# THE RITES OF PASSAGE

*Second Edition*

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# INTRODUCTION

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Few books in anthropology have had as much influence as Arnold van Gennep's *Les rites de passage*, originally published in France in 1909. Yet, it was only with the publication of the English-language edition of the book in 1960 that this influence began to be fully felt. Even now, well over half a century since the translation was published, hundreds of scholarly publications in a vast array of disciplines refer to the book every year. Nor has the book's impact been limited to academic circles, for few concepts from the scholarly literature have entered into popular parlance as fully as van Gennep's "rites of passage." The notion that an individual's life consists of a series of transitions, structured by the society one lives in, and that these consist of three stages—separation from the old role, a liminal period between roles, and then the assumption of the new role—has become so commonplace that relatively few who use the phrase are aware of its origin.[1]

Considerable credit for launching the book into the academic stratosphere is due to Solon Kimball, the American anthropologist who proposed publication of an English-language edition to the University of Chicago Press, oversaw its translation from the French, and wrote the introduction to the volume. In that introduction, Kimball set out to describe the intellectual climate in which van Gennep worked, summarize the book's main ideas, and assess its influence on the social sciences. The huge influence that the book has had since Kimball attempted that task would itself justify this new introduction, but it is not the only reason. Kimball's brief introduction left much to be desired in placing van Gennep and his book in historical context, and recent work has brought to light tensions within French academic life, unmentioned by Kimball, that had a great effect on van Gennep's career. Inevitably, too, Kimball presented van Gennep's text in accordance with the theoretical preoccupations of Kimball's

[1] Deep thanks to my colleagues John Bowen, Caroline Brettell, Paja Faudree, Jessaca Leinaweaver, and Daniel J. Smith for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this introduction. Thanks, too, to Priya Nelson at the University of Chicago Press for leading the effort to produce this new edition of van Gennep's classic book.

time, which makes his introduction now seem dated. Finally, there are some aspects of the translation itself that bear scrutiny, particularly the renderings of van Gennep's text that themselves have had a significant influence on scholarly uses of the book.

## Arnold van Gennep

Arnold van Gennep remains a strangely shadowy figure. Victor Turner, who has done much himself to spread the influence of *Rites of Passage*, introduces him as a "Belgian ethnographer," yet van Gennep was born in 1873 in Germany, his father a descendant of French immigrants to Germany, his mother of Dutch descent.[2] At age six, van Gennep moved to France, where he would live most of the rest of his life. On graduating from lycée in Grenoble, he went to Paris, where he studied Arabic and history at the École des Langues Orientales and religious studies at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. There were no courses in anthropology taught in France at the time.[3]

In 1897, van Gennep moved to Poland, where he taught French at a high school before returning to Paris four years later to accept a position as head of translations for the Ministry of Agriculture. While working at the ministry he continued his studies at the École Pratique. His two-part thesis became his first two books: *Tabou et totémisme à Madagascar* in 1904 and, two years later, *Mythes et légendes d'Australie*, an annotated collection of Australian myths and legends translated into French. Both were based entirely on library sources.[4]

[2] Turner uses the "Belgian ethnographer" term in his *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors* (195) and refers to van Gennep as a "Belgian folklorist" in his chapter in the edited volume *Secular Ritual* (36). The source of Turner's confusion is unclear, but given the influence that his publications have had on the spread of van Gennep's fame, his mistake has subsequently been repeated widely, in publications ranging from the *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education* (see Beames, "Overseas Youth Expeditions") to the *Harvard Business Review* (see Pontefract, "Leadership in Liminal Times").

[3] Zumwalt, *Enigma of Arnold van Gennep*, 12; Belmont, *Arnold van Gennep*, 2–11.

[4] Zumwalt, *Enigma of Arnold van Gennep*, 13; Belmont, *Arnold van Gennep*, 4; Belier, "Arnold van Gennep and the Rise of French Sociology of Religion," 144. Van Gennep began his thesis under the direction of the prominent historian of religion Léon Marillier, but due to Marillier's death completed it under his former fellow student Marcel Mauss. See Sibeud, "Un ethnographe face," 91.

In these years immediately preceding his work on *Rites de passage*, van Gennep began to craft the odd professional position that would be his lot in life. Frustrated in his attempts to gain a university post, he nonetheless became a well-known figure in the emerging fields of anthropology and folklore studies. Not only were his publications becoming recognized in both France and Britain, but he was entering into relationships with some of the major figures in anthropology on both sides of the channel. In 1908 he founded and became editor of the *Revue des études ethnographiques et sociologiques* (Journal of ethnographic and sociological studies), the first issues of which featured contributions from James Frazer and Andrew Lang. A decade earlier, van Gennep had prepared a French edition of Frazer's book on totemism. Indeed, van Gennep was becoming one of the prominent authorities on anthropological topics in France through his regular pieces on ethnography and folklore in the *Mercure de France*, the most prestigious publication in France aimed at offering the results of recent scholarship to a broad reading public. He would continue these columns, begun in 1906, for over three decades.[5]

It was while writing *Rites de passage* in 1908 that van Gennep decided to quit his job at the ministry to devote himself full-time to his scholarly activities. Living in spare circumstances at his home outside Paris, he would support himself and his family for most of the rest of his life through the modest income afforded by his writings and translations.[6]

Van Gennep undertook his only non-European fieldwork in two separate two-month field trips to the French colony of Algeria in 1911 and 1912. At the end of his second trip, he moved to Neuchâtel, Switzerland, to accept the only university faculty position he would ever have. Three years later, in the midst of the First World War, he was dismissed, apparently due to his criticism of the Swiss government for what he regarded as its pro-German position.[7] Following

[5] Sibeud, "Un ethnographe face," 92; Zumwalt, *Enigma of Arnold van Gennep*, 13.

[6] Thomassen, "Hidden Battle," 177.

[7] Centlivres, "L'ethnologie à l'Université de Neuchâtel." One of the more curious manifestations of van Gennep's anomalous position in lacking a regular academic position is that in its 2012 publication of the Italian edition of *Rites of Passage* (as *I riti di passaggio*), the publisher's back cover biosketch of van Gennep identifies him as "professor of ethnology at the University of Neuchâtel," a position he held for only three years, ending in 1915.

his return to France, van Gennep took a position with the French Ministry of Information, but he remained there only until 1922, when he resigned to accept an invitation to go on a lecture tour of North America. Remarkably, he gave eighty-six lectures throughout the United States and Canada, including at many of the major American universities.[8]

Exhausted and jobless upon his return, van Gennep briefly tried chicken farming in the south of France before settling back into his modest quarters at Bourg-la-Reine, outside Paris. There, where he remained for the rest of his long life, visitors would be struck by the contrast between his outsized scholarly productivity and reputation—he had by this time published fifteen books and over 160 articles—and his impoverished circumstances. Recalling a colleague's comment about the "shame" he felt at seeing a man of van Gennep's brilliance living in such penurious straits, British anthropologist Rodney Needham railed against the "professional neglect of a man of van Gennep's capacities," which he deemed an "academic disgrace."[9]

Shortly after the 1920 publication of *L'État actuel du problème totémique* (The current state of the totemism problem), van Gennep turned away from traditional anthropological topics to devote himself exclusively to French folklore studies. He would become one of the most influential figures in the development of the academic study of folklore in Europe, although by the study of folklore he simply meant, as he put it, "the ethnography of European rural populations, nothing else." Indeed, one of the principles by which he often organized his French folklore studies was the series of life course transitions he had examined in *Rites de passage*.[10]

[8] Zumwalt, *Enigma of Arnold van Gennep*, 14; Thomassen, "Hidden Battle," 178.

[9] Needham, introduction to *The Semi-Scholars*, x–xi; Thomassen, "Hidden Battle," 17.

[10] Van Gennep in a 1914 article, cited by Belmont, *Arnold van Gennep*, 71. His use of the rites of passage concept in his French folklore studies began shortly after publication of his book, with the 1910 publication of the three-part "De quelques rites de passage en Savoie."

