A Durkheimian Theory of "Witch-Hunts" with the Chinese Cultural Revolution of 1966-1969 as an Example
Author(s): Albert James Bergesen
Reviewed work(s):
Published by: Wiley-Blackwell on behalf of Society for the Scientific Study of Religion
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1385424
Accessed: 02/11/2012 22:16

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
A Durkheimian Theory of “Witch-Hunts” with the Chinese Cultural Revolution of 1966-1969 as an Example

ALBERT JAMES BERGESEN

University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona 85721

Ideas from Kai T. Erikson and Guy E. Swanson are brought together to account for the appearance of political witch-hunts like the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Erikson’s idea of a boundary crisis and Swanson’s notion of immanence are used to account for the highly religious overtones to these events. The American threat in Vietnam is identified as a threat to the Chinese and the purges and rectification campaigns of the Cultural Revolution are seen as Durkheimian efforts at reaffirming the collective identity of the Chinese nation. The idea of the sacred and the profane is shown to be similar to the notion of deviant and normal. Both, it is argued, are symbolic oppositions to collective purposes that are created by collectivities to renew their corporate existence.

In this paper I want to bring together two strands of Durkeim’s thought and propose an explanation for “witch-hunts,” such as the Chinese Cultural Revolution which lasted from 1966 through 1969. The first line of thought is represented by Swanson’s (1964; 1967) study of the complex interrelationship between the morphology of the social order and the morphology of collective representations. He has argued that there is a relationship between the degree to which the distinctly corporate aspects of collectivities are manifested and the strength and presence of religious symbolizations, such as gods, spirits, sacred forces, and so forth. The second Durkheimian tradition is best represented by Kai Erikson (1966), who has specified the relationship between instabilities in a community’s moral boundaries and outbreaks of deviance, such as witch-hunts, as a means of ritually renewing the impaired, blurred, or threatened moral order. The Swanson work derives from the discussions of primitive religion in the Elementary Forms and the Erikson work derives from the discussion of crime and deviance in the Division of Labor (the section on mechanical solidarity).

While these two traditions of Durkheimian thought are usually pursued separately, as a sociology of religion and a sociology of deviance, they can be seen as different aspects of the same general phenomena of moral revitalization, and together provide a distinctly sociological perspective on “witch-hunts.”

CHARACTERISTICS OF WITCH-HUNTS

There are three general properties of the modern political witch-hunt which hold the key to understanding them in distinctly Durkheimian terms. First, witch-hunts seem to appear in dramatic outbursts; they are not a regular feature of social life. A community seems to suddenly find itself infested with all sorts of subversive elements which pose a threat to the collectivity as a whole. Whether one thinks of the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution, the Stalinist Show Trials, or the McCarthy period in the United States, the phenomenon is the same: a community becomes intensely mobilized to rid itself of internal enemies. The substantive content of the subversion in question does not matter. Communist states fear "capitalist roaders" and "imperialist agents" and capitalist countries fear "communist sympathizers."

This dramatic appearance of subversion is very similar to Erikson's witch-hunting in Salem, and suggests that the community is somehow temporarily in need of being reset on the proper moral course. For Erikson the problem was what he termed a boundary crisis, a threat to a community's sense of collective identity which results in a collective mobilization to hunt down mythical enemies as a means of redrawing and redefining exactly what the collectivity stood for (for a discussion of collective identity crises in another context see Bergesen, 1977b). Where the community is defined in religious terms, as with the Puritan colony in Salem, the search is for religious heretics and witches. But, if we are dealing with a modern community, such as our example of China which is defined in political terms, then the search will be for political heretics and political deviants. If we are to search for the origins of the Chinese Cultural Revolution the Erikson approach would suggest looking for a threat to the collective existence of the Chinese nation just prior to the outbreak of the witch-hunt in 1966.

