ARE OUR WESTERN SOCIETIES PATRIARCHAL OR MATRIARCHAL?

(FOR A NEW PERSPECTIVE OF LAW)

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Summary

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

“Female principle and male principle in the context of western society”

1. “Cultural models and social patterns”
2. “Towards women’s liberation: observations”
3. “Equal access: various acceptions of human rights”
4. “Relations between politics and feminist theories”

CHAPTER TWO

“For a different view of female and male principles relationship”

1. “The paradox of feminist instances”
2. “Critical contributions to the idea of the incomplete feminist revolution”
3. “Female principle and a new perspective of law”

CONCLUSIONS

APPENDIX

SOURCES
INTRODUCTION

This paper is dedicated to the oblivion of themselves into which women have fallen.

The question “Are our western societies matriarchal or patriarchal?” wants to be a resounding invitation to remember this oblivion; the final answer aims to be the way for not forgetting a new.

The work is divided in two parts: in the first the problem is presented in its various faces. In the second the possible solutions are advanced. At the end my personal solution is advanced.

The final Appendix contains an interview with a normal person who has kindly explained his ideas and some data-tables¹.

¹ Omitted.
CHAPTER ONE

“Female principle and male principle in the context of western society”

1) “Cultural models and social patterns”

In his book “Filosofia della Prassi” (Mancini, 1986) the great Italian philosopher Italo Mancini talks about “femal and male principles” as universal codes of human life, on which are based our western cultural models. From here derives my provocative question: “Are our western societies patriarchal or matriarchal?” that aims to found a speculative reason to the end of the “tought” and the incapacity by law to comprehend the new instances of society.

The female principle is “a dissociated abundance of being/more definite for what she is” as Wallace Stevens poetically says (from “Teh woman in sushine” – “Auroras of Autumn” Poesia 1992) and identifies herself with these elements: the irrationality, the dream, the moon.

The male principle represents the sunlight, rationality, the power which becomes law. It’s my opinion that these two principles exist, as all the Graecian classical thought demonstrates, but their way of revealing themselves has been stressed by conflicts, incomprehension, injustices as I shall go on to explain.

In fact, in the past decade, iussues of gender equity have emerged as reactions to these conflicts by women’s movements. The basic general point of these movements was to change from a “naturally determined world” to a “socially determined world”. Altough aspects and concerns of iussues of gender equity are universal, one other point needs to be made: focus of each women’s movement reflects the cultural traditions of the society to which these members belong.

Thus, leaving aside non-western societies (they don’t fall into this investigation) it’s suffice to make the point on which that the professor Marian Lief Palley
(A.A.A.A.S. 1991) calls “a process of deprivatization of female roles” looking towards the role of religion, the secular moral codes and constraints in western societies.

In general issues of gender equity mean extension to women of rights enjoyed by the men: the right to own property, the right to work out of the home, the right to equal access to employment, the right for women employed to have jobs as well paid job as men, are good examples.

In particular gender equity means elimination of limitations that religion place on women’s role. For example Jewish women lack control over their own reproduction because religious law doesn’t permit birth control and abortion; Muslim women are often veiled and the schools and the workplaces are segregated by sex; for Christian beliefs women should be subservient to men and Catholic Church is politically and financially supportive of the right-to-life movement (M.L. PALEY – 1991).

As regards secular moral codes, gender equity means elimination of the limits of women’s lives. In fact, when women must be dependent on a man in the family, they don’t have own consciousness; when women may be self-reliant, public policies are not adequate to respond to this condition.

2) “Towards women’s liberation: observations”.

The issue of gender equity, in all the points above cited, represents a prerequisite for women’s full participation in the development of their societies.

Therefore, now, one other point needs to be made: verifying if women’s movements have achieved this full participation and consequently a complete liberation from their constraints.

From a 1980 United Nations report, it appears that “women constitute half of the world’s population, perform nearly two-thirds of its work hours, receive on-tenth of the world’s income and own less than one-hundredth of the world’s property” (UN World Conference for Women. Jani Sager, Ann Olsan).

Research (U.N.W.C.W. -1980) has shown that as women’s employment in paid work increases, the status of women proportionally improves, considering the variability of conditions, when religious and secular moral codes intersect with resources distribution.

Two other latter researches offer us useful data. Marian Lief says that in 1989 in the US, fifty-eight percent of women were employed (eight percent more than in 1980), many colleges and universities had more
women than men students enrolled and women have been voting in great numbers that have men. Pippa Norris reveals in her 1989 research on Western European countries in comparison with North-American countries, the West-European Women earned 73 percent of what men earned and North-American women earned 59 percent of what men earned.

