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Title of extract: **Religion, Culture and Environment**

Name of Author: **Bowie, F.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **The Anthropology of religion. Bowie, F.**

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **Blackwell**

Pages scanned: **107 - 137**

Course of Study (Module name and number): **Sacred Geography AHAN7006**

Name of Designated Person

authorising scanning: *E. L. Hamb*

Date authorised: 04.05.17.

Moodle/Powerpoint

Religion, Culture, and Environment

Introduction

As biological and social beings we are all dependent upon our physical and social environment in order to live. We do not, however, experience the world passively. The way we act affects both society and the web of life around us. Our actions are determined by what we think, by our values and belief systems. These in turn are actualized and reinforced by our education, through various aspects of our culture, and by means of ritual activity. This chapter explores this interrelationship of religion, culture, and environment from a number of different angles. The terms themselves are not discrete (separate). Religion is an aspect of culture, and the environment includes both the natural world and human society.

Environment: from the French *environner*, "to turn around." Our surroundings, all that influences the growth of animal and plant life.

In the first part of this chapter we look at the role of *cosmology* and the way in which different cosmological formulations lead to contrasting attitudes to the natural world. We examine the notion of an adaptive versus a maladaptive cosmology, with examples from both the industrialized West and small-scale societies. We then go on to look in more detail at the relationship between *mythology*, *gender*, and *the environment*, stemming from the work of Peggy Reeves Sanday. In the third section, "Totemism and the Dreamtime," we encounter some of the theoretical discussions on totemism and more recent work on Australian Aboriginal cultures which stress, albeit in different ways, the intimate connection between beliefs, rituals, social organization,

cultural artifacts, a sense of history, and connection with the land among native Australian peoples.

Cosmology

Cosmology: a theory or conception of the nature of the universe and its workings, and of the place of human beings and other creatures within that order.

Cosmogony: stories, myths, and theories relating to the origin of the universe, and of human beings.

The philosopher Freya Mathews rejects the views of Marxist and empiricist scholars who see cosmology, together with religion and mythology, as either outmoded or irrelevant because it cannot be verified. Rather than dismiss cosmology, Mathews argues, we need to recognize its fundamental importance within all human societies:

Is there a perennial human need, which cosmology can meet, and which, unmet, may lead to dangerous cultural dislocations? Is cosmology integral to the worldview a culture embodies, where the currency of such a worldview is a prerequisite of social and psychological integrity within that culture? (Mathews, 1994, p. 11)

The anthropological record indicates that all cultures compose stories to account for the origin and nature of the world, and these stories have, according to Mathews, an important function in orientating human beings within the world.

[A] cosmology serves to orient a community to its world, in the sense that it defines, for the community in question, the place of humankind in the cosmic scheme of things. Such cosmic orientation tells the members of the community, in the broadest possible terms, who they are and where they stand in relation to the rest of creation. (Mathews, 1994, p. 12)

A community whose cosmology represents the world as hostile to human interests, perhaps inhabited by "malevolent spirits which are nourished on the energies of their human playthings," could indicate a generally pessimistic view of the world and minimal expectations of a successful interaction

with the environment. Conversely, a community with a cosmology that represents the world as hospitable to human interests is likely to have more positive interactions with the environment and perhaps a better chance of happiness. Mathews also suggests that such a community (although admittedly idealized) is likely to operate with more high-minded principles, whereas the former might be expected to develop more ingratiating characteristics (as they spend time and energy propitiating or avoiding malevolent or indifferent forces) (Mathews, 1994, p. 13). Although Mathews is making a philosophical rather than an ethnographic statement, her insistence on the importance of cosmologies and on their relation to other aspects of culture is relevant to anthropology.

Cosmologies are not of course pulled out of the air to suit the convenience of the communities to which they are attached. They are conditioned by many and various historical, environmental, technological, psychological, and social factors. A flourishing community is likely to evolve a bright, self-affirming cosmology, and a languishing community is likely to see the world in darker shades. But my point here is that cosmology is not a cultural epiphenomenon; once it has taken hold of the communal imagination, it can on the one hand serve the community, tiding it through periods of material adversity, or on the other hand disserve it, undermining its morale even when material conditions improve and permit expansion. A good cosmology, in other words, is good for its adherents, and a bad cosmology predictably has the reverse effect. (Mathews, 1994, p. 13)

While Mathews contends that a "bad cosmology" may be better than no cosmology at all, it is characterized by individuals who are metaphysically adrift and insecure. The main thrust of her work is a demonstration of the inadequacy of a classical Western "atomized" cosmology, which regards people and things as separate rather than interdependent. Peggy Reeves Sanday's cross-cultural study in the next section lends some support to Mathews's assertion that there is a direct, if complex, relationship between cosmology, the environment in which it is located, and social attitudes. Anthropologists, most notably Roy Rappaport, have also advanced arguments similar to those of Mathews, concerning functional and dysfunctional cosmologies and their impact.

Sacred hierarchies and the natural world

In a series of articles in his book *Ecology, Meaning and Religion* (1979), Roy Rappaport develops this notion of adaptive and maladaptive or dysfunctional cosmologies. While acknowledging the difficulties involved in defining an

adaptive or a dysfunctional model of the world, Rappaport proposes an "ecological" argument, linked to the concept of hierarchies of knowledge. The problem is framed in terms of the disparity between our images of nature and the actual structure of the ecosystems of which we are a part.

Nature is seen by humans through a screen of beliefs, knowledge, and purposes, and it is in terms of their images of nature, rather than of the actual structure of nature, that they act. Yet, it is upon nature itself that they do act, and it is nature itself that acts upon them, nurturing or destroying them. (Rappaport, 1979, p. 97)

Cognized model: "a description of a people's knowledge of their environment and of their beliefs concerning it" (Rappaport, 1979, p. 97).

Operational model: a scientific description of an ecosystem.

Reference values: a cultural model of how the world and relationships should operate.

Goal range: the adaptive limits of sustainability for a particular ecosystem.

We all form "cognized models" of the world (Mathews's "cosmologies"), that are more or less close to an "operational model" that might be drawn up by ecologists to describe the functioning of ecosystems. Rappaport argues that it is not important whether the cognized model of a society fits well or badly with an operational model of the same environment, but whether it actually "works" in the sense of sustaining that environment. The "reference values" of a society are the culturally determined notions of how things should be. Problems arise when reference values fall outside the adaptive limits or "goal range" of an ecosystem. Rappaport, like Mathews, has a negative view of most Western cognized models, which have totally unsustainable reference values.

