The Burst and the Cut Stomach —The Metabolism of Violence and Order in Nilotic Kingship—

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An interpretation is offered of two contrasting Nilotic customs relating to the stomach of a king who has just died: the cutting of the stomach of a king who has been killed by his subjects for causing drought and the practice of some Bari speaking peoples of allowing the stomach of the king, who has died a natural death, to bloat and burst. The case material on the cutting of the stomach is taken from nineteenth century accounts by travellers and a missionary concerning two cases of regicide among the Bari and from the study of the murder of the Pari queen in 1984 by the anthropologist Eisei Kurimoto.

In a first round of interpretation it is argued that the relevant property of the stomach in this context, as well as in other Nilotic sacrificial ritual, is its capacity to turn a mass of undifferentiated substance into something valued and desirable. In a second round we demonstrate that the stomach-metaphor is used to make sense of the socio-political impact of the king on the conflicts in his realm and, closely interwined with that, of his cosmic impact on the weather. To understand why the king's metabolism plays such an important role at the moment of his death we turn to the theory of the victimary origins of kingship developed by René Girard. Since the death of the king is a powerful lever for achieving social unity and cosmic harmony, his people should leave nothing to chance when he dies, especially with regards to the organ most closely associated with his powers to dissolve conflicts and bring peace and rain.

Key words: sacred kingship, body symbolism, victimization, Bari, Pari, Nilotes.

1. INTRODUCTION

When a king had died among the Bari, the Kuku, and the Nyepu—three Eastern Nilotic peoples living along the Nile over a distance of about 250 km north of the Sudan-Uganda border—his body was raised on a platform that was normally used for drying the freshly harvested sorghum, the local staple. The platform consisted of a simple rafter supported by poles between one and two meters high. One of the king's slaves was ordered to guard the corpse while it bloated and, eventually, burst. He was positioned under the rafter in such a way that when the belly ruptured, which normally happened after four days, the liquid would drop on him. When this had happened, the slave would burst out in wailing alarming the other mourners that the king had now really died.(1)

In some communities the king's stomach was removed from the corpse and shown to the waiting crowd as proof that the king was truly dead. Only after these preliminaries could

Nilo-Ethiopian Studies 2: 1–13 (1994)

the corpse be taken down from the rafter and be interred in the subterranean niche-grave that had been prepared for it. The slave who had thus been anointed by the 'oil' of the late king, was either buried alive together with his master, because of the awesome powers spilt upon him, or he would become the principal keeper of the rainstones of the kingdom, the principal ritual objects of kingship.

A king's power and fortunes depended to a large extent on the rain he was believed to give to his subjects. If rain persistently failed and the king was no longer able to provide his people with a satisfactory explanation of the drought, the discontent of the community was directed at the king and his life would be at risk. On the basis of archival research and field-work during which I studied the kingdoms—some large, many quite small—located between the Nile and the Kidepo river in Equatoria, I identified 24 cases in which kings or queens had been killed for their failure to give rain (Simonse 1992: 360–364).

The most detailed account available on a case of regicide in the area is that of the killing of Queen Nyiburu of the Pari, on July 8, 1984, by Eisei Kurimoto (1986). The Pari (also known as Lokoro, Pöri, or Föri) are eastern neigbours of the Bari. They live in one large village—Lafon—in a string of six settlements around Lipul hill and are speakers of a Luo dialect. One of their migration myths, of which there are several, points in the direction of present-day Bariland (Driberg 1925: 49; Buxton 1963: 5; Kurimoto 1988a; Simonse 1992: 53–55). An offshoot of the Pari, locally known as Böri, live among the Bari speaking Köbora on the Nile (Buxton 1963: 5).

