MIMESIS, SCHISMOGENESIS, AND CATASTROPHE THEORY

An exploration of parallels between Bateson's notion of *cumulative interaction*, Thom's *cusp catastrophes* and Girard's concept of *mimesis*

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Bateson's mimetic premise

Within the spectrum of anthropological theories the approach of Gregory Bateson in his study of the *naven* ceremony of the Iatmul of New Guinea comes closest to a mimetic theory in the sense René Girard uses this term. Bateson's *Naven* has remained an oddity in anthropology. Few of his professional colleagues have praised the book (Kuper, 1973; Handelman, 1979), others have squarely dismissed it (Marcus, 1985), most kept an embarrassed (at least according to Houseman and Severi, 1986:7) silence. No anthropologist has attempted to apply Bateson's concepts to fresh empirical material. The published discussions of Bateson's concepts are all in terms of the material presented in *Naven* (Houseman & Severi, 1986; Handelman, 1979).

The singularity of the book is the deployment, in an empirical, ethnographic study, of a deductive approach, derived from general theoretical concerns in the study of social and biological morphogenesis. In its deductive design the book is in one class with Marxist and evolutionist monographs of single societies, a rare and not particularly successful genre. Bateson's theory, however, is not concerned with external, material, factors that influence the nature of social process from the outside: his deductive anthropology deals the intrinsic properties of social process. In this respect he is aligned with René Girard. The subject-matter of Bateson's analyses is interaction processes between individuals and groups. Like mimetic processes these processes are defined by their inherently escalatory character. They are sequences of cumulative actions and reactions. Like mimetic processes Bateson's sequences tend towards climax or crisis.

Bateson distinguishes two typical courses of cumulative interaction: the one symmetrical and the other asymmetrical. When action and reaction are symmetrical the relationship between the partners to the interaction becomes progressively more competitive. Rivalry, arms races, and so on are in this category (Bateson, 1946). When action and reaction are asymmetrical the relationship between both partners tends towards a complementary fit. The interaction between the exhibitionist behaviour and that of the spectator, and relations of domination/submission are among Bateson's examples. In *Naven* the distinction between the two types of interaction is used to elucidate the differences in gender ethos, the behaviour of Iatmul men being symmetrically

oriented while women's roles have a more complementary character. Readers who are familiar with Girard may have drawn a parallel with his distinction between the asymmetrical relationship between a model and his/her imitator and the symmetry of rivals or "doubles".[2]

In empirical relationships, according to Bateson, both modes of interaction are operative, although usually the dynamic of one is predominant. Between the dynamics of both modes of cumulative interaction there is usually a more or less permanent, institutionally supported, balance. This balance of symmetry and complementarity determines the stability of the relationship.

Bateson selected the term *schismogenesis* to refer to the processes of unchecked, escalatory, change, triggered off by the tipping over of this balance. This rather weighty term was coined in the hope it could help bridge the gap between analyses of processes of social and biological morphogenesis (1973:47-61).

The emergence of mimetic anthropology now allows us to see the truly innovative thrust of Bateson's theorizing in *Naven.* Bateson's interactional premise allows him to construct a model in which order and crisis are seen as continuous. The forces producing order are the very forces that can push a social system into crisis: an increase of symmetry, unimpeded by the constraints of complementarity, on the one hand, leads to a breakdown of the relationship into uncontrollable rivalry. A deepening of the complementary dimension in a sequence of interactions unbalanced by symmetrical acts, on the other hand, results in serious discomfort for both parties, oppression for the dependent party and rigidity for the controlling one.

Put against the background of the development of the social sciences in the mid-1930s this vision of social stability and social crisis is surprisingly new. It is no surprise that these ideas did not find an immediate reception. It is strange however that, after half a century, despite quite a few praising comments, no anthropologist has ever taken up the challenge of applying Bateson's concepts to empirical material.

In this article I shall first show how Bateson's concept of social order and disorder has explanatory value when applied to political crises in small-scale Nilotic kingdoms in the southeastern Sudan. In the second place we shall see that crises in these political systems can be aptly represented as elementary catastrophes in the sense of René Thom's catastrophe theory. In the last part of the article we shall ask why and how Bateson abandoned the mimetic inspiration of his early work. We shall see that the problems which defeated him find an unforced and elegant solution in Girard's model of victimary mimesis.

The naven *ceremony of the Iatmul*

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[2] A brief assessment by René Girard of Gregory Bateson's concept of 'double bind' is found in *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*, p. 316-9. Girard's critical remarks are directed against the mature Bateson of communication theory.

Let us first see how Bateson applied his idea of schismogenesis in the analysis of the *naven* ceremony of the Iatmul. The *naven* is performed by mothers and mother's brothers[3] to celebrate an achievement of her (his sister's) child. The occasions on which a *naven* is celebrated have as a common denominator the breaking of one kind of another of childlike dependence. The prototype occasion is the killing of an enemy. But *naven* are celebrated for less heroic feats, and long before killing becomes a practical possibility for the child: for the first fish caught, for the first time a girl extracts flour from sago, the first time a child makes a fishing net. A typical "modern" occasion for a *naven* is the return home of a migrant labourer (Stanek, 1983:170). A routine occasion for a mother's brother to perform a *naven* is when his sister's son indulges in excessive boasting in his presence. What these occasions have in common, according to Bateson, is that they introduce a disturbing amount of symmetry in a relationship which is otherwise defined by complementarity.

