

Geomentality: exploring spiritual and spatial attitudes in Sitka Alaska

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Spiritual landscapes hold visible and invisible remnants of the past that provide insights for intercultural land conflicts. Surprisingly, they are often overlooked in research. Frameworks explore tangible landscapes, but neglect to ascertain meaning of the apparent. This paper discusses *geomentality*, a practical method to understand cultural mindsets toward the environment. Spiritual and spatial beliefs relate *cosmologies* (i.e., ideas regarding the origin and structure of the universe) to environment attitudes. Tlingit, Russian and American (Judeo-Christian) myths and folklore reveal social structures, roles of humans, gods, and nature and how these interrelate. This study applies geomentality to explain diverse cultural attitudes toward the land and applies these to spatial patterns in place names. Future applications exist for a range of settings including local and international land designation and management, contested land uses, and academia, where spiritual dimensions can enhance studies of culture-land relationships.

1 The dilemma of intercultural land conflicts

One important belief is that *Io Matua* [the supreme god that has always existed, without beginning or end] has given a unique heritage to each and every culture across the world. No culture is more or less important than another – to suggest that there is, is to criticise the Creator. *Rangimarie Turuki Pere, Māori writer* [New Zealand's indigenous people] (in Schaef 1995:383).

In other words, cultures are diverse and equally important. A reasonable premise, yet randomly practiced as land issues around the globe attest. Intercultural conflicts continue through residual postcolonial dualities and land ownership disputes. They appear in government policies developed in cultural isolation and in ongoing debates of appropriate access, custodianship and land management approaches. Designations, land use and planning frameworks continue preferential treatments for some cultures. Community engagement methods for land issues are variable at best, and individual decision-making favours ethnocentricity. Contributing to these complexities, land conflicts are inevitably resolved within Western planning settings. Enhanced cultural understanding is urgently needed.

Exploration from the late 1400s led to conflict between European and indigenous cultures and left dualities of *us* and *them*, *White* and *non-White* embodied in land policies. As at February 2009, New Zealand's *Waitangi Tribunal* had 1,430 claims registered of breaches to the Treaty of Waitangi (*Te Tiriti o Waitangi 1840*). Colonial commercial motives also continue to influence control and ownership of natural resources. Western worldviews commodify the environment, remaining at odds with conservation motives, particularly around oil, gas, and water in Alaska (Haycox 2002). A deeper understanding of the nature and extent of difference across groups can contribute to reaching common ground for use and management of our limited and valuable natural resources. Simultaneously, there is a worldwide resurgence to promote cultural heritage and identity

for indigenous peoples. International policy questions through the United Nations, with their Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) seek to preserve indigenous and world heritage sites, but at the same time raise important questions regarding heritage designations, defining cultural landscape, what to value and by whom.

A lack of regard for cultural diversity exists across these land conflicts. Yet if cultures have unique heritage, surely these are not well understood, since the cost of antagonism impedes national development and social cohesion and is continuing across generations. It is naïve to assume enhanced understanding of cultural diversity will eradicate intercultural conflict, but one certainty for our children, is they will graduate into a “more culturally diverse world than it is today,” (Nair 2003:4). Conflicts will grow. Increasing population and static land supply will heighten issues of contestability over finite resources. These conflicts are not problems to *solve* rather are dilemmas to manage (Johnson 1999). A rice crop failure on Minnesota’s Leech Lake Reservation for example, blamed *government mismanagement of water reservoirs* focusing effort on “recreation and flood control, not for rice production,” (LaDuke 2005:185). Might our global society develop a framework to explore cultural heritage, raise awareness of diverse attitudes toward the environment, inform land dilemmas, and bring Pere’s statement to life?

Cultural geography and geomentality can assist. Geographic scholarship raises awareness “of the nature and significance of different cultural attachments to place,” (Murphy 2006:10). First, this paper sets out the theoretical context for conceptualising geomentality and its role in spiritual landscapes. Next, it introduces the study location and discusses creation myths to explore spiritual and spatial attitudes toward the environment for the main culture groups in Sitka. Geomentalities are compared for Tlingit, Russian and American cultures with brief comments on how such attitudes link to the tangible landscape through place naming. The paper concludes with future applications for geomentality in practical and research settings.

