

# Maternal Gift Economy Breaking Through: Salon #4

Salon #04 - January 16, 2021

Barbara Mann

[www.maternalgifteconomymovement.org](http://www.maternalgifteconomymovement.org)

LETECIA LAYSON

Thank you so much Heide. Indeed may new matriarchal cultures begin. And also there are many contiguous matriarchal cultures in our indigenous, from our indigenous people. So with that I'd like to introduce Barbara Mann, our next speaker.

Dr. Barbara Mann is a scholar and a professor in the Honors College of the University of Toledo in Toledo, Ohio, USA. She has authored 15 books, the latest of which are President by Massacre: Indian Killing for Political Gain and Spirits of Blood, Spirits of Breath: The Twinned Cosmos of Indigenous America. Other works include The Tainted Gift, on the deliberate spread of disease to natives by settlers as a land clearing tactic. Dr. Mann is currently working on an international project examining historical massacres around the world 1780 to 1820 and is participating in a book project on that. Her internationally noted Iroquoian Woman is in its third printing.

Two other internationally known books, George Washington's War on Native America and Daughters of Mother Earth, out in paperback as Make a Beautiful Way. She has published over 400 articles and chapters since 1995. She lives in her homeland and works for the rights of the people indigenous to Ohio living in Ohio. Ohio is a Seneca word meaning beautiful river, a spiritual designation. An Ohio Bear Clan Seneca with community recognition, she was for 20 years the speaker and/or northern director of the Native American Alliance of Ohio. Welcome Barbara .

BARBARA MANN

Thank you very much for that introduction Letecia. I wanted to follow up on what Dr. Goettner-Abendroth spoke about by giving very specific examples of how the Iroquois and the eastern woodlanders generally worked out the dynamics of a matriarchal gift economy.

Now I'm an extremely visual person so I like visual aids and I've created some visual aids, so I want to share my screen here and here it is. I called the presentation "It Takes Two to Tango" because obviously giving requires a giver and a receiver, and they have to exist in some kind of relationship, so it seemed to me that was a nice little image. People tango by twos and I think it's important to recognize that in native America - a second let me get something here - in native

America "one", which is considered a whole number by westerners, is considered a fraction. One is not a whole number, it is just half a number. The whole number is two. So when you're looking at these two images off left, westerners don't count four people one two three four, native Americans look at that and see two. Two because everything that exists, exists in pairs and you do not have a full number until you have two operating in cooperation, mirroring one another, complementing one another's activities. So this is the twin principle - the twinship principle - of the eastern woodlands, in fact the Americas. Everything that happens, happens by two existing compliments, and they mirror one another, so you have one breath, that's typically what you'd say. If you go west of the Mississippi, it's mostly the air and water; same difference. Blood is water, blood is kinship, blood is amniotic fluid, blood is the rivers and the lakes.

Breath is air, oxygen, the blue atmosphere, spatiality, wide open spaces. Okay now blood gives rise to the mother and suckling child principle so I've got a couple pictures here of twins, just to give you the idea of that's two, that those are two, it's not four it's two, so there's a lot of iconography in native America, of blood and breath. The square is always the square of earth, and that means the planet, the directions, and the rivers are considered blood/ water/ amniotic fluid design. The iconography of the sky is the circle obviously the circle of

sky around. By and large, earth is connected with women, sky is connected with men, and they both have to exist and they both have to interact on a complimentary basis if existence is going to continue. And you see this motif played out over and over and over again in the mounds that are all the way across America especially in the eastern woodlands. An awful lot of these have been destroyed by the settlers. For example in 1900 there were still 12,000 ceremonial and burial mounds in the state of Ohio. By 1950 that was down 5,000 and I've been scared to ask what it is now because people destroy these without the slightest thought of what they're doing.

But looking at this particular design which comes from the 1848 Smithsonian survey commissioned with Squier and Davis, who were two surveyors. They went out and they took a look at all these monuments that were built and they're very large areas, they're like dozens and dozens of acres each, so you see the square of earth there leading to water. Water is always a very important component, so the river is there, almost always to the east, and here you see at the bottom to the right the square of earth connected with the spherical of sky and in the middle of a circle of sky that I don't know if you can make it out is a mound, in that instance a burial mound. So these are connected; there's always a pathway between them. And it's really important because there's always a

pathway between the two halves of the twinship. They do not exist in isolation, they exist together.

