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CHAPTER 4
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MODERN HUNTER-GATHERERS AND EARLY SYMBOLIC CULTURE

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Hunter-gatherers have evolved diverse understandings of the relationship between themselves and the worlds they live in. Sometimes these differ substantially from the understandings of people such as ourselves. In particular, hunter-gatherers often construct the category 'nature' differently than do people in other societies. They view their relation to the environment differently, and therefore they understand the relation between the environment and the cosmos differently. However, not all hunter-gatherers are in agreement, either as individuals or, more particularly, as exponents of their traditional, cultural understandings of such relations. In many ways, African and Australian hunter-gatherers have developed rather different views of the world.

In order to probe the origins of symbolic behaviour, it is useful to engage ourselves in some symbolic thought. We need to consider the potential relations between nature and culture, and between one human and another, as these may have been conceived by early man. We also need to consider the place of our ideas in the history of anthropological and archaeological thought. Our generation is not the first to speculate on the origins of language, culture or ritual. The data presented in this volume may be new, but many of the ideas are old. The debates which engaged our ancestors, both 100,000 years ago and 100 years ago, should engage us today.

In this chapter, I shall begin by considering the problem in its historical context, before considering the principal features of human foraging societies in general and the features of Australian and southern African foraging societies. Within the history of anthropological thought, different positions have emerged about whether the world-views of African or Australian hunter-gatherers present the best models for the reconstruction of early culture. Broadly, the Australianist view has dominated evolutionist thinking in social anthropology since the late nineteenth century (in so far as social anthropologists have been concerned with evolution at all). However, the earlier and most commonly cited alternative, the Africanist one.

is now gaining ground as a result of new work in genetics and archaeology, and is the one I favour as the more likely. The decision must rest not merely on which might be geographically appropriate but on which has the greater propensity to define the necessary social and cosmological order while allowing flexibility for cultural adaptation. (Other possibilities, including Amazonian or Inuit world-views, have not been part of this debate and will not be dealt with here.)

SOCIETY, LANGUAGE, TOTEMISM AND EXOGAMY

The preoccupations of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers were, among other things, with matters relating society to the individual and language to society. Then, especially in the late nineteenth century, the narrower concerns of totemism and exogamy took over as major interests.

The seventeenth-century legal theorists Hugo Grotius and Samuel Pufendorf, among others, regarded society as the natural condition of humankind. In contrast, Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, despite their differences on the goodness of human nature, regarded the individual as prior and solitude as natural (see, for example, Slotkin 1965: 143-74, 320-41). In the nineteenth century, Sir Henry Maine (1861) was, for the time being, to solve the problem through his argument that the family, and not a literal 'social contract', is the basis of society.

On language, there were debates as early as the seventeenth century on universal grammar versus a *tabula rasa*. There were debates about whether language originated in warning calls or in proper names. There were also debates on which came first, language or society. Rousseau (1966 [1791]), for example, held that they emerged simultaneously. Lord Monboddo (1773) argued that society had to come first; part of his proof was the existence of what he called the 'Orang Outang' - the speechless but supposedly gregarious 'Man' of South East Asia and central Africa (not the same species as the orang-utan we know today!). Those seventeenth- and eighteenth-century notions are important, as we shall see, because they have something to tell us about two other alternatives: evolution and revolution.

Meanwhile, through the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, many of the great anthropological theorists have grappled with the origin of totemism, the origin of exogamy, and the relation between them (see, for example, Kuper 1988: 76-122). J. F. McLennan had a theory; W. Robertson Smith had a theory; E. B. Tylor, Edward Westermarck, Andrew Lang, Sigmund Freud, Émile Durkheim and others were all involved in heated debate. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown had two theories

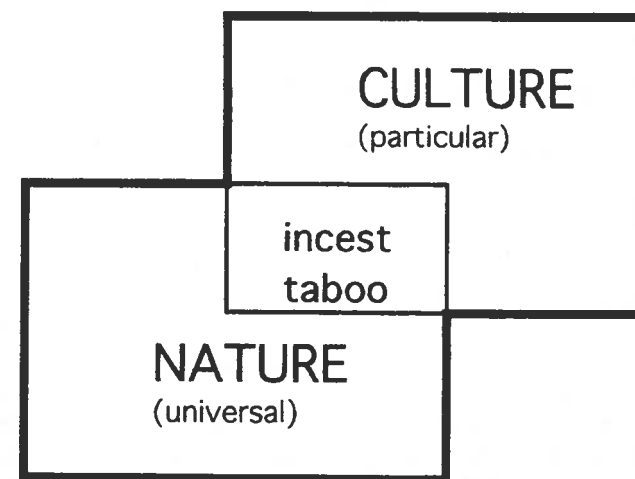
of totemism, and Sir James Frazer had at least three. Significantly, Alexander Goldenweiser and, following him, Claude Lévi-Strauss, argued that the monolithic concept of 'totemism' had no basis. Yet most theorists accepted its utility and most based their ideas of totemism primarily on the ethnography provided by Spencer and Gillen (1899, 1904) on the Arunta (Aranda) and other tribes of central and northern Australia.

