

Katherine K. Young

INTRODUCTION

In this book, the discussion of women and religion by women scholars begun in *Women in World Religions* (SUNY 1987) is extended to more religions. That book focused on religions in societies that had undergone state formation, defined by anthropologists as large-scale or complex societies. I categorized them as (1) ethnic religions, based on a communal identity—that is, birth into a “people” defined by the ancestors, territory, and language, (2) universal/reform religions, based on an associational identity formed by voluntary allegiance to a leader or by conversion to the founded religion, characterized by a reformed mode of life, experience, and universal salvation, and (3) nature religions, based on cosmic identity—that is, the experience of the harmony or unity of nature, the individual, and cosmos as salvific.

More religions of large-scale societies of the universal/reform type are examined in the present volume. Ketayun H. Gould examines the position of women in Zoroastrianism (originating in Iran between the fifteenth and the sixth century B.C.E.). Nalini Balbir surveys the history of women in the Śvetāmbara and Digambara sects of Jainism (starting in India about the sixth century B.C.E.). Rajkumari Shanker offers pioneering research on women in Sikhism (beginning in India in the fifteenth century C.E.). And Susan S. Maneck narrates the story of women’s position in Baha’i (developing in Iran in the nineteenth century C.E.). All these religions are still living traditions; while some were more prominent in former times—Zoroastrianism, for example, was once the state religion of the Achaemenid and Sasanian dynasties of Persia—today their

numbers are small (though they belong to large-scale societies) when compared to those of religions surveyed in the first volume such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. To broaden the perspective, the present volume has included the religious orientation of a number of small-scale societies—those of hunters and gatherers and horticulturalists—from North America and Africa. Accordingly, Kathleen M. Dugan looks at women and feminine symbolism in Native American religions and Rosalind I. J. Hackett offers an overview of women in African traditional religions. Since a focus of the present volume is on changes in feminine symbolism and women's religious roles, it is important to examine the transition from small-scale to large-scale societies. In this context, Michiko Yusa's study of feminine imagery and women's ritual roles in early Shinto is particularly helpful, as is Hackett's discussion of African religions. The chapters presented here make possible three levels of generalization: *intersynchronic* (between the class of small- and large-scale religions), *intrasynchronic* (among the large-scale religions themselves), and *diachronic* (within a given religion).

Several general patterns emerge from the rich materials gathered in this volume.¹ (1) Where feminine symbolism is common in small-scale societies, as in some hunting and gathering groups and many horticultural communities, women have higher religious status—more official ritual roles and leadership positions—and higher economic and social status. The presence of feminine symbolism is not, however, universal: there is no supreme mother goddess in all small-scale societies. (2) A decrease or marginalization of feminine symbolism often occurs with a social change from matrilineality to patrilineality; an economic change from simple horticulture to plow agriculture and trade; or a political change from small-scale societies to large-scale ones involving state formation. (3) Abuses of power are very common in the transition to large-scale societies. (4) These abuses inspire reforms. General reforms and ones specifically to improve women's lives lead to an increase in feminine symbolism, ritual roles for women, and laws to safeguard their interests. (5) These reforms, however, are historically limited in duration; reform is followed by decline in times of stress. (6) When a religion has reform as part of its foundational identity, however, it is easier to institute new reforms by calling for renewal of the fundamental vision. This often happens in the modern period. But since the modern period brings in its wake new stresses, these reforms too are of limited duration in some countries.

FEMININE SYMBOLISM IN SMALL-SCALE SOCIETIES

It has been difficult to recover feminine symbolism in small-scale societies.² Early ethnographers neglected oral traditions, on the one hand, and larger ideological patterns, on the other, both of which reveal much about feminine symbolism and women's religious practices. Almost always men, and often Jesuits, they were oblivious to women's religion. But even if they had wanted to learn about the women's world, they would have been prevented from doing so because of the separate spheres of men and women as well as economic and ritual specialization along gender lines. Their lack of interest in female spirits and rituals was matched by native women's traditional secrecy regarding their own religious practices. While the few female ethnologists could have had access to women's spheres and secrets, they generally modeled their questions on those of their male colleagues. Today ethnography is rapidly changing as aboriginal women and female scholars document women's lives, describe traditional women's religion, and relate their observations to comparative studies. Both male and female scholars are also taking another look at the archaeological record and reexamining previous ethnographies with questions of feminine symbolism and women's lives in mind. This has led to some major scholarly debates on the historical record.

The study of North American Indian religions is benefiting from the new interest in feminine symbolism and women's religious roles. One focus of this is the mistress of animals. A mistress of animals has been associated with the renewal of the supply of game in many hunting and gathering societies. From paleolithic times, humans have contemplated the death of the animals killed in the hunt; in cave paintings they have portrayed sacred acts for the animals' appeasement, restitution, return, and multiplication. In this volume, Kathleen Dugan notes that the Sioux of North America speak of White Buffalo Calf Woman who "mysteriously appears in a time when the people are beset by hunger and without clear direction . . . ; she is associated with the generation of new sources of life." Because female figures are linked directly to regeneration and rebirth, they are linked indirectly to death, which makes rebirth necessary. Accordingly, the symbolism of the mistress of animals comes to embrace the continuity of life, death, and rebirth.