Economic terms, for instance, are incommensurable with ecological terms, and the state of the "developed" world strongly suggests that the regulation of ecosystems in accordance with economic reference values is likely to result in environmental destruction, just as the regulation of social relations and health care in economic terms may degrade social relations and obstruct medical treatment. (Rappaport, 1979, p. 100)

An "irrational" view of the world as peopled by spirits may be more adaptive than a "scientific" view that sees the world in mechanistic terms. The key, for Rappaport, is the degree of respect engendered by a particular

model, and whether it is capable of investing an ecosystem with a significance and value beyond itself. A Western economic model of the world as seen by the IMF, for instance, contrasts strongly with that of the Ituri Pygmies of Central Africa.¹

All cognized models encode values, but all do not value the same things equally, and we may inquire into the adaptiveness of different sets of evaluative understandings. A model dominated by, let us say, the postulates of economic rationality would propose that an ecosystem is composed of elements of three general sorts: those that qualify as "resources," those that are neutrally useless, and those that may be regarded as pests, antagonists, or competitors. In contrast, the Ituri Pygmies take the forest encompassing them to be the body of God. These two views of the world obviously suggest radically different ways of living in it. (Rappaport, 1979, p. 101)²

Central to Rappaport's argument is the notion of a hierarchy of values. At the bottom of the hierarchy are instrumental values that are highly specific and goal-oriented. How to build a house or earn a living would come into this category. At the other end of the continuum there are ultimate values that are intentionally vague and abstract. These include notions such as liberty, freedom, and happiness. The loosely defined nature of ultimate values is central to their adaptive value. Because propositions about God, for instance, are typically devoid of material terms and do not in themselves specify any particular type of social arrangement or institution, they can "sanctify changing social arrangements while they themselves, remaining unchanged, provide continuity and meaning through those changes" (Rappaport, 1979, p. 155). This hierarchy is more easily maintained in small-scale societies of

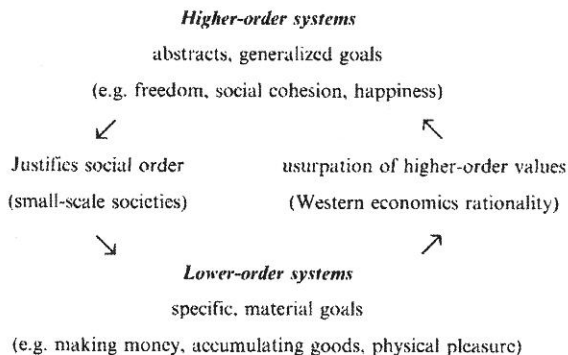


Figure 5.1 Rappaport's hierarchy of values.

limited complexity. In a global system, lower-order goals, such as the building of cars by multinational companies, can achieve enormous power and become self-sustaining with little or no reference to any higher good. Rappaport even refers to the "degradation" of sanctity. As "the material goals of lower-order systems usurp the places properly belonging to values of greater generality, they may lay claim to their sanctity" (Rappaport, 1979, p. 165). Lower-order goals may also become conflated with those of a more abstract nature. The pursuit of "happiness," for instance, loses the sense of "felicity" and is equated with the pursuit of pleasure and accumulation of material goods. "Liberty becomes little more than the right to serve oneself. Materialism and selfishness become honored as highest ideals" (Rappaport, 1979, p. 165), all with equally disastrous results for the ecosystem.³

The Kogi of Colombia

The ethnographic and historical record can quickly disabuse the romantic of any tendency to view non-Western peoples as the repository of all ecological wisdom. The early Polynesian settlers in New Zealand, for instance, deforested vast tracts of land within the early years of settlement. At the same time, it is also the case that small-scale societies in various parts of the world have achieved a high degree of sustainability, living in harsh as well as fertile regions. Entry into the global economy and its demands can, however, have profoundly unsettling effects upon ecosystems, societies, and the cosmologies that underpin them. One example of an adaptive cosmology that has been relatively successful in resisting overexploitation of the physical environment is that of the Kogi of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in the north of Colombia, Central America. The Spanish conquistadors first landed on the Colombian coast at Santa Marta in 1514, and met representatives of the Tairona culture. For a century or so there was a period of relatively peaceful coexistence, during which the Taironas were forced to provide labor, food, and gold for the Spanish. Eventually, however, the Spanish turned on the native peoples and tried to kill them, on the pretext that the men were homosexual. Those who could fled into the higher reaches of the Sierra Nevada, a northern outcrop of the Andean mountain chain, which rises from sea level to snow-capped peaks. The Kogi are one of three groups descended from the Tairona. They have maintained a high degree of cultural autonomy, partly due to the protection afforded by the terrain, but also because of the level of control exerted by the priestly caste (male and female), known as *mamas* (Ereira, 1992).

The Kogi have been described as the most complete pre-Columbian civilization. This does not mean that they have not changed. But what is



Figure 5.2 Ramon Gil and Juanchito: Kogi priests (*namas*) from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia.

© Felicity Nock, courtesy of Hurchison Picture Library.

remarkable is the degree to which the Kogi have sustained the internal coherence of their culture and managed to direct that change. Alan Ereira, a historian and documentary film-maker who has both filmed and written about the Kogi, claims that:

Faced by the threat of complete destruction, they were forced to decide what was really central to them, what it would mean to survive. The survival of a culture is not the same as survival of individuals: it is the survival not of the body but of the mind. And the emphasis of Kogi society became, and remains, an emphasis on the life of the mind. (Ereira, 1992, pp. 8–9)

The Sierra Nevada can be regarded as an ecological microcosm of the planet in the sense that the whole range of climatic zones, from tropical rain forest, to savannah and glacial peaks – with their associated flora and fauna – are represented at different altitudes. The Kogi see themselves as the “Elder Brother,” charged with protecting the heart of the world. Europeans are the “Younger Brother,” technologically gifted but destructive. The care for the “heart of the world” consists of a cycle of exchange of goods between different levels of the system. There is the economic exchange of goods between different zones, and a crucial system of offerings, from the mountains



Figure 5.3 A Kogi mother and children.

© Felicity Nock, courtesy of Hutchison Picture Library.

to the sea, that imitates the water cycle on which all life depends. The *mamas* train for nine or more years in virtual seclusion in order to prepare themselves to live in both this world and *aluna*, a parallel ethereal realm which mirrors the physical world. Exchanges are made simultaneously in *aluna* and on earth in order to maintain fertility and the cycles of existence. The earth is sacred, it is the Great Mother, whose menstrual blood is gold, the secret life-blood of the earth. While Kogi gold, once central to ritual and to the orientation of sacred space, is now either displayed in the metropolitan museums of the world or long since melted down into Spanish bullion, the integrative cosmology of the Kogi persists. The men's ceremonial house, the *nuhue*, for example, is a model of the cosmos, with its circular frame mirroring the worlds above (and below) the earth, and its four fires representing the four corners of the physical world. The central axis from which the *nuhue* is suspended symbolizes the spindle on which the Mother spun the world, while the men's hammocks suspend them between worlds.