Senn called van Gennep "the first modern folklorist of France." He explained: "At a time when the field of folklore was in disrepute with the literary folklorists, when ethnologists and sociologists such as Marcel Mauss denied its claim to an autonomous field of study, and when folklorists still argued over its purview, van Gennep was the primary theorist and collector of folklore whose work not only maintained interest in the subject, but provided specific models of gathering, collating and interpreting folklore." Senn, "Arnold van Gennep: Structuralist and Apologist," 229.

Zerilli, writing in Italy's foremost journal of folklore studies, noted that while van Gennep was well known through his work on rites of passage, he was "perhaps even more appreciated,

INTRODUCTION

## Van Gennep, Durkheim, and Mauss

To understand the intellectual and academic environment in which van Gennep was working at the time he wrote *Rites de passage*, it is necessary to examine his relation to Émile Durkheim—the towering figure of anthropological and sociological studies in Paris at the time—and the group of disciples that Durkheim was gathering around him. In his introduction to *Rites of Passage*, Kimball offers few glimpses into this relationship, having little to say about Durkheim other than to remark that his 1912 classic, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, published three years after van Gennep's book, while "in the same tradition of French sociology as van Gennep," makes no mention of him. This, adds Kimball, is especially curious as Durkheim's book focuses on Australian totemism, a subject on which van Gennep had previously published. Perhaps, Kimball speculates, Durkheim's failure to cite van Gennep was due to the fact that the two men had different objectives in their work, with Durkheim more interested in developing an "encompassing theory" of religion "while van Gennep's objective was more limited."[11]

Kimball's characterization of relations between van Gennep and Durkheim is both misleading and incomplete. In fact, at the time of *Rites de passage*, the two men were working on similar problems: totemism, taboo, myth, and ritual, especially those forms found in what were regarded as the most "primitive" societies.[12] These were issues receiving great attention among other European scholars of the time, ranging from the vast quantity of works by best-selling British anthropologist James Frazer to the influential psychoanalytic publications of Sigmund Freud.

Yet there was also something quite distinctive in the theoretical orientation that van Gennep shared with Durkheim and which would become a hallmark of French anthropology: a concern for

especially in Italy, for his celebrated *Manuel de folklore français contemporain* . . . a fundamental, and we can even say monumental, work." In his introduction to the Italian edition of *Rites of Passage*, the prominent Italian anthropologist Francesco Remotti made a similar point. Indeed, van Gennep published nine volumes of that manual for the study of folklore over the last two decades of his life, the final volume appearing only after his death. Zerilli, "Etnografia e etnologia," 143; Remotti, "Introduzione," viii; van Gennep, *Manuel de folklore*.

[11] Kimball, introduction to *The Rites of Passage*, xii.

[12] Belmont, "Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957)," 19.

social structure and classification. At the beginning of the century, Durkheim, with Marcel Mauss, had published the highly influential essay "De quelques formes primitives de classification" (Of some primitive forms of classification) in *L'Année sociologique*. In it, they examined systems of classifications of people and things in relation to the social structure.[13] Van Gennep would later share this interest. Indeed, the image of individuals and groups passing from one social category to another lies at the heart of *Rites of Passage*. Durkheim's failure to cite van Gennep's work, then, cannot be attributed simply to differences in their intellectual interests.

If van Gennep was intentionally excluded from the French university system, Durkheim bore no little responsibility. Fifteen years older than van Gennep, Durkheim had occupied the first academic position in sociology in France at the University of Bordeaux in 1887,[14] and in 1898 he founded *L'Année sociologique*, France's first social science journal, which would play a major role in the establishment of sociology and anthropology in France. In 1902, Durkheim was appointed to the Faculty of Letters at the Sorbonne in Paris, where, four years later, he was given a chaired professorship. From that post, he exercised considerable influence over French faculty appointments in sociology and related disciplines. That van Gennep himself was well aware of this influence, and perhaps even exaggerated it, is evident from his later remark that Durkheim had laid siege to faculty positions in his field and that anyone not a member of Durkheim's group was a "marked man."[15]

Durkheim's snubbing of van Gennep has not gone unnoticed. The influential British anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard, in his own critical review of Durkheim's theory of totemism, remarked that he need not offer a detailed critique since one was already "to be found in van Gennep's devastating criticisms." Van Gennep's critique, Evans-Pritchard added, was "all the more vigorous and caustic in that Durkheim and his colleagues excluded and ignored him."[16]

[13] Remotti has previously made note of this point. See Remotti, "Introduzione," xiv–xv.

[14] The existing position at the time Durkheim took it up was simply in education, but at his insistence, the name of the position was changed to add "social science," so that he was appointed as "Chargé d'un Cours de Science Sociale et de Pédagogie." Pickering, *Emile Durkheim*, 101.

[15] Cited in Belmont, *Arnold van Gennep*, 2.

[16] Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, 67. Here Evans-Pritchard was referring

That van Gennep returned the favor, mercilessly skewering Durkheim's *Elementary Forms*, can be seen in the review he wrote of the book in the *Mercure de France*.[17] Durkheim focused his book on Australian aborigines, whom he took to represent the most primitive—and hence simplest—form of social organization, and he paid special attention to their religious system, which he identified with totemism. It was an attempt to capture what lay at the heart of all religious systems. Van Gennep's review could not have helped bring him into the master's good graces, as is evident in his first paragraph:

> As I have myself, over the years, inspected the same documents as Mr. Durkheim, I consider myself entitled to declare their theoretical worth to be rather less than he seems to suppose. Indeed, he treats them in much the same manner as religious commentators treat their sacred texts, marshaling vast erudition to illuminate them, but never wondering whether three-quarters of the raw material is even trustworthy. I should like to hope this volume might attract a few new adepts to ethnography, but I fear that . . . it will only drive them away.[18]

Van Gennep kept up his attack on Durkheim for his uncritical use of ethnographic sources:

> The surfeit of references to documents written by sundry informants, police officers, random colonists, obstreperous missionaries, and so forth, is simply futile, as there are entire pages of Mr. Durkheim's book where the conscientious ethnographer is obliged to append a question mark to each line: "Really? How reliable is this informant? How reliable is the document and what does it actually say?" . . . In ten years, his entire systematization of the Australian material will have been utterly rejected, along with the multiple generalizations constructed on the flimsiest foundation of ethnographic facts I have ever observed.[19]

in particular to van Gennep's 1920 book, *L'État actuel du problème totémique*.

[17] Van Gennep's review of *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* originally appeared in *Mercure de France* in 1913. I quote here from the English translation published in *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, no. 1 (2017): 576–78.

[18] Van Gennep, review of *Les formes élémentaires*, 576.

[19] Van Gennep, review of *Les formes élémentaires*, 577.

It is worth noting that reliance on such nonscholarly sources was common at the time, and, ironically, van Gennep's *Rites of Passage* is open to the same criticism he leveled against Durkheim, as we shall see.

Van Gennep's critique of Durkheim's work was in many ways ahead of its time, both theoretically and methodologically. Many of the early anthropologists—and not only anthropologists, as Sigmund Freud's book *Totem and Taboo* makes clear[20]—looked to the Australian aborigines as embodying Europeans' contemporary ancestors, that is, the simplest forms of society and culture that were assumed to have characterized an earlier general stage in human social evolution. Working in the wake of Darwin's discoveries, they viewed the technologically simple, nonliterate societies of the world as somehow stuck at an earlier form of society, a stage through which all more advanced societies had passed. Van Gennep demurred, again criticizing Durkheim:

> The idea he has extracted from this ensemble of primitive man . . . and "simple" societies is simply misguided. The better one is acquainted with Australian societies, and the less one focuses on the development of their material culture and social organization, the more one remarks that they are very complex, very far from the simple or primitive, and indeed very evolved along their own lines.[21]

Van Gennep was likewise prescient in finding fault with Durkheim's theory for ignoring the role of the individual. Bronisław Malinowski would take up this critique in his own way in the twenties and thirties, and by the end of the century it would be identified with the concept of "agency"—the notion that individuals are not simply the products of their culture but also, by their actions, help change it:

> Mr. Durkheim's well-established personal proclivity for identifying and foregrounding the collective (or social) element leads him to neglect the generative role of particular individuals in creating certain institutions and beliefs, which I had myself underlined in *Australian myths and legends*, and which he willfully dismisses as

[20] Freud's *Totem and Taboo* was originally published in 1913 in German. The English translation appeared in 1918.

