

Ritual and Knowledge Among the Baktaman of New Guinea

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Frederik Barth's monograph is of great importance because it uses a theoretical approach derived from communications theory to analyze the state of ritual and knowledge among a remote New Guinea group. The significance of this book arises from the fact that, due to the culturally unique forms of codification of ritual and knowledge in New Guinea societies and Barth's theoretical conceptions and use of communications theory, these states of knowledge cannot be fully charted.

As an antidote to the static, conceptual systems approach of structural functionalism, Barth uses communications theory to illuminate the process through which social praxis (transaction) determines the form of the replicated messages that make all cultures ongoing systems of communications. Through repetition, symbolic codings emerge and are perpetuated, and the 'sacred symbols' of the Baktaman are framed in analogue codes; which is really no more than Barth's way of saying that they are built on metaphors because he has to find some kind of logical association to provide the conceptual justification for treating them as 'sacred symbols'. Barth suffers from the popular preconception that all primitives have complex forms of codified ritual and knowledge; the malaise of the professional decoder investigating 'temple cults' that owe more to the high traditions of the Old Testament or Vedas than to their New Guinea social context. Communications theory can reveal the design features of the system it isolates - primed to uncover the codifications of ritual and knowledge it can show that they are underdeveloped due to the social praxis of secrecy and the lack of an exegetical tradition - but its focus is set by the anthropologist who uses it.

Frederik Barth applies communications theory to his Baktaman material to determine how ritual and knowledge are codified. As a result he finds codes of ritual and knowledge but these are more the result of his basic premises.

His major premise is that: "Every culture is an ongoing system of communication and contains a corpus of replicated messages"<sup>(15)</sup> The mechanism of a culture's systems of communication is that through interaction messages are repeated and replicated. Through this process of repetition - replication these messages become routinized and develop into symbolic codings. The degree of repetition-replication-routinization gives them a social value and they are all obviously embedded in social praxis. Barth writes:

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"Thus only those messages which are constantly recreated will be transmitted and persist as part of the tradition; ie. only those metaphors and idioms that catch on and are reused become part of the corpus of these codes" (229).

Barth's schema relies heavily on communications theory as in his phases of interaction which consist of: (i) triggering, (ii) conceptualization of response, (iii) construction of response, (iv) the actual message output, (v) audience status (256-7).

His reason for studying the Baktaman, an isolated and primitive 'tribe' of 183 persons, appears to have been based on the assumption that, through studying a group of this kind, the codification process of ritual and knowledge would surely become discernible. Allured by the Baktaman's 'temple cults', Barth was committed right from the outset to finding codes of ritual and knowledge. This commitment hampered him by ensuring that his theoretical schema based on transactionalist communications theory comprised a pyramid with social praxis as the base and the codes of ritual and knowledge as the tip. Having the discovery of the pyramid as a fieldwork blueprint, there was no way that Barth could question the concepts of ritual and knowledge and their applicability to the Baktaman. He could only define Baktaman codifications of ritual and knowledge as being the apex of this pyramid built on social praxis. The interconnection was theoretically predetermined - the Baktaman had to have codifications of ritual and knowledge and consequently the pyramid could never change its shape. His division of the book into four major sections: (1) context of experience, (2) rites of initiation, (3) idiom clusters and social praxis, (4) analysis of interconnection and interdependence, testifies to this.

#### The Baktaman

The Baktaman are a group (dialect?) of 183 people living in a mountain rainforest somewhere below Telefomin in the Western District of Papua New Guinea. They are numbered as being part of 1,000 Faiwol speakers and have patrilineal exogamous clans. The Baktaman and Barth's transactionalist-communications theory approach to them may best be introduced with the following quote:

"The total corpus of Baktaman knowledge is stored in 183 Baktaman minds, aided only by a modest assemblage of cryptic concrete symbols (the meaning of which depends on the associations built up around them in the consciousness of a few seniors) and by limited suspicious communication with members of a few surrounding communities. I have argued that such a corpus will only persist to the extent that its parts are frequently recreated as messages and thereby transmitted. The immediate determinant of the occurrence of such messages may be described as social praxis. The mutual feedback between thought and action, culture and society may thus be best approached through social organisation" (235).

Social organisation creates and conditions the sectors of knowledge or coding found in Baktaman society resulting in what Barth calls "creative and stagnant sectors of knowledge". He writes:

"Briefly I will argue that the dynamism of a sector of knowledge depends both (i) on the potential of the major codifications; i.e. the fertility and capacity for precision and development of the symbolic apparatus by which it is handled, and (ii) on the praxis, i.e. the social organisation of statuses and tasks that channel the communications" (239).