2 Conceptualising spiritual landscapes and geomentality

The obvious context to explore land and culture variables is cultural landscape where “Landscape *is* tension,” (Wylie 2007:1). Past landscape research reveals power relationships in society, how built environments reflect cultural preference and value, and how intangible beliefs link with material expressions (Winchester et al 2003, Wylie 2007). Few studies however combine readings with intangible cultural heritage, despite the growing interest in the area (e.g., the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) 16th General Assembly in 2008 was themed: Finding Spirit of Place – Between the Tangible and Intangible) (Burgess 2009).

Geography and religion topics have ranged from denominational to spatial organisations of religious groups, development of sacred centers and pilgrimages (Park 1994). Traditional topics remain popular like cemetery studies (Zelinsky 1994). Fewer explorations go to ‘new’ geographies of religion, global culture relationships, or contestability in land interests (Kong 2001, Kong and Yeoh 2003, Winchester et al 2003). Traditional studies map distributions and diffusion of religions (Park 1994), while from the 17th century, evidence was sought of how the wisdom of God appeared in ideas of living nature and on all the earth (Glacken 1967). Environmental deterministic studies focused on how the environment provides materials used in religious ceremonies (LaDuke 2005, Howarth 1985) or how uncertain precipitation elevated significance of rain gods in India (Semple 1911). While descriptive, these studies can be simplistic, make inconclusive propositions and miss multivariable explanations. Kong (1990) overviews these topics as a *thesis phase*, then at the *anti-thesis phase* highlights how religion acts through social structures, ending with the *synthesis phase* examining multi-dimensional social and human/environment relationships (e.g., Pyong-Gap-Min’s (2000) investigation of Korean Church social functions for immigrants in New York).

So, religion has long had a role in making places. Cosmological beliefs reflect and influence the built environment. Pueblo and Apache used “designs intended to rebuild the cosmological order in microcosm,” and Duncan (1990) illustrated how the ruling powers in Kandy (Sri Lanka) used religious texts to “expand and legitimate its control in a series of ritualised building programmes,” (Johnson et al 1990:522). Yet this link between invisible spiritual beliefs and geospatial behaviours has not received sufficient attention (Yoon 2006). This paper gives these topics attention through the explanatory framework of geomentality.

2.1 Geomentality

Geomentality positions geographers well for public debates relating to intercultural land conflicts (Murphy 2006). It accurately reflects the combined spiritual and spatial connection of lasting cultural attitudes toward the environment while being a succinct and simple term. *Ge* (earth) and *mentality* (state of mind or mindset) conveys basically, ‘a culture’s state of mind toward the earth.’ Yoon (1986:39) first defined the term as “an established and lasting frame (state) of mind regarding the environment translated into geographic behavioural patterns and cultural landscape.” Figure 1 illustrates how cultural worldview subsets of cosmology and geomentality connect the material (built) and non-material expressions of culture for this study.

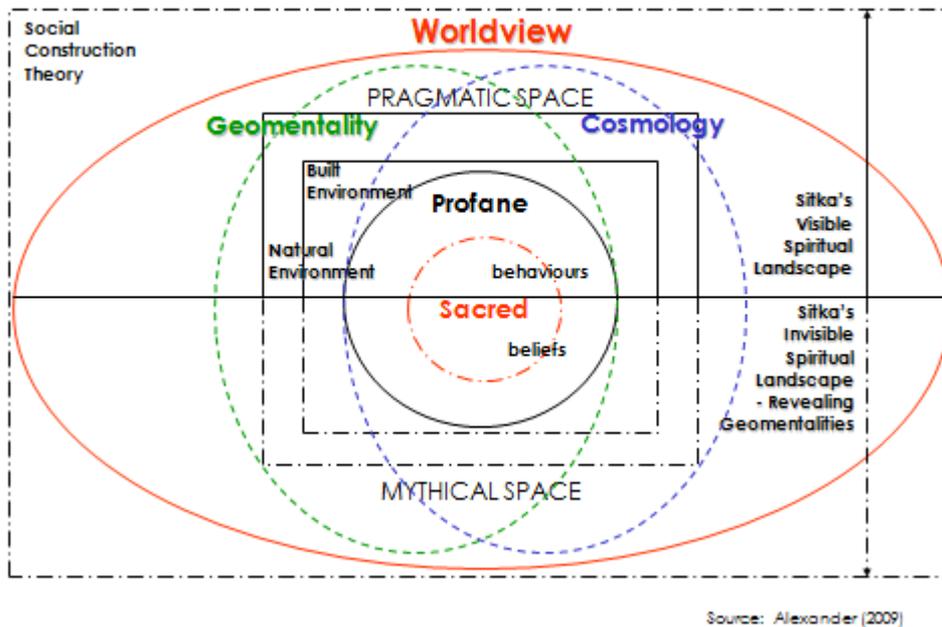


Figure 1. Influencers of beliefs.

