
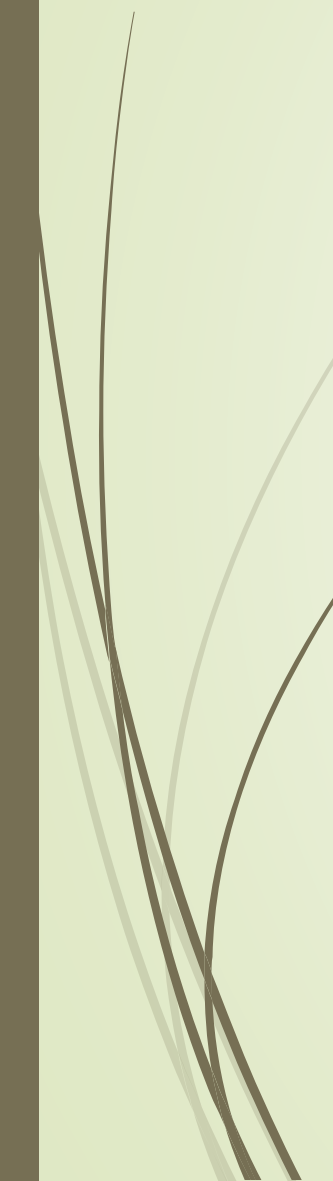



# Religion, Nature and Environment



## Background

- Roy Rappaport argues that religion is central to the continuing evolution of life, although it has been displaced from its original position of intellectual authority by the rise of modern science.
- His book *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, which could be <sup>understood</sup> construed as in some degree religious as well as about religion, insists that religion can and must be reconciled with science.  
to find a way in which two situations or beliefs that are opposed to each other can agree and exist together
- Combining adaptive and cognitive approaches to the study of humankind, he mounts a comprehensive analysis of religion's evolutionary significance, seeing it as co-extensive with the invention of language and hence of culture as we know it.  
It refers to the mental processes involved in gaining knowledge and comprehension  
two things are coextensive if they reach the same limits or cover the same area.

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- At the same time he assembles the fullest study yet of religion's main component, ritual, which constructs the conceptions which we take to be religious and has been central in the making of humanity's adaptation.
  - To review the anthropological evidence evidence of evolution which might allow for a more comprehensive understanding of ritual as the practical matrix of religious life.
  - To construct a religion compatible with the scientific laws ruling a world for which humanity is ultimately responsible, as that part of life on this planet which is able to think.
  - Religion, etymologically in a way that relates to the origin and history of words, or of one particular word speaking, binds us to an external force; it stabilises our meaningful interaction with the world, provides an anchor for our volatility.





➡ For Durkheim, religion was the organized attempt to bridge the gap between the known and the unknown, form an idea in the mind not relating to that which is sacred or religious conceived of as the profane world of ordinary experience and a sacred, extraordinary world located outside that experience.

➡ He recognized that we normally conceive of the sacred in terms of spiritual powers, summarized in the world religions as God [What is ultimately unknown to us is our collective being in society].



➡ Through ritual, Durkheim argues, we worship our unrealized powers of shared existence, society, and call it God.

➡ Sometimes we objectify the spirit world as nature and worship that [totemism] of the Australian Aborigines]

Totemism is a belief system that humans have a mystical or blood relationship with a spirit-being, such as a plant or animal, which is called a totem

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- In his *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim attempts to demonstrate that science springs from the same desire to connect the known and the unknown that spawned religion.
  - Durkheim believed that the central task of ritual was to instill these collective representations in each of us.
  - In a state of spiritual ecstasy we internalize the lessons which bind us to each other in social life.
  - He did not elaborate on this rather important conception of the socialization process.



