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Liminality and Communitas

FORM AND ATTRIBUTES OF RITES OF PASSAGE

In this Chapter I take up a theme I have discussed briefly elsewhere (Turner, 1967, pp. 93-111), note some of its variations, and consider some of its further implications for the study of culture and society. This theme is in the first place represented by the nature and characteristics of what Arnold van Gennep (1909) has called the "liminal phase" of *rites de passage*. Van Gennep himself defined *rites de passage* as "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age." To point up the contrast between "state" and "transition," I employ "state" to include all his other terms. It is a more inclusive concept than "status" or "office," and refers to any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognized. Van Gennep has shown that all rites of passage or "transition" are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*, signifying "threshold" in Latin), and aggregation. The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a "state"), or from both. During the intervening "liminal" period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the "passenger") are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation),

the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of a clearly defined and "structural" type; he is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions.

Liminality

The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon.

Liminal entities, such as neophytes in initiation or puberty rites, may be represented as possessing nothing. They may be disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system—in short, nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiands. Their behavior is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life. Among themselves, neophytes tend to develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism. Secular distinctions of rank and status disappear or are homogenized. The condition

of the patient and her husband in *Isoma* had some of these attributes—passivity, humility, near-nakedness—in a symbolic milieu that represented both a grave and a womb. In initiations with a long period of seclusion, such as the circumcision rites of many tribal societies or induction into secret societies, there is often a rich proliferation of liminal symbols.

Communitas

What is interesting about liminal phenomena for our present purposes is the blend they offer of lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship. We are presented, in such rites, with a "moment in and out of time," and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties. These are the ties organized in terms either of caste, class, or rank hierarchies or of segmentary oppositions in the stateless societies beloved of political anthropologists. It is as though there are here two major "models" for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of "more" or "less." The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders.

I prefer the Latin term "communitas" to "community," to distinguish this modality of social relationship from an "area of common living." The distinction between structure and communitas is not simply the familiar one between "secular" and "sacred," or that, for example, between politics and religion. Certain fixed offices in tribal societies have *many* sacred attributes; indeed, every social

position has *some* sacred characteristics. But this "sacred" component is acquired by the incumbents of positions during the *rites de passage*, through which they changed positions. Something of the sacredness of that transient humility and modelessness goes over, and tempers the pride of the incumbent of a higher position or office. This is not simply, as Fortes (1962, p. 86) has cogently argued, a matter of giving a general stamp of legitimacy to a society's structural positions. It is rather a matter of giving recognition to an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be *no* society. Liminality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low. No doubt something of this thinking, a few years ago, lay behind Prince Philip's decision to send his son, the heir apparent to the British throne, to a bush school in Australia for a time, where he could learn how "to rough it."

Dialectic of the Developmental Cycle

From all this I infer that, for individuals and groups, social life is a type of dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low, *communitas* and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality. The passage from lower to higher status is through a limbo of statuslessness. In such a process, the opposites, as it were, constitute one another and are mutually indispensable. Furthermore, since any concrete tribal society is made up of multiple personae, groups, and categories, each of which has its own developmental cycle, at a given moment many incumbencies of fixed positions coexist with many passages between positions. In other words, each individual's life experience contains alternating exposure to structure and *communitas*, and to states and transitions.

THE LIMINALITY OF AN INSTALLATION RITE

One brief example from the Ndembu of Zambia of a *rite de passage* that concerns the highest status in that tribe, that of the senior chief

Kanongesha, will be useful here. It will also expand our knowledge of the way the Ndembu utilize and explain their ritual symbols. The position of senior or paramount chief among the Ndembu, as in many other African societies, is a paradoxical one, for he represents both the apex of the structured politico-legal hierarchy and the total community as an unstructured unit. He is, symbolically, also the tribal territory itself and all its resources. Its fertility and freedom from drought, famine, disease, and insect plagues are bound up with his office, and with both his physical and moral condition. Among the Ndembu, the ritual powers of the senior chief were limited by and combined with those held by a senior headman of the autochthonous Mbwela people, who made submission only after long struggle to their Lunda conquerors led by the first Kanongesha. An important right was vested in the headman named Kafwana, of the Humbu, a branch of the Mbwela. This was the right to confer and periodically to medicate the supreme symbol of chiefly status among tribes of Lunda origin, the *lukanu* bracelet, made from human genitalia and sinews and soaked in the sacrificial blood of male and female slaves at each installation. Kafwana's ritual title was Chiv-wikankanu, "the one who dresses with or puts on the *lukanu*." He also had the title *Mama yaKanongesha*, "mother of Kanongesha," because he gave symbolic birth to each new incumbent of that office. Kafwana was also said to teach each new Kanongesha the medicines of witchcraft, which made him feared by his rivals and subordinates—perhaps one indication of weak political centralization.

The *lukanu*, originally conferred by the head of all the Lunda, the Mwantiyanywa, who ruled in the Katanga many miles to the north, was ritually treated by Kafwana and hidden by him during interregna. The mystical power of the *lukanu*, and hence of the Kanongesha-ship, came jointly from Mwantiyanywa, the political fountainhead and, Kafwana, the ritual source: its employment for the benefit of the land and the people was in the hands of a succession of individual incumbents of the chieftainship. Its origin in Mwantiyanywa symbolized the historical unity of the Ndembu people, and their political differentiation into subchiefdoms under Kanongesha; its

periodic medication by Kafwana symbolized the *land*—of which Kafwana was the original "owner"—and the total community living on it. The daily invocations made to it by Kanongesha, at dawn and sunset, were for the fertility and continued health and strength of the land, of its animal and vegetable resources, and of the people—in short, for the commonweal and public good. But the *lukanu* had a negative aspect; it could be used by Kanongesha to curse. If he touched the earth with it and uttered a certain formula, it was believed that the person or group cursed would become barren, their land infertile and their game invisible. In the *lukanu*, finally, Lunda and Mbwela were united in the joint concept of Ndembu land and folk.

In the relationship between Lunda and Mbwela, and between Kanongesha and Kafwana, we find a distinction familiar in Africa between the politically or militarily strong and the subdued autochthonous people, who are nevertheless ritually potent. Iowan Lewis (1963) has described such structural inferiors as having "the power or powers of the weak" (p. 111). One well-known example from the literature is to be found in Meyer Fortes's account of the Tallensi of northern Ghana, where the incoming Namoos brought chieftainship and a highly developed ancestral cult to the autochthonous Tale, who, for their part, are thought to have important ritual powers in connection with the earth and its caverns. In the great Golib Festival, held annually, the union of chiefly and priestly powers is symbolized by the mystical marriage between chief of Tongo, leader of the Namoos, and the great earth-priest, the Golibdaana, of the Tale, portrayed respectively as "husband" and "wife." Among Ndembu, Kafwana is also considered, as we have seen, symbolically feminine in relation to Kanongesha. I could multiply examples of this type of dichotomy many times from African sources alone, and its range is world-wide. The point I would like to stress here is that there is a certain homology between the "weakness" and "passivity" of liminality in diachronic transitions between states and statuses, and the "structural" or synchronic inferiority of certain personae, groups, and social categories in political, legal, and economic

systems. The "liminal" and the "inferior" conditions are often associated with ritual powers and with the total community seen as undifferentiated.

To return to the installation rites of the Kanongesha of the Ndembu: The liminal component of such rites begins with the construction of a small shelter of leaves about a mile away from the capital village. This hut is known as *kafu* or *kafwi*, a term Ndembu derive from *ku-fwa*, "to die," for it is here that the chief-elect dies from his commoner state. Imagery of death abounds in Ndembu liminality. For example, the secret and sacred site where novices are circumcised is known as *ifwilu* or *chifwilu*, a term also derived from *ku-fwa*. The chief-elect, clad in nothing but a ragged waist-cloth, and a ritual wife, who is either his senior wife (*mwadyi*) or a special slave woman, known as *lukanu* (after the royal bracelet) for the occasion, similarly clad, are called by Kafwana to enter the *kafu* shelter just after sundown. The chief himself, incidentally, is also known as *mwadyi* or *lukanu* in these rites. The couple are led there as though they were infirm. There they sit crouched in a posture of shame (*nsonyi*) or modesty, while they are washed with medicines mixed with water brought from Katukang'onnyi, the river site where the ancestral chiefs of the southern Lunda diaspora dwelt for a while on their journey from Mwantiyavwa's capital before separating to carve out realms for themselves. The wood for this fire must not be cut by an ax but found lying on the ground. This means that it is the product of the earth itself and not an artifact. Once more we see the conjunction of ancestral Lunda hood and the chthonic powers.

Next begins the rite of *Kumukindiyila*, which means literally "to speak evil or insulting words against him"; we might call this rite "The Reviling of the Chief-Elect." It begins when Kafwana makes a cut on the underside of the chief's left arm—on which the *lukanu* bracelet will be drawn on the morrow—presses medicine into the incision, and presses a mat on the upper side of the arm. The chief and his wife are then forced rather roughly to sit on the mat. The wife must not be pregnant, for the rites that follow are held to destroy fertility. Moreover, the chiefly couple must have refrained from sexual congress for several days before the rites.

Kafwana now breaks into a homily, as follows:

Be silent! You are a mean and selfish fool, one who is bad-tempered! You do not love your fellows, you are only angry with them! Meanness and theft are all you have! Yet here we have called you and we say that you must succeed to the chieftainship. Put away meanness, put aside anger, give up adulterous intercourse, give them up immediately! We have granted you chieftainship. You must eat with your fellow men, you must live well with them. Do not prepare witchcraft medicines that you may devour your fellows in their huts—that is forbidden! We have desired you and you only for our chief. Let your wife prepare food for the people who come here to the capital village. Do not be selfish, do not keep the chieftainship to yourself! You must laugh with the people, you must abstain from witchcraft, if perchance you have been given it already! You must not be killing people! You must not be ungenerous to people!

But you, Chief Kanongesha, Chifwanakenu ["son who resembles his father"] of Mwantiyavwa, you have danced for your chieftainship because your predecessor is dead [i.e., because you killed him]. But today you are born as a new chief. You must know the people, O Chifwanakenu. If you were mean, and used to eat your cassava mush alone, or your meat alone, today you are in the chieftainship. You must give up your selfish ways, you must welcome everyone, you are the chief! You must stop being adulterous and quarrelsome. You must not bring partial judgments to bear on any law case involving your people, especially where your own children are involved. You must say: "If someone has slept with my wife, or wronged me, today I must not judge his case unjustly. I must not keep resentment in my heart."

