Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Turner, Terence S., *The Fire of the Jaguar,* Chicago: Hau Books, 2017, 254 pages.

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The Fire of the Jaguar, Terence Turner's analysis of the Kayapo myth of the origin of cooking fire, has itself taken on a near mythic character. Turner, emeritus professor at the University of Chicago until his death in 2015, and a specialist in the Kayapo of the Brazilian Amazonia, a Gê-speaking people practicing swidden agriculture supplemented by hunting, fishing and gathering, had a lifelong engagement with the Kayapo, visiting them almost each year since his initial visit in 1962. Indeed, his engagements with the Kayapo exceeded academic norms, as Turner advocated for the Kayapo and was also the president of Survival International USA, a nongovernmental organisation (NGO) advocating Indigenous peoples' rights around the world. With his death in 2015, Turner left behind a number of unpublished papers. During his life, Turner maintained that his analysis of the myth of the origin of cooking fire could always be pushed deeper; after his death, his widow, Jane Fajans, at Cornell University, took up the task of publishing the manuscripts. *The Fire of the Jaguar* offers both Turner's analysis of the Kayapo myth of the origin of cooking fire and shorter essays, which advance theoretical critiques of structuralism, perspectivism, animism and Marxism.

The Kayapo myth of the origin of cooking fire starts at a time when people did not have fire and did not cook their food. The central character is a young boy abandoned by his relatives and taken in by a jaguar, who possessed an everlasting fire. One day, when the jaguar went hunting, the young boy decided to flee. He killed the jaguar's wife and stole an ember of the fire. On his return to his village, the young boy was invited to the men's assembly. The men asked the boy to guide them to the jaguar's house in order to bring the fire back to the village. By transforming themselves into various animals, the men succeeded in acquiring fire. Since that day, people have had fire and have eaten cooked meat. Turner's analysis of this myth emphasises the ideas that transformation plays a central role in mythical thought and that myths should be analysed in light of their social context. Turner asserts that this myth constitutes a model of socialisation for Kayapo society by providing patterns of affect and action aiming to reconcile personal lives with experience of the social environment. According to Turner, mythic thought is the highest level of self-organisation in society because "it treats contradictions in the structure of society and the cosmos as surmountable or resolvable within the terms of that structure itself" (138).

The remainder of the book can be divided into three parts. In the first part, "Beauty and the Beast: The Fearful Symmetry of the Jaguar and Other Natural Beings in Kayapo Ritual and Myth," Turner proposes that myth structure is "a hierarchically organized system of transformations of a single set of symbolic oppositions that recurs as the basis for each successive episode of the narrative" (3–4). Myths, in Turner's analysis, are modeled on the society that produces them. He argues, therefore, that myths reproduce social, cultural and ecological patterns and should be understood in light of those references. He adds that myths and society are both homologous and isomorphic generative processes. In other words, myths and society are parallel processes that interproduce themselves. Turner considers that comparative myth analysis, on the scale proposed by Levi-Strauss in the *Mythologiques,* could only be attempted with limited success. After all, anthropologists have yet to undertake a complete comprehensive analysis of individual myths. While Turner does not dispute the importance of comparative analysis, he "simply question[s] an approach that substitutes it for . . . the comprehensive analysis of the structures of individual myths and their relations to their particular social and cultural contexts" (6).

With the second part, "Cosmology, Objectification, and Animism in Indigenous Amazonia," Turner proposes theoretical insights into the concept of cosmology, using his own interpretation of Marxist concepts and drawing on Kayapo ethnographic examples. Turner defines cosmologies as "hierarchically stratified, multiperspectival totalities, composed of parts with forms that replicate the formal properties of the cosmos as a whole" (173). To put it in simpler terms, Turner sees cosmologies as universes in which whole and parts are dialectically and recursively interacting. Thus, cosmic reality can be considered as a continuous and dynamic process of production and reproduction of its own structure. Turner argues that most indigenous cosmologies are sociocentric because they put human society at the centre of their cosmic orders. This assumption has two consequences: first, the extrapolation of the forms of human social order on the cosmic order, and second, the merging of ontological and epistemological categories. This initial analysis of Indigenous cosmologies leads Turner to question whether cosmologies are forms of alienated social consciousness, forming a paradox consisting in the unalienated reproduction of an alienated structure. On one hand, cosmology is an alienated

form of social consciousness because it attributes the origin of society to extrasocial cosmic forces. On the other hand, Turner affirms that the social actors – in this case, the Kayapo – are fully conscious of constructing their society through ritual, myths and other cosmological activities. Therefore, in many cosmologies, creative power is placed outside of society.