The second general characteristic may seem somewhat obvious, but it is nonetheless important. The various charges that appear during one of these witch-hunts involve accusations of crimes committed against the nation as a corporate whole. It is the whole of collective existence that is at stake; it is The Nation, The People, The Revolution, or The State which is being undermined and subverted. When a charge is brought of being un-American, or counterrevolutionary, what is happening is that a ritual contrast is being drawn between images of the corporate order and things which would oppose it.

This can be seen as a construction of the Durkheimian idea of the sacred-profane dichotomy in modern terms. Here the sociology of deviance and the sociology of religion are merged, for the idea of deviant and normal is but another form of the idea of sacred and profane. They both have the same function: a symbolic opposition to collective representations is drawn, and as such representations of the corporate community are redefined.

What is ironic is that by claiming it is under attack the nation is, in fact, rejuvenating itself, for by creating enemies of itself it redefines itself. The extensive ritual accompanying a witch-hunt—show trials, trumped-up charges, self-confessions, and so on—suggest that there is something more important than simply removing someone from office or apprehending actual spies or traitors. What we are
dealing with, therefore, is one of the modern mechanisms for the renewal of collective existence through the rejuvenation of collective representations of the corporate collectivity and, therefore, of the corporate collectivity itself. While Erikson dealt with the role of ritual in manufacturing deviance, his line of analysis is also applicable to the manufacturing of collective representations.

There is one more characteristic of witch-hunts which will involve the more explicit merging of Erikson and Swanson, and that is the fact that these crimes and deviations seem to involve the most petty and insignificant behavioral acts which are somehow understood as crimes against the nation as a whole. In fact, one of the principal reasons we term these events “witch-hunts” is that innocent people are so often involved and falsely accused.

A good description of this is found in Talmon’s observations on the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution:

To have remained silent on some past and half-forgotten occasion, where one would have spoken; to have spoken where it was better to hold one’s peace; to have shown apathy where eagerness was called for, and enthusiasm where diffidence was necessary; to have consorted with somebody whom a patriot should have shunned; avoided one now deserved to be befriended; not to have shown a virtuous disposition, or not to have led a life of virtue—such and other “sins” came to be counted as capital offenses, classifying the sinners as members of that immense chain of treason comprising the foreign plot, Royalism, federalism, bureaucratic sabotage, food speculation, immoral wealth, and vicious selfish perversion (Talmon, 1970: 129).

It is this aspect of political witch-hunts which has created the greatest confusion as to their origins. Because there seems to be no “real” reason for a purge, a trial, or an investigation, we have been led to believe that these were conducted for other motives. The earlier totalitarian theorists focused upon witch-hunts as means whereby political elites could maintain power, intimidate possible enemies, and stabilize their total control of all aspects of social life. More recent versions have shied away from this and have focused instead upon the role of witch-hunts in mobilizing society, as in the collectivization of agriculture in the Soviet Union or as a means of perpetuating the revolutionary goals of Mao Tse-Tung in China. But regardless of the interpretation, the assumption remains that the ritual and paraphernalia of the purge or trial are a means to attain more realistic political goals. This is a reasonable enough perspective, for without conceiving witch-hunts in religious or Durkheimian terms, what is one to make of such irrational and paranoid behavior? There must have been some other ulterior motive; who could really believe reading a book threatened national security?

It is my position, though, that the high degree of ritual and the presence of so many insignificant actions defined as treasonous or subversive are social facts in themselves and as such require a distinctly social explanation. It is not something to be explained away by reference to the real motives of instrumental political elites.