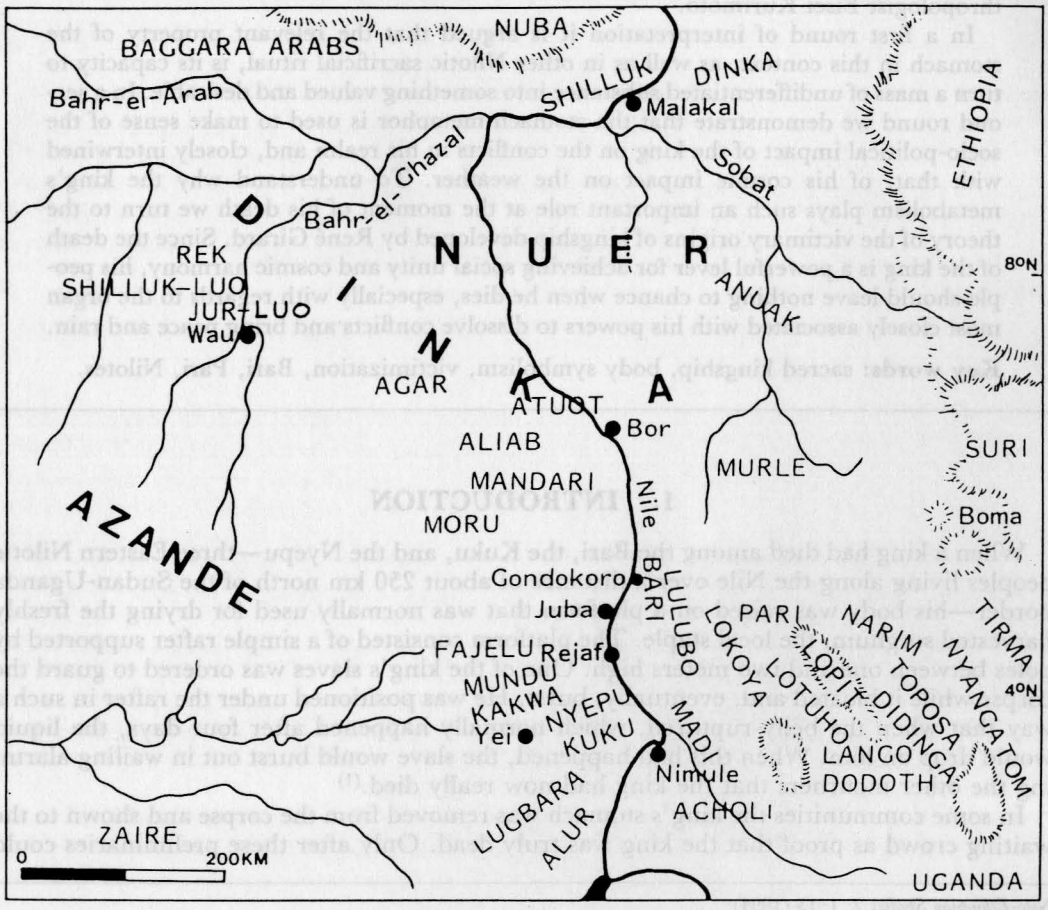

Fig. 1. Ethinic groups of southern Sudan.

Kurimoto who had stayed at Lafon for several extensive periods since 1978, visited the regicidal community four weeks after the event. The murder had been the culmination of a series of dramatic conflicts between the ruling age-grade and queen Nyiburu that had begun when she took office in 1980. The issue had been the rain which had been erratic for as long as the queen had ruled. At several occasions the queen had been accused, she had once had to flee to Bariland out of fear for her life, she had been deposed in her absence and replaced by another rainmaker (from Acholi), called back when the Acholi rainmaker had brought too much rain, she had attended the exhumation the bones of her late husband who was believed to have posthumously sent the drought. Finally, when she and her fellow-rainmaker from the same royal clan had taken the initiative to determine the cause of the drought for themselves—by seeing a diviner visiting from the district-headquarters— they had both been put under house-arrest. When her colleague escaped from the village, the blame for the drought for a while turned away from her. But when the rains of 1984 failed again the hostility of the community quickly stiffened against her. After a number of emergency meetings called by the ruling age-grade and attended by ever larger sections of the community, it was decided that she should die. The ruling age-grade took her to a location away from the village. She was kicked, beaten and thrown into a fire that was lit for the purpose.

> 'Her body was carried into the bush at some distance of the place of the ordeal. It was stretched down on the ground. Her belly and stomach were cut open. The *mojomiji* [ruling age-grade] brought a fruit of the *ucok* (a cultivated melon). It was crushed and mixed with the stomach contents of Nyiburu. The mixture was put back into the stomach. Then her tongue was pierced with thorns on both sides. The body was left in the bush' (Kurimoto 1986: 134; Simonse 1992: 370).

There are two other historically documented cases of a king being killed and his stomach being ripped open. On June 21, 1859 Nyiggilo, the king of the Bari of Bilinyan was killed by a gang of youngsters. Like Nyiburu his death came after a long build-up of tension between himself and his subjects over the rain. Since he was the only person possessing a gun in his kingdom he was able to delay his execution for some years (Lejean 1865: 75; Simonse 1992: 204). The Austrian missionary Franz Morlang who, according to the traveller Von Harnier (1866: 49), was present at the scene of the killing, limits himself to a brief mention of the event in a footnote:

> 'Finally the blame was cast on the Rainmaker himself, Nyiggilo, the great prince of Bilinyan. He had to flee from Bilinyan where all his livestock was robbed and his homestead set alight. As a fugitive, persecuted by everybody, he wandered from place to place till he found refuge with his relative Mödi near Gondokoro where he waited for the ships from Khartoum to escape and save his life. However, on June 21st a large group of armed young men assembled from far and near in Kujönö (Mödi's residence) and impetuously demanded for the Rainmaker Nyiggilo. He had fled again but he was captured in a nearby village called Swakir. He was thrown to the ground with four spear thrusts and some blows of clubs. His stomach was slit open, and he was left to be eaten by the vultures. This is how Nyiggilo, the prince of Bilinyan who was known in Europe by name, this is how the great Nyiggilo died. After his murder all cattle belonging to his family and his relatives was collected, raided and driven off' (Morlang 1862/3: 115, n.1).[2]

