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KINGS AND GODS AS ECOLOGICAL AGENTS: FROM RECIPROCITY TO UNILATERALISM IN THE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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1. INTRODUCTION

The questions this article addresses are as follows: do non-Western societies have a qualitatively better, more balanced relationship with nature than modern Western societies? Can the difference between the two be described in terms of an opposition between a reciprocal and an exploitative relationship? What difference does the Judeo-Christian tradition make in shaping the modern relationship with nature?

To answer these questions I will give brief descriptions of the way in which three cultural traditions have structured the relationship between man and nature: societies that are ruled by sacred kings, societies where power over nature is attributed to divinities, and the Old Testament tradition. As cases of sacred kinship, I present ethnographic material taken from my anthropological fieldwork among the Lulubo, Lokoya, and Lotuho peoples from the East Bank of the Nile in Southern Sudan. I will use the term "Eastern Nilotic" as shorthand for this complex of peoples. For the societies where divinities play the central role, I take the Western Nilotic Dinka, Nuer, and Atuot living in the flood plains of the Nile north of the kingship societies.

In comparing these three traditions my point of departure is René Girard's analysis of culture as a mechanism to resolve conflict by directing the aggression of the members of society onto a victim and so achieving a new consensus. We shall see that in the kingship societies what we call natural phenomena play an integral part in culturally staging the scapegoat mechanism. They are the stage of human rivalries and their resolution. Among the polytheistic Western Nilotes they are the instrument through which the gods make their power felt and demand attention from humans. In the Old Testament, natural phenomena remain the domain of God's power. Humans should not try to interfere. Their mission is to combat human evil as defined in Mosaic law.

2. KINGS AS ECOLOGICAL AGENTS

The survival of the communities of the Lokoya and Lulubo on the East Bank of the Nile who traditionally live in well-fortified village-polities, counting in the precolonial period between 1500 and 2500 inhabitants, is dependent on forces that are unpredictable (Simonse 1992). As agriculturists they are dependent on regular rains. However, the rains in their area are erratic and localized. As a result there is always a risk that the harvest may fail. The soil is of varying quality, giving varying yields in different places. The birth rate is another major concern. It determines the security of the community in its relationship to neighboring, frequently hostile, communities. There is the concern for epidemics, crop-eating insects and birds, and root-eating worms. Violent winds may destroy the crop, and lions and leopards may kill humans and cattle. A concern of a different order is the extent of the effectiveness of weapons, spears, and bows and arrows, in assuring security.

When adversity affects the community, the first question asked by those affected is that regarding its cause. Frequently the cause is a breach of the social rules: an act of violence and a failure to perform or properly perform a ritual of purification necessitated by the violence. It may also be unconscious resentment on the part of a person or group that feels excluded from benefits enjoyed by others. It may be the cry of a neglected relative. It may be incest. It may be an attack by outsiders.

Among the Lulubo and Lokoya, responsibility for the various aspects of the natural environment that can be critical for community survival is allocated to the different clans. In the case of a crisis (drought, infertility) the clan associated with the problem is the target of investigations. The main investigation strategy is to check, one by one, the quarrels in which members of that clan have been involved. When a conflict has been identified, a solution is suggested by way of reconciliation or restitution. Of particular interest are attempts to provoke the responsible clan official. If a settlement of the dispute fails to bring the required result, there will be more rounds of investigation. If no solution is found, the official of the clan associated with the natural disorder under investigation, will be suspected of bringing the disaster to the community. Accusations and counteraccusations will be thrown back and forth. The clan official stands face-to-face with the community. If the disaster subsides, and if he uses the expectations focused on him cleverly, he may come out as a more powerful and wealthier member of the community. If the disaster is prolonged, and there are no other candidates left to be blamed, he must be killed. He ends up as the scapegoat for his community.

