Where is the Real Thing? Psychoanalysis and African Mythical Narratives
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Résumé
V. Y. Mudimbe — Où est la chose réelle ? Psychanalyse et récits mythiques africains.
A partir d'une lecture de l'ouvrage de Luc De Heusch, Le Roi ivre ou l'origine de l'État (1972) cet article essaie de cerner dans une mémoire africaine un cauchemar originel dont la violence ne paraît ni mineure, ni différente, face à celle qui, dans le capitalisme, marque et accompagne les figures d'Œdipe ou d'Œlectre.

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Thus, these three points: the primitive, the barbarian and the civilized. The last one, as a concept as well as a moment, seems always to imply a past in which the two preceding ones actualize themselves as its imperfect signs or, to put it in a more positive light, as its promises. Marxism sets itself the task of understanding and commenting upon the dialectic dynamism of a progressive transformation of modes of production through stages and discontinuities which reflect these concepts. Freud, in Civilization and its Discontents (1953-74, XXI: 59), neatly dissociates and opposes the primitive to the civilized pole in a clear diachronic tempo. Anthropologists and psychoanalysts, since the debate between Jones and Malinowski, have been expounding contradictory interpretations about the universality of Oedipus in history and in space.

In this text, I shall address two linked issues: the fatality of a universal tempo of progression and its relation to the figure or structure of Oedipus and Electra. I have chosen to proceed from a brief synthesis of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s proposition on ‘the primitive machines’ (1977) to a simple but critically synthetic reading of De Heusch’s magnificent analysis of The Origin of the State (1982) by focusing on Oedipus’s or Electra’s presence and subtle duplications in mythical narratives.

Sive autem tribulamur . . .

Let us begin by locating a question. The radical meaning of ‘it all’ as well as of the ‘very sense of it all’, as proposed in G. Deleuze’s and F. Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus (1977), springs from a majestic order of

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explanation: a history of philosophy and a philosophy of history which posit a rational line of succession of events and stages in the organization and administration of societies. In fact, one might call it the evidence of a universal history. Deleuze and Guattari (ibid.: 140) say: ‘first of all, universal history is the history of contingencies, and not the history of necessity. Ruptures and limits, and not continuity’. More specifically, to use a paradigm which could, a posteriori, account for the fact that there is such a thing as a universal history, they propose (ibid.: 140) a thesis:

‘In a sense, capitalism has haunted all forms of society, but it haunts them as their terrifying nightmare, it is the dread they feel of a flow that would elude their codes. Then again, if we say that capitalism determines the conditions and the possibility of a universal history, this is true only insofar as capitalism has to deal essentially with its own limit, its own destruction—as Marx says, insofar as it is capable of selfcriticism at least to a certain point: the point where the limit appears, in the very movement that counteracts the tendency’.

In sum, this statement means that, on the one hand, the Marxist theorist or practitioner is looking for ‘the sense of it all’ because he has already found it. On the other hand, it is in the materiality of this found logic that a history of contingencies, seen and analyzed from capitalism as a concrete experience (or as an object of desire), transmutes itself into a universal history and unveils the logic of ruptures and discontinuities in the active progression of modes of production.

The ‘primitive territorial machines’—for which ‘filiation is administrative and hierarchical, but alliance is political and economic, and expresses power insofar as it is not fused with the hierarchy and cannot be deduced from it, and the economy insofar as it is not identical with administration’ (ibid.: 148)—, this machine can only precede the ‘barbarian despotic machine’ (ibid.) and its imperial representation: ‘exogamy must result in the position of men outside the tribe who for their part are entitled to an endogamous marriage and are able, by virtue of this formidable right, to serve as initiators to exogamous subjects of both sexes: the sacred “deflowerer”, the “ritual initiator” on the mountain or across the waters’ (ibid.: 200). The third and last moment of the ‘evolution’ is represented in ‘the civilized capitalist machine’. It localizes itself in the meeting of two constituents: ‘on one side, the deterritorialized worker who has become free and naked having to sell his labor capacity; and on the other, decoded money that has become capital and is capable of buying it’ (ibid.: 225). In terms of representation, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the capitalist locus is a product of a maximalized process of ‘the decoding and the deterritorialization of flows in production’ (ibid.: 244). Capitalism would have internalized in itself alliances and filiation and privatized the family. This latter can no longer shape the social grids of economic reproduction. Situated outside of the social
field, the family is now a simple reflection of symbolizing images such as 'Mister Capital', 'Madame Earth' or 'working child' whose 'alliances and filiations no longer pass through people but through money; so the family becomes a microcosm, suited to expressing what it no longer dominates' (ibid.: 264). For our authors (ibid.: 245), in these processes as well as in the flows it allows,

'[capitalism] produces schizos the same way it produces Prell shampoo or Ford cars, the only difference being that the schizos are not salable. How then does one explain the fact that capitalist production is constantly arresting the schizophrenic process and transforming the subject of the process into a confined clinical entity as though it saw in this process the image of its own death coming from within? Why does it make the schizophrenic into a sick person—not only nominally but in reality? Why does it confine its madmen and madwomen instead of seeing in them its own heroes and heroines, its own fulfillment?'