Durkheim's theory (especially 1898) had interesting parallels with Knight's (1991, this volume) – Durkheim believed that primitive men were in awe of blood and refused to cohabit with females of their respective clans, since their totemic gods were thought to inhabit this clan blood. In contrast, Lang and Frazer emphasized the consubstantial relation between a man and his totem. Tylor saw totemism simply as a special case of ancestor worship. Yet whatever their considerable disagreements, almost all theorists saw a relation between totemism and exogamy, and most of them held that totemism had evolved first. And, by implication at least, almost all of them saw this as an answer to the problem of primal human society, because they believed that Australian Aboriginal culture represented a survival of early culture.

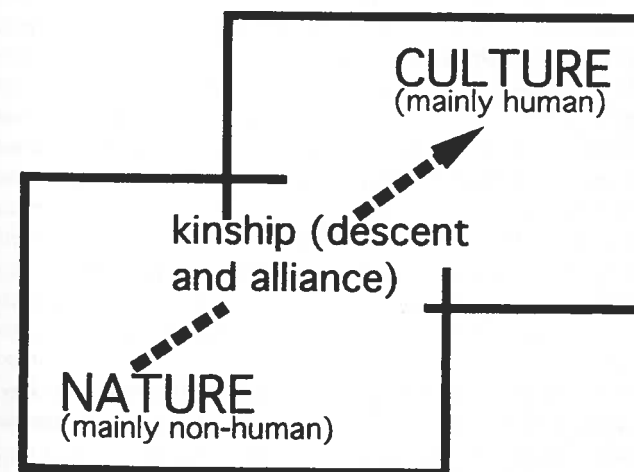
In a crude sense, virtually all of them, including Durkheim, saw some aspect of belief as prior to social institutions (totemism prior to exogamy). However, it is common to single out Durkheim (especially 1915 [1912]) as asserting, against Frazer in particular, that religious belief only exists in a social context. It is not an individual's relation to his or her totem which is important, but the relation between social groups represented by totemism, or, ultimately (according to both Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss), the symbolic and mythological relations between the totemic species themselves.

I propose we reject the constellation of nineteenth-century ideas which necessarily drew together totemism, exogamy, the incest taboo and ritual, and keep an open mind about the general relation between society and cosmology. Frankly, I agree with Frazer (for example 1910: IV) that totems may well have once been edible species that had become forbidden; that where totemism and exogamy coexist, as among the Aranda, they can be quite separate; that totemism may have originated in many places independently; and that it may precede but nevertheless spur on the evolution of systems of food production. In the last instance, it is noteworthy that African totemism tends to be found in pastoralist societies, where it provides a separation of symbolic from productive activities. Of course, Frazer's notions are not any more verifiable than Durkheim's, but they should be falsifiable through counter-example.

Now consider a debate of our own time: that between Claude Lévi-Strauss and Robin Fox on the place of the incest taboo as the bridge between nature and culture (see Figure 4.1). According to Lévi-Strauss



Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969 [1949])



Robin Fox (1975)

Fig. 4.1 Lévi-Strauss versus Fox.

Table 4.1 *Evolution versus revolution*

	<i>Human/animal 'kinship'</i>	<i>Basis of society</i>	<i>Development of ritual</i>
<i>Evolution</i>	Continuity (e.g. Fox)	Family (e.g. Maine)	Increasing complexity (e.g. Frazer)
<i>Revolution</i>	Discontinuity (e.g. Lévi-Strauss)	Social contract (e.g. Rousseau)	Sex strike, rapid spread of totemism, etc. (e.g. Knight)

(1969 [1949]), the incest taboo is part of nature because it is found in all cultures. However, it is part of culture because it is defined differently by different cultures. Some cultures define mating between cousins as incestuous; some do not. So, in essence, the definition of incest is the definition of culture itself. It is also the quintessence of humanity, since only humans have incest taboos.