The *mamas* dictate what can be adopted from the outside world and what is to be rejected. Christian missionaries are allowed to build chapels, but they have no Kogi converts. While men have adopted trousers, both men and women continue to dress in the homespun white cloth that connects them to the Great Mother and to the earth. Some Kogi have been instructed to learn

Spanish in order to press the Kogi's case for their traditional lands to be restored to them, but they remain an oral society. Kogi cosmology convinces them that they have a vital role to play in saving the world from the ecological destruction caused by global warming, which they see clearly reflected in the disappearing snow on the mountain peaks of the Sierra Nevada. Their offerings are combined with an exhortation to the Younger Brother to stop extracting minerals from the earth, which tear at the body of the Mother and make her sick. "Younger Brother thinks 'Yes! Here I am! I know much about the universe!' But this knowing is learning to destroy the world, to destroy everything, all humanity" (Ereira, 1992, p. 225).⁴

Western interest in "indigenous" cosmologies that are perceived as more sustainable than those of the industrialized world has taken several forms, affecting both the Green Movement and contemporary earth-based religions (usually covered by the blanket term "Paganism"). The reading list at the end of this chapter gives a few examples from the rapidly growing literature in this field. We will now look briefly at some examples of a Western ecological cosmology and ethics being created by contemporary Pagans.

An ecological ethical cosmology

Contemporary Paganism is a twentieth-century creation (although many groups claim continuity with the past), offering a response to dominant Western cognized models. A modern scientific cosmology fails to offer an integrated model of the world that incorporates and values both human beings and the ecosystem, and which feels at ease with the natural processes of life and death. Graham Harvey states that:

Pagan cosmology re-enchants the world. Pagans talk about deities and faeries not because they "believe" in them but because they take seriously the intimation of many cultures that the world is inhabited not only by animals, vegetables and minerals but also by less commonly seen people. The world is an exciting and sacred place to live. (Harvey, 1997, p. 174)

Developing Pagan cosmologies are based on this notion of a sacred universe in which human beings are decentered from the destructive role of masters and manipulators of the rest of creation. Pagans do not fit neatly into categories such as polytheist, pantheist, animist, monist, or monotheist – partly because the term Paganism encompasses a wide range of beliefs, but also because beliefs are often fluid and contextual. Pagans are trying to express the sacrality of living things and their interconnections, rather than formulating dogma.

A contemporary myth might suggest that deities evolved along with all other life on the planet and are equally threatened by the ecological devastation many humans fear and deplore. Polytheists do not deny the underlying unity of life, or the singularity of the planet which itself can be seen as a (or the) goddess or, more rarely, the God. Polytheism is not fundamentally a question of numbers of deities or their distance from non-divine life. It is, rather, a concern with the many and varied relationships between living things. It is an affirmation of the importance, beauty and absorbing engagement with ordinary everyday life. It allows both presence and absence, approach and distance, privacy, intimacy and mystery, companionship and detachment. (Harvey, 1997, p. 176)

The Green Movement (many of whose activists describe themselves as Pagans) has enthusiastically embraced the "Gaia hypothesis," put forward by the ex-NASA freelance physicist James Lovelock. Lovelock (1979, 1988) used the name of the Greek earth goddess (Gaia) to describe his scientific model of the planet as a single "organic" system, seen as analogous to a human body rather than as a series of atomized, unrelated elements. While there is increasing evidence from a variety of scientific perspectives that the planet earth is a self-regulating mechanism, Lovelock never intended his model to acquire the religious or quasi-mystical overtones in which it is often interpreted (aided by his, perhaps unfortunate, choice of terminology). A biologist, Rupert Sheldrake, has also propounded a "green" view of the world, but in more overtly religious language than Lovelock.

The old dream of progressive humanism is fading fast. There are still those who dream of the conquest of the biosphere by the technosphere, the human control of biological evolution through genetic engineering, and so on. But attitudes are changing around, and within, many of us: there is a shift from humanism to animism, from an intensely mancentred view to a view of a living world. We are not somehow superior to Gaia; we live within her and depend on her life. (Sheldrake, 1994, p. 174)⁵

Wicca and the goddess

One of the best-known proponents of a contemporary earth-based spirituality is Starhawk, an ecofeminist and witch. Her book of "rituals, invocations, exercises and magic," *The Spiral Dance*, has become something of a classic. The following description of the Goddess has parallels with the Kogi cosmogonic myth in which the Great Mother creates the universe out of her own body.⁶

The Goddess is first of all earth, the dark, nurturing mother who brings forth all life. She is the power of fertility and generation; the womb, and also the

receptive tomb, the power of death. All proceeds from Her; all returns to Her. As earth, She is also plant life; trees, herbs and grains that sustain life. She is the body, and the body is sacred. Womb, breast, belly, mouth, vagina, penis, bone, and blood — no part of the body is unclean, no aspect of the life processes is stained by any concept of sin. Birth, death, and decay are equally sacred parts of the cycle. Whether we are eating, sleeping, making love, or eliminating body wastes, we are manifesting the Goddess. (Starhawk, 1989, p. 92)

It is no accident that interest in the Goddess, ecology, and the women's movement go hand in hand. There is a close relationship between myths, rituals, the environment, and gender roles. We are not talking about simple causal links — a myth, for instance, does not give rise to a particular social structure. Myths and rituals can be seen both as a partial reflection of ecological and social realities and as a justification for them. When Starhawk creates rituals which honor the earth and the Goddess she is drawing on late twentieth-century American culture, feminism, and the green movement. She is also empowering women and men who recognize their own desires and intuitions in her writing to identify themselves as Wiccans (followers of the Craft) in a society that has traditionally been hostile to witchcraft. The myths open up visions of what could be, and the rituals enable people to "become witches," through performance.

Mythology, Gender, and the Environment

The way in which subjects are studied in academia tends to split off and isolate different facets of existence. Anthropology is a holistic discipline that seeks to understand human behavior and the influences on it from a number of different angles. The anthropology of religion does not focus on beliefs and ritual alone, but tries to contextualize religious behavior within a broad social framework, and to expose the links between religion and other aspects of the social and natural world. There is a fruitful tension within anthropology between the search for general explanations and theories and detailed descriptions of particular peoples and practices. With the decline of the grand unifying theories of social evolutionism and Marxism, much of the drive toward general theory has come from the women's movement. In the 1970s feminist anthropologists started to ask questions concerning the role of women in different societies, with the aim of discovering any underlying principles that could account for similarities and differences in women's experience. (As we have already seen, Margaret Mead and others had

undertaken similar projects a generation earlier.) One anthropologist who has pursued the search for general theories is Peggy Reeves Sanday. As Sanday herself states, general statements need to be tested against specific ethnographic examples. While it is easy to find exceptions to any overarching explanation, this does not necessarily invalidate the attempt. As so few anthropologists are currently prepared to risk making generalized statements, it is worth discussing Sanday's arguments concerning mythology, gender, and the environment in some detail.