We are now able to ask a question: what is this universal history which can be but a history of contingencies whose fulfillment is the capitalist or the socialist experience? It would be easy bad faith to use Mably's pessimistic evaluation of history (quoted in Furet 1984: 125-139) as 'an almost unbroken succession of miseries, disasters, and calamities'. A more correct interpretation would note the Marxist assumption of Deleuze's and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* which explicates that history coincides with a tale about objective transformations, discontinuities of modes of production and their ideological representations. One could still question this definition and the thesis it carries. What is puzzling is that Deleuze and Guattari would agree. They even refer to, and accept as obvious, the strongest critique against the imperialism of history which traditionally has entertained the idea that primitive societies have no history [. . .]: the presence of history in every social machine plainly appears in the disharmonies that, as Lévi-Strauss says, bear the unmistakable stamp of time elapsed' (Deleuze & Guattari 1977: 150-151). Yet, immediately thereafter, they make a move towards a possible universal historization of individualities by distinguishing types of interpretation of socioeconomic disharmonies. In effect, as they propose, these may be perceived and understood in several ways: *ideally* (through 'the gap between the real institution and the assumed ideal model' [ibid.: 151]), *morally* ('by invoking a structural bond between law and transgression' [ibid.]), *physically* (as 'a question of attrition' for the 'social machine' [ibid.]).

The being of a so-called 'primitive socius' is a historical way of being. For to be a living human being is to witness to a natural history as a permanent and progressive achievement genetically coded. On the other hand, the individuality of the being is given by, and, at the same time, defines itself from a sociocultural context marked by a dialectic of conventions and inventions which animates its institutions, language, systems of
beliefs and symbols (see e.g. Wagner 1981). Deleuze and Guattari (1977: 146) claim that the ‘primitive socius was indeed the only territorial machine in the strict sense of the term. The functioning of such a machine consists in the following: the declension of alliance and filiation—declining the lineages on the body of the earth, before there is a State’. This arrangement fixes two memories: on one side, the alliance or memory of words and agreements that keeps vivid facts concerning a circulating capital and the system of debts; on the other, the filiation or memory of blood which maintains a fixed capital and the filiative stock. Deleuze and Guattari (ibid.: 152) can thus state: this ‘primitive’ ‘machine is segmentary because, through its double apparatus of tribe and lineage, it cuts up segments of varying lengths: genealogical filiative units of major, minor and minimal lineages, with their hierarchy, their respective chiefs, their elders who guard the stocks and organize marriages; territorial tribal units of primary, secondary, and tertiary sections, also having their dominant roles and their alliances’.

What about Oedipus? One may repeat here the arguments which opposed Malinowski to Jones, Kardiner and Fromm to Geza Roheim. The question remains, simple and obvious: do cultural grammars of social formations constituted by different modes of production invent Oedipus and Electra in some cases and not in others? Deleuze and Guattari (ibid.: 175) believe that

'It is correct to question all social formations from Oedipus. But not because Oedipus might be a truth of the unconscious that is especially visible where we are concerned; on the contrary, because it is a mystification of the unconscious that has only succeeded with us by assembling the parts and wheels of its apparatus from elements of the previous social formations. It is universal in that sense. Thus it is indeed within capitalist society that the critique of Oedipus must always resume its point of departure and find again its point of arrival'.

Here is, then, the paradox. The universality of Oedipus is postulated in the necessity of a history fulfilling itself today in the capitalist experience. This very history itself, on the other hand, carries on this universal necessity of Oedipus insofar as it alone seems to have the power of referring back, even to the absolute beginnings, in which Oedipus is mythologized silently.

