

LECTURE #2

women in living archaic religions

Archaic religion occurs in small-scale societies which have not differentiated science from myth.

that is, they explain their reality in terms of stories originating from the imagination rather than scientific data.

thus all things, rain, thunder, etc. are seen as caused by divine powers reacting to human goodness or evil.

they do not clearly separate the sacred and the profane. all reality is sacred or potentially so.

the oldest human mentality was oral and artistic, not scriptural. the first scriptures date from 1400-1200 BCE in India, quite late in human religious history.

the most important factor for archaic peoples is the fact that the sacred is regularly represented as androgyne--at once both male and female. in fact, androgyne is a universal archaic formula for wholeness, strength and autonomy.

There are several concerns of all archaic peoples.

first, the sacred is what is truly real and is the basis for vitality and order.

second, is fertility, the need for children and the concern for survival after death. there is evidence from half a million years ago in China of people being buried with hope for life after death. buried in fetal positions or with objects needed

third is the mytho-ritualism. the rituals celebrate the

myths. their way of expressing oneness with the sacred. myths made up the first historys and cannot be considered 'critical history' such as is the standard today.

the myths of creation and how beginnings happened influence all religions and the attitude between men and women as discussed last week.

forth is the fact that all archaic peoples have their shaman. this is the specialist in archaic techniques of ecstasy. they are those who 'conquer death' and can relate between the gods or divine powers and the people.

Womans roles and images in Archaic societies

while the archaic woman's lot is far from easy, the preponderance of evidence indicates that she is valued as one whose sacred fertility affects the tribe's survival, and whose economic role is vital.

for example, in hunting and gathering societies women both assist in the kill as beaters and furnish the vegetarian parts of the diet. as well as make everything needed for living.

in fact, there is strong evidence that prehistoric man was basically lazy, doing only hunting, while the women did everything else.

bones found of both sexes show women as big boned and muscular attachments almost as large.

as shamenas and diviners, many archaic women have high status and, generally, archaic people venerate all women's maternity.

Unlike the so called higher religions in which menstration is considered a time of 'uncleanness' for women, most archaic peoples see it as a time for celebration.

the attitude in most archaic religions is not that a woman is unclean but that she emanates a dangerous sort of "woman power" meaning life-giving and men must avoid this because it can interfere with his killing power (whether for hunting or war).

the Pygmies of the Congo view the menarche joyously, as a time for both personal and tribal celebration.

for them the blood is a gift, an occasion for gratitude.

pygmy women reflect this attitude in many ways. young girls look forward to menstration eagerly. when it comes, they go into seclusion to learn the lore of the tribe from their mothers and other female relatives.

then, having rejoined the tribe as young adults, they enjoy a time of partying, with activities that allow them, as new women come of age, to select their future husbands.

the bearing of these young women is striking and projects their self-confidence, their pride.

finally, the pygmys share news of the menarche with no mention of pollution, shame or fear.

the Africans of Sierra Leone also have this positive evaluation of women rooted in their religion.

both women and men have their own religious societies which

exert great control over their lives.

Sande, the women's society, is organized in local chapters and a girl joins her mothers chapter upon puberty and they conduct the puberty rites.

she will join the chapter in her husbands village when married but returns to her own for childbirth.

by having linked chapters the Sande women form a support network that provides social services and religious and civil influences far beyond village boundries.

these chapters provide a way for women to choose their partners in marriage.

the Majo or headwoman of each Sande has many responsibilities.

she must know all kinds of gynachological advice, dispense medicines, oversee puberty rites and even know psychological lore.

she usually travels widely, and will be invided by neighboring Sande chapters to help with puberty rites and healings.

if she is really competent, whe will be a trans-chapter figure with much influence politically and culturally

her own chapter will support her in her travels because her reputation and influence rebound in their honor.

since Sande women can expect to be co-wives (their society is polygamous), it is important that they develop deep sisterly ties

Developing these ties is one reason for practicing Clitoridectomy which is the excising of initiate's clitoris.