Female power and male dominance

In her book *Female Power and Male Dominance: On the Origins of Sexual Inequality* (1981),⁷ Sanday studied data from the "Standard cross-cultural sample" (Murdoch and White, 1969) in order to look at the cultural context of sex-role configurations. Of the 186 societies, contemporary and historical, listed in the sample, 156 yielded sufficient data for comparison. The comparative survey revealed that symbolism plays a key role in channeling secular power. Sacred symbols are not an epiphenomenon of secular power roles, but are of primary importance. In fact, secular power roles derive from ancient concepts of sacred power. Following Ruth Benedict (1971), Sanday assumes that each culture selects or chooses its ways of doing and being from a "great arc" of behavioral possibilities. The environment or physical constraints provide hints, which institutions then elaborate. Margaret Mead (1963) argued that cultures have an ideal or standardized temperamental type that is selected for. Individuals who conform to the cultural ideals of their society will be more successful, so that while there will always be a range of temperaments, social selection emphasizes and encourages some traits at the expense of others. Clifford Geertz (1993, pp. 216–18) also argues that cultures set up *symbolic templates* or blueprints that define the limits of behavior and guide it along predictable paths. Sanday uses the term *sex-role plan* to describe the symbolic templates that "help men and women orient themselves as male and female to each other, to the world around them, and to the growing boys and girls whose behavior they must shape to a commonly accepted mold" (Sanday, 1981, p. 3). Sex-role plans also solve basic human puzzles, such as how and why the differences between the sexes came about and how men and women should relate to one another and to their environment. Having examined the cross-cultural data, Sanday concluded that *male dominance is not an inherent quality in human sex-role plans*, as many feminist writers of the 1970s had assumed, but a response to particular environmental pressures (whether social or physical).

In a seminal, widely quoted article, "Is female to male as nature is to culture?" (1974), Sherry Ortner argued that a defining characteristic of human societies is that they are engaged in a process of generating and sustaining systems of meaning that enable them to transcend the most basic, natural limits of existence. Rituals, for instance, are a way of manipulating and regulating the relationship between natural forces and human life. Culture is seen as something that works on and transforms nature, and in that sense is superior to it. *Women*, according to Ortner, are seen as *closer to nature* than men. While both women and men are active participants in the processes of culture, women are viewed as being more rooted in or as having more direct contact with nature. This is because a woman's *physiology*, with its role in childbearing, and the social consequences arising from this, mean that she spends more of her life engaged in natural processes than is true for men and for a male physiology.

The argument goes that if culture is seen as superior to nature, it is a small step to viewing men as superior to women. Women's participation in culture is evidenced by their acceptance of this symbolic hierarchy. The constraints of mothering, and the continuity between infant and adult roles for women, mean that *psychologically* women have a more intimate form of relating, and are less interested than men in hierarchical and role-based distinctions. This can be seen simultaneously as a more natural "lower" form of relating, and as a morally superior "higher" position – as either ignoring or transcending social categories. *Feminine symbols* also demonstrate this polarized ambiguity. They can be exalted (goddesses, dispensers of justice, and occupants of the moral high ground) or debased (witches, dispensers of the evil eye, castrating mothers). In either case the symbolic woman is "rarely within the normal range of human possibilities" (Ortner, 1974, p. 86).

Sanday contests Ortner's claim that because men are associated with culture, and it is culture's job to control nature, men are universally regarded as having the right to control women. Sanday does, however, point to the "permeability between the categories of female and nature" in some societies, but not all. She refers to such societies as having an *inner orientation*.

In societies where the forces of nature are sacralized... there is a reciprocal flow between the power of nature and the power inherent in women. The control and manipulation of these forces is left to women and to sacred natural symbols; men are largely extraneous to this domain and must be careful lest they antagonize earthly representatives of nature's power (namely women). (Sanday, 1981, p. 5)

Similarly, men are not unequivocally aligned with "culture" (defined as the transcendence of the natural givens of existence by means of systems of thought and technology). Men are part of nature, not only in their physicality but also in their need or desire to kill. "Men hunt animals, seek to kill other

human beings, make weapons for these activities, and pursue power that is *out there*" (Sanday, 1981, p. 5). These more exterior life-taking activities of men are referred to as an *outer orientation*. Societies vary in the extent to which they value an inner or outer orientation, the powers of women, and respect for reproduction, versus the role of men and their more destructive externalized power. This is not a dichotomy between nature and culture, terms that are in fact hard to define and arguably have no cross-cultural reference.⁸ Sanday conceptualizes the differences between the sexes as follows:

Looking as an outsider at males and females in the simpler societies of the world – that is, in societies unencumbered by complex literate traditions – one is struck with the degree to which the sexes conform to a rather basic conceptual symmetry, which is grounded in primary sex differences. Women give birth and grow children; men kill and make weapons. Men display their kills (be it an animal, a human head, or a scalp) with the same pride that women hold up the newly born. If birth and death are among the necessities of existence, then men and women contribute equally but in quite different ways to the continuance of life, and hence of culture ... all other things being equal, the power to give life is as highly valued as the power to take it away. The questions at issue are: (1) Why do some societies develop a symmetric as opposed to an asymmetric valuation of these two powers? and (2) How does a symmetric or an asymmetric valuation affect the secular power of men and women? (Sanday, 1981, pp. 5–6)

The variations in sex-role plans found in different societies show that they are cultural constructions rather than genetic (even if, as Margaret Mead proposed, there is an element of selection). Historical and political factors, as well as the environment in which people live, will affect the ways in which they interact. Sex-role plans will in turn change the social and natural environment. Sanday identifies four basic templates relating to the sexes, which can be represented as in figure 5.4.

These four types can be combined in various ways. Among the Mbuti of the Ituri forest in Central Africa, for example, the sexes are merged and decision-making powers shared. Among the Iroquois confederacy of North

Sexes segregated	Sexes merged
decision-making powers vested in one sex	decision-making powers shared

Figure 5.4 Sanday's four basic templates relating to the sexes.

America, on the other hand, sexual differentiation was extreme, while decision-making was still shared between the sexes. In both these societies the sex-role scripts give women both secular and religious power. Their cosmologies and rituals display a generally positive attitude to the world and the place of humans within it. In societies in which decision-making is shared, female or paired deities are given prominence. In societies in which males dominate and women are relegated to a subordinate role in both sacred and secular domains, there is an emphasis on a male godhead. The sexes are also invariably segregated, as among the Hausa of Northern Nigeria or Yanomamo of Venezuela and Brazil.

In seeking to answer the question of why a society should develop one type of sex-role plan rather than another, Sanday regards the environment as a crucial variable.