Writing in reaction to structural functionalism, Barth argues that there is no single comprehensive code. Baktaman coding is built around metaphors and idioms, which, although they cannot be logically deduced, are all interconnected in some way. This is combined with his major premise that the cumulative meaning of a symbol can be deduced from its statistical or repeated incidence in given social contexts. Baktaman ritual and knowledge are a result not only of social praxis, especially the practice of secrecy, but are also a result of the fact that the Baktaman ritual and knowledge are a result of the fact that the Baktaman have no logical alternative to them. "The absence of any systematic alternative to their own way of life has absolved them from the need to question features of their own customs and premises, and entails a very incomplete and unfocused self-image" (255).

Baktaman social praxis creates certain major disjunctions in the flow of information and Baktaman ritual and knowledge reflect this disjunction. Barth sees these as being: (1) the segregation of males and females which makes them different spheres of knowledge, (2) the segmentation of the male population into a small number of residential collectives, and (3) "..... partly congruent with this, the formal barriers of secrecy" (256).

Ritual and knowledge are manifested in 'temple cults' or male initiations. Only males participate directly in the fertility cults but the benefits of cult activity extend to the entire population and women play a certain supportive role in cult activities to which Barth pays no great attention. The Baktaman have seven degrees of male initiation but these degrees do not constitute an age grade system - there is an indefinite period of time between succession to one degree from another. The temple cults 'serve' to ensure the success of Baktaman food crops (especially taro), hunting, and warfare. Male cult activity centres around the following locations; the Katian, clan cult house for taro and hunting, the Yolani, communal cult house for taro, and the Kaveran, men's house. For every occasion on which one of these 'temples' is used, a 'sacrifice' must be made to the ancestors (191). Barth states that the offering both provides food for "sacramental commensality" and guarantees the success of the taro crops. Only cult leaders and some other old men know all the secret initiation knowledge.

#### Secrecy and Symbolic Coding

Baktaman knowledge is characterised by Barth as being shaped by secrecy and a lack of exegesis which result from Baktaman social praxis. He writes:

~~"So the fact remains that in the normal flow of life persons with different premises will interact, confuse each other, and thus, in part, increase rather than resolve the puzzle of life for each other. The force of sacred symbolism constructing a Baktaman reality arises from secrecy rather than a logical coherence of form. But secrecy entails a pattern of distribution where most actors are excluded from knowledge. This~~

exclusion affects the very processes whereby such reality is socially constructed; and so emerge the characteristic features of Baktaman tradition; at once poorly shared, poorly systematised and puzzling and groping in thought and imagery, while yet creative, complex, moving and rich"(265).

Baktaman social praxis determines that secret information is forbidden except in the context of sacred locations, that different sectors of the population have different ways of decoding this information, and that there is no truthful ideal in Baktaman society. Barth focuses on initiations because he believes they are the "most didactically powerful organisation" among the Baktaman(260).

Coupled with the lack of exegesis, secrecy is the most major aspect of social praxis which affects and determines symbolic coding. "The force of sacred symbols in constructing a Baktaman reality arises from secrecy rather than logical coherence of form"(265). Barth summarises the reasons the Baktaman have no exegesis - "the barriers to verbalisation" - as being:

"a. the explicit taboos and rule of secrecy surrounding the sacred symbols, b. a more diffuse wariness and reluctance to speak about and thus carelessly activate occult forces, c. a fear of sorcery reprisals from rivals and persons criticized" (258-9)

Faced with the problem of describing the codification arising out of Baktaman social praxis, Barth utilizes the distinction between digital and analogue codes and comes to the conclusion that Baktaman ritual is framed in analogue codes or independent metaphors. Digital codes are like languages or computer programs in which transformations and conceptualizations are arbitrary (207-8). But in an analogue code conceptualization and transformation are not arbitrary:

"Its meaning depends on an understanding of this transformation from object to symbol and the experience from reality which it evokes when reversed. Meaning arises independently of any total code and not from the symbol's systematic place among a limited set of alternatives within such a code" (208).

An analogue code does not allow for permutations to be performed on each element in the same way. Communication in analogue codes is always embedded in a wider social context. Baktaman ritual and knowledge are communicated through analogue codes.