However, Robin Fox (1975; see also Fox 1983 [1980]) has an alternative view. Fox's division of culture from nature has an area of overlap, just like Lévi-Strauss's, but his area of overlap is but a blur. He takes the view that human kinship systems are partly cultural intrusions onto human nature, and partly expressions of human nature, that is, of the natural propensities of our species. Furthermore, the rudiments of human kinship are found among non-human primates. For example, among chimpanzees and gorillas, each male knows his place in a hierarchy. When given females are in oestrus, high-ranking males get privileged sexual access to them. Such a system, says Fox, has the roots of matrilineal descent. Female-centred kin groups form: a mother and her children, another mother and her children, and so on. Importantly, the members of a given, small matrilineal kin grouping mate with each other less often than one would expect in a normal statistical distribution of matings. They tend to mate with members of other such kin groupings.

Thus Lévi-Strauss sees the revolutionary principle of the incest taboo, which he roughly equates with exogamy, as the origin of culture. Fox sees a continuity of evolution between non-human and human kinship. We can sum up all I have said thus far in a simple chart (Table 4.1). I would only add that the question of Africa versus Australia is also a question of the relative emphasis on evolution versus revolution. This is not to deny a symbolic revolution in either case, or to suggest that the time depth would be any different. The fundamental difference between the two is that African hunter-gatherer society is based on flexible accommodation between society, nature and the universe, whereas Aboriginal Australian cosmology assumes an exact fit which is quite foreign to African notions of the relation between social and cosmological spheres. Essentially, to support an Africanist model implies a greater emphasis on evolution from

higher primate society, whereas to support an Australianist model implies a greater emphasis on the human revolution.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN HUNTING-AND-GATHERING SOCIETIES

The precise definitions and exact time depths of our genus and species have long been matters of hot debate. The timing and cause of the origin of culture are the subjects of related debates. Yet none deny that only relatively little of humankind's time on earth has been spent in any subsistence activities other than hunting, gathering and fishing. Let us take that as a baseline.

Living hunter-gatherers are largely confined to parts of the world which are inaccessible or unattractive to agricultural peoples. They are found in the deserts of Australia and southern Africa, in the frozen wastes of the Arctic, and in the jungles of central Africa and Southeast Asia. Hunting and gathering activities are successful adaptations to harsh environments, and the way in which living hunter-gatherers explain their relation to the environment can be extremely revealing.

Hunter-gatherers exhibit a variety of different forms of social structure. However, there are a number of attributes which are common to most hunter-gatherer societies and which serve to differentiate them both from most non-foraging human societies and from the social groupings of non-human higher primates. One may quibble over details, but in essence there are some ten central, differentiating attributes of human hunter-gatherer societies. These are as follows: (1) large territories for the size of population and notions of territorial exclusivity; (2) a nested social organization with the band as the primary unit and further units both within and beyond the band; (3) a lack of social stratification except as regards sex (or gender) and age; (4) sexual differentiation in activity and in rituals (which take specific forms, for example emphasizing hunting) to mark initiation into adult gender roles; (5) mechanisms for the redistribution of accumulated resources; (6) universal kinship, that is the recognition of kin beyond the band to the limits of human interaction; (7) structures which relate humans to animals or to animal species; (8) a world order based on even, as opposed to odd, numbers; (9) a world order founded on symbolic relations within and between levels; (10) flexibility. Let us look at each one in turn.

1. Each hunter-gatherer population occupies a relatively large, recognized territory. In other words, they have a very low population density compared to non-hunter-gatherers; hunting and gathering are not labour-intensive activities, but they are land-intensive.

