

# Rituals of Rebellion – Rebellion as Ritual: A Theory Reconsidered

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This essay revisits a famous anthropological theory, the rituals of rebellion, which was developed by Max Gluckman in order to explain African ways of conflict management. It traces the treatment of this model in anthropological theory, especially in the work of the late Victor W. Turner and finally discusses its applicability to the wider setting of modern rebellions.<sup>1</sup>

## Rituals of Rebellion as Conservative Phenomena

Gluckman first presented his idea of the 'rituals of rebellion' in 1952 when he delivered the Frazer lecture at the University of Glasgow. He was obviously inspired by James Frazer's account of the priest-king of the Italian grove of Nemi in his famous book *The Golden Bough*. According to the myth, the king was killed by his successor, who, like himself, had to become a murderer before becoming a king. In Frazer's opinion, the Italian scenario was more than a singular artefact—it was a rite that could be found in many agrarian cultures where it was integrated into the annual cycle. He compared this custom with various myths of male heroes, Adonis, Tammuz, Osiris, and Dionysos, who represented the growth and decay of vegetation and, like the plants, which died annually only to rise again. While Frazer's theory quickly became very popular he had little evidence for the existence of the phenomena. So he must have been very pleased, in 1911, to receive a letter from the anthropologist Charles Seligman reporting on a practice similar to the Italian myth—the killing of a divine king among the Shilluk, a people living in the southern Sudan.<sup>2</sup> The Shilluk king, Seligman pointed out, was so much associated with fertility and new life, that he was immured alive or strangled when he became weak, unsuccessful or unable to fulfill all his sexual obliga-

<sup>1</sup> My thanks go to Anna-Maria Brandstetter, James W. Fernandez and Harold Scheffler for critical questions and comments on the manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> Seligman's letter to Frazer is cited in Ackermann (1987, 244–245).

tions. Apart from this it was considered legitimate for each of his sons to contest his power by attacking him and attempting to overthrow him by force.

The phenomenon of the ritual regicide of the Shilluk did not only impress Frazer. Years after the appearance of *The Golden Bough*, it inspired many other anthropologists to do further research, among them W.P.G. Thomson (1948), Edward E. Evans-Pritchard (1948; 1951), Paul Philip Howell (1944; 1952; 1953), William Arens (1979) and Burkhardt Schnepel (1988; 1990). I will not discuss the question of whether the killing of the king should be understood as fiction or as reality, but rather turn to the context within which the Shilluk conceive of the idea of regicide as being meaningful to the increase or restoration of the community's well being.

The king (*reth*) is seen as one who incorporates Nyikang, the primordial hero responsible for diverse natural processes, especially the weather. The task of his human representative is to bring a favorable influence to bear on these processes. Famine, droughts and illnesses are recognized as the king's failures and the more often he fails the more he has to be concerned about his declining popularity, which could finally lead to his death. Schnepel mentioned the case of a king who reigned from 1918 to 1943 and had to justify two phases of famine (Schnepel 1990, 199ff.). During the first, in the early 1930s, one of his potential successors attempted to overthrow him and could only be stopped by the intervention of the army. During the second drought he himself elected to die.

What is interesting for the topic under discussion here is not so much the circumstance of his death, which was surrounded by speculations, but the fact that one of his princes was involved in the revolt. In challenging a king who had turned out to be weak, he was acting in correspondence with the Shilluk worldview, where military success is interpreted as indicating that a prince is strong enough to take over the position of a king. Consequently, times of *interregnum* were often times of bloody feuds and civil wars until the British government enforced *pax britannia*. These violent processes were part of the installation ceremonies because the Shilluk did not just want a king, they wanted the right one. He was to be selected by Nyikang, and one prerequisite was military success.

Shortly after Evans-Pritchard's monograph on the Shilluk appeared, Gluckman compared the data presented by Frazer with his own findings in Southeast African societies. However, he did not restrict himself to the phenomenon of regicide, expanding the model to include a wider frame of ritual rebellions. To him the most striking feature of all the rites he observed was

the fact that they openly expressed social tensions. He thus shifted his analytical perspective from the spiritual meaning within the agricultural year, which had been stressed by Frazer, to social conflicts within particular societies. In his article "Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa,"<sup>3</sup> he described two major conflict lines among the South African Zulu: one between men and women and the other between the king and his subjects.