Geomentality is distinguished from *geographies of the mind* like geosophy, geopiety (Wright 1996[1947]), and topophilia (Tuan 2001[1977], 1974) that describe relationships between humans and the environment, but have not been used to explain patterns in the cultural landscape and contribute to regional knowledge. It is not time and place bound like cultural landscape and is more stable than individual perception (Tuan 2001[1977]:4). To date, applications of geomentality as a research tool are limited. Yoon (1986, 1991, 1994, 1999) applied geomentality to Māori landscapes in New Zealand and to Korean geomantic folklore. de Freitas (1998) used geomentality to explore contemporary artists and interpretations applied to New Zealand landscape art. Gilbert (1993) conducted an inquiry into the relationship between geomentality of the Japanese Gardener and Artist Andy Goldsworthy. This work strengthens the cosmology-geomentality link to explain spiritual landscape as “cosmologies also provide a strong orientation to the land,” Johnson et al (1994:521). Yoon’s past work has not formally linked the two.

3 Why Sitka Alaska

Sitka is located in the Alexander Archipelago in Southeast Alaska. It the largest city by area in the United States and at July 2007 had 8,640 residents. No roads connect Sitka to Alaska’s interior. It has a moderate coastal climate and diverse economy (health, government, fishers and seafood processing, tourism and education, *Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Data 2005*). The fur trade led Europeans to Sitka in the late 1700s. Russia established a settlement there in 1794 co-existed with the Tlingit until 1802 when the Natives attacked and demolished the fort. Russians retaliated in 1804 thereafter co-habiting until Alaska was sold in 1867.

Sitka is small and dynamic providing a postcolonial spiritual landscape setting, multiple cultural influences in development, location benefits and numerous reference materials. Its remoteness has assisted to preserve the Tlingit, Russian and American inscriptions in the landscape. Attracting much interest, research on Sitka reflects anthropological themes, preservation of traditional Tlingit culture, and the recording of historic events. There is little research on cross-cultural influences and spiritual/religious landscape.

4 Tlingit, Russian & American geomentalities

Cosmological study objects, like creation myths, together with other intangibles like legends, folklore and proverbs reveal a depth in cultural attitudes to the environment that enhance the reading of the spiritual landscape. Myths hold powerful information about how a culture structures the universe, cultural morals for living, beliefs regarding sacredness and attitudes toward nature. Recorded primary sources and religious documents are best for exposing an unbiased worldview (Berndt 1983, Burke 2005, Duncan and Duncan 1988, Duncan 1990, Park 1994). Distinctions between myths, folklore and legends are not always apparent as their veracity differs between cultures. Despite folklore *fiction*, Bascom (1965:284) notes it provides leads to “cultural details” otherwise overlooked and “a non-ethnocentric approach” to explore important but “esoteric features,” (see Yoon 2006:311). In this research, myths reveal integrating factors for humans, society, culture and nature that represent worldview and link the subconscious, behaviours, and social structures illustrated in Figure 1. They also “carry thumbprints of history,” (Yolen 1986:5) and link cultural activities and beliefs to local environments. Kong (1990:367) urges geographers to spend more attention on folk religions and myths.

4.1 *Raven cycle myths*

Tlingit geomentality begins with Raven cycle myths. For Tlingit people, creation and other Raven cycle myths occur during the “mythic age” when spirits transformed between animal and human states and clan or migration stories began. Aborigines in Australia refer to this period as The Dreaming. Being mindful of length, the following succinct full oral narrative covers the main aspects of the creation myths reviewed for this work:

