

# PART I

## The Problem and the Setting



*The pole-shrine and ceremonial ground of Mura-Hatiha*

*“Religion in its broadest sense, then, must be another term for that obscurity that surrounds man’s efforts to defend himself by curative or preventative means against his own violence.”*

(René Girard, 1977, p. 23)



*The villages of the communities discussed in this book have a variety of public spaces: meeting points with benches in wood or stone for debate, bamboo platforms for conversation and relaxation, as well as spacious grounds for ritual and festive occasions. The photo shows a square with meeting facilities of one of the sections of Ilyeu, Lotuho.*

# 1

## The King: Focus of Suspense, Lever of Consensus and Inventor of the State

### Girard's scapegoat mechanism

Before touching on ethnographic material a brief presentation of the model of the scapegoat mechanism is necessary. The scapegoat mechanism is a corollary of Girard's mimetic anthropology.<sup>1</sup> The cornerstone of this approach is the idea that human behaviour is essentially imitative, motivated by *mimesis*. Human knowledge and the ways of acquiring knowledge, human desires and ambitions originate in the imitation of the knowledge, desires, ambitions, etc. of others and not in natural instincts or in the individual psyche. There is a direct connection between the mimetic character of human motivation and man's propensity for conflict. Since imitation also governs the choice of the object of individual desire, the desiring person inevitably manoeuvres him-or herself into situations which lead to conflict with the model.

This situation in which the individual is torn between two contradictory imperatives, one saying "Imitate me!" and the other "Never imitate me in what I want and who I am!" constitutes a *double bind* which no socialisation process can avoid. Girard has borrowed the concept from the anthropologist Gregory Bateson but gives it a wider application than the Palo Alto school that Bateson inspired (Bateson, 1958 & 1972; Girard, 1978:316–319). In Girard's view, the double bind defines the human condition. Social life begins in conflict and the primary challenge for human societies is to reduce its destructive potential. This, according to Girard, is what religion is about. Like Durkheim, Girard attributes a central role to religion in the constitution of society.<sup>2</sup> At the heart of religion are two complementary operations that deal with the destructive potential of the mimetic process and transform it into a socially cohesive force. The first builds on the conflictual and ultimately violent dynamism of the mimetic process by allowing it to run its full course in a controlled environment, while the second pre-empts mimetic escalation and redirects its conflict potential into a togetherness that is characterised by peaceful sharing.

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1 Girard's own work is the best introduction to his anthropology, especially *Violence and the Sacred* (1977), *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (1987), *The Scapegoat* (1989) and *Evolution and Conversion* (2008). Girard's contribution to Hamerton-Kelly (ed.), *Violent origins* (1987:73–145) is a good summary of the ideas that concern us in this study.

2 Girard acknowledges this Durkheimian influence in various passages in his work, e.g. 1977:306–7; 1987:43, 63, 82. For epistemological parallels between the two scholars see: Livingston, 'La démystification et l'histoire chez Girard et Durkheim', in Dumouchel (ed.), 1985:191–200.

In the first operation, mimetic rivalry is left to escalate and intensify to a violent climax. During this crisis, the general discontent and disorder converge against an enemy or scapegoat who is blamed for the intolerable situation. Collective aggression discharges itself in a single mimetic drive against a shared victim. The unanimity generated in the act of collective aggression gives a sense of relief to the group which discovers that it is now no longer divided. When later faced with another crisis the group will reproduce the effect of deliverance from violence. Reproduction of the act by which divisiveness is transformed into unity is the core of all religious ritual.

In the second operation, violence is forestalled; and mimetic rivalry is redirected into non-violent channels. The potentially violent, mimetically reinforced competition for the possession of a desired object is brought to a halt by a sudden awareness of the threat of violence, and of the absolute need to stop. The arrested desires and the aborted competition make the object of attraction free for a new way of jointly enjoying it. Competition for the object is replaced by its non-violent distribution and consumption. This operation is the basis for all taboos. These two ways of resolving mimetic conflict correspond to Durkheim's categories of *negative* and *positive* rites (1976:297–350), a dichotomy also used by Girard: “The things you must not do are called *prohibitions* and the things you must do are called *rituals*” (Hamerton-Kelly, 1987:9).

Both ways of dealing with mimetic tension can be modelled as dramas, sequences of interaction between groups or individuals that bring about a change in the nature of the relationship between the groups and individuals involved. The models are *diachronic* and are best rendered as the unfolding of a story with a beginning and an end. Girard uses the words *scene* and *scenario* for this narrative model, probably in imitation of the Freudians who refer to their primeval event as a *scene*, a *drama* or a *tragedy*. The first, and in Girard's conception most fundamental of these models, is the *scapegoat mechanism*.

#### A. The scapegoat mechanism

1. *mimetic rivalry* escalating into a violent *crisis*;
2. *polarisation* of the violence driven by *antagonistic mimesis*, turning rivalling individuals into symmetric *doubles*, effacing social differences and, ultimately, pitting the group as a whole against a single member or minority;
3. the *transference* of the discontent in the group onto the targeted other resulting in his or her *negative transfiguration*;
4. the *elimination* of the thus designated victim in a collective mimetic drive in which the group experiences a new sense of unity and a relief from internal violence; and
5. the *transference* of this sense of unity and relief onto the eliminated victim, bringing about its *positive transfiguration*.

The process accounted for by this five-step model is self-regulatory<sup>3</sup>: a crisis unfolds, escalates and is resolved without intervention by extraneous factors. Because of the self-contained, inescapable way in which the process unfolds, Girard speaks of a *mechanism*. A similar sequence of interactions was, according to René Girard, the course of events that led to the emergence of modern humans. Exactly how the mechanism developed over time is an open question. It is worth emphasising that Girard never envisaged the collective murder as a single event — as Freud did and as some of Girard's interpreters do — but as a frequent occurrence during the early stages of our development as a species.<sup>4</sup>

Girard then makes it plausible that this five-step sequence is, first, the *model for ritual action*. In ritual the community, or rather, the individuals wanting to establish or restore their community, repeat the above sequence in order to obtain the deliverance from violence and the achievement of communal peace.

The combined effect of the negative and positive transfiguration of the victim is what students of religion know as *the sacred*. Its ambivalence, the mysterious fact that the sacred is both dangerous and beneficial — which has long been noted as one of the defining characteristics of the sacred (Otto, 1917; Caillois, 1950) — is now given a straightforward explanation by the scapegoat mechanism.

Sacrifice, according to Girard, is nothing but a repetition of this original scenario. It is 'the production of the sacred' (corresponding to the literal meaning of the Latin word *sacrificium*).<sup>5</sup> It consists of a process in which the negative sentiments in the group are elicited and projected on a human being, animal or object that is cast away. The success of the sacrificial operation depends on the amount of social negativity the victim captures as it is eliminated. The more forceful and generalised the negative transference, the more radiant and convincing the positive transfiguration of the victim.

The victimary model offers, secondly, a *model of representation*, i.e. a model for organising social experience cognitively. To the group involved in the collective act of expulsion, the victim signifies the return of consensus. The victim, its substitute (name, emblems, totem) or what remains of it (the body, the tomb) functions as the *signifier* for the power that has saved the community from destruction. This power, says Girard, is the essence of the sacred. The sacred is fundamentally ambivalent

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3 A discussion of this aspect of the theory is found in Dupuy, 1982:125–184 and in several of the contributions to the Stanford International Symposium 'Disorder and Order' (Livingston, ed., 1984).

4 In a conference in 1983 Girard is quick to correct Burkert's allusion to the collective murder as something that "happened once". Girard says: "The collective murder I am talking about must be regarded as a 'normal' occurrence in pre-human and human groups during the whole pre-history of our species and some of its history as well. My idea is that violent forms of so-called scapegoating must put an end to a kind of intraspecific fighting that is normal, too, during the same stages of human development, but so intense and deadly that it would make human culture impossible if there were nothing to interrupt it" (Burkert, Girard & Smith, 1987:121).

5 The Latin word *sacrificium* is derived from Latin *sacer* (sacred) and *facere* (to make).

since in the positive transfiguration of the victim the negative charge is not nullified. Collective attention for the victim is the precondition for the elaboration of all other cultural signs, linguistic as well as aesthetic. Accordingly, Girard defines the victim as the *transcendental signifier* (1978:108–113).

Implicit in the community's ritual reproduction and mythical representation of the victimary event are three fundamental organising principles:

### **B. Fundamental ordering principles deriving from the scapegoat mechanism**

- *before and after:*  
the miraculous transformation from a condition of intolerable violence to a state of salutary peace confronts the human group with its first question of causality. The awareness of the transformative role of the victim is the anthropological backdrop for all later causal connections and the condition for the human faculty of establishing causality;
- *inside and outside:*  
the inside is the sphere that has been purged of violence by means of the elimination of the victim while the outside is the sphere to which the violence has been driven out and where the victim in its negative and positive transfiguration dwells; the opposition between inside and outside is a fundamental structuring device in group formation and intergroup perception;
- *good and evil:*  
the contrast between the intolerable violence before the elimination of the victim and the experience of peacefulness afterwards generates the distinction between good and evil, the precondition for all moral and ethical notions.

In the third place, the scapegoat mechanism provides a *model of social organisation*. Although Girard explicitly includes social organisation in the range of phenomena to which his theory applies (1972:305–345), he hardly elaborates on this aspect. In the passages in his work on kingship, no distinction is made between kingship as a form of political organisation and kingship as ritual. Political power is treated as a mere spin-off of ritual action. Social organisation and ritual are different in important respects. Ritual is a form of collective symbolic action that reproduces and reinforces the cohesion of already existing groups. Social organisation is about the way relationships between groups and segments of groups are structured and about the division of roles between these groups and individuals.

