

**Gantowisas: democracy and eternal feminine beyond the legends – a way to rethink world
order**

More than a dissertation, by this short essay I'd like to bring to the limelight the myth of the eternal feminine in a quirky Iroquois adaptation, a long-lasting reality resisting the harshness and consumption of the elapsing of time. This myth, completely embodied in the story of the Gantowisas, that has contextualized it and made it a tangible and concrete reality, other than being an outstanding example upon which was based the USA Constitution, not only in its internal structure founded on the principle of popular sovereignty ("we the people") and in the recognized fundamental freedoms (i.e., first amendment), but also for the way they manage their international relations and diplomatic affairs, has left its sign over the time in the matriarchal society which represents a triumphal model of democracy strongly acclaimed by feminists movements and the utmost bulwark of the belief that a true open equalitarian society can just come from women and the values inherent to them. In this piece, I'd like outlining how, being life-giver the traditional core essence of the woman from which is originated creation, men are just unessential appendages and accessories that contribute to the perpetuation of the species but evidently on a secondary level, confirming, by this assumption, the efficacy of this societal pattern, that have demonstrated women are be able to better take on the same roles usually conferred to men, enhancing business productivity, ameliorating equality in justice and getting proved innate skills of cherishing people and undertaking social responsibilities, enough endowed with the characteristics of self-management and adaptability throughout the revolving doors of diplomacy, all venusian qualities imprinting harmony and resilience in the highs and lows of the international relations, in the fight against the defuse of martial unbalances produced by a chauvinistic male dominance. The eternal feminine has been a running thread in human culture for thousands of years, but each generation has to reinterpret it, and embedded in the secular society, keeping in mind that everyone in

everyday life should cultivate certain arrays of values such as: motherliness, inner beauty, devotion; nurturing, loving kindness, inspiration and creativity.

The matter is just not all about an enchanted, ethereal, angelic figure that has no weight in this world or the last word in debates, it's not just something inspiring and mildening the asperities of life but it's a concrete and determinant element in improving real democracy, guaranteeing fundamental freedoms for all and driving radical changes. Peace and dialogue against wars. Life, creativity and innovation against the stalemate and the power of death. Love, grace and equilibrium against brutalities, conflicts and injustices. Welcoming against invasions. Wisdom against instinctive hazard. Diplomatic qualities, in facts, are inherent to the nature of woman, having especially a flair and propensity to smooth away the social and interpersonal acrimonies, to make up for shortcomings and to appease the dissension, being endowed with those indispensable resilience and creative attitudes that lead to devise proper original solutions to resolve conflicts.

By the myth of the eternal feminine and the practical scolding example of the matriarchal societies centred on the pivotal role of the Gantowisas, we have learned as in these secluded microcosms, still accused to be primitive and out-of-date, have been developed and deployed the highest democratic and egalitarian freedoms and rights in a perspective of openness to the surrounding realities, to the dialogue and confrontation, to the tolerance, under banner of non violence and diplomatic liberality.

This myth could give an illustration of an alternative societal model. In this research, I have tried to convey deep insights aiming at spreading out the knowledge of Iroquoian culture and its political structure in every aspects of life, just departing from it¹. Citing Goethe in the Faust, "*The Eternal feminine attracts us to the higher*"², statement by which the author reduced this myth to a meaning of gateway of salvation and of spiritual redemption from suffering and evil.

¹ Canale P, *Eternal feminine: an inspirational source of democracy – an insight on Iroquois culture in USA and Canada*, Barnes and Noble, 2021

² Goethe, *Faust*, Oscar Mondadori, 2016 (first publication in 1832) "Everything that can be perceived/is only a symbol;/the imperfect, which cannot be realized,/here makes itself reality;/that which cannot be described,/here finally completes itself./It is the eternal feminine,/always attracting us to the higher."

Lately, we can't forget Pope John Paul II words, commenting the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*³, echoing John Paul I, "the smiling pope" that several times pronounced himself on gender issues and birth control, that affirmed, "God is Father, and even more, is Mother", born from Holy Mary, celebrated beyond the dogmas or legends about her Virginity and Immaculate Conception, "the Quintessential Woman", "the mystic rose", revealing the maternal face of the god of boundless love, to testify the modern openness of the Holy See to this topic and to emphasize the inescapable primary role of women in society, blending spirituality with a compelling sense of poetry, enchantment, transfiguration and mystery. Complementing my ideological mantra lying in the immanence of the perfection in nature and the sublime fascination of the beauty and the art, which are strictly feminine⁴, can be evidenced how Oppel analysis of the Nietzschean thought⁵ revised the traditional role of women, even if still strictly connected to the role of the superman and his proclaimed anti-misogynistic perspective.