The presence of feminine symbolism in hunting and gathering societies is correlated with an egalitarian ethos. These societies have separate spheres and gender roles for men and women who are

considered different but complementary and equal. Men hunt; women gather food and take care of children. Women's menstrual blood is powerful; a menstruating woman, for instance, can jeopardize the safety and effectiveness of hunters and shamans. Consequently, taboos restrict women's participation in these activities, though exceptions are sometimes made for nonreproductive women or role reversals when survival is at stake. Women also have important religious roles. Some are medicine women with a great knowledge of herbs; others are shamans with extraordinary powers who can move about in the various realms of existence, communicate with the spirits, and instruct the community. In this volume, Dugan describes their visionary quests.

Central to the discussion of feminine symbolism in native North American religions is the concept of Mother Earth. Dugan suggests, for instance, that the earth was an important feminine symbol in native North American religions. So does Jordan Paper. He observes that prehistoric images of vulvae in North American caves are similar to paleolithic ones in European caves and concludes that the cave is the vagina of the earth, the "life-giving female cosmic creator . . . the mother of all life."³ The symbol of the vulvae, continues Paper, also appears in Ojibwe writing. In the sacred symbolism of the Sacred Pipe ritual, at least fifteen hundred years old, smoke offerings made to the directions of the cosmos include offerings to the nadir of the earth, the primary female numinous being of procreation and nurture. The earth is addressed as "Mother" or "Grandmother," as are various spirits:

In native religious traditions from North to South America, Earth is understood as a numinous being of procreation and nurture. The details of this general understanding vary from culture to culture, subculture to subculture, but the essentials agree. From the Earth Mother's surface grow the plants essential to life and health, from clefts in her body emerge the game animals which share their life with the people, from her veins issue the life-giving fluid of water, from her cycles and those of her celestial and nighttime aspect, from Grandmother Moon, come the rhythms of women's bodies. Within Earth's narrow, dark, warm, moist crevices humans encounter her essence. Earth is the epitome of motherhood. Women mirror Earth.⁴

The feminine as earth, says Paper, is often coupled with the masculine as sun in creation stories. In some accounts, moon is the grandmother, earth the mother. According to him, North American

Indians see animals such as the bear and buffalo as manifestations of the earth. Black bears are prominent in myths not only because of their value as food but also because of their similarity to humans in diet, skeleton, ability to stand upright, and intelligence. They are identified with the earth because they hibernate within it during the winter and because the female emerges in spring from its caves with her new cubs. The female bear is a life-giving and healing spirit. Similarly, in their myth about the origin of buffalo, the Lakota describe how the buffalo were found in a hole in the ground and were driven up on the earth to become food for the people. Because of this, the spirits of the buffalo and the earth are the same.

Sam D. Gill, however, disputes this symbol of Mother Earth as an archaic and pervasive feature of native North American religions.⁵ First, he finds no basis for considering Native American religions as a single tradition. He has studied the religions of many native tribes and has found a variety of female figures in myths and rituals; some are "associated with the earth, others with the sky, the sea, plants, or animals."⁶

Secondly, he finds that traditional myths and rituals do not speak of Mother Earth as a major goddess, though this image appears in later sources. He traces the latter to a commonly quoted statement attributed to Tecumseh, the Shawnee leader in 1810: "The earth is my mother and on her bosom I will repose." (Elsewhere it is reported as "the sun is my father, and the earth is my mother; she gives me nourishment, and I repose upon her bosom."⁷) This statement, which was simply about the fact that Tecumseh wanted to sit on the ground during negotiations and not in the strange chair of the white man, became part of the Tecumseh legend and entered nineteenth-century American fiction and history books. By contrast, the earliest records of Shawnee religion as reported in early ethnographies, such as Trowbridge's *Shawnese Traditions* (1824) and Morgan's *The Indian Journals* (1859–1862), show that they believe in a male supreme creator associated with celestial realms, not a goddess of the earth. By the 1930s, however, the Shawnee had come to identify their major deity who creates and oversees the world as "Our Grandmother," though she was a celestial, not an earth, creator deity.

