

**CORPORATIONS, PERSONHOOD, AND RITUAL
IN TRIBAL SOCIETY:
THREE INTERCONNECTED TOPICS IN
THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF MEYER FORTES**

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1. *Introduction*

MEYER Fortes, who died in 1982, is one of the outstanding representatives of British social anthropology. In his numerous writings, published over a period of almost half a century, he contributed decisively to the shaping and refining of many of the central tenets and most important theoretical achievements of the structural-functional school of anthropological thought. In the present essay I intend no more than to provide a straightforward summary and systematization of Fortes' writings concerning corporations, personhood and ritual in tribal society. I will refrain, by and large, from closer critical assessments and leave it to the readers to decide for themselves whether and to what extent Fortes' ideas are of heuristic value in their own researches.

The task of summarizing and systematizing, to be sure, is rather a basic one, though two reasons in particular call for it. First, Fortes' ideas concerning the topics dealt with here are scattered over a great number of shorter articles. Only a recently published collection of essays by Fortes on Tallensi religion, edited and introduced by Jack Goody (1987), allows more readily available access to and comparison of Fortes' writings on the matter. Secondly, the complexity of Fortes' ideas, and his strict adherence to a rather technical terminology which is not easily intelligible, makes it difficult to see and to appreciate the extraordinary coherence and clarity of his thought. The present essay, then, is designed as an introduction

All references are to Meyer Fortes unless indicated otherwise.

to the complex thought of an important social anthropologist and to the structural-functional kind of anthropology itself.

2. *Corporations Aggregate and Corporations Sole*

Fortes, more than most of his fellow anthropologists, dedicated his efforts to the study of kinship, and it is in this field that he made his most important and influential contributions.¹ Fortes repeatedly defends the status of kinship as an irreducible factor or principle of social life. The kinship system is for him analytically distinct from other systems such as the economic, religious, or political systems; all of these he regards as being closely interconnected as equally irreducible one to another (1970a: 221). Kinship norms, relationships and institutions are not dependent variables of other exogenous forces, such as economic, demographic, ecological or other factors; they cannot be reduced to, or their particular forms be expanded by, these factors (*ibid.*: 250, 288-9; see also 1949a: 340; 1958: 8-9).

Of great importance in Fortes' analysis of kinship-based polities is his distinction between the familial or domestic domain on the one hand, and the politico-jural domain on the other.² This distinction links up with another one, that between the internal and external aspects of a social phenomenon: the familial domain is regarded as the smallest, internal domain, the politico-jural domain as the widest, external domain (1970a: 72, 95-100; see also Barnes 1971: 217-18). Moreover, referring to Morgan's distinction between *societas* and *civitas* and Maine's distinction between 'status' and 'contract', Fortes claims that 'these antinomies and others that have been linked with them do not identify different forms of social and politico-jural organization. They represent correlative and interdependent institutional complexes that work together in all social systems' (1970a: 219). And, he emphasizes: 'Where there is society, there is both kinship and polity, both status and contract. What is distinctive is their relative elaboration and differentiation, their relative weight and scope in different sectors of social life' (*ibid.*: 220). As concerns the 'relative elaboration' of structural domains in tribal societies, the anthropologist faces some specific problems. 'Structural

1. Fortes' 'style' of kinship study is the object of close investigation by J.A. Barnes in chapter three of his *Three Styles of Kinship* (1971), to which I am indebted particularly in this section.

2. In his 'Introduction' to Goody's *The Developmental Cycle in Domestic Groups* (1958) Fortes distinguishes between the domestic group and the family. Both may be coterminous, as is the case in modern Europe. Their main analytical difference, in Fortes' terminology, is that the term 'family' relates to reproduction in the narrow biological sense, whereas the 'domestic group' is the nucleus of social reproduction (cf. 1970a: 220-9).

domains', as Fortes puts it, 'tend to be fused together in simple societies, whereas in complex societies they tend to be numerous and structurally differentiated' (ibid.: 99). Most tribal societies are 'simple' societies in that respect. They are 'homogeneous societies' (1945: x; 1953a: 84) or 'organic societies', i.e., societies in which the same structural principles and moral axioms work at all levels of the social structure (1949a: 341).

In this context another of Fortes' distinctions becomes relevant, namely that between the realm of jural norms and the complementary and opposed realm of moral norms. Fortes holds that the *corpus juris* - the body of rules, norms and sanctions pertaining to a total society - emanates from, and is regulated in its working by, the political organization of a society (1970a: 90). Jural norms, which are immanent in all social relationships, have their roots in the political-jural domain from where they work their way downwards, or better, inwards, to the familial or domestic domain (ibid.). Moral norms, such as the 'axiom of amity' or 'rule of prescriptive altruism', have their roots in the familial domain, but they are found to be translated and extended from this domain into other domains (ibid.: 91 and ch. XII).

Yet another analytical distinction in Fortes' kinship studies is the one between 'descent' and 'filiation'. Filio-parental relations, to start with a truism, originate in the familial domain. Filiation is defined as the relationship created in the fact of being the legitimate child of one's parents. Filiation - in contrast to descent - is generally bilateral, as most if not all societies give jural recognition to the parenthood of both parents, to both matrification and patrification (ibid.: 261-2). Without being recognized as having been legitimately fathered as well as mothered, an individual cannot be, or at least is severely handicapped in becoming, a complete social person (ibid.). Descent, in contrast to filiation, belongs to the politico-jural domain and is normally unilineal. It is defined by Fortes as the jurally recognized relation, mediated by a parent, between a person and an ancestor (ibid.: 281; see also 1959: 108).

The interconnections between descent and filiation must be specified further. In segmentary lineage systems, descent provides the connecting link between the internal domestic domain and the external political and jural aspects of unilineal descent groups. Descent confers credentials of personhood (citizenship, for example) deriving from the legitimate relation of an individual to a genealogical predecessor of a pre-parental generation. These credentials differ from those created by filiation in that they relate to a person's place and statuses in the external politico-jural domain, but, to be sure, they derive from and are mediated by filiation. Filio-parental relations are 'encapsulated in a hierarchy of extra-familial structural contexts' (1970a: 266); their normative patterns and internal structure reflect the regulative effect of the external politico-jural domain (ibid.). Being the legitimate child of one's parents - the 'initial situation', to use Malinowski's phrase - determines and provides the primary credentials and qualifications for awarding status. Fortes writes on this point:

Filiation can be described as a relationship which creates for its bearers a package of jurally, ritually, and morally validated credentials for the rights and duties, privileges and claims that constitute status. They are credentials that entitle the bearer to activate statuses derived from those held by his parents in their respective fields of kinship, descent, and affinal relations, in the first place; but how these credentials, intrafamiliarily created as they are, are translated into social action and status depends upon the ways in which, and the institutions through which, the familial and kinship domain, on the one side, and the extra-familial, politico-jural domain, on the other, are interrelated. (Ibid.: 262; see also *ibid.*: 276)

The way in which this 'translation' takes place is characterized by two facts mentioned earlier, namely that filiation is universally bilateral, whereas descent is normally unilineal. Only one mode of filiation is associated with unilineal descent groups, and this 'dominant line' confers membership and status in the primary unit of the politico-jural domain (1949a: 32; 1959: 107-8). The 'submerged line' is, according to Fortes, linked with 'a cluster of moral and contingent rights, duties and claims ... sanctioned by religious beliefs' (1963: 60; see also 1953a: 89). The complementary opposition between matrifiliation and patrification, between descent and 'complementary filiation', is thus linked with Fortes' earlier distinctions between the realm of moral and the realm of jural norms and values, and between the external, political system and the internal, kinship system.³

For Fortes, the recognition of descent does not automatically imply the existence of descent groups as corporate groups (1970a: 240). As a first criterion, the very definition of descent as the jural recognition of the relationship between an individual and a pre-parental antecedent leads to the determination of the 'descent group' as a unit in the politico-jural domain. Moreover, Fortes, for analytical purposes, suggests that the application of the term 'descent group' be limited to groups which recruit membership by jurally acknowledging one line of descent only (*ibid.*: 280; 1959: 120-1), because non-lineal descent groups in most cases lack discreteness; they are not clearly identifiable and externally distinguishable structural units of the politico-jural domain. Fortes, in this context, makes use of Weber's distinction between 'open' and 'closed' societies, groups or associations: only closed descent groups are to be called 'descent groups'. Unilineal descent groups bear this criterion as they are genealogically closed, in

3. Although complementary filiation belongs primarily to the domestic domain, Fortes emphasizes that it comes into action in all domains of social structure. It may be the principle (in patrilineal societies) by which segmentation in the lineage is achieved. 'What is a single lineage in relation to a male founder,' Fortes writes, 'is divided up into segments of a lower order by reference to their respective female founders on the model of the division of the polygynous family into separate matrilocal houses' (1953a: 87). Complementary filiation, furthermore (in both patrilineal and matrilineal societies), provides the not unimportant link between an individual and the kin of his parent of the submerged line. The descent principle is counterbalanced by the principle of complementary filiation (*ibid.*: 88; 1959: 100-101; 1963: 60-1).

contrast to groups consisting of cognates; membership is exclusive and exhaustive (1970a: 285-7, 307).