Another motif you see throughout the world is the circle motif, and this is based on Turtle. Some of you may have heard that the Americas are Turtle Island. North America is a turtle swimming to the northeast. Alaska is a flipper to the west, Maine, that's a flipper to the right. Canada kind of angling towards Greenland to get a good bite out of it, that's the head. The left of the carapace is the California coast. On the Atlantic coast, you've got Florida as the back flipper and the Baja Peninsula is the back flipper. Mexico is the tail. South America is a remora fish swimming up to attach itself to the turtle. So we knew what the continents looked like - we always knew - and so we called it Turtle Island because that's how it looked to us.

All right, so what have we got here on the left? Women are associated with earth, not just turtle. Men are associated the sky, which is not the blue atmosphere but outer space. And the circle in the center is the back of the turtle rising out of the water, and then you've got the atmosphere around it. On the right you have the same thing in profile, so you're looking at the back of turtle rising out of water with the sky above it. And again you have that male female complement going on. So you see that for example in this motif. This is in Kentucky, right south of Portsmouth Ohio, right across the Ohio River. So

you've got the circles around, ripples as the turtle rises from the water. Right in the center there it is turtle's back; that's a burial mound. Around it, the ripples are coming up the water, but also this is a Lenape mound, one of the nations that envision reality as layers of dimensions, and those are the various dimensions radiating out from the center. On the left you see a turtle, what a turtle looks like when it's coming up out of water, and you can see where the iconography of the rising back comes from.

All right now, this twinship principle actually underpins the gift economy. Again you've got to have two. Everything happens by twos, by fours, by eights -- it's exponential. I want you to take a look at this iconography here. Remember what we just saw in the Kentucky example? Here, it [concentricity] is again with the square in the center, circles around, the water around, another circle around. What you're looking at on the left is Tenochtitlán when the Spaniards first arrived before they destroyed it in 1521. That iconography was used to actually build the city of Tenochtitlán in the center of the Lake of the Moon. On the right you've got a detail of exactly that design that comes from Pike County Ohio: square of earth in the center, circle of sky around, and off to the right you see the motif in profile. This happens over and over and over again throughout the Americas and it's more than just earth and sky; it's twinship. They have to happen together.

All right now this has to do with directions and gendering. Native American cultures are fully gendered. A lot of westerners think that means patriarchy. It doesn't. *It does not.* What it means is there are equal associations with each, and they must interface the right way. Now, to the Iroquois, east-west is male; north-south is female. Some nations do it in a different way but what we've got here is east and west male, north-south female. Now, that looks like four, again, to westerners, but it's not. It's two. You've got east-west as one line, and north-south as another line, and you see that cross motif? There's another one [symbol] that you see happening throughout the eastern woodlands. Interestingly Native Americans tend to look at the in-between spaces instead of the up down lines, so what I've got on the right top mixed, I've got as breath, and bottom left, I've got mixed as blood. You've got blood and breath interfacing on the diagonal, and then you've got them mixed because there's always blood and breath and they're always together, as you can see diagram on the right. They always interface; they're always connected. Neither of them is disparate, neither of them is discrete. They're always together. And I put the turtle in the center (?) because that's where he walks.

All right, now in the mounds you get a lot of imagery of pregnancy, fecundity, and Mother Earth holding it all. And that's what you're looking at here. You've got Mother Earth,

and she's holding the circle of sky and the square of earth. She's coordinating them. I want you to notice that she's pregnant. She is always pregnant. Lactation is a really, really important image for Native America and the gift economy. Part of the idea of lactation is that you're taking care of the weak. There's nothing weaker than the newborn baby; nothing. And so you will nurse that baby, you will take care of that baby, be careful of that baby. And mother is in charge, but that doesn't mean she's a tyrant. It means she's responsible, and she has obligations. It's assumed that the older you are, the larger your obligations. It's assumed that elders are more competent than younger. Elders must do everything. They are responsible. If something goes wrong, it's their fault; they're supposed to know better. So you see Mother Earth holding up everything here.

