. So, his wife also had to work to support the household: she ran a small grocery store in the market and sometimes went to farm tomatoes and plantains. Often, Mr. Okyere commented about his wife and his mother-in-law, saying that his wife spent too much time at her (mother's) family house instead of his own. Sometimes he was obliged to make his own breakfast and dinner because his wife was always with her mother. He was not complaining, but when he said that he knows how to cook for himself, he did not seem very happy or proud of it. He added, however, that he would not be able to achieve his happy marriage and good reputation in the community without his wife and her family.

According to Connell (1995:33), the "cultural function of masculine identity is to motivate men to work." Men's breadwinning position within the family identifies successful masculinity and bestows a man with the authority to dominate his wife and other family members. The position of (male) breadwinners is associated not only with economic independence, but also social status and respect as a man. This can be seen sometimes when men pressure their wives into low-paying jobs to gain this form of 'respect' (Wilott and Griffin 2000). In fact, all the male participants looked uncomfortable with the idea of having a wife who earned more than them, even if they did not have the means to pay children's school fees and bills from their own earning. According to Thebaud (2010:383), a man tends to interpret his income as the main resource for providing essential family needs, even when a wife's income is about the same as their own. Being a breadwinner in a household is important to men to retain their strong identities as a men.

My wife is a hair dresser. And obviously, her money is less than my earning. I decided about two years ago, that from now on, anything she earns from her work she should use for taking care of herself, like doing hair, buying underwear.. meanwhile I provide everything important like paying bills and school fees because that's my responsibility not hers. She is a lady, she needs to take care of her body... Men are suffering and getting pressure but because of poverty it is not easy to afford everything. But we try and that is important. That is the way of being respected and regarded as a real man in society.

(Atimah, 32, Male, Bar owner)

Male breadwinning is general 'gender frame' that organizes social relations and personal identities across gender, class, and socio-political lines even though it is associated with working class and conservative men (Demantás and Myers 2015:642). Breadwinning is core element of hegemonic masculinity because it links men's earning to their negotiation of masculinity. Breadwinning affects how people perceive themselves and others by measuring their breadwinning role in the family (Connell 1995). Thus, men have to engage in 'manhood acts' (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009) as a type of identity work in order to achieve the breadwinner title. When men fail to achieve the breadwinning title, that can be emasculating for them (Springer 2010:383).

The position of a man as a breadwinner is a typically positive, or rather ideal, social role for men in patriarchal ideology (Bernard 1981). In this regards, Parsons and Bales (1956) described the male role within the family as more instrumental than the female role. However, in matrilineal societies, the instrumental role of men in the family becomes more intensified, because they generally do not live with the conjugal family after marriage but still have to provide for the wife and children. In other words, their role is reduced almost entirely to material provision, since physical absence prevents them from participating in daily care or emotional involvement. If they cannot provide, they will not only lose the role of, and respect as, a providing husband and father, but also of 'a manly man' and they lose respect from others. So, among the participants, all middle-aged men were worried about that happening to them as they aged. Moreover, if a man could not provide as much as his wife, men felt this as disempowerment and a loss of dignity *as a man*, because their family and society would not respect them. They also think that their children will not take care of them:

They will just buy me underwear and towel to me while build a house for their mother. So what is the point of taking care of them? They won't return anything to me... Men is always suffering, and it is nothing related to matrilineal system or religion. They don't come to see me anymore unless they need money.

(Man at the bar, middle-age, married)

But still, at any rate, it was very hard to find men in Agogo who performed the 'ideal' man's role. As a result, their concerns were dismissed as 'whiny complaints' by women. Among the fourteen male participants who gave me in-depth interviews, one group of middle-aged men at the bar, and all those husbands whom I was unable to meet because they had left their family, there was no man who was the sole provider for his family. Besides, I met only one man who lived with his wife and children, and a number of men with more than two wives.

Father Absence and Young Masculinity

His full name is Emmanuel Okyere. He is named after the Mr. Okyere, not his biological father. He said that actually his mother and he decided to change his name when he entered the junior high school, since they divorced. They wanted to remove any trace or any memory of his father from their family. So not only Emmanuel, but other children too

all have different family name. He said when the siblings do not have the same surname, people usually think that their mother is sleeping around with many men. So, even when the man and wife don't have a good relation or even divorce, still it is not common to change the name. However, it seemed her reputation was not more important to her than her children's wishes.

(fieldnotes; 17th July, 2017)

I always had dinner at Emmanuel's house. He was the second son among the four sons and one daughter of Mabena. She cooked and sold food at the lorry station every night. The first day I visited his family, we made a deal that if I were to pay five Ghanaian Cedi (about 1 Euro) every meal, they would make my favourite Ghanaian dish every day. So, for the sake of my fried yam, I went to their house every single day, even during the weekend. Mabena called me *daughter obroni Adwoa* (the last is the Twi name for a girl born on a Monday) because I was born on the same date as her daughter. I very much enjoyed observing and talking with the family every day. Observing their routine was emotionally moving although it was almost the same every day.

Emmanuel told me that he did not have any good memories of his father; he only remembered that when he was very small, his father bought him a small chair. Other than that, most of his memories about his father appear to have been built by his mother since his father left the family when Emmanuel was six years old.

My father was womanizer and never brought money to house. He stole mom's money and used it for his enjoyment. He was just trouble maker and I am not going to be someone like him, never... If he worked and supported our family, we wouldn't have to go through all this suffering. We would have had our own house, my mom wouldn't have had to work until now.

(Emmanuel, 21, Son of Mabena)

According to Chodorow (1979:176), when a father or an adult man is not present in the family, boys are taught to be masculine more consciously than girls are taught to be feminine. Boys are 'assumed to learn' their heterosexual role without teaching, through emotional interactions with their mother. And the mothers, the wives without husbands, tend to expect that sons will identify with their fathers.

Since father-absence is common in the Akan matrilineal family, sons have fewer opportunities to learn masculine roles through personal relationships with their father (ibid). Hence, male gender development is more complicated than female in the matrilineal society because of expectations from mothers and society that boys must attain 'proper masculinity.' In Ghana, there is still a belief in fundamental distinctions between men and women, such as men should not express their sadness or weakness. They consider weeping or crying as unmasculine not only for adult man but for boys as well.

However, this does not mean that boys, in the absence of their fathers, do not learn masculine roles

or behaviour, just as boys whose fathers are present do not always follow their fathers' examples. The article 'Deconstructing the Essential Father' in *American Psychologist* (Silverstein and Auerbach 1999) disputes the argument about the danger of fatherlessness: that is, empirical research does not support the assumption that boys need a father to establish a masculine gender identity. The father's importance as a sex role model is ideological, rather than empirical. However, it is important for children to form personal relationships with their 'object of identification' and make those distinctions through the identification that results from the 'object' (Chodorow 1979:175). When the object of identification is not present in reality, they are replaced by ideals. "In their unattainability, masculinity and the masculine role are fantasized and idealized by boys (and often by girls), whereas femininity and the feminine role remain for a girl all too real and concrete." (ibid:177) In practice, when I asked young guys about what being a man meant to them and what kind of man they wanted to be in the future, most of them gave me a picture of manhood that was actually not close at all with their fathers. The boys attempted to construct their sense of masculinity more in contrast to their fathers, as a result of their negative evaluation of the men.

It was not only Emmanuel who removed his father's name from his own name. Evans was first son of Salome. He said that he does not have any memory of his father. He only knows his face through a picture that his mother owns.

I don't remember anything about him but my mom described him sometime. He abandoned me since my infancy, like when I was 2 years old. She said the only thing that he did for me was that he brought me ball to play. He did not pay even a pesewa for my school fee... He was teacher in Kumasi. So once we went there to see him with my uncle but we couldn't meet him. But the other teachers asked me if I am son of Mr. Kobo, that is my father's name. I resemble him a lot. I was about 13 years old but they already recognized me as his son. But still he didn't show up that day and later the school said he retired. I don't know if he was trying to run away from me or not though...

(Evans, 19, Son of Salome)

Perhaps with respect to the negative reputation of fatherhood, masculinity in a matrilineal society sounds similar that of to patrilineal society. However, a matrilineal kinship system which is rooted in a patriarchal society actually gives men freedom from responsibilities to their conjugal family while exposing them to negative social reputations. I do not want to overgeneralize, but I wonder about the future of these young men. During my interviews with older men in Agogo, they all spoke of similar (negative) experiences with their fathers when they were young and, yet, they repeated their father's behaviours and practices although they thought they would never become like that.

This research on Akan matrilineal kinship systems as practiced in patriarchal Ghana was depressing. I came to believe that matriarchy was just a myth. Has there ever been any time or place that was not patriarchal? Can men change or do they even want to change? In a patriarchal world, if men do not think or want to change, nothing will change.

MOTHERHOOD AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women and Motherhood

Although discourse about men as the head of household dominates Akan society, women's substantive role as breadwinner is common because there are a number of men who have more than one wife and they do not (or cannot) support one of their families. Thus, despite an ideal of male headship as being the main provider for their wives and children, most women do work: running a shop, sewing, farming, or selling food on the street.

However, women face more barriers to obtaining jobs than men because of child-care responsibilities and household duties. Culturally, the role of motherhood is more valued in matrilineal societies because the offspring belongs to their mother's family and, in the past, women were not allowed to go to school because of the widespread expectation that they were going to end up in a domestic role. As a result, there were not many women who spoke English in Agogo - although most men did. In this light, the matrilineal system and patriarchal social order intersected to keep women domesticated by limiting their sphere of activity, and reproduced a gendered division of labour in the households and segregation in the market by gender.

Not surprisingly, both male and female participants in my research declared that motherhood is the nature of woman. Most women say that children are all they have in their life and they take them as a duty that is assigned to them by God. Having children is considered to be a significant achievement of a woman's life and offers the attainment of social respect in their community, because giving birth represents a continuation of the family lineage both in physical and religious terms (Hollos and Larsen 2008). Therefore, women's successful mothering and motherhood represent a 'milestone' that grants to them the achievement of their female identity and normative destiny as women (ibid:170-171).

More than 300 people attended at Nana mansa's 75th birthday. Including Mr.Okyere and Abena (his wife/Nana mansa's daughter), all her family came even from abroad like the Netherland and U.K.. She looked splendid with nice blue and orange colour kente dress with gold jewelleries. She looks little nervous but enjoying her day... There was grant ceremony for lifetime achievement award for her by Pentecost church of Agogo. After, her daughters and grandchildren read a congratulatory message for her. I did not understand because it was in Twi, but some of them showed tears while reading out. I think today must be one of the most special day for Nana mansa's life.

(fieldnotes; 12th August, 2017)

To some extent, I feel highly recognized in Agogo because when you mention my name, everyone knows who I am. And it is because people know that I have been working very hard to send my five children to higher education, having my own business and house for my family, all by myself without husband. I feel proud of myself for that. Then I feel being empowered that people use myself as good example of parenting. Because some people find difficulty to raise even one child.

(Mabena, 49, Female)

Indeed, when I asked the question “when do you feel recognized in the community?” all the female participants who have kids responded that when their children grow up and finish school, they feel empowered and highly recognized in the community. In the same manner, when the child has done something bad, their misbehaviour becomes their mother’s disgrace, as they are considered to be failed women. Rarely is the father blamed. Therefore, women’s motherhood may empower women, but this empowerment still takes place within patriarchal authority (Walker 1995:421).

Patriarchal definitions of motherhood also reinforce limited definitions of femininity, because motherhood not only defines what mothering is, but also women’s identities. Since being a successful mother means being a successful woman, the women who cannot achieve the title of successful mother are marginalised in their society, including women who are infertile. However, I did not see any ‘bad mothers’ in Agogo. Most women are struggling to feed and send their children to school while the husband is not present.

Being a woman in matrilineal system is not easy. All I have got is children. Right now, my children are grown up. So I think I have done really good job. All I do is praying for them. You need to think about yourself and your children because men don't think about it. People think I have done good job raising children because I have made it by only myself and God. So when they have any problem, they come to seek advice from me. And people know that I can help them. It is all God's plan.

(Mabena, 49, Female)

From the time that you will be woman, you should start thinking of getting married to a man. And that means that everything that you are doing is to help your husband. Making sure of giving birth and bringing up your kids. It is lady's job to feed and take care of them: giving them your breast-milk, enlightening them, teaching them how to behave... that's why lady is a mother.

(Theresa, 44, Female)

We cannot deny that a mother is a woman, if 'woman' only means a biologically female parent in a heterosexual family. However, that does not mean that women are all mothers or potential mothers. Moreover, motherhood should not define women and femininity. There is no biological link between female sexual organs and the capacity to be caring, nurturing, and loving just as there is no connection between a man’s sexual organs and being macho.

Women’s mothering and motherhood have been taken for granted and it is a persistent sexual division of labour. In 1979, Chodorow analysed women’s mothering and its reproduction across the generations in *The Reproduction of Mothering*. She addressed the reality of the period that women’s mothering was taken as inevitable by both society and feminist scholarship, and that explorations of women’s roles within the family centralized childcare or taking care of the husband. However, the

issue of women's mothering is that it extends beyond the family. "Although women's mothering is of profound importance for family structure, for relations between the sexes, for ideology about women, and for the sexual division of labour and sexual inequality both inside the family and in the nonfamilial world, it is rarely analysed" (ibid:3).

As a woman, the story and experience of Agogo women are not a long way off from my personal experience. An Akan woman's story might be my mother's story, my sister's story, and my own story as well. During my stay in Agogo, I received unexpected proposals from strangers several times, even asking me to have a baby with them. Although they thought it was just a silly joke, I suspect they would not make such jokes to men. For men, I was just one of the future mothers, regardless of any other information about me.

Although mothering by women is universal, the foundation of the belief among Akan people that it is natural and instinctual to women is due to the matrilineal kinship system: children belong to women's family in matrilineal communities. In other words, parenting is understood as mothering while it is hard to find any meaning for 'fathering.' Thus, women's mothering activities are embedded in the social organization of gender.

M.S.: Why do you think men do not take care of children?

S: Akan men, they don't take care of children because they are wicked. They just don't want to take care of babies. Some men do. But most of them, they will just come to house sometimes to play with kids or scold them. They think that's their job. They don't even think taking care of children is work like labour, so nowadays, they don't even respect their wife if she doesn't work for money.

(Salome, 38, female)

Salome's statement shows that men have a choice about caring for their children based on their preferences, while women accept their role in rearing children as fated and natural since they were born as women. Indeed, men are in a better social position to enforce their preferences than women. This entitlement is based not only in biological difference between men and women but also in power relations between the genders socially and within the family. Therefore, women's mothering activities become a fundamentally legitimate 'arrangement' and 'ideological formulation' which justify the sexual division of labour within patriarchal social and familial organization. In this light, women's mothering does not mean only performing the role of mother, but, also, contributing to the reproduction of gender inequality through patriarchy and its effect on masculinity and femininity (Chodorow, 1979:32).

According to Adrienne Rich, the concept 'motherhood' can be distinguished by two different meanings: as an experience related to "the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to her children," while, as an institution, it "aims at ensuring that the potential mother – and all women – shall remain under male control" (Rich, 1977:xv). The institution of

motherhood can be a most effective tool of oppression in a patriarchal society for reproducing gender inequality: the reproduction of women's mothering role is the fundamental reproduction of women's domestic position and responsibilities. It is important to note that women are also perpetrators of reproducing the notion of motherhood as the essence of femininity and, along with it, their own social role and position in the hierarchy of gender.

It's not only in matrilineal system that women work more than men in the house. All the chores and labors would give burden to wife and daughter. For example, Adwoa (her only daughter) will do every work in the house when I am not around. When it comes to taking care of children, women mostly take responsibility. My children have no father and I don't have husband. But it is not true that I take care of my children while my husband does not because of matrilineal system. I am a mother of the children, that's why.

(Mabena, 49, Female)

I told her not to argue with Evans because she is pregnant now. So it's not good for her and baby. But she never listens to me. She is very stubborn. She doesn't like to cook. She doesn't like to wash clothes. Even she doesn't really like children. I don't know what kind of mother she would be.

(Salome, 38, Female)

Her family calls her 'pregnant woman,' instead of Dora, her name. She is Salome's stepdaughter, but she did not grow up in Salome's family house. She came to live there when she was pregnant because the father of her baby denied his paternity and her own mother was not able to provide a good environment. Although her own common-law husband is not around, Salome allows his daughter to stay in her family house. Although Salome was not in the best situation herself, she said her stepdaughter needed someone to teach her 'how to be a mother.' The community praised Salome for her generous act and it is thoughtful that Salome embraced her stepdaughter. However, Dora did not seem really welcome in the family; they did not respect her because she became pregnant before marriage and she had to drop out of school because of the pregnancy. Her own mother cannot provide the knowledge Dora needed to act as a good role model. As Chodorow says, "Women come to mother because they have been mothered by women. By contrast, that men are mothered by women reduces their parenting capacity" (1979:211). Therefore, mothers and daughters share the experiences of motherhood and their relationship reproduces institutionalized and patriarchal motherhood.

Women's Empowerment

It was during the second interview with Mabena. Emmanuel, her son, was translating my questions to her and her responses to me. 'What do you think about women's empowerment?' I asked. Then Emmanuel hesitated translating this into Twi; he said he could not find the appropriate word in Twi. I asked him again 'Okay, then when do you feel you are empowered?' Then he gave me a look meaning that he was still not sure. I asked him if he knew meaning of 'empowerment.' Then he smiled awkwardly and shook his head and asked me 'Isn't it something related to 'power' and 'women's

education?'

It is true that there is no word to explain 'empowerment' even in my language, Korean. Then how do I even perceive this word to talk about it?

Women's empowerment has been a buzzword in development and feminist gender studies. According to Kabeer (2001), empowerment is closely linked to agency. She sought to establish a link between agency and empowerment by analysing women's strategic choices, arguing for the need to contextualize approaches to understanding empowerment with respect to assessing interventions that were intended to better women's lives. She also discussed different levels of empowerment, from personal to structural, indicating that achieving the former does not directly lead to achieving the latter. Thus, Kabeer's theoretical approach to women's empowerment explains the manner in which women in any given society sees themselves, or may be seen by men and the their community.

Empowerment is also often associated with women's emancipation. If empowerment is involved with individuals' capacity within the system, emancipation challenges power structures and attempts to change the system (Inglis 1997:4). Among multiple approaches to women's empowerment and emancipation in feminist research, much of it equates emancipation with women's entry into the public sphere, such as education, the political domain, and employment. While these were the basis of women's emancipation in socialist societies, Moghadam (1992) discussed the relationship between emancipation and development, arguing that, despite criticism of development as a modernist, western ideal of progress, it has undermined patriarchy around the world and economically empowered women, especially through employment. Development, then, has emancipatory potential. However, whom do we regard as empowered women and whom do we not? Do women need empowerment and emancipation?

To return to translation, I tried to explain 'empowerment' to Emmanuel as I understood it as based on Kabeer's framework. So, I asked again 'When do you feel you are recognized by your community?' and 'What makes you think that you have a voice in the decision-making process?' Then he seemed to understand what I was trying to ask. As I explained in the previous chapter, most of the female participants (including Mabena) said that they felt empowered when they had achieved a good reputation for parenting their children. This was because it made them feel as though they had succeeded at the most important role available to them, which is being a mother. According to Rich (1977), mothering could empower women through their use of their natural power to create better situations around themselves, leading to satisfaction. O'Reilly also addressed empowered mothering: "The theory and practice of empowered mothering recognizes that both mothers and children benefit when the mother lives her life and practices mothering from a position of agency, authority, authenticity and autonomy. This perspective, in emphasizing maternal authority and ascribing agency to mothers and value to motherwork, defines motherhood as a political site wherein mothers can affect social change through the socialization of children and the world at large through political-social activism." (O'Reilly 2004:12)

During my field work, I expected to hear women talking about their agency and strong statements against the institution of motherhood in a patriarchal society. However, when they spoke about their own experience regarding empowerment, it was directly linked to motherhood: they felt empowered by their motherhood and mothering. When I asked them if they had any other source of empowerment they gave me the answers that I expected in the beginning.

... Apart from my children... When I go to market to buy meat for catering, I buy big portion of beef like whole thigh and leg. There are not many people who have money to buy whole part of the leg and it's not easy to cut them and take bone out. Even though there are butchers, I don't need them. I can do it by myself. And when there was funeral in my family, so many people came from my side to pay condolence, much more than I expected. Then I realized that I have been highly recognized in the community in a good way and that makes me feel empowered.

(Mabena, 49, female)

Although Mabena had started her catering business to support her children as a single mother, the facts that she decided to divorce her husband, to start thinking of her food business, and to send her children to a good school were definitely part of her agency. In this regard, I disagree that motherhood only acts to disempower any sense of women's agency by controlling expectations of their role as mothers. Rather, it can allow women to define not only their own value and concept of mothering, but, further, their empowerment as well. Women's empowerment is a multidimensional and complex idea. Therefore, measuring and conceptualizing it by regulated theoretical frameworks cannot always be employed in practice. Then I thought that perhaps I was biased towards categorizing women as those who need to be empowered and emancipated.

While most women I spoke with had positive thoughts about women's empowerment, most of men had mixed feelings on the subject. In the beginning, men said it was good because it contributed to bettering women's lives. But after some conversation, they showed their concern about it.

Women's empowerment is good thing and it can bring changes in family. They are educated more and understand issues more. And it also helps her children as well because women can help with children's homework and all that. You see, the empowerment that we are talking about now is not arguing with their husband and being assertive. Empowerment should be to contribute to family meaningfully, not to argue and claim your rights.

(Asamoah 32, male)

You know what, actually women don't need to be empowered or superior because they will be under control of men anyway. Every man will agree with me. I have this girl, Esther. She is challenging me because she is educated. She doesn't want to be under control of men. But I want her to be a lady who listens to man. But she thinks that's not something for her. She likes me but I can't marry her. Oh... she is too challenging.

(Ernest, 28, male)

Empowerment of women is very good. It will reduce unemployment issue and stress on men as well because they will contribute to household. But, if women are educated and empowered too much they will start talking about their rights. Then, there are two parties in the house who will fight over superiority, like: I want to show that I am the boss. Here, they run marriage as business. It's better to have only one person as decision maker, that is man.

(Atimah, 32, male)

According to these statements, men think women's empowerment is good in terms of improving women's education and contributing to the household financially. However, at the bottom of their hearts, they have negative feelings about empowered women who challenge their authority and attempt to become dominant in the family. I imagine women's emancipation cannot be welcome here. Although the men I interviewed recognize that they cannot be the only providers in the house, due to regular unemployment and changes in the economic climate, they have the misconception that empowering women means disempowering men - as if empowered women will dominate them. Meanwhile, women say they feel empowered when they are caring, mothering, and performing the patriarchal duties of women.

CONCLUSION

This research investigated the conceptualizations and practices of masculinity in the matrilineal society of the Akan community in Ghana and their association with family power dynamics and women's empowerment. An intersectional approach was employed to explore how people perceive masculinity, femininity, family, and everyday life in a matrilineal context, and how these perceptions shift under the influence of social factors such as gender, age, generation, and religion. By combining participant observation with interviews, this ethnographic orientation enabled me to engage closely with daily life in Agogo and to gain a deeper understanding of lived experiences. The findings demonstrate that intersecting social dimensions—such as gender, ethnicity, class, age, generation, religion, education, and cultural norms—shape perceptions of masculinity and reinforce patriarchal ideology and gender inequality, even within a matrilineal kinship system. My research journey, however, was far more dynamic than I anticipated.

First, the literature shows how concepts of matriarchy and matrilineality have often been dichotomized through patriarchal ideology and linked to assumptions of women's empowerment. In practice, Akan society demonstrates a matrilineal kinship system embedded in patriarchal values that reinforce male supremacy and female subordination. As a feature of 'matrilineal patriarchy,' my study revealed a paradox: the matrilineal system symbolically affirms men's presence while allowing them to evade social responsibilities as family men. Religion, particularly Christianity, further legitimizes male authority and control over women.

Second, perceptions of masculinity and fatherhood have shifted across generations. The figure of the 'Christian man' has emerged as an idealized model of loyalty and family responsibility. Yet this remains more aspirational than real, as the breadwinner role—central to hegemonic masculinity—is often more tied to identity than to actual responsibility. Younger generations construct ideas of manhood in relation to absent fathers; many aspire to enjoy legitimate authority while distancing themselves from their fathers' failures, seeking intelligent and independent partners while still holding onto patriarchal expectations of authority. Boys growing up without close relationships with their fathers often internalize idealized versions of manhood and fatherhood, shaped largely by maternal expectations and societal norms rather than lived paternal models.

Third, in this matrilineal system, motherhood remains central because children belong to the mother's family. Despite the increasing participation of women in paid labor, motherhood continues to be framed as women's natural and primary duty. This patriarchal framing defines femininity through motherhood and extends its scope into the sexual division of labor outside the household. Yet, contrary to outside expectations, many women in Agogo do not experience this as oppression. Instead, they find empowerment through mothering, which provides agency, autonomy, and the power to extend their family lineage—something men cannot achieve. This generative capacity grants women a form of authority that may explain men's anxieties about women's empowerment in the matrilineal system.

Ultimately, there is no matriarchy in Agogo; matriliney is not a mirror image of patriliney here, but, rather, another variation of patriarchal social structures. My encounters with men and women in Ghana illustrate the existence of multiple masculinities shaped by intersectional social relations. Hegemonic masculinity, as well as people's everyday perceptions, is constructed through overlapping factors such as gender, generation, age, religion, education, economic status, and cultural norms. Likewise, understanding women's lives in matrilineal systems requires attention to these intersecting layers and to individual experiences, rather than simple comparisons with men's lives.