This type of drama is most elaborate in the case of the rainmaker (one of the "kings"). Among the various public concerns, the weather has the greatest

dramatic potential. Rains are capricious and localized. Rain falls over a period of nine months. Its timeliness is a precondition for the two main harvests. The tension is particularly high in June when the first crop is about to be harvested and the annual period of hunger is peaking. The power of rainmakers is built on this suspense. If they manage the rains well they gain in prestige. If the rains fail the community turns against its rainmaker, blaming him or her for the drought. For as long as the drought persists, the confrontation between the king and his community will escalate. The process follows the steps listed in table 1. It may ultimately lead to the rainmaker being killed. In the area I studied, I identified twenty-six cases of kings who were killed within living memory. As the crisis deepens and the need for a solution rises, all the members of the community, including women and children, are gradually drawn into the process. It is the most dramatic manifestation of the community acting as a unified entity.

Crises are not desirable. People value predictability and normality. Socio-ecological responsibility is embedded in the relations of exchange between the community and the designated clans or their officials. The clan leaders, the rainmakers, the Master of the Bush, the Master of the Soil, the Master of Birds, and so on are recognized by being given designated parts of game after a hunt, the first catch of white ants, and so forth. They may be reminded of their responsibility by an annual sacrifice at the beginning of the season. Clan officials are also called on a private basis to bless a newly cleared field, to heal barrenness, or to protect against a pest.

Reciprocity in the management of natural order may be negative as well as positive. If the members of the community provoke the clan official, disorder will follow: leopards may turn up at unusual places, the soil will turn infertile, and women may have miscarriages. The initial solutions for addressing such disorders are through mechanisms of exchange, by way of restitution and restoration.

Among the various ecological responsibilities, rain is the most important. This is not only due to its practical importance for agriculture but also to its potential for generating social consensus during a period of crisis. While the rainmaker usually shares the title of "king" (Lulubo: *osi*; Lokoya: *ohobu*; Lotuho: *hobu*) with two or three other officials (usually those concerned with fertility and the soil), as "kings of heaven" they occupy the top position.

In conclusion to this section I want to note that the relationship with the environment is embedded in relations of exchange that are governed by the principle of reciprocity. However, the reciprocity is not between the community and the environment but between various clans that compete for power using their ecological responsibilities. In the Eastern Nilotic vision, ecological order is not a separate domain. The world, human relations, and natural

Table 1. Typical Sequence of Escalation when the King Fails to Account for Mismanaging the Rain (Simonse 1992, Ch. 16 & 17)

Initial Demands of the People	Alternative Courses of Action by the People
Customary humble request for rain at the start of the season made by the women	Customary reminder by women at start of season
<p>Demand for the truth concerning the cause of the drought in emergency meeting of the monyomiji or in an emergency meeting of women</p> <p><i>Emergency meetings have different degrees of seriousness (reflected in the location of the meeting) and different scopes of participation</i></p>	<p>Purificatory sacrifices in cases of the breach of a taboo, violence, adultery, or social exclusion, with special attention to the grievances of members of the royal (rain) clan</p> <p>Settlement of debts and disputes</p>
Repeated demands for rain: villages and territories ask the king to bring rain to their area, bringing him animals in payment and for sacrifice	Delegation sent to king with payment of tribute and/or sacrificial animal
<p>Renewed demand for truth: specialized investigations into the causes of drought with the help of diviners</p> <p><i>According to the seriousness of the situation, increasingly famous diviners can be selected and increasingly drastic divination techniques utilized</i></p>	<p>Accusations that the rainmaker or his close collaborators are sabotaging the rain</p> <p>Accusations may be alternated with mollification of the king ("cooling his heart"), through gifts: a wife, cattle, delicacies, alcohol</p>
Demand for rain using increasing amounts of physical force on the king	<p>Face the king with an ultimatum to make rain or be killed</p> <p>Women perform the ritual of symbolically killing the king by killing (if it is an animal) or burning (if it is a plant or tree) the totem of the royal clan</p> <p>Torture the king</p> <p>Kill the king</p> <p>Take precautions against posthumous revenge</p>