The first was enacted within a fertility rite which was related to the Zulu Princess of Heaven, Nomkubulwana, and required a series of transgression of gender boundaries by women and girls. The girls wore men's clothes, and herded and milked the cattle, which was an exclusive male activity and strictly taboo for them. At various stages of the ritual women and girls went naked, and sang obscene songs while men and boys hid in their homes. These rites of female transgression, Gluckman discovered, were not unique among the Zulu but could be found among several other people. In his article he mentioned the Tsonga of Mozambique where women even attacked men, and also the Swazi and the Transkeian Thembu; who practiced rites of female rebellion, which he designated as 'bacchantic.' All these rites, he argued, must be understood as an expression of gender inequality in South African societies and the subordination of women in daily life. Women were symbolically associated with evil powers, were excluded from political power, were exchanged for cattle to the benefit of their brothers and were in general, treated as a 'second sex,' to borrow the term introduced by Simone de Beauvoir in 1949.<sup>4</sup> Within the bacchantic rites they adapted the dominant role, behaved as if they were their brothers who stayed at home as if they were women. They humiliated men and acted in a lewd and provocative manner. While breaking the fundamental taboos of society they thus revealed the tensions between men and women and released them. According to Gluckman this is the deeper meaning of the ceremonies, insofar as the rituals served as a means of integrating centrifugal powers in society. In Gluckman's opinion the women's intention was not to change the gender order but to continue their lives as mothers, sisters and wives after the ceremonies. Zulu women, he pointed out, while suffering from the patriarchal system "became temporarily lewd viragoes, and their daughters martial herdsmen; but they accepted the social order and did not form a party of suffragettes" (Gluckman 1963, 127).

<sup>3</sup> The article was first published in 1954 and again in 1963 in a volume entitled *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa*. The latter is cited here.

<sup>4</sup> Gluckman never used this term, which he probably didn't know, but his descriptions fit exactly in de Beauvoir's schema.

This approach was also taken to explain the second kind of rituals of rebellion, the ones directed against the king. Gluckman mentioned the Swazi *incwala* ceremony, which was described in detail by Hilda Kuper (1947). It consisted of a public humiliation of the king, songs of hatred and a ritual threatening of the king who had to flee into a sacred enclosure. Because the ones who were mostly engaged in this ceremonial rebellion were members of the royal clan, Gluckman interpreted this relationship as one of the core conflicts of Swazi society, which was politically organized into a unification of several territorial segments. Each of these segments was economically independent and only under precarious control of the center. The segments often behaved competitively and their rulers strove to extend their power. Each of them had the possibility of being the next king and thus hostility and fights were not unusual. Although Gluckman did not observe a rite comparable to the one Kuper had described, he found the general political situation among the Zulu very similar to the Swazi. Murder within the royal line was a frequent occurrence.

Gluckman drew a distinction between these assassinations and revolutions, because they were never directed against the institution of the kingdom but just against a particular person. On the contrary, he defined "every rebellion therefore (as) a fight in defense of royalty and kingship" (Gluckman 1963, 130). Here Gluckman argued that every king had to cope with the values of kingship and try to be a good king. Whenever he failed he showed his deficiencies in fulfilling his duties to the country and was consequently in danger of being overthrown by one of his royal relatives.

Generally, Gluckman stressed the difference between revolution and rebellion. According to him the latter "proceed within an established and sacred traditional system, in which there is dispute about particular distributions of power, and not about the structure of the system itself" (Gluckman 1963, 112). To him neither the women nor the rebelling princes were interested in a radical change of society. On the contrary, the final goal of all these rituals was a social blessing and the strengthening and renewing of the established order. Gluckman used Aristotle's concept of *catharsis* to analyze the effects of rituals of rebellion. The performance of hostility, the revelation of social tensions and the possibility of a temporary taking over of the position of the ruling party produced purifying effects that would lead to a diminishing of tensions and a stabilization of society.