- Non-human primates may also have relatively low population densities and defend their territories, but human hunter-gatherers, in addition, have the capability of expressing, through verbal and often symbolic means, the boundaries between their group and some other, similar group.
2. A band level of social organization, with both larger and smaller units, is typical of human hunter-gatherers. They live in small groups of twenty or thirty people (for example, in the case of most African, South Asian and Australian peoples), or a maximum of a few hundred people (in the case of northern North American Indians and other temperate-climate populations). The larger groups often form only seasonally, and such 'composite' bands afterwards break down into smaller units to hunt in their own separate territories. Similarly, some smaller bands, such as those of the G/wi and the !Xô Bushmen, break down into family units to exploit resources separately within band territories. Likewise, all 'band societies' recognize units larger than the band, such as the macro-band or band cluster or the language group.
 3. Hunter-gatherer societies generally exhibit a lack of social hierarchy except, sometimes, through age and sex. Where social stratification exists, it tends to be where hunting and gathering are accompanied by fishing as a major subsistence activity, especially where there are rich fishing grounds (for example, in Northwest Coast North America). Generally, hunter-gatherers have no class structure, and they give little formal recognition to leadership roles. Indeed, when compared both to non-human primates and to human non-foragers, there tends to be relative equality between the sexes, though with sexual differentiation in subsistence activities. Strict age and gender hierarchy are characteristic mainly of Australian Aboriginal societies. In this sense, they may indeed resemble non-foragers, as suggested by James Woodburn's (1980: 108-9) description of Aborigines as people who 'farm out' their women and therefore are not good examples of immediate-return economy.
 4. Hunter-gatherers the world over do recognize a distinction between men and women in subsistence and in ritual. In subsistence, men hunt (or fish) and women do most of the gathering of wild plants, firewood and water. In ritual, there are separate initiation ceremonies for boys and for girls. Girls' initiation stresses sexuality over subsistence or non-sexual knowledge, and girls are generally initiated individually (at the time of their first menstrual period). Boys' initiation, on the other hand, tends to be collective (more than one boy being initiated at a time), often involves the teaching of hunting skills and the transmission of secret knowledge, and not infrequently the two

- are linked. It can have a sexual aspect as well, but this is rarely its main purpose. Only in Australia is genital mutilation common.
5. Hunter-gatherers also have mechanisms to distribute the produce of their hunting and gathering activities, not only to the immediate family of the procurer, but also to his or her relatives and other members of the band (cf. Bird-David 1992). They do not accumulate a surplus. As they are nomadic, it is useless for them to accumulate more than they can carry. Also, accumulation incurs an obligation to give things away, so there is neither the incentive nor even any real possibility to accumulate wealth. What a person or group cannot use, they often share out immediately, through systems of rules which determine who gets what. Among various Kalahari Bushman groups, for example, a man gives his parents-in-law the best parts of the hind quarters of any large game animal he shoots. He gives other parts to other relatives, depending on kin relationship and on their participation in the hunt. Among several Bushman groups, non-consumable movable property, in turn, is distributed in an elaborate system of formalized exchange. Australian Aboriginal peoples also share the meat of the hunt, though in place of formalized gift-giving, gambling is common. There is however, far from a clear-cut distinction between Africa and Australia here, as East African foragers gamble and Aborigines do exchange their most valuable commodity – their relatives – in very elaborate networks indeed.
 6. Hunting and gathering societies are usually based on a universal system of kinship classification (Barnard 1978). In other words, they classify all members of society as 'relatives', some being 'husbands' or 'wives' and others 'brothers' or 'sisters', some being 'parents' or 'children' (usually a relatively formal relationship) and others 'grandparents' or 'grandchildren' (often a more casual and indulgent relationship). Hunting and gathering societies have evolved various mechanisms for this beyond simple genealogical ties. Among the Ju/'hoansi (!Kung) and Nharo Bushmen, for example, people bear their grandparents' names, and namesakes are treated as 'grand-relatives'. A sister's namesake is treated as a 'sister', a brother's namesake as a 'brother', and so on. Among Australian Aborigines, the key mechanism through which classification takes place is the moiety, section or subsection system. Through universal kinship, the incest taboo is generated and maintained – a point I will return to.
 7. There are also structures which relate humans to animals or to animal species. Especially in the Arctic, animals and humans are thought to be in communication. Elsewhere, such as in the Kalahari, animals possess essences which are released by the hunter upon killing. In some societies, universal kinship is carried through to domestic

animals; Australian Aborigines classify their dogs as 'sisters', 'wives' and so on. And, of course, there can be totemistic relations between an individual and a species and totemic relations between a group and a species.

8. On a horizontal plane, that is any given level of the world-view, symbolic order is generally present in the form of binary oppositions or sets of such oppositions forming an order defined through an even number of elements. There are cultures in which threes, fives, sevens, and nines are important (Needham 1979: 6-15). Odd-number-conscious societies tend to be stratified, agricultural ones, where odd numbers are used to express differences between groups: our group, the group above us, the group below us, and so on. Hunter-gatherer societies, in contrast, tend to be egalitarian, and most operate in some multiple of two. This can include such sociocentric divisions as genders and moieties, and it can also include egocentric categories such as alternate generations and the distinction between a woman's classificatory brothers and her potential husbands.
9. Hunter-gatherers recognize a world order which expresses comparable symbolic relations within and between levels. It is conventional for us to think of these levels as comparable to the environment, society and cosmology, though hunter-gatherers themselves do not necessarily see the world order in quite this way; I will come back to this point later. Within one hierarchical sphere or level, say that of heavenly bodies, there will be relations which mimic those of another, say the animal world or the human world. Gender differentiation exists at all these levels. Interestingly, in light of Knight's theory of the origin of culture, hunter-gatherers the world over consider the moon as male or masculine and the sun as female or feminine. Non-foragers have almost invariably reversed this relation, with the moon as female and the sun as male, though why this should be is a subject beyond the scope of the present paper (but see Power and Watts 1997).
10. All these attributes are combined with a degree of flexibility which is rare in non-foraging societies. This flexibility is manifest in band migrations from waterhole to waterhole and in seasonal aggregations and dispersals which occur according to the availability of resources. It is also apparent in the freedom of individuals to move from place to place and even to change band membership. Because of the flexibility in intra-group relations, modern hunter-gatherers are able to take advantage of scattered and often meagre resources which non-hunter-gatherers could not hope to utilize.