Public Action/Sacrifice	Alternative Follow-up Actions of the King	Final Demands of the King
	Customary washing of rain stones	Demands for respectful recognition of his sovereignty, respect of order, and abstention from violence
<p>Collective prayer accompanied by the sprinkling of water heavenwards—a celebration of communal unity (for instance, by spitting in the water that is sent to the sky)</p> <p>Quasi-sacrifice by crushing wild cucumbers, which represent oxen</p>	<p>Circulation of interpretations of drought that link it to particular shortcomings, insults, and other mistakes (nonattendance at funerals) by community members with respect to the king</p> <p>Prayers to ancestors, overhauling the rain stones by first drying them and then thoroughly washing them</p>	<p>Demands for tribute</p> <p>Settlement of debts and disputes</p>
Sacrifices of small livestock or cattle for rain, at increasingly potent locations and at graves or on the skulls or bones of increasingly powerful royal ancestors	King meets special requests from various locations by washing the rain stones	Demand for livestock, cattle, or even a wife from the monyomiji
Public invocation of supreme God, blaming God for the drought and begging him to relent, accompanied by sacrifice and communal with relevant elders; performance of a human sacrifice, practiced only in one community in the research area	Accusations directed at specific individuals (witches), neighboring communities, enemies, and territorial sections or age-groups in the community	<p><i>Much now depends on the king's and the community's taste for risk-taking</i></p> <p>King may step up his demands or theatrically opt out by refusing gifts, selling off his rain-medicines, or secretly fleeing</p>
In response to the ultimatum, have the king perform a sacrifice with the most sacred paraphernalia, at which the king solemnly declares that it will rain within a specified period of time	The interpretations of the drought promoted by the king will put the blame on God or on actors that can safely be accused without raising the tension	<p>King will do all he can to save his life: defend himself from the aggression of his community turned into a lynch mob or flee to a safe place</p> <p><i>If killed, king's successor will demand compensation from the community</i></p>

events are interpreted as a single totality. Natural and social events are intrinsically connected. Disturbances in nature are explained by social upheavals; social conflict and consensus are bound to have an impact on the weather, on the behavior of predators, and on the fertility of the soil. Nature, as a domain separated from human rivalries and attempts to resolve these, carries little interest. In the late 1960s, as a result of insecurity and the proliferation of firearms, the large mammals in the area were depleted. People remember when they killed and ate their last rhino, when the last elephant was spotted, and so on. Yet these memories are not connected with any particular accusations or ruminations about the balance with nature having been disturbed. (To be fair to the communities referred to, I should add that the depletion of wildlife occurred in the context of civil war, when great human loss was deplored.)

3. DIVINITY AS ECOLOGICAL AGENTS

In few ethnographic areas is the continuity between kingship and divinity, as expressed in René Girard's famous expression, "gods are dead kings as much as sacred kings are gods who have not yet died" (1972, 154) so easily visible as in the Nilotic world. The death of the Eastern Nilotic rainmaker/king plays a key role. If he dies as a victim of the crowd, his death is expected to release the rain and to reactivate ecological normality. If the king dies a nonviolent death, his powers will remain active for at least one complete season. For that period the tomb of the king will be the object of ritual attention. For about one year after his death, there will be no successor. The dead king reigns. Before the new rainy season, after the tomb has been flattened, a new person will take over. We could say that these kings enjoy a short-lived divinity. The power of the king and that of divinity are continuous. They have the same object, operate the same mechanisms, and the same terms are used for both. To say that a certain rainmaker's powers are effective, the Lulubo will say the man is really *juok*. *Juok* is the word used for God. The peoples practicing sacred kingship do not have elaborate ideas about God. He is recognized as the supreme power and as such is the ultimate cause of disaster. Addressing this manifestation of God's power, the Lotuho practice a ritual in which God as the ultimate Destroyer is chased away from the community. The lack of any theological elaboration is remarkable, especially when compared to the precise cosmology of which the king is the object. Early travelers were amazed to find "atheists" in the heart of Africa (for instance, Samuel Baker 1867, vol. 1:322).