Going straight to the point in the study of Iroquois culture⁶ can be found that these Indigenous tribes are all about celebration of life and thanksgiving to the natural bless and the spiritual brotherhood with all human beings and flora and fauna species, whose mimic and recalling is interpreted with a sense of fusion and belonging to the land. By this way, considering all creatures as relatives, American Indians conceive all people as being the same children of a unique Mother, and they feel to be parts of an ordered balanced life, in a continuous search for the completeness of the being. Perceiving reality in a different way than that commonly intended by nowadays societies and conceiving time as a transcendental subsequence of Epochs, departing from the fall of Sky Woman on the Earth, differing from Roman Catholics, they believe in something cyclical, rejecting linearity and, in force of that, starting from this circular, dynamic concept of universe in which all things are related and belongs to only one family, they feel, as celebrated in each song and ceremony, that any creature is part of a somehow greater whole and that all these parts are intertwined one another by

³ [Mulieris Dignitatem \(August 15, 1988\) | John Paul II \(vatican.va\)](#)

⁴ Canale P., "Life's blooms. Illustrations in poetry...the silent side of beauty", Barnes and Noble, 2021, Introduction

⁵ [Frances Nesbitt Oppel. Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman \(core.ac.uk\)](#), 2006

⁶ Bruce E. Johansen – Barbara A. Mann, *Encyclopedia of the Haudenosaunee*, Greenwood, 2000

virtue of their integral and effective participation and the principle of reciprocity. The healing chants and rituals⁷ are intense invocations of the restoration of the natural order and a continuous search for harmony. “Beauty is wholeness. Health is wholeness. Goodness is wholeness. And they are symbolized in the sacred hoop”⁸, which is a female element. The role of the woman is associated with the springtime of the community. Their awareness derives first and foremost from the relationship and dialogue with the Spirit, that joins the discrepancies, mends the scratches and puts in harmony the bodies with the souls, not only healing but unleashing a sense of lightness and freedom and instilling that impalpable sense of joy letting them ride the wave of original and creative thinking and rhythmical dances and composition of sounds that float them on the magical enchantment of pleasure, caressing the fluidity of the fusion. All that can be called as spirits or gods or metaphysical, occult forces inform in these little corners of the world, often forgotten, every aspects of the institutional frameworks and structures, and social habits, nowadays as in the past, since the mists of times.

It could be illuminating to argue about how the myth of the eternal feminine has survived throughout the centuries, and how it’s more and more, even nowadays, an inspirational muse and a critical spectrum for political debates about new institutional democratic models⁹. Harking back to the Iroquois traditions, the real core of modern North American democracies, we can highlight how this myth is exalted by the leading role of the Gantowisas, the essential depositaries of the gifts allowed by our Universal Spiritual Mother, their necessary endorsement of responsibilities, their intrinsic mission to feed, to spawn and to develop human gender and species.

Following this pathway, I’d like to turn my interpretation of Iroquois culture, mixing spirituality, legends, what can be described as historical examples of possessed people, explaining what can be meant as possess, with Gantowisas, that, even descending their sacred powers from Sky Woman, are perfectly rooted on the planet Earth. What’s real and what’s transcendence, imaginary in their

⁷ [The Iroquois Book of Rites on JSTOR](#)

⁸ Barbara A. Mann, *Iroquoian Women – The Gantowisas*, Peter Lang, 2011

⁹ Johansen B., E., *Debating Democracy: Native American legacy of freedom*, Clear Light Pub, 1997

powerful healings and mystic realms? It's evident how the power of mind and suggestions between thaumaturge and patient, or on their own, have a regenerating energy, and how it can be amped up in collective rites and ceremonies, between the shamanism and the religiosity, in addition to the undeniable efficacy of natural remedies in comparison with ordinary drugs. Solutions that have far distanced the progress of modern traditional science and that have attracted proselytes and caused many pilgrimages from all over the world. The *Sacred Hoop*, or Medicine wheel, is, as said, a female element, according which "life is a cycle and everything has its place in it", based on four basic directions, each one offering its own lesson, color and animal spirit guide¹⁰.

The Sacred hoop and its circular perspective goes beyond any Manichean partition considering what's coming from a God as good and from a Devil as evil, rejecting concepts as original sin, redemption, faith, heaven and hell. The hoop is a field containing energy, in order to make it won't be dispersed, and that could gather in an indissoluble uniqueness the whole world, including physical and spiritual creatures. In Native Amerindian culture there's a keen sense of respect towards all forms of flora and fauna, not only as the main mean of subsistence, but also in order to preserve the longevity of the planet. The hoop is sacred because it opens up the way of awareness. The shamans heal sick people by the use of what are considered by European people just simply magic gifts, not special medicines, through wizard powers in which are intrinsic a sort of "mystic potency". The nature of Native minds is global-holistic for its ability to identify themselves with all the complexities and to maintain these structures in a dynamic equilibrium. By the use of the sacred hoop, they demonstrate how the Cosmogony works, how the laws of nature and the cosmos rule all human beings, the mysteries of life and death, the mind and the individuality of the Self¹¹.

My personal perspective dares to be quite transcendental, compelling myself to use a cross-cutting lens to substantially focus the attention on the importance of the rights of women, often victims of abuses, tortures and suffering sterility, metaphorically including by this term all kinds of

¹⁰ Native American Medicine Wheel Legends and Traditions (learnreligions.com)

¹¹ F. Minnella, "*Il sogno, il rito, l'estasi. Le vie del peyote degli Indiani d'America*", Massari Editore, 1998

unproductiveness and unfruitfulness. These, in facts, although currently protected and proclaimed by the international community standards by resonant slogans, are still hardly implemented in many contexts, with no mention of the rights of Indigenous people that fortunately in Canada have had a better treatment than in the USA or other parts of the planet¹². My utmost desire is here to shed light on what represents the inner essence of life, the straight sensitivity residing in every human being, made of a right balance game between its male and female components, and to remark what “Mother Nature” in the Iroquois culture have to teach to all of us in relation to the mentality of dialogue, comparison and inclusiveness.

Gantowisas represent the earthly emblem of the myth and the propelling power that makes everything in society work well, in harmony and in peace, from economic circuits, essentially trade and agriculture, to politics, justice administration and legal system, other than above all in the smallest but closest societal nucleus, represented by families, that they run with an enlarged vision, encircling in their own hands the full management of their communities and their international relations in a one world society, smoking together the pipe of amity and peace¹³.