... pro vestra exhortatione

J. Kristeva (1982: 78) writes so enthusiastically:

'Now, among the Bemba, power is in the hands of men, but filiation is matrilineal

1. Italics mine.
2. Italics mine.
and residence, after marriage, is matrilocal. There is a great contradiction between male rule and matrilineal residence; the young bridegroom is subjected to the authority of the bride’s family, and he must override it through personal excellence during his maturity. He remains nevertheless, because of matrilineality, in conflict with the maternal uncle who is the legal guardian of the children especially when they are growing up.

The Bemba, let us put it clearly, are part of a vast cultural complex which, according to both their own founding myths and historical evidence, includes the Luba and the Lunda. Here is a genealogical reconstruction proposed by Luc De Heusch (1982: 10) who carefully integrates Vansina’s contribution (ibid.: 10-11): ‘The history of the peoples in the savanna in the five centuries preceding 1900 is the story of the development of a Luba-Lunda civilization in the east and of a Kongo and colonial Portuguese civilization in the West’.

From Luba to Lunda and Bemba founding myths, one finds a regular pattern which, on the one hand, unfolds linkages between incest and regicide, and, on the other, marks or suggests a transition from strict patrilineality to strict matrilineality.

The narratives I am referring to are not, strictly speaking, historical. In effect, they do not claim to offer a re-enactment of the past even when they comment on, and narrate historical beginnings. One could say that these narratives simply constitute a discourse on, and an interpretation of the past. As such they are different in nature from, say, the historical genre insofar as in the latter the historian’s critical consciousness is said to prove that ‘history is the account of events happening to a nation’ (Veyne 1984: 81). Both the historian and the anonymous authors of mythical narratives know that ‘the knowledge of the past has always fed curiosity and ideological sophisms; men have always known that humanity is in a state of becoming and that their collective life is made up of their actions and their passions’ (ibid.: 78). The major
difference resides in the fact that the mythical narrative explicitly speaks from a collective memory or totalizing autobiography, whereas the historian’s narration is said to describe ‘what is true, what is concrete, experienced, sublunary’ (ibid.: 166) in order to contribute to the constitution of a collective memory (see Jewsiewicki 1988). Thus, on one side, an autobiographical narrative and its variations on beginnings, the original authenticity, and progressive transformations; and, on the other, the belief in a theme: there is a technique of narration or history which should translate a given plot, its causalities and becoming into a coherent and intelligible grid. In this framework, one understands how it is possible to postulate that myths speak about history, and history about myths. For

‘All knowledge supposes a horizon of reference beyond which all examination is impossible, and this framework is not supported by reasoning, since it is the condition of all reasoning. Thus, history sees equally legitimate Weltanschauungs follow each other, and their appearance remains inexplicable; they follow each other only by the breaking and changing of frameworks, reasoning that would be irrefutable if it did not consist of reifying abstractions’ (Veyne 1984: 115).

Mythical as well as ritual narratives do also exactly that (see e.g. Turner 1967, 1968, 1969). There is no amnesic society, and everyone speaks from a somewhere which always indicates a historicity, a becoming, and their questions.

An analysis of the sources utilized by Luc De Heusch confirms this interpretation. A basic grid in Luba myths and traditions unites and opposes simultaneously endogamy and exogamy in the body of the king. In the myths, two opposing founding fathers, Nkongolo and Mbidi Kiluwe, face each other. The first is cruel, wicked and has incestuous relations with his two sisters: because he is ‘suspicious of the power of women, he decided to avoid marrying outside his own family’ (De Heusch 1982: 15). The second is civilized, discreet and married to a complete foreigner. What all the versions of the myth of the foundation of the Luba kingdom (M1) (ibid.: ch. 1) show is an opposition between a ‘primitive’ royalty and a ‘civilized’ kingship. The first is marked by incest and symbolized in sterility, the second characterizes itself by hyperexogamy and in symbols of procreation. But, as De Heusch (ibid.: 31) notes:

‘A surprise awaits us when we compare the myth with the royal installation ceremonies which it legitimizes. For while the myth celebrates the abolition of incest, the ceremony incorporates the shameful legacy of Nkongolo. A new sovereign has ritual relations with his mother and sisters at the time of his investiture; his daughters and his brother’s daughters become his wives’.

A similar ritual can be observed for the installation of the king of Yeke and Sanga in Bunkeya. The body of the king incarnates the
paradoxical encounter of endogamy and exogamy. It denounces itself as a symbolic locus in which nature espouses culture, the disorder of forests faces the conventional norms of a social order, the primacy of laws overflows in its own negation.

'It is this paradox, this phantasmagorical project that must be elucidated if we are to understand why the sacred king is a multiplicative mechanism of productive and reproductive forces on the one hand, and a dangerous being surrounded by ritual interdictions, condemned to a premature death, on the other' (De Heusch 1985: 102).

