

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Or why myth matters

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One of the most influential papers I read in my first year of graduate school in anthropology was Terry Turner's interpretation of the Oedipus Myth (Turner 1969). It was a masterful reanalysis of what was already an iconic subject in the structural analysis of myth (cf. Levi-Strauss 1963: 206–231). Shortly after that academic introduction, I met Terry at a conference on Symbolic Anthropology at Stanford University. I could say that it was love at first sight and that “the rest was history,” but life sometimes takes a bit longer to acknowledge its inevitabilities. What I can say is that my meeting with him inspired me to get to know his broader work, and I vividly remember reading his papers “The Fire of the Jaguar” (see Part I, this volume) and “Transformation, Hierarchy, and Transcendence in Ritual” (Turner 1977) (which was initially entitled “Groping for the Elephant”). Although the latter, like many of Terry's other papers, was eventually published, “The Fire of the Jaguar” languished on his desk, unpublished. Yet, in spite of existing only in mimeographed form (remember those?), it became widely circulated among his students and colleagues. These informal distribution networks steadily expanded, but Terry was never ready to let go of this work or acknowledge it as final. Originally intended as a book, he continued to tinker with it intermittently over the course of the next forty-five years. This

is not the only manuscript he neglected to publish; his file cabinet sits full of them. In fact, I've been known to say that Terry only relinquished his texts when he had an editor badgering him to meet a deadline. Nonetheless, he did manage to publish a large number of articles in a far wider array of publication venues than most anthropologists publish in, including not just peer-reviewed anthropology journals and edited volumes, but also forums for the general public. A partial list of his publications appeared in 2006 (Turner 2006), and some other works are included here (see "Referenced cited"), but Terry never did pull all of his works together into a single bibliography. Many other articles, however, remained in draft form, often virtually ready for publication. Such was the fate of some of the previously unpublished papers in this volume. Since Terry is no longer around to continue his tinkering or otherwise hinder their publication, I have embarked on the task of ensuring that many of these papers move from mimeo to published form, in no small part due to the badgering of HAU editor, Giovanni da Col, for which I'm immensely grateful.

In my mind, "The Fire of the Jaguar: The Origin of Cooking Fire" always topped the list of Terry's works to publish. In this volume, we have paired this essay with several other analyses of Kayapo ritual, social life, cosmology, and socialization practices that combine to give a rich picture of Kayapo life. In Terry's analytical perspective, ritual, social organization, politics, and personhood were all intricately intertwined with daily life and social continuity. These papers illustrate how the essence of personhood is produced through kinship relations, ritual attributes, and the embodiment of cosmological principles. They endeavor to show how the activities of daily and ritual life are intrinsically intertwined and how the different aspects of these processes play out in individual and communal practices. The different foci of the articles look at these processes through the lens of particular contexts and events, but each necessarily refers to descriptions and analyses presented elsewhere throughout the book. Cumulatively, these descriptions illustrate the layers of embeddedness that build persons and community, culture and history within these particular contexts and, in Terry's view, well beyond.

Terry recorded the myth recounted in "The Fire of the Jaguar" while living among the Kayapo, a tribe scattered across a large territory in the states of Pará and northern Mato Grosso in the Brazilian Amazon. He began his field work with this group in 1962 and continued to return almost annually over the next fifty-two years and visiting most, if not all, of their communities. He heard and documented the fire myth in many of the villages he visited over several decades,

told mostly around the household fire as a bedtime story. Its popular evening retellings persisted, even as significant social and cultural changes triggered by the arrival of boom boxes, videos, and television transformed traditional routines. Over the decades that Terry continued to return to these villages, he was able to experience and document many such changes and continuities in Kayapo life using written, audio, and visual mediums. He served as the anthropological consultant for six British documentary films about the Kayapo, but a turning point came when he set up the Kayapo Video Project in 1990, providing significant guidance, financial support, and travel opportunities for the Kayapo to make their own films to document their culture and experiences on their own terms. He was intrigued by what he learned by observing and discussing the Kayapo filmmakers' documentary approaches, and he studied everything from their subject selection to their filming methods and editing styles (Turner 1991b, 1992). Video became an important part of the way that the Kayapo produced, documented, and defended their lifestyle and territory, both for internal community use as well as for external communications to broadcast their struggles to the international community.

Terry did all he could to facilitate this work and took great joy from the Kayapo's savvy emergence as powerful ambassadors for indigenous and environmental causes on the international stage. This was one way in which he became increasingly involved with the Kayapo's ongoing struggle to defend their territory, and thereby their communities, from incursions by gold miners, loggers, cattle ranchers, soy farmers, and unsustainable infrastructure projects like megadams on the Xingu River. As part of this work, he also encouraged, collaborated with, and wrote about the Kayapo's younger generation as it prepared to step into new leadership roles at pivotal moments in the tribe's history. He supported the Kayapo's own nongovernmental organization, the *Instituto Raoni*,¹ and worked with other organizations that stepped in to help indigenous struggles in the Amazon and elsewhere.