They are active agents, not passive victims; the kinship is traced through the female line; children are raised up and adopted by women; they own the lands, the crops and the longhouses, enjoy more privileges and greater freedom if compared not only with other American Indian women¹⁴, but also with the so-called civilized nations.

In the words of a Cheyenne saying, “A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground”¹⁵ and, although the European conquest of Native America, Native women’s hearts are still beating.

¹² F. Minnella, *L’America non esiste...io ci sono stato*, Gruppo Editoriale L’Espresso, 2012

¹³ Heckewelder, *History, Manners and Customs of the Indian Nations*, Philadelphia- Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1881

¹⁴ [Matriarchal Studies :: The Americas](#)

¹⁵ Allen, Paula Gunn, *The sacred hoop: recovering the feminine in American Indian traditions*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1986; Jaimes, Marie Annette. “Towards a new image of American Indian women”, *Journal of American Indian Education* [online] Oct 1982.

The purpose of “*The Great Law of Peace*”, the oral Haudenauonee Constitution, written on wampum belts, is to help remembering the natural laws of creation fundamentally derived from Sky Woman, the spirit that informs equality and order other than beauty, health and goodness. In it is recalled the Tree of Peace, under which the Council of Fire of the Confederacy sit to discuss their affairs. The Tree has four Great White Roots in four main directions, symbolizing peace and strength. A certain numbers of wampum strings are given to each of the female families that in the USA represent the completeness of the union and certify the pledge of the nations (Mowaks, Oneida, Tuscarora, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca) that all formed, in a unique body, the Union of the Great Law.

Wampum belts are also used for storytelling. In these black lands surrounded by rocks and cliffs, among the hills of god and spirits, brightened up by the moon, they breath in the nature each day greater and greater sensations, instilling in them an unsoundable mystic sense that they can’t refrain to unavoidably transmit to the world. The used symbols narrated a story in the oral tradition or spoken words. Since there was no written language, wampum was a very important mean of keeping records and passing down stories to the next generation, and were created to keep trace of the treaties or historical events. The greatest part of Indian tradition is oral, although the European attempts to write it down, and, as such, is unclassifiable and uncategorizable, becoming for its fluidity and hard reachability, unlikely to be sifted through a partisan or homologating critic. They are the outright free thinkers, unmindful even of the use of pen, they don’t need. Poetries and songs, often onomatopoeic, move along the notes of nature and even prayers that they rattle off as a breath are free. Thoughts that go beyond the walls. They don’t know repetitive novenas lo learn by heart or to brainwash themselves. The same sense of freedom invests their dances, and the so-called rituals, that are never identical one another but are expression of a pure creative art form. They have given origin to the highest form of religious apostasy: the denial of indoctrination.

The Gantowisas and the Jigonsaseh are the main actresses of the political life of the nation and formidable allies. The Gantowisas run local clan councils and held all the lineage wampum,

nomination belts and titles, they run the funerals and retain exclusive rights over naming - i.e., the creation of new citizens and the installation of public officials. They nominate all male sachems as well as all Clan Mothers to office and have the power to impeach wrongdoer, they appoint warriors, declare war, negotiate peace and mediate disputes.

The ferocious nexus of sexism, classism, and machismo that also fatally warped western studies linger on in a rather blithe acceptance of the white supremacist propaganda that harshly criticized governmental women just because was deemed unconceivable. The Great Law carefully delineates the political operation of the clans In western debates although the work done by early feminists on corroborating the political centrality of the Gantowisas, the official history seems determined to ignore the full half of the Haudenauonee government and is not found a complete discussion on the woman's complementary political structure to the Men Councils equally vital to the League, how their clan council are set up, how the Jigonsaseh declares war or peace, how Clan Mothers are selected, how they wield constitutional powers as judges or mediators, how speakers from the men Grand Council functioned, how the Gantowisas appoint warriors, how they help up and forward matters to the men Grand Council and how they decide issues of citizenship and political office through adoption and naming. The Jesuit Relation reported that the women had "*beaucoup d'autorité*" among their people, the Clan Mothers were highly respected and held their own councils and that the men's councils concluded nothing without consulting the Gantowisas¹⁶. Lafiteau in 1724 declared that the Gantowisas were the real "souls of the councils" on which resides all clear authority¹⁷, observing that their complete control over war parties was a "sign that they have a prestige somewhat more important than the Council of the Old Men itself". In 1761, Pierre de Charlevoix documented that "the women have the chief authority amongst all the nations of the Huron language" adding that "the chiefs are no more than their lieutenants"¹⁸ with peace-making

¹⁶ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed. And trans., *Les relations des Jésuits, or The Jesuit Relations: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionary in New France, 1610-1791*, New York, Pageant Book Company, 1959

¹⁷ Father Joseph Francois Lafiteau, *Customs of the American Indians compared with the customs of the primitive times*, Toronto, The Champlain Society, 1974

¹⁸ Pierrede Charlevoix, *Journal of a Voyage to North America*, 1761; Ann Arbor MI: University Microfilms, Inc, 1966

functions. According to the western misogynist literature, Iroquois governmental models were considered as immoral, unnatural and reprehensible. Gantowisas were even pointed out as transvestites, arising doubts about their true femininity.