Taking closedness and discreteness as the main criteria of a 'descent group' does not exclude the application of the term to some non-unilineal descent groups as well. Fortes mentions the bilateral recruitment of endogenous castes, ghettos and island communities; all of them are communities, as Barnes (1971: 238-46) points out, characterized by 'enclavement coupled with compulsory endogamy'. Fortes also includes royal dynasties (unilineal or not) under the rubric of 'descent group' (1970a: 286). What is significant here, again, is the discreteness of the royal dynasty as an identifiable and externally distinguishable political unit of the social structure. The dynasty is 'set apart from and in contraposition to the rest of society' (*ibid.*: 284).

Fortes' analysis of corporations in general is in line with this definition of descent groups, which he treats as paradigmatic corporations. In this context, his application to anthropological data of medieval corporation theories (as investigated by Maine, Gierke, Maitland, Kantorowicz, and others) leads to some interesting advances in lineage theory and political anthropology. These theories, Fortes recalls, revolve around the concept of medieval corporations aggregate as single 'juristic persons'. The fundamental characteristic of medieval corporations is - as was the case with lineages - their jural autonomy and unity in legal contexts, which in turn were determined by the overall political organization. As 'juristic persons' these corporations aggregate have rights and duties, responsibilities and claims; they can sue and be sued in the same way as persons (*ibid.*: 302-3).

The importance of medieval corporation theories as studied by modern legal historians is illuminated by Fortes by contrasting them with some anthropological theories. Radcliffe-Brown, Fortes recalls (*ibid.*: 74-5, 293-4), takes as the essential characteristic of corporate groups their collective solidarity, as well as their economic, political, or religious functions. This 'functionalist theory' does not investigate what is essential in Fortes' eyes: the external status of such groups in the politico-jural domain. From the 'functionalist' point of view, a group without functions is non-corporate. Here Fortes has to agree. He refers to Maitland's dictum that what we personify if we regard corporations aggregate as single 'juristic persons' is not the associated group of men but the purpose(s) for which they are associated (*ibid.*: 303). Fortes also makes it clear that 'corporations do not exist in a void. They have functions' (*ibid.*: 307). However, from the 'functionalist' point of view - and this is where his critique lies - a group is corporate as soon as it has some kind of function, regardless of whether or not it is externally distinguishable as a single 'juristic person'.

Another anthropological theory, the 'property theory' of corporations as Fortes calls it (*ibid.*: 295), is but a variant of the 'functionalist theory'; it sees property and its devolution as the constitutive principle of the corporate group (*ibid.*: 297). As the main representative of this standpoint, Fortes discusses Goody (1962):

His contention is that what makes a unilineal descent group into a corporate descent group is the possession, vested in and shared by all its members, of an estate which consists not merely of a bundle of rights in general, but of rights, specifically, in a definable good or array of goods, namely property above all, that which has productive or reproductive value. But if I follow him correctly, the fundamental reason why property generates corporation is that it is evaluated as a good or goods that must not be dissipated but must be preserved for the benefit of succeeding generations. (1970a: 296-7)

This point of view, according to Fortes, resembles too closely Weber's concept of the *Verband*, which primarily focuses on the internal constitution of corporations (rather than on their external status), and is too closely modelled on modern economic corporations to be applicable in anthropological studies. It is also a reformulation and misinterpretation of Maine's model of corporation theory (1970a: 293, 297).

We will pursue this last point, since Fortes' view of corporations is essentially that of Maine's (1888). For Maine, as Fortes points out, the leading attribute of corporations, both sole and aggregate, is their perpetuity, assured by laws of intestate succession. Maine's maxim that 'corporations never die' puts the emphasis on the preservation and devolution of the collectively held *universitas juris*, the bundle of rights and duties (1970a: 292). 'The important point in his view', Fortes holds, 'is that rights and duties, office and property, are not the forces that generate corporations but the vehicle and media through the agency of which corporations express their intrinsic perpetuity' (ibid.: 293). By contrast with Goody's standpoint, then, Maine (and Fortes) think that the corporation is the independent and autonomous variable, property the dependent one (ibid.: 300); or, as Fortes puts it alternatively: 'particular forms of property relations are contingent upon, not constitutive of, corporate group structure' (ibid.: 302). In this context Fortes also makes use of the findings of Kantorowicz's study of medieval political theology entitled *The King's Two Bodies* (1957) in which the author succeeds in showing how the controversies about the 'king's two bodies' in fact camouflage, or are expressions of and attempts to solve, the problem of the continuity of corporations sole and aggregate: their 'identity despite change', change through the death of their members (in the case of corporations aggregate) or through the death of the corporation sole's individual and single representative or personification. Quoting Kantorowicz (1957: 310-11) Fortes writes (1970a: 303):

The point here is that it is not their co-existence as 'a plurality of persons collected in one body' that makes a group corporate, but their 'plurality in succession', their perpetuity in time. Summing up these ideas, Kantorowicz says that 'the most significant feature of the personified collectivities and corporate bodies was that they projected into past and future, that they preserved their identity despite changes, and that therefore they were legally immortal'.

Fortes draws together these ideas concerning corporations on the one side and those referring to the study of kinship on the other by applying them to his analysis of lineages and offices. Descent, as an exclusive and exhaustive criterion for group membership, establishes the status of a lineage as a recognizable corporate group from the outside. The lineage is then a single juristic person which bears the status of an autonomous jural unit in complementary relation and opposition to the other constituent politico-jural units of a given society. This conclusion is underlined by the ethnographic phenomenon of 'the principle of unit representation' in lineage-based polities, according to which members of one lineage are, in their external relations, jurally equal, and according to which one member represents, in relation to outsiders, the whole lineage (1953a: 79). With regard to the perpetuity of the 'juristic person' lineage, it can be seen that the notion of descent also provides the key for the conceptualization of the lineage as an enduring structural unit. By seeing themselves in relation to a common, mythical ancestor, the members of one lineage conceive not only the unity but also the enduring existence of the group to which they belong. All the lineage genealogies of a given political system, moreover, are to be seen not as historical records but as 'conceptualizations of the existing lineage structure' (ibid.: 80). The crucial aspect of the lineage is, therefore - again from the external point of view - its continuing structural position in a system of such enduring structural units. The perpetuity of the lineage appears to be important not for the sake of any exogenous functions, but for the sake of the lineage itself and its enduring existence as a structural unit in the politico-jural domain. Its primary function is to have a structural place in the political system, and to hold it continuously.

The notion of descent not only provides the fiction through which the moral and jural unity and continuity of the lineage is presented; at the internal analytical level it also provides the means by which the physical perpetuity of the lineage is ensured. The 'dialectical, cyclical continuity' seen in the process whereby the filial generation ousts and replaces the parental generation is transformed into the 'straightforward, cumulative continuity' of the lineage (1949a: ch. V; 1949b: 1-2; 1958; 1959: 105; cf. Barnes 1971: 203-4). Viewed as 'cumulative filiation' or as 'successive steps of filiation', the notion of descent draws attention to the fact that it is through the family with its reproductive power that unilineal descent groups are replenished. 'Thus by viewing the descent group as a continuing process through time', Fortes writes, 'we see how it binds the parental family, its growing point, from a series of steps into the widest framework of social structure' (1953a: 90).

The common denominator which in Fortes' view makes corporations aggregate and corporations sole comparable is that - viewed as 'juristic persons' - they are autonomous and enduring structural units and as such occupy structural places in the political organization (1953a: 83; 1970a: 291-2; 1967: 12). The continuity of the corporation sole, from the external point of view, ensures that the network of politico-jural statuses and offices remains stable and perpetual (1953a: 92). From the internal point of view, the perpetuity of corporations sole is achieved by

definite rules of succession, which in many cases are linked to descent, but not necessarily to the existence of descent groups.

Now, instead of using the term 'corporation sole' Fortes uses the term 'office'. This term he takes to be the generic term which embraces 'status' and 'role' as special cases (1962: 57). Thus, although usually connected with political or ritual institutions such as priesthood or kingship, the term 'office' for Fortes denotes 'any juridically and socially fixed status' (1973: 287). Office *par excellence* he sees as an 'established position of authority', especially if constituted in political leadership (1962: 57, 59).