Finally, just as people's positionalities are constructed and reconstructed through shifting social relations, my own positionality was reshaped by the environment during fieldwork. I hope the reader recognizes this reflexive dimension and understands that my intention is not to cast Akan men in a negative light, but to present an honest account of my experiences, observations, and interpretations from my time in Ghana.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mihye Shin is a Gender Specialist working with UN and development agencies in Africa and Asia. Her work explores masculinity and women's empowerment intersect in contexts where matriliney coexists with patriarchy, bridging ethnographic insight with practical experience in health and gender equity.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview Guideline Questions

1. Basic questions for all participants (family members)

- How is life and family relationships within matrilineal family system in general?
- Do you think there have been any changes in family relationships from older times? And if there is, how?
- (How the changes impact on men and women's lives and their relationships in family?)

2. Each research question

- **Research Question (RQ): What are the relationships between men and women within matrilineal families?**
 - How do you describe your own life in the matrilineal family system in general?
 - How different do you think is your life from your parents' lives, and what has changed?
- **RQ: What does it mean to be a family man?**
 - To men
 - How do you see yourself within family relations?
 - Do you think the idea and notion of manhood has changed? If you do, how and why?
 - How do you feel about being a man?
 - To women
 - How do you see yourself within family relations?
 - How is your experience and relationship(s) with the men within your family?
 - What are your expectations of men in family? Do you think there is a gap between ideal and practice of manhood?
- **RQ: How have the notions and practice of manhood changed through generations and what do the changes mean to men's and women's lives within family?**
 - Do you think that the ideas and notions of a 'family man' have changed from before? If you do, how and why?
 - What is the impact of any changes on your own life and family relationships?
- **RQ: What do the meanings and the changes mean to women's empowerment?**
 - To men
 - What do you think about the empowerment of women?
 - Do you see any changes in the idea of the empowerment of women?
 - To women
 - What makes you feel being empowered? (What does empowerment mean to you?)
 - Has your idea of the empowerment of women changed over time?

Appendix 2. Drawn map of research area in Agogo town



Key

Red-coloured places: houses of participants and main meeting points

Yellow-coloured places: my hostel and church

Appendix 3: Photographs from field research

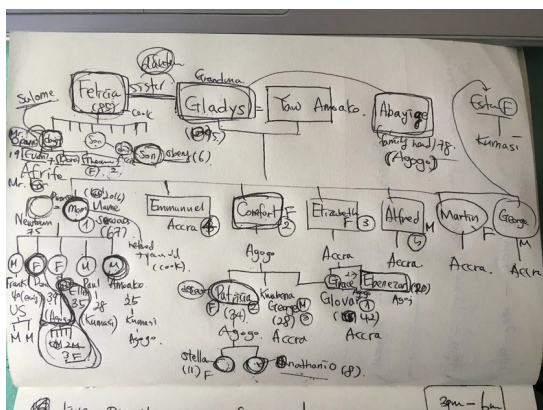


Fig. 1: Family Tree of Salome's Family



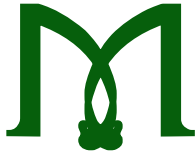
Fig. 2: Mabena's family: Mabena, Emmanuel, Peter and Caleb



Fig. 3: Group of men at local bar (participants of group interview) and Ernest



Fig. 4: Pictures of Nana Mansa's 75th Birthday: Her (blue dress) and her daughters cutting Bible-shaped cakes with Queen Mother and church people



Inside Women's Robes: Masculinity and Dress During Èró Festival

AYODEJI ABIONA

Abstract

In literature, the Yorùbá feature prominently in discussions on rituals, festivals, and gender in socio-cultural practices. The Yorùbá, like many other African societies, is patriarchal. However, in practice and literature, reference to femininity and female agency is rife. Èró festival is a community-wide feast where men don full feminine attires and embark on a festive procession around the community. This article considers cross-dressing during traditional festivities as a symbol of feminine power, a gesture to female inclusivity, and a tool of social cohesion in a Yorùbá community. In order to interrogate the centrality of Èró festival – a matricultural complex – to the continued existence of the community, the paper relies on the abundant literature on Yorùbá religion, culture, and particularly, gender relations. It combines an analysis of these with oral interviews with recent participants in the festival and other traditional observances to analyze dress as a gendered item in festive cultural practices among the Yorùbá. The paper thematically presents evidence of gender and dress both in literature and practice and limits itself to Ùṣò in eastern Yorùbáland. It argues that female power, informed by their biologically-



derived endowment, is ubiquitous and potent among the Yorùbá. In Ùṣò, men enact this feminine power through the symbology of dress.

Keywords: Yorùbá, festival, Èró, matriculture, cross-dressing

Résumé

En littérature, les Yorùbá occupent une place importante dans les discussions sur les rituels, les festivals et le genre dans les pratiques socioculturelles. Les Yorùbá, comme beaucoup d'autres sociétés africaines, sont patriarcales. Cependant, en pratique et en littérature, les références à la féminité et à l'agence féminine sont nombreuses. Le festival Èró est un festin communautaire où les hommes revêtent des vêtements féminins complets et entreprennent une procession festive à travers la communauté. Cet article considère le travestissement lors des festivités traditionnelles comme un symbole de pouvoir féminin, un geste d'inclusion féminine et un outil de cohésion sociale dans une communauté yorùbá. Afin d'explorer la centralité du festival Èró – un complexe matriculturel – dans la survie de la communauté, l'article s'appuie sur l'abondante littérature sur la religion, la culture et, en particulier, les relations de genre chez les Yorùbá. Il combine une analyse de ces éléments avec des entrevues orales avec des participants récents au festival et à d'autres observances traditionnelles pour analyser le vêtement comme un élément genré dans les pratiques culturelles festives chez les Yorùbá. L'article présente thématiquement des preuves concernant le genre et l'habillement, tant dans la littérature que dans la pratique, se limitant à l'Ùṣò dans l'est du Yorùbáland. Il soutient que le pouvoir féminin, influencé par leur don biologique, est omniprésent et puissant chez les Yorùbá. En Ùṣò, les hommes incarnent ce pouvoir féminin à travers la symbolique de l'habillement.

Mots-clés : Yorùbá, festival, Èró, matriculture, travestissement

INTRODUCTION

This article considers the symbolism of matrifocality in Yorùbá patriculture through dress. It examines Èró Festival, a traditional festive observance in Ùṣò, a small rural Yorùbá

community.¹ The premise of this paper is that Yorùbá patriarchy is practiced or exists relative to femininity, that is, there could be no notion of patriarchy without women's active participation. Ùṣò is located in Ọ̀wọ̀ Local Government Area of Ondo State, roughly at an equidistance between Ọ̀wọ̀, a frontier Yoruba kingdom to the east and Àkùré, the capital city, to the west. Ùṣò, ruled by the Ọ́lóbà, the *oba* (king), has an interesting history. There are two sections or quarters in the community: Ọ̀kẹ̀ Ùṣò, which traces its origin to Ọ̀wọ̀ and where people speak the Ọ̀wọ̀ dialect, and Odò Ùṣò, which traces its origin to Ọ̀bà-Ilé near Àkùré and where people speak the Àkùré dialect.² Ùṣò's oral tradition, however, claims its progenitor was an Ọ̀bà-Ilé king, an adventurous warrior monarch who was delayed on an expedition and missed the very important Ìpàgbọ̀n festival. By the time he arrived, his son had been coronated in his stead. He eventually settled in nearby Ùṣò and maintained the Ọ́lóbà title.³

Ùṣò's proud affiliation with Ọ̀bà-Ilé is not frivolous. Ọ̀bà-Ilé remains a relatively small town in the area and often finds itself squabbling for paramountcy with Akure in the post-colonial period.⁴ However, historically, Ọ̀bà-Ilé occupies a quiet niche in Yorùbá history, one that has been acknowledged by foremost Yorùbá historians as "the oldest settlement not only in the area but in the world," and the site of the "most feared of the ancient spirits inhabiting the depths of the earth."⁵

The Yorùbá people, one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, occupy the southwestern part of the country, which constitutes the largest core of Yorùbáland. Their notable presence, however, extends eastwards to Kogi, Edo, and Delta states and westwards outside Nigeria's borders to the République du Bénin, Togo, and Ghana, where sections of each population speak Yoruboid languages.⁶ The culture reaches farther

¹ Ordinarily, in Yorùbá morphology, words do not begin with the letter 'u.' However, certain dialects seem to override this general rule and, especially in the spoken form, supplant the vowel 'i' for 'u' as in place names like Ùṣò (Ìṣò), Ulésà (Ilésà), Ujù (Ijù), and in item names like Uṣu (Iṣu[yam]). Officially, and in textual form, these names are published observing the standard Yorùbá form.

² Ọ̀kẹ̀ Ùṣò and Odò Ùṣò may be loosely translated as upland and lowland, or uptown and downtown. Although downtown in the west often refers to the business center of a city, in this case, it is geographically positional. Ọ̀kẹ̀ translates as an elevation and Odò, a lowland. Interviewees argue that the people of Ọ̀kẹ̀ Ùṣò were minorities as the town is more culturally inclined towards Ọ̀bà-Ilé and Àkùré. For more context, see the news item, "Protest Rocks Uso Community As Residents Demand LCDA Headquarters or Boundary Adjustment," *Path News*, December 4, 2023. Accessed on 30.07.2025 <https://pathnews.com.ng/protest-rocks-uso-community-as-residents-demand-lcda-headquarters-or-boundary-adjustment/>

³ Oral tradition as provided during an interview with Pa Fadero, an elder and a prospective Èró celebrant. September 5, 2025.

⁴ "Ondo: Oba-Ile community, Deji of Akure bicker over paramountcy, chieftaincy rights," *Nigerian Tribune*, August 27, 2025. Accessed on 30.07.2025 <https://tribuneonline.com/ondo-oba-ile-community-deji-of-akure-bicker-over-paramountcy-chieftaincy-rights/>

⁵ S. Adebajji Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People* (Amalion Publishing, 2010), 28.

⁶ James S. Olson, *The Peoples of Africa* (London: Greenwood Press, 1996), 606-607.

westwards across the Atlantic to the Americas, where Yorùbá cultural practices survive and dominate those of other African groups that were similarly enslaved.⁷

The Yorùbá consist of different subgroups who speak varying dialects of the Yorùbá language, and who are united by myths of origin, belief system, political structure, and cultural practices. This united Yorùbá identity, though a defensive nineteenth-century development responding to colonization, wars, population movement, missionary work, and the rise of new elites, remains strong.⁸ A rich community of Yorùbá historians and historians of the Yorùbá, its relatively huge population, and perhaps its archaeological relevance remain at the core of Yorùbá's continued relevance.

A generation of scholars have written extensively on the history of the Yorùbá.⁹ As well, archaeological excavations since the 1930s present evidence of human occupation in the Yorùbá region dating back to the Middle Stone Age, but the most popular site is a Late Stone Age rock shelter site, Iwò Eléérú in Ìṣàrun, with deposits dated to 9000 BCE.¹⁰ Iwò Eléérú, literally 'cave of ashes,' was excavated by Thurstan Shaw in 1965. Located fifty kilometers away from Ùṣò, the site positions the Yorùbá within discussions about the evolutionary process of the modern man.¹¹ Iwò Eléérú continues to attract scholars as the only securely dated deposit in West Africa and for its distinctiveness from other fossil deposits.¹² Archaeological evidence, in addition to linguistic evidence, therefore challenges the migratory myths of Yorùbá origins which nevertheless remain dear to Yorùbá folk ethnogenesis.

In scholarly literature, the Yorùbá feature prominently in discussions on rituals, festivals, and, also, gender in socio-cultural practices. The Yorùbá people, like many other African societies, are patriarchal. However, in practice and literature, references to femininity and female agency are abundant. The focus of this study, the Èró festival is a community-wide feast where men don full feminine attire and embark on a festive procession around the community. Not only does this festival continue to hold on, even thrive, in a patriarchal society, it is the community's most prominent traditional observance.

⁷ Toyin Falola and Akíntúndé Akínyemí, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 2.

⁸ Falola and Akínyemí, *Encyclopedia of the Yoruba*, 3.

⁹ See the works of Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (Lagos, 1921); and other works by J.A. Atanda, I. A. Akinjogbin, S. O. Biobaku, Ulli Beier, Andrew Apter, Anthony Asiwaju, Robin Law, Jacob Olupona, and Toyin Falola, among others.

¹⁰ Falola and Akínyemí, *Encyclopedia of the Yoruba*, 34.

¹¹ P. Allsworth-Jones, K. Harvati, and C. Stringer, "The archaeological context of the Iwo Eleru cranium from Nigeria and preliminary results of new morphometric studies." In *West African Archaeology: New Developments, New Perspectives*. ed. P. Allsworth-Jones, BAR, S2164 (Archaeopress, 2010), 29-42.

¹² Christopher M. Stojanowski, "Iwo Eleru's place among Late Pleistocene and Early Holocene populations of North and East Africa," *Journal of Human Evolution*, 75 (2014): 80-89.

This paper considers cross-dressing during this traditional festival as a symbol of feminine power, a gesture to female inclusivity, and a tool of social cohesion in a Yorùbá community. In order to interrogate the centrality of Èró festival, a matricultural complex, to the continued existence of the community, it relies on the abundant literature on Yorùbá religion, culture, and particularly, gender relations. It combines an analysis of these with oral interviews with recent participants in the festival and other traditional observances to analyze dress as a gendered item in festive cultural practices among the Yorùbá. The paper thematically presents evidence of gender and dress both in literature and practice and limits itself to Ùṣò in southeastern Yorùbáland.¹³ It argues that female power, informed by their biologically-derived endowment, is ubiquitous and potent among the Yorùbá. In Ùṣò, men enact this feminine power through the symbology of dress.

APPLYING GEERTZ

The paper borrows from the work of Clifford Geertz, who wrote that cultures create meaning through symbols, by using the symbology of dress to provide a thick description of festive transvestism in the community. The role of clothing in symbolically communicating deeper cultural meanings is reflective of Clifford Geertz's notion that people create meaning through symbols and cultural practices. These meanings are sometimes not superficial, not just in the art, hence Geertz's argument for thick description.¹⁴ Clifford Geertz's work on interpretive anthropology and symbolic meaning or the role of symbols in cultural expressions was groundbreaking in the late twentieth century. The idea is that one can 'read' a culture, instead of merely documenting it.

In his method of thick description, Geertz argues that the analysis of culture is not an experimental science in search of law, or theory, but an interpretive science in search of meaning. This interpretive turn in anthropology is comparable and contemporaneous with the cultural/linguistic turn in history presenting new scholarly vistas and reiterating the transience of understanding. Still, Geertz's formidable anthropological approach is applicable to studying African societies for its advocacy of specificities, rather than generalizations. Even when there are broad themes, Geertz's argument for the need to dive deeply into each cultural expression is particularly useful and rewarding. Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete and, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is.¹⁵ Thick description favors particularity in ethnography rather than theory-based

¹³ For a discussion of Yorùbá subgroups, their dialects, and location within the larger group using maps, See Aribidesi Usman and Toyin Falola ed., *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 11-15; Atanda cited earlier also establishes the region in southeastern Yorùbáland.

¹⁴ Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural Symbol" in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90; Clifford Geertz, 'Art as a Cultural System', *Modern Language Notes*, 91, No. 6, Comparative Literature (December 1976):1475.

¹⁵ Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 3-30.

commonality. Beyond this, taking the native view of things and making meaning through the thick description of participant observation and creating webs of meaning is Geertz's proposition for understanding culture.¹⁶ As a young boy witnessing and participating in the Èró Festival in Ùṣò, meanings gleaned by the author from the event gave primacy to sheer spectacle and amusement. Some other observer, especially in contemporary times, might find evidence to counter arguments for the alienage of gender fluidity in African societies. Each of these would be incomplete and superficial given Yorùbá complexity; hence, the need for deeper analysis and native insight.

PATRIARCHY, FEMALE AGENCY, AND YORÙBÁ CONTINUITY

Yorùbá cultural expression is complex and diverse, just as the people themselves. This is arguably why, according to Jacob Olúpòṅà, a prominent Yorùbá scholar, the Yorùbá are "the most studied ethnic group in Africa."¹⁷ While the Yorùbá have a patriarchal society, as do many African societies, femininity is integral to religio-cultural observances. Beyond mere presence, femininity features quite prominently in and heavily informs the Yorùbá socio-cultural setup. In cases such as in the Oṅdó community, traditional politics provides a parallel line of female chiefs headed by the *Lóbùn* that administers the town alongside the male chiefs. In Oṅdó and Iléṣà, these women were king-makers, who crowned the king.¹⁸ These are enduring practices in these particular Yorùbá communities. The Oṅdó oral tradition, perhaps the only one in Yorùbáland, has a matriarch as progenitor.¹⁹ It is embedded in the folklore and psyche of the people. These examples are manifestations of matriculture within an essentially patriarchal society.

In a counter position, scholars such as Insa Nolte have argued that the existence of such parallel positions, or 'women's wings,' in organizations is evidence of limited representation, and "reinforces complementary gender roles."²⁰ This paper shows that the notion of these 'parallel positions' only reiterating female subservience requires much more nuance. Also, no debates exist on the complementarity of gender roles among the Yorùbá. It is a stark traditional reality that gender roles are traditionally and intentionally cultivated, taught and practiced. The argument lies in whether having specific gender roles

¹⁶ Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play. Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, edited by C. Geertz (New York: Basic Books.) 1973. 412–453.

¹⁷ Jacob K Olupona, "The Study of Yorùbá Religious Tradition in Historical Perspective." *Numen* 40, no. 3 (1993): 240–73. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3270151>.:241

¹⁸ Patrick Ogunshakin, *Ondo: The People, Their Origin, Custom, and Tradition* (Nigeria: Inway Publishers, 1979), 20; Jacob K. Olupona, *Kingship, Religion, and Rituals in a Nigerian Community: A Phenomenological Study of Ondo Yorùbá Festivals* (Stockholm, 1991), 47.

¹⁹ Samuel Johnson, *A History of the Yorùbá: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos: 1921), 25.

²⁰ Insa Nolte, "'Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed': Yorùbá Women in the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Nigeria," *Africa* 78, no.1 (2008): 85.

invalidates representation or undermines participation. Gender, therefore, is an interesting category that has triggered rich conversations among scholars of Yorùbá.

In her book *The Invention of Women*, Oyewùmi argues that colonialism invented gender as a social category in Yorùbáland.²¹ In a counter-argument, Olajubu observes that rather than absent, gender among the Yorùbá is complex and fluid in its configuration.²² Others have argued for the existence of African feminisms, critiquing liberal feminism that advocate equality of the sexes or that fails to distinguish differences between Euro-American and African cultural contexts.²³ Although heavily critiqued, Oyewùmi's work espouses age, experience and power as more potent social categories rather than understanding 'woman' through 'bio-logic.'²⁴ While this is true, the powers attributed to women by the Yorùbá are vested in their biomorphology, just as much as age and experience, all of which are crucial to social categorization. This is what Dianne Stewart calls female genital power (FGP), a biological endowment that bestows esoteric, mystical capabilities.²⁵

Broadly, Yorùbá cosmology aligns with that of many societies that conceive women as the fairer – and weaker – sex. This *prima facie* weakness, however, provides a much-needed balance in society. The gendered notion of *akọ* (male) and *abo* (female) is produced by but transcends sexual attributes to the abstract and metaphysical. In everyday parlance, *akọ* is associated with violence, turmoil, and lack of productivity while *abo* evokes notions of fruitfulness, peace and purity.²⁶ Things or phenomena thus become gendered by what they produce or can do, or otherwise. Evidently, productivity, provenance, life, and new beginnings are inherently female. This is however not exclusive to the Yorùbá but finds universal expression as many contemporary nations evoke women's purity in their nationalist or nativist discourses.²⁷

²¹ Oyèrónké Oyewùmi, *The Invention of Women: Making African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 1997).

²² Oyeronke Olajubu. "Seeing through a Woman's Eye: Yorùbá Religious Tradition and Gender Relations." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol 20, no. 1 (2004): 41–60.

²³ Luqman Oṣéyemí Muraina and Abdulkareem J. Ajímátanraeje, "Gender Relations in Indigenous Yorùbá Culture: Questioning Current Feminist Actions and Advocacies." *Third World Quarterly*, Vol 44, no. 9 (2023): 20-42.

²⁴ J.D.Y. Peel, "Gender in Yorùbá Religious Change," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 32, no.2 (2002) 136-166; Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, ix.

²⁵ Dianne Stewart, "Matri-archive: A New Portal to Knowledge Production in African Studies," *Journal of Africana Religions* 7, no.2 (2019), 311; See also Fola H. Kazeem, "The Vagina as Symbol of Power in the Yoruba Culture." *Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2000): 364-370.

²⁶ Oyeronke Olajubu, *Women in the Yorùbá Religious Sphere* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003) 9, 23.

²⁷ Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); David Koester, "Gender Ideology and Nationalism in the Culture and Politics of Iceland." *American Ethnologist* 22 (1995): 572–88; Wendy Bracewell, "Women, Motherhood, and Contemporary Serbian Nationalism." *Women's Studies International Forum* 19 (1996): 25–33; US westward expansion is also depicted as an immaculate white woman blazing the west-bound trail with her purity and civility.

Ulli Beier countered earlier European convictions about the subordination of African women based on his ethnography in Ede in 1952. Citing the case of Ìyá Şàngó, he argues that it is in religious life that Yorùbá women make their most important contribution. Women form the majority of adherents in Yorùbá religion and are the "sustainers of Yorùbá religious traditions."²⁸ It is also noteworthy that while the Yorùbá political culture has been male dominated, women usually serve as regents in many Yorùbá communities in the interregnum periods between male kingships.²⁹

One could make the argument that the position of Yorùbá women relative to men is premised on the notion that power is both visible and invisible with, respectively, males and females in charge of each domain. From the Western viewpoint, then, women are invisible and westerners understand Yorùbá women's invisibility as limitation, oppression, and irrelevance. Among the Yorùbá, however, there is gender complementarity premised on balance, and gender roles and religious beliefs mutually influence each other.³⁰ This complementary reality contradicts narratives of stark dichotomy between the domestic and public spheres. The power women possess is symbolized in an important item of paraphernalia held by Yorùbá kings—the staff, which usually includes a depiction of a bird. This bird represents *àjé* (powerful women and/or the women's witch cult) whose possession of *àşę* (authoritative power, spiritual or material, partly shrouded in women's procreative capabilities) the king can summon for the public good.³¹ Ayo Adeduntan discusses this exclusively-female reserve when analyzing Tùndé Kèlání's movie, *The Narrow Path*.³² Beyond the metaphysics of *àjé* and *àşę*, women also hold exclusive influence in commerce. *Ajé* is the Yorùbá deity of the marketplace, and of women's economic agency.³³ In that physical and spiritual space, women wield tremendous power and thereby possess the keys to the prosperity of the community. In that realm, men are outsiders.

The conclusion from the above is that women hold exclusive coercive *and* influential powers in certain areas of Yorùbáland - religious and economic spheres - and these metaphysical endowments are biologically derived. As material human *things*, they are female by what they can naturally give or produce, and they are prequalified for wielding

This notion also fueled and justified most of the lynchings in post-bellum America. George A. Crofutt, *American Progress*, ca. 1873. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/97507547/>.

²⁸ Ulli Beier, "The Position of Yorùbá Women," *Présence Africaine* no. 1, I-II (1955) 40. <https://doi.org/10.3917/presa.9551.0039>

²⁹ Oyèrónké Oládémọ. *Women in Yorùbá Religions* (New York: New York University Press, 2022), 4

³⁰ Oládémọ, *Women in Yorùbá Religions*, 5, 8.

³¹ Olajubu, *Women in the Yorùbá Religious Sphere*, 23, 43, 54.

³² Ayo Adeduntan, "Road Called Vagina: African Womanist Detours of Tùndé Kèlání's *The Narrow Path*." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 32, no. 4 (2020): 410 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27105596>.

³³ S. J. Mathews, "Ajé & Àjé: Gender and Female Power in Yorùbáland," (PhD diss., UCLA, 2014), 1, ProQuest (Mathews_ucla_0031N_12973). Merritt ID: ark:/13030/m5rr3cmj. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/60b6p51f>

such powers by their morphology. This distinctiveness in biology plays out in the uniqueness and value of their apparel. During kingship interregnums, as mentioned earlier, it is interesting that female regents will wear the traditional masculine *agbádá* or *dàńsíki* (traditional flowing or shorter tops) with *şóşó* (pants) and *filà* (cap) as well as other paraphernalia of the royal office. In that situation, the king's apparel symbolizes kingship authority and the women who don it possess royal authority.

This goes in line with Olajubu's claim that cross-dressing in ritual spaces is an example of fluid gender categories.³⁴ Fluidity in gender and the possibility of transition, though not physiologically, is perhaps what Oyewùmi argues for. This transition occurs through the possession of certain knowledge, power, and influence. Dress is therefore a symbol of this tradition especially during rituals and festivals.

FESTIVE TRANSVESTISM

Generally, dress evokes discussion surrounding sexuality and especially the female body. This is why African old women have traditionally employed nudity as a powerful protest tool to show disapproval and sanction wrongdoing before, during, and after colonialism. This practice persists till today. The purposive nakedness of a mother is a show of power repudiating a projected subordination and passivity by social authority figures, and is intended to shame society into compliance. Women have weaponized this understanding for the good of their patriarchal societies and naked protests were particularly potent during the colonial era for advocating better conditions and fighting injustice. The Aba Women's riot of 1929 and the 1947 Abéòkúta Women's Union protest are notable cases.³⁵

Another act of defiance among the Igbo is called 'sitting on a man,' whereby women as sparingly clad in loin cloths as men openly query men's manhood by singing lewd songs and using language ordinarily not expected of women, as well as being violent, in order to shame erring men into conformity.³⁶ While the feminine body is generally revered, that of

³⁴ Olajubu, *Women in the Yorùbá Religious Sphere*, 54.