The flexibility discussed in the final point above has enabled modern hunter-gatherers to retain aspects of their cultures, even when living on the

fringe of areas exploited by pastoral and agricultural peoples. Indeed some hunter-gatherers in both central and southern Africa have been able to move between a hunting-and-gathering lifestyle and a farming or herding lifestyle, depending on season and on the relative abundance of traditional resources from year to year. Some anthropologists would exclude such part-time foragers from the category 'hunter-gatherers', while others see this flexibility as an aspect of the *hunting-and-gathering*, or more broadly, the *foraging* lifestyle itself (see Barnard 1993).

Arguably, flexibility stretches even in some cases to the construction of a flexible or 'fluid' cosmological system. Bushmen, for example, develop their own, individualistic understandings of the world. Even the same individual can employ diverse and seemingly contradictory notions about deities and mythological figures in order to express different views of the world according to circumstances (Guenther 1979; Barnard 1988). Other hunter-gatherers, especially Australian Aborigines, have cosmologies which are more ordered. Yet even here, the ways in which categories are combined and recombined, in which symbolic associations are made between seemingly disparate objects within them (for example, people, animals or heavenly bodies), and in which individuals manipulate the rules of categorization, all betoken a flexibility too. Order and flexibility are not entirely opposites, and can at times be complementary.

Finally, the flexibility inherent in hunter-gatherer social organization, together with the very long time span that often separates even adjacent groups of hunter-gatherers, has generated a diversity within culture areas which is sometimes overlooked. The Kalahari Bushmen are not just one people, but indeed represent literally dozens of quite distinct ethnic groups who speak just as many languages and dialects. The Australian Aborigines are even more linguistically and culturally diverse. They speak languages of several different indigenous families (within one super-family), and the time depth which marks the divergence of Australian peoples – some 40,000 years – is far greater than that which separates the languages of the Indo-European language family, and certainly the cultures of the European nations.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ABORIGINES AND BUSHMEN

The similarities between Australian Aborigines and southern African Bushmen are not inconsiderable. Both populations live primarily in desert environments. Their foraging strategies, their seasonal aggregations and dispersals, and their group size and social interactions are similar. Yet they are very different in a number of respects. I would isolate six central differences, which are mainly ways in which the Aborigines differ from virtually

all other modern hunter-gatherers: (1) their belief in the Rainbow Serpent and the Dreaming; (2) their spiritual relation to the land; (3) their spiritual relation to other species (through totemism); (4) their relation to each other through unilineal descent and strong clan ties; (5) a system of negative and positive marriage rules related to such ties and to divisions of society into moieties, semi-moieties, sections and subsections; (6) a parallel division of the universe into such categories. The existence of these features and, more importantly, the unity of cosmology with social forms they create imply if anything the reverse of what nineteenth-century writers thought. The Australian Aboriginal world-view is the most coherent, or perhaps more precisely the most *structurally evolved*, the world has yet seen (cf. von Brandenstein 1970; Turner 1993).

