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## **THE CATASTROPHE AND SYSTEMS THEORY: TOWARDS A NEW ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY OF VIOLENCE**

**ABSTRACT:** The phenomenological analysis of a crime-genetic event requires a particular attention towards all the elements found within a system, either in an open or closed one, in order to understand the catastrophic event that provokes a destabilization of the system which will tend to re-stabilize itself in a new order. The catastrophic event, regardless of its predictability, is the result of the social interactions of the individual and it provides, from an anthropological point of view, a systemic cultural vision that can be understood by any single element, even the most insignificant one within the system. In each context, the elements are characterized culturally and the change of just one of them can provoke a catastrophic turbulence.

**KEYWORDS:** *Catastrophe, crime-genetic, anthropology, system, theory of violence.*

### **The Catastrophe and Systems Theory**

A systemic approach used in an anthropological research requires a methodological study in order to understand the advantages of the so-called ‘theory of investigation’ implemented in the phenomenon of murders or violence typical of a particular system.

The catastrophe theory and the systems theory, elaborated by the French researcher Morin represent, if they are interpreted and implemented as an approach of anthropological research and investigation, a

crucial model of investigation used to understand crime-genetic dynamics that are typical in different or similar cultures.

But what does *Catastrophe* mean? Several considerations converge in this word. These refer to the macroscopic circumstances that derive from natural events or events caused by human action (for instance the industrial, nuclear or oil catastrophes).

But if we analyze the etymology of the word *Catastrophe*, according to the Greek explanation of the word, we notice that the meaning of the word does not necessarily indicate a negative event but, instead, a transformation, a change of the system where a particular event takes a place.

So we can deduce that the word 'catastrophe' produces a concept that implies a change, a sudden and unexpected break of a new condition which has generated a case of discontinuity contrary to the previous state of the form.

The catastrophe, whatever it is, either if it is provoked by human action or it is natural, permits the researcher to prove a new form, different from the original one, characterized, or rather, re-organized with new variables and different constants. This new form is the creation of an event or a sequence of events that create the idea of disorder and confusion.

To sum up, we can conclude that a catastrophic event, regardless of its nature, generates a state of change and discontinuity with the previous state by causing an image of temporary or constant disorder.

Concerning what we have asserted so far, if we think about physic-mathematic theories regarding systems, we notice deep and upsetting analogies compared to the empirical analysis explained above.

To briefly illustrate, according to the principles of the thermodynamics, the energy produced within a closed space (the system) cannot straggle, but transforms, generating an internal disorder until it conforms to a new order and balance within the same system.

This scientific consideration, seen from an anthropological perspective, does not explain the physical dynamics of the heat but, instead, it takes into consideration the evolution/transformation of an initial order which, due to a catastrophic event (mutant), has produced a temporary

state of disorder to re-stabilize, reorganize, regenerate a new homologated order within the same system.

This theory of the systems according to which a cause a catastrophic event is provoked by producing a disorder to re-equilibrate itself in a new order, requires a new experimental question that is necessary for its evaluation of scientific applicability. In an open system, like for instance human beings, there is the sequence order > catastrophe > disorder > new order conceptually and anthropologically applicable? How can a background of disorder produce order? And this new order, how can it be linked to the previous one? Would it not be more correct to define it as a disorganized and dissociated state compared to the condition before the catastrophe?

### **The Thought and the Paradigm of Complexity**

The human being is considered as an open system, since they are inserted into different combinations that interact between them, creating the life of an individual. For instance, the head of the tribe, leads a lifestyle that makes him play his role when the tribe itself recognizes him as leader.

So the relationship with other human beings unequivocally causes a pyramidal relational system concerning the roles recognized by the community. The crucial interpretation of any system, understood as tool of anthropological analysis lies in the relationship between individuals, whose roles certainly become complementary or competitive or antagonistic. The ties that regulate the connections between individuals in any open system (tribe, sect, working environment, family environment, friends) determine the role and the actions of any individual that activates social interaction mechanisms when he is inserted in a complex system of ties (behavior, style, dress code, gesture, voice, words). In this context he generates specific and elective criteria of form concerning his social role within that community.

If an event of discontinuity (catastrophe) takes place within a context throughout an interrelation, and if this catastrophe is generated by relational ties that regulate the complex system in a community or, more

generally, in a group, the original order will change to new forms of interaction, probably characterized by other ties.

The head of the tribe is removed and a young head of the tribe succeeds him. The young one, who was a simple component of a system with specific ties to which he was used, has to reformulate the international dynamics and new relational ties, establishing his new lifestyle, his new order.

The complex thought leads the researcher of Anthropology to have a systemic approach in the studying of a precise order that, due to a catastrophic event or an element of discontinuity evolves to a new organization leading to a new order. The social interaction (*quid novis*) becomes the crucial element in the new organizational process, as it is considered as a catastrophic turbulence, by generating a disorder where a new order is created.

The study of the complex thought is important for the understanding of the violent phenomena within a community and it can acquire a model of thought that is profoundly useful in the mental disposition that has to be assumed.