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- Roy Rappaport gives such rigorous and explicit attention to ritual because he finds in it the ground where religion is made.
  - Rappaport believes that one possible answer to the world's crisis would be a religion founded on a postmodern science grounded in ecology, rather than astronomy – so that human society might be conceived of as being inside rather than outside life on this planet.
  - In Rappaport's usage, humanity is a personal quality, a collective noun and a historical project. [His definition of ritual draws no hard line between the sacred and the everyday, between society and the individual or, for that matter, between culture and nature]

# The evolution of humanity

- All animals communicate, and even plants receive and transmit information (Bickerton 1990), but only humans, so far as we know, are possessed of languages (symbols, signs etc.)
- With symbolic transmission individuals can learn from the accounts of others as well as from their own direct experience, and this learning may be transformed in its mere recounting, into public knowledge which can, by further recounting, be preserved as tradition.
- To ``explore" these worlds is not simply to discover what is there. The idea is to create what is there. (Expansion of conceptual power – accounts, understanding, abstractions, evaluations).


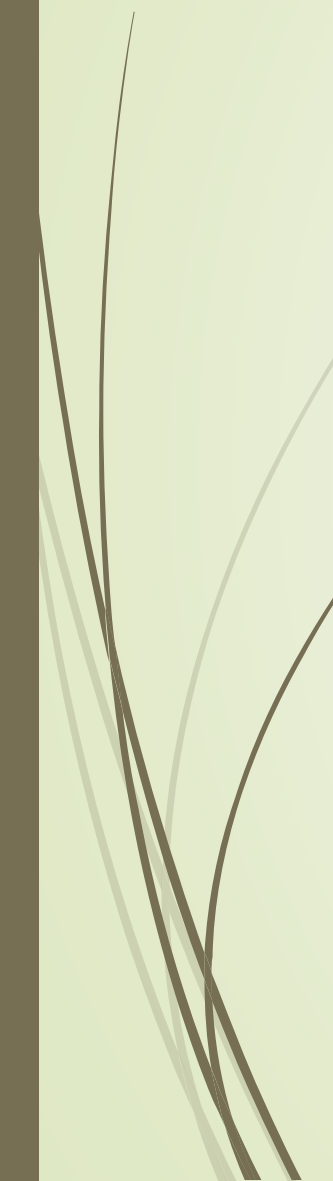
# Adaptation

- The processes through which living systems of all sorts (organisms, populations, societies, possibly ecosystems or even the biosphere) maintain themselves in the face of perturbations continuously threatening them with disruption, death or extinction.
- Adaptive responses to perturbations include both short-term reversible changes of state and longer-term irreversible changes in structure.
- Structural transformations in some subsystems made it possible to maintain more basic aspects of the system unchanged.
- This proposes that the fundamental question to ask about any evolutionary change is ``What does this change maintain unchanged?"




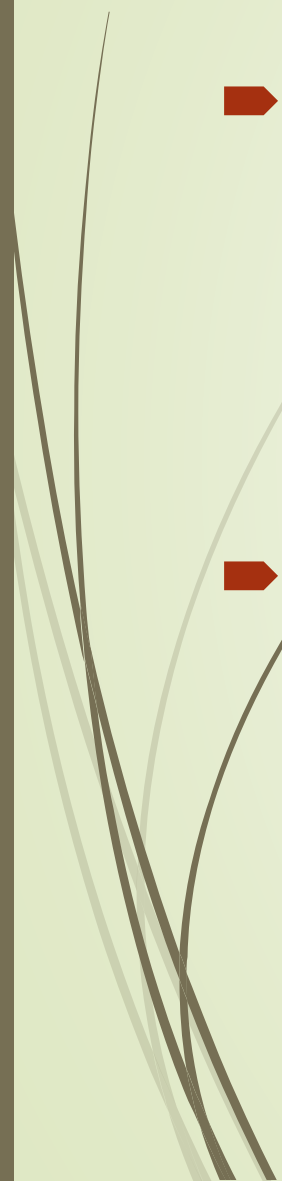
## The Symbol

- "Language is the foundation of the human way of life" [must have emerged through processes of natural selection as part of the adaptive apparatus of the hominids].
- To Leslie White, the appearance of the symbol (by which he meant language) was not simply an evolutionary novelty enhancing the survival chances of a particular species, but the most radical innovation in the evolution of evolution itself since life first appeared.
- Humanity is a species that lives and can only live in terms of meanings it itself must invent. [meanings and understandings by participating in its very construction].