1. The belief in the Rainbow Serpent, and more particularly the Dreaming, provides a common mythological basis for society across Australia. It also provides Aborigines with a coherent explanation of the relations between time and place, land and society, humans and animals, and indeed the order of the universe. (Although Rainbow Serpent-type creatures feature too in African mythology and rock art, they do not carry this symbolic weight; and there is no African equivalent to the Dreaming.) As flexibility is the hallmark of foraging society in general, order is the hallmark of Aboriginal society in particular.
2. In terms of their *use of the land*, Australian groups are not unlike Bushmen. Desert groups on the two continents live in similar-size units (twenty-five or fifty people in a band, depending on resources). In each case there are groups who live outside desert areas, and rely on fishing and a variety of seasonal adjustments depending on flooding as well as rainfall. In each case also, there is a high degree of flexibility in living arrangements. Yet, while their use of the land is similar, their *relation to the land* is very different. Aborigines recognize a spiritual relation to the land which is vested particularly in sacred sites. Sometimes these are areas where spirits are said to be especially present, where they emerged from the ground in the Dreaming. Specific groups are associated with specific pieces of land and with sacred sites, of which they are custodians, and the relation between groups of men and their land and sacred sites is represented ritually through initiation ceremonies. It is also represented even through 'kinship' – among the Aranda, in the form of 'conception' clans which complement matrilineal and patrilineal clans (see, for example, Strehlow 1947: 86–96).
3. Spiritual relations to other species are represented through totemism. Totemism is found in many societies, and this was of course a reason why nineteenth-century writers dwelt on it. Yet in Australia, totemic relations are much more elaborated than elsewhere, whereas in Africa

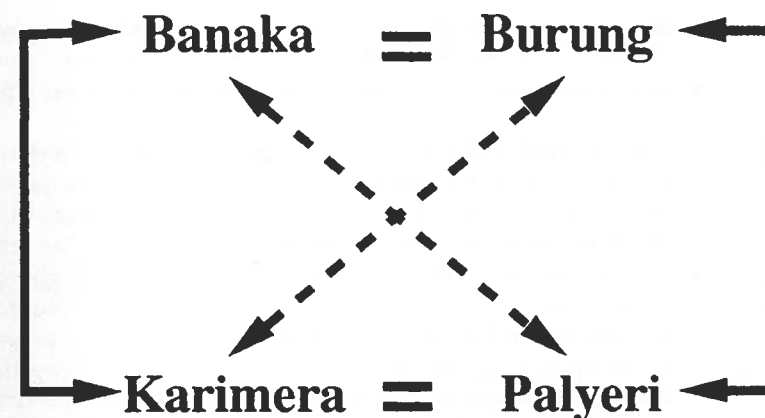


Fig. 4.2 A representation of Kariera rules of marriage and descent.

4. Australian Aborigines have rights and obligations through their totemic clans, rights and obligations over clans to which they are related (such as in bestowal and in funeral and reburial rituals), and relations between groups ordered through rigid systems which define each person's place in the social order. There is flexibility, but it is flexibility to account for 'wrong' marriages, flexibility to fit one's own culturally-determined divisions into those of one's neighbouring tribe, flexibility to bend the rules – not flexibility to dispense with the categories. I once argued that perhaps Bushmen had been on their way to inventing an Australian-like world order when they were interrupted by outside forces (Barnard 1975), but the fact is they never developed even the clan system, much less a system of cross-cutting clans, sections and so on.
5. Australian Aborigines have the most elaborate marriage rules of any society. What is more, these rules exist within systems, which themselves exist within a continent-wide system of mathematical precision (see, for example, Maddock 1973). This fact was well known to Radcliffe-Brown, Lévi-Strauss and others, and has been an object of both fascination and terror to generations of anthropology students. In the classic case of the Kariera, for example, the world was divided into four sections: Banaka, Burung, Karimera and Palyeri (see Figure 4.2).

Table 4.2 *Kariera totemic associations (after von Brandenstein 1970)*

<i>Banaka (Pannaga)</i>	<i>Burung (Purunu)</i>
savage goanna (dry)	lazy goanna (moist)
active	passive
abstract	abstract
<i>Karimera (Karimarra)</i>	<i>Palyeri (Palt'arri)</i>
plains kangaroo (fierce)	hill kangaroo (mild)
active	passive
concrete	concrete

Banaka married Burung, and Karimera married Palyeri. The children of a male Banaka were Palyeri (these forming one patrilineal moiety and set of patrilineal clans), and the children of a female Banaka were Karimera (these forming one matrilineal moiety which, in the mind of the anthropologist if not those of the Kariera, bisected the patrilineal moieties to form the four sections). The sections are also united by an alternating-generation principle: Banaka and Burung in one, and Palyeri and Karimera in the other. Kinship terms map directly onto the sections; though terms for parents and children are different, terms for grandparents are the same as those for grandchildren (see, for example, Romney and Epling 1958). Thus egocentric categories like 'grandfather', which are common to all kinship systems, are amplified by their congruence with the sociocentric categories of the section system, namely the four sections themselves.