When the mother's brother performs a *naven* he dresses up as a destitute old widow. He puts on rags and mimics a half-cripple in his way of walking. The first step in the performance of a *naven* is usually the offering of some food by the transvestite mother's brother to his sister's son. The interaction between the two comes to a climax when the mother's brother presents his buttocks to his sister's son and rubs them against his shin shouting out *"Thou art husband indeed!"* Bateson interprets the rubbing as a simulated act of copulation in which the mother's brother assumes the submissive role. This submissiveness is also expressed in the exclamation.

When the mother's brother succeeds in doing this --which is not always the case since sister's sons find it embarrassing and try to avoid it-- the sister's son is expected to quickly leave the scene to look for something valuable to offer his mother's brother. This gift is equated with a bride-price (Bateson, 1958:74-85).

There are various *naven* scenarios, all making the same expressive point. The mother's brother may, for instance, simulate giving birth to his sister's daughter (Bateson, 1958:19). Mothers may get hold of their child, perform the steps of the *naven* dance in front of him or her, and jump into the Sepik from the river bank (Stanek, 1983:171).

There are also varying degrees of elaborateness of *naven* depending on the importance of the event. In the more important *naven*, sisters, father's sisters, brother's wives to the person being celebrated also take part. They put on the smartest male clothes they can get hold of and are addressed for the occasion as "brother", "father" etc. They then go around beating their brother's sons, brothers or husband's wives- making a demonstration of typical symmetrical interactions.

On an important occasion such as the killing of an enemy, practically the whole village (with the exception of the father[s] of the person celebrated) participate in the *naven*, every family singling out an appropriate member to serve as the target of their *naven*. A minimal *naven* may

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[3] The cases discussed by Bateson involved mother's brothers. The *naven* observed, more recently, by Milan Stanek (1983:166) were all by mothers.

only consist of the exclamation *"Thou art husband indeed!"*

According to Bateson, the *naven* ritual gives expression to the complementarity of the relationship between mother and child and between mother's brother and sister's child at a moment a new symmetrical input jeopardizes the equilibrium of the relationship. The complementarity of the relationship is evoked not by the mother's brother acting out his usually superior role but by inverting it: by dressing up and walking around like a member of the weakest social category in Iatmul and by assuming a passive role in a simulated act of copulation. By jumping each with her son in the river, the mothers observed by Stanek, expressed the same complementarity in a more direct way.

The transvestitism of the female paternal relatives and their beating of brothers and brother's sons, which are features of a large-scale *naven*, are elaborations evoking the symmetry of the relationship between paternal relatives.

The *naven* is a theatrical statement expressing the distribution of symmetrical and complementary connections over kinship relationships. By emphatically evoking the complementarity of the relations between allied families, the *naven* ceremony counterbalances a drift towards symmetrical schismogenesis triggered off by the coming of age of the members of the family to which a sister has been given. While the schismogenic potential of the girl catching her first fish may seem insignificant, the schismogenic risk is very real when a young man turns into a "killer" -the prototype occasion for a *naven*.

The antagonism between the Nilotic king and his subjects

A major, largely unanticipated, discovery of my study of the political systems of the east bank of the Nile in Equatoria (Sudan)[4] was that relations between kings and their subject-communities were similar in structure to relations between opposed segments in a segmentary social organization. I had set out to study the rainmaker/kings of Eastern Equatoria, who, in times of drought, were frequently victims of collective aggression as instances of the Girardian scapegoat-king model -- as victims of consensual violence. I found that, besides serving as passive scapegoats, they frequently behaved as active enemies of the communities of which they formed the centres. I found that kingship as an arena of cumulative interaction between a central power-holder and a number of communities subjected to him could be satisfactorily described in exactly the same terms as interactions between mutually antagonistic territorial segments.

The arena in which king and people confronted one another was primarily cosmic. When relations between the two deteriorated the confrontation degraded into ordinary, bloody, fighting. The king was first of all a rainmaker. He was held responsible for rain and drought. In the Nilotic

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[4] I studied the Bari, Lulubo, Lokoya, Pari, and Lotuho. My field-work was centered on the Lulubo of Lokiliri. It was made possible by a grant of the Netherlands Organization for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO). In the text I shall refer to my study (Simonse, 1992) as *'Kings'*.

world-view social well-being and disaster (rain and drought, health and diseases, plagues and abundant harvests, and so on) and social conflicts and their peaceful resolution, are elements in an encompassing drama ruled by a single set of principles. The main protagonists in this drama were the community, the rainmaker/king, and, quite frequently, the community's enemies who were suspected of "stealing" or "poisoning" the rain.

The king was the principal peacemaker of the community. Violating the terms of the settlement of a conflict that had been mediated by the rainmaker was bound to unleash his curse: drought. When the curse did not result in the desired compliance the king reverted to physical force in dealing with his "rebels". The operation of royal sanctions was not very different from the "lateral" sanctions of segmentary political systems.

In my *Kings of Disaster* (esp. in ch. 16, pp.319-344) I have given a detailed account of the way conflicts between a rainmaker and his subjects developed and escalated. There was a wide range of practices to reduce the tension between the king and his people. Sacrifices of victims of increasing value, on places which were increasingly sacred, and by sacrificers of increasing importance, provided a powerful buffer to violent escalation. Another safety-valve was the simulation of actual regicide on the totem of the royal clan. This was the main method used by women to give vent to their dissatisfaction.[5] If the drought of which the king was accused persisted, the conflict would inevitably escalate into the killing of the king. Among the Bari and the Pari the king's body would be left in the bush or thrown into the river, as would that of an enemy. Among the Lulubo and Lokoya the king was buried alive by his subjects. The Lotuho strangled him inside a hut. Before being killed, the king would normally have been subjected to various forms of physical aggression (torture, beatings) (*Kings*, pp.351-4).