It is obvious that Gluckman argued from an institutionalist's point of view and that his idea of societies was quite static.<sup>5</sup> In "Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa" Gluckman designated African societies as 'relatively stationary' and 'repetitive' systems (Gluckman 1963, 127), a thesis which he revised in his introduction to the volume on *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa* that appeared nine years after publication of the article. He there responded to an earlier critique of Isaak Schapera who had argued that, far from always strengthening the state, African rebellions led to the opposite, namely the splitting of a segment or the migration of the rebellious group (Schapera 1956, 175). Gluckman corrected his former theory which he himself described as "colored by the fact that I studied ... two states where the cycle of rebellions without fission was dominant" (Gluckman 1963, 33) and recognized these as exceptions within a wider framework of African societies where rebellion more often led to separation. Despite these considerations Gluckman was criticized, as Toine van Teeffelen pointed out, for not differentiating between 'non-antagonistic contradictions' and those which could lead to revolution (Teeffelen 1978, 78f.).

### Rebellions and Communitas

One of Gluckman's students, Victor W. Turner, who did his fieldwork among the Ndembu of Zambia, later went beyond the framework of his teacher's model and thus extended it. Turner combined Gluckman's approach with the ritual theory of Arnold van Gennep who had largely worked on transitional rites. According to him rites of transition contain three phases: separation, margin and aggregation (see van Gennep 1960). Turner was primarily interested in the second phase, which he calls the liminal period. Liminality is characterized by certain attributes from which the experience of egalitarianism is the most striking one. During this phase society appears as "unstructured or rudimentary structured and relatively undifferentiated communitas" (Turner 1969, 96). With an example from his own research on Ndembu installation rites he shows the usefulness of this approach, which gives Gluckman's explanation of *catharsis* an additional depth.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Lincoln criticized Gluckman that he did not recognize historical conditions (1987). Lincoln also pointed out that Swazi *incwala* as described by Kuper (1947) had undergone a dramatic change of meaning which resulted in a fundamental stripping the king of his power.

Among the Ndembu the incoming new chief had to show up dressed in a ragged loincloth. Parading through the rows of his future subjects he had to endure affronts and humiliation with a bowed head and was not allowed to retaliate. The leader of those who opposed him was the head of an autochthonous group, which had been subjugated in the past after long battles. He had an important role in the installation process, advised the chief to use the mighty witch medicine and was ritually called 'mother.' During the installation he delivered a long speech to the king where he accused him of being an adulterer, a thief and a sorcerer. He admonished him to stop this behavior and become a responsible ruler. After finishing his speech he gave a signal to another member of the community thus authorizing everybody to criticize the chief. What ever he had done could now be revealed and no one who accused him publicly had to fear any reprisal.

What was mainly enacted in this ritual was "the power of the weak" (Turner 1969, 108) and a temporary travesty of the ruling order. Thus, Turner did not only stress the purification effect of the ceremony but took into consideration the fact that oppressed groups are often associated with a special amount of magical powers.

Turner was convinced that the weak could not only become strong in a ritualized context but also in secular life. In his books, *The Ritual Process* and *From Ritual to Theatre*, both inspired by the students' revolt, which undoubtedly influenced these ideas, Turner analyzed certain movements, some of them religiously motivated like the early Franciscans, others, like the Beatniks, more secularly orientated. All practiced *communitas* or were at least strongly concerned about developing communitarianism in daily life. The behavior, which was recognized as a means of expressing ritual liminality, was in these cases reformulated as a principle. Unlike the Shilluk, Ndembu and Zulu who, according to their anthropologists, never intended to engage in a revolution, the movements cited by Turner were mainly interested in changing the society. *Communitas* was considered to be more than a ritual stage; it became the final goal of all political and spiritual efforts. Here the members of such a movement created a model of society which was necessarily opposed to the ruling order. However, studying these movements Turner recognized that, despite all their intentions, after a while structure appeared within the so-called anti-structure, hierarchy emerged and the community of equals changed into a stratified organization. Thus, according to Turner, every attempt to endure and prolong the liminal phase is doomed to fail: the rebellion reveals itself to be just a ritual.

It is to Turner's credit to have opened up Gluckman's ideas of rituals of rebellion and put it into a wider frame of ritual theory. His knowledge is impressive and his unorthodox intercultural comparisons have not lost their fascinating power. However, to a certain degree his approach seems to be eclectic. In his writings he groups diverse rituals and rebellions, social movements and unusual circumstances under various aspects using them as examples for his thoughts on social drama, liminality and play. Undoubtedly this is evocative, but it is not an encompassing theory, which is able to put the diverse metaphors and tropes into a coherent relationship. Even his concept of 'liminality' is vapid since he extends it to modern leisure genres like sports, home entertainment and attending a concert. To characterize these activities he uses the term 'liminoid phenomena,' which, in my opinion, is a category that has less than tenuous connection to ritual.