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- The worlds in which humans live are not fully constituted by tectonic, meteorological and organic processes [They are not only made of rocks and trees and oceans, but are also constructed out of symbolically conceived and performatively established cosmologies, institutions, rules, and values.
  - ``Human worlds'' (are, therefore, inconceivably richer than the worlds inhabited by other creatures)
  - Each human society develops a unique culture – it constructs a unique world that includes not only a special understanding of the surroundings, but of other things 'unseen', as real as those trees and animals and rocks.

# The Ritual Form


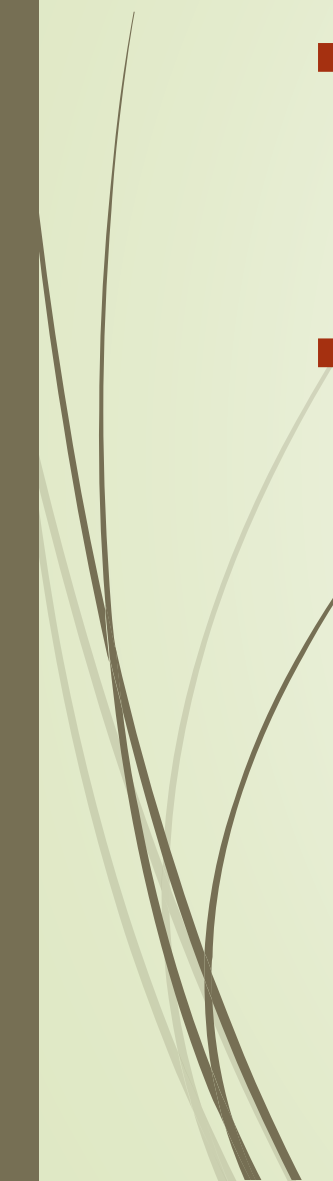
- ``Ritual" according to Rappaport denote the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers.
- First, this definition encompasses much more than religious behavior.
- Psychiatrists, for instance, have used ``ritual" rather similarly conceived, or the closely related if not synonymous term ``ceremony", to refer both to the pathological stereotyped behaviors of some neurotics (Freud 1907), and to certain conventional, repetitive but nevertheless adaptive interactions between people (Erikson 1966: 337).



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- In sociology and anthropology ``ritual" and ``ceremony" may designate a large range of social events, not all of which are religious, or may denote the formal aspects of such events (e.g. Bell 1992, Firth 1967, Goffman 1967, E. Goody 1972 etc.)
  - Ethologists have used it, virtually interchangeably with ``display," to designate behavior they have observed not only among other mammals but also among reptiles, birds, fish and even members of other phyla (Bell 1992, Blest 1961, Cullen 1966, Etkin 1964)

## ``Ritual" designates, a *form* or *structure*

- Ritual is often taken to be a symbolic form (see, for instance, Tambiah 1985[1979]: 128)
- The significance of the observation that our definition of ritual is formal - *the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers* logically entails the establishment of convention, the sealing of social contract, the construction of the integrated conventional orders



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- For instance, the Maring ritual cycle constituted a functional- ecological theory of ritual in general.
  - ...that if we are to understand what is uniquely human we must also consider those aspects of existence which man shares with other creatures. This conviction has led me to set religious rituals and the beliefs associated with them in a frame of reference that can also accommodate the behavior of animals other than man. It is this frame of reference that has exposed the crucial role of religion in the Maring's adjustment to their environment. (*Pigs for the Ancestors* 1968: 241: 2)

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- ``Myth implies ritual, ritual implies myth, they are one and the same,`` – ritual signifies neither more nor less than what is signified by the references symbolically encoded in its acts and utterances (Leach 1954: 13ff).
  - The ritual form, adds something to the substance of ritual, something that the symbolically encoded substance by itself cannot express.
  - In a sense, Rappaport take ritual to be the social act basic to humanity.

