

YOUNG SOLDIERS AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INITIATION: SOME NOTES FROM LIBERIA

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Shortly after the start of the Liberian civil war, in 1990, a group of rebel fighters invaded the rural campus of Cuttington University College. The college administrator, getting his first glimpse of the rebels, described their appearance:¹

Many of the men wore wedding gowns, wigs, dresses, commencement gowns from high schools, and several forms of 'voodoo' regalia. All rebels wore cotton strings around the wrist and around the neck and shoulder. They all displayed black tattoos on the arm, slightly below the shoulder. They believed that any person who wore these talismans and tattoos, and strictly adhered to the laws of not eating pumpkin, having sex, touching lime and taking a bath, could not be killed in battle by enemy fire. Because of the importance of this 'bullet proof' protection, there was a medicine man in residence at the Cuttington training base to administer these medicines at the end of their military training.

Clearly, these recruits had undergone a form of initiation that involved the application of bodily marks including tattoos and the wearing of particular items of adornment, some of them regarded as having religious value. This process, overseen by a religious specialist, included the imposition of ritual taboos. The impression given in this description was later confirmed by senior officials of the rebel organisation, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL).² All of the Liberian militias used techniques roughly similar to these.

¹Henrique F. Tokpa, 'Cuttington University College during the Liberian civil war: an administrator's experience', *Liberian Studies Journal*, XVI, 1 (1991), p.87.

²Author's interviews, Monrovia, March-April 1997.

The interest in considering the procedures followed by young men and women recruited into Liberian militias in light of this background is the light it shows on local histories of initiation into adulthood. In a sense, of course, all armies use similar techniques for recruiting newcomers, typically confining them to a closed area during their period of initiation, requiring them to wear special clothes (e.g. uniforms), making them perform particular actions in a ritualised sequence (e.g. drilling and marching in unison) and impressing individual soldiers with a sense of having undergone a change of character befitting their new status. For present purposes, what is most interesting about the particular forms of initiation used by militias in Liberia is not so much their resemblance to forms used by regular armies, but to traditional initiation schools used to manage the transformation of children into adults at the time of puberty. In this paper, I will briefly describe the contemporary mutation of such initiation societies throughout West Africa especially, suggesting that this represents an important new development – reformulating indigenous institutions that have deep historical roots, and reforging their relationship with bureaucratic institutions that were introduced in colonial times (or, in Liberia's case, under settler rule). It is particularly associated with youths being mobilised for military purposes, who are at the cutting edge of warlord armies. I suggest that this marks a significant historical development. The form of socialisation represented by the reinvention of initiation practices in new contexts will surely mark African societies for at least a generation to come.

Initiation societies in Liberia

Every part of Liberia has a tradition of initiation into adulthood, comparable with similar rites of passage to be found throughout the world. The most prevalent system in Liberia is that of Poro (for men) and Sande (for women). Many of the classic ethnographies written on Liberia associate these two societies with specific ethnic groups only. Certainly, they are traditionally present in western and northern Liberia and in adjoining areas of Sierra Leone and Guinea, but not in the south-east of Liberia. It is clear, however, that it is not entirely accurate to see Poro and Sande as institutions tied to particular ethnic groups only, as their use has spread during the twentieth century, while during the same period, some people from traditional Poro and Sande areas have ceased to be initiated, often as a result of a strict Christian missionary education.³ Moreover, although not all parts of Liberia traditionally have Poro, they have comparable traditions of initiation. Poro and Sande are neither more nor less than particular cases – quite important ones – of repertoires of initiation that are widespread throughout West Africa.

³Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The destruction of Liberia and the religious dimension of an African civil war* (C. Hurst & Co., London, 1999), esp. chapter six.

Initiation societies are typically sodalities or groups that require elaborate initiation rites whose details may not be divulged to outsiders, which is why they are sometimes called 'secret societies'. They are widespread throughout the forest regions of West and central Africa particularly. Some secret societies, like Poro, seem to be very old. In Poro areas, everyone knows of its existence, although members will not divulge details of their initiation to others. At the other end of the scale are far more exclusive societies, whose existence might not be generally known, whose membership is restricted, and whose spiritual knowledge is regarded as being of the most esoteric sort. Some, such as the leopard societies in West and central Africa, have been associated with spiritual practices including possession by the spirits of wild animals. In many parts of Africa, the activities of secret societies have been associated with the use of masks, suggesting that power is hidden and is never quite what it seems; it is by nature mysterious.

