A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion

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Victor Turner (1920-83), who taught at the universities of Manchester, Cornell, Chicago, and Virginia, is remembered as both a master ethnographer and one of the most creative minds in the field. He is almost singlehandedly responsible for transforming the anthropology of religion from dry social science into a humanistic field that could bring religious practices to life. He combined a rigorous approach to social process with an appreciation for the open-endedness of imagination. More than anyone else, Turner was able to evoke the humaneness of religion and the religious creativity of humankind. His work is rooted in a series of wonderful ethnographic studies on the Ndombo of Zambia (1957, 1962, 1967, 1969, 1981 [1968]), followed by essays on Christian pilgrimage (1974, 1979) and ritual as theater (1986). As he progressed, Turner widened his scope until his subject was virtually humanity as a whole. The essay here is both the clearest marker of the transition in his work and Turner at his illuminative best.

Turner builds on van Gennep's early tripartite model of rites of passage (1908) and Glöckner's approach to social process to develop a rich account of the ways in which rituals manage transitions for individuals and collectivities. Such transitions are key to the shaping of both temporal and social experience. Turner's work is thus critical for studies of birth, initiation and death rites, calendrical rituals, political installations and secessions, pilgrimage, healing, and all forms of movement in social life. As such rituals work on and by means of the body, Turner can also be credited as one of the first to direct scholarly attention toward embodiment. Turner founded a lively school. Among the best explorations and elaborations of his ideas with respect to religious and ritual phenomena are Myerhoff (1974, 1979).

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 (1960) 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 present 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 initiates. 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 communitas, 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 incum-

bents of positions during the rites de passage, through which they changed positions. Something of the sacredness of that transient humility and modestness 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
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Limiting the rites de passage to arranged positions. Some of that transient human experience, which goes over, and tempers the brunt of a higher position. As simply, as Fortes (1962, igugu, a matter of giving is rather a matter of receiving, and every essential and generic principle which could be no more than a localized belief that the high could not exist, and he who does not believe what it is like to be round thinking, a principle of order and Prince Philip's decision to make his heir apparent to the British throne, school in Australia and one could learn how to do it.

The Cycle of the Liminal Cycle

That, for individuals and for the whole of a dialectical process in the experience of high and low, homogeneous structure, homogeneity is when the creases and inequality. Order to higher status is the ritual cycle. In such a cycle as it were, constitute mutually indispensable. An abstract of a concrete tribe society that of personae, groups, and the two, has its own development. Moment many incursions coexist with many moments. In other words, social experience contains alternating nature and communities, connections.

The Unity of an Initiation Rite

Focusing on the Ndembu of Zambia that concerns the office, that of the senior

...will be useful here. It will...
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 Ndenbu. 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 katfu, a term Ndenbu derive from ku-fua, "to die," for it is here that the chief-elect dies from his commoner state. Imagery of death abounds in Ndenbu liminality. For example, the secret and sacred site where novices are circumcised is known as ifuli or chifuli, a term also derived from ku-fua. The chief-elect, clad in nothing but a ragged waist-cloth, and a ritual wife, who is either his senior wife (msuudzi) or a special slave woman, known as lukamu (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 mswadi or lukamu in these rites. The couple are led there as though they were infirm. There they sit crouched in a posture of shame (nsosyo) or modesty, while they are washed with medicines mixed with water brought from Katang'onyi, the river site where the ancestral chiefs of the southern Lunda diaspora dwelt for a while on their journey from Mwantiyanwva'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 Lundisha and the chthonic powers.

Next begins the rite of Kumukindyila, 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 lukamu 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 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 Mwantiyanwva, 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
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The wife must not be present at follow are held to destroy the chief-elect, the chiefly couple must from sexual congress for several rite.

now breaks into a home.

Are you a mean and selfish home-tempered? You do not love your and are only angry with them all you love! Yet here we and you that you are the chiefship. Put away your, give up adulterous them up immediately! We chiefship. You must eat, men, you must live well get prepare witchcraft medicine devours your fellow in his/hidden! We have desired you at our chief. Let your wife prepare people who come here to the home? Do not be selfish, do not keep ship to yourself! You must leave, you must abstain from witchcrafts if you have been given it must not be selling people! You generous to people! The chief Kanongeza, Chitawanaembles his father) of Mwani have danced for your chiefship your predecessor is dead [i.e., killed him]. But today you are chief. You must know the Kwakwanu. If you were mean, your cassava mush alone, or today, you are the chief-just give up your selfish ways, one everyone, you are the first stop being adulterous and you must not bring partial judged in any law case involving your family where your own children you must say: "If someone has the life, or wronged me, today I this case unjustly. I must not in my heart."