After this harangue, any person who considers that he has been wronged by the chief-elect in the past is entitled to revile him and most fully express his resentment, going into as much detail as he desires. The chief-elect, during all this, has to sit silently with downcast head, "the pattern of all patience" and humility. Kafwana meanwhile splashes the chief with medicine, at intervals striking his buttocks against him (*kumubayisha*) insultingly. Many informants have told me that "a chief is just like a slave (*ndung'u*) on the night before he succeeds." He is prevented from sleeping, partly as an ordeal, partly because it is said that if he dozes off he will have bad dreams about the shades of dead chiefs, "who will say that he is

wrong to succeed them, for has he not killed them?" Kafwana, his assistants, and other important men, such as village headmen, man-handle the chief and his wife—who is similarly reviled—and order them to fetch firewood and perform other menial tasks. The chief may not resent any of this or hold it against the perpetrators in times to come.

ATTRIBUTES OF LIMINAL ENTITIES

The phase of reaggregation in this case comprises the public installation of the Kanongesha with all pomp and ceremony. While this would be of the utmost interest in study of Ndembu chieftainship, and to an important trend in current British social anthropology, it does not concern us here. Our present focus is upon liminality and the ritual powers of the weak. These are shown under two aspects. First, Kafwana and the other Ndembu commoners are revealed as privileged to exert authority over the supreme authority figure of the tribe. In liminality, the underling comes uppermost. Second, the supreme political authority is portrayed "as a slave," recalling that aspect of the coronation of a pope in western Christendom when he is called upon to be the "*servus servorum Dei*." Part of the rite has, of course, what Monica Wilson (1957, pp. 46-54) has called a "prophylactic function." The chief has to exert self-control in the rites that he may be able to have self-mastery thereafter in face of the temptations of power. But the role of the humbled chief is only an extreme example of a recurrent theme of liminal situations. This theme is the stripping off of preliminal and postliminal attributes.

Let us look at the main ingredients of the *Kumukindiyila* rites. The chief and his wife are dressed identically in a ragged waist-cloth and share the same name—*mwadyi*. This term is also applied to boys undergoing initiation and to a man's first wife in chronological order of marriage. It is an index of the anonymous state of "initiand." These attributes of sexlessness and anonymity are highly characteristic of liminality. In many kinds of initiation where the neophytes are of both sexes, males and females are dressed alike and referred to

by the same term. This is true, for example, of many baptismal ceremonies in Christian or syncretist sects in Africa: for example, those of the *Bwiti* cult in the Gabon (James Fernandez; personal communication). It is also true of initiation into the Ndembu funerary association of Chiwila. Symbolically, all attributes that distinguish categories and groups in the structured social order are here in abeyance; the neophytes are merely entities in transition, as yet without place or position.

Other characteristics are submissiveness and silence. Not only the chief in the rites under discussion, but also neophytes in many *rites de passage* have to submit to an authority that is nothing less than that of the total community. This community is the repository of the whole gamut of the culture's values, norms, attitudes, sentiments, and relationships. Its representatives in the specific rites—and these may vary from ritual to ritual—represent the generic authority of tradition. In tribal societies, too, speech is not merely communication but also power and wisdom. The wisdom (*mana*) that is imparted in sacred liminality is not just an aggregation of words and sentences; it has ontological value, it refashions the very being of the neophyte. That is why, in the *Chisungu* rites of the Bemba, so well described by Audrey Richards (1956), the secluded girl is said to be "grown into a woman" by the female elders—and she is so grown by the verbal and nonverbal instruction she receives in precept and symbol, especially by the revelation to her of tribal *sacra* in the form of pottery images.

The neophyte in liminality must be a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group, in those respects that pertain to the new status. The ordeals and humiliations, often of a grossly physiological character, to which neophytes are submitted represent partly a destruction of the previous status and partly a tempering of their essence in order to prepare them to cope with their new responsibilities and restrain them in advance from abusing their new privileges. They have to be shown that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by society.

Another liminal theme exemplified in the Ndembu installation rites is sexual continence. This is a pervasive theme of Ndembu ritual. Indeed, the resumption of sexual relations is usually a ceremonial mark of the return to society as a structure of statuses. While this is a feature of certain types of religious behavior in almost all societies, in preindustrial society, with its strong stress on kinship as the basis of many types of group affiliation, sexual continence has additional religious force. For kinship, or relations shaped by the idiom of kinship, is one of the main factors in structural differentiation. The undifferentiated character of liminality is reflected by the discontinuance of sexual relations and the absence of marked sexual polarity.

It is instructive to analyze the homiletic of Kafwana, in seeking to grasp the meaning of liminality. The reader will remember that he chided the chief-elect for his selfishness, meanness, theft, anger, witchcraft, and greed. All these vices represent the desire to possess for oneself what ought to be shared for the common good. An incumbent of high status is peculiarly tempted to use the authority vested in him by society to satisfy these private and privative wishes. But he should regard his privileges as gifts of the whole community, which in the final issue has an oversight over all his actions. Structure and the high offices provided by structure are thus seen as instrumentalities of the commonweal, not as means of personal aggrandizement. The chief must not "keep his chieftainship to himself." He "must laugh with the people," and laughter (*ku-seha*) is for the Ndembu a "white" quality, and enters into the definition of "whiteness" or "white things." Whiteness represents the seamless web of connection that ideally ought to include both the living and the dead. It is right relation between people, merely as human beings, and its fruits are health, strength, and all good things. "White" laughter, for example, which is visibly manifested in the flashing of teeth, represents fellowship and good company. It is the reverse of pride (*winyi*), and the secret envies, lusts, and grudges that result behaviorally in witchcraft (*wulaji*), theft (*wukombi*), adultery (*kushimbana*), meanness (*chifwa*), and homicide (*wubanji*). Even when a man has become a chief, he

must still be a member of the whole community of persons (*antu*), and show this by "laughing with them," respecting their rights, "welcoming everyone," and sharing food with them. The chastening function of liminality is not confined to this type of initiation but forms a component of many other types in many cultures. A well-known example is the medieval knight's vigil, during the night before he receives the accolade, when he has to pledge himself to serve the weak and the distressed and to meditate on his own unworthiness. His subsequent power is thought partially to spring from this profound immersion in humility.

The pedagogics of liminality, therefore, represent a condemnation of two kinds of separation from the generic bond of communitas. The first kind is to act only in terms of the rights conferred on one by the incumbency of office in the social structure. The second is to follow one's psychobiological urges at the expense of one's fellows. A mystical character is assigned to the sentiment of humankindness in most types of liminality, and in most cultures this stage of transition is brought closely in touch with beliefs in the protective and punitive powers of divine or preterhuman beings or powers. For example, when the Ndembu chief-elect emerges from seclusion, one of his subchiefs—who plays a priestly role at the installation rites—makes a ritual fence around the new chief's dwelling, and prays as follows to the shades of former chiefs, before the people who have assembled to witness the installation:

Listen, all you people. Kanongesha has come to be born into the chieftainship today. This white clay [*mpemba*], with which the chief, the ancestral shrines, and the officiants will be anointed, is for you, all the Kanongeshas of old gathered together here. [Here the ancient chiefs are mentioned by name.] And, therefore, all you who have died, look upon your friend who has succeeded [to the chiefly stool], that he may be strong. He must continue to pray well to you. He must look after the children, he must care for all the people, both men and women, that they may be strong and that he himself should be hale. Here is your white clay. I have enthroned you, O chief. You O people must give forth sounds of praise. The chieftainship has appeared.

The powers that shape the neophytes in liminality for the incumbency of new status are felt, in rites all over the world, to be more than human powers, though they are invoked and channeled by the representatives of the community.

LIMINALITY CONTRASTED WITH STATUS SYSTEM

Let us now, rather in the fashion of Lévi-Strauss, express the difference between the properties of liminality and those of the status system in terms of a series of binary oppositions or discriminations.

They can be ordered as follows:

- Transition/state
- Totality/partiality
- Homogeneity/heterogeneity
- Communitas/structure
- Equality/inequality
- Anonymity/systems of nomenclature
- Absence of property/property
- Absence of status/status
- Nakedness or uniform clothing/distinctions of clothing
- Sexual continence/sexuality
- Minimization of sex distinctions/maximization of sex distinctions
- Absence of rank/distinctions of rank
- Humility/just pride of position
- Disregard for personal appearance/care for personal appearance
- No distinctions of wealth/distinctions of wealth
- Unselfishness/selfishness
- Total obedience/obedience only to superior rank
- Sacredness/secularity
- Sacred instruction/technical knowledge
- Silence/speech
- Suspension of kinship rights and obligations/kinship rights and obligations
- Continuous reference to mystical powers/intermittent reference to mystical powers
- Foolishness/sagacity

Simplicity/complexity

Acceptance of pain and suffering/avoidance of pain and suffering

Heteronomy/degrees of autonomy

This list could be considerably lengthened if we were to widen the span of liminal situations considered. Moreover, the symbols in which these properties are manifested and embodied are manifold and various, and often relate to the physiological processes of death and birth, anabolism and katabolism. The reader will have noticed immediately that many of these properties constitute what we think of as characteristics of the religious life in the Christian tradition. Undoubtedly, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Jews would number many of them among their religious characteristics, too. What appears to have happened is that with the increasing specialization of society and culture, with progressive complexity in the social division of labor, what was in tribal society principally a set of transitional qualities "betwixt and between" defined states of culture and society has become itself an institutionalized state. But traces of the *passage* quality of the religious life remain in such formulations as: "The Christian is a stranger to the world, a pilgrim, a traveler, with no place to rest his head." Transition has here become a permanent condition. Nowhere has this institutionalization of liminality been more clearly marked and defined than in the monastic and mendicant states in the great world religions.

For example, the Western Christian Rule of St. Benedict "provides for the life of men who wish to live in *community* and devote themselves entirely to God's service by *self-discipline*, prayer, and *work*. They are to be essentially *families*, in the care and under the *absolute control* of a father (the abbot); individually they are bound to personal *poverty*, *abstention from marriage*, and *obedience to their superiors*, and by the vows of stability and conversion of manners [originally a synonym for "*common 'life*," "*monasticity*" as distinguished from secular life]; a moderate degree of austerity is imposed by the night office, fasting, abstinence from fleshmeat, and *restraint in conversation*" (Attwater, 1961, p. 51—my emphases). I have stressed features that bear a remarkable similarity to the condition of the chief-elect during his

transition to the public installation rites, when he enters his kingdom. The Ndembu circumcision rites (*Mukanda*) present further parallels between the neophytes and the monks of St. Benedict. Erving Goffman (*Asylums*, 1962) discusses what he calls the "characteristics of total institutions." Among these he includes monasteries, and devotes a good deal of attention to "the stripping and leveling processes which . . . directly cut across the various social distinctions with which the recruits enter." He then quotes from St. Benedict's advice to the abbot: "Let him make no distinction of persons in the monastery. Let not one be loved more than another, unless he be found to excel in good works or in obedience. Let not one of noble birth be raised above him who was formerly a slave, unless some other reasonable cause intervene" (p. 119).