The explorer Lejean who visited Gondokoro a year later confirms the slitting of Nyiggilo's belly, but the method of disposing of the body recorded by him was different. The account is put in the mouth of the son of the man who did the slitting, a certain Tschoka [Swaka?] or Tchoba [Subek?] who was the chief of the blacksmiths in Gondokoro:

> 'We asked Nyiggilo to give us rain. He made promises and demanded cattle as payment. Despite his spells the rain did not come. So we got angry. Then Nyiggilo took his rifle and threatened to kill everybody. We had to leave him. Last year the same thing happened for the third time: then we lost patience, we slit Nyiggilo's belly open and threw him into the river: he will no longer make

fun of us' (Lejean 1865: 75).[3]

A third case, which occurred in 1850, in the Bari kingdom of Jabur is, without further details, reported by the Savoyard merchant Brun-Rollet:

> 'The kujurs and royalty of the White Nile only have influence in their tribes in as far as people believe they posses magical powers over rain. When the rains delay and the pastures get finished, every family-head has to bring one head of cattle to the magician to attract the heavenly waters with this offering. If the weather remains dry, the people assemble to demand the rain from their magicians once again. If the rain does not fall they open their belly which is supposed to contain the rainstorms. In 1850 the king of Jabur, a land between Bilinyan and Ferica died in this manner' (1855: 227).[4]

The question I want to answer in this article is why the stomach of a king who had died a natural death had to be allowed to swell and burst while the stomach of a king who had been killed for stopping the rain had to be ripped open. Before embarking on an answer to this question, however, I have to provide some background information on the peoples and kings to which this exercise relates.[5]

2. KINGSHIP IN THE EQUATORIAN NILE VALLEY

The Nilotic societies are remarkable for the degree to which they allow open expression of conflict. Among them the pre-colonial society of the Bari stands out in its warlike character and its proneness to armed conflict. The European travellers and administrators who entered Bariland in the middle of the last century were struck by the great courage of the Bari compared to the soldiers brought from Khartoum and Egypt, but also by their excessive rivalry. In comparison with the Bari, the Dinka, further downstream, were characterized as "soft" (Lejean 1865: 85) and "more sociable" (Kaufmann, in: Toniolo 1974: 180). Charles Gordon who, as the Egyptian Governor of Equatoria, pacified part of Bariland observed that the courage of the Bari warriors was nullified by their quarrelsomeness: "They are far too jealous of one another to combine their forces against us" (Hill 1881: 102).

A warlike front to the outside world and rivalry inside also characterized the Pari political community that was modelled on the *monyomiji* systems of the Lotuho speaking peoples living to their south (Simonse 1993). As an illustration of this taste for confrontation I mention two events: the exodus to Acholiland of a whole section (one of the six) because of intersectional rivalry and a conflict with the king, in the first decade of the century (Kurimoto 1988a: 9–10), and the conflict between the ruling and the aspiring age-grade in the mid-80s which went so far that the age-sets immediately following the ruling age-grade joined the Sudan People's Liberation Army, very much against the will of the rulers (Kurimoto 1994: 107).

The proneness to conflict of the Bari has been a major factor in the collapse of their political system once they were faced with traders, slavers and with colonial powers that had an interest in dividing them. The peoples practising the *monyomiji* system have generally retained more of their political integrity during the period of the incursions of the traders and the establishment of colonial rule.

The stability of these political systems depended on two factors: a mechanism of balanced or complementary opposition not unlike that described by Evans-Pritchard for the Nuer (1940: 139–162), and the institution of kingship. The system of balanced opposition among the Bari and in the *monyomiji* societies was not expressed in a kinship-idiom as among the Nuer, but manifested itself as a tendency for antagonistic groups (based on territory, descent, or age) to match their forces. This matching can, for example, be seen in the formation of a new age-grade. The ruling age-grade normally only allowed itself to be retired when the aspiring age-grade could make a convincing show that it possessed equal strength. Such a show might include an inter-age-grade stick-fight (Simonse 1992: 172). According

to the regional code of war the difference in the number of casualties on both sides should not exceed certain limits. Warriors were expected to look for men of equal strength and fame among their enemies (Simonse 1992: 165–188). In the village organization the oppositional balancing took the form of moiety-formation (Simonse 1992: 152–157).

In this fragile balance of forces the king played an important stabilizing role. Transcending the differences between rivals he settled disputes between clans, sections and villages. His homestead was a sanctuary for the persecuted. He represented the unity of his people and led them in war. He performed the rituals that concerned the well-being of the community as a whole and presided over the installation of a new age-grade and the retirement of the old.