The third part, "The Crisis of Late Structuralism: Perspectivism and Animism," examines critiques of structuralism coming from perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 2009) and animism (Bird-David 1999; Descola 2005). After explaining how animism defines nature as a universal panspiritism and how perspectivism sees nature as an anthropocentric panculturalism, Turner exposes his own conception of culture. For him, culture is a "complex, reflexive, transformative relation" to nature in which production "is thus the essence of culture and its differentiation from nature" (227). Moreover, Turner adds, many Amazonian cosmologies are founded on the principle that cosmological forms have the agency to produce and transform themselves. In this light, human culture is more an incremental transformation of natural elements than a radically distinct order of nature.

The Fire of the Jaguar is a major contribution to the study of Indigenous cosmologies. Turner's analysis of the Kayapo myth of the origin of cooking fire provides methodological advice and perspectives that can contribute to revitalising myth analysis in anthropology. His theoretical reflections form another major contribution to the current debates in the anthropological study of indigenous societies, whether it be to the never-ending nature–culture question, the body/spirit duality, or the reproduction of social structure and social change. It is clear that many of Turner's insights will help the discipline develop an analysis critical of the ontological turn. As an example, Turner's argument that production is the major feature of culture could be used to build a better theory of personhood, now understood as production of persons, as sketched by himself (Turner 2008) and David Graeber (2001).

Nevertheless, one weakness of *The Fire of the Jaguar* is that it is set in overly complex prose; even as particular words are chosen with precision, the argument is sometimes hard to follow and engage with. While Turner's book will spark debate and offer inspiration for scholars specialising in Indigenous cosmologies, myth analysis, theory of production or cultural change, it may have little to recommend to a wider public or an anthropologist, unless they are willing to put in the work required.

References

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Clément, Daniel, *The Bungling Host: The Nature of Indigenous Oral Literature*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018, 543 pages.

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Daniel Clément's *The Bungling Host* is an analysis of North American Indigenous oral narratives that centre on the Bungling Host, a veritable trope among cultures from the Canadian Subarctic to the American Southwest. The Bungling Host motif acts as a common theme throughout these stories and typically revolves around the Trickster – more specifically, the Trickster's imitation of a benevolent animal host. In this volume, Clément analyses Bungling Host narratives from a range of Indigenous North American nations and considers the material, social and cultural lives of each group, including their deep-seated understanding of plants and animals. In doing so, Clément reveals relationships between science and myth-narrative ways of knowing (and imparting information) that have been largely misunderstood.

Clément traces interest in this "genre" of Indigenous oral narratives within anthropology back to Franz Boas, who attempted to interpret the Bungling Host in Northwest Coast stories (Boas 1916). However, these early endeavours focused on the Trickster himself (in the majority of the narratives of Boas's volume, this figure is depicted as male), or on the classification of these episodes according to their geographic or culture area range. The result was a dilution of the lessons of the stories, and thus their fuller meaning was lost. Clément, on the other hand, seeks to focus on the content with regard to the characteristics of the host to determine the driving forces that bring meaning to the narratives.

A common thread in these myths is the procurement of food or the hosting of a meal by a kindly host and a bungled imitation of the host's act by the Trickster, which ultimately results in empty stomachs, injury or, in some cases, death. The Host and Trickster are always represented by common, but different, animals. The Trickster as representative of a human person and the fates that are met with are the results of the Trickster's (the bungling human's) hubris. At first glance, these stories are confusing and seemingly unintelligible, which is a point emphasised several times by Clément. However, closer reading reveals elaborate narratives that hold deep cultural and social ethnographic detail specific to a region and to the lives of those who live there.

Clément approaches these narratives as a series of mythemes, or a metanarrative, that carries sociocultural meaning, and etymons that are embedded in and can be derived from the mythemes. Through Clément's approach, etymons can be understood as the host's actions and have emic meaning that supports and drives the mytheme forward (xv). In each myth, Clément provides a basic analysis in order to pull back the narrative curtain and expose the etymon(s) behind the mytheme. For example, Clément first presents the narrative in its original form and proceeds to pull out clues rooted in the story. Specifically, he looks to the etymon, or action of the kind animal hosts, which to an outside eye is obscure, and provides detail regarding the animals' real habitat or behaviour in order to elucidate the story and provide clarity. Fundamentally, his analysis of etymons within mythemes offers a methodology that