

Tragedy, Ritual and Power in Nilotic Regicide: The regicidal dramas of the Eastern Nilotes of Sudan in Comparative Perspective¹

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Introduction

Regicide as an aspect of early kingship is a central issue in the anthropological debate on the origin of the state and the symbolism of kingship. By a historical coincidence the kingship of the Nilotic Shilluk has played a key role in this debate which was dominated by the ideas of James Frazer, as set out in the first (*The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*), the third (*The Dying God*) and the sixth part (*The Scapegoat*) of *The Golden Bough* (1913). The fact that the Shilluk king was killed before he could die a natural death was crucial to Frazer's interpretation of early kingship. Frazer equated the king with a dying god who through his death regenerates the forces of nature. This 'divine kingship' was an evolutionary step forward compared to 'magical kingship' where the power of the king is legitimated by his claim to control the natural processes on which human communities depend.

Frazer's interpretation of kingship was opposed by a post-war generation of anthropologists who were interested in the empirical study of kingship as a political system and who treated the ritual and symbolic aspects of kingship as a secondary dimension of kingship more difficult to penetrate by the methodology of structural-functional analysis. The reality of the practice of regicide that was so central to Frazer's interpretations of kingship was put in doubt (Evans-Pritchard, 1948). The ongoing practice by mostly Eastern Nilotic communities of killing Rainmakers when they failed to make rain – noted by Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (1913, Part 1, Vol. 1, p.345-346) -- was ignored in this debate.

Since the 1980s a new generation of anthropological kingship studies claim a Frazerian inspiration: the study of Rukuba kingship by Jean-Claude Muller (1980), of Moundang kingship by Alfred Adler (1982) and the monumental work of Luc de Heusch on Bantu kingship (1987, 1982a, 1982b, 1985, 2000).

During the 1980s, when I was teaching anthropology in the University of Juba, South Sudan, my attention was drawn to several cases of kings and queens aggressed and killed by their communities after they had been accused of drought. I had the opportunity to study these cases in more detail, especially among the communities of the Bari, Lokoya, Lulubo and Pari on the Equatorial East Bank of the Nile. After my return to the Netherlands, the material collected served as the mainstay of my doctoral thesis *Kings of Disaster* (1992). The idea of René Girard that kingship is rooted in the mechanism of consensual scapegoating enabled me to adopt a fresh angle in looking at the connection between the sacred and the political in kingship and in the practice of king killing.

In the literature, archaic regicide is typically represented as a controlled ritual event in which the king is a passive victim.² This image, to which Frazer's work has contributed, is

¹ The paper at the basis of this article was presented at the conference "Kingship: A Comparative Approach to Monarchy from History and Ethnography" organized by Declan Quigley in January 2002 at the University of Saint Andrews, Scotland. Its original title was 'Kingship as a Lever, versus the State as a Killer of Suspense. Some Lessons from the Study of Early Kingship on the Upper Nile'. Together with the other contributions to the conference, it was published in 2005 by Berg in *The Character of Kingship*, edited by Declan Quigley, pp. 67-100. In the version presented here, I have suppressed the central position of the reference to the literary kingdom of Kasch (see footnote 2) which at rereading the article I found confusing to the overall argument.

² The lead legend in the *Ruin of Kasch*, the mythic-historical-philosophical novel by Roberto Calasso is about an African sacrificial kingdom that falls apart when the astrologically timed killing of the king is forgotten when

misleading. The material I collected on the East Bank of the Nile shows kings killed in violent confrontations with their subjects next to kings who are allowed to die a natural death but treated as lifelong victims. The cases presented here show that regicide is most fruitfully studied as belonging to a set of practices that generate consensual antagonism –a set to which war also belongs.

The methodologically innovative step I choose to take is to approach kingship as a *drama* without prejudging the content –symbolic or political- of the drama. Watching the drama unfold will enable us to distinguish political, ritual or economic moves by the actors. This angle will also be possible to describe and analyse changes in the overall configuration of the drama including shifts from ritualisation to politicisation and vice-versa.

Finally, we shall see that this dramatic approach yields an unexpectedly simple answer to the classical anthropological question: *under what conditions does a kingdom become a state?* By analysing kingship as a drama enacted between king and people, it becomes possible to understand the transition from early kingdom to early state as the result of an obvious royal political strategy. Achieving irreversible leverage over their people must have been an objective that kings must have pursued, successfully or unsuccessfully, in many places, in many ways, and over a long period of time.

Kingdoms of the East Bank of the Upper Nile

The ethnography of the Southern Sudan presents us with a rare variety of political forms, not only of acephalous polities but also of monarchical structures. There is a tremendous diversity: from sizeable kingdoms covering areas as large as Belgium and incorporating over 100,000 individuals to polities limited to a single agglomeration. Some of the acephalous structures –such as that of the Nuer- have a capacity for massive political mobilisation that far exceeds that of the largest kingdoms. We noted already that the Shilluk of South Sudan became the classical anthropological case of ‘divine kingship’ and of ‘ritual regicide’. The Nuer on the other hand became the textbook example of an egalitarian society that renounced central authority, generating political unity from the systematic polarization of its constituent segments.

The societies from which I draw my ethnographic material live in Equatoria, the southernmost region of Sudan, on the East Bank of the Nile, east of Juba. They include the Bari, the Lotuho, Lulubo, Lokoya, Oriorok, Lango, Lopit, Dongotono, Logir, Imatong, the Pari, the Tenet and the northeastern Acholi. Except for the Pari and Acholi who are Western Nilotic Lwoo speakers, the Lulubo, who are Central Sudanic Madi speakers, and the Tenet who are Surma speaking, all of the groups mentioned are Eastern Nilotic. According to an outdated but still popular classification they are also known as Northern Nilo-Hamites (Huntingford, 1953). These societies are unique in the open, confrontational style that characterizes the dealings between king and people. The men are organized in quasi-generational age-grades. The core responsibility of the age-grade in power is to monitor the security of the polity in all its aspects. This includes policing the king’s movements. When

an immigrant storyteller succeeds in distracting the king’s astrologers from watching the stars. In this way the storyteller saves the life of one of the virgin guardians of the sacred fire with whom he has fallen in love. She was to be replaced and sacrificed before the new fire of the successor king is lighted. The transformation of the sacrificial dispensation by a kingdom based on stories (of one Holy Book or another?) ushers into an era of great prosperity and impressive military victories. Girard who is one of the characters in the book, comments on this historical transition: “while we are expelling sacrifice through the front-door it is already entering through the backdoor.” He referred to the killing fields of Kasch’s post-sacrificial military expansion (Calasso, 1994:148- Calasso, 1994:170). While the type of African kingship discussed by Girard often complies with the passive sacrificial model evoked in the *Ruin of Kasch*, the king that has served him as a prototype of archaic kingship is also a literary figure but a far more active character than the early kings of Kasch: Oedipus the king of Thebes as dramatized by Sophocles (Girard, 1970, 1972, 2004).

there is reason to believe that the king is not acting in the community's best interests, especially where food security is concerned, women convene their own assembly issuing resolutions that usually outdo the men in radicalness.

The aspect of kingship that has struck early travellers and colonial administrators most is the fact that kings are answerable to their subjects on the state of the weather. In the literature these kings have therefore come to be known as 'Rainmakers', a title that connived to bolster the nineteenth century stereotype of magic, cunning and superstition as the source of power in 'primitive' polities. Frazer adopted this characterisation and put the kings of the Bari, Lotuho, Lokoya and Lulubo in a different, less evolved, class from the 'divine kings' of the Shilluk³. According to him, the kings we are discussing here represented an older evolutionary stage, that of 'magical kingship' (1913, part 1, vol. 1, p.345-346). Placing the sovereigns of the East Bank in a different category from the rulers of the Shilluk is not helpful. It obscures the continuity between the different political systems and discourages an approach in which different specific formations are studied as transformations of the same underlying structures. Nor is size a good reason for treating the kingdoms of the Equatorial East Bank differently. It is true that most are smaller than that of the Shilluk kingdom, but the pre-1850 Bari kingdom was probably larger. Moreover, size was variable, depending in large measure on the perceived rain-giving capability of a given ruler. The reach of a polity under a king who was successful in rain-matters could extend as far as his fame spread, comparable to the size of a following of an evangelist in the modern West. As Hocart (1970:86) remarked 'it is not the size of the civil list or the extent of square mile ruled that concerns the anthropologist but the structure of kingship.'