This painful process is performed amid strong group support, for the other women console the initiate with food, songs, and dances.

they help her to believe that her present suffering will ensure her future fertility and be a sign to her husband of her moral and social maturity. (Young men have their backs lacerated at puberty, as a similar passage to responsible adulthood.)

scholars also think that clitoridectomy removes any "maleness" the clitoris being perceived as analogous to the penis, so the woman can fit cleanly into her femal social status.

in the Sande, women learn that being a woman is a complete way of being human, an unlimited way to the sacral powers of fertility and order.

~ Show Film - nomads

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North American Indians

Most the Pueblos are still matrilineal but are not matriarchal in practice.

A boy participates in the ceremonies of his home pueblo if he speaks the language, based on his mothers relationship.

Men are in charge of the religious and political structure and in fact, as at Isleta last year, it is considered wrong for a woman to impinge on the male's domain by being elected governor of her pueblo. (this according to a Jemez Indian woman).

Menstruation: practices and beliefs

This was an important time in a young woman's life. some tribes have more elaborate celebrations than others but all

Africa: A Ritual Of Danger

“When I was a girl of ten, I was told to be brave and not to cry, that I’d be a big girl after the ordeal. But when I saw the half-blind old woman with her razor, I bolted. My mother and aunts held me down and spread open my legs. Suddenly, I felt excruciating pain. She sliced off my clitoris and now it lay in her gnarled hands. She then sliced my inner lips until there was nothing left. There was blood everywhere, but by now I felt no more pain, not even when she stuck a thorn from the acacia tree into me to keep the wound closed.”

The Somalian woman who gave this account was describing a rite undergone by more than 80 million African women. Female circumcision—the mutilation of the external genital organs—is a centuries-old rite of passage, intended to ensure that young women become desirable wives. It frequently causes life-threatening blood loss and infection. It can also lead to pain-

ful intercourse, infertility and difficult childbirth. While often erroneously linked to Islamic scripture, it is not mandated by any religion and is practiced by people of many faiths in some two dozen black African nations, Egypt and the Sudan.

There are three degrees of the procedure: *sunna* (traditional), which involves cutting off

the tip of the clitoris; excision, the removal of the clitoris and the labia minora; and infibulation, the removal of the clitoris, the labia minora and labia majora. With infibulation, the pubic area is stitched up after the genitals are removed, leaving only a single small opening for urination and menstruation.

Midwives, village healers

and elderly female relatives perform the ritual without anesthesia, using unsterilized razor blades. Parents look upon it favorably, on the grounds that removing the clitoris purifies their daughters and deadens their interest in sexual pleasure. Ironically, the frigidity or infertility caused by the mutilation leads many husbands to shun their brides.

Doctors throughout Africa recognize the harmful effects of female circumcision but feel powerless to stop a practice so entrenched in custom and tradition. Many organizations are campaigning against it, and the new African Charter on the Rights of Children includes items condemning circumcision. Governments in Sudan and elsewhere have passed laws against it, but they are seldom enforced.

It will take education, not just laws, to halt what Africans view as a symbol of their culture. Asks Birhane Ras-Work, president of the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices: “How do you eradicate a tradition that is more powerful than a legal system?” ■

acknowledge the importance of womanhood.

at this time girls were (and still are) taught what they should know about their future, about the role of women in the tribe. Instruction is sought for such a girl and is given by grandmothers or thru some other relationship.

the kind of instruction given at this time was usually in preparation for marriage, and her role thereafter.

tho the initiation varied from tribe to tribe all ceremonies had some common features.

first, the menstruating women of the tribe, and the yuourn women being initiated, were usually isolated from their families and remainder of the tribe for four days.

2. the patterns of behavior prescribed for menstruating women and pubescent girls were similar in their reasoning and objectives.

3. menstruation was equated with power which could be utilized for healing or curing.

the power had to be recognized by a woman and others around her. when she adhered to the prescribed rules of behavior, this power was acknowledged.

4. A girl's puberty ceremony was usually a festive time for the people, though it might have been a test of endurance for a young woman.

When women were menstruating they separated themselves from other members of the family and tribe. They did this because they believed that the power attributed to them might affect themselves or another in a negative way if they did not.