Girard's victimary model is silent about the social organisation of proto-humans before the first eruptions of mimetic crisis. It figures a single group that suffers endemic conflict and that by arbitrarily picking on one its members (an individual or a sub-group) and driving him or her out, finds peace. The proto-humans, however, were not clean slates. Like other primates, they must have lived in territorial groups that were in contact with other groups. Recent primatological research shows that

demonstrations of hostility are part of inter-group relations of primates. Chimpanzees even engage in warfare including acts of killing and cannibalism (Goodall, 1986).

It is plausible that the proto-humans who acquired the capacity to use symbols incorporated existing pre-human behavioural patterns when they started reproducing the salutary victimary event. It is likely that the first mimetic crises after the primeval event were resolved by discharging the urge of salutary scapegoating on groups competing for the same territory and resources.

The worst fear of human communities is a descent into a crisis that could entail the chaos of the raw scapegoat mechanism. The controlled reproduction of the scapegoat mechanism in sacrificial ritual is one way of preventing the community from slipping into crisis. Warfare is another outlet that pre-empts the escalation of internal conflict. It captures the emerging negative mimetic dynamic and mobilises it against outsiders. In a roundabout way, the initial threat of division is ultimately transformed into a boost of internal cohesion and sense of identity. This kind of warfare is particularly effective in areas where otherwise independent communities have a shared understanding of what wars are about. In the literature, such warfare in which victimisation is controlled by a code of conduct is known as *ritual warfare*.

Relations between different groups inside communities benefit from the same mechanism by organising group interactions on the basis of competition. To be sustainable, such internal competition should remain non-violent. In the societies that form the topic of this book, controlled warfare and social competition are central to social organisation. To distinguish this *modus operandi* from the scapegoat scenario where the discontent achieves focus in a confrontation with an internal scapegoat, or in a sacrifice, I have called this type of dramatisation of the victimary mechanism the *enemy scenario*.

The victimary mechanism is embedded in many institutional complexes. Two of these stand out in their morphogenetic impact on the profile of society: war and kingship. This study will show that war is a powerful force for order as long as hostile groups are able to maintain a balance in the toll of victims that their warfare imposes. A fundamental requirement for maintaining a balance of power is an unequivocal, bi-polar definition of who an enemy is, and who is not. The universal principle *my enemy's friend is my enemy* and *my enemy's enemy is my friend* serves that purpose. It allowed communities to engage in war in such a way that each camp gathered a maximum of glory at the cost of a minimum of unnecessary bloodshed.

In contrast to war, kingship channels the negative sentiments in the community onto a single person. The suspense that the collective expression of anger creates provides the king with the leverage necessary to make demands on the people. These demands offer an action perspective to the people as well as hope in facing the crisis. However, if the crisis is not resolved the accusations will bounce back to the king. They may mean his end — at least if the people do not give him another chance. They often do since they know that without a king they are likely to start blaming one another, the consequences of which are difficult to control.

Kingship and war are equally effective dramatisations of consensual antagonism but their morphogenetic impact on social organisation is different. War organises the society in symmetrically polarised groups while kingship organises the society around a centre. In this book, I will use the term *enemy scenario* when referring to the consensual mechanism as it is activated in warfare and the term *dualism* to refer to the organisational principle that channels and maximises the consensual potential of the enemy scenario. The term *scapegoat scenario* is used when the consensual antagonism is played out between a group and one of its members while the term *centralism* refers to the organisational principle that channels and maximises the consensual potential of the scenario of the single scapegoat.

### The enemy scenario

It is possible to summarise the enemy scenario of the victimary model in the same format as the scenario of the individual or minority victim of Girard's scapegoat-mechanism:

C.	The enemy scenario
1.	a <i>crisis</i> driven by mimetic rivalry threatening the survival of the group;
2.	a <i>polarisation</i> process, driven by antagonistic mimesis resulting in the alignment of groups into opposed hostile camps;
3.	the <i>transference</i> of the discontent between and inside the hostile groups onto the opposite party resulting in a <i>negative transfiguration</i> of the adversary;
4.	the <i>elimination</i> of adversaries (individuals or groups) in one or more violent group confrontations resulting in a new sense of unity and collective destiny within the enemy camps; and
5.	the <i>positive transfiguration</i> of victim(s) and/or victimiser(s) associated with the violence that enhanced group cohesion.

The precept that 'my friend's enemies and my enemy's friends are my enemies and my friend's friends and my enemy's enemies are my friends', channels the *mimesis of the antagonist* towards a polarisation of the political arena into two neatly opposed camps. Since the antagonists seek to ensure — by way of coalitions with similar groups, for instance — that they are able to meet the challenge posed by a potentially superior adversary, the system tends towards equilibrium.

The scenario of the internal scapegoat and the scenario of the external enemy run parallel till the fifth and last step. The fifth step is different in two ways: confrontations between enemies have a variable outcome — one party becoming the winner and the other the loser; while the outcome of the scapegoat scenario is fixed — the scapegoat being the victim and the community being the actor in charge of the killing. The

sacralising effects primarily impinge on the victim but they may also reflect on the community and on the official in charge of the killing.



*War hero making a mock-charge at the camera. The wild cucumbers hanging from his bow and those squeezed on his head protect the people he interacts with from contamination with the violence this killer of one or more enemies is associated with. In the Nilotic world the wild cucumber is a common substitute of a sacrificial victim.*

In the enemy scenario, we have two sets of victims and two sets of victimisers. Cultures differ in their choice of who among the four is to be sacralised. In the societies studied in this book, it is the victimiser of one's own group who attracts the effects of sacralisation. The dead bodies of victimised group members are left in the battlefield to be eaten by predators. They are not given funeral rites, nor are they taken to the village of the killer. Yet, the names of the enemy victims will survive in self-aggrandising songs of their killer, his age-group, and his community.<sup>6</sup> The killing will mark the killer for the rest of his life. He is a celebrated member of the community but he will also be expected to protect his entourage and himself from the dangerous sacred charge that henceforth taints his person.

In other cultural contexts, it is the enemy-victim that attracts the sacralisation. This is the case in societies practising head-hunting and cannibalism. In *La Violence*

6 The Toposa, Didinga, Boya and Acholi have the custom of giving 'victim-names' to men who have killed an enemy. The names recall the situation of victimisation e.g. Toposa: *Goromoi* 'the enemy was crying'; *Rumamoi*: 'the enemy was caught by the hand while running away'; *Lotoparamoi*: 'the enemy was killed in a pool', etc.

*et le sacré*, Girard provides us with an analysis of Tupinamba cannibalism. The enemy-victim, normally a war captive, is eaten by the community in a collective orgy which intimately associates the well-being and integrity of the community with the enemy. The eating is believed to have healing powers. Being killed and eaten by one's enemy is the preferred way of dying. In fact, the passage through the enemy's stomach is a means of achieving immortality. Since the enemy will later be revenged and eaten by one's own people, a never-ending lineage by digestion is established that assures the integrity of their respective hostile communities.

Not only the victim but also the captor, who is responsible for killing the captive at the orgy, is affected by his deed. Like his Nilotic counterpart, he is impure and a danger to others as well as to himself. He does not take part in the cannibal meal. After the killing, he leaves the group and goes into seclusion, he fasts (while others are eating the victim), undergoes scarification and bloodletting, has his properties taken from him, and takes up a new name, a scenario not fundamentally different from what one finds in South Sudan. While the Sudanese victimiser may include his victim's last words in his war cry and in songs of self-praise, the Tupinamba hero cuts the lips of his victim and carries them around his wrist as a bracelet to remind himself of his victim's last words and of his own future violent death that is usually announced in these words.

There are also cases where the enemy in his quality of victimiser is sacralised by the victimised community. The Arawete, related to the Tupinamba and studied by Viveiros de Castro (1992), believe that after death, they will go to a heaven where divinised enemies will eat them. After being eaten, they will be resuscitated to join these cannibal gods and stay with them.<sup>7</sup>

In other cultures, including that of the modern nation-state, the victims fallen at the hands of the enemy are, if possible, taken home and transfigured into heroes or martyrs. The commemoration of their *sacrifice* is an important source of inspiration for their compatriots and a key reference in the narratives that underpin national unity. It is the only form of sacrificial death that survives even in nations and under regimes that define themselves as strictly secular.

## **Dualism as the institutional embedding of the enemy scenario**

Dualism and dual organisation are classic topics in social anthropology. Although anthropologists generally recognise that dualism is associated with antagonism and competition, they have mostly been studied as institutions that facilitate marriage transactions and other 'positive' exchanges. Dual organisation makes possible one of the most straightforward applications of the rule of exogamy. The society is divided into two halves (called moieties) whose men exchange their sisters and daughters — a practice called 'restricted exchange' by Lévi-Strauss (1967). Cognitive anthropologists,

7 Girard based himself on Métraux's work (1967). The Huguenot Jean de Léry (1578, 1994) who stayed in Brazil from 1556–1558 is the most important eyewitness of Tupinamba cannibalism and a source for Métraux.

among them the later Lévi-Strauss, relate these structures to the binary operation of the human mind. No anthropologist, to my knowledge, has looked at classical moieties as vehicles of consensual antagonism.

Most of the communities in this study are divided into named territorial and antagonistic moieties. They compete in sports, hunting and in the discharge of community work. They confront one another in stick fights. These confrontations are strictly non-violent, in the sense that spears are forbidden and bloodshed should be avoided at all cost. The community thrives on the mimetic energies that are mustered in the many forms of competition. Many daily activities are staged as occasions for competition: from fetching water to composing songs and dancing. During feasts, villages, sections and age-sets compete in keeping the floor to make their own tunes and songs heard. Although the risk of violence is never completely absent, the ambiance during contests at the lower levels of social inclusiveness usually remains playful.

The territorial and age-class organisation of the communities being studied is systematically structured in polarised pairs: successive age-sets facing one another; the two senior age-sets of a generation-facing the two junior ones; while alternating generation-sets form opposed blocks; the retired elders and aspiring young men forming one block against the ruling generation-set and its alternates. Among the Lotuho, the resulting pair of permanent generational moieties carry proper names. In many communities, women are organised in the same way, their age-sets mirroring those of the men. There are institutional settings where the men and the women of the community act as competing political blocks, for example, in the investigation of the cause of drought.