The polities I studied all had a notion of ultimate sovereignty. All communities recognized one person as having the highest authority. In practically all cases he or she was the Master of Rain and Drought. If there were two claimants to this role, they would fight it out till one of them won lest the kingdom split. Next to the king, most communities had a variety of other offices: for fertility and health of humans and cattle and freedom from pests (birds, worms, insects) and predators (leopards, lions, crocodiles). While in some languages the holders of these offices could be addressed by the same honorific title as the king, there was usually a special term of address. I am using the term Master (Master of the Land, Master of Birds etc.) for the incumbents of these offices. Since they were ultimate authorities in their own domain I do not use the term 'priest'. This word is better reserved for elders of descent groups, territorial groups or age-groups who perform sacrificial duties on behalf of these groups and for the ritual assistants of the various 'masters'.⁴ The assistants of the sovereign are more appropriately termed 'ministers' in English as their role is likely to have significant political content.

During successive episodes between 1981 and 1986, I carried out field research on local institutions of kingship --or what remained of it. I worked intensively among the Lulubo and Lokoya and later, when it was unsafe to spend long periods in the field, I collected material on Lotuho, Bari, and the Pari during short visits and from people displaced in town. The field work was complemented with archival research in Juba, Khartoum, Entebbe and Rome.⁵

The Scenario of a Rain Drama

By the end of my fieldwork period I had collected twenty-four case histories of regicide covering a period of 130 years. Since 1986 I have received information about five more cases

³ I will not delve here into the complex issue of the 'divinity' of the powers of the king. I have earlier argued that I see no reason to disallow the claim of 'divinity' for the powers of the Eastern Nilotic Kings and rainmakers as Frazer does (Simonse, 1992:277-279)

⁴ The word 'priest' is derived from the Greek *presbuteros* meaning elder.

⁵ Between 1898 and 1914 most of the area was administered from Entebbe, Uganda

that had occurred. It would seem that the ongoing war in the region and the resulting generalized insecurity raised the frequency with which community leaders were accused of collective misfortune. I will begin by presenting the general scenario of a rain drama, before analysing two rain crises that occurred in the early 1980s. Both resulted in the killing of the rainmaker by his or her community. Drama here is defined as a sequence of interactions between actors holding reciprocal expectations for which they demand compliance, if necessary, on pain of death. The justification for such a violent definition of 'drama' will become apparent.

In the dramas of kingship studied here there are two principal protagonists:

- *the king*: an individual designated as the incumbent of a set of expectations concerning security in the widest sense by a community believing itself dependent on the powers attributed to him;
- *the people*: a collective body from which the king holds expects submission, in recognition of his status as the upholder of orderly and lawful behaviour in the widest sense.

The security expected from the king includes protection from violence by enemies, but also from epidemics, earthquakes, droughts, pests and plagues. It embraces health (of man and cattle, including procreative health), economic and social security. The king is the community's protective cosmic shield. He is perceived as exercising a heroic kind of brinkmanship, facing, annihilating or redirecting the many dangers impinging on the community from outside. But he is also believed to have the capacity to turn into a diabolic destroyer of the community. The orderliness expected by the king from his people includes abstention from violence, either by the use of arms or by witchcraft, respect for the taboos underpinning orderly relations between groups (incest), looking after the weak (widows) and appropriate and timely displays of gratitude for his cosmic patronage. The terms used by a former generation of anthropologists to describe the relationship of king and subjects have sometimes been unnecessarily exotic, for instance Seligman's formulation of the king as 'the dynamical centre of the universe' (1934, p4), or the term 'rainmaker' itself. What the Nilotic subject expect from his king is, in fact, very similar to what modern citizens expect from their welfare states: protection from a wide range of factors of insecurity: from enemies via a wide range of factors influencing the security of livelihood, to epidemics and diseases.

Considering the fact that the relationship between king and subject has been the favourite subject-matter of playwrights for many centuries, it is remarkable that anthropologists have not made more use of a theatrical model in their studies of kingship. Frazer's description of the Nilotic Rainmaker as a performer persuading a sceptic public of his power is apt. It is true that the king seeks to accumulate credit so that he withstands the accusations of his subjects. In this respect he is like a magician who cannot afford to be transparent about his art. But this is where the parallel stops. The drama played by king and people is intensely interactive, with ups and downs, angry confrontations, mediation efforts leading either to the settlement of the dispute and a new start, or to a showdown between king and people -in which the king's life is at stake.

Common security from drought, enemy attack, epidemics, and so on are the central issues that define the public sphere in these societies, as opposed to the sphere of private family interests. Any development requiring a community response, prompts a meeting. The ruling age-grade (*monyomiji*) is responsible for calling these public meetings. The same drum is beaten for war, and in response to a threat of drought, plague, a cattle epidemic. Women have their own public meetings separate from the men. The weather is an ongoing public concern offering a very rich material for dramatic interaction: prompting accusations, arrests, payment of fines, sacrifices and reconciliation rituals. Rainfall is very erratic in the area. One village may benefit from timely rains while its neighbour's fields are left parched or destroyed by floods. The changes in the weather are monitored and interpreted on a day-to-day basis causing a great deal of worry and suspense. Recently deceased members of the community may also be agents of rain and drought. If identified as the cause of drought, they

need to be placated or exhumed or have the remains of their body completely removed from the community, for instance by throwing it in the Nile.

In the process of identifying the cause of disaster king and subjects stand face-to-face. The understanding between king and people stipulates that if no other agents are left to be identified, it is the king who carries the blame. It is this ultimate responsibility that motivates the king to do everything in his powers to mend the situation: by directing the blame onto others, by performing sacrifices and by praying to his fathers for assistance. Normally rain will fall while this process is still running. If no rain falls his subjects' accusing fingers of his subjects will fall while this process is still running. If no rain falls, his subjects' end up pointing at him. He will be faced with an ultimatum, or a succession of ultimatums, to relent and allow the rain to fall. If he does not, the only course of action left to his subjects is to seek his death. If disaster persists even then, people must accept that God is responsible-- as the king will claim as a last defence.

The Stage and the Cast of Rain Dramas

I collected twenty-four more or less detailed cases of regicide that occurred between 1850 and 1985 in the stretch of Equatoria that is located between the Nile and the Kidepo river. I have selected the ethnographically most complete cases for analysis. The first, the burial alive of the Lowe rainmaker came to my knowledge more than a year after the event. I visited the community and interviewed the people who had been immediately involved in the event including the brother of the murdered rainmaker and his son who had played a leading role in the killing.⁶ The material for the other case, the killing of the Queen of the Pari in 1984, was collected by my friend, the Japanese anthropologist Eisei Kurimoto. He has carried out research among the Pari since 1978 and visited the community within a month after the tragedy.⁷

The following ethnographic background information concerning the main actors in the drama is necessary to be able to follow the case studies:

Lafon and Lowe:

the two communities in which the rain dramas take place about 75 kilometres apart. They are both located at the foot of hills. Lipul, the hill surrounded by the agglomeration of settlements of the Pari is small and is divided in six sections, in clockwise order: Wiatuo, the king's section (and the largest), Bura, Pucwa, Pugeru, Kor and Angulumere. The total population at the time of the event was about ten-thousand.