As an interpretation of the scapegoat mechanism, the kingship model is simple and relatively transparent. The layers of mystification and misrepresentation seem to be fewer than in religious systems focused on divinity. The sacred kingship mechanism may therefore offer important clues to the

explanation of other religious systems focused on divinity. We should realize that the need for transformation of the sacred kingship system has an objective basis. Sacred kingship, especially the variety involving the killing of the king, is a vulnerable political system. Regicide easily triggers revenge, and may thus defeat its own purpose. The king himself, for the sake of his own survival, has an interest in changing the system. In this respect the following strategies of transformation can be distinguished: ritualization of the office; the centralization and concentration of royal powers; and the divinization of the power of the king.

Ritualization is very prominent in most West African (Adler 1982; Muller 1980) and Bantu (de Heusch 1981 & 1982) kingship systems. The king's rule is set for a fixed period of time. He is surrounded by different echelons of dignitaries and removed from direct interaction with his people. The violence of the scapegoating is replaced by a sequence of acts in which the violence is reduced, controlled, or simulated. Sacrifice replaces lynching; a smaller animal is killed to take the place of a bigger, bloodier one, or an egg or fruit is crushed to replace an animal. Control of manifest violence is also achieved by creating a hierarchy of officiants and by making performance of the core sacrificial rite incumbent on a select and closed circle, by screening it off from the public eye, and by setting and keeping a fixed time. Table 1 shows the buffer role that ritual plays in channeling discontent, containing the escalation, and delaying or, if possible, cancelling the scapegoating of the agent deemed responsible for collective misfortune.

The dimension of ritual that is particularly differentiated in Nilotic religions is the role of the animal victim in sacrifice. Cattle and other livestock are classified according to their color configuration. Specific issues and powers need animals of a matching color configuration. Rain needs a fully black victim. Killing a red animal would be counterproductive, a curse. Cattle are the substitutes for men. They are intimately associated with men. Each young man acquires his praise ox, which becomes part of his identity. Cattle are killed only in sacrifice. The herds of cattle kept by the Nuer and the Dinka represent a huge collection of sacrificial capital used to cope with adversity. Different social categories are defined by the part of the sacrificial animal to which different categories of people are entitled. Against external hostile forces, oxen are a powerful protective shield. Internally, the distribution of body parts in communal meals to different categories of people projects and consolidates the social order.

An obvious strategy to reduce the vulnerability of sacred kingship is to concentrate the powers over different natural domains in the hands of one king. Likewise, powers over a single domain previously dispersed over several actors may be centralized in the hands of a single person. In the Eastern Nilotic communities practicing kingship, both processes have been at work.

Dispersed and centralist political systems form a continuum and exist side by side. Next to the village societies of the Lulubo and Lokoya, each with a rich differentiation of powers relating to different ecological domains being allocated to different clans, we find the kingdoms of the Lotuho, where one king may have as many as fifteen large village communities under his care. The same king may have acquired responsibility for other natural domains, relegating other clans to second rank positions.

Turning the focus of community expectations from the live king to an immortal and invisible extension or substitute of the king, a *divinity*, is a radical strategy of preempting the violence connected with sacred kingship. From the perspective of the societies practicing kingship, it is an obvious strategy, since the deceased king is already an object of veneration for some time after his death.