The royal actualization of incest, that is the legacy of Nkongolo, is the other side of the legitimization of a strict exogamy among the Luba according to Mbidi's lessons of civilization. The ambiguous body of the king encompasses these two poles. One, negative, linked to the memory of beginnings and incestuous unions (De Heusch 1982: 26). In the royal ritual, its activity (the bulopwe, or 'sacred blood of royalty' [ibid.: 21]) takes place outside of the inhabited space, on the margins of the society, in 'a suffocating environment, without communication with the external world in the sociological sense, and without any opening in the formal sense: a hut lacking doors or windows, called "the house of unhappiness"' (ibid.: 32). The second (the bufumu, or 'political authority' [ibid.: 21]) is positive, paradigmatic, outlines and witnesses to the conditions of social order and human survival. Kalala Ilunga, the founder of the second Luba kingdom, and all his successors after him, inherit both the bulopwe and the bufumu.

Who is the real father of Kalala Ilunga? According to M_1 (Verhulpens's version [ibid.: 18-19]), 'Nkongolo who had incestuous relations with his two sisters, Bulanda and Mabela, lent these women to his guest [Mbidi Kiliwe]. Bulanda became pregnant and brought forth a son, Ilunga, while Mabela was delivered of a boy and a girl'. The story does not say more. Consequently, Ilunga can be seen as both an endogamic model (the child of an incestuous relation between a brother and a sister) and an exogamic figure (the product of a sexual encounter between a stranger and Bulanda (the child's paternal aunt)). It is this exogamic model that amplifies M_1. In Colle's version (ibid.: 20-21), Nkongolo is the uncle of the child, and Mbidi, the father.

Clearly, the narrative conjures away something, the unspeakable unveiled in the ritual which takes place in the margins of the society. At the same time, the myth obscures the forms of its own meaning. Yet, a question mark is subtly preserved in the mystery of the name of Kalala's father. Hence, this amazing confrontation between a founding myth and the sociopolitical institution it legitimizes. But, let us be more specific. By the concept of conjuring away, I mean a way—be it a pre-reflective choice (in the Sartrean sense), an unconsciously motivated
decision, or simply (why not?) a conscious desire to erase the unthink-
able—of whisking away (in fact, into the bush) an essential name or
action and of pretending to know nothing about it (see Leclaire 1971: 90).
As a consequence, the anonymous narrator of the narrative seems really
to know nothing about it and the discourse of a collective ethnic memory
can whiten an ambiguous genesis. Does not one see here in this small
silence of a narrative a key to Freud’s concept of original repression
(Urverdrangung)?

Rightly, De Heusch (1982: 30) writes that

‘It was necessary that Mbidi marry Nkongolo’s two sisters so that the myth could
oppose the only son of one to the twin offspring of the other. The true heir of
Mbidi, the hyperexogamic hero, had to be an only son, devoid of a twin sibling.
The incestuous relationship, which until then had harmlessly united the pairs of
twins, undergoes a profound change, becoming the tragic passion of a sister who
prefers her half brother, an only son, to her own twin brother. This radical alter-
ation in kinship spells the end of endogamy, until then characteristic of human
society’.

The price to be paid for this discontinuity articulates itself in a regicide
and a possible patricide. In effect, the young Kalala enters in competi-
tion with Nkongolo, a confrontation takes place and Kalala flees to
Mbidi’s country. He soon comes back leading an army against Nkongolo.
According to Burton’s version of M, (ibid.: 15-18), his soldiers capture the
king and cut off his head. In Orjo de Marchovelette’s version (ibid.: 
11-15), Nkongolo is beheaded and castrated. With this tragic confron-
tation a mythical order ends and history begins: it will develop as exo-
gamic and patrilineal.