In the beginning there was no light. Raven, the most powerful of all being had made the animals, fish, trees, and humanity. He had made all living creatures. But they were all living in darkness because he had not made the sun. One day Raven learned that there was a great chief living along the banks of the Nass River who possessed the sun, the moon and the stars in a carved cedar box. The great chief also had a very beautiful daughter. Both the girl and the treasure were guarded well. Raven knew that he must trick the villagers in order to steal their treasure, so he decided to turn himself into a grandchild of the great chief. He flew upon a tall tree near their house and turned himself into a hemlock needle. Then, disguised as the needle, he fell into the daughter’s drinking cup. When she filled it with water, she drank the needle. Inside the chief’s daughter, Raven became a baby and soon the young woman bore a son who was so dearly loved by the chief that he gave him whatever he asked for. The stars, the moon, and the sun were each held in a beautiful and ornately carved cedar box which sat on the wooden floor of the House. The grandchild, who was actually Raven, wanted to play with the stars and the moon and would not stop crying until the grandfather gave them to him. As soon as he had them, Raven threw them up through the smoke hole. Instantly they scattered across the sky. Although the grandfather was unhappy, he loved his grandson too much to punish him for what he had done. Now that he had tossed the stars and the moon out the smoke hole, the little grandson began crying for the box containing the sun. He cried and cried and would not stop. He was actually making himself sick because he was crying so much. Finally, the grandfather gave him the box. Raven played with it for a long time. Suddenly though, he turned himself back into a bird and flew up through the smoke hole with the box. Once he was far away from the small village on the Nass River, he heard people speaking in the darkness and approached them. “Who are you and would you like to have a light?” he asked them. They said that he was a liar and that no one could give light. To show them that he was telling the truth, Raven opened the ornately carved box and let sunlight into the world. The people were so frightened by it that they fled into

every corner of the world. This is why there are Raven's people everywhere. Now there are stars, the moon, and the sun and it is no longer dark all the time (Smelcer 1993:17-18).

Another version tells of how Raven created rivers by stealing water and dropping some from his beak to make the Nass River with smaller drops to make streams (Postell and Johnson 1996:7). Other Tlingit myths explain: why salmon run up the creeks; naming the north, south, east and west winds; different races and languages spoken; why tides rise and fall; how the blow hole came to be in the great killer whale; significance of the shaman's stick holding power; creation of rain, fog, and more. Different bird species are explained in a story where Raven tells them 'the fire ate all the flesh of the fish,' and there was none left for them (though Raven really ate the fish himself):

Then all of the birds felt very badly, the little chickadee cried bitterly and continually wiping its eyes with its feet, wore away the feathers which ever after showed a white stripe from the corners down. The blue jay was so angry that he tied up the feathers on top of his head which ever since formed a crest, (for when the Tlingit are angry they tie the front hair up in a knot), while the robin in his grief sat too close to the fire and burned his breast red (in Hope III 1982:86-87).

4.2 *Traditional Russian pagan beliefs*

Historic studies tend to use Orthodoxy as a starting point to examine the Russian culture (Black 2004, Kan 1999, Oleksa 1992, Veniaminov 1993). This discussion focuses on earlier traditional Russian culture with pre-Christian pagan beliefs. It helps substantiate the "qualitatively different" Russian-Native relationship projected by Oleksa (1992) and Black (2004: xiii). Comments on the Russian geomentality are based on a collection of 50 Russian folktales from various sources (Afanasiyev 1998, Cavendish 1982, Yolen 1986); and epic verses (Cavendish 1982). Russian people were Christianised at the end of the 10th Century (988) and joined the Eastern Orthodox Church because it best suited the Russian people (artistic, music, colour):

The Russians before conversion had neither temples nor an organized priesthood; they worshipped divine power revealing itself through the various manifestations of nature.

The sun, the wind, the earth and especially the thunderstorm, were considered by them to be the vehicles of divinity (Zernov 1945: 8).

Unfortunately, there is an absence of accepted Russian pagan folklore for comparative purposes. Source materials refer to a nameless "Mother Earth," or sky, which may be a result of the evolution in beliefs and/or loss of written recordings of traditional oral history (Fedotov 1946:7). The elements: wind, frost, sun and moon are the primary features in Russian folklore. The celestial deities (e.g., sky and heavens) play a secondary role. Fedotov (1946:11) considers these are less tangible than the focus on mother earth because the cycles of winter, spring, and production of grain-bearing soil are important for survival. Regarding nature's cycles, springtime is a key part of the year for Russians. Many pagan beliefs honour the springtime, a tradition incorporated within Orthodoxy (Kan 1989). Anchors for the structure of the Russian universe include Mother Earth and the elements, with spirits, humans and animals co-existing together. Movement occurs between the living and afterlife and through ancestry (past, present and future).