gue, any person who considers wronged by the chief-elect led to revile him; and most resentment, going into as the desires. The chief-elect, alone to sit silently with downcast eyes, to turn all patience and humility, meanwhile splashes the chief eats (Ndungu) on the night before the He is prevented from sleeping, in a dream, partly because it is said of him he will have bad dreams dead chiefes, "who will say they will succeed them, for has he the") Kafwana, his assistants, and prominent men, including village headmen, the chief and his wife - who is revered - and order them to fetch and perform other menial tasks. The

Attributes of Liminal Entities

The phase of reaggregation in this case concerns the public installation of the Kanongeza with all pomp and ceremony. While this would be of the utmost interest in study of the chiefship, and to an important aspect in current British social anthropology, it does not concern us here. Our present focus is on liminality and the ritual powers of the chief. 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 underlying comes supreme. Second, the supreme political authority is portrayed "as a slave," recalling L. Photograph of the coronation of a pope in western Christendom when he is called upon to be the "servus servorum Dei." Part of the epic 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 Kumukundlanyula 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 "initiation." 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 baptisms in Christian or syncretic 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 funeral association of Chiwila. Symbolically, all attributes that distinguish categories and groups in the structured social order are here in abeyance; the neophytes are merely entries 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 not 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 (mani) 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
ordeal's 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 overrider 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 chiefainship to himself." He "must laugh with the people," and laughter (kwa-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 a 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 (tsumba), and the secret envy, lusts, and grudges that result behaviorally in witchcraft (wulefi), theft (tumulumbi), adultery (kushimbana), meanness (chifupa), and homicide (wubanjira). Even when a man has become a chief, he must still be a member of the whole community of persons (antwa), 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 communities. 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 punitious 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, Kanongesho has come to be born into the chiefainship today. This white clay (mpemba), with which the chief,
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The living and the dead, between people, merely as human are health, strength, and White's laughter, for example, manifest in the flashing of chieftainship and good company, pride (ominy), and the secret grudges that result behaviors (wudii), theft (wukombe), bana), meanness (chipwa), (basi). Even when a man has must still be a member of act the others, respecting coming everyone, and them. The chastening func- tion is still a component of many influences. A well-known's vial's vigil, during the acolade, when soul to serve the weak and to meditate on his own subsequent power is thought from this profound immem- 

Liminality, therefore, rep- of two kinds of separation: bond of communitas. act only in terms of the by the incumber of structure. The second is to biological urges at the souls. A mystical character- timent of humankind liminality, and in most cul- nizations is brought closely in the protective and divine or preterhuman. For example, when the emerges from seclusion, who plays a priestly role in the fence or dwelling, and prays as of former chiefs, before assembled to witness the

Kanongeshas have come chieftainship today. This with which the chief,

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 manifest 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 "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

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

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 opposi- tions or discriminations. They can be ordered as follows:

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<th>Transition/state</th>
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<tr>
<td>Totality/partiality</td>
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<td>Homogeneity/heterogeneity</td>
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<td>Communitas/structure</td>
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<td>Anonymity/systems of nomenclature</td>
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<td>Absence of property/property</td>
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<td>Absence of status/status</td>
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<td>Nakedness or uniform clothing/distinctions of clothing</td>
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<td>Sexual continence/sexuality</td>
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<td>Minimalization of sex distinctions/maximization of sex distinctions</td>
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<td>Absence of rank/distinctions of rank</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humility/just pride of position</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disregard for personal appearance/care for personal appearance</td>
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<td>No distinctions of wealth/distinctions of wealth</td>
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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, 1962, 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 obedi- ence. 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 “stripped” of their secular clothing when they are passed beneath a symbolic gateway; they are “levied” in that their former names are discarded and all are assigned the common designation isuuduyi, 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 Mfunu tshibwekwa, 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, insipid, or polluting to persons, objects, events, and relationships that have not been ritually incorporated into the liminal context. My view is brief 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 communities. 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
through his title Mfumu, literally “husband of the village” and his passive role.