³⁵ Chima J. Korieh, and Elizabeth Onogwu. "Women and Rural Protest in Colonial Eastern Nigeria: The 1929 Women's Revolt (*Ogu Umunwanyi*) Reexamined." *Journal of Women's History* 36, no. 3 (2024): 94-117; Judith A. Byfield. *The Great Upheaval: Women and Nation in Postwar Nigeria* (Ohio University Press, 2022).

³⁶ See Judith Van Allen. "'Sitting on a Man' : Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women." *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 6 no.2 (1972): 165–81; Daniel Olisa Iweze. *Histories of Tax Evasion, Avoidance and Resistance* (Routledge, 2022), 127; Abiodun Afolabi and Oladiti Abiodun Akeem. "Change and resistance: a reflection on the Aba Women Uprising in Colonial Nigeria." *Hemispheres* 37 (2022): 53; Korieh and Onogwu. "Women and Rural Protest in Colonial Eastern Nigeria," 104; and "Undressing for redress: the significance of Nigerian women's naked protests" *The Conversation* September 3, 2020. Accessed on 26.07.2025 <https://theconversation.com/undressing-for-redress-the-significance-of-nigerian-womens-naked-protests-144823>

mothers has a higher place for having given life, borne the sacrifice and throes of birthing, and thereby paid their dues in sustaining society.³⁷ To be semi-clad is to become essentially a man. Therefore, women wear nakedness to arrogate masculinity. However, when it is not sanctioned, it is a taboo, and therefore, a powerful gesture.

In the same vein, dress is a channel through which men attempt to access femininity and this is the case with the Èró festival. When it is an enactment, a communally sanctioned spectacle, then, it becomes what Gilmore understands as “controlled violence,” or “symbolic aggression.”³⁸ The festive spectacle of cross-dressing and its accompanying ‘violence’ is not only controlled but momentary, consciously providing for a fleeting disruption of societal order. Globally, festivities permit remarkable fluidity of behavior, socially sanctioned abandon, or role-reversal.³⁹ The festive performativity of another gender by cross dressing does not signify the permission of transgressive practices in Yorùbá culture; rather it simultaneously pays homage to femininity, entrenches patriarchy, and normalizes traditional gender roles.

As early as 1966, Robert LeVine had identified ritual cross-dressing practices among the Yorùbá and Ibo of Nigeria.⁴⁰ In his work with members of the *Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀*, a female-themed male masquerade cult, LeVine observes a conspicuousness of transvestism among the Yorùbá, so much so as to suggest “a more pervasive element in their culture than in others.”⁴¹ Yet he states emphatically this happened on ceremonial occasions. LeVine vividly describes the staggering influence of women on the male cult:

During my interview with the Gelede elders, two or three old crones several times poked their heads in the window to correct and scold the men. I had never before witnessed such an attitude of officiousness and arrogance on the part of women during my interviews with elders of other cults or with healers. It seemed to be part of the general picture of the cult as dominated by the “mothers,” that is, the witches.⁴²

He goes further to quote Ulli Beier,

³⁷ Oluwasola Ibitayo Daniels, “Nudity and Power in North-Eastern Yorùbá: A Study of Pre-Colonial and Modern Traditional Practices,” *Kenneth Dike Journal of African Studies*, 1, no.1 (2020):4.

³⁸ David D. Gilmore. *Carnival and Culture: Sex, Symbol, and Status in Spain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 23.

³⁹ Addo, Ping-Ann. “Anthropology, Festival, and Spectacle.” *Reviews in Anthropology* 38, no. 3 (2009): 219–222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00938150903110625>.

⁴⁰ Robert A. LeVine, “Sex Roles and Economic Change in Africa,” *Ethnology* 5, no. 2 (1966):186-93.

⁴¹ LeVine, “Sex Roles and Economic Change in Africa,” 193.

⁴² LeVine, “Sex Roles and Economic Change in Africa,” 192-3.

Gelede is the secret of women. We the men are merely their slaves. We dance to appease our mothers.⁴³

Geoffrion argues that festive transvestism creates a "liminal time-space for the exploration of gender practices and sexualities."⁴⁴ In other words, the short period when this happens is a short period where sexes invert and experience the other's reality through the social performance of dress. The event provides a liminality that removes inhibition and permits the abnormal or outrageous. In performance events such as beauty contests, cross-dressing allows men to "test the local boundaries of gender identity."⁴⁵ A *New York Times* article describes the Abissa festival among the Akan people of Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire as an "occasion for letting loose" in a society governed by countless traditional protocols.⁴⁶ During this festival, "men could dress as women and women as men."⁴⁷ It is a "moment of collective catharsis," which removes restrictions: townspeople can reproach their leaders and each other in a symbolic "accusation-repentance ritual" performativity.⁴⁸ In this framework, festive transvestism in Èró Festival is an example of the complexity of gender among the Yorùbá, bringing to light the debate about the traditional existence of gender dichotomy on one side and fluidity on the other.

DRESS AND FEMININITY IN ÈRÓ FESTIVAL

By all indications, the word Èró may be translated into English as the conjugated verb, 'to wrap,' presented in the two syllables È and ró, and derived from ìró (wrapper). To ró is simply to wrap. Wrappers for the lower body is a quintessential female cladding and dress style in many African societies. To clad, or be clad, in wrappers was therefore to make effeminate as in the expressions 'tied to mother's apron strings,' 'tied to his wife's wrapper,' and 'woman wrapper.'⁴⁹ In some African cultures, men also wear some form of wrappers publicly. However, generally, wrappers are associated with women in and beyond

⁴³ Ulli Beier, "Gelede Masks," *Odu* 6 (1958): 5-23.

⁴⁴ Karine Geoffrion, "Ghanaian Youth and Festive Transvestism." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 15 (2013): S48-61. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23524928>.

⁴⁵ Hansen, Karen Tranberg. "The World in Dress: Anthropological Perspectives on Clothing, Fashion, and Culture." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 384. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25064858>.

⁴⁶ "Grand-Bassam Journal; In One Unbridled Week, a Town's Moment of Truth," *New York Times* November 3, 1995. Accessed on 10.05.2025 <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/11/03/world/grand-bassam-journal-in-one-unbridled-week-a-town-s-moment-of-truth.html>

⁴⁷ "Abissa 2024: les N'Zima de nouveau en fête." 7info YouTube page. Accessed on 26.05.2025. <https://youtu.be/y9SbpfyrBbA?si=smk6-2oxMwCFbhpJ>

⁴⁸ "The festivals of Ivory Coast: dances and music," *TransAfrica*, Accessed on 26.05.2025. <https://transafrica.biz/en/the-festivals-of-ivory-coast/>

⁴⁹ Specifically, 'woman wrapper' is a contemporary Nigerian lingo to denote a man whose actions and ideas are geared towards gaining the approval and/or affection of females. "Woman Wrapper" Urban Dictionary. November 14, 2017. Accessed on 28.05.2025 <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=woman+wrapper> Urban Dictionary is a crowd-sourced dictionary of informal cultural expressions.

Africa. For instance, private Victorian era robes for women, now called dressing gowns or robes, were also called wrappers.⁵⁰ Among the Yorùbá, ìró is both a private and public garment.

To understand the rationale behind Èró, it is useful to touch on the age grade system as an integral aspect of the social structure of the community. The age grade system is a social organization based on age stratification of social practice or participation. Membership and activities within a grade is exclusive to people of that age set and transitioning to a higher age set is celebrated by a rite of passage.⁵¹ In Ùṣò, the polity is three-tiered consisting of the ìàrẹ (Ọlọbà-in-council), the Ọmọlúṣò (Elders who had observed Èró), and the Ugbàmọ (younger adults next in line for Ọmọlúṣò). This socio-political structure further establishes the historic ties between Ùṣò and Ọwọ as the same ìàrẹ and Ugbàmọ also exist in Ọwọ.⁵² Aside from the Ọlọbà-in-Council, which consists of the king and his cabinet of chiefs, the other two tiers, Ugbàmọ and Ọmọlúṣò, are age-grade derived and for the purpose of this paper, most relevant.

Among the Yorùbá generally, the age grade system is an important traditional social mechanism and constitutes the executive arm of the society. Traditionally, age groups in Ùṣò were saddled with many responsibilities including executing communal works, burying the dead and accompanying rituals, and defending the community from external aggression. The Ugbàmọ is the oldest grade consisting of men between the ages of forty and fifty, and only a step below the Ọmọlúṣò, which is the highest level of non-royal civil membership. Tradition saddles the Ugbàmọ with the defense of the town. Though under the direction and oversight of the Ọmọlúṣò, the Ugbàmọ also wield considerable power such as preventing the deceased from being buried and even holding ceremonies to ransom. The community therefore holds the transition from the Ugbàmọ to the Ọmọlúṣò in high esteem. This is what the Èró festival marks and signifies. The festival remains till date the most colorful and important observance in the community.

The beginning of Èró festival is fuzzy but septuagenarian and octogenarian members of the community confirm it was a practice that predated them. The festival is held every nine years in December: it is an initiation process into the commune of elders. Beyond the linguistics, “the definition of Èró is freedom.”⁵³ This implies an end to labor: a transition from the age grade in charge of communal assignments and responsibilities to a segment of the community that only serve in an advisory role to the ìàrẹ. This transition absolves the qualified from all communal responsibilities. Beyond this absolution, the Ọmọlúṣò

⁵⁰ “Elegance at home: Victorian wrappers” Nov 2, 2021. *Recollections* Accessed 02.06.2025 <https://recollections.biz/blog/elegance-at-home-victorian-wrappers/>

⁵¹ Falola and Akínyemí, *Encyclopedia of the Yoruba*, 25.

⁵² Sydney Ogunleye, the Alajadudu of Iloro, Owo, “Igogo Festival: A love story with a lasting legacy,” TVC News Nigeria YouTube. Accessed on 02.06.2025 https://youtu.be/GIELrzBak_I

⁵³ Telephone interview with Pa Aiku Oke, High Chief Osodi of Ùṣò on January 7, 2025.

enjoy certain other privileges. Having been initiated into the commune of elders, Èró graduands may no longer stand while sharing palm wine at the *Ọlóbà*'s palace and may keep their caps in the presence of the king. They can also make meaningful contributions to discussions at the *làrẹ*. These are important privileges within the community. In preparation for the festival, Èró candidates who themselves were once *Ugbàmọ* would present the subordinate age group as the next *Ugbàmọ*. In the year of celebration or initiation, the candidates must cultivate a piece of farmland, and the proceeds thereof are fed to the people during the celebration. This signifies the last responsibility to the community before stepping into the community of elders.

As a patriarchal Yorùbá community, however, the most striking feature of the ceremony is the feminine symbology present throughout its events. Foremost, the notion of communal responsibilities and the freedom from them connotes not just age and growth but also possesses heavily gendered connotations: communal responsibilities are typically masculine. One could therefore interpret the initiates' transvestism to mean that they are graduating from masculinity and becoming feminine. To drive home this point vividly, during the procession through the community, Èró candidates wear the *Ùgberò*, a full-fledged female ensemble consisting of the *iró* (wrapper), *bùbá* (blouse) and *gèlè* (head tie). To any visitor or external observer, this bizarre spectacle would only be tempered by the knowledge that it was an event, publicly sanctioned, and thus temporary. It is also crucial to know that the *Ùgberò* can only be procured and presented to the candidates by their *àrẹ̀mọ̀binrin* (first daughter).

The special role of the *àrẹ̀mọ̀binrin* in Èró is as prominent as that of the *Arugbá* in Ọ̀ṣun Ọ̀ṣogbo. During the Ọ̀ṣun Ọ̀ṣogbo festival, an observance dedicated to Ọ̀ṣun, Yorùbá goddess of fertility and procreation, the central female character, *Arugbá*, supposedly a virgin young woman, is a communal celebrity for her sacrifice of abstinence throughout the years she holds that position, and consequently, her potential endowment to cleanse and purify. Her virginity and dedication embody her with purgatorial virtues. In contemporary literary cultural works, the *Arugbá* is the superhero a corrupt male-dominated community needs for renewal or redemption.⁵⁴ For the Èró Festival, the *àrẹ̀mọ̀binrin* of each candidate is saddled with the responsibility of purchasing the material for his *iró*, *bùbá*, and *gèlè* or having them woven at the loom. In addition to the *Ùgberò* is the *Ṣowóṣi* (*sheghosen* in Ọ̀wò); both *Ùgberò* and *Ṣowóṣi* are indigenous fabrics in Ọ̀wò.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Rotimi Fasan. "'Arugba': Superwoman, Power and Agency." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (2016): 283. See note on page 290 for an overview of Osun in Yorùbá imaginary. *Arugba* translates as calabash-carrier.

⁵⁵ "Indigenous fabric -Owo as a study case," *The Hope Newspaper* 18 April 2023. Accessed on 01.06.2025 <https://www.thehopenewspaper.com/indigenous-fabric-owo-as-a-study-case/>; See also T. M. Akinwunmi, "Taboos and the Control of Social Roles and Quality of Owo Ritual Textiles." *Lagos Notes and Records* 11 (2005).

The indigo dyed material features narrow weft stripes across bold warp stripes (see Appendix 1).⁵⁶

Interestingly, becoming feminine is not derogatory in this case, but gestures at the inevitability of the cycle of life and the waning of vigor. This feminization of men through dress is “simply a tradition we have grown up to know. They wear female clothes to look like their wives.”⁵⁷ The cloth and the role of the daughter in its purchase is symbolic. By the purchase of *Ùgberò*, the daughter underscores her importance to her father and to this specific tradition, signaling the daughter’s, and by corollary, women’s hold and influence on fathers and men. Effectively, the *àrẹ̀mọ̀binrin* robes her father in femininity and participates in absolving him of masculine responsibility. This emasculation is celebrated as a coming of age rather than ridiculed as effeminacy; men don women’s attire as a symbol of retirement from valour and laboured commitment, and an entrance into rest. Casting off the toga of valiance to ‘become women’ is thus symbolized by their feminine apparels. Rest, though, is not tantamount to irresponsibility, as the *Ọ̀mọ̀lúșò* continue to serve the community by drawing from their wisdom and experience, rather than brawn. In the same manner, women are of imperative significance to the community in other ways than physical labor.

During the procession, each candidate carries a broom (a domestic tool), and sweeps the ground in front of him towards the new *Ugbàmo*, thus signaling a transfer of responsibilities and a hand-over of masculine power. One should take note of the irony of employing sweeping, a supposedly feminine domestic activity, to signal transfer of manly duties. While they ‘become women,’ tradition forbids the candidates from having any form of sexual intimacy with any woman, their wives inclusive, for the seven days of festivities. To be a woman and be with another woman would be anomalous. This not only establishes gender roles in society but upholds heteronormativity.

Ironically, although this position of elder rids them of manly responsibilities to the community, it does not strip them of access to privileged secrets of the town nor the religio-cultural classified information that are afforded only to masculine ears and eyes.⁵⁸ The system of curfew central to *orò* for instance precludes female participation. The Yorùbá presumes that two things are involved when a woman becomes privy to *orò* secrets: either death or masculinization.⁵⁹ In other words, access to certain levels of knowledge is associated with masculinity and one begins to see the sense that, while there

⁵⁶ A picture can be found in this virtual gallery: “Owo Wrapper Cloth” Adire African Textiles. Accessed on 02.06.2025 <https://www.adireafricantextiles.com/product/owo-wrapper-cloth/>

⁵⁷ Interview with Pa Oke.

⁵⁸ Brian C. Smithson, "Sounding the voice of tolerance: the *orò* secret society at the Yorùbá borderlands." *Material Religion* 17, no. 4 (2021): 517-538.; Michael Marcuzzi, "The bullroarer cult in Cuba." *Latin American Music Review* 31, no. 2 (2010): 151-81; Abiodun J. Macaulay and Shola Balogun. "A Selection of Yoruba Oro Sacred Texts from Nigeria." *Delos: A Journal of Translation and World Literature* 37, no. 1 (2022): 45+.

are traditional gender roles among the Yorùbá, there are other social categories that make transition across the divide possible, if not common. The *Ùgberò*'s relevance transcends the one-week ceremony, however. It is usually stowed away until the passing of the individual, when it becomes part of the funeral rites for the deceased.⁶⁰ That is, ordinarily, the Èró graduand is buried in the *Ùgberò* provided by his *àrẹ̀mọ̀bìnrin*. This is ostensibly to show that the hold the female daughter has on him continues in death. Considering the prevalence of the afterlife in Yorùbá thought, one could interestingly read this as perpetuating their transition into femininity for all eternity.

Different versions of Èró exist in the neighboring towns of Ipele, Ute, Idanre, Àkùré, and Ọ̀wọ̀. An elder in Ọ̀sò confirms that the festival "is a practice borrowed from Ọ̀wọ̀."⁶¹ The fact that a section of the town originated from Ọ̀wọ̀ buttresses this claim. During the most-celebrated Igogo festival in Ọ̀wọ̀, the king, Ọ̀lọ̀wọ̀, dons full female attire and other chiefs may also do the same in solidarity. Other neighboring communities similarly name their festivals Èró and key mentions such as *Ugbàmọ* and *Ùgberò* have very similar-sounding variants. Apparently, transvestism is a feature of only the Ọ̀sò version of Èró Festival. By all linguistic indications, Èró does not necessarily connote being dressed in female attires but simply being robed. In Ute, for instance, Èró Festival, the most colorful traditional festival, happens in five-year intervals, and it is an ungendered affair. However, where Èró is celebrated, the same themes of graduation from age groups upon attaining seventy years of age, along with unity and love, resonate.⁶²

In Àkùré, a similar festival is Ọ̀gún Obìnrin, literally 'women's Ọ̀gún festival.' Ọ̀gún, the Yorùbá god of war and metallurgy, is a male deity and the Ọ̀gún festival is predominantly a masculine affair. Observance of the Ọ̀gún Obìnrin began during the reign of Ọ̀ba Afúnbíowó as an appeasement or antidote to the toxicity of the actual Ọ̀gún festival, which often featured actual and performed violence.⁶³ That a female version of the festival exists

⁵⁹ *Orò* is a Yorùbá corporate ancestor cult which demands and enforces the sequestration of non-initiates, particularly women. While non-initiate men who violate its secrecy may be penalized, female transgression attracts weightier consequences. Its interface or presentation is its distinct sonic presence, unlike other deities that have physical shrine. See Brian Smithson and Michael Marcuzzi cited immediately above.

⁶⁰ Interview with Pa Oke, High Chief Osodi.

⁶¹ Interview with Pa Fadero.

⁶² Ero Festival: Ute community celebrates new septuagenarians. Ondo State Radio-vision Corporation (OSRC) YouTube page April 10, 2022. Accessed 10.06.2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qv164_Ambnc. Age grade from 21 to 70 are responsible for communal work.

⁶³ Metallurgy also associates state formation, war, and bloodshed with Ogun. See Akinwumi Ogundiran, "Yorùbá Indigenous Religion" *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*. 23 Oct. 2024; Accessed on 09.06.2025. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.1556> Ayodeji Ogunnaike explores the continued relevance of Ogun to increased violence in contemporary America by framing our current world as the "Age of Ogun." See "Oyinbo Ọ̀mọ Aşogun Dere: An Analysis of Racial Injustice, Gun Violence, and Sexual Assault in America through a Traditional Yorùbá Religious Perspective," *The Journal of Interreligious Studies*, 23 (May 2018): 103-126.

in Àkùré speaks to the social permissiveness of festive spectacle. During this observance, women clad in full male ensemble of *agbádá* (flowing top), *ṣòkòtò* (trousers) and *filà* (cap), with sticks in hand, go about every night singing and greeting, but also chiding and ridiculing men who are either offenders or who are not man enough: either that they are impotent or shirk their responsibility as husbands and fathers. These women, riding on the temporary immunity afforded them by the festival, assemble at the frontage of offenders, irrespective of their class and position in society, and rain abuse on them. Even the monarch is not exempt from this show of spite. During the week-long festivities, women also sit in public spaces and direct denigrating songs with unbridled and explicit sexual content at male passersby. Male traffic in the town is largely reduced during this period as men who are impotent, unsure of their sexual prowess or masculinity, or who having offended, prefer to stay at home. Such lack of restraint by women is unacceptable outside of the festive period. The entire ensemble of sticks and male garb are also an anomaly on an ordinary day. Wearing male dress is a ritual performance that has neutralizing capabilities because the ritual is performed by women.⁶⁴ This underscores the theme of feminine invisible power which is very prominent among the Yorùbá.

Ironically, communities tend to draw the line between the symbolism of transvestism and homonormativity. Working with Ghanaian youths, Geoffrion argues that African societies try to detach cross-dressing from homosexuality, but instead employ it to reinforce heteronormativity, against a permanent exhibition of transvestism in fear that cross-dressing indicates homosexual tendencies; these festivals reinforce rather than redress hegemonic masculinity.⁶⁵ Cross dressing in this context is not an everyday practice but a spectacle in ritual context.⁶⁶ This is in tandem with Ronit Irshai's analysis of Jewish scholarship, and the observation that the intention behind cross dressing is what is important, and not cross-dressing *per se*.⁶⁷ In this case, festivities ratify cross-dressing as a symbol to communicate intricate cultural messages. For the Yorùbá, and specifically those in Ùṣò, dress communicates the integral value of women to their culture and creates an opportunity for visibility, solidarity, and cohesion.

CONCLUSION

⁶⁴ Interview with Mrs. Veronica Adedun, a 70-year-old Àkùré indigene, granddaughter of a previous High Chief Sasere of Àkùré, and granddaughter of Ọba Afúnbíowó on April 19, 2025. Ọba Afúnbíowó is considered the most prominent *Déjì* of Àkùré. *Déjì* is the title of the Akure monarch.

⁶⁵ Geoffrion S49, S56, S57.

⁶⁶ Addo. "Anthropology, Festival, and Spectacle," 217–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00938150903110625>.

⁶⁷ Ronit Irshai, "Cross-Dressing In Jewish Law and the Construction of Gender Identity." *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues*, no. 38 (2021): 46+. *Gale Literature Resource Center* (accessed May 29, 2025). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A671460678/LitRC?u=tall85761&sid=summon&xid=c914f842>.]

This paper has presented the Èró Festival as a matricultural complex integral to the sustenance of the Ùṣò community, where male candidates in the festival employ transvestism and female dress as a communal symbol of success, progress, continuity, and solidarity. While the Yorùbá people are generally patriarchal and patrilineal, there exists, in many instances, a strong articulation of matriculture. Exclusively wielding invisible power and influence, women are prominent rather than obscure, complementing rather than subdued. The sexuality of female dress and its appeal is tied to this bio-metaphysical power and when men wear female clothes, they symbolize an appropriation of these powers. Rather than effeminizing and carrying its associated stigma, cross dressing men in Ùṣò highlight the importance of women to the community, the hold of women on men, and the inevitability of the cycle of life. This practice, however, upholds heteronormativity and occurs strictly within a communally-sanctioned, temporary, festive space.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ayodeji Abiona is a doctoral candidate at the Florida State University and a scholar of twentieth century America with a focus on migration. His thesis is specifically on the development of the Nigerian community in Texas and the role of the church in Nigerian transnationalism.

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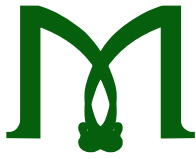
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APPENDIX 1



Şowóşì (*sheghosen* in Ọ̀wò) “Senghosen, a woven clothing of the Yoruba People of Owo kingdom, Ondo,” *Lipstick Alley*, February 10, 2023; Accessed on August 22, 2025
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Personal Reflections on Blackfoot Men and Matriculture: Transcript

DOUGLAS CARDINAL

[lightly edited; please cite using time signatures]

I am Douglas Cardinal. I'm an architect, born in southern Alberta, actually in Calgary. My father was, he had Blackfoot heritage and my mother had German heritage. So she was very concerned, being a nurse, that the women were respected as nurses by the doctors. And they were always doing so much, but never respected by the men. And so, she looked for, she was an age where they were courting her, particularly the doctors. But she said, "I want somebody that respects women." And she had, my dad's sister was working as a nurse at the time, as well in the Pinoka Mental Hospital, where she was a supervisor. And she encouraged my mother to come with her to meet my father. And when they met, my mother discovered how much he respected women. And that was because he was taught by his grandmother, and of course, his mother, who had a Blackfoot heritage.

[02:08]

Actually, his grandmother was head of the Good Striker clan. Now, the Good Strikers were actually led by a woman, my grandmother. They were the warriors, but she was the clan mother. And so, as a clan mother, she had a relationship with the Sioux grandmothers.



And the Siouxs were always come to extend their land and their resources on Blackfoot territory. And the Blackfoot people were doing the same with the Siouxs. So they're continually fighting each other. And so, my grandmother also had Sioux heritage, because the grandmothers got together centuries before and they came into an agreement that their young men, their young studs, their strong men were all being killed in the wars between them. And the grandmothers decided that that was not right for both tribes to do that, because Mother Nature didn't have the males killing each other for territory. Mother Nature, particularly the wolves, did not kill each other for territory or females.

[04:24]

So they decided that they would learn from the wolves about battling their male battles for territory. And so, what they decided to do would be that the first warriors that would come out would have nothing but a coup stick. It's a stick that's straight with a hook on the end. And they'd ride into battle with just nothing but a coup stick. And then, they would wrestle with the other tribe that had coup sticks with each other until they could take the coup stick from the other person and then ride back. And so, then the chiefs would get together in a separate meeting and they would count the coup sticks. And whoever had the most coup sticks would negotiate the territory without killing anybody. And so that was my grandmother's tribe [*clan*], the Good Strikers, because they respected life. And that was the grandmothers' doing. And so she was the clan mother of the Good Strikers, my grandmother, my father's grandmother.

