

Unveiling Patriarchal Motherhood

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Cet article démontre que la famille et l'économie sont en interaction, elles sont même basées l'une sur l'autre. Comme la définition du travail est arbitraire et omet les tâches dites féminines, la rhétorique de la réconciliation travail-famille est trompeuse. L'auteure décrit les hypothèses sur lesquelles les théories classiques d'économie sont basées et elle formule des approches décisives pour une économie matricentrique.

At the beginning of my research on motherhood—then a young mother in my twenties—I realized that there is something deeply wrong with motherhood. Soon I became convinced that the problems inherent within the concept of motherhood is based on the mechanical approach towards the maternal procreative potential; I was particularly disturbed by the way of quantifying the offspring (two per woman), the functional way of delivering a child, and reproductive technology's ruthless developments to physically replace the mother. I therefore set out to prove that the official image of motherhood is wrong.

In this paper, I will describe the public discourse surrounding motherhood before introducing my thesis on the reason why mothers are trapped. I will then provide a discussion of the theoretical concept that my work is based on. I will also discuss the role of feminism in current developments. The results of my research, within which I applied the critical theory of patriarchy, demonstrated the mother's abuse and defeat, a condition that is most clearly represented by the patriarchal mother. She is still mothering under extreme conditions, and her body continues to be a target of technological experiments that are intended to aim at a motherless life. I will close by showing the decade-long developments of a social mindset, one that

has succeeded in convincing even women themselves that surrendering is for their own good, e.g., by outsourcing pregnancy.

This article is based on several of my own empirical studies in the field of reproduction and politics as well as additional studies conducted by other researchers, mostly in a European context. I began my work with the subject of matricide (1992) before turning my attention to other subjects, including motherhood in patriarchy (2004/2013), abortion (2002), fatherhood (or rather the absence of fathers) (2007), and family and population policies (2000, 2009).

The Public Discourse

The public discourse is dominated by two subjects. One concerns work and family, and takes an economic perspective, and the other concerns procreation and its political implications. "Having it all," is supposedly the key phrase for women who want to raise children and work (Sandberg). In Europe, this debate is dominated by the social democratic viewpoint; in the U.S. it is led by socialist liberal feminists and expressed most often in the concept of freeing women by including them in the workforce and encouraging them to develop careers. Ostensibly to create "gender equality," the European Union created Gender Mainstreaming Programs. In practice, these initiatives put women at the mercy of European contracts¹ that aim to increase European economic strength. This discourse is based on the concept of liberal feminism, which understands equality as equality with men, and does not question the much deeper and

broader omissions of neoliberalism's philosophy, rules, and practices.

The other subject on the daily agenda is the reproductive one. The first aspect discussed is the debate on abortion, which has become a bloody battlefield complete with the threatening of pregnant women, the murdering of doctors and nurses, and ruthless political lobbying in order to prohibit the procedure in medical institutions. More and more U.S. states and Eastern European countries are being targeted by proposed regulations.² These discussions are decades old; they have been ongoing since the 1970s. It is clear that the liberal legislations introduced then did not bring an end to the anti-abortion campaigns, as women were hoping (Tazi-Preve and Roloff). While the backlash continues, it now operates by new legal means introduced by right-wing groups rather than Christian activities.

Second, the permanent low birth rates in Europe since the 1980s brought a new incentive to increase population growth. The norm of the two-children family is constantly pursued and propagated in politics and the media, as well as by the economic demands for more human resources. Finally, the technologizing of motherhood has introduced a completely new understanding of the maternal body, namely that it can be replaced any time by the artificial process of conceiving (in vitro fertilization) and carrying a child (surrogate mothers, etc.).

Third, the narrative regarding the women's body and procreative ability in the context of reproductive technologies has shifted dramatically over the last several decades. It became common sense to accept the neoliberal approach of commodifying even one's own body, and the terminology associated with the body became linked to reproductive liberals' language of "rights" (to have a child) and "choices" (Klein, R. 162). These discourses paved the way for the transformation of women into "body shops" (Klein, R. 162).

My Thesis, the Critical Theory of Patriarchy, and Feminism

My thesis is that the idea of motherhood today—which I call patriarchal motherhood (Tazi-Preve *Motherhood in Patriarchy*)—is based on the historical notion of matricide (Tazi-Preve "Der Muttermord"), which results in leaving behind a maternal artifact—the ultimate goal its technological replacement. In my earliest work, I demonstrated that in mythology, religion, and psychology—as well as in the disciplines of science, medicine, law, and politics—the mother was eradicated and the father was considered to be the real creator. Thus patriarchy is a project intended to replace matriarchy.³ It is important to note here that the (patriarchal) mother is still alive—insofar as she is

still required to be a breeder, caretaker, and worker—but the conditions and the constraints she is living in are the result of a violent transformation. Thus the patriarchal mother is left in the "Mother Trap."⁴ Here, each choice turns out to be false as "there is no right life within the wrong (system)" (Adorno 43).