The victimary drive in dualism becomes visible when we turn to inter-communal relations. There, the polarisation has not crystallised into stable pairs of moieties or named corporate groups. Inter-communal relations in our area of study are ruled by what the British anthropologist, Evans-Pritchard, has called “complementary segmentary opposition”. The characteristic feature of this system is the existence of several levels of hostile polarisation. Polarisation on one level is superseded by polarisation on a higher level. People who face each other as antagonists on one level are allies when faced with a higher level common outsider. This outsider, in turn, may be an ally on a more inclusive level when a remoter outsider has to be confronted.

The classic description of this type of political system is Evans-Pritchard’s study, *The Nuer*. Between the village and Nuer society as a whole (an entity which is defined in opposition to other peoples such as the Dinka), there are at least five different levels: tertiary (not in all tribes), secondary and primary sections, tribes, tribal coalitions and Eastern versus Western Nuer. Evans-Pritchard uses the following diagram to represent the mutual inclusion and exclusion of segments on different levels.

**D. Complementary segmentary opposition** (based on Evans-Pritchard, 1940b:144)

A	B		
<p>The complementary tribes A and B are united in their opposition to external enemies (<i>the enemies are not represented in the diagram</i>)</p> <p>The antagonism of tribe A and B (and others not shown) leads to occasional warfare that keeps the primary sections of both (only X and Y of B shown here) united.</p>	<b>X1</b>	<b>Y1</b>	<b>Y 1</b>
	<p>The primary sections X and Y occasionally fight thus unifying their secondary sections X1 and X2 and Y1 and Y2.</p>	<p>The tertiary sections of Y1 (not shown here) and of Y2 stay united because of the antagonism of Y1 and Y2</p>	
	<b>X2</b>	<b>z1</b>	<b>Y2</b>
	<p>The antagonism with X1 keeps the tertiary sections of X2 (not shown) united</p>	<p>The tertiary sections of Y2 occasionally fight</p>	
		<b>z2</b>	
		<p>The fights between z1 and z2 strengthen the cohesion between local descent groups that make up z2</p>	

When the tertiary sections z1 and z2 have a conflict, they will be left to fight it out by themselves. In a conflict between z1 and Y1, all of Z unite as Y2. Similarly in a confrontation between villages belonging to the primary sections X and Y, all of Y will take the opposite camp from X. In a conflict between the two tribes A and B, X and Y must unite to face A, and so on.<sup>8</sup>

From the village level to the tribal level, restrictions on the use of violence in settling conflicts gradually diminish. In the village, only wooden sticks or clubs may be used in fighting; between tribes spears are the rule. The relations between sections are expressed and defined by feuds and occasional violent clashes, on the one hand, and by routine procedures to settle conflicts, on the other. War, feuds and stick fights define the boundaries of the groups that make up Nuer society. Which group identity is relevant in a particular encounter and which level of consensus an individual social actor should comply with depends on the situation of the moment.

Evans-Pritchard is very brief in his description of the interaction between killer and victim and on the social consequences of the killing for the killer. He obviously considers it an issue which requires a different, symbolic, type of analysis. The

8 Other classics in the study of 'complementary segmentary opposition' are: Barth on the Pathans of Pakistan (1959) and Gellner on the Berbers of the Moroccan Atlas (1969); important contributions to the discussion on the nature of segmentary systems are Smith (1956), Sahlins (1961), Sigrist (1967), Holy (1979) and Kelly (1985).

information that the killer, before being allowed back into normal life, has to have his upper arm cut with a fishing-spear<sup>9</sup> by the 'Master of the Land'<sup>10</sup> to remove the blood of the victim from his body, is evidence of the victimary significance of the Nuer system of complementary opposition (1940b:152).

I propose to study the volatile, situational groupings that emerge from hostile polarisation in societies organised on lines of complementary opposition as outcomes of the same morphogenetic principle as the more permanent 'dual organisations' that form the choice evidence of the structuralists. This means a departure from Durkheimian, structuralist analysis where dual organisations are studied as part of all-embracing cosmological classifications that derive their dualism from the way the human mind works, not from a social necessity (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963; Lévi-Strauss, 1958:147–180, 1962).

From a passage in *Violence and the Sacred*, it appears that Girard initially considered dual organisation as not being amenable to victimary analysis.<sup>11</sup> Yet, a few pages down, he provides us with an admirable analysis of ritual hostility at the occasion of weddings between intermarrying Tsimshian sections. He concludes: "In sum, the [intermarrying] groups agree never to be completely at peace, so that their members may find it easier to be at peace among themselves." (1977:249)<sup>12</sup>

Girard is here more direct to the point than in his analysis of Tupinamba cannibalism. To apply the scapegoat mechanism to Tupinamba cannibalism, Girard feels obliged to explain how an external enemy becomes an internal scapegoat. He, therefore, puts great emphasis on the 'domestication' of the enemy during the period between his capture and execution when the captive receives VIP treatment from his host community. It is only after this assimilation to his captors that he can stand in as a victim for the benefit of the community.

While the concepts of 'enemy scenario' and 'dualism', as developed here, would have saved Girard the detour of a preliminary domestication to turn the captured enemy into an effective victim, Girard's analysis pointedly shows the equivalence of the enemy victim with a domestic scapegoat. When analysing the relationship between the Nilotic king and his people, we shall see that the reverse is also true: the king deals with his subjects as if both parties to the interaction were enemies.

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9 The symbolism underlying the use of the fishing-spear should be understood in the contrasting values Nilotic cosmology attributes to water and blood. More on this in Chapter Nineteen.

10 The *kuaar muon* is in the literature known as the 'leopard-skin chief'.

11 "There are perhaps two fundamental types of society which overlap to some extent: those that have central authority essentially monarchical in character and those having no such authority, disclosing no trace of generative violence in their political institutions — the so-called dual systems" (1977:305). The French original (1972:424) has '*organisations duelles*' for 'dual systems'. Again in *Des choses cachées* Girard reaffirms this dividing line: "...in the so-called dual societies, central authority has never existed and no one has ever thought of making it up" (1978:63; my translation).

12 The French original is more pointed: "...on s'entend pour ne jamais s'entendre, afin de s'entendre un peu mieux au sein de chaque groupe" (1972, in 2007b:602–603).

## **Centralism as the institutional embedding of the scapegoat scenario**

The main aim of this book is to demonstrate that kingship is an institutional complex that is powered by the scapegoat mechanism. In contrast to war, kingship follows a scenario in which collective aggressiveness is discharged onto a single member of the group. In times of collective distress, the person or group designated as a potential victim receives the blame for disaster and disorder, and provides the group with opportunities to affirm its threatened integrity. Whatever affirmative transactions may take place in times of good fortune, the default relationship between king and people is one of hostility. If a community suffers disaster or defeat, the king is held responsible for not having protected his people, even of having unleashed the disaster. An exchange of accusations follows in which the king will try to shift the blame to the people and seek solutions that de-escalate the crisis. The king will not deny that he is angry or upset but accuse his people of having caused his anger. This opens the door for negotiations. The king's demands may vary from restorative sacrifices or payment of tribute to a plea for a change of heart of his people, for forgiveness and reconciliation. If the people choose to negotiate, they will take measures that mitigate the hostility and re-engage the king as their benefactor. If they do not, force will be used to break the king's stubbornness. Kings who fail to avert the crisis will eventually die as victims of the fury of their people. Their bodies will be left in the bush just like those of enemies slain on the battlefield.

In many societies, including those in our area of study, natural disasters figure prominently among the crises the king is called to deal with: drought, epidemics, plagues. The recurrent character of certain natural disasters makes for frequent opportunities for king and people to come to grips with one another. As kings grow more versatile in leading their people through crises, their rule will become more permanent. They will find ways to consolidate their rule and avoid an untimely death.

Confrontations between kings and their subjects carry lots of suspense. It is not accidental that some of the greatest works of literature are king's dramas. Long before these dramas were canonised by the authors of the Mahabharata, the Greek tragedians and Shakespeare, they were the life blood of politics in the first centralist formations. To understand the nature of kingship, the volatile centralist formations studied in this book are more telling than the stable states that later evolved out of these formations, let alone contemporary constitutional monarchies. States only offer a frozen and lopsided reflection of the vigour and dramatic reversibility of roles in early kingship. In contemporary constitutional monarchies, the king has almost completely been insulated from real political drama. The drama has shifted to the arenas of democratic decision-making, elections and street protests.



*Lokoya age-mates in festive attire on the way to the New Year celebrations, Liria, 1986; note the syncretistic elements. Photo by Eisei Kurimoto.*

This book relates and reconstructs the dramas played out by the historic kings of the Bari, Lotuho, Lokoya, Pari and Lulubo. Since these societies did not have writing, we have to rely on oral traditions and on the observations of explorers, traders, colonial officials and missionaries who dealt with the kings before the colonial administration drastically curtailed their freedom to deal with their subjects as they felt fit, and vice-versa. Almost 80 years elapsed between the first contacts of explorers, traders and missionaries with local royalty and the effective establishment of colonial rule which only occurred when the Lotuho, Lokoya, Lulubo and Pari were incorporated into the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in 1914. Only the Bari underwent a measure of administration under the Uganda Protectorate (1898–1914). The Turco-Egyptian (1871–1885) and Mahdist administrations (1888–1898) hardly interfered in the relationship between local rulers and their subjects.

In order to obtain a relatively unbiased picture of events, I brought together, and cross-checked, accounts from oral history with reports of explorers, colonial officers and missionaries. For a number of kings, it proved possible to draw a picture of their careers as victims and idols of their people that is sufficiently complete to serve as evidence for the argument of this study.