Although the king could mobilize the people of his own section to raid recalcitrant subjects in punishment, his most important sanction was the ability attributed to him to 'spoil' the rain. The king made active use of his rain-powers by pronouncing threats and sending curses to rivals and insubordinate subjects. If a drought could not be attributed to a royal scheme the diviners were there to detect or make up a suitable cause: usually some shortcoming of an individual or group in his or its respect of the king.

When the rains failed the relations between the king and the rest of the community became increasingly tense and antagonistic. The king would blame his people pointing at disrespect for his authority, at the small size of the tribute, at the quarrels among his people. The oracles of the diviners would point at ominous sins (e.g. incest) and witchcraft. The people in turn blamed the king for being uncooperative, incompassionate, stubborn or downright evil and might threaten to kill him. The king was not a passive, ritual, victim. He resisted attempts at his life—as Nyiggilo's case proves. He fought back with force and diplomacy, alternating promises of rain with counter-accusations, —meanwhile hoping for a turn in the weather. If the drought persisted the escalation in the antagonism could reach a point of no return—as in the case of the Pari queen.

3. LETTING THE KING DIE OR KILLIMG HIM

In all the kingdoms in the Equatorian part of the Nile valley the imminent death of the king gave rise to special precautions and heightened expectations. When people knew the king was in agony changes in the weather and the environment were followed with special interest as side-effects of the dying of the king Vice-versa those further afield would base their judgment of the state of the king on their observations of the weather.

Three sequences, each marked by a period of waiting and a concluding intervention by those responsible can be distinguished in the protocol of the royal funeral:

1. from the agony till the moment of biological death concluded by the laying out and plugging of the body;
2. the period of laying in state concluded by the burial;
3. the period after the burial concluded by the exhumation of the bones or skull, or by the leveling of the grave.

For the Bari speaking peoples the second period is the most significant. It is the period the attention of the whole community is focused on the dying of the king. Only when the corpse has burst is the king assumed dead. The Lotuho speakers, including the Lulubo and possibly the Pari, put more emphasis on the first and the third stage of the funeral. Since practices in one community throw light on those of their neighbours it pays to cast our net a little wider than the funeral customs of the Pari and the Bari speaking communities:

When the queen Ikang of the Lotuho kingdom of Tirangore who died on November 1, 1938 entered her last agony people put ears of the different varieties of sorghum cultivated by the Lotuho, and three small calabashes with sesame oil, groundnut oil and butter in her hands 'so that they would receive a lasting blessing, and as a homage since these were the products that had matured owing to the queen's rain mandate' (Pazzaglia, typescript: 130–131).

For most peoples the physical death of the king was the signal to start ritual action. Sacrifices were made. The corpse was shaven, washed and oiled. All the body orifices, in-

cluding the spaces under the nails, are closed with sesame paste (Bari), or with the soil of an ant-hill (Kuku, Nyepu).[6] Other peoples (Lulubo, Nyangbara, Kakwa) use the leaves of particular trees classified as 'cool' (Simonse 1992: 382, n.16). The reason given for this practice is to prevent evil forces from leaving the body. These may include worms, crop-eating insects and birds, grasshoppers. The spaces under the nails are filled up to prevent them from turning into predator claws.

According to information collected by Haddon the Bari used to make cuts in the corpse with a knife. In the cuts they rubbed a sorghum seeds and the husks and the oil of freshly ground sesame seeds(see endnote 5; Haddon, *thesis*: 79). They also put rainstones in his arm-pits and hair. Plentiful rains, peace, and above all "food" figure as the results expected from these practices.

From the moment the death of the king had been announced till his final burial all wailing was strictly prohibited or it had to be carried out in a strictly controlled way as among the Lotuho where people were allowed four rounds of wailing in response to four signals blown on a special horn (Pazzaglia, typescript: 130). In some communities some wailing was allowed again after the closure of the king's body. The sacrifices made at the death of the king had to be of a noiseless type: by strangling or suffocation. Manifestations of anger and grief, disorderliness and noise were forbidden. They could activate destructive powers to leave the corpse. As long as the belly of the Kuku Rainmaker had not ruptured no other funerals were allowed. People dying during that period had to be buried in silence, without ceremony (Yunis 1924: 21). Only after the royal abdomen had burst was wailing permitted again. Despite the lamentations by those close to the king the overall mood was festive. The dance prescribed for the occasion was the *kore*, the jumping dance associated with the celebration of a plentiful harvest. According to a Bari informant the bursting of the king's body made "peace, rain and food to spread over the land as air from a punctured balloon."