4.3 *Judeo-Christian story of creation*

Judeo-Christian cosmology is explored for the American culture. The Judeo-Christian story of Creation is well known, as summarised in *Genesis 1:1-31*, wherein God creates the environment and humanity over a six day period, focusing on one element each day: On the first day he creates light (from the darkness); on the second day sky and water; on the third day the lands, sea and plants; on the fourth day the sun and the moon; on the fifth day birds and fish; on the sixth day animals and humans. On the seventh day of creation God rests, creating a distinction between six days of work (labour) with the seventh day set apart "to remember" the Creator God through worship. The importance of the Judeo-Christian cosmology is reflected in the American founding *Charters of Freedom* (e.g., Declaration of Independence, Constitution, Bill of Rights) reinforcing God's role in creating the United States and protecting the rights of the individual.

4.4 Comparing creation myths

Several aspects are highlighted: the creation of light from darkness; the role of the creator; the evolution of creation; and the concept of time. In the beginning, the Tlingit believe the world was in darkness, void of light, which is similar in other cosmologies such as the Yin/Yang theory for Chinese, the Judeo-Christian (e.g., God creates light on the first day), and Māori cosmology (where Rāngi (sky father) and Papa (earth mother) are created from “one undivided and unknown substance”) (Yoon 1994:307). Barlow (1991:55) notes how European writers translate Te Kore as ‘nothingness’ or ‘void’ which to the Māori mind is “the source of all things,” or what Buddhist teachings refer to as ‘Being’ (Tolle 2004) or “unorganised potential” as yet without form. How *Te Kore* is perceived as important since it is a non-tangible concept which, if recognised as a starting point for the creation of the environment, sets up a framework for belief in invisible or spiritual concepts.

One example of the invisible manifesting in the environment is when the Judeo-Christian God as Creator ‘breathes life into’ humans. For Māori, the separation of light and darkness was “through the application to each of the mauri or life-giving essence,” (Barlow 1991:55). The Tlingit have a similar vital force or essence of life (Chinese qi - chee), or the Pueblo po-wa-ha (water-wind-breath) where, “existence is not determined by physical manifestation, but rather breath, symbolised by movement of water and wind,” (Horwath 1985:25). For Tlingit, vital force runs through all things (e.g., houses are sacred and have life/death). A key difference is the agency involved in granting the vital force. In Tlingit mythology it is inherent, like *Te Kore*, but in Judeo-Christian beliefs the Creator actively ‘designs humanity.’ This distinction sets a power relationship where humanity can supersede or influence the essence of life. Darwin strengthened this position. “Far from eliminating God...evolution made clear that the perfecting of man was the chief object of the creative activity of the universe...the chief among God’s creatures,” (Commanger 1950:84). In Tlingit cosmology all living creatures appear *at the same time* with no evidence to support Raven creating dominion over life forms, or humans as closer to the creator. All living creatures were present when Raven created the world from darkness.

Looking closer at creation and evolution, the Judeo-Christian ‘designed earth’ notion discussed by Glacken (1967) differs to the evolutionary process illustrated in Tlingit and Māori myths. In Māori creation myths Rāngi and Papa beget five offspring, effectively the five gods: Tawhiri (wind and storm), Tangaroa (sea and fish), Tane (forest), Tu (people), Rongo (cultivated foods) and Haumia (wild foods). In Māori myths, the gods “struggle for dominance between relationships” to cause evolutionary changes to the environment (Yoon 1994:305). In the Tlingit mentality, Raven assists humans by stealing the sun, moon and stars, and he forms rivers, streams and the variation in the detail of birds through his interactions with humans and animals. Raven, though viewed as all powerful, has a more harmonious relationship with all living creatures, and is presented as part of the whole natural system and order of things. This contrasts Judeo-Christian traditions of creation by God over a linear six days. Such notions of time lead to the emphasis on historic events (e.g., commemorating Easter, Christmas, Hannukah) whereas Native spiritual teachings are “affirmation-based” and focus on “a sense of order into a chaotic physical present,” (LaDuke 2005:13). Time concepts impact views of ecological preservation and how social relationships are managed.