The first key term that we must consider is "patriarchy." It was coined at the beginning of the second feminist movement to designate a comprehensive system of domination of women (Walby). The Critical Theory of Patriarchy uses an etymological approach to show that the term consists of the Latin term *pater* (father), and the Greek term *arche*. *Arche* has different meanings: it implies dominance, but it also means beginning (Gemoll). The term therefore indicates that it is the father who wants to replace the mother as the origin and creator of life. This replacement took place about five thousand years ago, and it was done ideologically by degrading her, but also by means of symbols and myths—consider Zeus who "gives birth" to his daughter Athena out of his head. Greek myths have changed dramatically over the centuries (Ranke-Graves), but the most recent version of this particular myth conceals the fact that Zeus had previously swallowed the goddess Metis, who was pregnant with her daughter. Therefore, in Ancient Greece—like today—patriarchy depended on absorbing maternal potency to imitate the creation of life.

During the course of my research, I realized that the second women's movement succeeded in naming the fundamental problems, but could not induce any essential change. In order to understand why what socialists have called the "women's question" is not being solved, but on the contrary is worsening, the development of new analytical tools became an urgent task. Most academic research lacks appropriate critical questioning: Studies on motherhood conducted within the social sciences—mainly within sociology, political science, and psychology—describe the fate of mothers according to the economic premise of family life and workforce (e.g. Rille-Pfeiffer and Kapella), or according to their socio-psychological states during pregnancy, after birth, and while raising children (e.g. Klepp). The approach is mostly descriptive, from a single discipline, and apolitical.⁵ The whole picture of manifold constraints that mothers are living under is completely left out of the picture, as these analyses usually lack a comprehensive understanding of coercion and violence. Johan Galtung showed that violence not only exists in direct physical form, but also on the level of structure and culture. Patriarchal motherhood is therefore the result of violent structures.

In response to the absence of appropriate answers in feminist and political theory, the Innsbruck School—which

I have been part of—began to systematize earlier feminist theoretical developments from the 1970s in Germany. The Critical Theory of Patriarchy evolved from this project. It presents a systemic, transdisciplinary meta-theory that seeks to understand civilization in all its dimensions (von Werlhof “Destruction through ‘Creation’”; Projektgruppe Zivilisationspolitik). Through the use of its tools, it becomes clear that the final goal in politics, economics, and society is the enduring destruction of nature and human beings, and ultimately their artificial—supposedly better—

Furthermore, in academia, widely accepted concepts caused a shift towards from a systemic view to an individualization of the “female problem.” In a gender-neutral world, the collective understanding of women is vanishing, and the political activism against structural injustice and violence is consequently rendered impossible.⁶ In this individualistic view, “womanhood” is reduced to a rhetorical problem and feminism is losing its transformative power. We do not know whether this dramatic shift was the aim of gender theory, but what we do know for sure is that

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recreation. Furthermore, it explains why the delusional idea of an ostensibly better “modern” and “progressive” world is called “progress,” but can only be developed on the basis of “shock and awe” (see Naomi Klein’s famous book), murder, rape, and destruction.

According to Claudia von Werlhof, alchemy is the patriarchal method, which has been falsely located in antiquity and the middle ages alone, by which the idea of “improving the world” in pursuit of the “*opus magnum*” (the great work, the alchemist transformation from ordinary material into gold) comes into existence. The idea that runs through both ancient and modern alchemy is the dissection and re-composition of nature in order to mortify the animated world. Just as Paracelsus tried to find the “elixir of life”—or the “philosopher’s stone”—in order to create the “homunculus” (an artificially created human being), modern alchemists try to find the mother’s essence in order to replace the mother using her body parts.

The longer I dealt with the patriarchal critical approach towards motherhood, the more I realized that in the academy, some feminist approaches are not part of the solution but are rather part of the problem. There are several trends shaping the contemporary image of motherhood, one of which is the shift in feminist theory and practice towards performativity. Over the last several decades, the postmodern approach of Michel Foucault and his critical theory of modernity was applied to feminist theory, ousting feminist social science approaches in the process. Judith Butler and others developed the theory of gender performativity, which denied that there is anything natural in the female body, thus rendering it impossible to talk about women in a collective sense.

this approach contributes to the patriarchal project of the replacement of the mother.