Gill does admit that there may have been some feminine spiritual entities associated with the earth as "Earth Person," but they were by no means a major, supreme, creator figure. He then examines other references that contributed to popular literature by looking at a story of imagining America that began back in 1575. At this time, Europeans personified America as a female Indian queen—

an Amazonian with bow and arrow—in graphic and decorative arts. By the colonial period, she was younger and less ferocious, virtually a Greek goddess; now the daughter of Britannia, the Indian princess symbolized American liberty and held the American flag. Gill argues that the story of the Indian princess Pocahontas was also a tale with well-known folk motifs turned into popular fiction and eventually into history. The story of Pocahontas first saving a white man (Captain John Smith) and then marrying another (John Rolfe) symbolized the union of European and native peoples. But it was also premised on the idea that Pocahontas gave up her Indian ways; the story thus symbolized the sacrifice or death of native cultures and the acquisition of Christianity and “civilization.” Already by 1933, Archibald MacLeish had transformed Pocahontas into the counterpart of Ceres, Demeter, and Gaea; she was now a “fertility goddess, an earth mother, a mother of a new race in America” who was sacrificed:

The statement attributed to Tecumseh and the story of Pocahontas are two aspects of the same American story: the story of the sacrifice of the Indian in the triumph of civilization over savagism. This powerful story reveals the sentiments of Americans and their need to conceive the earth as female and as Indian. There is a homology between the conception of the earth as the mother on whose bosom (a term peculiarly prominent in all of these stories) Tecumseh and the Indians would prefer to rest, the sequence of images of America as female Indian, and the stories of Pocahontas who, in laying her bosom upon the head of John Smith, entered into marriage with Europeans and their cultivating ways. Pocahontas, the Indian princess, the earth mother, is mother to us all and sacrificial victim to American respectability. The seeds are thus sown. The conception of Mother Earth in North America has taken place.⁸

Gill notes that the statement attributed to Tecumseh was not only quoted by E. B. Tylor in his influential work *Primitive Culture*, (1873), but also that Tylor used it as the lynch pin of a major theory about the origin of religion. “The idea of the Earth as a mother is more simple and obvious,” said Tylor, “and no doubt for that reason more common in the world, than the idea of Heaven as a father.”⁹

The statement attributed to Tecumseh and the story of Pocahontas are only part of Gill’s reconstruction of the history of the

earth goddess in North America. He also examines a similar history of the statement "shall I tear my mother's bosom" (about the destruction of the earth created by ploughing her fields and cutting down her forests) attributed to a Wanapum man, Smohalla, who had led a millenarian style protest, with Christian elements, against the white settlers. The change from a metaphor of the earth as feminine to a goddess was first popularized in James Mooney's monograph "The Ghost Dance Religion and Sioux Outbreak of 1890." Now Gill argues that we need corroboration for these accounts about a supreme deity who is Mother Earth from native oral traditions and rituals, but that this is not forthcoming.

More importantly, how do we account for the fact that the imagery of a mother goddess as female creator enters into native religions at this time? This occurred, Gill suggests, because of the American policy to transform native hunters into cultivators. To do this, the Indian tradition of holding the land in common had to be changed into the desire for individual property. In the northwest, native peoples rejected this demand for change. They appealed to a supreme creator who made the earth and then its people from it. From this creation account came explanations for a number of things. Natives were darker than whites because they were made from the earth. And they were more moral because as hunters, gatherers, and fishers they neither cut into the land with sharp plows nor cut down her forests. The creator told the prophets that oppressors would be killed or transformed, and that natives must maintain their protection of the land. Based on this religious authority, legal demands for inherited native rights to the land were made.¹⁰ From the mid 1850s, native leaders spoke of the earth metaphorically: Indian culture depends on the land as a child on its mother. Gill concludes:

Ambient imagery of non-native origin is appropriated and put to meaningful use of tribal traditions, even incorporated into oral traditions. . . . Statements about the earth that were metaphorical and political, though contained within a basically religious perspective, were consistently misinterpreted as theological. In time (not such a very long time, really), these misinterpretations were appropriated by Native Americans who transformed metaphor into divinity.¹¹

This divinity was none other than Mother Earth, the supreme creator.

Gill also examines the "world-parent" cosmogony—that is, the story of how Father Sky and Mother Earth begot the world—among the horticultural tribes of the American southwest. Once again, he shows through his careful scrutiny of existing scholarship that the locus classicus of this myth, the Zuni account of creation, is really the fictional creation of Frank Hamilton Cushing. Cushing was a controversial nineteenth-century ethnologist who created a literary and imaginative synthesis out of his knowledge of Zuni culture and claimed that it was common throughout North America. These ideas were borrowed, in turn, by H. K. Haeberlin who wrote a popular monograph on the tribes of the southwest. Gill demonstrates that many tribal female figures—a mistress of the animals, a goddess of vegetation, a personification of rain, a moon goddess, and occasionally even an earth mother (though not a progenitor of creation with the sun)—have been formed into a major goddess, Mother Earth, at the hands of scholars. This was done by associating the earth, womb, water, and fertility with stories about the impregnation of a woman by the sun and accounts of the return of the dead to the underworld. When this earth goddess was associated with the sun god, the claim was made that the myth of the world-parents is characteristic of horticultural societies in general. After examining similar claims of a world-parent cosmology attributed to the Luiseno tribe of California, Gill concludes that this too is the creative rendering of a highly influential scholar, in this case, Alfred L. Kroeber. He conveniently ignored the tenuous connections to the earth and the fact that in the Luiseno myth the couple are a brother and sister, the act of begetting is by incestuous and primal rape, and the resulting order has the male dominate over the female.