4.5 Cultural attitudes toward the environment

Tlingit mentality reflects no boundary between different living creatures in human or animal form. All are imbued with life force and spirit. Nature is personified and all living creatures co-exist without one dominating the rest. Similarly in Māori mentality, the land, oceans, rivers, and all living things are inherently tapu (sacred) as they were created with “the power and influence of the gods,” specifically the supreme god (Io) (Barlow 1991:128). The Māori mentality however, sets apart the human role since Māori beliefs are influenced by the “law of conquest”. The domination of nature in the Māori mentality has similarities in the Judeo-Christian attitudes. In Genesis 1:27-28, God tells humans to: *Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.* Humans are able to extinguish animal life to obtain food (Glacken 1967: 157).

Contrasting these views, Russian folklore is useful to conjecture Russian attitudes to the environment. Fifty Russian folk tales and songs were reviewed having strong references to nature in their storyline as some titles illustrate: the Bear and the Fox; Silly Old Grey Wolf; The Crystal Mountain; The Snake Princess; The Birch Tree and the Three Falcons (Afanasiev 1998). In a children's story by JP Lewis (1988), a cow, Buryonka, is given magic powers to assist a peasant family. The cow is 'loved like family,' able to speak to humans, and brings back to life the family's dead children. This illustrates the personification of animals, the triumph of the peasant over the aristocracy and the attitudes toward the forest as a foreboding place reinforcing earlier traditional Russian attitudes toward their environment and the hierarchy of society.

The co-existence of spirits, humans and nature suggests the universalism with which Russians see life/living. Zernov (1945) comments on this connectedness of all things:

A Russian does not divide life into compartments. Classifications and subdivisions, so characteristic of the European mind, do not appeal to him. He thinks and feels along the broad lines of the general and the universal (p177).

The Russian attitude to life as one and undivided, incorporates a collective sentiment among humans and a strong sense of the mutual dependence, perhaps a response to the vastness of the Russian plains. This vastness is exemplified in *The Enchanted Princess*, where Baba Yaga asks the personified south wind, how far away the kingdom is and the wind replies: "It would take a man on foot thirty years and a man with wings ten years to get there, but I can carry him [the man] there in three hours" (Afanasiev 1998:85). Baba Yaga is a common figure in Russian folklore illustrating co-dependence of living, natural and spirit worlds and the important female role within Russian culture: mother earth creator and sustainer of life, both human and animal.

Mother Earth is at the core of Russian pagan religion. The 'mother' link is also articulated by Māori activist, Eva Rickard:

Whenua is land. It is also the placenta within the mother that feeds the child before birth. When the child is born the whenua is treated with respect, dignity and taken to a place in the earth and dedicated to Papatuanuku – the earth mother of the Māori people. There it will nurture the child because our food and our living comes from the earth. It says to the child that this is your Papakainga and it will receive you in death. This, I believe, is the spiritual significance of the land to the Māori people (in Cosedine and Cosedine 2001:102).

It is part of the Tlingit spiritual responsibility to "renew the Earth", which is done through ceremonies, "so that our Mother, the Earth, can continue to support us," (Mann in LaDuke 2005:15). Many ancient cultures choose female figures and the womb to represent the birth of creation, sustenance and nourishment (Tolle 2004:164). From the Tao Te Ching, Tolle (2004:164) interprets Tao as "infinite, eternally present, the mother of the universe."

Concepts of Mother Earth contrast with the harsh view of the land found in the Judeo-Christian religion where the fall from grace is reflected in the "deteriorating condition" of the landscape (Glacken 1967:162-3, 379) a an ongoing need to work hard since Adam ate the fruit which God told him not to:

Because of what you have done, the ground will be under a curse. You will have to work hard all your life to make it produce enough food for you (Genesis 3: 17-18).

Mountains remain as reminders of human sin in both Christian and Māori interpretations (Yoon 1994:305). Looking to Tlingit cosmology and traditional pagan Russian beliefs, there are no fall from grace, and natural landmarks in Tlingit geomentality are personified and respected. The mountain volcano woman *Shee* (Mt Edgecumbe) allows Tlingit to settle the area.

Conservation and custodial aspects represent another difference in cultural geomentalities. The Tlingit geomentality has strong respect and regard for nature illustrated in traditional conservation principles like:

aat ya' ayunei, "Respect everything provided by the Holy Spirit" (from Herman Kitka), is understood to require that one not harvest fish or deer, for example, in excess of one's needs. The Tlingit phrase *daat huyawdzitaakh*, "one cares for (or looks after) it," describes the responsibility of clan or house leaders (*hi't s'a' ati*) to husband a salmon stream or other resource patch within the clan territory (Hunn, Johnson et al 2003:101).