Despite my critique of Gluckman's functionalistic approach and Turner's unsystematic approach I consider their theories can provide useful insight into the phenomenon of rebellion in general.

In the following I examine three different kinds of rebellion of which at least two have only been analyzed from economic, social and political points of view: Melanesian cargo cults, a case of recent headhunting in Indonesia, and Western youth subcultures. All these rebellions have a common pattern that distinguishes them from Gluckman's feuds and the other examples of rituals of rebellion in that their activists intended to trigger fundamental changes in society. Despite this, they developed elaborate ritual spheres, which were inseparably related to the rebellious project as such.

### Cargo Cults in Melanesia

Cargo cults are prophetic movements, which emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century in New Guinea and some Melanesian islands, especially the New Hebrides, the Solomon islands and Fiji. Cargo, the white colonialists' commodities, which had reached Melanesia by air or by sea, symbolized a strange power and was the central metaphor of the cults. The members of a cult expected their ancestors to return soon and to bring with them all the desired goods: steel axes, weapons, money and canned food. This event would be the beginning of a new happy era.

The particular movements were founded by prophets who told their followers they had been in contact with spiritual beings who had given them exact instructions on the required ritual practice. Often this included a prohi-

bition of work in the fields, the responsibility for constructing landing-places for the ancestors and the duty to participate in ceremonies. Until the middle of the twentieth century these movements were recognized as collective hysteria or possessions by ghosts. This changed after World War II, when anthropologists began to interpret them as reactions to the dramatic social changes triggered by colonialism and the technological and economic power of the whites. Anthropologists like Peter Worsley (1957), Wilhelm E. Mühlmann (1961) and Ton Otto (1992) defined cargo cults as anti-colonial rebellions and put them into the context of a universal religion of the oppressed. Worsley saw their primarily positive effect in the unifying results for the Melanesian people, which contributed to the overcoming of segmentation within Melanesian society. Worsley and others have additionally defined them as direct precursors of Melanesian nationalism. They thus did not characterize them as traditional rites and expressions of a pre-modern consciousness but as classical modernizing movements. Consequently, Worsley, whose most important study was published in 1957, expected a successive transformation of the cults into secular organizations like unions and political parties. An oft-cited cult, the Paliau movement, seemed to prove this theory. It began as a millenarian movement and then, after a phase of disappointment, which followed the failure of the prophecy, continued with political and social activities within the villages. Under a strict set of rules Paliau's followers, who had come from different ethnic groups, lived peacefully together within the villages. According to Holger Jebens and Karl-Heinz Kohl, Paliau initiated "the import of western organization models long before the colonial government itself introduced them" (1999, 14; translated by the author).

Cargo movements were different from Zulu or Shilluk feuds. Their members never intended to maintain the ruling order but attempted to change it radically. No longer would the whites be the only possessors of wealth—their goods and the power related to them would become the property of Melanesians. The leaders developed new social, political and religious models and strove to put them into practice. The colonial government reacted promptly. The cults were forbidden, the army was mobilized, and the leaders were arrested and banned. In some cases fantastic alternate models were created to redirect the anti-colonial feelings in a different direction. In Fiji, for example, the colonial administration tried to deactivate the Fiji Luweniwai movement by the founding of cricket clubs (see Mückler 1996). For this purpose they invented an encompassing ritual inventory including ritual titles like High Lord Admiral or Major General. At the beginning this strategy

seemed to be successful but in time the members of the cricket clubs derived political attributes from these titles. The colonial government recognized that the harmless clubs had become places of political anti-colonial agitation and suppressed them.