Here parallels with *Mukanda* are striking. The novices are "striped" of their secular clothing when they are passed beneath a symbolic gateway; they are "leveled" in that their former names are discarded and all are assigned the common designation *mwadyi*, or "novice," and treated alike. One of the songs sung by circumcisers to the mothers of the novices on the night before circumcision contains the following line: "Even if your child is a chief's son, tomorrow he will be like a slave"—just as a chief-elect is treated like a slave before *his* installation. Moreover, the senior instructor in the seclusion lodge is chosen partly because he is father of several boys undergoing the rites and becomes a father for the whole group, a sort of "abbot," though his title *Mfumwa tubwiku*, means literally "husband of the novices," to emphasize their passive role.

MYSTICAL DANGER AND THE POWERS OF THE WEAK

One may well ask why it is that liminal situations and roles are almost everywhere attributed with magico-religious properties, or why these should so often be regarded as dangerous, inauspicious, or polluting to persons, objects, events, and relationships that have

not been ritually incorporated into the liminal context. My view is briefly that from the perspectival viewpoint of those concerned with the maintenance of "structure," all sustained manifestations of *communitas* must appear as dangerous and anarchical, and have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions. And, as Mary Douglas (1966) has recently argued, that which cannot be clearly classified in terms of traditional criteria of classification, or falls between classificatory boundaries, is almost everywhere regarded as "polluting" and "dangerous" (*passim*).

To repeat what I said earlier, liminality is not the only cultural manifestation of *communitas*. In most societies, there are other areas of manifestation to be readily recognized by the symbols that cluster around them and the beliefs that attach to them, such as "the powers of the weak," or, in other words, the permanently or transiently sacred attributes of low status or position. Within stable structural systems, there are many dimensions of organization. We have already noted that mystical and moral powers are wielded by subjugated autochthones over the total welfare of societies whose political frame is constituted by the lineage or territorial organization of incoming conquerors. In other societies—the Ndembu and Lamba of Zambia, for example—we can point to the cult associations whose members have gained entry through common misfortune and debilitating circumstances to therapeutic powers with regard to such common goods of mankind as health, fertility, and climate. These associations transect such important components of the secular political system as lineages, villages, subchiefdoms, and chiefdoms. We could also mention the role of structurally small and politically insignificant nations within systems of nations as upholders of religious and moral values, such as the Hebrews in the ancient Near East, the Irish in early medieval Christendom, and the Swiss in modern Europe.

Many writers have drawn attention to the role of the court jester. Max Gluckman (1965), for example, writes: "The court jester operated as a privileged arbiter of morals, given license to gibe at king and courtiers, or lord of the manor." Jesters were "usually men of low class—sometimes on the Continent of Europe they were

priests—who clearly moved out of their usual estate. . . . In a system where it was difficult for others to rebuke the head of a political unit, we might have here an institutionalized joker, operating at the highest point of the unit . . . a joker able to express feelings of outraged morality.” He further mentions how jesters attached to many African monarchs were “frequently dwarfs and other oddities.” Similar in function to these were the drummers in the Barotse royal barge in which the king and his court moved from a capital in the Zambezi Flood Plain to one of its margins during the annual floods. They were privileged to throw into the water any of the great nobles “who had offended them and their sense of justice during the past year” (pp. 102–104). These figures, representing the poor and the deformed, appear to symbolize the moral values of *communitas* as against the coercive power of supreme political rulers.

Folk literature abounds in symbolic figures, such as “holy beggars,” “third sons,” “little tailors,” and “simpletons,” who strip off the pretensions of holders of high rank and office and reduce them to the level of common humanity and mortality. Again, in the traditional “Western,” we have all read of the homeless and mysterious “stranger” without wealth or name who restores ethical and legal equilibrium to a local set of political power relations by eliminating the unjust secular “bosses” who are oppressing the smallholders. Members of despised or outlawed ethnic and cultural groups play major roles in myths and popular tales as representatives or expressions of universal human values. Famous among these are the good Samaritan, the Jewish fiddler Rothschild in Chekhov’s tale “Rothschild’s Fiddle,” Mark Twain’s fugitive Negro slave Jim in *Huckleberry Finn*, and Dostoevsky’s Sonya, the prostitute who redeems the would-be Nietzschean “superman” Raskolnikov, in *Crime and Punishment*.

All these mythic types are structurally inferior or “marginal,” yet represent what Henri Bergson would have called “open” as against “closed morality,” the latter being essentially the normative system of bounded, structured, particularistic groups. Bergson speaks of how an in-group preserves its identity against members of out-groups,

protects itself against threats to its way of life, and renews the will to maintain the norms on which the routine behavior necessary for its social life depends. In closed or structured societies, it is the marginal or “inferior” person or the “outsider” who often comes to symbolize what David Hume has called “the sentiment for humanity,” which in its turn relates to the model we have termed “*communitas*.”

MILLENARIAN MOVEMENTS

Among the more striking manifestations of *communitas* are to be found the so-called millenarian religious movements, which arise among what Norman Cohn (1961) has called “uprooted and desperate masses in town and countryside . . . living on the margin of society” (pp. 31–32) (i.e., structured society), or where formerly tribal societies are brought under the alien overlordship of complex, industrial societies. The attributes of such movements will be well known to most of my readers. Here I would merely recall some of the properties of liminality in tribal rituals that I mentioned earlier. Many of these correspond pretty closely with those of millenarian movements: homogeneity, equality, anonymity, absence of property (many movements actually enjoin on their members the destruction of what property they possess to bring nearer the coming of the perfect state of unison and communion they desire, for property rights are linked with structural distinctions both vertical and horizontal), reduction of all to the same status level, the wearing of uniform apparel (sometimes for both sexes), sexual continence (or its antithesis, sexual community, both continence and sexual community liquidate marriage and the family, which legitimate structural status), minimization of sex distinctions (all are “equal in the sight of God” or the ancestors), abolition of rank, humility, disregard for personal appearance, unselfishness, total obedience to the prophet or leader, sacred instruction, the maximization of religious, as opposed to secular, attitudes and behavior, suspension of kinship rights and obligations (all are siblings or comrades of one another regardless of previous secular ties), simplicity of speech and manners,

sacred folly, acceptance of pain and suffering (even to the point of undergoing martyrdom), and so forth.

It is noteworthy that many of these movements cut right across tribal and national divisions during their initial momentum. *Communitas*, or the "open society," differs in this from structure, or the "closed society," in that it is potentially or ideally extensible to the limits of humanity. In practice, of course, the impetus soon becomes exhausted, and the "movement" becomes itself an institution among other institutions—often one more fanatical and militant than the rest, for the reason that it feels itself to be the unique bearer of universal human truths. Mostly, such movements occur during phases of history that are in many respects "homologous" to the liminal periods of important rituals in stable and repetitive societies, when major groups or social categories in those societies are passing from one cultural state to another. They are essentially phenomena of transition. This is perhaps why in so many of these movements much of their mythology and symbolism is borrowed from those of traditional *rites de passage*, either in the cultures in which they originate or in the cultures with which they are in dramatic contact.

HIPPIES, COMMUNITAS, AND THE POWERS OF THE WEAK

In modern Western society, the values of *communitas* are strikingly present in the literature and behavior of what came to be known as the "beat generation," who were succeeded by the "hippies," who, in turn, have a junior division known as the "teeny-boppers." These are the "cool" members of the adolescent and young-adult categories—which do not have the advantages of national *rites de passage*—who "opt out" of the status-bound social order and acquire the stigmata of the lowly, dressing like "bums," itinerant in their habits, "folk" in their musical tastes, and menial in the casual employment they undertake. They stress personal relationships rather than social obligations, and regard sexuality as a polymorphic instru-

ment of immediate *communitas* rather than as the basis for an enduring structured social tie. The poet Allen Ginsberg is particularly eloquent about the function of sexual freedom. The "sacred" properties often assigned to *communitas* are not lacking here, either: this can be seen in their frequent use of religious terms, such as "saint" and "angel," to describe their congeners and in their interest in Zen Buddhism. The Zen formulation "all is one, one is none, none is all" well expresses the global, unstructured character earlier applied to *communitas*. The hippie emphasis on spontaneity, immediacy, and "existence" throws into relief one of the senses in which *communitas* contrasts with structure. *Communitas* is of the now; structure is rooted in the past and extends into the future through language, law, and custom. While our focus here is on traditional preindustrial societies it becomes clear that the collective dimensions, *communitas* and structure, are to be found at all stages and levels of culture and society.

STRUCTURE AND COMMUNITAS IN KINSHIP BASED SOCIETIES

1. *Tallensi*

There are some further manifestations of this distinction found in the simpler societies. These I shall consider in terms, not of passages between states, but rather of binarily opposed states that in certain respects express the distinction between society regarded as a structure of segmentarily or hierarchically opposed parts and as a homogeneous totality. In many societies, a terminological distinction is made between relatives on the father's and mother's side, and these are regarded as quite different kinds of people. This is especially the case with regard to the father and the mother's brother. Where there is unilineal descent, property and status pass either from father to son or from mother's brother to sister's son. In some societies, both lines of descent are used for purposes of inheritance. But, even in this

rivers is mixed with white clay in a bowl, and the shrine is sprinkled with it.

In many patrilineal societies, especially those with the blood feud, it is descent through males that is associated with ambivalent blood symbolism. But, in Ashanti, where matriliney is the dominant articulating principle, the male-to-male link of descent is regarded as almost totally auspicious and connected with the Sky God and the great river gods, who preside over fertility, health, strength, and all the life values shared by everyone. Once more we meet with the structurally inferior as the morally and ritually superior, and secular weakness as sacred power.

LIMINALITY, LOW STATUS, AND COMMUNITAS

The time has now come to make a careful review of a hypothesis that seeks to account for the attributes of such seemingly diverse phenomena as neophytes in the liminal phase of ritual, subjugated autochthones, small nations, court jesters, holy mendicants, good Samaritans, millenarian movements, "dharma bums," matrilinearity in patrilineal systems, patrilinearity in matrilineal systems, and monastic orders. Surely an ill-assorted bunch of social phenomena! Yet all have this common characteristic: they are persons or principles that (1) fall in the interstices of social structure, (2) are on its margins, or (3) occupy its lowest rungs. This leads us back to the problem of the definition of social structure. One authoritative source of definitions is *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences* (Gould and Kolb, 1964), in which A. W. Eister reviews some major formulations of this conception. Spencer and many modern sociologists regard social structure as "a more or less distinctive arrangement (of which there may be more than one type) of specialized and mutually dependent *institutions* [Eister's emphasis] and the institutional organizations of positions and/or of actors which they imply, all evolved in the natural course of events, as groups of human beings, with given needs and capacities, have interacted with each other (in various

types or modes of interaction) and sought to cope with their environment" (pp. 668-669). Raymond Firth's (1951) more analytical conception runs as follows: "In the types of societies ordinarily studied by anthropologists, the social structure may include critical or basic relationships arising similarly from a class system based on relations with the soil. Other aspects of social structure arise through membership in other kinds of persistent groups, such as clans, castes, age-sets, or secret societies. Other basic relations again are due to position in a kinship system" (p. 32).

