

Annie Finch

Book Review: Matriarchal Societies: Studies on Indigenous Culture Across the Globe

Review of *Matriarchal Societies: Studies on Indigenous Culture Across the Globe* by Heide Goettner-Abendroth

Clearly, the time is overdue to overthrow the structures of violence and financial and cultural oppression that support the patriarchy. But a revolution like that can't happen in a vacuum—it can't be just a matter of getting rid of something. For real change, we need to be *for* something—something new that will take the place of the old.

Matriarchal Societies by Dr. Heide Goettner-Abendroth is a book about that new something—which is also something very old. Matriarchal culture “still exists on every continent, and has a long and worldwide history—much longer than the history of the patriarchal form of society. Far from existing only as isolated, “exotic,” special cases, this form of society was once the general rule.” (p. xxiii). While Goettner-Abendroth claims that cultures on every continent have “residual matriarchal patterns,” *Matriarchal Societies* focuses on documenting only extant matriarchal societies, which she has so far found in North America, South America, India, and Africa.

First published a decade ago in German, *Matriarchal Societies* started a worldwide movement—[Matriarchal studies](#). This stunningly unique and influential book is now, excitingly, translated into English for the first time. Dr. Goettner-Abendroth's exhaustively documented research illuminates the widespread patterns of indigenous matriarchal cultures: consensus decision-making, matrilineal cultures, gift economy, and goddess-centered spirituality. Here is Dr. Goettner-Abendroth's description of patriarchal and matriarchal cultures: “In patriarchal states . . . hierarchical pressure from above keeps everything—and everyone—in line, while matriarchal peoples base their largest forms on the equal value of every member. In this, and in their fundamentally peace-oriented politics, matriarchal societies serve as important models for future societies, beyond patriarchy, that are just and peaceful.” (p. xxxvi)

I had the pleasure of hearing Dr. Goettner-Abendroth deliver the keynote address at the annual conference of one of my favorite organizations, the [Association for the Study of Women and Mythology](#), several years ago. Hearing this brilliant scholar speak, I was overwhelmed with respect for the depth and care of her research and excitement over the impact of her mind-blowing findings. That one talk informed and change my thinking about spirituality, witchcraft, art, and my own life.

Dr. Goettner Abendroth's visionary theories and painstakingly collected evidence of how matriarchal societies work across continents resonates deeply with my inner awareness and life experience of how we can live most easily, how we can live with the most delight, and also how we must live if we are to survive as a species. Her career path is also a model for all of us independent thinkers; for example, at the beginning of her career, when she realized that her research was too radical for the current university system to handle, she simply founded her own [Academy](#) so she could work unhindered and have the most impact.

When I contemplate Dr. Goettner-Abendroth's [core description and definition of matriarchal societies](#), I am joyfully amazed at how naturally these ways of living come to me, and how good they feel. But why should I be amazed? Joy is our natural condition. And matriarchal ways of living form the way that is most directly open to us to return to it. I'm grateful that we now have this extraordinary book to help show us the way back to ourselves.

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Annie Finch

arcpoet@gmail.com