[06:10]

So I, I, my father took me to meet her when I was, when I was about five years old, because he felt that as a child I should meet my grandmother, whom he loved very much. My grandmother, when she saw that her people were starving, and particularly her clan, what she did was say, "I am going to seduce and marry the richest rancher in southern Alberta to feed my clan and my people." And so what she did was got on her horse and went hunting. And she found William Samuel Lee with thousands of head of cattle. And she seduced him and married him and adopted him into the tribe. And he became a member of the tribe. And so, she fed her people with, and she turned her tribe, her Good Strikers, into cowboys. So, they became cattle ranchers instead of warriors. And you will notice that the Good Strikers are always winning in the Calgary Stampede, because they're better cowboys than the cowboys [*laughter*].

[07:59]

When I was a five-year-old child, my father took me to meet my, to meet his grandmother. And she was living in a cabin at Rocky Mountain House with a, ah, he was actually, I believe, he was an Ojibwe elder. I'm not sure, but he was a Native elder. And when I was there, being just a child, I was tired from the long trip. And so she put me in a room, a private room, where it was sort of off limits. And that's where her husband had prayed and had his medicine bundle and all his pictures and all his tribal regalia was there. So, when I was there, I saw this medicine bundle in a, way back in a shelf. And just being a curious five-year-old, I took the medicine bundle out and I didn't know I was not to touch it, but I took the medicine bundle out and put it on the floor, which was a buffalo skin I was sitting on. And I opened it up and I saw all these art of really beautiful carvings, pipes, pipestones, and images carved out of pipestone, red pipestone and, and other tobacco pouches and things. And I took them all out, and I unwrapped every one of them and put them all around me. And, because I was so curious at a five-year-old about these objects, they were quite beautiful objects. And I was very curious.

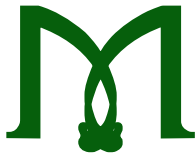
[10:54]

And then he came in the room, he says, "No one touches my medicine bundle, no one!" And he came to his, his wife and said, "Look at what your grandson is doing!" And she says, "Yes, I'm looking. When was the last time you opened up your medicine bundle? And when have you aired out your medicine bundle and prayed with all those souls?" And he said, "Well, it's been a while." And she says, "Right, it's been a while, and now it's opened. And now we should, we should have a prayer. We should share our prayers to all those little souls." And he says, "But he touched them all! No one touches my bag!" And she says to him, "Now you have to understand he's doing what is natural to him because my blood flows in his veins, and it's natural for him to do that. I would have done the same. It's time you opened your medicine bundle and said a prayer and said your prayers. It's time you should have done that. Shouldn't you?" And he said, "Yes, I should have." And he said, "But this is just a child." And she said, "Yes, he's not looking for anything, but it's just that his blood is flowing through my, through his veins. My blood is flowing through his veins, and he's doing something very natural to him. And one day, he's going to have his own medicine bundle. I predict that." And so she said, "Let us pray together on each one of these little souls you have here." And she said to me, "All of these are sacred little souls. They mean something very important, and I want you to listen to every word that I'm saying to you. I will speak in English because you don't know the language yet. I will speak in my language, and I'll speak in English, so you'll understand what I'm saying."

[13:54]

And so she made a prayer for each one because she knew the prayers for each one. And he, he would, after each prayer, he would say, "Aha, aha," saying, "Yes, that's the prayer." So, she was praying to each one. And then, she took the pipe out, the female pipe out, and she lit it. And then she sang, she sang a song in prayer. And then she gave the pipe to me to hold and to smoke. And she says, "You are now praying to our creator. And I'll say it in my language. You listen to my language. That's your language, too." And so, she had my father and me pray with her with one of the pipes that she had. Then she turned the pipe in the four directions and sat it in front of me. And she said, "That's the way we do it. And I want to be able to teach you one day about your culture in the way I taught your dad."

[15:45]



Personal Reflections on Muskogee Men and Matriculture: Transcript

JEFFREY GRAY

[lightly edited; please cite using time signatures]

Hi, I'm Jeff Gray and I grew up in West Texas in a little town called Lubbock, famous for the musician Buddy Holly. And my lineage is, you know, part Muskogee. My ancestors on the Muskogee side came from Oklahoma. And there's a little longer story about my great-grandmother who was murdered and how my relatives ended up in Texas after that murder. And then on the other side, on the Muskogee side, it goes way back all the way to a guy called Red Eagle or William Weatherford, who was half Scottish and half Muskogee. And his father was from a Scottish clan. And the Scots actually were a lot of Scots in Alabama and the Carolinas that had basically left Scotland after the Cromwell opposition. And they had left because they wanted to set up a clan way of life, and so, when the Scots got into the Carolinas and Alabamas, they mixed quite well with the Native peoples. And because William Weatherford's father was an expert with horses, then he was adopted into this Muskogee tribe and married the chief's daughter. And then his son, Red Eagle, was the result of that. So, it's a mixed, from all the way back, it was a mix. And then on my mother's side, it was primarily Irish and Scottish, and the Irish came over in the famine. So yes, so basically my Muskogee side were in Oklahoma until very recently. And then after



the murder of my great-grandmother, they, some relatives brought them down to Texas and that's how I ended up in West Texas.

[02:00]

You know, as I'd said earlier, my very distant ancestor, Red Eagle or William Weatherford, he actually fought in the war against Andrew Jackson. It was the War of 1812, and he was aligned with a gentleman called Tecumseh, which he was Shawnee, and Tecumseh means a panther in the sky or basically a comet. So, after the war, he was pardoned by Andrew Jackson. And then my great-grandmother, the story was, and there's some, you know, speculation was that she was murdered by the lover of her husband. And it was, so it was a dispute there, where apparently this, her husband's lover came in and murdered her. And then once that happened, then the relatives, there were some relatives that were living in Texas and, and they heard about this. So, they went up to Oklahoma and gathered up the youngest children, which was, one of them was my grandmother, Minnie Weatherford, and they brought them down to Texas to take care of them. And I still have some relatives that are part of the Muskogee tribe up there. I think one of her older brothers, who was like seventeen or eighteen at the time of the murder, he stayed there and became integrated into the Muskogee tribe. But my great-grandmother and my grandmother relocated down to Texas. So that's that story.

[03:41]

It was my grandfather and grandmother, Minnie Weatherford and William Gray. And they, because I guess... it was interesting about William, his mother, he was Irish, but his mother was part of something called New Fredonia, which was a group in Texas that were into cultural equality. So, they had formed a little community in Texas to promote racial equality, social equality, you know, Native American, Black, Hispanic, whatever was in this tribe. So, that was my grandfather's mother. She was Mary Fredonia, named after the Fredonians. And so, he brought that cultural element when he married Minnie Weatherford, the Muskogee. And he actually was practicing some of their shamanic, I'm assuming he learned it from, from Minnie's relatives. But he was a fiddle player and also sort of, you call it a medicine man or he knew all the herbs and different cures from the Muskogee that he had learned, although he was Irish. But part of that is, you know, when you understand his background coming from Mary Fredonia and these people that were really seeking out an idealistic community. So, that was a big influence on me, was that coupling. And she was also active in a sense, but was more in the background, which I've found is very typical.

[05:40]

I've spent a lot of time on reserves out in Manitoba and, and Saskatchewan. And one of the things I noticed was the women tend to be in the background, but not silent. So, their presence is, it's interesting, I mean, they're definitely a force and an energy, but it's not as outspoken as typically the male. And so, that relationship with my grandfather and grandmother was this, he had adopted the information customs of that tribe and they worked in tandem. And so I got exposed to a lot of that just growing up. And you know, it was, I don't know, it would just, also for me, it just seemed very authentic, compared to some of the other sides of the family, which were very racist and, and very overly masculine. I just attached and attracted to that soft-spokenness of that couple.

[07:04]

It's a little town in Lubbock. It was West Texas, kind of more of a ranch type of culture versus, you know, Eastern Texas was more your old South, whereas the part I grew up in was more ranch and farm type country. My dad was a plumber. And so he just didn't like to talk about the Native side of things. I got that from my grandfather and grandmother. So, I would say just growing up, I led a very sheltered life. When I was born, I went up, they don't quite know half an hour, maybe an hour without oxygen. My mother had, I guess something had happened, she was bleeding excessively. And my father was actually out of town. He was very psychic. And he just, he was working on an oil rig down in the Permian Basin. And he just on a whim, just got in his truck and drove back to Lubbock and found my mother almost dead on the floor, rushed her to the hospital. And so when I got, when I was born, I hadn't had oxygen for quite a while. And so they were, basically they said I would probably was going to be brain damaged or something. And so, that was for me as a young child, that was kind of like my get-out-of-jail-free card, where I didn't talk till I was seven. And it was like this wonderful little world where I didn't have to interact or talk because, you know, I wasn't expected to. And so, I'd say my first seven years were very much a living dream time.

[09:05]

Dreaming was extremely powerful. Out-of-body experiences, all of that stuff was just, um, was what I lived for. And I, there was these dream teachers that would come to me and I would, I spent most of my time in this imaginary world, you know, communicating with dogs and not speaking until finally I had to speak. And, [laughs] but I just didn't really want to! And also I have memory of birth! Before birth, actually, it was with my grandfather. And it was, I want to say it was, I was born in September. So, this was either late July or August when my mother, father, and older sister were visiting my grandfather, and my grandmother had passed away by then. Or no, no, yeah, yeah. My great-grandmother had passed away. So, visiting my grandfather and grandmother, and I actually have a memory

of this event being in the womb. And I later discussed that with my father and, you know, explained to him all of the details of that. And I don't know, I don't think I ever heard that story, right, to that level of detail. But so that was kind of my first seven years was, you know, very little interaction with the culture or Dreamtime, I mean, or anything other than just being in this other world. And then I think it was about that time, about seven or so, that my grandfather and grandmother had moved back to Lubbock. He had retired, and I spent a lot of time with them.

[11:08]

They had a little house. He was starting to get arthritis and be crippled. And so I spent, I say from seven to about eighteen, seventeen or eighteen when he passed away, I spent a lot of time taking care of him and then listening to him and getting information from him and just basically being around the two of them and just their influence on me. On both sides of the family, you know, a lot of these psychic abilities; my dad was just amazing. He was a plumbing contractor, but he would basically bid up a job, right. He'd go bid for, to do the high school or whatever, and many times right before he would submit his contract bid, which, you know, the lowest bidder would get the job. He would dream the exact number of the bid and bid at \$1 under. And he did this a lot. And it was just like, that was kind of normal for him, this dream time. And with him and my grandfather I spent a lot of interaction in the dream. My father almost never spoke, but we communicated, we talked, we'd meet in the dream. And that's where most of my interaction with him verbally occurred or whatever that state is when you're in dream time.

[12:49]

I do believe that these abilities, you know, call them psychic, call them whatever, sixth sense, that we all have it. But you know, certain cultures promote it, and certain cultures, like my grandmother on my mother's side was a strict Southern Baptist, and she was extremely psychic, but she was against it. It was like afraid of it and against, it was like the devil and the devil was hiding behind, you know, when I'd visit her I got baptized seven times. So, when I would be visiting her, I mean, she really believed this. Like she said, you know, the devil, he's right behind that bush over there. And so, a lot of, I think on one side was this culture and these abilities were feared because of this extreme Christianity. And on the other side, it was just accepted and lived.

[13:53]

When my dad was younger, they would make trips up to Oklahoma, and he was telling the story when he went up to, went up to Oklahoma that his, one of his, I think great-aunts, that they would go up there and they would make tribal drums and she actually helped

them make a canoe, a birch bark canoe. And they would go up there and, and spend time with, I think it was his great-aunt because my great-grandmother had been murdered. So, they would spend time up there, learning this traditional stuff. And then, and I actually, that drum that they made, I was able to keep that. And in terms of the other stories, it was just a lot of stories about going up to that area and learning, you know, how to make, how to make a drum, how to make a canoe. And then, the different herbs and stuff. I guess this aunt was really into a lot of the different herbs and they would learn about that. And yeah, so, basically, my two sisters and they were, we were all interested in the Muskogee, the Native American side of the family because we'd hear the stories. And I would say more what I got from them was just the actions, the behaviors, the stories of visiting the relatives up in Oklahoma. I think that's it, more living the spirituality.

[15:54]

It was like, don't talk about it, live it. That type of mentality and, and especially from my grandfather was just very much like that. It was like, well, I'm not here to try to convince you of anything, I'm living my spirituality. This is who I am. I know who I am. And I'm going to be who I'm going to be. And I don't need to tell people about it. I don't need to, you know, to try to go convince anybody and just watch my behavior. And if you like what you see, then emulate that. And if you don't, it doesn't matter. So, that was very much the, yeah, the mantra that I experienced.

[16:46]

In terms of experiencing some of the racial aspects... I remember, I think it was first or second grade, I had become very good friends with a young, you know, young boy my age in the same grade. And his father was, I think the superintendent of the school system. So pretty upwardly mobile. And I remember one time we were spending a lot of time together and then he came up to me and said, "My dad said, we can't be friends anymore because of this Indigenous side of your family." And so that hurt, because I mean, we were just, you know, how it is when, when you're like six, seven, eight, it was like, we were just best friends and did everything together. And then, yeah, so, there was that. And then, there in the family get-togethers and stuff, there was one side of the family that basically the, when my grandparents would go visit, they'd have to drive in through the back way, so the neighbors wouldn't see them coming in and stuff like that, where it was, wasn't even subtle. They, we, especially in our teenage years, that all three of us really bonded around this identity.

[18:25]

And also, so let's see, this would have been like late sixties, early seventies. And at that time in the United States, there was a cultural renaissance going on with Martin Luther King and, and the civil rights movement and also just culturally a lot of the music. So being of Indigenous background actually became kind of cool at that point. You know, like, I don't know, people probably won't remember, but Kris Kristofferson, who wrote *Me and Bobby McGee*, he was married to Rita Coolidge, who was a member of the Cherokee tribe. And you know, so there was this whole cultural renaissance, not just Indigenous people, but starting to celebrate people of different ethnicities. And I think a lot of it, it was a whole movement, but I attribute a lot of it to Dr. King. I mean, he, that movement was incredible. So by that time, I'd say by the, by our early teens with my sisters, we were all very proud of this heritage and started learning as much as we could about it and participating and learning some ceremonies, sweat lodge ceremonies and different things like that. My younger sister, her, I'm more in touch with her son and, and he's very much, I mean, I, when I find out information about, like, I wasn't even aware of my relationship to Red Eagle or William Weatherford until, I don't know, maybe ten years ago.

[20:18]

I'd always just heard different stories, but I, an aunt of mine, or I guess our second or third cousin, she's the one that got me the information and showed me the lineage chart of Minnie Weatherford back up a couple, back to Red Eagle. And so I was able to share this with my nephew and he was really excited, so whenever I get information about our heritage, I share that with him and also a lot of my cousins on that side, they're very interested because I've been the one that's really more researching the genealogy and the history, but because as I was saying earlier, they didn't talk much about it because in part trying to hide that link, should just more fit into, you know, into the society at that time.

[21:28]

When we met Linnéa [*Rowlatt, editor of Matrix*] in Ottawa and then Kristine and I had been adopted into a tribe in Manitoba, Ojibwe tribe, and by an elder named Dorothy Francis. And we got adopted by Hugh and Margaret McKay. And when we got up there, I explained to them, look, I wasn't raised on the reserve, but, I had this incredible influence from my grandparents and just this need to try to want to reclaim, try to re-understand that cultural aspect. And they were going through the same thing. And so I think that was one of the reasons they were welcoming to me. My wife, Kristine, her lineage is Saami or Laplander. And it was interesting because they totally related to her as well. They had mythologies about, that predated European culture about those people, you know, the Reindeer People and somehow they knew about that. And so when we were getting involved with the Waywayseecappo Reserve, they were also trying to reclaim this. So part

of, I think why they accepted myself and Kristine is because this was showing here's some people who had lost a lot of their cultural identity and we were going back to try to understand it more and so bringing us into their community, it sort of showed the people there on the reserve that there was this interest, you know, these like myself, what we call, in Canada you call it Métis, but I'm, in the U.S. we'd be called breeds, like half-breed or breed. And so us going up there and being very much wanting to try to learn as much as we could about that culture because I'd felt like I had been denied that experience, the direct experience of that. And so it was really a good experience up there because I think it was kind of a symbiotic kind of relationship where us exploring and trying to understand more about the culture also helped a lot of the younger people there have more interest in it because why would somebody like this, why would we be interested in their culture? And so I know that Huey, *Mishomis*, he talked to me about that and he was trying to get his tribe, his people, more interested in their cultures. And so, that was sort of this relationship.

[24:40]

Certainly, you know, I've had mostly experience, here in the U.S. and up in Canada and for sure there's this broader movement, especially within patriarchal societies to try to reclaim that cultural element. And I think either intuitively or maybe objectively, people understand the value of that in our society. And one of the interesting, this is kind of an antidote [sic], but Thomas Jefferson was a big fan of, a student of, Indigenous cultures. He actually had this incredible archive of information. And so, when they started to frame the original Constitution of the United States and the separation of powers, that all came from his study of the Iroquoian alliance, who had a similar system set up of executive, legislative, and judicial. And the interesting thing about this Iroquoian alliance is that the judicial system, which would be the equivalent of our Supreme Court here in the United States, was a hundred percent comprised of the matriarchy. And so the executive and the legislative were male. They could create the laws and do the same thing that we do here in the United States with that. But the ultimate authority in that society was, it was a group of grandmothers, a hundred percent female, who could veto or negate any one of these legislative items. And it was an incredible system. I mean, it worked for hundreds of years. They, you know, that it was this peaceful renaissance, I think it was over a hundred years of peace that the Iroquoian alliance had when they had this system of government. So there's some practicality to understanding the matriarchy and in its place. And I personally think if our Supreme Court in the United States was patriarchal, that we would be in a much better state.

[27:02]

That's a good question, you know, the influence of, you know, strong matriarchal on a man, on a male. And I would say, for myself, I just resonated to that aspect because it, I guess it allowed me the freedom to understand my feminine more and to see the strength of that femininity, which is, you know, half of my identity. And it's kind of hard to explain, but I felt like there was a balance that I didn't see in a very patriarchal society, which is toxic and also unhealthy, physically unhealthy, mentally unhealthy, um, to when you go an extreme, when you don't have a balance. And so I saw that extreme toxic masculinity all around me. And I feel like having these relationships with my grandmother and that side of the family and with my grandfather and my father, because they were all influenced by that.

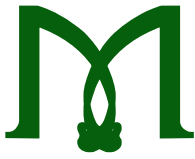
[28:33]

It was more of an acknowledgment that we could embrace our feminine side and create a balance. And yeah, so, I really, I think that any matriarchal society is going to afford that to its people and that balance and the imbalance is, is that it creates disease and it creates pathologies and I mean, my gosh, you just have to look at the current United States and it's like it creates that, lack of it creates what we're experiencing today in the United States. And so, from more of a extreme on the other side, it's like, why would... without it, you get what we're experiencing today in the U.S., which is, it is just, you know, is seriously problematic. And I don't know, I mean, it's, it's not good for anybody. It's not good for men. It's not good for women.

[29:43]

It was like, I remember in the seventies, when the women's rights movement was coming along. Of course, my sisters were very much into that, and I was, and my mother. And so, in our little circle, it was my two sisters, my grandmother was still alive, my mother, and then myself and my father. So, it was a four-to-six ratio of women to men. And, I remember thinking, just kind of doing some critical thinking about it, and going, "What's good for the matriarchy is actually good for me." Because in my little pod, four-sixths of us were female, and so this is going to benefit my pod for sure, and all other pods. So, yeah, as a young adult, that was kind of my takeaway when the feminist movement started: one hundred percent behind that; still am.

[30:54]



Personal Reflections on Tlingit Men and Matriculture: Transcript

KAI MONTURE KÁAKH'UTXHÉICH

[lightly edited; please cite using time signatures]

[Speaking Tlingit] Káak'utxhéich is what my grandmother named me. [Speaking Tlingit] She also gave me the name Ikahaka. [Speaking Tlingit] We come from Tsisk'w Hít, the Owl House. [Speaking Tlingit] My clan is called Gineixkwaan, and we also are called Kwaashkikwaan and Ikahakwaan. [Speaking Tlingit] We come from Yaakwdáat, also known as the village of Yakutat in Alaska. [Speaking Tlingit] My mother's mother was called Chew Shaa, or Elaine Abraham. [Speaking Tlingit] I'm the grandchild of the L'uknax.adi clan, and my grandfather was named Uxt'akhu'ish, George Ramos. [Speaking Tlingit] My outer shell are the Teikweidi clan. *Gunalchéesh*. Thank you.

[01:37]

Some of the really important events in my life were when my family, my mother, my sister, and I moved back to Yakutat, our village and traditional homeland of our people on our Tlingit side. I was ten years old when we moved back to Yakutat, and it's when my reconnection to my Tlingit culture really began. We had stayed in touch with my grandparents while we were living in British Columbia when I was a child, but I only got some small bits and pieces of my Tlingit culture and language. But our home village of



Yakutat is a place where Tlingit culture and language are still really strong, and where my grandparents were well known as culture and language bearers.

[02:51]

I got to start learning directly from my grandparents and was raised, especially by my grandmother, in Tlingit *kusteeyí*, the Tlingit way of life, and was also able to learn in our traditional dance group, the Yakutat Mount Saint Elias Dancers. We perform traditional Tlingit song and dance from the five clans of the Yakutat area, and a lot of the songs we still perform today are over a thousand years old. My grandfather, George Ramos, was the leader of that dance group for over thirty years, I believe, and I was also lucky to learn from other elders, my other grandmothers in my clan, Nellie Lord and Lena Farkas, who ran an after-school Tlingit language program when I was a kid. So, I learned a lot from them as well, and also had lots of other grandmas and aunties that I learned a lot from growing up, and I still consider Yakutat to be my home, even though I'm now living in the city of Juneau, and I love to travel back there whenever possible to see family and friends and participate in our cultural events, our *ku.éex'*, or potlatches, and everything else that happens back home with my people.

[04:55]

My grandmother was the biggest teacher for me in connecting to our family history and our ancestry. She was very traditional, and genealogy was a big traditional value to know and understand, so from a very young age she started teaching me our family lineage through Tsisk'w Hít, the Owl House, and Gineixkwaan, our clan, and she could trace the lineage and family tree of our clan back at least eight generations, I believe, and that's an important aspect of our culture because we believe in reincarnation. So, the names we're born with are the names that belong to family members or ancestors that passed on before us. So, she gave me the name Káak'utxhéich, which came from her uncle, George Bremner, who was really close to her as a child and a really important person in her life. We still practice that tradition of passing on our clan names and holding them within our clan.

[06:34]

She also taught me our clan history. Our clan, the Gineixkwaan, were originally Ahtna Athabaskan people from Copper River, and over twelve hundred years ago, we split off from our original Athabaskan clan, and we began migrating south over a period of a few hundred years, and this all happened during the last ice age, so our clan was walking over the top of glaciers for much of this migration, and we became intermarried and intermixed

with the Eyak people for a long time, and then we moved even further south into the Yakutat area where we became intermixed with the Tlingit people and eventually adopted Tlingit language and culture. But we still carry and hold on to our history as Athabaskan people originally, and we still have songs, stories, and names that come from our Ahtna ancestors as well as our Eyak ancestors, and our culture even today is a very unique mix of Ahtna, Eyak, and Tlingit. And my grandmother really taught me how important it is to hold on to that history and to carry it on as we went through many, many hardships in our migration, and we still have songs, mourning songs that mourn for the people we lost along the way. I've been happy that two years ago I got to visit Copper River for the first time and to meet my Ahtna ancestors. And it was a really powerful reconnection for me because I had just had my grandma's stories up until that point, but to actually walk on the land there and meet my most ancient ancestors that still live there was a really powerful spiritual and emotional experience for me. And I'm really grateful that my grandma passed on all that history to me.

[09:27]

I was born in Ottawa, Ontario, in Canada on March 4th, 1990. My mother is Tlingit and Filipino from Yakutat, and my father is Kanienkehaka, the Mohawk tribe from the Six Nations Reservation in Canada. And I grew up around British Columbia, mostly in Haida Gwaii in the village of Masset up until I was eight years old, and we also lived in Kamloops for a while, too. One of the earliest memories I have actually is my mom pointing towards Alaska and telling me that's where my grandma and grandpa lived, and I remember trying to wave and say "Hi" to them, like thinking they would somehow hear me all the way from Haida Gwaii. We spoke mainly English, but my grandparents spent a lot of time teaching me the language. With my grandmother, I got to a conversational level of fluency. So, there would be times when we'd be speaking in Tlingit maybe about half the time, but not full time.

[11:07]

Speaking from my Tlingit culture, there is a big difference between your mother's family and your father's family because of our moiety system. Half our clans fall under Yéil, the Raven side, and the other half fall under Ch'áak, the Eagle side, and they're considered to be opposite but equal, and balance between the two moieties is a really important aspect to our culture. Our rule is that you have to marry someone from the opposite side of you because everyone on your own side is considered family. I come from the Yéil, the Raven side, so all the other people that come from Raven clans, even if we don't share any blood, I still consider them to be a brother or sister because we're from the same moiety, and even if they're from a clan that's hundreds of miles away from Yakutat, if they're a Raven

clan, then they are still a sibling to me. Because of that cultural aspect, your father is usually from the opposite moiety as you with his family, and when we introduce ourselves, we call ourselves the children of his clan. Or in my father's case, his tribe, so I would introduce myself as "*Kanienkehaka yatki hatsiti*; I am the child of the Kanienkehaka, the Mohawk tribe."