Most definitions contain the notion of an arrangement of positions or statuses. Most involve the institutionalization and perdurance of groups and relationships. Classical mechanics, the morphology and physiology of animals and plants, and, more recently, with Lévi-Strauss, structural linguistics have been ransacked for concepts, models, and homologous forms by social scientists. All share in common the notion of a superorganic arrangement of parts or positions that continues, with modifications more or less gradual, through time. The concept of "conflict" has come to be connected with the concept of "social structure," since the differentiation of parts becomes opposition between parts, and scarce status becomes the object of struggles between persons and groups who lay claim to it.

The other dimension of "society" with which I have been concerned is less easy to define. G. A. Hillery (1955) reviewed 94 definitions of the term "community" and reached the conclusion that "beyond the concept that people are involved in community, there is no complete agreement as to the nature of community" (p. 119). The field would, therefore, seem to be still open for new attempts! I have tried to eschew the notion that *communitas* has a specific territorial locus, often limited in character, which pervades many definitions. For me, *communitas* emerges where social structure is not. Perhaps the best way of putting this difficult concept into words is Martin Buber's—though I feel that perhaps he should be regarded as a gifted native informant rather than as a social scientist! Buber (1961) uses the term "community" for "com-

munitas": "Community is the being no longer side by side (and, one might add, above and below) but *with* one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude, though it moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the others, a flowing from *I* to *Thou*. Community is where community happens" (p. 51).

Buber lays his finger on the spontaneous, immediate, concrete nature of *communitas*, as opposed to the norm-governed, institutionalized, abstract nature of social structure. Yet, *communitas* is made evident or accessible, so to speak, only through its juxtaposition to, or hybridization with, aspects of social structure. Just as in *Gestalt* psychology, figure and ground are mutually determinative, or, as some rare elements are never found in nature in their purity but only as components of chemical compounds, so *communitas* can be grasped only in some relation to structure. Just because the *communitas* component is elusive, hard to pin down, it is not unimportant. Here the story of Lao-tse's chariot wheel may be apposite. The spokes of the wheel and the nave (i.e., the central block of the wheel holding the axle and spokes) to which they are attached would be useless, he said, but for the hole, the gap, the emptiness at the center. *Communitas*, with its unstructured character, representing the "quick" of human interrelatedness, what Buber has called *das Zwischenmenschliche*, might well be represented by the "emptiness at the center," which is nevertheless indispensable to the functioning of the structure of the wheel.

It is neither by chance nor by lack of scientific precision that, along with others who have considered the conception of *communitas*, I find myself forced to have recourse to metaphor and analogy. For *communitas* has an existential quality; it involves the whole man in his relation to other whole men. Structure, on the other hand, has cognitive quality; as Lévi-Strauss has perceived, it is essentially a set of classifications, a model for thinking about culture and nature and ordering one's public life. *Communitas* has also an aspect of potentiality; it is often in the subjunctive mood. Relations between total beings are generative of symbols and metaphors and

comparisons; art and religion are their products rather than legal and political structures. Bergson saw in the words and writings of prophets and great artists the creation of an "open morality," which was itself an expression of what he called the *élan vital*, or evolutionary "life-force." Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, "edgemen," who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination. In their productions we may catch glimpses of that unused evolutionary potential in mankind which has not yet been externalized and fixed in structure.

Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority. It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or "holy," possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency. The processes of "leveling" and "stripping," to which Goffman has drawn our attention, often appear to flood their subjects with affect. Instinctual energies are surely liberated by these processes, but I am now inclined to think that communitas is not solely the product of biologically inherited drives released from cultural constraints. Rather is it the product of peculiarly human faculties, which include rationality, volition, and memory, and which develop with experience of life in society—just as among the Tallensi it is only mature men who undergo the experiences that induce them to receive *bakologo* shrines.

The notion that there is a generic bond between men, and its related sentiment of "humankindness," are not epiphenomena of some kind of herd instinct but are products of "men in their wholeness wholly attending." Liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority are conditions in which are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art. These cultural forms provide men with a set of templates or models which are, at one level, periodical reclassifications of reality and man's

relationship to society, nature, and culture. But they are more than classifications, since they incite men to action as well as to thought. Each of these productions has a multivocal character, having many meanings, and each is capable of moving people at many psychological levels simultaneously.

There is a dialectic here, for the immediacy of communitas gives way to the mediacy of structure, while, in *rites de passage*, men are released from structure into communitas only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of communitas. What is certain is that no society can function adequately without this dialectic. Exaggeration of structure may well lead to pathological manifestations of communitas outside or against "the law." Exaggeration of communitas, in certain religious or political movements of the leveling type, may be speedily followed by despotism, overbureaucratization, or other modes of structural rigidification. For, like the neophytes in the African circumcision lodge, or the Benedictine monks, or the members of a millenarian movement, those living in community seem to require, sooner or later, an absolute authority, whether this be a religious commandment, a divinely inspired leader, or a dictator. Communitas cannot stand alone if the material and organizational needs of human beings are to be adequately met. Maximization of communitas provokes maximization of structure, which in its turn produces revolutionary strivings for renewed communitas. The history of any great society provides evidence at the political level for this oscillation. And the next chapter deals with two major examples.

I mentioned earlier the close connection that exists between structure and property, whether this be privately or corporately owned, inherited, and managed. Thus, most millenarian movements try to abolish property or to hold all things in common. Usually this is possible only for a short time—until the date set for the coming of the millennium or the ancestral cargoes. When prophecy fails, property and structure return and the movement becomes institutionalized, or the movement disintegrates and its members merge into the environing structured order. I suspect that Lewis Henry

Morgan (1877) himself longed for the coming of world-wide *communitas*. For example, in the last sonorous paragraphs of *Ancient Society*, he has this to say: "A mere property career is not the final destiny of mankind, if progress is to be the law of the future as it has been of the past . . . the dissolution of society bids fair to become the termination of a career of which property is the end and aim; because such a career contains the elements of self-destruction. Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending" (p. 552).

What is this "higher plane"? It is here that Morgan seemingly succumbs to the error made by such thinkers as Rousseau and Marx: the confusion between *communitas*, which is a dimension of all societies, past and present, and archaic or primitive society. "It will be a revival," he continues, "in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes." Yet, as most anthropologists would now confirm, customary norms and differences of status and prestige in preliterate societies allow of little scope for individual liberty and choice—the individualist is often regarded as a witch; for true equality between, for example, men and women, elders and juniors, chiefs and commoners; while fraternity itself frequently succumbs to the sharp distinction of status between older and junior sibling. Membership of rivalrous segments in such societies as the Tallensi, Nuer, and Tiv does not allow even of tribal brotherhood: such membership commits the individual to structure and to the conflicts that are inseparable from structural differentiation. However, even in the simplest societies, the distinction between structure and *communitas* exists and obtains symbolic expression in the cultural attributes of liminality, marginality, and inferiority. In different societies and at different periods in each society, one or the other of these "immortal antagonists" (to borrow terms that Freud used in a different sense) comes uppermost. But together they constitute the "human condition," as regards man's relations with his fellow man.

5

*Humility and Hierarchy:
The Liminality
of Status Elevation
and Reversal*

RITUALS OF STATUS ELEVATION
AND STATUS REVERSAL

Van Gennep, the father of formal processual analysis, used two sets of terms to describe the three phases of passage from one culturally defined state or status to another. Not only did he use, with primary reference to ritual, the serial terms *separation*, *margin*, and *reaggregation*; he also, with primary reference to spatial transitions, employed the terms *preliminal*, *liminal*, and *postliminal*. When he discusses his first set of terms and applies them to data, van Gennep lays emphasis on what I would call the "structural" aspects of passage. Whereas his use of the second set indicates his basic concern with units of space and time in which behavior and symbolism are momentarily enfranchised from the norms and values that govern the public lives of incumbents of structural positions. Here liminality becomes central and he employs prefixes attached to the adjective "liminal" to indicate the peripheral position of structure. By "structure" I mean, as before, "social structure," as used by the majority of British social anthropologists, that is, as a more or less distinctive arrangement of specialized mutually dependent institutions and the

institutional organization of positions and/or of actors which they imply. I am not referring to "structure" in the sense currently made popular by Lévi-Strauss, i.e., as concerned with logical categories and the form of the relations between them. As a matter of fact, in the liminal phases of ritual, one often finds a simplification, even elimination, of social structure in the British sense and an amplification of structure in Lévi-Strauss's sense. We find social relationships simplified, while myth and ritual are elaborated. That this is so is really quite simple to understand: if liminality is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs.

In this chapter the primary focus will be on liminality, as both phase and state. In complex large-scale societies, liminality itself, as a result of the advancing division of labor, has often become a religious or quasi-religious state, and, by virtue of this crystallization, has tended to reenter structure and acquire a full complement of structural roles and positions. Instead of the seclusion lodge, we have the church. More than this, I wish to distinguish two main types of liminality—though many others will undoubtedly be discovered—first, the liminality that characterizes *rituals of status elevation*, in which the ritual subject or novice is being conveyed irreversibly from a lower to a higher position in an institutionalized system of such positions. Secondly, the liminality frequently found in cyclical and calendrical ritual, usually of a collective kind, in which, at certain culturally defined points in the seasonal cycle, groups or categories of persons who habitually occupy low status positions in the social structure are positively enjoined to exercise ritual authority over their superiors; and they, in their turn, must accept with good will their ritual degradation. Such rites may be described as *rituals of status reversal*. They are often accompanied by robust verbal and nonverbal behavior, in which inferiors revile and even physically maltreat superiors.

A common variant of this type of ritual is when inferiors affect the rank and style of superiors, sometimes even to the extent of

arraying themselves in a hierarchy mimicking the secular hierarchy of their so-called betters. Briefly put, one might contrast the liminality of the strong (and getting stronger) with that of the permanently weak. The liminality of those going up usually involves a putting down or humbling of the novice as its principal cultural constituent; at the same time, the liminality of the permanently structural inferior contains as its key social element a symbolic or make-believe elevation of the ritual subjects to positions of eminent authority. The stronger are made weaker; the weak act as though they were strong. The liminality of the strong is socially unstructured or simply structured; that of the weak represents a fantasy of structural superiority.