"An analogue code must consequently be understood in the context of its praxis; the practice of secrecy and the absence of exegesis are essential features of this praxis among the Baktaman" (229).

Analogue codes use metaphors or idioms to form the association between symbol and invoked concept. In an analogue code "... the symbolic value of the elements depends to a large extent on their uses as metaphors." and "... the essence of metaphor is the use of the familiar to grasp the elusive and unrecognised rather than the mere ordering of phenomena by homology"(199). Barth resolves the problem of the metaphor's place in between the two logical domains it links by arguing that the metaphor belongs to the realm it illuminates rather than the realm from which it originates. "It follows from this that the domain of thought or experience which is being

explicated by metaphor is that which metaphor is used to illuminate, not that from which the idioms or metaphors are fetched"(210). Barth argues that the codes of Baktaman ritual and knowledge are analogue codes because the symbols cannot be deductively derived although they are cognitively connected and they comprise separate discrete metaphors(264).

Having set out to discover how the Baktaman codify their ritual and knowledge it is hardly surprising that Barth comes to the conclusion that these sectors of knowledge are codified, albeit in the disconnected metaphorical 'bridges' of analogue coding. To justify his conclusion Barth argues that the Baktaman's lack of any conceptual alternative means that they cannot, or have no need to, characterise the theme of their ritual. The social purpose and significance of the 'sacred symbols' is that: "Their relevance is overwhelmingly to agricultural growth and fertility and they encode this in the manner of a mystery cult"(236). Given the ecological situation of the Baktaman, it is not so surprising that: "The only theory of gardening and growth which the Baktaman know is contained in these metaphors and allegories"(238).

Barth opposes his theoretical approach - transactional communications theory and analogue codes - to structural functionalist approaches which presume the logical unity of conceptual systems. From an archaeological investigation of Barth's book, it becomes apparent that he probably only jettisoned the notion that Baktaman symbolic coding could be logically deduced sometime after he completed his fieldwork. One clue is his argument that the "central paradox" of Baktaman knowledge is the fact that for the Baktaman the sky is pure and the earth is polluting, yet taro, their staple crop, grows in the ground(235). This does not tally with his perceptive coverage of Baktaman taboos as being contextual and temporary or with his finding that, as in other New Guinea societies, the Baktaman say that the spirits of the dead go to their own place geographically removed but still on the ground. In New Guinea conceptual schemas there is little division of the earth and sky into separate opposed universes, as missionaries trying to explain the benefits of heaven over hell know to their frustration. It can only be presumed that this central paradox was part of an earlier model which Barth superseded. Barth presents another faulty analogy when discussing the multiplicity of connotations of Baktaman 'core symbols'. He writes:

"Moreover, the association seems to pose an intellectual problem to the actors so that they will attempt to harmonize the disparate connotations of each symbol into a more coherent chord"(263).

Such an assertion can in no way be related to the production of contextual noise that makes New Guinea 'music' unique and belongs more to universal theories of symbolism (Johnson 1975, Mayer 1975).

Beating initiates with nettles and rubbing them with pig grease, fur as a symbol of growth and fertility, white as a symbol of taro and plenty, these are examples of the idioms that Barth finds in Baktaman ritual. ~~Confronted with such metaphors and the Baktaman social praxis of secrecy and a lack of exegesis it is inevitable~~ that Barth comes to the conclusion that Baktaman ritual knowledge is a fertility cult articulated in analogue codes. However one must question to what degree his findings reflect a commitment to a general theory of symbolism because, given the Baktaman social praxis of secrecy and lack of exegesis, why should Baktaman ritual require any more codification than that necessary to perform an act in a given context? Barth's approach explains why the Baktaman do not

have ritual codification like that of literate stratified societies but it cannot explain the relative importance of different codified or recurrent activities to the Baktaman because of the commitment to initiation cults as being the most 'didactically' important organization in their society.

#### The Contextual Nature of Baktaman Society

The only way to demonstrate how Barth's transactional communications theory approach and his commitment to finding ritual and knowledge among the Baktaman affect his interpretation of his material is to analyze some 'sectors of knowledge' in a slightly different manner. Barth's approach is general and universalistic. It can be applied to any society where people interact, where culture is an on-going system of communication, and where messages which are repeatedly communicated become codified and ritualized. New Guinea societies, on the other hand, manifest unique aspects of social organisation and adaptation to their environments when compared to other major culture areas of the world. Barth has not focused on these specificities, some of which are: exchange and reciprocity (most probably short term reciprocity judging by Barth's description), the exchange of food and degrees of commensality (food being the primary commodity of exchange), sorcery and curing. By concentrating on male initiation ceremonies among the Baktaman and trying to analogue-ize their codifications, Barth may well have concentrated on the merely decorative (the New Guinea pidgin word is 'bilas') aspects of Baktaman society rather than those of recurring central importance to them.