[13:24]

But you're raised in your own clan, and you're born into your clan through your mother's side, so we're a matrilineal culture, so everything, all my clan history and practices, the core of my identity comes from my mother's side, and from our house lineage, *Tsisk'w Hít*, the Owl House, or family relations. Our maternal aunties, we use the term *ax tlaak*, which means 'my little mother.' So, maternal aunts, we don't call them aunts, we call them 'other mothers,' basically, 'little mothers,' and, yeah, the children of your maternal aunts are just like brothers and sisters to you. We don't have a term for cousins. So, everyone in the same clan is considered family, the same, like, blood lineage. But we hold high reverence for our father's side, for who we're the children of, and anyone from your father's clan, you treat them culturally like as another parent to you. Even if it's someone younger than you, you still kind of give the same respect and acknowledgment of them being a father to you, and we give the same acknowledgment to our grandfather's clan, too, anyone. My grandfather came from the Chookaneidí clan, so anyone from that clan, even a little child, I would still address them as a grandparent. Your in-laws are also given that same kind of respect, say, *ax káani yán*, my brothers-in-law, so anyone from the clan that you're married to, or that one of your sisters is married to, you give a lot of respect to and address all of them as in-laws.

[16:30]

Traditionally, as a man, there was a big relationship between you and your maternal uncle. In the olden times, once you reach the age of six-and-a-half to seven years old, your maternal uncle would become your, the primary person to raise you. There's a few different reasons for that. One is that our ancestors believed that your parents could spoil you too much or not discipline you enough, and that's tied into your father being the opposite clan of you as well. Traditionally, your father can't discipline you or mistreat you because he's not the same clan as you, he's the opposite clan. And, *wooch yáx*, the respect between the opposite clans is like a number one rule for us. You have to treat your people from the opposite moiety with the utmost respect and love. So, traditionally, your father can't be too strict or harsh with you. They're just culturally obligated to give you love and support. It becomes your maternal uncle's duty to be the one to discipline you, to give you structure, and to raise you to be strong and resilient.

[18:44]

Your uncle was the one to raise you to become a warrior in the olden days. So, the training with your uncle would be really tough in the olden days. As soon as the sun rises, your uncle would wake you up and tell you to go run into the ocean, into the water. Cold water dips were a really essential part of our warrior training, becoming conditioned to the cold and becoming resilient against it. So, you would have to stay in the cold water as long as you could stand it, and then when you come out of the water, your uncle whips you with alder or willow branches on the chest. And part of the reason was to build up calluses and scars to toughen you up. But it also helped in bringing back your blood circulation. Boys that grew up to be the strongest warriors would lean their face forward so they could get whipped in the face. The cold-water dipping is something we still practice today, but we don't do the whipping part.

[20:15]

It has been a goal of mine over the last three years to bring back traditional Tlingit warrior training, because as far as I know, it hasn't been practiced for about five generations. My grandfather was the last person in Yakutat who was raised by his uncle in the traditional way. But he didn't go through the warrior training; he went mainly through subsistence and cultural training. It's something that's only exists right now for us through oral history mainly. Over the years, I've been trying to support our women with things like MMIWG (Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls), and how much gender-based violence our people go through. I really realized how unhealthy our boys and men have become from intergenerational trauma and from toxic masculinity that's been put upon us because of colonization. And I realized that we have very few role models for positive, healthy Tlingit masculinity because so many of our men are in these toxic cycles, and so many of them are in the prison system. There's just a lot of problems and things to heal and cycles to break right now.

[22:39]

And I was inspired by all the stories and history my grandfather had taught me about traditional warrior training and most especially the Tlingit warrior code. It was something my grandfather liked to teach a lot to the youth and to our dance group. The warrior code was a set of five rules that the *xeigaa káa* lived by. *Xeigaa káa* was our title for a really high-level warrior, and it translates to 'true or authentic man or person.' *Xeigaa* means 'authentic.' The five rules they had to live by were, number one, never make yourself heavier than the person you're with. In the Tlingit culture, 'heavier' means more

important or more valuable. So yeah, never make yourself more valuable than the person you're with. Number two is always be humble with the person you're with. I personally translate that as, you have to have outer humility and inner humility in balance. Rule number three is reach out for the hand of the person next to you and lift them up. So be of service to the people that need it. Rule number four is always protect the person you're with. So, that's always being prepared and ready to defend your people. Rule number five is if you're wounded, and you know you're going to die, then fight to your last breath. That's what we called the *xeigaa káa yugatangi*, the 'words of the true person or the authentic man.' My dream, my vision, is to use that warrior code as a foundation for raising the next generation of my people to be supporters and caretakers and to participate in community service, to try and break the cycles of violence against our women and girls and to try and heal intergenerational trauma.

[25:45]

So, for about two years now, I've been working with a group of my brothers and my sister and we have an advisory council of Tlingit matriarchs and grandmas and aunties that are guiding us in what are the most essential values and teachings we need to bring back for the next generation as part of warrior training. And we're hoping to be able to start these warrior training groups in all of our communities. Though we're mainly Tlingit culture-based, the group has already become inter-tribal. One of my brothers in the group is UnangaĶ, or Aleut, and that was a really important thing that happened that I wasn't expecting. But I'm really grateful that he joined us because traditionally, our tribes used to war against each other for, like, hundreds and hundreds of years, and we were really bitter enemies for a long time. But coming together like this, I think is a really beautiful healing thing for our cultures because we can train as warriors to protect each other instead of fighting each other. My brother-in-law, who is a Māori, is also a member of the group and he's been a really huge supporter and brought a lot of beautiful teachings from his people. I'm really grateful we have so many supporters and allies, especially from other tribes and cultures, giving us guidance and mentorship and just tons of love and support and trying to make this dream come real.

[28:23]

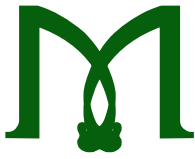
I'm really, really grateful that I had the opportunity to be raised in traditional Tlingit matriarchy by my grandmother, my mother, and all my aunties. It really instilled in me my ancestors' value, values on how the women and girls in our clan are our most precious, precious members and how they carry our future by being mothers. My whole identity—my name, my membership in my clan and house—all comes from the women in my lineage and my ancestors, going back to time immemorial. All the most important parts of

my upbringing and training in my culture and language, all came from the women in my life. I'm really grateful for the privilege of that because I know not many men in our tribe get to experience the same thing right now because of colonization. I was really, really lucky to have two traditional grandparents to raise me with these traditional values, but because of colonization and intergenerational trauma that's come from it, many, many of our boys and men go without that. And it definitely manifests into toxic masculinity and acting in a patriarchal way over the traditional matriarchal way.

[31:31]

And I hope that our warrior training group, Toowu Latseen, can be part of the solution, but I know it will take a lot more than that. There's lots of healing that my people have to go through, and some of this healing work is probably going to take a few generations to happen. And I know not everyone will choose to be healed or are ready to be healed, but I feel focusing on our youth is the best thing we can do. And giving them the tools and the knowledge they need to break these cycles is the best we can do. And I try and hold on to the fact that my ancestors used to make decisions thinking up to, like, seven generations into the future. It wasn't just about themselves or what would happen in their lifetimes, but what's going to happen generations from now when you're long gone. And I try and think about that a lot and try and call on my ancestors, all the powerful women that came before me, and the ones that I learned from, especially my grandmother Chew Shaa, for guidance. Yeah, I just hope and dream that every day we can restore the traditional Tlingit matriarchy. And the more that we restore it, the more our people will heal, and the more of our *toowú latseen*, our inner strength, will come back with that.

[34:16]



Personal Reflections on UnangaĀ (Aleut) Men and Matriculture: Transcript

CARTER PRICE

[lightly edited; please cite using time signatures]

[Greeting in the UnangaĀ language]. My name is Carter Price. I'm from Unalaska, Alaska, which is a small island on the Aleutian chain off of Alaska. And that's where my ancestors come from; we're UnangaĀ. That's where my wife and her family come from. She's UnangaĀ. And yeah, so the UnangaĀ side of who I am is from my mom's side, and her grandmother, and her mom.

[00:36]

And as a kid, I always knew I was Alaska Native. I always knew that was part of my identity, but not until about, I think, about high school timeframe, is when I really started to, like, think and realize, oh, this is part of my identity. How do I want to, do I want to reconnect? Or, you know, you get on this life path, and you have these choices like reconnection, or, you know, choose something that you, maybe you're passionate about. And that was really the time I started doing that. And a lot of family values come from just my grandmother and her home. Like, my grandmother, her nickname was 'Honey,' which is everyone called her: Honey. That's how I knew her growing up, and I never called her by her first name. But she, she really was a strong woman in the sense of, like, caring for her



family, caring for her community. She was a health worker that would travel to smaller communities as well. So, I saw that, the tenderness and caring, like, really, really closely, and I think that stuck with me. Growing up, her home was a place of, like, safety, and we'd always have family dinners, and we'd always, you know, she taught me about, like, fishing. You bring the fish home, we can cut it together and cook it right then and there. And she just always was willing to provide however she could. And that always stuck with me, just one of the kindest people I'll ever, you know, know.

[02:37]

And so that's where it starts. And I think that language wasn't huge, because she went to boarding schools when she was a child. And the language was, you know, taken from her, and that passed down to my mother as well to us. But what she really, really focused on was subsistence, food, gathering together, and being, like, a safe, safe space with our family. So, our family was always, you know, our, our center. And so that's where it started for me, just being able to fish and provide for my family as much as I could, as you know, a young child, always wanting to be on the beach and whatnot, but then spending time with my grandmother, my mom, picking berries at her secret berry spot. You know, those memories stick with me, like, so, so, so much.

[03:44]

Yeah, so yeah, in the Unanga culture, it's a little different. We don't have clans or systems like that. We claim our mothers, like, I'll let people know, if they're familiar with the region, like, yeah, my family's the McGlashan family. That's my grandma Honey's, last name. And, or, yeah, I'm related to the Bear family. That's my grandmother's maiden last name. And it clicks with people. They know the family names and gives them a sense of connection early on, if that's what we're talking about. I was born in Anchorage, but I was raised on Unalaska Island, and that's where my grandmother, my aunties, and family lived. So really, really close by, like down the hill, maybe a ten-minute walk, I'd pass by her house walking to school in the morning. Walking back home from school, I'd pass by and say "Hi." And yeah, so really close, really close in relationship.

[05:00]

Yeah, my traditional tattoos are, represent my mother's family on her side. So, my mom has these tattoos, my sisters has these tattoos, I have them. But my wife is also Unanga. So, her tattoos, my son will take on those. And like my sister, if she has kids, her children will have our family tattoos. So, I did, I forgot to point that out earlier. But, yeah, it's something special, and represents who we are. I think it's really cool, because my sister and my mom made the design themselves, looking through old textbooks and whatnot.

For them, that was like ceremony for them, being able to design or what represents our family, what's going to represent our family down the line, and really special. A lot of designs, you know, are familial, even not just only tattoos, but also in the basket designs; the art you see as well. We live in Wasilla, which is an hour north of Anchorage, but her (*Carter's wife*) whole family, where she grew up, was in Anchorage. And so, she has really strong familial ties, and we visit, you know, as much as we can. Her parents have been so helpful with like raising our son and giving us time, you know, if we need a babysitter, they'll watch him. Yeah, she has lots of aunties, uncles that are just in and out of Anchorage and family dinners. We actually, this winter, we started going to our local semi-pro hockey games. All of her aunties are always there having a good time. And one of her cousins plays for the hockey team. But um, it's just a fun time for family to come together and we all sit in the same section in their arena. And it's, you know, families, family is huge for us.

[07:14]

For me, I was separated, not separated from my family, but I was living in Anchorage. The rest of my family was in Onalaska. And for some time, you know, I was alone, and I just didn't have that sense of community until I met my wife. And spending time with her family, also being UnangaĀ, you know, I saw the importance of the family and dinners, cooking, and, you know, I always, I like clung on to that. That was so important.

[07:46]

My wife, Chloe always mentions that he's [*Carter's son*] a, he's a 'dada's boy.' And he very much is very, ah, he loves being around 'dada' and always has me picking him up. But I think as my role as his father, it's making sure I give him the right tools and the right tools to pursue whatever passion he wants in the future, whether it's something like playing the guitar or reconnecting with his culture or starting the foundation of just connection to culture. I think that is super important. And just really creating, my goal is if I could create a son that loves his family, respects his wife, cares about his culture, I think, Chloe and I could say we did a good job. But we've done our best, surrounding him by culture, bringing him to dance practice, our traditional dance practice. When he was a young baby, small, we were taking a language course together, our traditional language course, and he would sit and listen with us. And we try our best to speak it around him as well. And I think just surrounding him by his culture, and empowering him to be strong, strong in different senses, not just physical, but, you know, spiritual and mental. And if he could be strong in those areas, I think we've done a good job.

[09:39]

Yeah, traditionally, just from the notes and journals that, you know, these explorers took, it was the uncles at a certain age, maybe, I think, like past five, is when the uncles would take the children, as well as the aunties, if it was a girl. And then they would teach them the ways of, the importance of providing or basketry was big for the women, teaching the young women how to create baskets, or sew, or cook and things like that. But as for the uncles' side, it would, they would be my wife's brothers. And they would train or teach *acigakuq*, important life lessons, which I think is a cool, cool way of being. I wish my uncle and my mom's side passed away when I was a baby, but I think it would have been really cool to learn from him. He was a really good fisherman. And I think it would have been an amazing experience to spend more time with him.

[10:53]

I think the term that I've been taught or learned through some of my classes is like reimagining ceremony. And I'm currently in the process of doing that with some of the work I do, but it's taking what you know, from the past, taking what you've experienced, and then also looking forward to reimagine ceremony for the future generations without trying to change it completely, but just integrating them both and, and really, because people like saying like, "If our ancestors had our technology, they would have, they would have used it, they would have created something more beautiful or have similar ideas as us." And I think it's important to do that.

[11:48]

And so yeah, it's all about reclaiming and, you know, doing our best with what we have. From just my knowledge and readings and research I've done, there was a pretty, not structured, but men were providers, hunters. But the women would provide the sewing to for their clothing, as well as their kayaks. Everyone is a part of that process. But from what I know, I don't think there were much women hunters. But of course, today, those rules have broken. And if we're able to preserve the culture, and if there's people that are interested or willing, we're open to that. And I know there, there are also recognized two-spirited people in our culture. And oftentimes, they were spiritually powerful, not necessarily shamans, but very, very intellectually grounded in the spiritual realm.

[13:00]

I think it will, it'll touch a soft spot in who I am that I maybe not even know yet. But I think just the relationship I have with my son, we're very active, we like to play outside. We like to have fun, play with cars. And he's such a boy, like, he loves car tires and playing in the dirt. And I think it would be so cool to see just the passions of my daughter, my future daughter, and seeing how she [is] similar to myself, as well as my wife. My wife's an

amazing artist. She uses traditional materials and does contemporary earrings and art. I have some of her art on the wall behind me as well. And it's just, I would just love to, you know, see that be brought up out of her. And like, I already know if you know, if I had a daughter, she would, I would just spoil her so much. *[laughs]* Just do my best to protect her.

[14:19]

Yeah, I think the mindset might change because I'm obviously, you know, I don't feel the same. I don't have the same experiences as a female. But I know how I can protect or create a safe environment for my wife, future daughter. So, I know the things that I can do. And if I can just do that for them, I would be happy. And I obviously can't teach my daughter about periods, I've never had one or what pregnancy is or feels like, but I have the experience and outside perspective to share as much as I can, but I'm like, I'm not going to teach, if that makes sense. I think there's ceremony in the small things like cooking and berry picking. There's, really, there's something spiritual about being out on the land or just in silence with Mother Nature and harvesting and providing in that sense. I think there's ceremony in doing those ri-, it could be considered rituals other than like, a task or a hobby. It's providing for your family.

[15:45]

The funny thing is, so my wife introduced me to the Anchorage Unanga Dancers. They've been a dance group for, it was revitalized in the nineties. Our dance coordinator, our dance instructor, they were a part of the revitalization of dance, the Unanga dance for quite a while. We say it went to sleep. It was taken from us during the boarding school times and colonial times, when our language went away as well. But my wife actually introduced me to that group. Oh no, forgive me. My friend, Dustin, introduced me to the group. He invited me and that's where I met my wife. She was the most beautiful dancer, and I couldn't stop staring at her. I just fell in love with her dance movements. And just for me, it was incredibly empowering to hear the drums, to see the movements of our ancestors and hear the language, it's so empowering and it just pulls so much emotion out of you.

[17:14]

For my experience, I mean, I was in a similar situation, just at that point in time, when I was invited, I was going to school, a little disconnected, a little antisocial. Like, I hadn't met Chloe and her family yet. So, I was separated from my family, but seeing community and focused around our culture, that was something I just, I wanted to hold on to. And like I said, the emotions and empowerment that it felt seeing people be proud of their culture,

wear the regalia, is so important. And it made me want to join the dance group. And I started drumming and practicing, and it's just being a part of community is so important. I mean, you meet people that you would have never thought or known you'd end up marrying two years down the line. And it's so impactful. I mean, getting on stage and seeing people from your community, as well as other communities in Alaska, just celebrate and cheer and clap. And it's so, so empowering. And I think young men should absolutely take the chance. It's obviously nerve-wracking, but being surrounded by your culture is... It changes you.

[18:56]

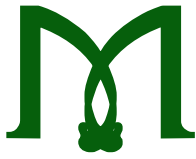
Just listening is probably one of the best, not pieces of advice, but I've just, I've learned to listen. Listen to my wife, listen to my parents, my mothers. You know, it takes time and maybe even practice doing that. It's not so easy. Just being the way I was raised, I'm kind of stubborn or have a hard head, but Chloe has definitely just not opened my eyes, but just through conversations and understanding. It's like, I see that her knowledge and her feelings are incredibly valid. And if it's even like a feeling that she has, and she thinks maybe we should just call it a day, or let's actually postpone this plan that we're doing. It's like, you take that into consideration ten out of ten times. And often, she's right. Like, there's a reason, like there's either that mother nature, not mother, but the mother instinct kicks in, or things like that. Men are not like super intelligent, historically; we can provide, but I think the really... Being able to like, understand the perspectives of others, women are incredibly, incredibly innate and natural. I think they have an understanding of how the world works differently than men. And like I said, just listening, and being present with them is, it's changed, you know, our marriage, and it's changed how we teach our son, and it's been incredibly helpful.

[21:11]

I did want to talk about some of the work I do. And it relates to this topic we're talking about matrilineal process and culture, but I am the repatriation coordinator for my tribe, and that's returning ancestors and artifacts from museums, and institutions like that, back to the rightful, our rightful lands. And I learned about this word called rematriation. You might have heard it as well, but it's returning to Mother Nature, to heal, to regenerate, to break down traumas. And I've made that kind of a center of pursuits and making sure that tribal members know that we're involving rematriation in this process. And we're actually really close to returning some ancestors at the end of June, fingers crossed, is our plan. And I'm excited to reimagine ceremony as well. But my mantra during this work is 'When our ancestors return, the land will heal, as well as our people.' So, it's all rematriation. And

I believe in it wholeheartedly. And I'm so excited to see the different levels of healing go on in our community. And yeah, I just wanted to finish with that. Thank you.

[22:56]



Personal Reflections on Nama Khoe Men and Matriculture: Transcript

GERALT CLOETE

[lightly edited; please cite using time signatures]

Good day, I'm Geralte Cloete. I'm a theatre maker by profession, and I'm from South Africa. The name of the community that I'm from in South Africa is called Sanddrift in the Northern Cape Richtersveld. I'm from the Nama tribe. The Nama tribe is also part of the Khoekhoe family. Through my theatre work, I normally speak back to our culture, our heritage, where we come from as a nation. Yeah, that's me.

[00:36]

So, I was born in the nineties, 1993, yeah, in Sanddrift in the Richtersveld. We had midwives back then, before we had nurses and hospitals, and because we, our rural community, so far from the cities, where you have all these facilities, I was born at home through a midwife. So yeah, my mother and the midwife was there. As a young boy growing up in the Richtersveld, I kind of had a lot of freedom as a young boy there, because it's such a small community and such a safe neighborhood. I could be out, I could go out of the house, I could play outside and come back at any time. Obviously, any parent would always be worried about your whereabouts, but it was never an issue as I was



growing up because I'm in a small rural community where everyone knows everyone, and when you're outside, you know there's a certain time that you have to be home. We know before sunset, you have to start making your way home. I had the best time growing up, especially knowing that it's such a small community and knowing that everyone know each other. You know that when you go and play at another kid's house, you know that you are safe, you know you'll return back home safely, your parents know where you are, and they don't have to stress about your whereabouts because it's such a tiny community.

[02:28]

I have four sisters, and then I had one brother who passed away. May his soul rest in peace. He was the eldest, and then I have four sisters, and then I'm the youngest in my family. And then, my grandfather was still alive at that time. May his soul also rest in peace. My grandfather and my grandmother stays in the same neighborhood as myself and my family, which is my grandmother and grandfather from my mother's side. My grandmother and my grandfather from my father's side live in a small community, also a Nama community, which is about fifty or thirty kilometers away from us. The community is called Kuboes.

[03:12]

So, the language that we spoke, and that we are still speaking in our house, is Afrikaans. Our first language is Afrikaans, and my parents, however, grew up speaking Nama, which is the language of our tribe. It's Nama. Some people call it Namagowab, but then some people say, like, why do you have to call it Namagowab, because Namagowab means 'Nama language,' and you don't say 'English language,' 'Tswana language;' why do we have to say Namagowab? So, my parents grew up in homes where they spoke Nama. However, because of colonisation and how colonisation has influenced our people, we kind of stopped speaking Nama, and I was asking my dad once, like, why didn't he teach us Nama as we grew up, or why aren't we speaking Nama as a family in our home? And then he told me as they were growing up as children at schools, the teachers wouldn't allow them to speak Nama in schools, and also they called the language demonic.

[04:30]

The church called it demonic, and they weren't allowed to speak it, and once they speak it in school, they were punished. So, for them as parents, they carried their trauma, and they didn't want us to be carrying the same trauma as them, and they didn't want us to be punished at school for speaking a language that's our home language, or our mother tongue. So, I'm sitting with a tongue that's not my mother's tongue, which is Afrikaans. I'm

sitting with some other mother's tongue in my mouth [*laughs*], if that makes sense! If that makes sense. With us, also with the missionaries, came the schooling system. With the schooling system came the torture and the trauma and the ripping away of language, the ripping away of culture, the ripping away of identity. Yet till today, we've got such a strong belief in the faith that we have learned from the missionaries. Till today our people still believe in going to church, still believe in the biblical views, whilst at the same time there's such a huge connotation when you think about it, because it's with the church that we've lost so much of who we are as Nama people, and I feel like today, it's also the church's responsibility as much as it's the responsibility of our country, South Africa, to ensure that they put systems in place to ensure that we reclaim our land, reclaim our languages, and reclaim our identity.

[06:30]

So, as I was saying when we started this interview and I introduced myself, I'm a theatre maker, and I work under the company that we call Nama Khoi Productions. Nama Khoi Productions work as a community arts centre in Sanddrift, where I'm based. I started this organisation in 2022, and the reason why I started this organisation was because I wanted to use the arts as an artist, as a theatre maker, to start reclaiming land, to start reclaiming identity, to speak about the traumas of our past, because they always say, like, we need to forget about the past in South Africa. And how can you just forget about the past when our people are carrying so much trauma, when our people are still living in poverty, when our people are still living in pain, when some of us can't even speak our mother tongues. So, for me as a theatre maker, it was important to start this organisation Nama Khoi Productions, and to use the arts to really look at how we can reclaim our identity, how we can reclaim our languages, and how we can become one with ourselves and one with our ancestors. How do we become the true, truthful versions of ourselves, and that's only by really connecting to who we really are, and that's through language, the history of my lineage.

[08:05]

But also, I went to a conference once, and it was a Nama conference, where one of our elders spoke about language and the importance of language. And he said something so profound; he said that it is the mother's job to teach the mother tongue to the child, and that's why it's called the mother tongue. So, [*laughs*] and then he made a joke to me, and he's like, the reason you shouldn't be asking your dad why you can't speak your mother tongue, you should go and ask your mother. In general children spend most of their time with the mother, because the mother is the one that nurtures. The mother is the one that breastfeeds. So, it kind of makes sense to call it the mother tongue, but it also makes sense

that the mother would be the one that pass on the language from generation to generation. In my general view of growing up in the Richtersveld, women have always played the role as the nurturers, the people who raise us, and as I said before, like the uncle said, that it is the mother's job to teach the children, or the child, the mother tongue. Also, in our communities, that's what mothers normally do, whether it's Afrikaans that they are teaching. There are quite a number of homes, where in the households, some families still spoke Nama, which is also coming from the grandmothers who taught their grandchildren the language.

[10:00]

Like, I do have two females in our theatre company that can speak Nama, and we are kind of the same age, in our thirties, early thirties, and they can speak Nama. And the reason why they can speak Nama is because they grew up with a grandmother who still spoke Nama to them indoors, but also a grandmother that was very cautious, and said, like, "You can speak Nama inside but make sure that you don't go speak Nama at school." So, that has always been the role of the women in our community. The women in our community also played the role of caregivers, but also the ones that almost, like, played the role of the nurse, because it's the women in the community that has been the midwives, the ones that had the knowledge when it comes to traditional medicine, and also has also played the role of the teacher, because they would be the ones teaching us about our customs, our traditions.