[21] Van Gennep, review of *Les formes élémentaires*, 577.

> nugatory. . . . Having no feel for life, no feel for biology or ethnography, he transforms living phenomena and beings (*vivants*) into scientifically desiccated plants arranged as in a herbarium.
>
> From there to outright denial of the reality of the individual and the dynamic part played by individuals in the evolution of civilizations is a short leap that Mr. Durkheim eagerly makes.[22]

Durkheim died five years after the publication of *Elementary Forms*. Through most of van Gennep's career, the man most responsible for carrying on the Durkheimian project of establishing a science of anthropology and sociology in France was thus not Durkheim himself but his nephew and intellectual heir, Marcel Mauss. Practically the same age as van Gennep, Mauss had been a fellow student at the École Pratique in Paris. It was Mauss who became the guiding force behind *L'Année sociologique* following his uncle's death, and much of his work was published in its pages.[23]

Van Gennep's relations with Mauss were complicated. The men became rivals, yet early on their relationship was apparently quite close. Mauss provided comments on a draft of van Gennep's first book, *Tabou et tolémisme à Madagascar*, and van Gennep subsequently offered thanks in the book's preface to "my friend Marcel Mauss." In *Rites de passage* van Gennep wrote positively of some aspects of Mauss's work.[24] Yet though they would both spend most of their lives not far from each other in the Paris area, their career paths diverged, as Mauss solidified his position at the center of the institutional devel-

[22] Van Gennep, review of *Les formes élémentaires*, 578.

Van Gennep continued to offer critical comments on Durkheim well after Durkheim's death. In an article on methodology in folklore studies published in 1934, for example, van Gennep offered an unflattering view of Durkheim's construction of a universal theory of religion based on the study of Australian aborigines: "When one thinks that Durkheim and others based universal theories on tribes comprising no more than twenty to a hundred individuals, one is assailed by qualms. In Savoy I have been dealing with three million people. At that rate I could have invented a hundred universal theories just by concentrating on the exceptions alone." Quoted in Belmont, *Arnold van Gennep*, 56–57.

[23] Fournier, *Marcel Mauss*, 2.

[24] For example, see van Gennep, *Rites de passage*, 155 (hereafter *RDP*), in reference to Hubert and Mauss's 1904 essay in *L'Année sociologique* on a theory of magic. Thomassen notes that van Gennep's lengthy discussion of systems of exchange in *Rites de passage* offered some of the key ideas later taken up by Mauss in his own classic essay in *L'Année sociologique*, later published in English translation as a book, titled *The Gift* (1954). Yet if Mauss was inspired by *Rites de passage*, he does not acknowledge it. Thomassen, "Hidden Battle," 189; Mauss, "Essai sur le don."

opment of anthropology in France, while van Gennep was forced to work outside the world of the universities altogether.[25]

## *Rites of Passage*

"My rites of passage," van Gennep reflected some years after its publication, "is like a part of my own flesh, and was the result of a kind of inner illumination that suddenly dispelled a sort of darkness in which I had been floundering for almost ten years."[26] The darkness in which he was struggling, it seems, was caused by the welter of theories on the nature of ritual appearing in the works of the pioneering late nineteenth-century anthropologists in Britain, France, Germany, the United States, and beyond. No one had been more influential in spreading such theories, which were rooted in a fascination for the exotic rites of the newly colonized world, than James Frazer, whose *Golden Bough*, first published in 1890, had become a best seller. Many of these writings were organized by what were taken to be types of ritual: fertility rites, rites linked to rain and crops, initiation rites, funeral rites. Few of these theorists had actually observed the rites they examined, relying instead on the flood of descriptions coming in from European travelers, colonial administrators, missionaries, and the like.

The unusually ambitious scope of van Gennep's book is evident from its original title page, which bore the ponderous subtitle: "Systematic study of the rites of the doorway and the threshold, of hospitality, adoption, pregnancy, delivery, birth, childhood, puberty, initiation, ordination, coronation, engagements and marriage, funerals,

[25] Thomassen, "Émile Durkheim," 235–36. As late as 1932, van Gennep was writing Mauss to ask for his help in gaining an academic position in Paris, seeking, he said, to have "something stable for [his] old age." Quoted in Fournier, *Marcel Mauss*, 300. If in the earlier part of his career van Gennep was hardly anomalous as a respected scholar unemployed by any university, museum, or research institute, by the latter decades of his life this scholarly path was becoming increasingly rare.

[26] Van Gennep in a 1914 article on *The Golden Bough*, quoted in Belmont, *Arnold van Gennep*, 58. Although van Gennep could be highly critical of the work of other scholars, he always retained a respectful tone in *Rites of Passage* in his treatment of Frazer and his *Golden Bough*, referring to the work frequently. Frazer's *Totemism* was the first of many anthropological works van Gennep translated into French, from English, German, and Italian authors. Zumwalt, *Enigma of Arnold van Gennep*, 102.

the seasons, etc."[27] Yet while the book at its heart offered something very new, it in many ways reflected the larger intellectual traditions of the anthropology of its time. In his foreword, van Gennep writes that the new interpretation he offered was "consistent with the progress of science," and this faith in science—and this view of the nature of anthropological work as scientific—was certainly a widely shared tenet of early twentieth-century anthropologists (xlv).[28] The pages of the book are littered with citations to the work of the major anthropologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from Edward Tylor's *Primitive Culture* and Frazer's *Golden Bough* to William Robertson Smith's *Religion of the Semites* and Edward Westermarck's *The History of Human Marriage*. While van Gennep would be critical of Durkheim, he seems to have drawn from Durkheim in dividing the social world into two spheres: the sacred and the profane.[29] And although van Gennep did not always approve of the use of cultural details removed from their ethnographic context, *Rites de passage* is in fact typical of the time in following just such an approach.

"A host of ethnographers and folklorists," writes van Gennep, "have demonstrated that among the majority of peoples, and in all sorts of ceremonies, identical rites are performed for identical purposes." His goal, he tells us, is different: "Our interest lies not in the particular rites but in their essential significance and their relative positions within ceremonial wholes—that is, their order" (191).

Van Gennep opens the book by noting the universality of rites of passage in the life course: "The life of an individual, regardless of the type of society, consists in passing successively from one age to

[27] The subtitle does not appear in the 1960 English edition of the book.

[28] All citations to *Rites of Passage* are to the present edition, with page numbers given in the text. Any references to the English edition of *Rites of Passage* will hereafter be abbreviated as *ROP*.

[29] Van Gennep speaks of the separation into sacred and profane in the very first page of his opening chapter, and on the second page writes (here I use my translation): "As we move downward on the scale of civilization (taking this word 'civilization' in its broadest sense), one notes a greater predominance of the sacred world over the world of the profane" (*RDP*, 2). Later, he refers to the separation between sacred and profane as one of the two primary divisions "characteristic of all societies irrespective of time and place" (the other being the separation of the sexes) (*ROP*, 189). Although it is Durkheim's 1912 book, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, that is most responsible for the centrality of this sacred/profane distinction in subsequent theorizing on religion, Durkheim had already employed this dichotomy in his study of incest in the opening article of the first volume of *L'Année sociologique* (1897).

another and from one occupation to another."[30] He goes on to note "a wide degree of general similarity among ceremonies of birth, childhood, social puberty, betrothal, marriage, pregnancy, fatherhood, initiation into religious societies, and funerals." Yet rather than limit use of his rites of passage scheme to such individual life course transitions, he sees a much broader application. Such rites, he argues, are also to be found accompanying the regular passages that take place in time and season: rites of the full moon, festivals celebrating seasonal changes, and New Year's celebrations (3–4).