SWANSON’S IDEA OF IMMANENCE

The fundamental insight of Durkheim was that society presented its distinctly corporate capacity through a variety of symbolizations or collective representations. Swanson (1964; 1967) has introduced the idea of a society’s constitutional system to
capture the different ways in which a collectivity can structure itself as a corporate actor. He argues that a collectivity realizes its distinctly corporate existence through a structural apparatus which is empowered to make collective decisions and take collective action. For national societies this apparatus is what we generally call government or the State. There are also arrangements facilitating the inclusion of the interests of the collectivity as a whole and those of its constituent groups. In modern societies political parties provide for the representation of group interests, whether of constituent groups or of the collectivity as a whole. The more corporate the society, the more the interests of the collectivity as a whole are formally represented in the structural apparatus for taking collective action (government) at the expense of including the interests of specific constituent groups. Following these ideas we can arrange political party systems along a corporateness continuum (Bergesen, 1978). At one end, with a low degree of corporateness, are multi-party states, with their proportional representation electoral arrangements. Here many group interests are represented in the national legislatures (the structural apparatus for taking collective action). Then one doesn’t need to win an election to gain representation (a certain percentage of the vote and a certain percentage of the parliamentary seats). This is in contrast to two-party states, which generally use the majority principle. Here one must win the election to gain representation, and as such many smaller parties, representing differing group interests, are prevented from having their interests formally represented in some legislative body. In two-party systems divergent group interests have to be subordinated to the larger collective interest so they can fall within the framework of the two parties. As such they represent more of the corporate interest, than multi-party states. Finally there are one-party arrangements, whether Communist, Fascist or one-party nationalist. Here there is only one party which represents the interests of the nation as a whole; there are no formal arrangements, through parties, for particular sub-national groups to have their constituent interests formally represented. These are the most corporate states where the interests of the collectivity as a whole are represented at the expense of constituent group interests.

This brings us to Swanson’s idea of immanence. He noted that in certain religious systems, ideas of gods, forces, spirits—collective representations of the corporate order—are sometimes found to be present in the things and structures of everyday life. In the Birth of the Gods he studied the presence of a person’s spirit or soul within the fabric of his body, and in his study of the reformation, Religion and Regime, he studied the idea of Christ’s body being immanent in the body of the Church. Modern societies also have collective representations of their corporate existence, and these seem to center around various symbols of the corporate political community: images of The Nation, The People, The Revolution, The Proletariat, The Masses, and so on. These images, like the idea of gods and spirits in primitive societies, can also be immanent in everyday life. What we refer to as a highly politicized society is one with a high degree of immanence. Where ultimate political meaning is given to the tasks of daily life and where one can serve the nation or build the revolution in his daily life, it represents a situation where symbolizations of the corporate nation have penetrated and merged with the structure of ordinary reality.

Swanson argues that where the constitutional system of a collectivity provides
for the representation of the singular corporate interest of the group as a whole at the expense of the competing interest of that collectivity’s constituent groups, we should expect to find a high degree of immanence. In terms of modern societies this translates into the proposition that as we move from multi-party through two-party to one-party we should find more areas of life being politicized, that is, immanent with ultimate political significance (see Bergesen, 1977a, for some empirical data which attempts to test this proposition about the relationship between political parties and rates of witch-hunting). What we now need is the theoretical linkage between being highly politicized, or highly immanent, and outbreaks of witch-hunts. For that we will turn to Erikson and merge his ideas with those of Swanson.

MERGING SWANSON AND ERIKSON

Erikson (1966) began with the insight that a society need not wait for someone to cross its moral boundaries in order to reap the benefits of punishing the transgressor and thereby reaffirming the moral order. A society could create or manufacture deviants, by labeling them so, and thereby rejuvenate itself. This idea comes from the Durkheim who wondered about punishment and crime, not the Durkheim of the Elementary Forms. But, I think Durkheim is talking about one underlying process in both crime and religion. For how are collective representations created or renewed? It is by the sacred-profane dichotomy, a dichotomy established through religious ritual. There are positive rites, like ceremonies and celebrations, and there are negative rites, like purges, trials, and political investigations. Here the profane is created with someone being labeled a subversive, an enemy, a traitor. When Erikson speaks of the community manufacturing deviance he is talking about ritual, in the religious sense, that is, the Durkheimian religious sense, which means anything that relates to the fundamental sacred-profane dichotomy. The deviant-normal dichotomy is the same as the sacred-profane dichotomy, so that Erikson’s manufacture of deviance is also the manufacturing of profanity, and therefore the renewal of the sacred. Erikson’s moral boundaries are the same as Swanson’s collective representations. Both are symbolizations of the corporate social order, and both are renewed by the same ritualistic process of finding the opposite of what they stand for: deviants and profanity.