In societies dependent on animals, women are rarely depicted as the ultimate source of creative power. The latter is usually attributed either to an animal deity or to a supreme being. When large game are hunted, regardless of the contribution of meat to the overall diet, males engage in an activity whose outcome is unpredictable and entails danger. Whether or not men spend part or most of their time in hunting activities is not as important as the psychological energy expended in this effort. This energy is not directed inwardly toward nurturing children or family but toward acquiring and using powers beyond man's dominance. The major source of power is perceived as residing in a supreme being who resides in the sky or in animals. (Sanday, 1981, pp. 65-6)

In fact, any environmental tension, whether created by food scarcity, climatic unpredictability, warfare, or political uncertainty, tends to move a society in the direction of an outer orientation, male dominance, and androcentric mythology. Sanday suggests that there is transference of anxiety from the external world, which is beyond control, to women, who may be taken as symbolic representatives of the natural world. A lack of environmental security therefore correlates with control of women and male domination. If, on the other hand, the world is experienced as benign, an inner orientation develops in which both the environment and women are seen as partners, rather than as sources of danger to men and to society as a whole. If women acquiesce in cultural definitions of female danger and inferiority, they do not necessarily do so passively, or without the necessity for physical sanctions. Joan Bamberger states that, among the Tukuna of Brazil,

women are excluded from participation in important social and religious events because all females fall short of perfection as defined by the Sun Father and his

earthly protagonist, Juruparí. Sexual differences, defined by and legislated in myth, are demonstrated in ceremony. To preserve these sexual distinctions in social life, supernatural sanctions are invoked. (Bamberger, 1974, p. 275)

Among the Kayapó and Mundurucú of the Amazon basin women who step out of line are punished by ritual humiliations, gang rape, and forced intercourse for young girls (Bamberger, 1974, p. 278). A Tukuna myth tells the story of a young girl who spied on the sacred flutes (which men are said to have stolen from their original female owners), who was killed, quartered, and eaten, with both her mother and sister summoned to the feast. Bamberger concludes that whether or not women believe the myths that record the overthrow of female power and women's subsequent subordination, "the penalties brought to bear on women and children for infractions of the ceremonial injunctions seem to be real enough" (Bamberger, 1974, p. 275).

To summarize, male dominance and female power are consequences of the way in which peoples come to terms with their historical and natural environments and develop their separate identities. Male and female power roles are cast when peoples forge their sense of peoplehood. A sense of peoplehood implies a shared code that guides behavior, including the behavior of the sexes, not only in relation to each other but also in relation to valued resources and to the supernatural. Power is accorded to whichever sex is thought to embody or to be in touch with the forces upon which people depend for their perceived needs. Conceiving power in this way, one can say that in some societies women have more power, or men have more, or both sexes have an approximately equal amount. (Sanday, 1981, p. 11)

Sanday's attempt to draw general conclusions as to the relationship between gender, religion, and the environment is quite unusual and rather courageous. After all, negative cases that appear to contradict the pattern, or societies which defy the classifications used, are not difficult to find. Nevertheless, the attempt is useful and Sanday's hypothesis broadly convincing. There certainly are numerous ethnographies in which it is possible to trace the configurations predicted by Sanday's model. I will give just one example, Maria Lepowsky's description of Vanatinai, a small island off Papua New Guinea.

Gender in an egalitarian society

According to Maria Lepowsky, Vanatinai society is sexually egalitarian. "There is no ethic of male dominance, the roles and activities of women and men overlap considerably, and the actions of both sexes are considered equally valuable" (Lepowsky, 1990, p. 171). Both women and men have

access to economic and ritual spheres of activity and share in the power that accompanies the control of these resources. Unusually for Papua New Guinea, there are no men's houses, and the village leader or "giver" can be male or female. Vanatinai men and women at equivalent stages of the life cycle have similar levels of autonomy, influence, and access to prestige and wealth. Lepowsky says of Vanatinai: "Its gender ideology stresses that both women and men should strive to be strong, wise, and generous, and the highly valued quality of generosity is explicitly modeled after parental nurture. Women are not viewed as polluting or dangerous to themselves or others in their persons, bodily fluids, or sexuality" (Lepowsky, 1990, p. 174).

If Sanday's model has any predictive value we should find that the Vanatinai environment is stable and unthreatening, offering sufficient physical security and food for people to live comfortably. We would also expect to find cosmogonic myths with female deities and positive mythological roles for women. Vanatinai has a low population density (four persons per square mile), unlike the neighboring Trobriand Islands. This means that everyone has enough space to garden, hunt, fish, and make sago without competition for resources. As there are few ascribed statuses (i.e. rank by virtue of birth or title), both men and women can achieve status through their own efforts by competing in the cycles of exchange which bring prestige (similar to the *Kula* ring described by Malinowski in the Trobriands). Lepowsky also suggests that a low population density reduces conflict and fosters an ethic of respect. Not only are people not fighting for scarce resources, but also if they fall out with a neighbor they can simply move away. There is an ideology of individual autonomy in which people have considerable latitude to do things their own way. Supernatural sanctions are similarly individualistic, and misfortune may be attributed to the violation of a *taboo* attached to a particular place by its guardian spirit (Lepowsky, 1990, p. 179). The people of Vanatinai also display another characteristic of egalitarian societies – a lack of differentiation between "domestic" and "public" spheres.⁹ Vanatinai is a face-to-face society where most people are related by ties of kinship and affinity (through marriage), and in which the household is the central institution. Women can own and inherit land, live with their own kin after marriage, and control and dispose of culturally valuable resources (Lepowski, 1990, p. 180).

Taboo (tapu): "sacred," both powerful and dangerous. From a Polynesian word *tapu* or *tafoo*. Usually associated with the avoidance of certain places, objects, or people. The term has been extended to refer to the avoidance of *totemic* animals or plants, or prohibitions on marrying certain classes of kin.

It is clear, then, that the people of Vanatinai generally experience the physical and social environment as hospitable. What then of Vanatinai mythology? The creator spirit, Rodyo, is depicted as male, sometimes taking the form of a snake, and lives on Vanatinai's highest peak with his two wives and the spirits of the island's dead. However, according to Lepowsky,

The Vanatinai creation myth is culturally unelaborated, contains few details, and is rarely recounted by the islanders and not, apparently, because it is a particularly sacred myth. When it is told, the narrator usually launches immediately afterward into the story of Alagh, a supernatural who left Rodyo's community taking with him all the valuable goods that now belong to Europeans. Often narrated alone, this "cargoistic" explanatory myth is obviously more compelling to present-day islanders than the story of Rodyo's creation of the world. (Lepowsky, 1990, p. 197)

More culturally significant and frequently recounted is the myth of the inauguration of exchange relationships, in which "a female being teaches another female the peaceful exchange with off-islanders of surplus food for ceremonial valuables" (Lepowsky, 1990, p. 200). The wise woman is apparently a common element in Vanatinai myths, which include the story of Emuga, a female deity (from *mumuga*, "custom") who is the first being associated with the secret of fire and cooking. Vanatinai myths, therefore, provide a "charter" validating women's right to engage in exchange and learn the magic associated with it, to own goods and to dispose of them. Through both exchange and cooking, women are clearly associated with "culture." Sanday's hypothesis would appear to hold for Vanatinai, although cosmogonic myths, on which Sanday concentrated, are not necessarily those that are most culturally relevant.