Liberians of various backgrounds, including even non-initiates, are generally proud of the Poro in particular, which they often see as an authentic Liberian institution, and a mainstay of their culture. In conversation, Liberians quite often question the description of Poro as a religious institution, claiming that it should rather be considered an educational one. Both adjectives are justified, in my view. In fact Poro could with equal justification be described as a political institution. In precolonial times, throughout a substantial area of modern-day Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, every person, male or female, was in principle initiated into the appropriate school at puberty. A non-initiate was simply not considered as a mature person, whatever their age. Initiation took place during a long period of seclusion, sometimes as long as seven years, when an adolescent was removed from his or her home and secluded in a ritual village in the bush to learn the business of being an adult. The separation was, understandably when it was so prolonged, experienced as an extreme rupture from previous family life, to the point that the initiate was perceived as having 'died' as a child and been reborn as an adult. For men, the education they received during their initiation included learning hunting and house-building skills, history, and ritual knowledge. For women it included knowledge of child-rearing. Older people, who had attended numerous initiations of new generations and had spent repeated periods in the bush school, became senior in the societies. They were likely to accumulate material privileges commensurate with their status, such as access to land, labour and trade opportunities. Senior Poro officials in particular could intervene in chieftaincy affairs, which is one ground for describing Poro as having a major political role in precolonial times.

Although Poro and Sande still exist, the duration of the period spent by an adolescent in the bush school nowadays has been dramatically shortened, down to a few weeks or even days. During the

twentieth century, much of the educational function of these initiation societies was replaced by Western-style schooling. Similarly, much of the political function of Poro was superseded by colonial systems of indirect rule in which Poro still had a role to play, but in a much-changed relationship to chiefs and central government. Colonial rulers sometimes outlawed indigenous initiation societies and sometimes adopted policies intended to depoliticise them by encouraging them to develop into rather harmless folklore associations, rather like the performers of traditional dances who perform at luxury hotels for tourists. In many cases, however, colonial rule did not actually disempower initiation societies, which have generally proved to be highly resilient. Under colonial systems of indirect rule, chiefs, clerks and other African agents of the administration sometimes continued to make use of traditional initiation societies for their own purposes, or established new groups that could not be called traditional but that used many ideas and methods drawn from older repertoires, assimilating some of these into the emerging style of nationalist politics. Only rarely have traditional structures of this sort disappeared without trace as a result of colonial policies. More often, their practices and ideas have emerged in new institutional forms that are inextricably linked with modern state politics.⁴

The reemergence of secret societies

It is remarkable how often such forms of initiation are now reemerging throughout West Africa in the context of modern political-military conflict. Examples of modern militias with a detectable background in traditional initiation societies or procedures include the Mouvement des forces démocratiques casamançaises (MFDC) in Senegal, the kamajors in Sierra Leone, the Lofa Defense Force in Liberia, the dozos in Côte d'Ivoire and the Bakassi Boys in Nigeria.⁵ Other militias, although not an emanation from historically existing secret societies, nonetheless function in a mode of initiation, such as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (the NPFL, described above) and the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone (RUF), both of which have initiated newcomers with rituals, tattoos and scarification that resemble traditional techniques to some extent. Each of these cases refers to local traditions of initiation, sometimes very old, that became vehicles for new forms of contestation in the late twentieth century. It is hard to know precisely how to describe this phenomenon. It could

⁴Ibid., esp. pp.220-80.

⁵Cf. Charles Gore and David Pratten, 'The politics of plunder: the rhetorics of order and disorder in southern Nigeria', *African Affairs*, 102, 407 (2003), pp.211-40. The revival of secret societies in a non-traditional setting in Nigeria was noted as long ago as 1969 by Tekena Tamuno and Robin Horton, 'The changing position of secret societies and cults in modern Nigeria', *African Notes*, 5, 2 (1969), pp.36-62.

be classed as some sort of neo-traditionalism, a label that would emphasise the historical roots of such formations but may underestimate the enormous changes wrought to Poro and similar societies during a century of settler or colonial rule. Alternatively, the formation of new initiation movements could be regarded as manipulations by modern politicians or warlords,⁶ which they are indeed, but such a description risks underestimating the social roots of such societies and their strong ideological overtones. This is part of their religious significance, since initiation is often seen as a form of communication with a perceived spirit world; hence the importance of the bullet-proofing and distribution of amulets on such occasions.

