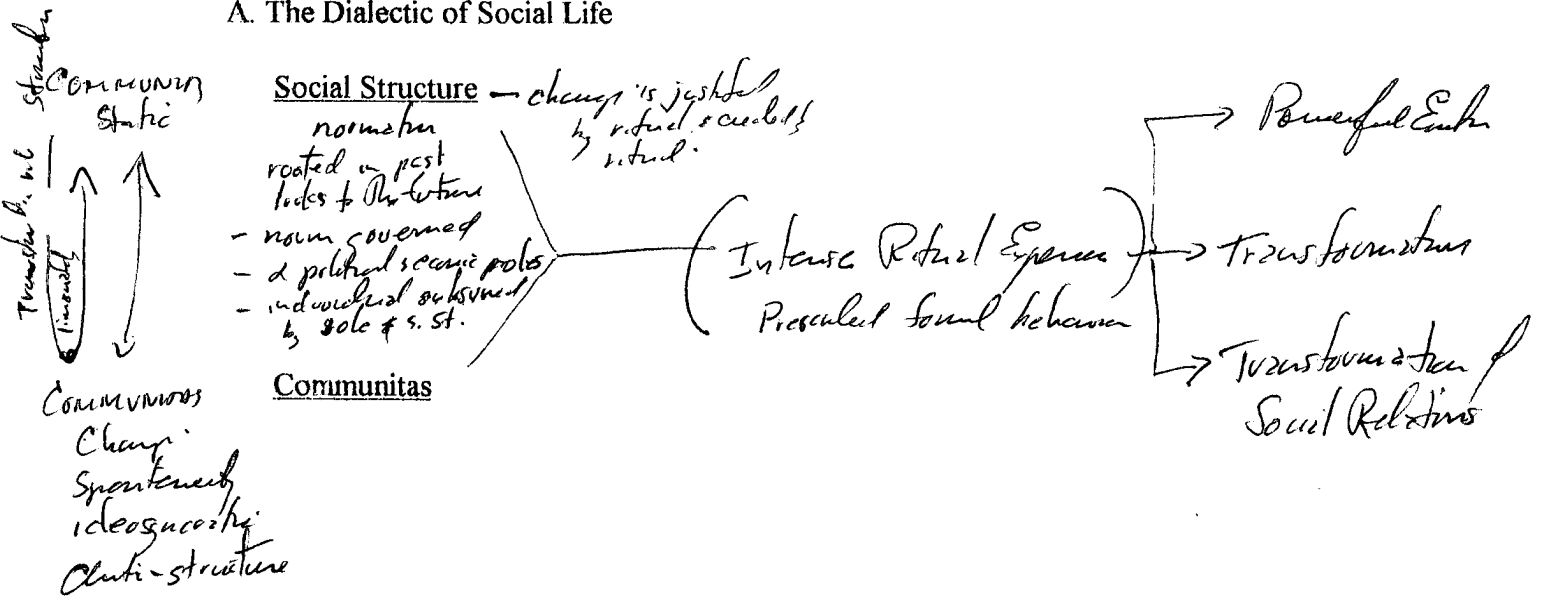


VICTOR W. TURNER  
1920-1983

I. BIOGRAPHY AND EARLY INFLUENCES

II. THE RITUAL PROCESS AS THE KEY IDEA

A. The Dialectic of Social Life



B. The Necessity of This Dialectic

### **III. IMPLICATIONS**

#### **A. The Need For Ritual Leadership**

#### **B. Worship As Anti-Structure**

#### **C. Conflict Resolution**

### **SELECTED RESOURCES**

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## VICTOR TURNER

Victor Turner (1920-1983), was a Scottish-born, American anthropologist and comparative religionist. On the basis of fieldwork in central Africa, Victor Witter Turner produced rich ethnographic achievement.

- > Turner was born in Glasgow, Scotland in 19~~20~~<sup>20</sup>.
- > <sup>in 1943</sup> He received his B.A. degree with honors in anthropology in 1949 from the University of London, where he studied with some of the leading figures of structural-functionalism: A. R. Radcliff-Brown, Meyer Fortes, Raymond Firth, and Edmund Leach.
- > He went on to graduate study at the University of Manchester under Max Gluchman and was introduced to conflict theory and political anthropology.
- > During 1950-1954 he was a research officer at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in Lusaka, Zambia (then northern Rhodesia), where he undertook, with his wife, a two-and-a-half-year study of the Ndembu people.
- > In 1954 he returned to the University of Manchester and was appointed to the positions of lecturer and senior lecturer in social anthropology.
- > From 1963 to 1968 he was professor of anthropology at Cornell University, and from 1968 to 1977 he was professor of anthropology and social thought at the University of Chicago.
- > From 1977 until his death he was the William R. Kenan Professor of Anthropology at the University of Virginia. He held numerous fellowships, visiting appointment, and distinguished lectureships at universities in the United States and around the world.
- > He organized major international conferences and was editor of the important series "Symbol, Myth and a Ritual" published by Cornell University Press.
- > Turner's ideas were shaped by his field experience. In the course of fieldwork he decided to abandon the social structural emphasis of his teachers and their bias against religion and to pursue a microsociological investigation of the actual processes of Ndembu village life that, he found, were articulated and resolved in ritual performances. He also rejected the static and mechanistic models of functionalism together with its goal of constructing universal social laws.
- > He treated Ndembu society as a dynamic social process whose events were analyzable as "social dramas," consisting of phases of breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration or schism, in which ritual played a central role. He also set aside the analytical perspective and alien categories of the outside observer and oriented his studies around the experiential context and cultural criteria of the Ndembu world, and approach that he later called the "anthropology of experience."

> He wrote one of the most detailed and perceptive studies of African divination, *Ndembu Divination: Its Symbolism and Techniques* (1961), viewing the subject in the context of social process and analyzing its use of social and ethical symbolism. He also wrote a short but brilliant clarification of methodological issues in African witchcraft studies, "Witchcraft and Sorcery: Taxonomy versus Dynamics" (1964), in which he treats as subject that had become bogged down in functionalist theorizing and confused definitions.

> In addition he wrote a pioneering study of an Ndembu cult of affliction, *Chihamba, the White Spirit* (1962). One of these studies, *The Drums of Affliction* (1968), became the locus classicus of later scholarship in the field of African medical anthropology.

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From 1980 until his death in 1983, Turner was an editor of an encyclopedia, to which he contributed two articles: "Bodily Marks" and "Rites of Passage: A Few Definitions." His published works include the following.

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