In the *excursus* of the juridical Iroquois panorama could be interesting to have an outlook on the main treaties binding them, first as Aboriginal people, then as Indigenous people, with Canada Federal Government and the International Treaties on this topic other than exploring minorities and women rights¹⁹. The written version of the Great Law, published by Arthur Parker in 1916²⁰, reported how it required Clan Mothers to hold councils and, instead of asserting that women has the same rights as men, pointedly stated that men has the same rights as women.

The best way to reconstruct the political role of Iroquoian women resides in women traditions: while Sky Woman and her Daughter of the First Epoch modeled considerable social power, the most politically powerful woman depicted in all of tradition appeared in the Second Epoch: the Jigonsaseh, “the great woman”, “the mother of nations”, “the peace queen”. In Wyandot-Seneca tradition is recalled as the reincarnation of the Lynx. Her words were laws and their sanctions were necessary in all political measures of inter-tribal importance. She played the role of both the Peace Woman and peacemaker’s mother and she took active part in the conferences and in deliberations resulting in the establishment of the League. There have been as many different women bearing the title Jigonsaseh as men bearing the title of Adodaroh. The Jigonsaseh acted in the political capacity of Head Clan Mother.

Among the symbolic practices adopted by the Peacemaker according to the Great Law there was that to “eat together from one bowl”, that meant that kinship subsisted between those who had shared food and, since it was forbidden to make war on one’s own kin, by feeding both sides from the same pot, Jigonsaseh effectively used this provision to make peace between warring factions. Jigonsaseh house was also called “peace house”: by her direct authority was negotiated peace and

¹⁹ Canale P., *Eternal feminine, Ibid.*, chapter. 2

²⁰ Arthur C. Parker, *An analytical history of the Seneca Indians*, Researchers and Transactions of the New York State Archeological Association (1926, Kraus reprint co.1970)

declared war. She used the power to stop conflicts by stating simple sentences, being their declarations outright laws²¹.

A primary strategy of the League was peace through expansion. This was not a western-inspired view, but one inherent in the Great Law. In giving the Great Law, the Peacemaker had begun by planting the sacred council Tree of Peace and the Nations interested in joining the League might follow one of its four Shining roots. In describing the official symbols of the league, the peacemaker held up a bundle of five arrows for all to see, noting that singly each arrow was easily broken, but, tied together in a bundle, the arrows were very strong. Thus the League was united for physical strength and self-protection and the bundled arrows became a mechanism of havoc once the disruptive influence of European invasion began. The sudden depopulation caused by epidemic diseases pressured survivors to deliver pelts to European markets in order to acquire supplies that the overburdened remnants of society could no longer produce by themselves. The result was a series of “mourning wars”, condolence raids, whose primary purpose was to gain adoptees to rebuild the population²².

These European promoted wars pitted the Wyandot from above the St Lawrence against the Haudenosaunee below the St Lawrence. These peoples had not been traditional enemies but long acknowledged relatives, being instead traditional enemies England and France. Between them, these interlopers infused a high level of negative tension and snarling rivalry into the once peaceful relations between the French “Wyandots” and the British “Haudenosaunee”, ranging them against each other as suppliers of raw materials (skins and furs). Thus the Wyandots- Haudenosaunee war was an affair initiated by the French and the British in pursuit of colonial empire.

In a series of concerted actions beginning in 1633, the Gantowisas called for the Wyandot nations to be invaded one by one, and they succumbed to League pressure. Following the first assault, many of them sued immediately for peace. Although negotiations for entering the League, peace talks fell

²¹ Benjamin Franklin “*Remarks concerning the Savages of North America*”, Benjamin Frankling Writing, 1783 (New York, the Library of America, 1987)

²² [The Iroquois Peoples - WorldAtlas](#), 2017

apart in 1635 as it became clear that some of the more proselytized Wyandots were reluctant to boot out their French missionaries, a requirement for entering the League. In response, the Seneca and Onondaga Gantowisas pushed to continue the war against the French, taking Wyandot converts captive, sending young men to plant a League Tree of Peace. From Haudenosaunee perspective, this action was not really equivalent to disrupting peace talks, but their logical extension. Just the Wyandots, not the French had been invited. Ultimately, the fight escalated, culminating in what is still mistakenly call “the fall of Huronia” by historians. It’s important highlighting that the Haudenosaunee were not attacking the Wyandots *per se* but just Christian converts, with a particular eye to dislodging the French, so that many Wyandots were allied with the League against the French.

It was a women affairs appointing League warriors. Seneca - Wyandot Gantowisas also took on role as warriors, standing armed beside the men. The Jigonsaseh of 1687 temporarily assumed military power, fulfilling civilian and military leader roles. As a result of his war on the Senecas, Denonville was recalled to France in disgrace in 1689, soundly trounced by a woman, the Jigonsaseh of 1687-1690. The Haudenosaunee as a great heroine of the League history remembers her as she defeated “the largest European force ever assembled in North America” up to that time. There is no reason to suppose that the position of Jigonsaseh was not continuously filled between 1650 and 1848 when the USA government presumed to dissolve the League and forced a “civilized” form of government on the Haudenosaunee of New York with the main purpose to deprive Clan Mothers of their traditional powers. At first, Women Keepership of the land and tokens of their involvement in the political process, including suffrage, were begrudgingly recognized. All real power was concentrated in the hands of the men’s Grand Council. Although that, continued to be recognized the women’s ownership of land and the original clan base of the Great Law was shunted aside, along with the Gantowisas’s remaining political powers. As a result, Haudenosaunee women were massively disempowered, with Seneca women not regaining voting rights until 1964. The office of Jigonsaseh seemed to be officially reinstated in 1853 with Gahahno.