The similarity in the antagonism between king and people and segmentary antagonism extends to the reasons given for regicide. These follow the logic of "*an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth*". When I asked an informant why, in 1981, he had taken part in the burial alive of his rainmaker, he answered: "*He is killing us* [by drought], *so why should we not kill him?*" (*Kings*, p.199)

The structural similarity between segmentary and centralist antagonism is also reflected in the etiquette governing the interactions between the king and his subjects in times of confrontation. When there is drought the king is approached in the same way as the enemy. The ruling age-grade sends women to make representations on its behalf. According to the interethnic code of war-diplomacy on the Upper Nile, women and blacksmiths were the only persons who could move unharmed between enemy lines.[6]

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[5] In connection with the transvestitism of the *naven* ceremony it is interesting to note that the women on the Upper Nile, when they go and 'kill the king' dress up as warriors wearing their husband's attire. Like in the *naven* ceremony the switch between the two modes of interaction (symmetrical/complementary) is marked by transvestitism (*Kings*, pp.354-9).

[6] The Egyptian governors were repeatedly faced with women as negotiators during their campaigns to subjugate the Upper Nile (Baker, 1874:331; Gordon, in Hill: 1881:120; *Kings*, p.210).

One of the features of segmentary systems that has received a great deal of attention in anthropological studies is the fact that the boundaries of the group involved in the conflict extend and contract in function of the enemy the group is facing. When the social distance to the enemy is large, hostilities between closer segments are forgotten in order to present the common outsider with a large force. When the conflict is over, the temporary unity resulting from the confrontation dissipates and old accounts are again open to be settled.

In centralist political systems the king functions as a unifying antagonist in relation to the various rivalling communities and sections that make up his realm.   He is, as it were, an enemy brought home. For the community owning him, the kings combines the advantages of the enemy's consensual leverage, with the possibility of having a measure of control over his actions.

Viewed against this structural background regicide loses much of the mystery with which Frazer (1913) and his followers (o.a. Muller, 1980; De Heusch, 1985:98-124) have surrounded it. Its possibility is a structural requirement of a centralist political system in the same way as the possibility of homicide is a necessary feature of a feuding-system.

Phrasing the results of this demonstration in Batesonian idiom one could say that the symmetrical schismogenesis between the king and his subjects forms the structural core of the Nilotic rain-kingdoms. It should be added, however, that Bateson did not perceive the consensual effects of symmetrical antagonism.[7] Although Evans-Pritchard (1940), Simmel (1955), Coser (1956) and Murphy (1956), revealed important dimensions of the operation of the consensual mechanism, its discovery as the fundamental structuring force of society should be credited to René Girard.

The complementarity of Nilotic king and his people

It is obvious that the mere repetition of real consensual violence would form a very fragile basis for ordered social life. Girard convincingly showed that the institution of sacrifice mitigates and controls the degree of violence while keeping its consensual effect intact. By directing the aggressiveness against a substitute victim, violence, to a certain extent, becomes socially manageable. Nilotic societies dispose of a series of telescoping victim-scenarios of decreasing violence: the violence against the rainmaker being neutralized by animal sacrifices, the sacrifice of cattle being substituted by smaller livestock and fowls, while animal-sacrifice is frequently replaced by the crushing of a wild cucumber. We also saw that the figure of the scapegoat-king himself, in his role as a lever of consensus, could be interpreted as a less violent substitute for the enemy.   It is clear that these practices are fundamental in reducing violent conflict and in generating a sense of community as a value transcending individual and sectional rivalry.

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[7] *In some analyses he seems to catch a glimpse, for example when he comments on the group dysphoria resulting from the inability to take revenge (1958:140).*

However, a whole class of social interactions which are crucial to the stability of the society is left outside the scope of this perspective: those based on an asymmetrical premise and tending towards complementarity between the interacting partners.

The king's subjects deeply believed that they were dependent on him for rain. The king asserted his authority over his subjects in permanent reference to this indispensable gift. Rainmakers always seem to have maximized the expressions of respect and gratitude from their subjects. They measured their power by the amount of tribute they received.

Gifts of livestock formed the bulk of the tribute among the Bari and the Lotuho. Their kings travelled around the country performing rain rituals and collecting tribute. The Lotuho kings made a tour twice a year. In each village they would receive gifts of grain which were stored in the king's house in that village. It is remarkable that at the approach of the king a mock-battle was staged by the ruling age-grade of the receiving village, as if the complementarity of the payment of tribute had to be played down by a demonstration of symmetrical antagonism.

The kings of the Bari, who were based in Shindiru in the south, toured their country, which was larger, once a year, at the beginning of the rainy season. They set off in a northerly direction along one bank of the Nile and returned by the other bank. During the king's visit at a village, a variety of rituals were performed: healing rituals, rituals for the fertility of the land and of women, rituals for the purification of the community of diseases and other evils, including a new fire ceremony. By the time the king approached home a large herd of cattle and smaller livestock followed in his wake.

Spells of drought were interpreted, by king and subjects alike, as reflections of the king's mood. They were indications that he felt slighted, in other words: that the complementary deference to which he was entitled had been infringed upon. The routine way to restore the balance was by providing him with gifts. The relation of control and dependence between the rainmaker/king and his community tended towards extremes. The more a drought continued the higher the demands of the king, and the greater the number of livestock given to the king. Periods of drought made rainmakers rich. The Bari word *kör*, denoting the rainmaking class (the rainmakers, the rain clan, and the king's slave-ministers ['*dupi*']), even today evokes images of destructive exploitation by rainmakers who used the rain as blackmail. The missionary Vinco attributed his initial success among the Bari, in the early 1850s, to the fact that he preached that the rain came from God and not from the rainmakers (Vinco, 1940:305-7).