All these rites of passage, van Gennep observes, have a three-part structure: rites of separation, rites of the margin, and rites of incorporation. The first involve rites that mark the separation of the individual from his or her previous role, the second a period that Victor Turner would later dub "betwixt and between," in which the individual, while no longer in the old role, has not yet entered the new one. It is through the third set of rites, those of incorporation, that the individual reintegrates into society in the new role.

## Some Misunderstandings

Two points are worth noting, for, although van Gennep is careful to stress them, they are sometimes misunderstood. First, as he states early in the book, "It is by no means my contention that all rites of birth, initiation, marriage, and the like, are only rites of passage." He maintains that these rites have multiple purposes. Marriage rites, for example, are also likely to include rites aimed at ensuring the couple's fertility. Pregnancy ceremonies, he tells us, are likely to include rites aimed at protecting mother and child from evil forces and ill health. Funeral ceremonies may primarily attempt to protect survivors from the wrath of the soul of the deceased (11, 41, 192–93). In short, a complete anthropological study of these rites would include analysis that goes beyond their characteristics as rites of passage.

Second, van Gennep does not argue that each particular sequence of rites of passage develops all three stages of the rites to the same extent. In some sequences, he tells us, it is the phase of separation that is emphasized, in others the phase of the margin—what he refers

[30] *RDP*, 3. Translations of the French are my own.

to as the *marge*—and in yet others it is rites of incorporation. The rite of baptism, for example, is, in van Gennep's view, principally a rite of incorporation (53–54).

It might be expected that a book on rites of passage would be organized by the various common transition points in an individual's life, and indeed chapters 4 through 8 do follow this expected course, from pregnancy and childbirth to funerals. Neither of van Gennep's first two chapters after his introduction, however, deal with such transitions. The first of these, titled "Le passage matériel," focuses on the rites involved in passing from one place to another. In such transitions, he points out, the land between two territories is often accorded a kind of sacrality, a sacrality that he identifies with the *marge*—that is, the middle stage of rites of passage. The *marge*, then, is found in not only the transition between roles, but the transition between places as well.

In the 1960 English edition of the book, "Le passage matériel" is translated as "The Territorial Passage." This is not quite exact. What van Gennep has in mind are not only passages from one country to another, or from one tribe's or kinship group's lands to another, but also much more limited movements. In this context, he gives special attention to rites of entry into a house.[31]

The chapter that follows similarly considers rites of passage that have nothing to do with individual life course transitions. "Individuals and Groups" examines those rites that surround the arrival of strangers. Van Gennep detects a "surprisingly uniform pattern" in ceremonies to which such visitors are subjected (27). Again he identifies a three-stage pattern. He refers to the initial phase here as the "preliminary" stage (28). In this first stage, separation from the previous state may be marked by such symbolic means as the wholesale departure of villagers into nearby hills or forest, or by their closing themselves in behind their doors. He refers to the subsequent phase of the rites as "the period of *marge*." This consists "of such events as an exchange of gifts, an offer of food by the inhabitants, or the provision of lodging" (28). Finally, in the third stage, the ceremonies end by rites of incorporation, as enacted through a formal entrance, a common meal, or exchange of handshakes. Van Gennep cites the

[31] *RDP*, 24.

classic anthropological case of the potlatch of Native Americans of the northwest coast as an example of such rites (30).[32]

## Life Course Transitions

With chapter 4, dedicated to pregnancy and childbirth, van Gennep begins his analysis of life course rites. He takes pregnancy and childbirth to form a single system of rites of passage, and he argues that they should therefore be studied as a whole. Rites of pregnancy, he tells us, are primarily rites of the *marge*, as women in this period remain in a marginal state. Rites following childbirth, then, are principally rites of incorporation, that is, rites "intended to reintegrate the woman into the groups to which she previously belonged, or to establish her new position in society as a mother, especially if she has given birth to her first child or to a son" (41).

Van Gennep turns in the following chapter to rites of passage involving the newborn child and young children. Again he argues that these involve a sequence of rites of separation, rites performed in the period of the *marge*, and then rites of incorporation into the new role. As throughout the book, his chapter draws on examples from around the world, discussing within only fifteen pages a dizzying range of examples from Africa, Australia, Borneo, Samoa, South Asia, China, and native North America.

The comparative great length of chapter 6, "Initiation Rites," reflects the central place that rites of transition into adulthood have in the book. Van Gennep begins by criticizing the widespread tendency to label such rituals "puberty rites," pointing out that they may or may not coincide with the physiological attainment of puberty (66). Rather, he suggests, they should be viewed as rites of separation from the asexual world, which are followed, after a period in the state of the *marge*, by rites of incorporation into the "world of sexuality" (67).

Van Gennep's discussion of rites of incorporation into the new social identity offers a colorful example of the way he casts what had been seen as a wide variety of rites from around the world into a single framework: "Cutting off the foreskin is exactly equivalent to

[32] See also *RDP*, 38–39.

pulling out a tooth (in Australia, etc.), to cutting off the little finger above the last joint (in South Africa), to cutting off the ear lobe or perforating the ear lobe or the septum, or to tattooing, scarifying, or cutting the hair in a particular fashion." He then adds the clitoridectomy, or the excision of the clitoris, to this list as an example of a rite of passage that marks girls' passage to the world of sexuality, and he devotes considerable attention to the rite in these pages (65–74).

While this kind of analysis can appear to be a classic example of the quest for the exotic in early anthropology, the chapter in fact represents a significant step in advancing anthropology beyond a simple division of the world into the "savage" and the "civilized." The chapter makes the case that what contemporary scholars had regarded as very different rites of initiation found in more "complex" societies should be placed analytically in the same category as these "primitive" rites. Hence the chapter includes an extensive discussion of the evolution of Christian baptism, along with accounts of the enthronement of kings.[33]

Van Gennep pursues this view further in his next chapter, as he examines marriage and betrothal. He faults previous work for its narrow focus on individual rites in isolation, rather than as part of a larger structure. Here he argues for examining together "the marriage ceremonies of any civilized or semicivilized people, whether they be in Europe or Africa, Asia or Oceania, antiquity or the present" (117). Previously, many scholars had interpreted those ritual features found in European society that were also found in "primitive" societies as survivals, no longer serving any useful purpose in the more "advanced" society. Now van Gennep called on them to recognize that similarities among rites in these very different kinds of societies were due to deeper commonalities.

After in the following chapter applying his scheme to funeral ritual and then offering a somewhat catchall chapter on other kinds of rites of passage, van Gennep comes to his conclusions. What differentiates his work from the vast outpouring of publications on ritual in previous decades, he argues, is his focus on the structure

[33] "It becomes readily apparent," he tells us, "that the conceptual scheme proposed is also applicable to enthronement ceremonies," to which he adds ceremonies undergone by individuals entering Roman Catholic or Orthodox Catholic religious orders or the priesthood (106–14).

of groups of rites, rather than on individual rites themselves. In rites that seem so different in focus, he has discovered a common order: "Their positions may vary, depending on whether the occasion is birth or death, initiation or marriage, but the differences lie only in matters of detail. The underlying arrangement is always the same. Beneath a multiplicity of forms, either consciously expressed or merely implied, a typical pattern always recurs: *the pattern of the rites of passage*" (191). Here we see a kind of structural analysis that would prove influential in later developments in French anthropology, most notably through the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Van Gennep calls attention to a second finding as well. In these rites, he tells us, he has detected a pattern "whose generality no one seems to have noticed previously" (191). They all tend to include a period of *marge*, a time that may acquire a certain autonomy of its own. Here he gives as examples the case of betrothal, not married yet no longer single, and the case of novitiates preparing to enter religious orders or the priesthood.[34] This observation would serve as a springboard for major developments in anthropology over a half century after van Gennep's writing, taken up in different ways by both Mary Douglas and Victor Turner.

