

The Transmutation of Packs

ALL FORMS OF pack, as I have described them, have a tendency to change into one another. Though, in general, the pack is repetitive, each reappearance closely resembling earlier appearances, there is always something fluid about it during the course of any individual manifestation.

The very attainment of the goal it was pursuing is inevitably followed by a change in its structure. The communal *hunt*, if successful, leads to distribution. Apart from "pure" cases, where the aim is butchery of the enemy, *victories* degenerate into looting. *Lament* ends with the removal of the dead man. As soon as he is where people want him to be, and they can feel partially safe from him, the excitement of the pack abates and its members scatter. But their relationship to the dead man does not really finish here. They assume that he goes on living somewhere else and may be summoned back to help and advise the living. In the conjuration of the dead the lamenting pack re-forms, as it were. But its aim now is the opposite of its original one. In some form or other the dead man, previously banished, will be recalled to his people. The successful *increase pack* becomes a feast of distribution. The buffalo dance of the Mandan ends with the arrival of the buffaloes.

It is thus clear that each type of pack is linked with an opposite into which it changes. But, in addition to this change into its opposite, which seems natural, there is also an entirely different kind of movement: the transmutation into one another of quite distinct types of pack.

This is exemplified in the Aranda legend quoted above. A strong kangaroo is trampled to death by a number of men together. During the struggle the foremost hunter falls victim to his comrades and is solemnly buried by them. The hunting pack is transmuted into a lamenting pack. The meaning of communion has already been discussed at length; there the hunting pack changes into an increase pack. At the beginning of wars stands yet another transmutation. A man is killed and the members of his tribe lament him. Then they form into a troop and set out to avenge his death on the enemy; the lamenting pack changes into a war pack.

The transmutation of packs is an extraordinary process. It occurs everywhere and can be investigated in the most diverse spheres of human activity. Without precise knowledge of it, no social event whatever, of any kind, can be understood at all.

Some of these transmutations have been taken out of their wider context and *fixed*. They have acquired a special significance and have become rituals. They are reproduced over and over again in exactly the same way. They have become the very substance, the core, of every important faith. The dynamics of packs, and the particular kind of interplay between them, explain the rise of the world religions.

It is not possible to give an exhaustive interpretation of religions here; that will be the subject of a separate work. But, in the following pages, I propose to examine a few social and religious structures with reference to the nature of the packs prevailing in them. It will be shown that there are religions of hunting and of war, of increase and of lament. Among the Lele in the former Belgian Congo the hunt, in spite of its meagre productivity, stands at the centre of social life. The Jivaros in Ecuador live exclusively for war. The Pueblo tribes in the South of the United States are distinguished by the atrophy of war and hunting, and by an amazing suppression of lament; they live entirely for peaceful *increase*.

For an understanding of the *religions of lament* which, in historical times, have spread over the whole earth and have unified it, we shall turn to Christianity and to one of the derivatives of Islam. Description of the Muhurran festival of the Shiites will confirm the centrality of lament in this type of religion. A final chapter is devoted to the descent at Easter of the Holy Fire in the Church of the Sepulchre in Jerusalem. It is the Feast of the Resurrection, into which the Christian lament is taken up; its meaning and its justification.

Hunting and the Forest among the Lele of Kasai

IN A SEARCHING recent study the English anthropologist, Mary Douglas, has succeeded in establishing the unity of life and religion in an African people. This work is characterized by a remarkable clarity of observation and openmindedness and absence of prejudice. The best tribute, however, is to summarize and quote from it.

The Lele, a tribe of about 20,000 people, live in the Belgian Congo, in a region near the Kasai river. Their villages, compact squares containing from 20 to 100 huts, are always set in the grassland, but never far from the forest. Their staple food is maize, which they cultivate in the forest. Fresh clearings are made each year and only one crop of maize is expected from each. In these clearings raffia palms also grow, all of whose products are used. The young leaves provide the material