The practical political discourse on feminism is dominated by liberal and social democratic feminism. According to the latter, employment is still considered to be the source of freedom and motherhood a personal issue. In spite of European gender-mainstreaming programs, women’s decades-long efforts did not lead to equal pay or career opportunities. They are therefore still far from the propagated equal power and income. Women defending the equality approach are becoming disillusioned. In an article written for *Time* in 2015, Kristin van Ogtrop writes, quoting Anne-Marie Slaughter, “I see that system itself as antiquated and broken” (54) She goes on to draw the conclusion that “there must be something else to do rather than networking at all-night events and on the golf course to get even” (Ogtrop 54).

In an unholy alliance of liberal, social democratic, and gender-based approaches, subjects like intersectionality and identity theory dominate the academic and political discourses. Women’s studies has been replaced by gender studies, and since the last decade also by the developing field of sexuality studies, which focuses on sexual orientation. Through these shifts, the feminist movement is not only becoming mitigated but also eradicated; the academic and political focus, and the money that comes with it, is moving towards apolitical research on questions of gender identity. Debates on issues like marriage for gay couples⁷ serve to distract from the real and ongoing destructive consequences for the majority of women in patriarchy.

Economy plays another part in the devastating narrative of motherhood. The mother image is heavily influenced

by the new understanding of what formerly was called “economy”; *oikos nomos*, the original Greek term, meant providing people with the necessary goods. This is not what the term signifies anymore. The neoliberal ideology is accelerating, taking advantage of all the goods that are supposedly free: gifts from the mother as well as gifts from nature. The neoliberal destructive concept—within which “national European governments are now defined as nothing [more] than money collectors for the banks and corporations” (von Werlhof *The Failure of Modern Civilization* 28)—was accompanied by the mechanization of human beings and the whole animated world (Gent). Under neoliberalism, any vitality is destroyed in favour of a world transformed into a “money-making-machine.”

In the neoliberal world, the mother is transformed into a cog in the family-machine, a process that eradicates social cohesiveness, mutuality, solidarity, and a whole culture of social interaction. Women, as creators of maternal culture, are constantly weaving a net of social interaction, a practise that is coming under enormous pressure. The maternal culture consists of a huge array of processes and states including the world of emotions, which mother and child occupy together from birth; the sharing of time; the process of cooking and sharing meals; and the female and maternal network, which comprises a group of mothers and friends who exercise artisanry, create spaces, and engage in handcrafting and sharing circles. All of these aspects of maternal culture are being pushed aside and ridiculed. This cultural shift shall bring about a world of profit maximization that reduces the mother to her reproductive function.

Matriarchal Studies

Another concept that has heavily influenced my work is that of matriarchal studies, particularly findings related to matrilinearity. Many currently existing matriarchal cultures spanning the entire globe have been well researched. They exist all over the world, from the Mosuo in southern China (Freeman; Danshilacuo and Mei; Madeisky, Parr, and Margotsdotter) to the Minangkabau on the Indonesian Island of Sumatra (Sunday), from the Khasi on the India subcontinent (Mukhim), to the peoples of Africa and the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. All matriarchal societies bear the same basic characteristics, but many of them are being constantly undermined by the surrounding patriarchal societies on several levels: economic (renunciation of common property, effects of tourism on traditional transportation, etc.), religious (missions and conversions) and political (e.g., imposing marriage and family laws).

For the most part, I am alluding to the writings of Heide

Göttner-Abendroth, who outlined the social organization models of societies living matrilineally. The basic principle is that their understanding of lineage centres around the clan mother. In matrilineal families, mothers, siblings, and children live together or in close proximity to each other. The mother’s name is bestowed on each coming generation. The distinctive quality of matrilineality is that relationships are defined through the mother, not by marriage or through the father.

This concept of motherhood is fundamentally different from the concept common in the West. All the women of a family take part in mothering. Erotic partnerships and marriage are not part of this concept of family, but are considered to be extremely personal matters for women and men alike. Usually a husband and wife do not live in the same household. Marriages are generally less of a commitment than marriages in the West, with all of their legal consequences. Visiting marriages are common and mean that men visit their wives during the day, occasionally staying overnight. The emotional and economic support for children and adults comes through the mother’s lineage. The lack of emotional and economic dependence on a spouse is a fundamental principle. A mother’s brother fulfills the functions of fatherhood; he is therefore the social father to the children of his sisters.