Some kings developed into true tyrants. During the reign of king Alikori of the Pari, one of the sections went into exile because of the unabated harassment by the king and the royal section (*Kings*, pp. 125-8). These processes could aptly be described as instances of *complementary schismogenesis*.

To regulate the complementarity between the king and his subjects, and to limit excesses the

complementary dimension of the relationship was formally represented and institutionalized as a marriage. King and people were alternatively defined as in-laws and as husband and wife, the king sometimes playing the role of the husband, sometimes that of wife.[8]

The offering of a wife to the king was the central event in the installation ceremonies. The bridewealth for this wife was paid by all the sections of villages in the kingdom. The union of the king and his new queen was celebrated collectively. In Lulubo they were both put in a hut in which ebony wood was burned. The smoke of ebony is very prickly. While both were inside the ruling age-grade surrounded the hut, waiting. If the king or queen sneezed it meant that the marriage would not be propitious. If they didn't, both were put on a special seat to undergo the purification that marked the installation of the king. After the ceremony the members of the responsible age-grade went and collected the queen's bridewealth from the community (*Kings*, p.210).

Among the Lotuho the king and queen spent their first night on the spot where Imuhunyi, the dynastic ancestor, first stopped when he entered the country from Bariland. They were made to sleep on the skin of a black bull that had been sacrificed for the occasion and that was eaten by the ruling age-grade. Its stomach-contents were used to purify the royal couple before they were sexually united. The union of the royal couple was believed to affect the fortunes of the country as a whole (*Kings*, p.211).

The Lotuho queen who had thus been married to the king by the people remained of special significance to the country, also after the king's death. Since the legitimate heir should be one of her children winning her meant becoming the king. The competition between pretenders to the throne over the queen-widow was intense. She was the object of scores of marriage-proposals. If she refused she risked being attacked and killed by the proposer. Some of the Lotuho queens are known to have survived four successive husbands.[9]

The sexual dimension of marriage was also exploited in this imagery. The custom of some Lulubo and Madi rain clans which prescribes that the rainmaker should sleep prostrate the night after he has performed the rain ritual, is an example. The prostrate posture suggests that the relationship between the rainmaker and his land was conceived as a sexual one. This interpretation is confirmed by the custom of the neighbouring Madi which stipulates that the wife of the person performing the rain-ritual must not be pregnant --as if the rainmaker's procreative power at the time of the ritual should be exclusively devoted to public ends. In symbolic acts of sexual intercourse between the king and the land the king always played the male role.

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[8] Among the Dinka and the Nuer, who are outside the area discussed here, the relationship between the Master of the Fishing Spear and his followers (Lienhardt, 1961:318) and that between the so-called Leopard-Skin Chief and his dependents is defined as that of a mother's brother to his sister's son (Evans-Pritchard, 1956:293) .

[9] The turbulent life-history of Queen Tafeng, the widow of king Wani of Loronyo who was abducted by the Mahdists shortly after marrying her, offers a lively illustration of the importance of queens as foci of rivalry (*Kings*, p.283-8).

From the point of view of the sexual division of household labor the king is equated with a wife. *"My husband"* is a respectful title of address used by the Lulubo king when addressing a meeting. In fact, most of the goods paid as tribute were the product of male work. So was the clearing and cultivation of the king's land on royal cultivation day.

Every year the community cultivates for its king for one whole day. The fields of the different wives of the king were distributed over the different villages, moieties and sections of his kingdom. Digging for a king was equivalent to recognizing him.   Rebellions and defections of sections and villages became manifest when they absented themselves at the annual cultivation day. As the recipient of customarily designated parts of the game hunted, the king also played the role of housewife in relation to the men of the country. The surplus food that thus flowed into the court allowed the king to entertain the community and his numerous guests. His position as sovereign antagonist, was thus underpinned by a network of economic dependencies, complimentary in nature.

Rain crisis as a cusp-catastrophe

The interactions between Nilotic kings and their subjects easily folds into the schismogenic model designed by Bateson in *Naven*. Two tendencies towards crisis are at work in this relationship, on the one hand a tendency towards symmetrical polarization leading to regicide, on the other hand a progressive shift of the relationship in terms of control and dependence resulting in tyranny and oppression for sections of the community.

While the polarization of king and people was mitigated by sacrifice and performances of mock-regicide, the tendency towards tyranny and oppression was restrained by a charter which defined the relationship of king and people as a marriage.

Taking these inbuilt brakes into account, the stability of the relationship between king and people can be modeled as the result of the combined operation of complementary and symmetrical cumulative interactions. The joint operation of both processes becomes visible in times of crisis. When the rain fails over a longer period of time the interactions between the king and the people tend to alternate between two contrasting modes of behaviour: on the one hand an exacerbation of the antagonism between people and king and on the other hand an intensification of demonstrations of dependence. We can observe this double process in the building up of tension against the Lotuho king who managed to withdraw himself from the process of escalation. The confrontation took place in 1982:[10]

The rainmaker who is the hero of this case had become King of the Loronyo kingdom as a

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[10] I am indebted to Dr.Grüb of the University of Frankfurt for providing me with some valuable information on this case. In his monograph on the Lotuho, however, Grüb only mentions the case in passing (Grüb, 1992:160).

result of the inheritance of his deceased brother's wife who was the legitimate queen. She had been given in marriage by the ruling age-grade. In his dealings with the ruling age-grade the rainmaker relied heavily on his diviner. During rain-crises the diviner read the intestines of the sacrificial animals offered to the king. Through the years the diviner had put the blame for the drought with the ruling age-grade. According to his divination he was not paid the respect a king deserved. The ruling age-grade was repeatedly ordered to provide more tribute and services to their rainmaker. The rainmaker himself put the blame for the current drought -which was particularly serious- with the "*head*" of the ruling age-grade, the senior, leading age-set, who -he claimed- did not believe in his powers.