Where one does not wait for the king's body to burst, as among the Lulubo, the eastern neighbours of the Bari, the leaves that are used for plugging the orifices of the king, are solemnly disposed of before the king is buried. Leaving them in would interfere with the next harvest. Among the Lulubo these relics of the dying king were carried in procession by a group of old ladies to a stream or a cave outside the village. The leaves were handled with the greatest respect and the procession stopped at a number of prescribed stations at each of which prayers and genuflections were made. Royal mourning songs were sung in which the dropping of the liquids from the king's body was gratefully accepted as a blessing. A similar procedure was followed by the Bari who had the hair of their dead king—which had remained unshaven during his occupancy of the throne—taken away to a place in the bush.

The grave of the king served as a place of worship especially during the first year after the burial. The newly buried king was believed to continue controlling the fortunes of his subjects. No successor was appointed till the beginning of the new agricultural season. During this period the subject villages or village-sections came to dance around the grave for rain and for a good harvest. These dances were normally concluded by the distribution of sorghum seeds by the sisters of the late king. This so-called 'oil of the king' was mixed with seeds from the private stock. Among the Bari and Lulubo this "year of the reign of the dead king" was formally ended by the leveling of the tomb. Among the Lotuho, Lokoya and Pari the mourning taboo on making unnecessary noise, shouting, drumming and fighting remained in force till the exhumation of the dead king's skull (Lokoya) or his skeleton (Lotuho, Pari).

The latter communities monitor the decomposition of the body of the king with the same expectation as the Bari speakers do the bloating and bursting of the king's corpse. To facilitate the decomposition of the corpse the soil surrounding the grave should be of certain composition. People may revert to a reburial if the rains prove to be affected by the slow pace of decomposition. The more easily the body falls apart the better the king, and the greater the material and spiritual well-being of the community.

While for the Bari and their Bari speaking neighbours the generation of the king's blessings at his death is modelled on a process of concentrated fermentation resulting in an explosion in the open air, that of the peoples practicing exhumation, is modelled on a process of

impregnation of the surrounding earth by the king's blessing substance.

There could not be a greater contrast than that between the festive, expectant, non-interventionist mood that characterizes the crowds attending a royal funeral and the ominous tragedy that is regicide. While the funeral is surrounded by all sorts of restrictive taboos on spontaneous and potentially violent action, the killing of the king is a violent discharge of tension that has built up over the years. A king is not killed lightly. His death can have disastrous consequences for the community. The king's posthumous vengeance (Pari: *cien*, Bari: *senya*) could cause more drought. When the regicidal crowd stands face to face with its victim for the final ordeal it knows that by killing the king it is taking grave risks. The reassurance of the victim that it will not take revenge—as did Nyiburu—counts for little. One is aware of the possibility that the victim may be the wrong one. This was the conclusion the ruling age-grade of the Lokoya community of Lowe came to when the burying alive of their rainmaker did not bring the rains back. At the beginning of rainy season following the killing, the ruling age-grade perfomed a sacrifice of atonement on the rainmaker's grave admitting their mistake. After that they exhumed his skull and placed it in a cave with the customary respect due to a king (Simonse 1992: 202). For the community regicide is a choice between a greater and a lesser evil: either suffer drought and famine at the hands of the live king or get rid of him with the risk of a posthumous curse over the weather. The Pari ruling age-grade that was responsible for the death of Nyiburu therefore took all kinds of precautions to reduce this risk. They staged the killing at a location in the bush far away from the village. The body was left in an even more remote place or thrown in the river so that it could not easily interfere with the community's rains. The avoidance or neutralization of the queen's *cien* was the main reason given by Kurimoto's informants for the different manipulations of her body (cutting, inserting the mixture of tasteless melon, blood and stomach-contents, the transfixing of the tongue). The tongue in this context is, obviously, the organ most immediately involved in cursing.

Allowing the king's stomach to bloat and burst and cutting and opening it are opposite practices. If one trusts the king is working for the benefit of the community and that his death will form the climax of his good works, nothing should be done to disturb the generation of blessings expected from it. If however one assumes that the king is working against the interests of the community, then a radical intervention is required to stop him from wreaking more havoc. The organ where the drought is produced should be opened, its functioning be brought to a halt, and its effects neutralized.

We have now placed the two practices, allowing the stomach to bloat and to cut it, in their context. What is not yet clear is why from all parts of the body the stomach should be cut or be left to burst. To understand this we need to take a closer look at the symbolic role of stomachs and of the substances involved in the metabolic process.

4. THE WORK OF THE STOMACH

The rumen, the greenish, half-digested grass found in the stomachs of sacrificial animals, forms the most important substance used in the purificatory rituals of the Nilotes. In the sacrifices I have witnessed the use of stomach-contents was far more prominent than that of blood. The rumen is usually taken out before the animal is killed and spread over the persons or objects that are in need of purification. As the case may be, they are smeared on the village shrine, sprinkled over the paths leading to the village, or over fields in need of ritual cleansing. They may be thrown to the crowd attending the sacrifice, or applied to specific spots of the bodies of the individuals for whose benefit the sacrifice is made. They are also used to wash the rainstones. In some places the rainstones may be enveloped overnight in the stomach of the animal sacrificed for the rain, in order to increase their effectiveness.