In the Western Nilotic communities to the north of the flood plains, among the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1986), the Dinka (Lienhardt 1961), and the Atuot (Burton 1981), but also among the linguistically Eastern Nilotic Mandari (Buxton 1973), divinities are center stage when it comes to protection against natural dangers and disasters. Some of the spiritual agents are linked to clans, as among their Eastern Nilotic royal counterparts; others are “free.” The free divinities even cross ethnic borders. Divinities of the Dinka or Nuer are classified as belonging to the Upper World or Heaven or the Earth, like the powers of the kings and clan masters among the Eastern Nilotics. The free divinities impact particular realms of human experience and may provide protection against dangers and disasters. Among the Dinka, Deng is the god of rain. Macardit is associated with fertility and infertility in humans and cattle. Garang, a divinity whose cult spread in the 1950s, has power over rain and manifests himself in fevers and minor indispositions. Abuk is a female deity with powers over the grain harvest. These divinities manifest themselves by possessing individuals. These individuals then become the divinities’ mediums, who may effectively pray and sacrifice for the blessing or protection desired. The divinities are believed to be related to one another as father and son, husband and wife, etc.

The Dinka clan divinities, unlike the powers associated to the Lulubo and Lokoya clans, are of little practical relevance to the members of other clans. These divinities—whom Lienhardt (1961) preferred to call totems—are mostly associated with animals and plants. Acts that may imply violence to the totem-animal (hunting, eating) must be avoided at all costs as they may cause blindness and other misfortunes.

One clan divinity is of relevance to all: Ring (“flesh”), the divinity of the clan of the masters of the Fishing Spear, who are responsible for peacemaking, human fertility, and sacrifice. The name of the divinity refers to the quivering

flesh of an animal dying in sacrifice. When present at a sacrifice, spearmasters will quiver like the animals being killed. Spearmasters do not take part in fights and should avoid the sight of blood. They are the guardians of the truth.

The Nuer share some of their divinities with the Dinka. Deng sends diseases and protects against them. Diu is associated with the cattle plague. Buk (the same as Dinka Abuk), the mother of Deng, has power over streams and sickness and receives the first harvest offerings. Dayim and Dhol, sons of Deng, and Wiu are war gods invoked to destroy enemies. Wiu also manifests himself in thunder.

The Shilluk (Hofmayr 1925), neighbors of both the Dinka and the Nuer, have a mixed regime. They have a sacred king and divinities. The divinities are the ancestors that preceded the ruling king. Each of them has a sanctuary, to which ecological power is attributed. The Shilluk no longer go to the point of killing their kings in times of crisis. Instead their kings, when they grow old and weak, are expected to give a signal that they are ready to be suffocated.

When the responsibility for disaster and communal well-being is attributed to divine beings, procedures to turn or control the course of disaster become less direct. The relation of reciprocity, in which environmental concerns were embedded in the model of sacred kingship, is now askew. There is still the possibility of pleading and negotiating with the various divinities through prayer and sacrifice; however, the possibility of applying real pressure is gone. The suspense that follows prayer or sacrifice is less charged than that triggered by regicide. Divinities are freer in their response to popular pressure than is the sacred king. In the ethnographic literature on the Dinka and Nuer, I have not come across records of cases of open expression of anger toward God, such as we find among the Eastern Nilotes. But anger is the predominant mood by which divinity makes itself known to people.

The transformation that takes place when the role of kings is taken over by gods is a process with at least three dimensions:

- The responsibility for social and ecological well-being is transferred to beings external to the community, with whom direct negotiations are not possible; physical pressure on them by the community is impossible.
- The relationship between the agent controlling the natural environment and the community has become irreversible. In the kingship scenario, victimhood alternated between the community (suffering disaster) and the king (suffering regicide). In the divinity scenario, humans are always at the receiving end of victimhood. Among the Western Nilotes, as in many other places, religiosity is, first of all, submissiveness to God and acceptance of victimhood.