In understanding sacral kingship, anthropologists have often had recourse to the concepts of ‘god’ and ‘divinity’ — as if these referred to self-evident phenomena. James Frazer coined the term ‘divine kingship’ to refer to kings whose installation was staged as a capture of the new king by a spirit. His key example was the king of the Shilluk of

South Sudan who was captured by Nyikang, the spirit of the founder of the dynasty (Frazer, 1913, Part III, p. 14–34). Frazer, however, excluded from this category the kings who are the subject matter of this book. They were classified as ‘magical kings’ and were supposed to represent a more primitive stage in the development of the institution of kingship.<sup>13</sup> At their installation, they were not captured by a spirit but, in Frazer’s view, imposed themselves claiming cosmological powers and abusing the credulity of their subjects. In fact, as we shall see later, the kings in this study were installed after being either captured as a wild, predating animal — a leopard (Lokoya), or a crocodile (Lotuho), or selected as a sacrificial animal (Bari, Lulubo) that will take diseases and disasters with it in its death.

With Girard’s victimary theory, it is possible to overcome Frazer’s artificial distinction. ‘King’ and ‘god’ are personifications of different, successive stages of the unfolding of the scapegoat mechanism. The ‘king’ dramatises the events preceding the elimination of the victim while in the worship of divinity, the aftermath of the elimination is highlighted: the victim-saviour being worshipped in his accomplished transcendence.

Compared to the cult of divinity, the living king lends itself far more easily to lively and dramatic enactments of the original scenario. Kingship puts a live victim centre stage. Divinity, as the apotheosis of something absent, must always be *re-presented*. For this reason, sacred kingship is one of Girard’s favourite institutions to demonstrate the explanatory power of the scapegoat mechanism (1978:64–65).

According to Girard, modern thinking narrows the conception of the divine to the *supernatural* and *non-empirical*. It conceives God-like qualities attributed to kings are envisaged as something separate, added on later in an attempt to make the monarch look more important, or to legitimate his power:

Everyone repeats that the king is a kind of ‘living god’ but no one says that the divinity is a kind of dead king, which would be just as accurate. In the end, there is a persistent preference for viewing the sacrifice and sacredness of the king as a secondary and supplementary idea, for we must beware of rocking our little conceptual boat. Yet what guides our interpretation is only a conceptual system dominated by the idea of divinity, a *theology*. Scepticism about religion does not abolish this theological perspective. We are forced to reinterpret all religious schemata in terms of divinity because we are unaware of the surrogate victim.<sup>12</sup> If one examines psychoanalysis and Marxism closely it becomes evident that this theology is indispensable for them. (1987c:57)

The conception of the separate existence of worldly and divine power in sacred kingship, denounced as “theological” by Girard, is still characteristic of most of the

13 “Among the tribes which cherish these beliefs [in the magical powers of the king] and observe these customs [killing of the rainmaker if he fails to perform] are the Latuka, Bari, Laluba (*sic*) and Lokoiya” (Frazer, 1913, Part I, Vol. 1:p. 345). The Pari who are the fifth group studied in this book would certainly have been included in Frazer’s list if, at the time, they had also been under the administration of the Uganda Protectorate one of whose officials Frazer is quoting, and not under the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium of the Sudan.

work done on African kingship. The structural-functionalist position in this respect is very similar to the Marxist one. Research is focused on the establishment of correspondences between the 'religious level' and the 'politico-economic level' which are conceived as separate entities in which the latter as the infrastructure, shapes the profile of the former, the superstructure.

An illustration of the contradictions this theoretical stance leads to is offered by Evans-Pritchard's and Fortes' introduction to *African Political Systems* considered a classic text in the development of anthropological theory on political systems. The authors present the 'mystical' and 'ritual' values 'attached' to offices of central authority as 'the ideological superstructure of political organisation' (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard, 1940:3, 17). This superstructure is conceived as a duplication of the social structure 'on a mystical plane, where it figures as a system of sacred values beyond criticism or revision' (p.18). The authors advise researchers to keep ideology and political organisation strictly separate in the course of investigation 'because the nature of the connexion is a major problem in sociology' (p. 3). At the same time, they concede that the members of an African society do not look beyond the symbols in which their institutions are immersed because 'it might well be held that if he [the subject of the African king] understood their objective meaning they would lose the power they have over him (p. 18). So we reach the paradoxical theoretical position of two identical political systems: one, profane, examined by anthropologists but overlooked by the participants, and the other, 'mystical', of primary importance to the participants, but considered as a secondary elaboration by anthropologists.

### **Frazer's scapegoat king**

Following a period during which Frazer functioned as a kind of scapegoat of modern anthropology (Boon, 1983:149), a number of anthropologists working along structuralist precepts again admit indebtedness to Frazer's inspiration.<sup>14</sup> Luc De Heusch even speaks of "Frazer's camp" in anthropology (1984:301–314' 1985:98). In addition to De Heusch, this group includes, Alfred Adler, the author of a detailed study of Moundang kingship in Chad, and Jean-Claude Muller, who investigated kingship among the Rukuba in central Nigeria. Adler considers the research programme set out by Evans-Pritchard and Fortes a failure (1978:29, 1982:15). In traditional Africa, the political is immersed in symbolism and can be isolated from it only at the cost of a serious distortion of the facts. Whatever exists in the way of competition for power coincides with "heraldry: insignia, coats of arms, sacra, regalia, etc." (1982:402). While distancing himself from Frazer's evolutionist views and from his work on magic, Adler avows that without Frazer's 'dogma' of regicide, his material on Moundang kingship could not have been deciphered (1979:194). Nowhere, however, do we find a discussion or explicitation of this dogma.

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14 For a general discussion of the present Frazer revival see also: Douglas, 1978; Wood, 1982; Boon, 1983.

What Adler retains of *The Golden Bough* are a few themes. In his major study (1982), for instance, he makes use of the theme of the ‘magical king’ whose power is demonstrated by his control of nature. In his analysis of the annual ritual cycle (1979:193–207) he retains the Frazerian idea of the king as ‘scapegoat’. According to Adler this scapegoat role is meant to counterbalance the overestimation of his power during the rest of the year (1982:394) — a conclusion which rather deviates from Frazer’s ‘dogma’.

Jean-Claude Muller also reckons himself part of the new generation that has divested itself of the structural-functionalist prejudices against Frazer. In his ‘*Le Roi bouc émissaire*’ (The Scapegoat King) Muller describes how the Rukuba blame and depose their kings for allowing disasters to befall the country, and how they kill a royal substitute as part of the installation ceremony. Despite the inclusion of a brief presentation of Girard’s theory (1980:164), Muller refuses to look beyond the interpretations which the Rukuba give of their royal institutions (1980: 473).

De Heusch has criticised Girard on several occasions by referring to particular African rituals and myths of kingship as evidence contradicting the alleged general applicability of the victimary thesis (1985:98–124). It is not necessary to discuss this evidence, since De Heusch’s assumption that Girard’s scapegoat mechanism should be directly manifest in ritual practice and myth is wrong. In Girard’s theory, the scapegoat mechanism has the status of a structuring device which is not *represented* but organises practice and belief while being *misrepresented*.

The way cultures represent victimary violence is, according to Girard, necessarily distorted, since no society can afford to admit explicitly its violent origins. Instead, each culture produces a deliberate misinterpretation of the process, throwing light on some of its aspects while obscuring others.<sup>15</sup> These misrepresentations follow directly from the negative transference of the group towards the victim before his elimination — the victim being portrayed as evil while the victimisers pretend innocence — and the positive transference afterwards — which results in the attribution of superhuman powers to the victim.

Since the ‘Frazerian structuralists’ limit themselves to the study of the inner coherence of representations and do not ask the question of their genesis and function, their interpretations leave the victimary content largely implicit. This content can only be brought to light by a hermeneutic tool that interprets the beliefs and practices that constitute ‘divine kingship’ as part of a larger whole that is cognisant of their origin and function. Such a tool is the victimary model. It does greater justice to Frazer’s intuitions than the authors just mentioned. Let us list the main characteristics attributed in Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* to divine kingship and set them off against the victimary model:

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15 “To keep its structuring power intact, the founding violence should not come to the surface. Misrecognition [*méconnaissance*] is indispensable for any religious and post-religious structuring” (Girard, 1972:430; my translation).

**E. Frazer's themes that connect kingship and scapegoating**

1. The idea that the king has power over nature and the related practice to aggress and kill him when this power fails (Part I, *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, esp. vol.1);
2. The idea that, in a later stage of intellectual development, the king's power is believed to emanate from a divinity incarnate in the king (Part I, *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, esp. vol.2);
3. The idea that the community rids itself of evil by transferring it onto a scapegoat who may be a king (Part VI, *The Scapegoat*);
4. The idea that the king is equated with a *dying god* who through his death regenerates the forces of nature (Parts III, *The Dying God*; IV, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*; and V, *The Spirits of the Corn and the Wild*).

In *The Golden Bough*, these themes are not brought together in an organic whole. Once Frazer's scheme is shorn of its evolutionist and intellectualist assumptions the listed dimensions of kingship easily reveal their victimary coherence:

**F. The scapegoat model as a construct integrating Frazer's concepts of the magical and divine king, the scapegoat and the dying god as moments in a single transformational sequence**

1. *Mimetic crisis*: for Frazer, human behaviour, including conflict, is determined by ideas; he lacks a theory of the pre-reflective origin and nature of conflict;
2. *Polarisation*: Frazer is not interested in social processes of escalating tension that lead to the designation of a scapegoat, but he perceives the link between collective misfortune and the aggression against scapegoats including *magical kings*—although in the latter case he tends to consider the magical kings' fate as the just reward for their bluff (Theme 1);
3. *The transference of collective evil* onto a scapegoat who may be a human being (witch, king), a demon, a god and even an inanimate object. It is a great achievement of Frazer to have identified, for the first time, a wide range of practices from all over the world as the single phenomenon of scapegoating (Theme 3);
4. *The victimisation of the scapegoat* (Frazer 1, 3 and 4);
5. *The positive transfiguration of the victim*  
The death of kings is a source of blessings. Most of Frazer's *dying gods* are transfigured, divinised, scapegoat kings. Instead of killing the king or waiting for his regenerative death, the ruling king, at his installation, is invested by his ancestors' healing and cosmic powers, thus becoming a *divine king* (Frazer 2 and 4).