In 1982, after a spell of drought, the tension between the rainmaker and the senior age-set erupted in an open conflict. At a discussion at their meeting-point the ruling age-grade had, in an attempt to break the deadlock in their relationship with the king offered him a wife and a day's labour to cultivate a large field for him. The rainmaker had refused the proposal saying: "*I no longer want your gifts.*"

Not long after this, while the drought persisted, the two most powerful sections of the village beat the drum for an emergency meeting of the ruling age-grade. They collected the rainmaker from his palace and dragged him to the central dancing ground, without giving him a chance to put on his clothes. There they questioned him on the drought. The rainmaker, as usual, immediately demanded a ram for his diviner to read. The senior age-set of the ruling age-grade refused saying that the diviner's interpretations always placed the blame on the same party and never offered a solution. The rainmaker then demanded that his rain-powers be taken away from him in a ritual of purification, and that someone else be selected to the rain office. He suggested the name of one of his rivals who had a following in the village.

At this stage members of the retired age-grade intervened. In order to stop further escalation they advised that it would be better for the rainmaker to leave the village and go into exile. So the rainmaker went, escorted by the police in order to avoid any violence, and followed by the queen. who feared that she might be abducted by one of her husband's rivals, who might attempt to establish himself as king (*Kings*, pp. 329-30).

As a result of repeated and prolonged drought, the hostility between the rainmaker and the ruling age-grade grew. When the situation became critical the ruling age-grade reaffirmed its dependence on the king by the gift of a wife and a full day's agricultural labour of all the able-bodied men of the community. The offer practically equalled a re-enthronement, the gift of a bride being the central transaction in the installation ceremonies.

Minor spells of drought are usually solved by soothing the rainmaker's pride with a gift of livestock, the animal given being used for haruspication. If the rainmaker goes on accepting the successive gifts, he implicitly reinforces the expectations with regards to his complementary role as rain-provider. Then, if there is a further delay in the falling of rain, a point may be reached when demonstrations of complementary dependence can no longer contain the growing hostility.

This fateful escalation took place in the case of the killing of the queen of the Pari on July 8, 1984, reported by the Japanese anthropologist Eisei Kurimoto (1986; translation in *Kings*, pp.

367-70). The process of polarization against her had lasted for over three years. When I first tried to meet with her in 1981, she was hiding out of fear that I might be in collusion with her persecutors. At each new spell of drought the hostility against her escalated, though at times new possible explanations were brought forward and other persons accused. For a brief period in 1982 even a new rainmaker from Acholi, a neighbouring group speaking the same language, was appointed. But the rains failed again and he was sent packing. In 1984, after a failed attempt to attribute the persisting drought to the posthumous curse of a member of the retired age-grade[11], the blame was put on the queen again. This time she did not try to escape as on previous occasions. She resigned herself to her fate. During the last weeks of her life, she was generously provided with beer, and was almost always drunk. It was a deliberate policy of the ruling age-grade. Each of the six sections had contributed one tin of sorghum flour to make beer and 15 Sudanese pounds in cash --a considerable sum in the village-- for her to buy distilled liquor. When no rain fell. she was beaten to death and thrown in a fire at the last of a series of three mass-assemblies held at increasingly remote locations in the bush.
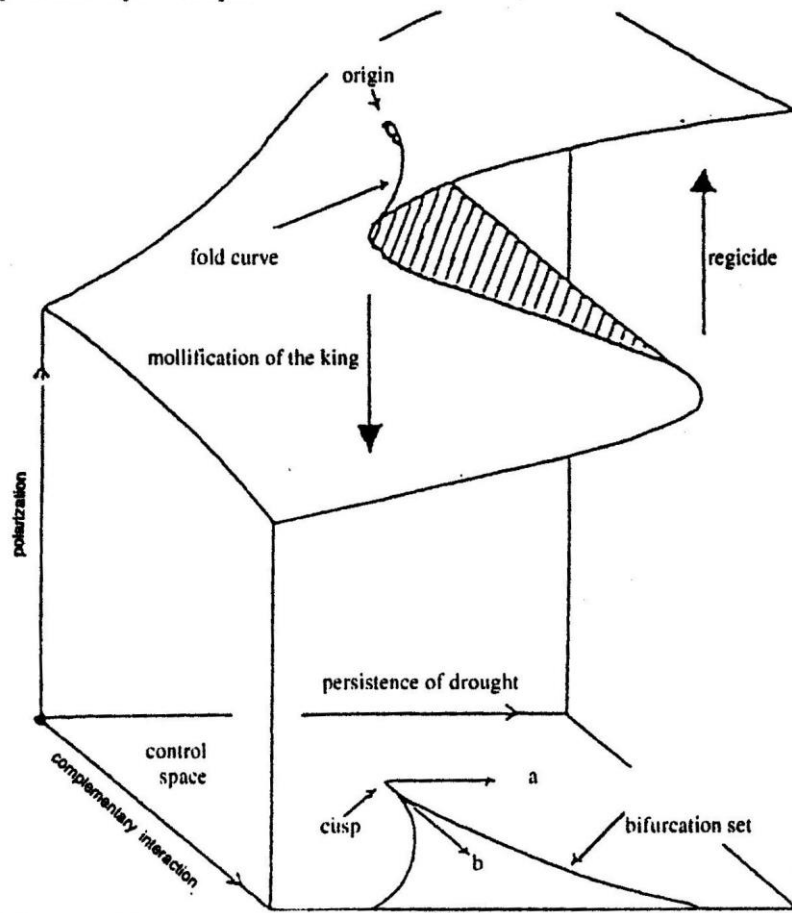
In this case too, the process of the escalating antagonism alternated with bouts of gift-giving. The synchronized escalation of hostility and gift-giving, of symmetrical polarization and demonstrations of complementary dependence, till a point of crisis is reached. can be represented as a cusp-catastrophe in the sense of René Thom's catastrophe theory:[12]