While in isolation the women took and ate their meals separately, prepared the meals themselves or another woman might do so.

some tribes such as the Winnebago, Washo of Calif and Nev. and Puyallup practice fasting so the secluded women were not allowed to eat, except water occasionally.

how a young woman behaved during her puberty ceremony was believed to give shape to her disposition and attitudes, influence her mental and physical health and well-being, and give meaning and understanding to her life.

The Chiricahua believe this strongly. in the course of the ceremony, certain demands were made upon the young girl and how she reacted to those demands was to give evidence of her behaviour later in life

The WAshe watched how a girl behaved during the "girl's dance" following her four day isolation. if she behaved properly during the dance and the four days preceding she would be hard working, energetic, self-effacing, able to withstand hunger, generous and able to endure discomfort.

this belief that how a girl behaved at this time shaped her entire life was widespread.

Another trait desired from women was modesty which was displayed with silence, or looking at the ground and not looking someone in the eyes or face.

Menstruation was associated with power by most people of the world at one time. among Native Americans there were beliefs that these women and pubescent girls could cure and heal as well.

a story is told by a man who was healed of warts by a menstruating girl. He could not see her but passed his hands in and repeated certain words. She wet her fingers with her saliva and touched the warts. in five days all the warts were gone. this is from the Anishnabe tribe.

a Cibecue Apache explains how a pubescent girl "is just like a medicine man, only with that power she is holy."

she can cure without a song and even cause rain.

among other benefits (modesty, endurance, etc.) she has the goal of attaining old age. this is the most familiar goal and it was believed a young woman who did not undergo the ceremony may not attain old age.

The puberty ceremony is no longer performed in the majority of tribes for several reasons.

1. tribal groups are scattered and related families are often separated by great distances.

2. the intent of the ceremony and the demands placed upon a young woman in the ceremony have often been misunderstood so today young women have misgivings about undergoing such a ceremony.

The Apache and Navajo, related to each other as Athapaskan speaking groups, still have the puberty rites.

With most tribes, an important prerequisite to the rite is that the young woman undergoing the ceremony should be pure.

she should not have experienced sexual relations tho a few tribes, such as the Gros Ventre, gave the girls in marriage before puberty as they believed a girl would not menstruate unless she had had sexual relations.

Today, with both the Navajo and Apache, the rite continues for four days.

there is socializing, feasting and participation in events. For the girl there is instruction; her body is pressed and molded that she might be beautiful and healthy, in the likeness of changing woman or White painted woman (depending on tribe), who were the women who started the rites.

Comparatively speaking, the Indians of North America have some basic religious concepts in common. the girls puberty rite is an example of these similarities.

the reverent attitude expressed by a Navajo sums up:

According to our legend, when Changing Woman had her first period they prepared her by using the dews of various plants. They put that into her body to enable her to produce offspring for the human race. On that account, today we believe that when a girl has her first period there is nothing wrong with that. It is something sacred to us. *show + tibet clip*
Austrailia and New Zealand

In New Zealand, the Maori have almost all male gods with the female being fashioned out of earth. the main opposition between earth and sky is maintained in the male/female relationship

the sky was seen as the realm of life. the earth is therefore for transitory beings while the sky is permanent.

there is a similar duality between spirit and substance, or between life and fate, but there is no opposition between good and evil.

the first woman was the earth-formed Maiden and her first child was a daughter, called the Dawn Maiden, who eventually became the wife of Tane, the main god who defeated and banished the powers of darkness and was the author of all vegetation, as well as creator of the first woman.

the priesthood is strictly male with the priests who were specialists in diagnosing the causes of adverse happenings and relaing messages from the gods who communicated by whistling.

most the Maoris today are nominally Christian but kinship ties still have the most potent religious groups.

The Austrailian Aborigines

These are what is known as a totemistic religion.

the group one is born into included their totemic ancestors

and the design of life was fixed by a founding drama.

