

## Fourteen

In social anthropology, the specification of continuity is highly problematical. To formulate hypotheses about change, we must be able to specify the connection, that is, the processes that maintain a social form, an institution, or an organization. An item of behavior does not breed an item of behavior. What then is it that creates continuity of society from one day to the next?

Obviously, one can say that society is in the minds of men—as experiences and expectations. If forms of behavior can be described as allocations with reference to evaluated ends, then what persists in the minds of men can be understood as items of credit and debt, as pretensions outstanding that make the actors pick up where they last left off. In more general terms, one can see a continuity of agreement between people about the distribution of assets—that is, about the location of rights in statuses distributed in the population. Underlying these one might expect to find shared cultural schemes of classification and evaluation.

But the aggregate pattern of behavior, the structure of society, is not determined by this alone, so this does not exhaust the factors of continuity. What people do is also significantly constrained by circumstance: a whole range of facts of life, mainly ecological, enters as components because people's allocations are adjusted and adapted in terms of what they experience as the observed outcomes

of their behavior. The strategic constraints of social life also enter and affect behavior: people's activities are canalized by the fact of competition and cooperation for valued goods with other persons and thus by the problems of adapting one's behavior to that of others, themselves predictive and adaptable.

I would argue that since these various components are all involved as determinants of the forms of aggregate social behavior, consequently they must all enter into our specifications of the continuity connecting situations in a sequence of change; and any hypothesis about social change is inadequate unless it takes all these constraints of continuity into account. It may be a convenient shorthand for structural comparison to say that a matrilineal kinship system changes into a bilateral one, or that a lineage organization develops into a segmentary state. But such a formulation is ***not*** a convenient shorthand for the series of events of change that have taken place, since it begs the whole analysis by implying a naive and mechanical kind of continuity between the two forms, like that between the fish and the crab in the aquarium.