LIFE CRISIS RITES AND CALENDRIAL RITES

Now that I have put my cards on the table, so to speak, I will supply some facts to support these assertions, beginning with the traditional anthropological distinction between life-crisis rites and seasonal or calendrical rites. Life-crisis rites are those in which the ritual subject or subjects move, as Lloyd Warner (1959) has put it, from "a fixed placental placement within his mother's womb, to his death and ultimate fixed point of his tombstone and final containment in his grave as a dead organism—punctuated by a number of critical moments of transition which all societies ritualize and publicly mark with suitable observances to impress the significance of the individual and the group on living members of the community. These are the important times of birth, puberty, marriage and death" (p. 303). I would add to these the rites that concern entry into a higher achieved status, whether this be a political office or membership of an exclusive club or secret society. These rites may be either individual or collective, but there is a tendency for them to be performed more frequently for individuals. Calendrical rites, on the other hand, almost always refer to large groups and quite often

embrace whole societies. Often, too, they are performed at well-delineated points in the annual productive cycle, and attest to the passage from scarcity to plenty (as at first fruits or harvest festivals) or from plenty to scarcity (as when the hardships of winter are anticipated and magically warded against). To these also one should add all *rites de passage*, which accompany any change of a collective sort from one state to another, as when a whole tribe goes to war, or a large local community performs ritual to reverse the effects of famine, drought, or plague. Life-crisis rites and rituals of induction into office are almost always rites of status elevation; calendrical rites and rites of group crisis may sometimes be rites of status reversal.

I have written elsewhere (1967, pp. 93-111) about those symbols of liminality that indicate the structural invisibility of novices undergoing life-crisis rituals—how, for example, they are secluded from the spheres of everyday life, how they may be disguised in pigments or masks, or rendered inaudible by rules of silence. And I have shown above (p. 108) how, to use Goffman's terms (1962, p. 14), they are "leveled" and "stripped" of all secular distinctions of status and rights over property. Furthermore, they are subjected to trials and ordeals to teach them humility. One example of such treatment should be sufficient. In the Tsonga boys' circumcision rites, described by Henri Junod (1962, Vol I, pp. 82-85), the boys are "severely beaten by the shepherds . . . on the slightest pretext" (p. 84); subjected to cold, they must sleep naked on their backs all night during the chilly months of June to August; they are absolutely forbidden to drink a drop of water during the whole initiation; they must eat insipid or unsavory food, which "nauseates them at first" to the point of vomiting; they are severely punished by having sticks introduced between the separated fingers of both hands while a strong man, taking both ends of the sticks in his hands, presses them together and lifts the poor boys, squeezing and half crushing their fingers; and, finally, the circumcised must also be prepared to die if their wound does not heal properly. These trials are not only, as Junod supposed, to teach the boys endurance, obedience, and

manliness. Manifold evidence from other societies suggests that they have the social significance of rendering them down into some kind of human *prima materia*, divested of specific form and reduced to a condition that, although it is still social, is without or beneath all accepted forms of status. The implication is that for an individual to go higher on the status ladder, he must go lower than the status ladder.

STATUS ELEVATION

The liminality of life crisis, therefore, humbles and generalizes the aspirant to higher structural status. The same processes are particularly vividly exemplified in many African installation rituals. The future incumbent of the chieftainship or headmanship is first separated from the commonalty and then must undergo liminal rites that rudely abase him before, in the reaggregation ceremonies, he is installed on his stool in final glory. I have already discussed the Ndembu installation rites (Chapter 3) where the chief-to-be and his ritual wife are abased and reprimanded during a night's seclusion in a small hut by many of their future subjects. Another African example of the same pattern is vividly presented in Du Chaillu's (1868) account of the election of "a king in Gaboon." After a description of the funerary rites for the old king, Du Chaillu describes how the elders "of the village" secretly choose a new king, who is himself "kept ignorant of his good fortune to the last."

It happened that Njogoni, a good friend of my own, was elected. The choice fell on him, in part because he came of a good family, but chiefly because he was a favourite of the people and could get the most votes. I do not think that Njogoni had the slightest suspicion of his elevation. As he was walking on the shore on the morning of the seventh day [after the death of the former king] he was suddenly set upon by the entire populace, who proceeded to a ceremony which is preliminary to the crowning [and must be considered as liminal in the total funerary installation complex of rites] and must deter any but the most ambitious man from aspiring to the crown.

They surrounded him in a dense crowd, and then began to heap upon him every manner of abuse that the worst of mobs could imagine. Some spat in his face; some beat him with their fists; some kicked him; others threw disgusting objects at him; while those unlucky ones who stood on the outside, and could reach the poor fellow only with their voices, assiduously cursed him, his father, his mother, his sisters and brothers, and all his ancestors to the remotest generation. A stranger would not have given a cent for the life of him who was presently to be crowned.

Amid all the noise and struggle, I caught the words which explained all this to me; for every few minutes some fellow, administering a specially severe blow or kick, would shout out, "You are not our king yet; for a little while we will do what we please with you. By-and-by we shall have to do your will."

Njogoni bore himself like a man and prospective King. He kept his temper, and took all the abuse with a smiling face. When it had lasted about half an hour they took him to the house of the old king. Here he was seated, and became again for a little while the victim of his people's curses.

Then all became silent; and the elders of the people rose and said, solemnly (the people repeating after them), "Now we choose you for our king; we engage to listen to you and to obey you."

A silence followed, presently the silk hat, which is the emblem of royalty, was brought in and placed on Njogoni's head. He was then dressed in a red gown, and received the greatest marks of respect from all who had just now abused him (pp. 43-44).

This account not only illustrates the humbling of a candidate in a rite of status elevation; it also exemplifies the power of structural inferiors in a rite of status reversal in a cycle of political rituals. It is one of those composite rituals that contain aspects of status elevation along with aspects of status reversal. In the first aspect, an individual's permanent structural elevation is emphasized; in the second, stress is laid upon the temporary reversal of the statuses of rulers and ruled. An individual's status is irreversibly changed, but the collective status of his subjects remains unchanged. Ordeals in rituals of status elevation are features of our own society, as the hazings in fraternity and military-academy initiations attest. One modern ritual of status reversal at least comes to my mind. In the

British Army on Christmas Day, privates are waited on at dinner by officers and N.C.O.'s. After this rite the status of the privates remains unchanged; indeed, the sergeant-major may bawl them out all the more stridently for having been made to run about with turkey at their behest. The ritual, in fact, has the long-term effect of emphasizing all the more trenchantly the social definitions of the group.

STATUS REVERSAL: THE MASKING FUNCTION

In Western society, the traces of rites of age- and sex-role reversal persist in such customs as Halloween, when the powers of the structurally inferior are manifested in the liminal dominance of pre-adolescent children. The monstrous masks they often wear in disguise represent mainly chthonic or earth-demonic powers—witches who blast fertility; corpses or skeletons from underground; indigenous peoples, such as Indians; troglodytes, such as dwarves or gnomes; hoboes or anti-authoritarian figures, such as pirates or traditional Western gun fighters. These tiny earth powers, if not propitiated by treats or dainties, will work fantastic and capricious tricks on the authority-holding generation of householders—tricks similar to those once believed to be the work of earth spirits, such as hobgoblins, boggarts, elves, fairies, and trolls. In a sense, too, these children mediate between the dead and the living; they are not long from the womb, which is in many cultures equated with the tomb, as both are associated with the earth, the source of fruits and receiver of leavings. The Halloween children exemplify several liminal motifs: their masks insure them anonymity, for no one knows just whose particular children they are. But, as with most rituals of reversal, anonymity here is for purposes of aggression, not humiliation. The child's mask is like the highwayman's mask—and, indeed, children at Halloween often wear the masks of burglars or executioners. Masking endows them with the powers of feral, criminal autochthonous and supernatural beings.

In all these respects there is something of the character of theranthropic beings in primitive myth, for example, the male and female jaguars of the "fire" myths of the Gê-speaking Amazonian peoples described by Lévi-Strauss in *Le Cru et le Cuit* (1964). Terence Turner, of the University of Chicago, has recently reanalyzed the Gê myths (in press). From his precise and complex analysis of Kayapo myths of the origin of domestic fire, he concludes that the jaguar form is a kind of mask that both reveals and conceals a process of structural realignment. This process concerns the movement of a boy from the nuclear family to the men's house. The jaguar figures here represent not merely the statuses of father and mother but also changes in the boy's relationships to each of these parents—changes, moreover, that involve the possibility of painful social and psychological conflict. Thus, the male jaguar of the myth begins by being genuinely terrifying and ends as benevolent, while the female jaguar, always ambivalent, ends as malevolent and is slain by the boy on the advice of the male jaguar.

Each jaguar is a multivocal symbol: while the male jaguar represents both the pains and the joys of specific fatherhood, he also stands for fatherhood in general. There is in fact among the Kayapo the ritual role of "surrogate father," who removes the boy from the domestic sphere at about the age of seven to assimilate him into the wider male moral community. Symbolically, this appears to be correlated with the "death" or extirpation of an important aspect of the mother-son relationship, which corresponds with the mythical account of the slaying of the female jaguar by the boy—whose will to kill has been fortified by the male jaguar. Clearly the mythical account is not concerned with concrete individuals but with social personae; yet, so delicately interwoven are structural and historical considerations that the direct representation, in human form, of mother and father in myth and ritual may well be situationally blocked by the powerful affects always aroused in crucial social transitions.

There may well be another aspect of the masking function both in American Halloweens and in Kayapo myths and rituals—and

in many other cultural manifestations as well. Anna Freud has had much that is illuminating to say about the frequent play identification of children with fierce animals and other threatening monstrous beings. Miss Freud's argument—which derives its force, admittedly, from the theoretical position of her own mighty father—is complex but coherent. What is being given animal guise in child fantasy is the aggressive and punitive power of the parents, particularly the father, and especially with regard to the well-known paternal castration threat. She points out how small children are quite irrationally terrified of animals—dogs, horses, and pigs, for example—normal fear, she explains, overdetermined by unconscious fear of the menacing aspect of the parents. She then goes on to argue that one of the most effective defense mechanisms utilized by the ego against such unconscious fear is to identify with the terrifying object. In this way it is felt to be robbed of its power; and perhaps power may even be drained from it.

For many depth psychologists, too, identification also means replacement. To draw off power from a strong being is to weaken that being. So, children often play at being tigers, lions, or cougars, or gunmen, Indians, or monsters. They are thus, according to Anna Freud, unconsciously identifying themselves with the very powers that deeply threaten them, and, by a species of jujitsu, enhancing their own powers by the very power that threatens to enfeeble them. There is in all this, of course, a traitor-like quality—unconsciously one aims “to kill the thing one loves”—and this is precisely the quality of behavior that generalized parents must expect from generalized children in the customs of the American Halloween. Tricks are played and property is damaged or made to look as though it has been damaged. In the same way, identification with the jaguar figure in the myth may indicate the potential fatherhood of the initiand and hence his capacity to replace structurally his own father.