On the last point, Frazer's presentation is unnecessarily cumbersome, since most of the dying gods that Frazer comes up with are originally murdered kings (Dionysus, Adonis, Osiris).

## Unequal exchange

Our discussion has focused on the negative dimension of the relationship between king and people. I have argued that the fundamental role of the king — that of keeping his people united and at peace — is a function of the antagonism between the two. When the tension mounts in a period of crisis and people look for its causes, the blame will ultimately be directed to the king and, if the crisis is not resolved, this may lead to his expulsion. However, in times of peace and plenty, the same principle of attributing accountability will be used by the king to make claims for the good he is doing. The relationship between king and people cannot just be a series of confrontations. To be sustainable, king and people should also be able to understand and operate their relationship as an ongoing exchange in which the blessings operated by the king are reciprocated by demonstrations of appreciation by his people and vice-versa.

First launched in 1924 in Marcel Mauss's famous *Essai sur le don*, the notion of reciprocal exchange is central to the work of the structural anthropologists. Lévi-Strauss, in *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (1967), demonstrates that reciprocity is the fundamental morphogenetic principle that accounts for the wide variety of forms in which kinship is organised worldwide. In *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*, Lévi-Strauss presents the rule that a man should not marry from his own group but give his sisters and daughters to men of other groups as a strategy that avoids conflict and builds bridges of peace with actually or potentially hostile groups (1967:68–69; 98–101). Instead of satisfying his desire to get a woman in his own group, a man has to approach strangers and engage in negotiations to obtain one of their women as his wife. On the other hand, he has to treat the women in his own group as 'peace capital'. Radicalising his argument Lévi-Strauss comes to defend the thesis that the incest prohibition is just a corollary, the flip side, of the injunction to exchange.

In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard devotes a whole chapter to a refutation of this subordination of the negative incest prohibition to the positive obligation to exchange (1972:305–345). According to Girard, before any transaction qualifying as an exchange of women can take place, there has to be a set of ordered relationships based on the distinction between relations of alliance (husband-wife), consanguinity (brother-sister) and filiation (parent-child). These distinctions can only emerge as a consequence of the incest prohibition. Without it, there are no clear-cut fathers, brothers, husbands and sons, no wives, daughters and sisters, only males — some dominant, others subordinate — competing over the possession of females. By arguing the primacy of prohibition over exchange, Girard defends the decisive role of the victimary mechanism in the emergence of human culture. Prohibiting any conduct that triggers or even evokes the violence of the mimetic crisis is an obvious step only when the community has experienced the peace of the scapegoat mechanism. Girard sticks to the Durkheimian distinction between 'positive' and 'negative' religious practices, things you should do and things you should not do, rituals and prohibitions.

Eric Gans, one of the first students of Girard to carry out his own research in victimary theory, has given an interesting elaboration of his master's insistence on the independent socio-morphogenetic role of prohibition. He developed a processual model that shows how cultural practices of exchange and sharing emerge in a situation when heightened tension over the possession of an attractive object is cut short by a group's sudden awareness of the violence that will follow if all individuals reach out for the same object. Like Girard's scapegoat mechanism, Gans's primeval drama can be summarised as a sequence of five moments:

**G. The scenario of aborted violence**

1. *nascent mimetic rivalry* provoked by the simultaneous desire of a number of individuals for the same appetising object;
2. a *premonition of imminent violence* followed by an *alarming gesture* make the group shrink away from reaching out for the attractive object;
3. in the shared fearful attention following the alarm the object appears dangerous; it undergoes a *negative transfiguration*;
4. the deferral of a violent crisis relieves the fearful tension and transforms it into a sensation of *non-violent togetherness* resulting in a *positive transfiguration* of the object;
5. the doubly transfigured object is now available for a non-violent appropriation by the group of individuals that is transforming itself into a *community* that will reproduce their non-violent co-existence in events in which the object (or its substitutes) is ceremonially shared and celebrated.

Gans's model is the mirror image of the scapegoat mechanism. The two models describe symmetrically inverse operations. While the scapegoat mechanism transforms an abhorred victim into a sacred 'subject' in a violent conjunction of rivals, prohibition transforms a focus of mimetic attraction into a sacred object by a non-violent disjunction of the rivals. While the object of prohibition is ultimately internalised by the community in an act of sharing, the scapegoat ends up as an object of worship external to the community. The non-event of the abortion of violence is the condition for a social praxis of the exchange of real values, while the scapegoating event is reproduced in a ritual praxis that addresses an imaginary transcendence.

This model makes it possible to build a bridge between mimetic theory and the intuitions of the early Lévi-Strauss who understands gift exchange as a strategy to avoid and overcome conflict but does not spell out how institutions of reciprocal exchange could have emerged in an essentially conflictual context. The object of appropriative mimesis that Gans had in mind when designing his model was an object shared in a group at the same time and place, for example, a game animal. (Gans, 1985:14). I believe the model works just as well, or maybe even better, when applied to other exchangeable values, including a partner for sex and procreation. The sacred horror with which society reacts to incest may even evoke the drama of the

abortive gesture more vividly than the scorn that hits the hungry hunter who reaches out to the forbidden heap of flesh. It is clear that the joint involvement in networks of matrimonial exchange establishes a moral presence between the partners which is structurally of the same order as that of the participants in Gans' ceremonial meal. The fact that the 'consummation' of marriage does not necessarily take place in the physical presence of the group, does not, of course, place it outside its moral presence.

While safeguarding the connection between prohibitions and the imminence of violence from being subordinated to Lévi-Strauss's exclusive focus on exchange, Gans, in turn, underrates the fundamental role of the scapegoat mechanism in the generation of social consensus by subordinating it to his 'model of the aborted gesture' — or 'aborted violence'. Gans argues that the extreme polarisations that are assumed in Girard's scapegoat mechanism could only have occurred among mimetically advanced hominids, already endowed with the faculty of speech, representation, and with a sense of the nature of prohibition not among the hominids still protected by their instinctual dominance patterns, that Gans stages in his scenario of the aborted violence. Girard's reply to this is that prohibitions can only take hold when a group knows what extreme polarisation is. How, otherwise, can one explain the extreme apprehension of an outbreak of violence among Gans' proto-humans?

Anthropological studies of systems of exchange have demonstrated that marriage transactions (such as Lévi-Strauss, 1967), the exchange of valuables (such as Malinowski, 1922) and the distribution of food (such as Rappaport, 1968) depend on principles which cannot be derived from political and economic considerations. They are procedures to maintain *sociality* where otherwise *hostility* would reign. The gift, in its quality as symbol of the social relationship, is often more important than the material satisfaction the given object provides. In many objects that are exchanged, the symbolic value prevails over the use-value.

Exchange has its own dynamic of creating social inequality. As Mauss has convincingly argued, the process of exchanging gifts creates inequality between the giving and the receiving party. The giver puts the recipient under an obligation to acknowledge his gift by reciprocating it. As long as the gift is not reciprocated, the recipient is indebted — putting the giver in a superior position. This superiority does not derive from commonplace considerations of credit and debt but from the fact that the gift is a move in a strategy to avoid, contain and replace potential violence. As long as the gift has not been reciprocated, the sole credit for having taken the 'social' option of exchange against keeping the option of conflict open, goes to the giver. This double character of the gift — affirmation of peaceful intentions of the giver and its potential to become a cause of conflict if disregarded by the recipient — provides the gift with a sacred charge.<sup>16</sup>

As long as the partners in the cycle of transactions are capable of reciprocating, the inequality created by the gift exchange will only be temporary. But if one of the

16 The Maori, who call this sacred quality of the exchanged object *hau*, attribute a revenging power to it when the partners in the exchange betray the friendship of which the object is the material symbol (Mauss, 1990:10–12).

partners is not or only partly able to reciprocate, the relationship will gradually turn unequal. The power of the anthropological figure of the *Big Man* is rooted in this inequality.

## **The two sources of the king's power**

The victimary scenario of kingship puts king and people face-to-face, exchanging hostilities, the people accusing the king of their troubles, the king — while returning the blame and seeking ways out of his predicament — a potential victim for scapegoating. As a purely victimary institution, kingship would not be sustainable. In a society where military might is defined by the number of able-bodied men a leader can put into the field, the primeval king, being a minority, would normally be the loser. Kingship only becomes a sustainable option when king and people have other mechanisms at their disposal to build their relationship. This is where gift exchange comes in. When it is possible to manage routine conflicts by gift exchange and the payment of fines, the relationship of king and people has a chance to stabilise and it becomes possible for both to engage constructively.

In fact, in the communities in our field of study, the day-to-day interactions between king and people revolve around exchange. The king is believed to be the provider of rain, an unparalleled gift creating a perpetual indebtedness among his people. His subjects acknowledge their debt by giving him wives; cultivating his field; providing him with firewood and other daily necessities; pampering him with choice cuts of game and all sorts of seasonal delicacies (termites, honey), and so on.

Since the rains are unpredictable, they can be the occasion for a lot of drama. When the rains are prompt, the king is spoilt with gifts. But if they persistently fail, a problem in the relationship of king and people is suspected. Investigations are carried out. Both sides will consult diviners who will come up with unresolved issues (unpaid debts, unwarranted violence by an age-set or section, an offence against the king, a destitute widow left to her own devices, and so on) and give advice on ways to address the problem. When the rains are regular and people start taking their king for granted, the king will use a spell of drought as an opportunity to remind the people of his powers and claim his due. People will first oblige but if the drought persists, they will conclude that the fault must lie with the king. A point will be reached when the community will fall back on its default response to crisis. The king will meet his fate as envisaged by the scapegoat model.