As Genevieve Vaughan points out, the egocentric exchange economy can never provide what matrilineal societies are practising, namely putting the free giving in the heart of the family, the society, and the economy. All peaceful societies are based on the Gift Paradigm.

Mothers in the Trap

To understand patriarchy as a comprehensive civilization theory, one needs to see the purpose of modernity with new eyes. The goal of the modern “progress”—a term that usually carries positive connotations—is to create a new, supposedly better world by getting rid of the mother altogether. The method is therefore not one of improvement or assimilation into the existing natural conditions—like the native worldview—but rather one that calls for the destruction of the (embodied) mother and the culture of motherhood. An example how that works is the hostile treatment of mothers in certain media, as for example in the prominent German weekly newspaper, *Die Zeit*, when thirteen articles were published on the occasion of mother’s day: The male authors demanded that “the mother must get lost;” that she must be literally killed, eradicated. The existing mother represents merely a kind of intermediate step until her complete “mortification,” on the way to the “motherless world” (von Werlhof *The Failure of Modern Civilization*).

What happens to the caring mother?

Still, the mother is needed. Patriarchal motherhood has to be understood as an *institution* within which the mother's body, work, and creative potency are transformed into a kind of administrative unit. By providing food, housing, and care, the mother and housewife embodies economy in its true sense. This is the shadow economy on which the official one is based in a "parasitic way" (Vaughan 67). Since the seventeenth century, and thus the onset of Modern Times, the institutionalized mother

of modern patriarchal times to impede women's sexual freedom to undermine a mother's authority. Within marriages, procreation became transformed into a controlled and supervised duty (Tazi-Preve "Deconstructing Family"). From then on, being a non-married mother was considered to be shameful, while being a married mother was considered a blessing. Until the 1970s, the seizure of "illegitimate" children¹¹ was a common practice all over Europe. Over time and space, the concept of the family was normatively shaped in manifold ways, but its

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has been supervised and regulated by pedagogy, medicine, psychology, and law. For example, regulations and recommendations on breastfeeding over the past several decades have been constantly changed based on the state of research or popular opinion of the time.⁸

European social policies compensate for at least part of mothers' lost earnings, and employ regulations regarding *maternity leave*. These policies are praised in the U.S., which does not even provide basic maternal health programs before and after delivery. German and Austrian mothers leave their place of employment for much longer than women in other European countries or North America.⁹ There are negative consequences to this system however; because economic viability is often tied to the amount of time one spends in the workforce, long absences can result in severe income and retirement losses. Actually, the European welfare state functions as a substitute for the actual fathers, who are often absent, paying child support or providing childcare. Women have long been turning to the state to receive substitute benefits. However, in Europe, the picture of the caring state has been changing since the 1990s. Today neoliberal ideology has taken over politics with the aim of reducing and "privatizing" social services through so-called austerity policies. Further, just as it does everywhere in the world, the blame for this alleged abuse of welfare benefits is falling now on mothers and the poor instead of the ones who make the real profit, including corporations, for example, which get away with paying a minimal amount of taxes.

Maternal life is restricted to the family unit, particularly the *nuclear family*,¹⁰ a concept created in the beginning

aim of preserving control over the reproductive process never altered.

In order to conform with these established norms, the patriarchal mother has to follow an *ideal of a heterosexual relationship*,¹² which is supposedly the best place for her children and herself. Heterosexuality is presented as "natural," since children are conceived by a man and a woman. By referring to "nature," men and women are kept together in a lifelong unit as a nuclear family. The patriarchal mother is made to believe that a lasting romantic relationship in marriage is the norm (Tazi-Preve "The End of the Nuclear Family"). The truth contradicts this narrative, however: studies show that the family is the most dangerous place for women and children due to sexual, physical, psychological abuse, and danger of violent death (Kapella, Baiert, Rille-Pfeiffer, Geserick, and Schmidt). The lifelong loving relationship is the exception, while unhappy unions, divorces, and separations are the statistical norm.

Nonetheless, the European and North American idea of motherhood and the nuclear family is also an *export good* to non-western societies. Since colonial times, the nuclear family has been communicated or violently imposed by means of religion (missionaries), economics (private property, creation of new workforce), and political measures (introduction of paternal family names). This has happened to all non-patriarchal societies throughout history, and still continues to this day. For example, the Khasis in Assam are currently being threatened by family laws, and the Mosuo in South-China are facing a huge influx by Han tourists and men wanting to prostitute the "sexually free" Mosuo women.