A careful examination of versions brings to light two startling points.
First, the identification with the uncle-father is explicit: Kalala competes
with the king, regularly beats him at games. The child’s ambition is so
obvious that the mother of the king warns Nkongolo that he might soon
lose his political power. Second, in a systematic manner, the mythical
narratives silence what the kingly ritual proclaims: the permanence of
the bulopwe that Kalala incarnates and its sexual prerogatives over the
mother and sisters. This deviation between myth and ritual, between
the identification of the son and his fatherly figure and, on the other
hand, the wish to have the mother, is highly interesting if we have in
mind Freud’s statement (1953-74, XIX: 31) that: ‘His [the boy’s] iden-
tification with his father [then] takes on a hostile colouring and
changes into a wish to get rid of his father in order to take his place with
his mother’. Focusing on this issue and comparing Group Psychology
and the Analysis of the Ego (ibid., XVIII: 67) to The Ego and the Id
(ibid., XIX: 3), R. Girard (1979: 173) rightly notes that in the latter
Freud discourages us from thinking that one and the same impulse—the
wish to take the father’s place everywhere—stimulates identification with
the model and directs desire toward the mother. Yet, in the Luba case,
the legitimacy of the *bulopwe* is intimately thought through the *bufumu* which absolutely seems to oppose the very possibility of Oedipus whereas, simultaneously, it proclaims it in Kalala’s saga. But does this mean that Oedipus is the unthought or simply the hidden in the mysterious figure of the king? Even by supposing the structure were more obscure, how would one account for the circumlocutions of the myths, the paradoxical conjunction of the *bulopwe* and the *bufumu*, and the highly significant confusion about the name of Kalala’s father?

In order to clarify these questions, let us examine the foundation myths of the Lunda empire (*M*₂₀) (De Heusch 1982: 144-152). King Yala has from his first wife two sons (Chinguli and Yala) and a daughter, Lueji. The boys are asocial, lazy and drunken. They once insult their father, beat him, and abandon him in a pool of blood. Lueji comes along, she takes care of her dying father and is finally chosen by him as successor. She becomes queen and ultimately marries a Luba prince, Chibinda Ilunga, a son of Kalala Ilunga, the Luba king (*ibid.*: 147-148). In the version of Duyster (*ibid.*: 144-147), Lueji hands the power to her foreign husband and, since she was sterile, gives him a second wife who is the mother of Naweji, the successor of Chibinda. In Van den Byvang’s version (*ibid.*: 149), it is Chibinda who steals the power from his indisposed wife. According to de Carvalho’s version (*ibid.*: 148), ‘The marriage [of Chibinda and the queen] took place when Lueji was pregnant. The eldest dignitary solemnly handed the chiefly bracelet to Chibinda, enjoining him to unify and build up the country his son would rule’.

In any case, despite these divergences, three things are clear. First, a patricide-regicide makes possible a matrilineality which almost immediately breaks down in a love story that explicitly brings back the Luba line of male filiation. Second, contrary to the ambiguous complexity of the Luba *M₁* which opposes a nephew (who is perhaps a son) to an uncle (who might be the father), the Lunda foundational myth is luminously explicit: the two sons beat their father and are directly responsible for his death. Finally, the two brothers emigrate because they cannot accept the new kingly power of the foreigner who has taken over the body of their sister and her power over the land. Interestingly enough, most of the versions of *M*₂₀ (*ibid.*: 147-152) seem to cover the sexual dimensions of the struggle for power. These become obvious when one opposes *M*₂₀ to *M₁*.

At any rate, these three facts make explicit a well-known lesson: violence is related to sexuality, and the latter to the former (see Freud 1953-74, VII: 125; IX: 179; Girard 1979). Moreover, they maintain that blood, as a symbol or as a reality, is almost always impure (Douglas 1966), particularly when it is linked to a violent crime. ‘The act of regicide is the exact equivalent, *vis-à-vis* the polis, of the act of patricide. In both cases the criminal strikes at the most fundamental,
essential, and inviolable within the group. He becomes, literally, the slayer of distinctions' (Girard 1979: 74). In M_{20}, as we have seen, the patricide is a regicide. It brings about an overvaluation of blood relationship between the father and the daughter. This outcome, although a transformation, perfectly reproduces M_{1} in which the regicide coincides with a 'possible' patricide.

Luc De Heusch (1982: 154-155) observes the fact but, unfortunately, he insists only on the asymmetrical situation of Nkongolo and Lueji: 'Lueji lives with her brothers as an untamed virgin; Nkongolo lives incestuously with his sisters. An aberrant sexual relation is opposed here to an absence of sexuality, which is just as abnormal'. I would rather emphasize another opposition. The conjunction in M_{20} of a father (Yala) and his daughter (Lueji) which indicates an overvaluation of blood relationships is the other side of another opposition, a disjunction, illustrated in the tension between the sons (Chinguli and Yala) and their father (Yala). In the conjunction we have a coded incestuous relationship. It is not negated in the virginity of Lueji, and it is explicitly emphasized in a peripheral version: Lueji saw the nakedness of her drunken father, covered him and washed him. In the disjunction, the violence and rebellion of the two brothers become significant: they oppose the power of a father over the body of his daughter, their sister, and this shows why they could only oppose the foreigner who marries her. M_{20} is a simple, yet a radical reversal of M_{1} in which a nephew confronts the authority of an uncle (who is perhaps his biological father) and in this gets encouragement and help from his biological father (who, in fact, could be only his social father).