This discussion of native North American religions serves as warning to be attentive to the sources; story and history, as Gill observes, are often interdependent. Stories, furthermore, may originate in different communities, be based on quite different concepts of authority (historical or ahistorical), and maintain meanings that are distinct though they significantly overlap, as did those of the European-Americans and the Native Americans. In addition, Gill reminds us of the role played by a mother goddess in theories about the origin and nature of religion. We have already encountered Tylor's contribution to the theory of an original earth mother. Because Tylor thought that the idea of earth mother was more "simple" than that of the sun god, he viewed the native Indians as primitive. (In reality, he probably worked back from the idea of the natives as primitive to the idea of the earth goddess as original.) Tylor's ideas

influenced Hubert Bancroft, who also drew on Bachofen's ideas of motherright for his 1882 book *The Native Races*. And both Tylor and Bancroft influenced many historians of religions including Andrew Lang, Albrecht Dieterich, Hartley Burr Alexander, James Frazer, Frederick Heiler, Joachim Wach, Gerardus van der Leeuw, E.O. James, Raffaele Pettazzoni, and Mircea Eliade.

Let us take the example of Eliade. Eliade, says Gill, thought that the earth goddess was known to paleolithic peoples and is common even today with hunters and gatherers, though she is by no means the only deity. In his *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (1958), he bases his discussion of the original *Tellus Mater* on the Smohalla quotation cited by Mooney, suggesting that it reveals "relics of the old worship of the Earth-Mother" and that these words "come to us from very distant ages. The emotion that we feel when we hear them is our response to what they evoke with their wonderful freshness and spontaneity—the primordial image of the Earth-Mother. It is an image that we find everywhere in the world, in countless forms and varieties."¹² After establishing the ubiquitous Mother Earth, Eliade proceeds to quote from Frazer and Cushing. Gill suggests that Eliade has selected his data for structural consistencies, both his phenomenology of the earth and his idea of the cosmogonic "centre." And he notes that Eliade, like his predecessors, combines various feminine figures into one structure or deity through a chain of associations that merge all "myths dealing with Life and Death, with Creation and generation, with sexuality and voluntary sacrifice."¹³ Eliade's ideas are then used by Åke Hultkrantz in his book *The Religions of the American Indians* (1979) and in his essay "The Religion of the Goddess in North America" (1983).

Gill concludes that this mother goddess must exist in the minds of these scholars before their examination of the data. They then select information to fit their preconception. This too is a story in the making. Gill's point is not to argue that there are no feminine figures or goddesses in native North American religions, but that there is no *one* goddess, much less a supreme goddess, called Mother Earth. Suspicious about how other evidence may have been ignored, he looks briefly at Hultkrantz's evidence for the earth goddess of the paleolithic hunters of Europe and northern Asia. Hultkrantz identifies some feminine figurines in ivory, bone, and stone as birth goddesses, even though their identification as deities, much less their meaning, has been very controversial. He identifies them, in turn, with the mistress of animals of today's Siberian hunters. Gill suggests that this gives Hultkrantz the great synthesis needed to gather

all feminine figures into one great deity through time, though she may subsequently take other transformations. All native North American figures, for example, are identified with her from the Sioux's White Buffalo Calf Woman to the Shawnee's "Our Grandmother," to the Iroquois' corn goddesses, the Hopi's Spider Woman, and the Navajo's Changing Woman. It is no wonder, concludes Gill, that today the Hopi are doing sand paintings of Father Sky and Mother Earth.

Despite his debunking of the concept of the original and ubiquitous Mother Earth—which he charitably calls the making of a story—Gill leaves the door open to the possibility that goddesses associated with the earth and vegetation become common in horticultural religions. These goddesses, however, are multiple; they are often one among many figures and vary from group to group. Because they arise in certain historical conditions, moreover, they are historically contingent, not primordial and archetypal.

It does seem to be the case that goddesses are prevalent in horticultural societies. The Hopi, says Dugan, speak of Spider Woman who breathes life into the first man and first woman. The Seneca refer to Sky Woman who is pregnant and falls to earth; she subsequently gives birth to a daughter who then gives birth to sacred twins and they, then, give birth to all the beings of creation.

Feminine figures are also associated with vegetation. Dugan speaks of the importance of vegetation, especially corn, to southern horticulturalists in North America. With the development of horticulture, she observes, the deeply feminine aspects of native American religion emerged and took a sharper definition.¹⁴ The Abanaki, for instance:

Speak of First Woman who came to live with a spirit being called Kloskurbeh and a disciple. She offers them her power and love, and she and the disciple have many children. However, a famine interrupts their peace, and in the suffering that is created, First Woman begs her husband to slay her. Then she instructs him to have her body dragged through a field until all her flesh is gone. He was to bring her bones to the center of the field and let them alone for several months. When that time was over, they were to return and gather the food produced by this act. All that is accomplished is done by the power of this sacred woman and by her sacrifice. The food is the tangible sign of her love and concern, and they are reminded that they are to eat it with thankfulness and in

peaceful harmony, for thus will the love of the first mother be fulfilled.