It is interesting that this relationship between theranthropic entities and masks and aspects of the parental role should be made both at rituals of status elevation and at culturally defined points

of change in the annual cycle. One might speculate that feral representation of the parents concerns only those aspects of the total parent-child relationship, in its full longitudinal spread, that provoke strong affects and volitions of an illicit libidinal, and particularly aggressive, character. Such aspects are likely to be structurally determined; they may set at odds the child's *aperçu* of his parent's individual nature and the behavior he must direct toward and expect from his parent in terms of cultural prescription. “Father,” he must think, “is not acting like a human being,” when he acts in accordance with authoritarian norms rather than with what is usually called “humanity.” Therefore, in terms of subliminal appreciation of cultural classifications, he may be thought to be acting like something outside humanity, most frequently an animal. “And if, as an animal, rather than the person I know, he exercises power over me, then I may borrow or drain that power if I too assume the culturally defined attributes of the animal I feel him to be.”

Life crises provide rituals in and by means of which relations between structural positions and between the incumbents of such positions are restructured, often drastically. Seniors take the responsibility for actually making the changes prescribed by custom; they, at least, have the satisfaction of taking an initiative. But juniors, with less understanding of the social rationale of such changes, find that their expectations with regard to the behavior of seniors toward them are falsified by reality during times of change. From their structural perspective, therefore, the changed behavior of their parents and other elders seems threatening and even mendacious, perhaps even reviving unconscious fears of physical mutilation and other punishments for behavior not in accordance with parental will. Thus, while the behavior of seniors is within the power of that age group—and to some extent the structural changes they promote are for them predictable—the same behavior and changes are beyond the power of juniors either to grasp or to prevent.

To compensate for these cognitive deficiencies, juniors and inferiors, in ritual situations, may mobilize affect-loaded symbols of great power. Rituals of status reversal, according to this principle, mask

the weak in strength and demand of the strong that they be passive and patiently endure the symbolic and even real aggression shown against them by structural inferiors. However, it is necessary here to revert to the distinction made earlier between rituals of status elevation and rituals of status reversal. In the former, aggressive behavior by candidates for higher status, though often present, tends to be muted and constrained; after all, the candidate is "going up" symbolically, and, at the end of the ritual, will enjoy more benefits and rights than heretofore. But, in the latter, the group or category that is permitted to act as if it were structurally superior—and in this capacity to berate and belabor its pragmatic superiors—is, in fact, perpetually of a lower status.

Clearly, both sociological and psychological modes of explanation are pertinent here. What is structurally "visible" to a trained anthropological observer is psychologically "unconscious" to the individual member of the observed society; yet his or her responses to structural changes and regularities, multiplied by the number of members exposed to change generation after generation, have to be taken into cultural, notably ritual, account if the society is to survive without disruptive tension. Life-crisis rites and rituals of reversal take these responses into account in different ways. Through successive life crises and rites of status elevation, individuals ascend structurally. But rituals of status reversal make visible in their symbolic and behavioral patterns social categories and forms of grouping that are considered to be axiomatic and unchanging both in essence and in relationships to one another.

Cognitively, nothing underlines regularity so well as absurdity or paradox. Emotionally, nothing satisfies as much as extravagant or temporarily permitted illicit behavior. Rituals of status reversal accommodate both aspects. By making the low high and the high low, they reaffirm the hierarchical principle. By making the low mimic (often to the point of caricature) the behavior of the high, and by restraining the initiatives of the proud, they underline the reasonableness of everyday culturally predictable behavior between the various estates of society. On this account, it is appropriate that

rituals of status reversal are often located either at fixed points in the annual cycle or in relation to movable feasts that vary within a limited period of time, for structural regularity is here reflected in temporal order. It might be argued that rituals of status reversal are also found contingently, when calamity threatens the total community. But one can cogently reply by saying that it is precisely because the whole community is threatened that such countervailing rites are performed—because it is believed that concrete historical irregularities alter the natural balance between what are conceived to be permanent structural categories.

COMMUNITAS AND STRUCTURE IN RITUALS OF STATUS REVERSAL

To return to rituals of status reversal. Not only do they reaffirm the order of structure; they also restore relations between the actual historical individuals who occupy positions in that structure. All human societies implicitly or explicitly refer to two contrasting social models. One, as we have seen, is of society as a structure of jural, political, and economic positions, offices, statuses, and roles, in which the individual is only ambiguously grasped behind the social persona. The other is of society as a *communitas* of concrete idiosyncratic individuals, who, though differing in physical and mental endowment, are nevertheless regarded as equal in terms of shared humanity. The first model is of a differentiated, culturally structured, segmented, and often hierarchical system of institutionalized positions. The second presents society as an undifferentiated, homogeneous whole, in which individuals confront one another integrally, and not as "segmentalized" into statuses and roles.

In the process of social life, behavior in accordance with one model tends to "drift away" from behavior in terms of the other. The ultimate desideratum, however, is to act in terms of *communitas* values even while playing structural roles, where what one culturally does is conceived of as merely instrumental to the aim of attaining

and maintaining *communitas*. Seen from this perspective, the seasonal cycle may be regarded as a measure of the degree of drift of structure from *communitas*. This is particularly true of the relations between very high- and very low-ranked social categories and groups. though it holds good for relations between incumbents of any rank or social position. Men use the authority vested in their office to misuse and abuse the incumbents of lower positions and confuse position with its incumbent. Rituals of status reversal, either placed at strategic points in the annual circle or generated by disasters conceived of as being the result of grave social sins, are thought of as bringing social structure and *communitas* into right mutual relation once again.

THE APO CEREMONY OF THE ASHANTI

To illustrate, I quote a familiar example from anthropological literature concerning the *Apo* ceremony of the northern Ashanti of Ghana. This ceremony, which Rattray (1923) observed among the Tekiman peoples, takes place during the eight days immediately preceding the Tekiman new year, which begins on April 18. Bosman (1705), the early Dutch historian of the Coast of Guinea, describes what Rattray calls "undoubtedly one and the same ceremony" (p. 151) in the following terms: there is ". . . a Feast of eight days accompanied with all manner of Singing, Skipping, Dancing, Mirth, and Jollity; in which time a perfect lampooning liberty is allowed, and Scandal so highly exalted, that they may freely say of all Faults, Villainies, and Frauds of their Superiors, as well as Inferiours without Punishment or so much as the least interruption" (Bosman, Letter X).

Rattray's observations abundantly confirm Bosman's characterization. He derives the term *Apo* from a root meaning "to speak roughly or harshly to," and points out that an alternative term for the ceremony *ahorohoria* is possibly derived from the verb *horo*, "to wash," "to cleanse." That the Ashanti make a positive connection

between frank, rough speech and purification is demonstrated by the words of the old high priest of the god Ta Kese at Tekiman as told to and literally translated by Rattray:

You know that every one has a *sunsum* (soul) that may get hurt or knocked about or become sick and so make the body ill. Very often, although there may be other causes, e.g., witchcraft, ill health is caused by the evil and the hate that another has in his head against you. Again, you too may have hatred in your heart against another, because of something that person has done to you, and that, too, causes your *sunsum* to fret and become sick. Our forbears knew this to be the case, and so they ordained a time, once every year, when every man and woman, free man and slave, should have freedom to speak out just what was in their head, to tell their neighbours just what they thought of them, and of their actions, and not only to their neighbours, but also the king or chief. When a man has spoken freely thus, he will feel his *sunsum* cool and quieted, and the *sunsum* of the other person against whom he has now openly spoken will be quieted also. The King of Ashanti may have killed your children, and you hate him. This has made him ill, and you ill; when you are allowed to say before his face what you think you both benefit (p. 153).

It can be seen at once from this indigenous interpretation that leveling is one of the principal functions of the *Apo* rites. The high must submit to being humbled; the humble are exalted through the privilege of plain speaking. But there is much more to the ritual than this. Structural differentiation, both vertical and horizontal, is the foundation of strife and factionalism, and of struggles in dyadic relations between incumbents of positions or rivals for positions. In religious systems that are themselves structured—most commonly by the intercalated segmentations of the solar and lunar year and by climatic nodal points of change—quarrels and dissensions are not dealt with *ad hoc* as they emerge, but in generic and omnibus fashion at some regularly recurrent point in the ritual cycle. The *Apo* ceremony takes place, as the Ashanti say, "when the cycle of the year has come round" or when "the edges of the year have met." It provides, in effect, a discharge of all the ill-feeling that has accumulated in structural relationships during the previous year. To purge

or purify structure by plain speaking is to reanimate the spirit of *communitas*. Here the widespread sub-Saharan African belief that grudges nourished in the head or heart physically harm both those who hold them and those against whom they are directed operates to insure that wrongs are ventilated and wrongdoers refrain from taking reprisals against those who proclaim their misdeeds. Since it is more probable that persons of high rank wrong those of low rank than the reverse, it is not surprising that chiefs and aristocrats are regarded as the typical targets for public accusation.

Paradoxically, the ritual reduction of structure to *communitas* through the purifying power of mutual honesty has the effect of regenerating the principles of classification and ordering on which social structure rests. On the last day of the *Apo* ritual, for example, just before the new year begins, the shrines of all the local and some of the national Ashanti gods are carried in procession from their local temples, each with an entourage of priests, priestesses, and other religious officials, to the sacred Tano River. There the shrines and the blackened stools of deceased priests are sprinkled and purified with a mixture of water and powdered white clay. The political head of Tekiman, the chief, is not personally present. The Queen Mother attends, however, for this is an affair of gods and priests, representing the universal aspects of Ashanti culture and society rather than of chieftainship in its more narrowly structural aspect. This universal quality is expressed in the prayer of the priestly spokesman of one of the gods as he sprinkles the shrine of Ta Kesi, the greatest of the local gods: "We beg you for life; when hunters go to the forest, permit them to kill meat; may the bearers of children bear children: life to Yao Kramo [the chief], life for all hunters, life to all priests, we have taken the *apo* of this year and put it in the river" (pp. 164-166). Water is sprinkled upon all the stools and on all those present, and after cleansing the shrines, everyone returns to the village while the shrines are replaced in the temples that are their homes. This solemn observance, which ends such a Saturnalian ritual, is in reality a most complex manifestation of Tekiman Ashanti cosmology, for each of the gods represents a whole constellation of

values and ideas and is associated with a place in a cycle of myths. Moreover, the entourage of each replicates that of a chief and bodies forth the Ashanti concept of structural hierarchy. It is as though structure, scoured and purified by *communitas*, is displayed white and shining again to begin a new cycle of structural time.

It is significant that the first ritual of the new year, performed on the following day, is officiated over by the chief, and that no women, not even the Queen Mother, are allowed to be present. The rites take place inside the temple of Ta Kesi, the local god; the chief prays to him alone and then sacrifices a sheep. This stands in marked contrast to the rites of the previous day, which are attended by members of both sexes, held in the open air by the waters of the Tano River (important for all Ashanti), involve no bloody sacrifice, and entail the exclusion of the chief. *Communitas* is the solemn note on which the old year ends; structure, purified by *communitas* and nourished by the blood of sacrifice, is reborn on the first day of the new year. Thus, what is in many ways a ritual of reversal seems to have the effect, not only of temporarily inverting the "pecking order," but of first segregating the principle of group unity from the principles of hierarchy and segmentation and then of dramatically indicating that the unity of Tekiman—and, more than Tekiman, of the Ashanti state itself—is a hierarchical and segmentary unity.