[11:18]

Because we are a mining community, men has always been the ones that's been working in the mines, while women has been at home, but there's a time I think it's—I'm not sure whether it's in the twenties or the early nineties—that women started working in the mines as well. There used to be a lot of people that work in the mines, but also nowadays the mines don't even give jobs to our local community. Mostly, our community, most people in our community, doesn't have a job, and the basic income that most people get here comes from government grants. So, we have mines in our communities, and these mines bring people in from outside of our communities to come and work here, whilst our people don't have jobs. When it comes to our community, women are free to do or be whatever they want to be. We're not living in Stone Age, where women are just going to play the role of the nurturer. Women in our community, like, my sister is the principal at our primary school. So yes, women do other things besides nurturing.

[12:46]

As I told you before, there are quite a number of women that do work in the mines, or women that's been working in the mines, and my other two sisters are working in the sandparks. So, women get the freedom to do what they like, and because our community is still such a safe community, women can work late at night, but also like any other community, there's always that risk that women might not be as safe as they think they are, especially when it comes to going out drinking having fun. Then it's probably a good idea to make sure that you are surrounded with people that you trust, when you go out and drink. The mines is what brings in this kind of unsafety and the risks when it comes to our communities because there's a number of people or influx of people coming into our communities that works in these mines, and then, it gets to a point where you don't know everyone anymore that's in your community. So, that's that as well.

[14:09]

So, when we speak about inheritance in our community, it's always the youngest child who gets the inheritance, or the boy who gets the inheritance. Because I guess it's in our communities, it's also, I guess, that expectation that a woman is going to get married to a man, and once she gets married to a man, she won't be able to take care of the family, because there's going to be someone else that's going to take care of her and their family. Whilst if a boy gets the inheritance, the boy can still, like, even if the boy ends up getting married, he would still be able to take care of the family, or extended family, in a sense. So, that's inheritance work, in essence, but also there's always other ways to look at inheritance, because sometimes there would be, like, this idea of when you grew up in a house, it rather becomes a family house, so the entire family inherits it in a sense. We're an active family in general, because we are a very close-knitted family. We are close; we see each other often, because we live in this community. My... Only one of our sisters doesn't live in this community. She stays in the Upington area, but still in Northern Cape, but we also see her a number of times. Yeah.

[15:39]

One thing that comes to mind when I think about being Nama; I think about being first, the first thing that comes up, is being first nation, to be a people of first nation, to be the first that walked on South African soil. So, I always say this to our people, when it comes to being Nama, we have, we've been taught to hate ourselves. We have taught, we've been taught, to hate our languages, that we are ugly, that our languages are demonic, and that we are kind of not worthy. But being a Nama, you need to know that you are the first on the soil, not just South Africa, but in Southern Africa, which include Namibia, Botswana. We are the first people to live here, so if you know that, you'll know that you're an owner of this land. So, you don't have to feel any less than. When it comes to protection of land;

yes, definitely when it comes to protecting of land, our people play a big role in protecting the land.

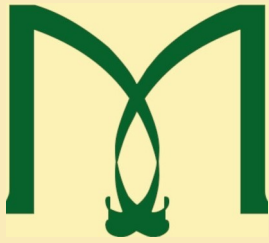
[17:02]

I mean, there's been numerous times where mines wanted, or mining companies wanted, to come and mine at certain areas, and they've been stopped. There was times, there's even now a huge project that the government wants to come in, or it's a presidential project. It's called the Boegoebaai Green Hydrogen Project that they want to come and do on communal land. Richtersveld is communal land, so they want to come and do this huge green hydrogen project on our communal land, where they want to build a huge harbour, and they want to manufacture green hydrogen here on our communal land, and some of our concerns has always been, like, what is the impact going to be on the land? And also, what we've been saying is, as a community, is that you as the government gave us our title deeds for that land. Now you, as the government, are coming back, and you want to grab the land, or you want to come and propose a project on land that you gave us back, and it really doesn't make sense. But at the same time, we've been asking questions around the impact that it's going to have on the land. And one thing that's so special about the Boegoebaai area, or as we know it as is Boegoeberg, is that there's three graves, there's three graves in that area, that one of the graves are the grave of our late chief, or previous chief, and they want to do the project in that very same area which is very problematic and very disrespectful. But also, at the same time, they came back and said they would protect that area where the three graves are. Yah!

[19:27]

Not everything has been wiped out; there is some rituals that we still practice. There's one ritual that happens when a woman gets her first period, or her first menstruation. Then, she would be taken into a nama hut for, depending from family to family, some put the daughter in, or the young girl, in the hut for seven days, and in that seven days, no one is supposed to see her. There will be, like, one woman, normally the grandmother and the mother, that will be, that will go into the hut and see her and take care of her for those seven days, give her food, teach her about womanhood while she's in the hut for those seven years [sic]. And then, after the seven years [sic], she can return back into the community, whilst the parents now know, or the woman now know, that she is... They've passed on the values of... the cultural values, but also making sure that she understands what womanhood means from a cultural perspective, or what it means to be a Nama woman.

[20:52]



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Interview 6

Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies

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Personal Reflections on Euskaldun (Basque) Men and Matriculture

FORTHCOMING

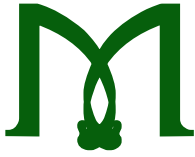
XABI OTERO

(Euskaldun/Basque)

14 June 2025



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Recension du livre:

Heide Goettner-Abendroth,
« Sociétés matriarcales du passé et émergence du
patriarcat – Asie occidentale et Europe »,
traduit de l'anglais par Camille Chaplain et Annie Montaut
(Paris: *des femmes* Antoinette Fouque, 2025)

MARCEL BLANC

Le nouveau livre de Heide Goettner-Abendroth met en œuvre deux révolutions de la pensée : l'une sur la forme; l'autre sur le fond. Sur la forme, la révolution consiste en ce que l'historien des sciences Thomas Kuhn a appelé un changement de paradigme. En effet, la philosophe et anthropologue allemande ré-écrit complètement la façon classique de présenter l'Histoire, ou plus exactement ici la Préhistoire, depuis le Paléolithique jusqu'à l'Antiquité. Elle ré-interprète les données de l'archéologie au prisme de la condition des femmes: c'est donc une lecture radicalement différente de l'Histoire, car elle est effectuée du point de vue d'en bas (celui des dominées), et non plus du point de vue d'en haut (celui des dominants), comme est traditionnellement écrite l'Histoire académique.

La deuxième révolution, sur le fond, consiste à établir que la domination des hommes sur les femmes, autrement dit, le patriarcat, n'a pas toujours existé. Une forme socio-



culturelle l'a précédé, le matriarcat, que Heide Goettner-Abendroth décrit, non pas comme l'image inversée du patriarcat (la domination des femmes sur les hommes), mais comme une structure sociale et culturelle définie sur quatre plans: économique (distribution et partage des biens), social (liens de parenté matrilineaires), politique (égale participation de tous aux décisions collectives et égalité hommes-femmes) et culturelle (vision du monde et religion). Cette définition se fonde sur les connaissances que la philosophe a acquises par ses recherches théoriques et anthropologiques-ethnologiques menées depuis 1978 et qu'elle a exposées notamment dans son précédent ouvrage majeur, traduit en français sous le titre: *Les Sociétés matriarcales* (2019).⁽¹⁾

Si l'on admet que le matriarcat a précédé le patriarcat, cela signifie que celui-ci est advenu à un moment donné dans l'histoire. Plusieurs questions se posent : au préalable, a-t-on des preuves historiques que le matriarcat est une forme sociale ayant précédé le patriarcat? Ensuite, quand et comment celui-ci a-t-il supplanté le matriarcat? Les recherches de Heide Goettner-Abendroth se sont limitées à la région européenne et à celle du Proche et Moyen-Orient. Le patriarcat s'est certainement établi de façon différente et à des moments différents selon les régions du monde, précise-t-elle (p.39). Répondre aux deux questions du quand et du comment à l'échelle de la planète et de l'Histoire universelle demandera dans les années à venir le concours de nombreuses équipes internationales (grâce à leur bagage culturel, des chercheurs et des chercheuses issues des sociétés matriarcales existant encore aujourd'hui seraient les plus à même de faire ce travail).

LES MULTIPLES RÉVOLUTIONS DU NÉOLITHIQUE

Les sociétés matriarcales se mettent en place au Néolithique. Rappelons que cette période, appelée autrefois: «l'Age de la pierre polie», débute il y a environ 10.000 ans av.-J.-C., et se termine vers 2.100 av.-J.-C. en Europe – voir le tableau chronologique p. 201). Elle succède à une époque plus ancienne, le Paléolithique, autrefois appelée «l'Age de la pierre taillée», qui, elle, a débuté, il y a environ 2 millions d'années et qui a vu, dans sa dernière partie, l'apparition de notre propre espèce, *Homo sapiens*, il y a 300.000 ans. Les êtres humains vivaient alors d'un peu de chasse et surtout de cueillette, assurée par les femmes (l'autrice note, p. 71 et pp. 72-73, que les préhistoriens «main stream» tendent généralement à surestimer l'importance de la chasse et à quasiment ignorer l'apport fourni par la cueillette des aliments végétaux – un préjugé évidemment patriarcal, puisque les ethnologues ont établi que, chez les chasseurs-cueilleurs d'aujourd'hui, la cueillette assurée par les femmes procure 70 pour cent de la ration alimentaire.⁽²⁾

Le Néolithique est la période de l'histoire humaine qui a vu s'accomplir le premier grand

changement dans le mode de vie des êtres humains. Cette «révolution néolithique»⁽³⁾ a été le fait des femmes, en raison de leur implication antérieure dans la cueillette des végétaux. En effet, elles ont observé, dans les déchets issus de leurs cueillettes, des graines germer, et ont donc eu l'idée de semer intentionnellement de telles graines, en vue d'en récolter les produits, inventant ainsi l'agriculture (p. 130). De plus, les produits issus de l'agriculture nécessitent d'être conservés et stockés dans des récipients. Les découvertes archéologiques montrent que ce sont, là encore, les femmes qui ont inventé les techniques de fabrication et de décoration des récipients en argile (p. 140), ainsi que le tour du potier (p. 209), autrement dit les techniques et l'art de la poterie (ou céramique, dont les différents styles servent aux archéologues à différencier les cultures pratiquées par différentes populations à différentes époques). Que ces contributions aient été dues aux femmes est généralement passé sous silence par les préhistoriens «main stream».

Le Néolithique est aussi la période où s'est réalisé le plus grand progrès dans le domaine socio-culturel, celui de la prise de conscience de la généalogie, c'est-à-dire des liens unissant les êtres humains d'une génération à l'autre au sein d'une société. A l'époque précédente, le Paléolithique, le mode de vie des chasseurs-cueilleurs (ou plutôt des «chasseurs-cueilleuses», devrait-on dire) impliquait la participation de chacun à des groupes. Or, comme le montre l'observation des chasseurs-cueilleuses d'aujourd'hui, par exemple, chez les peuples africains tels que les San ou les Pygmées, ces groupes ne réunissent pas des familles (au sens généalogique actuel) mais des individus de même âge: les enfants, les jeunes adultes, les adultes, les personnes âgées (p.85). On parle de regroupement par «classes d'âge». La notion de généalogie n'existe pas.

C'est précisément cette notion qui a été découverte au Néolithique, là encore grâce aux femmes. Il s'agit de la prise de conscience de la matrilinearité: les êtres humains, désormais sédentarisés et vivant dans des maisonnées, forment des clans matriarcaux (pp. 156-158), c'est-à-dire à des lignées familiales issues des mères et où les individus sont unis par des liens d'apparentement, appelés depuis, les «liens du sang». Cette expression, toujours en usage de nos jours, provient de l'observation ancestrale que les femmes, durant la grossesse, n'ont plus de règles, c'est-à-dire n'ont plus d'excrétions périodiques de sang (p. 156). On a donc pensé, dans les temps anciens, que le développement d'un enfant dans le sein maternel provenait de ce sang non-excrété, explication corroborée par les déclarations recueillies de nos jours par les ethnologues chez certains peuples (comme par exemple, les Trobriandais d'Océanie ou les Berbères – voir la note 87 de la page 156). Le rôle de l'homme dans la procréation est ignoré. Heide Goettner-Abendroth écrit: «Dans les millénaires qui ont précédé la patriarcalisation, la participation de l'homme à la grossesse de la femme était une chose inconnue» (p. 323).

La formation de clans matriarcaux au Néolithique est expliquée de la façon suivante par

Heide Goettner-Abendroth (pp. 148-149): alors qu'au Paléolithique, le lien entre une mère et ses enfants s'interrompait en raison des regroupements par «classes d'âge», ce lien persiste au Néolithique grâce à la sédentarité induite par l'agriculture. Chaque maison va donc regrouper plusieurs générations issues d'une mère, formant un clan fondé sur la généalogie. La patrilinearité ne peut pas exister, car, la sexualité étant libre et les femmes choisissant différents partenaires au sein d'autres maisonnées, il est impossible d'identifier avec certitude les enfants de tel ou tel individu masculin (p. 148) (comme le montrent les observations ethnologiques de l'autrice chez une société matriarcale d'aujourd'hui, celle des Mosuo en Chine – voir le livre précédent de Heide Goettner-Abendroth sur les sociétés matriarcales contemporaines).

Avec la mise en lumière de la matrilinearité, dans laquelle, il faut le préciser, la prise en compte des liens du sang concernait les individus des deux sexes au sein de la lignée maternelle, c'est donc une révolution supplémentaire que les femmes ont accompli au Néolithique. Elles ont fourni une structure sociale aux sociétés de cette époque, une structure sociale qui n'existait pas à l'époque précédente du Paléolithique: il s'agit de la société matriarcale, telle que définie ci-dessus, c'est-à-dire une société fondamentalement égalitaire sur les plans économique, politique et social.

LES PREUVES DE L'EXISTENCE DES SOCIÉTÉS MATRIARCALES AU NÉOLITHIQUE

Les preuves de l'existence ubiquitaire de sociétés matriarcales au Néolithique sont nombreuses, et Heide Goettner-Abendroth en fournit d'abondantes, tirées des observations archéologiques. Il n'est pas possible de les détailler toutes dans le cadre de cette recension: citons-en quelques-unes, comme les pratiques funéraires égalitaires entre les hommes et les femmes et le regroupement préférentiel dans les tombes entre mères et enfants (p. 256); l'architecture des temples ou des tombes évoquant le corps des femmes (p. 207, p. 223 et pp. 261-265); la persistance du même style céramique sur des millénaires, grâce à la transmission des techniques de mère à fille (p. 253); les statuettes doubles représentant la relation mère-fille (p. 153) et, de façon générale, une abondante iconographie se rapportant aux femmes: plus de 95 pour cent des statuettes trouvées dans les habitations du Néolithique sont féminines (p. 273), et elles représentent des femmes-ancêtres vénérées ou bien des déesses-mères, au premier rang desquelles la «Terre Mère» (pp. 276-284).

La vénération des statuettes féminines témoigne de l'existence d'une vision du monde religieuse ubiquitaire au Néolithique: la «religion de la renaissance», selon laquelle le rôle des femmes est de faire renaître les ancêtres par le biais de l'enfantement. La conception d'un enfant n'est en rien le fruit de la biologie, mais celle du désir de renaître exprimé par

l'âme d'un ancêtre et exaucé par le biais du corps d'une femme (p. 167). Cette religion existait déjà au Paléolithique, comme en témoignent les peintures et gravures des célèbres grottes ornées (Lascaux, Chauvet, Altamira, etc., entre 30.000 et 18.000 ans av.-J.-C.), ainsi que les statuettes datant de cette époque, stupidement appelées «Vénus» par les préhistoriens «main stream». L'autrice fait une description détaillée de l'art paléolithique, en l'interprétant de façon magistrale dans le cadre unificateur de la «religion de la renaissance» (pp. 93-115), laquelle est à cette époque, un peu différente de la «religion de la renaissance» du Néolithique. En effet, cette dernière fait appel à la notion d'ancêtre (p. 167), issue du concept de généalogie, qui n'existait pas au Paléolithique, de sorte que la «renaissance» se référait, à cette époque, à une vision cosmique liant la capacité procréative des femmes aux cycles de la Lune et de la Terre (pp. 97-98).

Au Néolithique, la «religion de la renaissance» a inspiré la construction de grandes structures (temples, mégalithes, enceintes de terre circulaires) (pp. 215-242), ainsi que d'abondantes œuvres d'art de petite dimension, comme déjà dit - les statuettes et les objets religieux créés par les femmes (pp. 273-276). Ces œuvres d'art, grandes ou petites, exprimaient toutes sous forme symbolique un thème constant: **vie, mort et renaissance**. Les femmes étaient au centre de la «religion de la renaissance», conduisant à la vénération des ancêtres féminins (mais aussi masculins), un culte assuré par elles (p. 282).

Heide Goettner-Abendroth fournit l'une des preuves archéologiques les plus spectaculaires de la culture matriarcale au Néolithique: une peinture murale trouvée dans une habitation sur pilotis au bord du lac de Constance dans le sud-ouest de l'Allemagne (datant de la fin du Néolithique, vers 3500 ans av.J.-C.) (pp. 253-255). Cette peinture montre 7 figures abstraites (3 seulement sont visibles sur la fig. 19 b), représentant les mères ancestrales des 7 clans du village, et entre elles, d'autres figures abstraites, représentant sous forme symbolique la lignée maternelle de chaque clan.

Il faut noter qu'une toute récente preuve spectaculaire en faveur de la thèse de Heide Goettner-Abendroth sur l'existence de clans matriarcaux au Néolithique vient d'être publiée (en date du 26 juin 2025) dans la célèbre revue scientifique américaine *Science*.⁽⁴⁾ Elle a été obtenue par une équipe internationale de chercheurs et chercheuses (turcs, américains, etc.). Ces archéologues ont établi quels étaient les liens de parenté généalogiques au sein des habitations de l'une des toutes premières villes de l'histoire de l'humanité: Çatal Höyük, en Anatolie, datant de 7000 à 6000 ans av. J.-C. Pour cela, ils ont étudié le patrimoine génétique de 131 individus, en analysant l'ADN prélevé sur leurs squelettes (au moyen d'une technique révolutionnaire en archéologie, que l'on appelle: l'analyse de l'ADN ancien, dont nous allons reparler plus loin, à propos de l'émergence du patriarcat). La conclusion de cette étude est claire: **la lignée généalogique est bien matrilineaire au sein des habitations de Çatal Höyük.**

Également spectaculaires, sont les sociétés matriarcales tardives des Minoens de Crète et des Étrusques en Italie. La société dite «Minoenne» de Crète a duré de 3200 à 1450 av. J.-C. (p. 438). Tous les archéologues l'ayant étudié ont souligné la beauté et l'élégance de cette culture, et l'ont même loué pour son «charme unique» et sa «plus totale affirmation de la beauté de la vie» (p. 451). Heide Goettner-Abendroth détaille tous les aspects sociaux, économiques et culturels de cette admirable société matriarcale (pp. 438 – 460).

L'autre grande société matriarcale tardive (de 1000 av. J.-C à 500 av. J.-C.) est celle des Étrusques (pp. 473-483), établie initialement au centre de l'Italie (avant l'émergence des Romains). Là encore, tous les archéologues reconnaissent que cette culture se remarque par l'expression d'une extraordinaire joie de vivre. L'auteur en détaille tous les aspects matriarcaux, notamment tels qu'ils apparaissent dans l'art pictural (pp. 477-480), proche de celui des Minoens. A noter, une illustration émouvante sur l'art étrusque: la figure 15, p. 480 montre une sculpture de deux époux allongés ensemble dans la pose du banquet. La femme verse du parfum sur la main de son mari (une pratique rituelle – le flacon a ici disparu) et des sourires illuminent leur visage, suggérant une gaie complicité amoureuse – il y a 2500 ans! Cette scène indique bien à elle seule quel statut d'égalité existait entre femmes et hommes chez les Étrusques, contrairement à ce qui se passait chez les Romains patriarcaux, où le *pater familias* régnait en maître absolu sur femme, enfants et esclaves.

LE PREMIER PATRIARCAT DANS LA STEPPE EURASIENNE

Après avoir abondamment décrit les sociétés matriarcales du Néolithique et celles, plus tardives, des Minoens et des Étrusques, Heide Goettner-Abendroth en vient à la question de leur destruction et à l'établissement du patriarcat. Comment cela s'est-il réalisé? En ce qui concerne l'Europe ainsi que le Proche- et Moyen-Orient, la philosophe apporte des réponses précises: **le passage du matriarcat au patriarcat s'est effectué principalement par la force des armes, et aussi par celle du pouvoir économique**, processus s'achevant vers 3000 à 2500 ans av. J.-C., c'est-à-dire à la fin du Néolithique et au tout début de la période suivante que les archéologues appellent «l'Age du Bronze».

En Europe, le processus a été le suivant : la première forme de patriarcat s'est établie dans les steppes du sud de la Russie, dans la région de la Volga à l'Ouest de l'Oural (pp. 305-312). A cause d'un climat devenu plus froid et plus sec, la production des subsistances s'est tournée principalement vers l'élevage des bovins et des ovins, car l'agriculture devenait moins productive. Les femmes ont donc perdu de leur importance économique, tandis que les hommes en ont gagné, grâce à leur gestion des grands troupeaux qu'ils

surveillaient en étant montés à cheval (animal qui venait d'être domestiqué). Entre 4700 et 3800 BCE, les archéologues observent **les premiers signes de pouvoir des hommes** en tant que dominants au sein d'une culture basée sur l'élevage de grands troupeaux: dans des tombes, désormais individuelles, d'hommes, ils trouvent des poignards de silex, des haches en pierre polie ainsi que des massues ornées de têtes de cheval, c'est-à-dire des attributs de chefs (p. 307).

Plus précisément, de grands troupeaux de bovins et d'ovins demandant de grands pâturages, les éleveurs sont entrés en conflit avec leurs voisins pour s'approprier ceux-ci. Les hommes, au sens masculin, sont donc devenus des **guerriers pasteurs** (gardiens de grands troupeaux) (p. 309). La figure du "chef charismatique," vainqueur dans toutes les situations, apparut, ce qui fit s'écrouler l'ordre matriarcal traditionnel. Le chef s'est entouré d'un groupe de combattants, lequel devint la première force de coercition ou police, contraignant à respecter la loi du chef. Cette dernière fit, en effet, respecter **la propriété privée du bétail par le chef**, car celui-ci se mit à se «dédommager de ses risques» en s'appropriant une partie des troupeaux (lesquels étaient, normalement, la propriété collective du clan matriarcal). Le chef pouvait apaiser les objections agressives éventuellement soulevées par le reste de la communauté en donnant quelques-unes des bêtes à manger lors de fêtes collectives (pp. 309-310). **La première forme de patriarcat, issue de conflits, est ainsi apparue dans la steppe eurasiennne.** Heide Goettner-Abendroth souligne que ce n'est donc pas la propriété privée qui a fait apparaître la domination, comme le soutiennent classiquement les préhistoriens «main stream», mais l'inverse: **la domination masculine a engendré la propriété privée** (p. 310).

Et elle a entraîné, fondamentalement, **la subordination des femmes** (p. 322). En premier lieu, elles ont perdu leur liberté sexuelle (pp. 323-324), car les dominants masculins se sont approprié leur capacité à donner naissance aux nouvelles générations. La monogamie pour les femmes, qui n'existait pas sous le régime du matriarcat, leur a été imposée par la force (surveillance permanente et punition violente en cas de transgression) pour assurer que des héritiers, seulement issus du maître, reçoivent la propriété privée de ce dernier et que celle-ci ne retourne pas à la communauté. C'est ainsi qu'a été instauré la lignée paternelle ou patrilinéarité.

En deuxième lieu, la subordination des femmes a aussi concerné l'appropriation de leur travail, désormais entièrement tourné vers la sphère domestique. Chez les guerriers gardiens de grands troupeaux, par exemple, leur rôle consista surtout à traire les vaches et à fabriquer des produits laitiers (p. 317), en plus de la charge des enfants. Globalement, elles sont devenues des servantes vouées à prendre soin de la propriété du maître (dont sa progéniture).

Naturellement, ce tournant radical dans la condition des femmes n'est pas allé sans rencontrer des résistances. En premier lieu, le patriarcat ne s'appliquant qu'à l'élite guerrière, la partie subordonnée de la société a continué à pratiquer une partie des coutumes matriarcales. En second lieu, certaines femmes se sont radicalisées et ont fait sécession, créant un nouveau type de société: les Amazones (p. 333). Il ne s'agissait plus alors de société matriarcale, mais de communauté exclusivement composée de femmes, de surcroît de femmes guerrières, capables de se défendre par les armes contre les raids des guerriers patriarcaux. Heide Goettner-Abendroth retrace leur histoire en se fondant sur le livre récent d'un archéologue allemand, Gerhard Poellauer.⁽⁵⁾ Elle rapporte ainsi que l'archéologie atteste l'existence de cités habitées par des communautés d'Amazones au troisième millénaire av. J.-C. sur l'île de Lemnos (au voisinage des côtes occidentales de la Turquie), puis sur ces côtes elles-mêmes, et ensuite, au second millénaire av. J.-C. jusqu'au bord de la Mer Noire (pp. 336-345). Les Amazones ont notamment combattu aux côtés des Troyens, contre les Grecs, lors de la guerre de Troie (vers 1200 av. J.-C.), comme le mentionne Homère dans «*L'Illiade*» (mention que les préhistoriens «main stream» considèrent à tort comme un mythe – voir p. 334, la critique cinglante qu'Heide Goettner-Abendroth adresse à ces derniers sur ce sujet).

