

8. SOCIOLOGY OF DEVIANCE

Variation is a precondition for selection. If there is no variation in behavior then the cultural selection has nothing to choose between. Several scientists have found that variation is highest during periods of crisis where the population is experiencing stress. The variation in behavior is evidence of experimentation and inventiveness with the purpose of finding a solution to the problems that create the stress (Kirch 1980; Rosenberg, M. 1990; but contrast Russell & Russell 1982-1992).

If a variation in behavior goes against the established social norms or is regarded by the majority as wrong or undesirable then we may call it a *deviation*. Sociologist Jack Douglas (1977) thinks that a deviation can be a creative phenomenon necessary for social change and adaptation. He compares deviations with mutations and thus draws a parallel to Darwin's evolutionary theory.

Many sociologists have realized that there is a close connection between deviance and social control. Those in power exert control by defining unwanted behaviors as deviant and stigmatizing the persons associated with such behaviors (Lemert 1967, Foucault 1980).

In this chapter i will discuss theories about how norms are created, how deviations from the norm arise, and the importance of these processes for social evolution. I will focus mainly on such deviations which are claimed to be dangerous to society because these have a special importance to the cultural r/k-theory.

8.1 The fight over defining reality

In his later theories, sociologist Nachman Ben-Yehuda regards the phenomenon of deviancy as central to the explanation of social stability or change (Ben-Yehuda 1990). In a situation of deviancy, one person or group defines another person or group, or their actions, as deviant and dangerous to society. In Ben-Yehuda's terminology, any deviance is a social construct, and the concept of deviance is therefore always relative. A central concept in Ben-Yehuda's sociology is a *symbolic-moral universe*. Others call it a paradigm or a cognitive structure. A symbolic-moral universe is a theoretical tradition or a conception of reality that integrates symbols, meanings, values, motives and reasons

into a coherent system which legitimizes a certain moral order. The symbolic-moral universe delineates the moral limits and hence the criteria for what is deviant. A deviant person often has a different symbolic-moral universe which legitimizes his actions to himself. Hence the deviancy situation represents a conflict between two symbolic-moral universes. Such conflicts take place constantly in every society. The conflicts imply negotiations over moral limits and social identities, and the outcome of such conflicts may be that symbolic-moral universes are changed or replaced by other universes (See also Klaus Eder's theory on the selection of cognitive structures mentioned on p. 28).

Since a symbolic-moral universe legitimizes power, then the consequence of a change in this universe may be that the distribution of power and resources is changed. A deviantization may thus have far-reaching political consequences, even if it is not defined as political (Ben-Yehuda 1990). Ben-Yehuda's sociology of deviance can profitably be combined with the cultural r/k-theory because it provides a functionalistic explanation of the distribution of power and resources.

A deviantization may be directed from the center of a society against its periphery or vice versa (Ben-Yehuda 1990:59). In other words, this means that those in power and their subjects may reciprocally accuse each other of deviant and anti-social actions. If a man in power successfully accuses some of his subordinates of deviance, then the result is a reinforcement of his power and hence a regularization. The deviance demonstrates and legitimizes his power and gives occasion for corrective interference in the form of punishment or therapy. That this means of power can be effective is seen by the historical fact that the inquisition successfully upheld the threatened monopoly of power of the catholic church throughout five centuries by a systematic hunting of heretics and witches. The fact that in reality the witches did not have the dangerous capacities that were imputed on them did not make this regal means less effective as long as the imaginary danger legitimized the maintenance of a strong power structure.

If, on the other hand, the deviantizations and corrective actions towards critical deviants fail, then the position of those in power is weakened, in other words: a kalyptization occurs. The same is the case in situations where persons or groups with low social status successfully accuse those with high status and power of deviance. This is typically seen in the uncovering of corruption and the abuse of power.