The story of the sacrifice of a first woman to create food is extremely common among horticulturalists the world over. Other North American myths say that the origin of food (corn, squash, and beans) is a gift from a sacred woman or that corn gives rise to First Woman and First Man, and then to Changing Woman as with the Navaho.

It has been suggested that women, who collected edible plants in hunting and gathering societies, were responsible for their domestication. The discovery of this technique, with its revolutionary implications for human life, may have inspired stories of the origin of plants from a divine woman. Of course, it is also possible that older motifs of a mistress of the animals who discovers or regenerates the food supply may have inspired these accounts; plants were simply substituted for animals. Be that as it may, women in horticultural societies have had an important economic role as gardeners. Matrilocal residence (dwelling with the wife's female kin) and matrilineal succession (inheriting through the female line), common in horticultural societies, have also contributed to woman's status and power.

William Divale,¹⁵ who combines methods of social anthropology and historical research, explains this as follows. Matrilocality was an accommodation to constant warfare.¹⁶ When competition over land occurred because of a change in the means of production, population explosion, or migration of other groups into their territory, groups faced the choice of whether to flee or fight. Those who chose the former were relegated to marginal lands and a more harsh existence, if not extinction; those who chose the latter often prospered. Because land conflicts occurred over centuries, societies developed social structures and residence patterns to maximize their military effectiveness to gain and maintain territorial control. It was important for warriors to bond together, rather than to kin, for protection of the group. To weaken the bonds with their natal families, they had to move to other villages for marriage. And to weaken the bonds with their wives and children, they had to live in a "men's house" or spend considerable time there. Such societies were matrilocal. Over time, with the development of private property and inheritance, matrilocality developed into matrilineality. These types of residence and lineage permitted the bonding of female kin and contributed to their status in horticultural societies.

George R. Mead defines this arrangement as a matricentric family:

A woman in occupying the structural position of wife/mother is usually the *de facto* leader of the family group, and when, the man occupying the structural position of father/husband, although the *de jure* head of the household group, is marginal to the complex of internal relationships of the group. By marginal is meant that the man associates relatively infrequently, or in a much reduced level of interaction, with the other members of the group, and is on the fringe of the effective ties which bind the group together. In other words, the paternal dyad is extremely weak, although still present, while the maternal dyad is the main cohesive force for the family group.¹⁷

Economic, domestic, and lineage power have sometimes been expressed politically. Iroquois women tended gardens and managed households. And they had matrilineal descent:

Iroquoian female power was part of a centuries-old tradition . . . in which women were officially proclaimed the progenitors of the people and the owners of the land and the soil. . . . During the early Colonial period, the Iroquois could be described as matrifocal at the village level and patrifocal at the level of League and intervillage affairs. Before the establishment of the League and the tribal units that united to form the League, the Iroquois could perhaps be described as matriarchal, if this term is redefined to mean female economic and ritual centrality and not female rule.¹⁸

Iroquois women, moreover, could nominate and depose chiefs.¹⁹ Along with these worldly powers, Iroquois women have had divine powers and important ritual roles.

With these aspects of horticultural societies in mind, let us think about feminine symbolism in African religions. Although scholarship on African traditional religions has focused on masculine symbolism, there is evidence of feminine symbolism in African pantheons when scholars decide to look for it. "Contrary to the pantheons constructed by most studies of African traditional religions," says Rosalind Hackett in the present volume:

It is exciting to discover that there exist a number of female creator gods. The Uzo (or Ijo), a matrilineal people of the Ni-

ger Delta region of Nigeria, for instance, speak of God in strictly female terms. They have four principal names for the Supreme Being, namely Temearu . . . "she who is the moulder of all," Ayeba . . . "the foundress of the universe", Woyingi . . . "Our Mother," and Oginarau, "she who dwells in the heavens." There are also references in a ritual context to Ayo, which also means "mother" and to Pere Bau, meaning "the sovereign queen."

In Africa, societies with feminine symbolism and women's rituals are often horticultural; these are located from southern Zaire to Angola in the southwest and to the coasts below the Zambesi River in the southeast. As is true of other horticultural societies, the ones in Africa exist at a subsistence level and have little political organization beyond the village level. Here too gender roles are carefully defined; women care for children and tend gardens; men focus on hunting, herding, and war.²⁰ These societies are often matrilocal or matrilineal. Women may be religious specialists in distinct spheres; ultimately, there is ritual complementarity, "transcending everyday hierarchical social relationships" (Hackett).

This discussion of native American Indian religions and African religions shows that there is evidence of more feminine figures in small-scale societies now that scholars have begun to examine the evidence. But as Gill's study has shown, it is important to look at the ethnographic record and to examine carefully one's own views about goddesses and the theories of religion and gender related to them. This is necessary so that one does not find goddesses where they did not exist traditionally, nor elevate them to supremacy when they did not have this position. Despite these concerns, a correlation is found between feminine religious symbolism and a comparatively high status, compared to complex societies, for women, related to religious, economic, and social roles considered vital for the horticultural community.