As the pivot of the cycles of exchange inside his community and as the main interface of his community with outsiders, the king has all that it takes to become a *Big Man*. The Oceanist anthropologist Marshall Sahlins is the main architect of the concept of *Big Man*. He describes him as a 'social entrepreneur' whose aim it is to 'amass a fund of power' with which he can 'create and use social relations which give him leverage on others' production and the ability to siphon off an excess product (1962–63:292). This excess product is normally spent on the organisation of feasts and food distributions with which the *Big Man* obtains more 'social credit' and 'prestige'.

Sahlins contrasts the *Big Man* which, according to him, is a typical Melanesian phenomenon, with the Polynesian *chief*. The *Big Man* is the product of a personal career, in which he is 'a fisher of men' always trying to increase the number of his dependants. He competes with other men for pre-eminence, using economic, political and magical powers in this struggle. In contrast to this, the authority of the Polynesian 'chiefs' is ascribed. Chiefs related to a well-defined section of the society. Their power is not the end-product of a career but is believed to reside in the office and in the *mana* ['charisma'] inherent in the chiefly line.

The power of the Nilotic king is a combination of both. While his royal power depends primarily on the chancy operation of his inherited rain-charisma, it is sustained by exchange practices that turn him into a *Big Man*. The two types of power compare as follows:

#### H. The power of the king compared to that of the Big Man

KING	BIG MAN
Office: source of power is transcendent to social give and take;	Status: source of power is immanent to social give and take;
Selection to office ascribed and endorsed by community in a collective sacralising act, either a curse or a blessing;	Power of status achieved as a result of the accumulation of wealth that is invested in the mobilisation of dependants (wives, clients) who enable him to accumulate even more wealth, and so on;
Position defined in opposition to all other members of the community;	Position defined in competition with other <i>Big Men</i> as a function of one's number of dependants;
Typical relation to others: bless and curse, leader in war and interlocutor of the enemy in peace negotiations;	Typical relation to others: patronage and protection;
Power conceived as separate of the incumbent;	Power closely associated with personal career.
Continuity of office by succession to office	Continuity of status by inheritance of one's wealth;
Tendentially centralist.	Dispersed, competing, foci of power.

In the myths about the origin of kingship, the king's power comes from a location outside the community, from heaven (for example, among the Bari), from the bush (in the staging of the inauguration rituals of the Lokoya) or from the depths of the water (in Lotuho dynastic myth). The fact that succession is conceived as the result of the conjunction of a transcendent power with the concrete person of the king opens the possibility for the king to be false. His relationship with the transcendent could

be a sham. This explains that the succession to the kingship is normally subjected to all sorts of restrictive rules, not only aimed at reducing the number of competitors for the throne but also to ensure that no 'false' king ascends the throne.

In Lotuho, for example, the successor should be a child from parents both of whom are of rain descent. Before nominating the prince-elect, the biographies of candidates are scrutinised for indications of extraordinariness. If there remains doubt, communities may force their would-be Rainmaker to undergo an ordeal or to engage in a rainmaking contest.<sup>17</sup> Once there is a candidate who fulfils the criteria and shows hints of extraordinariness, the kind of circular mimetic process ensues that is as admirably described by Ernest Gellner for the selection of the *agurram*, the charismatic leaders in the Moroccan Atlas:

*Agurram*-hood is in the eye of the beholder. But that isn't quite right: *agurram*hood is in the eyes of the beholders—all of them in a sense squint to see what is in the eyes of other beholders, and if they can see it there, then they see it also. Collectively this characteristic is an ascription, but for any one man, it is an objective fact, an inherent characteristic: if all others see it in a man, then, for any single beholder, that man truly has it (Gellner, 1969:74).

The *Big Man* Polynesian or Nilotic is the product of an entirely different, more down to earth process. From among his peers, he rises to a position of prestige by clever use of manpower, social connections and wealth. He is a product of upward mobility.

The benefits the subjects receive from their king, and the way in which these are received, contrast with the advantages the dependents and clients receive from their *Big Men*. In the case of the latter, the advantages are distributed individually; they are tangible and often have an important material component (food, bridewealth, prestige goods). In the case of the king, the benefits accrue to the collectivity as a whole. They often have a cosmological or sociological dimension (protection against disaster, the unity of the group, national glory).

*Big man* dynamics are active in all societies covered in this study. Only in exceptional circumstances does a *Big Man* make the leap to kingship. But a king is always a *Big Man*, having more wives (from his people's gifts) and children, benefiting from the collective labour of his subjects. Being the lynchpin of regional trade<sup>18</sup>, the king has more to offer as a patron of the poor and will have more clients than *Big Men* who are commoners. While his power of kingship comes from the beyond, he is likely to be the 'biggest man' around.

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17 This custom is practised by the Logir, one of the Lotuho-speaking groups in Eastern Equatoria.

18 For example: Polanyi, 1944:43–55; Ekholm, 1972:128ff; Claessen, 1984:30.



*The royal drums of Loronyo, the capital of Lotuho kings of the Mayya Dynasty, 2009*

## **Early kingship and the genesis of the state**

An unintended spin-off of the endeavour to apply Girard's scapegoat theory to the analysis of kingship in the southern Sudan was the discovery, during the analysis of my field data, of the structural homology between the consensual antagonism played out in the relationship between king and people and the oppositional dynamics underlying territorial and age organisation. As I shall demonstrate in Chapters Seven, Eight and Ten, in all three cases — territorial organisation, age-organisation and kingship — the interactions between the antagonists follow a confrontational, potentially violent scenario that results, in principle, in one or more victims.

As I have argued above, dualism is institutionalised on two levels, on the inter-communal level as warfare in which descent-based and/or territorial groups of matching scope of inclusiveness are mobilised as adversaries with the aim of making victims among their opposite number, and secondly, on the intra-communal level, as competition between equivalent, fixed sections and moieties in which the use of violence is strictly controlled and victimisation prohibited. The latter situation is what anthropologists usually label as *dual organisation*. Centralism institutionalises around a central actor (individual or group) confronting a larger, surrounding, peripheral group — consisting of devotees, supporters, dependents who may, at times, turn into persecutors — and results in formations that are marked by social inequality.

The question presents itself whether this homology between dualist and centralist consensual antagonism offers a clue as to how centralist formations, including kingship and the state, developed out of more egalitarian, dualistically structured, social

formations. The origin of social inequality and the emergence of the state have been key questions in anthropology since Rousseau. Anthropological studies have mostly examined external conditions that correlate with the emergence of central authority and the state, such as the development of the productive forces resulting in a surplus production that can feed an upper class, long distance trade, the rise in population numbers, or else looked at systemic functions performed by the new institutions of central control (coordination of production, adjudication, safeguarding the position of the ruling class). Little attention has gone to the political dramas that must have been part of this transformation of social relations from relative equality to inequality.

I believe that the kingdoms that are the subject of this book offer us a glimpse of these dramas of transition. We are dealing with kings whose sovereignty had an extremely volatile character. In fact, every rainy season was a test of their royal legitimacy, not only of their effectiveness as Rainmakers but also of their capacity to maintain internal peace and keep enemies at bay. Rivals, from the ruling rain family or from rain clans of neighbouring communities, were always waiting around the corner to take over. Popular suspicion that the king had turned against his people led to head-on confrontations in which the king's life was at stake. As we shall see in Chapter Nine, the nervousness with which moves of enemies were monitored often also characterised the community's dealings with the king, and vice-versa. The outcome of the confrontations was not predetermined. They could mean the king's demise, but they could also work in the king's favour. If the rains were timely, the enemies suffered defeat and internal peace prevailed, his success was likely to breed more success culminating in recognition by an ever widening range of communities including former enemies.

The relationship between the early kings and their 'subjects' was full of suspense. In fact the people these kings were ruling had not been transformed into *subjects*, they had not been *subjected*. Yet, if we study the interactions of these kings with their people, it soon becomes apparent that their main purpose was to strengthen their grip on the people. Chapter Eleven shows that the kings did everything they could to tip the balance of power to their side and become irrevocable, omnipotent, *sovereigns*<sup>19</sup>. They did this by economic means using the possibilities offered by the *Big Man* scenario, by manipulation of their dynastic antecedents and — last but not least — by allying themselves with the builders of commercial and political empires that appeared on the Nile in the middle of the nineteenth century.

So the kingdoms studied in this book may offer a unique window on a crucial phase in the evolution of political systems: one in which the control of the use of physical force is 'not yet' monopolised by the king, or in other words, in which the use of force by the people against a king perceived as obstructive to their interests was not less *legitimate* than the king's use of force against some of his people who were perceived as disobedient.

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19 'Sovereign' is derived from Medieval Latin *superanus* an adjective meaning 'on top'; cf. *soprano* derived from the same root, meaning 'the top of the vocal range'.

I qualify this window as unique because once a king can more or less credibly claim the monopoly of the use of physical force, the window will quickly be shut and may remain so for centuries. Hinting at the king's power as a reversible reality will remain forbidden as subversive propaganda while any activism to restore the old situation will count as a *rebellion*, to be met with royal counter-insurgency measures.

Within the mosaic of political systems — more or less 'centralised kingdoms', 'segmentary states', 'generation-based gerontocracies', acephalous societies practicing complementary segmentary opposition — that emerged in the Upper Nile basin, the societies studied in this book — possibly together with the Anuak and Shilluk<sup>20</sup> —, most patently built their political institutions on the reversible polarity between king and people.

From the point of view of the emancipatory activism that sustained the democracies that developed from the absolute monarchies in Europe and that has continued to inspire democratisation world-wide, it is tempting to consider these political systems as 'democracies *avant la lettre*'. This is, in fact, what local ethnographers (Lomodong, 1995) argue in an attempt to inspire pride in the dynamic complexity of the traditional political set-up. Without belittling the political sophistication of the *monyomiji*-systems, I think the use of the term *democracy* is better reserved for mechanisms of popular representation that control the exercise of power by *states*, that is polities where the government has full control of the use of physical force.