The population number of Lokoya of Lowe, located around a much higher hill, is larger. Lowe has seven sections located in a semi-circle at the bottom of the hill. Clockwise from North to South we have Lobugi, Losok, Pura, Lohera (the king's section) Logilo, Omirai and Hojofi.

Absence of state-provided security:

The killing in Lowe happened when the police of Torit District were still functioning. 22 *monyomiji* were arrested, some of them released within a week, others escaped.

The killing in Lafon happened at a moment when the area was already affected by the spreading civil war. Development project in the village had already been stopped.

There was no response to the killing from the government.

⁶ More details on the case are related in Simonse (1992: 199-204).

⁷ Kurimoto's account was published, in Japanese, in the *Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka*; a translation of the Japanese text, authorised by the author, can be found in Simonse (1992: 199-204).⁸⁸

Moieties:

Most communities in the area are polarised in halves, or 'moiety' as they are conventionally termed in anthropology. Lafon and Lowe are no exception. Lafon is divided between the Boi, comprising all the sections except Kor, and the Kor, a moiety consisting of a single section. Lowe is divided in the 'Lotuho' comprising the four northern sections, and 'Omirai' comprising the three southern ones.

Monyomiji, elders and young extremists

The men in Lafon and Lowe are organised in 'quasi-generations' based on age which succeed one another every 12-16 years. The generation carrying responsibility for the security of the community is called *monyomiji* meaning the 'owners' or 'fathers' (*monye*) of the community (*amiji*). The young age at which these societies allocate public responsibility is in stark contrast to the gerontocratic set up of most of the societies of the Karimojong cluster who are the eastern neighbours of the societies practicing the *monyomiji*. A newly completed generation -consisting of four age-sets- will push the sitting *monyomiji* out, when they feel their numbers and political and military effectiveness equal that of their seniors. Included in the new generation-set are males from about sixteen years onwards. Power is handed over after a contest, often in the form of a stick-fight. Ideally, this should be a mock-fight but there are historical cases that the fight was for real and the aspiring *monyomiji* were defeated and relegated to the waiting room. The retired *monyomiji*, as elders, will continue to play a role as political moderators. Some of these 'elders' are still in their early 40s when they retire. Before acceding to public responsibility, the younger generation, are a political factor as radicals and extremists. In the case of the killing of the Queen these stereotyped roles of the generations come out clearly.

Kings, Priests and Rainmakers:

Apart from the king who is the sovereign, politically as well as in rain matters, both communities have hereditary officers with rain-powers. Kor, the smaller moiety of Lafon, has its own Rainmaker. He plays a role of some importance in the events related here. In Lowe we find, besides the king, two Rainmakers residing at both extremities of the crescent-shaped string of villages. The case related here concerns the Rainmaker at the southern tip. He is the descendant in a line of priests assisting the king (*oihejek*). The Rainmaker who was killed in 1981 had a great deal of success in the early 1960s and extended his power to include neighbouring sections. He was recognised as the Rainmaker of the southern moiety of Lowe and assumed the title of 'king' (*ohobu*).

In the Lowe case the Rainmaker managed quite well as long as he was dealing with his own generation-mates, the Thimomonye ('those who ignore their fathers'), the generation that took over after independence, at the onset of the civil war in which Lowe played an important role. But when faced with a new generation of radicals, after the conclusion of the war, he ran into great problems and was killed. The Rainmaker was one of the first primary school leavers of the village. During the war he led the bush-school in Lowe. As the second son of the sectional rain-priests of Hojofi, he succeeded to his father's responsibilities, his elder brother becoming a catechist. His only surviving full son who was foreordained to succeed him was killed when a lorry hit him while he was riding a bicycle. The Rainmaker was reluctant to hand the responsibility to the son he had fathered in the name of another brother. This son had grudges vis-à-vis his biological father. An employee with a modest income at a nearby forestry project, he was still unmarried at thirty. He blamed his father for not having passed the wives of his dead half-brother to him. The Lokoya Rainmaker in Lowe had exercised his responsibility for twenty-three years when he was killed.

At her death, of the Queen of the Pari who had been installed after her husband died had only ruled for four years. She was a caretaker of the throne till her son was old enough to take over. In contrast to the Rainmaker of Lowe she took little interest in rain-matters. From the beginning her rain-duties had been a source of problems for her. Even before the rain-crisis of 1983, she had been in conflict with the *monyomiji*. When I tried to pay her a visit in 1981, she was in hiding because of her problems with the *monyomiji*, and, apparently, feared that a meeting with a white man in that situation could only make her situation worse. In rain-issues she relied heavily on the advice of her fellow-Rainmaker from Kor.

Table 1: The Killing of the Queen of the Pari

<i>Period</i>	<i>Weather</i>	<i>Action by the people</i>	<i>Action taken by the Queen and Rainmaker</i>
<i>Rainy season 1982</i>			
May 82	poor rains	Wiatuo accuses the Bura section of having caused the drought; Wiatuo takes revenge. In a stick fight Wiatuo kills two men of Bura Queen and Kor Rainmaker king submitted to the ordeal of jumping over the sacred stick	Rainmaker of Kor flees to District Headquarters
June 82	poor rains	Assembly of <i>monyomiji</i> in which the Queen is summoned to make rain on pain of death	Queen flees to a location across the Nile crossing the desert east of Lafon on foot
August 82	floods; measles epidemic that kills 30 children; weaver bird plague	<i>Monyomiji</i> install an interim king from Acholi, a friend of the former king who was the late husband of the Queen	
September 82	floods spoil harvest	<i>Monyomiji</i> ask the interim king asked to stop the rain or leave Lafon	exit interim-king/rainmaker
<i>Rainy season 1983</i>			
April-May 83	poor rains	Delegation of elders invite the Queen and Rainmaker of Kor back from exile	Queen and Rainmaker return
June 83	drought and famine	Assembly of <i>monyomiji</i> decides to exhume the corpse of the previous king to remove his posthumous curse	
	brief spell of rains	Royal corpse exhumed and thrown into the river	
July 83	drought	<i>Monyomiji</i> consult diviner to verify the interpretation according to which the late king was responsible for the drought; the diviner said the cause was different General Assembly of <i>monyomiji</i> of all six sections; the leaked truth of the oracle consulted by the Queen and Rainmaker is revealed; accompanying elders are fined one ox each; the oxen are sacrificed to restore the trust between the <i>monyomiji</i> and Kilang	Queen and Rainmaker of Kor accompanied by two elders of Kilang generation also consult diviner in Torit who, as is leaked later, puts the blame with the Rainmaker of Kor; At their return to Lafon they do not reveal this information
		Queen and Rainmaker of Kor are put under house arrest	The Rainmaker of Kor escapes through a hole he has dug in the wall of his house: second period of exile
August-October 83	good rains resulting in a good harvest		