Totems were therefore ancestors in the form of local animals from whom the people in a tribe or region were descended, and a person shared the same life with his or her animal or plant totem.

do myth of Djanggawal & Bidjilwaroiju - next page →

aboriginal courtship according to the first reports of Europeans in Australia, was the old cliché of the caveman dragging the mate home by the hair, or in this case, arm.

to quote from an 1802 work it is commented that "their conduct to women makes them considerably inferior to the brute creation." the author says:

in obtaining a female partner the first step they take, romantic as it may seem, is to fix on some female of a tribe at enmity with their own. . . The monster then stupefies her with blows, which he inflicts with his club, on her head, back, neck, and indeed every part of her body, then snatching up one of her arms, he drags her, streaming with blood from her wounds, through the woods, over stones, rocks, hills and logs, with all the violence and determination of a savage, till he reaches his tribe.

A girl was usually given away as soon as she was born. She was the absolute property of her kin until marriage, whereupon she became the equally helpless possession of her husband.

the purpose of betrothal was to strengthen existing kinship bonds by means of reciprocal favors.

the taboo against marrying anyone with your totem prevented intra-tribal marriage so a man had to marry outside his own totem group.

this applies to the Iora tribesmen but there is reason to

THE DJANGGAWULS OF ARNHEM LAND

○ In the Northern third of the Northern territory, myths center on the Great mother or mothers. This is unlike anywhere else in Australia, where male dieties are dominant in mythology and where women, if present at all, play subordinate roles.

There are variations on the myth, depending on the area of Arnhem land, but the mother or sisters (in some areas) either emanate from their own person, or thru ritual acts create everything alive.

The Djanggawuls were two sisters (and sometimes a brother or consort) whose celestial origin was with the female sun. they came from a distant and somewhat vague land that lay to the north east of Australia.

they journeyed by canoe to Arnhem land, crossing the region from east to west creating the ancestors of the various human groups. They also gave the countryside its present contours and vegetation, leaving behind them in fixed spots the sacred objects that even today are the focus for the most important ceremonies.

These three "gods" brought forth springs and trees in Arnhem land by planting magic sticks in the soil. The phallic function is clear, for the aborigenes of this region understand the part played by the sex act in procreation so impressive erotic symbolism is used to explain the origin of things.

Often a rainbow snake, a python or lightening snake is involved. He raises his lengthening body from the springs, billabongs and rivers to the sky, flashing and roaring. The rains and floods come, and with them the wet season proceeds. The Mother, the Earth, brings forth food.

Arnhem land is the only exception to the extremely patriarchal/male dominated attitudes of most the Australian aborigine tribes. Rather, most come under the categories that the earliest Europeans noted in their early writings. Remember, most were debtors and/or prisonors but there were some astute observers among them as evidenced by an 1802 work which describes what was observed before the Aborigenes were "contaminated" by Christian missionaries.

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believe it was no different for the others.

a wife could be lent to visitors whom the Iora tribesmen wanted to honor.

warriors, before setting out on a revenge raid against some other aboriginal group, would swap their women as an expression of brotherhood. if a tribal group was about to be attacked and knew where its enemies were, it would sometimes send out a party of women in their direction; the attackers would then show that they were open to a peaceful solution by copulating with them.

but if the women came back untouched, it was a signal that there was no choice but battle.

a nights exchange of wives usually capped a truce between tribes. on those occasions most kinship laws except the most sacred incest taboos were suspended.

if a woman showed the least reluctance to be used for any of these purposes, if she seemed lazy or gave her lord and master any other cause for dissatisfaction, she would be furiously beaten or even speared.

Fertility was controled by women not weaning their children till 3 years or older since nomads were on the march, a woman could only handle one babe in arms.

to get rid of surplus children, the Iora, like all other Austrailian tribes, routinely induced abortions by giving the pregnant women herbal medicines or, when these failed, by thumping their bellies.

if these measures failed, they killed the unwanted child a birth.

deformed children were smothered or strangled.

if a mother died in childbirth, or while nursing a child in arms, the infant would be burned with her after the father crushed its head with a large stone.

this weeding out of the helpless also applied to the old, male or female, after their teeth were gone and their joints had seized up they were killed.

this sound cruel, but it has enabled the Aborigenes to survive for about 40,000 years w/o either extending their technology or depleting their resources.