Addressing the question of *communitas* I would argue that cargo cults tried to develop a sense of equal distribution of wealth and as such reinstall the pre-colonial situation on a modern level. As anthropologists like Kenelm Burridge (1960) and Peter Lawrence (1964) have pointed out, indigenous Melanesian communities had kept a certain balance of power through the exchange of goods and the competition between 'big men' in order to increase the amount of supplies in circulation. This mechanism of maintaining egalitarianism between men was deeply disrupted by the colonial encounter. Through their belief that the white people's wealth had been stolen from their ancestors, who would bring it back and restore equality again, Melanesian people responded to this imbalance and found a way of reorganizing their lives in anticipation of a traditional utopia.<sup>6</sup>

Cargo cults were obviously rebellions and their members obviously used ritual means. Unlike Gluckman's idea it was not the ritual but the rebellion against the ruling order that was the activists' main goal. Choosing the ritual form of resistance they tied their present to their pre-colonial past. This included reinterpretations of their myth and a general revitalization of their culture. Thus, Jebens and Kohl analyzed rituals with reference to Fritz Kramer as the "attempt to cope with threatening influences from the outside through the use of mimesis" (Jebens and Kohl 1999, 17; translated by the author).

### Headhunting as Ritualized Rebellion

The next rebellion I want to mention began in December 1996 as an incident between a group of indigenous people on the island of Kalimantan, the Dayak and migrants from the island of Madura. As a result of the relatively minor conflict a great number of Dayak gathered and started rampaging through the Madurese villages. They burnt the houses, chased the inhabitants, beheaded many of them<sup>7</sup> and finally placed their victims' heads on

<sup>6</sup> According to Harold Scheffler, cargo cults emerged primarily in areas with a rather egalitarian social system (personal communication).

<sup>7</sup> Official sources reported that 2000 people were killed, 5170 made refugees and more than 1000 houses destroyed (see Sukma 1998, 106).

sticks along the roads. Commenting on that incident, a German newspaper<sup>8</sup> quoted a Christian missionary: members of his community had told him that although they continued to be good Christians they would now temporarily become Dayak again and fight for their interests as Dayak would.

The reason for the conflict was not very different from those occurring in other parts of Indonesia at that time, and although there also were some local aspects, it was primarily a result of Indonesia's policy of *transmigrasi* (see Fulcher 1980; 1981), that is, the policy of sending peasants from the overpopulated islands of Java and Madura to some of the outer island while offering them land and an amount of money for the expenses of the first year. In many places this led to conflicts between these settlers and the autochthonous population who often became minorities in their own region. A different way of living, of farming and trading, the competition for resources and access to jobs and an ethnocentric attitude on both sides increased the difficulties.<sup>9</sup> Within the Indonesian scale of upheaval this outburst of violence was not considered surprising but just seen as a further area of conflict. What is more important to our topic is the fact that the Dayak resorted to headhunting for their purpose. Headhunting was widespread in pre-colonial Indonesia and it belonged to a set of customs that was strongly related not only to an indigenous mode of warfare but also to the realm of fertility and procreation (Hoskins 1996). As such, it was the focus of a group of ceremonies. On colonizing Indonesia the Dutch banned headhunting. It disappeared almost completely and was just performed symbolically.

By beheading the Madurese the Dayak were not just intervening in a local rebellion, they were acting in a highly symbolic manner. Additionally they used the beheading to demonstrate their ethnicity and thus reconstructed their ethnic affiliation. In older ethnographic accounts headhunting was used as a kind of ethnic marker<sup>10</sup> and even today headhunting is seen as "the Dayak's particular form of interethnic relations" (Drake 1989, 277). Visible to the whole world—the pictures were printed by both the regional and the international press—they presented themselves as Dayak, a group with special fierce war tactics and rituals and related themselves to their glorious past

<sup>8</sup> *Frankfurter Rundschau* of March 20, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> In the Kalimantan case this was not only a conflict between autochthonous people and migrants but between two migrants groups: the Malay and the Madurese, which led to a coalition between Dayak and Malay.

<sup>10</sup> This had led to titles like *The Head-Hunters of Borneo* (Bloch 1881).

of resistance to Dutch colonialism and Malay hegemony.<sup>11</sup> They also revived the image of themselves as wild people, barbarians—an image, which is widespread within the Indonesian context.<sup>12</sup>

Choosing headhunting as a means of political protest they also acted within a highly sensitive sphere of talking about violence. According to Anna Tsing (1996), the lines between headhunters and their victims have now become blurred, so that some Dayak groups feel themselves to be victims of unknown raiders while at the same time using verbal violence as a means of creating identity. Rumors of headhunting occur regularly in Indonesia, and recently indigenous people have often described themselves as victims. They especially suspected the state, the police, international companies and missionaries of initiating such violent actions in order to get human sacrifices for construction projects or to wipe out a certain people. In some cases they might even have used Dayak groups for political purposes.