from which the Lele weave their raffia cloth. Unlike their neighbours all the Lele men can weave; woven squares of this material are used as a kind of currency. The palm also provides an unfermented wine which is highly prized. Though palms and bananas grow best in the forest, they are also planted round the village; groundnuts are planted only there. All other good things come out of the forest: water, firewood, salt, maize, manioc, oil, fish and animal flesh. Both sexes, the women equally with the men, spend the greater part of their time working in the forest, yet the Lele regard the forest as almost exclusively a male sphere. On every third day the women are excluded from it and must lay in their supplies of food, firewood and water the day before. "The prestige of the forest is immense. The Lele speak of it with almost poetic enthusiasm. . . . They often contrast the forest with the village. In the heat of the day, when the dusty village is unpleasantly hot, they like to escape to the cool and the dark of the forest. Work there is full of interest and pleasure, work elsewhere is drudgery. They say, 'Time goes slowly in the village, quickly in the forest'. Men boast that in the forest they can work all day without feeling hunger, but in the village they are always thinking about food."

But the forest is also a place of danger. No mourner may enter it, nor any one who has had a nightmare. A bad dream is interpreted as a warning not to enter the forest on the next day. All kinds of natural dangers may hurt the man who disregards it. A tree may fall on his head, he may cut himself with a knife or fall from a palm tree. The danger for a man is one of personal mishap, but a woman who breaks the injunction against entering the forest may endanger the whole village.

"There seem to be three distinct reasons for the great prestige of the forest: it is the source of all good and necessary things, food, drink, huts, clothes; it is the source of the sacred medicines; and, thirdly, it is the scene of the hunt, which in Lele eyes is the supremely important activity."

The Lele have a craving for meat. To offer a vegetable meal to a guest is regarded as a grave insult. Much of their conversation about social events dwells on the amount and kind of the meat provided. Nevertheless, unlike their southern neighbours, they breed neither goats nor pigs. The notion of eating animals reared in the village revolts them. Good food, they say, should come out of the forest, clean and wholesome like antelope and wild pig. Rats and dogs are unclean and designated by the same word, *hama*, which they use for pus and excreta. Goats and pigs are also unclean, just because they are

reared in the village. The Lele's craving for meat has never led them to eat anything which is not the product of the forest or of hunting, though they keep dogs and poultry successfully and, if they wished, could make a success of goat herding too.

"The separation of women from men, of forest from village, the dependence of village on forest, and the exclusion of women from the forest are the principal recurring themes of their ritual."

The grassland has no prestige. It is dry and barren, a neutral sphere between forest and village, and it is left exclusively to the women.

The Lele believe in a God who created men and animals, rivers, and all things. They believe also in *spirits* whom they fear and speak of cautiously and reluctantly. The spirits have never been men, and have never been seen by men. If a man were to set eyes on a spirit, he would be struck blind and die of sores. The spirits inhabit the deep forest, especially the sources of streams. They sleep in the day, but roam about at night. They suffer no death or illness. They control the fertility of women and prosper men's hunting. They can strike a village with sickness. Water pigs are regarded as the animals most highly charged with spiritual power, because they spend their days wallowing in the sources of the streams, which are the favourite haunt of the spirits. The pig is a sort of dog, owned by a spirit; he lives with him and obeys him like a hunter's dog. If an animal is disobedient the spirit punishes him by allowing him to be killed by a hunter; by the same act the hunter is rewarded.

The spirits exact all kinds of requirements from men; in particular, however, "they require all persons living in a village to be at peace with each other. . . . Good hunting is the clearest sign that all is well with the village. The small amount of meat which each man, woman and child may receive when a wild pig is killed cannot explain the joy which is shown in talking about it for weeks afterwards. The hunt is a kind of spiritual barometer whose rise and fall is eagerly watched by the entire village."

It is a striking fact that child-bearing and hunting are coupled together, as if they were equivalent male and female functions. 'The village is spoilt' say the Lele, 'hunting has failed, women are barren, everyone is dying'. If, on the other hand, things are going well, they say, 'Our village is soft and good now. We have killed three wild pigs and many antelopes, four women have conceived, we are all healthy and strong!'

The activity which has the highest prestige is the *communal* hunt, not the private hunter's or trapper's success. "The method is to get a

cordon of men armed with bows and arrows around a section of the forest, which is then combed by beaters and their dogs. Young boys and old men who can hardly walk try to join the hunt, but the most valued members are the dog owners, who have the heavy work of scrambling through the undergrowth, shouting to control and encourage their dogs. The game startled by them rushes out on to the arrows of the waiting hunters. This is probably the most effective method of hunting in dense forest. It depends on surprising the game and on quick shooting at very short range.