- In a move that seals the new deal, the externalization of ecological power and the shift from reciprocity to unilateralism is represented as a symmetrically opposite transformation. Instead of humans putting ecological and other powers at a safe distance where they cannot disrupt social life, the divine is represented as the original totality from which humans, because of their carelessness, greed, or other weaknesses, are expelled. Divinity is now the expelling agent and humans the victims of expulsion. Humans are not only excluded from communion with God but also from new divine attributes like immortality. While the enjoyment of the abundance of nature becomes conditional on the generosity of God, the core of much God-worship is the quest for nearness to the divine from which humans have been expelled. In their hymns addressed to God, the Dinka emphasize this sense of having been abandoned in a world full of misery and confusion. Lienhardt, the principal ethnographer of the Dinka, quotes the following hymn:

I have been left in misery indeed
 God, help me,
 Will you refuse to help the ants of this country
 When we have the clan-divinity Deng
 Our home is called "Lies and Confusion"
 What is all this for, O God
 Alas, I am your child. (Lienhardt 1961, 45)

Once ecological power has been defined as the domain of divine sovereignty, humans lose the initiative in maintaining ecological order. They become mere beneficiaries or victims of a divine master plan or, as the case may be, of divine arbitrariness. The main strategies left to humans are crying out for mercy and giving due attention to God through sacrifices and offerings in the hope of receiving protection from ecological and other disasters from divinities. The Nilotic divinities demand constant attention. Neglecting them can cause serious harm to the community. Fear marks the attitude towards divinity. In the ethnographic literature on the Dinka and the Nuer, I have not come across any ritual in which a divinity is chased away by the community, as we find among the king-worshipping Eastern Nilotes.

When we compare the Eastern Nilotes, who practice kingship, with the Western Nilotes, who practice god-worship, we notice a shift in the way divine or royal power manifests itself. In the kingship societies, the king and clan officials are primarily concerned with humans in relation to their environment. Rain, fertility, and protection against pests and enemies are the issues. While these concerns are also a concern of the Western Nilotic divinities, their powers are more frequently invoked in relation to individual health. Among the

Nuer and Dinka, humans are potential targets of the aggressive attention of the gods. If they neglect one divinity or another they will be the victims of or possessed by a spirit who will make them physically or mentally sick.

The tendency toward centralization and concentration of powers that we observed in kingship systems also operates in divinity systems. The most important gods are no longer linked to a clan. The free divinities of the Nuer and Dinka attack human beings indiscriminately, irrespective of clan affiliation. New divinities appear and have an interethnic appeal. The Nuer go further in this respect than the Dinka. They make their gods more dependent on the supreme God, Kwoth. Using the kingship idiom, a hierarchy of Father and children is established between the various heavenly divinities (Garang, Buk, Deng). Compared to the Dinka, the Nuer de-emphasize the divinities of the earth, especially if these manifest themselves as reptiles as is often the case among the Dinka. From these and similar observations, Evans-Pritchard concludes that the Nuer are more "monotheistic" (1956). The Nuer believe that Kwoth is omnipotent. It is impossible to strike a deal with him through sacrifice or otherwise. He therefore has no sanctuary. On the other hand he is believed to maintain a special relationship with the Nuer. Unlike the supreme deities in other African religions, the Nuer believe that Kwoth is on their side. He offers them protection and destroys their enemies. He is partial, like the God of the Old Testament.

4. MESSIANISM: HISTORICIZATION OF THE RESOLUTION OF THE MIMETIC CRISIS

How is the interaction between God, humans, and the environment structured in the great historical faiths? Here again, the scapegoat paradigm is an indispensable instrument in comparing religious strategies that are far apart. In this article I limit myself to Old Testament religion. I will first mention a number of parallels between the Nilotic traditions discussed in the previous paragraphs and the religion of the Old Testament:

- In both cases, we are dealing with a divinity who unilaterally controls the relationship between humans and their environment. Disaster and natural disorder come from him, frequently in response to humans' misbehavior (the Flood, for example).
- As in the Nilotic myth, the Old Testament describes humans as victims of an act of expulsion by God. The reasons given for the expulsion in the Bible are not fundamentally different from those in Nilotic myths. Both put the blame on humanity. Secondary blame is placed on animal agents (the snake in the Genesis story; a hyena cuts the connection

between heaven and earth). Communion with God, abundance, and immortality are lost.