Rainy season of 1984

April 83	promising start of the rainy season		
May 83	faltering rain	Assembly of <i>monyomiji</i> of Wiatuo section; the posthumous curse of an elder of Kilang is identified as the cause of the irregular rain; corpse is exhumed and thrown into the river	
June 83	no rain	Second Assembly of <i>monyomiji</i> of Wiatuo; Queen accused of dishonesty, alcoholism and hiding medicines;	the Queen attributes the drought to God and denies possessing rain-medicines,
		<i>Monyomiji</i> contribute 15 Sudanese pounds and one tin of sorghum flour per section to make beer for the Queen;	aware and resigned to the fact that she will be killed the Queen goes on drinking
July 7, 1983	no rain	General Assembly with compulsory attendance of all members of the communities of all six sections, including women and children; location: place in the bush where matters of life and death are discussed;	
		The Queen is accused of destroying the community by forcing it to move to another place; members of the generation aspiring to take over power beat the Queen but are stopped by Kilang (retired elders);	apparently as a delaying tactic, the Queen now admits to possessing rain medicines; but she only hands the official rainstones, kept in her house, to the <i>monyomiji</i>
		<i>Monyomiji</i> attempt beating her again; they offer she will be pardoned if she hands the rain-medicines -- or if she makes rain;	
July 8,	no rain	Assembly of <i>monyomiji</i> only, of all six sections, at a location deeper in the bush; Queen is put in front of the fire and told that she will die in the flames;	Queen accepts the sentence and promises that she will take no posthumous revenge on her community
		A cripple, a leper and a blind man, taking turns, accuse the Queen of being responsible for their deaths that will inevitably result from the destruction of the community;	the Queen tries to run away at several occasions
		The cripple uses his stick to push the Queen into the flames; the crowd joins in using whips and sticks;	the Queen dies as a result of burns and beating
		The Queen's corpse is carried some distance into the bush and stretched on the ground. Her stomach is slit open and treated with a particular kind of melon and her tongue is immobilised by thorns, both being done in order to prevent her curse.	the Queen's body is left in the bush as is the practice with the bodies of warriors slain in battle
	7mm rain	Before returning to the village the <i>monyomiji</i> perform a purificatory sacrifice and treat their bodies with protective substances.	
July 9	10mm rain	Kurimoto who arrived in Lafon one month after the regicidal tragedy went to the Rural Development Centre and registered the readings of the rain gauge during the weeks before and after the killing.	
July 11	10mm rain		
July 13	15mm rain		
July 18	60mm rain		

Table 2 - The Killing of the Rainmaker of Lowe

Year, date	Weather	Actions undertaken by the people	Actions undertaken by the Rainmaker
1959-1974 rule of Thimomonye ('those who ignore their fathers')	years with relatively good rains	After the sectional <i>monyomiji</i> accept the son of their deceased sectional rain priest (<i>oihejek</i>) to continue his father's work, his rains are a success to the point that <i>monyomiji</i> from neighbouring sections also rely on him for their rain calling him <i>ohobu</i> (king); he becomes a <i>de facto</i> 'king' of his moiety which is formally under the overall King of Lowe.	Rainmaker steps up his demands from the <i>monyomiji</i> of his moiety demanding one day of cultivation, a privilege reserved for the king
c. 1967		Standoff between the <i>monyomiji</i> and the Rainmaker; <i>monyomiji</i> refuse to perform the services demanded by the Rainmaker	Rainmaker demonstratively sells his rain medicines off to the King of neighbouring Liria
c. 1970	drought	<i>Monyomiji</i> give in, buy the medicines back from the King of Liria, perform the cultivation service for the Rainmaker and request him to make rain	Rainmaker continues to put high demands on the community repeatedly getting into conflict with the Anyanya rebel army.
c. 1978	drought	New generation of <i>monyomiji</i> accuse the Rainmaker of being responsible for the drought	Rainmaker accuses the <i>monyomiji</i> of having cursed his last surviving full son and designate-successor to death (son killed in road accident)
April-June 1981	poor rains	Renewed accusations by <i>monyomiji</i> against the Rainmaker; tension mounts; when the Rainmaker calls his son, there are immediate rumours that the Rainmaker knows he will soon die and that he has no intention to relent; the crisis is felt to have run out of hand	Rainmaker calls his son home; this is a son he has fathered in the name of his late elder brother with the wife he inherited from the same brother; the son works in a forestry project; the issue is the responsibility for the children of the deceased son; the son who is unmarried expects to inherit at least one of his late brother's wives; he blames his father for not supporting him to marry.
June 1981 Day 1 (true date not known)	no rain	Meeting between Rainmaker and his son turns violent, the father shooting the son with an arrow, the son hitting the head of the father with a club; local <i>monyomiji</i> come to the scene to stop the violence; they interrogate the Rainmaker and lash him. Spokesman of the <i>monyomiji</i> replies that the Rainmaker will be the one to die first	Rainmaker curses the <i>monyomiji</i> of the four sections controlled by him announcing that for seven years they will lack rain
		Same afternoon, the son of the Rainmaker helped by <i>monyomiji</i> friends starts digging the Rainmaker's grave; some <i>monyomiji</i> try to stop them son but the son retorts "Don't you want to eat food?" and he is left to dig	

Day 2,	no rain	Assembly of the <i>monyomiji</i> of the village; <i>monyomiji</i> put Rainmaker on a chair in the middle and interrogate him	Rainmaker admits having hidden rain-medicines in a tree four hours distance from the village, in Acholiland.
Day 3,	no rain	Task-force of <i>monyomiji</i> takes Rainmaker to inspect the tree but do not find any medicine; sacrifice of goat to ‘normalize’ the tree	
Day 4,	no rain	Assembly of the <i>monyomiji</i> of the sections receiving rain from the Rainmaker decides that Rainmaker should die; there is general consensus; the brother-catechist and village headmen later claim to have opposed the decision but say they were afraid to speak out;	
		The <i>monyomiji</i> dig the grave. Rainmaker made to measure the grave before he is put down in it	
		Rainmaker’s son lists his father’s crimes while the <i>monyomiji</i> cover his body with soil.	Father orders his son to stay at home observing the customary mourning period of 7 days.
		Sacrifice of a goat made on the grave to prevent the Rainmaker’s posthumous revenge	
Day 5,		Police arrests twenty-two men who participated in the killing; Rainmaker’s son who has returned to his place of work is arrested there.	
	heavy rain	<i>Monyomiji</i> conclude that they took the right course of action	
End June 1981		All men arrested have been released or have escaped from prison except Rainmaker’s parricidal son,	Son of Rainmaker stays in prison “waiting for the day the <i>monyomiji</i> will carry him home on their shoulders to install him as the new Rainmaker.”
July-August 1981	drought	Posthumous revenge of Rainmaker is identified as the cause of the drought; <i>monyomiji</i> perform a sacrifice of apology on the grave; the skull is removed and set to rest in a rock-vault as an act of respect and reconciliation	
1982-1984	poor rains	<i>Monyomiji</i> reinvestigate the cause of the drought and conclude that the swallowing of rain-medicines by the Rainmaker is the cause.	
1985	poor rains		Prison of Torit closes as a result of the spreading hostilities of the civil war. The son of the Rainmaker returns home and demands payment of bloodwealth from the <i>monyomiji</i> for having killed his father claiming that this as the cause of the current drought.
1985	Poor rains	<i>Monyomiji</i> led by the Rainmaker’s brother refuse the Rainmaker’s son’s demand for payment of blood wealth.	There is no resolution to the cycle of hatred, and the son does not succeed his father.

Regicide in Early Kingship

What do these two dramas tell us about regicide in the two communities?

- *The killing of the king is not a ritual.* It is the unintended, yet inevitable, consequence of a process that should have resulted in rain but has failed to do so. It is the culmination of an escalating conflict; the killing would have been avoided if rain had fallen before the crucial moment.
- *The king is not a passive victim.* He has a whole range of tactics at his disposal that he uses to influence the course of events. He:
 - takes risks to obtain maximum benefit from the expectations raised about his power. He may raise the stakes by demanding services, tribute or a wife when the *monyomiji* have already started accusing him of sabotaging the rain.