The rationale for using stomach-contents and the stomach, according to informants' statements, is that they help to make things 'cool,' coolness being associated with a state of peacefulness, lack of excitement, and non-violence.

Frequently a distinction is made between rumen in different stages of digestion the cruder substance being used in removing pollution, and the more refined substances for ap-

plying positive blessings. This distinction would suggest that the more the digestive process has put its mark on the matter processed the more it is associated with a state of religious perfection.

In Western culture the substances that are in the process of being digested and the by-products of the metabolic process epitomize dirt, the most common form of pollution. They are waste matter that should as soon as possible be removed from the public eye.(7) On what grounds then do they in the societies of the Southern Sudan constitute a vehicle of purification?

First of all it should be noted that in the societies under discussion animal dung is not considered to be mere waste matter. It has many useful purposes: it is used as manure, as fuel, as plaster for walls and floors, and as a protective covering for wounds. Goat and cow-dung are collected and, if necessary, carried over long distances.

The purifying properties of stomach contents only appear when we consider the processual character of stomach contents. Rumen is still recognizable as grass but already decomposing into something else, something less definite, less differentiated: on the one hand physical strength, life, on the other excrement. The view that it is this undifferentiated, 'transsubstantial, character' of stomach contents that counts in ritual is supported by other practices. The fact that the rumen is taken from the stomach while the animal is still alive, that is while its digestive process is still in tact, would suggest that what is being collected is rather processual than substantial.

Among the Lotuho, during the initiation of a new ruling age-class, the bowels of goats are made into rings and hung around the necks of the new initiates. Here again an element from the digestive process is used to facilitate the metamorphosis from young man to member of the ruling age-class. The inspection of the bowels of sacrificial animals for forecasting the future fits in very neatly with this interpretation of the symbolism of the digestive process.

If it is true that the stomach and its contents signify a transformation from one state of another, the next question is: what is the transformation that is believed to take place in the king's stomach? According to informants a whole range of good things are produced there: health, rain, food, peace, etc. The order generated by the operation of the king's stomach embraces both cosmic and social well-being.

However, the metabolic process in the king's stomach should run its full course. No substance should leave it by accident, unprocessed. Therefore all orifices are plugged after death to avoid cosmic and social disturbances: epidemics, crop pests, man-eating predators etc.

The king's body is plugged to prevent any unprocessed disorder from coming out. When the abdomen is allowed to bloat, the residual forces of disorder left in the king are being metamorphosed in forces of order which are set free at the bursting of the corpse.

Under what circumstances should the stomach be cut? During my field-work I identified three types of disturbances of royal stomachs: excessive retention manifesting itself in swellings of the stomach and also of other parts of the body, incontinence, and the inversion of the metabolic process.

When a King does not give the rain demanded by his subjects his body, especially the stomach, is believed to show swellings. These are considered to be the combined result of indigestion as a result of his greed to receive more and more gifts and of obstipation, an unability or unwillingness to release the rain due to the community. To break his retention physical force is applied by the community. One rainmaker whom I knew personally frequently suffered from a swollen stomach, a stigma in the eyes of his people. At least at one occasion, during a period of drought, this stigma was the justification for a severe beating at the hands of the men of the ruling age-grade. Cutting of the stomach in this case would stop the retention and release the stored rainfall. This was the explanation, given above, by Brun-Rollet for the slitting of the stomach of the king of Yabur.

While retention is seen as a manifestation of the king's power, incontinence is viewed as a sign of weakness, of ineffectiveness. When a king is unable to deliver the goods expected from him his stomach is said to lack in 'bitterness.' The word 'bitter' is a central concept in

Nilotic magico-religious terminology.[8] In many contexts it is most appropriately translated with the English term 'sacred.' The root meaning refers simultaneously to properties of the ingested food and of the organs absorbing it. It could be said to refer to a condition in which both food and body interact optimally. Incontinence is a condition where the stomach has lost its grip on the ingested food, the result being drought and other evils. This provided an additional explanation why the king should be plugged at his hour of death. Leaving him unplugged would bring him close to the category of incontinent kings.

When we list the causes of death of kings within living memory a disproportionate number of them are said to have died of stomach-troubles or dysentery. Most of these died in periods of drought, their deaths usually being attributed to curses in retaliation of the suffering inflicted upon their people.