Political-military movements with recognisable roots in local traditions of initiation are now playing significant roles in political contests in states undergoing the reformulations that have been widely commented since the 1980s, notably economic and political liberalisation. This has been described by some authors as a process of state decay or collapse, and by others as a form of privatisation of the state.⁷ The phenomenon is most apparent in West Africa but also appears to be far more widespread, such as in the case of the Mungiki movement in Kenya.⁸ Certainly, it is safe to say that the reinvention of initiation societies in Africa is more than just a localised reaction of an eccentricity. If it is as widespread as I am suggesting, then that is a reflection of the ubiquity of forms of initiation in systems of governance that have a deep historical resonance in Africa.

It seems necessary to take histories of such institutions or practices seriously if we are to investigate the new interactions between religion and politics in Africa. This is particularly appropriate when considering the role of youth. Young men, particularly, are used in the front line of combat all over the world. Probably in every martial tradition, an adolescent's initiation into combat is also experienced as an initiation into adulthood. To return to the Liberian case, it was frequently noted during the 1990s that young fighters 'wanted to be seen as "somebody"'.⁹

⁶Suggested notably in the case of the kamajors in Sierra Leone by Mariane C. Ferme (Jean-Pierre Warnier, trans.), 'La figure du chasseur et les chasseurs-miliciens dans le conflit sierra-léonais', *Politique africaine*, 82 (2001), pp.119-32.

⁷On the former, I. William Zartman (ed), *Collapsed States: The disintegration and restoration of legitimate authority* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1995); on the latter, Béatrice Hibou (ed), *La privatisation des Etats*, Karthala, Paris, 1999.

⁸Peter Kagwanja, 'Facing Mount Kenya or facing Mecca? The *Mungiki*, ethnic violence and the politics of the Moi succession in Kenya, 1987-2002', *African Affairs*, 102, 406 (2003), pp.25-49.

⁹Bill Frank Enoanyi, *Behold Uncle Sam's Stepchild*, SanMar Publications, Sacramento, p.86.

Liberians quite often commented on the way in which war gave youngsters the opportunity to create a new status for themselves, while older people lamented the arrogance of these youths who no longer respected their elders, sometimes suggesting that the youngsters' lack of respect was because they were not being properly initiated in the old way. However, the point is that youngsters *were* being initiated – but not into societies (like Poro) that were controlled by village elders and notables. Traditional societies, like Poro, no longer had the total control of the process of initiation into manhood that they had a century ago. Instead, youngsters were being recruited into militias that functioned in the mode of initiation, in a society that had a long historical experience of this form, but in which a new class of political-military entrepreneurs controlled. For some of the youngsters, warlords were people to be admired.¹⁰ Young people were rejecting traditional models of correct behaviour in favour of those being held up to them as new models.

In many parts of West Africa, initiation societies have historically functioned as powerful agents of political and social incorporation, notably of young men who are most likely to be the warlike element in any society. In precolonial times, such initiated societies performed some of the political functions that, in modern political convention, belong to states. The relative lack of pervasive, bureaucratic organisations that qualify to be called states is one of the most striking characteristics of African history before colonial times. 'The most distinctively African contribution to human history', in the opinion of a leading historian, 'could be said to have been precisely the civilized art of living fairly peaceably together *not* in states'.¹¹ Although West Africa certainly has its own tradition of state organisation, including the great mediaeval empires and the Yoruba city-states, these had never aimed to control society through bureaucracies in the modern manner. Throughout West Africa, the systematic, bureaucratic management of social affairs that is characteristic of the modern state was generally a product of colonial rule. It is in light of this background that one may interpret the revival of initiation movements such as those described above.

Modern politicians and civil servants engineer the external aspects of individual lives through taxation, policing and the regulation of material resources. They regulate the main events in the lives of individuals, such as by requiring the official registration of births, deaths and marriages. All of these techniques were used to subject Africans to colonial rule. However, beneath their thin veneer of

¹⁰Cf. Ellis, *Mask of Anarchy*, pp.285-90.