If this game of bluff fails, he

- influences the public interpretation of weather-events through friendly diviners, through investigations into abuses and broken taboos in the community;
 - proposes sacrifices to win time;
 - to win more time he can confess to having tied up the rain using rain medicines thus affirming his power and upping the ante to win time. Both rainmakers resort to this tactic;
 - he can flee if the situation become too risky (as the queen and the Rainmaker of Kor actually did);
 - he can fight back and defend himself. When kings were the only gun owners in the community this was sometimes a successful tactic. King Nyiggilo of the Bari, the first native owner of a gun, used his gun on three successive occasions to prevent the crowd from fetching him to be killed. He managed to survive for over two years more (see Lejean, 1865:75).
- *The killing of the king is not the outcome of purely political processes.* It is not the assassination of an oppressive ruler who does not deliver what he has promised. It is not the death of the king that is desired by the community, but his blessings. In its last stages of escalation, regicide is a necessity imposed on the community that is not so different from the obligation to revenge a killed relative. As the son of the Lowe Rainmaker said to me about his father: “He was killing us, so why should we not have killed him?” In its origins kingship may have depended on the very possibility of an all-out confrontation with the community just a system of complementary segmentary opposition depended on the possibility of revenge. Instead of going through the disruption of regicide -- which includes the possibility of conflict with supporters of the king, of posthumous curses on the community and potential rivalry about the succession -- the community would rather have the rain.
 - *Regicide is the outcome of a cumulative process in reaction to protracted drought in which the king, considered guilty of the situation, gradually becomes the sole target of a slowly intensifying, condemning consensus of ever larger sections of the population affected by the drought.*

The process is reactive, because the build-up of consensus stalls as soon as rain starts to fall. A timely end to drought may even benefit the power and reputation of a rainmaker; if he can come up with a good justification for his temporarily withholding the rain, his power and reputation may benefit from the drought. This is a striking example of the scapegoating process as it has been analysed by René Girard. Initially unfocused discontent in the community in crisis gradually converges on a single

person considered to be an agent of evil. The subsequent collective expulsion unifies the divided community and offers it an action perspective.

The gradual build-up of consensus is clearly demonstrated in the case of the Pari queen. From the six sections of the Pari, only one brought up charges against the queen in 1982. Before that, sections had blamed one another. In 1983 three sections jointly accused the queen. In the course of 1984 as many as four meetings took place. The first was a meeting by the largest section, which is also the royal section. The second comprised the adult men of all sections, the third all the people including women, children and old people. In the final showdown, only the warriors participated. The venue was a location far enough away from the village that it could have been a battlefield. It was an act of violence comparable to war. The elders who could have given some protection to the queen were absent. The gradual build-up of tension against the king keeps the community united in circumstances of crisis that put its unity severely to the test. Without the king, conflicts between sections or between the *monyomiji* and the junior generation would have easily run out of hand. The more the tension against the king mounts, the more difficult it becomes to retreat from resorting to regicide. While the possibility of regicide keeps the community together, its consequences in terms of political turmoil --even if it happens to unblock the rain - are difficult to oversee and ominous. This brings us to a final observation:

- *The killing of the king or queen in the communities studied is not just a case of mob lynching, but, because of the simultaneously involuntary and necessary character of the escalation of the regicidal crisis, a socio-political tragedy.*

Table 3 - Typical Sequence of Escalation in a Rain-Crisis

Demands by the people (<i>monyomiji</i>, women)	Alternative courses of follow-up action on demands by people	Public action/ sacrifice	Alternative courses of follow-up action by the king	Demands by the king
Customary humble request for rain before the start of the season by women	Customary reminder of the king by women before the start of the rains	Washing of rainstones and minimal sacrifice	Customary washing of rainstones	Remind subjects to abstain from violence 'to be of one heart'
Demand for the truth of the cause of the drought in emergency meeting of the <i>monyomiji</i> and/or the women; Urgency of emergency meetings reflected in the sacredness of the venue and in the scope of participation.	Purificatory sacrifices to neutralise breaches of taboos, acts of violence and social exclusion, adultery, and especially behaviour that could have upset members of the royal family; Settlement of debts and disputes.	Collective prayer accompanied by the sprinkling or spitting of water heavenwards; celebration of communal unity; light sacrifice; common prayer to ancestors;	Circulate interpretations linking the drought to short-comings of the community (insults to the king, non-attendance royal funeral, etc.); thorough overhaul of rainstones (drying, purifying, washing, oiling).	Demand respect for the power of the king; demand proper tribute; accuse other drought makers; advocate the resolution of disputes and the settlement of debts.

Delegations of <i>monyomiji</i> of sections and villages meet the king bringing cattle and livestock as tribute and for sacrifice.	Gifts that mollify the king and pre-empt his breaking out in anger.	Sacrifices of increasingly valuable livestock in increasingly potent locations; (graves, ancestral skull-shrines).	King meets requests of local delegations by washing the rainstones in their company	Demands for livestock, cattle and gifts or even a wife from the <i>monyomiji</i>
Renewed demand for truth: more thorough investigations by involving diviners – of increasing fame, using increasingly drastic divination techniques (from rat and cucumber oracles to the reading the intestines of an ox.	More vehement accusations of Rainmaker and his close collaborators, alternated with gestures to mollify the king ('cooling his heart'), by the gift of a wife, cattle, delicacies, alcohol (given to the Pari Queen).;	Publicly invoke and blame the supreme god begging him to relent by means of increasingly valuable sacrifices Perform a human sacrifice (only practised in one community in the research area)	Renewed search for evildoers throwing a wider net that catches wizards, or enemy communities, and generation-sets.	King either steps up his demands and increases the suspense or theatrically opts out refusing gifts; selling off his rain-medicines (as in the Lowe case); or secretly flees (as in the Lafon case)
Face the king with an ultimatum to make rain or be killed, while women perform the ritual of simulated regicide by killing the king's totem.	Use increasing physical force on the king, torture him, or kill him, while taking precautions against his posthumous revenge	In an ambiance of social undifferentiation have the king perform the most powerful of sacrifices available in the repertory and solemnly declare that it people should run home before the rains	The king's interpretations of the drought will put the blame with God or with actors that can safely be accused without raising social tension	King will do all he can to save his life; he may flee, defend himself against the lynching mob that the community has become.

Sacrifice as a Buffer

While the established image of African regicide evokes a scene in which senior courtiers advised by diviners or astrologers decide in deep secrecy that, in the interest of the realm's prosperity, the king's reign should be concluded by his ritually controlled death, the Eastern Nilotic communities expect deliverance from imminent disaster by raising the suspense of their relationship with their king to a pitch of deadly intensity. There is a general belief that the greater the pressure that is brought to bear, the more likely the King will be to give in and deliver. This explains the use of torture and threats.

Sacrifice has a moderating influence on such a build-up of tension. It protects the community against a destructive runaway in the growing antagonism of king and people. It is an action king and people carry out jointly. Sacrifice, varying from the crushing of a wild cucumber to the immolation of different numbers of smaller and larger livestock, has its own repertoire of alternatives of varying degrees of violence and effectiveness, to be deployed in response to a prolongation and deepening of the crisis. Sacrifice so forms the most important buffer in the escalation of a regicidal crisis.

The following brief note by a District Administrator working among the Bari catches this relationship between suspense and sacrifice:

There comes a time when the need is too great, and he [the Rainmaker] is given a last chance. Then an ox, if they can afford it, is slaughtered, and a great feast prepared, and some of the

blood⁸ with some round pebbles [the rainstones] is put in one of the hollowed stones used by the women for grinding corn. This is left on one side, I presume as an offering to some higher power. The feast is held with much drumming; at its conclusion, on a given signal, amid dead silence, all retire to their huts, and not a sound is made till morning. If no rain comes in three weeks from that day the Rainmaker is killed and his son rules, his cattle being divided among the villagers. (Jennings-Bramly, 1906:102).

Sacrificial interventions create their own short-term suspense that is generative of rain. If other conditions are fulfilled, only the deliberate undoing of the suspense can stop the rain. The belief is dramatized by the speed with which the participants leave the scene of the sacrifice. They run to get home before the rains – without looking back. Ignoring the suspense is a subversive act of disbelief, like that of the wife of the patriarch Lot, looking back at her native city.