6. Above all, Aborigines classify their world as they classify their relatives. The categories of marriage are the categories of totemic relations, and these also map onto the categories of night and day, moon and sun, fresh water and sea water, activity and passivity, abstractness and concreteness, and a host of cross-cutting as well as coinciding binary oppositions. The totemic associations may embody these, creating a world order in which animals may represent not only social groups but the entire structure of the universe (see Table 4.2).

Yet a further question to be considered here is how the Aborigines see this world order. Briefly, I would suggest that most social anthropologists see the relation between society and the rest of the world order in a hierarchical and essentially Durkheimian way, with society sandwiched between the environment and the cosmology, and with a causal or transformative relation between these elements as indicated in Figure 4.3. (At least within the British tradition, most would emphasize the relationship between society and cosmology over that between the environment and society.)

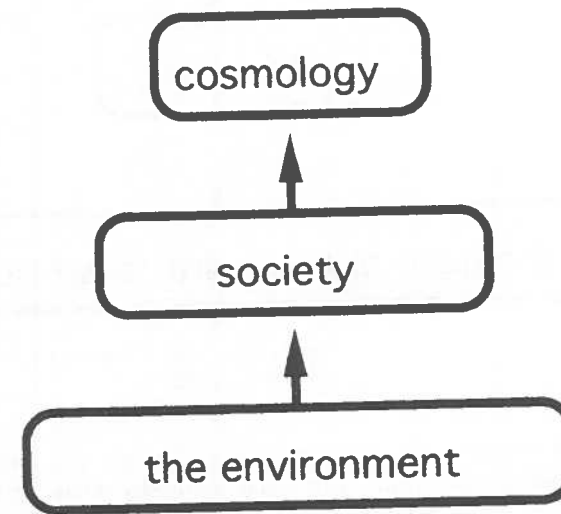


Fig. 4.3 *An anthropological model of the relation between the environment, society and cosmology.*

In Aboriginal thought, all these elements are so interrelated that it becomes difficult to separate them and certainly difficult to give priority to material causation or social behaviour over cosmological assumptions. It has recently been argued that in Aboriginal thought, form is prior to content and thus, as Frazer suggested, society can only reflect the natural order (Turner 1991). What separation there is involves a horizontal distinction between land and people, with totemic spirits associated with particular groups of people, and these spirits in turn associated with particular plots of land. Indeed, there is a direct association between spirits and land. Cosmology (as a belief system) is not necessarily dependent upon people or society if it is taken as representing the true nature of the world, which to Aborigines it of course does. There is also a sense in which society itself rests simultaneously on both the environment and the spirits which are associated with it (cf. Maddock 1973: 21–44). What that implies is a reversal of the Durkheimian notion that society is the source of cosmology. It also reverses ideas held by many ecological anthropologists that the main features of social organization in foraging societies simply spring from the environment. To put it simply, Aborigines see their society as founded on natural associations which are spiritually manifest. This view is represented in Figure 4.4.

So, why not Australian models? There are essentially two interrelated reasons. First, Australian models are virtually unique to Australia. No

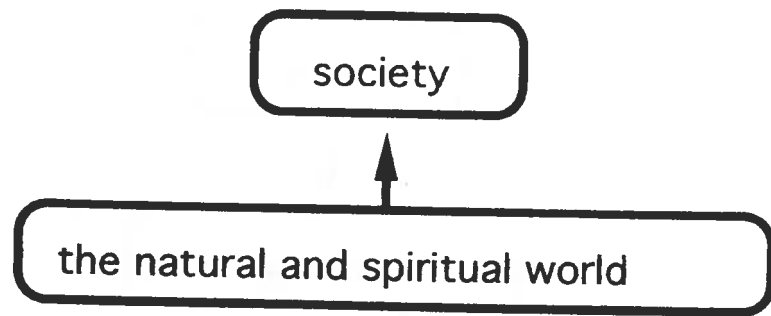


Fig. 4.4 *An Aboriginal model of the relation between the environment, society and cosmology.*

other continent, as far as we know, has produced quite the degree of cosmological structure or structural uniformity as has Australia. Although structures such as those Aborigines possess may once have had a wider distribution, nevertheless no unified system has existed within the historical record in Africa, Asia, Europe or the Americas. Nor is it necessary to have evolved moiety or section systems in order to classify the central elements of one's cosmology or to classify individuals of opposite sex as possible or not possible as mates. Although it has been argued that a four-section system might be considered *logically* simpler for classifying kin than one based on egocentric categories alone (e.g. Allen 1986), it seems unlikely that such logical simplicity would have evolved or diffused everywhere, only to be replaced by more flexible systems as technology advanced.