Fortes then envisages the following structural criteria of 'office' and 'office-holder':

(1) Office and office-holder are to be seen as distinct from one another (*ibid.*: 58, 86), for there is 'the need to segregate the perpetual and self-identical office from its transient and mortal holders' (1968: 18). Here Fortes makes use of Maine's observation (1888: 181) that the office-holder is not the corporation but is invested through a fiction with the qualities of the corporation - first and foremost its perpetuity - as if he were the corporation (*cf.* Fortes 1970a: 292). It is then possible for the office-holder to be regarded as unsuited to the qualities of the office which he occupies and for his legitimacy to be doubted.

(2) Offices may not be left unoccupied for long because they are then otiose and potentially dangerous (1962: 68-70; see also 1968: 7). The most important feature of offices is that they are perpetual and entail succession. It is obvious that in the case of corporations sole - by contrast with corporations aggregate - the fictional perpetuity of, and succession to, the office pose specific problems. This is so because a corporation sole is personified by a single individual. He is, at a given time, the last member (and only representative) of a corporation which is made up, not of a plurality of members at one point in time, but of a series of individuals, each of whom held the enduring office successively and for a limited period only. Whereas in the case of a lineage as a corporation aggregate, filiation and descent smoothly regulate intestate succession and continuity, in the case of corporations sole the death of its individual representative or personification dramatically disrupts and endangers the ideal perpetuity of the office.

(3) Offices have 'outward and visible trappings' (1962: 67), such as heirlooms, regalia, crowns, royal beads, or other material insignia, which objectify their greatness, sanctity and perpetuity (1968: 16-18). Office-holders - and this is a point which refers to a tenet rather than to the office - must conform to certain characteristic modes of behaviour connected with the office (1962: 67).

(4) Offices must have moral and jural sanction from society, or, as Fortes puts it alternatively, 'a mandate from society given through its responsible organs and institutions' (*ibid.*: 61). Office-holders, consequently, cannot instal themselves but must be legitimated or licensed by society (*ibid.*: 62, 71).

(5) The insignia of office, the 'dressing up of the incumbents for their parts' (*ibid.*: 66) and the 'mandate from society' are conferred upon the office-holders by means of ritual (1962, especially pp. 54, 56-7, 67).

3. Personhood and the Office-Holder

Fortes starts his investigations concerning personhood from the orthodox sociological view of the person as an ensemble of statuses and as an actor of roles (1970a: 95-99; 1967: 8-9). But he also enriches and makes more dynamic this rather static concept of the person by adding various psychological insights, many of them stemming from Freud, and by adding several different analytical considerations, which are of four major kinds. First, there is Fortes' inclusion of a diachronic dimension in the synchronic study of personhood. He investigates the prototypical life-cycle of an individual and constructs its structural phases or stages. Secondly, Fortes looks at the particulars and irregularities, the luck and misfortune, which an individual may encounter in his passage through the social structure. Thirdly, Fortes shows that the successful completion of one's personhood presupposes that an individual's path towards completion must be 'full of succession'. Fourthly, Fortes identifies a problem that is closely related to the problems of 'complete personhood' and succession, the problem of 'good parenthood'. These points, which Fortes elucidates and analyzes by discussing ritual phenomena, will structure my discussion in this section.

Fortes distinguishes between four major stages or phases in a person's life-cycle, which are closely connected with what he regards as the three main phases of the developmental cycle in domestic groups. These latter are: (1) the phase of expansion: from the marriage of a couple to its completion through offspring. The first-born has particular importance, as he 'opens the womb' and can be regarded as the creator of parenthood. This phase lasts as long as the children are economically, affectively and jurally dependent on their parents; (2) the phase of dispersion: the marriage of the children and their bringing forth of offspring; (3) the phase of replacement: death of the original couple and their replacement by the families of their children (1958: 4-5). The four stages in a person's life-cycle are marked by changing structural relationships for the individual in each of these stages. In the first phase or stage, the child is wholly contained in the matricell; it is a mere appendage to its mother. In the second phase, the father/husband assumes responsibility for the mother/child unit and for the child in relation to society at large. In the third phase, the individual comes under the jural and ritual authority and care of the domestic group and its head; the child is not yet jurally autonomous. In the fourth phase, finally, the individual is admitted to the politico-jural domain and becomes jurally responsible.⁴

'Birth', says Fortes, 'marks only the starting point of parenthood' (1973: 296), and he argues that nobody can become a complete person if he is not legitimately

4. On these points, see Fortes 1958: 9; 1974: 81-2. Fortes' reconstruction of phases in an individual's life-cycle was stimulated by Miller's *The Generations: A Study of the Cycle of Parents and Children* (1938; see Fortes 1974: 81-2). The influences of van Gennep (1960 [1908]) and Malinowski, especially his *Sexual Life of Savages* (1929), are also discernible.

fathered as well as mothered. But it is the transference of the individual into the fourth stage which marks the decisive and most important step from the internal, domestic domain into the politico-jural domain with its concomitant acquisition of the specific statuses and roles of this domain (1958). It is only when the individual has reached this fourth stage that one can speak of him as a *personne morale* in the Maussian sense.

These ideas are essential to an understanding of Fortes' analysis of the problem of 'complete personhood' in *Oedipus and Job in African Religion* (1983). He himself writes that 'Fate, or Destiny, is the main theme of this essay' (1983: 3). According to Horton, the main theme of *Oedipus and Job* is 'the way in which these peoples use religious concepts to order and explain certain key aspects of the individual passage through the social structure, and operate religious cults to facilitate this passage (Horton 1961: 110; see also Horton 1983). This is certainly one aspect of Fortes' multilayered study. However, it is necessary to stress that in the book in question, Fortes does not really discuss all the structural stages in a person's life-cycle and their concomitant religious conceptualizations and practices. He looks predominantly at the fourth phase, and there he is concerned with the development of an individual's personhood from the first acquisition of minimal jural adulthood as such up to the successful completion of personhood in death and ultimately ancestorhood.

In order to achieve 'complete personhood', we learn, it is necessary for an individual in the fourth phase to marry, to produce offspring (that is, to acquire the statuses of husband and father), to succeed legitimately (and in due time and order) to other acquired statuses or high offices, and lastly, to die a 'good' or 'proper' death. A 'good death' in West African societies means that a person does not die a 'premature' or an 'unnatural' death (these characterizations being open to the actors' interpretations), and - most importantly - that he leaves behind offspring to perpetuate his name and his line of descent by establishing and worshipping him as an ancestor. 'Certainly for the Tallensi', Fortes writes, 'the ideal of the complete person is an adult male who has reached old age and lineage eldership, who has made descendants in the patrilineal line and who is qualified by a proper death to become a worshipped ancestor' (1973: 299; see also *ibid.*: 293-4, 304, 308; 1974: 84, 91). To achieve 'full personhood' or 'complete personhood' with maximum jural autonomy, then, takes a lifetime, and its crucial test takes place only at death.

In *Oedipus and Job* Fortes shows that, and how, the particulars and irregularities (manifested as fortunes but even more so as misfortunes) which a person may encounter on his way to 'complete personhood' are conceptualized in the religions of West African peoples. These concepts, which he epitomizes in the paradigms of Oedipal fate and Jobian supernatural justice, are used by the actors to explain occurrences which upset and endanger the normal expectations and routines of an individual in his passage to ancestorhood. In the structural-functional frame of interpretation these religious concepts account for the 'irregular individuality' of persons in homogeneous and rigidly structured societies, i.e., in

societies where individual choice concerning the statuses and offices which a person is entitled to hold is predetermined and limited by the facts of his 'initial situation'. The notions of Oedipal fate and Jobian justice, then, represent forces in a person's passage through the social structure which upset and threaten the socially fixed passage but which cannot be regulated or changed. By ascribing supernatural causes to these forces, these religious concepts explain and offer a theodicy and thereby devices for ritual action with which the actors hope to encounter and manipulate their individual fate (see also 1966: 415; 1979a). Individual fate, seen as supernaturally caused, is ultimately justified. And, as ultimately responsibility for 'deviation from the norm' is projected outside the living body, an individual as well as a social catharsis and exoneration is achieved (1983: 14, 23, 29, 33, 35).

In many of his writings on religion in societies with a social organization based on kinship and descent, Fortes interprets religious concepts and beliefs as 'religious extrapolations of the experiences generated in the relationships between parents and children' (*ibid.*: 39; see also 1961a: 185). Interpreted in this way, the notion of Oedipal fate is the representation of an abortive filio-parental relationship. It expresses the failure of an individual to be incorporated successfully into society and to achieve 'complete personhood' in ancestorhood. The notion of Jobian justice and fulfilment is the religious representation of a successful filio-parental relationship. Job stands for an individual who dies a good death, but first he has to accept God's omnipotence and justice as a phenomenon beyond human questioning, and thereby accept his particular misfortunes as divinely justified (1983: 4-6; 32-7).