The polities built on the king-*monyomiji* polarity were definitely not *states*. While their capacity to form larger, more cohesive and more enduring political units must have been manifest to both the kings and their peoples, their weaknesses often outweighed their strengths. The main weakness was the interminable rivalry between pretenders to the throne. The coexistence of centralist kingship with dualistically structured territorial and age-based groups that offered opportunities to competing rivals to promptly mobilise followers made things worse.

The Lotuho version of the myth of the bead and the spear (Chapter Fifteen) can be read as an expression of the misgivings that existed about the capacity of kingship to sustain a unified political community. The story concludes with a curse by a dying king which forever prevents his subjects from having kings. The curse is pronounced when his people are ready to hand him over to his enemies to be killed.

There are indications that such a re-conversion from centralism to dualism is not just a story. As I suggest in the concluding chapter, the radical egalitarian dualism of the Nuer may very well have been the outcome of a collective rejection of kingship. Abnegating centralist kingship was not necessarily a step backwards as rigid evolutionists may be tempted to think. The rapid expansion of the Nuer at the cost

20 Because of the similarities of their political system, the Anuak, some of whom are ruled by kings and others by village headmen who are moreover targets of rebellion (Lienhardt, 1958a:31–5); the Shilluk with their peculiar mix of dualist and centralist institutions (Lienhardt, 1954: 151–4) and the regicide practicing Shilluk-Luo of the Bahr-el-Ghazal (Santandrea:1938; Santandrea & De Giorgi, 1965:24–30), together with the groups who form the focus of the book, may be grouped as members of the same class of political systems.

of their more centralist neighbours proves that the dualist option was, in terms of its capacity of ensuring collective survival, not inferior to centralist options.

## **The state as an evolving cybernetic system**

What can this genealogy of the state teach us about contemporary states? Assuming that the mechanisms that produced the first states continue to be at work in present-day state formations, be it in a transformed way, I will try to answer this question by approaching the operation of the state as a cybernetic system consisting of a number of superimposed feedback loops:

The bottom of the multi-layered structure corresponds to the scapegoat mechanism. We should imagine a scene where a group of individuals caught up in an uneasy, conflictual, relationship is edging to the brink of violence. One individual sets himself apart from the wrangling and confronts the others. The pent-up negativity now directs itself at him. He becomes the focus of the hostility of all. At that very moment the scene changes. The disgruntled lot turns into a group because of the common focus. The impasse is broken.

The longer the stand-off lasts, the stronger will be the bonding of the group. The emerging sense of togetherness does not go unnoticed nor does its association with the figure who triggered it. The group may welcome its new state of being and realise that it is in its interest to make the suspense triggered by the exceptional figure last. The group — or the exceptional figure — may also realise that the new cohesiveness gives it an edge over similar, less cohesive, competing groups. This configuration may be the springboard from which the earliest forms of kingship were launched. What is important here is that the bonding was not the result of a deliberate agreement between individuals or the outcome of mutual compatibility, nor the side-effect of the pursuit of a common interest, let alone an expression of group solidarity. The unity is the product of the suspense of the stand-off between the group and its antagonist.

It will be clear that the dependence of these proto-kingdoms on a combination of defiance, trust and admiration does not make for a very stable political entity. We must imagine the early forms of kingship as volatile and in need of being propped up by practices that bridge and transcend the confrontational character of the relationship between the group and its proto-royal antagonist. As we have seen in the discussion of the powers of the king and the *Big Man*, the exchange of gifts, courtesies, favours and other signs of mutual appreciation open up a space for constructive management of the relationship between king and people for diplomacy.

On this second cybernetic level the role of the king is being defined as that of a partner in a cycle of exchange. The peoples in this book have integrated their kings in the cycle of exchange as givers of rain, in many ways the most crucial condition of survival. In return for this gift they marry him wives, perform services (the men clearing his land and building his residence; the women weeding the crops and collecting firewood) and provide him with all sorts of attentions. At this level of complexity, the relationship of king and people is ruled by the norm of reciprocity.

The king can count on his people's gifts and attentions as long as he continues to regularly deliver his blessing of rain.

However, when the flow of blessings emanating from the king is interrupted, the cycle of reciprocal exchange will begin to falter. The usual services are performed reluctantly. Reciprocal demands will be made but not granted. Mutual accusations escalate into violent scuffles. The bridge of peaceful exchange and diplomacy caves in and a crisis driven by negative reciprocity ensues. The system slips into regression, falling back on its basic operational level: that of the scapegoat mechanism.

While recovering from the crisis, the new king and the surviving people have good reasons to look for ways to remedy the fragility of their political arrangements. The people, on one side, may decide to mitigate the regicidal violence by ritualising it into mock-charges and verbal abuse during periodic festivals — as do the Swazi in their *ncwala* ritual. (H. Kuper, 1944; Gluckman, 1954; Makarius 1973; Apter, 1983). Alternatively, the killing of the king can be postponed until the time when his natural death is imminent, as in the case of the Shilluk.

The survivors of a crisis may also decide to make a completely new start, doing away with kingship, leaving the responsibility for internal order and external relations to lineage elders or to an assembly of age-mates. In the case kingship is abnegated after the crisis, its unifying, consensual dynamic should be expected to shift to other institutions: warfare, witchcraft.

In case the community emerging from crisis sticks to the centralist option, its new king — whose life could be at stake in a new crisis — will muse on alternatives that prevent another slippage into scapegoating. An obvious objective from his point of view will be a firmer control over his people. Chapters Eleven, Twelve and Thirteen show the many strategies used by kings to achieve ascendancy over their people, from the creation of armies, the control of trade, and the levying of tribute to the concentration of all ritual powers in the hands of the king.

Manifestations of this royal will to power are the Bari king Logunu who, in 1841, did not hesitate to try out the gun, which he had just received from the Egyptian explorers, on subjects who happened to be within range (*see* p. 209); King Alikori of the Pari, who at the turn of the nineteenth century, relentlessly continued to fight the smaller and weaker moiety of his kingdom to the point that its members massively fled into exile (*see* p. 143–144); and the excessive rage of King Lomoro, observed by the American explorer Donaldson-Smith, against one of his subjects (Case 9.2). A common reason for the Condominium Authorities to fire chiefs, who were usually from royal families, was their proneness to homicide. They had no qualms to kill commoners opposing their commands.

## **From regicidal kingdom to sacrificial state**

To support my argument that the early kingdoms on the Upper Nile offer us a window on a crucial phase in the evolution of the state, I propose to take a closer look at what the transformation from non-state kingship to state-framed kingship means in terms

of empirical practices and institutions. A suitable field to make relevant observations for this purpose is the kingdom of Buganda. While it is strictly speaking outside the Nilotic ethnological field of study, there have been regular historical contacts between the societies in our research area and the Buganda kingdom, and the founders of the royal dynasty of Buganda are believed to have Nilotic antecedents. Claessen, an international authority on the study of early states worldwide, counts Buganda among the most centralised and differentiated state formations that emerged in Sub-Saharan Africa before the colonial period (Claessen & Skalnik, 1978; 1981; Claessen, 1987).

What strikes first when examining Buganda kingship is the important role of violence in the exercise of power. This has puzzled anthropologists. Lucy Mair (1934:177–8), for example, ponders thus: “The question of precisely how the cruelties [...] by the last independent kings were reconciled with the conception of a ‘good’ king expressed at his accession is one that cannot be answered.” And Audrey Richards (1964:291) remarks that ‘many African chiefs are formally praised for their ferocity to enemies but the insistence that the Kabaka [the king] can and should destroy his own subjects is, I think, unusual.’

In fact, executions were a regular feature of the king’s rule. While the king’s court, at the apex of Buganda’s finely meshed network of local courts, settled cases according to the principles of customary law, many of the death sentences ordered by the king were not the outcome of jurisprudence but were made by royal decree. Foreign visitors to the pre-colonial royal courts frequently reported on people being sentenced to death for trifles, often minor infringements of the court etiquette (sneezing, laughing, touching the throne, showing a piece of naked flesh, etc.).

While the executions decreed or confirmed by the king included criminal cases, most of the sentencing had a sacrificial or political objective. This is especially true for the mass executions called *kiwendo*, a term that refers to the fact that the number of victims required for this type of execution was fixed in advance. Roscoe (1911:333), who wrote an extensive monograph on the Baganda, following instructions given by Frazer, mentions a number between two and five hundred. The number was fixed by the king, often in compliance with the oracle of a spirit medium linked to one of the temples of the Ganda gods. Mediums also identified dangers to the well-being of the kingdom and reported suspected insurgents.

To complete the required numbers, commoners were randomly and in large numbers captured by the king’s executioners from the roads leading to the capital. The work of the executioners was supervised by the king’s police. When the desired number was reached the king’s police chief would sound the drums to stop the arrests.

There were thirteen mass-execution sites in the kingdom. Some sites were specific for certain categories of victims: for chiefs and dignitaries; for princes accused of planning a rebellion (they would be burnt or starved since royal blood could not be shed) or for wives and friends of the king (a category of victims that was only executed some days after arrival to give the king time to change his mind); other sites catered

for a mix of convicted offenders and innocent captives. The victims of these executions were generally co-operative, at least if Roscoe is to be believed:

Those who have taken part in these executions bear witness how seldom a victim, whether man or woman, raised his voice to protest or appeal against the treatment meted out to him. The victims went to death (so they thought) to save their country and race from some calamity and they laid down their lives without a murmur or a struggle. (1911:338)

Before being killed — usually by spear or club — they were made to drink a potion that gave the king control of the victim's ghost. The bodies were left where they fell, for wild animals or birds to prey on. Relatives did not dare to bury the corpses because they had been given to the gods (*idem*: 336) or to the king (*idem*: 112).