## The Initial Reception

Van Gennep's book was met by withering criticism in the pages of *L'Année sociologique* in a review written by Marcel Mauss himself. Nicole Belmont's characterization of the review, in her biography of van Gennep, as "fairly uncomplimentary" is an understatement. More on the mark is her charge that the review showed "bad faith," for, in addition to well-founded criticisms, it offered others based on what seem to be willful misinterpretations of van Gennep's text.[35]

Van Gennep was not content, wrote Mauss, to limit his scheme of rites of passage to religious initiation ceremonies, as, Mauss suggested, he should have. Rather, charged Mauss, he "sees everywhere only passages, with [stages of] separation, *marge*, and incorporation."

[34] The original is found in *RDP*, 275. The 1960 English translation is found on p. 191, which, however, translates *marges* as "transitional periods." See my discussion below regarding problems with this translation.

[35] Belmont, *Arnold van Gennep*, 62–64.

Suggesting that van Gennep was proposing a "law," he then argued that van Gennep believed that this law "dominates all religious representations . . . it is the origin of theories of reincarnation . . . of philosophies from that of [ancient] Greece to that of Nietzsche, etc. In the end, this work embraces practically all the questions that the science of religion can pose."[36] Van Gennep would have reason to be upset at Mauss's review, for he nowhere in the book characterized his rites of passage as a "law," and he repeatedly stated that there were many aspects of ritual that his rites of passage schema did not address. Nor did he claim to be offering an explanation for the history of philosophies of any kind.

If Mauss voiced a criticism that rings true today, it is with van Gennep's method—common to anthropology of the time—of employing examples plucked willy-nilly from ethnographic contexts from Borneo to the Congo. "The method employed," wrote Mauss, "is that prevalent in the anthropological school. Rather than focus analysis on some typical facts that one can study with precision, the author takes a kind of ramble through all of history and all ethnography. . . . He makes use of all rituals, those of China, of Islam, of Australia, of America, of Africa, of the Catholic Church, etc. We have often spoken of the disadvantages of these scattershot reviews."[37]

British scholars greeted the book much more warmly, and their reviews—in major journals—testify to the fact that van Gennep was already a well-known figure in anthropological circles.[38] "M. van Gennep's book, like everything he writes, is learned, judicious, and methodical," Andrew Lang, then one of the preeminent anthropological scholars of religion in Great Britain, wrote in his review.[39] T. C. Hodson, a South Asian specialist who would later become the first William Wyse Professor of Social Anthropology at Cambridge, judged

[36] Mauss, review of *Rites de passage*. Translations of Mauss's review are my own.

[37] Mauss, review of *Rites de passage*. I translate Mauss's final phrase, "*ces revues tumultueuses,*" as "these scattershot reviews," which I think best gets at his meaning, although there does not seem to be a fully adequate English equivalent.

[38] "M. Van Gennep is well known to specialists for his researches in anthropology, folk-lore, and kindred subjects," reported the review in the *Journal of the Royal African Society* (108). "The variety, as well as the extent and thoroughness of his learning, is shown in his *Mythes et Légendes d'Australie,* his *Tabou et Totémisme à Madagascar*, and *La Question d'Homère*, to which Mr. Andrew Lang devoted an article in the *Morning Post* a few months ago."

[39] Lang, review of *Rites de passage*, 826.

the book "a substantial and valuable contribution to anthropological literature" and remarked that "its sustained and close argument merits thought and attention from the beginning to the last word of the last chapter."[40]

Although less widely reviewed in the United States, what reception the book did receive was no less enthusiastic. Frederick Starr, the first professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago, opened his review in the *American Journal of Sociology* by calling it an "important and original work." Starr highlighted van Gennep's unusually broad sweep in proposing that a common structure united a wide variety of rites and concluded: "To bring all of these into one group and to demonstrate their identity is a synthesis of extraordinary boldness."[41]

## The English-Language Edition

Despite the warm reception that *Rites de passage* received in Britain and the United States, it was not until the publication of the English-language edition half a century later, and three years after van Gennep's death, that the book began to have its enormous worldwide impact.[42] Credit for the project of publishing a translation of the book goes to Solon Kimball, who first proposed it to the University of Chicago Press. It was Kimball, too, who arranged for Monika Vizedom, then a graduate student at Columbia, where Kimball was a professor at Teachers College, to translate it.[43]

[40] Hodson, review of *Rites de passage*, 30.

[41] Starr, review of *Rites de passage*, 207–8.

[42] In addressing the influence that *Rites of Passage* has had following 1960, I focus on the impact of the newly translated text and so limit my attention in these pages primarily to the English-speaking world. *Rites de passage* continued to have significant influence in the French-speaking world as well, as evident in Pierre Bourdieu's important 1982 essay, "Les rites comme actes d'institution," which begins: "Avec la notion de rite de passage, Arnold Van Gennep a nommé, voire décrit, un phénomène social de grande importance. . . ." For another French example, see Fellous, *À la recherche de nouveaux rites*.

[43] In her translator's introduction, Vizedom writes: "Although Dr. Kimball's name appears on the title page only in connection with his introduction, this translation has been primarily his project, and one which never would have reached completion without his tireless efforts." Gabrielle Caffee is credited on the book's title page with being a cotranslator with Vizedom, but in his introduction Kimball makes clear that the translation is largely Vizedom's work, with Caffee only providing help "in the initial phases of the translation." See 1960 edition of *ROP*, xxii, xviii.

Although Kimball was a prominent anthropologist, it is in some ways surprising that it was he who spearheaded the project. He was not a student of ritual or religion, nor was he known for any previous interest in French theory. While a graduate student at Harvard, he had worked as a research assistant for Lloyd Warner in his community study of Yankee City (Newburyport, MA) and then conducted his dissertation fieldwork in Ireland. Following his graduate work, he spent a decade working for the US Bureau of Indian Affairs. Far from a theorist, he was a pioneer in applied anthropology and the anthropology of education, serving as president of the Society for Applied Anthropology in the mid-1950s.[44]

In offering his rationale for publishing an English edition of van Gennep's book, Kimball explains: "The need for a translation . . . has long been felt by those who were appreciative of the significance of his theoretical formulations. Although his influence has been considerable in some anthropological circles, his contribution, in general, has failed to reach the other social sciences."[45] While perhaps overstating the extent to which van Gennep's book had been read by American anthropologists in its original French, Kimball was prescient in thinking that publication of an English edition would have a major influence on disciplines well beyond anthropology. As for anthropology, Kimball correctly observed that, by the time he was writing, the focus on religious and ritual topics that had so marked earlier anthropological studies had been substantially reduced.[46] While there were some notable holdouts, such as Evans-Pritchard,[47] the functional revolution in anthropology had turned attention to matters of social organization, to economy, politics, and kinship. If in subsequent years anthropologists' attention would turn back to religion and ritual, it would be in no small part due to the influence that publication of the English edition of *Rites of Passage* would have.

Curiously, although she was only a graduate student when she translated *Rites of Passage*, and not a particularly advanced graduate

[44] Burns, "Obituary"; Moore, "Obituary." Kimball would later (1970–71) serve as president of the American Ethnological Society. Burns, "Obituary," 153.

[45] Kimball, introduction to *ROP*, v.

[46] Kimball, introduction to *ROP*, xvii.