\[ \text{M}_{20} \text{ (Lunda)} \]
\[ \text{Father (Yala)} \vdash \text{Daughter (Lueji)} \]
Overvaluation of blood relationships

\[ \text{M}_{1} \text{ (Luba)} \]
\[ \text{Uncle (Nkongolo, possible father)} \]
\[ \text{vs. Nephew (Kalala, possible son)} \]
Undervaluation of blood relationships

The common point which unites M_{1} and M_{20} in what they narrate as truth of the past outlines a meaning that states its power in a curious language: the two narratives are interdependent and echo each other. Yet, the first affirms the permanence of patrilineality, and the second witnesses to a failure of matrilineality and a return to patrilineal filiation and social organization. What is the name of this game and what does it signify exactly? The centrality of Lueji may be the heart of the
problem. In effect, whatever angle one takes, she is omnipresent as an essential figure in the founding of Lunda history. The master-discourse of a dying father made her queen and source of power. According to Struyf’s version (ibid.: 149-150), she is an obvious symbol of an Electra whose image is transmuted into the incomprehensible knowledge of genesis. But, it is in the signs of her fertility or those of her sterility that, according to all versions, she allows the now founded matrilineal law to reformulate itself in relation to her Luba husband and the taxonomies of a patrilineal filiation.

And now, our last step, M₃₂: the origin of the Bemba kingdom (ibid.: 229-244). Labrecque’s version reads this way: Mumbi Mukasa, the niece of God, queen mother of Lembaland, decides to marry Mukulumpe. They have four children. These young people have the foolish idea of constructing a tower which could reach heaven, the country of their mother. The tower collapses, killing some people and Mukulumpe decides to punish his sons who are responsible for the catastrophe: Katongo, Nkole, and Chiti. They revolt. The father wants to humiliate them. They react by committing other crimes, one of which is ‘possibly adultery with a young wife of their father’s’ (ibid.: 230).

The uniqueness of this fact is exemplified in the whisking away of the name of the woman. The unthought, once again, oscillates between the impossible which cannot be made explicit and the articulation of a text offering the melodrama of a polygynic structure. A possible repression in the narrative accounts for, and convincingly comments upon desires and violence in such an extended family. Indeed, the woman cannot be the mother, can she? That is unacceptable even among the Bemba. Correctly, this reading should refuse to identify the desirability of the mother in the very moment that it accepts reasons which account for the confrontation between the sons and the father. To exploit an ironic statement by Serge Leclaire (1971: 122) which refers to something else (another thing and project. . .), is it strange to imagine that one of the sons participating in the seduction of one of their father’s women would have said: ‘Je crois que c’était une bonne séance . . . nous allons en rester là’ (‘I believe it was a good session . . . We shall stop here. . .’).

Ultimately, the sons leave Lembaland and, beyond the Luapula river, build a new village. Its new prince, Chiti, ‘regretted that his sister, Chilufya-Mulenga, had not accompanied him to assure the royal succession, in conformity with matrilineal descent’ (De Heusch 1982: 230). A delegation of aristocrats of royal blood is sent to bring the princess who is a prisoner of her own father and succeeds in its mission. Yet, one night, on his way back to the new village, prince ‘Kapasa lay with Chilufya-Mulenga, who was his classificatory sister [. . .] Six months later the pregnant princess confessed the name of her incestuous seducer’ (ibid.: 231).
This Bemba narrative, \( M_{32} \), constitutes the extreme reversal of the Luba founding myth and a critical rearrangement of the Lunda one. As De Heusch (1982: 234) writes:

"Chiti's sister is jealously kept prisoner by a cruel father [...]. Chiti is obliged, to ensure matrilineal dynastic continuity, to remove Chilufya-Mulenga from their common father. Finally, we know that a second obstacle occurs to the effective realization of the matrilineal order: the excessive (incestuous) conjunction of brother and sister [...]. The prince Kapasa, who has been charged with the removal of Chilufya-Mulenga, seduces her. Chiti thereupon flies into a great rage. By banishing the guilty one from the royal clan, he clearly proclaims the fundamental law of matrilineal society which unites brother and sister in a socioeconomic association devoid of erotic ambiguity".