## Encoding by other than performer

- The performers of rituals do not specify all the acts and utterances constituting their own performances. [They follow, more or less punctiliously, orders established or taken to have been established, by others]
- Behavior in ritual tends to be punctilious and repetitive – Rituals are performed in specified contexts, that is, they are regularly repeated at times established by clock, calendar, biological rhythm, ontogeny, physical condition, or defined social circumstance, and often they occur in special places as well.
- What is true of humans is true of other animals.

# Rituals and Ceremonies

- Gluckman and Gluckman (1977: 231), state that the term ``ritual" was stipulated ``to cover actions which had reference, in the view of the actors, to occult powers: where such beliefs were not present, it was suggested, that the word ``ceremony" be used."
- Firth's distinction is slightly different.

Ceremonial I regard as a species of ritual in which, however, the emphasis is more upon symbolic acknowledgment and demonstration of a social situation than upon the efficacy of the procedures in modifying that situation. Whereas other ritual procedures are believed to have a validity of their own, ceremonial procedures, while formal in character, are not believed in themselves to sustain the situation or effect a change in it. (1967: 13)

# Theatre and Ritual

- Those present at a ritual constitute a congregation. The defining relationship of the members of a congregation to the event for which they are present is participation.
- Those present at theatrical events include, on the one hand, performers and, on the other hand, audiences.
- Audiences and performers are more or less radically separated from each other, always in function, almost always in space, often clearly marked off by raised stages, proscenium arches, curtains and so on.
- Gluckman has used the term "ritualization" to refer to the assignment of ritual roles to individuals in conformity to their secular relations and statuses (kinship relationship).



# Ritual as mode of communication

- Ritual utterances are not "mere words," but frequently possess special characteristics – stereotypy (Bloch 1973), weirdness (Malinowski 1965[1935] II: 218ff.) and repetitiveness – that may enhance their seeming force, and so may the often noted emphasis upon propriety and precision in uttering them.
- The separation in time and space of some rituals from daily life, the grotesque quality of some ritual postures and gestures, the weirdness of some ritual utterances, the exuberant elaboration of some objects and structures used in rituals – become clear.
- The effectiveness of signals is enhanced if they are easy to distinguish from ordinary technical acts [the transmitters of ritual's messages are always among their most important receivers]



# Ritual regulation and environmental relations

- Most functional studies of religious behavior in anthropology have as an analytic goal – the elucidation of events, processes, or relationships occurring within a social unit.
- The social unit is often a group of people who entertain similar beliefs about the universe, or a congregation, a group of people who participate together in the performance of religious rituals.



➡ Homans (1941: 172 ) functions of religious ritual:

Ritual actions do not produce a practical result on the external world—that is one of the reasons why we call them ritual. But to make this statement is not to say that ritual has no function. Its function is not related to the world external to the society but to the internal constitution of the society. It gives the members of the society confidence, it dispels their anxieties, it disciplines their social organization.


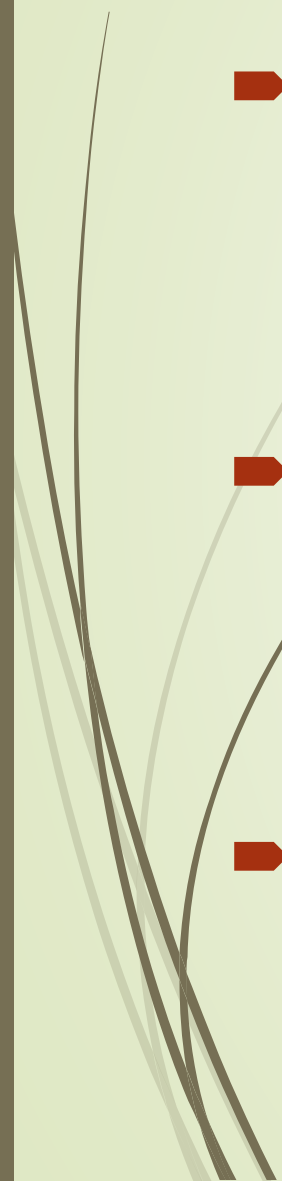
# Ritual cycles of the Tsembaga, New Guinea