Totemism and the Dreamtime

One of the ways in which the relationship between religion, culture, and environment has been studied is via the concept of *totemism*. It is a term that, like witchcraft (see chapter 8), has gained wide currency in anthropology. Totemism has been invoked to explain the way in which early (ancestral) and "primitive" societies ordered human relations and oriented themselves to the natural world. Although the word *totem* is of North American origin, many of the early theoretical studies of totemism took Australian Aboriginal societies as their model. Despite having occupied many leading anthropologists for the best part of a century, totemism as a concept is now seldom

discussed, and by many is dismissed altogether. The association of totemic systems with early or "primitive" societies has been unfortunate, leading to views of Australian Aboriginal beliefs as representative of prehistoric types of cosmology. While Australian Aboriginal cultures may have maintained greater continuity over time than Western cultures, there is no evidence that they are in any sense "ancestral" to non-Australian peoples, or that their belief systems were once universal. These views imply that simpler societies are ahistorical and static, which is very different from claiming that they are both adaptable and conservative.¹⁰

Totem: an Ojibwa word (from the Algonquin people of Canada). The expression *ototeman* can be translated as "He is a relative of mine." A relative was a member of the same exogamic group or clan (i.e. people classed as unmarriedable kin). Each clan was named after an animal species or totem (Morris, 1987, p. 270). Among Australian Aboriginal peoples totems can also include natural features, such as rocks, rainbows, or thunder.

Totemism: the term became widely used to refer to "any situation in which a special relationship was thought to exist between a social group and one or more classes of material objects, specifically animals and plants" (Morris, 1987, p. 270), or, one might add, other natural phenomena.

Totemic principle: Durkheim proposed that totemism was an original, universal form of religious expression, a means of uniting notions of divinity with those of society. A totem is an outward and visible form both of the totemic principle or god, and of a particular clan. "So if it is at once the symbol of the god and of society, is that not because the god and the society are only one?... The god of the clan, the totemic principle, can therefore be nothing else than the clan itself, personified and represented to the imaginations under the visible form of the animal or vegetable which serves as totem" (Durkheim, 1976, p. 206).

Totemism as an early form of religion

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anthropology was driven by a desire for explanations and origins (see chapter 1). Totemism, along with shamanism (see chapter 7), was one candidate for an original and universal form of religion. John McLennan (1865, 1869–70), W. Robertson Smith (1889), Sir James Frazer (1903), and Émile Durkheim (1976) all regarded totemism as the earliest form of religion. They shared an evolutionary perspective that assumed a progression from an early (animistic) to a modern Western

(monotheistic) religious expression, and looked for their data to the most "primitive" (and therefore most like prehistoric human) societies. For McLennan, totemism derived from the worship of plants and animals ("fetishism"), in association with an exogamous clan structure and unilineal descent groups.

Exogamy: marriage outside one's group or clan.

Endogamy: marriage within one's group or clan.

Unilineal descent: kinship traced through either the male (*patrilineal*) or female (*matrilineal*) line (but not both).

Robertson Smith, an expert on Semitic religions, based his observations on the matrilineal clans of Arabia, each of which had a species of animal as a sacred totem. This totem represented the clan, and the sacrifice of the totemic animal was interpreted by Robertson Smith as a form of communion — a way of entering into relationship with the divine (Morris, 1987, pp. 112–13). It is hard to escape the conclusion that Robertson Smith's theories owed much to his own Christian Presbyterian upbringing. Jewish and Christian traditions do indeed emphasize the sacrificial meal, and in Christianity the notion of communion succeeds the Jewish tradition of atonement and propitiation (although these elements are not absent in Christianity). While Robertson Smith's arguments may seem plausible for Semitic peoples (monotheistic Jews and Arabs), the idea of totemic sacrifice as a primary and universal religious act does not find cross-cultural support. Where Robertson Smith was influential was in his insistence that rituals were prior to and more important than beliefs, and were of primary importance in creating and sustaining social bonds (Morris, 1987, p. 113).

Durkheim, in his monumental work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912, English translation 1915), held that religious beliefs everywhere depended on a primary classification of phenomena, real and ideal, into two categories, the *sacred* and the *profane*.

This division of the world into two domains, the one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is profane, is the distinctive trait of religious thought; the beliefs, myths, dogmas and legends are either representations or systems of representations which express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers which are attributed to them, or their relations with each other and with profane things. But by sacred things one must not understand simply those personal beings which are called gods or spirits: a rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, in a word, anything can be sacred. A rite can have this

character; in fact, the rite does not exist which does not have it to a certain degree....[Sacred things] are naturally considered superior in dignity and power to profane things, and particularly to man, when he is only a man and has nothing sacred about him. (Durkheim, 1976, p. 37)

Many anthropologists have pointed out that it is not always possible to distinguish in practice between the sacred and the profane, and this idea, so central to Durkheim's work, has by and large been discarded, at least as a monolithic organizing principle. For Durkheim, however, who based his ideas on Australian Aboriginal examples, totems were signs (he referred to them as "flags") that linked the clan to the environment and to the sacred. In the "Dreamtime" ancestors walked the land, leaving evidence of their journeys in the physical features of the landscape. Rituals performed by initiated male elders at sacred totemic sites linked clans with the past and reinforced group identity and solidarity. Durkheim concluded that totemism was "a whole complex of belief and rituals that involved a ritual attitude toward nature, and a cosmology that expressed the idea that humans and nature form part of a spiritual totality" (Morris, 1987, p. 118). The sacred was real, but its origins lay in the social group. When worshipping a totemic animal, the clan was affirming and worshipping itself via the visible totemic symbol.

Radcliffe-Brown (1952) was influenced by both Durkheim and Robertson Smith. He affirmed both the social nature of religion and the importance of rituals, which have the task of regulating, maintaining, and transmitting the social mores on which a society depends. Radcliffe-Brown's emphasis, also using Australian source material, was on the social and symbolic value of the totemic animal or object to a particular group, arguing that: "Any object or event which has important effects upon the well-being (material or spiritual) of a society, or anything which stands for or represents any such object or event, tends to become an object of the ritual attitude" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952, p. 129). For Radcliffe-Brown, however, totemism was not a universal form of religion but a specific specialization in societies characterized by a clan structure. It is just one way among many of relating to the environment and natural world.