In West African religions, the notions of fate and supernatural justice are often closely linked with an elaborate system of ancestor worship. In his various studies of ancestor worship (1961a; 1965a; 1965b), Fortes illuminates the problem of 'complete personhood' in its specific aspect of succession to the various statuses which an individual has to acquire for his successful passage in and through society. In question here, then, are not so much the religious conceptualizations of individual success or failure to achieve ancestorhood as the religious concepts and practices used to express and resolve the structural opposition and tension inherent in the relations of father and son, and of office-holder and successor. In line with his view of religion as the extrapolation of experiences generated in filio-parental relationships, Fortes opens his analysis of ancestor worship by looking at filio-parental relationships in general, and by looking at the relationship between father and first-born son in particular.⁵

5. For Fortes on filio-parental relationships, see 1949a: ch. VI; 1961a; 1970a: ch. XIII. In his writings on ancestor worship, Fortes concentrates on the relationship of a father to his first-born son, who establishes the couple irreversibly as parents. The first-born son is regarded as the representative of the whole sibling group and as the legitimate heir to his father's status (1961a: 176; 1974).

The relationship between father and first-born son is the 'key relationship in Tale social structure' (1983: 13). In Tale society a man is not autonomous as long as he has a father alive (1949a: 147-9). Although paternal authority is usually exercised benevolently, and although sons usually accept their dependent status with filial respect, the impossibility of succeeding to one's father's status and politico-ritual office until he dies leads to rivalry and hostility, albeit suppressed (1983: 12; 1961a: 170-2; 1978: 19-21). This rivalry increases with the growing up and maturing of the son and with the growing old, feebleness and approaching death of the father (1983: 5; 1961a: 186; 1974: 93). The emphasis on filial piety in Tallensi society - *pietas* as Fortes calls it, reviving the old Latin meaning of the term - can be seen as the main mechanism by which the structural opposition and latent hostility between father and son are restrained and even appeased, and by means of which the moral imperative of kinship amity is preserved (1983: 25). Fortes describes *pietas* as 'the temporary renunciation of self-interest in order to maintain indispensable relationships' (1961a: 191). It is the 'saving grace of *pietas*' (ibid.: 194) which keeps in check sons who are tempted to rebel and fathers whose patience is exhausted (ibid.: 191). Filial piety, then, can be defined as the son's unquestioned acceptance of the father's supreme authority, that is, it is the kind of obedience which Job had to make his own (1983: 6; 1961a: 181-4). The supreme act of filial piety in West African societies is the performance of mortuary rites on behalf of one's deceased father. Without the attendance of the first-born son the ceremonies are not properly conducted, and there are severe mystical sanctions for those sons who neglect this duty (1983: 12; 1961a: 177-8).

An ancestor, according to Fortes' definition, is a dead, named forebear who has the right descendants, and who, by holding this status and by becoming the object of ritual service through a well-defined social group, achieves continued structural relevance for his society (1965b: 124, 129). This definition reveals Fortes' emphasis on the structural matrix of ancestor worship as a religious cult. A man becomes an ancestor not because he is dead but because he is dead and leaves behind the right category of descendants, first and foremost a legitimate filial successor (a son in patrilineal societies and a sister's son in matrilineal societies). The congregation of worshippers, then, is well defined by kinship and descent criteria. The worship of royal and chiefly ancestors, Fortes holds, follows the same pattern of family and lineage ancestor worship. The king (or chief) appeals to his ancestor (or predecessor of some kind) in his capacity as successor to the office on behalf of the whole nation (or, in the case of the chief, on behalf of his political segment) in a way similar to the way a family or lineage head does on behalf of the group he represents (ibid.: 122-3).

If death is a necessary but not a significant condition for attainment of ancestorhood, it can similarly be said that death ceremonies are also necessary but not sufficient to confer the status of ancestor. The main function of funeral and mortuary rites is, to follow Fortes, not to place a dead person among the ancestors but to disincorporate the deceased from the social structure (ibid.: 128). The first and main task of the congregation of worshippers is therefore to reinstate and

enshrine the deceased as an ancestor. The dead have to be 'brought home again'. This is accomplished by specific obsequial rites which are conducted after the death ceremonies, sometimes two or three years later. At the end of these rites the status vacated by the father is taken over by the eldest son, who ritually breaches taboos he had to observe during his father's lifetime (1983: 13; 1961a: 174-80). In this way he is established as his father's heir and achieves the right (and the duty) to officiate in the ancestor cult (1961a: 176, 178-80; 1965b: 128-9). Fortes discerns an analogy with the succession to royal or chiefly office. A man who succeeds to an office has a status relationship to his deceased predecessor which resembles the status relationship of a son who succeeds to his father's status. In both cases, the right to officiate is the right of the successor.

More has to be said about the much emphasized structural matrix and relevance of ancestor worship. An ancestor, one may put it, is a person who occupies a structural position or office in a well-balanced system of such positions or offices. In segmentary lineage systems these structural places are distributed in conformity with the lineage structure, and they emphasize it. Ancestorhood is a status in the descent structure; ancestor worship, consequently, is a lineage cult. It is, as Fortes writes (with reference to the matrilineal Ashanti),

a cult... of the basic politico-jural unit of Ashanti society, not of the domestic unit in which both parents count. In other words, ancestor worship belongs to the region of kinship and descent structure in which law, backed by the sanctions of political order, regulates social relations and conduct, as opposed to the region of patri-filial relationships in which conduct is ruled by moral and spiritual considerations. (1965b: 130).

Ancestor worship, then, originates in the family domain but is a function of the politico-jural domain. The relations of filiation through the dominant line become relations of descent in subsequent generations, and paternal status thus merges into lineage authority (1961a: 181).

These conclusions lead to a further specification of the statement that ancestor worship extrapolates filio-parental relationships to the religious plane. What is transposed, we have seen, is the dominant line of filiation only. Fortes further concludes that it is not the whole relationship of father and son in patrilineal, or of maternal uncle and sister's son in matrilineal societies, but only the component of jural authority which is transmuted into ancestorhood. Neither the personalities of *pater* and *filius* nor the specific facts of their lifetime relationship matter in this context. In ancestor worship, only jural authority is transformed into mystical power. Ancestor worship, in a nutshell, is the ritualization of paternal authority and filial piety (1983: 22-3, 30; 1965b: 130, 133-4; 1973: 293).

It is evident, given the absolute power and ultimate justice of ancestors, that the jurally autonomous son of a deceased father still remains dependent on, and accountable to, the mystical power of his father/ancestor and through him to the mystical power of all ancestors. As the intermediary between his group and the ancestors, the family or lineage head (or chief or king) is also accountable to his

group for the misfortunes which befall them. But by officiating in ancestor worship and thus expressing his continued filial reverence as well as his status as heir, the officiant also underlines the principle of paternal authority and filial piety *per se*. He emphasizes his authority over his dependants, from whom - justifiably, and backed by the mystical sanctions of ancestors - he demands obedience in turn. Ancestor worship, then, legitimates and hallows the key command/obedience relationship of the social structure and thereby sanctions the existing authority structure as a whole (1983: 25, 31, 40; 1965b: 139).

The structural opposition between father and son, or between office-holder and successor, is both marked and resolved in the cult of ancestors. The ritual symbolism of ancestor worship marks out and underlines the positions of predecessor, incumbent and successor. The present holder of authority is reminded of the transience of his authority; he is shown that he is the servant of the higher authority of his predecessor (1965b: 140-1). But the incumbent is also safeguarded from the 'premature' competitive inclinations of his legitimate heir, as the successor - reminded of his duty of filial piety or loyalty to the incumbent - is kept still and appeased in his waiting position. The successor, moreover, is assured that one day he may legitimately succeed and hold authority, authority which is thus being passed perpetually and in an orderly manner from generation to generation. Replacement of father by son, of incumbent by successor, takes place not by usurpation, but lawfully and with the consent of society. One is reminded here of the three phases of the developmental cycle in domestic groups. The triad of predecessor, incumbent and successor can be regarded as representative of these phases. Inasmuch as the dialectical and cyclical continuity of the domestic group leads to the straightforward, cumulative continuity of the lineage, the lawful passing of authority in a cycle of three structural positions of authority holders leads to the lineal perpetuity of the authority structure of the body politic as a whole. 'Authority never dies' (1961a: 188).