[47] Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic*; Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion*; Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*.

student,[48] Vizedom felt free to add scores of her own footnotes to the text. In addition to notes defining or explaining terms that might be unfamiliar to readers, she offered numerous comments giving her own view of the veracity of van Gennep's assertions. In an early note, she remarks that one of van Gennep's ethnographic descriptions "appears to be primarily speculative" (21n1). In response to van Gennep's statement that even in societies where divorce is easy, it is difficult or impossible to get a divorce when the woman has already born children, she offers her own correction: "Current data do not bear out this statement for all societies. Exceptions will be found especially where there are matrilineal or bilateral kinship systems" (49n1). She takes particular issue with a number of van Gennep's characterizations of Jewish rituals. "Van Gennep is in error here," she begins one of these lengthy notes, referring in this case to his description of the Jewish holiday of Passover (40n3). Many more examples could be cited.[49]

Given the impact that publication of the translation has had, and the way its English terms have been employed in thousands of publications since, it is worth calling particular attention to Vizedom's decision to translate the middle stage of rites of passage, which van Gennep referred to as the *rites de marge*, as "rites of transition." The translation is misleading: while stages one and three constitute transitions, this is the one stage that does not. For this reason van Gennep sometimes refers to this second stage as a period, rather than a transition,[50] that is, as a duration of time with unique, often sacred, characteristics. He also uses the term *rites liminaires*, liminal rites, to refer to this stage of the rites of passage.[51] As it would happen, two of

[48] Vizedom would receive her PhD in anthropology at Columbia University in 1963. Zhang, "Recovering Meanings Lost," 127. Thirteen years later she published her own book on rites of passage, *Rites and Relationships*.

[49] It might be thought that Kimball rather than his graduate student wrote these notes, but in the book's first footnote, after offering a seemingly superfluous explanation of what she takes van Gennep to mean in using the term "modern," Vizedom writes: "All further notes by the translator appear in brackets" (1n1). All of the notes in question appear in brackets as footnotes in the text.

[50] E.g., *RDP*, 38, 57, 62. Likewise, van Gennep uses such terms as *le stade de marge* (27) and *l'état de marge* (211) to capture this sense of duration rather than movement.

[51] *RDP*, 14, 27, 62. "I propose to call preliminary rites [*rites préliminaires*] the rites of separation from the previous world, liminal rites [*rites liminaires*] the rites performed during the stage of the marge, and postliminal rites [*rites postliminaires*] the rites of incorporation into the new world" (*RDP*, 27). Zumwalt has previously called attention to the problematic nature

the most influential anthropologists to find their inspiration in van Gennep's work—Mary Douglas and Victor Turner—would base some of their most important work on exactly this concept of a marginal, or liminal, state.[52]

## The Reception Given to the English-Language Edition

The stature of the anthropologists who reviewed the University of Chicago Press edition of *Rites of Passage* offers a sense of the importance given to the book's publication. In Britain, Evans-Pritchard reviewed the book for the *Times Literary Supplement*, identifying van Gennep as the author of "several important anthropological treatises and many important books on folklore." He added that, "in spite of his erudition and excellent researches, he never received high academic recognition and was, indeed, cold-shouldered by Durkheim and his colleagues of the *Année Sociologique*, whose writings he subjected to some merciless criticism."[53] Edmund Leach reviewed the book in *Man*, the journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, together with the newly translated essays in *Death and the Right Hand* by Robert Hertz. "The belated appearance of English translations of these classics of French comparative sociology," wrote Leach, "is thoroughly welcome."[54] Six years later, in his article on "Ritual" for the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Leach offered a comparison that would have been especially pleasing to van Gennep: speaking of the two men's theories of ritual, Leach concluded that "van Gennep's schema has proved more useful than Durkheim's."[55]

of translating *rites de marge* as "rites of transition." Zumwalt, *Enigma of Arnold van Gennep*, 24.

52 On Douglas and Turner and their use of van Gennep's concept of *marge*, see my discussion below.

53 Evans-Pritchard, "Ritual Reintegration."

54 Leach, review of *The Rites of Passage.*

55 Leach, "Ritual," 522. Leach was much less kind in evaluating Kimball's introduction to *Rites of Passage*. "Professor Kimball," wrote Leach, "offers van Gennep to American College students as an almost unknown author and his comments upon the general climate of anthropological opinion in England and France during the first decade of this century are both naïve and misleading."

In his review, Leach argued that *Rites of Passage* was "really only an elaboration, on a wider canvas, of the ideas contained in Hertz's essay on *Death*." This seems somewhat overstated, although Hertz did recognize the processual nature of rites of transition and wrote of a movement from the status of living member of society to the status of ancestor via an intermediate phase. In this sense his work did presage van Gennep's famous three-stage model. Yet,

In the United States, one indication of the significance of the English edition's publication was the decision of *Science*, the prestigious journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, to publish a review, as few books in social anthropology were reviewed in its pages. Just as notable was the anthropologist called on to write the review, Clifford Geertz. Unfortunately, the first sentence of Geertz's review contained three errors: "Although van Gennep, one of the original group of Durkheimian sociologists, lived until 1957, this book, originally published in 1908 but not previously translated into English, is the sole basis for his considerable international reputation as a theorist in the field of comparative religion."[56] As we have seen, van Gennep was decidedly not a part of the original group of Durkheimian sociologists; the book was first published in 1909;[57] and van Gennep's international reputation as a theorist in comparative religion was not based solely on *Rites of Passage*.

In fact, one could argue that in France, at least, his publications on totemism had a greater effect on theories of religion, thanks to the influence they had on Claude Lévi-Strauss. In his classic study *Totemism*, Lévi-Strauss praises van Gennep's interpretative move in highlighting the links between totemism, exogamy, and reciprocity. "This interpretation, which is also our own (see *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté*)," explains Lévi-Strauss, "seems to us to be still superior to that proposed by Radcliffe Brown." In fact, this linking of exogamy to systems of reciprocity among kin groups, which Lévi-Strauss credits to van Gennep, was central to much of Lévi-Strauss's work on not only totemism but also kinship.[58]

Geertz in his review went on to skewer van Gennep—as Mauss had done a half century earlier—for his uncritical use of a "great variety of material, much of it unreliable, from peoples all over

Hertz focused only on a single kind of passage—death—and confined his focus to death rituals in Indonesian societies. Leach, review of *The Rites of Passage*, 173; Hertz, "Contribution à une étude," 49–50.

[56] Geertz, review of *The Rites of Passage*.

[57] Zumwalt noted the widespread reference in American reviews of the book to an original publication date of 1908. Zumwalt, *Enigma of Arnold van Gennep*, 119. It is particularly notable that the estimable British anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard, in his review of the English edition in the *Times Literary Supplement*, makes the same mistake. The error is undoubtedly due to the first sentence of Vizedom's translator's note to the English edition: "Arnold van Gennep published *Les rites de passage* in 1908." See 1960 edition of *ROP*, xxi.

[58] Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, 36.

the world" and "his total failure to deal with the social and cultural contexts from which his examples are drawn." Yet, concluded Geertz, despite all these limitations, van Gennep "offers, in his concept of an underlying pattern of withdrawal, isolation, and return which is common to all passage rituals, a valuable theoretical insight into the dynamics of religion in both psychological and sociological terms."[59]

## The Influence of *Rites of Passage*

In the decades that followed the English-language publication of *Rites of Passage*, hundreds of anthropological works appeared in the Anglophone world making use of it. None were more influential than the writings of Mary Douglas and Victor Turner, both of whom built on van Gennep's concept of the middle, liminal stage, the *marge*.

In her influential 1966 book, *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas draws out theoretical implications from van Gennep's concept of the sacred nature of this liminal stage, giving special attention to the dangerous quality that this state often has. "Danger," she writes, "lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next." Douglas offers examples from a wide variety of contexts, from the dietary taboos of Leviticus to initiation rites in Africa. "Holiness," she tells us, "requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong." Those people, or those things, that do not fit comfortably into such a class lie at the margins, and the margins are a perilous territory.[60]

The reference to van Gennep in her work is clear: "The person who must pass from one [state] to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others. The danger is controlled by ritual which

[59] Geertz, review of *The Rites of Passage*, 1801–2. For other reviews of the book by prominent American anthropologists, see Hoebel's 1960 review in *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly* and Spencer's 1961 review in *American Anthropologist*. Spencer's review was very positive, while Hoebel's was more mixed. Hoebel acknowledged that "in its day, this contribution was a major stepping stone in the development of social anthropology: it ordered and placed in proper focus a number of functionally related ritual practices." He concluded that "van Gennep's central thesis was, and to some extent still is, of first-rate importance." Yet, he termed the book "ethnologically crude, artless, and boring," complaining that its author was overly concerned with problems of classification and "given to fragmentary cataloguing of snippets and bits from an anthropological grab bag."