¹¹John Lonsdale, 'States and social processes in Africa: a historiographical survey', *African Studies Review*, 24, 2-3 (1981), p.139.

modern, secular bureaucracies, colonial governments often depended greatly for their effectiveness on the management of relationships institutionalised through religion and indirect rule by chiefs, or mediated through Christian missions. For this reason, it is possible to detect the continuing operation of indigenous African techniques of governance, such as initiation societies, that were operating even during the heyday of colonial rule. Sometimes they were forced underground, and sometimes they were actually incorporated into colonial apparatuses.

Post-independence rulers have generally attempted to perpetuate the techniques of bureaucratic governance introduced during colonial or settler rule, but they have in many cases also attempted to harness to their own purposes indigenous techniques of regulation via initiation societies. The straddling of official and unofficial, as well as indigenous and colonial, systems of governance, is rather typical of postcolonial politics. To return to the Liberian example, successive presidents of Liberia have had themselves proclaimed leaders of the Poro male initiation society. William Tolbert, president of Liberia from 1971 to 1980, was both supreme *zo* of the Poro society and president of the World Baptist Alliance. The current head of state, Charles Taylor, has taken the title of Dakpanah, or supreme head of all *zoes*. He has also formed an association of officials of traditional secret societies and proclaimed himself the supreme officer of the new society.¹² According to a Nigerian intelligence report,¹³ he has required all his cabinet members to be initiated. One of Taylor's closest colleagues has alleged that the president has also established a more personal secret society still, known as the Top Twenty, with a sinister reputation.¹⁴ At the same time, Taylor shares with the former Sierra Leonean warlord Foday Sankoh the services of a renowned ritual expert, Alhaji Kuyateh, according to the official Sierra Leonean news agency.¹⁵ At the same time Taylor claims to be a born-again Christian. He has prayed together with former US president Jimmy Carter and regularly welcomes American preachers to Monrovia.

The point here is that all African countries have been subject to a process of colonisation (or, in the cases of Ethiopia and Liberia, of very similar processes) in which an originally European form of government, through bureaucratic states, as learned to co-exist with previously existing forms of governance that existed in a wide variety of forms, including the initiation of

¹²Reginald B. Goodridge (ed), *Presidential Papers: A premiere edition*, vol.I, publisher unknown, Monrovia, 1999, p.268.

¹³In the possession of the author.

¹⁴Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*, p. 264.

¹⁵Despatch by Sierra Leone News Agency, Freetown, 11 December 2000.

adolescents into societies run by older men who were able to influence their behaviour and direct it in what they considered proper ways. Nationalist politics actually arose from a merging of a great variety of structures and networks, some of European origin, others of indigenous origin. Hence, we may see that today, the patronage of quasi-traditional initiation societies by modern politicians is quite widespread. Africa's longest-serving head of state, President Bongo of Gabon, has patronised at least two powerful initiation societies, Bwiti and Ndjobi. He is also a leading Freemason and a Rosicrucian, and has converted to Islam. Denis Sassou N'Guesso, twice president of Congo-Brazzaville, a French-trained army officer as well as formerly a leading marxist, mentions his own initiation into a traditional secret society in his autobiography.¹⁶ President Eyadema of Togo is one of several heads of state to have in effect created his own religious cult. In his case, this bears a close resemblance to a traditional Vodun cult. Its centre is at a spot in the north of his country where he claims to have been miraculously saved from a plane crash.¹⁷

While allegiances such as these may have been carried on throughout the colonial period, and during the first years of independence, with discretion, they have become increasingly open in recent years. In this respect there appears to be a connection between the erosion of the colonial-style systems of bureaucratic management and the revival of neo-traditional institutions. Generally speaking, since the mid-1970s, it has gradually become clear that the ambition to create a world of efficient modern states, which seemed on the road to realisation in the third quarter of the twentieth century, has become an illusion. It is not surprising that where the state can no longer convince people of its ability to deliver a prosperous new life through development, other mechanisms of social regulation may be invented or rediscovered. This, in my view, is part (not all) of the explanation for the revival of religion in public space that is evident in so many parts of the world. Hence, while many traces of precolonial traditions of governance through forms of ritual control that fall somewhere between the social science categories of religion and politics have been more common. Traditional initiation societies may survive or have been revived or reinvented, but they have also been synthesised with political institutions, ideas and instruments of public management originally imported from Europe. The history of how this came about can be traced back into colonial times.