Up to now I have been concerned with the social person as a holder of statuses and politico-jural offices, and with the (successful or unsuccessful) passage in and through the social structure to maximum jural adulthood. Questions of morality or good conduct have entered the discussion only randomly. The problem of 'good personhood', which I want to discuss in the final paragraphs of this section, is characterized by Fortes as follows:

If personhood is socially generated and culturally defined, how then is it experienced by its bearer, the individual? This is the question of the awareness of the self, *moi* of Mauss's analysis, that is of the connection between the 'inner man' (the 'natural man' some would say) and the 'outer' socially formed person. (1973: 286)

One influence on this aspect of Fortes' work, then, is Mauss's famous essay on the notions of the person and 'the I' (1938), in which the French anthropologist envisages an evolution from the *personnage* - a holder of marks, one may put it - to the self-conscious and socially aware *personne morale*. It is this *personne*

morale of Mauss's Huxley Lecture that is at issue when Fortes deals with the problem of 'good personhood'. However, whereas Mauss saw the *personne morale* as a typical product of European and Christian history, Fortes takes the term to be universally applicable. 'The notion of the person in the Maussian sense', he writes, 'is intrinsic to the very nature of human society and human social behaviour everywhere' (1973: 288). The question of how individual and society are interrelated is specified by Fortes as a concern with 'the I' (as an introspective self) and his social relations with such selves (*ibid.*: 286).⁶ Distinguishing between the external aspects (or objective side) of personhood and its internal aspects (or subjective side), Fortes writes in his 'Totem and Taboo' (1967):

Person, then, has two aspects relevant to my theme. On the one side is his public identification, externally, by and in his relations with other persons, sole or corporate. This is a question of how he is supposed to be. On the other side is his self-awareness - his conception or image of his identity in the social order. This is a question of his internal orientation, how he knows himself to be the person he is supposed to be. (1967: 10; see also 1973: 287, 311; 1978: 23-4).

Fortes, by envisaging the problem of the self in society, takes seriously Durkheim's postulate that a human society is not only a social order but a moral order as well. This statement implies that members of such an order assume moral responsibility for their conduct (Fortes 1967: 5). The person - sole or corporate - must be identifiable from the outside, and he becomes so by displaying his statuses in the socially prescribed and accepted way. But this is not sufficient. An actor must not only be identified, he must appropriate and identify himself - he must internalize - his statuses and roles, and the rights, duties and capacities that go with them (*ibid.*: 9). The *personne morale* is not just a passive bearer of personhood but reflects on what he is expected to be, in a given social relation or status, in the eyes of the other. He is aware of his social and moral obligations, and he has, Fortes writes, "'volitional control" over his acts - in conformity with the norms and values of his society and culture' (*ibid.*: 10). Self-awareness for Fortes is, we see, essentially not the awareness of an idiosyncratic individual but the awareness of oneself as a *personne morale* (1973: 317). Even this inner state and interpretation of the individual, therefore, is interpreted in a structural, sociological frame of reference. 'Individual and collective', Fortes holds, 'are not mutually exclusive but are rather two sides of the same structural complex (*ibid.*: 314).

6. Fortes, in the context of this approach, acknowledges his indebtedness to the works of American writers; for instance, G.H. Mead 1934, Hallowell 1955, Margaret Mead 1949, and Goffman 1959. It is worth noting that the approach of studying the relationship between 'the I' and 'the other' (or 'thou') was created and developed in the first decades of this century by scholars such as Husserl, Löwith, Rosenzweig and Buber. This style of philosophy became known as the 'Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität' or as the 'Philosophie des Dialogs'.

The methodological approach which distinguishes between the internal and external aspects of personhood is capable of seeing the individual apart from his statuses and offices; and with this distinction in mind, one is able to identify and analyze cultural devices by means of which the two sides of personhood can be brought and fused together. These cultural devices are manifold. Fortes mentions names, titles, kinship labels, costume, bodily marking, initiation ceremonies, ritual avoidances, and totemistic observances and taboos (1967: 10; 1973: 287, 311; see also 1955). These are, according to Fortes, not mere external indices: 'they allocate persons to their roles and statuses, and they objectify, for the actor, his presentation to himself of his roles and statuses, and his commitment to them' (1967: 10).

These ideas lead to and are developed in a re-interpretation of the phenomena of totem and taboo. Totemistic observances, such as the prohibition to kill and eat certain animal species, are interpreted by Fortes, just as they were by Freud in his famous *Totem and Tabu* (1974 [1912-13]), as 'commands of conscience'. In the history of anthropological thought, Fortes recalls, totemistic objects were interpreted as being 'good to eat' (Radcliffe-Brown 1929, 1939) and as being 'good to think' (Lévi-Strauss 1962). Fortes holds that they are both of these, but most of all they are 'good to forbid' (1967: 18). Taboos are primarily inward oriented: they are 'objectifications of moral imperatives' which enable the person to visualize and internalize his social identity (*ibid.*: 11-12). It is through totemistic observances that persons are constantly reminded and made aware of who they are and what they are (1973: 313).

Fortes, then, not only sees - in the context of the problem of 'complete personhood' - a structural opposition between office-holder and successor: he also identifies - in the context of the problem of 'good personhood' - a structural opposition and dialectical relationship between the actor and his part, between the office-holder and the office conferred upon him by society (1962: 57-8). This relationship manifests itself as a tension and a gap between 'the I' and 'the other', between the inner self-awareness and external expectation. Members of tribal societies attempt to resolve this tension and to close the gap by means of cultural devices for the inner orientation of the office-holder. The 'outward and visible trappings' of politico-ritual office, such as royal insignia and costume, as well as the characteristic modes of behaviour connected with the office-holder, such as respect shown towards him or taboos to be observed by him, are to be seen in this context of 'good personhood'. They are cultural devices which not only point outwards (as they undoubtedly do) but also, and primarily, have inward oriented significance. It is by means of such 'moral imperatives' that the office-holder's conscience is moulded and he is reminded of his duty and moral obligation to exercise his office properly (1962: 73, 75, 82). They thus serve to bring his inner view of himself and the external expectations of others closer together; they make a 'good person', a 'good office-holder', a *personne morale* out of him. Referring to ritual symbolism and taboos of office, Fortes asks (certainly with Frazer in mind): 'Can they be explained by the theory of divine kingship according to which

it is all a matter of a magical association between the vigour and fertility of the ruler and the well-being and fertility of his people?' (ibid.: 78). And he answers: 'It is not magic of "divine kingship" kind that imposes ritual forms on these offices. Their religious character is a way of investing with binding force the moral obligations to society, for its well-being and prosperity, which those who accept office must solicitously translate into actions' (ibid.: 83).

4. *The Social Functions of Ritual*

Fortes began his long list of publications with an essay on Tallensi ritual festivals (1936). His concern with ritual remains of such importance throughout his subsequent work that one may speak of ritual as one of his favourite concerns, if not the favourite. Ritual, Fortes holds, in an attempt to clarify what he understands by the concept, is not any kind of stereotyped verbal or motor behaviour that is habitual or customary in a given culture. In accordance with orthodox concepts of ritual he sees it as a formal mode of behaviour which implies belief in the operation of 'supernatural' agencies or forces. What can be observed in ritual is that the actor - as believer - distinguishes between a world made up of 'things patent' and 'things hidden' or 'things occult' (1966: 409-11). He writes:

My thesis is that ritual is distinguished from non-ritual by the fact that it is aimed at the occult. More exactly, I would define ritual as a procedure for prehending [*sic*] the occult, that is first, for grasping what is, for a particular culture, occult in the events and incidences of people's lives, secondly for binding what is so grasped by means of the ritual resources and beliefs available in that culture, and thirdly, for thus incorporating what is grasped and bound into the normal existence of individuals and groups. Thus regarded ritual is not synonymous with the whole of a religious or magical system. It is, so to speak, the executive arm of such systems. (Ibid.: 411)

For the anthropologist, Fortes holds, the principal significance of ritual is not the efficacy the actor intends and expects his ritual to achieve. It is the efficacy of ritual on the social level, the social functions of ritual, which represent the primary concern of social anthropological studies.

The first and probably the best known function which Fortes sees in ritual is taken from van Gennep's influential study of rites of passage (1960 [1908]). The three main theorems of this work are summarized by Fortes as follows:

First, that the critical stages, as he called them, of the life cycle, beginning with birth and going on to puberty, marriage, parenthood, and finally death, though tied to physiological events, are in fact socially defined; secondly, that entry into and exit from these critical stages - or statuses - are always marked by ritual and

ceremony...thirdly, that these passage rites follow a more or less standardized pattern. (1962: 54-5)

The first and second theorems are of importance here.⁷ Fortes, as we have seen, is eager to emphasize the structural matrix of the life-cycle. At each successive stage incorporation into society means incorporation into a new field of social structure, or conjuncture of social relations (1962: 56). Ritual accompanies each of the critical steps of an individual's passage through the social structure, starting with the social recognition of a new-born child up to the final installation of the deceased as an ancestor. At each of the entries into a new field of social structure ritual confers the statuses that are specific to this field upon the person, whereas some of the former ones - those that are specific to the preceding field only - are ritually extinguished. What applies to statuses that are normal in a life-cycle is equally valid for what Fortes calls '*office par excellence*'. Both normal statuses and high politico-ritual offices are perpetual institutional entities owned by society and set apart from their temporary holders. The candidate for a status or high office cannot enter it by his own unilateral action. As possessions of society, status and high office are entrusted to a person by means of ritual through the responsible agents of society, either for his lifetime or for a limited period only (1968: 6-7). These agents, who in the case of high office are usually themselves barred from legitimately entering upon the office which they confer, are representatives of the community to which the office belongs. They confer their trust in the name of the community, and commonly in the name of a superior or supreme political or religious authority (*ibid.*: 8).