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[11] The posthumous curse is called *cien* in the local languages: a wish or curse of a dying person believed to have portentous consequences; for a discussion of the concept read Lienhardt (1962).

[12] For those who are well-versed in mathematics René Thom's *Structural Stability and Morphogenesis* would be the obvious introduction to his work; for those who are not, like me, there are various popularizing presentations of the theory: Woodcock & Davis, 1978; Isnard & Zeeman, 1976; issue no. 23 of *Behavioral Science*, edited by Cobb & Ragade; and various articles in Zeeman 1977; a discussion of Thom's work from the perspective of various disciplines is Petitot, 1988.

Cusp-Catastrophe Graph

origin

fold curve

regicide

mollification of the king

polarization

persistence of drought

complementary interaction

control space

cusp

a

b

bifurcation set

In this three-dimensional graph the folded surface on top represents the possible courses of action taken by the community. The bottom space shows the interaction of the so-called control factors (a and b) which in this case are the persistence of the drought and the intensity of the demonstrations of dependence. On the top-surface every point represents a possible mode of action which, in each case, is the combined response to the operation of the two control factors on the polarization between king and people. The folded part of the top-surface represents the area where behaviour will be discontinuous, tending to extremes and alternating between expressions of dependence and threats to the life of the king. The shaded zone does not correspond to any possible real behaviour (is 'inaccessible'). Sociologically speaking the behavioural possibilities located on the fold represent a crisis-situation, in this case a rain-crisis.

The combination of values for which the equilibrium will be stable and that for which it will oscillate can be projected on a two-dimensional control-space (at the bottom). The projected area

at which behaviour will oscillate between aggressiveness and mollification of the king, the so-called "bifurcation set", has the form of a cusp, the lowest combined values for both axes forming the apex or "origin" of the cusp. We see that Bateson's model of a dynamic equilibrium between two types of schismogenesis and Thom's catastrophe model start from premises concerning the nature of (social) reality that match very well.

It is possible to project an actual rain-crisis on the upper-surface as a progression from one point to another. The zone on the top-surface to the left (low values for both axes) describes situations of relative calm. Those to the right (high values for polarization) a situation where regicide is the only option. In the imagination of those concerned, this is a highly undesirable situation. During the public discussions preceding the killing of their queen, the Pari alluded to this eventuality as a situation in which the community would have to disperse (*Kings*, p. 369). Of course it was the queen who was blamed for "putting the mountain upside-down" as the Pari said, or "finishing the land", an expression used in a similar context by the Shilluk.[13]

What is being finished exactly at the death of the king? The person of the king? If it were just the life of the king why should the country be considered "finished"?   What is gone is the suspense of the impending death of the king. When we assume that kingship is a form of consensual antagonism, the cohesion of the community depends on the possibility of victimary polarization against the king. When the king is killed the very source of unity of the community is lost.

The unity of the Nilotic kingdoms is founded on this tragic paradox: in order to survive as a community its members should be prepared to accomplish an act which, in their eyes, makes an end to their existence a community.

Returning to the catastrophe-graph the question could be asked what point of equilibrium, what combination of control-factors, would best guarantee the stability of the kingdom. My suggestion is: a point close to the origin of the cusp. There the suspense of polarization and the expression of dependence are at levels high enough to have a convincing cohesive effect. The situations of calm represented by points in the left top corner (low polarization, low complementarity) carry little suspense. We may expect the community to easily loose its unity, for example when neighbouring kings make a claim on the allegiance of peripheral sections. Statesmanship in these polities, to a large extent, is an art of maintaining suspense, "keeping the attention of the community focused on the apex of the cusp". A good king should therefore show considerable antagonism without slipping into 'schismogenic interactions'. Local conceptions and stereotypes largely confirm this extrapolation from our catastrophe-graph.

As a lever of consensus the king conforms to Girard's characterization of the king as "a victim which has not yet been sacrificed" (1978:64). In the suspense of their relationship to the king the

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[13] *"piny bugon"*: "there is no land (or country) anymore'", "things fall apart", 'the centre has fallen out' (Howell & Thomson, 1946:18; Evans-Pritchard, 1948:19).

groups and individuals constituting the kingdom experience themselves as part of an encompassing whole transcending the interplay of antagonisms. They feel part of a "society". This 'sense of community' is the necessary context for a non-violent *mise-en-scène* of symmetrical and complementary sequences of interaction.

Stick-fights, mock-battles, sports-competitions, competitive dances are all based on the premise of the commitment of the participants to this sense of community. In the Nilotic polities villages and sections subject to the same king were supposed to only use sticks in the settlement of their conflicts. Complementary interaction in a non-escalatory *mise-en-scène* takes the form of ceremony and functional differentiation. In the Nilotic societies the most elaborate ceremonies, showing a sophisticated differentiation of offices are those surrounding the death of the king. The missionary Muratori, who observed the exhumation of King Acalili of Loronyo in 1945, gives a long list of offices: of singers, drummers, horn-blowers, excavators (of the corpse), sacrificers, shrine-builders, carriers of the royal bones, rainstone advisers, and many others whose ceremonial duties he was unable to identify.