Although Terry visited many Kayapo villages multiple times, he formed a deep and lasting relationship with the community of Mentuktire, the home of Chief Ropni. Terry and Ropni's relationship spanned decades; they became acquainted as young men in their midtwenties and grew old together. During

1. Chief Ropni is commonly known as Chief Raoni, the name he has come to use in international circles. Terry continued to call and refer to him as Ropni, given it is the name he uses in his village. For that reason, I refer to him as Ropni here.

Terry's last trip to Mentuktire in 2014, he and Ropni spent many quiet moments reflecting on the time they had spent together, the changes they had witnessed, and the continuities that nevertheless persisted.

I accompanied Terry to Mentuktire on his last trip, which coincided with a multiday, village-wide performance of the Kayapo's *Ta Kut* naming ceremony. As an anthropologist who does not work in Amazonia or speak Kayapo but has read what Terry has written about them, I felt a strange familiarity with the *Ta Kut* rituals being performed in front of me and appreciated the significance of the relationships and values it created. Believing that this might be Terry's last trip to the field (it was), our group included family members, a journalist and former student of Terry's, a photographer and videographer, and select friends.² However, we were not the only spectators of this ritual: in addition, several other non-Kayapo had been invited by the world-traveling Ropni to witness this ceremony. None of these other guests had had the benefit of access to Terry's teaching or writings. I felt sorry for them, as I would not have come close to understanding the ritual without the context that Terry's insights—his life's work—provided. Just witnessing the ceremony was not sufficient to understand it, given how embedded its structure is in the way the Kayapo perceive and value their social relations, as well as their relationship to the natural environment. The ritual is not an enactment of a myth or story, but its meaning is imbued with Kayapo notions of the world they inhabit. It references myth, social ties, status, and values in ways not explicitly articulated, yet implicitly understood by its participants.

As I've edited the papers in this volume, I've frequently thought about how these papers would have benefited the outside spectators at the *Ta Kut* event. The ceremony involves the confrontation of young children with dancers bedecked as jaguars. The children, adorned with beads and feathers, are expected to face the menacing approach of the jaguar-men with stoicism; they are subsequently honored for their bravery with the bestowal of "beautiful" names by specific categories of kin, the significance of which is further explained by the writings in this volume. Although these articles bring together Terry's many insights on the ways that social life and ritual practices are embedded in the Kayapo's daily routines, each one examines these topics through a different lens. The first article focuses on a particular myth but draws on kinship, initiation, and communal organization to explicate the myth. Another paper starts with

2. The trip was generously funded by the Avatar Alliance Foundation.

cosmology but melds into a discussion of body decoration and kinship. A third article explains how asocial behavior gets interpreted through social connections built up through ritual performance. A fourth one shows how Kayapo notions of social bodiliness challenge certain poststructuralist theoretical models proposed in Amazonian analyses. Together these papers emphasize the importance of the dialectical relationships that social, cultural, and ideological beliefs play, and how each practice or belief takes on meaning in relation to the community's set of beliefs and practices while consequently shaping and evolving those encompassing beliefs. This emphasis on dialectical relations was deeply instilled in Terry's thinking about important subjects across the board from his teaching to his politics to his family engagements. In the larger corpus of his work, this same attention to the imbrication of belief and activity is a focal aspect of his analyses.

As you will read in the different articles of this volume, Terry's dedication to interpreting the beliefs and practices of the Kayapo goes beyond a commanding understanding of the stories and performances that characterize social life. He seeks to show how these activities are the fundamental building blocks of that life. Consciousness is a product of action, and action is a result of goals, desires, and beliefs. For Terry, this matrix was best embodied in Marx's notion of praxis. This perspective is why Terry spent so much time appreciating and trying to understand the Kayapo's continued valuation, performance, and perpetuation of the activities that actively constructed their unique cosmology and perspective on the world.

The example of the *Ta Kuk* event, as with so many other examples in the life we built together, highlights how Terry's observations, analyses, and insights enhanced and enriched not only my intellectual understanding of an anthropological experience but also my profound appreciation of our collective human experiment to produce—and re-produce—ourselves, our communities, and our world. The editing and publication of this book is an attempt to amplify and more broadly share some small part of those insights while providing a foundation that emanates outward into his wide range of social and cultural analyses. I believe this volume will revitalize certain anthropological perspectives and values in contemporary debates with ramifications well beyond the specific case study of the Kayapo. In addition, I hope this book, like my in-person introduction to Terry, will lead you, its readers, to seek out his writings beyond these. And if you've already read them all, then stay tuned: I intend to continue editing and publishing his archive of work that still resides in those mimeo-filled file drawers.

I have been helped in what for me has been an emotional but also cathartic process of preparing these papers for publication, by many friends and colleagues. In particular, I want to thank my (our) daughters, Vanessa Fajans-Turner and Allison Fajans-Turner. In addition, I want to thank Catherine Howard who was a student of Terry's and a long time reader of his work. In addition, Catherine (Carine to her family and friends) is an Amazonianist who has visited the Kayapó on several occasions. She has done a thoughtful and thorough job of editing these papers and articles and they are much stronger for her keen eye. Thank you!