The question *why* ritual is apparently indispensable for entering upon office leads Fortes to look at the actor and at the internal aspect of personhood. I have already discussed the dialectical connection between the actor and his part, between the person and his office. A *personne morale* or 'good person' not only shows his part, he knows it, he appropriates and internalizes it. In line with this, Fortes argues that ritual not only confers the outward apparel and insignia - the masks, one might say - of the office, it also fixes upon the person behind the mask distinctive moral imperatives of speech, conduct, taboo, and other ritual observances that go with it (1962: 62, 72). Another function of ritual then, relates to the moral commitment of a person to his status or office. Ritual reminds the holder of office that he holds a trust, often a sacred trust; it helps the actor apprehend the duties that the office entails and reminds him of his accountability to society for the proper exercise of the functions of the office (1962: 62, 86; 1968: 6). Offices, according to Fortes, always serve some instrumental or technical end. Ritual, however, places office and incumbent in the moral order (1962: 62). To put it in

7. When Fortes is concerned with the third theorem - that is, with the internal organization of rites of passage and of installation ceremonies in particular - he is less indebted to van Gennep than to Hocart's comparative study of installation ceremonies (Hocart 1969 [1927]; Fortes 1968: 5, 8-9, 19; see also Schnepel 1988).

Weber's terminology, ritual adds *Wertrationalität* to *zweckrational* institutions. It is, moreover, implied in Fortes' thought that the more irrational and arbitrary the ritual symbolism and observances, the better this function of ritual is fulfilled (1967: 17; Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940: 18).

We have seen in our discussion of the principles of Oedipal fate and Jobian justice that religious concepts and practices may relate to and account for the fact of individuality in homogeneous, rigidly structured societies. This is especially so if individual deviations from normal expectations and routines manifest themselves as misfortunes and crises, and if some kind of theodicy and a manual for action are needed. Ritual, to be efficacious in the actors' eyes, must get through and seize hold of the occult (Fortes 1966: 411). Here the ritual of divination becomes significant. It is defined by Fortes as 'a ritual instrument by means of which choice is made, from among the total ritual resources of a community, of the right ritual measures for particular occasions and with regard to individual circumstances' (ibid.: 413). The outcome of divination provides the actors with 'an authoritative and legitimate, though stereotyped policy for ritual actions' (ibid.: 421), which - and this is another function of ritual - serve cathartic purposes. Ritual activities and symbolism, thus established by divination, represent a mode of action which in itself, but even more so because it purportedly influences the mystical agents and causes of misfortune, assuages the emotional tensions - grief, anger, anxiety etc. - which have been aroused by disease, afflictions of material loss, or death.

Besides this direct physiological relief, ritual may serve a deeper social catharsis, both for the individual afflicted by misfortune and for society at large - a catharsis which concerns the question of accountability for particular misfortunes. If ritual attempts to control, influence or reverse the vicissitudes of life fail, man normally assumes some kind of responsibility. But ultimate responsibility is also fixed ritually upon mystical forces and is thus projected outside the living body politic (1983: 29). Fortes writes:

We could say that when things go wrong a person admits that he is in some sense answerable. But he is allowed, nay compelled, by custom to perceive his misfortunes as emanating in the last resort from his ancestors. Since they are invested with personality they can be appeased by word and act, and this serves to restore both the sufferer's self-trust and his social esteem. (Ibid.: 30)

The cathartic efficacy of ritual is especially stressed by Fortes in his analysis of prayer (1979b: 138-9, 142-3). What can be said about the functions of ritual in connection with individual crises is similarly applicable to family, community or large-scale national crises caused by major misfortunes, such as droughts, famines, war or epidemics.

The functions of ritual I have reconstructed and summarized up to this point are concerned mainly with individual attainment of office or status, with individual passage and crisis. It is, however, obvious that individual and society must be seen in their dialectical relation. It is nowadays a commonplace in social

anthropological thought that ritual cannot be understood without taking the social situation in which it occurs into account and without considering the social relationships of the actors. Ritual beliefs and practices reflect and bear the imprint of the social structure. The social functions of ritual which are reconstructed in the following paragraphs are related to society at large. They are based on the somewhat tautological view that ritual not only reflects but in turn also has an effect on what it is purportedly moulded on and what it mirrors. Augé speaks in this context of 'the circular logic of mirror effects' (1982: 7). The functions of ritual discussed below are presented in two lines of thought which contain several distinct but interrelated points and which are interconnected themselves. In the first, ritual is seen as providing a regulating mechanism for the proper and legitimate exercise of social and political affairs. The second line of thought concerns the integrative function of ritual.

We have seen that in Fortes' definition, ritual is essentially - from the actors' point of view - a procedure for apprehending and seizing the occult (1966: 411). It is not surprising to find, but ought to be stressed here, that in Fortes' view the occult inheres in basic social relationships. Rites of passage, for instance, are not ritualizations of birth, marriage or death by virtue of the physical mysteries of these events; what are ritualized are, as Fortes phrases it, 'the basic inscrutability and potential intractability of the social relationships and psychological dispositions represented in these events' (ibid.: 413). And, he goes on:

It would not, I think, be out of step with modern anthropological theory to say that most, if not all, religious and magical ritual is concerned with prehending the unconscious (in the psychoanalytical sense) forces of individual action and existence and their social equivalents, the irreducible factors in social relationships (e.g. the mother-child nexus, at one end of the scale, the authority of society at the other). By bringing them, suitably disguised, or symbolized in tangible material objects and actions, into the open of social life, ritual binds them and makes them manageable. This bringing out into the open of social life is important. It implies legitimacy, authorization by consensus. (Ibid.)

Ritual beliefs and practices are, then, a means by which social relationships and the social system as a whole are made intellectually tangible and coherent to the actors, and by which these are legitimized.

The cognitive function of ritual - its capacity to make apprehensible of what there is otherwise (Fortes thinks) no objective knowledge - can be regarded as the basic efficacy of ritual. It is the precondition which makes communal and organized action possible, for it enables members of tribal societies to think and feel about what they are doing (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940: 17).

Ritual symbolism, by bearing the imprint of, and being modelled on, the social structure, not only mirrors it but also expresses and emphasizes it. Ritual stresses cardinal parts of the social structure, such as apical points at the various levels of the lineage structure, high politico-ritual office, or kingship. Furthermore, it accompanies and emphasizes key economic, social or political activities, and lastly,

it underlines and stresses the most important social relationships. I have elaborated this last point in the case of filio-parental relationships and in the case of the relationship between office-holder and successor. Besides its cognitive function, its organizing capacity, and its emphasizing key parts, activities and relationships of the social structure, ritual also sanctions and hallows the status quo of the social structure and of the activities and relationships to be found in it. 'The social system', writes Fortes, 'is removed to a mystical plane, where it figures as a system of sacred values beyond criticism or revision' (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940: 17; see also 1983: 13).

The interpretation of ritual as serving integrative functions, the second line of thought I want to follow up, is based on two major premises. First, there is the ethnographically well-documented fact that the ritual congregation in tribal societies is well defined by kinship, descent and other criteria, and that nobody may officiate or otherwise actively participate in a ritual unless he is legitimized to do so by holding criteria which are the same as those that define and establish social and political groups. Ritual power and responsibility are distributed in conformity with the social structure. Ritual and social or political groups are in fact identical, only they are directed towards different purposes. The second premise sees ritual symbolism as standing for something other than itself. Though it acknowledges that, from the actors' point of view, the purpose of ritual is of a religious nature, it implies that the real, the objective and pragmatic level of the efficacy of ritual lies at the social or political level of action. This is a level of efficacy which is not, or at least not primarily, envisaged by the actors themselves and which (so it is thought) only the anthropologist can fully understand.⁸

The view of the integrative functions of ritual can be stated simply and tautologically by saying that by coming together for ritual purposes, a group of socially and politically defined people, though it pursues religious aims, really expresses and achieves social and political unity. Here one has to add another, complementary function, that of the efficacy of ritual in distinguishing and marking off constituent groups from other groups of the same kind. Ritual thus expresses and achieves the unity as well as the distinctiveness of social groups.