In other words, the queen mother is, this time, an obvious institutional given: she is the niece of God. This fact is puzzling since we know that the overconscious father, Mukulumpe, the spouse of the divine Mumbi Mukasa, was very probably one of the discontented members of the Lunda aristocracy (Vansina 1966: 175). On the other hand, despite the power of this divine matrilinealism, the sons of Mukulumpe, in order to oppose the power of the king, commit adultery with one of his wives. She is not their mother, yet she is the wife of their father. Again, Oedipus is blurred, but can we say for sure that he is not there in that diverted sexual encounter? In any case, the proclamation of matrilineality—Chiti needs his sister in order to assure the kingly succession—goes along with an other extreme emphasis on blood relationship: to punish the guilty prince Kapasa, Chiti 'gave him a degrading totem (the female genitalia). Kapasa, covered with shame, left the group with his close relatives' (De Heusch 1982: 231).

\textit{Et nos patimur} . . .

What should we do now with the declension of alliance and filiation in the being and life of the so-called primitive machine? Let us emphasize two problems: one, the circularity of mythical narratives as invention of history; two, the symbolism of the divine kingship as a paradoxical locus of coherence between nature and culture.

From \( M_1 \) to \( M_{20} \), the narratives recite the rhetorical unity of a tradition of alliances and its crises. At the same time, they invent and expound successive transformations in customs and rules of filiation from a strict patrilineality to a strict matrilineality. This formulation presents also an interpretive periodization of history which expands spatially the internal diachronic contradictions of \( M_1 \). For, in some versions, as exemplified in what Luc De Heusch calls a minor history of technology, the first couple is exogamic and creates architecture and pottery; then follows a series of incestuous twins who discover fishing, trapping, and
hunting; finally, Mbidi-Kiluwe appears in the process, bringing back exogamy and establishing a new order. The circle is closed upon itself. And then one understands the inversion in the succession of inventions: 'Technical innovations follow one another in a mythical order which curiously inverts the historical progression from the paleolithic to the neolithic economy' (De Heusch 1982: 28).

Indeed, one could validly argue that this inversion may signify something else. Insofar as mythical narratives do not claim to submit to the rationality of a historical genre that they do not know, the inversion could possibly be the recording of a lesson: the order of a culture can be lost and the frightening return of a primitive space would symbolize the horror to be relived. This means that African traditional statement as well as the pundits of the ancient order do not necessarily expect a correct reading of their founding myths when they decide to negotiate them and offer them to the analysis of a colonial commissioner or an anthropologist. Some anthropologists have felt this and, generally, have failed to draw out the consequences of this disturbing fact. The reciting of a founding myth might be a reformulation of the origin of the State but it almost always opposes diachronically or cyclicly primitive stages to civilized ones. Let us insist on the fact that the transcription of a mythical narrative takes place on a presumption: that a radical deviation exists between two types of knowledge (the mythical and the historical).
The myth becomes anthropological knowledge in the ambiguous exchange which unites the politics of an informer and those of the anthropologist. Moreover, in this dialogue, the myth, instead of being performed according to its strict social functions, is managed as an object unveiling itself to a scientific curiosity and imprimatur for the institution of a new knowledge. In this exchange, it is, in fact, an exegesis which is offered for consumption and we should understand all the process as an attempt to institutionalize an interpretation for political purposes. In this exercise, it is clear that history identifies with myth and myth witnesses to an invented history on the supposition that historical narratives can duplicate (or, by the way, negate) a mythical tradition.

The second problem concerns the representations of Oedipus and Electra in our mythical narratives. It is widely accepted today that it is the adult, the father who in his paranoia oedipalizes the son and invites him to violence (Deleuze & Guattari 1977; Girard 1979). But the father has been himself a child and, therefore, oedipalized. Where should we stop in going back? Girard (1979: 177) insists on

‘The mythical aspect of Freudianism, which is founded on the conscious knowledge of patricidal and incestuous desire; only a brief flash of consciousness, to be sure, a bright wedge of light between the darkness of the first identifications and the unconscious—but consciousness all the same’.

Specifically, our African narratives seem very clear. They address the problem at the beginning of history. It is Nkongolo, the drunken and incestuous king, who provokes his nephew-son Kalala and creates the possibility of a regicide. The mild king Yala ‘overflows’ his daughter Lueji. In a peripheral version from Kahemba region (De Heusch 1982: 149), we even learn interesting facts on how and why Lueji became queen:

‘The king-father became drunk while drinking palm wine in the company of his wife Kamonga and his children. He retired behind the hut. Chinguli found his father naked and left him in this state. His sister Lueji (Na Weji), however, covered her father with a mantle and washed him. On awakening, Konde [the king-father] disinherited his son in favor of his daughter’.