[60] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 97, 53, 96.

precisely separates him from his old status, segregates him for a time and then publicly declares his entry to his new status." Among Douglas's insights was the application of this theoretical approach to contemporary secular situations where the lack of rites of passage leaves individuals in a marginal state, and hence regarded uneasily by the larger society. As an example, she writes of the ex-prisoner who, without any ritual means of incorporation into his or her new role in society, remains forever at the margins.[61]

Douglas's work extended van Gennep's concept of the *marge*, applying it to cultural categories more generally, that is, beyond the rites of passage that were the focus of his book. Dirt, for example, is "matter out of place. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification."[62] Most famously, she employs this theoretical proposition to offer a new explanation for the hodgepodge of Jewish dietary taboos that have their origin in Leviticus. Those animals it was forbidden to eat failed to conform to the common categories of their kind: creatures that lived in the ocean yet crawled and did not swim; pigs that were four-legged livestock but, unlike cattle, did not chew their cud.

Victor Turner was likewise drawn to the same elements of van Gennep's work that Douglas was building upon—van Gennep's concepts of the liminal and rites of passage. Turner opens his now classic essay "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*" by crediting van Gennep's influence: "In this paper, I wish to consider some of the sociocultural properties of the 'liminal period' in that class of rituals which Arnold van Gennep has definitively characterized as 'rites de passage.'" Turner goes on to characterize what he calls, drawing on van Gennep, "the period of the margin or 'liminality'" as an "interstructural situation." He thus focuses his work on rites of passage that have a well-developed marginal or liminal phase. These he locates above all in rites of transition to social maturity or to cult membership in small-scale societies.[63]

Turner termed *Purity and Danger* a "magnificent book" and praised Douglas for calling attention to the link between the mar-

[61] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 96, 97.
[62] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 36.
[63] Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 93–95.

ginal state and a condition of uncleanliness and danger. "From this standpoint," writes Turner, "one would expect to find that transitional beings are particularly polluting, since they are neither one thing nor another . . . and are at the very least 'betwixt and between' all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classification."[64] Turner would go on to develop this concept of a liminal phase in a series of publications that helped to turn anthropology away from earlier functionalist approaches toward the symbolic dimension, bringing renewed interest to the study of ritual.[65]

Among the topics Turner explored was the application of van Gennep's theoretical construct, and especially his concept of the *marge*, to the relatively neglected topic of the pilgrimage. Turner opens his book on the subject, coauthored by Edith Turner, with an extensive discussion of van Gennep's text. The Turners then proceed to develop van Gennep's concept of liminality well beyond his original focus on rites of passage, terming the implications of van Gennep's "discovery" to be "truly revolutionary" in freeing social scientists from limited paradigms of the social structural.[66]

Another indication of the spreading influence of van Gennep's book in the wake of its appearance in English was the publication in 1962 of Max Gluckman's influential edited collection, *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations*. The book carries the dedication: "To the Memory of Arnold van Gennep." In his lengthy introductory chapter, titled "Les rites de passage," Gluckman, one of Britain's most prominent anthropologists at the time, argues that *Rites of Passage* "was one of the most important books written about ritual in the generation before the First World War, and his 'discovery' was to make a greater impression on subsequent work than books which are much better known . . . like Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, and Marett's *The Threshold of Religion*." Van Gennep, according to Gluckman, had made a "remarkable breakthrough," one that improved the quality of subsequent studies of ritual by pro-

[64] Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, 97.

[65] Turner, *Ritual Process*; Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*; Turner, "Variations on a Theme." See also the discussion of this point in Thomassen, "Uses and Meanings." Kapferer argues that van Gennep's work granted Turner "a non-Durkheimian legitimacy" for his processual approach to the study of ritual. Kapferer, "Ritual Dynamics," 37.

[66] Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 1–3.

viding a proper framework for observation.[67] In his own chapter in the book, Meyer Fortes, an equally prominent British social anthropologist, praises van Gennep's book as "one of the major theoretical achievements of our science."[68]

The number of anthropologists who, since the publication of the English edition of *Rites of Passage*, have made use of van Gennep's framework and his insights in their own ethnographic work is not easily calculable, but there are hundreds of examples. They range from short notes, such as Beidelman's "Ghostly *rites de passage* in East Africa," to edited volumes such as Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff's application of van Gennep's framework to nonreligious settings in their *Secular Ritual*, and books focusing on the same series of life course transitions that van Gennep examined, as found in Martha and Morton Fried's *Transitions: Four Rituals in Eight Cultures*.

Arguably the best book-length anthropological study of funeral rites in the decades since the publication of the translation of *Rites of Passage*, Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf's *Celebrations of Death*, appropriately begins with a section titled "Van Gennep's *Rites of Passage*." The authors offer insight into the influence that van Gennep's book has had on the study of ritual. Before the book, they write, scholars seemed unable "to view ritual as anything other than an anachronism," a view associated with "nineteenth-century rationalism." In contrast, they argue, *Rites of Passage* provided "a radically different assessment of the meaning and function of ritual behavior. . . . Elements of ceremonial behavior were no longer the relics of former superstitious eras, but keys to a universal logic of human social life."[69]

Anthropologists have also built on van Gennep's basic framework by using it to provide insight into political processes in modern state

[67] Gluckman, "Les rites de passage," 1–2, 7–8, 12. Gluckman was not without his criticisms of van Gennep's book, accusing him of following the prevailing methods of piling up ethnographic examples as means of proof and lacking the focus on "functional connections" in society that Durkheim had. See Gluckman, "Les rites de passage," 1, 11. For a rebuttal to Gluckman's negative comments on *Rites of Passage*, see Pitt-Rivers, "Un rite de passage," 115–18. Pitt-Rivers credits van Gennep with moving anthropology beyond the study of rites as magical practices to work that focused on the role of ritual in ordering social relations. Pitt-Rivers, "Un rite de passage," 129n2.

[68] Fortes, "Ritual and Office," 54.

[69] Huntington and Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death*, 9–11.

societies. Here I can cite some of my own work. In an ethnographic study of the battle between the Catholic Church and the Italian Communist Party for people's allegiance in a working-class Italian *quartiere*, it became clear that rites of passage constituted an important battleground. The previous church monopoly of such rites of passage as baptisms, weddings, and funerals had great value for binding people to the church. Realizing this, Communist Party leaders went about creating an alternative system of rites of passage. Funerals offered one example. The city hearse in Bologna, used in funeral processions, had a cross on the roof that screwed off for Communist funerals. In Communist processions, red flags replaced the crosses borne aloft in church funerals. Neither the political implications of rites of passage much less political competition over them are discussed in van Gennep's book, which pays little attention to intrasocietal cultural heterogeneity. Yet his work provided the impetus for developing just such insights.[70]

What may be even more remarkable than the great influence that the book's English-language publication has had on anthropology is the influence it has had on other fields. Tracking references to the text, as well as uses of the concepts that originate in it but do not mention van Gennep, one witnesses the vast array of fields in which scholars have used van Gennep's framework in attempts to shed new light on their subjects.

Among those closest to van Gennep's initial fields of interest are works in folklore and religious studies. "It is probably fair to say," wrote the prominent American folklorist Alan Dundes in 1999, referring to *Rites of Passage*, "that no example of folkloristic analysis has had more impact on the scholarly world than this classic study."[71] The religious studies literature, along with the parallel religious practice

[70] I note, with embarrassment, that my lengthy discussion of the subject in a subchapter of that book labeled "Rites of Passage" makes no mention of van Gennep, nor is he even cited in the bibliography. I extended this analysis of the political uses of rites of passage in my later, more general book on politics and ritual, in a section titled "The Battle over Rites of Passage." There, I was relieved to see on checking now many years later, I did credit van Gennep. Kertzer, *Comrades and Christians*, 135–43; Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 114–19.