These two latter data show (respect to the 1980 research) a progressive increasing participation of women but not a complete participation at all. Taking into account differential cultural adaptations, these researches give encouraging signals with regard to the problem so far examined: gender equity in relation with religious moral constraints, economical hardships.

But this isn’t enough: the picture of women’s activity and achievements would be incomplete if we wouldn’t consider women’s participation in political offices and their representation. And this is what I shall go on to say in the next part.

3) “Equal access: various acceptions of human rights”

The question I want to ask, talking about women in public and political offices, is if women can achieve a complete participation in their societies thanks to a political representation too. As such the question might seems useless, but it is essential to this investigation.

The first point which needs to be made is the historically under-representation of women on which all scientists are agreed. A group of researchers, cited by Janet Clark (A.A.A.A.S. – 1991), found that women’s under-representation is due on the one hand to the “sex-role socialization”; and on the other, the historical low representation of women is due to an explicit discrimination against them.

The second point which needs to be made is the actual situation. Although the situation can vary in each national experience, taking account the due differences, it’s possible to observe this common current trend. In fact, since 1970-75, increasing numbers of women have entered government office at all levels, as Janet Clarke can show for the American situation (A.A.A.A.S. – 1991), and Miriam Mafai (“Grazia” A.M.E. -1991) for the west-European can show, thanks to many factors operating simultaneously and similarly in both these countries.

First, the society that created domestic sex roles for women has irreversibly changed, according to Janet Clark (A.A.A.A.S – 1991), because, as Miriam Mafai (“Grazia” – A.M.E. 1991) explains, women have founded a free style (she remembers Mary Quant’s mini-skirt), they have an easy gait and even can eat much more than their
mothers eaten; in fact “they are much more respected today than they were one hundred years ago” as C. N. confirms in the interview (see Appendix3).

Second, women have developed a self consciousness and supported the issues of feminist movement as both Miriam Mafai and Janet Clark say; they have achieved most important legislative measures on abortion and divorce that have improved their beliefs in women’s representation in public offices for empathising and recognising the problems of women.

Third, the educational levels of women have increased, consequently more women are entering the professions from which public officials are drawn and although Miriam Mafai laments a low percentage of women at the Italian Parliament (only 11.1 percent in 1990, against 7.8 percent in 1978), the global picture of the number of women in the eligible pool is growing, thanks to the fact too that younger women are more willing to consider running for public office than they were in the past, as Janet Clatk sustains and than because they have founded “feline aggressiveness” as C. N. says in the interview3.

Now we can outline a temporary answer to the question with which this part began. Taking account of the arguments so far advanced although in the last years women’s representation in political office has grow this is not enough for a complete liberation and a full participation as the recent battle for women’s priesthood in England demonstrates (Time, novembre 1992). Therefore this means that the issues of women’s participation, gender equity, equal access are not simply numerical issues, because a complete participation is possible only when men will see women as brothers, without interests and vice versa.

4) “Relations between politics and feminist theories”

As I said before, the issues of gender equity, full participation of women and so on are not simply numerical issues. To treat them as such is to subscribe, by and large, to the liberal position that context is all. From this position derive political egalitarianism of individuals, “negative liberty” as “the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others”, as Sr Isaiah Berlin (cited by M.G.D. “Daedalus” 1987) says in his essay on freedom, equal access whereas equal access is “power” of access to social, economic, political institutions. Two important feminist theories: the Marxist one and the Maternalist one in different ways try to give an answer to this position.

2 Omitted.
3 Omitted.
The Marxist feminist seek to reveal the capitalistic and patriarchal foundations of the liberal state and the consequences of oppression on women’s dual contribution to sustain capitalism, because the liberal state is an ideological fiction that underlies the reality of a dominant male ruling class. Thus the liberation of women will be possible only when the state’s capitalistic and patriarchal structures are dismantled (M.G. Dietz “Daedalus” 1987).

Maternalist feminists, as Mary Dietz defines them, sustain a conception of female political consciousness grounded in the virtues of women’s private sphere, primarily in mothering. In fact, they deny what the liberal state defends (an individualistic, right-based, contractual conception) and assert the moral primacy of the family because the women’s experience as mothers makes them able to contain male liberal individualist world view, thanks to the virtues of love, caring for others.

Against both these theories Mary G. Dietz (J.A.A.A.S. -1987) assistance professor of political science at the University of Minnesota, offers a real alternative to their political conception and also to the liberal political conception, showing that context is not all and access as equal numerical access is not enough. She says that for a vision of citizenship, feminists should turn to “practices that are expressly political and participatory and democratic”. According to Mary G. Dietz this is simply a human activity that is not reducible to representative government or male realm; a democratic conception that takes politics as the “people’s affair”.