LE VERDICT DE L'ADN ANCIEN

Les besoins incessants en nouveaux territoires pour nourrir leurs grands troupeaux ont obligé les premières populations patriarcales du sud de la Russie à conquérir de nouveaux espaces. Comme l'a montré l'archéologue lituano-américaine Marija Gimbutas dès la fin des années 1970, l'Europe a alors subi trois invasions successives de guerriers montés sur des chevaux, venant des steppes eurasiennes, entre 4400 et 2500 ans av. J.-C. (voir tableau chronologique p. 423). Outre l'imposition du patriarcat, ces invasions ont eu aussi pour effet à long terme de répandre une langue indo-européenne dans toute l'Europe (et jusqu'en Inde), dont toutes les langues sur ce continent descendent aujourd'hui. C'est pourquoi Heide Goettner-Abendroth appelle ces guerriers: les Indo-Européens.

Les travaux de Marija Gimbutas ont suscité de vives controverses chez les archéologues, depuis les années 1980. L'opinion des archéologues «main stream» était que le patriarcat avait toujours existé (p. 436) et qu'il n'y avait pas eu d'invasions de guerriers à cheval venus des steppes. Mais entre 2015 et 2017, tout a changé: grâce à l'analyse de «l'ADN ancien», c'est-à-dire de l'ADN prélevé sur des squelettes datant de 3000 à 2500 ans av. J.-C., des équipes internationales de scientifiques (américains, allemands, suédois, danois, chinois...) ont montré que les patrimoines génétiques des populations européennes ont été massivement modifiés à cette époque par les gènes d'une population provenant des steppes du sud de la Russie (pp. 434-435).⁽⁶⁾ La conclusion est inévitable: Marija Gimbutas

avait vu juste, il y a bien eu invasion de guerriers indo-européens venus des steppes eurasiennes.

Et, comme le souligne Heide Goettner-Abendroth, cette rencontre des populations matriarcales et des envahisseurs patriarcaux a été tout sauf pacifique (p. 435). Les données génétiques montrent que les hommes des sociétés matriarcales conquises ont été éliminés, tandis que les femmes de ces mêmes sociétés ont été «mises à contribution» pour la «production» des nouvelles générations. Cela veut dire en clair, comme l'écrit l'autrice, qu'elles ont été soit kidnappées et violées par les conquérants, soit forcées de se marier avec eux. Car comme l'indiquent aussi les données génétiques, les envahisseurs étaient venus des steppes, en n'ayant avec eux pratiquement aucune femme, en raison des règles de transmission du pouvoir dans la société patriarcale: seuls les aînés héritaient de celui-ci et pouvaient le transmettre à leur tour par mariage arrangé, de sorte que les cadets étaient assignés au statut de guerriers célibataires, dévolus aux conquêtes territoriales ⁽⁷⁾. Il fallait que ces derniers trouvent absolument des «reproductrices» dans les populations conquises pour perpétuer la société patriarcale.

Etant donné le «verdict de l'ADN ancien», ce scénario d'invasions guerrières vers 3000 ans av. J.-C., au début de l'Age du Bronze, est maintenant admis par les archéologues qui étaient précédemment les plus opposés aux thèses de Marija Gimbutas, comme le Britannique Colin Renfrew (p. 434, note 23). Certains archéologues, comme le Danois Kristian Kristiansen ou l'Américain David Anthony (qui a travaillé autrefois avec M. Gimbutas), ont même co-signé les publications sur l'ADN établissant l'existence de ces invasions par des guerriers indo-européens (pour être précis, les recherches sur l'ADN ancien n'ont concerné que la plus récente des trois invasions; les deux autres n'ont pas encore été étudiées sous cet angle).

Notons que Heide Goettner-Abendroth, toutefois, critique sévèrement K. Kristiansen, car dans certaines de ses publications, celui-ci utilise des expressions qui euphémisent la violence subie par les femmes lors de l'arrivée des guerriers patriarcaux. Il parle ainsi «d'intégration sociale», «d'interactions pacifiques» (p. 435-436) pour décrire ce qu'elles ont subi, alors, que souligne l'autrice (p. 435), il s'agissait de viols ou de mariages forcés avec les conquérants patriarcaux, signifiant l'abandon de toute la liberté et de toute l'importance sociale et économique qu'elles avaient eues dans le cadre de la société matriarcale. Heide Goettner-Abendroth conclut: «Il n'est que trop clair que le concept et la notion de "sociétés matriarcales" devaient être évités à tout prix, dans la mesure où ils choqueraient la vision patriarcale dominante dans le monde et révéleraient la violence patriarcale qui domine encore aujourd'hui.» (p. 436).⁽⁸⁾

UN SCÉNARIO VOISIN EN MÉSOPOTAMIE

Au Moyen-Orient, plus exactement en Mésopotamie, le scénario est assez semblable: des guerriers gardiens de grands troupeaux (mais non montés à cheval, dans ce cas), les Akkadiens, issus d'une société patriarcale venant d'Arabie (pp. 382-386), ont imposé, là encore, par la force des armes, la militarisation et la patriarcalisation des sociétés antérieures (qui étaient des sociétés matriarcales modifiées en raison des conditions géographiques et climatiques particulières à la Mésopotamie – pp. 372-382). Ce processus de patriarcalisation par la force des armes a duré de 2600 à 2200 ans av. J.-C. et a culminé avec l'avènement du roi Sargon (p. 384). Celui-ci a fondé un vaste empire, basé sur les conquêtes militaires, comprenant toute la Mésopotamie et les pays voisins. Heide Goettner-Abendroth écrit: «C'est ainsi que débuta, avec Sargon, l'histoire sans fin des empires patriarcaux avec leur potentiel de violence tant externe qu'interne, à savoir l'oppression de leurs propres peuples, provoquant la misère sociale tant interne qu'externe. Seuls le chef et ses fidèles - «l'élite» qui finit par entrer dans l'histoire – menaient une vie fastueuse, avec l'état-major de coercition hiérarchisé des autorités disciplinaires et de contrôle. C'est le patriarcat classique, et c'est là qu'il fut inventé» (p. 386). Elle précise: «le patriarcat est essentiellement fondé sur la domination des femmes, car sans elles il ne pourrait pas survivre jusqu'à la prochaine génération. Il repose aussi sur la domination de la plupart des hommes, des peuples étrangers et de la nature en général. Les femmes en tant que sexe opposé, les autres hommes, les étrangers n'ont pas de valeur en soi mais sont appréciés uniquement comme ressource exploitable pour renforcer le pouvoir de la domination.» (p. 386).

LE RÔLE DU POUVOIR ÉCONOMIQUE

Enfin, l'émergence du patriarcat s'est produite aussi dans un autre lieu géographique, le Levant (Palestine, Liban, Syrie) et selon une modalité, cette fois-ci, différente, qui n'implique pas les armes, mais le pouvoir économique. Des cités marchandes s'étaient développées dans cette région dès la fin du Néolithique (vers 3000 ans av. J.-C.). Chez l'un de ces peuples, les Phéniciens, la société n'était plus matriarcale, sous sa forme originelle, mais les femmes y gardaient un statut élevé, élisant des reines qui avaient prééminence sur les rois. Dans chaque cité, le pouvoir politique était au main d'un conseil des anciens, qui pouvait lui-aussi déposer le roi. Les artisans et les commerçants jouissaient de la plus grande estime, et cela concernait aussi les femmes en tant qu'artisans tissant des textiles de haute réputation commerciale (pp. 411-412). Les femmes participaient parfois au commerce entre cités, mais jamais au commerce par caravanes ou sur les mers, car cela

impliquait des voyages longs et dangereux: ces derniers étaient donc menés uniquement par des hommes, précise l'autrice (p. 412). Au troisième millénaire, entre 3000 et 2000 ans av. J.-C., les Phéniciens devinrent des commerçants maritimes de premier plan. Ce type de commerce permettait tout particulièrement l'accumulation d'immenses richesses (p. 414).

Les plus riches de ces commerçants (exclusivement masculins) formèrent alors une oligarchie qui supplanta le conseil des anciens et abolit la royauté (roi aussi bien que reine) (p. 413). Un système politique républicain fut organisé, formé du conseil oligarchique et de l'assemblée générale des citoyens, dans chaque cité. Cela peut paraître un système démocratique, écrit Heide Goettner-Abendroth, mais cela ne l'était pas, car les femmes en étaient totalement exclues. Elles perdirent dorénavant toute importance sociale et politique. Cela montre, affirme l'autrice, que la patriarcalisation peut aussi se produire dans le contexte d'une prétendue démocratie. «Il s'agissait d'une démocratie purement masculine, comme celles qui ont apparu plus tard en Grèce, à Rome, et dans l'Europe bourgeoise» (p. 414).

CONCLUSION

En conclusion, le nouveau livre de Heide Goettner-Abendroth, fondé sur d'abondantes données archéologiques et sur les récentes avancées dans les analyses de l'ADN ancien, soutient brillamment la thèse selon laquelle le patriarcat a été imposé aux femmes par la force, soit par le pouvoir des armes, soit par le pouvoir économique, à un moment donné de l'histoire, c'est-à-dire à l'Age du Bronze, en Europe et au Proche- et Moyen-Orient. Il complète ainsi le livre de Simone de Beauvoir, «*Le deuxième sexe*», qui montre que la domination des hommes sur les femmes n'est pas naturelle, mais est construite socialement. Le magistral ouvrage de Heide Goettner-Abendroth devrait donc jouer un rôle aussi important que ce dernier pour le mouvement féministe, car il donne aux femmes des raisons supplémentaires de lutter contre le patriarcat: ce que l'histoire a fait, l'histoire peut le défaire, par la lutte des femmes ainsi que de leurs alliés masculins, dès lors que ceux-ci ont pris conscience des effets néfastes de l'ordre patriarcal sur tous les aspects de la vie et du vivant.

À PROPOS DE L'AUTRICE

Heide Göttner-Abendroth, née en Allemagne en 1941, est docteure en philosophie des sciences et a enseigné la philosophie pendant dix ans à l'université de Munich (1973-1983). Elle consacre sa vie et ses recherches aux sociétés et cultures matriarcales dont elle est devenue l'une des grandes spécialistes mondiales, ouvrant la voie à toute une

génération de jeunes anthropologues. En 1986, elle a fondé en Allemagne l'Académie internationale HAGIA pour les recherches matriarcales modernes, dont elle assure depuis la direction et qui est à l'initiative de nombreux congrès internationaux sur le sujet. Elle a été sélectionnée en 2005 par le programme international «1000 Femmes de paix à travers le monde» comme candidate pour le prix Nobel de la Paix.

À PROPOS DU CRITIQUE

Marcel Blanc est écrivain et traducteur scientifique. Il a publié *Comparsa ed Evoluzione dell'uomo* (Milan: Fabbri, 1983), *L'ère de la génétique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1986) et *Les héritiers de Darwin* (Paris: Seuil, 1991). Il a traduit notamment de nombreux ouvrages de Stephen Jay Gould, dont *La structure de la théorie de l'évolution* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005) et le livre d'Elizabeth Kolbert *La sixième extinction* (Paris: La Librairie Vuibert, 2015).

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(2) Voir le livre du célèbre ethnologue R.B. Lee, *The!Kung San: Men, Women and Work in a Foraging Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979. Un tout récent article de paléo-anthropologie, paru dans *Science*, 3 juillet 2025, porte pour la première fois sur l'alimentation végétale des êtres humains, il y a 300.000 ans en Chine: «Ancient wooden tools show human ancestors ate their veggies», Andrew Curry: <https://www.science.org/content/article/ancient-wooden-tools-show-human-ancestors-ate-their-veggies>.

(3) C'est l'expression classiquement employée par les préhistoriens pour décrire l'invention de l'agriculture au Néolithique. Elle a été lancée par l'archéologue marxiste Vere Gordon Childe dans son livre *Man Makes Himself*, Londres, Watts and Co., 1936.

(4) E. Yüncü *et al*, «Female lineages and changing kinship patterns in Neolithic Çatalhöyük». *Science*, 388, eadr2915(2025). Voir aussi l'article de mise en perspective de cette recherche: «Genomic insights into social life in Neolithic Anatolia. Matriarchs and foragers emerge as important players in early farming villages»,

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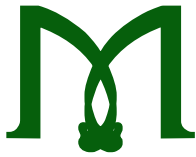
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(7) L'archéologue Kristian Kristiansen donne les explications suivantes dans son livre *Archaeology and the Genetic Revolution in European Prehistory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022: «Sons who could not inherit were sent off as migrating warring colonists» (p. 58); «We can document a male-dominated migratory expansion from Yamnaya to Corded Ware cultures, based on two institutionalized principles : that of primogeniture (oldest sons inherit) and that of male youth warbands... It was the maintenance of these two institutions that gave rise to continued migrations during subsequent millenia" (p. 65).

(8) Cette remarque incisive de Heide Goettner-Abendroth peut sans doute s'appliquer à bon nombre des travaux de recherche de l'archéologie préhistorique «main stream». Par exemple, dans le commentaire «officiel» d'un récent documentaire (2024) consacré aux monuments appelés «nuraghes», en Sardaigne, on peut lire que la «mystérieuse civilisation des nuraghes» de l'Age du Bronze était «organisée en villages interdépendants, sans pouvoir central» et qu'il s'agissait d'une «société pacifique pratiquant l'élevage et la polyculture». De plus, ses pratiques funéraires indiquaient un «peuple égalitaire», car il «enterrait ses morts collectivement, sans distinction de sexe, d'âge ou de rang social.» <https://www.inrap.fr/sardaigne-la-mysterieuse-civilisation-des-nuraghes-une-enquete-archeologique-de-19576>

Toutes ces caractéristiques donnent à penser que cette «mystérieuse civilisation» de l'Age du Bronze était, en fait, une société matriarcale, mais l'expression n'est jamais employée dans ce commentaire, ni dans le documentaire lui-même. Et pourtant la culture matriarcale a bel et bien existé en Sardaigne à l'Age du Bronze, comme le montrent les nombreuses pages que lui consacre Heide Goettner-Abendroth (pp. 486-492; voir aussi la figure 22, p. 265).



Book review:

***Son of Old Man Hat: A Navaho Autobiography*
recorded by Walter Dyk, foreword by Edward Sapir,
University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1938
(Second Bison Book printing 1968)**

MARIE-FRANÇOISE GUÉDON

Son of Old Man Hat has been a classic from the time of its first edition: published before the second World War, it continues to provide a major contribution to our knowledge of the Navajo world. Told in the first person, it is an unadorned autobiography which was the result of a long encounter between an older Navajo man, born in 1868 and known as Left Handed, and Walter Dyk, an anthropologist. At first primarily interested in collecting material about clans and kinship functions in the Navajo society, well known for its enduring matrilineal kinship structure, Dyk began work on the Navajo reservation in 1934 with Navajo men living in the region of Lukachukai (Arizona, USA). Then he asked Left Handed to relate the course of his life, and the ensuing book actually takes us from the Navajo man's birth to his twentieth birthday and his marriage, along with his daily routine as well as his steps in becoming an adult in his community. Edward Sapir, a leading anthropological voice at the time, contributed a short foreword that has not lost any of its



methodological importance and is well worth reading today, if only for what it implies about the idea of culture.

In the late nineteenth century, Navajo life was practically semi-nomadic, with most families moving from site to site with their sheep, cattle, and horses. The Navajo society was (and still is) organised in exogamous matrilineal clans; one belongs to one's mother's clan. Left Handed, the narrator of this autobiography, was a member of the Bitahni clan through his mother; his father belonged to the Many Goat clan. Because Left Handed's first mother was sick at the time of his birth, he was adopted by his mother's sister (whom, by custom he would already have addressed as 'mother'); she later remarried a former husband named Old Man Hat. Old Man Hat was also a member of the Many Goat clan and, therefore, belonged to Left Handed's father's clan as a 'father's brother' - whom Left Handed would also have addressed as father. This short introduction gives us a first clue about the cultural context of a society where most interpersonal ties are defined by kinship.

Left Handed's narrative was translated from Navajo into English, but otherwise did not borrow much from the Euro-American society. And it directly reflects a Navajo perspective on the human and non-human aspects of the world. This is a Navajo story, in form, in style, and in content. This perspective demands from the reader a willingness to accept the fact that there are different ways to live, think, and make sense of the world, the Navajo ways being truly distinct from the contemporary dominant Euro-centric worldview in both explicit and implicit terms.

The book is addressed to a general but learned public. Today's reader must also take into account the mores and language of the times, almost ninety years ago, especially in the foreword by Edward Sapir, and the preface by Walter Dyk. These authors use the term 'primitive' several times in lieu of First Nation or Indigenous, as well as the expressions 'American Indian' or simply 'Indian;' these latter remain common today in the USA both within and outside of Navajo communities.

Through his research, Dyk developed an interest for an aspect of culture rarely noticed today, perhaps because it does not attract much attention even though it lies at the very core of the cultural context. He summarised it and the intent of this work as follows, contrasting it with ethnological theoretical discussions and the usual focus on important events that can be observed as focal points of a society:

Valuable as anecdotes are, they tend naturally to cluster around such highly dramatic events as birth, death, murder, suicide, incest, witchery.... They tell nothing of the common place, the homespun stuff from day to day with which

life everywhere is so largely concerned. To get this, some long slow narrative that recalled the ordinary, the petty, the humdrum insignificant affairs as well [is needed]. With a view to obtaining such material, not alone for the light it might throw on the functions of clan and kin but on Navaho life in general, I asked one of my informants, an old man, Left Handed by name, to relate what he could remember of his life, insisting that the leave out nothing, no matter how trivial. (Dyk 1938, p. xi)

In order to record Left Handed's narrative with minimum manipulation and respect for the integrity of his account, Dyk had to consider the circumstances of the recording. He summarises his methodology in the preface as follows:

Like most Navaho of his age, Left Handed did not know English, and therefore the story had first to be told bit by bit to an interpreter who then translated each fragment in turn. [the interpreter was Philip Davis, a Navaho man from Lutkachukai.] As it is set down here it differs in no essentials from that first telling. I have tried to add nothing and left out only some few minor experiences and repetitious episodes, beside recurring passages, such as the details of moving from day to day, when it seemed to me these would only burden the reader and add neither to his knowledge nor to his pleasure. Likewise it seemed advisable to rearrange the episodes of early childhood into what would appear to be a more exact chronological order from that in which they were originally given. (Dyk 1938, xi-xii)

The resulting narrative itself is a remarkable document: It is not a book about Navajo society nor about Navajo culture or history. This is a book about a man remembering his own past.

Important aspects of Navajo world view are revealed as one follows the day-to-day routine, moves, hardships, and happy moments of a Navajo family seen through the eyes of a child remembered by an old man. But where an American anthropologist of the early twentieth century would identify and single out particular traits allowing us to define 'Navajo culture,' the recollections by the son of Old Man Hat flow from one day to the next, one season to the next, in a life obviously shaped by a cultural context one can recognize as distinct from the dominant society, but without any opportunity to define or construct it as a 'cultural' system' and, therefore, an outsider's perspective. Instead, we follow an individual moving through life, land, and people as related by an insider. As Edward Sapir remarks, in the foreword, there is no attempt here to inject an analysis of the cultural context or psychological interpretations, not even from the narrator himself.

Let us quote Sapir's words in full, as they reveal an essential aspect of what we call 'culture.' That is to say, it is an 'artifact.'

Before we undertake to estimate the meaning and value of this truly remarkable document, let us be clear as to what it is not and does not pretend to be.

In the first place, it is not a cultural museum. There are historical novels and primitive romances, also a few primitive records of individuals [*notably Paul Radin's fascinating Winnebago autobiography, Crashing Thunder; see Jung's review this issue*], which aim to show a given culture in operation, as it were. Such works are dramatizations of cultural patterns, of the mechanics of custom, rather than human documents in the simple sense. [...] There seems, indeed, to be something inhuman about the conscious articulation of custom, just as there is something in us all which rebels at the analysis of words. There is no doubt - at least, I presume there is none - that the Son Of Old Man Hat is as completely in the grip of his own culture as any other Navaho. No doubt the detailed picturesqueness of sand-painted gods and goddesses, perhaps even the secret of divining and witchcraft, are as present to his cultural consciousness as to that of any Navaho who is urged, or paid, to talk about such matters. But there is no declaration of them in this book, merely a quiet subtle assumption of their reality in the minds of men. [...] Navaho culture, so clearly patterned as an ethnological artifact, is here in the mind of the narrator an electrically charged solution of meanings, and Dr. Dyk has been skilful in the transcript, leaving out little that was essential, injecting nothing out of the spirit of romance or scientific curiosity. (Dyk, 1938, vii-viii)

Clifford Geertz, who warned us about the pitfall of ascribing our own scholarly concepts and cultural constructs to the society or the individual we are attempting to describe, would have been, I think, sensitive to this primacy of an individual testimony free of judgment and analysis. As Sapir explains:

Nor is this book a heavily documented contribution to individual psychology. It is in no sense the study of a personality. It is a sequence of memories that need an extraordinary well-defined personality to hold them together, yet nowhere is this unique consciousness obtruded upon us. We are in constant rapport with an intelligence in which all experiences remote and proximate, "trivial" and "important" are held like waving reeds in the sensitive transparency of a brook. Such concepts as "ego" or "frustration" seem heated and out of place when we try to feel with this intelligence. (Dyk 1938, viii)

As an ethnographer, I am here reminded of my experiences in Northern Athapaskan communities (linguistic cousins of the Navajo) where the older people who attempted to teach me how to behave so as not to disrupt their daily lives ignored such terms as 'culture,' 'ritual,' or 'traditions,' even 'kinship' or 'clans.' They prefer to talk about their 'ways,' or not to talk at all, inviting me to simply imitate their actions. Culture as a constructed object to be analysed by the observer was instead replaced by life lived.

From the beginning of this autobiographical document, we realise that we are not in a Euro-American social setting. And as we follow the memories first of the child, then the older boy, and the young man, we are presented with a version of childhood and growing up alien to most of us and yet strangely precise. The cultural setting we reconstruct from this account is organised, with norms and rules, meanings and values, purpose and ways of doing things, with stories and jokes; it is learned, and we learn with the child growing up.

Childhood here is matter-of fact: learning about winters and summers, about sheep and horses, about attacking snakes, and coyotes snatching puppies away, about having not much to eat and about hospitality and sharing meat without restraint, about playing with the lambs, and about learning the responsibility imparted to a five- or six-year-old child shepherding several dozen animals sometimes with other kids, most of the time by himself. These memories are sharp:

I was so small. I went out with the sheep like a dog. I just walked along with them and stayed right in the middle of the herd. I was afraid to go around them, but while I was in the middle of the sheep I wasn't afraid of anything.
(Dyk 1938, 8)

This childhood is also about watching the adults, kin or strangers, without judgment but with much awareness of their actions and the consequences of their conflicts and shortcomings. It sometimes has to do with witnessing the pain, grief and death of others, and being overcome by emotions before they can be named, and crying without restraint or recriminations. Physical and emotional upheavals are recalled without comments, as part of the day-to-day life of all beings.

It is also about discovering the pleasures of sexuality in an environment uncluttered by the biblical original sin or notions of sexual impurity, or even the physical dominance of one gender over the other, and where children explore without any explanations, but with models that are more likely to come from the herd animals than from human adults.

There were many Paiute girls, and once I went among them and began to play. They said to me, "We'll be goats, all of us girls will be goats, and you be the billy-goat." That's how we started, and they said. "Do to us as the billy-goat does to the goats. Get on top of us." I did that. Just like a billy-goat I jumped on the girls and laid over them. Some had on only one dress, and when I'd get on them they'd scream and I'd bend over and throw myself back, just like a billy-goat. They sure did like it. After we became acquainted we liked each other, and so we played that way everyday. (Dyk 1938, 10-11)

This is a world where girls are equally likely to initiate sexual encounters. Growing up also entails the need to lie to the adults about such encounters, by omission mostly, partly because all are already aware of potential pregnancies. It is also about learning when and how to lie.

There is no separation between children and the rest of the world. They are all participants in the same community. There is no school to keep children away from the grown-ups. One learns by watching and listening.

While they were talking [*about ritual songs*] I was sitting up listening to what they were saying. My father said to me, "Sit up and watch the fire. Keep the fire going." So I was sitting there listening, and I was glad he'd told me to sit up. I wanted to sit up and listen anyhow. Everything my father said, I was kind of picking up. [...] When the men started talking, I always liked to hear them. (Dyk 1938, 77)

It is about witnessing the dealings of adults with each other: watching adults support each other as well as lie, fight verbally and physically, steal or even kill others, and how they justify their deeds, and how they judge each others and how they bring about some reconciliation. It is about learning the difference between kinfolk, clan members, and strangers, and the proper behaviour corresponding to each term.

Above all it is about the land, a sometimes frigid, sometimes burning, always dry mountainous desert where one has to find the grassy pastures needed by sheep and horses, together with the rare sources of water. To keep oneself and the animals alive, one has to know the land; day after day, the child develops an intimate relationship with the dynamics of weather, seasons, and the lay of the land where, like his peers, he spends most of his time alone and in silence. The passing of time is tangible and part of reality.

As a young man, Left Handed becomes more involved with the human world; interpersonal connections building up with the management of herds, economic

transactions, participation in ritual events, dances and healing chants, marriages and funerals, and the amorous adventures permeating the lives of both unmarried and married men and women - with women often assuming the initiative.

