

SOCIETIES OF PEACE

Second World Congress on Matriarchal Studies

September 29 – October 2, 2005 in San Marcos, Texas/USA

Final Report

Edited by INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY HAGIA

Matriarchal societies have a non-violent social structure. They are based on gender equality; their political decisions are made by consensus; insightful and well thought-through principles and social guidelines ensure a peaceful life for all. These are true “Societies of Peace”. Before the inauguration of modern Matriarchal Studies 30 years ago, matriarchies had not been impartially investigated by Western social sciences. Matriarchal societies have a long and fascinating history, and despite the destructive disrespect they have been subject to, they continue to exist on various continents.

At this congress these largely misunderstood societies that have been shaped primarily by women were presented to a wider public.

In 2003, this process was already begun at the the *First World Congress on Matriarchal Studies* titled *SOCIETIES IN BALANCE* which took place in Luxembourg. It was mainly sponsored by that country’s Minister of Family and Women's Affairs, Marie-Josée Jacobs, and organised and guided by Dr. Heide Goettner-Abendroth, founding director of the “HAGIA. International Academy for Modern Matriarchal Studies” in Germany. It was a ground-breaking event: it brought together for the first time scholars from across the world who have up to now been working on this issue in relative isolation. It was a milestone with great historical implications for Matriarchal Studies in general, developing out of the international contacts of the Academy HAGIA, especially those of Heide Goettner-Abendroth. Thus, a wide-ranging, alternative scientific community came into its own.

In 2004, Genevieve Vaughan, founding director of the “Center for the Study of the Gift Economy” in Austin, Texas, who participated in the first World Congress, invited Heide to bring the topic of matriarchy to the USA. After a year of friendly collaboration between Heide in Germany, and Genevieve in the USA – a collaboration that included Sally Jacques, the Congress Coordinator, and the other women of Genevieve’s staff – the *Second World Congress on Matriarchal Studies*, titled *SOCIETIES OF PEACE* was held in this year (2005) in San Marcos, Texas. It took place thanks to Genevieve’s generous sponsorship, and was once again chaired by Heide. In addition, to promote the

idea of the gift economy, Genevieve offered this congress free to all of the participants.

The congress was co-sponsored by Dr. Sandra Mayo from the “Center for Multicultural and Gender Studies” of the Texas State University, San Marcos, and by the “Indigenous Women’s Network”, “The Institute of Archaeomythology”, the “Reformed Congregation of the Goddess International”, the “Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom”, and the “Women’s Spirituality Program of the California Institute of Integral Studies” all based in the USA.

This Second World Congress went even beyond what had been achieved by the 2003 Congress; this time it brought together indigenous researchers, mostly women and some men, from many of the world’s still existing matriarchal societies. They came from different continents: from North, Central and South America; from North, West and South Africa; from Asia, including China, Sumatra and India. This made the Second World Congress a significantly intercultural event; it set an unparalleled precedent with respect to the meeting of indigenous matriarchal speakers from all over the world. Dressed in their symbol-filled, traditional costumes they spoke not only about the matriarchal patterns their societies have preserved, but also about the societal and political problems that colonization and missionization have caused to their communities. In this way, they corrected the distorted perspective often held by non-indigenous peoples, and taught the audience about the non-violent social order of their communities; these are places where all living creatures – humans, animals and nature – are respected and reciprocal equality – regardless of sex and age – is practised.

In the last part of the congress, historical theories and research on matriarchal societies, as well as matriarchal symbolism, were presented by renowned scholars from the USA and Europe. This bridged the gap between the researchers from those two continents, and was rounded out by a lecture on the origin of domination and patriarchy. Overall, the creative impact of women’s contribution to human development was splendidly presented throughout the congress.

As a whole, the presentations can be seen to constitute a new research area, an area which has indeed become a social science in its own right, and which now emerges as a new paradigm of human history and society. Furthermore, it became obvious that the speakers all, in their own way, work with a new complex methodology that integrates many of the traditional scientific disciplines and also transgresses them: for ex. ethnology, anthropology, archaeology, history, theology, folklore and oral traditions, the arts and linguistics amongst others.

Each of the continents involved was represented by a panel of speakers. After each panel there was a time for short, concentrated discussion in which the audience was an unusually active participant. This world congress was received with great enthusiasm and there were between 300 and 350 people present, who filled the beautiful University Performing Arts Center, built on top of a hill with a panoramic view. Participants came from all over the USA, from Canada, Mexico, Haiti, Costa Rica, Brazil, Bolivia, Nepal, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Israel, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and other countries. Most of them were women; among them were many scholars, academically educated or self-educated persons and political activists. Adults of all ages were there.

The audiences followed the presentations closely, from 9:00 a.m. until 7:00 or 8:00 p.m., and attended programs later in the evening as well. The interest in discussion after each lecture was so immense, that it was not possible to complete it within the time allocated by the schedule. At the persistence of this extraordinary audience, some more hours of dialogue were added to the schedule. The enthusiasm for the congress found its expression in repeated long lasting applause, which on occasion ended in standing ovation. The formidable hospitality of Genevieve Vaughan received well-earned applause. The excellent guidance of Heide Goettner-Abendroth, and the backup work of the organizational and technical crew was warmly appreciated.