Only thanks to this vision of democracy can we affirm a complete participation of women in society. In fact in this vision the political issues for feminists must not be, for example whether children are protected but how and by whom those ends (protect children) are determined, because democracy makes it possible to transform individuals (and not women or men as such) into workers, artists, teachers, friends, in short citizens among other citizens.
CHAPTER TWO

“For a different view of female and male principles relationship”

1) The paradox of feminist instances

We seen that instances of women’s movements and the activity of feminists, supported by various theories have had good results towards achieving a complete participation of women in society towards access in political, economic institutions, and ultimately in religious institutions. But at the same time we founded a curious paradox and a strange contradiction, passing through the basic points of feminist theorists, among which the only one coherent in its implications seems to be that of Mary G. dietz, as I shall go on to argue (“Daedalus” – 1987).

The paradox is this: most of the stand points cited above, have shown the male principle as the enemy, the aggressor, concentrating all their energies, capacities, activities against him.

So as the first thing they have confused the claim of gender equity, of equal access, of equal opportunities, etc… with omologation to the male principle.

Second they have tried to imitate the male principle assuming male attitudes. The business world shows that were women vie with women everything can occur: a female boss is even more aggressive than a male boss (as report the article of David Brand on Time); C. N. talking about femininity says that has diminished and there is a
sort of vicious circle in that they are seen as being aggressive and so that are disliked an so it become even harder…” (see Appendix^4).

Third, they haven’t affirmed themselves, their essential being: the female principle.

From here, consequently, derives the contradiction: how is it possible to conquer hated enemy and affirm themselves, becoming as the enemy is, assuming the same attitudes, in short annulling themselves? In fact, it’s impossible, but to this point the feminist implications seem to lead.

Now it is clear why only Mary G. Dietz seems to be the only coherent theorist. In fact she leaves space to feminist claims but only in terms of claims by citizens in relation to other citizens taking account that “context is not all” and that what is necessary is a democracy as described above.

2) “Critical contributions to the idea of the incomplete feminist revolution”

From this picture it inevitably emerges that it’s impossible to think not only about the idea of the women’s revolution (in fact, revolution from and for who and what?), but also the idea of an incomplete women’s revolution.

But although the idea of an incomplete women’s revolution is impossible it is helpful to identify this paradox, so we can ask why it has occurred and how it’s possible to resolve it. For the second question I defer to the next part.

For the first question I can outline a my possible answer, derived from the impression that many lecturers have left to me and also from intuitions suggested by the interview with C. N. and by his idea of women as wonderful individuals pheraps superior to the men that he considers a “puppet”. My idea is that women from time immemorial conscious that their essential being is superior to the male essential being, have shamed to be inferior to the male principle and have invented the male dominator with the purpose of containing the exuberant female principle and of having a peer interlocutor in the male principle, in short with the end of enjoying themselves.

^4 Omitted
Therefore, feminist movements have not only forgotten this female shame, but have ceased to enjoy themselves, too. Obviously it’s only a speculative suggestion of mine.

3) “Female principle and a new perspective of law”.

Before passing on to give the conclusive answer, one other point needs to be made: how it’s possible to resolve the paradoxe, as above cited. It’s possible with another paradox.

As it’s impossible to define what though is before thinking it, so it’s impossible to know what the female principle and the male principle are before they exist and manifest themselves.

Therefore when the paradox is resolved that is to say when both the female and male principles will standing in society as such, finally we’ll have a different perspective of law in which both principle will act as such, without mediation of roles and without the shame of law as expression of male power, considering that this is the basilar condition for a new society with a new law and not the contrary.

Now we should be able to conclude this investigation and to give an answer to the starting question, but not before a recapitulation.

“CONCLUSIONS”

We started this investigation presenting the female principle and the male principle as universal codes of human life.

Than we have tried to understand what they are towards cultural experiences of western societies.

So we have founded that from feminist movements results a courious paradoxe that shows as the female principle must yeat reveals herself.

Therefore, as above I argued, only resolving the paradox, we have te possibility to renew the law for a society of male and female inidviduals.
At this point it’s easy to give the answer to the starting question: only after that the female principle and the male principle will act as such in society we’ll can say if our western societies are matriarchal or patriarchal society, or neither matriarchal nor patriarchal, or both matriarchal and patriarchal societies.

In short, what that is really important is that both principles exist and act as such.
Interview with C. N.

M.A. (Master of Arts) from Glasgow (Scotland)

OMITTED
SOURCES


6. “The Second Reformation – Admission to the priesthood is just one iussue as permissism emerges as the most vexing thorn for christianity”, by Richrd M. Ostihng (Time – November 23, 1992).


8. Interview with C. N. (Master of Arts, from Glasgow-Scotland), December 18, 1992.