Bali: zygogenesis and the demise of schismogenesis

Why did Bateson's model not find a wider echo? One reason may be the rather clumsy way in which the initial idea was formulated -burdened by the conceptual contrast between *ethos* and *eidos*, by an idiosyncratic use of the terms culture and structure, and by the ambition to account for personality types and the function of ritual in a single model. This weakness was plainly admitted by Bateson in the *Epilogue* to the second edition of *Naven* (1958:281). Why then did Bateson not propagate his idea in a more convincing way? An important reason must have been the demonstrated failure to apply his model to Balinese society.

Immediately after the completion of his *Naven* manuscript, in 1936, Bateson left Britain for Bali with the plan of further elaborating on the idea he had so successfully applied in New Guinea. The research-proposals he had written were full of confidence in the applicability of the concept in Bali.[14] But the society he came to was very different from his Iatmul experience. In her autobiography Margaret Mead --whom Bateson had met during his Iatmul research and married on the way to Bali-- described the transition from the Iatmul to Bali as a *quantum leap*.[15] They were struck by the almost total lack of schismogenic sequences or climaxes in the lives of the Balinese (Bateson & Mead, 1942:255; Bateson, 1973 (1949):84). Bateson's contribution to the Festschrift for Radcliffe-Brown of 1949 is a long list of arguments against the applicability of the concept of schismogenesis in the Balinese context. Interactions among

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[14] Personal communication of Mr. Yasuyuki Nagafuchi of the *Nagoya Institute of Technology* who has read Bateson's research-applications in the Mead-archive in the Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

[15] Chapter 17 of her autobiography is called *Bali and Iatmul: A Quantum Leap* (Mead, 1975 , 223-240).

the Balinese, according to Bateson, were almost never cumulative. There were no arenas for open competition, neither economic nor rhetorical. Even the music lacked climax and precolonial warfare was to a large degree characterized by strategies of avoidance (1973:86). Peace making procedures missed the dramatic curses sent upon the offender by the Nilotic rainmaker. Instead when two men quarrelled they would register their dispute at the office of the local representative of the king and pledge that whoever opened his mouth first against the other should pay a fine or make an offering to the gods (1973:86).

In daily interactions the "whole" always took precedence over individual antagonisms. Most actions of villagers were accounted for in terms of the interests of or the respect for *I Desa* (Mr. Village) or *Betara Desa* (God Desa).

Bateson has been accused of drawing an idyllic picture of Balinese society (Schulte Nordholt, 1991:17; Pollman [who grossly underestimates the complexity of the research-enterprise of the anthropological couple], 1990). In fact, it certainly looks as if Bateson did his best to play down the importance of the schismogenic sequences he did come across. References to them are all put in between brackets or in footnotes. Significantly, the only schismogenic sequences reported by Bateson occurred between the community as a unanimous body and a deviating individual. In his 1949 article he mentions (in brackets) the escalation between *I Desa* and a person who refused to pay a fine. Fines were usually very small and had a mainly symbolic character. But if the fine was not paid the amount was augmented at each successive refusal to pay. If the person persisted in his refusal his behaviour was stigmatized as an act of "opposing the village". Ostracism followed (1973:96).

The other cumulative sequences, reported in a footnote to another article (Bateson, 1942:355, n.3) also occurred in interactions between the community and the individual: thief-beating and the reaction of the spectators to an infringement on the rules of gambling during cock-fights. Again the significance of the events is played down.[16]

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[16] This is the text of the note: 'It is also interesting that cock-fighting and gambling are, for the Balinese, in some sense *regressive* [Bateson's italics] activities, to which men become addicted under stress of misfortune, and that cock-fighting with its clearly marked climaxes of excitement between the cocks and among the spectators produces a psychological atmosphere a good deal different from that of daily life'. In *Balinese Character* Bateson compares the Balinese cock-fighter to an alcoholic in Western society (Bateson & Mead, 1942:140).

Geertz, who is generally in sympathy with Bateson's interpretations, attaches greater significance to the cock-fight as a social institution than Bateson does. To him, the cock-fight is not a mere deviation from the norm of conflict-avoidance but "a dramatization of status-concerns" (1972:18), the "central metaphor in everyday discussions of politics and morals" (1972:5), and "the way the Balinese deal with violence" (1972:27). However, Geertz explicitly adds that cock-fights are not cumulative. They are not part of a "directional movement out of the past, through the present toward the future". They remain disconnected events in a non-directional time-space (1972:25).

Geertz -in a final footnote- sees a parallel between the time-frame of the "cock-fight" and the massive violence in Bali that was triggered by the military coup of 1965. In a very short period (Geertz says "in two weeks") between forty and eighty thousand Balinese were killed by other Balinese. It is difficult to believe that these killings were not the result of an accumulation of tensions: between a growing landless peasantry and the old nobility, between communists and those upholding the old tradition

Even if recent history, the cock-fight, and the Balinese reaction to deviance, show that cumulative interaction did occur and that avoidance of confrontation was not complete, we have to concede to Bateson that there was nothing of the close fit between the model of schismogenesis and his Bali observations that had characterized his Iatmul study. The perspective of schismogenesis could not account for the perpetual avoidance of conflict, for the fear to deviate from the norms, for the near-absolute primacy of the society as a whole over its constituting groups and individuals.