So, when the Dayak of West Kalimantan decided to become temporary headhunters they engaged in this ambivalent discourse of power and turned their role from that of a victim to that of a perpetrator.

### Western Youth Subculture

The last example, the organization of post-adolescent young people in diverse subcultures, is neither a phenomenon of non-Western countries, nor a response to colonialism or an expression of ethnic tensions in a multicultural state. Actually, it is an international phenomenon, not just a Western one, since we find very developed subcultures all over the world in the urban sector. However, as a cultural phenomenon it originated in the West and is deeply related to a certain stage of economic and social development, mainly the dissolution of kinship ties and the eradication of ritual life.

Although youth has always been the main force of any rebellion, the phenomenon of youth subculture emerged as mass phenomenon after World War II. While the war generation enjoyed their newly achieved wealth and comfort, their children gathered in the streets, smoked in public and listened to a music that was seen as the "niggers' revenge for ... slavery" (Farin 1997, 14, translated by the author). Rock 'n' roll was born and with it the

<sup>11</sup> Garang (1974) mentioned several rebellions in 1870, 1887 and 1901. Also the banning of the Ngasi-Njuli cult 1905 led to oppositional movements in 1920 and 1922.

<sup>12</sup> Rumor that groups of Dayak rove around looking for heads occurred from time to time among the Chinese and Muslim population of Kalimantan (see Bhar 1980).

culture of the Teds. Teds recruited themselves mostly from working-class youth but dressed as dandies, imitating the style of King Edward, the black sheep of the British royal clan. The Teds were followed by the Mods, who distinguished themselves carefully from the first. Like the Teds they seemed, at first sight, to be elegant and, on closer inspection, rather odd. They carried umbrellas in the sun and did not mind wallowing in mud in their new clothes. According to Farin, it was not easy to classify them properly. They seemed to be both conformist and provocative "behind the friendly façade subversion was sneering" (Farin 1997, 15, translated by the author). The Mods were followed by Rockers with their motor-cycles and crude cult of masculinity, and another working-class phenomenon, the skinheads. Finally, at the end of the 1960s youth subculture exploded into a great variety of forms: hippies, beatniks, urban guerillas, punks, heavy metals, Ancient Goths and many others. Since this time a growing number of sociologists, politicians, educationists, psychologists, social workers and members of the church have been occupied with explaining and classifying them, with finding solutions for problems they have caused and considering preventive measures.

Although there are numerous scientific approaches to explaining urban youth culture only a handful of researchers (see Inhetveen 1997; Turner 1969; 1982) have taken account of the ritualistic aspect. This, however, is obvious. Members of Western youth cultures form ritual communities. They develop a special dress code which functions as a marker to outsiders, create their own values, their own mode of behavior, their own music, literature, art and—last but not least—a set of rituals which keep the group together, shape their relationship, and present them to the outside. Some of the groups have professed religious or occult affiliation but the majority conceive themselves as atheists and attacks on the church and the Christian belief system are often part of their public behavior. Their rebellion is not only directed towards authorities or representatives of the state but also to society as a whole. Miller has called this "the ethics of cultural opposition" (Miller 1991). This makes youth subcultures unique among the wide range of rebellions: they are rebels against their own society, against parents, teachers, and the older generation in general and also against most of their age mates. Consequently, their behavior is an active refusal of current customs, values and rules. Some, like the leftwing autonomous groups, stress their opposition to the state's power monopoly and perform regular highly ritualized fights with the police (see Manrique 1992), others like the skinheads constitute their group identity while provoking ordinary people with racist slogans and violence.