Totemism as a mode of thought

In his book *Totemism* (1973), Lévi-Strauss sought to demolish earlier theories, declaring that totemism should not be regarded as an aspect of religion at all. Lévi-Strauss eschewed the functionalist explanation that animals are "good to eat," declaring instead that totems are chosen because they are "good to think." What matters is not some correspondence between a clan

and a particular animal or totemic feature, but the structural relation between totemic creatures which are used to think about and express relations between social groups. As a term, "totemism" rests on the conjunction of three elements, which Lévi-Strauss regarded as being artificially associated with one another. There is the organization of society into clans, the attribution of the names of natural species or phenomena to specific clans (such as the bear, eagle, or rainbow clan), and, finally, the maintenance of a ritual relationship between a clan and its totemic emblem. These three elements can and do occur independently of one another. Totemism should not, therefore, according to Lévi-Strauss, be regarded as a religious institution, and certainly not as the earliest form of religion. It is a classificatory device that serves to regulate human groups and their relationships with the natural world. Lévi-Strauss concludes his essay with the claim that "there is nothing archaic or remote about it [totemism]. Its image is projected, not received; it does not derive its substance from without. If the illusion contains a particle of truth, this is not outside but within us" (Lévi-Strauss, 1973, p. 177).

Having dismissed the concept of totemism, Lévi-Strauss returned to the theme at great length in *The Savage Mind* (like *Totemism* originally published in 1962). It is, however, the structure and function of totemic classifications that interest Lévi-Strauss. He gives, for instance, an example of a mythogeographical system in the Sudan that linked the whole Niger valley, crossing the territorial boundaries of numerous cultural and linguistic groups. People were therefore related in both time (*metaphorically*) and space (*synchronically*), thus overcoming the tendency of small-scale societies to "treat the limits of their tribal group as the frontiers of humanity." Totemism can therefore promote a broader and more inclusive view of humanity. "Totemic classifications make it possible both to define the status of persons within a group and to expand the group beyond its traditional confines" (Lévi-Strauss, 1976, p. 166).

The Dreamtime

Arguably some of the most explicitly environmental cosmologies in the world are to be found among the Aboriginal peoples of Australia (i.e. cosmologies in which the interdependence of human life and the ecosystems that sustain them are made conscious and are embodied at the level of myth, ritual, language, and lifestyle). For all Aboriginal groups in Australia the land is at the center of a mythical order that regulates the relations of people with one another and with the physical environment. The land, through the concept of *Dreaming*, connects Aboriginal peoples both to local ecological systems and to the past, providing a durable but flexible mechanism for

dealing with change and with the vicissitudes of life and death. According to Veronica Strang, the Aboriginal cosmos is also "non-human centred and non-hierarchical – all parts of the natural and supernatural world are equal, contain moral agency and are sentient" (Strang, 1997, p. 238). Although most Aboriginal societies were formerly depicted as patriarchal (with male elders wielding considerable authority), Strang points out that men and women can both become "elders," own land, and have ritual responsibilities, and that "The symbolic universe is also balanced in terms of gender, with male and female creative forces" (Strang, 1997, p. 238). Strang goes on to explain that "Aboriginal cosmology is both practical and spiritual – there is no division between sacred and secular or between spiritual beliefs and the laws governing everyday life – the cosmology is The Law, entering every aspect of human existence" (Strang, 1997, p. 238).

The Dreamtime is understood as the period of creation "long ago," in which ancestral beings emerged from a featureless landscape. The "story places" are where ancestral beings emerged, acted, or reintegrated themselves with the landscape, while the "story lines" (or "song lines") tell of the ancestors' journeys across the land. All living creatures and natural phenomena are imbued with ancestral spiritual power, and are linked via these story places and lines, where the interaction of the ancestral beings with the land transformed them into rocks, birds, trees, waterholes, and so on. These ancestral figures then become "totems" of individual clans, which have particular obligations and ritualized relationships between them. The story lines traverse linguistic boundaries, forming a network of relations between different Aboriginal groups. They are also dynamic. Like all myths, story lines are capable of developing and of sustaining the connections between people and the land. The "long ago" of the Dreamtime is also immanent. Human spiritual existence is seen to reflect that of ancestral beings, emerging and returning to a particular location, which is identified as their spirit home.

Veronica Strang likens the stories of the Dreamtime to the psychophysical development of human beings. "Thus the stories describe a sequence of emergence, differentiation, categorisation, transformation and reintegration. This provides a striking metaphor of human cognitive development – the epigenetic development of the individual achieved through a process of externalisation, objectification and reintegration" (Strang, 1997, p. 241). The landscape is also described as a conscious, sentient being that co-creates, nurtures, and responds to the actions and emotions of human beings. Johnny Clarke, one of Strang's informants, told her that "If the young people don't come back to this country, the country will feel that, ... so this country will just sort of die away" (Strang, 1997, p. 253).¹¹ The landscape can also be dangerous – punishing those who ignore taboos or who fail to respect

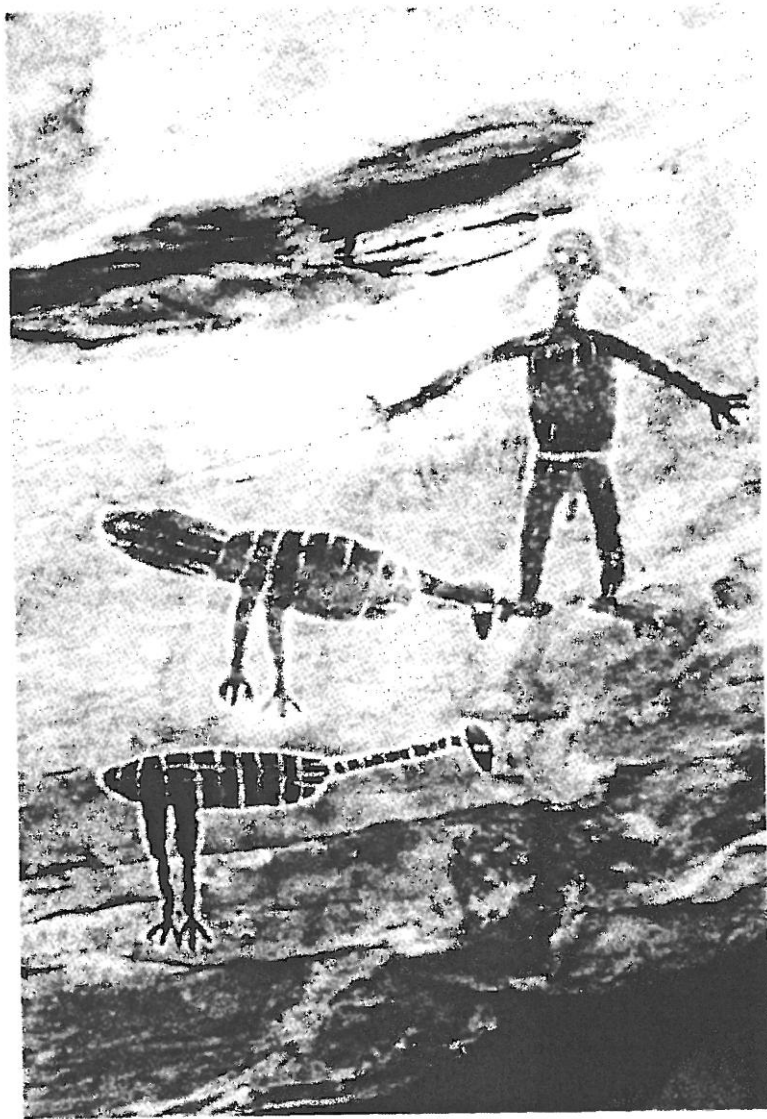


Figure 5.5 Ancient Aboriginal rock art from Laura, Northern Queensland (Australia).