While feminine symbolism is common in small-scale, especially horticultural religions, it is by no means universal. Peggy Reeves Sanday, for instance, finds that gender symbolism in creation stories is related to the mode of production. Masculine origin symbolism predominates when large animals are hunted, feminine origin symbolism when small game is hunted, and couple or dual sex symbolism when both small and large game are hunted.²¹ Dugan, when speaking of North American hunting and gathering tribes, observes that North American Indian tribes that hunt large

buffalo have predominantly masculine images of faunal life and the sky, though they also recognize the earth, the moon, and the mistress of animals as feminine sacred symbols. Other groups have a master of animals instead of a mistress of animals. Here we are reminded of the many male deities mentioned by Gill: the great male spirit who is the creator of all and dwells in the sky, corn fathers, and male begetters, such as two brothers in the Mohave account of creation. Often the female figures are subsidiary to these male deities. And in the ritual sphere, the institutionalized aspect of religion often belongs to men; the informal, private, and domestic ones to women. Hackett warns us that much more research is needed to reconstruct the women's religious world in Africa "not just in contradiction to, but also in interaction with, men's religious lives."

WHEN FEMININE SYMBOLISM IN SMALL-SCALE SOCIETIES DISAPPEARS

The story of the decline of feminine symbolism is sometimes described in moral terms. This is now *au courant* in certain feminist circles. In the beginning was the goddess, matricentric society, and a time of peace. Then men usurped power, violently displaced women, erased memory of the goddess, and ushered in a history of tyranny. This gynocentric version of the Western myth of the fall—here it is men instead of women who introduce evil and end the golden age in the garden—calls the process the "male-takeover" or the "patriarchal revolution."²² But is there evidence for this idea of a paradise that was destroyed by men? And was the reason for changes to male symbolism and male dominance in certain sectors simply men's abuse of power over women?

Small-scale societies with feminine symbolism were not always peaceful. Many horticultural societies throughout the world, in fact, had endemic warfare.²³ Moreover, the issue of a male "takeover" is not simply a question of immoral use of power and victimization of women. On the contrary, horticultural societies had created a number of problems for men. Matrilocality and matrilineality, in that they privileged women for continuity of residence and lineage, contributed to the erosion of concepts of equality so common in hunting and gathering societies. In some arenas, women were perceived as superior in horticultural societies. Endemic warfare, which was necessary to secure lands for survival or well-being, made men extremely vulnerable and highlighted the comparative security of the women who were protected. Men's arduous initiation rites for the

formation of warrior identity also highlighted how women attained their feminine identity naturally and easily through menarche. Both male risk of life through initiatory raids and subsequent warfare caused men to envy women.

Myths of matriarchy were common in many of these horticultural societies.²⁴ Women may not have ruled (in fact, no one did in these very decentralized societies; chiefs, if they did exist, had little authority). But women were perceived by men, and with good reason, to be comparatively powerful because of their household power, their lineage rights, their natural power to give birth, their spiritual power to regenerate life, and their ability to make the crops grow. Men projected their envy and fear onto women; central to the myths of matriarchy was the fall of women from this position of power because of some wrongdoing or incapacity and the need for men to takeover.

From this brief exposition, we understand why there was a subsequent change in social structure. The fact that men were marginalized from family life in these societies and had no intergenerational continuity in the same place may have led them to desire household and lineage continuity, hence a change to patrilocality and patrilineality. The move toward real male dominance over women, to reverse what was perceived as women's dominance, was supported by development of surplus crops and herds, trade, specialization, and booty from raids. With distribution of resources through male alliances, the invention of iron plows, control of new resources through trade, and more complex patterns of political organization, the power of some men over other men and over all women became entrenched and endemic warfare began to subside. In short, when community survival and well-being were at stake in horticultural societies, men risked their lives and submitted themselves to family marginalization in order to be good protectors and providers, for everyone, including women and children. From men's perspective, there were legitimate reasons why they wanted to change society and its symbolism. These reasons are not accounted for in the feminist reconstruction that speaks of a takeover by *immoral* men. Acknowledging some legitimate reasons for the new social changes does not mean, however, that the methods—including, in some societies, threat of rape to keep women in line—or the outcome of real male dominance, rather than restoration of equality, should not be judged for going too far.

The historical record does not always give the reasons why a change occurred. It does, however, testify to the change. Sometimes these changes occurred during state formation. At other times they

occurred under the impact of colonialism, which often introduced state formation or fundamentally altered the nature of the indigenous state. To illustrate the former, let us examine a change in the Shinto religion of ancient Japan, which accompanied state formation.²⁵

A Chinese reference in the *History of the Kingdom of Wei* mentions the queen Himiko (Pimiko) who ruled Yamatai (Wa), one of the Japanese islands. From the account, which describes how over one hundred male and female attendants followed her to the grave when she died, it is obvious that there had been state formation. The structure, however, was fragile. The old matrilineal pattern of the former horticultural society had continued in the tradition of female ruler. But after Himiko's death, there were attempts by men to change this to male rule. We are told, for instance, that a man established himself on the throne. The people, however, revolted; the king was assassinated and a relative of Himiko's was made queen. For some time power went back and forth between queens and kings. Jingū, for instance, ruled independently after the death of her husband. Not only was she a queen; she was also a shamaness, for she would become possessed by the sea goddess Amaterasu and give oracles. Finally, male rule was established.