[71] The Dundes quote is cited by Zhang in his own reevaluation of the influence that van Gennep's work has had on the discipline of folklore. Dundes, *International Folkloristics*, 100–101; Zhang, "Recovering Meanings Lost," 119.

literature, is filled with references to van Gennep.[72] In the allied field of the archaeology of religion, van Gennep seems no less omnipresent. Fourteen articles in the 2011 *Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion* employ the concept of "rites of passage," and in the separate *Handbook* entry titled "Rites of Passage," the author observes that van Gennep's book "remains extraordinarily influential as the point of departure for discussions of transition rituals."[73]

A whole essay, if not a book, could be written on the effect that *Rites of Passage* has had on the work of historians. Indeed the major cultural turn in history, begun in the early 1970s, with its emphasis on popular rituals, was influenced in no small part by van Gennep's book. This is made clear in Natalie Zemon Davis's seminal 1971 article on charivaris in sixteenth-century France, which contains twenty-seven references to van Gennep. In that oft-cited article she shows how these carnivalesque rites, in which unmarried young men publicly humiliated their older neighbors, became vehicles for political protest. In looking for the analytical tools necessary to examine such rites, she found inspiration in van Gennep's book, as her correspondence with fellow historian Edward Thompson makes clear.[74]

Van Gennep's influence among historians can also be seen in the fertile line of historical work that has built on his treatment

[72] To get some sense of the range of works making use of rites of passage in religious studies and what might be called applied religious studies, see Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*; Magida, *Opening the Doors*; Guest, review of *Meeting Jesus at University*; Pike, "Radical Animal Rights"; Williamson, *Illuminata*; Baum, "Wrestlers on the *Awasena* Path."

[73] Garwood, "Rites of Passage," 261. Unfortunately, Garwood not only picks up the mistake Victor Turner had made of referring to van Gennep as "Belgian," but also gives the original date of *Rites de passage* as 1911, two years after its actual publication.

[74] Davis, "Reasons of Misrule"; see also Walsham, "Rough Music and Charivari." While Davis makes ample use of van Gennep's *Rites of Passage*, most of the citations to van Gennep's work in Davis's article are to his publications on French folklore. Around the same time that Davis's work on the carnival was having such a big influence in the development of historiography, the English-language publication of Mikhail Bakhtin's book *Rabelais and His World* was having a comparable effect. Indeed, many scholars found that combining Bakhtin's insights of carnival as time outside normal time and van Gennep's insights—often mediated by Victor Turner—into the state of liminality offered a fertile theoretical framework to explore in their own work. These include not only historians (e.g., Scribner, "Reformation"), but scholars from fields ranging from literary studies (Bristol, *Carnival and Theater*) to folklore (Lindahl, "Bakhtin's Carnival Laughter"; Santino, "Carnivalesque and the Ritualesque") and sociology (Shields, "The 'System of Pleasure'"). The prominent Brazilian anthropologist Roberto DaMatta, in his recent reconsideration of the concept of rites of passage, similarly brings Bakhtin into his critique. DaMatta, "Individuality and Liminarity."

of coronation rites as rites of passage. The 1999 edited volume *Rites of Passage in Ancient Greece* offers but one example. "The last three decades," Mark Padilla writes in his introduction to the book, "have been exciting for scholars of Greek literature, religion, and society . . . with a particularly productive 'node' of this interdisciplinarity being the study of initiatory patterns, rites, and social functions." Van Gennep, Padilla observes, "pioneered the anthropology of the subject in his seminal *Les rites de passage*," which, he enthuses, "remains an astonishingly stable and useful paradigm to this day."[75]

The sociological, social services, and social problems literatures are similarly filled with applications of the rites of passage model, and in psychology both life course and developmental studies have made abundant use of the paradigm.[76] In literary criticism, as one observer remarked, van Gennep's categories have had "truly remarkable fortune."[77] Feminist and postcolonial literary theorists, as well as feminist psychiatrists, have been developing van Gennep's framework to advance their own new interpretive paradigms.[78] And scholars in fields from mortality and education studies to management, geography, and disability studies have likewise offered new approaches to their subjects by employing van Gennep's insights.[79]

Indeed, the term that van Gennep put into such widespread use has become ubiquitous well beyond the scholarly world. Examples are everywhere, from the 1980 Booker Prize–winning book by William Golding, *Rites of Passage*, to the latest copies of daily newspapers. Another example is found in Julia Alvarez's *Once upon*

[75] Padilla, introduction to *Rites of Passage in Ancient Greece*, 15–16. Among many other examples of the use of *Rites of Passage* in historical study, see Lane, *Rites of Rulers*; Centlivres, "Les rites de passage"; McMullen, "Bureaucrats and Cosmology"; Price, "From Noble Funerals"; May, "Presidential Address"; Pickering, "Chartist Rites of Passage."

[76] For representative examples, see Sande, "Intoxication"; Brown, Brunelle, and Malhotra, "Tagging"; Janusz and Walkiewicz, "Rites of Passage Framework."

[77] Calame, "Le rite d'initiation tribale," 23–24. See also Drewery, *Modernist Short Fiction*.

[78] Dodgson-Katiyo and Wisker, *Rites of Passage*; Brenner, *Women's Rites of Passage*.

[79] Among hundreds of examples, see Willett and Deegan, "Liminality and Disability"; Blumenkrantz and Goldstein, "Seeing College"; Söderlund and Borg, "Liminality in Management"; Winchester, McGuirk, and Everett, "Schoolies Week"; Murphy et al., "Physical Disability." "Here," writes Jenny Hockey, "I want to consider the theoretical insights which such a schema might offer for a social science of mortality today." One might substitute for "social science of mortality" any number of fields and find similar articles. Hockey, "Importance of Being Intuitive," 213.

*a Quinceañera: Coming of Age in the USA*, a feminist examination of a Latina girl's coming of age rite. The number of Latina girls' responses to Alvarez's survey referring to the celebration as their "right of passage" illustrates the depths to which van Gennep's concept has sunk into the popular imagination.[80] Indeed, designing feminist rites of passage has become something of a feminist cottage industry, marked by such events as the 2018 "Rites of Passage Facilitator Training" held in Byron Bay, Australia.[81] Nor does the popular influence of the book show any sign of diminishing. In 2018, the *New York Times* introduced a new column titled Rites of Passage, described as "essays that explore notable life transitions and events," and invited readers to contribute their own essays on the subject for publication.[82] From the time that the English translation of *Rites of Passage* was published in 1960 through 2014, 699 *New York Times* articles made use of the phrase.

And so the legacy of the man whom Durkheim, at the height of his influence in Paris in 1915, dismissed as unworthy of a university position,[83] a man who survived to old age in reduced circumstances outside Paris surrounded by his books and not much else, lives on through a work written when he was thirty-five years old. The envious reputation he achieved is due in no small part to the publication of the English edition of his now classic book in 1960, three years after his death.

[80] The author herself credits van Gennep's work as the source of her use of the concept. The reference to a "right of passage" is found on p. 5.

[81] "Imagine having the support of sisterhood & women's wisdom to help you navigate turning 40 or life changes like becoming a mum, divorce, or menopause." The announcement for the five-day workshop—"We're Reclaiming Our Feminine Rites of Passage!"—was accessed on August 7, 2018, at https://themoonwoman.com/rites-of-passage-facilitator-training/.

[82] "How to submit a 'rites of passage' essay," *New York Times*, July 6, 2018. A search of the *New York Times* database from 1969 to 2013 turned up thirty-four *Times* articles with "rites of passage" in their titles.

[83] Thomassen, "Hidden Battle," 185–87. Thomassen has explored this history, quoting from Durkheim's two letters to Mauss regarding van Gennep's candidacy for a faculty position in Paris. Durkheim appears to have been upset at his nephew, suspecting him of having encouraged van Gennep to apply for the positions.

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