Those interested in maintaining a truly traditional government should look up her lineage and her heirs, reinstating her position and her powers, along with the Clan Mothers' Councils. The Haudenosaunee began to feel the full weight of the western conqueror bearing down on them as soon as the Revolutionary War ended. With the forced assimilation, the "forgotten removals",²³ the nations fell like pushed dominoes into the grip of settlers' mitts that throttled Haudenosaunee culture. The engine of forced assimilations in New York involved the Quakers primary cultural adjustment to reduce the Gantowisas to a proper state of female subjection to male "protection". Under the Quakers plan of civilization Iroquois women were to be reformed into pliant women bruised under the heavy thumb of their autocratic male relatives, according to the Christian-European model: the Gantowisas were to become submissive to their husbands, absent from public assemblies, quiet in places of worship, hopeless at finances and concerned only with the domestic sphere, confined to household chores and baby-making. They had to give up farming, men's work in the European view. Was also under the Quakers influence that Gahahno was inaccurately described as a Virgin but virginity was a European, not an Iroquoian credential.

Concerning their International Relations, it must be recalled that the Grand Council of the Iroquois Confederacy declared war on Germany in 1917 during WWI and again in 1942 in WWII. Passports have been issued since 1997 for international travel, but after Sept 11 attacks was no more recognized legal value to the document. In 2010, the Iroquois Nationals lacrosse team was allowed by the U.S. to travel on their own passports to the World Lacrosse Championship²⁴ in England only after the personal intervention of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton but the British government refused to recognize Iroquois passports and denied the team members entry in UK.

²³ James P. Ronda, "*Forgotten Removals: the life and the times of Hendrick Aupaumut*" Minnestrista Council for Great Lakes Native American Studies, 1991-1992 Proceedings of the Woodland National Conference (Muncie: Minnestrista Cultural Center and Ball State University, 1993)

²⁴ Nicole Terese Capton Marques, *Divided We Stand: The Haudenosaunee, Their Passport and Legal Implications of Their Recognition in Canada and the United States*, S. Diego International Law Journal, 2011

The Onondaga Nation spent \$1.5 million on a subsequent upgrade to the passports designed to meet 21st-century international security requirements²⁵.

Jigonsaseh's story is vital to understand the powers and duties of the Gantowisas. Her negotiations with the Peacemaker and her personal centrality in ending the Second Epochal war resulted in the women sections of the Iroquois Constitution. The wampum belts of the Great Law "Clans and Consanguinity" and "Laws of Adoptions" are Jigonsaseh's sections. The Roster of the Gran Mothers²⁶ named the Clan Mothers of the Canadian League. The organizing principle beyond the local-federal mechanism was Twinship in the form of gendered balance: the Clan Mothers' Council mirrored the Men's Grand Council and *vice versa*. It was the reciprocal interaction of these two bodies that ordered the functioning of the League. Everyone had both a Clan (mother) and a national citizenship (father). By women power to block decisions, it was no accident that *Sganyadai: yoh's woman-crushing Gaiwi: ho* (Code of Handsome Lake) took over fifty years to be codified and recognized²⁷. The men could not deliberate upon an issue that had not been sent forward by the Gantowisas. Within the Councils decisions were taken by consensus, according to the principle of popular sovereignty, the will of people, *Ne' Gāshasde'sä*, inspiring modern democracies, from which they highly differ because they don't even need, because of the values and principles they rely upon, a Montesquieu system of checks and balances²⁸ distributed in distinct centers of power. Although sometimes depreciatorily labeled as "petticoat governments", their legal principles are echoed in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution.

The Gendering rule resulted in mirror-image councils of Clan Mothers balancing councils of men sachems. According to the protocol, men didn't speak in women's councils and *vice versa*. Ayonwantha was the Peacemaker's Speaker to the men, as the Jigonsaseh was Speaker to the women. The Peacemaker needed two speakers, and, under this system of gendering, women sent

²⁵ Benny, Michael, "Iroquois spend \$1.5 million to upgrade passports". *CNYCentral.com*. Barrington Broadcasting Group, LLC, 2011

²⁶ Barbara A. Mann, *Ibid.*, p. 156-160

²⁷ Arthur C. Parker, *The Code of Handsome Lake, the Seneca Prophet*, New York State Museum Bulletin, University of State of New York, 1913

²⁸ Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The spirit of laws*, Bell, 1914

male speakers to men's councils, while men sent female speakers to women's councils. Speakership was a conventional office accomplished by individuals sent forth to present the chiefs', or Clan Mothers', consensus message to the official opposite. Speakership operated on the principle of One-Mindedness, or functional consensus. All Spirits – from those of Mother Earth, the waters, the plants, the animals, GranMother Moon, Milky Way, etc. – were called together with the goal of achieving a perfect consensus of all sentient minds in a cosmic *Ne' Gāshasde'sä*. Speakers were selected for their good memories, clear oratory and faithfulness to the will of their constituent body. They operated independently of Clan Motherhood or sachemship: a speaker might or might not simultaneously be a chief or a Clan Mother.

The practice of naming and its gendering into a female power is quite ancient. Its genesis may be found in stories of the First Mother and Daughter: in the First Epoch of Time, when Lynx grew up, her mother sent her walking through the back of the Turtle every day, to see what existed on the great island and at her return Sky Woman advanced the challenge of naming creatures, proposing to be inspired by their movements.

Accordingly the power over names and titles passed to Gantowisas, the daughter of her first daughter. It was the clan mother who knew the rightful possessors of their names and titles of the League encoded into lineage wampum, often called "Chief belts".