The patriarchal system has developed and propagated an *idealized image* of what it means to be a mother. The German mother image in particular is clearly the product of a male fantasy, designed over many centuries by clerics, jurists, psychologists, and political theoreticians. Political theorists like Jean-Jacques Rousseau started to invent motherhood in the eighteenth century. In the twentieth century, national socialism in Germany and Austria created a special form of motherhood, the traces of which can still be seen today. The characteristics today are: a normative number of children, strict instructions about how to raise them,¹³ the amount of care to provide, and the correct way to sanction and not “spoil” the child. Then, the idea of fascist education included the sacrificing of the sons to the battlefields and the daughters to the martial services (e.g., nurses, etc.) or to motherhood.¹⁴ Today we still face a strictly regulated family life, including the regimentation of reproduction from conception until the child’s graduation. The amount of time mothers spend with their toddlers is under constant scrutiny; for example, Lieselotte Ahnert devoted her book entitled *How Much Mother Does a Child Need?* to the ongoing debate within German-speaking countries, arguing that all family members can take on maternal care.

Mothers are under the pressure of a rigorous neoliberal economy with its deregulated labour laws, flexible working hours, dramatic decrease in salaries, and overwhelming amount of underpaid part-time work, particularly within meaningless professions, within which the majority of women are employed.¹⁵ These pressures to make a living has turned family life into the building of a *family machine*, in which its members are deprived of any space for freedom. Time spent in school and at work, the regimented time of public institutions and bureaucracy, the time spent on supposed necessities for children (e.g., social activities, sports, arts, etc.), and the time spent supervising homework keeps mothers’ lives on hold for a lifetime. During the process of “patriarchalization” the animated spirit of community was absorbed and family life was turned into a hostile, stressful, pathogenic machine.

Therefore, a mother’s life in patriarchy is characterized by her constant *state of exhaustion*, not only when she is single, but also when she’s in a relationship. Statistics prove time and time again that working mothers are usually subjected to an imbalance of childcare and household duties (Tazi-Preve “Presentation of Research Projects”), a persistent gender-based wage gap, and so-called career obstacles. Today paid employment proves to be an economic necessity to maintain the household; the leftist slogan of gaining freedom by employment is not true, and never was. Women’s salaries are low and usually considered an add-on to the men’s salaries, which are still much higher

and considered to be the main source of income for the household. Female employment has seldom been a matter self-realization; rather, it was and continues to be simply a matter of survival. So, mothers instead of gaining the freedom promised by economic independence, women are becoming exhausted. It seems that, within a patriarchal system, neither employment nor motherhood can provide women with fulfillment.

Therefore, mothers have three options, none of which are desirable: The first is to become a dependent housewife, which requires a husband who will support his wife for her whole life. In light of the divorce rates, which are 40 to 50 percent in Europe and the U.S., this way of life is unrealistic for mothers. The second option is to work part-time. This option also requires either a breadwinner or dependency on social welfare from the state, since part-time income would not be sufficient to support the mother and her child(ren). The third option is to take on all the responsibility alone for a full-time job, childcare, and housework. Few women are able to hire help or rely on assistance from their relatives or social network. Within the patriarchal logic, none of the choices are desirable; rather, they turn out to be traps.

Being the primary or sole caregiver—in or out of a marriage or heterosexual relationship—mothers often develop an inescapable neurotic relationship with their child. A recent Israeli study shows that mothers love their children without any doubt, but that they hate the circumstances of motherhood (Donath). Overburdened, impatient mothers will be the target of their children’s frustration and aggression and vice versa; children’s constant demands will drive mothers into despair and aggressive reactions. The effects of and implications of such an upbringing are wide ranging. The patriarchal system means to take the nuclear family not only as the basis of economics but also as the origin of citizens’ mental states. Due to the fact that mothers shoulder most of the responsibility for the children, a practice that is clearly unmanageable and unsustainable, the nuclear family necessarily leaves basic needs unsatisfied. Needy children develop into the addictive personalities of our time. Therefore, the nuclear family model serves to create the perfect consumer for an economy that produces goods in superfluous abundance.

By *individualizing* the challenge of raising children—a pursuit that necessitates constant care, responsibility, and management—society disposes of any accountability for support and sharing. The isolation of mothers in nuclear families is the result of promoting the separation of mothers and children from the public world. The so-called individualization occurs because women are not only cut off from their mother’s lineage and other women, they are also subject to mental manipulation; they are taught to

believe that the nuclear family dynamic is normal. Instead of sharing work with others, mothers perform their day-to-day tasks in “solitary confinement” (Rich); they live their lives according to detailed instructions about how to be successful mothers. Maternal solidarity has turned into a warzone in which women compete to be the better mother.