In contemporary co-management conservation, the 'trustee concept' embodies two aspects: both the "welfare of the people of his clan or house group," and a responsibility "for maintaining the

resources,” (Langdon, in Hope & Thornton 2000:120). For Māori, the concept of *kaitiaki* encompasses the human role as “protector, caretaker, trustee,” (Ryan 1989:18). Guardianship attitudes contrast Judeo-Christian beliefs with linear time concepts where nature offers limitless resources for humanity to exploit into the future.

The Tlingit concept of *shagóon* (heritage and destiny) clarifies the impact of different time concepts. Referring to ‘place consciousness,’ Thornton (2008:106) links Aborigine *Dreaming* to *shagóon* that “posits a dynamic fusion of time and space in the landscape.” The concept is precisely what geomentality seeks to highlight: a deeper collective understanding of culture through lasting attitudes toward the land. Thornton (2008:106) cites a *Lukaax.ádi* song capturing this connection to the land and its importance not only to the individual, but the clan, into the future, “*Lest my ancestors’ land lie desolate, you will always hear my voice there.*” There is a sense that ancestors inhabit the land and will continue to inhabit *that place*. Respect for ancestral lands serves to explain the importance of ‘giving of offerings prior to hunting or fishing’ and ‘seeking the blessing of those existing including nature (e.g., bears or mountains),’ prior to taking action upon the earth (Thornton 2008:186). Indigenous Māori share a similar link to ancestral land: “*Mine is the land, the land of my ancestors, was his cry,*” (Firth 1959:368, in Yoon 1986). Such strong bonds to place explain why repatriation efforts endure years of struggle for a “healing process [that] remains in sharp contrast to America’s colonizer’s traditions,” (LaDuke 2005:75). Research continues to link mental health and displacement from ancestral lands.

4.6 Rules for living

In the Judeo-Christian faith, The Ten Commandments are set out in Exodus 20:2-17. The first four commandments underline the supremacy of the Creator, his authority, and the relationship that he has with humanity. The remaining six commandments relate to relationships between human (such as honouring parents), character traits like honesty (do not steal) and the sanctity of personal ownership (what belongs to another should not be coveted). None of these commandments relate to how humans should interact with nature. Consequences of disobeying the commandments are set out in Revelation 22:14. To reach heaven and attain immortality amongst God, his laws must be abided. Humanity’s former ‘fall from grace’ reiterates the consequences. This compares to traditional Tlingit beliefs they say, “Just as Yéil lived and acted, so do we,” (in Hope III, 1982:25). There is retribution or consequence for not adhering to the ‘rules that govern living.’ Creation myths discuss accepted ways to kill animals needed for food. Improper killing meant species would not reincarnate after death. In geomancy, Yoon (2006:72) discusses how “human bones can concentrate vital energy,” and need good soil for preservation during burials since “descendants are theoretically influenced by the vital energy,” (p 86). For this reason preferred burial sites in Korea are upon hills with soil (and better energy flows), than rocky mountain areas.

The Judeo-Christian duality structures societal understanding in a binary right/wrong manner similarly found in the Māori creation myth. Through “actions of the gods, all living things were given their opposites,” (Barlow 1991:55) which sets in motion opposing forces in life (e.g., pleasure/pain, good/bad). In geomancy, to benefit from nature requires that “humanity chooses an auspicious environment and uses it appropriately,” (Yoon 2006:155). Yin-Yang concepts and the Five Elements Theory underpin specific principles for auspicious site decision-making that involve “mountains, water and cosmic directions,” (Yoon 2006:10). Neither science nor art, various aspects must be considered as geomancy does not provide for a binary answer. This may appear a subtle difference, but within decision-making is critical. Illustrating two different perceptions from the same stimulus (e.g., the popular Gestalt psychology figure and ground picture depicting both a wine goblet and two faces), Johnson (1996:43) shows that being correct is the easy step in identifying and managing unsolvable problems. His book, *Polarity Management*, has merit in land conflicts as distinguishing conflicts from problems to solve. To manage polarities (conflicts), Johnson advocates a need to “affirm diversity.” Seeing the other person’s view allows an easier shift between perceptions, thus increasing the likelihood of reaching a mutual course of action (p 50). If Johnson’s proposition is applied to approaches within the rules for living depicted above, starting from a binary position would make managing conflicts impossible. Considering only one geomentality in land conflicts similarly makes resolving dilemmas problematic.

