

Summarium. – In many primitive societies of Melanesia, Australia, South America, and Africa the religious status of women is characterized by a significant inconsistency or even antinomy between the mythical past and the actual day-to-day behaviour. The woman is recognized as the inventor and primal owner of ritual paraphernalia, e. g. bull-roarers, or even as creator and owner of the rites and secret societies. Additionally, she is believed, throughout the world, to have concealed and kept the fire in her vagina. According to numerous myths, fire, rites, ownership of paraphernalia, etc. were stolen from her by the men. Since that time the women are excluded from rites and from handling the paraphernalia. – The fieldwork material collected by COLIN M. TURNBULL among the net-hunters of the upper Ituri (Zaire) enables us to demonstrate that the above mentioned mythical complex as well as the corresponding actual "anti-feminine" behaviour may be interpreted as the outcome of Man's elementary need of legitimizing his cultural activity. Among the Mbuti the *molimo* fire, songs and trumpet periodically are taken over by the women and are handed back to the men only after a pay has been made. This may become understandable if we focus our attention on the origin of social norms, and understand, that social norms have to be justified or legitimized by an authority (*pouvoir constituant*) whose social locus *transcends* the society in question. The mythical association of sexual activity with fire making may be understood on the basis of two additional premises: 1. the most elementary normative system is that which regulates sexual activity, 2. this basic normative operation is symbolized by kindling a fire. – The inconsistency between myth and actual behaviour represents the inconsistency between the immanence and the transcendence of a given society. Since the legitimacy of the actual normative system is constantly weakened by entropy, it has to be strengthened again and again by periodically bringing everyday behaviour in unison with myth. – That it is the women who legitimize norms set up and sanctioned by the men may be explained by the fact that the men have to work hard to create and maintain sexual norms culturally, whereas women are cultural beings by "nature": They are given sexual norms in the form of sexual regularity and sexual order as a gift.

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