The individualization and *isolation* of mothers makes them extremely vulnerable, the perfect target for political and psychological interventions. The method of *divide et impera*, of isolating mothers from each other and from society as a whole, renders them perfectly controllable. Therefore, the constant accusation by the Catholic Church that “individuality” and “materialism” has supposedly caused the “deterioration of the family” is completely misleading. In fact, Pope Francis’s 2015 speech in the U.S. Congress about “the richness and beauty of family life” can be taken as a kind of mockery. If a mother is a housewife, she is blamed for being overwhelming or overprotective. If she is employed, the isolated mother is blamed for seeking her so-called “own advantage” or “self-realization.” Like a boomerang, each of her attempts to raise her children while making a living causes serious accusations of failure and falls back on her. This procedure of maternal exclusion and pillorying traces back to the age-long witch hunt, in which women were criminalized and prosecuted for midwifery as well as for giving advice on natural contraception and abortion.

The method of transforming maternal life from maternal culture into misery is the “*blame game*.” Mothers are held responsible for their children’s behaviour, from criminal activity to their sons’ failed school careers and their daughters’ eating disorders. The terrifying mother is the basic component of psychoanalysis. Patients usually lie on the analyst’s couch symbolically alongside their mothers. While in psychotherapy, the suffering caused by mothers is given priority; the suffering of the mother herself is completely ignored. The sanctions against so-called “bad mothers” are severe and can mean the seizure of her child. In her article “Patriarchal Procreation and Destruction of the Good and the Bad Mother,” Mechthild Hart exposes the victimization and law enforcement profiling that, women of colour experience. Single mothers are primarily targeted, regardless of the (step)father’s role in raising children. Ladd-Taylor, for example, reports on a mother who was charged with first-degree murder although not present when her boyfriend beat her toddler daughter to death (12).

The constant threat of the *criminalization of motherhood* is caused by the isolation of the mother and the possible neglect or mistreatment of the children. In an impoverished and isolated environment, neurotic relationships between mothers and children can easily evolve. The mother’s

abilities and failures are constantly supervised, and she is constantly suspected of abuse. Mothers are often accused of being unable to find a partner and/or to stay married, and of keeping children away from their fathers. Left alone and put to work, regardless their circumstances, they are set up to fail.

Women go to tremendous lengths to avoid the *accusation of being bad mothers*. In order to uphold the ideal, a mother must be constantly present and bear all the responsibility for the children, while simultaneously taking care of all the children’s economic and personal needs as well as her own—a clear paradox as the mother’s and the children’s needs often differ. Conversely, it is argued that a mother’s constant presence is psychologically detrimental, and that the symbiosis with the mother must be dissolved unconditionally in order to allow the development of individuality to take its “proper” course. This concerns primarily male children who are expected to commit matricide, to reject the symbiosis and the attachment to their mothers forever, and then turn to their fathers who represent the “true world” (Jung). The Freudian model of triangulation claims that the family unit of father-mother-child is a constellation dictated by nature. Feminist psychoanalysts have since put a lot of work into questioning Freud’s male-centered perspective and focusing on the identity development of female children (see, for example, Moeller-Gambaroff). Nevertheless, Freud’s patriarchal concept of family continues to be reinforced by research and politics.

For women, Freud’s model positions the male partner as an emotional surrogate for the lost mother. This dependency, which is often also economical, is a result of having *intersected the mother-daughter-bond* by eliminating matrilinearity and replacing it with a husband. Separation from one’s children in many countries happens at an early age. In the U.S., teenagers often move to distant colleges, which is supposedly the right step toward developing independence. This leads often to early marriage or partnership, due to the fact that long-term monogamous relationships are considered to be the only socially acceptable norm. Returning to one’s mother—even temporarily—is considered to be emotionally infantile and/or caused by a professional failure.

What happens to the mother’s body?

Having discussed mothering or carework under patriarchy, we will now turn to what is happening to the mother’s body. New reproductive technologies (RT) have created the ultimate call for eliminating the mother’s body, aimed as they are at inventing a new kind of life, developed by the “techno-fathers” (Corea). Thirty years ago, Gena Corea described the idea of separating procreation from the female body. Over the past few decades, advances in

gynecology have paved the way for this idea to become a reality; pregnancy has gone from a supposedly uncontrolled, wild, and unpredictable state into a calculable, controlled and measurable one. In the U.S., Caesarian sections have grown by over 30 percent (Statista). The use of peridural anesthesia has become more and more common. The practice of gynecology is therefore marked by the long history of deprivation of women's authority in the birth process, and the aid of midwives has been rolled back in favour of (male) gynecologists (Martin).