And there are other motifs. Here's another one. And you can see the burial mounds inside the square on the right. I just flipped it because when Squier and Davis did it, they didn't know what they were looking at. So I thought, so you can see what was going on there. The burial mounds are important because we have reincarnation. Typically people reincarnate four times because it's a reflection of the twinship. You can see them going into the round, pregnant womb area--into the amniotic fluid. That's a really important thing, and you also see



a kind of thing that looks like a smile? That's the rising turtle giving birth, giving birth, giving birth.

Now, even though men and women are equal, women alone control the economy. It's in the constitution. Women are the progenitors of the soil. They own everything that comes from the soil and that means all the goods that come from earth and all the people that come from earth. That's women alone; women are responsible. On the left this is from *Iroquois Uses of Maize*, Parker's book in 1910, and you see a Seneca woman in the fields. She's using a buffalo ridge there rather than a more traditional mound because by 1910, the Europeans are really messing with us and won't let us do the traditional mounds. So people did their best. I remember when we were kids, we mounded a little bit, but we had to be really careful because the Europeans got very angry if you started trying to do things in a traditional way. So this one [photo] is kind of half cooperating, half not. The buffalo ridge is what you can see as the little raised area. On the right you've got two Ottawa grandmothers from this area, from northwest Ohio. I've never been able to find out their names, but it was a mother and a daughter, and they were two elders from the Odawa people.

All right, now for the imagery of suckling., You not only have pregnancy but you have suckling, you have *children* suckling, very important imagery, and it's applied to men as well as women. The Europeans when they first heard us applying it

[the imagery] to men just couldn't understand. They thought there was some kind of a horrible gay thing going on. They didn't understand what they were looking at. But it's very common to say, "I'm a really good chief who makes much milk" [*i.e.*, lactates]. A chief makes sure that the people have the food they need. It's very common to say his breasts are large and give much milk, a very common phrase. It's a standing metaphor throughout the woodlands, and I want you to notice that it's female-based imagery. Right. Women are creating the wealth, creating the milk that's feeding the people. And if you've ever raised corn, used corn, cooked corn, you know it makes a kind of milk. So milk was really important to us.

Now the women make it so that women control it. It doesn't come out of the breast until the woman releases it to the child, right? Hopefully. Women thus hold all the goods and services necessary for life. When the men come back from the hunt they give it [the game] to the women. And this happens with the deer, they give it to the women. She's the one that takes care of it [*i.e.*, holds the food from the hunt]. She's the one that distributes it to whoever needs to eat, whoever she's responsible for. And it's her job to ensure that everybody gets what they need. Every two years, traditionally every two years, who is in charge changes, and as Dr. Guettner-Abendroth was saying, you've got to make sure that the community is small enough to see what's going on. If everybody can see how

things are being managed, it's a lot harder to get away with favoritism than if you've got some large, anonymous group. So we have small groups, and we have changing leadership. In fact, out west, every six months the leadership changes.

Mounds are considered breasts of the mother, earth. These are planting mounds, any kind of mounds that we had. They were envisioned as breasts of mother earth. Why? Because you planted in them and they grew the crops, the corn, beans, and squash, which are what would grow naturally but which were hybridized [by Native American women]. We hybridized corn, and everything else.

As Dr. Goettner Abendroth was saying, you can distribute knowledge. You sure can; you sure can. One of the things we'd do in our large gifting alliances if somebody invented something was neat. For example in the year 500 or so, when the Seneca men invented the bow and arrow with a flint tip, they immediately sent moccasins – that's speakers - out to all the gift allied nations and showed them how to do that, too. When the women invented a better way to make a watertight basket, they immediately sent out moccasins, young women, who would demonstrate the technique to all the Gift Alliance people. Now everybody knew how to do this better thing. That's the kind of thing you would also share. And you can go great distances. Sometimes it would take years to get to everybody that you knew.

So the second principle [sharing] is very important. Now, sharing is just suckling people, too. The idea is, if you're stronger than this person over here, you share, you take care of that weaker person, either until he or she becomes strong, or if that person's never going to be strong, say that somebody is born with Down syndrome, you take care of that person forever. Forever. Why? Because the strong take care of the weak. That's the suckling principle.