the coming of the Europeans has been the end of the Aborigenes way tho there are a very few left that keep the old ways.

initiation is the only way to come to full acceptance into the realm of the sacred and there are no longer any young men desiring to be initiated, or very few.

women have their own sacred traditions and are not allowed to see any of the men's rites, tho some older women in some tribes assist the men in parts of their secret rites. these rites are performed so infrequently now that they are being lost.

most Aborigines are now de-tribalized and only a few isolated groups remain. only recently have the Aborigenes been given full citizenship. of about 80,000 listed in a recent census, 50,000 consider themselves christian.

the price of missionary help and welfare has been to convert and forget the old ways.

The sacred trumpets of the Mundurucú, called the *karökö*, are taboo to the sight of women, but the women once owned them. In fact it was the women who first discovered the trumpets.

There were once three women named Yanyonböri, Tuembirú, and Parawarö. When these women went to collect firewood, they frequently heard music from some unknown source. One day they became thirsty and went off in search of water. Deep in the forest they found a beautiful, shallow, and clear lake, of which they had no previous knowledge. This lake came to be named *Karököboaptí*, or "the place from which they took the *karökö*." The next time the women heard the music in the forest, they noted that it came from the direction of the lake and went off to investigate. But they found only *jiju* fish in the water, which they were unable to catch.

Back in the village, one of the women hit upon the idea of catching the fish with hand nets. They rubbed the mouths of the nets with a nut which had the effect of making fish sleepy, and returned to the lake properly equipped. Each woman caught one fish, and these fish turned into hollow cylindrical trumpets. The other fish fled. That is why each men's house now has a set of only three instruments. The women hid the trumpets in the forest where no one could discover them and went secretly every day to play them.

The women devoted their lives to the instruments and abandoned their husbands and housework to play them. The men grew suspicious, and Marimarebö, the brother of Yanyonböri, followed them and discovered their secret. He did not, however, actually see the instruments. Marimarebö went back to the village and told the other men. When the women returned, he asked if it was true that they had musical instruments in the forest. The women admitted this and were told, "You can play the instruments, but you have to play them in the house and not in the forest." The women agreed to this.

The women, as possessors of the trumpets, had thereby gained ascendancy over the men. The men had to carry firewood and fetch water, and they also had to make the *beijú* (manioc cakes). To this day their hands are still flat from patting the *beijú* into shape. But the men still hunted, and this angered Marimarebö, for it was necessary to offer meat to the trumpets, and the women were able to offer them only a

drink made from sweet manioc. For this reason, Marimarebö favored taking the trumpets from the women, but the other men hesitated from fear of them.

On the day on which the women were to bring the trumpets to the village, they ordered the men out to the forest to hunt while they made the sweet manioc drink. When the men returned from the hunt, the three discoverers of the trumpets led the other women out to get the instruments. The leader of the women, Yanyonböri, sent one of the women back to tell the men that they should all shut themselves securely inside the dwelling houses. The men refused to do this and insisted upon remaining in the men's house. Finally, Yanyonböri herself went back to order the men inside the dwelling houses. Her brother, Marimarebö, replied, "We will go into the house for one night only, but no more. We want the trumpets and will take them tomorrow. If you do not give them to us, then we will not go hunting, and there will be no meat to offer them." Yanyonböri agreed, for she knew that she could not hunt the food for the trumpets or for the guests at the ceremonies.

The men entered the dwelling houses, and the women marched around and around the village playing the trumpets. They then entered the men's house for the night and installed the instruments there. Then, one by one the women went to the dwelling houses and forced the men to have coitus with them. The men could not refuse, just as the women today cannot refuse the desires of the men. This went on all night, and the women returned to the men's house all slippery inside.