Robert Ellwood²⁶ reconstructs ancient Japanese history from clues in the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*. He thinks that changes of royal imagery, spiritual authority, and religious symbolism reflect historical changes. The royal lineage, for instance, no longer went through the female line but rather the male line. Intimacy between gods and humans declined; household shrines were needed to make the deities present within the family and female shamans to communicate with them.²⁷ The symbolism of the goddess Amaterasu went through a series of changes. First she became identified with the sun, and vertical or transcendent symbolism, rather than the sea, and lateral symbolism. Then Amaterasu, as the female spirit of the sea, married Yamato no Ōkunidama, the male spirit of the land. They coexisted as a female and male kami, representing heaven and earth. Later Amaterasu was banished first to a village and then to Ise on a remote peninsula. At this time, Yamato became the male supreme god. Priests and the authority of dreams replaced priestesses and the authority of shamanism and oracles.

Ellwood thinks that the Sujin/Suinin narratives, which allude to these events, reflect the emergence of a new dynasty in the late third and early fourth centuries C.E. This development may have been related to an invasion from Korea. The ruler's name, Mimaki,

resembles the name of the southern tip of Korea called Mimana. The account of the mythic figure Jimmu Tenno points to an incoming prince. And a new archaeological style (Kofun or great tomb) indicates a new cultural wave. The transition was not smooth; the narratives mention confusion, epidemics, vagabondage, and rebellions. Ellwood concludes that the suppression of goddesses and priestesses of the old regime amounts to a "patriarchal revolution." More specifically, he suggests that the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*, the sources of the aforementioned accounts, were compiled during a period (seventh and eighth century C.E.) when several women succeeded to the throne for lack of a male emperor. Amaterasu may have been rediscovered at this time. In the present volume, Yusa draws our attention to parallelism among the accounts of Himiko, the empress Jingū, and the queens who ruled at the time of the compilation of the texts. But according to Ellwood, even though a few queens ruled after the "patriarchal revolution," they were mere patriarchal tokens and figureheads, just as Amaterasu was in heaven; society had lost its real *female* magic, mystery, and personality. From this period, priestesses were chosen from the unmarried daughters of the emperor to officiate at Amaterasu's shrine in Ise. Because Ise was far from the capital, feminine religious leadership was marginalized.

A similar process occurred in Africa. The Asante, for example, had one of the great African kingdoms. Although the kingdom was headed by a king and male chiefs, features of their society indicated a former matrilineal and matrilineal phase. When Asante society was first described by westerners, it still had matrilineality at the village level; each chief had a senior woman who assisted him; the office of the king was inherited through the female line; both priests and priestesses officiated at all major rituals; and a sky god and earth goddess were the two major deities.²⁸

The process of state formation is happening even now in Africa. Long before this actually happens, economic, religious, and political changes may be signaled by a change in symbolism. African myths themselves provide clues to the decline of feminine symbolism.²⁹ Here are some examples provided by Hackett. (1) Eka Abassi, which means the mother of God, was once the primordial deity of the Ibibio. She was the mother of all created things, the source of life. The myths suggest a subsequent period when she was both the mother of Obumo, the thunder god and his consort. Today, however, she is either a *deus otiosus* who cannot be mentioned or a mundane agent of fertility mandated by Abasi Ibom, now the male, supreme being,

to deliver unborn babies. It is "a jealously guarded secret," notes Hackett, "that, in earlier times, it was woman, not man, who was the dominant sex . . . and source of creation." (2) Similarly, the Ewe people of the republic of Benin (formerly Dahomey) have myths that tell how the goddess Mawu created the earth but then withdrew because of trouble with men. There are no temples or worship for her. Some myths call her mother or elder but others associate her with the male god Lisa (her consort, twin, or only son). It is likely, therefore, that the early phase of the religion focused on her; the next phase associated her with male figures; and the last phase virtually displaced her by male gods. (3) Such stories are found in neighboring regions. In the Central Republic of Benin and Togo, observes Hackett, the female deity Nana buku was associated with creation; more recently, she has been paired with the male god Osha identified with Lisa. (4) In some regions of Yorubaland, a goddess ruled over both the gods and the good things of the earth at the time of creation. In other areas, a supreme pair of creators—Oriṣanla (or Ọbatala) and his wife Odudua—replaced this goddess; they, in turn, were replaced by the male god Olodumare (Ọlọrun) and the earth goddess Oniḷe. And, according to a secret doctrine of the Ogboni sect, the god Olodumare has now displaced the goddess Oniḷe because he is superior to her. (5) The decline of a female creator can also be detected in the myths of the Akan of Ghana. Some stories describe how the moon goddess gave birth to the universe. But others, which associate her with the female aspect of a bisexual deity or identify her with the male deity Nyame, suggest a process of displacement. The fact that the queen of the Akan state is still ritually identified with the moon and the headwomen of the clans have her statue put on their graves—because of her power over death and rebirth symbolized by the waning and waxing moon—suggests the former supremacy of the moon goddess. (6) The goddess Idemili of the Nnobi Igbo was domesticated and transformed into the wife of the once weaker god Aho. Her cult decreased in popularity; the patriarchal ancestral cult increased in popularity.