The death of his father, Old Man Hat, brings grief and hardship, shared with relatives and kicking off another quickening of social life. Crying is an acceptable response, for both men and women, for this is not an isolated event; death is literally part of life, as the singer brought in to assist Old Man Hat repeats in the usual formula:

He said to my father [*uncle*], Choclys Kinsman, "It's all right, my uncle, everybody's dying off. Every creature on this earth is dying. Even the mountains are caving down. [...] He [*Old Man Hat*] was like one of the mountains. He had everything and knew everything, and everyone knew him, and everybody named him. So don't be worrying about him. We'll all be gone. We want to take care of and look after ourselves. While we're still alive we should help and take care of each other. When we die we're gone forever. No one will bring us back. So there's no use worrying so much about it." (Dyk 1938, 275)

Recollecting conversations, admonitions, location, and circumstances in amazing detail, the text takes us into the continuity of a world always in motion. After the death of Old Man Hat, one of his 'brothers' steps into the family as a 'father,' for someone has to take care of the herds and someone has to take care of the old woman.

Contrary to the continuity of life in settled villages, social life here alternates between relatively long periods of isolation, if not solitude, and periods of intense social interactions (which allow for a way out of dispute or conflicts). There is coming and going between herding on the mountain slopes and tending small corn fields and vegetables patches in the valley, between temporary summer camps and the regrouping of relatives in lower sites, between the poverty following drought or winter killing cold, and abundance brought by rainy seasons and grassy green pasture, between the loneliness of isolated hogans and the relief of visitors, as well as trips to the store or the rowdy crowds of festivals, and the gathering of relatives for 'chants' and funerals. There is also coming and going between the non-human world, out on the mountain and in the night, and the human world. While White people would speak of cycles, Dyk's narrative brings the reader to perceive this life more like a pulse.

The book ends when Left Handed, now about twenty years old and a competent adult, seeks a wife. He meets several girls and, with his mother's complicity, rescues a young woman from a hazardous marriage: "...the woman stayed with us there that night and never did go back." (Dyk 1938, 378).

From the reader's perspective, several aspects of the context in which this life is lived announce that the social environment is specifically Navajo. We already mentioned matrilineal clans. But this book is not a book about a matrilineal society; it is about a man's life in a society built on matrilineal kin groups, and one cannot separate the kinship structure from an obviously strong matricultural system nor from the more general context of a Navajo worldview; all these components belong to the same human environment. We immediately notice the constant influence of kinship in all human interactions, and at the same time recognize that the Navajo kin terms do not fit in with European terms, even though the English translation attempts to provide some kind of equivalent meaning. As lived, this social milieu goes without saying; the intricacies of the kinship system are not explained, though they obviously affect the choice of mates and spouses. Neither are differences in behaviour between fathers and father's sisters - which are affectionate, even intimate, and peaceful on the one side - and mothers and mothers' brothers, which are more authoritarian and demanding of respect, on the other side: "I think I never told a lie to my mother." (Dyk 1938, 45)

The text does not provide an explanation about the exogamous rules forbidding marriage with all members of one's mother's, father's, mother's father's, and father's father's clans, no matter how remote the kin connection. Before engaging in conversation with anyone, one has to know who they are and their clan identity. In fact, when introducing oneself in the Navajo context, people supply the names of their mother's clan and father's clan along with their mother's father's clan and their father's father's clan (the clan names of all four grand-parents). We may notice that a man is obliged to contend with keeping track of and supporting his children, that is, his sisters' sons and daughters - his biological nieces and nephews - as they grow up. He is particularly responsible for imparting to his sisters' male children (his nephews) the teachings, lore, and knowledge they need, including knowledge about the land and, of course, the herds, but also medical knowledge (both human and veterinarian) and how to deal with the non-human world. Women are more responsible for educating their daughters and their clan's daughters.

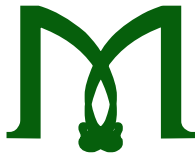
As far as women are concerned, we cannot ignore the many ways in which women make certain their authority, independence, and power. This is a society where one could explore equally how women are treated by men and how men are treated by women, where both men and women can and do leave their mate, fight each others physically, initiate sexual encounters, and are able to live, and move or travel, by themselves.

Left Handed mentions several times his fathers and his uncles lecturing him, and lecturing others, in order to maintain or re-establish peace in the household, and sometimes in the community's ever changing circle of relatives and neighbours. These speeches provide us

with access to a vision of the Navajo moral and political ideals. The problematic aspects of jealousy facilitated by social acceptance of separation and amorous affairs, (though glossed as 'stealing' other people's partners), polygamy, or more often, sororal bigamy, are shared by men and women. Navajo women do not perceive themselves as weaker than men. They can and do make their own decisions and have their own resources: the animals in the herds are individually owned by the various members of a domestic family, even though they are cared for communally. Obviously, this is not a matriarchal society, but women display a status that was, at the time, unthinkable for White women, and their participation in public life and economic affairs confirms their role in family affairs.

Left Handed and his relatives and neighbours are in contact with a number of various ethnic groups, including White people, and are well aware of the cultural and linguistic differences present in these interactions. The son of Old Man Hat could probably have provided a critique of his community's social structure or even an assessment of his way of life, if he had been prompted to do so, although with this, he would have been asked to step out of his own world into our own, since this kind of reflexion would not be part of his daily concerns. And there is no guidance for the reader, an outsider, interested in the mysteries of the ceremonial aspects of healing 'chants,' 'star gazing' rituals, or witchcraft accusations. Furthermore, Left Handed finds no need to provide a systematic description, even less a critique, of a social and ritual environment which is, from his perspective, as normal as a river is to a fish, or as authoritative as the language spoken by one's parents. It is also noteworthy that Left Handed and his relatives share a perception of themselves - and of other living beings, including sheep, horse, snakes, coyotes, and bears - as self-supporting and self-aware individuals, with an ensuing responsibility for self as well as for the human and non-human community.

Altogether, this a remarkable book, both as an introduction to Navajo ways through the recollection of one man's memories, and as an unusual narrative based on both eventful and especially the trivial aspects of one's life instead of a scholarly research report on the cultural context as a whole. Though it would be helpful for the scholarly reader looking for entry into the Navajo world to access a good monograph on Navajo culture before reading this autobiography, that reader might lose the immediacy of an encounter with a real person, and the richness of an individual life if its narration were superseded by a simplified abstract construct. As Sapir concludes in his foreword: '... in all their pages [*the pages of priceless ethnological records*] it is not told what a boy who happens to be about is expected to do when an old man dies.' (Dyk 1938, x).



Review Essay:

Men And Matriculture Among The Ho-Chunks

PATRICK J. JUNG

Paul Radin, ed. *The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian*.
University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, vol. 16, no. 7.
Berkeley: University of California Press, 1920.

Nancy Oestreich Lurie, ed. *Mountain Wolf Woman, Sister of Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian*.
Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961.

Two of the most celebrated and widely read works of American ethnography also occupy the literary genre of autobiography. The first, edited by Paul Radin, recounts the life of Sam Blowsnake, a Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) born in Wisconsin, likely in 1872. The second, edited by Nancy Oestreich Lurie, examines the life of Blowsnake's sister, Mountain Wolf Woman, born in 1884. The two works have much in common in addition to the fact that they present the lives of two Ho-Chunk siblings. Radin and Lurie heavily annotated the narratives of their respective works to provide ethnographic interpretations of the various facets of their informants' lives. The annotations make passages in the texts clearer to the non-Ho-Chunk reader who might be unfamiliar with the culture, and they afford additional context for events in which Blowsnake



and Mountain Wolf Woman participated that might be opaque to the lay person. Thus, the two works are valuable ethnographic sources, both the main narratives and Radin's and Lurie's copious annotations.

Researchers investigating the lives of males who hail from cultures that demonstrate strong matrilineal elements can glean important ethnographic information about Ho-Chunk men who lived at a time when their society experienced the trauma of settler colonialism and westward removal from their Wisconsin homeland to a reservation in Nebraska. A central theme in both works is how the Ho-Chunk people retained much of their traditional culture despite the dramatic changes to their situation. In earlier works, both Radin and Lurie argued that the Ho-Chunks possessed a matrilineal system before the era of European contact, and while the Ho-Chunks transitioned to a patrilineal system afterward, their society preserved important matrilineal elements. Lurie, in particular, noted that the Ho-Chunks retained a strong avuncular tradition and that women's brothers often had stronger relationships with their sisters' children than with their own.¹ The two works provide clear evidence of this unusually tight relationship between brothers and sisters. Moreover, the dual traumas of settler colonialism and removal had a more dramatic effect on male Ho-Chunks, and men often came to rely on the stability that women provided for the Ho-Chunk nation as it navigated its new circumstances in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The publishing histories of these two works must be examined to understand how they complement each other as ethnographic sources. Radin had been a student of Franz Boas, the father of American anthropology. Boas and his students rejected the evolutionary theory of their predecessors and sought instead to research cultures from the Native perspective. Radin conducted his fieldwork among the Ho-Chunks of Nebraska between 1908 and 1913. His first attempt at employing autobiography as an ethnographic method appeared in a 1913 article in the *Journal of American Folklore*, edited by Boas, with a memoir penned by Jasper Blowsnake, Sam's older brother, written in the Ho-Chunk language along with the English translation on each page. Radin asserted that this autobiographic method provided "an inside view of an Indian's thoughts."² Seven years later, he published Sam Blowsnake's edited, 92-page autobiography in the *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology*, a periodical edited by Alfred Kroeber, another student of Boas. This work subsequently appeared as a separate monograph that retained the pagination of the original

¹ Paul Radin, *Winnebago Hero Cycles: A Study in Aboriginal Literature* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1948), 40, 43-45, 116, 123; Nancy Oestreich Lurie, "Winnebago," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 15, *Northeast*, Bruce G. Trigger, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978), 694-95.

² Paul Radin, ed., "Personal Reminiscences of a Winnebago Indian," *Journal of American Folklore* 26 (October-December 1913): 293 (qtd. 293). Also see Arnold Krupat, *For Those Who Come After: A Study of Native American Autobiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 77-83.

periodical in which it appeared. As in his earlier 1913 work, Radin wrote in the 1920 *Autobiography* that he sought “an inside view” of Ho-Chunk culture.³

Radin later expanded the 1920 *Autobiography* into his well-known book *Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of an American Indian*, first published in 1926 and reprinted several times thereafter.⁴ However, this later manifestation of Sam Blowsnake’s autobiography is, in many ways, less useful and satisfying than the earlier *Autobiography*. Radin expanded the number of pages from 92 to 203 by including additional material he had collected during his fieldwork rather than limiting the text to that information received directly from Blowsnake. Moreover, Sam’s Ho-Chunk name was Big Winnebago (Hoćąŋkxátega in Ho-Chunk); his older brother, Jasper, was named Crashing Thunder (Warudjáxega in Ho-Chunk). Radin decided to use Jasper’s Ho-Chunk name as the main character of *Crashing Thunder* rather than Sam’s (the actual subject of the narrative) because Radin believed ‘Big Winnebago’ sounded too pretentious and even fictional. This editorial decision alone makes Radin’s 1926 *Crashing Thunder* unnecessarily misleading. Moreover, Radin’s critics, particularly Arnold Krupat and Ruth Underhill, believe that many of the textual changes between the *Autobiography* and *Crashing Thunder* constituted rhetorical flourishes by Radin to make the latter work more dramatic and even artistic. Of greater concern from an ethnographic point of view was Radin’s decision to whittle the 351 annotations in the *Autobiography* to a mere 32 in *Crashing Thunder*.⁵ While no ethnographic text can be considered perfect, the 1920 *Autobiography* is the more useful of the two texts, as it better preserves both the ‘emic’ voice of Sam Blowsnake and the ‘etic’ observations Radin recorded in the annotations.

Less controversy surrounded the writing of Lurie’s *Mountain Wolf Woman*. Lurie began her fieldwork among the Wisconsin Ho-Chunks in 1944 while still an undergraduate. In 1945, she met Stella Blowsnake Whitepine Stacy, whose Ho-Chunk name was Xehaćiwingga, or Mountain Wolf Woman in English. Ho-Chunk people possessed a variety of names during their lives. As infants, names were assigned by birth order, and later, as children, they received a more formal name in the Ho-Chunk language. In the late nineteenth century, Ho-Chunks adopted English first names and surnames for government enrollments. Unlike her brothers, Mountain Wolf Woman rarely used her official name, asserting proudly that “in English I just say my name is Mountain

³ Paul Radin, ed. *The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian*, University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, vol. 16, no. 7 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1920), 383 (qtd. 383).

⁴ Paul Radin, ed., *Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of an American Indian* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1926). For a later edition that includes a preface by Arnold Krupat, see Paul Radin, ed., *Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of an American Indian* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

⁵ Krupat, *For Those Who Come After*, 80-92; Ruth Underhill, “Foreword,” in Nancy Oestreich Lurie, ed., *Mountain Wolf Woman, Sister of Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), viii-ix, 92-97.

Wolf Woman.”⁶ Whereas Radin had Sam Blowsnake provide the material for the 1920 *Autobiography* in two long, rather tortuous sessions, Lurie and Mountain Wolf Woman collaborated over a more leisurely five weeks in January and February 1958.⁷ Lurie’s edited work was published in 1961 by the University of Michigan Press, and the publisher reissued it as a paperback (without changes to the text or pagination) in 1966. The book has since enjoyed numerous reprintings and has been translated into Italian and Polish.⁸

The tone of the two books differs significantly, and this provides our first glimpse into the lives of men in Ho-Chunk society. Women retained a significant role in Ho-Chunk society in the two centuries bracketed by the period of the Ho-Chunks’ initial contact with Europeans in the seventeenth century and the onset of removal and the reservation era in the nineteenth century. While the demands of the fur trade and the Ho-Chunks’ increasing contacts with their Algonquian neighbors brought about the transition from a matrilineal to a patrilineal society, women retained significant economic, political, and even military roles among the Ho-Chunks. Thus, a strong matriculture remained evident and discernible even as the pressures of removal and relocation and a growing population of white settlers in both Wisconsin and Nebraska caused social and cultural dislocation. These forces proved detrimental to both men and women, but men in particular reaped the bitter harvest of consequences to a greater degree than their female counterparts.⁹

The life of Sam Blowsnake makes this abundantly clear. As a young adult, Blowsnake rapidly sank into the abyss of alcoholism. Like many Ho-Chunk men, he engaged in temporary jobs such as logging, and he even joined a circus along with other Native people and participated in the ‘Wild West’ shows common at the time. What money he earned, he spent on alcohol. He also engaged in many short-term, casual relationships with Ho-Chunk women. In the period before removal and white settlement, divorce was not unheard of among the Ho-Chunks. However, the serial nature of sexual relationships described by Blowsnake was a new development, and while he called the women with whom he lived his ‘wives,’ the nature of the relationships indicated

⁶ Lurie, *Mountain Wolf Woman*, xi-xii, 6-7, 111-12 (qtd. 7). Also see Tom Jones, Michael Schmudlach, Matthew Daniel Mason, Amy Lonetree, and George A. Greendeer, *People of the Big Voice: Photographs of Ho-Chunk Families by Charles Van Schaick, 1879-1942* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2011), 245.

⁷ Lurie, *Mountain Wolf Woman*, xiii-xiv, 92-93.

⁸ For the Italian translation, see Nancy Oestreich Lurie, ed., *Donna Lupo di Montagna: autobiografia di un'indiana Winnebago*, P. d'Oro, trans. (Milan, Italy: Rosconi Libra, 1989). For the Polish translation, see Nancy Oestreich Lurie, ed., *Górska Wilczyca, siostra Grzmiącego Pioruna: autobiografia Indianki z plemienia Winnebago*, Aleksander Sudak, trans. (Wielichowo, Poland: Tipi, 2009).

⁹ Patrick J. Jung, “Traces of the Feminine: Matriculture in the Traditional Ho-Chunk Life World,” *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies* 3 (Spring-Summer 2023): 118-39. For an essay that defines the concept of matriculture, see Marie-Françoise Guédon, “Introduction,” *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies* 1 (May 2020): 3-7.

otherwise, as these unions lacked the exchange of gifts and reciprocal family obligations that had earlier characterized Ho-Chunk marriage. Blowsnake noted:

I then had two women staying with me as my wives, and, at one time I had as many as four, two at my parents' house and two staying with other relatives of mine. I wasn't serious with any of them.... On one occasion four children were born to me and each one had a different mother. Nevertheless, even after that I still courted women and kept on drinking.¹⁰

Blowsnake's narrative indicates he was not the only person who had fallen victim to the temptations of casual relationships, loose 'marriages,' and heavy alcohol consumption. Radin noted in an annotation that, "This saturnalia has developed only in recent times. I know of nothing to suggest that we are dealing with an old survival."¹¹

What stands out in Blowsnake's narrative, and even more so in that of his youngest sister, Mountain Wolf Woman, is the strong bond that characterized brothers and sisters among the Ho-Chunks. This bond, Lurie argues, was evidence of an earlier matrilineal system that survived, in part, the transition to patrilineality. The Ho-Chunks possessed an Omaha system of kinship, common among many patrilineal societies in Native North America, but there also existed:

respectful deference between brothers and sisters, which would include parallel cousins; actual male siblings and classificatory brothers arranging marriages for sisters.... Uncles, that is, ego's mother's male siblings and classificatory brothers and their male descendants, were called upon as needed by the mother to be official punishers during ego's childhood.¹²

Blowsnake frequently mentions his sisters in the context that Lurie describes. When he returned home drunk to Black River Falls, Wisconsin by train after dancing in a show, Blowsnake noted that, "My relatives saw me and saw that I was drunk. They were very sorry and an older sister of mine wept when she saw me. Then I again made up my mind that I would not do it again."¹³ He had initially been reluctant to become a member of the Peyote cult that had been spreading among the Ho-Chunks, but his resistance waned after one of his sisters returned from Oklahoma as a follower of the new religion. He had promised his youngest sister, Mountain

¹⁰ Radin, *Autobiography*, 409-17 (qtd. 409). For Ho-Chunk marriage customs, see Paul Radin, "The Winnebago Tribe," in *Thirty-Seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1915-1916* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1923), 138-39; and Nancy Oestreich Lurie, "Trends of Change in Patterns of Child Care and Training among the Wisconsin Winnebago," *Wisconsin Archeologist* 29 (September-December 1948): 133.

¹¹ Radin, *Autobiography*, 417n84 (qtd. 417n84).

¹² Lurie, "Winnebago," 696 (qtd. 696).

¹³ Radin, *Autobiography*, 407 (qtd. 407).

Wolf Woman, that he would not succumb to the peyote religion, but the blandishments of his other sister and her husband resulted in his participation. Afterward, he stopped drinking alcohol; he also married permanently. Another man approached him one day and said, "Come home with me. I have a younger sister. I want her to marry a good man; I would like to have her marry you."¹⁴ Sam Blowsnake remained a teetotaler, a member of the peyote religion, and a committed husband thereafter.¹⁵

His descent into alcoholism and sexual dissipation resulted in often-strained relationships with his sisters and other relatives. Nevertheless, he never forgot what the ideal relationship with his sisters should be. At the end of his narrative, he recounted the teachings he received from his father, tenets that expressed the principal contours of Ho-Chunk culture. One of them concerned sharing the spoils gained through a war party with his sisters, even though the Ho-Chunks could not go to war as they had done in the era before the advent of white settlement, which began in the 1830s. Particularly interesting are Blowsnake's 'Precepts Concerning Marriage' in his autobiography because they privilege a man's relationship with his sisters over that of his wife. Blowsnake recounted, "When you get married do not make an idol of the woman you marry; do not worship her.... If you keep on listening to a woman in this way, all your relatives will scold you. In time even your sisters will not think anything of you."¹⁶ In his annotation of this passage, Radin added, "Respect for sisters was a fundamental fact among Winnebago [Ho-Chunks]."¹⁷ Indeed, the body of Blowsnake's narrative, while mentioning his sisters in only a few places, indicates he held them in the highest regard, and, despite his flaws, he did his utmost to retain and maintain their respect throughout his life.

Mountain Wolf Woman's narrative tells a very similar story, albeit from a female perspective. Her story presents far less drama than that of her brother. Her most poignant story involves her first marriage, which her brothers arranged. This was a common cultural convention among the Ho-Chunks, as Sam Blowsnake's final marriage illustrates. Just as he married his wife at the behest of her brothers, Blowsnake and his brothers arranged the first marriage of their youngest sister, Mountain Wolf Woman. When one considers that Ho-Chunk men often had stronger relationships with their sisters' children than their own progeny, it would be logical that they would have a significant say concerning whom their sisters should marry. While she was still a young girl, likely in her teens, Mountain Wolf Woman's brothers arranged for her to marry. The control her brothers exercised in this matter was evident when her mother told her, "My little daughter, I prize you highly. You alone are the youngest child. I prize you highly but nothing can be done about this matter. It is your brothers' doing... if you do not do this they will be

¹⁴ Radin, *Autobiography*, 430-446 (qtd. 446). Also see Lurie, *Mountain Wolf Woman*, 102-3.

¹⁵ Radin, *Autobiography*, 446-49.

¹⁶ Radin, *Autobiography*, 451, 463-64 (qtd. 463-64).

¹⁷ Radin, *Autobiography*, 464 (qtd. 464).

disgraced.”¹⁸ If Mountain Wolf Woman’s mother was resigned to her daughter’s fate, she also provided her with the means to escape her situation when she told Mountain Wolf Woman on her wedding day, “When you are older and know better, you can marry whomever you yourself think that you want to marry.”¹⁹ After having two children, a boy and a girl, with her first husband, that is exactly what she did. Mountain Wolf Woman justified the divorce by the fact that her husband was a jealous man. In her annotation, Lurie noted that divorce on the grounds of jealousy was “eminently acceptable” among the Ho-Chunks, and a woman had a significant degree of autonomy when it came to staying in a marriage or choosing to leave, even a marriage arranged by her brothers.²⁰

In fact, Ho-Chunk men lived in a society that afforded women a great deal of personal freedom and individual choice, and they had to respect the opinions and decisions of their wives and sisters. Radin noted that children received a rather formal education from their parents concerning proper behavior and ethical conduct in Ho-Chunk culture. These *hok’i’ku*ⁿ (‘teachings’ or ‘precepts’) included instructions on how men should treat their wives. According to one of Radin’s informants, fathers warned their sons, “Women can never be watched. If you try to watch them you will merely show your jealousy and your female relatives will also be jealous.”²¹ Sam Blowsnake recorded similar teachings he received from his own father and wrote, “Finally, after your jealousy has developed to its highest pitch, your wife will leave you and run away (with someone else).”²² A man who favored his wife over all other persons or became overly jealous of his wife risked not only losing her but also jeopardizing his relationships with his sisters and other female relatives. Thus, the autobiographies of both Sam Blowsnake and Mountain Wolf Woman illustrate the delicate balancing act that Ho-Chunk men experienced in both their consanguineous and affinal relationships with the women in their lives.

Radin tended to be less cognizant of the experiences of Ho-Chunk women than Lurie, a fact noted by one of Radin’s biographers, Jack Glazier, who writes, “Radin built strong relationships with several of the Winnebago [Ho-Chunks] with whom he worked, but none of those relationships was with women. His viewpoint was highly gender-constricted. He had little to say about Winnebago women, as informants or otherwise.”²³ Lurie, a female anthropologist working during the latter half of the twentieth century, was much more attuned to the roles of women among the Ho-Chunks and other Native societies. She noted in an appendix to Mountain Wolf Woman’s autobiography that the stresses and traumas of American settler

¹⁸ Lurie, “Winnebago,” 696; Lurie, *Mountain Wolf Woman*, 29 (qtd. 29).

¹⁹ Lurie, *Mountain Wolf Woman*, 30 (qtd. 30).

²⁰ Lurie, *Mountain Wolf Woman*, 30, 122n5-23n5 (qtd. 122n5).

²¹ Radin, “Winnebago,” 166, 175 (qtd. 175).

²² Radin, *Autobiography*, 464 (qtd. 464).

²³ Jack Glazier, *Anthropology and Radical Humanism: Native and African American Narratives and the Myth of Race* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2020), 45-46 (qtd. 46).

colonialism had had a far greater effect on Ho-Chunk men, whose traditional roles as hunters and warriors had been seriously disrupted during the course of the late nineteenth century. Ho-Chunk women, on the other hand, were much more able to fulfill the roles that had always defined their lives. Lurie wrote, "Mountain Wolf Woman's autobiography is a predictable reflection of the greater self-confidence enjoyed by women in comparison to men in a culture undergoing rapid and destructive changes. As was true of many American Indian groups, the roles of wife, mother and homemaker for which the Winnebago [Ho-Chunk] girl was prepared could be fulfilled in adulthood despite the vagaries of acculturation."²⁴

In a well-known essay, Michael Allen argued that matrilineal societies in Melanesia were better able to weather the forces of colonialism than patrilineal societies.²⁵ A corollary to this conclusion might be that women in societies with strong matricultures are better able to adapt to the changes wrought by colonialism than men. Of course, such a conclusion requires more research, but the evidence culled from the autobiographies of Sam Blowsnake and Mountain Wolf Woman is intriguing and worthy of additional investigation. In a review of this length, it is not possible to examine all the facets of matriculture that are manifest in the autobiographies of these two Ho-Chunk siblings. Nevertheless, the examples presented here adequately demonstrate the rich ethnographic information that can be gleaned by reading both works together. What emerges is a picture of a society undergoing a rapid series of changes, but also the retention and maintenance of earlier cultural practices that found new functions and expressions. These included the relationships between men and women, particularly consanguineous relationships within nuclear and extended family groups. The two works are particularly useful in reconstructing the roles of women in Ho-Chunk society and the matricultural elements that defined women's lives. Ho-Chunk men not only lived within this matricultural system, but they also helped to define it.

²⁴ Lurie, *Mountain Wolf Woman*, 100 (qtd. 100).

²⁵ Michael Allen, "Elders, Chiefs, and Big Men: Authority Legitimation and Political Evolution in Melanesia," *American Ethnologist* 11 (February 1984): 20-41.