The management of change

¹⁶Denis Sassou N'Guesso, *Le manguier, le fleuve et la souris*, J-C. Lattès, Paris, 1997, p.114.

¹⁷Comi M. Toulabor, *Le Togo sous Eyadéma*, Karthala, Paris, 1986, pp.105-31.

Both states and religious institutions can be considered as methods of managing the social change that is inherent in all societies. In an attempt to explore the variety of ways by which societies try to maintain institutional regulation of highly subjective experiences of personal transformation, the following paragraphs will consider the ways in which states and religious institutions manage change in different historical traditions. The aim of this brief description is to contribute to the development of a theoretical model for understanding the initiation of young people into armed groups in contemporary Africa.

Rites of passage that transform children into adults, such as the initiation of boys into men through Poro, are often perceived as the result of a person entering the spirit world and returning as a new being. People undergoing such an experience may be regarded as potentially dangerous, because they do not fit into any stable category. They are in a liminal condition since they are passing from one state of being to another.¹⁸ This exceptional condition is often marked by ritual drama, which is in effect an attempt to manage change through religion. One example of what can happen when such transformations are poorly managed can be seen in the Liberian civil war of the 1990s, when adolescent boys committed terrible atrocities while dressed in women's clothing. Reference to earlier literature shows that these and other patterns of the violence in Liberia that seem most in need of explanation had identifiable antecedents, and ones that seem particularly rich in meaning. For example, transvestite dressing is a feature of the transition to adulthood in the rituals of the most widespread initiation societies in Liberia, essentially indicating the perception that a child entering adulthood goes through a dangerous indeterminate zone between male and female identity before finally being confirmed as an adult. Liberians, even those who have never been initiated into one of the traditional societies, are familiar with the symbolism employed by these sodalities, which is shared in many masquerades and popular entertainments. For a young man to dress as a woman at moments when violence is in the air is tantamount to carrying a sign saying 'Look out, I am dangerous'. One could compare this with the behaviour of English football hooligans in the 1980s; they did not dress in women's clothing, but, on the contrary, used to sport military-style cropped haircuts and boots, often calling themselves an 'army' or a 'squad', thus displaying symbols of martial status and aggressiveness that everyone in their society would recognise. This is comparable with the fighters of the Liberian war in that both were using a widely understood symbolic language to make a point about what they were doing: looking dangerous. Other aspects of the Liberian

¹⁸The classic source is Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1975 [first published in French in 1908]. The concept of liminality is from Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and anti-structure*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1969.

violence also had clear antecedents in the rituals of the initiation societies that were the mainstays of public order in much of Liberia in pre-republican times and that survived, often in radically altered form, throughout the twentieth century.¹⁹

Religious techniques for managing radical change have been analysed most insightfully by Elias Canetti. Canetti has pointed out that the continuum of form and nature that was discussed earlier in this chapter in the context of humans' ability to transform themselves can also be applied to the public powers that govern society.²⁰ He describes how the control of transformations in society can be achieved by authorities using a range of techniques that can be classified according to their tendency towards mobility or immobility. At one end of the scale is the master-transformer or shaman; at the other end is the divine king. The shaman is a religious specialist who is believed to be so adept at negotiating relations with the spirit world that others are obliged to respect his authority. The special character of the shaman is his perceived ability to assume any shape at will, to appear or disappear, and to travel astounding distances in an instant. Many shamans are people who are thought to have died during their initiation and to have returned as a being of a higher level. In West Africa especially, an important role in governing transformations is played by a masked figure. The mask may be used not only to hide the identity of a person performing a ritual, but also to express the unchanging identity of the invisible force or spirit that is thought to be invoked through the mask and that operates transformations of people in the process of initiation into adulthood. At the other end of Canetti's spectrum of authorities that can control transformation is the divine king, who does not change, 'to whom all *self*-transformation is forbidden, though he is a continual fount of commands which transform others.' This figure, Canetti notes, 'has had a decisive influence on our whole modern conception of power. The non-transformer has been set on a pedestal at a fixed height in a fixed and permanent place.' An authority of this type 'who is himself denied all transformation can transform others as he pleases'.²¹ Modern states fulfil this function. Institutional, implacable, they present a massive solidity that endures over generations. In their classical Western form they are also secular.