On the fourth day, a common political declaration was formulated. The speakers and many participants shared their ideas how to generate concrete alternatives and practical solutions to the patriarchal system of exploitation and what steps can be taken to promote the re-establishment of peaceful societies. There was such a vivid interest in taking part in this declaration that it went on all morning and continued in the afternoon. After the declaration was finished, several groups were formed to take action on issues that had arisen during the congress. Groups formed around four themes: resistance to the building of "big box" stores; concern about the murders of women factory workers in Mexico; changing the political climate in the US; and rebuilding the women's movement from the perspective of Matriarchal Studies. There was not time for these groups to fully explore their topics and so email discussion groups were created for some of them, including the Yahoo group on Matriarchal Studies, which all of the congress participants were invited to subscribe to.

The arts were also represented: Besides Lydia Ruyle's beautiful Goddess banners that decorated the stage in the congress hall, some impressive exhibitions were set up in the foyer: at the center the exhibit of "The Foundation for a Compassionate Society", Austin, displayed their work; along the walls the artistic photo exhibit of "The New Matriarchal Mystery Festivals" of the

International Academy HAGIA, Germany; at the main door the exhibit of “The Center for Multicultural and Gender Studies” of the Texas State University, San Marcos; the exhibit of “The Reformed Congregation of the Goddess”, USA, including a room for meditation; and a photo exhibit about “The Life Cycle of the Juchiteca” created by the indigenous speaker Rosa Martha Toledo from Mexico.

Furthermore, the four congress days had a spiritual frame: Each one was opened by a short ritual by an indigenous speaker, symbolically representing the matriarchal traditions of the continents from which they came: North America, Africa, Asia, Central- and South America. The congress was closed by a ritual titled “The Circle of a Peaceful World”, performed in the open air by the women of Academy HAGIA, Europe. It was dedicated to Mother Earth, and the circle of (old and new) matriarchal people from all over the world, a circle whose existence was made visible during the congress, was represented and celebrated.

The media response was provided by alternative media, and this is still on-going. The whole congress was carefully broadcast on audio on-line by the feminist media FIRE (Costa Rica): www.fire.or.cr and taped for radio by WINGS (Canada). Moreover, filming was done for a video/dvd which will be produced by UR-KULTUR (Germany). The male dominated mainstream media were very reticent, in spite of the fact that they had received invitations. They behaved either indifferently or dismissively, in one case even slanderously (“Weltwoche” in Zurich), a fact which is all too familiar to researchers on matriarchal societies.

The documentation of the congress will be published as a book, including all lectures, and will be presented in the film.

Thanks to all those who supported the *Second World Congress on Matriarchal Studies* in the most generous way, it became a great success. The short and longterm consequences of this extraordinary event cannot be anticipated at this point.

May the example of matriarchal societies show us the way to leave patriarchy behind!

November 2005

HAGIA. International Academy for Modern Matriarchal Studies and Matriarchal Spirituality

Final Words by Genevieve Vaughan

Two years ago I went to a wonderful conference in Luxembourg, the *First World Congress on Matriarchal Studies*. It was particularly exciting for me, because for some 40 years I have been working on an analysis of patriarchal capitalism in the light of an alternative economy, a gift economy, which I believe women already are practicing in their caring work in the home and elsewhere. The idea of matriarchy is particularly important to me because it is a context for the gift economy, and a cultural and social consequence of organizing lives according to satisfying needs, before and beyond the capitalist market. By taking the mother as the human norm, and ego-oriented *homo economicus* as the aberration, we can envision and at last create a society that can work for everyone.

I was bowled over by the congress I attended in Luxembourg as were many other women who were there. One day at lunch I was sitting at the table with women from several countries, including some US women. We started talking about how wonderful and important it would be to have a conference on matriarchies in the US. It's just what we need, we said, in these heavy patriarchal war-mongering times, to get people thinking in a different direction. All of us at the table toasted to this possibility of a US congress on matriarchies, with great enthusiasm. A few days later I met Heide Goettner-Abendroth in Austria at a conference of Fem Attac and I broached this subject. She did not feel up to directing another congress in 2004, but that she would do it in 2005. For that reason my organization, the Center for the Study of the Gift Economy and I put on a conference on the Gift Economy last fall in Las Vegas with many wonderful speakers from many different countries. Some of the people told me it was one of the best conferences they ever attended.

Now, in fall 2005, the time finally arrived and the *Second World Congress on Matriarchal Studies* took place in San Marcos, Texas. Thanks to the work of Heide Goettner-Abendroth, to all the speakers and participants who came from so many countries and especially to all the women who devoted so much time, energy and heart to putting on this event, the congress was a great success. I appreciate the place the gift economy occupies in matriarchies and can occupy in our vision of a better world. For that reason I have been particularly glad to support this congress and to make it the final event of my 25 years of trying to promote the gift economy in a practical way.

May women lead the way again to societies of peace!

December 2005

Genevieve Vaughan

Center for the Study of the Gift Economy