SAMHAIN, ALL SOULS, AND ALL SAINTS

As noted, the emphasis on the purificatory powers of the structurally inferior and the connection of such powers with fertility and other universal human interests and values precede the emphasis on fixed and particularistic structure in the *Apo* case. Similarly, Halloween in Western culture, with its emphases on the powers of children and earth spirits, precedes two traditional Christian feasts that represent structural levels of Christian cosmology—i.e., All Saints' and All Souls'. Of All Saints' Day, the French theologian M. Olier (quoted in Attwater, 1961) has said: "It is in some sort greater

than the Feast of Easter or of the Ascension, [for] Christ is perfected in this mystery, because, as our Head, He is only perfect and fulfilled when He is united to *all* His members the saints (canonized and uncanonized, known and unknown)."

Here again we meet with the notion of a perfect synthesis of *communitas* and hierarchical structure. It was not only Dante and Thomas Aquinas who pictured heaven as a hierarchical structure with many levels of sanctity and, at the same time, as a luminous unity or *communitas* in which no lesser saint felt envy of a greater nor greater saint any pride of position. Equality and hierarchy were there mysteriously one. All Souls' Day, which follows, commemorates the souls in purgatory, emphasizing at once their lower hierarchical position to the souls in heaven, and the active *communitas* of the living, who ask the saints to intercede for those undergoing liminal ordeal in purgatory and the saved dead both in heaven and in purgatory. But it would appear that, as in the "lampooning liberty" and status reversals of the *Apo* ceremony, the rude power that energizes both the virtuous hierarchy and the good *communitas* of the Saints and Souls of the calendrical cycle is derived from pre-Christian and autochthonous sources that are often given infernal status at the level of folk Christianity. It was not until the seventh century that November 1 began to be observed as a Christian festival, while All Souls' Day was brought into the Roman Rite only in the tenth century. In Celtic regions, some aspects of the pagan winter festival of Samhain (our November 1) were attached to these Christian feasts.

Samhain, which means "summer end," according to J. A. MacCulloch (1948) "naturally pointed to the fact that the powers of blight, typified by winter, were beginning their reign. But it may have been partly a harvest festival, while it had connections with pastoral activities, for the killing and preserving of animals for food for winter was associated with it. . . . A bonfire was lit and represented the sun, the power of which was now waning, and the fire would be intended to strengthen it magically. . . . In dwellings the fires were extinguished, a practice perhaps connected with the

seasonal expulsion of evils. Branches were lit at the bonfire and carried into the houses to kindle the new fires. There is some evidence that a sacrifice, possibly human, occurred at Samhain, laden as the victim would be with the ills of the community, like the Hebrew scapegoat" (pp. 58-59).

Here, too, it would appear that, like the *Apo* ceremony, Samhain represented a seasonal expulsion of evils, and a renewal of fertility associated with cosmic and chthonic powers. In European folk beliefs, the midnight of October 31 has become associated with gatherings of the hellish powers of witchcraft and the devil, as in *Walpurgisnacht* and Tam o' Shanter's near-fatal Halloween. Subsequently, a strange alliance has been formed between the innocent and the wicked, children and witches, who purge the community by the mock pity and terror of trick or treat and prepare the way for *communitas* feasts of sunlike pumpkin pie—at least in the United States. Somehow, as dramatists and novelists well know, a touch of sin and evil seems to be necessary tinder for the fires of *communitas*—although elaborate ritual mechanisms have to be provided to transmute those fires from devouring to domestic uses. There is always a *felix culpa* at the heart of any religious system that is closely bound up with human structural cycles of development.

THE SEXES, STATUS REVERSAL, AND COMMUNITAS

Other rituals of status reversal involve the supersession by women of masculine authority and roles. They may be held at some node of calendrical change as in the case of the Zulu *Nomkubulwana* ceremony, analyzed by Max Gluckman (1954) where "a dominant role was ascribed to the women and a subordinate role to the men at rites performed in local districts in Zululand when the crops had begun to grow" (pp. 4-11). (Similar rites, in which girls wear men's garments and herd and milk the cattle, are found in many southern and central Bantu societies.) More frequently, rituals of this type

may be performed when a major territorial division of a tribal society is threatened by some natural calamity, such as a plague of insects or famine and drought. Dr. Peter Rigby (1968) has recently published a detailed description of women's rites of this variety among the Gogo of Tanzania. These rites have been elaborately discussed elsewhere by such authorities as Eileen Krige, Gluckman, and Junod. Thus, I shall point out only that in all the situations in which they occur, there is a belief that the men, some of whom occupy key positions in the social structure, have somehow incurred the displeasure of the gods or ancestors, or, alternatively, have so altered the mystical balance between society and nature that disturbances in the former have provoked abnormalities in the latter.

Put briefly, structural superiors, through their dissensions over particularistic or segmental interests, have brought disaster on the local community. It is for structural inferiors, then—(in the Zulu case, *young* women, who are normally under the *patria potestas* of fathers or the *manus* of husbands), representing *communitas*, or global community transcending all internal divisions—to set things right again. They do this by symbolically usurping for a short while the weapons, dress, accouterments, and behavioral style of structural superiors—i.e., men. But an old form now has a new content. Authority is now wielded by *communitas* itself masquerading as structure. Structural form is divested of selfish attributes and purified by association with the values of *communitas*. The unity that has been sundered by selfish strife and concealed ill-feeling is restored by those who are normally thought of as beneath the battle for jural and political status. But “beneath” has two senses: it is not only that which is structurally inferior; it is also the common basis of all social life—the earth and its fruits. In other words, what is law on one social dimension may be basic on another.

It is perhaps significant that young maidens are often the main protagonists: they have not yet become the mothers of children whose structural positions will once more provide bases for opposition and competition. Yet, inevitably, reversal is ephemeral and transitory (“liminal,” if you like), for the two modes of social inter-

relationship are here culturally polarized. For girls to herd is a paradox for classification, one of those paradoxes that can exist only in the liminality of ritual. *Communitas* cannot manipulate resources or exercise social control without changing its own nature and ceasing to be *communitas*. But it can, through brief revelation, “burn out” or “wash away”—whatever metaphor of purification is used—the accumulated sins and Sunderings of structure.

STATUS REVERSAL IN
“THE FEAST OF LOVE” IN VILLAGE INDIA

To summarize our findings so far on rituals of status reversal: the masking of the weak in aggressive strength and the concomitant masking of the strong in humility and passivity are devices that cleanse society of its structurally engendered “sins” and what hippies might call “hang-ups.” The stage is then set for an ecstatic experience of *communitas*, followed by a sober return to a now purged and reanimated structure. One of the best “inside” accounts of this ritual process is provided in an article by the usually sober and dispassionate analyst of Indian village society, Professor McKim Marriott (1966). He is discussing the *Holi* festival in the village of Kishan Garhi, “located across the Juman from Mathura and Vrindaban, a day's walk from the youthful Krishna's fabled land of Vraja.” Indeed, the presiding deity of the rites was Krishna, and the rites described to Marriott as “the feast of love” were a spring festival, the “greatest religious celebration of the year.” As a green field worker, Marriott had been plunged into the rites the previous year, inveigled into drinking a concoction containing marijuana, smeared with ochre, and cheerfully drubbed. In the intervening year, he reflected on what might be the social function, à la Radcliffe-Brown, of these turbulent rites:

Now a full year has passed in my investigations, and the Festival of Love was again approaching. Again I was apprehensive for my physical person, but was forewarned with social structural knowledge that might yield better understanding of the events to come. This time, without the draft of

RELIGIONS OF HUMILITY
WITH HIGH-STATUS FOUNDERS

There are many examples of religions and ideological and ethical movements that have been founded by persons of high, or, if not high, of solidly respectable, structural status. Significantly, the basic teachings of these founders are full of references to the stripping off of worldly distinctions, property, status, and the like, and many of them stress the "spiritual" or "substantial" identity of male and female. In these and in many other respects the liminal religious condition they seek to bring about, in which their followers are withdrawn from the world, has close affinities with that found in the liminality of seclusion in tribal life-crisis rites—and, indeed, in other rituals of status elevation. Abasement and humility are regarded not as the final goal of these religions but simply as attributes of the liminal phase through which believers must pass on their way to the final and absolute states of heaven, nirvana, or utopia. It is a case of *reculer pour mieux sauter*. When religions of this type become popular and embrace the structurally inferior masses, there is often a significant shift in the direction of hierarchical organization. In a way, these hierarchies are "inverted"—at any rate in terms of the prevalent belief system—for the leader or leaders are represented, like the Pope, as "servants of the servants of God" rather than as tyrants or despots. Status is acquired through the stripping of worldly authority from the incumbent and the putting on of meekness, humility, and responsible care for members of the religion, even for all men. Nevertheless, just as in the South African Separatist sects, the Melanesian Cargo cults, the Order of Aaron, Negro adolescent gangs, and the Hell's Angels, the popular expansion of a religion or a ceremonial group often leads to its becoming hierarchical. In the first place, there is the problem of organizing large numbers. In the second—and this is seen in small sects with complex hierarchies—the liminality of the poor or weak assumes the trappings of secular structure and is masked in parental power, as we saw earlier in the discussion of animal and monstrous disguises.

The Buddha

As examples of structurally superior or well-entrenched religious founders who preached the values of humility and *communitas*, one might cite the Buddha, St. Francis, Tolstoy, and Gandhi. The case of Jesus is less clear-cut: while Matthew and Luke trace the descent of his *pater* Joseph to King David, and while the importance and status of a carpenter are high in many peasant societies, Jesus is usually considered to be "a man of the people." The Buddha's father was reported to be an important chief among the tribe of the *Sakiyas*, while his mother, Maha Maya, was the daughter of a neighboring king in a region to the southeast of the Himalayas. According to the received account, Siddhārtha, as the prince was known, led a sheltered life for 29 years behind the protective walls of the royal palace, waiting to succeed his father. Next comes the celebrated tale of his three ventures into the world beyond the gates with his coachman Channa, during which he encountered successively an old man worn out with labor, a leper, and a rotting corpse, and saw at first hand the lot of structural inferiors. After his first experience of death, on his return to the palace, he was met by the sound of music celebrating the arrival of his first-born son and heir—assurance of the structural continuity of his line. Far from being delighted, he was disturbed by this further commitment to the domain of authority and power. With Channa he stole away from the palace and wandered for many years among the common people of India, learning much about the realities of the caste system. For a while he became a severe ascetic with five disciples. But this modality of structure, too, did not satisfy him. And when he entered his celebrated meditation for forty days under the Bo tree, he had already considerably modified the rigors of the religious life. Having attained enlightenment, he spent the last 45 years of his life teaching what was in effect a simple lesson of submission and meekness to all people, irrespective of race, class, sex, or age. He did not preach his doctrines for the benefit of a single class or caste, and even the lowest Pariah might, and sometimes did, call himself his disciple.