If initiations are the most didactically powerful organization among the Baktaman, surely it would stand to reason that the same situation would hold true for all the neighbouring villages that could be classified as belonging to the Faiwol language group? Barth found out that all three temple cults - Katiam, Yolam, and Amowkwan - were not indigenous to the Baktaman but had, sometime within memory, originated in the 'West' (255). This means that the form of these initiation cults, like so many other decorative aspects found in New Guinea social systems, is a new fashion, although the social organization necessary to stage male initiations is undoubtedly traditional. The Faiwol groups adjoining the Baktaman have neither the exact same number of stages of male initiations - the Baktaman have seven - nor were they necessarily in operation when Barth carried out his fieldwork. Barth cites the case of the Augobmin who twenty years before had four grades of male initiation until warfare killed off all their knowledgeable senior men, leaving them at the time of fieldwork, with only a truncated form of first degree initiation (260). Among the Baktaman and their neighbours, male initiation cults and the knowledge imparted through them are controlled by powerful senior men and should the cult leader die, his cult may well be terminated if no new leader appears.

Taboos, like initiation knowledge, are contextual in that they are status specific. The Baktaman use them to demarcate particular social statuses and temporary ritual states. Barth writes that few taboos are universal or permanent (162). For the Baktaman, the conceptual definition of a given taboo is synonymous with contextual definition of the taboo because the concept and context of the taboo are indissociable.

It is not useful to see all Baktaman ritual coding as being framed in analogue codes. Emblems of rank and the body decorations worn by initiates (type of feathers, pig's tusks) are symbols of the same order as military insignia - they are status specific privileges denoting social position. On page 158 Barth presents a chart of the

particular body decorations that different initiation grades are allowed to wear. He writes:

"Finally the fact that public emblems of rank and valued privileges (feathers, drums, pig slaughtering, first harvest, various delicacies) have ritual significance entails that the social tug-of-war whereby interest groups seek to redistribute such goods is constrained by, and in turn affects, ritual codification"(266).

The contrary, that whatever ritual codification there is among the Baktaman is a result of this "social tug-of-war", is more probable.

Colour symbolism in New Guinea societies is a very problematic subject due to the difficulties inherent in trying to determine whether the colour - an aspect - of an object is given a greater significance than the object itself. Is the red colour of the pandanus fruit the reason it is eaten at ritual events or is the only reason for its consumption that it is a choice food and all pandanus fruits are red anyway? Barth approaches this problem in a most unsatisfactory way, arguing that colour is codified in Baktaman initiations without taking into consideration that, given the nature of Baktaman society and the resources of colours at its command, the Baktaman probably cannot distinguish between the efficacy of a colour and the efficacy of the object in which or from which the colour derives. His approach to determining the codification of colours is one of elementary semantics whereby he looks at the colours of all the objects used in initiations and on the basis of his interpretation of the meanings of initiations ascribes meanings to the three colours used - red, black and white (172).

The colour red is an idiom for patrilineal descent and the ancestors; it belongs with growth and increase (porkfat), ancestors and maleness (pandanus) (174-5). Red ochre is the most easily obtainable strong colour and the significance of painting something red is probably no more than colouring something with a strong colour. The colour black is an idiom for male solidarity and seniority. Barth writes:

"In conclusion, it would seem that black is made the vehicle of a conceptualization of corporate solidarity, strength, and reliability expressed by male groups in their joint cult of the ancestors" (177).

The crucial factor which Barth does not take into consideration when dealing with the significance of black is that the fires which are burned perpetually in the cult houses of the Baktaman totally blacken the roof and inside walls of the house and everything which is stored in the house for long periods of time (shields, bones and other 'sacra'). The colour white is an idiom for food, prosperity and plenty, probably because taro is white and because all Baktaman ornaments of wealth - shells, job's tears, even pig's tusks - are white. Taking a more metaphysical approach Barth writes:

"So white stands in its most abstracted sense for a cosmic force of growth and prosperity deriving from the ancestors; just as red symbolizes their effect on descendants so white symbolizes their effect on the world" (176).