"What is strange in a people proud of their hunting is the general lack of individual skills. A man going into the forest for any purpose carries his bow and a few arrows, but these are intended for birds or squirrels. He does not expect to take large game by himself. They know none of the specialised techniques of the single hunter. They do not stalk, do not know how to imitate the calls of animals, do not camouflage or use decoys, seldom penetrate into deep forest alone. All their interest is centred on the communal hunt. A man walking in the forest might come on a herd of pig wallowing in a marsh, creep up to them so close as to hear their breathing, then, rather than risk a long shot, he will tiptoe away agog to call out the village.

"The Lele hunt the grassland only in the dry season when they fire the grass. On this annual occasion several villages combine to ring around the burning countryside. This is the time when young boys expect to make their first kill, for the slaughter, I am told, is terrific. This is the only occasion when the hunting unit is more than the male population of one village, as it is in all forest hunting. Ultimately the village is a political and a ritual unit because it is a single hunting unit. It is not surprising that the Lele think of theirs as a hunting culture first and foremost."

Of particular significance is the *distribution* of the game. It is shared out according to strict rules which emphasise the religious meaning of the hunt. There are three cult groups among the Lele, each of which enjoys a food privilege forbidden to outsiders. The first group, the Begetters, consists of men who have begotten a child. They are entitled to the "chest" of game and also to the flesh of all young animals. Within this group there is a sub-division of men who have begotten a male and a female child; from them is selected the second and more exclusive group, that of the Pangolin men, who are so called because only they are allowed to eat the flesh of the pangolin. The third group is that of the Diviners; they receive the head and the intestines of the wild pig.

No large animal can be killed without itself and its distribution becoming the object of a religious act. "Of all animals the wild pig has most significance; it is shared in the following manner: the head and entrails are reserved to the Diviners, the chest to the Begetters, the shoulders go to the men who carried it home, the throat to the dog-owners, the back, one haunch and one foreleg belong to the man who shot it, the stomach goes to the group of village-smiths who forge the arrows."

The structure of Lele society is, as it were, re-affirmed by each hunt. The excitement of the hunting pack has widened and become the driving emotion of the whole community. Without distorting the author's findings, we can speak here of a *hunting religion*, in the most literal sense of the words. Such a religion has never before been described in so completely convincing and indubitable a manner. We are also given a precious insight into the development of the forest as a crowd symbol. The forest contains everything which is valuable, and the things which are most valuable are fetched from it by the whole pack together. The animals which are the object of the hunting pack live in the forest; and also the dreaded spirits by whose sufferance men hunt.

The War Booty of the Jivaros

THE JIVAROS ARE the most warlike people in the whole of South America today. A great deal can be learnt from an examination of the part which war and booty play in their customs and ceremonies.

There is no question of over-population among them; they do not go to war to conquer new territory. On the contrary, their living-space is too large rather than too small; there are about 20,000 people in an area of over 25,000 square miles. They have no large settlements and dislike even living in villages. Each family, in the widest sense of the word, lives in a house by itself, with the oldest man as its head, and may be separated from the next family by several miles. They have no political organization; in times of peace the father is the highest authority in each family, answerable to no-one. If their hostile intentions did not lead them to seek each other out, one group of Jivaros would scarcely ever encounter another in the vast spaces of their virgin forests.

Blood revenge, or rather death, is what cements them. In their eyes there is no such thing as natural death; if a man dies it is because an

enemy has bewitched him from a distance. It is the duty of the relatives to find out what sorcerer was responsible for his death, and to revenge it on him. Every death is thus a murder, and every murder can only be avenged by a counter-murder. But, whilst the fatal witchcraft of the enemy is effective at a distance, the physical, or blood revenge, which is a duty, only becomes possible by actually getting hold of the enemy.

The Jivaros seek one another out in order to take vengeance and thus blood revenge can be called the cement of their society.