The most dangerous disturbance of the king's stomach, however, is an inversion of its functions. In that case the king is not just selfish in holding the rain back, or ineffective by loosing grip of cosmic and social realities. He is believed to work for the destruction of his subjects. Instead of generating 'coolness' and 'rain' he produces 'heat' and 'violence': i.e. divisiveness and drought. The stomach of kings who mercilessly punish their subjects with drought, is considered to be like that of wizards: full of 'blood,' the substance closely associated with violence and occupying a symbolic position opposite and hostile to rain. Since the inverted stomach, in contrast to the failing stomach, is believed to produce real effects, it is also 'bitter' or 'sacred.'

To be on the safe side those who have killed the king must assume the worst: that the king was a wizard. This would explain why, after the killing of the Pari queen a crushed 'tasteless' cucumber was mixed with the stomach contents and the blood of the queen and put back in the stomach. *Bäth*, the Pari word translated as 'tasteless,' is the opposite of 'bitter.' Like the latter term it refers both to properties of the ingested food and of the absorbing organ. By adding a neutralizing antidote to the half-digested stomach liquids and by putting the mixture back inside the stomach the effectiveness of the ongoing transformation process that is working for evil is blunted. The inclusion of blood in the mixture may have been justified by the assumption that the queen was a witch.

5. THE SYMBOLISM OF DIGESTION AND THE VICTIMARY MECHANISM

We are left with a last question. Why should the transformation process in the king's stomach be activated at the hour of his death—be it a violent or a non-violent death? If the functioning of the stomach was a mere metaphor for the ordering role of kingship, it would be more logical to assume a lessened functioning of the stomach at the king's death.

An unforced and satisfactory answer to this question can be given with the help of the victimary theory developed by René Girard. According to this theory the principal, if not only, mechanism by which humans resolve conflict—which is endemic among them because of their 'mimetic' character[9]—is by directing the violence dividing the group towards an outsider or an insider being expelled from the group. Because of his unifying impact the 'victim,' eliminated for being the source of discontent becomes precious to those aggressing or expelling him.

In ritual the consensual violence of the victimary mechanism is reproduced in a controlled way, by using a substitute victim. The victimary mechanism not only structures ritual, but is also at the root of social and cultural institutions, including kingship. Its operation is normally covered up, or mystified, as those who live in its shelter, relatively free of violence, do not want to be reminded of the violent source of their peace.

Kingship, according to Girard, is one of the institutions in which the victimary scenario is played out. The king is fundamentally a scapegoat in suspense. He is the unifying target both of his subjects' hatred and, because of his unifying role, of their love and admiration.[10]

As I have argued in my *Kings of Disaster*, Girard's model, with some modifications,[11] fits the realities of Nilotic kingship very well. The king maintains the internal peace in the com-

munity by positioning himself antagonistically in relation to his subjects, by making himself into a target of accusations, by putting his own life in the balance, and by being victimized when things go wrong.

The king's role as a judge and arbiter in intra-communal conflicts is a corollary from the more fundamental premise of his victimary role. His first duty to his subjects is to maintain the suspense of their mutually antagonistic relationship. The king does so by emitting constant reminders of his power over rain and drought, by providing adequate reprisals to signs of contempt for his power, by getting angry with dissidents who jeopardize the unity of the polity and sending curses to factions that refuse to settle their differences. An effective king keeps his people together by reacting adequately to internal rivalry and political confusion, and by using his people's love, expressed in their gratitude for his rain, to arrest ongoing processes of escalation and to break deadlocks in negotiations.

The possibility of consensus between the king's subjects depends, in last instance, on the possibility of a confrontation between the totality of these subjects and the king as their potential victim. Regicide, independent of the frequency with which it is implemented, is a structural necessity. The death of the king, the accomplishment of his victimary role, is structurally of greater importance than his life. It signals the accomplishment of unity of his subjects.

We now understand why the operation of the king's powers, his stomach, at the time of his death is of crucial importance. His powers derive from his death as a victim. To maximize this power the Bari, and other peoples of the Upper Nile, prolong the moment of death, turning it into a phased process: from the moment of biological death to the rupturing of the body, and again from the burial to the exhumation or leveling of the grave, thus multiplying the blessings generated by it. In fact, in local theology, even the power of the live king is derived from his anticipated death, the installation ceremonies emphasizing his position as the victim of the community (Simonse 1992: 374–379).

The consensual violence which is the foundation of kingship is symbolized by the metabolic process. The lack of differentiation of the contents of the stomach evokes the chaos caused by generalized violence, the life that is generated out of this undifferentiated mass, the peace and unity when the violence has been directed to a victim outside the group. The functioning of the stomach confirms the paradoxical intuition that violence is the mother of order.

In societies with rudimentary technology and little knowledge of chemistry, alimentary processes (cooking, ingestion, digestion) and processes of fermentation and putrefaction are the only metaphors available to interpret processes of transformation, including the process by which order is generated out of disorder.[12] When the Bari, and other peoples on the Upper Nile, say that their king has a 'bitter stomach' they refer to his capacity to convert endemic conflict and violence into ordered communal life, and on the cosmic level to replace the heat of drought by the coolness of the rains.