So the anthropologist, after an empirical study concerning the phenomenon of the violence, has to approach it with an emotional and prejudicial detachment and has to understand, throughout a complex dynamic of thought, the analysis of the reasons concerning specific violent behaviors ascribed to a specific system. In Ancient Egypt, when faced with a sand storm, in order to appease the anger of their Gods, people used to sacrifice young children.

We should start this study by analyzing the disorder element, focusing on the interaction and on the ties affecting the subjects. We have to also understand the element of the catastrophe, the element of discontinuity as a component of a new open or closed system.

In this context and with this premise, it is logical to ask ourselves what entity a catastrophic event should be, in order to call into question the order.

We have already argued that catastrophe is an event; the prominence of this element is not important. The anthropologist has to be extremely precise in registering any element of discontinuity within the system,

even the most insignificant, as even the smallest one can generate a catastrophe and create disorder in a community<sup>1</sup>. (In this regard it is appropriate to remember the popular Lorenz's quotation: Does the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas<sup>2</sup>?)

Beyond any emotional involvement, we have to understand that from the slightest variation of the interaction or even without it, an event can intervene and provoke a change; on the systemic plan it does not matter if the change is positive or negative, the crucial point is that it has to be a reorganization of the system itself. After having certifying the implementation of the element of discontinuity, the system has to reacquire a new order. It cannot remain in a condition of disorganization and disorder. So in this regard it is important to understand the catastrophic events from which a new order and a new system can be established.

### **Categorization of catastrophic elements**

The catastrophic elements that intervene in a system can be classified in predictable or non- predictable elements at least in terms of probability. In nature, any system characterized by an order has to be considered relatively rare and it can be modified by simple disturbances or catastrophic events (predictable or not). The nature chooses chaos to fight chaos, keeping the biodiversity and reestablishing itself on a different level. In nature when a way is closed, others will be opened in order to maintain the stability throughout a new organization<sup>3</sup> of the system.

After these theoretical hints, the question that has to be asked by the anthropologist is: How can we use the chaos and the catastrophe

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<sup>1</sup> The most obvious example is to miss the flight (and so an important commitment). Then we find out that it would be a swindle. Missing the flight has been a catastrophic event that could have changed the order of life that will reorganize itself on different standards.

<sup>2</sup> The butterfly's effect is a metaphor used to affirm that even the smallest event in favorable or coincident circumstances can provoke consequences and modify the original system.

<sup>3</sup> Medical example: if, due to a negative event, a vascular bundle of an important district is closed, collateral bundles activate "spontaneously" to nourish the vital blood system.

theory in the anthropological research when this is applied to violent behaviors?

We have argued that a violent action within a system has to be considered as an event (predictable or not) of discontinuous nature (catastrophic nature) which provokes a temporary phenomenon of disorganization of the system until new system stabilizes itself. The event of catastrophic discontinuity happens when the individual experiences a condition of *interrelation* with other individual.

In terms of a relationship, we observe for instance a woman whose relationships always follow the same path and end disastrously.

This sequence is not accidentally determined but we can deduce that it is the behavioral outcome of a personality (open system) which has been structured in a certain way within its open surrounding-system (the society). These systems, according to the adoption of the chaos and catastrophe theory, are subjected to the chaos. So the female behavioral model will continuously be repeated until a catastrophe will intervene (the element of discontinuity). This element of discontinuity within the individual systemic circle, predicable or not, has not to be interpreted as a negative painful element, but as a variable of an open or close system. For instance, during a journey a woman could experience realities or meet a person and the interrelation between them can cause an effect of discontinuity, breaking the present chain of events. Each of these possibilities represents a catastrophe, a change that will reorganize the 'relationship' chaos and the new organization will set up a new relationship model.

This example leads the anthropologist to foresee the catastrophic element and above all when it will happen. In this case it is necessary to reflect on it further. Should the anthropologist foresee the catastrophic element, inserting it in the framework of future events? He plays a role whose competence is inter-disciplinary and systemic. The anthropologist cannot consider every element and factor of a social community. The anthropologist is a key figure that has to coordinate a response action aiming at guaranteeing a social order especially during emergencies or crises. By knowing the potential of the destructive elements, the anthropologist has to prevent the catastrophic element or, inversely,

to deduce which element can generate the alteration of the system to facilitate a new one. Here's why the catastrophe and systems theory, as anthropological approach in crisis interventions, in emergencies and in the occurrence of violence, is crucial during the reorganization of a new system.

The purpose of the anthropologist is not to prevent any form of social deviation (sociological, psychological and medical framework). The anthropologist deals with the problem of the variables within a system where these can generate chaos and purposely change the current system. If we know the system in which the actions happen, and if we consider the interactions and their nature, it could be possible to seize the reason for the catastrophic events occurrence, that will become a resource in order to activate the interdisciplinarity. So the anthropologist, assisted by other experts, will carry out an analysis of the current system in its completeness. In doing so, he will be able to recognize in which conditions the system will react in specific ways when it is activated by specific catastrophic occurrences, thanks to which it could later organize and reorganize itself. If we ourselves follow this circular model, the first symptoms of different and uncommon behaviors and the smallest modifications in the relationships can warn us of a drop point used as a prediction of an action or as a worsening of the behaviors.