- In facing disaster, disease, defeat, and misfortune, humans are dependent on God. Though these crises may be punishments from God for specific acts of misbehavior, God cannot be pressured by acts of sacrifice. There is no bargaining for support against enemies. When God answers the call for protection, he does so in full sovereignty. The most poignant expressions of the relationship between man and God are the psalms, in which humankind affirms its victimhood in the face of the Almighty.
- A biblical theme that we saw prefigured in the way the Nuer define the relationship between God and man is the partnership between God and His people. God is partial to this community, gives it guarantees that it will be fertile, supports it in its struggle with its enemies and protects it—on His own terms—against ecological adversity. In the covenant of the partnership, humankind is put under the obligation not to worship rival divinities and respect the code of behavior set by God.

Is the Bible story just a particularly strong variant of the divinizing tendency that we already noticed among the Nilotes? Or is there more to it? To define the specificity of the biblical approach we return to Girard's fundamental religious scenario (1972 & 1978). There, religion is the reproduction in word and deed of a sequence of actions that are able to prevent and resolve mimetic crisis. The sequence begins with a conflict that is a threat to the survival of the community. The community designates a member as the cause of the crisis. In a unanimous act the community expels the scapegoat. The experience of unanimity against the scapegoat enables the community to overcome its differences and make a new start. The expelled agent may be thanked retrospectively and venerated by his persecutors because he stood at the beginning of a new order. The process has three structural dimensions:

- A time frame: there is development from a situation of chaotic conflict to a situation of peace and order.
- A spatial dimension: the boundary between inside and outside that is crossed by the expelled victim.
- A dimension of value: the situation of violent conflict is undesirable or evil while the result of the expulsion process is highly desirable, good (Hamerton Kelly 1987).

We have noted that this scheme fits the societies practicing regicide very well. Environmental disasters are blamed on the king, who is ultimately expelled from the community in a process marked by a gradual increase in suspense. This suspense unites the members of the community under heightened environmental stress and threatened by conflict. The crisis is over when environmental normality, in most instances the rain, returns. This scheme of dealing with environmental threats also fits the societies worshipping gods. Here the divine agent believed to cause disaster and misfortune must first be identified. The community unites in prayer to beg the destructive god. It gathers around a victim (an ox in the Nilotic case) whose death will take the affliction away from the community. The victim is offered to the god in the hope that the god will have pity on the afflicted party and relent his anger.

In the kingship scenario as well as the god-worship scenario, the process of identifying the cause of an environmental disaster is not only looking outward, finding a divine or royal aggressor, it also has an inward looking side. It involves a search of the hearts of the members of the community. They are urged to do away with socially negative feelings, scorn violence, pay unsettled accounts, remove possible causes for friction, forgive one another for harm done in the past, and start with a clean slate. It has an important moral component. The elimination of the external aggressor is complemented by a process of inner moral purification. These processes, remedying ecological disorder, follow the course of the disaster. They are relatively short term and recurrent. The building and maintenance of ecological order have a cyclical character. The work of converting order out of violence is never finished and will never come to an end.

The novelty of the Old Testament is in the definition of the time frame of the crisis. The suffering of the people, with whom God has a covenant, is put into a historical frame. History itself is a crisis from which salvation is possible. The history of the people with whom God has a partnership is a long process of purification in response to a crisis. The purification is no longer primarily clothed in terms of the sacrificial elimination of evil, but in moral terms. What is good and what is bad are defined in the law given by God to his people. The resolution of crises by designating an arbitrary scapegoat is condemned. The sacrificing of humans is condemned. The sacrificing of animals is restricted to calendrical rituals and subjected to strict rules laid down by the priests. Sacrifices that address ecological adversity as it presents itself are discouraged. History is no longer a succession of religious and political regimes, but a process with a purpose in which periods of moral progress follow periods of decline.