Now, a lot of people say: "Oh, why did the Aztecs give gifts to Cortez? Why didn't they kill him on the beach?" Because we're a gift economy, that's why. What happened when Montezuma first met Cortez [was] he arrived with a ton of gifts. First of all, he kissed Mother Earth. This is right in the chronicles at the time. First of all, he kissed Mother Earth. Then, he gave Cortez pearls, which come from water, quartz--that comes from the ground; gold that comes from the ground; silver--that comes from the ground. That's all mother earth stuff. Why? Because they [the Spaniards] arrived in ships [on water]. They [the Aztecs] also gave lavishly embroidered cloths with all the colors made from plants and six thousand bolts of woven cotton. All right, people say, "Oh, why'd they do it" It was foolish." But westerners say that. He [Moctezuma] did it because Cortez and his men were poor and weak. They stank. They had terrible food. Their clothes were tattered; they were barefoot, and the Aztecs were very strong, so Montezuma

suckled them. That was the right thing to do. That was the proper thing to do. I just have that picture of the featherworks ceremonial shield because it's a very beautiful example of the kind of cloth that was given to Cortez.

All right, so what Montezuma was trying to do was create a gifting alliance with the Spaniards. There were brand new people coming in, so the first thing you do, just exactly as Dr. Goettner-Abendroth said, you expand the circle. You draw people in. So as an example in year 1142, when the Iroquois League was ratified by all five nations, we had the five nations. Immediately runners were sent out to all the nations around us saying, "Come, join us in this alliance. Come sit beneath the tree of peace with us." We invited a lot of others in. And some like the Cherokee said, "Thanks, we already have our own thing but we'll be [friends]." But by 1780, 600 years, 650 years later, there are now six full nations in the League and 61 nations in the Gift Alliance. And this meant that goods could be traded - not traded they weren't traded they were given - across the entire expanse of the eastern woodlands and in fact we had things from the west coast - I mean California. California had things from the Atlantic Coast, things from the Gulf found in Michigan, things from Michigan wound up in the Black Hills. We had alliances all over the place and these gifts would go in every direction. Yes, food is a little hard to keep. We would dry food, but usually people raised their own food,

and if somebody was in need, the nation closest to them was the one that would share the food, and then if everybody along the line is sharing, everybody's got enough. This is how it expands. You invite people. You got to go out and invite them.

So here was what was going on with Montezuma. A new kingdom came in. So on the left you've got the Gifting Alliances. The gold is a newcomer, drag them in. You bring in that pink diamond. By the way, the diamond is the traditional symbol of a fire, so you have all these people in fire alliance. Some bigger or some smaller, all in the Gifting Alliance. So you see a newcomer, bring them in immediately. That's why we always gave gifts to the Europeans. With them, they didn't know what it was. They thought they were getting a good deal. They ran away with the goods, giggling. But what we were doing was establishing a gifting circle. The ultimate result of this is that communal wealth is enhanced. And it happened on all occasions. It wasn't just once a year. Any time you go to a council, you bring whatever you got to give away. Okay, and you try to bring your best stuff. You don't bring rickety stuff; if you bring rickety stuff, it means you're the poor one. Nobody is omitted. Everybody brings something, even if it's just a rock, and then you put it down, and people pick things up. There is no sense of equivalency. It's not like, well I gave you a truck and you gave me a rock. No, no, no, no, no. Whatever you get is what you got. Here's some pictures from the early 20th

century of people laying down their gifts. Now, typically here [in Ohio], we would have tables but there they just put them right down on the boardwalk. Here, you I see some in the share bowl [1925 photo on the right, bottom]. You give some, you take some. So the idea is to expand the circle indefinitely until everybody is fed, clothed, housed, and cared for. And that is the recipe for peace.

Okay, I'll stop the share-screen, here. Okay so I'm ending the share at this point, and I hope you've got some idea of how the twinship principle now works in conjunction with the gift economy.

Thank you.

LETECIA LAYSON

Thank you so much Barbara. That was very dynamic and very powerful. I think the one thing that is so critical to understand in your presentation was that one is a fraction of the whole and that two together creates a whole and that twinship is central to this notion and idea and then to expand the circle which is what we're doing here is expanding the circle and the awareness. So thank you so much. It's incredibly exciting to have you and Heide together with Genevieve to be able to answer questions that people have for us and for you.