Danger and the Of the Weak

why it is that liminal sites, often almost everywhere attractive, contain religious properties, or why they should not be regarded as dangerous or polluting to persons or relationships that have not been ritually cleansed, proscribed, prohibited. And, as Mary Douglas argued, that which cannot, or will not, be subsumed in terms of traditional classification, or for that reason unique, is almost everywhere “dangerous” and “hazardous” or “harmful.”

said earlier, liminality is the state of becoming and becoming manifest, of becoming a manifestation of community, of belonging, of being understood and shared. In the societies discussed, there are other functions and other meanings of the liminal, including the regulation of access to places by those who are not in the dominant group. Within stable structural contexts, changes in status or in the way that people are categorized can lead to changes in the way that liminal events are interpreted and understood.

in the case of the Ndembu, for example, we can see that the liminal events associated with the passage of a child from one status group to another are significant in the social and cultural life of the community. These events are important in the socialization process and in the transmission of values and norms. The liminal events are also important in the regulation of access to certain resources, such as land and water, and in the establishment of social relationships.

Millenarian Movements

Among the more striking manifestations of communitas are the so-called millenarian religious movements, which arise among those who believe that the world is coming to an end and that a new age is about to begin. These movements are characterized by a strong sense of community, a belief in the power of the individual, and a focus on spiritual matters. They often involve a charismatic leader who provides guidance and direction for the movement. The leaders of these movements are often seen as having a special relationship with the divine and as having the ability to influence the course of events.

Among the many examples of millenarian movements are the Shakers, the Hutterites, and the Branch Davidians. These movements have been characterized by a strong sense of community, a commitment to spiritual matters, and a belief in the power of the individual. They have also been known for their unique physical characteristics, such as their clothing and their use of musical instruments. The leaders of these movements have often been seen as having a special relationship with the divine and as having the ability to influence the course of events.

The success of these movements is often dependent on the degree to which they are able to create a sense of communitas among their followers. This is achieved through the establishment of shared values and beliefs, the creation of a strong sense of community, and the provision of spiritual guidance and support. The leaders of these movements are often able to create a sense of purpose and direction for their followers, and they are able to inspire and motivate them to work together towards a common goal.

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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 instrument 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 congeneres 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.

Liminality, Low Status, and Communitas

The time has now come to make a careful review of a hypothesis that seeks to account
Communitas, and the Roles of the Weak

In society, the values of com-

munity and individu-
ality are frequently in conflict. This is particularly true when the values are in opposition to the interests of the powerful. The concept of "community" has been associated with the idea of a shared identity, but it is not always clear how these identities are formed or how they are maintained.

Low Status,
Communitas

In his book "The Sacred and The Profane," Eliade argues that the concept of "community" is closely related to the idea of "sanctity," which he defines as a state of being set apart from the profane. He suggests that this concept is important in understanding the rituals and practices of many cultures, as they serve as a means of creating a sense of belonging and identity.

Communitas

The term "communitas" is used by Mauss in his work "The Gift," to describe a state of community that is characterized by a sense of belonging and unity. This is not the same as community in the modern sense, as it does not involve a shared identity or shared values.

Homology and Communitas

The concept of homology is used by Mauss to describe the similarity between different cultures. He suggests that this similarity is not due to coincidence, but rather is a result of the way that different cultures develop and evolve. This is important in understanding the way that communities are formed and maintained.

Communitas and the Role of the Weak

The concept of communitas is important in understanding the role of the weak in society. In communitas, the weak are able to find a sense of belonging and identity, and this can help them to find strength in numbers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of communitas is important in understanding the role of the weak in society. It is a concept that is often overlooked, but it is an important part of the larger picture of how communities are formed and maintained.

Buber's "I and Thou"

Buber's book "I and Thou" is a seminal work that explores the idea of community and the role of the weak in society. He suggests that the weak are able to find a sense of belonging and identity in communitas, and that this can help them to find strength in numbers.

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the communitas component is elusive, hard to pin down, it is not unimpor-
tant. 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 scien-
tific precision that, along with others who have 
considered the conception of communitas, I 
find myself forced to have recourse to metap-
hor and analogy. For communitas has an 
extistent character; it involves the whole 
man in his relation to other whole men. Structure, 
on the other hand, has cognitive quality; as 
Levi-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 poten-
tiality; 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 incumbe-
cncy 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 inter-
stices 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 rela-
tionships and is accompanied by experience 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 energy 
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 experi-
ence of life in society,...

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 producers of 
"men in their wholeness wholly attending." 
Liminality, marginality, and structural inferi-
ority are conditions in which are frequently 
generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophi-
cal 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 relation-
ship to society, nature, and culture. But they 
amore 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 psychobiological levels 
simultaneously.

There is a dialectic here, for the immediacy 
of communitas gives way to the mediacity of 
structure, while, in rites de passage, men are 
released from structure into communitas only 
to return to structure revitalized by their expe-
rience 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." Exag-
guration 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 Bene-
dictine monks, or the members of a millenar-
ian movement, those living in community seem
and institutionalized re-
panied by experience.
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