We can now turn our attention to the integrative efficacy of ritual on a higher level, the national or tribal level. Here Fortes reaches his main conclusions by studying segmentary acephalous societies. In 'Ritual Festivals and Social Cohesion in the Hinterland of the Gold Coast' (1936) he succeeds in illuminating

8. Take sacrifice as an example. From the believer's point of view, sacrifice is directed at really existing occult forces. It is intended and expected, as Fortes puts it, '*really* to expiate his sin, *really* to propitiate his God or other divinities, *really* to erase mystical pollution, *really* to conduce towards, if not necessarily to succeed in removing his affliction' (1980: ix). For the anthropologist the most significant and intelligible aspects of sacrifice are of a sociological nature. He focuses on the facts that sacrifice presupposes amity of the communicants, and that quarrels among them have to be made public and to be resolved, often by specific rites of reconciliation. Most important for the anthropologist is the common meal of the sacrificial animal, the sacramental commensality that follows the sacrificial act.

the significance of ritual as a mechanism for social cohesion in a society which lacks any unity of a technical order (see also 1940; 1945: ch. VII). The Tallensi 'cycle of the great festivals', we learn, is closely connected with the ecological cycle. The various ceremonies of the 'cycle' are the joint responsibility of all the politico-ritual lineage and clan chiefs of the country. They are so concatenated that every ceremony is the necessary preliminary to the succeeding one (1962: 74-8). 'Tallensi society', Fortes holds, 'is not a fixed political entity but a functionalist synthesis' (1940: 263). And elsewhere: 'what political and moral cohesion they have arises from public ritual institutions' (1962: 65). What are actually integrated, to be specific, are the structurally equivalent but opposed groups which make up the lineage system. On a level higher than that of lineages or clans, ritual unites functionally differentiated groups which stand in complementary opposition to one another. Among the Tallensi this can be observed in the way in which the cycle of the great festivals integrates the two groups of clans, the Namoo and the Talis (1936: 149-50, 160-1).

In Fortes' analysis the integrative function of ritual is set in the context of the distinction between a 'moral order' and a technical order'. In African societies, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) hold, the basic needs of existence - land, cattle, rain, fertility, physical health - and the basic social units - the family, clan or state - are subjects of common interest. But these matters are also subjects of the private interests of individuals and sections of society who are more concerned about the productivity of their own land, about the welfare and fertility of their own family etc. The authors write:

Thus the basic needs of existence and the basic social relations are, in their pragmatic and utilitarian aspects, as sources of immediate satisfactions and strivings, the subjects of private interests; as common interests, they are non-utilitarian and non-pragmatic, matters of moral value and ideological significance. The common interests spring from those very private interests to which they stand in opposition. (Ibid.: 19; cf. *ibid.*: 18)

This is where ritual comes in. It is not enough, the authors hold, to assume a magical mentality of Africans and to say that ritual sacralizes land, fertility, rain etc. because they are vital needs of the community. Nor is it sufficient to say that the ritual symbolism of chiefship or kingship sanctions political authority, or that it serves to promote political solidarity. Why, they ask, are ritual ceremonies concerned with 'vital needs' usually held on a public scale? Why are mystical values and ritual always bound to pivotal political offices? Why does ritual obviously not only sanction political authority but also provide a sanction against the abuse of political power? Why is efficient administration, or the dynamics of the lineage system, insufficient to achieve and maintain social cohesion? The answer is that social and political activities, relationships and institutions - besides their pragmatic and utilitarian content - always have a moral aspect: they operate in a 'body of common, reciprocal and mutually balancing rights, duties, and sentiments, the body of moral and legal norms' (*ibid.*: 20), and ritual places them

in this body. The periodicity of the ritual affirmation and consolidation of these common values is necessary because otherwise private interests would become too dominant and people would lose sight of them and of their political interdependence (ibid.: 21).

Ritual, then, achieves and ensures the unity of a given political community by stressing the common interests of the people and by harmonizing them with their private interests, with which they are dialectically linked. It does so by emphasizing the embeddedness of pragmatic social and political relations in a moral order, which could not be kept in being, Fortes believes, by secular means and sanctions alone.

The most common function of ritual, and the one in which all others result, refers to the continuity of activities and relationships and, on the highest level of abstraction, to the perpetuity of the social structure. Ritual, in a nutshell, serves to sanction and ensure the enduring existence of the social structure. It has, then, an essentially conservative function.

Fortes' conclusions concerning the uniting capacity of ritual, which he mainly derives from the study of segmentary acephalous societies, are similarly applicable in studies of societies with centralized politico-ritual authority, where it is even more obvious that the ritual symbolism surrounding the centre serves in integrating and uniting the members of the body politic in question. With regard to the perpetuating function of ritual connected with high politico-ritual office, continuity as an ideological concept is most directly expressed in the ritual symbolism used. Take installation ceremonies, which Fortes characterizes as follows: 'the mysterious quality of continuity through time in its organization and values, which is basic to the self-image of every society, modern, archaic, or primitive, is in some way congealed in these ceremonies' (1968: 5). And, further on:

A recurrent theme in these ceremonies is to show that office has a reality and continuity, one might almost say immortality, as an institutional complex that is separate from and prior to, and that outlasts the succession of, its holders. This is often associated with material relics and insignia, the symbolism of which is relatively patent. (Ibid.: 8)

Office is symbolized in installation ceremonies as being antecedent to and transcending its temporary holders. Fortes, in this context, points out that the slogan 'the King is dead, long live the King' could also be phrased 'the King is dead, the Kingship lives forever'. The sanctity of high office expresses this principle (ibid.: 9).

5. *Conclusion*

In this essay I have provided no more than a summary and systematization of Fortes' ideas concerning corporations, personhood and ritual in tribal society. It has become evident, I hope, that topics such as kinship, kingship, personhood, office and ritual are all closely interconnected aspects of an extraordinarily coherent 'system' of ideas put forward by Fortes on the basis of a painstakingly investigated body of ethnographical data. A thoroughgoing critical assessment of Fortes' anthropology as a representative example of the structural-functional kind of anthropology in the tradition of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown and of the impact (or lack of impact) of Fortes' writings on other anthropologists would go beyond the scope of this essay. Such a task would require major intellectual enterprise which, though to some may seem outdated and counterproductive, is certainly called for if present-day and future anthropologists are to profit from the work of one of the great pioneers of social anthropological thought.⁹

In order to show the embeddedness of Fortes' ideas in the anthropological thought of his time, I want to conclude this paper with a discussion of some of the more general comments made by Fortes concerning social anthropology as an academic discipline. I will do so by comparing Fortes' kind or style of anthropology with that of Evans-Pritchard. Both anthropologists worked closely together for many years, especially in the late 1930s in Oxford, where Radcliffe-Brown then headed the Institute of Social Anthropology. It was during this time in Oxford that some of the central tenets of structural-functional anthropology, first and foremost with regard to the study of segmentary lineage systems, were developed.

Both Evans-Pritchard and Fortes stress the prime importance of the intensive study of limited areas through empirical fieldwork; and it is unnecessary to emphasize that both were superb ethnographers. Ethnography, moreover, is regarded by them not as a value in itself, but, in Fortes' words, as 'the medium for the truly significant theoretical task which was to present a consistent and coherent model' (1979c: viii). Evans-Pritchard and Fortes equally order and analyze the elements of a given culture by using the abstract conceptual tool of 'social structure' as a frame of reference, and thereby reject and surpass the kind of anthropology represented by Tylor, Frazer and to a certain extent Malinowski, who ordered and analyzed their material by reference to the notion of 'culture'.

Fortes' and Evans-Pritchard's structural-functional and holistic approach in the tradition of Radcliffe-Brown and, to a certain extent, of Malinowski, implies that everything happening occurs in the context of social relations. This is social action and hence takes place between individual actors in the framework of a total social order. The task of the social anthropologist, Fortes asserts, is to establish the structure of this 'distinguishable whole' (1949b: 3). He has to determine the

9. Among those works which have dealt more closely with Fortes' anthropology, or rather aspects of it, one has to mention Barnes 1971, Horton 1978, Goody 1987, and Kuper 1973 and 1988.

different parts of it and show their interrelations. Most important, however, is the elucidation of the 'principles which govern structural arrangement' of the parts. Culture and social structure, it is further argued, are at different levels of abstraction. Structure, Fortes holds, is not immediately visible in concrete reality but has to be established by abstraction from it. Talking about structure, 'we are in the realm of grammar and syntax, not of the spoken word' (ibid.). This analogy shows that culture and social structure cannot be regarded as being mutually exclusive. 'The social structure', Fortes writes, 'does not exist without the customary norms and activities which work through it' (1953a: 75).