The family which lives together in one house forms a very compact unit. Everything a man undertakes he undertakes in common with the other men of his household. For larger and more dangerous expeditions the men of several relatively near houses combine, and it is only then, when purposing a serious punitive campaign, that they elect a chief, an experienced and usually elderly man to whom they voluntarily submit themselves for the period of the war.

The war pack is thus the true dynamic unit of the Jivaros; apart from the static unit of the family, it is the only important one, and all their feasts are arranged round it. They assemble for a week before going to war, and assemble again after it, when they have returned victorious, for a whole series of big celebrations.

The war expeditions are pure *destruction*. All enemies are killed, apart from a few young women and perhaps some children, who are received into families. The enemy's possessions, which are extremely scanty, his domestic animals, his patches of cultivation and his house, are destroyed. The only object the Jivaros really want is the enemy's severed head. But for this they have a true passion, and the highest aim of every warrior is to return home with at least one such head.

The head is treated in a particular way and shrinks to the size of about an orange. From then on it is called a *Tsantsa*. The owner of a *tsantsa* gains a special prestige from it. After some time has passed, a year or two perhaps, a great feast is celebrated, the centre of which is the properly prepared head. Everyone is invited to this feast; they eat, drink and dance a great deal, all according to strict ceremonial. The feast is wholly religious in character and close examination reveals that the desire for increase, and the means of achieving it, constitute its very essence. It is not possible to enter into all the details here; they have been described at length by Karsten in his paper, "Blood Revenge, War and Victory Feasts among the Jivaro Indians." It is sufficient to mention one of the most important dances, during which all the animals they hunt are addressed in a series of impassioned

conjunctions, and, after them, the sexual act of man himself, which serves his own increase.

This dance is the actual introduction to the great feast. All the men and all the women arrange themselves in a circle round the central pillar of the house and, holding hands, move round in slow time, first whistling shrilly and then enunciating the names of all the animals whose flesh they like eating. After each name they utter a resounding cry, 'Hej'.

"Hej! Hej! Hej!
The howling monkey, hej!
The red one, hej!
The brown monkey, hej!
The black monkey, hej!
The capuchin monkey, hej!
The grey monkey, hej!
The wild hog, hej!
The green parrot, hej!
The long-tailed one, hej!
The house-pig, hej!
The fat one, hej!
Women's clothing, hej!
Girdle, hej!
Basket, hej!"

This conjunction lasts for about an hour, the dancers moving alternately to right and to left. Every time they stop in order to move in the opposite direction, they whistle loudly and utter shouts of "Tshi, tshi, tshi, tshi" as if thereby to preserve the continuity of the conjunction.

Another conjunction is concerned with women and their fecundity.

"Hej, hej, hej!
Woman, hej!
Woman, hej!
Copulation, hej!
Copulation, hej!
May the *tsantsa* grant copulation!
Mating, hej!
Coupling, hej!
Woman, hej!
Woman, hej!
May it be true, hej!"

We will do it, hej!
May it be good, hej!
Enough, hej!"

In the centre of these conjunctions and all the other acts of the feast stands the *tsantsa*, the captured and shrunken head of the enemy. The spirit is always close to the head and is extremely dangerous. Everything possible is done to subdue it; once mastered, it becomes very useful. It takes care of the increase of pigs, poultry, and manioc, and ensures every kind of prosperity. But it is not easy to subdue it completely. At first it is full of vindictiveness; the things it could do to one are inconceivable. But there is an amazing number of rites and observances for subjugating it, and, by the end of the feast, which lasts for several days, full power will have been acquired over the head and over the spirit which belongs to it.

Set beside our own more familiar habits of war, we have to say that the *tsantsa* takes the place of what we call booty. It is in order to win the heads that the Jivaros go to war; it is their *only* booty but, small as this booty finally appears, especially when shrunk to the size of an orange, it comprises all that matters to them. The head procures for them all the increase they desire, that of the animals or plants on which they feed, of the objects they make and, finally, of their own people. It is booty of a gruesome concentration, and its capture alone is not sufficient; lengthy operations have to be undertaken to make it what it should be. These operations culminate in the communal excitement of the feast, and especially in its wealth of conjunctions and dances. The *tsantsa* feast as a whole is sustained by an increase pack. The war pack, when it has been lucky, becomes the increase pack of the feast; the transmutation from one into the other is the true dynamic of Jivaro religion.