Erikson advanced two propositions. First, he argued that all things being equal a society should experience a relatively constant volume of deviance. Second, given a crisis in a collectivity’s collective identity (a boundary crisis), there should be a dramatic increase in the volume of deviance a society experiences. Erikson focuses upon the means whereby the moral order is renewed, the increase in deviance; but he has identified a more general process of moral rejuvenation that has direct implications for the rejuvenation of Swansonian collective representations. As these are also part of the moral order, and as the deviant-normal dichotomy is but another version of the sacred-profane dichotomy, we can assert that given a crisis in collective identity there should be an increase in ritual mechanisms for the renewal of political representations such as images of The Nation and The People. We can speak of political deviance, where the Erikson process would predict a dramatic increase in the volume of political deviants—subversives—if a society experiences a crisis in collective identities.
The Erikson process only predicts the presence of deviants; he is not concerned with exactly where they will be discovered. Here is where the Swanson idea of immanence enters the picture. If collective representations are immanent in daily life, then the ritualistic creation of their symbolic opposites will create subversives in the daily fabric of ordinary life. The more immanent societies, like one-party states, will ritually look for subversives in the nooks and crannies of daily life, and will define ordinary activity as subversive because that is where the collective representations are embedded. This then, provides the explanation for why political witch-hunts in these societies find such trivial activity as subversive. It is not that reading books, seeing plays, or writing letters are themselves subversive, that is, can do real damage to the national interest, but it is because they are infused with transcendent political significance, such that the Durkheim process of creating the opposite of the national interest involves defining them as subversive.

The exact linkage between collective representations and the daily reality they infuse is at this point not well understood. It may be, as I have just mentioned, that larger political significance surrounds daily activities, such that a crisis in collective identities is a crisis in collective representations, with the result being insignificant acts being considered subversive as a means of drawing the sacred-profane-deviant-normal dichotomy. It may also be that the moral order itself, as a set of rules or norms, can be infused with transcendent political meaning, so that small moral infractions take on a larger significance. For example, petty theft in a society with a low degree of immanence, where the rules are not filled with political significance, will be experienced as just that, petty theft. But, with a high degree of immanence, where the rules are filled with ultimate political significance, then a moral infraction, crossing the norm, becomes a crime against the nation, not because it really “gets to” the national interest, but because the national interest has “come to it.” In either case there is the presence of larger political meaning in daily life in these highly immanent societies, and given a collective crisis the response is to find crimes against the nation in the most insignificant of things and activities, which is the hallmark of a political witch-hunt.

THE CASE OF THE CHINESE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

To see how this merging of Erikson and Swanson would actually operate, let’s consider a concrete example, such as the Cultural Revolution. Here we have a dramatic upsurge in political deviance. Intellectuals, party members, bureaucrats, students, and peasants found themselves charged with “taking the capitalist road,” and with being in opposition to the larger values and goals of the Chinese nation. Like Erikson’s crime wave it dramatically appeared and disappeared (1966-1969).