The killing of the Pari queen clearly shows how the acuteness of the community's sense of crisis finds expression:

- in the venue selected for meetings that are expected to resolve the crisis:
 - at the sectional meeting place (the level at which concerns are first shared);
 - at the meeting point on the ceremonial ground opposite the king's palace (for community-wide concerns)
 - in front of the village gate (a liminal zone for issues of war and peace);
 - in a location in the bush (war, the generational transfer of power, but also, as we observed, the final resolution of the rain crisis in Lafon by the lynching of the queen)
- in the degree of inclusiveness of the participants of the meeting:
 - rain problems are first discussed by the *monyomiji* at the sectional level resulting in accusations between generation and age-sets, of local rainmakers, and of other sections; When another section is accused the matter is settled by way of a stick-fight;
 - when the rain-crisis lasts, it becomes the issue of the *monyomiji* of all sections of the community;
 - before taking the crucial decision to kill the queen, the queen is brought before a meeting of all the members of the community including women and children;

Sacrifices are also ranked:

- according to the seriousness of the emergency to which they respond
 - a preventative solo performance by the king,
 - a performance at the request of a delegation from a particular area;
 - a ritual performed by the king with participation of a selected group of elders or big men and elders only,
 - a performance with participation of the *monyomiji* in varying degrees of territorial inclusiveness;
 - a meeting with compulsory presence of all members of the community;
- according to the sacredness of the location of the sacrifice:

⁸ It would seem that Jennings-Bramly had not been present at Bari sacrifices. When purification is the objective, the animal substance applied to the rainstones is the rumen, the undigested stomach contents of the sacrificial animal; oily, usually vegetal, substances are applied to boost the blessing power of the stones. According to Nilotic symbolic logic, exposure of the stones to blood is likely to cause drought (Simonse, 1992:415).

- on the rainstones of the local rainmaker;
- on the grave of one of the ancestors of the rain clan;
- on the grave of a more powerful ancestor of the rain clan accompanied by offerings of meat and prayer to the surrounding Mountains;
- on the grave of Mödi-lo-Busok⁹
- by the value of the victim immolated:
 - a wild cucumber, the minimal substitute victim in the Nilotic world;
 - one or more goats or sheep (usually a black he-goat for rain);
 - one or more bulls;
 - one or more human beings

Only one community in the area of study is known to have sacrificed young men for rain. The young men who were selected as victims were only made aware of their destiny when they were about to be killed. They had to be pure, without any exposure to violence and sex. In contrast, the king was killed in revenge, for killing his people and as an embodiment of evil. This makes the human sacrifice into a performance that is very different from regicide, Sacrifice being deliberate controlled

Sacrifice mitigates the antagonism between Rainmaker/King and his community. It provides a space for joint action between the king and the people. By using its sacrificial repertoire parsimoniously, a community can prolongate the crisis without slipping into a regicidal runaway.

The inherent instability of a political system based on confrontation that could result in regicide must have been a powerful argument to look for change, to make the system more amenable to control. Ritualizing the regicidal drama, having the king killed without the mess of a concrete murder, would be an attractive option for community leaders with a stake in stability and maintenance of the status quo. The targets of regicidal aggression, the kings, should also be expected to have looked for ways to deter their subjects from killing them.

I will show that both suspected responses to the tragedy of regicide were indeed operative in the political constellation of the East Bank of the Nile. First, I look at the various ways in which regicide has been ritualized. Then I will show that much of the observed political action of kings corresponds to strategies that improve their security and, eventually, reverse the balance of victimhood. From being at the mercy of their subjects, kings proactively sought to establish a situation where their subjects would be at their mercy.

Ritualization of the Scapegoating of the King

We found a tremendous proliferation of ritual forms relating to the violent dimension of kingship in the communities that have occasional recourse to the scapegoating their king, This variety of ritual forms testifies to the fact that we are dealing with fresh ritual creativity by communities that are still in direct touch with the practical purpose of the ritual: the need to transfer undirected, subliminal discontent to the well-structured, polarised relationship of the community with its king.

These forms can be divided into three categories:

⁹ This sequence is based on information collected by Ernest Haddon (1911) among the Bari of Gondokoro. Mödi-lo-Busok was the most powerful Master of the Land in the Gondokoro in the middle of the nineteenth century.

- rituals in which the king is designated as a victim of his community, usually at his installation;
- ritual procedures mitigating or controlling the violence of regicide;
- ritual elaborations of the king's natural death as an event where evil is expelled

Rituals in which the king is designated as a victim of his community at his installation

A preliminary step in ritualizing the scapegoat role of the king is the separation of the royal office from the pre-existing person of the king. In our area of study the differentiation of 'the two bodies of the king' is achieved by designating the undifferentiated body as 'wild' or 'predator-like' and extracting the royal body by a process of purification – as among the Lokoya- or by adding sacral powers to a pre-existing, supposedly innocent body of the designate king – as among the Bari.¹⁰

The Lokoya and Lotuho stage the installation of the king as the capture of a dangerous animal. In Liria the *monyomiji* beat the war-drum for an emergency meeting and pass the message around that a leopard or lion has been spotted near the village. The *monyomiji* collect in front of one of the gates of the village. Their number includes the prince to be installed as king: he is not supposed to be aware of his selection. One of the senior *monyomiji* will come forward to congratulate the king with his selection. This will lead to a fight between his brothers and the rest of the *monyomiji*. The *monyomiji* will win and carry the king into the village where he will undergo a long series of purification rituals that will make him fit to be the king. The Lotuho have a similar procedure. Among them the king is an aquatic monster (crocodile), captured from the river through the power of the instant performance of a quadruple sacrifice carried out by the four clans of the Lotuho.

While the Lokoya and Lotuho humanize a monster from the wild to become their King, the Bari and Lulubo deliberately turn their king-elect into a kind of monster: a receptacle of evil. The making of the king is a curse, and the word used for the 'cursing of the king' is the same as the one used for cursing the enemy.

The Bari thus transfer all diseases to the king elect:

Let measles be with you!
 Let syphilis be with you!
 Let small-pox be with you!
 Let scabies be with you!
 Let conjunctivitis be with you! etc.

AIDS would have been added to this list had the curse not been recorded before the mid-1980s. The Lulubo have several expressions that betray their understanding that the king elect is designated as a victim: the king is 'going to be cut' (as a victim in a sacrifice), and 'he is put in the eye of evil' (as the target of evil).

Ritual procedures mitigating or controlling the violence of regicide

These procedures are found outside our immediate area of research. Instead of allowing the relationship between the king and the people to escalate and degenerate to the point that the community has no other alternative than to kill its king, the Dinka and Shilluk prevent all kings from dying a natural death. The obligatory killing of the king is postponed till the time that the king is sick or about to die of old age. If a king would die a natural death, the community would lose the essential blessings of kingship.

¹⁰ This differentiation was an issue of extensive theological debate in the European Middle Ages, beautifully analyzed by Ernst Kantorowicz in *The King's Two Bodies* (1957).

The Masters of the Fishing Spear, who are the Dinka rainmakers and sacrificers, decide themselves when they should be killed. When they think the right moment has come they make their wish known. Among the Dinka of Bahr-el-Ghazal they would be buried alive. A grave is dug and the spearmaster seats himself on a roofed platform, singing solemn songs while the grave is filled by the crowd. The mood of the crowd is festive and aggressive. The men are armed. When the grave is filled they throw themselves on a calf -which had been treated with reverence until then- and kill it by trampling and suffocating it under their joint weight (Lienhardt, 1961:298-319).¹¹

Among the Donjol Dinka of Northern Upper Nile, the spearmaster would be walled in a hut together with his first wife and favourite ox and left to die of starvation and thirst (Bedri, 1939 p. 131). The Padang Dinka used to suffocate their spearmaster. The suffocation was carried out by the members of the age-sets he had initiated (Bedri, 1948: 50). The Bor Dinka had their spearmasters suffocated by dancers raising dust around them. The spearmaster was put in the middle of a closed stable and died as a result of the dust raised by the feet of his people from the loose soil consisting of burnt and dried dung.