As a part of naming functions, the Clan Mothers held the lineage wampum of the Great Law. All white wampum is women's wampum, whereas black (actually purple) belongs to the men. White wampum signifies peace and justice, the women's gender purview, purple ("black") wampum signified warfare and danger, the men gendered one. Gantowisas have also full power of naming wampum of adoption, that was not only an act of nuclear families taking in an orphaned or abandoned child, but that also consisted in granting full citizenship to someone from outside of the League, or the clan. Normally during inter-clan adoptions, the respective Clan Mothers agreed at the time of adoptions to return any lineage title that might later come the child's way, so that, upon his death, the original lineage and clan might retain its rights to the title.

Gantowisas has the power to impeach civic wrongdoers: any sachem or Clan Mother found guilty of crimes in office, dereliction of duty or incompetence could be removed. Gantowisas were not empowered to impeach anyone until they had given the offender three warnings to amend his behaviour. If the final warning was ignored, the women may act.

Forms of denaming came with death. In the instant of death, Gantowisas after running funerals also directed the following feasts and festivals.

The final cluster of political powers reserved to Gantowisas concerned warfare. Before they could empower the men to use their black wampum, authorizing specific military actions, law required Gantowisas, to hold three successive peace councils. The “mourning wars” initiated just after these three persuasive efforts failed. If the Indians go to war without the consent of the great women, the Great Spirit will not prosper them in war, but will cause disgrace²⁹.

As it concerns Women’s control of economy, the fact that the woodland business was not capitalized in the western sense didn’t mean that they were not production and above all agricultural economies. The primary asset was Mother Earth. Gantowisas controlled the Iroquoian economy, and not just through their ultimate legal ownership of the means of all production but through their sole rights to keep and distribute her bounty. Men acted as the Keepers of the Forests and women as the Keepers of the fields.

In the 18th century, in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1782, Jefferson reinforced the image of “unjust drudgery” supposedly imposed upon Native Women denouncing that women are formed by nature for attentions, not for hard labor. In the 19th century, during the period of their control on the New York reservations, the Quakers tried to save women from the fields but with shaky results. Iroquois women displayed a complete lack of interest in home arts as spinning, knitting and soap making – except as entrepreneurial ventures. They remained interested in these activities as long as the Quakers supplied raw materials free of charge. They didn’t want the product for home use but were promptly selling their wares to the settlers, and at a tidy profit, since they had no expenses for their

²⁹ Rotemberg D., *The Mothers of the nation*, Ta’ wil books, 1992

equipment. The campaign aiming at getting out of the fields Iroquois women was not unique to the Quakers but also a federal policy, also pursued by government boarding schools. On the contrary, Champlain found that the women enjoyed plenty of free time in which occasion they amuse themselves by gambling, going to dances, and feasts, chatting and killing time, doing what they like the most for their leisure. The Iroquois woman was not the overworked drudge she's usually represented to have been.

Iroquoian woman invented a form of communal economics of agriculture and horticulture that guaranteed social security and preservation. What essentially distinguishes Iroquois economic system from the Western ones is their premise of natural plenty available to all, as opposed to the European presupposition of scarcity and the spiritual source of its management, being sharing and cooperation their paramount social values. The point of Iroquoian economics was not to exploit Mother Earth but to reciprocate her gifts of life with human gifts of Keeping. Under such a system, the traits of competition and individualism leading to accumulation of wealth – central in capitalism- were seen as expressions of insanity, conveying instead a mentality of generosity and inclusion. Iroquoian cooperation ruled out competition as a cultural value. Both men and women worked cooperatively in collective units focused on community-centred tasks, not ego-driven goals. The women's farming society is based on the *Gai' wiu O'dännide* ' *osha* principle, meaning "Good Rule, They Assist One Another".

Conservation techniques of Native farmers, such as the protection of the ground moisture and village rotation, must be seen through the lens of their ecological sensitivity and limited social definition of "need". They adopted agricultural techniques such as planning, timing and goal-oriented management. In an anti-Marxist perspective, if materialism underpins capitalism, spirituality is the core of Iroquoian communalism. Mother Earth was a living entity. Her Spirit was the Spirit of the Lynx, her breast were the hills and the mountains, her sweat ran into rivulets of her streams, her waters were the lakes, the creases in her body were the valleys, the grasses were her

hair and the trees were her lungs. Setting food on her skin of dirt was a sacred act. The Gantowisas were One with Mother Earth.

The Haudenosaunee constitution, for the economic rules of the League was written into the Great Law: “Women shall be considered the progenitors of the Nation”, “They shall own the land and the soil”. However, private property rights are not implied. What they hold is a sacred trust that have legal precedent in the Creation Story.

The fertility of Mother Earth was especially invoked on nights of full moon. There were certain rules as to how the Gantowisas made the distributions of the fields, depending on the need, the ability to produce, fairness and equality. In addition to clan plots, every town maintained common fields, reserved for use in communal feasts, councils and ceremonies. It was possible in post-contact days for individuals to manage “private” plots, after their consent. The redistribution of land was an ordinary affair as well as the management of allotted land. The Gantowisas elected Clan Mothers of the field annually. The Iroquois had a unique form of crop rotation: they moved themselves, not the fields, from place to place along a regular circuit every fifteen or twenty years. This allowed the fields and the forests of the latest site to lie fallow until the town folks returned to it, some four or five rotations later.