What was the external threat that could have set off the witch-hunt? The rapidly escalating American presence in Vietnam in 1965 can be seen as constituting a direct threat to the Chinese. Now here the analysis becomes difficult. Was it a real threat or just a matter of perception? In some sense it does not matter, for the Chinese seemed to experience it as a threat (Yahuda, 1972; Ra’anan, 1968; Zagoria, 1968). The Chinese leadership seemed convinced that war with America was to come soon. Further, the Soviet Union was viewed as an unreliable ally, and also a potential
threat to invade Mongolia. Supporting this idea is a quote from Chairman Mao in early 1966, the same time as the Cultural Revolution was beginning:

A war between China and America is inevitable. This year at the earliest, or within two years at the latest, such a war will occur. America will attack us from four points, namely the Vietnam frontier, the Korean frontier, and through Japan by way of Taiwan and Okinawa. On such an occasion, Russia with the Sino-Russian defense pact as its pretext, will cross the frontier from Siberia and Mongolia to occupy China, starting at Inner Mongolia and Northeast China. The result will be confrontation across the Yangtse of the Chinese Liberation Army and the Russian Army... It is a mistake to say that in the world today there are war powers and peace powers confronting one another; there only exist revolutionary war powers and anti-revolutionary war powers. World revolution cannot come about by the evasion of war (quoted in Yahuda, 1972: 70-71).

At a conference with the Japanese where these remarks were made, a Japanese delegate said: “We got the impression that Mao was a bit neurotic about it all; he even seemed to be suffering from America-phobia and persecution mania about a Russian occupation of China” (Yahuda, 1972: 71).

If the American presence in Vietnam can be considered an external threat and creating a collective identity crisis for the Chinese, then what was their response? As we have argued, the response was the Cultural Revolution in which Chinese society suddenly found itself infested with all sorts of traitors, plotters, wreckers, alien elements, foreign ideas, and subversion of all sorts. The ritualistic search for enemies, or the creation of political deviance, is also the creation of the sacred-profane dichotomy, and the renewal of those collective representations of the corporate community. This process of manufacturing the sacred-profane (or deviant-normal) dichotomy comes about in a number of different ways. Although the charges and crimes may be substantively different, they all share the same analytical form: someone, or thing, is in opposition to the nation and its collective purposes. We can identify at least three general types of symbolic oppositions a collectivity can ritually generate.

1) *Ideological Subversives.* This would include anyone, or thing, standing explicitly in opposition to a nation’s ideology. There are *global oppositions,* where one simply opposes the nation and its purposes as a whole without specifying the exact nature of the alternative ideological position. This would include charges of being undemocratic, counterrevolutionary, anti-state, an enemy of the People, failing to follow the party line, and a host of variations on ideological positions such as deviationism, revisionism, ultra-leftism, left in appearance but right in essence, and so on. Since we are dealing with matters of definition, there is an almost limitless number of possible charges and types of deviation that can be created. The substance does not matter, it is the charge, the creation of oppositions, that counts. For it is the sociological process of making the charge, conducting the trial, evoking the self-confession that does the ritual work of repairing social and moral boundaries, not the actual proof of someone having gone astray or committed *real* treasonous acts. There are also *substantive oppositions* where the alternative ideological position is itself the substance of the opposition. One is no longer merely undemocratic or counterrevolutionary but taking the capitalist road or being an imperialist agent. This category would include charges used in all kinds of purges: Royalists, Trotskyites, Titoites, Bourgeois Nationalists, and so on.
(2) Attacking the Nation Itself. A second mode of generating oppositions is the appearance of those who would more literally threaten national security. This would include charges of spying, sabotage, wrecking, suppressing revolutionary movements, treason, sedition, intelligence with the enemy, conspiracy, or plotting to overthrow the government. Here it is not so much a matter of ideological differences, but of actual damage purportedly done to the country and the national interest.

(3) Personal vs. Collective Interests. Finally, there is the contrast between individual or organizational interests and the interests of the nation as a whole. This is one of the most complex ways of making the necessary Durkheimian opposition, and used extensively during the Cultural Revolution. Consider the following crimes that appeared in China: revisionism, economism, bureaucraticism, and hedonism. What do they all share in common? They are activities where the purposes and interests of the society’s component groups are purportedly given precedence over the interests and purposes of the whole society. In so charging individuals the corporate community is creating a ritual contrast between its collective sentiments and representations and that which opposes them. It is important to remember that the substance of the crime doesn’t matter, only the fact of opposing the national interest. Let us consider each in slightly more detail.