This information is often more important than the specific knowledge of the future evolution of the system.

For those who work in the field of human sciences, is important to know that we cannot always act on external parameters of a system, but it is equally important to understand when the system loses its stability due to the intervention of the catastrophic event, the start of its disorganization and consequently its reorganization towards a new order. The anthropologist in his research on the phenomena of violence should understand that the human being (open system) is inserted in an open surrounding-system (the society). Both systems, by definition, cause relationships, interactions, bonds and they even drive the subjects to chaos and catastrophe.

## **Integrated Behavior**

In any cultural community, or rather within any system (close or open), the relationship and the ties that bind people are regulated by particular social norms that are respected and shared by the members of that system. These norms determine a behavior of the system members that is socially accepted and integrated. The latter is important on the analysis of the systems and on the study of the violent phenomena caused within the system as any system is composed by social norms that are valid, shared, respected by the members of the community throughout an integrated behavior of a particular system. Each system has its own norms, its own order shared by the members of that system who accept the rules by integrating themselves within the social framework. The integrated behaviors of a system characterize the interaction and the ties of the subjects admitted to the system shaping, as we have already seen in a previous analysis, an idea of potential chaotic complexity.

The change of the shape of a system anticipates a catastrophic event that, in an anthropological perspective, can represent a deviating behavior compared to the norm or an antisocial behavior. When we talk about deviant behavior, we refer to an action which tends not to respect the ties imposed by the norm, by rejecting something regulated by the social consensus; on the other hand when we talk about antisocial behavior, we refer to a rejection of any rule, tie, regulation or norm supporting the antithesis of the social norm and generating micro and macro criminality phenomena. Within a community, the realization of these two behaviors contrary to the social norms, causes disorder and chaos. The social disorganization occurs in the form of a chaotic alarm where the subjects associated in the system run the risk to lose willpower and stability altogether. The loss of the latter and its consequences, provoke a passage between deviance and anti-sociality, indeed a very subtle distinction.



### **Applications in the Anthropological Framework**

The application of the catastrophe theory in the anthropological framework represents a method of analysis in the phenomenology of murders. It permits the anthropologist to understand the essential and predictive elements during his empirical research of data. For instance, if the Egyptians during a sand storm (catastrophic element) were used to sacrificing children it would be interesting to understand why children were chosen and not elderly people or women, and why sacrifice was the measure taken. The anthropology of violence is aimed at understanding the cultural dynamics of a country that can reflect acts of violence, homicidal behaviors without consciously intervening or trying to socially modify them. The methodological rigor proposed here, implements mechanisms of research and study in order to understand the violent actions typical of specific cultures and civilizations.

The recognition of the catastrophic event provides the researcher with a systemic analysis of the reality and identifies the weakness and the catastrophic activators of the system.

The comparison between a violent act and the creation of a new social context, that follows what these theories argue, takes the individual to a complex and circular study where any single element has to be considered as essential and part of the system. Even the most ordinary event, for instance, lighting a match, can generate a violent act. According to the circular and complex study, the researcher has to take into consideration any single element that might compromise the system by inserting it into the context of that community.

When a collective or single murder committed within a community context becomes a matter of anthropological study, we do not have to interpret it as something typical just for that culture; a catastrophic event, a violent action of course can be committed by a community that follows its beliefs, its culture, its myths but also a subculture of a group of people that identifies itself with a behavior, an ideology, a belief, a lifestyle, can do it. An example of this is the phenomenon of the destructive crime-genetic cults in which a community (that is a group of people sharing a common thought) understands violent actions, as they are accepted by that specific community. It is interesting to notice that,

from an anthropological perspective, the catastrophic event, the violent action, is realized in more complex cultural dynamics aimed at restoring and/or confirming a cultural situation (a new system) or belonging to a cultural community (for instance in this case the clitoridectomy in some African countries).

## **KATASTROFE I TEORIJE SISTEMA: PREMA NOVOJ ANTROPOLOŠKOJ TEORIJI NASILJA**

SAŽETAK: Rad predstavlja filozofsku raspravu o fenomenologiji analize događaja zločina, koji genetički zahteva posebnu pažnju prema svim elementima koji se nalaze unutar sistema i koji utiču na njega. Kako bi se razumela suština katastrofalnog događaja, koji izaziva destabilizaciju sistema, potrebno je analizirati svaki elemenat sistema i tek nakon toga nastojati ponovno stabilizovati sistem u novom poretku. Katastrofalni događaj, bez obzira na njegovu predvidljivost, je rezultat socijalne interakcije pojedinca i sredine, i sa antropološke tačke gledišta može se razumeti kao sistemska kulturna vizija u kojoj promena makar i jednog njegovog elementa može izazvati katastrofalne turbulencije.

KLJUČNE REČI: *katastrofe, zločini, antropologija, sistem, teorija nasilja.*