¹⁹Mary Moran, 'Warriors or soldiers? Masculinity and ritual transvestism in the Liberian civil war', in Constance R. Sutton (ed), *Feminism, Nationalism and Militarism*, Association for Feminist Anthropology/American Anthropological Association, Arlington VA, 1995, pp.73-88.

²⁰The following is drawn from Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, first German edn. 1960; Penguin, London, 1987, pp.440-2.

²¹*Ibid.*, pp.442-3. Italics are in the original.

In short, it is interesting to consider the recent history of Liberia and other West African countries in the light of Canetti's remarks about different forms of managing the transformation of human personalities, with particular reference to the change of boys into men. In West African traditions of initiation, this is done through a religious corporation (often controlled by adult men) initiating a newcomer, who gains a new status and, in theory, may gradually advance in prestige as he gains in years. This has co-existed with bureaucratic techniques of social management, such as through formal education, that have declined noticeably in their efficiency and prestige since the 1970s. An appreciation of how modern states, beginning in Europe, have equipped themselves to manage change, including by assimilating some techniques previously falling within the field of religion, can usefully be applied to the recent history of what used to be called the third world. Since the 1950s and 1960s, the period when three-quarters of the member-states of the United Nations acquired sovereign status as they threw off colonial rule, almost every government in Africa, South America and Asia has proclaimed national socio-economic transformation in the form of 'development' to be its central objective. All of them have used modern techniques of bureaucratic management to try and control the massive social changes entailed by the implementation of policies intended to achieve this. In Africa particularly, the development agenda has often served to disguise the redistribution of power on a vast scale.²²

Youth and war

There have been signs of a crisis of youth in West Africa for at least one generation. This first became apparent in the adulation given to a generation of young men who took power by force, most notably Jerry Rawlings (1979) and Thomas Sankara (1983). For a brief period, a similar adulation was accorded to the young men of military juntas in Liberia (1980) and Sierra Leone (1992). They were popular, at least for a short period, not just for the normal reasons that men in khaki may appear as saviours, but precisely because of their youth. They offered to young people a vision of power. There are grounds for supposing that their emergence reflected more complex social struggles within their societies that were to become visible in the civil wars of the 1990s. In many of these wars, both local and foreign observers have detected an element of youth out of control, adolescents and even children who, in societies with strong gerontocratic traditions, seize power by force.

²²Cf. Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, Brookings Institution, Washington DC, 1995.

The most extreme case is probably that of Sierra Leone. The RUF in particular often seemed to be an army of youngsters. Its leaders were all people from previously obscure backgrounds, including Foday Sankoh, an embittered former army corporal. Liberia is another story. While the youths who fought for them often struck Liberians as being out of control, at the most strategic level they were not out of control; they were being manipulated by a handful of existing power-brokers. The most important warlords had served as ministers or officials of Cabinet rank in the 1980s (Taylor, Kromah, Boley) or at least as senior officials (Roosevelt Johnson). Other leading politicians (Ellen Sirleaf Johnson, Sawyer, Tipoteh, Matthews) were all recognisably members of the same elite and the same generation.

The recent history of West Africa, then, includes the experience of young people who were offered the vision of state-led development, and of prosperity, only to become frustrated in the economic and political conditions obtaining since the 1970s. In the last years of the colonial period and in the first years of independence, it seemed that modern techniques of secular government would restrict the role of religion to a private sphere, with traditional religion heading towards the status of tribal folklore. This was part of the process of modernisation. The populations of newly-independent countries in Africa experienced the first years of their new status as a change without precedent. People whose ancestors had for generations lived in small communities with access to a restricted and only slowly changing range of consumer goods and technology were moving to cities. Their children were going to schools, and even stood a chance of getting salaried employment. The creation of juridical independence in itself created national economic booms as the new apparatus recruited thousands of officials, leading to high economic growth rates at a time when commodity prices were reaching sustained highs. Such developments amounted to 'the disintegration of an entire universe of social relations'.²³ Hopes were raised of replacing this disintegrating universe with a new one, fashioned according to North American and European models, including Marxism. In retrospect, the separation of the secular and religious realms in many of these states was more institutional than psychological or cultural. The relative failure of state-led modernisation has worked together with the return of indigenous techniques of social management, notably initiation into adult societies, sometimes in a context of armed conflict. This form of initiation can be analysed both as an institutional and a personal transformation.

²³ The phrase is by Pierre Bourdieu, quoted in Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The global rise of religious violence*, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2000, p.225.