From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, the Shilluk changed from immuring kings to suffocating them. The reason for the change was concern for a king who, while still alive, was exposed to the stench of the corpse of his female companion (Seligman & Seligman, 1932:92). This shift can count as evidence of a tendency to mitigate the violence of regicide. The killing of the king was the duty of a particular caste who also buried him.. For the Shilluk, I have found the only mention of a fixed period of reign after which the king would have outlived his royal potency and should be killed. The period mentioned is ten years (Hofmayr, 1925:179).

Frazer's famous image of the Shilluk king spending the night waiting for his rival 'as a sentinel on duty prowling round his huts fully armed, peering into the blackest shadows' (1913, part.III:22) is confusing. It is presented to underpin his vision of the king as the incarnation of the 'dying god'. The attacks that must have been the primary concern of the king were political assassinations by rivals -not the ritual death when his term was considered to have ended. Early travellers' reports indicate intense dynastic rivalry. The king's palace was built as a true labyrinth and the king changed his sleeping hut every night (Beltrame, 1881, 79). The position defended by Evans-Pritchard in the Frazer lecture of 1948 maintains this confusion. Against Frazer, Evans Pritchard argues that all the historic cases of Shilluk regicide were political and that their representation as having a deeper meaning was just a part of the mystifying ideology surrounding kingship. The evidence does not support Evans-Pritchard's position. Riad's detailed review of the reported causes of death shows that out of thirty-one rulers, the first four mythical rulers vanished mysteriously, nine kings were killed in dynastic rivalry, six were killed in war, and six others were ritually killed. The six remaining kings either died of other causes or information is lacking on their death (1959:52-163).

The ritual construction of the king's natural death as a salutary event

Regicide carried out in response to drought or to another disaster has two closely linked aspects: the expulsion of evil and the collection of the blessings:

Averting the evil of the king: The royal funerary rituals of the communities under study are extraordinarily complex. After the king has died, the greatest precautions are needed to defend against the evil powers that are believed to be incarnate in him. These powers must be

¹¹ This is a manner of killing in which many a Rainmaker from the Lulubo and Bari lost his life.

contained or channelled to safe locations lest disorder should follow. It was a general practice in the area to plug the orifices of deceased kings with leaves or sesame paste. Before laying the king in his grave, the leaves were taken out. They were carried in a solemn procession to the river or to a cave away from the village by old women advancing on their knees. While moving in this way they waved their arms, as if they were harvesting sorghum. The Bari dispose of the royal hair --that has not been cut since the king's installation-- in a similar way.

During the period immediately following the king's death wailing is prohibited. Strict non-violence is observed lest evil powers be unchained. The king might turn in a leopard. Sacrifices at the funeral should be by suffocation --bloodless and noiseless. The practice of burying the prime minister (Lotuho), a slave (Bari), a nubile maiden (Shilluk), the king's favourite ox (Dinka, Shilluk) with the king should probably be interpreted as attempts to avert the posthumous anger of the king. These performances on the body of the king who has died a natural death have the same objective as the piercing of the tongue of the Queen of the Pari and the mixing of a crushed melon with her blood and stomach contents.

Collecting the blessings of the king: There is a general belief that the death of a king is bound to cause rain. (If rain falls out of season there is immediate speculation which rainmaker's death might have triggered it.) The death of the king must therefore be exploited to the maximum. The Bari prolong the king's dying. In fact, the Bari king is made to die three times. After his 'medical' death, which is bound to cause some showers, people wait for his 'effective death' when the bloated stomach of the plugged corpse, placed on a platform, bursts. The dripping of the body liquids on the land below, and on the slave positioned under the platform, is the most potent manifestation of his power. This slave, if not buried with his master, thus receives the most powerful blessing as the assistant of the future king. The grave of the king will continue to produce miracles for one rainy season. After that the tumulus on top of the grave will be: his third and final death.

The power of the king is considered most effective in the period after his death. The rains following his death are attributed to him. The dead king will remain 'in power' for at least one cultivation season before a successor can take over. After this reign of the deceased king, his bones are exhumed, placed in pots and transferred to the royal shrine in stages. This ritual is even more elaborate and sophisticated than the burial itself. The process of reaping the benefits of the king's death, from the time of the burial to exhumation, is surrounded by a variety of purification sacrifices. These range from the crushing of cucumbers to the killing of a big black bull. The ritual surrounding the king's funeral aims at purification, at separating the beneficial powers of the king from his evil. The funeral process among the Lotuho, which culminates in the exhumation, can be interpreted as a long extended purification process. At each stage some evil is removed; simultaneously the blessing deriving from the king becoming purer, but also less virulent. The fact that no flesh was left on the bones of the king of Tirangore at his exhumation in 1986 was a posthumous confirmation of his good-naturedness, of the purity of his soul.

There is a striking parallel with the dual rule of the dead and the live king in ancient Egypt. Dismembered Osiris, the dead king, comes to life each year with the flooding of the Nile. I believe the parallel should be explained by the universal origins of kingship in the scapegoat mechanism, rather than by cultural borrowing or diffusion. Moreover, the kind of sacrificial order that characterized these kingdoms has developed as a very specific response to preliminary disorders. The ethnographic material presented here gives us a glimpse of the nature of that disorder. In comparison to the spontaneous regicidal dramas I have recorded, the sacrificial killing of the king is a step in the direction of greater priestly control, greater mystification, and reduced popular participation in the drama of kingship.

What requires more consideration is the epistemological incapacity of researchers to capture kingship as the multi-dimensional drama it is. Once embarked on the fascinating wealth of royal symbolism and ritual, too many lose sight of the realpolitik of kingship. And when the point of departure is the political economy of kingship, it would seem that ritual and symbolism are only allowed to appear as false consciousness.

The Revolution of the Scapegoat Kings

Even when the drama of kingship is staged on a level playing field where the expectations of the people are matched by the blessings of the king and the expectations of the king by the obedience and tribute of his people, the king is under permanent pressure to strengthen his position. When it comes to the use of physical force, the king, his kinsmen and clients will just form a minority in the wider community. It is not only his interest in his own survival but also his duty to his clansmen that forces the king to consolidate and strengthen his power. If he enjoys taking risks, he may use the changes in the weather to this effect: by exacting tribute from his subjects. Though the benefits of his position may be at times be impressive, the risk of being killed in the game are great.

The stability of his office is better served by long-term investments in social and economic capital, by obliging his subjects with generous gifts, as a ‘big man’, or by investing in networking through trade, or by engaging in political alliances with neighbouring kings. When we zoom in on these activities we touch the familiar ground of power politics. A brief listing of the political and economic strategies deployed by the Nilotic scapegoat kings will suffice:

Establishing a network of alliances:

Matrimonial alliances were the primary means by which the king consolidated his position. The Lotuho king would have a wife, a palace and a household in each of the twenty or so macro-villages that constituted his kingdom. This gave him a *pied-à-terre* in each of the communities of his realm that were frequently in conflict with one another. Government chiefs during and after the colonial period continued to follow the same strategy. To a large extent the tribute in cattle received for the rain must have been used to extend this matrimonial network.