Secondly, Australian models are too elaborate to be the basis of early culture. They relate to social divisions which are necessary only when form becomes an end in itself. Some of the more elaborate systems were, apparently, only being worked out in the nineteenth century, when Europeans were arriving. Further, Australian models require the investment of too much intellectual energy for them to be primal. With due respect to Aboriginal thinkers, in my view their cosmological system is self-defining. That is, it finds order in order, as much as it finds order in the external world. Pantheism and 'primitive monotheism', which are not incompatible, characterize the rest of the religions of the world's hunting-and-gathering peoples even better than do animism and totemism, let alone a religion based on form alone.

In contrast, the Bushman world-view is based on one simple principle: an extreme flexibility at all levels. In relation to the six attributes of the Aboriginal world-view, we have six alternative ones: (1) a belief in one or many deities as well as spiritual essences ascribed to things; (2) a

connection to the land through an intimate knowledge coupled with a belief in ancestral right; (3) emotional, but not totemic, relations to animals hunted; (4) a lack of clan organization, but wide cognatic kin networks; (5) marriage rules which follow egocentric means of universal kin category extension; (6) a complete separation between levels, that is no uniform division of the world. This last attribute reflects the greater flexibility inherent in Bushman society. I will touch just briefly on each (see, for example, Barnard 1992 for ethnographic details and further references).

1. Bushmen generally believe in one main deity. Though essentially male, often he is divided into male and female halves, sometimes into good and evil halves. Or the male and female, the good and evil, are all considered part of a pantheon of deities which are not definite in number. They merge with other things; they are represented, for example, in the moon or the sky.
2. Bushmen do not have a spiritual relation to the land in the same sense that Aboriginal peoples do. Nevertheless, Bushman groups do occupy delimited territories. Families, bands and band clusters can all be territorially based. People change band membership, but bands, as corporate entities, retain rights over resources. The core members may be any who are descended from putative band founders, and not just those in a single line of descent. Indeed, lines of (unilineal) descent are essentially foreign to Bushman ideology.
3. Bushmen may have relations to the animals they hunt, for example through the spiritual force called *n!ow* among the Ju/'hoansi (Marshall 1957). Only a small number of groups are totemic, like the Hiechware – the example used by Frazer. Totemism is not a necessary feature of exogamy, nor of food exchange. Bushmen, of course, maintain both egocentrically defined marriage rules and various forms of exchange without totemic beliefs.
4. Bushman groups generally lack clan structures. Again, those which exist, in the eastern Kalahari, resemble those of the neighbouring Bantu-speaking herding peoples and not the clan structures of the Khoekhoe, who are related to the Bushmen and who themselves lack totemism. Nevertheless, Bushmen extend kinship widely. Ju/'hoansi and Nharo do it through namesake links, G/wi and G//ana do it simply through friendship links. Among the Nharo one's namesake is classified as one's 'grandrelative'. Even ethnographers can be incorporated into the system of universal kinship by being given a Nharo name. This brings everyone into the same 'kinship' system. Consequently, one may distinguish from 'kinship' those relationships which make up voluntary giving and receiving networks, called *hxaro*

- in Ju or //a! in Nharo, and those within a separate, non-kinship sphere.
5. Universal kinship is often the mechanism of determining the choice of spouse. Far from *not* having elementary structures, several Bushman groups indeed do have them in the sense that they possess positive marriage rules. One must marry a member of the category 'grand-relative' among Central Bushmen (Nharo, G/wi, G//ana, etc.) including the classificatory 'cross-cousin'. They share this particular attribute with Australian Aborigines; what they do not share is a sociocentric means of classification. They do not need it because universal kin category extension can and does function independently both of group structure and of the world order.
 6. Thus the world order has no singular coherence. Its basic property is its flexibility.

For me, the existence of universal kinship structures, without the constraints imposed by totemism, is of prime importance. If, as Dunbar (1993) suggests, a turning point in evolution was marked by the development of language and the expansion of groups to a size of about 150 with a recognition of that as a social unit, then I would suggest that the further expansion of such groups through kin category extension marks an equally significant event. It is also a related event, for with mechanisms such as namesake equivalence (or indeed sections and subsections) one does not need to keep track of ancestors. If people are named after their relatives, as happens among Ju/'hoansi and Nharo, then they may all be presumed descended from an original namesake ancestor whose essence they share (cf. Marshall 1976: 202–3). This is at least as good a model of the origin of human culture as any other.

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PART II

THE EVOLUTION OF ART AND RELIGION