6. CONCLUSION

I have demonstrated that in the societies bordering the Equatorian Nile the stomach of the king is the scene of a drama between the forces of good—of social and cosmic blessings—and the forces of evil—political chaos and natural disaster. However, important questions remain: a first one is the question how the physiology of the king's body is related to that of the bodies of his subjects. A Bari song I collected speaks of a transfer of the powers of the stomachs of the people to the stomach of the king (1992: 376).

A second issue is the relationship of the stomach and the stomach-contents to other organs and body-substances. It would seem that stomach-contents stand in opposition to blood. While the stomach-contents bear witness to a constructive, life-increasing, process, the appearance of blood generally connotes violence and destructiveness.

I would like to end with a question on the way regicide is valued. How are the two opposed customs relating to the king's death, allowing him to die naturally and killing him, regarded by the communities who practice them? Do the peoples on the Upper Nile maybe

favour regicide because of its revolutionary character and the more realistic consensual effects it may produce?

The answer has to be negative. Regicide is the outcome of a prolonged crisis caused by unreliable rainfall. When the point is reached that the king is killed many other alternatives to restore cosmic order have already been tried. Regicide is a last resort and full of risks for the unity of the community resorting to it. The corpse of the murdered king is a source of embarassment and danger. The relatives of the king may want to take revenge and may so create new divisions in the community, and thereby new causes for drought. The successor of the murdered king who will in most cases be a relative, will ascend the throne with a grudge against his people.

To minimize further conflict with the royal family the Lotuho paid blood-wealth for the murdered king on the same terms as for a victim of common homicide. The Bari did not. Instead, adding insult to injury, all the cattle of the murdered king and of his relatives were rounded up and confiscated. The resentment over Nyiggilo's murder may partly explain why the conflict between the lineage of Nyiggilo and the other branches of the royal family of Bilinyan lasted till deep in the twentieth century (Simonse 1992: 307–311) causing great destruction.

The Bari were even uncompromising when it came to burying the corpse—in case it had not been thrown in the Nile. The family or friends of the dead king had to pay cattle to get permission from the murderers to bury him (Haddon, *thesis* 1911: 105, see note 5).

From the point of view of political stability ritualization of the victimhood of the king applied to his natural death is clearly preferable regicide with its inherent potential of a multiplication of tragedies. If we examine the historical traditions of the Shilluk kingdom, the largest and possibly oldest Nilotic kingdom still existing, this preference has resulted in a thoroughly ritualized mode of regicide. In their myths the Shilluk explain it as a mitigating substitute for more violent regicidal practices in the past. In a myth recorded by Hofmayr (1910: 330; 1925: 45) the practice of suffocating the king with a cloth is presented as a measure taken by king Nyikang in response to his people's plan to kill him. According to information collected by Seligmann (1911: 222–223) the practice of smothering the king with a cloth replaced another more violent custom of walling the king up in a specially built house and leaving him to die a slow death caused by starvation and suffocation. These changes in regicidal custom fit in very well with Girard's thesis that the "good" violence that generates consensus, in order to be effective, has to be made to look different from the ordinary "bad" violence. The more successful the mystification the more legitimate and politically unchallenged the order based on the "good" violence.

NOTES

(1) This scenario was distilled from testimonies of Bari informants from: Bungu (West Bank), Tombur (Southern Bari), Muggi (extreme south of Bariland), from the Nyepu Rainmaker, and from Kuku informants from Livolo and Kajo Kaji. They were collected between 1981 and 1985 when I was a lecturer in the University of Juba. From the few written references that by Yuzbashi Negi Yunis on the funeral of the Kuku king Jibi-lo-Kajo is the most complete. Here a platform is erected inside the grave and the bursting of the stomach is monitored by a guard who is placed in a small hut at the entrance of the grave (Yunis 1924: 19). The body of Chief Yokwe Köri whose funeral was attended by Beaton was also lowered into the grave and watched over by a slave. In reaction to Beaton's observation Father Spagnolo informed him that the slave normally stayed inside the grave for four days (Beaton 1932: 87). It is plausible that the practice of holding the vigil inside the grave was a modification of the custom in response to the attitude of the colonial government.

(2) 'Endlich muss der Regenmacher selbst, Nígila [Nyiggilo], der grosse Fürst Belényan's [Bilinyan], und sein Anghang die Schuld tragen. Er musste sich von Belényan, wo man ihm all' sein Vieh raubte und seine Wohnungen anzündete, flüchten und als Flüchtling irrte er überall verfolgt eine Zeit im Lande herum, bis er endlich bei seinem Verwandten Medi [Mödi] bei Gondokoro Unterkunft fand, wo er die Schiffe abwarten und nach Chartum fliehen wollte,

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