How did the use of RT become so common? In response to this question, Renate Klein points to the invention of the concepts of "choice" and "rights," as well as the justification inherent in the phrase "for our own good" (Klein, R. 147). She alleges that reproductive technologies were developed based on concepts of liberation; indeed, RT provides opportunities for infertile women to have children, for pregnancy to be "outsourced," and for gay couples to become sole parents.¹⁶ Surrogate motherhood, which is only legal in a few countries including the U.S., Ukraine, India, Thailand, and Mexico,¹⁷ is "the spawn of a neoliberal ideology based on the fate of women selling their bodies out of poverty" (Klein, R. 78). Motherhood has become a business in which potential parents pay huge sums to agencies, fertility clinics, lawyers, and finally egg and surrogate donors.¹⁸

The practices of reproductive technology represent the abolition of motherhood in favour of a new means of procreation, one that is supposedly genetically perfect. The underlying intentions behind these technologies include aid for childless women, freedom of scientific inquiry, and technological "progress" for its own sake. By contrast, the practice maternal pregnancy and delivery seems primitive. In addition to the psychological dangers, proponents of RT do not name the numerous physiological damages these technologies can do to the female body. For example, the numerous hormone injections that are required to make women ready for the procedure can cause severe illnesses, such as cancer, or even lead to death. Separating the gestating mother from the egg donors ensures that there is no longer any biological bond between mother and child. However, there are still mothers who often refuse to give away the child that they have given birth to.

According to the principle of *divide et impera*, modern procedures of reproductive technologies can be broken down into several steps. First, the maternal body is split up according to its functions: conceiving, pregnancy, giving birth, and breastfeeding. In the second step, the supposedly better essence and idea—in other words, the most modern technology—is added. The third step is the supposedly perfect new creation, the ultimate goal of patriarchy. Reproductive technologies have divided moth-

erhood into multiple forms including the genetic mother who provides the egg, the surrogate mother who gestates the fetus, and the social mother who raises the child. In this formulation, motherhood becomes as arbitrary as fatherhood always was. The concept of "split motherhood" also makes sure that maternity can be manipulated in many forms and on each level. It is not yet possible to replace the female uterus, but it is clear that RT is moving in this direction. There have been several experiments that gesture towards this eventually, from growing an embryo in a male abdominal cavity to cloning animals. Scientists are racing to be the first to clone a human being.

I want to conclude with Renate Klein's words:

I believe it is time that a new generation of feminist activists and theorists publicly and powerfully question these technologies from a women-centred perspective and move away from the post-modern legacy of fence-sitting and positing that all subjectivities are of equal value, and that at best "regulation" or "harm minimisation" might be the answers. (169)

Where Do We Stand?

It is urgent to understand that in patriarchy mothers will never be offered anything other than a constant negotiation of unacceptable options, politically labelled as "freedom of choice." This is what I call the Mother Trap. The analysis of motherhood under patriarchy shows that equality for women is only possible for childless women, and that therefore female procreation is an obstacle to real emancipation. But the irony is that women without children do not reach equality either.

We can also identify the reasons why equality feminists still believe that motherhood is the true obstacle to the achievement of equality. Gender theorists agree with this assessment because of their own concept of an alienated body; social democratic feminists agree as well, and are particularly supportive of the outsourcing of pregnancy (because it enables women to better reconcile family and career responsibilities). Advocates also argue that this would make pregnancy and birth supposedly more secure and that it would free women of the sole and stressful burden of pregnancy. Any resistance to the development of RT has been systematically impeded, both by the RT industry itself and by "pro-choice feminists" (Klein, R. 161). Therefore, artificial replacement by surrogacy continues, while the generously funded research on artificial wombs and human cloning is proceeding feverishly.

What we are facing is the world of the "Stepford wives," a world in which women turn into robots who continue to fulfil their duties as mothers and wives in a way approved

by (father) state.¹⁸ According to von Werlhof, you have “to kill the mother first” in order to “alchemically mortify,” her and replace her with a materialized male fantasy (A Sojourn into the Critical Theory of Patriarchy 20). We are therefore way beyond just humiliation and domination of women by a patriarchal system; rather, we have entered a new stage: the acceptance of matricide and the calling for artificial procreation by women themselves.