Economism refers to the separation of economic issues from their larger political significance, and more specifically, giving primacy to the free working of price mechanisms and material incentives. When, for instance, during the Cultural Revolution there occurred strikes in Shanghai and elsewhere, “demanding an end to the low-wage policy which was a common feature of all these systems, they were told that they had been hoodwinked into following the ‘evil road of economism’ and were ‘pursuing only personal and short-term interests’” (Bridgham, 1968: 9). Economism is also defined as “the conspiracy of issuing the ‘sugar-coated bullets’ of economic benefits . . . to corrupt the masses’ revolutionary will” (Bridgham, 1968: 9). Similarly, bureaucraticism involves the pursuit of the interests which might be specific to the bureaucratic structure, and not those of the more general society. One of the major complaints is that the party bureaucrats do not have close enough ties with the masses. To institutionalize contact with the masses the “Hsia Fang” system was constructed that provides for manual labor experiences for the intellectual and leadership elites. This is also interesting in terms of the larger question of immanence. The idea is that absence from contact with the masses and participating in manual labor results in a loss of “revolutionary spirit.”

. . . when a cadre is detached from the masses he is often first divorced from labor. Once he is divorced from labor there will be a change in his thoughts and feelings. Gradually he will develop a distaste for labor and a passion for idleness (Lee, 1966: 53).

It is further argued that if “his laziness is allowed to persist, he will forget the ‘idea of rendering service to the people’ and will ‘tread the path of corruption.’ To be corrupt, in this instance, means to enjoy material comforts ‘without doing any proper work’” (Lee, 1966: 53). In a fashion similar to the practice of eating part of your enemy or of some animal to gain its strength, working at manual labor and mingling with the masses is thought to instill in intellectuals and other leaders the proper revolutionary zeal. The “spirit” or proper motives to do socialist work to carry out
larger purposes can be acquired through their "contact" with the masses and their performance of physical labor. Socialist virtue, as a collective representation, is immanent within the actual behavior of manual labor, and to do that work is to acquire those virtues.

The following of personal interests, presumably at the expense of collective interests, is found in the errors of bourgeois individualism and the related issue of being both red and expert. Bourgeois individualism involves the pursuit of individual interests which are felt to be antithetical to the larger task of socialist construction. National construction requires not merely the presence of technical skill, being an "expert," but also the proper ideological commitment, to hold the "ideology of collectivism" and to place one's skills "wholeheartedly at the service of the people." Those who are not "red," but merely "expert,"

... do not offer themselves wholeheartedly 'to the people and socialist construction' but think instead in terms of 'individual narrow interests' and carry on their work 'according to the academic viewpoints of the capitalist class.' Examples of 'harmful individualism' cited in the Chinese press include research personnel who, in their pursuit of personal fame, 'refuse to conduct research in certain problems of production and choose to watch the country's production sustain loss,' professors who 'regard knowledge as their own private property' and engineers who avoid the study of functional work and choose instead to 'play the connoisseur, with resulting damage and loss of national construction' (Lee, 1966: 55).

The issue of personal interests and corporate interests is captured in the distinction between hedonism and selfless collectivism. "The collectivist spirit in an individual causes him to be motivated, not by considerations of self-interest, but by a desire to serve the higher interests of the collective; it is the fundamental characteristic of the new communist man ..." (Lee, 1966: 50).