Planting was typically undertaken by the midnight light of the fat face of Granmother the Moon, by the use of fish and broken shells as fertilizer, a practice Native women taught to the English. Remaining in this field of expertise and going beyond, we can highlight the importance of the moon, associated with the female element and often with the world of dreams, oneirism, unconsciousness and occultism and how they can affect the psyche and determine the destiny of humanity³⁰.

The Gantowisas of present-day Canada supplied 65% of the people’s food, against the 35% supplied by men’s hunting and fishing. Iroquois economic profits are up to now boosted by

³⁰ Canale P., *Oneiric dimension- the dreams: a place where to find the spirit*, 2021, <http://sparklingmoonshine.blogspot.com>

ecotourism, casino and gambling. Women hold the taxes and the public treasure and Lafiteau westernized the matter turning the Gantowisas into the Exchequer of the League. The logic of Keeping was not materialistic but spiritual and let the Gantowisas have full rights over all products. After four hundred years of colonization by Dutch, British and French, Quakers and finally the Dawes Act, the spiritual economics of communal sharing once managed by Gantowisas has now crumbles into the dust of history.

About diplomacy it must be said that treating with guests was an ancient Gantowisas duty. On international scale, it was the duty of the Jigonsaseh; on the local level, responsibility of the Clan Mother of the longhouse. Hospitality was really part of the overall economic system: it consisted in an active redistribution of wealth, based on the principle that Mother Earth's bounty belonged equally to all creatures. On the micro-level open-handed festivals cemented goodwill among all clans and nations; internationally, it strengthened alliances. Delâge termed this economic regulatory system "the rule of the gift"³¹. Gifting operated on the reciprocating principle of Twinship. The Twins must remain in balance: what comes from one must go to the other and back again. Hospitality was private generosity reflecting a comfortable personal surplus and gifting was the personal benevolence of wealthy towards the poor. Both were acts of individual conscience, undertaken at private discretion, and testify the good predisposition towards recipients. This act was frowned up by the Quakers as a sort of extortion and manipulation but it was not bribery but the enlargement of a social fabric to include new possibilities of alliances for peace, under which an increasing number of people might join together to share Mother Earth's prosperity. Soon European diplomats begrudgingly acceded to the rules of Gifting that was an expected part of treaty councils: both France and Britain bowed to the custom and reverted to it whenever it suited their purposes. Iroquoian culture esteemed elder women as sowers of wisdom and givers of life, the guardians of next generation. This female focus led to social practices outrageous to Christian patriarchy:

³¹ Delâge, D. *Le Pays Renversé; Amérindien et Européens en Amérique du Nord-est, 1600-1644*, Montréal, Boréal Express, 1985

inheritance through the female line, female-headed households, pre and extramarital sexual relations for women, female control of fertility, permissive child rearing, trial marriages, mother-dictated marriages, divorce on demand, maternal custody of the children in case of divorce, polyandry and female appointed hunting wives were considered scandalous customs by the Europeans, especially their sexual mores. Gantowisas inspired the 19th century American feminists, providing their free model of womanhood. In the colonial era, women were anything but the social ornaments that the 18th century British etiquette insisted they must be. As Namias showed in *White Captives* (1993), the bold and adventurous “American Amazon” was no less than the female ideal, from the late colonial era until the Revolutionary and Federal periods³². Her athletic Amazon retraced the Iroquoian style of womanhood: active, resourceful, self-directed, rational, politically and socially powerful and completely responsible for the civic lessons of her children. Kerber examined women of the Revolutionary era and tried to fit the Amazonian attributes into the ideal of “Republican Mother”³³. The prototype of republican education was Iroquoian. There was a reason that the first emblem of the USA was an Iroquois woman (Columbia, symbolizing strength) although their Constitution failed at first to include rights of personal conscience and individual liberty, later recognized in the Bill of Rights. These rights are the cornerstones of Iroquois society but were foreign to European cultures, attributing their proclamation to the arise of individualism following the Protestant revolution. Warren³⁴ argued that although many European scholars tried to recast the matrilinear focus into patriarchal terms, Mother and Daughter are still the key of the Iroquois understanding.

The place where women sat in honour was the longhouse, long, rib-and-rafter framed buildings covered with elm bark, looking something like an upside-down ”U” or the Greek letter “Ω”. These roomy buildings were also called Clan Houses, for each accomodated all members of its

³² June Namias, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier*, Chapel Hill, NC: Unicersity of North Carolina Press, 1993

³³ Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980

³⁴ Elaine Crovitz and Elizabeth Buford, “Mercy Otis Warren”, *Courage knows no sex*, North Quincy, The Christopher Publishing House, 1978

matrilineage. Linguistically, Haudenosaunee means “the completed longhouse”. Each clan house was presided over by its Clan Mother that was not necessarily the oldest woman but the most impartial and politically sly of the elder women of that lineage.