Religious action is increasingly focused on moral purification, a purification of hearts in accordance with the law that is given as the contract of the

covenant. This law addresses human violence directly, in day-to-day behavior at all times, and not only in the context of disaster or misfortune. Ecological well-being and moral well-being are strictly separated. Periods of abundance can be periods of moral decline and injustice, while justice and morality may flourish in adversity. This is the typical message of the prophets. They harangue the people in God's name. They also keep the time. The resolution of the crisis has an end. The prophets remind the people of the time frame that really counts. History is one long, drawn-out mimetic crisis that will be overcome in a process of purification that is informed by obedience to God's law. This resolution of the crisis is called "the kingdom of God." In this kingdom the separation of God and humankind, the many conflicts between humans, the hostility between humankind and nature, and the conflicts within nature itself (see the reconciliation of the lion and the lamb) will be resolved.

While the resolution of a social or ecological crisis can be empirically verified by the end of hostilities, the falling of rain or the reconciliation of former enemies, the resolution of a moral crisis can only be proclaimed. The role of the prophets is to preserve the sense of the encompassing time frame and awaken people to the fact that the time is limited. Without the suspense created by an imminent end to the crisis, the scenario of historical salvation is incomplete. Prophets therefore announce "the end of time," "the kingdom of God," "the last judgment," as imminent. It is significant that in the Old Testament the resolution of the conflict is represented in reference to kingship, as a social entity led by a person who has been "anointed" as king, a "messiah." Messianism is the fundamental structure of the Abrahamitic faiths and of their modern secular derivatives.

CONCLUSIONS

- In the ethnographic material I have presented, natural phenomena are the object of transactions between the community and either office holders, including kings or divinities believed to have power over a particular domain of nature. It would be wrong, however, to characterize these transactions as occurring between the community and nature. The cases presented here may therefore carry few lessons for the drawing up of a "natural contract" between the global community and its natural environment that could be the framework of new legislation and policies aimed at managing the relationship to the mutual benefit of both as envisaged in Michael Serres' *Le Contrat naturel* (1990).

- Natural and social events are interpreted by the communities of the Upper Nile as a single drama in which social events are bound to have repercussions on the natural order and human conflicts are the nexus of cosmological causality. Nature is drawn into the human circle. It is appropriated for purposes that are not its own. Its “otherness” is not recognized. Whatever partnership there is, is with human or divine controllers of nature. When woods, streams, mountains, specific animals are associated with the powers of royal office or divinity, they partake in this cultural partnership.
- The relationship between office holders and the community are structured as relations of reciprocity. The reciprocity is alternately positive and negative in character. It is positive when the blessings of the office holders generate gifts from the community, or when gifts of the community are used to motivate the effectiveness of the office holder. It turns negative when the office holder is considered ineffective or unwilling to provide the community with the desired natural blessings. This negative reciprocity may escalate and result in death.
- When power over the domains of nature is attributed to divinities, the cycle of negative reciprocity is broken. While divinities have the power to harm living humans, humans cannot harm a divinity. A regime of unilateralism sets in with gods afflicting mankind with natural disaster according to their whims and man warding off divine anger with offerings and prayer. Man cannot help but structure this relationship according to the principles of positive reciprocity expecting a reward or return gift from the gods in exchange for offerings made. Orthodoxy, however, will always emphasize the unilateralism of divine favors. In this respect there is little difference between the polytheists and monotheists.
- In the Old Testament, the natural environment as a key concern in transactions between God and humans retreats further into the background to give way to a concern about moral purity and justice. This may be the context in which the creation story in Genesis must be read. The text emphatically repeats that what God created was good. There was no more need for humankind to play a side role in maintaining cosmic order.

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