In the Buddha we have a classic case of a "structurally" well-endowed religious founder who underwent initiation into *communitas* through stripping and equalizing and putting on the behavior of weakness and poverty. In India itself, one could cite many further examples of structural superiors who renounced wealth and position and preached holy poverty, such as Caitanya (see Chapter 4); Mahāvira, the founder of Jainism, who was an older contemporary of the Buddha; and Nanak, the founder of Sikhism.

Gandhi

In recent times, we have had the impressive spectacle of the life and martyrdom of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who was at least as much a religious as a political leader. Like the others just mentioned, Gandhi came from a respectable segment of the social hierarchy. As he writes in his autobiography (1948): "The Gandhis . . . for three generations from my grandfather . . . had been prime ministers in several Kathiawad States" (p. 11). His father, Kaba Gandhi, was for some time Prime Minister in Rajkot and then in Vankaner. Gandhi studied law in London and afterward went to South Africa on legal business. But soon he renounced wealth and position to lead the South African Indians in their struggle for greater justice, developing the doctrine of nonviolence and "truth-force" into a powerful political and economic instrument.

Gandhi's later career as main leader of the National Independence movement in India is well known to all. Here I would merely like to quote from his autobiography (1948) some of his thoughts on the virtues of stripping oneself of property and making oneself equal to all. Gandhi was always devoted to the great spiritual guide of Hinduism, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and in his spiritual crises he used to turn to "this dictionary of conduct" for solutions of his inner difficulties:

Words like *aparigraha* [nonpossession] and *sambhava* [equability] gripped me. How to cultivate and preserve that equability was the question. How was one to treat alike insulting, insolent and corrupt officials, co-workers of

yesterday raising meaningless opposition and men who had always been good to one? How was one to divest oneself of all possessions? Was not the body itself possession enough? Were not wife and children possessions? Was I to destroy all the cupboards of books I had? Was I to give up all I had and follow Him? Straight came the answer: I could not follow Him unless I gave up all I had (p. 323).

Eventually, and partly through his study of English law (notably Snell's discussions of the maxims of equity), Gandhi came to understand the deeper teaching of nonpossession to mean that those who desired salvation "should act like the trustee, who, though having control over great possessions, regards not an iota of them as his own" (p. 324). It was thus, though by a different route, that Gandhi came to the same conclusion as the Catholic Church in its consideration of the problem of Franciscan poverty: a juridical distinction was made between *dominium* (possession) and *usus* (trusteeship). Gandhi, true to his new conviction, allowed his insurance policy to lapse, since he became certain that "God, who created my wife and children as well as myself, would take care of them" (p. 324).

Christian Leaders

In the Christian tradition, too, there have been innumerable founders of religious orders and sects who came from the upper half of the social cone, yet preached the style of life-crisis liminality as the path of salvation. As a minimal list, one might cite Saints Benedict, Francis, Dominic, Clare, and Teresa of Avila in the Catholic sphere; and the Wesleys, with their "plain living and high thinking," George Fox, founder of the Quakers, and (to quote an American example) Alexander Campbell, leader of the Disciples of Christ, who sought to restore primitive Christianity and especially the primitive conditions of Christian fellowship, in the Protestant sphere. These Protestant leaders came from solid middleclass backgrounds, yet sought to develop in their followers a simple, unosten-

tious life-style without distinctions of worldly status. That their movements subsequently succumbed to "the world"—and, indeed, as Weber shows, threw in it—in no way impugns their pristine intents. In fact, as we have seen, the regular course of such movements is to reduce *communitas* from a state to a phase between incumbencies of positions in an ever developing structure.

Tolstoy

Gandhi was strongly influenced, not only by aspects of Hinduism, but also by the words and work of the great Christian anarchist and novelist Leo Tolstoy. *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, wrote Gandhi (1948), "overwhelmed me and left an abiding impression on me" (p. 172). Tolstoy, who was a wealthy nobleman as well as a famous novelist, went through a religious crisis when he was about 50 years old, in the course of which he even contemplated suicide as an escape from the meaninglessness and superficiality of life among the upper class and intellectuals and esthetes. It came to him then that "in order to understand life I must understand not an exceptional life such as ours who are parasites on life, but the life of the simple labouring folk—those who make life—and the meaning which they attribute to it. The simplest labouring people around me were the Russian people, and I turned to them and the meaning of life which they give. That meaning, if one can put it into words, was as follows: Every man has come into this world by the will of God. And God has so made man that every man can destroy his soul or save it. The aim of man in life is to save his soul, and to save his soul he must live 'godly' and to live 'godly' he must renounce all the pleasures of life, must labour, humble himself, suffer, and be merciful" (1940, p. 67). As most people know, Tolstoy made strenuous efforts to replicate his beliefs in his life, and lived in peasant fashion until his life's end.

SOME PROBLEMS
OF ELEVATION AND REVERSAL

Enough has been said to underline, on the one hand, the affinity between the liminality of rituals of status elevation and the religious teachings of structurally superior prophets, saints, and teachers, and, on the other, the affinity between the liminality of calendrical or natural crisis rituals of status reversal and the religious beliefs and practices of movements dominated by structural inferiors. Crudely put, the liminality of the strong is weakness—of the weak, strength. Or again, the liminality of wealth and nobility is poverty and pauperism—of poverty, ostentation and pseudohierarchy. Clearly, there are many problems here. Why is it, for instance, that in the intervals between occupying their culturally defined socioeconomic positions and statuses, men, women, and children should in some cases be enjoined and in others choose to act and feel in ways opposite to or different from their standardized modes of behavior? Do they undergo all these penances and reversals merely out of boredom as a colorful change from daily routines, or in response to resurgent repressed sexual or aggressive drives, or to satisfy certain cognitive needs for binary discrimination, or for some other set of reasons?

Like all rituals, those of humility and those of hierarchy are immensely complex and resonate on many dimensions. Perhaps, however, one important clue to their understanding is the distinction made earlier between the two modalities of social interrelatedness known as *communitas* and structure. Those who feel the burdens of office, who have by birth or achievement come to occupy control positions in structure, may well feel that rituals and religious beliefs that stress the stripping or dissolution of structural ties and obligations offer what many historical religions call "release." It may well be that such release is compensated for by ordeals, penances, and other hardships. But, nevertheless, such physical burdens may well be preferable to the mental burdens of giving and receiving commands and acting always in the masks of role and status. On the other

hand, such liminality may also, when it appears in *rites de passage*, humble the neophyte precisely because he is to be structurally exalted at the end of the rites. Ordeals and penances, therefore, may subserve antithetical functions, on the one hand punishing the neophyte for rejoicing in liminal freedom, and, on the other, tempering him for the incumbency of still higher office, with its greater privileges as well as more exacting obligations. Such ambiguity need not by now surprise us, for it is a property of all centrally liminal processes and institutions. But, while the structurally well-endowed seek release, structural underlings may well seek, in their liminality, deeper involvement in a structure that, though fantastic and simulacral only, nevertheless enables them to experience for a legitimated while a different kind of "release" from a different kind of lot. Now they can lord it, and "strut and stare and a' that," and very frequently the targets of their blows and abuse are the very persons whom they must normally defer to and obey.

Both these types of rituals reinforce structure. In the first, the system of social positions is not challenged. The gaps between the positions, the interstices, are necessary to the structure. If there were no intervals, there would be no structure, and it is precisely the gaps that are reaffirmed in this kind of liminality. The structure of the whole equation depends on its negative as well as its positive signs. Thus, humility reinforces a just pride in position, poverty affirms wealth, and penance sustains virility and health. We have seen how, on the other hand, status reversal does not mean "anomie" but simply a new perspective from which to observe structure. Its topsyturviness may even give a humorous warmth to this ritual viewpoint. If the liminality of life-crisis rites may be, perhaps audaciously, compared to tragedy—for both imply humbling, stripping, and pain—the liminality of status reversal may be compared to comedy, for both involve mockery and inversion, but not destruction, of structural rules and overzealous adherents to them. Again, we might regard the psychopathology of these ritual types as involving in the first case a masochistic set of attitudes for the neophytes, and, in the second, a sadistic component.

As regards the relationship of *communitas*, there are those who, in the exercise of daily authority or as representatives of major structural groupings, have little opportunity to deal with their fellow men as concrete individuals and equals. Perhaps, in the liminality of life crises and status changes, they might find an opportunity to strip themselves of all outward tokens and inward sentiments of status distinction and merge with the masses, or even to be symbolically at least regarded as the servants of the masses. As for those who are normally at the bottom of the pecking order and experience the comradeship and equality of joint subordinates, the liminality of status reversal might provide an opportunity to escape from the *communitas* of necessity (which is therefore inauthentic) into a pseudostructure where all behavioral extravagances are possible. Yet, in a curious way, these bluff *communitas*-bearers are able through jest and mockery to infuse *communitas* throughout the whole society. For here too there is not only reversal but leveling, since the incumbent of each status with an excess of rights is bullied by one with a deficiency of rights. What is left is a kind of social average, or something like the neutral position in a gear box, from which it is possible to proceed in different directions and at different speeds in a new bout of movement.

Both types of rites we have been considering seem to be bound up with cyclical repetitive systems of multiplex social relations. Here there appears to be an intimate bond of relationship between an institutionalized and only slowly changing structure and a particular mode of *communitas* which tends to be localized in that particular kind of structure. Undoubtedly, in large-scale complex societies, with a high degree of specialization and division of labor, and with many single-interest, associational ties and a general weakening of close corporate bonds, the situation is likely to be very different. In an effort to experience *communitas*, individuals will seek membership of would-be universal ideological movements, whose motto might well be Tom Paine's "the world is my village." Or, they will join small-scale "withdrawal" groups, like the hippie and digger communities of San Francisco and New York, where "the village

[Greenwich or otherwise] is my world." The difficulty that these groups have so far failed to resolve is that tribal *communitas* is the complement and obverse of tribal structure, and, unlike the New World utopians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they have not yet developed a structure capable of maintaining social and economic order over long periods of time. The very flexibility and mobility of social relations in modern industrial societies, however, may provide better conditions for the emergence of existential *communitas*, even if only in countless and transient encounters, than any previous forms of social order. Perhaps this was what Walt Whitman meant when he wrote:

One's-self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.

One final comment: Society (*societas*) seems to be a process rather than a thing—a dialectical process with successive phases of structure and *communitas*. There would seem to be—if one can use such a controversial term—a human "need" to participate in both modalities. Persons starved of one in their functional day-to-day activities seek it in ritual liminality. The structurally inferior aspire to symbolic structural superiority in ritual; the structurally superior aspire to symbolic *communitas* and undergo penance to achieve it.

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