Often members of youth cultures reject middle class carriers and practice a self-chosen poverty: they rely on welfare systems or work in a low paid, alternative sector. Mostly they have a developed sense of equality and constitute a radical *communitas* within the groups. This seemed even valid for the majority of right wing skinheads.<sup>13</sup>

Youth subcultures, especially those assumed to be a threat to the public, were explained as results of failed youth policy (Boniter-Dörr and Weinknecht 1993; Heitmeyer 1989), as effects of the ongoing individualization of society (Beck 1986; Furlong and Cartmel 1997) and the alienation of its members or as an effect of class conflicts and social instability (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Heitmeyer 1988; Osgerby 1998). All these analytical approaches, although they serve quite well as an explanation of the particular form of youth cultures, give no answer to some reasonable questions. Why is their protest so highly ritualized and why is it temporarily limited to the phase of late adolescence? Most of those alienated, disorientated and forlorn young people who revolt so fiercely turn into ordinary citizens when they reach a certain age. The latter is a relatively hidden process when the protagonists belong to the working class or do not get into influential positions. In the case of young leftists, however, the break becomes obvious. Many activists of the former students' rebellion belong now to the societies' elite, and recently we have witnessed the change from rebels to established politicians within the Green parties. Such developments are not always positively recognized. This is shown by the very polarized debates over the rebellious of the German minister for foreign affairs, Joseph Fischer, in his youth.

By considering all these circumstances we can point out several constitutive elements for Western youth cultures: (1) they create a group, (2) they establish *communitas* within the group,<sup>14</sup> (3) they elaborate their own rituals, (4) they live in a liminal state, (5) they use the means of rebellion to define their extraordinary situation, and (6) they reintegrate into society when they have become 'real' adults. Thus my argument is that since traditional rites of transition have disappeared in industrial societies young people have created their own rites. The transformation from non-adult to adult creates needs rituals which fit perfectly into the scheme of *rites de passage* described by van Gennep and Turner. Together with Gluckman's thesis that ritual rebellions finally do not lead to a revolution—as expected by, at least, the young leftwing—these theories offer useful models for analysis.

<sup>13</sup> These are the findings of Klaus Farin's famous studies (Farin 1996; 1997), which correct the common notion of skin heads as leader-oriented, authoritarian characters.

<sup>14</sup> Some, like the hippies, did this explicitly (Miller 1991), others did so more implicitly.

### Rituals of Rebellion: A Powerful Answer to Social Change

When we have a look at the similarities of the cases discussed above we see that all these movements occurred in situations of rapid social change. The Melanesians were faced with colonialism, the Dayak feared being marginalized and threatened by the state, and members of Western youth subcultures suffered from ongoing changes in modern industrial societies. They all belong to groups who lacked access to power and wealth and thus were unable to participate as equals in society. By creating a cult, a subculture or by engaging in a revolt people solved the problem of belonging to an oppressed group in several ways:

*First*, they empowered themselves while creating a counter-world with its own rules and values that gave meaning to their existence. Doing this they also demonstrated that they did not accept either the prevailing order or their own inferior status.

*Second*, they improved their role in society. When people of oppressed groups organized themselves they did not only develop strength and self-confidence but also developed a powerful position in society. This happened especially when people used violence. In the case of autonomous groups this was a clearly expressed strategy, in other cases it might have been more a psychological activity.

Comparing this to Gluckman's model of rituals of rebellion one can recognize a significant difference. Neither the Melanesians nor the Dayak or Western youth intended to practice a ritual. According to their self-image, they were rebels, and their goal was to bring about a noticeable change of the social order. They were probably unaware of the fact that they were also ritualists. This is especially true for members of leftwing organizations who planned not only a rebellion but also a revolution. Thus, to apply the African model to the cited cases one has to turn it upside down. Generally, it is a dialectical relationship. Political rebellions can drift to mere rituals and ritual rebellions can reveal themselves to be more political than ceremonial. Although ritual rebellion was practiced in African divine kingships there was also real political rebellion which, when it failed, resulted in bloody revenge and violent oppression for the rebelling group, as Lincoln (1987) showed for the Swazi. Thus, the princes were both rebels and practitioners of reversal rituals and one might speculate about their personal intentions. The participants of rebellions, which were defined as social or political ones did not only engage in political action, they also used the means of ritual. The result in both cases was necessarily uncertain: a divine king could be killed on the

occasion of an event, which was thought to be a ritual and the political rebel could end up as a ritualist.

However, for analytical purposes it would seem to make sense to use the means of ritual analysis in order to understand social and political rebellion. This would provide additional insights into processes, which until now have just been analyzed from the angles of political science and sociology.

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