Iroquois women commonly practised abortion and birth control techniques, if necessary, as Thomas Jefferson testified by the use of some vegetable, into the 20th century as in the 18th century. The French officer Lahontan and the Seneca scholar Arthur Parker reported that they drank the “Juice of certain roots” to prevent conceptions and to abort pregnancies without destroying the “generative organs”, merely preventing conception or ending pregnancies on a one-time basis. Although accused by the Longhouse Religion of “witchcraft, murder, and infanticide”, they absolutely knew the distinction between abortion and infanticide. The free use of abortion in fact was allowed to minimize the sufferings of mothers, according to the tradition of Creation in its concern for the lives and suffering of women. Annemarie Shimony was told that boiled sassafras shoots induced abortion³⁵ and in addition to that Iroquois women used the bark of *Fagus grandifolia*, of *Zanthoxylum americanum* or the boiled root of *Ceanothus americanus*. After westernization, the legalization of abortion and the spread of contraceptive pills, many modern Iroquoian women now opt for these newer antifertility methods. As important as preventing an unwanted conception was planning for one when a pregnancy was desired. Prospective mothers observed the phases of Granmother Moon, knowing that full moonlight was the time for conceiving children, to determine when they are ovulating. One of the side effects of controlled fertility was that every child was wanted and well looked after. Usually families have no more than three or four children, and not that many, if they cannot support them comfortably. The age of basic self-sufficiency for children was fixed at about five. An Iroquoian mother simply didn’t give birth to another child during the formative years of a child already in existence.

Once children were born, women held the exclusive right of naming them. Personal names served the purpose of attaching individuals to their communities. The names were usually given a year

³⁵ Shimony A., *Ibid*, Conservatism among the Iroquois

after birth since traditionally naming ceremonies didn't take place until Green Corn time (late August through October) or the Midwinter Ceremony (January), when all the new children of a community were formally introduced to everyone attending the festivities. One of the rules of naming is that no one may be given a name currently in use.

Gantowisas had undisputed control over it in Iroquoia children rearing. Children belonged only to the mother, and acknowledged no authority but hers. Even one hundred-twenty years of missionizing didn't alter the practice. The fondness of Iroquoian adults for children is legendary. Charlevoix reported "the care which the mothers take of their children while they are still in the cradle is beyond all expression. They never leave them, they carry them everywhere about with them". Because of their gentleness, corporal punishment was unthinkable to them. Using "no whips, no punishments, no threats" such as Europeans habitually plied against their own children, the Iroquois permissiveness reflected their philosophy that children learned only from experience. They preferred verbal prompts and community pressure on them, publicly praising desirable behaviours and, conversely, publicly condemning undesirable ones. Heckewelder underlined that, unlike the alienating system of Europe, which only trained people to respond to punishment, the Iroquoian system turned out talented, responsible, civic-minded citizens capable of living in democracy, "in peace and harmony, and in the exercise of moral virtues".

Civic duty was not the only lesson reserved for puberty. Sex was high on the list, as well. For them, sex and marriage were not necessarily connected, while controlled paternity was a nonsense idea. Sex was freewheeling and male jealousy was beneath contempt. Seneca women practiced polyandry. Divorce was frequent, free and easy. Sex began at puberty, at the behest of the girls. Boys might signal interest with their eyes or small presents but it was up to the girls to initiate the liaisons. Lahontan reported the reversal of sex role customs: "the men are as cold and indifferent as the girls are passionate and warm". Premarital sex was considered normal and was considered a very important part of every young person development. No one, male or female, was pushed to marriage without having any idea of what she or he was getting into. Furthermore, lovemaking was

held to strengthen both the female and male body, explaining its liberal use in the *andacouandet* healing ceremony, in which the healthy made love to the sick. Le Jeune recorded that sex played a part in an eight-to-ten shamanic spiritual ceremony³⁶.

Free love started generally at twelve; multiple marriages, lesbian unions, also interfamilial ones, are admitted. There's a tough understanding of homosexuality, leaving us imagine how distant this so-called "uncivilized barbarians" are from western countries, showing off a broader sense of tolerance and respect towards diversity and demonstrating to have a wider vision on how and about can work the dynamics of the interpersonal relations and the tantalizing fascination that the same sex could exercise on ourselves, in which we see reflected as in a mirror, inevitably boosting personality and self-esteem.

An accepted proposal did not seal a marriage contract. Instead, a trial marriage ensued, during which the girl was called *asqua*, meaning, "maybe married". After sampling time had passed, the mother, after consulting the girl, decided whether the couple matches well. If it was not the case, the girl returned the presents and called the marriage off. Champlain claimed that some women had been married between twelve and fifteen times. Once a full marriage was deemed suitable to proceed, the bride was now called *aténonha*, or "really married". The young couple lived in the bride's matrilineal longhouse and the mother of the girl, whose authority was complete, was responsible for the married life of her children.

Finally, what can be deduced from this overview about Gantowisas women and Iroquois culture and political, economical and social customs, is undoubtedly that can't be eluded and passed beyond their strong bond with the lands, with Mother Earth, they even resemble into the colour of their skins and with which they feel to be as one, from which they stretch out, to which they take on luxuriance and even dirtiness, adaptability and steadiness and in which they are firmly rooted. Remarkable in their life is the voice of natural elements they are able to be tuned in, with which

³⁶ Twaites Reuben Gold, *The Jesuit relations: travels and explorations of the Jesuit missionaries in New France, 1610-1791*, New York, Pegeant Book Company, 1959

they continuously talk in infinite returning, circular dialogues that disclose the mysteries of the awareness, from which they keep on learning erudite lessons, always different and new, whose they can read out the signs and secret messages guiding their deeds and addressing their thoughts, reshuffling their wittiness and intuitivity, with the slighthness of the wind and the acumen of the eagle. Whispers of nature echoing sentiments of universal god's love they try to translate in forms of beauty and art and put into practice giving a precise imprinting to the institutional and structural model of their communities on the base of this rudimental but essential pattern, in a synodal democratic *itinere*, from the Greek "syn-hodos", that's "walking together", transpiring a deep sense of brotherhood, in a missionary spirit of communion and participation, in a no one left behind society in which are all equal and have the same dignity.

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