The preceding examples suggest that an older, usually horticultural, stratum of many African cultures had a female creator. She was displaced in various ways either directly by a supreme male god or indirectly by being paired first with a male figure and eventually replaced by a supreme male deity. As a result, the archaic female creator eventually became a *deus otiosus* or a mundane fertility figure, though occasionally her significance was maintained in the rit-

uals of royal women. Reasons for the displacement of the goddess are sometimes given in mythology. The goddess herself withdraws because of trouble with men; a god steals her superior creative and mystical powers and becomes the supreme deity; or a god takes over because she cannot keep secrets,³⁰ because she is unwilling to wage war, or because she destroyed paradise and introduced death.

Hackett observes that despite the great cultural diversity of the African continent, male deities now predominate. There is also an increase in male secret societies accompanied by men's ambiguity or hostility to women as "purveyors of evil and misfortune, witchcraft, polluters." This observation of more male symbolism and ritual leadership is confirmed by Marion Kilson who finds in her study of thirteen African societies mainly male supreme beings and deities in the pantheon, male ancestors in national cults, and male priests in central communal rituals. Female figures appear generally as the wives and mothers of gods. And queens, female mediums, and priests' wives are found only in lesser ritual roles.³¹

Changes to feminine symbolism happen when small-scale societies turn to plow cultivation and trade; the new mode of production makes possible permanent settlements, food surpluses, craft differentiation, and eventually state formation. State formation is also inspired by contact with neighboring states, religions such as Islam and Christianity, and international contacts. As in other parts of the world, so in Africa men do the more strenuous plow cultivation and travel, and replace matrilineal and matrilineal structures by patrilineal and patrilineal ones. With these changes, women often lose economic and social status.³² Men view menstruation more negatively.³³ Myths describe how a woman's primordial offense led to the origin of menses, taboos, and confinement in a hut during her "impure" period. Such myths are reflected in social practice. On the death of their husbands, women are subject to lengthy rituals, seclusion, and physical ordeals in order to eliminate pollution, in effect a kind of punishment. They are also relegated to subordinate roles in public rituals. Ibibio women, for instance, once had responsibility for the burial of their dead warriors; by moving sacred boughs over the body of a deceased warrior, they extracted his virility for the community. Today this important ritual has disappeared.

Despite the new masculine symbolism and male dominance, a degree of female power and status remains. (1) In life-cycle rituals, in a submerged line of descent, or in personal rituals of status transformation, women exercise their spiritual qualities. (2) They also

gain temporary power and overcome traditional male hierarchy through possession, divination, healing, and mystical knowledge. Greenbaum argues:

Power . . . lies at the core of possession ideology. The essential trait . . . is *heteronomy*: personal powerlessness to define the authentic self. . . . Possession is therefore common and institutionalized . . . in hierarchical societies . . . ; possession trance is not merely a protest against imposed identity and oppressive power: it also ironically affirms these realities on an ultimate level, or the transcendental spirit that "possesses" one also submerges the impotent self.³⁴

The Gã of Ghana may be a case in point. Hackett says "the priesthood is a kinship-ascribed male status chiefly concerned with representing humans to the gods; mediumship is an achieved female status concerned with communicating the messages of gods and humans to one another." (Of course, despite its origin in a reaction against subordination, female religious power and authority through possession are still powerful and authoritative. They attract both men and women.)

(3) Sometimes political power continues to be passed through the female line; this helps preserve some status for women. The sanctity of Lovedu, the rain queen of the Transvaal, observes Hackett, is preserved by various royal institutions and royal matrilineality; her feminine qualities of reconciliation, reciprocity, and diplomacy are highly regarded. These qualities also characterize the district heads called "mothers," even though some are now men, who mediate between the queen and her people. This helps to maintain the high status of women in an otherwise patrilineal society. (4) That traditional African societies have had distinct male and female spheres helps women to preserve power. Says Hackett, "women frequently act collectively within their own sphere, either through voluntary associations or through institutions that parallel those of men." (5) Women continue, moreover, to do much of the agricultural labor and trade; they dominate the retail food trade, for example, in West Africa. This may cause problems with men. Among the Nupe, for instance, women occupy a strong economic position as itinerant traders; because men are often indebted to or dependent on them, they fear women's secrecy, supernatural powers, knowledge, and refusal to become pregnant for professional reasons. Consequently, they often view women as witches. By contrast, women