The son and his brother are drunken, they beat and kill the king-father in the principal founding myths. Interestingly enough, in the Luba (M₁) as well as in the Lunda (M₂) narratives, there is an absolute silence about the desired mother who, along with the sister, are in actuality possessed by the bulopwe in the obscurity of the ‘house of unhappiness’. Paradoxically, it is in the Bemba myths (M₃) celebrating matrilineality that this fact comes somehow to light. The three irresponsible sons of Mukulumpe, the consort prince, lay with one of their father’s wives. And the price for maintaining matrilineality resides in the incest of prince Kapasa, and his classificatory sister.

In the Luba M₁, the name of the father of Kalala is obscured, and the
paternal uncle is victimized by his nephew. In the Bemba reversal of the narrative, M₁, there is no regicide, but three irresponsible brothers lay with one of their father's wives. In both cases, Oedipus is silenced. In M₁, there is no victimized mother. One has to forget about mythical narratives and look at the royal rite of enthronement in order to find her. In M₁, there is no regicide. Mukulumpe is only a consort prince married to God's niece. The woman possessed by the children is not their biological mother but only one of their father's wives. The dissociation between regicide and incest cannot be more complete. The murder of the king in M₁ is obvious. The incest between the sons and the mother is remarkably covered in the Bemba M₁; she is not really their mother after all.

Between these two extremes, the Lunda M₂₀ presents a table on which 'Electra' makes her own representation and clearly overimposes herself on the hidden Oedipus in M₁ and M₁. On the one hand, there is an explicit overvaluation of blood relationship in the meeting of the father and the daughter who sees the nakedness of the former (Struyf's version [De Heusch 1982: 149-150]). On the other hand, let us face the fact: the father is murdered by the sons, Chinguli and Yala (de Carvalho's version [ibid.: 147-149]).

These narratives witness to history and its beginning. The Luba, Lunda and Bemba are really one ethnic community. To this day, despite the variation of their systems of filiation, they all know that real life should, in an absolute manner, negate the ambiguity represented by the body of their king (in patrilinical social formations) or the consort prince and his queen (in matrilinical ones). The origins of history signify a danger. From Mbidi's lessons, they all think that the movement and density of history can be fruitful only thanks to radical separations: the world of women should be clearly distinguished from that of men, sons should not participate in their mothers' activities, daughters are to be excluded from their fathers' social and cultural milieux, and the in-laws of different sex cannot be allowed to talk to each other directly.

Let us be more synthetic. The opposition between Nkongolo and Mbidi, or the primitive and the civilized, recites a historical succession and a major paradigm: the origin of history is linked to the foundation of the State. Both witness to the same binary opposition that the myth emphasizes: the possibility of a history means the invention of a refused space and its figures, those of a primitive, which are whisked away in the name of civilization. The meaning of this invention of a pre-history makes itself explicit in the rejection of an original sin. In this confrontation with its own past, a civilized society establishes itself as a cultured space opposed to the untamed nature and its aberrations. There we find the power of an illusion or, more specifically, the paradox of origins. As P. Veyne (1984: 42) put it, 'origins are rarely beautiful—or, rather, by definition what we call origins is anecdotal'.
To Deleuze's and Guattari's chronologization of Oedipus and periodization of historical types (the primitive, the barbarian and the civilized), one could now say, after P. Veyne (ibid.: 78-79): can we really suppose that

‘The primitives are too close to original authenticity to have, in their visions of the world, the slight perspective and the touch of bad faith that we have about our most strongly asserted theories. And then, of course, they are not peoples to have theories. So we pull down their cultural and philosophical productions to the level of consciousness, which finally confers on that consciousness the weight of a pebble; thus, we will have to believe that the primitive, about whom it cannot be doubted that he sees with his own eyes that one year is not like the preceding year, continues nonetheless to see everything through archetypes — and not just profess to do so’.

C. Lévi-Strauss (1969: 48), at the outset of his study on South-American Indians’ myths, forcefully points out that: ‘The initial theme of the key myth is the incest committed by the hero with the mother. Yet the idea that he is “guilty” seems to exist mainly in the mind of the father, who desires his son’s death and schemes to bring it about’. The nightmare is there. Mystification or truth, in the ambiguous representations expounded by narratives about Nkongolo, Yala or Mukulumpe, directly or indirectly, the nightmare speaks out from regional histories and at the very foundation of their own dream, long before capitalism.

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