The kings measured their power in terms of the capacity to victimise subjects. When King Muteesa (1856–1884) was shown a photograph of Queen Victoria by the missionary Felkin, the king not only asked him “how she lived, what she wore, and how many servants she had, but also whether she killed many people” (Wilson & Felkin, 1882, Vol.II:18). The thirty priests of the *lubaale* (Ganda divinity) cults who were decapitated during the audience given by Muteesa to Chaillé-Long, Gordon's envoy charged to convince the king to agree to the annexation of Buganda to Egypt (see the illustration on p. 447), were also meant to send a signal of the king's power to Egypt's *Khedive*. Mass executions took place at different occasions, at the inauguration or renovation of a king's tomb — with one of the largest known executions taking place at the renovation of King Ssuuna's (1832–1856) tomb in 1880 when thousands were killed. The frequency of such mass executions was estimated by Mair as once every ten years (1934:179). The missionary Mackay writes that the massacres had been more frequent during the last years of King Muteesa's reign and suggests that they were carried out to help restore the king's health (Ray, 1991:176). His fellow missionary, Felkin, reports that the number of massacres was rather an indicator of the king's good health. Once Muteesa would be well, so he had been assured, the frequency of executions would again go up (1882, Vol. 2: 23).

The executions were ordered when the king or the mediums felt that disorderliness was on the rise. Signals of such disorder could be dirty roadsides covered with excrement, young men loitering in the capital, a rise in adultery cases, especially those involving princesses, as well as reports of a planned insurrection. Executions were meant to counteract any tendency to entropy. They served, according to Mair, ‘to set the land right’ (1934:233).

Buganda as a country could be said to alternate between two conditions. On the one hand during an interregnum, it was ‘[a] wild state of disorder [...], where anarchy reigned, people tried to rob each other, and only chiefs with a strong force were safe, even the smaller chiefs being in danger from stronger chiefs, who did as they liked during the short interregnum’ (Roscoe: 1911:103). On the other hand was ‘the king's peace’ (*mirembe*), always vulnerable and in need of sacrificial propping up. The forces of disorder were imagined to be permanently on the lookout for

opportunities to undermine the peace. The king was permanently on the alert for signs of insubordination. Brothers of the king were the primary suspects. While Speke, in 1862, met with an estimated thirty brothers of Muteesa, the missionary Ashe, in 1883, is told that only one brother was still alive (Claessen, 1987:226). The Queen-Mother played an important role in protecting the king from the political aspirations of his brothers by arranging for their elimination (Roscoe, 1911:188).

The mass executions kept everybody on their toes. They were *sacrificial* in the sense that Girard gives to this term: they served to channel any uncontrolled discontent and hostility in the country in a single direction, in this case away from the king onto victims that were arbitrarily selected from among the people. Though these killings followed the opposite direction they fulfilled the same function as the regicidal confrontations played out between the Nilotic Rainmakers and their people some five hundred kilometres down the Nile and analysed in Chapter Seventeen.

There are two important differences between the Buganda kings and their Nilotic counterparts: the far higher cost in human lives of the state-framed mass executions in Buganda, and secondly, the fact that in Buganda, commoners were killed in order to establish, maintain or restore 'the peace of the king', while in the societies downstream the king was killed to remove epidemics, droughts and other misfortunes from his people. Between the state of Buganda and the regicidal Nilotic kingdoms, the direction of victimisation was inverted, Buganda representing an extreme case of the tipping of the balance of power between king and people, as discussed in Chapter Eleven, to the advantage of the king. While in the Nilotic kingdoms the king is the focus and point of attraction of internal discontent, in Buganda all violence is taken out on the king's subjects. At no point during his rule is the Ganda king brought into a situation of confrontation with his subjects, as is commonplace between the *monyomiji* and their king (Chapter Sixteen). The Ganda king is never summoned to account for his deeds. He is legally immune — together with a selected few of his top dignitaries. He is practically inaccessible to his people unless mollified by significant gifts such as a number of nubile women (not just one), a gift that is out of reach for monogamous commoners (Roscoe, 1911:333). People hid from the king and from his police when they encountered a royal party on the road. Their mere gaze could be considered a provocation, and a reason for execution (Speke, 1863:272).

The remoteness of the Ganda kings from their subordinates was underscored by the funerary arrangements. While among the Bari, Lotuho and Shilluk the closest associates of the king accompanied him in his grave, in Buganda all the staff in charge of the king's personal needs — chamberlain, cooks, fire-maker, dairymen, water fetchers including the wives of these officials — followed the king in his death. They were not buried alive alongside their dead master but killed at the inauguration of the tomb, weeks later, their bodies being left to decompose in the fenced compound surrounding the tomb (Ray, 1991:166).

A similar contrast is evident in the installation ceremonies. At his installation the Nilotic king is reminded of his eventual victimhood. The Bari transfer their most

feared diseases on him while the uncle of the new Lulubo king demands payment of damages for putting his sister's son in the "centre of evil". The Lotuho and Lokoya take a lot of sacrificial trouble to domesticate the feline foundling they will convert into their ruler.

The installation of the Buganda king follows an opposite scenario. While he is believed to be a feline predator like his Lotuho and Lokoya counterparts the installation rite is aimed at intensifying his feline ferocity, not at taming it. Dressed in a fresh leopard skin, he is given a symbolic knife to kill rebels. Using metaphors that liken the king to a queen-termite eating the drones fertilising her, the top dignitaries counsel him not to refrain from using violence since "commoners (*bakopi*) are like sorghum: whoever judges them owns them" (Ray, 1996:171). Later, during a nine-day induction tour of the central districts of the kingdom (*okukula*), the new king, who was often only an adolescent, was made to witness killings, to give orders to kill, and even to kill himself (Roscoe, 1911:210–4; Ray, 1996:171–5; Wrigley, 1996:147–54).

Statehood implies an end to reciprocity in the conduct of affairs that are a common concern to king and people. The actions of the king are no longer contingent on those of the people and vice-versa — as this is to a large extent the case in the Nilotic kingdoms studied in this book. The norm of reciprocity is replaced by the *de facto* complementarity<sup>21</sup> of two distinct sets of roles. One set of roles is reserved for the king and his entourage and the other set defines the behaviour expected from the people. The two sets match like a dovetail joint but their fit is externally imposed and to the advantage of the king and his group. The key rules in the role relationship are that only the king has the right to decide on the use of violence and that he is immune to acts of violence himself. The complementarity of roles opens the possibility of organised repression and exploitative forms of mobilisation of people outside the orbit of reciprocity. As the complementarity of the state-subject relationship sinks in, it becomes increasingly difficult to re-convert the asymmetrical relationship into a reciprocal one. History teaches us that most rebellions and revolutions against the state, even when successful, ultimately result in another statal arrangement. Statehood is forever because of its capacity to deeply transform the society. It results in forms of demographic, economic and military expansion that social systems organised according to principles of reciprocal exchange cannot accommodate.

The inbuilt tendency of the state to violent repression demands feedback mechanisms on a fourth level of complexity: democracy and the rule of law. Because there is no way back, the transformation of polities based on early kingship into asymmetrical states has historically been exceptionally rapid despite the unequal and intrinsically violent nature of the power exercised by states. The capacity of the state to expand and incorporate foreign political entities has no other limit than the ambition of other states to do the same — with the result that today there are hardly any humans left that have not been brought within the orbit of state power. The challenge put before contemporary state-builders is to domesticate the state's violence and to create institutions that enable citizens to participate in political life — as was

21 For my use of the concepts of 'reciprocity' and 'complementarity', see Gouldner, 1960.

the case before the advent of the state. The uneven achievements in this direction over the last two and a half millennia have proved that this transformation will be far more difficult than the emergence of the state itself.

### **The state as crystallisation of the mimesis of the antagonist**

If kings are the founders of the first states, then the state is ultimately an outcome of what Girard called the 'mimesis of the antagonist' and not of some kind of 'positive mimesis' as the founding fathers of sociology assumed. Both Durkheim and Weber described society as being primarily held together by positive imitation. Durkheim called that cohesive force 'solidarity by resemblance', the sharing of a common identity, beliefs and moral attitudes of which the king is an incarnation:

If [society] happens to fall in love with a man and if it thinks it has found in him the principal aspirations that move it, as well as the means of satisfying them, this man will be raised above the others and, as it were, deified. Opinion will invest him with majesty exactly analogous to that protecting the gods. This is what has happened to so many sovereigns in whom their age had faith: if they were not made gods, they were at least regarded as direct representatives of the deity (1915:213).

Society cultivates 'the principal aspirations that move it' by 'falling in love with a man' who has the means of turning these aspirations into reality. For Weber, too, the charismatic bond between a leader and his following is the stem cellular prototype of all forms of political authority. Charisma is defined as:

...qualities of a person which are held to be extraordinary (originally magically determined, as in prophets, war-heroes, leaders in the hunt, healers and peacemakers) by virtue of which that person is accepted as a leader, while he is either believed to have a supernatural or superhuman effectiveness, or to be sent by God, *or to be someone to be imitated* (1985:140; my italics).

As for Durkheim, the special qualities of the charismatic leader are in the admiring eyes of his followers. Weber is aware of the scapegoat kings of the past. He discusses the case of the Chinese emperor (1985:656) who was made to do penance in times of disaster when people believed he underperformed, and that of the *Verschmäherkönige* ('kings of scorn') of the Germanic tribes (*idem*: 140; 670).

For both thinkers positive imitation was the foundation of the social bond, negativity being incidental, prompted by disappointment and anger about failure. Marx implicitly shared this viewpoint. For him the state had no social substance of its own. It was an extension of the dominant classes in the political realm. Once the proletarian revolution settled the class struggle, the state would perish and an era based on positive reciprocity could return.

Girard's theory reverses the classical view of the primacy of positive attachment as the cement of social life. This study demonstrates that Girard's scapegoat mechanism provides a plausible explanation of the practice of regicide in early kingship, and thereby of the dynamics that transformed early kingdoms into states.