To find an explanatory model Bateson sought help from the game theory of Von Neumann and Morgenstern. Starting from the assumption that the Balinese -like human beings elsewhere- tend to maximize certain values, he postulated that Balinese society is analogous to a game in which the players are prevented from losing. The Bali village council functions as an umpire who prevents anyone from maximizing his share in the acquisition of value. In the course of time the villagers grow to see themselves more and more in terms of the interests of the village, and their old-time competitive strategies disappear. The non-cumulative ethos sinks down in the practices of child-raising and so a personality-type emerges which is always concerned about the individual's position in relation to others and to the community as a whole. The key to interaction among the Balinese is the fear of upsetting the existing equilibrium. The Balinese is like a "tightrope walker, afraid any moment to make a mistake" (1973:92). Bateson and Mead saw this preoccupation with keeping balance everywhere -- in the postures of children, in the poses given to human figures in carvings and paintings (Bateson & Mead, 1941:16, 88). In contrast to schismogenic processes which are rooted in primary processes of interaction the balancing act of the Balinese is mediated by the awareness of the community as a transcendent value. According to Mead Bateson played with the idea to call this new construct *zygogenesis* (from Greek *zugos*: yoke, balance) (Mead, 1975:236). However, the word never flowed from Bateson's pen.

Since the solution is arrived at at the cost of eclecticism it can hardly be called satisfactory. The premises of game-theory are foreign to the Bateson's initial interactionism. In his later work Bateson tried two other theories to account for the encompassing hold of the whole over its parts: cybernetics and the theory of logical types of Russell (Bateson, 1973:173-198; 250-279; 1958:294-302).

In the *Epilogue* to the *Naven* edition of 1958, complementary and symmetrical schismogenesis are construed as a single cybernetic circuit in which a "runaway" in one triggers a "negative feedback" by the other, so that the homeostasis of the system as a whole is maintained. Referring to Russell's theory of types, Bateson criticizes his analysis in *Naven* for

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who were helped by the army (Cribb, 1990:241-248; Schulte Nordholt, 1991:17-21; Robinson, 1992).

overlooking the fact that the interaction between both modes of schismogenesis constitutes a new, higher level of analysis, that of Iatmul society as a whole. The postulation by Bateson of "society" as a separate analytical level is a mere epistemological necessity. It is not derived from his initial interactional premise. He does not show how, in the reality of the Iatmul, a notion of society as a value transcending individual and group interests, is generated. It should therefore cause no surprise that in his later work Bateson moves away from his initial interactionist positions in a more epistemological direction. In his article on alcoholism of 1971 "complementarity" and "symmetry" have become "fundamental epistemological premises" (1973:306).[17] Bateson's interactionism and the openness of his theory towards crisis dissolves into an epistemological hierarchy of interlocking self-correcting circuits. The book he had promised to write on schismogenesis under a Guggenheim fellowship never materialized (Lipset, 1980:177).

Conclusions: from schismogenesis to mimesis

Where Bateson stopped, Girard proceeds. The idea that the schismogenic crisis could also be a source of order and the beginning of an awareness of a common good between those recovering from the conflict never occurred to Bateson. The consensual side-effects of the schismogenic runaway remained outside his theoretical scope. In the analysis of Nilotic kingship I have shown that Girard's victimary model enables us to conceptualize the sense of community as a derivative of symmetrical interaction focused on a victim-king. Yet, we have also seen that Bateson's conception of society as consisting of two (or more) cumulative processes exercising a mutually corrective role opens an analytical perspective that deserves further exploration.

Bateson's vision of two forces, which, if left to themselves, inevitably lead to crisis, lend social substance to the models of social stability proposed by catastrophe theory. Of course the graph we presented was an extreme simplification of possible courses of events. Important control factors which did not enter the model were: shifts in the targeting of victimary polarization (wizards, other rainmakers) and the buffer function of sacrifice. Catastrophe theory is, in principle, able to deal with such complexities. It claims to be capable of constructing models with up to six dimensions (Woodcock & Davis, 1978:54). Although projections of these complex catastrophes can be generated by computers they cannot be represented in the mind, let alone on a two-dimensional sheet of paper.

In my view the usefulness and charm of catastrophe theory lies in its possibility to represent a discontinuous progression. It allows us to chart the progression of a critical situation building

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[17] On the way Bateson positions schismogenesis in his theory of types read also *Mind and Nature*, pp. 205-219.

up "under the surface" to a point when it "suddenly" erupts. Purely linear graphs cannot deal with this kind of transition. The catastrophe-model offers a perspective in which normality is not discontinuous with crisis. Therefore its use in the representation of mimetic crises is appropriate.

One problem was left without a satisfactory solution: Bateson's theoretical impasse in Bali. Although we found evidence indicating that symmetrical antagonism might play a decisive role in Balinese society, especially in the relation between the state and its subjects, it cannot account for the systematic and pervasive avoidance behaviour that Bateson and Mead observed in Bali..

From the angle of mimetic theory the avoidance behaviour of the Balinese does not pose an insurmountable problem. In good Durkheimian style Girard distinguishes positive and negative rites (Hamerton-Kelly, 1987:93). Positive rites achieve consensus in directing lurking violence against a substitute victim. Negative rites or prohibitions, establish a social space where violence is taboo inspiring a common avoidance of violence and of any action that could evoke or trigger a violent response. The interrelation of these two primordial cultural strategies and their respective role in social morphogenesis is one of the core challenges of the now emerging mimetic anthropology.[18]

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[18] Gans, 1981 & 1985; *Kings*, pp..33-37.

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