4.7 Summary

Tlingit cultural values revealed a priority for heritage (shagóon) and the associated strong ties to ancestral lands; a mutual regard for the natural environment (without a human dominated hierarchy); and a strong sense of kaitiaki (guardianship) over the environment. Traditional Russian geomentality valued Mother Earth and showed a reliance and co-existence with the natural environment and seasons, reflecting the vastness of their geography. The sense of collective and ancestry (heritage) was also a dominant feature. The American geomentality was discussed within the Judeo-Christian context influencing attitudes toward nature that: prioritised human use of the land over other living creatures; reflected how the Fall of Man ‘cursed the earth’; the notion of the individual (prioritised over the collective or government); and noticeably integrated the role of the Judeo-Christian faith and the creator (God) within the rules for living.

5 Reflections of geomentality in naming

Place names are important study objects in the spiritual landscape as visible representations of cultural importance (geomentality). Much has been written on the power of names to give a sense of meaning to place and to convey ideological intent (Kong and Yeoh 2003; Goldschmidt and Haas 1998; Thornton 2008; Duncan 1990; Yoon 1980a, 1986, 1991). In the Sitka Territory, there are 20 tribe names and 45 Clan House (Tlingit Readers 2003) that were categorized into: *Nature* names related to the environment including flora, fauna, water or seasons; *Location* names indicating a cardinal direction; and *People* names referring to individuals. It was found that Tlingit naming reflects the Tlingit geomentality with *Nature* names dominating 72% of the 65 Tribe and Clan House names. None are *People* related names and none are repeated. Similar numbers of clan houses exist for each moiety (i.e., 23 houses in the Raven Moiety (Kiks.ádi) and 22 houses in the Eagle/Wolf Moiety (Kaagwaantaan) supporting the balance in society dividing people into two groups (moieties). Location and nature categories combine in some names like, *Looking Out to Sea House*, illustrating the importance of the natural locale.

The analysis of topographic place names included 147 Sitka Territory names and 160 Sitka street names assembled from Tlingit, Russian and American cartographic sources. Analysis categories consider methods by Yoon (1986, 1994) and Thornton (2008) including: *cultural influence*; *type of feature* (water, land, built); *feature scale* (small, medium and large for point/creek features, rivers/capes, and islands/lakes, respectively); and *name type* (nature, location, people, other). Numerous geomentality aspects are observed in spatial patterns. For example, larger topographic features reflect Russian and European influences with smaller features reflecting Tlingit naming. The dominance of the Russian culture for example appears on all seven of the largest islands in the area while points and smaller scale features bear Tlingit names that are more relevant to a Tlingit subsistence lifestyle (Thornton 2008). Cultural influences are also reflected in settlement with densely populated areas and longer occupied places have a greater quantum of names. European, Russian and American cultures predominantly use ‘people’ category naming, while Tlingit names reflect nature in topographic features. It was surprising to find the modern Sitka streetscape *dominated by American ‘people’* names (representing 70% overall) while Tlingit cultural naming was present in 13 of 160 (each reflecting ‘people’ names, uncharacteristic of the Tlingit geomentality). These and other observations raise questions about the naming process and meanings reflected in ordinary landscapes as subjects for a separate paper. Hermann (1999) cautions against traditional naming that excludes original intent and context linked to deeper meaning, particularly relevant given the Tlingit geomentality.

Conclusions

Geomentality targets the heart of the cultural ‘belief’ system. It ties the invisible threads connecting material and non-material expressions of culture, particularly relevant in areas of land conflict where deeper cultural understanding is urgently needed. Expressions of cultural geomentality have illustrated different starting points for human-environment relations, concepts of time and space, and differences in how these are expressed. Notions that all the environment and all creatures are sacred (tapu) for example, contrasts a preferential treatment of the needs of humanity over other living things. Numerous future applications are possible for geomentality. It is an effective building block to better understand culture-land relationships in their own right adding a “spiritual dimension” to reflect what a culture values and why. It can be applied to local and

international agencies managing and governing land such as those developing designation frameworks aiming to reflect diversity across many cultures. In academia, it provides a depth to explaining landscape that is hidden in socio-political or economic readings. Geomentality does not provide *answers* per se, but rather a framework for discussing why cultures are diverse and equally important. It offers a depth of understanding that comes in handy as we set out to manage the environmental dilemmas in our multicultural world.

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