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traditional associations between particular clans and their territory. Strangers must be introduced to the ancestral beings if they are to pass unharmed. This view of the land is contrasted with that of the white Australian cattle ranchers, for whom commercial productivity, using the land for what it can yield, is prioritized. Countryside that simply supports its Aboriginal population in a sustainable way, or which is turned into national parks, is viewed as wasted (Strang, 1997, pp. 263ff).¹²

Despite the influence of Christianity and Western educational systems, Aboriginal conceptions of the Dreamtime have proved resilient. With a global trend toward environmental protection, and increased legal enforcement of Aboriginal land rights, there is increasing respect for "indigenous" cosmologies, in Australia as elsewhere in the world. Strang sums up the Aboriginal view of social, spiritual, and environmental relations in the following way:

Aboriginal Law therefore provides for every aspect of life, setting out foundational beliefs and values that continue to provide the basis for social and environmental relations in the community today. The Law, within the land, is the source of all life, creating, identifying and binding people socially and spiritually. It defines who owns and has rights to which country, and who must marry whom. The land is both father and mother: it is alive, listening, watching, nurturing, disciplining and balancing human and natural resources. Humans share with the ancestral beings a responsibility for maintaining the land and their relationship with it, and their well-being depends on that of the land. Thus the Law constructs a relationship with the land that is complex, qualitative and deeply affective. (Strang, 1997, p. 261)

Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at various types of cosmology in both Western and small-scale societies from the perspective of their relationship with the environment. The environment has both social and physical aspects, and the actions of individual humans and social groups both shape and are shaped by their interactions with their surroundings. Several of the scholars we have looked at in this chapter argued that Western cosmologies are predominantly destructive and unsustainable, treating ecosystems as endlessly expendable and exploitable. Western societies are often contrasted with those with cosmologies that encourage sustainable (adaptive) economic and environmental practices, exemplified by the Kogi of Colombia and the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, together with contemporary Western Pagan traditions.

A second strand has been the ways in which social structures, and in particular sex-role patterns, develop in different environmental contexts, and

the influence of mythology as a charter for society. Sanday distinguished between "inner-oriented" societies, which have positive cosmologies, in relation to both women and the environment, and "outer-oriented" societies, which view both the environment and women as potentially dangerous and in need of control. Discussions on totemism relate to earlier, longstanding concerns in the anthropology of religion, that seek both to explain religion in terms of origins, and to account for societies which have both exogamous kinship groups and ritual relationships with totem animals or other natural phenomena. Claude Lévi-Strauss turned the study of totemism on its head with his insistence that totemism should not be viewed as a form of religion, but as another example of symbolic classification (see chapters 2 and 3). Rituals, which encode and enforce modes of behavior, socializing people into culturally appropriate ways of being and relating, are seen as central to the expression and maintenance of a cosmology. We will explore the role of ritual in greater detail in the next chapter, in the context of rites of passage in general and female initiation in particular.

Notes

- 1 One may wish to take issue with Rappaport's romanticization of the Ituri Pygmies and their view of the forest (see Turnbull, 1961), but the general point stands. In *Sick Societies: Challenging the Myth of Primitive Harmony*, Robert Edgerton (1992) puts forward a powerful argument that sick or maladaptive societies can and do occur everywhere. Maladaptation is defined as: "the failure of a population or its culture to survive because of the inadequacy or harmfulness of one or more of its institutions or beliefs"; as sufficient dissatisfaction with social institutions or cultural beliefs to threaten the viability of that society; and, third, as the maintenance of "beliefs or practices that so seriously impair the physical or mental health of its members that they cannot adequately meet their own needs or maintain their social and cultural system" (Edgerton, 1992, p. 45).
- 2 Feminist theologians are also concerned to develop cosmological values that are more sustainable than those that guide most current Western industrial practices. See, for instance, McFague (1997).
- 3 See, for example, O'Neil et al.'s (1998) article on the conflict between uranium mining and indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan, Canada, which contrasts the goals of the mining company and national government, and supposed benefits of short-term employment for local men, with the social, health, and environmental problems perceived by the Saskatchewan Aboriginal women.
- 4 The Tairona Heritage Trust, and the Tairona Heritage Studies Centre, founded to give financial support to the Kogi via their organization *Gonavindua Tairona*, and to provide educational materials and information about the Kogi, are based

at the Department of Anthropology, University of Wales Lampeter, SA48 7ED, Wales, UK. <http://www.lamp.ac.uk/tairona/>.

- 5 In almost apocalyptic terms, Sheldrake goes on to claim that: "The recognition that we need to change the way we live is now very common. It is like waking up from a dream. It brings with it a spirit of repentance, seeing in a new way, a change of heart. This conversion is intensified by the sense that the end of an age is at hand" (Sheldrake, 1994, p. 175).
- 6 See Reichel-Dolmatoff (1987).
- 7 See also Sanday (1974).
- 8 Ortner's 1974 article has stimulated a wide range of work seeking to critique or refine her thinking. The debates around "nature" and "culture," and the associated terms "domestic" and "public," are too numerous and complex to do justice to here. See, for instance, MacCormack (1980), Strathern (1990), and Lock and Kaufert (1998, pp. 19–21).
- 9 Strathern (1990) points out that among the Hagan of Highland Papua New Guinea it is not really possible to delineate a "domestic" or a "public" sphere of action. The desire to distinguish these spheres or "domains" is, according to Strathern, a product of Western thinking, with its own hierarchy of values. She writes: "The idea of domains corresponding to men's and women's worlds is not a dualism that needs be sustained in the Melanesian context. Domaining itself is not simply a male description of the world imposed upon a pre-existing heterogeneous nature; nor do the values ascribed to the domains simply stand for men's and women's intrinsically opposed perspectives. The very questions about the articulation of domains that were so important to the anthropological-feminist critique turn out to endorse a model of a society that must code its own and not other people's gender constructs. . . . Domaining is better taken as an activity, the creation/implementation of difference as a social act" (Strathern 1990, p. 96).
- 10 I am grateful to Veronica Strang for stressing this point.
- 11 "The land suffers and the ancestral forces are weakened because of the grief associated with the country owners, and the resultant lack of someone to care for that place" (Veronica Strang, personal communication).
- 12 Strang points out that it is not that the white ranchers are unconcerned about the environment, but that they have a very different relationship with it from Aboriginal peoples (personal communication).

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