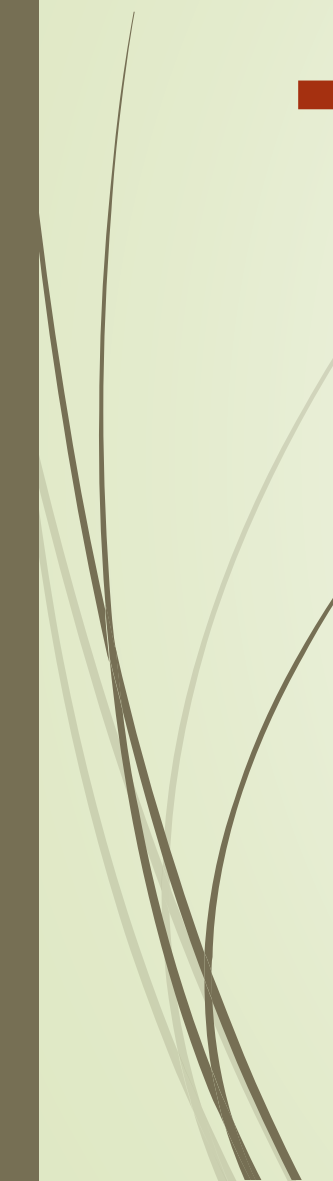
- Ritual play an important part in regulating the relationships of these groups with both the nonhuman components of their immediate environments and the human components of their less immediate environments (that is, with other similar territorial groups).
- Ritual regulation helps to maintain the biotic communities existing within their territories, redistributes land among people and people over land, and limits the frequency of fighting.
- Religious ritual may be defined as the prescribed performance of conventionalized acts manifestly directed toward the involvement of nonempirical or supernatural agencies in the affairs of the actors.


# Tsembaga ecosystem

- An ecosystem is a system of material exchanges, and the Tsembaga maintain against other human groups exclusive access to the resources within their territorial borders.
- Conversely, it is from this territory alone that the Tsembaga ordinarily derive all of their foodstuffs and most of the other materials they require for survival.
- The Tsembaga are bush-following horticulturalists.
- Staples include a range of root crops, taro (*Colocasia*) and sweet potatoes being most important, yams and manioc less so.
- All gardens are mixed, many of them containing all of the major root crops and many greens – namely "Taro-yam gardens" and "Sugar-sweet potato gardens"



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- A rule of population redistribution may thus be stated in terms of ritual cycles: *A man becomes a member of a territorial group by participating with it in the planting of rumbim.*
  - The importance of the *rumbim* planting ritual, which represents or even constitutes the fundamental terms of Maring cosmology and society at the same time that it establishes a sanctified truce.
  - *Rumbim* is, thus, associated with patrilineality as well as with territoriality and with men's well-being and strength.

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- The operation of ritual among the Tsembaga and other Maring helps to maintain an undegraded environment, limits fighting to frequencies which do not endanger the existence of the regional population, adjusts man-land ratios, facilitates trade, distributes local surpluses of pig throughout the regional population in the form of pork, and assures people of high quality protein when they are most in need of it.

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- Rappaport postulates that the Tsembaga ritual slaughter and consumption of pigs – the *kaiko* – functions as a regulatory mechanism that keeps within acceptable parameters the size of the herd of pigs, the intake of animal protein, and the amount of female labor needed to take care of them as well as of the gardens.
  - Rappaport shows all the components of Tsembaga reality – ecological, nutritional, social, military, ideological – constitute a coherent totality.
  - Rappaport's studies provide a model for understanding the role of ritual in the creation and maintenance not just of social solidarity, à la Durkheim, but in the maintenance of the conditions within which human organisms can survive.



## Reference

- Rappaport, R. 1967. 'Ritual regulation of environmental relations among a New Guinea people', *Ethnology* 6: 17-30.