The next day the men took the trumpets from the women and forced them to go back to the dwelling house. The women wept at their loss. When the men took the trumpets from the women they sang this song:

It was I who went and hid
I entered the house and hid
I entered the house and almost hid
Because I did not know I was ashamed
Because I did not know I was ashamed
Because I did not know
I entered the house and hid
I entered the house and almost hid

the last group I will cover is a tribe in Amazonian Brazil known as the Mundurucu - Yolanda & Robert Murphy - Women of the Forest

~~the~~ anthropologists observed an acute and fascinating battle of the sexes in which reality squarely contradicted ideology.

the women, living apart from the men, accomplish their daily round of tasks in a convivial sisterhood and tho their authority over the practical matters of living exceeds that of the men, the official, male-dominated culture depicts the women as second-class citizens who are subservient to men.

this is reverently handed down through myth and ritual.

the women do not agree with the men and, in spite of the sanctity given by tradition to their role, they neither like it, nor do they accept it.

the relation between the sexes is not one of simple domination and submissiveness but one of ideological dissonance and real opposition.

the entire charter and rationale of Mundurucu sex roles is contained within a single myth which I shall now read to you.

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The very fact that the women were believed to have once been dominant bespeaks a latent fear that they can become dominant again.

unlike attitudes in the west as well as many other places, it is not assumed that woman is biologically inferior.

women as people, are not inferior to the Mundurucu for

otherwise the rebellion of the males would have been unnecessary.

only their status is inferior, and this is so only because the men managed to shear them of their power in the remote past.

The revolution of the men was made possible because the women did not hunt, and, being unable to hunt could not make the required ritual offerings of game meat to the ancestral spirits in the Karoko.

the division of labor, then, if primary and the possession by the men of culturally given hunting skills underlies their higher status.

the instruments are key symbols in our sexual paradigm. It was their discovery that gave the women a power which they lost when the men wrested them away.

Each men's house has a set of three of the instruments kept in a totally enclosed chamber secluded from the eyes of women

all the men know how to play them and even when they play them outdoors for celebration they carefully keep them hidden from the eyes of the women.

the long tubular shape of the karoko is clearly a phallic symbol in the classic sense.

fear of emasculation runs deep in these men. women cannot view the instruments under penalty of gang rape, surely a clear example of phallic power, but the women were seen not to have any great curiosity. the women can describe the instruments but show no awe concerning them.

clearly the women were obviously less impressed with the male prowess and its props than were the men.

when the women controlled the phallus, they were dominant; now that the men own it, the roles are reversed.

Mundurucu men frequently make joking references to sex as a means of subduing women. "We tame them with the banana,"

this is not dream material, but conscious stated thought.

the position of the man is not given within nature, but rather within culture, and the men must defend themselves lest a counter-revolution take place.

the myth of the karoko is a parable of phallic dominance, of male superiority symbolized in, and based upon, the possession of the penis but is at best an uneasy overlordship.

the tribe is patrilineal in descent and illegitimate children are commonly destroyed at birth, as are twins and children with serious birth defects.

women contain the future potential of a society and are valued for this, but if patrilineal descent is to prevail, the formal status of the woman must be lowered to assure men the rights to the young.

the Mundurucu believe that the substance of the fetus is formed from the seminal fluid and that a woman must have several sexual contacts with a man to amass the necessary material.

the man by this reasoning is essential to procreation; he provides the raw material for the child, which then grows in the mother's uterus.

women occupy a lower status than men in Mundurucu myth, but they are also portrayed as ungovernable.. this is much the way the

contemporary men look on their women

women occupy no formal positions of leadership of any kind, a situation that finds parallels in most primitive societies.

the formal position of women in ceremonies has the same element of passivity. they serve as a chorus and not as instrumental figures.

a woman must be retiring during childbearing years but a post menopausal woman can sit where she pleases, and men will actually defer to her.

she can speak on whatever interests her and her opinions are freely given and listened to

by graduating from sex and child-bearing she has graduated from the female role and, in a legal sense, had become a man, albeit an old one.

to conclude, women are not intrinsically, personally and naturally inferior--their roles are inferior.

the sexes among the Mundurucu indeed constitute a division of the population along lines of anatomical difference and function, just like everywhere else.

but the split is more than that, each sex is a social entity, each has its own internal organization and each has a sense of solidarity and a consciousness of its own unity and its opposition to the other.

the battle of the sexes is not carried on by individual gladiators, as in our society, but by **armies**.