The Rain Dances of the Pueblo Indians

THE RAIN DANCES are increase dances intended to procure rainfall. They, as it were, stamp the rain up out of the ground. The pounding of the dancers' feet is like the fall of rain. They go on dancing through the rain if it begins during the performance. The dance which represents rain finally becomes it. Through rhythmic movement a group of about 40 people transforms itself into rain.

Rain is the most important crowd symbol of the Pueblo peoples. It was always important, even for their forebears who may have lived

elsewhere, but, since they settled on their arid plateaux, its importance has increased and has fundamentally determined the character of their religion. The maize they live on, and the rain without which this maize would not grow, stand at the centre of all their ceremonies. All the magical methods used to attract rain are brought together and heightened in their rain dances.

Observers have stressed the fact that there is nothing wild about these dances. This is due to the nature of rain itself. Approaching as a cloud, it forms a unit which is high overhead, distant, soft and white; when it is near, it arouses feelings of tenderness in men. When it discharges itself, it must disintegrate; it is as isolated drops that rain reaches men and the soil into which it sinks. The dance which, through transformation into rain, is to allure it thus represents the flight and disintegration of a crowd even more than its formation. The dancers desire the presence of clouds, but these are not intended to remain gathered in the sky, but to pour down as rain. The clouds are friendly crowds, how much so can be seen from the fact that they are equated with the *ancestors*. "The dead come back in the rain clouds, bringing the universal blessing. People say to their children when the summer afternoon clouds come up the sky 'Your grandfathers are coming', and the reference is not to individual dead relatives, but applies impersonally to all forbears. . . ."

"The priests in their retreat before their altars sit motionless and withdrawn for eight days, summoning the rain.

"From wherever you abide permanently
 You will make your roads come forth,
 Your little wind-blown clouds,
 Your thin wisps of clouds
 Replete with living waters,
 You will send forth to stay with us.
 Your fine rain caressing the earth,
 Here at Itiwana,
 The abiding place of our fathers,
 Our mothers,
 The ones who first had being,
 With your great pile of waters
 You will come together."

What one desires is "a great pile of waters", but this great pile, gathered in clouds, disintegrates into drops. The stress of the rain-dances is on disintegration. It is a *gentle* crowd that one desires, not a

dangerous animal which has to be captured, or an obnoxious enemy who has to be fought. It is equated with the crowd of the ancestors who, to these people, are peaceful and benevolent.

The blessing which the raindrops bring to the soil results in that other crowd on which they live; their maize. Every harvest betokens a bringing together in heaps; rain is the reverse process. The clouds are dispersed as drops, whereas every single corn cob harvested is already a stable collection of grains.

Men grow strong and women fertile on this food. The word "children" occurs often in their prayers. The priest speaks of the living members of the tribe as children, but he also speaks of "all the little boys, all the little girls, all those whose roads are ahead". These are what we would call the future of the tribe. The priest, whose image is more precise, sees them as all those whose roads lie ahead.

Thus the essential crowds in the life of the Pueblos are those of ancestors and children, rain and maize; or, if we want to range them in a causal sequence: ancestors, rain, maize and children.

Of the four types of pack, two—the hunting and the war pack—are almost atrophied among them. There is still some communal rabbit hunting, and there is a society of warriors, but the function of these is only that of police, and there is little occasion for policing in our sense of the word. The lamenting pack has been suppressed to an astonishing degree. They make very little fuss about death and try to forget the dead as individuals as quickly as possible. Four *days* after the occurrence of death, the "chief speaks to the people telling them that they shall not remember any more. 'It is now four years he is dead.'" Death is removed into the past, and grief thus stilled. The Pueblos do not hold with lamenting packs; they *isolate* grief.

There remains the increase pack, which is highly developed and active amongst them. They put the whole stress of their communal life on it; it could be said that they live for increase alone, and in a purely positive sense. That Janus head, common to so many peoples—one's own increase on the one hand and the decrease of the enemy on the other—is unknown amongst them; they are not interested in wars. Rain and maize have made them gentle; their life depends entirely on their own ancestors and their own children.