In the U.S., it is called a “hate crime” to speak of mothers as women, arguing that all other (substitute) mothering/delivering people are supposedly being excluded. This concern is raised in the names of pregnant women who have undergone sexual reassignment surgery and gay men who have a motherless child. Such reasoning is a new method to silence women and to insist that the artificial creation is the true and only reproductive method, that female birth is obsolete, and that the definition of who is giving birth is now in the hands of technocrats. The perfidious point is that the new spin is concealed by the supposedly progressive rhetoric of diversity and identity politics.

This paper is based on two lectures held in Rome in April 2015 at two conferences (respectively entitled “The Maternal Roots of the Gift Economy” and “Maternal Subjectivities”), the forthcoming paper entitled “The Perversion of Maternal Gift Giving,” and my article in Boomerang, Volume 1.

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Endnotes

¹See, for example, the treaty of Lisbon, which shaped an accelerating neoliberal agenda.

²In 2019, conservative state legislators raced to enact an unprecedented wave of bans on all, most or some abortions, and by the end of the year, twenty-five new abortion bans had been signed into law, primarily in the South and Midwest (Nash et al.).

³I will explain the term “matriarchy” later within the text.

⁴The term was originally introduced by Simone de Beauvoir

and it meant that mothers were excluded from the public discourse and “trapped” in their homes. That is why she proposed that real freedom for women can only be gained by renouncing motherhood altogether.

⁵In my view, it is also a betrayal of the origins of social and women’s sciences, namely, their goal to critically analyze society beginning with the suffering and the injustice in the world, and to thereby devote scientific work to the improvement of society.

⁶To my knowledge, there is no similar ideology that aims to abolish men.

⁷I acknowledge the problems non-heterosexual couples have but my criticism is aimed first at the point that marriage itself is a patriarchal institution, and second, to point out the problem of the recent shifting the focus away from the enormous political, social, and economic problems women are still facing.

⁸A few years ago, breastfeeding was considered to be dangerous because mothers’ milk was thought to be contaminated with dioxins; today prolonged breastfeeding is encouraged.

⁹There are political campaigns to that advocate for including fathers. From a feminist standpoint, this is double-edged sword. On one hand, fathers should be encouraged to play an active role in raising children. On the other hand, however, this kind of advocacy has led to the development of a fathers’ movement that actively and successfully lobbies governments to implement joint custody of the children. As of late in Germany and Austria, joint custody is granted even when the mother and the child’s father never entered a relationship (see Fassbender).

¹⁰Otherwise known as the “family cell”—this is truly a phrase borrowed from the terminology of punishment.

¹¹This occurred especially if the mother was a minor and without the support of her parents.

¹²There is much more material to consider regarding the narrative of heterosexuality. I plan to undertake this work in the future.

¹³For example, to stay at home at least until the child reaches the age of three.

¹⁴The Arian eugenic mother cult spawned the so-called “Lebensborn” (spring of life), in which German blond and blue-eyed children were conceived and born. German mothers were awarded gold, silver, and bronze Crosses of Honour for bearing many children.

¹⁵Consider the dramatically rising rate of burnout syndrome as a result of the shifting labour market.

¹⁶In most countries in the world (including Germany and Austria), surrogate motherhood is (still) defined as the exploitation of the female reproductive capacity.

¹⁷An advertisement in *Orlando Weekly* in September 2015, by the company known as My Egg Bank, targeted young

women between the ages of twenty-one and thirty. In exchange for their contribution of the “gift of live” (i.e., “harvesting their eggs”), the company offered the women “valuable medical and genetic information” and \$4,500.¹⁸ Not only mothers are being replaced, there is also an ongoing production of robots in the shape of females satisfying male sexual desires.

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HOLLY DAY

Have I Got the Strength

I imagine how it will happen:
I'll be in the kitchen, making a sandwich
or in the living room, sorting through the
mail
when I'll hear him gasping
somewhere nearby. I'll look up

and see him clawing at his chest
or his throat, a panicked look
on his face, before he falls to the floor, silent.
This is the moment when I'll have to decide
if I'm going to call for an ambulance
or wait to see if he recovers on his own,

or just stays down. This is the moment
when I'll find out if I'm the type of person
would could let my husband just die
if the thought of life insurance payouts and
no more arguments
about my weight or the credit card bills
or the kids or our future
is the thing that keeps my hand
from picking up the phone

if I really am that kind of monster
after all of this.

Holly Day's poetry has recently appeared in Tampa Review, SLAB, and Gargoyle, and her published books include Walking Twin Cities, Music Theory for Dummies, and Ugly Girl.