RITUAL MECHANISMS DEFINING OPPOSITIONS TO SACRED NATIONAL PURPOSES

As we can speak of different kinds of symbolic oppositions we can also distinguish the differing kinds of ritual used to make these charges. Although we speak of the manufacturing of deviance in a very general sense, there are a number of different ways in which this takes place. The collectivity as a corporate whole, acting through the agency of the state, employs a number of ritual mechanisms for creating the idea of subversion. We can speak of different degrees of community mobilization to search out subversion. The issue is one of who will act as an agent of the corporate order. This can range from social positions in formally chartered agency functions, the state, to situations where ordinary citizens are empowered as agents for the collective good and go about rooting out enemies on their own. We can distinguish the following types of ritual mechanisms and different degrees of community mobilization.

(1) Verbal Accusations and Charges. The simplest means of creating the presence of imaginary spies, traitors, reactionaries, or counterrevolutionaries is the mere statement that they exist. This would include charges by political elites that, say, "class enemies" have "sneaked into our ranks" to "plot capitalist restoration" and "inflict our minds with bourgeois ideas." The action here is at the level of
interpersonal interaction, of charges by individuals, rather than the activation of institutional mechanisms.

(2) Institutions of Social Control: Arrest, Trial, Imprisonment. The nation becomes even more mobilized when not only verbal charges are leveled as to the presence of subversion, but institutions’ formally chartered social control functions are activated. The use of arrests, imprisonment, police, intelligence agencies, and the like to charge individuals with crimes against the nation involve a more extensive activation of the formal agencies of the corporate community than the earlier stage of verbal accusations.

(3) Large Scale Ceremonies. Verbal charges by political elites and actions by social control institutions are part of the normal structural apparatus all collectivities possess for taking corporate action. Ceremonies, like the Show Trial, Purges, and Rectification campaigns, involve the temporary construction of a mechanism for purifying society. These events involve much more public drama and ritual embellishment—self-criticisms, elaborate charges, dramatic disclosures, and surprise witnesses—than at the previous two levels. The community is more involved, as these public spectacles are widely advertised in the mass media, and in China on wall posters, where there is often a running discussion of the progression of a purge or rectification campaign.

(4) Empowerment of Citizens as Agents of the Corporate Order. The most extensive mobilization of the society occurs when authority to root out subversion is extended beyond formal institutional roles and allocated to ordinary citizens. Here agency moves from being lodged in institutional structures to being a temporary identity or role that anyone can acquire. A classic example was the great number of students who during the Cultural Revolution came to Peking, paraded in front of Mao, and were instantaneously constituted agents of the collectivity to travel through the countryside and unmask those following the “reactionary bourgeois line” and “taking the capitalist road” (Bennett & Montaperto, 1972; Hinton, 1972; Nee, 1969). In the most extreme version of this situation everyone can be an agent of the state and take as their personal responsibility the search for subversion and deviation wherever it may appear.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this paper I have argued that the idea of immanence, usually considered solely as a topic of interest for sociologists of religion, can be of use in explaining features of political witch-hunts. These ritual cleansing efforts, in which numerous diverse activities are given political meaning, are a consequence of a social system having a constitutional system that makes it highly immanent, where being immanent means that collective purposes and interests are infused into the organizations, activities, and actions that comprise everyday life.

As a consequence of this, given a Durkheimian boundary crisis, there will appear an outbreak of deviance, functioning to reaffirm the contours of the society. In systems where there is immanence, there will be a more extensive distribution of various sorts of polluting agents through the social structure. Since the larger purposes are found in the everyday life of these societies, crises in the larger order
will be reflected in outbreaks of crimes against the interests of the nation in all sectors of the community. That many of these will seem unrelated to being “real” acts against the interests of the nation is a function of the fact that the larger interests are infused into these ordinary everyday activities.

REFERENCES

Bennett, Gordon A., and Ronald N. Montaperto  

Bergesen, Albert James  


Bridgham, Philip  

Erikson, Kai T.  

Hinton, William  

Lee, Rensselaer W., III  

Nee, Victor  

Ra’anan, Uri  

Swanson, Guy E.  


Talmon, J. L.  

Yahuda, Michael  

Zagoria, Donald  