Barth sets out to demonstrate that given the differences in the social positions of women and junior male initiates as opposed to the senior men who are the owners and codifiers of ritual knowledge,

there must be differences in each group's understanding of the symbolic meanings of the three colours. For senior men who are the only individuals who 'know' all the sacred knowledge, red is an idiom for descent and the ancestors, black is an idiom for male solidarity and seniority, and white is an idiom for food, prosperity and plenty (172). For women (Barth pays very little attention to the supportive role of women in the staging of male initiations), red is a sacred colour denoting virility and sexuality, black is an emblem of senior male status, and white signifies valuables and objects of wealth (178). The meanings of the colours for junior male initiates are that red refers to strength and secrecy and is associated with virility, black refers to senior male status and is a symbol for the 'prerequisites of status' such as loyalty, solidarity, and corporate activity, and white refers to wealth and value, the taro which comes from the ancestors (178-9).

The similarity of the meanings that the three colours have for the three groups - senior men, women and young initiates - demonstrates that colour codification cannot be of very great importance to the Baktaman and that looking at the uses of colour in Barth's way does not illuminate much. By abstracting a quality of an object, in this case colour, Barth has created a classification of semantic similarity by colour which is meaningless to the Baktaman who classify an object only as an object or by its use or function in a given context.

Barth shows a great misunderstanding of New Guinea societies in general when he states that excessively hot fires and the deprivation of water are used as methods of torturing the initiates (66). There must always be a fire to sit around whenever New Guinea villagers gather to talk in the evenings because it keeps them warm and a blazing fire is the only source of light at night. It is highly unlikely that a hot fire could be used for torture because New Guineans, unlike Western anthropologists, have a very high tolerance to wood smoke and seem to find the narcosis it induces relaxing. As for depriving the initiates of water, it would probably be more relevant to comment on how they are deprived of sleep because New Guinean villagers drink little flowing water and obtain most of the water in their diets from the excessive bulk of vegetables which they eat.

Barth underplays the importance of the sharing of food between the Baktaman themselves and elevates the sharing of food in the context of the cult houses to a 'sacrifice' offered by the Baktaman to the ancestral spirits to propitiate them and ensure fertility. He sees commensality as being a metaphor of communion with the ancestors, the consummation of a 'sacrifice', and a metaphor for the presence of 'ancestral altars' (199). He argues perceptively that the act of sharing food, of commensality among the Baktaman is a "... powerful idiom for equality and trust" because sorcery is made with scraps of food and to share food with people is to not suspect them of an intention to work sorcery (197). Commensality is so important to the Baktaman that before, when they had cannibal feasts, pig meat was always cooked together with the human flesh so that those who could not stomach human flesh could at least participate in the eating (198).

The emphasis which Barth places on commensality in the cult houses as constituting "sacrifice" is understandable in terms of his theoretical schema and what it constrains him to do with the Baktaman material. In order for ritual knowledge as practised in cult houses to be of central importance to Baktaman society as a whole there must be communication with the 'ancestral altars' through offered commodities (food or as Barth terms it 'sacrifice') thereby providing the



necessary hierarchy of exchange to elevate this relationship above the realm of material transaction.

It is equally likely that the idiom of giving food to the ancestors refers more to the contribution, distribution, and consumption of food within the cult houses by the Baktaman. The only tangible sign of the presence of the ancestors inside the cult houses is the ancestral relics assembled by the cult leader. The pigs' jaw bones kept in the cult houses are not so much relics of sacrifices as Barth sees them, but relics of pigs which have been feasted on in the cult houses, mementos that signify the prestige of the donors. All the conventions which Barth interprets as proving that the cult houses are 'temples' of the ancestors can just as easily be reinterpreted to show that what goes on is ceremonial exchanges of food between Baktaman and not sacrifices of food to the ancestors. The prerequisites for cult activity - a fire for warmth and to cook on and meat to cook on it - are of equal benefit to the cultists as to the ancestors.

In New Guinea societies the food assembled for ritual activities is not 'potlatched', it is used as payment. The purpose of giving is to ensure a return, and at feasts the food is redistributed in accordance with the status of the receiver.

Barth does not deal with one of the most important aspects of ritual in any New Guinea society: the meanings or codifications of the social use of food. Because food is the essential, primary commodity for the Baktaman and because surpluses of food are hard to accumulate we must ask who accumulates the food necessary for rituals, who gives it, who receives it? Barth virtually ignores the role of women in the preparations for ceremonies, especially in the providing of food and the making of decorations for the initiates. Given that Baktaman ritual knowledge is so poorly transmitted and that so few Baktaman know it, surely rather more of them have ideas about the social distribution of food?