While the general methodological approach and the fundamental theoretical premises of Evans-Pritchard and Fortes do not differ radically, their writings often display different cognitive interests as well as different descriptive and analytic emphases. This becomes evident especially from the 1950s onwards, when Evans-Pritchard and Fortes began to express different views concerning the role of history in social anthropology and concerning the interrelated problem of the scientific status of the subject; they differ further in their standpoints regarding the anthropologist's approach to the study of religion. Let us retrace these points of divergence.

Take, for example, Evans-Pritchard's appeal in 1950 for social anthropology to be regarded as a subject in the humanities, and not one modelled on natural science as Radcliffe-Brown proposed. Social anthropology, Evans-Pritchard argues, is 'a kind of historiography, and therefore ultimately of philosophy or art' (Evans-Pritchard 1950: 123; see also 1951: 62). In this way, Evans-Pritchard introduces anthropology to the centuries-long discussion as to whether the social sciences are part of the *Naturwissenschaften* or of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. His arguments in favour of the latter imply that social anthropology studies societies as 'moral systems and not as natural systems...that it therefore seeks patterns and not scientific laws' (1950: 123). Fortes, in his 1978 retrospective, stresses that the position put forward by Evans-Pritchard in 1950 is not greatly at variance with his own notion of social anthropology as an empirical and scientific discipline (1978: 10). But he considers the controversy over whether or not anthropology is one of the humanities and a kind of history as 'futile' and 'meaningless' (cf. 1953b: 30, 36). Anthropological studies, he held in his Cambridge inaugural lecture, have close ties with both the natural sciences and the humanities (ibid.). This is so because human life, although it is necessarily different from animal life, is nevertheless a part of organic evolution (ibid.: 35).

Fortes, then, sticks to the notion of social anthropology as a scientific discipline primarily modelled on the natural sciences (see also 1949c: v-vi). For him, social anthropology aims at the discovery of 'general laws or tendencies of human social life' (as Radcliffe-Brown put it), and these laws are comparable with those discovered in the natural sciences. Fortes (1953b: 30-2), then, disagrees with Evans-Pritchard's view that general statements in anthropology 'often are little more than guesses on a common-sense or *post-factum* level' and that they 'sometimes degenerate into mere tautologies or even platitudes' (Evans-Pritchard

1950: 120; see also 1951: 57). In his critique of the theoretical standpoints of other anthropologists, Fortes often reacts sharply if the possibility of objectivity in social anthropological researches is questioned (for example, 1978: 9; 1979c: viii). In this context, it should be mentioned that Fortes is as cautious as Evans-Pritchard and others in ascribing the status of 'law' to what he prefers to call 'basic principles of social life', and he holds that these laws or principles can be stated only in terms of probability (1953b: 36). He also argues that the anthropologist's 'models' and 'mechanisms' provide 'directives' rather than 'operative rules' (1961b: 211).

As regards Fortes' attitude towards history, he certainly agrees with many of Evans-Pritchard's remarks, made in the Marett Lecture of 1950, on the importance of history and on the parallels between the work of the historian and that of the social anthropologist (Evans-Pritchard 1950: 122; Fortes 1978: 10). But for him the specific task of social anthropology as a scientific discipline with its own subject-matter and theoretical framework is quite distinct from the task of history. Social anthropologists, according to Fortes, ought to be chiefly concerned with the synchronic study of living communities and with the investigation of how institutions and customs maintain the total structure of a society (1953b: 25). He distinguishes 'two roads in the study of social life' (*ibid.*: 29). Whereas the historical method 'seeks to explain customs and institutions by tracing their antecedents in the past and the steps by which they came to be what they are where they are' (*ibid.*), the sociological method 'seeks explanations of contemporaneously interdependent customs and institutions, the significant connections being those that reveal the functions of an institution in relation to the whole system' (*ibid.*). The two methods are not opposed to one another but complementary (*ibid.*). Thus, although acknowledging the importance of the historical method, Fortes does not consider the investigation of the kind of time called 'history' as a part of the scientific discipline of social anthropology. This view, however, does not imply that he neglects other kinds or functions of time. Accepting Marett's dictum that the 'social present' refers to a time span of at least three generations, Fortes throughout his work attempts to include a diachronic dimension in the synchronic study of societies (1949a: 63-77; 1949b: 1-2; 1958; cf. Barnes 1971: 202).

In their approaches to the study of religion, the positions of Evans-Pritchard and Fortes can be outlined as follows. Evans-Pritchard (1965: 121) finds himself in agreement with Pater Wilhelm Schmidt's claim that 'religion can be truly grasped only from within' and that 'this can be better done by one in whose inward consciousness an experience of religion plays a part' (Schmidt 1931: 6).¹⁰

10. In 1944 Evans-Pritchard entered the Roman Catholic Church, and he may well be regarded as someone 'on whose inward consciousness an experience of religion plays a part'. Fortes was the first-born son of first-generation South Africans of European Jewish parentage. His religious standpoint is described by Firth as follows: 'It is true that while apparently quite sceptical as regards dogmatic belief, Meyer seemed to be a believer in the symbolic values and social

But Evans-Pritchard clarifies his position elsewhere in his *Theories of Primitive Religion* when he writes that beliefs for the anthropologist are 'social facts, not theological facts, and his sole concern is with their relation to each other and to other social facts. His problems are scientific, not metaphysical or ontological' (1965: 17). This statement is in accord with the point of view of Fortes' who, however, contradicts the assumption that a believer, through his own religious experience, would make a better anthropologist of religion. He suggests that 'being in part actors in their own religious systems, theologians must believe, whereas anthropologists...who are primarily observers, cannot but be agnostic if they want to achieve objectivity' (1980: vi; see also *ibid.*: vii).

If one looks at Fortes' and Evans-Pritchard's writings on religion, taking Evans-Pritchard's *Nuer Religion* (1956) and Fortes' *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion* (1983 [1957]) as examples, one finds two similarly sensitive studies of the religions of the peoples in question, and it does not seem to matter very much whether one anthropologist regards his subject as part of *Geisteswissenschaften* and the other as part of *Naturwissenschaften*, or whether one is a believer and the other an agnostic. What is important is that both studies are structural-functional analyses of religion. Both Fortes and Evans-Pritchard are quite aware of the fact that their analyses can only grasp the external aspects of religion. But in their views as to how the inner state of the believer could be grasped they differ. Whereas Evans-Pritchard, at the end of *Nuer Religion*, proposes that 'at this point the theologian takes over from the anthropologist' (1956: 322), Fortes, at the end of one of his studies on ancestor worship, sees 'problems that call for psychological analysis' (1956b: 141).

Here, one is reminded of the lasting impact on Fortes' work of his early interest and training in psychology, which provides a distinctive characteristic of his writings in a generally or even anti-psychological climate of social anthropological thought.¹¹ It should, however, be stressed that Fortes' psychological considerations - similar to his considerations of the 'time-factor' - are rigidly

significance of the Jewish faith and practice. But if so he was sociologically religious not theologically religious. Like many other agnostic anthropologists, Meyer saw a basic importance in ritual as a means of expressing human values and giving people a sense of what they were and where they belonged' (Firth 1983: 60-1).

11. Besides the general influence which Fortes derives from his study of Freud, he also acknowledges the influences of Flügel and Miller (Fortes 1961a: 168 n.1; 1974: 81). In 1931 Fortes received his Ph.D. in psychology with a thesis on non-verbal intelligence tests devised for interracial application. He thereafter worked in a Child Guidance Clinic in the East End of London at a time when, and in a place where, mass unemployment prevailed. It was through this work, Fortes writes, that 'problems of family structure and its connection with character and personality formation and with social behaviour were... forcefully brought to my attention' (1978: 3). This interest in the psychology of the family strongly influenced Fortes' choice of the people and place of his fieldwork (*ibid.*: 7-8). See also Goody 1987.

embedded within the framework of a social and structural-functional analysis. One of his main points of criticism of Malinowski is that the latter was not able to conceive of kinship as a part of the total social structure (1957: 161), and that he did not sufficiently distinguish between the jural and psychological aspects of kinship (*ibid.*: 179). Fortes, then, not only distinguishes a structural frame of reference from a cultural frame of reference, he is also eager to distinguish the former frame of reference from the socio-psychological and bio-psychological frames of reference (1953a: 72-3; cf. Barnes 1971: 186-93).

It is probably this rather orthodox and disciplined attitude, even where his own cognitive interests are concerned, which in the eyes of present-day anthropologists makes Fortes' ideas, like the concepts of structure and function in which his kind of anthropology found its roots, appear to be particularly outdated and theoretically superseded. But also, it is probably exactly his strong desire to establish social anthropology as a scientific discipline with its own subject-matter and its own method of enquiry and theoretical foundations which makes his anthropology a powerful and useful tool for future anthropologists.

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