Matrimonial alliances also served as an important political instrument for the conduct of foreign policy. Alliances with neighbouring kings were crucial when the king’s position was threatened in a rain crisis. They offered sanctuary to their ally. They also offered military support when their ally was besieged by his own subject *monyomiji*. For example, the powerful town of Imatari came to its end in an attack of the Toposa that was coordinated by its own king against the *monyomiji* of Imatari (Simonse, 1992:173-5). The accounts of the first travellers on the Upper Nile and the first colonial administrators are full of stories of kings eagerly looking for a strong ally to impress their commoners and enemies alike – categories that sometimes overlapped or coincided. When Samuel Baker came to the Lotuho village of Hiyala, its king ‘most coolly proposed that we should plunder one of his villages that was rather too “liberal” in his views’(Baker, 1867:152).

Modifying the demographic balance

As a result of the multiple marriages of the kings, royal families and clans grew more rapidly than those of the commoners. The section that is home to the royal family was normally the largest of the community. As a result of networking by the kings, the society on the east bank developed two clearly marked trans-ethnic classes: the royals and the commoners. The lack

of restraint with which allied royals of different communities joined hands in punishing and plundering their subjects could be interpreted in terms of an emerging class contradiction.

Establishing monopolies of trade

Intertwined with these political and matrimonial networks were trade relations. In the middle of the 19th century political and trade networks on the East Bank overlapped, the two Lotuho dynasties dealing with competing northern traders of slaves and of other commodities. After 1840 the demand for ivory allowed the kings of the Upper Nile to increase their wealth rapidly. Cotton textiles, which had reached the Bari from the Indian Ocean well before the arrival of the first traders from Khartoum, were a trade monopoly of the king. Trade became the most important asset of power in the latter half of the nineteenth century, especially among the Bari who were strategically located on the Nile. The power of the Egyptian governors (Baker, Gordon and Emin) was to a large extent based on their brokerage of the trade from the North.

Establish monopolies of production

Kings sought to control all specialized branches of production. Blacksmiths, who were the weapons producers, were attached to the royal courts, as slaves (as in Bari) or as close allies of the king (Lulubo). The power of the Bekat kings of Bari was closely associated with their control of the extraction of iron ore found in large quantities on Bilinyan mountain. The disintegration of Bekat power in the middle of the nineteenth century may be largely due to the import of cheap scrap iron and copper from the North from 1841, the year that the first expedition from Khartoum reached Bariland.. Control of metalworking was also a feature of the Lotuho kingdoms. Up to the twentieth century the Lotuho king was the owner of all the copper helmets made from re-processed bullet cartridges. When the bearer died the helmet was returned to the king, who would distribute it to another follower. Among the Bari, hunters and fishermen were dependents (clients or slaves) of the king.

Tribute

The king's fields were cultivated by his subjects. Each year the *monyomiji* of each community were expected to spend one day of clearing and digging on the king's fields, while the women had to spend one or two days of weeding. In the larger kingdoms such cultivation was done in all the local communities, supervised by the resident queen. As a result of this labour the king had significant surplus resources at his disposal. We have seen how, on the smaller scale of the sections for which the Lowe Rainmaker was responsible, this prestation of labour was a major issue between the *monyomiji* and the Rainmaker.

Armies and the monopoly of the use of physical force

Despite their control of blacksmithing, and their role as military commanders of the *monyomiji* -at least among the Lotuho- kings had limited control of the use of physical force of their subjects. *Ex officio* the king's only instrument of power was his curse to bring drought. When two clans or villages had fought, and the king had settled the case, the threat of drought had a restraining influence. His position was really determined by the balance of power between his own clan, usually one of the bigger ones, his internal and external allies, and whatever coalition chose to oppose him.

The introduction of firearms offered an opportunity to tilt the balance of power in the king's favour. Kings started to establish armies equipped with firearms from the 1880s. By the end of the Mahdist period (1898) King Lomoro of Tirangore was reported to have 200 men under arms organized as his royal army. Bariland, along the Nile, was divided into a number of zones controlled by warlords, each with his own army. Many, but not all, were

rain kings who had succeeded in using the opportunities offered by the new times to consolidate their position.

The centralisation of ritual

A last strategy in consolidating his power is the centralization of ritual powers under the king. The societies studied here show a graded scale. At one extreme we have decentralized societies such as the Lulubo and Lokoya where, next to the rain-clan and the king, each clan has a specific cosmic responsibility. The title of king is shared by three to six office-holders.¹² In the Bari and Lotuho kingdoms, which are larger in size, many of these minor powers have been incorporated in the power of the king. However, clan traditions still manifest past responsibilities. The seasonal rituals of each community are, in the larger kingdoms, made uniform and subordinate to the kingdom's rituals.

None of the Nilotic scapegoat kings in our area of study was able to tilt the balance of power to his advantage and to the interests of his personal survival irreversibly. The colonial situation spoiled the game. The civil wars that ensued defined a new arena for political competition with completely new stakes. However, the evidence that the old kings tried very hard to reverse their social position, put an end to their vulnerability and, in many cases, establish themselves, in turn, as the victimizers of their own communities, is overwhelmingly clear. In doing this they were revolutionary agents in the process of inventing statehood.

The State as the End of Regicidal Tragedy

The state is defined by its monopoly of the use of legitimate physical force. None of the scapegoat kings discussed here achieved such a monopoly, despite their best efforts. Their sovereignty remained contested. Some of the kings went a long way toward running their rain kingdoms as states, but they could only succeed at the cost of extreme repression. King Alikori of Lafon, ruling around the turn of the century, is remembered as an absolute despot. His repressive policies caused one complete section of Lafon, Kor, to go into exile in Acholi, only returning after Alikori had died. Lomoro in Tirangore may have been a similar case. As a result of his clever dealings with the Mahdists, and thanks to the army he built up, he attained undisputed local sovereignty and was viewed by the British as the King of all Lotuho. In his case, however, opposition from rivals and *monyomiji* was too strong. In the end he was not assassinated because of drought but, most likely, because of an adulterous affair. Had firearms come earlier to these political entrepreneurs, a belt of small-scale states might have developed between the Zande states in the west and the pastoral gerontocracies of the peoples of the Karimojong cluster to the east.

These effervescent Nilotic polities were characterized by an acute sense of political risk and opportunity. Their kings developed formidable skills in crisis management, skills that may have been the decisive factor that made Nilotic political entrepreneurs such a success in the Bantu kingdoms to the south. In terms of statehood, anthropologists have considered Buganda and Bunyoro among the most advanced kingdoms of Africa. A disconcerting aspect of these kingdoms is the arbitrariness with which their monarchs victimized their subjects. Were these apparently firmly established monarchies still haunted by the spectre of a reversible power balance and the scapegoating of the King?

¹² Liria, for instance has a King of Heaven (rain), who is considered the most powerful, a King of the Land (Fertility of the Soil), a King of the Mountain (reproduction of humans), a King of Grain, a King of War, and the King of Winds. Together they are known as the 'Fingers of God'. (Simonse, 1992:264ff).

What is won and what is lost when reversible systems of kingship are transformed into the irreversible system of the state? We win stability, the possibility for sustained accumulation of wealth and power which results in the further expansion of the state at the cost of less effective political systems.¹³ What we lose are the regular plunges into political chaos -- but also the galvanising suspense of the stand-offs between king and people. It is this last aspect of kingship that continues to fascinate us, the modern or post-modern citizens of successful and entrenched state systems. It may be the deeper reason why we do not want to give up on our antiquated, non-utilitarian, spendthrift monarchies. Our kings and queens remind us that the state is not an alien straightjacket forced on us, but that it originated as a relationship between social actors, between the people and royalty. The continued presence of royalty among us is an antidote to the bloodless instrumentality of the state. When our contemporary royals rebel against the ruling monarch and compete for the favour of the public we are reminded, that, in the end, the workings of the state are embedded in social relationships. When these same royals die as a result of their controversial initiatives we are offered the temporary illusion that the state is still rooted in risk-taking, defiance and suspense.

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¹³ Of course, this gain is the cause of other larger-scale historical tragedies with ever smaller circles of winners and larger masses of losers.

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