Barth's conclusion is that Baktaman conceptualizations of social relations and their construction are poorly elaborated and transmitted and that their conceptualizations of their relationship to the ancestors are "poorly equipped". The entire field of knowledge is poorly elaborated and transmitted (259). But there is ongoing conflict between interest groups over "public emblems of rank and valued privileges" (266). As opposed to valued privileges and emblems of rank, initiation knowledge appears to be of minor importance to most of the Baktaman, not worth quarreling over, and something that only the few men who survive to senior status ever have to know.

Two sectors of knowledge which one would expect to be very important to the Baktaman are sorcery and curing. It is obvious that the secretive Baktaman did not tell Barth very much about sorcery - only that it could be made from scraps of food and one method by which women, a pretty powerless group in most New Guinea societies, could make sorcery against men - certainly little about the poison adult men used to make sorcery against their enemies, ways of detection, and antidotes to poison which they obviously must have had.

Although Barth states that sickness and the curing of sickness are "not codified" like the ritual fertility cults (244-5), from his sketchy description of curing ceremonies it would appear that there are certain basic equivalences which should have been mapped out and given more consideration. In curing ceremonies a pig is killed, the

sick person is anointed with some of the pig's blood, "spells and prayers" are given, the meat is distributed, and during the distribution some pieces are "discreetly taken" as an offering to the clan ancestors (192).

The similarities with cult activity are apparent and another perspective could have been obtained by tracing which features of the 'minor', more frequently enacted ceremonies are similar to those of initiations; analyzing cult activity as a social elaboration of these more basic and fundamental ceremonies.

To summarise Barth's approach; using communications theory he argues that the codifications of Baktaman ritual and knowledge are the result of Baktaman social praxis - of which the most determining factors are the practice of secrecy, the lack of exegesis, and the absence of any conceptual alternative. His conclusion is that these codifications are poorly shared, elaborated, transmitted, and systematized, but that the initiation cults are the most "didactically important" organisation in Baktaman society. The "only theory" of agricultural fertility, growth, and gardening that the Baktaman know is contained in the metaphors and allegories that Barth discovers and explains as analogue codes. The metaphors cannot be logically deduced but are all connected through their social meaning. To have discovered this is a great achievement.

The reason that Barth's communications theory cannot uncover the cultural specificities of Baktaman society is because innate to the approach is the notion that repeated social events become condensed into symbols which both summarize the event and represent a higher order of metaphysical statement than the event as a total configuration. Communications theory does not ignore the total configuration of an event; it uses the variables of sender, receiver, message, audience, context, etc. to map out the dimensions of the event. Only when the event is repeated and becomes routinized does the problem arise because the theorist regards the event as having become so routinized that it is greater than the sum of its part. Then the theorist looks for semantic patterning in the events and the symbols which condense them, searching for a higher order of social explanation. The metaphor necessary to lock together symbol and this higher order in a codification process of ritual and knowledge is supplied by the concept of analogue coding.

This is a deficient approach for analyzing the 'codifications' found in New Guinea societies because, due to the kinds of social organization, the context or configuration of a repeated event does not become abbreviated or codified into a higher order symbol of social meaning. The meaning of an event is indissociable from the context of its actual enactment; as Barth states, secret information will only occur in the sacred locations of the cult houses. It should be remembered that in New Guinea, unlike Africa, folk explanations are usually functional explanations. The things that have the greatest importance and the most social meaning to the Baktaman and are hence the most codified are those which can be exchanged or disputed over - food, emblems of rank, and valued privileges.

For Barth to come to the conclusion that the overwhelming relevance of the 'sacred symbols' is to agricultural growth and fertility is hardly surprising because given the ecological situation

of the Baktaman this is precisely what one would expect them to be preoccupied with. To discover that an arrow is an important symbol of maleness in Baktaman society is of the same order as discovering that money is an important symbol of banking in our own. Enough universal typologies of ritual and symbolic coding have been constructed. It is now time to investigate the cultural specificities of given social organisations to determine the applicability of the universalistic constructs of social anthropological theory. Concentrating on these crucial cultural differences will lead to the formation of new theoretical constructs.

On the other hand, Barth's Baktaman is really an allegory of the state of knowledge in social anthropology.

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#### Bibliography

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